

Town Life



A guide to living in the northeast metropolitan area

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Student Elliot Wilcox and Piano Teacher Helen Fillebrown circa 1965.

Music Lessons at the Fillebrown House on Lake Ave.

The Victorian "Red Chalet" was built in 1879 by Charles P. Noyes, who co-owned a wholesale dry goods business in St. Paul and, later, lived in a Manitou Island cottage designed by Cass Gilbert. The home was next sold to Judge George Young. In 1905, it was sold, again, to Jonas Walter Fillebrown, who owned a fruit company in St. Paul. In 1920, the summer cottage was renovated and turned into a year-round home for Jonas and Harriet Eleanor Fillebrown and their children, Arthur and Helen.

Helen Fillebrown became an accomplished pianist who had studied alongside Arthur Rubenstein at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik and, later, gave concerts and accompanied singers in Boston, Richmond, Louisville and Quincy, Ill.

According to Historian Maureen Raymond, from 1930 until approximately 1967, Helen taught music students in her home until the age of 83. She gave lessons not only to her own students, but later also included the children at the Preventorium at Lake Owasso.

In 1977, Arthur and Helen Fillebrown bequeathed their remarkable home to the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society. It has since been added to the National Historic Register.

Century College Chamber Orchestra brings Classical Literature and Community together

The Century College Chamber Orchestra needs more violins. So tune up your strings and rosin up your bows. It's time to join in the fun.

"I've been playing in the orchestra for more than 20 years. I love the people. Elliot Wilcox is one of the most gracious human beings I've ever met," said Violinist Anna Newton. "I'd absolutely recommend joining the orchestra for anyone who is interested in playing and can make a commitment to come and rehearse. There's no need to be nervous. We're all amateurs."

Violist Briana Markie is grateful for the friendships she has made while being a member of the orchestra.

"It was intimidating at first, but everyone was so welcoming and wanted me to succeed," said Markie, who is a music student at Century College. "Elliot is an outstanding conductor. Without him my experience would not have been the same. He is a dedicated teacher, patient with us and always willing to make time for his students."

Background

The Century Chamber Orchestra began in the late 1970s when Century was known as Lakewood Junior College. It is one of the few orchestras in Minnesota's community college system.

The orchestra is made up of college music students and community players who sign up for non-credit through Century's Continuing Education program. Players ages run from 17 to 80+. The orchestra performs classical music from the baroque, classical, romantic and modern eras.

The orchestra gives three concerts per year in early November, March and May and the performances are

always at 3 p.m. on Saturdays.

Performances include overtures, symphonies and other standard works from the orchestra literature, and also solo works and concertos with wonderful guest artists. Some of the music you might hear at the performances comes from familiar names: Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Rossini, Saint-Saëns, Brahms, Debussy, Ravel and Copland.

Each year the orchestra also performs a new work by fine, local composers. The composers often sit in on rehearsals, giving the orchestra the opportunity to work closely with them.

Century Chamber Orchestra concert dates for the 2015-16 season:

Saturdays at 3 p.m.

Nov. 14 – Soloists Will and Theresa Richardson, Vivaldi 2 Cello Concerto

March 5 – Soloist Shannon Loelirke, Century Music Faculty Member, Mozart Piano Concerto No. 23

May 7 – Soloist Kai-Li Cheng, Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No. 3

Over the years the orchestra has also performed oratorios and other choral works including Handel's Messiah, highlighting great vocal soloists, and by collaborating with the Century College choir, combining forces with the Normandale Community College Choir, as well as local church choirs in the White Bear Lake area.

The orchestra is a chamber group, typically 35 players compared to the 60 or more members that play in a symphony orchestra. There is an advantage to this in that this size lends itself to more interaction between players and the conductor.

Conductors

Century College faculty member Robert Bobzin conducted the orchestra from 1976 until 2001. Bobzin's advanced training in conducting included study in Vienna, Austria.

In a 2001 interview he reflected on retirement and his role as musical director and conductor. "The conductor's job with an orchestra such as this is to take a wide variety of people and levels of talent and work

to meet their demands and needs as musicians while performing major works of classical literature. You have to realize that limitations exist, yet still aim toward a performance of a piece of music that is relevant and faithful enough to the composers' wishes."

He also said, "The one thing I am most proud of over these many years has been presenting solo opportunities for so many artists and also bringing this talent to the White Bear Lake area."

In the fall of 2001, Century College Professor Elliot Wilcox became the orchestra's conductor. His background is tied closely to this area. He grew up in North St. Paul and, as a child, studied piano with Helen Fillebrown at her historic home on White Bear Lake. He went on to study music at UW River Falls, piano performance and conducting in graduate school at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois), and in music theory at the University of Minnesota.

"When I first started conducting the orchestra, I spent countless hours talking with Robert Bobzin about orchestral literature and his approach in conducting and rehearsing. He was a valued colleague and friend. He cared deeply for the orchestra. I miss him, his intelligence, charm and wit (Robert passed away in Dec. of 2003). I have tried to keep the concept of the orchestra in line with Robert's vision; performing fine classical music with fine soloists and an orchestra made up of players who learn to listen carefully to each other and truly work together to perform as an ensemble," said Wilcox. "We work earnestly in rehearsal every Monday evening. We really do enjoy each others' company, and humor is involved. (Example: Why couldn't Beethoven find his teacher? Because he was Haydn!). It is so important to have live music in this community. Nothing is better than live performance. And I'm proud that we have a good connection between the college and the surrounding community. We have an enthusiastic audience, the young and old can attend as we only do afternoon matinees and concerts are always free at the West Campus Theatre."

Century College faculty member Shirley Mier serves as the orchestra's interim conductor when Wilcox is on sabbatical.

"The Century Chamber Orchestra benefits the community (at the college and in our corner of the metro area) by providing opportunities for amateur and aspiring musicians to perform great classical repertoire – and opportunities for students and community members to attend concerts for free and to hear these works played in a live setting," said Mier. "My experience as conductor has always been positive. This orchestra works hard and knows how to have fun, too."

Devoted Members

Violinist Marion Owens, 80+ years old, has been with the orchestra since shortly after it was formed. She also played with the 3M Orchestra for 50 years. Outside of a little arthritis in her thumbs, she's still going strong.

"Playing with others gives me a great sense of satisfaction. When we play well I have a good feeling," she said. "On rehearsal nights, I go home so happy that it's hard for me to go to bed."

Another longtime member, flutist Barbara Wohlferd, enjoys learning new music and spending time with a good group of people. Like Wilcox,



Conductor Elliot Wilcox

she was a piano student of Helen Fillebrown's as a child. She switched to playing the flute in the fifth grade, taking lessons from Paul Hendrickson.

"I just love music," she said. "Playing the flute is what I do best. It's my favorite thing in life."

Future Success

The continued success of the orchestra depends, in large part, on its members.

"The musicians are in good hands with Elliot Wilcox, and my hope is that the orchestra will continue to grow in its creative endeavors as well as in its numbers," said Mier. "The sky's the limit!"

For more information, contact Wilcox at 651•779•3214.

Elliot Wilcox, Conductor, and Shannon Loehrke, Piano Soloist, performing Beethoven Choral Fantasy with Century Chamber Orchestra, Century College Choir and Normandale Community College Choir on May 7, 2011. Photo courtesy of John Middleton.

