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Just a Dream?

by

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Editor's Digest

Just a Dream?

Our files and bookshelves are filled with materials “we really must read sometime.” So it is refreshing that Institute founder and chairman Paul Judy suggests in the following essay that we take time out to consider two texts: Philip Hart’s *Orpheus in the New World*, and the American Symphony Orchestra League’s *Americanizing the American Orchestra*. He suggests that a careful reading of these texts will remind us of the potentials available in transformational change for American symphony orchestras.

A Thematic Review

Drawing extensively from the texts themselves, Judy leads readers through a variety of common themes: repertory, orchestra boards, artistic direction, and musician involvement. Much of what you are about to read was written years ago. However, the messages are very contemporary. Is the idea of positive change for symphony orchestra organizations “just a dream”? The author suggests that there is some evidence that we are, perhaps, moving from dream to reality.

Readers will also appreciate the biographical sidebar on Philip Hart which accompanies the essay. Octogenarian Hart currently lives in Santa Fe and continues to write.

Just a Dream?

The Symphony Orchestra Institute is dedicated to fostering improvement in the functioning of North American symphony organizations, toward greater participant and constituent satisfaction and community value. The Institute came into being based in part on the anecdotal observations of more than 100 interviewees who felt, generally, that the symphony organizations with which they were familiar functioned well below their potential. Nor, to the knowledge of most interviewees, had much change ever taken place in the basic structure and operating processes within these institutions. The gist of what many interviewees said could be paraphrased as follows:

As far as I know, we have always been organized and functioned this way. There isn't really very much we can do about it. Our practices and patterns are traditional and deeply imbedded. Our problems are systemic. This is just the way these organizations operate.

Some people's observations were more optimistic and suggested possible avenues for change. But they still ended on a questioning note.

Well, we might change. To do so, many people would have to change together, simultaneously. I can envision the ways it might work. I for one would be interested in trying. But, of course, all the right people would need to agree to work toward something different, challenge their own assumptions, understand the views of others, give up vested interests, develop trust, embrace new forms of teamwork, and create new behavioral patterns and practices. We might then achieve closer to our potential. We could be much more effective. We would also feel more secure and experience less stress. It would be a really fun place to work or volunteer. But, how could this be done? I must be dreaming.

How "Pollyanna"—or realistic—is our typical symphony organization participant? How deep and systemic are the organizational patterns and practices within the community of North American, and particularly U.S., symphony organizations? How great is our challenge in bringing about change? Are we just dreaming, or can change take place?

Recently, in hiring and orienting a new associate here at the Symphony Orchestra Institute (see page ix), these fundamental questions again came to

mind. In addition to learning other aspects of a new job, my new associate was faced with a good deal of background reading. Certain texts are canon for the well-rounded student of symphony orchestra organizations, but which ones should I indicate had priority?

After some review, two texts stood out. One provides a particularly excellent historical and somewhat prophetic perspective; the other, a more contemporary view. In addition, some secondary readings surfaced to supplement these primary texts. To better discuss the materials, I sat down and reread them myself.

The result is this essay. For I had forgotten the power of these writings.

Reflecting on the systemic nature of organizational patterns and practices in symphony organizations over a span of 25 years, the texts offer tellingly similar and interrelated insights. I decided that in addition to discussing these insights with my new associate, I should also share them with the readers of *Harmony*.

The first text is *Orpheus in the New World: The Symphony Orchestra as an American Cultural Institution—Its Past, Present, and Future*, written by Philip Hart in the early 1970s. This book is now out of print, but it is available in many libraries. A brief biography of Philip Hart appears on the facing page.

The majority of the book traces the historical development of American symphony organizations and some people prominent to that development. Hart also provides the historical background of two industry associations, the American Symphony Orchestra League (League) and the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM), and a look at certain other dimensions of the industry through the early 1970s. In the final chapter of the book, however, Hart offers his own contemporary critique and overview of the orchestral institution. Permeating this chapter are explicit and implicit suggestions for institutional change which would enable orchestral organizations to better serve their communities and advance the symphonic art form—or otherwise face decline. In the material below, I call special attention to this chapter of Hart's book.

