The Professional Orchestra in the United States: Current Problems and Solutions for Improving its Future

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Introduction

Professional orchestras have existed in the United States for over a century and a half and enjoyed especially great popularity in this century. Despite the proliferation of so many organisations, however, the professional orchestra community faces some very key issues which will affect the ability of some of its members to survive. The situation in the United States is notably different from that of other countries by virtue of the size of the population that is served, by the number of orchestras which serve it, and in the way the typical orchestra is funded. Despite its many organisations and the geographical distances over which they are spread, they remain closely tied to each other and in many ways similar through their common problems. The amount and variety of information available about them provides a very interesting picture of how the orchestra fits into the American way of life.

In various sectors of the industry, new ideas are continually being put to work to combat the challenges that these orchestras face and many are finding success. The solutions are not necessarily immediate or comprehensive but, for many orchestras, they mark the beginnings of new partnerships and programs which will help them continue to bring the sound of an orchestra to an appreciative audience.

In this paper, I have identified seven areas which continually provide obstacles to professional organisations throughout the American orchestral industry. These areas include: the financial problem of keeping the orchestra running; finding ways of reaching a wider audience and improving attendance figures; involving the orchestra in educational activities which increase the musical knowledge of both children and

adults; finding high calibre musicians to contribute to the quality of the orchestra; looking for ways in which to improve the job satisfaction of the orchestra's members; seeking to improve the variety and creativity of the orchestra's musical programming; and, examining and improving the commitment of orchestras to contemporary music.

This list of challenges is by no means utterly comprehensive, since in addition to those listed, each professional orchestra naturally faces its own particular set of obstacles. It does, however, include the key common issues which currently plague the American orchestral community and with which this paper will deal, looking at the roots of the problems and considering some of the ways in which they can and are being solved.

The Value Of Professional Orchestras

Before examining the problems of the orchestral industry, some of which, as will be seen, are rather sobering, it seems appropriate to address the issue of whether there even exists a need for such an organisation. What purpose does a professional orchestra fulfil that its problems should be examined in the hope of finding solutions that will improve it? Does an orchestra contribute to its community in such a way that warrants trying to help it continue its existence? Are people interested in what it has to offer?

The roots of the American professional orchestra reach back across the past 150 years to 1842 when the New York Philharmonic, the oldest professional orchestra in the United States, was founded. Most of the industry's growth, however, has come in the past 50 years,[1] multiplying "to the point that almost every American city of even modest size can claim one."[2] This proliferation of orchestras came with the growth of urban America, where investments were made in all sorts of cultural institutions as part of cities' civic pride and efforts to gain prestige. Today, the pride of the community in the accomplishments and offerings of their orchestra is still one reason for their importance.[3]

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[1]"Then and Now," by Catherine French. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 25.

[2]*Americanizing The American Orchestra*, a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 3.

[3]Music critic Robert Finn discussing the Cleveland Orchestra says: "It's as though this city...still cannot quite believe that we *really* do have a world-class crew on stage at Severance Hall...People here devour appraisals of our orchestra by outside critics." "Of Time and Tradition," by Sandra Hyslop. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, vol. 3, p. 25.

Further support for the contribution that professional orchestras make to their community comes from John Sparks, the American Symphony Orchestra League's[4] Director of Government Affairs, addressing the issue of why there should continue to be national investment in the arts: "The arts more than pay their own way, and give back more than is invested by the public sector. They provide direct and indirect employment, attract investment to communities, help attract talented people to locate in a community, and serve as an employment and training base for artists who serve the community independently in various ways. The arts pay their own way in the taxes paid by employees, vendors, and contractors doing business as a result of the arts institution's existence...To the limited degree that we do fund the arts, we do it because it is in the *national interest*, and that does benefit us all."[5] The establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts by the United States Congress in 1965 is also testimony that support for the arts is considered in the nation's interest. The agency was set up with a purpose "to promote the arts, develop a broadening public support for them, and administer the grants allotted to the arts by public and private sources...The law creating the

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[4]The American Symphony Orchestra League, from which much of the data about American orchestras comes, was founded in 1942 as a non-profit service organisation and is the "only unilateral music organization that has been granted a Federal Charter by the U.S. Congress (Public Law 87-817, passed October 15, 1962." Its purpose, according to the Law, is: "To serve as a coordinating, research, and educational agency and clearinghouse for symphony orchestras in order to help strengthen the work in their local communities; to assist in the formation of new symphony orchestras; through suitable means, encourage and recognize work of America's musicians, conductors, and composers; and to aid the expansion of the musical and cultural life of the United States through suitable educational and service activities." Through their work and publications they collect and provide information about the condition of orchestras across the country and serve as a strong political lobbying force for legislation that affects groups throughout the area of the performing arts. From *The American Music Handbook,* by Christopher Pavlakis, The Free Press, New York, 1974, p. 23-26.

[5]"Answering the NEA's [National Endowment for the Arts] Critics," by John D. Sparks. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 3, p. 56.

Endowment intended that it develop programs of aid which would benefit arts activity nationally."[6]

Beyond all of this, however, is the music and the interest of the public in hearing it. Statistics reveal that there are approximately 26 million people, about 10% of the population[7], who make up the audience that attends live orchestra concerts in the United States. In 1985, almost 40 million people watched at least one classical music concert on television and 35 million listened to classical music at least once on either a radio broadcast or a recording.[8] Furthermore, "nearly all Americans say they appreciate the importance of the arts."[9]

Thus, it would seem that there is indeed a place in American society for the professional orchestra. The question now is what are its problems and how can it be made a more viable institution?

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[6]*The American Music Handbook*, by Christopher Pavlakis, The Free Press, New York, 1974, p. 63-64.
[7]"Then and Now," by Catherine French. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 92.
[8]"Our Cities, Our Selves," by Blayne Cutler. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 37.
[9]"Colorado Springs Surprises," by John Felton. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol, 45, no. 1, p.59.

Finding The Money

Without a doubt, finding the money to make ends meet is the most pressing challenge faced by professional orchestras in the United States. A professional orchestra which can fund its budget from its earned income without relying on any additional funding does not exist in the U.S., where the average orchestra brings in just under 40% of its total budget from the sale of tickets.[10]

This certainly reveals a rather dismal picture of the financial state of professional American orchestras, forcing consideration of why it is that they are unable to function without the need for support from alternative forms of fund-raising. Historically, orchestras have always functioned under a system of private patronage, growing out of the period in European history when most orchestras were attached to the royal courts or supported by the local nobility. In the United States, early professional orchestras "relied for a long time on high ticket prices for admission and the generosity of private patrons."[11] This path of development is partially responsible even today for the general impression among many people that orchestra concerts are highbrow affairs whose only appeal is to a small portion of the population, comprising some of the wealthier and more intellectual members of society. (Other factors such as the formality of concert attire and the physical surroundings of the event, as well as demographic statistics which show that concert-goers are still most likely

[10]A report commissioned by the American Symphony Orchestra League found the average cost of presenting a concert in the United States to be over US$26 per audience member while the average actual revenue generated from ticket sales was only about US$10 per member, which translates to roughly 38%. From *The Financial Condition of the Symphony Orchestra*, prepared by The Wolf Organisation, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 1992, as cited in Mandeles, p. 5.

[11]"Orchestra," by Jack Westrup with Neal Zaslaw. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, 1980, vol. 13, p. 689.

to be older, well-educated and financially well-off[12], contribute to this perception.)

