



# Music floats through the

## Zimmermann dislikes the aura of being a conductor

By JEFF GROVE

Gerhardt Zimmermann sounded very sure of himself during a telephone interview the day before he was to conduct a North Carolina Symphony concert in Chapel Hill.

But then, he had a right to. At the age of 36, he is the artistic director and principal conductor of a high-quality professional orchestra — the only one between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. This came despite a decidedly unsensational background. After all, Van Wert, Ohio isn't New York City, and Bowling Green State University is hardly the Eastman School of Music.

Perhaps this training formed Zimmermann's opinion of the conductor's being more a part of the orchestra than its leash-tugging leader. "I've always despised the arrogant attitude of conductors," Zimmermann said in a June interview with *The News and Observer* in Raleigh. Now he clarifies that by saying, "I guess I mean that I dislike the aura of being a conductor."

It is not unusual, then, that Zimmermann is willing to share the podium with other conductors. "I think it's good that guest conductors are brought in," he said. "It gives the audience a little diversity, and it allows me to program works that I'm not particularly attracted to conduct."

What does he like to conduct? His first love is German music. "The best way to build an orchestra is through the Germanic repertoire," he said. Two-thirds of the works to be performed in Chapel Hill by the Symphony this season are by German composers or composers leaning toward a Germanic style. "In the future," Zimmermann said, "I'd like to add the big Mahler symphonies, and, of course, Bruckner and the Strauss tone poems."

When the absence of British music in this year's repertoire was pointed out, Zimmermann said, "Well, we're doing the Britten *War Requiem* this season, but not in Chapel Hill. I would like to do some works by Elgar, and some of the Vaughan Williams symphonies, which are quite beautiful. I'm also thinking of some things by Tippett. He's a very fine composer."

Other than that, Zimmermann said, future seasons will be much like this year's season.

Though public taste is always a concern in planning an orchestra's repertoire, it is even more crucial for the financially troubled N.C. Symphony. Zimmermann said of his role in helping the orchestra achieve financial stability, "The only thing I can really give the people is a first-class orchestra, one that is exciting in performance, and through that you open up the doors to a wider financial base."

Zimmermann distinguishes two movements in today's trend to popularize classical music. He conducts pops concerts, which feature light classical favorites, but he said he doesn't do the "Fifth of Beethoven" or "Hooked on Clas-

sics" — they aren't his style. The pops concerts represent Zimmermann's attempt "to get people turned on to the symphony in general."

The Carolina Union will sponsor one of these concerts Sunday at 4 p.m. in Forest Theatre. Zimmermann programmed the concert to be especially appealing to area audiences. "The Saint-Saens (*Princess Jaune Overture*) is one of those gems that you discover gathering dust in a music library and has no business being buried. Then we're doing Rachmaninoff (*Caprice Bohemien*), which should be a great crowd pleaser. There's a sing-along and the medley from *The Sound of Music*, which speak for themselves."

Zimmermann wants to persuade people whose musical experience is limited to pop music to try classical music.

"As with any acquired taste, one concert won't do it, just as reading one Shakespeare play won't make you love all Shakespeare. I would advise that you try to come to several concerts and get rid of any preconceived notions. It's like trying a new food — you just have to jump in with both feet."

Jeff Grove is assistant arts editor of *The Daily Tar Heel*.

## Half a century old

# NC Symphony comes home for its bir

By JEFF GROVE

The North Carolina Symphony is a stylish operation.

Two occurrences from last Wednesday's concert in Memorial Hall serve as examples. As seems to be traditional, the audience applauded concertmaster Paul Gorski when he came onstage to tune the orchestra. Then, when it came time to open the concert with "The Star-Spangled Banner," all of the orchestra members who could stand while playing did so.

Style was in order for the concert. The Symphony had returned to its birthplace to celebrate its first half-century of existence.

On May 14, 1932, 48 musicians sat on the stage of Hill Hall Auditorium in front of conductor Lamar Stringfield. They were a varied group. Some were professionals while others were amateurs. Some were still in high school, and others were already well-established in their careers.

Getting into the group was no easy job. "The musicians were chosen from among the best in the state," said William Mitchell, who played the trombone in that original group. Mitchell was present at the 1982 concert, along with 12 other members of the original N.C. Symphony.

"I roomed with a fellow who was the mayor of Wilson, so of course he was a good bit older than me," Mitchell said, pointing out the diversity of the group.

