

# Penn State Has a Conductor in the House

By Joe Kupec

If you have been hearing music down near the Lion's Den on Wednesday evenings and it sounds like Vivaldi, Telemann, Bach, or Mozart, it is probably originating from Room W12.

Since the semester began, many curious students have looked in on Dr. Ronald Schafer's CMOS 212 class, The Development of The Concerto. Each Wednesday during the fall semester, Dr. Schafer guides a diverse class ranging from Music majors to Engineering Technology majors through the development of the concerto form.

Diversity is something this Lancaster native deals with daily. His schedule takes him from class in the basement of the Olmstead Building to the director's podium at Hershey Theatre. In between, Schafer acts as the music director for the Harrisburg Youth Symphony Orchestra and serves as the string specialist for the Derry Township school district.

His strong emphasis in music education is reflected in Schafer's academic background. He received a B.S. in Music Education from Westchester State College and both his masters and doctorate degrees from The Pennsylvania State University. During his residence at the university, he studied under Raymond Page of The Alard String Quartet and served as assistant conductor of The Pennsylvania State University Symphony Orchestra.

Musical interests and development for Schafer came together when

he was in seventh grade. His music teacher, who stimulated his developing interest in music and the arts, was the catalyst that directed his musical development.

Later, in high school, Schafer had the opportunity to play string bass in a jazz quintet. Again, this group was influenced by a music instructor who enjoyed the style of Dave Brubeck, which was popular at the time. But it was his involvement in the high school orchestra, both as an instrumentalist and student conductor, that made the greatest impression on Schafer the student.

His experience conducting at several high school concerts led to the choice of a Music Education major, with a Conducting minor; which he later expanded on and today employs both in his activities as instructor-director-conductor.

When asked about the challenge of getting young people, who are familiar with MTV and 3-4 minute music, to listen to the classics, Schafer is optimistic.

"If young people are regularly exposed to good music literature, they soon learn to appreciate and enjoy it," he said.

He points out that, "My daughter, who is in ninth grade and a violinist, enjoys U-2, but she also enjoys playing Bach and Handel."

At the youth symphony level, Dr. Schafer finds the students bring a high level of interest and energy to practice sessions.

"They tend to be a hands-on

type of student who want to try new works. These young people are looking for a challenge and the opportunity to play a composition without transcription (altering the composer's original). The challenge of playing original compositions successfully produces enthusiasm in the students," he said.

"Music programs at American schools are quite different from those in Europe," according to Schafer. Here we tend to have "music for the masses." Everyone has a general exposure and opportunity to participate or play in an orchestra or band. In Europe, the emphasis is to specialize early on. By the time a young person has reached early adolescence, parents and instructors know where the pupil's musical talents lie. Early recognition of talent, combined with state-sponsored schools for the arts, result in virtuoso playing and quality technique.

However, Schafer noted during a trip to Europe that major orchestras in the United States are on par with their European counterparts. "The appreciation for the arts at a local level is fantastic. People in the communities play well there because the music is so much a part of the culture," he said.

The relationship between the development of a culture and parallel changes in its music is just one element Schafer uses in exploring the development of the concerto. Starting in the Middle Ages and on through the Baroque he explains how the shift from voice to