In the 20th-Century, however, the trend of private patronage began to change as large single donations of support lessened through weaker economic periods, such as the two world wars and the general depression of the 1930s, and as a result of the increased demand for private support from the growing number of non-profit and charitable organisations. This forced professional orchestras to try to broaden their appeal for support to reach a wider portion of the public and eventually, in the 1960s, resulted in a turn towards government in search of funds. Gradually, local and state government agencies and even the federal government, with its establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), were drawn into the practice of providing annual funding to keep orchestras afloat. Thus, orchestras have always been institutions which are seemingly incapable of existing without supplemental financial support.

Today, despite the substantial amount of additional financial support that most orchestras receive, strained budgets and end-of-year deficits are still commonly found.[13] The basic factor which accounts for this is production expenses that are growing at a rate with which the combination of earned income and supplemental funding cannot keep up. A report commissioned by the American Symphony Orchestra League determined the following: "Significant gains in total attendance (up 52.6% from 1971 to 1991) have been offset by skyrocketing symphony

[12]From a study by Street Pulse Group and George Fine Research of New Milford, Connecticut. "Our Cities, Our Selves," by Blayne Cutler. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 36.

[13]In 1991, the combined deficit of orchestras in the United States was US$23.2 million. From *The Financial Condition of Symphony Orchestras*, prepared by The Wolf Organisation, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 1992, as cited in Mandeles, p. 5.

orchestra expenses that increased eight-fold in the same period...The inability of earned income to keep pace with expenses is coupled with a 4.3% decline in public-sector giving to orchestras since 1986, and a one-third decline in orchestras' share of private philanthropic arts dollars from 1970 to 1990."[14] One factor to consider for the reduction of public-sector giving is the poor economic conditions of the late 1980s, especially with the stock market crash in October, 1987. Part of the increased production expenses which plague professional orchestras comes as a result of stronger competition for private donations, which has given rise to the necessity for larger and more specialised development staffs with bigger budgets for such items as advertising, brochures, newsletters, and incentive "awards" to encourage donations. Other increases to production expenses have come in the area of investing in better employment conditions, where more money has been put towards health insurance, retirement pensions, and keeping salaries competitive with other orchestras to retain high quality players.[15]

In the face of such figures and considering the established methods of budget-funding, there seems little hope that professional orchestras will ever achieve self-sufficiency. Yet, continued reliance on government support, be it at the local, state or national level, leaves music organisations, and arts organisations in general, extremely vulnerable to the whims of politicians and the parties in power. Funding that exists one year may be drastically reduced or cut the next, or may include specific conditions relating to the use of the funds. In the United States, nearly every major arts organisation benefits financially from the

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[14]*The Financial Condition of Symphony Orchestras,* prepared by The Wolf Organisation, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 1992, as cited in Mandeles, p. 5.

[15]"Musicians say offer would hurt orchestra: They fear best players will leave for better pay," by Michael Anthony. Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 15, 1994, p. 2B.

existence of the NEA, yet in recent years, the NEA has been plagued by problems and controversy (especially pertaining to NEA-funded artists whose work some find offensive -- the photographs of Robert Maplethorpe are one highly-publicised example which raised the issue of censorship in art funding versus the constitutionally guaranteed civil right to freedom of speech and expression) and there have even been calls by some members of Congress to abolish the endowment fund altogether. Such an act would devastate orchestras all over the country, some of whom receive upwards of a quarter of a million dollars each year in support.[16]

Unfortunately, a solution to this problem is not easily found. The solution which seems most obvious, that is, raising the price of tickets, is not an option in most cases. Orchestras have seemingly already put ticket prices as high as is safely possible and to go much further invites the risk of losing ticket-buyers, the long-term effects of which are even more devastating. Furthermore, raising prices only reinforces a general impression that attending orchestra concerts is something only available to those who can afford such luxuries, not for just anyone who enjoys listening to the music. At a time when increasing the audience base is absolutely fundamental to the continued survival of the orchestra (with an aim of serving as many areas of the community as possible), this is an action which would certainly do little to assist with the attaining of that goal. It is thus necessary for orchestras to focus their energies on the objectives of filling their venues to maximum capacity at every concert, coming up with special events that successfully accomplish the goal of raising additional funds, and insuring that the orchestra's time and skills

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[16]"1993-94 Season NEA Grants." Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1993, vol. 44, no. 6, p. 48-50, 58-63.

are used to maximum advantage. And the accomplishment of these rests first and foremost on the success of efforts to increase the audience base.

Increasing The Audience Base

Developing and maintaining a strong audience base is a challenge that nearly all orchestras continually face. As stated earlier, figures show that attendance rates have increased, but the fight to keep a stable and, better yet, growing number of subscribers is an ongoing one. Practically speaking, however, it is unlikely that there is any professional orchestra that would not benefit from increasing its audience size. This is especially true for those orchestras trying to increase the length of their season in an effort to become more full-time organisations.

Given the fact that only about 10% of the American population attends performances given by its professional orchestras, there is an enormous amount of untapped audience available that orchestra marketing departments can target and to draw in to the concert hall.

One of the primary issues involved in getting orchestra tickets sold is considering what kind of alternatives provide competition. Orchestra performances compete for their audience with other areas of the performing arts such as live theatre, musicals, dance, opera, and jazz and pop concerts. Often, many of these events, such as performances by dance companies, jazz and pop musicians and theatre groups, feature groups which are touring around the country and can only be seen for a limited time, sometimes only once. In contrast, a professional orchestra with a full-time season, while also offering limited runs of each concert, is based in the city year-round, providing different musical programs on an almost weekly basis.

Another potential area of competition for professional orchestras comes in the form of concerts given by community, college and youth orchestras, of which there are over 1500 in the United States.[17] One line of argument regarding these groups is that their concerts are ultimately detrimental to the professional orchestras.[18] One reason given to support this is that the ticket prices for the concerts of amateur groups are rarely as expensive as those of the professional orchestras. Additionally, the varied level of performance quality from these groups can mean that the audience is learning to settle for standards that are less than the highest available to them. Their support is cast towards the amateur groups and potentially taken away completely from the professional ones. Further thinking in this argument suggests that some of the people who attend the performances of amateur orchestras will become disgruntled by poor performance quality and will stop going to hear live concerts altogether in favour of staying home and listening to high quality recordings. Combatting these opinions, however, is the idea that "live music is better than being entirely satisfied with mechanical reproductions...[and] that those who play in a community orchestra will make the best nucleus for an audience for the professional touring artist or orchestra."[19] Furthermore, amateur orchestras contribute to the amount of music making that is happening in a community thereby helping to bring more people's attention to it.

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[17]*Americanizing the American Orchestra*, a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 2.
[18]"Financial Evolution of the Orchestra," by Samuel R. Rosenbaum. *The American Symphony Orchestra: Voice of America Forum Lectures,* edited by Henry Swoboda, U.S. Information Service, November 1967, p. 186.
[19]"Financial Evolution of the Orchestra," by Samuel R. Rosenbaum. *The American Symphony Orchestra: Voice of America Forum Lectures,* edited by Henry Swoboda, U.S. Information Service, November 1967, p. 186-187.

This argument introduces two topics for consideration. The first is the question of audience sophistication. The make-up of a concert audience can cover a wide range which includes very educated listeners through to those who have no classical music education whatsoever. Certainly there are many people who find it quite enjoyable to listen to a good quality amateur orchestra and feel no particular need to attend the performance of a professional orchestra. This reasoning lends itself to the above argument that support for amateur orchestras draws potential audience members away from the professional orchestra concerts. Yet, perhaps these same people might not attend any orchestra performance at all if they didn't attend that of the amateur orchestra. On the other hand, they might attend the concert of a professional orchestra and feel no different from how they would feel about the amateur performance, or they may be aware of the differences between the two, but appreciate each for its own merits. Furthermore, there are some amateur orchestras whose level of quality is extremely high, in some cases, potentially as high or higher than some smaller professional orchestras. Both sides considered, it seems unlikely that amateur orchestras actually take away potential audience members from a professional orchestra. It is quite possibly the opposite: that their performances introduce something new to people and inspire them to seek out other opportunities to hear more, including attending the concerts of a professional orchestra.

