

History of the Symphony Society by Society Founder Veronica Awis

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How The Society Began

As I was a member on the Board of Directors of the Fort Myers Symphony Orchestra (1969-70 season), the orchestra manager requested I form an organization for women to support and nourish the symphony movement in our community. Where does one start? Research!!

Having moved to Cape Coral from South Oakland County in Michigan, I called both the South Oakland and Pontiac Symphony Michigan regarding information. They had only business personnel. I was familiar with the Sarasota Symphony and knew they had a vibrant ladies' organization. They invited me to lunch in Sarasota and after three hours with their Board of Officers I had enough information and was on my way.

Twenty-three women (friends) with a love of the arts and dedicated to music were invited to lunch at the Holiday Inn on the River. That meeting gave birth to the Symphony Society of Women - its name, officers, logo, possible activities including a monthly luncheon meeting (with the Conductor and a guest artist) to be held on the Friday prior to each monthly concert were discussed and agreed upon. The Society was off and running: of our 23 members, Kathleen Powell, a writer for the Cape Coral Breeze and Maureen Bashaw, a writer for the News-Press, wrote articles almost weekly regarding our activities. Oh, the power of the press! Concentration was placed on the Symphony's image in the community, and our focus centered

on membership. Giving the Symphony movement an "aura of beauty and grace" started with the first concert of the 70-71 Season (our birth year). We gave a "First Nighter" reception following the first concert. The lobby of the Ramada Inn on the River with its circular staircase provided an elegant setting and our ladies wore gowns and gloves for the evening.

Weekly coffees were held in private homes with a guest soloist providing musical entertainment. Membership grew, and by the end of our first season we had 150 members. It was a delightful first year.

That "aura of beauty and grace" has continued throughout these 34 years at all the functions and events the Society sponsors.

Symphony Society History: Part 2

One cannot speak only of the Symphony Society in the years from 1970 through 1976 without also speaking about the development of the musical and artistic climate of Lee County during that time. Cape Coral and South Fort Myers were on fire with new housing developments and growth. Talented persons from various musical and theatrical fields were moving into the area. A growing audience for classical music, theater and associated arts was forming rapidly.

Barbara Mann and friends had given birth to the Community Concert Series some years earlier. Arlo

Diebler who worked with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra started the Fort Myers Community Symphony Orchestra in 1960. Local musicians and members from other symphony orchestras in Florida provided the personnel. Edison Community College started their Fine Arts Series of 45 concerts a year in 1967. I had the privilege of singing a recital in the first year's program on December 8, 1967. We had moved to Cape Coral in November, 1965. The Edison Players (a group of professional and talented thespians, stage directors and radio and television personalities) were providing plays and other theatrical performances for the community's enjoyment. They were going to present Menotti's opera "The Medium", and they called me after the College performance and offered me the role of Monica. The community responded so well to the opera that the performance was repeated the following year in both Fort Myers and Port Charlotte. I became a member of the Orchestra's Board of Directors in 1968.

Many members of the Society were members of the Orchestra's Board of Directors and had contacts with the College and the theater. Barbara Mann was also a founding member of the Orchestra and has been a long-time member of the Society. The musical family for the performing arts was on the move in a community devoid of the arts. The big interests in the Lee County area had been baseball, fishing and golfing.

With last month's issue of *News of Note* you became aware of how and why we started the Fort Myers Symphony Orchestra Society of Women (original name). The final event of our first season on May 18, 1971 (the Orchestra's tenth season) closed with a Pops Concert sponsored by the Symphony Women. It was a special night, a full

house in the new auditorium at Seven Lakes and a garden reception outdoors in their courtyard following the concert. Arlo had invited a concert pianist to play, and I had the privilege of singing for the first time with the Orchestra. The community was truly aware of this tidal wave of art that was slowly descending upon the area.

I became President of the Orchestra Board of Directors during 1971-72. Many Society Past-Presidents have served on the Symphony Board as the Orchestra improved and became the regional professional orchestra we have today.