The second primary text of interest is *Americanizing the American Orchestra*, published in 1993, 20 years after *Orpheus*. A report of the National Task Force for the American Orchestra: An Initiative for Change, which was convened by the American Symphony Orchestra League, *Americanizing* summarizes the contemporary discussions and views of some 150 close observers of the American orchestral institution in the early 1990s. The report presents a chapter on each of seven central issues facing many American symphony organizations; three of these issues relate directly to human resource and organizational matters.

The publication of *Americanizing* (along with its predecessor, known in the industry as the "Wolf Report," which concentrated on the financial status and outlook of the industry and its institutions), created an uproar in various industry quarters. At that time, the Symphony Orchestra Institute was but a gleam in my eye; I was not attuned to the process that generated the content of *Americanizing*,

Philip Hart

Philip Hart was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1914. Educated in the Portland public schools, Hart first attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but transferred to Reed College (in Portland) where he graduated in sociology in 1937. After a brief sojourn to New York, where he assisted a concert program annotator, and upon his father's death, he returned to Portland and opened a music store, expanding its activities into a local concert-presenting business. Over the next few years, he became an active volunteer with the Portland Symphony during a period of severe organizational and financial problems.

Hart's career in orchestra management started in 1946. After becoming half-time manager of the Seattle Symphony, and while retaining his Portland business, he was soon invited to become manager of the newly resuscitated Portland Symphony, where he served for eight years. In 1956, he and his family moved to Chicago, where he became assistant to George Kuyper, manager of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Hart's duties ranged widely and included the preparation of confidential summaries of the finances and operations of the 20 or so major orchestras that composed the "conference of major managers" (before that group became part of the American Symphony Orchestra League). During this period, too, he was a colleague of Fritz Reiner at the height of Reiner's musical leadership of the Chicago orchestra. After five years of intensive and varied work in Chicago, Hart moved to New York, joining the staff of the Juilliard School, taking charge of the public performance program of the students—chamber music, orchestra, dance, and opera—and counseling young musicians who were about to seek musical careers. He was also involved in overseeing Juilliard's outreach program built around performances in public schools, and in the planning and construction of the Juilliard Building within Lincoln Center.

Hart began to think about writing at an early stage in his musical career. As he told the Institute: "In a sense, *Orpheus* began with my writing publicity for the Portland Symphony." He explained that he always wanted to write, and after 25 years of a diverse career involving orchestras and classical music, was ready to write "about a topic I knew something about." In 1970, Hart and his wife moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and for almost 30 years, he has devoted his time and energy to researching and writing about symphony orchestra topics. He completed *Orpheus in the New World* in 1973, and then embarked on the research, interviews, and writing which resulted in *Conductors: A New Generation*, published in 1979. In 1983, Hart began to research and write a comprehensive biography of Fritz Reiner, which "labor of love" was completed in 1994. This book involved extensive travel to many locations where Reiner had lived and worked, and extensive archival research. After finishing this book, and following the death of his wife, Hart moved to a Santa Fe retirement community, where he now lives and continues to write. He is currently devoted to completing an annotated Reiner discography.

nor the basis for the wide-ranging criticism it received. Since then, people have tried to explain the situation to me, but I have yet to comprehend the problem. Perhaps in the reactions to *Americanizing*, we can learn something about our industry's mindset just a few years back.

To me, *Americanizing* stands on its own, like the music of Wagner. The question is, Do the observations in this report, particularly in regard to organizational issues, resonate with the observations and experiences of people closely familiar with the American orchestral institution? For the most part, my answer is yes. Many findings in the report are well expressed, informative, and valuable, especially those which describe the more pressing organizational problems which American symphony organizations face, and the directions in which change might and should take place. In addition, the report gives us a relatively recent plane of reference from which to look at such thoughtful past observations as those of Philip Hart.

A third, supplementary, overview of the development of the symphony orchestra in America is *The Professional Symphony Orchestra in the United States* by George Seltzer. Written in 1975, a year or so after *Orpheus*, the book is a compilation of writings by various participants in and observers of professional orchestras. The writings touch on the history of the symphony orchestra, the role of the conductor and musicians, audiences, repertory, economics, and the outlook for orchestras at the time.