The second topic which is brought up by the above line of reasoning is that of people preferring to listen to high quality recordings instead of attending live performances. Naturally, orchestras have something to gain from the production of recordings in terms of the exposure it brings them and the revenue that is earned from both the recording session and from sales of the finished product, especially for some of the big

orchestras that produce large numbers of recordings each year. Thus, if it is true that some people choose to listen to recordings without ever attending a live performance, the orchestra is still benefiting from having made the recording because they are receiving the revenue from the sale. If it were truly the case that the production of recordings was having a seriously detrimental effect on attendance figures, surely orchestras would have reached this conclusion and have ceased to make so many recordings.

Aside from any financial gains, however, a case can be made for the fact that recordings can also help to build up an orchestra's reputation, making more people aware of its talent and what it is doing and generating interest that brings people into the concert hall to hear it perform live. Recordings which have been well-promoted and well-received can be especially beneficial to an orchestra when it goes on tour, generating extra interest that improves its chances of drawing a sizeable audience for the live concert. "Live performances boost sales, while the exposure afforded by broadcasts and recordings has the potential to draw millions into the hall."[20]

The issue, then, with such a wide variety of competition from so many different areas, is how to reach the public with a message that makes them want specifically to go out to hear live orchestral music of the highest quality.

The structure of the symphony orchestra in the United States has its origins in the European orchestra tradition of the 19th-Century. And while some of this influence still lingers on, professional orchestras in

[20]"Our Cities, Our Selves," by Blayne Cutler. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 37.

the United States have begun to develop more in the way of their own particular identity as they face the problems that are unique to their market. The variety and quality of choices that are available to potential audience members for the use of their leisure time means that orchestras must come up with creative ways of demonstrating their uniqueness and making what they have to offer attractive and accessible to as many people as possible.

The ability to explore creative alternatives and try something new is an area in which some orchestras have been slow to respond, but which most have begun to realise is the key to staying alive. Still, change is perceived to involve a certain amount of risk, especially where tampering with an already delicate audience base is concerned.[21] There are certainly many people who attend concerts regularly to hear performances of the "great" works of the standard repertoire (see discussion further on about programming) who are not particularly interested in hearing something other than that. Because the programming of so many orchestras often does not veer very far from this repertoire, the audiences have become accustomed to hearing just that and are more resistant to change. However, as the financial picture shows, relying on the same old formula is no longer enough to keep an orchestra in business.

With proper consideration and planning, tampering with the presentation format does not have to be a perilous undertaking. The key to offering something new is to make it appealing to the audience and one useful way to do that is through the help of the print, television and radio media.

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[21] *Americanizing the American Orchestra*, a report of the National Task Force for "The American Symphony Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 20-21.

In many instances, the media (specifically, journalists) only come into the picture after a performance has taken place, providing a review of what took place the day or days before. Although this may potentially bring people to a concert at a later date, the effect of alerting people in the few days right before a particular concert might actually be greater. To this end, some orchestras have found it very useful to work with the media ahead of time to prepare the audience for what they will hear and to generate interest among people who might otherwise not attend. This has proved to be a very effective tool, for example, in Toronto, where, in 1992 and 1993, the Toronto Symphony combined forces with Roman Tam, "a singer from Hong Kong whose immense appeal to Asian audiences makes him one of the world's most popular musicians...the Roman Tam concerts became a 'focal point' of interest for the local Chinese-Canadian community, estimated at some 200,000 people. Tickets were sold at community banks and shops, and Chinese newspapers heavily promoted both concerts."[22] A newspaper story about a contemporary composer whose work will be performed by the local orchestra can arouse people's interest by providing information which can make them feel more personally in touch with or curious about the music. Or, even just a simple write-up in the newspaper or minute on the radio previewing the upcoming music program can help to spark people's interest.

Getting the media to help the orchestra in the way they want and need to be helped can be a bit problematic, but if an orchestra is willing to do some of the work, for example by providing copy-ready material and potentially saving the media agency some of the time it takes to produce the story or

[22]"Opening Doors in Toronto," by John Felton. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 1, p. 58.

information segment, they can better their chances of getting their story across the way that they want it presented. The power of the media can be very great and is probably one of the most useful ways to help get across to people the significance of music and all the arts to a better society. Other solutions for drawing in more people are also solutions to problems such as music education and making programming more interesting and diverse. These solutions appear further on in the paper.

The Orchestra's Role As An Educator

Another area where the orchestra's success will mean a better future is in its ability to involve itself in the promotion of music education on a variety of levels. (By "music education," I mean to include the broadest range of activities which can help to further audiences' knowledge about music -- from formal involvement in primary and secondary school classrooms to informal methods such as the conductor providing commentary about a work from the podium during the concert.) It is simply not feasible for the industry to ignore or underestimate the impact that music education can have on its future, as well as how it can begin to have impact in the short term. Assuming the attitude that it is not a part of their function to play the role of educator may, in the short term, seem to some like a rational decision, especially when money is tight and there are plenty of seemingly more pressing needs for the money which is available. However, for the future health and survival of the orchestra, the long term outlook must also be given serious consideration. Unfortunately, looking at one's long term picture over immediate needs can be a more uncomfortable, even painful task for an organisation, and is also one which is more easily put aside Despite this, it is an area which cannot be ignored.

As discussed earlier, one of the difficulties faced by professional orchestras is coming up with an effective way to compete with the many choices people have for the use of their decreasing leisure time.[23] Competition from such areas as the local movie theatre, television, and video and computer games (the last three being entertainment that people can enjoy

[23]"American adults face six fewer leisure hours a week than they enjoyed in 1965." "Our Cities, Our Selves," by Blayne Cutler. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 93.

right in their own home) is hard to compete with because they are more easily accessible for people. In a study of 1500 American adults to determine why people don't attend performances of theatre, music and dance more often, the second most-cited reason was "it is difficult to get from here to places where performances are given," the third was "it is too difficult to find a parking place," and the fifth, "going out at night is a real worry" (the most-cited reason was "ticket prices are too high" and the fourth was "the cost of hiring a babysitter, eating out, and other such costs are more than I can afford").[24] Of the top five reasons, three involve the obstacles of physically getting oneself to the performance and none of the top eight cited reasons was for lack of interest in the arts. In fact, a recent national poll reveals that nearly all Americans say they appreciate the arts, yet the majority of them rarely attend performing arts events such as an orchestra concert.[25] Orchestras therefore need to reach more people with efforts to increase knowledge and interest in what the orchestra has to offer (as well, of course, as break down the physical barriers that keep people from attending).

Given this situation, it is imperative that orchestras take an active role in promoting and helping to provide the education that is necessary to develop and sustain an audience that generates a continuous demand for its services. Producing a clear-cut agenda on how to achieve the greatest possible educational impact with the resources that are available is something every orchestra must consider. The rewarding thing about investing the orchestra's time, energy, and resources in this area, aside from the benefits that will ultimately be derived for the organisation, is

[24]From *Americans and the Arts VI,* a study directed by Louis Harris for the American Council for the Arts as cited in "Our Cities, Our Selves," by Blayne Cutler. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 94-95.

[25]"Colorado Springs Surprises," by John Felton. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 59.

that the variety of ways in which an orchestra can become involved and have an impact is only limited by the creativity of those who want to contribute to the undertaking.

