

**Oral Memoirs**  
**of**  
**David Schillhammer**

An Interview Produced by

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Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra

*Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewee: David Schillhammer

Transcriber: Victor Gallo

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

In celebration of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra's 20th Anniversary season, this video series chronicles the orchestra's two decades of history in Central Florida. This video was produced by Joe Gennaro, Timothy G. Brown and Lisa Mills with the guidance of Stella Sung and Emily Lindahl.

The Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra, located at 812 East Rollins Street Suite 300 in Orlando, was inspired by the closing of the Florida Symphony in 1993. The orchestra performs in more than 125 concerts each season. In June of 2013, the Philharmonic made plans to purchase the Plaza Live, located at 425 North Bumby Avenue in downtown Orlando, for office space, a rehearsal hall, a music library, and a music hall.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with David Schillhammer is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed in 2012.

## **Abstract**

Episode in the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra's 20th Anniversary video series, chronicling the orchestra's history in Central Florida. This episode features an interview with David Schillhammer, Executive Director since 2010. Topics in the video include performing at the Grand Opening of Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter, being conducted by John Williams, sales and programming, the concert experience, the involvement of musicians on the Board, the Orlando Philharmonic's track record of fiscal responsibility, and educational programs offered by the orchestra.

David Schillhammer was born and raised in Burlington, Vermont and received his Bachelor of Music in Bassoon Performance from the Eastman School of Music. He has also served as the executive director of the San Antonio Symphony, general manager of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and production and education coordinator for the Rochester Philharmonic. On April 30, 2010, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer declared April 30th to be "David Schillhammer Day."

# David Schillhammer

## Oral History Memoir

0:00:00

### Introduction

0:00:13

### Grand Opening of Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter

**Schillhammer** In my 13 years with the Orlando Philharmonic [Orchestra], there are so many great stories, but I think one of the really great highlights and one of the great honors bestowed upon the Orlando Philharmonic was the opportunity to play for the grand opening of Universal [Studios Florida]'s Wondrous – Harry Potter's Wondrous World.<sup>1</sup>

And that, in of itself, was an honor enough, but we were conducted by the great John Williams, who of course has composed all of that great music and is truly, you know, um, America's genius. As soon as he picked up his baton and started conducting, it transformed the sound of the Orlando Philharmonic. The conductor can have that. It was so inspiring for the musicians of the Orlando Philharmonic – for those of us who were there to witness it – to see the kind of music making that he could bring to the Orlando Philharmonic.

He had put his foot down. He wanted either the London Symphony [Orchestra] or the Boston Pops [Orchestra], and they were going to have to fly in these orchestras from either London[, England, United Kingdom] or Boston[, Massachusetts], and, uh, that was, those were his demands and once we sent him recordings of the orchestra and once, uh, some people from Universal came to the concerts, they knew they had a prize-winning, award-winning orchestra right here in their backyard. And he penned the most genuinely, kind, sincere complimentary letter, um, that we have ever received. He didn't have to do that. And, um, I get goose bumps right to this day thinking about what a great thrill it was performing with John Williams.

0:01:54

### Sales and programming

**Schillhammer** We have had incredible success with ticket sales. It is an enormous increase. we've had double-digit growth increase in subscription sales each and every year during what has been the worst [Great] Recession in American history since the – since the Great Depression. and people have remained passionate about the programming of the Orlando Philharmonic. Our mantra is “exciting programming marketed well.”

You have to have both. We have to have exciting programming and we have to tell the story about why it's exciting programming. I like to think

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<sup>1</sup> Correction: Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

and I—I do believe that every Orlando Philharmonic concert is an event. And the musicians are some of the best in the country, if not the world. I mean, our performances are as good as any American orchestra. I'll put us up against anybody. And, uh, uh, people respect and appreciate that and they come in record numbers.

**0:03:06                      Involvement of musicians on the board**

**Schillhammer** We elevated the musicians from what is generally the bottom of the totem pole and put them at the top of the totem pole, equal setting with the— with the community board of directors. Our bylaws mandate that 25 percent of the positions on the board of directors be filled by musicians in the orchestra— unheard of to this day. Most American orchestras have no musicians on the board on purpose. Uh, some might have one or two. Um often, they're non-voting, and they're never on executive committee, where the real decisions are made and we break down all those barriers. We have a musician who serves on the five-member executive committee, and we talk about things open and honestly at every level, no matter how difficult it is.

**0:03:49                      Fiscal responsibility**

**Schillhammer** Well, we have a tremendous track record of fiscal responsibility. I really give credit to the founders and to the Board of Directors. We all work together to ensure financial equilibrium each and every year. We've never had a penny of red ink.

**0:04:05                      Educational programs**

**Unidentified** Okay, now if I take that down a half step [*plays trumpet*].

**Schillhammer** Our educational programs are something for which we're very proud. Our young people's concerts— every year we perform 28 young people's concerts for close to 60,000 elementary school students in Orange, Seminole, and Osceola Counties. It's one of the largest of its kind in the country.

We also have "Tiny Tots" for daycare centers we have "Notes in Your Neighborhood" that goes into the school, primarily in those critical after school hours. We have our young composers challenge which is also very special. It started out as the Orlando Young Composers Challenge and now it's the National Young Composers Challenge.

**Schillhammer** I think that you'll find this event has all drama of a spelling bee combined with the passion of great music making.

**Schillhammer** We have adult classes. We have, uh— it's called "Sounds of Music in Adult Music Appreciation" class we have about a hundred people who

sign up every year. They want to know more. They go to the concerts and there's mysteries about symphony orchestras. They want to know this information and when they know this information they can enjoy the performances more. They become more passionate supporters. And, uh yeah. So our adult music appreciation classes have been really great. So we're — we're out there as much as we possibly can, nurturing people's interests and passion for symphonic music.

0:05:40

**Closing credits**

*End of Interview*