

## The Early Years

History by Sue Dewar, Former ACSO President 1979-80.  
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From the beginning there has been a symbiotic relationship between ACSO, the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL) and state government through the offices of the California Arts Commission and, later, its successor, the California Arts Council (CAC).

Assembly Bill No. 1, which created the commission on September 20, 1963, was passed just two years before the first financial assistance was made to the American Symphony Orchestra League for its summer Conductors' Workshop at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in Monterey County. The purpose was to offer a training opportunity to young California conductors and 80% of the participants were.

The commission, with Martin Dibner as its first executive director, began holding symposiums around the state featuring celebrated speakers. 300 cultural leaders attended the 1964 San Francisco Symposium at which Roger Stevens deplored the fact that numerous school districts in California had abolished music instruction in primary schools in order to save money. The commission responded by funding a 1965-66 music touring program involving school districts and a dozen California orchestras and chamber ensembles.

The following year the commission held a symposium at Asilomar in conjunction with the ASOL Conductors' Workshop, by then an established annual event. The CAC file shows the 1967 conference "was considered an exciting and stimulating meeting with all of the sessions well attended." The record continues:

"In furtherance of classical music, the California Arts Commission brought together 46 representatives of the state's symphony orchestras at the first State Assembly of California Symphony Orchestras during the last three days of the American Symphony Orchestra League's Conductors' Workshop at Asilomar in July 1969.

"From a feasibility study, funded by the commission and presented to orchestra representatives at this Monterey meeting, came a new self-sustaining organization available to serve all of California's symphonies. This new Association of California Symphony Orchestras facilitates the exchange of artistic and management information, reduction of operating expenses by arranging cooperative use of artistic resources, and provides a means of coordinating workshops and special projects."

The success of the relationship was evident in several areas. The commission co-sponsored ACSO's third annual conference at Monte Corona, Lake Arrowhead in 1971, attended by 200 orchestra representatives of the state's 112 community orchestras. The number of orchestras on record grew by twenty, when the following year the commission helped to underwrite ACSO's fourth annual conference in Sacramento for "...California's

132 diverse 'community' orchestras," in 1972; the word "community" here used to describe an orchestra's place in the world rather in its budget or repertoire. The record adds:

"...as a result, ACSO has grown in strength to the point that it can maintain an ongoing program of management workshops, young artists showcases and consultative services for its membership."