Each orchestra is part of a larger community comprising many other organisations which can be tapped into by the orchestra to achieve greater success with its endeavours to promote music education. Yet, many orchestras set about developing educational programs without giving a great deal of consideration to how the valuable resources around them might be able to enhance their programs. Developing programs with groups such as other arts organisations, community education programs, public and private school systems, youth groups, religious groups, universities, libraries, hospitals, business groups, and senior citizen groups can afford the orchestra a wealth of opportunities to increase its impact beyond that of its individual efforts and can result in the development of high quality programs that are well-suited to a variety of needs.

A further consideration for orchestras in developing educational programs is to seek the advice and knowledge of those who specialise in educational methods. Even programs that have already been found to be effective can benefit from the input of these professionals. But, more importantly, a great deal of time and money can be saved by avoiding making some of the mistakes that can come from non-educators trying to create programs that need to have a maximum amount of impact in the often small amount of time that is given over to them.

The most frequently targeted institutions for orchestral educational programs are, of course, local primary and secondary schools. Introducing

children to orchestral music can provide them with the start of a lifelong love for that music[26] and can also be an important first step in cultivating future audience members. As a result of this philosophy, one which is encouraged by the NEA as a way to increase the public's appreciation of the arts, the practice of performing concerts targeted at a children's audience has become a traditional part of most orchestras' regular season.[27]

Although attending a children's concert can certainly be educational for a child and help to spark his or her interest in music, the orchestra's influence should not stop there. The impact of the one concert can be made even greater if the orchestra can develop something in the form of a mini-curriculum as a supplement to the actual concert experience. This could be distributed to all those classes who sign up to attend and could include activities, discussion topics and information for use in the classroom by the regular and/or specialist music teacher both before and after the actual concert. Another possibility might include sending some of the orchestra's musicians out to the schools in the weeks prior to the concert to present information that would be beneficial to the students' understanding and expectations of the performance. The musicians could possibly use their own instruments as a focal point for discussion or come armed with other materials such as simple wind or percussion instruments, or video or computer materials. The Queens Symphony is

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[26]British teacher and musicologist Isaiah Berlin states, "most people, by the time they're sixteen or seventeen, are formed culturally. What they like at age seventeen, they are likely to like at the age of seventy." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p.124.

[27]Figures which tell how many professional American orchestras actually include children's concerts in their programming are unavailable, however, of the 196 grants made to orchestras by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1993, 95 of them, or 48%, were made to orchestras who included children's concerts as part of their need for funding. "1993-94 NEA Grants."
Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1993, vol. 44, no. 6, p. 48-50, 58-63.

one example of this with their "sequential, curriculum-based education program that trains teachers and ensembles, provides audio and video tapes, and presents in-school ensemble concerts," and the Dayton Philharmonic's In-School Ensembles Program which each year "presents 550 lecture-demonstrations by five resident ensembles to over 40,000 students in more than 300 area schools."[28] The point is that there is a multitude of ways in which the orchestra can extend its impact, even in just this one area, and that the benefits of actually doing so should leave their mark on the future health of the industry.[29]

Children are not the only ones who can benefit from efforts to educate about music. There are plenty of adults whose education about orchestras and their music is minimal. Although adults cannot be targeted in one particular place in the way that children can be in schools, it is still quite possible to provide educational information to adults through the media (television, newspapers, magazines) and by working with the above-mentioned members of an orchestra's community. Increasing the music education of adults will not only contribute to broadening the audience base, but is also useful in the areas of introducing more varied styles of programming and in helping to break down the barriers that seem to exist for many people regarding contemporary music.

Finally, not only can the audience be educated to appreciate what the orchestra already does, but they can also be educated in such a way that

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[28]"1993-94 NEA Grants." Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1993, vol. 44, no. 6, p. 61.

[29]One of the goals of the National Endowment for the Arts is to help performing arts organisations "broaden their public support and appeal by increasing or improving their programs of public service. There is an educational motivation behind this goal, for the survival of the arts is dependant upon continuing generations of those who would make the arts part of their lives." *The American Music Handbook,* by Christopher Pavlakis, The Free Press, New York, 1974, p. 64-65.

they actually enjoy and demand a greater variety from the orchestra,[30] responding positively to such things as more varied programming, more contemporary music and more experimentation with the type of ensemble which presents the music. An audience which brings with it such a desire will surely mean a more prosperous future for any orchestra, providing they are willing to accommodate the demands.

[30]Los Angeles Philharmonic Managing Director, Ernest Fleischmann: "Our big task is to...educate the audiences, not only children but the very large audiences that come to our concerts in the evenings; to get that audience to demand flexibility." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 11.

High Quality Musicians

The need for musicians of high quality and their current availability is not an issue that receives a great deal of attention in the face of some of the other more critical problems that the orchestra industry faces, yet it is certainly a very important issue which has far-reaching effects for every organisation. Obviously, the quality of the music begins with the quality of the conductor and the musicians in the orchestra, therefore making the ability to find high-calibre musicians of fundamental importance for any organisation.

Some members of the orchestra industry, however, assert that there exists a general shortage of high quality orchestral musicians, most notably among string players, where the greatest numbers are needed to fill the many rank and file seats in orchestras around the country.[31] The problem is not one of a lack of musicians in general, for most announcements of an open position realise a sizeable response, but rather a lack of top quality players who, if hired, would indeed be an asset to the orchestra. It is not unusual to hear of a lengthy audition process that does not ultimately end with the selection of any of the auditioning players for the main reason that a suitable candidate simply could not be found.[32]

To locate the root of this problem, one must examine the educational institutions which are responsible for the training of most musicians.

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[31]"The Symphony Orchestra and the Conductor," a discussion between Helen M. Thompson and Max Rudolf. From *The American Symphony Orchestra: Voice of America Forum Lectures,* edited by Henry Swoboda, U.S. Information Service, November 1967, p. 68.

[32]Ernest Fleischmann, discussing the problem as it pertains to the Los Angeles Philharmonic, states: "After five different lots of auditions this last year in Los Angeles, for each of which we had upward of two hundred applications, only two positions were filled. For three other positions we were unable to find musicians of sufficiently high caliber." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 30.

Regarding this topic, the words of Joseph Polisi, president of The Juilliard School, point to a key factor in the training of young musicians in America which helps accounts for this problem. "Wind players and percussion players see their ultimate goal as being in an orchestra; string players for the most part envision themselves first as soloists, second as chamber musicians and last as orchestral players - with, perhaps, teaching squeezed in somewhere." He states further that "certainly only one half of one percent of musicians will ever have gainful employment as soloists."[33] Thus, while wind and percussion players are typically educated with the realistic goal of becoming orchestral players, the focus of many string players' education is on becoming a soloist, even though the odds are quite strongly against such an eventuality. Furthermore, when some of these string players become members of orchestras, they arrive having focused a great deal of time and energy on developing the skills which are required of a soloist, skills which differ somewhat from those necessary to play well as a member of an orchestral string section.

A common problem that Joseph Polisi points out is that "conservatories don't train the students adequately to take an audition and perform in an orchestra over a long period of time."[34] Looked at from this point of view, it is conceivable that the shortage of high quality players is perhaps not quite so great, but just appears greater because so many players lack the auditioning and orchestral skills necessary for the jobs. Auditioning is certainly a vital skill for a musician who wants a job in an orchestra. Even though a player might be highly qualified for the job, the failure to convey that message in the few short minutes of an audition means the

[33]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 29.
[34]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 29.

loss of the opportunity. Furthermore, the persistence of this problem can cause a great deal of frustration to a player resulting in damage to the player's confidence and worsening their ability to audition effectively.

Beyond the problem of auditioning is the difficulty of students not receiving sufficient training to prepare them for life as a member of an orchestra. Conservatory students certainly learn to play their instruments, but don't necessarily learn the skills and discipline that are needed for playing in an orchestra. These skills, such as knowing how to blend one's playing with the section, or how to balance practice time outside of orchestra commitments, are often only learned once one becomes a member of a professional orchestra. This deficiency can cause a new orchestra member difficulty in adjusting to the requirements and demands once they do secure a job, even to the point of realising that being an orchestral player is, after all, not how they want to use their musical training.