Carolyn von Gehren did "Score One More" during her Symphony Society Presidential year of 1971-72. Membership grew especially through a series of coffees held in homes of Society members. These coffees were continued for several years—friends of members and other women were invited from a list provided by the Board. Carolyn and her ladies served orange juice to all the musicians in the orchestra during the intermission as there were no drinking fountains nor was there any air-conditioning in the Fort Myers High School Auditorium where the concerts were held. At the monthly luncheon meetings Carolyn also gave each new member a banana from a large bunch welcoming the member "You are now one of the bunch". Membership has remained one of the primary concerns and a vital part of the organization.

Mary Robinson our third Society President ("Campaign 72-73") also focused on membership which reached an outstanding total of 300 members. A quote verbatim from Mary: "An equally important goal was to help the Symphony Board eliminate debt. An evening dinner dance, auction and fashion show held at the Cape Coral

Country Club provided outstanding results. The profit from the event was enough to pay off the Symphony's debt. This became an annual fund-raising event. That same year Gale Bennett, a local distinguished artist, designed the logo for the Society and recommended the colors of rose and ivory to use consistently on invitations, letterheads and other official documents from the organization. The Society provided volunteers to various activities of the Symphony including post-concert receptions, office assistance, etc." This practice continues each Symphony season.

Symphony Society History: Part 3

With the support of Mr. and Mrs. Werner Singer, a New York couple who had retired to Cape Coral, and the cooperation of David Robinson, President of Edison Community College, the Southwest Florida Opera Association was formed in 1972. Werner Singer was a gifted pianist and had been a music director of opera in Brazil. His wife was an opera singer in pre-war Germany and had taught voice in New York. An operatic workshop was developed, and performances were given at Edison Community College by a group of Fort Myers professionals and college faculty. This led to the Opera Association with musical guidance of Mr. and Mrs. Singer and with business direction by a Board of Directors. Professional, fully staged performances of complete operas were given for two years at the Fort Myers High School Auditorium featuring local singers and staged by the Edison Players staff. Barbara Mann (the first lady of music) and her committee filled the house with 600 subscriptions.

I relate these fabulous two years because at the end of 1974 the Board of Directors of both the Fort Myers Symphony Orchestra and the Southwest

Florida Opera Association merged into one board to form the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Opera Association. The Exhibition Hall became the home for all performances. The audience now numbered 1,200 subscriptions. Arlo Diebler became the Musical Director of both. However, after two seasons opera was dropped because of the tremendous cost involved. The name of the orchestra became officially the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Association.

During the years 1973-75 the Symphony Society membership grew under Gladys Roberts (now deceased). During her two years of leadership, "The Fourth Movement" and "Opus V", many local artists donated paintings and art auctions were held. "Meet the Artist" luncheons were held monthly prior to concerts; the Dinner-Dance-Fashion Show became an annual event and membership coffees continued.

Greater community participation in all events occurred during 1974-75. Mary Robinson (our Society's President during 1972-73) was elected President of the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Association Board of Directors for 1974-75. This followed Michael Peceri's two years of leadership from 1972-74. During Mary's term the orchestra had for the first time a guest conductor on the podium. Mary also was involved in organizing the Alliance for the Arts which soon followed. Now the arts in our community were united.

In 1975-76 Johanna Hudson's "Fill the House" spotlighted concert attendance. The house of 1,400 seats was now filled to capacity. The Society continued to help in the Symphony Office as needed, and all other activities continued.

Marguerite Kefauver's "Salute to Seven" in 1976-77 featured a tour of the Henry Ford winter home during the week-long Pageant of Light celebration in February, 1977. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bigger, were delighted with the interest of so many who toured the home of the world's great auto magnate. It proved very successful for the Society.

As we are enjoying our 35th year we must look back in order to appreciate the accomplishments of so many Society members who have inspired interest and appreciation in music and its value in our lives and in our community. I want to share a letter I received from Rita R. Steward, one of the ten founders of the Orchestra, also one of the 23 who organized the Society. Rita was a driving force to both organizations. She wrote in 1977:

"In achieving a symphony orchestra in a musical desert, you knew we must have a masterpiece. Our canvas was Lee County. We selected a mix of positive Major Keys of Heart, Mind and Spirit to which we added notes of Patience, Determination, Endurance, Self-Discipline, Work, Love and Faith."

