

After a successful tour to Argentina in June 2017, the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra returned to Cambridge, MA for an exciting 210th Season, with pieces that highlighted the diverse talents of the orchestra. The whole year was dedicated to celebrating the centennial of Leonard Bernstein, a Harvard alumni and one of the most iconic figures of modern classical music. We opened the season on Freshman Parents' Weekend with a special talk by Bernstein's daughter, Jamie Bernstein, and Professor Caroline Oja, a member of the Harvard University Music Department who was teaching a class on Bernstein's work. Afterwards, we performed Bernstein's "Symphonic Dances" from *West Side Story*, along with the *Chichester Psalms* with the Harvard Choruses, conducted by Andrew Clark. After an intermission, we brought an academic twist to the concert, and projected Bernstein's talk on Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.4 in f minor at the New York Philharmonic Children's show. The HRO played along during the excerpt examples, thereby simulating a true NYPhil Children's show. After the video, the HRO performed the symphony in full. While the concert was long (almost three hours!), tickets sold out and there was large praise from everyone who came. There was much interest in the unique twist that we took with projecting the video, even if it did lengthen the performance. The orchestra far exceeded expectations in terms of profits and morale was high throughout the players looking forward to the rest of the year.

In December, we performed Bernstein's "Profanation" from Symphony No. 1 *Jeremiah*, with our newly appointed student conductor, Reuben Stern '20, a member of the bassoon section. We also performed Debussy's *Prélude à L-après-midi d'un Faune*, under the baton of Fed, and once again included the video projection of Bernstein's New York Phil Children's show talk of the piece before the full performance of the piece. After intermission, we welcomed to the stage the winner of the 2017 James Yannatos Competition - Audrey Chen '18 with the Shostakovich Cello Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major.

In the new year, the orchestra worked with Reuben again to perform Bernstein's Overture to *Candide*. The orchestra again projected the Bernstein video of Brahms' Symphony No.4, Op. 98 before performing the piece in whole. In the second half, we re-welcomed to the stage world-class pianist and silver medalist of the Tchaikovsky competition George Li '18 - he had performed with us in the 2017 tour to Argentina, and was considered a close friend of the orchestra. He closed the night with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor," ending with a standing ovation from the audience.

For the final performance of the year, the Harvard Choruses and HRO worked together put on a performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection." Extra rehearsals, financial worries, logistical worries with stage setup and singers, caused the new Exec Board of HRO to quickly rise to their positions with less transition time. However, the orchestra came together and gave a wonderful performance for its 210th season closing.

In the midst of the orchestra's season, the orchestra itself and select members were busy representing HRO throughout campus. In October, a subgroup of the orchestra calling themselves the HRO Chamber Players performed Stravinsky's *L'Histoire d'un Soldat*, with narration by members of the Harvard University Music Department: Professor Tom Kelly, Professor Anne Shreffler, and conductor Maestro Edward Jones. The students, Erica Chang '19 (clarinet), Steve Ekert '20 (bassoon), Topher Colby '20 (trombone), Kai Trepka '20 (percussion), NEC ringers Ross Wightman (bass) and Andrew Heath (trumpet), and myself on violin, were led by HRO alum Elias Miller '16. During the Mahler preparation, HRO performed Overture to *Candide* at the Harvard Foundation fundraiser celebration - a touching end considering the orchestra had opened the fundraiser with the same piece 5 years prior.

As a finalé to the season and the Class of 2018's end with HRO, the orchestra was invited to perform the Beethoven Emperor concerto with legendary André Watts to kick off Arts First 2018 festival. At this performance, André Watts was presented with the 2018 Luise Vosgerchian Teaching Award, Harvard's highest music award recognizing an outstanding educator. All members of the orchestra was honoured to perform with such an exemplary teacher and pianist in the presence of many important members of Harvard's community, including students, professors, and directors. President Drew Faust was also present and came to the green room to greet André Watts and students after the performance. The performance itself also had an outreach educational component to it. Members of the Argentinian ringers that we played with during tour were visiting that week, and they were able to play with us as part of a continuation of our tour outreach.

Financially, the orchestra started the season off in the red zone due to a Tour that barely made the fundraising deadline to travel to Argentina. We faced setbacks in tour preparations from getting personal and company donations on the ground in Argentina during its economic crisis. However, we worked with the HROF and Fed to create a budget and concert plan for the season that would allow us to put on cohesive concerts that pertained to the Bernstein centennial theme while still being conservative with our projected profits and applying strong cost management. Our increased publicity efforts linked with strong soloists, pieces, and unique academic setting brought us large audience members that boosted the orchestra morale along with bringing in high profits to make up for tour deficits and put us in a good place to still be financially stable even after a project like Mahler 2.

