



DMCO History and Background

The Des Moines Community Orchestra was founded by Dr. Janice Wade in 1976, gathering together interested area musician acquaintances. The first concert featured guest percussion soloist, Drake faculty member Larry Kaptain, playing the Milhaud percussion concerto. Interest in the orchestra continued to grow, and the fledgling group could be found rehearsing and performing all around town, encouraged by donations of time, space and financial assistance from members and supporters.

Music Directors and Conductors:

Janice Wade continued as Music Director and Conductor of the orchestra from 1976 through 1987. She then took a teaching position at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, as Professor of Violin and Viola, and Music Director and Conductor of the Wartburg Community Symphony.

Rod Sharpe conducted the Des Moines Community Orchestra for two seasons (1987 - 1989) while he was a student at Drake University. He subsequently went on to study Library Science at the University of Iowa.

Richard Gerstenberger became Music Director and Conductor for the next ten concert seasons (1989-1999). Before the 1999/2000 concert season, with health considerations in mind, Richard decided to retire from the Des Moines Community Orchestra.

The 1999 - 2002 seasons featured a variety of guest conductors as the orchestra sought a new music director and conductor.

Carl Johnson became music director in the Spring of 2002 and served as the conductor and music director until Spring of 2025, when he retired from the orchestra. During the 2025-2026 concert season, DMCO will be auditioning various finalists for the position of Conductor/Music Director and anticipates making the final selection in the summer of 2026.