

Life



CHRISTY STANFORD / THE VANDERBILT HUSTLER

Music for Commodores, by Commodores

The Vanderbilt Commodore Orchestra, the newest performance group on campus, operates on an ethic of inclusion and welcomes members regardless of musical experience. In so doing, VCO joins a century-and-a-half's worth of music-making at this university.

By Angelica Lasala, life editor; Matt Lieberson, life reporter; Sophie To, life reporter

For many Vanderbilt students, the transition from high school to college involves giving up some pastime: Hours of daily piano practice turn into hours of calculus problem sets; years' worth of voice lessons only see the light of day in communal showers or at Lonnie's; cellos gather dust because they don't fit comfortably in already-snug dorm rooms.

Nonetheless, those unwilling to let their penchant for music fall to the wayside have options. Vanderbilt's newest performance group, the Vanderbilt Commodore Orchestra (VCO), operates on a philosophy of inclusion, inviting undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni and faculty from both the university and the Vanderbilt University Medical Center to practice and perform in an ensemble setting. Moreover, since VCO is a full orchestra, wind and percussion players join string instrumentalists.

"I talked to a lot of people on campus that were instrumentalists in high school bands, community bands and other groups that couldn't commit to the time needed to be in Blair, so I saw a demand," said Keehun Nam, co-founder and director of VCO.

In recent history, similar efforts to build a community orchestra at Vanderbilt have sprouted to no avail. Nam remains optimistic, however, saying he "couldn't figure out why this didn't work in the past, but whatever the case (VCO has) gotten a lot of support."

A good portion of that support came from Mark Wait, dean of Blair School of Music, and Frank Weislo, dean of The Martha River Ingram Commons, as both supported VCO in its inception financially and through word of mouth.

Nam's vision for VCO puts bringing people together at the forefront — music just happens to be the means. "We don't stand for music specifically," he said. "We're more of a community of people who are just all passionate."

Ben Hummel, president of VCO, shares a similar sentiment. "We're about creating a music camp-type atmosphere with a great group of people who love to play together, and we have that at the moment even in our first year," Hummel said.

For Nam, the ideal group would involve "professors playing next to students next to alumni, all mingling because music is universal, and there's so much potential to be unlocked when a group of musically-inclined people share their gifts."

VCO's ambitions for the school year align well with this ideal, as Jeremy Wilson, associate professor of trombone, is slated to play in the orchestra's first concert this upcoming spring. The concert program will feature pieces that fit with a "History of the Commodore" theme.