Unlike today's Symphony members, the players in the first concert were not paid. "We hoped that someday the orchestra members would be paid, but we were willing to do it just for the excitement," Mitchell said. He said that musicians' salaries in 1932 started at \$15 per week, with the best players netting \$18.50 per week. But volunteer status did not decrease the commitment of the musicians to the group, Mitchell added.

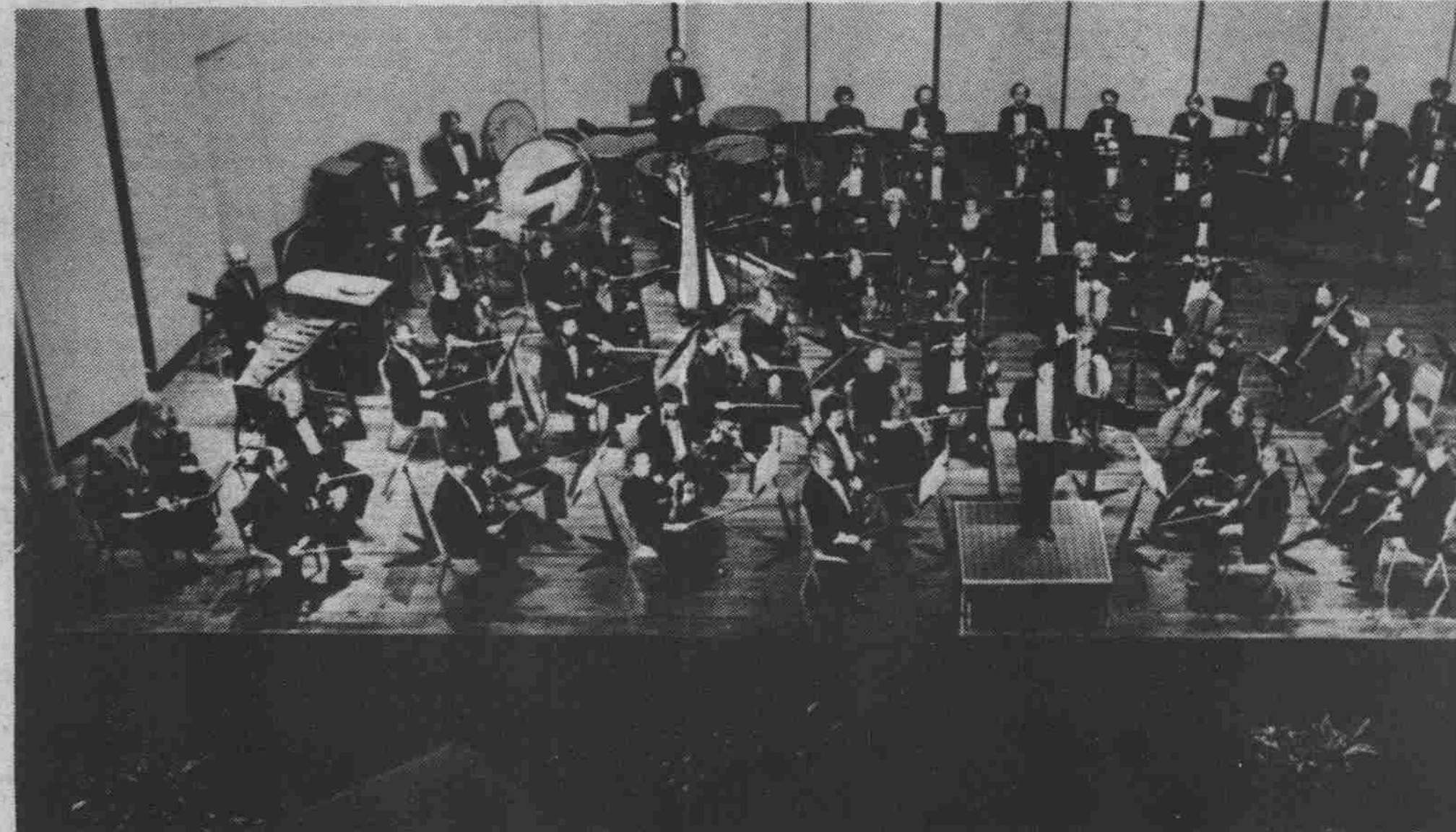
French horn player Raymond Brietz Jr. was probably more excited than Mitchell by the first concert. He met his wife during rehearsals.

