



Parties OF NOTE

Project: Concluding 32 Years of Parties of Note

Volunteer Organization: Cincinnati Symphony Volunteer Program

Orchestra Address: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
1241 Elm Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

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Approximate population of the community: Greater Cincinnati as of 2010 is 2.1 million

Orchestra Group Size: 1

Project Description: Over the past 32 seasons, Parties of Note has been a series of events presented by a volunteer-led Parties of Note Committee with the goal of raising awareness and funds in support of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Pops. Hosts covered all party expenses and 100% of ticket revenue was donated back to the Orchestra. Each season of parties featured a wide range of venues, cuisine and entertainment, including CSO musicians.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that an intimate fundraising series hosted mostly in private homes like Parties of Note will be able to continue any time soon. Additionally, like many organizations, the CSO is beginning to use this time in history to assess our past and promote change by improving the lives of all we serve, especially when it comes to addressing systemic racism. Taking all of this into consideration, the CSO is retiring the Parties of Note program and will shift resources to support other facets of the Orchestra's strategic plan. We want to take this time to honor and celebrate 32 years of a successful fundraising series that not only helped the CSO meet financial goals but also created unique, engaging events, as well as providing many opportunities for volunteers to give their time in support of an organization they love.

Project Timeline: The committee began work on Parties of Note in 1987 and continued for the next 32 years. The final Party of Note was hosted in February 2020, before the global pandemic caused remaining parties to be cancelled.

Project Goals and Achievement: In 1987 the Cincinnati Symphony Association (CSA) celebrated its 50th anniversary. The CSA formed a Research & Development committee to develop a fundraising proposal to meet two goals: 1) give patrons the opportunity to attend several fundraising events throughout the year with unique programs, venues and relatively low ticket prices and 2) raise money with minimal expense or risk to the organization. Until that time, fundraising involved large-scale events incurring major expenses that had to be recovered with high ticket prices to net significant revenue.

Parties of Note (PON) presented smaller, more intimate gatherings, often in the host's home. The first year of PON was during the concert season of 1988/1989. In the early years, as many as 60 parties were offered in a season. The challenge of maintaining a project over 32 years and keeping it fresh was to have a mix of venues, hosts and themes, an array of musicians and engagement with CSO leadership. Thanks to the Orchestra's fantastic hosts, several parties were repeated over multiple years and continued to sell out. At the same time, new parties were offered each year with fresh themes and venues.

In 1989, Parties of Note received a Gold Book Award from the League. This concept has been adopted by other volunteer organizations, benefiting orchestras of all sizes.



Cover of 2019-20 brochure of Parties of Note



Photo from a Party of Note in 2019 featuring CSO musicians and synchronized swimmers

Revenue, in-kind expenses and net profit: Throughout 32 years, 1,200+ parties were hosted with a net revenue of over \$1.4 million. The key to financial success with this initiative was that hosts incurred 100% of the expenses for each party while the CSO and volunteer committee promoted them. This combination guaranteed that the CSO received 100% of the income from ticket sales. It is nearly impossible to measure the investment that the hosts of these parties contributed to ensure that these 1,200+ parties over 32 seasons were successful. Some hosts submitted in-kind contribution forms to receive a tax credit for their party, but many did not, making the full financial contribution of Parties of Note impossible to quantify.

Benefits/savings: Parties of Note was initially developed to create engagement opportunities for Orchestra supporters and generate revenue with minimal organizational investment. Many attendees did not attend concerts and were encouraged to buy tickets to performances while gathering with Orchestra supporters and musicians. The over \$1.4 million received through Parties of Note ticket sales could not have happened without the time and energy given by hosts and Parties of Note Committee members.

How the project adapted to COVID-19 pandemic: In response to the pandemic, the Parties of Note Committee and CSO leadership decided to retire the Parties of Note program and will shift resources to support other facets of the Orchestra's strategic plan.

Collaborations/partnerships: Each season, a committee led by a chair hosted meetings in which members discussed potential parties and planned for the next season by engaging their network of friends, family, vendors, businesses and community partners. In more recent years, a staff liaison has worked with the group and was ultimately responsible for selling tickets, promotion, and communicating with hosts and guests.

Volunteer and staff engagement and organization: For many years, Parties of Note required a fairly large number of volunteers. The planning committee, which solicited hosts and coordinated the calendar of parties, varied from as many as 40 to as few as 10 members. They worked with Orchestra staff to align with the goals and mission of the CSO.

In 32 years, over 200 volunteers have served on planning committees. The Volunteer Manager and a representative of the Communications department were members of the committee. Over the years, parties that offered performances by CSO musicians became more and more popular. The Box Office assisted with sales and musicians volunteered their time to perform.