Another aspect of musical training institutions which receives criticism is that the young players who are coming out of these schools have a strong ability to play with great technical perfection, but lack the ability to play musically.[35] Technical virtuosity seems to have grown in importance over the ability to offer an interpretation that is found within the music. Further criticism of training methods points to the conservativeness of the process.[36] Musicians are still being trained in a manner based on the

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[35]Basil Tschaikov, director of the National Centre for Orchestral Studies in London, says, "more and more frequently among the young musicians who come to play to me, I hear that virtuosity is commonplace, but music is increasingly rare." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 13.

[36]Violinist Anna Lindal: "You'd have to look a long way to find a form of training more conservative than ours. We're generally trained in a tradition which, at best, belonged to the previous generation." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History,*

traditions of the 19th-Century European conservatories, yet the need for a broader, more diverse education is critical to the continued survival of orchestras. Unfortunately, there is a rather vicious circle in place. The older generations of musicians teach the younger generations, but teach them as they themselves were taught, which usually means the same technical studies and etudes and the same solo and orchestral excerpt repertoire. This process can have especially detrimental effects on contemporary music because it can mean that musicians enter professional orchestras having had insufficient exposure to this music and are therefore lacking in the techniques and understanding that are required to properly play some of this music. Additionally, there exists the potential for them to be biased against it, which helps to perpetuate the difficulty of getting contemporary music performed. The task of educating the audience to increase their appreciation of modern music is certainly hard enough for an orchestra without the added problems of trying to encourage its own musicians to appreciate and enjoy it, and thus take an interest in performing it well.

One last area that deserves mention because of its need for improvement is the area of finding good teachers. A great musician is not automatically a great teacher, and perhaps doesn't even enjoy teaching, yet for many musicians, even those who secure a good full-time orchestral position, it is still quite likely that they will also be a teacher of their instrument. Despite this, most musicians' education does not include much in the way of training to be a teacher and players must typically work out for themselves teaching methods which are effective, relying on the how they were taught and their own imagination.

Problems and Agendas, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 35.

The orchestra industry, nevertheless, is in a fairly good position to engender a positive effect on these shortcomings of the conservatory training system, thereby affecting the quality of musicians which are being turned out. Many of those who teach private lessons to the students at conservatories are themselves members of professional orchestras. Orchestras should become involved by encouraging their members who teach to consider the many issues of conservatory training which could be improved upon and by helping them to find ways of changing the process. An effort on the part of musician/teachers to push for a more relevant curriculum which includes emphasis on becoming better at auditioning, understanding what spending one's life sitting in an orchestra means and requires, learning to approach playing more musically and not just with technical perfection, and broadening the repertoire that is taught to include more contemporary music would have long-term effects of a very positive nature for the orchestra industry.

Satisfaction Within The Orchestra

The satisfaction of the musicians who make up the orchestra is, of course, very important to the smooth operation of any orchestra, yet, here is another area that often does not receive as much attention as it should, again giving way to the more immediate organisational pressures of staying in business from one day to the next. The musicians, it must be remembered, create the music and as a whole are responsible for the sound of the orchestra. Therefore, their enthusiasm for their job is certainly a factor which will show up in the final product. A great love of music is not enough to transcend dissatisfactions that can build over several years of playing in an orchestra, especially for string players who are sitting at the back of the section or wind and brass players whose job it is to continually play second or third parts. These players perhaps especially, but all players in general, need a chance to let their individual musicianship stand out from time to time, not to mention the importance of having some variety that provides an often much appreciated break from the standard repertoire. (Ideally, of course, orchestras aim to expand and vary their programming anyway, which is discussed in the next section.)

From time to time, one finds a principal orchestral player featured as a soloist with their orchestra, but on the typical orchestra program, this is not an altogether frequent event. The need to feature big name guest artists with the orchestra to draw in an audience usually takes precedence over asking players from within the ranks to perform as a soloist. This is unfortunate because offering more members of the orchestra the chance to be featured as a soloist would certainly be one way to provide a boost to orchestra morale. In rethinking the shape and function of the orchestra,

consideration should be given to trying to achieve a better balance between featuring guest artists and players from within the ranks. Featuring its own players has the added benefit of demonstrating to the audience the type of high quality musicianship that exists among the orchestra's members, which can help raise the audience's appreciation of the orchestra.[37]

While it is not a common occurrence to hear chamber music performed on the program when attending an orchestra concert, here is another way of making the programming of the orchestra concert more interesting and of offering some of the players the chance to show their talents in a more demanding and exposed role. It also offers the orchestra the chance to widen the audience's musical knowledge and opens up the large repertoire of chamber music, which is typically a less familiar area for most orchestra audience members. This is not, of course, to say that the orchestral repertoire isn't large enough in itself to offer a great deal of variety. The amount is indeed tremendous and should be equally well explored by orchestras in their pursuit of more varied programming. (See the next section for a more thorough discussion of this topic.)

As the orchestra industry responds to its problems and seeks to become more versatile, introducing chamber music into the formula, although not without complications, is certainly one way to go about it. The benefits of this alternative, besides giving individual musicians the chance to stand out, take on more individual responsibility and enjoy the

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[37]"I try to involve individual musicians as much as I can in every single concert we do here...for instance soloing with the orchestra, so they become well-known. Then they become a vital part of this community." "The Pride of America: Preserving the Heritage," by Catherine Comet. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 15. (See also Symphony Magazine, 1994, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 44.)

added variety to their job,[38] include the fact that more rehearsal time would become available to the orchestra as a result of being responsible for a smaller portion of the program. The availability of extra rehearsal time could possibly be put to good use by thoroughly preparing the work of a contemporary composer, since a lack of funds to support the extra rehearsal time that is often needed for contemporary works is one commonly-cited problem for why new works don't get performed more frequently.

Another way for orchestras to work chamber music into the orchestra season if they choose not to present it on the same program with works for the full orchestra is to program special concerts or even a series devoted solely to chamber works. This alternative creates further opportunities for orchestra members to be involved and might also be a way of attracting new audience members whose interests lie more particularly towards hearing the performance of chamber music. Many of America's professional orchestras have already established chamber groups made up of their orchestral players, including such groups as the Boston Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.[39] In looking for ways to increase the satisfaction of the orchestra members, as well as varying what they have to offer their audience, adding chamber music into the formula is an option to which more orchestras may turn.

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[38]"I imagine the orchestra of the future as something quite different...greater flexibility in all areas: program planning, types of concerts, division of labor; greater responsibility for each musician, and hence, more pleasure in his or her work." Violinist Anna Lindal in *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 37.

[39]"1993-94 NEA Grants." Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1993, vol. 44, no. 6, p. 61 and 1994, vol. 45, no. 3, p. 28.