"It was exciting enough for me to come from Charlotte to Chapel Hill. But then on the first night of rehearsals I met Raymond, so that sort of increased the excitement," Mrs. Brietz said.

After their marriage, the Brietzes stayed involved in music — he in the Greensboro public schools, and she in their church.

Since Brietz was so involved in music in the schools, he especially admires today's Symphony for its free concerts offered to public school audiences. "The only way you're going to train cultural arts performers is to start early," he said.

The school performances are one indicator of how much the N.C. Symphony has developed in 50 years. Robert Phay, president of the Chapel Hill-Orange County chapter of the North



Formal attire for the North Carolina Symphony performs with Associate Conductor James Ogle

Carolina Symphony Society, explained that the concerts are not really free. Someone has to pay the musicians.

"The evening concerts (in the Chapel Hill subscription series) help fund the daytime concerts to educate school children," Phay said. "So people who go to our regular concerts are helping us out in that way."

*"The Symphony today is a precision instrument."*

William Mitchell  
an original Symphony member

Today the Symphony consists of 66 players, a staff of three conductors, and a flock of office workers who make their home in Raleigh's Memorial Auditorium. All season ticket holders are members of the North Carolina Symphony Society. Local chapters of the Society make arrangements for concerts in their areas and take charge of selling season and individual tickets.

With each concert costing an individual chapter \$8,000, breaking even might seem a problem. But even high ticket prices — \$8 for the general public — have not kept people away. The first Chapel Hill concert this season was actually oversold, and people were turned away when the box office ran out of tickets.

The audience is there. It isn't, however, what you might expect. There is the usual quota of little blue-haired old ladies who drag unwilling husbands in to see and to be seen, but these are in the minority. Plenty of students were present for the recent 50th anniversary concert. And why not? Student ticket prices have been held down to \$2.50, courtesy of the Carolina Union.

Pops concerts also demonstrate widening appeal of classical music. The Union sponsors one such concert in Chapel Hill each year in the fall semester. This year's concert takes place Sunday at 4 p.m. in Forest Theatre. The atmosphere is far from highbrow. People arrive early with picnic meals. Dress ranges from three-piece suits to sweat suits. People are there to share in the musical experience, not to be seen and to be recognized on the society page.

From a volunteer group which finished its first season with a bank balance of \$28.14, the North Carolina Symphony has grown into a complex professional organization with a budget of over \$2 million.

The Symphony survived the Depression first on Federal Emergency Relief Administration grants, then on the Work Projects Administration's use of the Symphony to employ out-of-work players and music teachers. Dr. Benjamin Swalin took over as conductor in 1939 and increased the orchestra's exposure as an

educational group. When Swalin retired in 1971, John Gosling succeeded him and led the Symphony to a position among the nation's major orchestras.

At the Sept. 15 concert, William Mitchell said that he could not compare the performances by the original group with those offered by today's Symphony. "The Symphony today is a precision instrument," he said.

At the close of the concert, the Symphony's present artistic director and principal conductor, Gerhardt Zimmermann, offered thoughts for the past and the future.

"We would like to play three encores for you," he said. "The first we dedicate to all the former Symphony musicians. The second is dedicated to Dr. and Mrs. Swalin for their years of service to the Symphony. The third... is for the next 50 years."

The North Carolina Symphony has already performed one concert in Chapel Hill this fall. Four more are scheduled for the remainder of the academic year.

This Sunday, Gerhardt Zimmermann will conduct a free pops concert at 4 p.m. in Forest Theatre. The program will feature Saint-Saens' *Princess Jaune Overture*, Rachmaninoff's *Caprice Bohemien*, Herold's *Zampa Overture*, a medley of songs from *The Sound of Music*, and Sousa's *Liberty Bell March*.

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William Mitchell  
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Zimmermann will conduct again for an all-Beethoven concert at 8 p.m. Oct. 20 in Memorial Hall. Soloist Richard Luby will perform in the *Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra*, and the Durham Civic Choral Society will be heard in the *Symphony No. 9 in D Minor*.

January 14 will bring another 8 p.m. Memorial Hall concert, this one with a program of music by North Carolina composers. Robert Suderberg will conduct his *Concerto: Night Voyage after Baudelaire for Chamber Orchestra and Soprano*. UNC music professor Roger Hannay then takes over the podium for his *Symphony No. 5 ("American Classic")*. To conclude the program,



Photo courtesy of the North Carolina Symphony

Gerhardt Zimmermann  
Artistic Director and Conductor