Each year our struggling organizations vibrated with energy. Our conductor and artists added increasing dynamic purpose. There were harmonies and discords, some forte and some pianissimo. Finally the area came of age. Financial backing emerged with creative imagination, talents and ability to become a constructive accomplishment.

When you throw the weight of your influences on the side of good, the true and the beautiful, your efforts will achieve an endless splendor. It will go on in others, bigger, finer and nobler than you ever dared to dream.

You became the proud Mothers of the Symphony Society and nodded your approval. Today, we radiate pride and happiness in our Masterpiece—the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Association.

Rise and give yourselves a Salute!!!!

How very appropriate Rita Steward's inspiring words are today when we are celebrating 35 years of accomplishments and having a ball doing it.

Symphony Society History: Part 4

"Themes and Variations for Love of Music" carried Phyllis Baker through two seasons as president from 1977-1979. What a challenge! In addition to the established yearly functions, the following events were featured. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bigger again opened their Ford Home during the Pageant of Light Celebration in February, at which time the hostesses dressed in period costumes and greeted visitors at the door and throughout the home. As was custom at all Society events refreshments were served. Recitals were held in members' homes featuring various orchestral ensembles. The musicians always gave a small lecture regarding the music and composer. These events were not only entertaining but also educational and most enjoyable. An antique car show with a country store added interest and profits. Symphony Week at the Edison Mall showcased music and dance programs to entertain shoppers, and the Symphony Ball at Cape Coral Country Club was a delight. The annual Society Christmas Tea began that year and featured musical programs by professional musicians, high school choruses and visiting artists. Musical education given in pleasant surroundings expanded visitors' musical knowledge making them thirst for

more. The yearly Christmas Teas given in large beautiful homes in Fort Myers and Cape Coral were always crowded and were events to anticipate. Our ladies served tea and pastries at long tables beautifully decorated for Christmas. The Young Artists' Concerts and Vocal and Instrument Competition were started giving focus to our youth programs. The Society was also invited to send representatives to the ASOL Conference held in Chicago and New Orleans those years.

Mildred Ryan (1979-1980) and her board carried on with the established events already proving so successful. The Society was excited and looking forward "In Tune for the Tenth" coming the following year.

1980-1981 found the Orchestra 20 years old and growing. Lucille Vea dedicated her year to the orchestra movement "Happy Twentieth". And it was - - a year with concentration on giving service to the orchestra itself. Working in the Symphony Office, assisting with the Youth Movement, the expanded youth auditions and continuing with the well-attended projects established in our successful ten years were all part of the Society's efforts in those years. Sometime during that period Society members who served as hostesses at luncheons and ushers at concert performances at both Fort Myers and Cape Coral High School Auditoriums and at the Exhibitions Hall on the River began another tradition. They distinguished themselves by wearing black floor length skirts and white blouses with a rosy-pink G-Clef on the left shoulder. They were hospitality hostesses and remain as such even now.

1981-1982 "Communication Through Fellowship of Music" was Barbara Elliott's theme, and Betty Boyd followed in 1982-1983 with "Adventure in

Harmony". These two years stressed fellowship in membership and loyalty to the basic purpose of our being. A by-product of our organization seemed to be in progress: it was more than just an organization; it was fun serving the Symphony and Choruses while developing loyal friendships along the way. We also were making money for the Symphony's growth and artistry.

Symphony Society History: Part 5

"Traditions and Transitions" was an appropriate theme for Dr. Suzi Martin who held a Doctorate in Management to have chosen for her year as president 1982-1983. The Society's membership was approaching 1,000 members. As President she saw the need to establish a management program for this organization similar to a corporate design. I had established a set of officers from president through treasurer and committees that were needed at the time. The membership had grown in size with many events dictating special needs. Lee County was slowly experiencing tremendous growth in land and housing development. Country clubs were popping up in all directions. Fiddlesticks Country Club was to have a grand opening, and the society was right there taking part in all the activity and establishing a new project avenue to explore for many years. A cookbook, *Recipes of Note*, was published in August 1983 by the Society. It was a 230-page volume of wonderful recipes contributed by the members of the Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Chorus, Symphony Board and Symphony Society. Secret recipes from friends and also many of the best restaurants in the Lee County area were included.