Each concert, we spend money on ringers, coaches for sectionals, any rental pieces, performance recording, poster and program printing, and any instrument rental. In the case of professional singers, HRO must also budget for singers' travel and accommodation, along with the contract fee. We receive aid from the HROF for our coaches and ringers and HRO also tries every concert cycle to save money in hiring alumni in the area, NEC students, or having divided rehearsals if sectionals aren't deemed to be necessary as sections learn their parts.

In previous years, HRO had stipends for members-only lessons and instrument checkups and tweaking (including strings). There would be days (a Saturday or Sunday morning) when one or two instrument restorers would come on campus and students could go for check ups or arrange for appointments if an alteration is needed (from fixing cracks, rehairing bows, or other instrument issues that winds and brass have that I'm not experienced with). The Harvard Office for the Arts still is housing a special portion of the lesson subsidy for HRO students, but we no longer have the funds to support (at least to a certain degree) strings, checkups, and any alterations instruments may need during the year, especially during the extreme seasonal changes. I know that many students, including me, would appreciate having the opportunity to have my instrument checked without going through the pains of making a separate appointment, especially if I don't think anything needs extreme tweaking. Any extra funds channeled into this area may over time help the overall sound quality of the orchestra as well if instruments are kept in good condition. A larger budget for lesson subsidies may allow more students to take lessons if financial barriers aren't a problem anymore.

We had a large influx of freshmen this year, per usual. However, the retention rate of the class of 2020 was also very high -- a product of a successful tour of extra off campus musical bonding. Looking at the numbers, we concluded that the high number of freshmen wasn't because of a lower retention rate -- the retention rate for this season was very high. The larger need for new members came from the fact that the Class of 2017 was an unusually large class for HRO, so many more spots were open at auditions this year for new members. Even though the numbers and analyses show greater social cohesion within the orchestra, there is a concern amongst the upperclassmen that there is a cycle of growth and decline in the group's cohesion in relation to each class' size and how members as freshmen viewed the friendship and teamwork amongst the seniors upon their induction to HRO. The Class of 2018 is smaller and not as cohesive a unit as, for instance, the Class of 2017 was. Many view this potentially stemmed from the fact that, according to members of '17, the seniors their freshman year ('14) were very welcoming as a group and served as mentors, and members of '20 refer to '17 members as older mentors, friends, and "HRO parents". Meanwhile, the Class of 2018 wasn't as close to its seniors, as both grades were relatively small to the Class of 2017 and 2014, and many if not most members either left or left and came back senior year instead of staying all four years. Seniors this year worked on being more approachable and reaching out to new members more often, so hopefully the previously mentioned pattern will start to break down.

I believe that the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra Foundation could help the retention problem through helping to tie current students to alumni in the area or abroad. Many students travel all around the country and world, especially during the summer, so any interactions with alumni don't necessarily need to be Boston-based. If students are made aware of the alumni ties and community and are welcomed into this group early on in their freshman year, they may feel a stronger connection to the orchestra. In the case where the senior class may not be able to fulfill the role of mentor and friend to students, recent alumni may be able to step in help out any freshmen who wish to have someone to

lean on. This would allow the orchestra to have better chances of retaining people instead of losing them for reasons ranging from lack of cohesion and being drawn to other activities on campus that have “a stronger sense of community.” Events, from dinners, lunches, outings in Boston, to especially larger reunions, will cost money, but if attendance is high enough, I believe that the social and financial returns future years will make up for it.

HRO occupies a unique position of being a student-led organisation while still holding itself to standards of a professional student orchestra. This comes with its strengths of providing students organisational and professional experience while still in university, but still comes with the danger of being very dependent on the dedication and work ethic of the student body in charge, along with the steep learning curve of handling finances and professional organisation of a 100-member symphony orchestra in the US and abroad during a tour year. The orchestra has kept afloat and done very well in the past few years, but with the help with the HROF would be able to achieve even greater musical and social levels than it has already.

My last season with HRO was filled with unique and once-in-a-lifetime performances, making it memorable despite the fact that I was leaving the orchestra. The senior class left wishing the best for the remaining underclassmen and future generations of the orchestra.

Sincerely,  
NaYoung Yang '18  
Violin  
President 2017