The traditional set-up of the orchestra, where only a few people such as the music director, top level managers and perhaps a few board members make the majority of the orchestra's decisions, can make it difficult for musicians to raise their concerns and have their ideas heard. Additionally, management is often preoccupied with the more immediate crisis of keeping things running, often failing to set aside time in which to hear the input and concerns of the players. This can cause the development of a rift between the two segments of the organisation, one which can widen immensely when the time for renegotiating contracts comes up.[40] More and more, however, this has begun to change as orchestras have realised the value of including the musicians in some of the decision-making processes which determine the future of the organisation. The inclusion of musicians on the various decision-making committees of the orchestra has become increasingly common, with musicians even serving on the boards of several large orchestras (in Denver, for example, the Colorado Symphony requires that one third of its board membership be drawn from its musicians).[41] Given the chance to be included, some musicians go on to become even more active outside their required musical duties. In the Houston Symphony, some of the musicians have undertaken the task of producing a monthly newsletter (funded with a minimal voluntary deduction from players' paychecks) which spotlights various members of the orchestra, board and community, along with other relevant feature articles. The finished

[40]After six years with the Houston Symphony, violist Tom Elliott decided he'd had enough. "I had been on the negotiating committee and we were locked out...[there existed] very poor communications, lots of posturing and positional mistrust." He returned to the Houston Symphony in 1986 where "its wholly different now." Since his return he has represented the musicians by serving as a member on the orchestra committee, the tour committee, the benefits committee and the negotiating committee, all with an orchestra that has even gone so far as to even include an orchestral musician at the executive level. "In 1976 that was not only not happening, but it would have been an extremely controversial notion." From "Winds of Change," by Chester Lane. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol 45, no. 4, p. 114.

[41]"Winds of Change," by Chester Lane. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 114.

product goes out to such diverse people as board members, the local mayor, Congressional delegates and other orchestras.[42] Cellist Anne Duthie McCafferty of the Indianapolis Symphony, in addition to having served on several orchestra committees and donated her individual time and services for orchestra fund-raising events, took on the role of newspaper correspondent when her orchestra went on a three-week European tour for which the local newspaper was unable to provide a critic. Despite a hectic orchestra schedule, she produced seven articles for the *Indianapolis Star*, usually having to meet deadlines just a few hours after the end of evening concerts.[43] Thus, the potential solutions for creating greater satisfaction among the orchestra's musicians are such that both the individual players and the overall organisation end up reaping the benefits.

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[42]"Winds of Change," by Chester Lane. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 114.
[43]"Hoosier Commitment," by Chester Lane. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 46.

The Programming Dilemma

The content of the music program is another area to which orchestras must turn their attention as they try to improve the overall health of their organisation. Among the problems here are a lack of variety, creativity and courage in programming. Pierre Boulez, speaking on the state of orchestras around the world, offers the following analysis of today's situation: "The orchestra should be an ensemble of possibilities, and not exclude anything; the repertoire however is becoming narrower and narrower. Much of it is being given to specialised groups, while the orchestra itself becomes like a museum, with a room for classical works and a room for contemporary works. The repertoire of a standard orchestra no longer touches the eighteenth century."[44] British writer and critic, Peter Heyworth, seems to agree, offering his view that "the orchestra is in the process of losing its grip on the pre-Classical repertoire."[45] In so far as they apply to American orchestras, Boulez' statement regarding 18th-century repertoire is exaggerated, with Heyworth's appearing closer to the truth. There is indeed a demonstrable trend in the programming of American orchestras which reveals that increasingly less of the repertoire is drawn from the music of that century.[46]

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[44]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 9.

[45]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 7.

[46]A survey of the programming of ten professional American orchestras for their 1942-43, 1962-63, 1982-83 and 1992-93 seasons reveals the gradual disappearance from regular season programming of Baroque works and the reduced occurrence of late 18th-century works. During the 1942-43 season of the Chicago Symphony, 22 "pre-Beethoven" works were programmed, 11 of them Baroque. In 1992-93, there were ten such works, none of them Baroque and all ten composed by either Haydn or Mozart. The Philadelphia Orchestra shows the same trend. In the 28 programs of the 1942-43 season, there were 14 pre-Beethoven works, eight of them Baroque. In 1992-93, for 32 programs there were nine works (again all by either Haydn or Mozart), none of them Baroque. For the whole ten

The decreased use of this area of the repertoire has happened at the same time that specialised Baroque and chamber ensembles have grown in popularity, working their way into this area of the repertoire with the increased interest in "authentic" performances. Because the works of the 18th-Century were not typically written for ensembles the size of today's orchestras,[47] the performing of such works by large orchestras began to draw increased criticism for being "unauthentic" and were compared unfavourably to the results produced by the specialised groups.[48] Naturally, everyone has their own opinion as to what sort of ensemble they prefer to listen to where 18th-century works are concerned, and while specialised groups do a fine job with that repertoire, that should not necessarily mean that orchestras eliminate completely from their repertoire the music of that period.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is contemporary music, which has much to offer the orchestra as well. Yet, orchestras have not thoroughly taken up this aspect of the repertoire either. (A more detailed examination of this area appears further on.) Thus the problem faced here is that orchestras have developed the habit of limiting themselves in what they present.

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orchestras surveyed, there were 33 Baroque works (11 of which were transcriptions) programmed in 1942-43 and in 1992-93, only six Baroque works (none of which were transcriptions). From "Of Time and Gravity," by Henry Fogel. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 76-77.

[47]While the size of the orchestra varied depending on the country, type of orchestra (Italian opera orchestras were typically larger than German court orchestras) and general availability of local musicians, the general size of orchestral ensembles was not as high as the 80-100 that are commonly found on the stage today. "Orchestra," by Jack Westrup with Neal Zaslaw. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, 1980, vol. 13, p. 683-689.

[48]"Of Time and Gravity," by Henry Fogel. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 77.

A study by the American Symphony Orchestra League on the repertoire presented by approximately 100 of the United States' largest professional orchestras over a period of five seasons (1987-88 through 1991-92) very pointedly reveals just where current orchestral repertoire is most commonly taken from. The five composers whose works appeared most often on the programs were Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Haydn. Works by Mozart appeared on 24% of the programs (the fact that the bicentennial of Mozart's death occurred during one of the five years of the survey should be taken into account), by Beethoven, 16%, by Tchaikovsky, 10%, by Brahms, 10%, and by Haydn, 7.5%.[49] The next five composers on the list were Richard Strauss, Dvorák, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Ravel. From the results of this survey it can be seen that the programming of a large number of these orchestras is firmly rooted in works composed between the late 18th- and early 20th-Century.

An altogether different picture is revealed, however, by a look, in the same survey, at the percentage of concerts featuring works by 20th-Century American composers. The orchestras surveyed for this study were all American and therefore the most likely group to be performing the works of the 20th-Century American composers, but despite this, only three of these composers' works appeared on more than 2% of the concert programs, these being Samuel Barber with 2.8%, Aaron Copland with 2.6%, and Leonard Bernstein with 2.4%. The remaining seven of the top ten composers in this category (in descending order of representation - John Adams, Charles Ives, George Gershwin, John Harbison, John Corigliano, Elliott Carter and William Schuman) vary in programming representation from only 1.5% down to .49%. For these ten composers, the combined representation of their works on concert programs is just

[49]From *1992-93 Orchestra Repertoire Report,* American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1993, as cited in Mandeles, p. 18-19.

over half that of the frequency with which Mozart's works are performed (13.53% vs. 24%), certainly a dismal finding.

It is not, however, a matter of rigid unwillingness on the part of orchestra organisations to experiment and expand on the typical content of the music program, but instead, often a result of the fear that to make a sudden change in the existing format will be to risk a loss at the box office. Faced with tough economic problems, many organisations feel it is better to play things safe and go with the format which is at least allowing them to get by instead of opting for a change whose results are difficult to predict, especially when the gamble is one they absolutely can't afford to lose. On the other hand, there is interest in and pride for orchestras in the communities where they are located and, as already discussed, developing different approaches for reaching new audiences and presenting programs with varied formats are techniques that have already been successful for many. In looking to the future, professional orchestras do not need to, nor does it appear that they can afford to, resist the necessity for change.