This also was the year of the grand opening of the Bell Tower Shops. The mall itself had opened in

October, 1982. The elegant Jacobson's Department Store was the largest occupant and held center court. Small stores circled around a Spanish theme courtyard — with a water fountain, et al. Jacobson's sponsored a grand opening in the fall of 1983 sparing no expense. The Symphony Society sponsored a formal Champagne Cocktail Party in the courtyard. This cocktail party featured a fashion show of Jacobson's beautiful women's attire with professional models on an extensive runway and stage built from Jacobson's front entrance to the center of the courtyard. The News-Press carried complete coverage prior to and following the event. It was a magical night; the sky was clear and the temperature just right for the outdoor event. Large spotlights criss-crossed the sky over the courtyard making a strobe-like effect. Our hostesses looked lovely as they served their champagne and goodies to a sell-out audience. Barbara Mann presented a musical program and served as Mistress of Ceremonies.

I had been asked to sing on the program just before the Fashion Show itself. I walked the full runway singing Butterfly's entrance aria, "I Walk This Path With Love", then "I Could Have Danced All Night" ending with a flare of "Granada" in true Spanish style. It truly was a magical evening for all. If Lee County had been unaware of the Symphony Society and its exciting presence in the community, it became aware that evening.

Mabel Westrate, a member since 1973, became President for the 1984-1985 season. Her theme was "Friendship Through Music". The Society had become an enervating body of women dedicated to providing musical growth in our community. It had also become instrumental in providing an organization whereby women new to the community had the opportunity to develop warm

and lasting friendships while having fun with the many diversified projects the Society sponsored.

Symphony Society History: Part 6

As the Society of Symphony Women grew in numbers and the community expanded in territory and population, the Society's activities became more diversified with each season. During Mabel Westrate's year (1984-85) the Society entertained a fashion show at Burdine's, a golf tournament at Eagle Ridge, a bake sale, trash and treasure sale, and a musical hosted by Suzi Martin.

Lee Satava, 1986-87 "A Silver Salute". This year the membership had pledged \$25,000 to the Symphony for the first time. They were successful in attaining their goal by adding a champagne breakfast and style show, and hosting the opening of Robinson's Dept. Store at the Edison Mall in addition to other yearly activities.

"Expanding Musical Horizons" was Onabel Pressler's theme for 1986-87. Opera to Pops was produced at Barbara Mann Hall and the First B# Follies was produced and sponsored by the Society with local artists, held at Mann Hall, chaired by Peck Garland.

Peck Garland in 1987-88, fortified with "Insurmountable Opportunities" as her theme with a \$30,000 pledge to the Symphony, chaired the special event "The True Story of Cinderella" at Mann Hall, directed by Edmund Taylor. Under the professional direction from New York, B# Follies Number Two was produced and presented again at Mann Hall. It was a great success.

It was during Peck's presidency that the Honors Program initiated our "Members of the Year" 1987-88: Veronica Awis, Dorcas Brewer and Carol

Wadlow. That program is beautifully explained annually in our Yearbook.

Jane Anderson became president in 1988-89 inspiring the membership with a "Prelude to Greatness". The Holiday House event given prior to the Thanksgiving season emerged as a successful project. It featured a gift shop with items hand made by our talented members. Holiday House became a favorite event of the Society for many years. These were model homes fully furnished by the developer and now decorated for Christmas by professional florists for a two week fund-raising event in early November. The ladies served refreshments in a tea room atmosphere.

This dedicated membership rises to new heights with each passing year. Such is the devotion to the Symphony Movement for the benefit of our community.

Symphony Society History: Part 7

Eighteen years and the Society was meeting new challenges and looking toward new horizons.

