

**PRINCE GEORGE'S PHILHARMONIC**  
**1965 to 2015**  
**A HISTORY**

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## The Beginnings

The orchestra that we know today as the Prince George's Philharmonic had its beginnings in Bowie, Maryland, through the efforts of Rita Souweine. Mrs. Souweine and her husband were raising their children in the early 1960s, in the then-new residential development of Belair-at-Bowie. Mrs. Souweine was particularly eager for her viola-playing daughter, Jamie, to have the experience of orchestra performance. In 1964, Rita began working with friends and with staff of



Rita Souweine

the *Bowie Post-Times*, a small newspaper produced in the Belair community. The *Post-Times* ran articles announcing the formation of a new orchestra, and encouraged instrumentalists to join the growing group.

By September of 1964, a small group of musicians began rehearsing at Belair Junior High School each Wednesday evening. The first orchestra leader was Robert Schaaf, professor in the musical theater department of American University. Schaaf had received two bachelor's degrees, in organ performance and music theory, from the University of Kansas. After serving in the army, he returned to the University of Kansas for an advanced degree, and then in

1963 came to American University in Washington, D.C. He was interested in working with a local orchestra, and was invited by Rita Souweine to come regularly to Bowie to help put together the new orchestra and to direct rehearsals. In September 1964, Schaaf began conducting weekly rehearsals at the Belair Junior High School, traveling without remuneration from the District of Columbia while teaching at American University.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Rita Souweine worked with friends to attract more musicians to the new orchestra. They ran frequent calls in the *Bowie Post-Times* for additional string and wind players. Rita attended the rehearsals, helped set up chairs, and kept announcements and advertisements appearing in other local newspapers. She made contacts with other local supporters of orchestral music, and by late fall of 1964, music enthusiasts, mostly from Bowie, established the Prince George's Symphonic Association, Inc. The first president of the new association was William Mirabella, with Rita Souweine as secretary, and Irene Murphy as treasurer. The Association was to be composed of a Board of Directors, a Women's Auxiliary, and a Publicity Director. It was through this Association that the Bowie Civic Orchestra was born. The stated purposes of the Association were: to introduce into Prince George's County organizations addressing themselves to

music of a high order; to bring music close to home for all residents of the County; to provide individuals with a vehicle for practicing and improving their knowledge of instrumental music during leisure hours; to produce entertaining and educational programs for young people which will demonstrate to them high standards of artistic taste; to contribute to the enrichment of musical offerings in the schools in Prince George's County; to encourage artists, performers, and teachers to establish residence in Prince George's County, and particularly to foster talented young musicians in their training and artistic development.<sup>2</sup>

Rehearsals continued for the small Bowie orchestra under Robert Schaaf's direction, and while the new Board of Directors worked hard to attract string players, the first performances, just before Christmas of 1964, were by the brass section. Three performances of carols were sponsored by the Bowie Businessmen's Association and conducted by Mr. Schaaf. The efforts were lauded by the local *Bowie Post Times*: "During this period the highly professional Mr. Schaaf has given his time and effort – commuting from the heart of Washington – without pay. In fact, the budget of the orchestra has been non-existent."<sup>3</sup>

After a year, as Maestro Schaaf's commitments to organ recitals and to American University increased, he left the still-forming orchestra, beginning in 1966 a 45-year career as organist and chapel choirmaster at the Old Post Chapel at Fort Myer (now Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall) adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. He has now retired, and resides in West Virginia, but he graciously spoke to the author with reminiscences of his time with the newly forming orchestra during its earliest year.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Orchestra under Lloyd Farrar**

The next leader of the still-forming orchestra was Lloyd Farrar, who had graduated from the University of Illinois with degrees in trombone and musicology, and had spent a Fulbright year in the Netherlands studying early Dutch music. By 1965, after teaching at Mary Washington College, he had come to the Washington area to work at the Library of Congress on his dissertation in musicology. Through



**Lloyd Farrar**

connections with employees of the Dale Music Company, Lloyd Farrar learned that a new orchestra in Bowie was seeking a music director; he made contact with Mrs. Souweine, and began as director in September 1965. Rehearsals moved to the new Bowie High School that had opened that fall. Wishing to expand beyond the borders of Bowie, the orchestra, under Farrar's leadership, was renamed the Prince George's Civic Orchestra. Rita Souweine continued her enthusiastic support of the orchestra, working with Maestro Farrar to spread the word and attract more musicians, while

scheduling rehearsals at various schools in Bowie. She says now that during those early years “I moved a lot of chairs, and provided a lot of punch and cookies.”<sup>5</sup>

During these formative years, Rita Souweine and Lloyd Farrar were the lifeblood of the orchestra. With no salaries, and little income from donations, they provided the financial support for the maintenance and growth of the orchestra, and are generally acknowledged as responsible for the orchestra’s very existence. Their early efforts were rewarded in December 1965, when the orchestra performed a pair of concerts. The first public concert was performed on Sunday afternoon, December 19, 1965, in the auditorium of the new Bowie High School. The concert included music by Beethoven, Prokofief, Bartok, Fauré, and Vaughn Williams, as well as a Verdi aria sung by baritone Ronald Hedlund, who had recently made his operatic debut with the Washington Opera Society, and soon went on to an eminent operatic career. This Bowie concert was preceded by a sort of “trial run” (though without the Hedlund solo) on the previous day at the auditorium of De La Salle College in Avondale, on the boundary of the District of Columbia.<sup>6</sup>

Marie Crump, who would later become a mainstay of the Prince George’s Civic Opera, was at that time the author of a regular Bowie column in *The Prince George’s Post*, another local newspaper. In a glowing report of December 23, 1965, she wrote: “Prince George’s County has something to be truly proud of – the new Prince George’s Civic Orchestra which gave its first public concert last Sunday afternoon, December 19, in the auditorium of the Bowie Senior High School. The orchestra of 51 talented musicians under the direction of Lloyd P. Farrar gave a wonderful concert, and the singing of Ronald Hedlund, baritone, was most enjoyable.”<sup>7</sup>



**Concertmaster Margaret Wardall and Assistant Concertmaster Jon Teske, 1966**

We have personal reminiscences of this period from a current (2015) member of the Philharmonic’s first violin section, Jon Teske, who in 1965 was recruited as Assistant Concertmaster of the orchestra.<sup>8</sup> The first Concertmaster was Margaret Wardall, who was with the orchestra for only a short time (she later returned to serve as Concertmaster between 1969 and 1973). From 1966 to 1969 the Concertmaster was Charles Granofsky, who had just retired from a long Air Force career with the “Strolling Strings,” that part of the U.S.A.F. Band well known for playing at the White House during the Kennedy years. Mr. Granofsky, in