Programming is an area which offers an enormous variety of possibilities to the orchestra. There is no limit to how creative an orchestra can get with its choice of works and how it presents them. "Programs should be as mixed as possible; it's the unusual combinations and unexpected connections which turn an audience of passive listeners into one of active participants," states violinist Anna Lindal of the Stockholm Philharmonic.[50] Simple ideas such as featuring the works of one composer or of a group of composers who share common traits, who

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[50]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 37.

influenced each other with their works, or were working in the same location during the same period are all themes that can be used to give cohesiveness to a program and offer additional angles to help in the promotion of the concert. Other theme ideas might include featuring works of composers of similar nationality or works by composers which all include a similar type of nationalistic influence.

Regardless of how an orchestra chooses to expand its programming, it must acknowledge the importance of top-rate promotion and secure an appropriately effective department to back it up and maximise the potential for drawing in the largest possible audience. The work of the promotion team can include creating events outside the actual concert which tie in to make orchestra concerts even more attractive to potential audience members. Tying in pre- or post-concert food, entertainment, and/or lectures in some way to the concert can only help to make the experience more memorable and enjoyable, not to mention educational, for the audience, thereby encouraging them to return more often.[51] This is not to say that every concert on an orchestra's schedule must be developed to revolve around a theme of some sort, but it can be a highly effective tool for helping an orchestra broaden its reach and appeal and becoming more effective in their community.

There are a whole host of ways to use creativity in this area and reaching out to explore the vast amount of repertoire that exists for orchestra can

[51]One example of this is the targeting of the young singles crowd by the Toronto Symphony with their "Classic Network" series. "For five Thursday-night, regular-season concerts the orchestra offers a pre-concert lecture, a cocktail half-hour, the concert, and a post-concert social hour at a popular nearby restaurant. In its first year, this series only attracted six subscribers; this season [1993-94], more than 170 people have signed up." "Opening Doors in Toronto," by John Felton. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 1, p. 58.

be an enjoyable experience for everyone involved, both musicians and audience alike.

The "Duty" To Contemporary Music

Speaking on the importance of contemporary music to the life of an orchestra, John Rushby-Smith, a senior music manager of the British Broadcasting Corporation, has stated that "without new [contemporary] music the orchestra, even with the best will in the world, will ultimately die."[52] Despite this emphatic declaration, contemporary music is not necessarily so enthusiastically embraced by many of today's professional orchestras. There certainly exist many ensembles which do an admirable and conscientious job of bringing new music to the public, who are even dedicated to that sole purpose, but it is also true that many great American professional orchestras could do more to improve their record in the area of presenting and commissioning contemporary music.

Throughout the history of the orchestra, a close relationship has existed between composers and orchestras. The growth of the orchestra's shape as we know it today, in terms of its instrumentation, is mainly the result of two things: the demands composers have made on it with their compositions and the technological advances of instrument-making. In the mid-19th Century, the improvement of already existing instruments (such as changes in the construction of stringed instruments which allowed for "more brilliant timbre, greater volume and higher standard pitch" and improvements Theobald Boehm made to the design of the flute, oboe and clarinet[53]) and the rise in popularity of those which were new or had been out of fashion (examples of the former being the bass

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[52]*The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 126.

[53]"Orchestra," by Jack Westrup with Neal Zaslaw, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, 1980, vol. 13, p. 683.

tuba and Eb clarinet and of the latter, the cor anglais[54]) gave composers an ever-increasing number of sounds with which to colour their works. Berlioz and Wagner are two of the 19th Century's most notable composers in this regard with their influence extending later on to such writers as Mahler, Strauss, Stravinsky and Schoenberg.

While not all of the 18th-, 19th- and early 20th-Century works that are great favourites of audiences today were well-received at the time of their premieres, a great deal of them did meet with enough success that it was not long before they made their way into the ever-growing orchestral repertoire. What is most important to note about the performing of new works throughout this period of music history is that the contemporary music of the time was what comprised orchestras' repertoire. The music was written because there was an existing demand for it.

In this century, however, that situation has altered in such a way that orchestras are sometimes called "cultural dinosaurs"[55] or compared to museums,[56] because in choosing their repertoire they have turned more towards the preservation of music of previous eras and away from the music that is contemporary today. Nearly thirty years ago, Walter Piston stated, "there is a good deal less interest in contemporary music now than there was at any other time in history,"[57] and that seems to continue to be

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[54]"Orchestra," by Jack Westrup with Neal Zaslaw, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, 1980, vol. 13, p. 683.

[55]"Then and Now," by Catherine French. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p.25.

[56]"The Pride of America: Preserving the Heritage," by Catherine Comet. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1994, vol. 45, no. 4, p. 100 and *The Evolution of the Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agenda*, a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 9.

[57]"Fifty Years of the American Symphony Orchestra: Personal Vignettes," a discussion by Walter Piston and G. Wallace Woodworth. *The American Symphony Orchestra, Voice of*

the case today. Somewhere along the line, programming the work of contemporary composers became less desirable or necessary to either the orchestras, the audience, or both, resulting in greater barriers to the programming of such works.[58] One factor to consider here is that composers such as Wagner, Strauss and Mahler were also conductors, providing them with a closer relationship to the orchestra. Today, a conductor/composer such as Pierre Boulez is the exception to the rule. As Peter Heyworth, a British writer and music critic, asserts, "[the] intimate link between creativity and interpretation has become much rarer today. As a result, conducting is increasingly a matter of mere virtuosity. Not for nothing has Herbert von Karajan come to be regarded as the representative conductor of our time. Technical perfection has become an end in itself."[59]

Thus developed a convention which today means that orchestras no longer rely on contemporary music for the bulk of their repertoire,[60]

America Forum Lectures, edited by Henry Swoboda, United States Information Services, November 1967, p. 21.

[58]"Conventional wisdom says that all audiences will dislike contemporary music or other unusual repertoire. Task Force members report that presentation of contemporary works sometimes leads to outspoken objections from subscribers and devoted board members...orchestra leaders may also observe an increase in no-shows for subscription programs containing unusual or unknown repertoire, and the receipt of letters threatening subscription cancellation if the orchestra does not desist in deviating from the traditional canon." From *Americanizing the American Orchestra,* a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 20-21. Additionally, Christopher Bishop, managing director of the London Philharmonia Orchestra, states, "the prejudice [on the part of the audience] against modern music, particularly if it's suspected of being atonal, shouldn't be underestimated." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 120. (see also footnote #65)

[59]*The Evolution of the Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 6.

[60]A programming survey of ten professional American orchestras for their regular 1992-93 concert series revealed that music written over the past 40 years makes up approximately 20-30% of the total number of pieces presented for the season. From "Of Time & Gravity," by Henry Fogel. Symphony Magazine, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., 1992, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 78.

making the premiering and performing of contemporary works a less frequent event in the typical orchestra season. Worse still is the frequency with which additional performances of newly-commissioned works are given, being infrequent enough to have spawned more than one organisation whose sole mission is the securing of just those performances.[61] Composers no longer play the important role to the orchestra that they once did, one result of which has been for composers to turn their talents towards composing for other musical combinations, no longer seeking the orchestra as a principal forum for their work. In the words of Erich Leinsdorf (speaking about the institution of a composer-in-residence program with the Boston Symphony), "the idea...has as its basis the regrettable fact that many of the younger contemporary composers have turned away from the symphony orchestra as, to them, a sympathetic medium to express their musical ideas. They have chosen instead odd combinations of a few players...but not anything which orchestras with their normal complement of players can do.[62]

The breakdown of the composer/orchestra relationship raises the question of just what the duty of the orchestra to modern music is, or whether there is a duty at all. There are people in the music industry who argue that the orchestra does indeed have an obligation to

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[61]The Utah Symphony recently formed a "society for second performances," drawing up a list of works that had been written and premiered over the past 25 years but had received little additional attention. Ten of the works were subsequently programmed throughout their concert season. Additionally, in 1986, the AT&T American Encore Program was founded to provide funding to orchestras who program into their regular concert series 20th-Century American works that have received few performances beyond their premieres. From *Americanizing the American Orchestra*, a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 25.