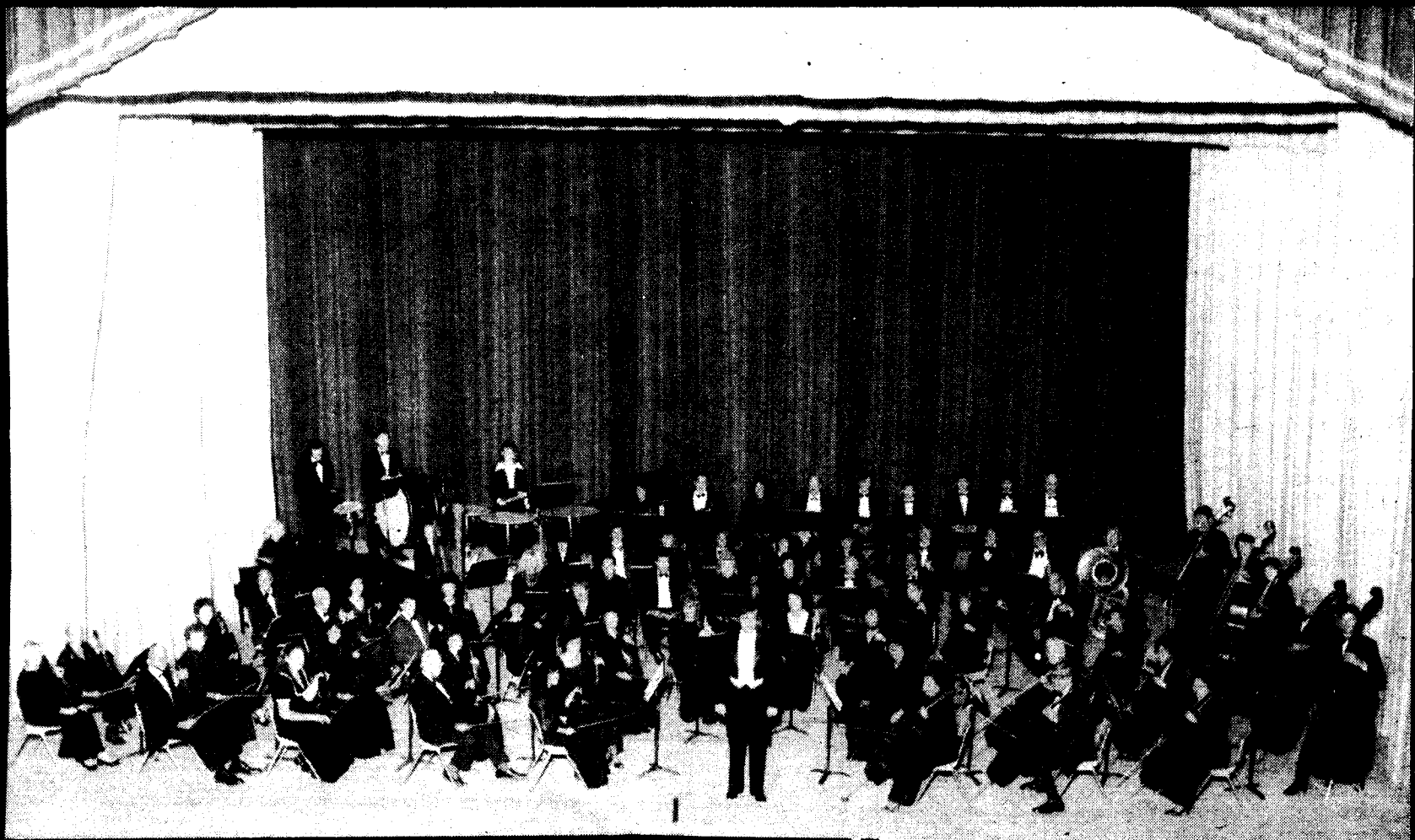
instrument, liturgical music to secular music, and the evolution of the instruments and playing styles shaped the various works from different periods.

After realizing that some students in class did not know what a viola was, he arranged to have one of the Music majors who played the viola to bring her instrument to class and demonstrate the tonal difference between it and a violin. After playing a few notes, Schafer took the instrument and demonstrated trills and stops for students unfamiliar with music terminology.

Is there much difference between the lecturers' and conductors' podiums? According to Schafer, the big difference is in controlling the material.

"In a concert the musical score controls the music. While I have an interpretation. In the classroom I must exercise judgment over all of the material in the text. Suddenly I have to be selective of what to emphasize as being important and there is so much good material to choose from," Schafer said.

Above all else, in class he "tries to make music enjoyable."



Conductor Ron Schafer appearing onstage with the Hershey Symphony