



THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTEMORELOS CELEBRATES THIRTY YEARS OF MUSIC

In November 2007, Montemorelos University in Mexico celebrated its 65th anniversary and the 30th anniversary of its music degree program. These thirty years, which started with minimal resources and produced today's flourishing multi-faceted program, were celebrated with enthusiasm, an abundance of music, and an honoring of its leaders, teachers, and students.

With the sound of voices, strings, bells, brass, and keyboards echoing in praise, the University of Montemorelos musicians, both past and present, united to celebrate three decades of music on their campus this past November. While the primary events happened in the beautiful spacious sanctuary of

the UM church on Sabbath, there were numerous other activities leading up to that day, the first being a campus-wide convocation Wednesday evening that launched the celebration of the 65th anniversary of the school.

Music activities started the next morning with a meeting of music alumni, past and present faculty, and students at which the music directors were honored. All former directors and present director Norka Castillo spoke and were then given plaques honoring

them for their service at UM. This was followed by a piano workshop led by Evelyn Mariani and Kent Stearman,

former teachers who had returned for this occasion, with Stearman coming from Korea where he now teaches



Evelyn Mariani and students at the piano workshop

English. Immediately following the workshop there was another meeting

Alumni talked about their careers and recalled what it was like to be music students in the earliest years, when the "department" was nothing more than an old painted green piano. That afternoon, Hector Flores, former music and choir director, held a workshop on how to work with high school choirs. Flores, guest conductor for the Sabbath morning music, also rehearsed the choir for its part in that service and later in the day worked with the forty-member orchestra in the church sanctuary.

That evening, a well-attended and received program featured two string ensembles, the Violin Consort and the Sonare orchestra, a small

group of younger string students, plus a recital in the music auditorium by former faculty members Olga Schmidt, organist, and Evelyn Mariani, pianist, with former student Ruth Urdiales, violinist. During the first part of the program, former teacher Julian

Lobsien, who had

taught in the department in its earliest years for eight years at two different times, was remembered and honored.



The Sonare orchestra plays in the newly renovated music auditorium on Thursday evening

in the music auditorium of music students and teachers with returning music alumni and former teachers.

After the end of the program an informal social occasion was held at a reception room in a nearby hotel. It was attended by a large gathering of former students, faculty, and present teachers.

Friday morning, a workshop for elementary school teachers on how to teach music elements to young students was given by Martha Martinez, while one for band was conducted at the same time by David Aguilar, UM band director.

Olga Schmidt, founder and first music director of the music department, was honored in a meeting following the workshops. She was recognized for her vision, spirit, and "the quality of her unselfish service as founder of the School of Music." Francisco Stout then made a presentation on "Praise and Adoration in Music." That afternoon, Flores again rehearsed the choir and orchestra for the following morning.

A Friday evening band concert preceded the consecration vespers service commemorating the school's 65th anniversary. Emanuel, a small choral group conducted by Laura Ortiz, former student and now a member of the music department, presented a concert immediately following the vespers.

This popular group, which sings lighter quality sacred music and hymn arrangements, was also celebrating its 30th anniversary, having been started by Julio Avila, a music major from Venezuela, in the same year the department was founded. Now a physician in California, Avila was present for this occasion.

The Sabbath morning worship hour, a high point for the anniversary celebration, started with the overflow congregation singing hymns, continued with four choral numbers

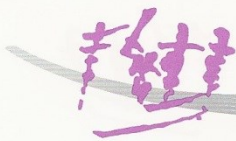
accompanied by orchestra and brass, and ended with the spirited singing of the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's *Messiah* by both the choir and congregation, assisted by the orchestra. Choral works sung during the service included *Just Imagine* by Cindy Beary, *There is Hope* and *Everlasting God* by Tom Fettka, all accompanied by a full orchestra, and *A Call to Celebration* by Joseph Martin, which included a children's choir and brass.

Music alumni and the Emanuel choir gave a concert that afternoon featuring soloists, duets, handbells, and keyboard music. Vespers, the final meeting for the weekend, started as the afternoon program ended. It included hymn singing, some accompanied by the orchestra, and ended with Wayne Hooper's *We Have this Hope*, a longstanding favorite at the university which is sung every Sabbath.

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The UM choir and orchestra, with guest conductor Hector Flores, perform during the worship hour



THREE DECADES of Music

AT THE UNIVERSITY of MONTEMORELOS

Thirty years ago this past Fall, the University of Montemorelos department of music started its first year of operation. For the 35-year-old school, a recently renamed university with an enrollment of only 499 college age students, it was a bold but important move. In the three decades since, the growth at the university and the music department is one of the great success stories in Adventist higher education. Today, there are over 1,600 college students at the university and more than thirty music majors as well as a conservatory (preparatory) program with over 350 students.