1989-90 Carole McCullah "Striking New Chords" with a growing membership expanded the 2nd Holiday House Tour by asking the developers to take a larger financial participation in the event. This had been her baby in 1988-89, and she wrote to the ASOL regarding the project thus winning the first Silver Ribbon presented to this Society by the American Symphony Orchestra League. In the spring of 1991 she traveled to Washington, D.C. to receive the award. During her year the first petting zoo was presented, and the project is now directed by the SWFL Symphony Board of Directors' Educational Committee. The Executive Director was invited to all of our Board Meetings that year; the first 50/50 Drawing at the monthly luncheons

was held and the first New Member Coffee was given. Carole went on to become President of the Symphony Board of Directors and has served on that Board for 10 years.

Our 20th year 1990-91 brought "The Power and Glory of Music" with DeDe Devic at the helm. The Holiday House event gained momentum with a wonderful Gift Shoppe featuring handmade items crafted by DeDe and her crew. The established events contributed to a constant flow of new members.

Enthusiasm with "There's Music in the Air" was Ruth Bagley's term in 1991-92. The Society's donation to the Symphony reached \$30,000 for the first time. All of the events already mentioned continued to be successful. Ruth initiated the change from Symphony Society of Women to SWFL Symphony Society, an organization of women and men.

In 1992-93 with vivacious Dorothy Kollmar now in the Presidential Chair, 'With a Song in Our Hearts' spotlighted the FIRST Designer Showcase project, and it proved to be a huge success. The Judd House on the River was done over, and even the fireplaces got a face lift by the decorators. This was a joint project by the Society and the Symphony Association. There has never been another such joint project. A Dixieland Jazz Festival at Cape Coral Yacht Club and a "Summer Gala", another first, were attempts to provide entertainment and to make money during the summer lull. The Gala was at Club Riveran and featured 'Tommy O'.

"Celebrate the Symphony" was Ann Moran's call during 1993-94. Holiday House was held at the beautifully decorated Fiddlesticks Country Club. It was called Holiday Magic. The Society's events got a new name also — Symphony of Treats. Designer

Showcase '94 was our big two week event in February and generated a tremendously successful Society year of Celebration.

Symphony Society History: Part 8

"E"ntering our Second Quarter Century as a Unified Ensemble 1994-95" was President Rosealie Lesser's theme. At the beginning of its Silver Anniversary year the Society was a well-integrated part of the Community's musical life, as well as an important member of the Symphony family. Each past-president went on the Symphony Board of Directors for a year following their term; many remained for several years, and some became President of that Board.

November 1994 spotlighted "Deck the Hall" at Barbara Mann Performing Hall. The lobby was beautifully decorated with Christmas Trees — donated by professional local florists and given for a silent auction. They were all delivered by the Symphony Society to the winners in time for the Holiday Season. Another first for Rosalie's team was the Dixieland Jazz Concert — which has become a favorite event. A successful Designer Showcase followed in February '95.

Pat Meyer, 1995-96, ushered in "Reward Yourself with Music" — and they did. A trip to England with a tour of London Theaters was planned and enjoyed by many. Another "Holiday Splendor" held at the Alliance for the Arts, decorated with Christmas Trees for Silent Auction, was a tremendous delight for the community. A "Fashion in Concert" and a "Symphony Ball" were held at the Alliance for the Arts and both were winners as was the "Designer Showcase '96". Success was sweet that season as the Society for the first time was able to give the Symphony a check for \$100,000.00.

The first 23 women who gave birth to the Society must have been as gratified as I for our objective was to be able to offer our community an orchestra ensemble of professional musicians improving the product for benefit of the community.

We not only wanted our ladies to enjoy making new and lasting friendships by having delightful and interesting activities, but to provide a climate for the musical growth of our children where there had been none or very little. It was slowly happening by the united efforts and talents of the membership involved. This is the true spirit of the Society.

