

Midland-Odessa Symphony

The Midland-Odessa Symphony and Chorale began as two separate entities. The Midland Symphony originated in September 1952, when Naomi Lancaster convened a group of citizens for the purpose of establishing a symphony orchestra. The result was an unincorporated association known as the Midland Society of Community Music chaired by Lancaster. The name of the organization was soon changed to the Midland Symphony and Chorus Association. The first conductor in 1952 was Mathys Abas, a young musician from the Netherlands who was in the United States to complete his education. Abas recruited seventeen local musicians and fifteen singers who were joined by musicians from Abilene and Lubbock for their first performance in January 1953, at San Jacinto Junior High School auditorium. Since Abas was in the country on a student visa, he returned to the Netherlands when the visa expired.



Following Abas, the Midland Symphony hired Walter Mantani in July 1953. Mantani was so successful that, in 1954, his second year in the Permian Basin, he also was hired to be conductor of the Odessa Symphony. After enjoying a successful career leading both orchestras, Mantani resigned at the end of the 1961-1962 season. A search for his successor began, and the Midland Symphony hired Lara Hoggard, who had earned his doctorate at Columbia University and gained a national reputation as a choral director and conductor. Dr. Hoggard would help lead the effort to merge the Midland and Odessa orchestras. By 1968, Robert J. Cowan, President of the Midland Association, and John W. Torrey, President of the Odessa Association, convinced their respective boards to form a new non-profit corporation, the Midland-Odessa Symphony & Chorale, Inc. The charter was issued on January 8, 1969, and the new corporation took over all jointly owned property and operations. Hoggard's resignation at the end of the 1966-1967 season led to the hiring of Robert G. Mann, who served as Music Director of the Midland-Odessa Symphony until April, 1971. He would be followed by Phillip Spurgeon, former conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, who was hired as acting director for the 1971-1972 season. The Midland-Odessa Symphony's next conductor, arriving for the start of the 1972-1973 season, was Robert Kreis, who remained two years.

In 1974, Dr. Thomas Hohstadt arrived to begin the longest tenure of any conductor of the Midland-Odessa Symphony. Under Hohstadt's leadership the ensemble concept was introduced into the symphony. In 1977, Hohstadt hired the Thouvenel Quartet, which provided the orchestra with principal violinists, violist, and cellist, and made possible a series of chamber concerts by the string quartet itself. In recent years, the Midland-Odessa Symphony and Chorale has remained very active, featuring performances by such artists as pianists Peter Nero, Ferrante and Teicher, Dave Brubeck, and Roger Williams, classical guitarist Carlos Montoya, soprano Roberta Peters, Broadway artist Anna Maria Alberghetti, and violinist Eugene Fodor. In early 1981 the Symphony and Chorale began to give concerts in Big Spring, and the following season the orchestra went on tour in Mexico. For the Midland centennial celebration in 1985, the Symphony commissioned a work by Samuel Jones, former conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic and first dean of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. Titled "Listen Now, My Children," the piece utilized numerous folk songs of early Texas and was included in a 1988 recording by the Symphony. Dr. Hohstadt remained with the Symphony for 15 years and was succeeded by Don Jaeger (1989-1995), Rob Hunt (1995-2001), and Nyela Basney (2002-2004). In 1992 the Symphony faced bankruptcy, but concerned citizens launched a successful

campaign which culminated in the hiring of Frank Bell, a retired business executive, as new Executive Director. Under Bell's leadership, new fiscal policies were put in place, and by 2000, when he passed the management of the Symphony on to his successor, the organization had an endowment of more than \$1,000,000.

Currently the Midland-Odessa Symphony & Chorale has four Pops concerts and four Classical 'Masterworks' concerts per season. In addition the Symphony and Chorale supports four ensembles: the Permian Basin String Quartet, Lone Star Brass, West Texas Winds and Midland-Odessa Symphony Chorale. For the 2006-2007 season the principal guest conductor is Gary Lewis.

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