[62]"The Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Berkshire Music Center," a lecture by Erich Leinsdorf. From *The American Symphony Orchestra, Voice of America Forum Lectures*, edited by Henry Swoboda, United States Information Services, November 1967, p. 27.

commission and perform the works of today's composers, that the 18th- and 19th-Century tradition of a close working relationship between the two should without a doubt be continued.[63] It is further argued that not only is it a duty, but it is essential to the artistic life of an orchestra in helping it to maintain its identity, something which some feel is being lost.[64] Yet, the reality which most orchestras face is that the majority of their audience is not particularly interested in hearing contemporary music. They come to hear the "great" repertoire of composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. Focus groups conducted to gather information for the Pittsburgh Symphony found that "much of the 20th-Century and contemporary music played by the Symphony is disliked. People understand the Symphony's need to introduce new music to the Pittsburgh audience but that does not mean they like it. In general, the audience approves of one relatively short contemporary work on every other program in a six concert subscription series."[65]

In the face of such information, an orchestra can either continue to give the audience what they (the audience) believe they want to hear, namely programs which draw from the same basic repertoire year after year, or disregard, to some extent, that predisposition in favour of making a genuine commitment towards contemporary music by programming it conscientiously. Here, of course, is where effective solutions to some of

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[63]See, for example, Fogel, p. 78; Mandeles, p. 24 ; *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* p. 126; and, Swoboda, p. 37.

[64]British music critic, Peter Heyworth: "Today the orchestra, in so far as it continues to meet composers' demands, is a chameleon. It changes shape and size continually. Composers take from it what they want...as far as new music is concerned, the orchestra is in danger of losing its identity, becoming merely an ad hoc assembly of instruments." From *The Evolution Of The Symphony Orchestra: History, Problems and Agendas,* a conference sponsored by the Wheatland Foundation, chaired by Isaac Stern, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 5.

[65]From *Pittsburgh Symphony Marketing & Promotions Planning Study,* Tripp, Umbach & Associates, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 1991, as cited in Mandeles, p. 21.

the other challenges faced by the orchestra industry can be put into practice to achieve positive results in this area.

In the presentation of new music, education of the audience about what they are going to hear can accomplish a great deal towards making listeners more open to and interested in what they are hearing. Sending information about the work and the composer to ticket holders ahead of the concert, working with local press to promote the work through the media, presenting pre-concert talks on the radio or at the concert hall, providing information even in the course of the concert, and allowing audience members an opportunity to perhaps meet and even ask questions of the composer following the concert are all effective ways of making contemporary works more accessible and more attractive to the audience. The use of just some of these techniques have already been put into practice and found to be effective by such orchestras as the Milwaukee Symphony, the San Diego Symphony, and the Kansas City Symphony.[66]

Furthermore, the importance of repeated performances can not be underestimated. Becoming familiar with any piece by hearing it more than once is one of the best ways for an audience to grow to appreciate and enjoy it. Even the Brahms symphonies which are so beloved today once met with their own share of audience resistance when first introduced. Despite initial rejection of them by the Chicago Symphony's audience, conductor Frederick Stock continued to program them repeatedly until they grew to be appreciated.[67] Persistence on the part of

[66]*Americanizing the American Orchestra,* a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 97.
[67]"The Composer As Conductor and Performer," a discussion with Aaron Copland and Leon Kirchner. *The American Symphony Orchestra: Voice of America Forum Lectures,* edited by Henry Swoboda, U.S. Information Service, November, 1967, p. 90.

conductors to continue programming music that was contemporary to the time, but not necessarily popular (Serge Koussevitsky and Leopold Stokowski are other well-known examples[68]), is what won audiences over then and is what can be used to succeed today.

Additional assistance to overcoming the resistance to contemporary music will also come from success in the area of broadening the audience base. If the orchestra can draw in an audience with a more varied profile, they will likely be drawing in people who are more receptive to, or who at least arrive with fewer pre-conceived notions regarding, contemporary music.

Financial concerns are also among the most-commonly cited reasons which contribute to an orchestra's restricted ability to promote contemporary music. Not only does the fear of losing money at the box office with contemporary programming come into play, but so too do the constraints of a tight budget in affording orchestras the "luxury" of being able to commission new works. One effective solution has come when orchestras have sought to lessen their cost for a commission by teaming up with fellow organisations to share the cost. A good example of this is the Consortium Commissioning Program which was initiated in 1988 by the National Endowment for the Arts. A minimum of three ensembles must agree to participate, committing to giving at least two performances of the finished work. The success of the program is illustrated in the commission of a work by Libby Larson, "Marimba Concerto: After

[68]*Americanizing the American Orchestra,* a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p. 21.

Hampton." 12 orchestras combined their resources for the commission and gave a total of 27 performances of the new work.[69]

Further financial restraints that affect an orchestra's ability to perform contemporary music come from the additional rehearsal time that is often required to learn these works, as well as calls in the score for unusual instrumentation. Finding the money to pay a full orchestra for a few hours of extra rehearsal time and/or hire additional musicians can run up a bill in the thousands of dollars in a disturbingly short period of time. When money is made available for such undertakings through special grants or donations, most orchestras are quite happy to have the opportunity to present contemporary music, especially for the stimulation that it provides to the musicians. And, as mentioned previously, here is where the addition of chamber music to an orchestra's programming can contribute by freeing up some of the orchestra's rehearsal schedule.

The real solution for improving the status of contemporary music can only come out of a concerted effort by orchestras to make the music accessible and attractive to the audience through the use of educational techniques. By demonstrating a true commitment to the work of today's composers and not just sandwiching in short works here and there between audience pleasing standards, an acknowledgment in itself by the orchestra that the audience hasn't come to hear such music, it is possible to help improve the status of contemporary music and break down some of the audience's prejudices in regards to it. The work of today's

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[69]*Americanizing the American Orchestra,* a report of the National Task Force for "The American Orchestra: An Initiative For Change," principal writing by Laura Lewis Mandeles, American Symphony Orchestra League, Washington, D.C., June 1993, p.27.

composers will be part of future music history and is a treasure which today's orchestras would be foolish to let pass them by.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the various challenges faced by today's professional American orchestras are not isolated, independent issues that can be singled out and dealt with one at a time, but are instead interdependent aspects which together contribute to the overall picture of the orchestra's health. By broadening the number of people who have been exposed to music education, the audience base is increased. An increased audience base means more sold out concerts and more public and private funding to lessen the habitually tight financial situation in which most orchestras find themselves. A better financial outlook means the management can give more consideration to the needs of the musicians, improving job conditions and salaries and attracting higher quality players, which in turn will improve the overall standard of the orchestra. As a result of education efforts and a more stable financial situation, the duty to modern music can be better carried out through an increased number of commissions and performances of contemporary music. And, by becoming more involved in the education process which produces orchestral musicians, orchestras can improve the quality of their future members.

This description may perhaps sound a bit utopian, yet it is not an altogether impossible goal to accomplish. On the other hand, the achievement of such an end will not come easily or quickly, but rather over many years, even generations, and will involve a persistent long-term commitment to a well-thought out plan of action.

While the difficulties that have been discussed here are those most commonly faced throughout the American orchestral community, this

does not mean that every orchestra faces all of the same problems or does not have its own unique challenges. The most important thing, however, is that there are positive solutions which can be and have been employed to prevent further damage to and actually strengthen the position of orchestras in today's society. Many orchestras have already put some of the solutions discussed here to work for them with good success. However, there remains an enormous amount of progress to be made and, hopefully enough solutions will be found and used to not only preserve, but to foster the growth of one of society's valuable institutions - the symphony orchestra.

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