



EASTMAN WIND ENSEMBLE

A 60th Celebration

A groundbreaking ensemble celebrates six decades of setting a musical standard.

By Robin L. Flanigan

LEAN AND ADVENTUROUS, THE INTERNATIONALLY acclaimed Eastman Wind Ensemble helped popularize symphonic wind music, choosing innovative compositional techniques over the conservative constraints typically associated with the classical orchestra.

“It is the Eastman School of Music’s crown jewel,” says Mark Davis Scatterday ’89E (DMA), professor of conducting and chair of the Eastman School’s Department of Conducting and Ensembles. “It created a standard in the wind world that put the Eastman Wind Ensemble on a par with the best ensembles in the world, including

▲ **SOUND DIRECTION:** Since debuting in 1953 under Frederick Fennell (opposite), the Eastman Wind Ensemble has been directed by (above, from left) Fennell, who died in 2004, Donald Hunsberger, Mark Davis Scatterday, and Clyde Roller, who gathered at the ensemble’s 50th anniversary.

professional orchestras. In fact, many people think the Eastman Wind Ensemble is a professional group.”

The group will mark 60 years of pioneering its own symphonic sound with a four-day celebration from February 6 to 9. Events include programs and performances as well as the release of a new CD that pays tribute to an Eastman visit by composer Igor Stravinsky.

Founded in 1952 by legendary conductor Frederick Fennell ’37E, ’39E (MS), ’88E (Honorary), the ensemble includes undergraduate and graduate students of the Eastman School, where Fennell was a faculty member. The group earned a Grammy nomination in 1987 and has had a global impact on the way composers view wind and percussion players.

“It’s just phenomenal to see what kind of influence it has,” says Donald Hunsberger ’54E, ’59E (MM), ’63E (DMA), who conducted the ensemble from 1965 to 2002 and was a professor of conducting at the Eastman School. “People are constantly writing works, hoping to have us play them.”

Over the past six decades, the ensemble has premiered more than 150 pieces of music from composers around the world. Many of the pieces “were really ahead of the curve



SINGING STRAVINSKY: A collaboration with the Eastman Virtuosi, the Eastman Wind Ensemble’s new recording marks a visit to the school by composer Igor Stravinsky.



from legitimate composers” who deserved to be heard but struggled to find an appreciative audience, says Hunsberger. “Unless you’re doing something people are comfortable with at that moment, it sits on a shelf.”

While the ensemble has transformed the fields of music education and performance and spawned similar groups, Scatterday notes that none other can quite match the original. He points out its hometown advantages: the Eastman School’s faculty, the distinctive Kodak Hall and Kilbourn Hall venues, and the ensemble’s former conductors and composers who have written works for the group with whom they share a deep connection.

With a history of performing in Asia, the musicians will embark on their first European tour within the next few years. The ensemble also continues to develop new


repertoire, and plans to record the music of Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra Principal Pops Conductor Jeff Tyzik ’73E, ’77E (Mas), contemporary classical music composer Roberto Sierra, and classical composer and conductor Karel Husa.

The anniversary’s highlight will be a concert on February 8 at Kodak Hall, featuring music by Mozart and Stravinsky (both were performed at the premiere concert in 1953), as well as two new works recently commissioned by the ensemble from Sierra and from Douglas Lowry, the Joan and Martin Messinger Dean of the Eastman School of Music. The concert takes place 60 years to the day after the Eastman Wind Ensemble debuted—with Hunsberger, an undergraduate at the time, playing trombone and euphonium. (Before Fennell died in 2004, he sent Hunsberger, with whom he became a

friend and collaborator, a birthday card every year on February 8.)

Timed for the event, the Eastman Wind Ensemble will release a new CD, *Stravinsky at Eastman: Octet and L’histoire du Soldat* (Avie Records), featuring the ensemble and the Eastman Virtuosi together for the first time. The release date is February 12.

Guest artists and scholars, master classes with young conductors, and additional music round out the celebration.

Says Scatterday: “This all represents the core of the Eastman Wind Ensemble philosophy—the greatest and most challenging music, important scholarly research and discovery, and real-world professional experience.” 

Robin L. Flanigan is a Rochester-based freelance writer.