A key person in starting the program was Olga Schmidt, an accomplished pianist and organist, who arrived on the campus of Montemorelos Vocational and Professional College in the fall of 1971 to teach music. She quickly reviewed what resources were available and discovered a desperate situation. There were no facilities or instruments for teaching music; a small baby grand piano in the seminary was off-limits and the two remaining pianos were woefully inadequate, one being infested with spiders and other insects.

Not to be deterred, Schmidt started giving piano lessons on her upright piano in her home. Within a short while, she was teaching 40 to 50 students. During that time, someone sent her a grand piano, which she then used for her lessons. She also taught art at the college.

The interest in piano study increased, becoming greater than she could handle. At one point, she had four student teachers who, tutored by her each Sunday on how and what they should teach, then gave lessons to as many as 25 students each in the following week.

Among the outstanding students in those early years was Hector Flores. He and his brother Carlos would become influential music teachers at Montemorelos and later at other schools. Although Carlos had grown up near the campus, he had left to study at Andrews University the year Schmidt came to the campus. He returned four years later to assist her in the rapidly growing program, having just completed a B.Mus. at AU.

They talked about the need for a more complete program in music, especially since the school had just become a university two years earlier, and discussed and developed some ideas together. Finally, when Schmidt and her husband were on leave during the 1976-1977 school year, he prepared a proposal for a bachelor's degree program and submitted it to administration and the board. It was approved, and when Schmidt returned in 1977, she led the new department beginning that autumn.

In 1979, Hector Flores, who had completed a B.Mus. degree at Andrews University that year, also returned to teach, direct the choral program, and start the first orchestra. Three years later, when Schmidt returned to the U.S., he became

director of music, a position he held for seven years, until he left to teach at Antillian College, now University, in Puerto Rico in 1989, where Carlos had become chair a year earlier.

In that same decade, the year before Schmidt had left, Evelyn Mariani had been hired to teach piano. An outstanding performer and teacher, she inspired both her students and colleagues in her eight years at the school. Mariani was honored by the university as Outstanding Professor of the year in 1989, when she left to accept a position in the U.S.

Ruth Ann Wade, a talented pianist and organist who had been at UM since 1984, became director of music in 1989, when both Hector and Mariani left. A music graduate of Union College, she had completed an M.Mus. at AU in 1979. During her time as chair, she made important contacts in the U.S. that led to the addition of needed keyboard instrument resources. She also started a review of the curriculum and explored ways in which to improve the department's operation.

Many teachers have assisted in the music program at the university. In addition to numerous persons from Central and South America who have made outstanding contributions, several have also come from North America. These include Wade, David Holder, wind instruments; Minden Angel and Julian Lobsien, violinists; Lucille Taylor, violist; and Kent Stearman, organ and

piano - all from the U.S. - and Edward Simanton, brass, from Canada.

More recently, others from Russia and the Ukraine have included Elena Bulgakova (now Abel), Elena Kolokolova (now Quiyono), and Oksana Lesyshyn (now Jacobo), pianists; and husband and wife Pavel Semanivsky and Natalia Semanivska, flutist and violinist. These, along with others, have assisted full-time, while some have served for shorter periods as visiting teachers. In every instance, when those persons coming from outside the country have left, they were inspired by what they had observed during their time on campus.

In 1995, Norka Harper de Castillo became director following an interim semester of leadership by Pedro Sánchez. Castillo, who had been running the school's large and highly successful conservatory program, was chosen when school leaders decided that the university and conservatory programs be merged.

A pianist, she had been one of those four student teachers who had taught under Schmidt in the early years of music at UM. During her tenure as director she has made a number of curriculum revisions, updated music resources, and refined the music degree.

One of those initiatives was the offering of a master's degree through an extension program with Andrews University, beginning in 1999. AU visiting professors Carlos Flores, Stephen Zork, and Lilianne Doukhan taught in the program, which was offered only in the summers. Fifteen students, including music director Castillo,

completed AU master's degrees at MU before the program ended in 2005.

The department in its early years was housed in Sabbath school rooms at the university church, with recitals being given in what had been the first church on campus, a



Olga Schmidt, founder and first director of the music department at UM, and present director, Norka Castillo, during the department's 30th anniversary celebration

small building with limited seating. In 1981, the music program was relocated to a building constructed for that purpose on the other side of campus.



The Music Building at the University of Montemorelos in the 1980s and 1990s

Funds for constructing that building were earned in part by Olga Schmidt and by four young girls, one of them being present chair Castillo, who traveled with a staff member and

his wife on a 6,000 mile marimba tour in the U.S. Later, another building was built nearby for art, with both programs and buildings being identified as the fine arts department. During that time, Hector Flores, who was serving as director of music, served in an expanded role as director of fine arts.

In 1999, music vacated that building and moved back to what had been its first location, near a newly constructed university church, the third to be built on campus. The second church, now vacated, became the music auditorium. It was completely renovated this past summer.

That newly renovated building and its former Sabbath school rooms and new construction, which includes fifteen practice rooms, four teachers' studios, two classrooms, a music office, a music library, and a recording studio, have been the initial phases of what will be an extensive music complex. It is being completed as funds are available.

Located as it is in a mild climate, the facility embodies architecture that combines the best elements of both enclosed and open areas. When fully realized, it will include more teaching studios, and classrooms, rehearsal areas, and a recital hall. Its location near the new church is ideal since the church serves as a focal point for many music activities.

In the last fifteen years, keyboard resources have also been expanded and updated. The new university church was given a four-manual Johannus 485 organ with 85 stops



and an Estonia nine-foot concert grand piano, both gifts from Orland and Joan Ogden. The Ogdens also donated several upright pianos for use in teaching studios and practice rooms, as well as two more grand pianos for use in Sabbath school and the theology department chapel plus a Rogers electric organ which is used in the music auditorium.

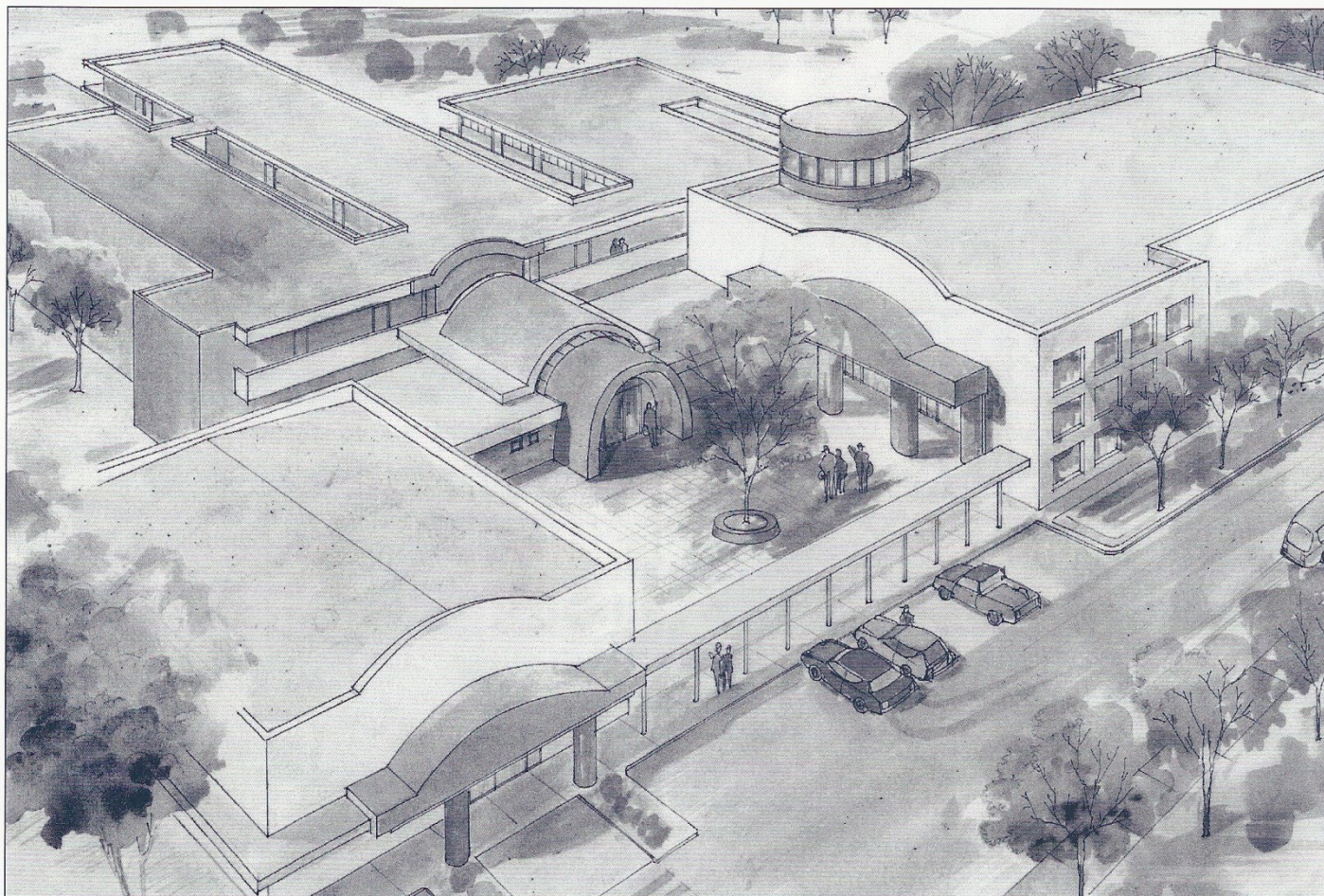
Other acquisitions during that time have included additional acoustic and electric pianos and computer and other music resources for the music library, which is a satellite of the university library. All MU music majors are expected to become computer literate and be able to work with music-related software before completing the music degree program.

The school offers numerous ensemble opportunities to students in both the university and conservatory programs. These include four orchestras, three bands, eight choirs, a brass choir, a handbell choir and string ensembles and marimba groups as needed. There are also a number of vocal ensembles on campus that function independently of the music program.

The orchestra is an example of how a number of teachers and good decisions have led to today's thriving string program and outstanding university orchestra. From those first orchestras, which were staffed with older students and other players with limited experience, to today's ensemble, in which many of its members have been taking lessons

since they were in grade school, there have been obvious improvements in the musicianship, intonation, and accuracy of the group. Minden Angel and Julian Lobsien, two of the earliest string teachers, started many students during their stays on campus. Lucille Taylor also contributed to the growth of interest in strings, inspiring many with both her playing and teaching during her years at the school.

As important as these teachers were in starting the string program, however, the efforts of Timoteo Montealegre in working with students in the conservatory program have probably contributed most to the quality of players in today's orchestra. Montealegre came to UM to study music as an older student with a very limited musical background.



An artist's rendering of the new music facility at the University of Montemorelos

When he completed the program, he was assigned to teach violin in the conservatory, where his careful work with the children endeared him to the students and inspired them to achieve at a remarkable level. Many of the players in today's orchestra are students he started. Their playing, guided by present director Pavel Semanivsky, has led to an orchestra that is the pride of the campus.

UM music students and groups figure prominently in the church services and are an important part of campus life, often playing and singing in the university worship services. The ensembles not only tour widely in Mexico but also regularly perform in regional churches. Graduates from the music program now play important roles in the

church's work in Central and South America and elsewhere.

Today's music program is light years removed from where it was just thirty years ago. It is a remarkable achievement and a prelude for even greater accomplishment as a new decade in music begins.

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This article is based on interviews with Julian Lobsein, June 1990; and with Olga Schmidt, Carlos and Hector Flores, Evelyn Mariani, and Ruth Ann Wade, all in February 2008.



The University of Montemorelos collegiate and conservatory music faculty

Front Row, left to right: Olivia Michel de Del Valle, Martha Díaz de Martínez, Oksana de Jacobo, María Elena Pazos de Sánchez, Ruth Ann Wade, Natalia Semanivska, Norka Harper de Castillo, Coordinator of the Conservatory, Laura Ortiz de Murillo, Roxana Valladares de Moreno, Secretaria. Second Row, Left to right: Pavel Semanivsky, Saúl Pitti, David Aguilar, Pedro Sánchez, Francisco Stout

TEACHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTEMORELOS

BIOGRAPHIES FOR THE FOLLOWING PRESENT AND FORMER UM
TEACHERS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.IAMAONLINE.COM

ELENA BULGAKOVA ABEL
DAVID AGUILAR AGUILAR
NORKA HARPER DE CASTILLO
LILIANNE DOUKHAN
CARLOS FLORES
HECTOR FLORES

OKSANA LESYSHYN DE JACOBO
JULIAN LOBSIEN
EVELYN MARIANI
MARTHA DÍAZ DE MARTÍNEZ
LAURA ORTÍZ DE MURILLO
SAÚL PITTI

BLYTHE OWEN
MARÍA ELENA SÁNCHEZ
PEDRO SÁNCHEZ
OLGA SCHMIDT
NATALIA SEMANIVSKA
PAVEL SEMANIVSKY

FRANCISCO STOUT
LUCILLE TAYLOR
OLIVIA MICHAL DE DEL VALLE
RUTH ANN WADE
STEPHEN ZORK