

Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra's GAGLIANO BASS



The *Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra* is proud to claim ownership of a rare piece of its own early history, a legendary double bass whose sound was first heard in the Eastman Theater in 1945, in the hands of Oscar Zimmerman. The orchestra's sound has long been shaped by Kodak Hall, within the Eastman School of Music, and formerly known as the Eastman Theater. The sound of the orchestra's **bass section**, *the foundation of this and every orchestra*, was characterized by two great Gagliano basses masterfully played by Oscar Zimmerman, and his son Robert, throughout their sixty-two year sequential principalships in the orchestra.

The Zimmerman's two legendary basses were made by the famous Gagliano family of makers, representing the finest cherished orchestral instruments that were produced by hand in Naples, Italy, in the 18th-19th Centuries. The Gagliano basses represent the epitome of rich orchestral sonorities, and are highly sought by bassists worldwide.

Oscar Zimmerman purchased this older Gagliano bass in 1931 from his teacher, Anton Torello, longtime principal of Philadelphia Orchestra, as student of the first graduating class of the Curtis School of Music. Torello had bought the instrument from bass pedagogue Jsaia Bille in Italy, before bringing it to the United States. Oscar played the bass under Eugene Ormandy in the Philadelphia Orchestra, and as principal in St. Louis, and then the NBC Symphony under Toscanini, whom it is said favored its deep sound over the other basses. This quality can be distinguished on NBC Symphony recordings made during Oscar's principalship, 1938-45. Generations of Oscar's bass students from the Eastman School of Music, now holding jobs worldwide in various orchestras, know and love the "black Gagliano," which now permanently resides in Rochester with the RPO. The lineage of ownership is remarkable, each of these names hallmarks of the orchestral bass world.

The bass itself is a wonder to behold. Its impressive old-world character presents as an unusually stout, gamba-cornered bass with wonderfully dark chocolate vanish, and a typically Italian gamba-styled flat back. Other notable Gagliano characteristics are the broad pattern (exaggerated by the fact it is reduced in size from its original proportions, an unfortunately common practice in the 20th C.), the very long, sweeping f-holes, slab top, and deep ribs. These all contribute to its dark and deeply resonant sound, best described as "felt more than heard," and uniquely orchestral in quality. Its largess of sound requires the airspace of a large orchestral stage and hall to be best appreciated.

The other Zimmerman-owned bass, the "blonde" 1796 Joseph Gagliano, was recently purchased by the Gothenburg Symphony of Sweden. European orchestras seeking to distinguish their sound commonly purchase instruments of great historical and tonal value for their players to utilize. Oscar Zimmerman had purchased this bass shortly after the first, and Robert preferred it when playing principal. Throughout his twelve years as Robert Zimmerman's stand partner, Assistant Principal Michael Griffin states "I was daily in awe of its great sound, as well as Bob's skill producing such unforgettable tone. It's a shame this treasure of a bass is lost to the Rochester Philharmonic and its audiences forever. But it is an honor and joy to play the RPO-owned "black Gagliano!"

This bass is a *rare* piece of Rochester's musical history, literally very great and simply irreplaceable. **Not only a museum piece, its distinctive purpose is still of great use!** Its uniquely deep and noble voice would be of perceptible benefit to any world orchestra, but here in Rochester it benefits the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and listeners in a *living way*. Like the orchestral repertoire played upon it, the bass is its own culture, and as such, connects both players and listeners to the past, present, and future.

Special thanks to the donors and staff that made this historical acquisition possible.

Michael Griffin
Assistant Principal Bass
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra