

The History of the Charleston Music Club* (1936 – 2020):

Under the leadership of our first President, Mrs. John N. Thomas, “The Charleston Music Study Club” began in 1936, an auspicious year for classical music in Charleston. This coincided with the starting of The Charleston Community Orchestra, the first iteration of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. The Orchestra was founded by music lovers and Club members Miss Maude Winthrop Gibbon and Mrs. Martha Laurens Patterson. From the start, Club members were prominent arts supporters and performers with local ensembles.

As the Club grew through the 1940s and into the 1960s, membership continued to reflect a balance of music advocates with professional musicians. One President from this era, Claire McPhail, had a career for 30 years as the music critic for Charleston’s newspaper, *The Post & Courier*, and was an active performing singer in the Charleston Opera. With Mrs. McPhail’s leadership, the Club was instrumental in instituting music classes in local public school curricula in the 1950s.

In 1976, Miss Emily Remington moved to our city and joined the Club, while simultaneously establishing a first-rate choir that eventually became the Charleston Symphony Chorus. She had 90 years of continuous church music service, having started playing organ in her father’s church at age 10 and a full career as organist/choir director at numerous churches until shortly before her death in 2020, just shy of 104!

Since the 1980s, our Club has been blessed with many talented members who have over 30 (some 50!) years’ service as choir members, organists, choir directors, and/or choral composers (Clara Godshall, Mary Ann Spivey, Jeannie King, Jean Breza, Marilyn Taylor, and Barbara Loehr-Fox). We have long-time music teachers like Jeannie King with 44 years of classroom dedication as well as brilliant young teachers, fresh from their music degrees. Throughout, the Charleston Music Club has remained committed to offering a Junior Music Club, thanks to many but especially Mary Ann Spivey who guided it over the past 3 decades.

Marilyn Curry, our eldest member at age 91, had a brilliant violin career, having studied at Curtis Institute of Music, and is still playing to date! She was active as Concertmistress from 1964 to 1981 for the Charleston Orchestra/Symphony (Dir. Lucien DeGroot). Dr. Don Shetler, a gifted cellist and pedagogue affiliated with Eastman, organized and continued a weekly chamber music group within the Charleston Music Club until his death at age 87 in 2014. Our very own Geraldine (Jerry) Cassidy was a NFMC representative and SCFMC Board Member-at-Large for many years in the 1990s and 2000s.

We were proud to host the SCFMC 85th Annual Convention in Charleston with the theme “Music Bridges All Ages.” Under the enthusiastic leadership of President Linda Manning, it included a performance by a 2006 Student Scholarship Winner, Seth Gilliard, who has since made national headlines and a music career with his unique violin “mash-up” of classical pieces with Popular and Hip-Hop tunes.

Today, our Club continues the long tradition of active participation in the musical life of Charleston, some in leadership roles in other arts organizations (Dr. Irina Pevzner, Director of *Charleston Academy of Music*). For the past 14 years, we have brought a monthly outreach concert series to local elderly and homebound which has continued “virtually” uninterrupted during the COVID pandemic. And with our Scholarship Program, we continue to support our local youth musical talent, many of whom have gone on to illustrious music careers.

Submitted by Dr. Terri Thomas, December 2020

(*The Club’s name was changed to Charleston Music Club in 2003).