

LEFT 2

**BOX**  
 CASIMIR HALL  
 GOOD ONLY  
 Saturday Aft'n  
 Dec'br 3 1927  
 GLOBE TICKET COMPANY-PHILA.

**CASIMIR HALL**  
 (Curtis Institute of Music)  
 1724 Locust St.

Saturday Aft'n., at 3:30  
 Inaugural Recital  
 by  
**JOSEF HOFMANN**

**DEC'BR 3 1927**



# IN THE HALL

THE MEMORY OF PERFORMING ON CURTIS'S LEGENDARY RECITAL STAGE  
 UNITES GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS AROUND THE GLOBE.

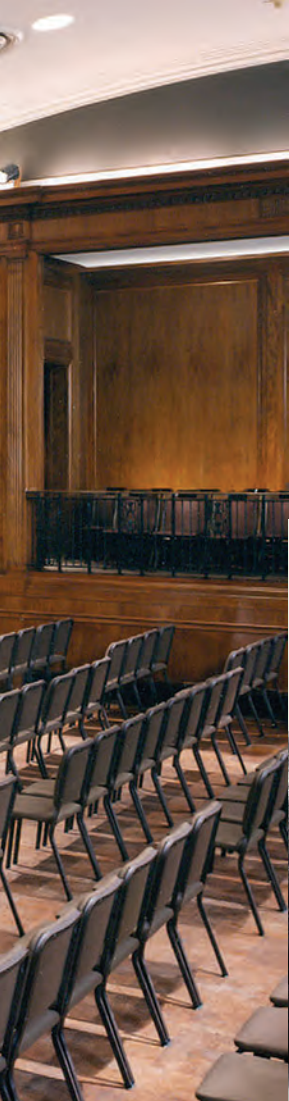
BY MATTHEW BARKER

*Invitations have been issued* by Mrs. Edward Bok for the opening of the new concert hall of the Curtis Institute of Music, of which she is founder and president, on Saturday afternoon, December 3. Mr. Hofmann, Director of the Institute, will play.

*The event will assemble in Philadelphia a notable gathering of personages prominent in the musical and social world. The results already manifest by the work of the Curtis Institute have attracted the attention of musicians and educators throughout the country, and their presence here will reflect the growing importance of the school as a factor in the artistic life of America.*

—The Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia)  
 Thursday, December 2, 1927





Nearly every major event in the school's history has taken place inside that hallowed room. Those treasured memories are part of the enduring legacy of the Hall.



Opposite: Legendary pianist Josef Hofmann, Curtis's new director, gave the inaugural recital of Casimir Hall in 1927. The new performance space was named in honor of his father.

Above left: The greenhouse and walled garden of 1726 Locust Street, prior to the construction of the Hall

Above right: "I am nervous. I would rather play anywhere than in this hall." So declared the great violinist Efrem Zimbalist before his first faculty recital in the Hall in 1929. He would later serve as Curtis's director from 1941 to 1968.

Top: Curtis's annual holiday party in 1951. Founder Mary Louis Curtis Bok Zimbalist examines her program in the balcony, second from left.

PHOTOS: CURTIS ARCHIVES

The rest, as they say, is history. That this keenly prescient notice was published only three years after the school's opening is a testament to Mary Louise Curtis Bok's vision for her beloved Institute. Casimir Hall—as it was then known—fulfilled its promise, and continued to do so over the decades as Curtis Hall (1943–2001), and eventually Field Concert Hall (2001 to the present).

In the 85 years since its opening, "the Hall" (as it is generally known in the Curtis community) has been the epicenter of the school's "learn by doing" philosophy and the keeper of the Curtis tradition. Now, with the addition of Lenfest Hall to the campus, Field Concert Hall enters a new era as a dedicated recital space—finally free of the orchestra rehearsals and sectionals that have made it work overtime for decades. It's a long-postponed nod of respect to the stage that nurtured generations of musicians into visionary artists.

Prior to Casimir Hall's inauguration, Curtis was a fledgling institution but ready to spread its wings. Mrs. Bok's retention of many of the world's musical luminaries as faculty created an immediate draw for what she called "the cream of the cream" among aspiring musicians. The young talent displayed in small private recitals fueled the growing message that Curtis was a place to watch, and also emphasized the need for a venue that would more thoroughly prepare students for their careers as professionals. When pianist Josef Hofmann became director of the Institute in 1927 he wasted no time in bringing that idea to fruition. Mrs. Bok provided \$300,000 and construction began on the site of the mansion's greenhouse and walled garden.

Ingenuity was front and center; only so much can be done with a plot measuring 45 by 70 feet. Every inch of available space had to be maximized, and the work of architect

**More Online**

Discover the Directors' Musical Legacy through recordings, photos, and history. This special *Appassionato* season project is at

[www.curtis.edu/Legacy](http://www.curtis.edu/Legacy)





The Hall leaves an indelible, uniform impression on performers, and everyone who has ever studied or taught at Curtis shares this bond.

Top: Rehearsing on the stage of the Hall in 1973  
PHOTO: GEORGE KRAUSE

Above: Conductor Sergiu Celibidache's 1984 residency at Curtis comprised rehearsals and performances with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra as well as lectures in the Hall. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES

Above right: A wind quintet of current Curtis students in the Hall: (l. to r.) Diondré McKinney, flute; Alexander Vvedenskiy, oboe; Katherine Jordan, horn; Julia Harguindey, bassoon; and Juyong You, clarinet.  
PHOTO: PETE CHECCHIA

Horace Wells Sellers and acoustical engineer Clifford M. Swan was state-of-the-art. They could not know the full effect their work would have on the world of classical music—but the Hall has always been more than the sum of its parts.

## TERRORS AND TRIUMPHS

The Hall is the unifying factor running through nearly nine decades of superlative music-making. It leaves an indelible impression on performers that is eerily uniform, and everyone who has ever studied or taught at Curtis shares this bond. The weight of history alone can be intimidating.

“A terrifying place,” says violist Steven Tenenbom, adding, “if someone doesn’t think so, they are not human!” Violinist Arnold Steinhardt recalls the “sheer terror” of performing in front of “the most knowledgeable and critical audience (he) would ever encounter—the Curtis faculty and students.” Even the fearless Efrem Zimbalist was heard, just minutes before his first faculty recital in 1929, muttering, “I am nervous. I would rather play anywhere than in this hall.”

But the Hall is more than a stage for trials by fire; and it is more than the hundreds of public performances held each year. Nearly every major event in the school’s history has taken place inside that hallowed room: every commencement; the annual holiday party, with Menotti’s *Catalogue* and then-student Pamela Frank dancing with her father, faculty member Claude Frank; the venerable maestros of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra, from Stokowski and Reiner through Werner-Mueller; Wanda Landowska’s groundbreaking lectures on early music during the 1920s. Those treasured memories are part of the enduring legacy of the Hall.

With so much asked of it over the years, the aging process has not always been kind. Major renovations were completed in 2001, based primarily on a generous contribution from Joseph and Marie Field. This complete overhaul included a new ceiling, upgraded audio equipment, restoration of the pipe organ, and acoustical enhancements. All were central to preserving the seminal elements of the Hall. “Keep it the same—only make it better,” was the motto, and with good reason. Even with recent upgrades such as high-definition video cameras (another result of the Fields’ generosity), the Hall looks virtually identical to when it opened but can function as a 21st-century facility.

With continued respect and preservation, Field Concert Hall will live on as a vital presence in our musical landscape. As the school propels itself forward, future generations of the Curtis family will create new legends, stories, and triumphs through myriad performances and events each year. It is comforting to know that they will experience the Hall just as we do. ♦

*Matthew Barker is the director of student recitals and coordinator of outside performances at Curtis.*

### Field Concert Hall on Facebook and More

Have you heard an unforgettable performance in the Hall? Or played in one? Become a Facebook fan of Curtis at [www.facebook.com/CurtisInstitute](http://www.facebook.com/CurtisInstitute) and share your reminiscences with 3,500 other Curtis friends.

The next time you’re at Curtis, stop by the “Legacy of the Hall” exhibit in the Gary and Naomi Graffman Common Room. The display, just outside the entrance to Field Concert Hall, includes photographs and artifacts from the Curtis Archives.