Natalie Pillion picked up the ball with "A Year of Great Performances 1996-97". With 591 members the Society sponsored a musical tour to Budapest, Vienna and Prague. They witnessed live opera with distinguished voices in these historic cities and their famous theaters. There was also a tour to Charleston, South Carolina for the Spoleto Festival. The Tribute Fund, Key Signatures and the Bridge Marathon blossomed. A Holiday House at Gateway, a Jazz Concert, Fashion Show at the Broadway Palm Theater and Designer Showcase '97 (an old house on McGregor Blvd.) were the highlights of the year. The old home was in dire need of remodeling and proved to be a challenge for the Society as the owners became eccentric and controversial. In the end our ladies needed to do not only full redecoration of the interior but full exterior painting and landscaping. Their efforts were not in vain as the owners received a Plaque from the City of Fort Myers for the most improved home on the Blvd.

"The Joy of Music 1997-98-99" served as Mary Kirkpatrick's theme. She served a two-year term. You have already become familiar with all of the

yearly activities of the Society: the monthly luncheons, Symphony of Treats, Key Signatures, Tribute Fund, Bridge Marathon and the Dixieland Jazz Concert Party given at the Cape Coral Yacht Club. The Dream Drawing was begun in 1997-98 adding to the list of annual events. Mary's Board sponsored a Fashion Show in November '97 at Barbara Mann Hall with 700 persons attending. Holiday House at Lexington Country Club, a Designer Showcase '98 and a Caribbean Cruise in March brought the year to a close. \$101,469.05 was presented to the Symphony Orchestra Board at the last luncheon of the year.

Mary's second year (1998-99) included all of the yearly activities with the Holiday House given at the Legends Country Club. The major highlight was the establishment of the Jill Prescott Memorial Music Fund. Dick Prescott made a donation to the SWFS Society, through the SWFL Community Foundation, in memory of his wife Jill. The interest accruing from this donation provides sponsorship, as the Jill Prescott Memorial Music Fund, for the Symphony's Young Artist Competition. The yearly competition program handled by the Symphony's Educational Committee usually includes a member or members of the Symphony Society.

Our support given to the Symphony indeed helps support the entire Youth Program including the Youth Orchestra. Kudos to all of you who labor for the Love of Music in our community.

Symphony Society History: Part 9

Joan Peta, 1999-2000, took us into our 30th year with "Music as the Treasure of the Centuries." Joan wrote me from Pennsylvania: "My focus centered on our common goal, that of supporting one another in our quest to serve and sustain the

Southwest Florida Symphony." Joan's personal guest at each luncheon was either a symphony board or staff member.

The Holiday House in North Fort Myers drew "crowds of visitors and tourists", and the florists, having decorated every room, were delighted with the reception given their labors. The Symphony of Treats committee was comprised entirely of members who had never worked on such a project and had not had the pleasure of knowing one another. Nevertheless, they provided the Society with a super year of Treats. Membership had grown considerably (over 600).

"Music Fills our Hearts" was Carol Edmier's theme in 2000-01, and fill our hearts she did. Carol is a former high school English/ Spanish teacher. She never lost her love of working with those who were on the verge of adulthood. She had been working with Natalie Pillion on the Youth Program, which is handled through the Orchestra Board. Her year offered traditionally established activities as well as a Fashion Show Luncheon at the Broadway Palm Theater, a Swing with the Maestro golf tournament at Kelly Greens Country Club, and a Designer Showcase at Cape Harbour.

The new development on the Caloosahatchee River was in its infancy. Two houses were shown in a sparse community. There was plenty of room for a concert by the river to be given by the Youth Symphony Orchestra at the Gala celebration prior to the showing of homes. And so it was! Special seating was arranged for the guests as well as parking, elegant picnic box foods, and concert liquid refreshments were provided. A special area was arranged for the general public who brought their own chairs and food, but were given free admission. What a success that was! Carol has

worked with Natalie all these years, and with Natalie's retirement as chairperson, Carol will now chair that committee of the board.

