



Symphony Orchestra

History of the California State University, San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra

In the Fall of 1965, San Bernardino-Riverside State College opened its doors to 293 students, seven majors, and three divisions, including the Department of Music. For the first five years of the university's existence, from 1965 to 1970, there was no orchestra. Rather, instrumental students were placed in small chamber groups for their ensemble experience. That changed in 1970 when the chair of the Department of Music, Dr. Richard Saylor, with the support of university president John Martin Pfau, created a string chamber orchestra. This orchestra was designed to meet the needs of both the talented string majors, and also the desire for a community orchestra. Dr. Saylor himself conducted the orchestra for almost twenty years, growing it from a strings-only chamber orchestra to a chamber-size symphony orchestra that included woodwind, brass, percussion, and occasionally keyboard instruments. Alumni have shared that this was a special experience for them because, with financial support from President Pfau, Dr. Saylor frequently hired professional musicians in the surrounding area to perform with the orchestra, playing alongside both the music majors and community musicians.

In 1976 the Departments of Music and Theatre moved in to a brand new building that had been specially designed with input from faculty and students in these respective departments, and in 1984 San Bernardino-Riverside State College earned its university status and name change, becoming California State University San Bernardino. After Dr. Saylor's retirement in 1991, we know from concert programs that the ensemble fluctuated back and forth over the years from being a string chamber orchestra to a regular chamber orchestra and back again to a string chamber orchestra. How the ensemble was structured had to do with enrollment, and also the fact that it was taught by adjunct faculty. This finally changed when the Department of Music received permission from the university in 2013 to create a full-time tenure-track orchestral position, and Dr. Lucy Lewis was subsequently hired in 2014.

Since Dr. Lewis's hire, the orchestra has subsequently grown from being a fifteen to twenty-member string chamber orchestra to a fifty to sixty-member full symphony orchestra. Each season features vibrant and diverse programming that includes interdisciplinary partnerships, featured artists, new music commissions, a young artist competition, community engagement and educational outreach opportunities, a tour, and collaborations with the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra.