

CORNELL UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2019 ISSUE 3

# WHOLE NOTE



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## About the Orchestras

The Cornell Symphony Orchestra is one of the highest caliber musical groups on the Cornell campus. The group's members are drawn from all circles of Cornell life, including undergraduate students, graduate students, and members of the Ithaca community. Under the direction of Adrian Slywotzky this semester, the Cornell Symphony Orchestra continually strives to present the best works of contemporary composers as well as compositions by established musical figures.

The Cornell Chamber Orchestra is a string orchestra of approximately 30 musicians, comprising students from all colleges on campus. Acceptance into the orchestra is by audition only. The Chamber Orchestra performs a wide variety of works from the 18th century to present time, written expressly for the intimate setting of a smaller chamber orchestra. The Chamber Orchestra, lead by Timna Mayer this semester, rehearses in Barnes Hall and performs many of their concerts in this venue.

# Orchestra at College?

a letter from the editor

BY SAGE LEE

CELLO, '22

My name is Sage Lee and I am a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences. I am a cellist in CSO, and I am honored and thrilled to be serving as the Newsletter Chair of the Cornell Orchestra Board. I'm hoping to revamp the newsletter concept for the future and share the freshman orchestra member experience.

## I actually almost didn't audition for orchestra at all.

The excerpts, especially those from the Mahler, scared me (my hands are too small!) and I was expecting an exclusive, competitive audition process that would surely weed me out early on. The audition was, in fact, nothing like what I feared. The "judging panel" was accommodating, sincere, and curious about my personal playing. I left the room feeling relieved about going through with the audition, and confident that I'd be bettering my freshman year here at Cornell. My acceptance into CSO has been the doorway to a fulfilling freshman experience so far.

I've been a member of orchestras of all kinds for nearly a decade now. I find myself always turning to orchestra and music circles for the community -- for friends and new families, for mentors and mentees. CSO has been no different. Despite being but a freshman, I have already met so many wonderful people whom

I am genuinely honored to call friends. The abundance of social events (thank you, chair of the social kind) on top of the inherently social concept of orchestra has made it surprisingly easy for me and other freshmen to integrate smoothly into the community. Orchestra has quelled the fear of making new friends that I'm sure all prospective and new college students can relate strongly to.

It's hard to believe I was a high school senior applying to colleges only a year ago. I remember that as a high school senior, one of my strict stipulations when choosing where to send college applications was the inclusion of a non-major music program, or at least an orchestra. Cornell University fulfills this personal requirement exceptionally well; I've already been given a performance opportunity with a chamber group under the chamber music program here and am enjoying the chance to learn the chamber repertoire of dreams. I've seen violin soloists and a piano-clarinet-cello trio and a cello quintet I've fallen in love with. Most of the staff here are amazing and accommodating, and the history and theory courses are engaging and interesting, pushing me down the path of a potential music minor.

And of course, the orchestra experience has been exactly what I've wanted -- we get to play grandiose full orchestra pieces I remember listening to as an eight year old in the elementary

Music Memory program (anybody else?). We went on an exhilarating trip this past winter break to Taiwan, of all places, which was the perfect amalgamation of doing what we love most with the people we love most. Rehearsals are a small reprieve from the daily sufferings of a college student, and I find that listening to and playing music genuinely acts as healing for my soul. I look forward to every Monday and Wednesday, when I get the chance to catch up with some of my closest friends and make music with them. I love seeing our conductor get excited about the music, hearing the orchestra breathe together before an entrance, and feeling my bow strokes align with those of my stand partner.

I don't know where I would be without orchestra. I'm excited for what's to come during the next three years of my life as a Cornellian -- and during my time in orchestra at college.

## Upcoming Concerts

**MARCH 17, 2019**

CCO, lead by Timna Mayer  
Bartok, Mozart, Piazzolla  
Barnes Hall @ 3 PM

**APRIL 26, 2019**

CCO, lead by Timna Mayer  
Bach, Rachman, de Saraste, Grieg  
Barnes Hall @ 7 PM

**APRIL 28, 2019**

CSO, lead by Adrian Slywotzky  
Stravinsky, Brahms  
Bailey Hall @ 3 PM

the orchestra onstage before the concert in Taipei, Taiwan



photo by Lindsey Forg





all photos provided by Adrian Slywotzky

# Meet the Conductor

Introducing Adrian Slywotzky,  
director of CSO for the 2019 Spring season

BY SAGE LEE AND COREY ZHENG  
CELLO, '22      VIOLA, '20

The orchestra would like to welcome our new guest conductor for the 2019 spring semester, Adrian Slywotzky. Adrian currently serves as Associate Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras. He holds orchestral conducting degrees from both the University of Michigan and the Yale School of Music. He also holds a BA of architecture and a Master of Music from Yale. We had the great opportunity to do a quick interview with Adrian. We hope this serves as a glance into his past experiences and into him as a person!

Q: What's your personal musical experience?

A: I've been playing violin since the age of four, and started conducting in college. As a college student I majored in architecture, while also playing and conducting —so when I checked out the CSO roster online in the course of my research about the group, I was excited to see such a huge range of majors represented. I think there's something very special about an orchestra that dedicates itself to rehearsing and performing even with so many competing interests and obligations to manage.

Q: What was your first impression of the orchestra, back when we first met you during the conductor auditions?

A: I was really delighted to meet the orchestra back in November. I enjoyed rehearsing with CSO from the get-go, and I especially appreciated that the group was receptive to trying out some new ideas in the Mahler, even right after having performed the piece. That was one of the reasons I was excited to work with CSO.

Q: How has your experience been working with CSO so far?

A: I think we've been on a good path, and I'm looking forward to what comes next. I'm always trying to make each rehearsal better than the last, each concert better than the last—that's the job, after all. There are still plenty of things to discover this week, even at the end of a long concert cycle: how we work in Bailey as opposed to B20, how we work in performance as opposed to rehearsal.

Q: Favorite composer or orchestral piece?

A: No such thing! I tend to fall in love with whichever repertoire I'm working on at the moment. Sometimes I need a very different outlet, as a balance to the music at hand—during this cycle, I've found myself listening to Satie's "Gymnopédies," some of Liszt's solo piano pieces, and Sondheim show tunes.

Q: I know you have a lot of fun facts about "Pictures At An Exhibition". What's your favorite tidbit about the piece?

A: One thing I love about "Pictures" is that it emerges out of the ideas of so many individual creators — Hartman (the artist), Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov (who edited the first published version), Ravel, even Stasov (whom we can thank for the movement descriptions) and Koussevitzky (who commissioned and premiered Ravel's orchestration). The piece is a wonderful melding of all these different influences and sources.





BY ALISON HSIEH  
CELLO, '21



The Music Mentor Program, established in the Fall of 2017, has successfully entered the Ithaca community as a program that enables young, aspiring musicians to receive free lessons from Cornell students currently enrolled in university music programs. Over the past year and a half, the program has grown to become a commonly mentioned topic among parents from Cayuga Heights Elementary School, the main school that the program currently works with. This semester, the mentor program is looking to expand to other schools, allowing Cornell students to branch out deeper into the community and reach more students of different ages and locations.



Music mentoring would not be possible without the undying support of Ithaca school parents and of course, the Cornell students who volunteer their time on weekends to mentoring their mentees. Even though the program is still quite new, we are excited to see its growth in the next few years, and are excited for what's to come in the near future.

# Imagine That Everyone

BY MAXWELL ALEMÁN



above and right: Timna Mayer leading a CCO rehearsal, violin in hand

...That's her mentality. With this notion, Timna Mayer, the Interim Director of Cornell Chamber Orchestra (CCO), guides her ensemble into virtually uncharted territory. Unlike most directors, Mayer leads without a baton, and never envisions her orchestra performing with her at the helm. In fact, she has dismantled the hierarchy of her orchestra entirely by ousting commonplace leadership roles; every musician on stage shares in the group's authoritative impulse. And she does this fearlessly, for in Mayer's mind, the soul of the orchestra depends on each player making a difference by both leading and co-educating. As she sees it, these roles call on the same skills, and develop a relationship of trust between each member of the orchestra.

This axiom rests at the very core of her teaching, and represents her music-making philosophy at large.

Given this revolutionary point of view, it was necessary to consult Mayer directly, learn about her diverging methods, and get a better sense of her pedagogy. This article serves to relay that investigation and shed light on CCO's exciting trajectory.

In every CCO rehearsal, students are not only encouraged, but are obliged, to take leadership responsibility. In the traditional model

# Were a Leader...

of an orchestra, each section of instruments is appointed a leader, with a relatively fixed order for those who are left to follow. From there, section leaders are stratified into a hierarchy, from which the concertmaster, or chief violinist, gets the utmost say. Beyond that, the conductor has the final word. Mayer doesn't simply turn that pyramid of ranking upside down: she shatters it, picks up the loose bricks, chisels them into new shapes, and constructs an edifice where every brick carries the same weight. Her orchestra has no conductor, and the musicians in each section rotate so that every person must take initiative. In due course, they recognize the importance of a broadly neglected practice, namely, leading by following.

A good leader must continuously cultivate the balance between taking and deferring charge. In other words, he or she must respect the fact that followers still have autonomy. In the CCO, this concept gives every single musician a sense of the orchestra as a collective, and a unique position of clout. With Mayer as their model, the students co-educate in an effort to strengthen the whole. In this way, she and the ensemble work together

to contradict a rather passive and reprehensive adage, which claims "an orchestra is only as strong as its weakest member". This is a platitude passed around groups that lack resourcefulness and pluck.

With unprecedented ardor, Mayer leads orchestra rehearsals with violin in hand, teaching players to cue each other, providing technical advice that influences their sound and ability to convey musical ideas, and inciting confident energy into their work. She does all of this equipped with the knowledge and experience learnt on her by Professor Chris Kim and the Cornell Symphony Orchestra, which she feeds back into the system with motivated, assertive, and expressive musicians. To witness the Cornell Chamber Orchestra yourself, mark your calendar for the 17th of March, when the ensemble will perform its program, *Around the World*, at Barnes Hall. This concert will feature a collection of classical music that draws influences from sultry South America, agrarian Hungary, the pristine Austrian Alps (where Mayer was born and raised!), and sentimental Scandinavia. Watch the students work together in a way Cornell has never seen before.



# Tour Testimonials

BY SAGE LEE  
CELLO, '22

In January, the Cornell Orchestras enjoyed an immensely successful tour to Shanghai and Taipei. Our students had an amazing time and would love to share their experiences with you!

When I first heard that Cornell Orchestras would be going on tour, I was excited to be able to experience collaborating with a professional orchestra in another country and explore Taiwan. One thing I wasn't expecting was getting to know as many other members of the orchestra as I did. I became friends with people I would not have even met had it not been for tour. In the words of Chris Kim, we really got to know more about what it is like to live "like local musicians in Taiwan." I think we really were able to connect with Taipei more than other tourists because of our collaborations and outreach events and because we got the chance to explore as much as we wanted to with new and old friends. Going on tour was a great experience, and I'm really looking forward to the next one.

Christine Sit, '21 Environmental and Sustainability Sciences

As an introvert, I had some trepidation going halfway across the world with a large number of people on a tour planned largely by undergraduate students. But this quickly dissolved as I actually got to know the people I had been playing with for two years. I made a big effort each sightseeing day to spend it with different section-one day violas, another horns, once violins, another basses; then cellos, woodwinds, brass, and strings...as time went on I saw more and more mixing across the group, indicating an increased bonding across the ensemble. The professionalism was evident at each rehearsal, outreach activity to engage with local schools, and the concert, and the enthusiasm for playing and interpreting a difficult piece and composer (Mahler) was palpable. What an experience to play with professional musicians and hold our own as non-music majors! Chris Kim's never-ending confidence and pride in the group helped us rise to the occasion.

Susi Varvayanis, staff

top: Chris Kim conducts a rehearsal; bottom: the orchestra before the concert









the orchestra's cello section, including both TSO members and Cornell students

The opportunity to participate in the tour was one of the most meaningful experiences I have taken part in. The ability to communicate with people around the world through music is something that I have always wanted to do. Despite it being financially difficult, I was so lucky to be able to attend this tour after so much help from donors who made it possible. The partners we had with TSO in Taiwan were amazing musicians and people who, despite many of them not speaking our language, were able to connect with us through the music we were playing and form bonds of friendship. Being able to visit a foreign country not only inspired us to have open minds and thoughts about new people and experiences but also brought our orchestra closer together. There is something that has definitely changed among the orchestra members since the tour; we understand each other more fundamentally and it shows through our music. This is invaluable to the success of our ensemble. Being able to go on tour as a group is something that cannot be replicated in an academic setting and something which has far-reaching effects beyond success in the orchestra that help us become better and more conscientious members of society. The greater appreciation we gained for the world and for people, in general, will show for the rest of our lives.

Geneva Notario, '21 Biological Sciences



friends on the steps of the Chiang-Kai Shek memorial



the orchestra's bass section, TSO + Cornell

The orchestra is a breathing and living organism. Each musician has to live and breath the music in order for this organism to become a functional unit. Coordinating the synchronicity of over 100 musicians within an orchestra is no easy task, but after going on tour to Taipei, I strongly believe our orchestra became a transformative organism that adapts and molds to the music. This tour not only provided us with a deeper understanding of the music but also provided the opportunity for musicians to mingle and bond. String players interacted with winds, percussionists with the brass -- a sense of family was created. This developed a sense of trust between the musicians which added more character and emotion to our final performance. As a senior, it was wonderful to end my Cornell Orchestras career with this tour. It was truly the icing on the cake.

Zeyu Hu, '19 Environmental and Sustainability Sciences, '19 MENG



friends in front of Taipei101



friends in the hostel





top, right, and bottom: outreach at Kuang Jen Catholic High School

The tour to Asia was an unforgettable experience for me. I would like to thank the Cornell Music Department, all the donors for this tour, and Taipei Symphony Orchestra for giving us the opportunity to travel to Asia and share music with the TSO members. This tour was an opportunity to discover myself because I realized how much I loved music.

I am so grateful for the opportunity for us to visit local schools in Taiwan. It was so inspiring to see so many young, passionate students enjoying making music. Also, it was amazing to see how quickly the members of Cornell Orchestras and TSO connected through the music. Although we did not speak the same language, through music, we shared our perspective on Mahler and Mendelssohn and connected with each other. With the energy that each member of the orchestra brought to the rehearsal, I realized how powerful music can be. Overall, this tour was so memorable and valuable, and I want to give thanks to everyone who was involved in this tour for giving me this precious time.

Seungmin Lee, '22 Civil Engineering





I cannot express in words how lucky I feel to have gone to Taiwan with Cornell Orchestras. Mahler Symphony no. 1 was my first time ever playing a full symphony, and to get to do this in Taipei with the TSO made it all the more exciting. I got to bond with the other orchestra members in a way not possible in Ithaca, and I think these social connections help form us into a better ensemble as a whole.

The tour was a perfect balance of intense rehearsal time, time to explore the food, sights, and culture of Taiwan, and outreach to local schools. It was so meaningful to play with the middle and high school students as well as the TSO members, because despite language barriers we were all speaking the common language of music. The tour made me so excited for my next few years in orchestra at Cornell.

Lindsey Forg, '22 Environmental  
and Sustainability Sciences



all photos taken and provided by Cornell students and staff

# Thank You & Farewell

a letter from the Orchestra President

BY GRACE HWANG  
VIOLIN, '19

Cornell is a tough school to attend. Against the backdrop of seemingly endless grey weather and unceasing academic pressure, it is easy to become numb. Sadness, happiness, defeat, triumph. It is easy for them to blur into monotony. In this monotonous space, we are in the most danger—dispassionate, disillusioned—our feelings apathetic and unvarying. In my sophomore year, the do-it-all energy and passion that so many of us foster suddenly left me. I had a crippling lack of confidence in not only my ability to succeed in my studies, but also in my interest in my field. I retreated into a space that many college students occupy for some time during their four years. Uncertainty and fear made me numb to every feeling, good or bad. I went through the routine of my life, feeling nothing and losing the precious sense of service to humanity that brought me to Cornell in the first place.

During fall break of my sophomore year, I went to New York City with two friends from orchestra. We bought tickets to watch the Philadelphia Orchestra perform Mahler Symphony No. 6 under the direction of the legendary Maestro Simon Rattle at Carnegie Hall. Seated high in the balcony, I was carried along emotions I had long become numb to in the midst of academic pressure. The music rose over mountains and valleys of emotional turmoil, tender recollections of memories past, intense and quiet tragedy, and searing loss. Maestro Rattle held his arms in the air long after

that final pizzicato, letting what we think of as a short note fade slowly, the entire audience straining to hang on to the last whispers of the sound. We burst out of Carnegie Hall onto Times Square and I felt invigorated for the first time in months. We felt reconnected with our humanity through the complexity of a tragic symphony—through the tranquility of loving memories, angst of loss, defeat in the face of fate, and most of all, the continuity of life in turmoil of it all.



post-concert happiness: (left to right)  
Eunu Song ('17), Lauren Blacker ('17), Grace Hwang ('19)



It is difficult to always live in the moment. Our academic success often demands that we plan constantly, always keep sight of our path, and only make calculated changes. But in the hour and 45 minutes we were in Carnegie Hall, we were clinging to every moment as it came and passing on to the next just as Mahler so masterfully intended it to be. We actually were so caught up in the moment, we got completely lost leaving Carnegie Hall. We were chattering about every exquisite moment, practically running through Times Square until we suddenly ended up at the river by the Lincoln Tunnel. That night, I wondered if I would ever feel so joyously human again.

And I did. Six months later, the orchestra toured in Argentina, collaborating with the Orquestra Sinfonica del Neuquen on that very special piece, Mahler Symphony No. 6. There are a lot of important things to say about that tour—the cross-cultural collaboration, the sprawling scenery of Patagonia, the way our orchestra family became even closer. The entire process was formative, but during the performance, I felt swept away again. Many of us who perform in this orchestra are accomplished musicians from childhood, but we still have very few opportunities to play in halls meant for music. Instead, we're often in auditoriums or speaking forums, where the music does not feel as gratifying as it does in a music hall. So to have an opportunity to perform in a theatre to a full house, not only inside, but outside in the public town square, was a monumental opportunity for us. After the performance, we exited the theatre to embraces from strangers, a vibrating energy in the air. You can feel the sheer amount of joy in the pictures.

The feelings I take away from my time with the Cornell Orchestras are not always tangible. But one thing is clear. Our love for music will never fade behind academic priorities. It is a truly special gift to experience music and academics or professional work as something greater than a zero-sum game. Investment in music should not be reduced to its potential to raise a child's grades in school. Music gives us expression when we fail to find words. Each moment of music builds to a reflection of our unique yet connected human experience. At the very time when it is easy, almost safe, to become detached from our feelings while we trudge to the library, music anchors us to our empathy and our spark. Music makes us better humans to ourselves and to others. And because of that, I will always be grateful for the opportunity to continue playing violin at Cornell. Those who lament the "impending death" of classical music must come see Cornell—to see how the resiliency of classical music is built here. Current orchestral players become future music patrons, new conductors are mentored, and an elevating platform is provided for new composers.

As I complete my final semester at Cornell, I am faced with the reality that the Cornell Orchestras will likely be the last high caliber symphonic ensemble I play in. I am reassured by the fact that music will stay in my life, whether I am on stage or in the audience. So I want to say thank you. Thank you to music for bringing me back to the person I am and want to be. Thank you to this orchestra for being the family of a lifetime, for a lifetime. Thank you and a fond farewell.



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