Pamela Webber Simon's theme in 2001-02, "2001: A Musical Odyssey", became a musical adventure for our Society. The highlights of this musical odyssey took us to Sanibel Island for the Designer Showcase House, "The Sanibel Naughton House" on the Gulf of Mexico. Our showcase of artists and designers was a smashing success (despite the toll bridge). Focus was also placed on a drawing for an automobile in conjunction with the Symphony. Pam sings with the Symphony Chorus.

"Harmonizing to Reach the Highest Notes" was Janet Forrer's theme 2002-2003. The special highlights were: Introduction of the "SSS" also known as the Symphony Society Shop. A table was set up in the lobbies at the monthly meetings at which beautiful items decorated with a musical motif were sold to members and proved to be a profitable venture. The first performance/dinner given to honor the Young Artists Competition Awardees was held. Performing to a full house, delighting the audience and reaffirming that today's unbelievable talent should be given encouragement in performance. Holiday House on the River, named "Coming Home" was a hit with the community. The Designer Showcase was a three-story historical home on McGregor Blvd. The Society took on the renovation with the owners, who were a delight. The owners took assistance from many local businesses and restored the grandeur of the lost beauty of this from foundation, floors, doorways, woodwork, and walls prior to and in conjunction with our local ASID Interior Designers. Each room, reflecting the era of the 20's, was decorated and furnished. The third floor was painted by a professional artist. He had

converted a large attic to a children's playroom: ceiling and walls became an underwater mural, with toys and toy boxes to match. Local garden clubs selected and planted 13 native floral gardens throughout the grounds while an outdoor water pond and a \$45,000 swimming pool were installed by the owner. A country store was held in an old Carriage House on the grounds. The Gala held the evening before featured guests dancing under the stars and a concert pianist played the grand piano located in the front drawing room. The Symphony Society saved a local historical home treasure and gave back to the community a second historical home on McGregor.

2003-04 "So that the Music Continues for our Children" was Diane Varisto's theme. Diane's year was special indeed with the Holiday Walk at the new development, Renaissance, on Daniels Road. The Designer Showcase event held in February every year was outstanding. The home was in the new Bonita Bay Community located on the Orange River off Route 80 called "Veranda". A typical South Florida home nestled in the embrace of towering ancient oak and slash pines. The Gala offered a sight that gave the appearance you were visiting a palace under a giant silk nylon tent with music and lights glowing in the dark. Truly a grand opening for the Veranda Development.

"Building Musical Bridges to the Future" was the theme chosen by Harriet Reece 2004-05. Harriet, with her expertise and leadership skills was able to develop a stronger, more efficient organizational structure. She sought ways and means for smooth transference leadership from one year to the next. The year, of course, offered all the traditional activities as all the years have.

Although we are not a paid corporation, the Society has become a corporation of volunteers who are devoted to the ideology that music is food for the soul. Our symphony orchestra is a vital part of the musical growth in our community and to the healthy development of our youth.

Harriet had chaired the successful 2004 Designer Showcase and now she as President also chaired the 2005 event, "The Symphony House", as it was named by the developer. The small development on South McGregor Blvd. on the river has old world charm, Mediterranean design and proved to be a winner for the Society. Harriet had entered this project in the ASOL, and was awarded the Silver Star, which will be presented at the ASOL Conference in Los Angeles.

Pat Lang introduced us to a 2005-2006 season "In Harmonious Collaboration." The year was outstanding with over \$105,000.00 being raised. Each traditional event was exciting with new ideas

constantly developing. New faces, newly made friends, changes and new thoughts were tossed about. We keep the tried and true and still dare to explore. It's not unlike what our conductors and musicians do: some music is repeated, explored, changed in tempo or volume. Some music can be performed frequently, but it must be kept fresh for the performer as well as the listener.

This is my last article on the History of the Society. You all have made the organization what it is today. It has become a vital, successful, unique collaboration of women and men with a goal forever young: to provide good music for the betterment of our community and our spirit. Thank you all for the wondrous functions we enjoyed all those years. As our president, Pat Lang, stated so eloquently on the front of this May 2006 issue: "We must have passion in our lives", passion in what we believe and passion in how we live. Each composer had passion as he or she composed the great music that we enjoy today.