Let us turn first to *Orpheus*. In introducing his last chapter—appropriately titled “Toward a Responsible Institution”—Philip Hart expresses his deep affection for and belief in the institution.

I believe that the symphony orchestra is an essential part of American culture, as a vehicle for the preservation and presentation of a body of art . . . as important . . . to Western civilization as [its great paintings and literature]. . . . The symphony orchestra in America has become the primary and central force in maintaining the [musical] profession in scores of cities across the nation. (Hart, p. 455)

However, many years of experience with symphony organizations convinced Hart that significant change was needed in “this complex and growing institution.”

I do not believe that the institution has always operated effectively in the past, I view its present state with considerable misgivings, and I have deep concern for its future course. (Hart, p. 455)

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as being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the last third of the 20th century. (Hart, p. 478)

Fundamental Problems Are Not Financial

Hart especially criticizes the symphony institution for addressing problems with such a singular short-term financial focus, as opposed to addressing its strategic and organizational—or as he puts it, psychological—dimensions.

I am convinced that the issues and challenges confronting this cultural institution require much more than a primarily financial approach. To be sure, virtually every aspect of symphonic activity has direct financial implications, and the continued viability of our orchestras rests in the last analysis on their fiscal solvency, but the degree to which economics has dominated major policy deliberations has too often obscured and distorted basic consideration of the total role of orchestras. (Hart, pp. 453–454)

The time has come for the economic study of our orchestras to proceed beyond the definition and projection of financial needs (important as these are) to an analysis of what orchestras should do, rather than merely what they are doing. (Hart, p. 473)

In their almost exclusive preoccupation with economic problems, both sides have tended to ignore some profound psychological elements of personnel relations. (Hart, p. 467)¹

Twenty years later, *Americanizing* echoed Hart's view.

[The financial] picture looks bleak, yet its very gloominess suggests opportunity and hope. The hope lies in the realization that the orchestra field's crisis is not merely financial. For if it were, new and effective solutions would be hard to discern. The financial condition [of orchestras] cannot be corrected by applying purely financial solutions or management "fixes" because it is symptomatic of other problems in the orchestra. (*Americanizing*, p. 5)

Repertory

Both *Orpheus* and *Americanizing* address the topic of "repertory." As Hart put it, repertory issues facing symphony orchestras and their audiences embody an age-old "conflict between the past and the present." Repertory seems to have been as pressing an issue within orchestral institutions 20 years ago as it is today.² Hart devotes a section of his book to this topic, and concludes with this very contemporary observation:

"I am convinced that the issues and challenges confronting this cultural institution require much more than a primarily financial approach."

[Our] problems can[not] be solved [by] conservatively holding to an increasingly static repertory, because that is what the audience wants, or by merely scolding the artistic direction of orchestras for the repertory rut they are in. In this the orchestras confront the challenge of education in the broadest sense—arousing the receptivity of the present adult audience to a broader, richer, and more intense musical experience and developing among our youth a basic understanding of the art. To the degree that there is a crisis in the symphonic repertory . . . orchestras must come to grips with it through a deeper understanding of their educational function. (Hart, p. 426)

Prophetically, Hart felt that musicians should be involved in determining and carrying out the educational policy and programs of their organizations, and should be challenged by the diversification inherent in these activities.

Contemporary Environment

Of course, between 1973 and 1993, and even more so over subsequent years, a great deal has happened in the community and national contexts in which symphony orchestras operate. Our contemporary environment is succinctly described in *Americanizing*:

Audiences today are bombarded with a number of cultural and entertainment options of which the orchestra is just one. A great variety of music is instantly available through radio . . . television, digital recordings, and various emerging technologies. Development of new technology and changes in the nature and use of leisure time can only intensify as time goes on. The challenge for orchestras is to harness the technology to aid in the presentation of the music and to adapt to changing lifestyles among potential audience members. (*Americanizing*, p. 22)

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Given the changing times in which, unfortunately, the medium is more and more the message, and also given the growing complexity of urban life, *Americanizing* put less emphasis on straightforward community adult and youth education, and more emphasis on product packaging and marketing, the promotion of American music, the targeting of repertoire to diverse audiences, innovations in concert presentations, and the collaboration of orchestra organizations in larger-scale community music education systems. As noted, the environment for orchestra life has become even more complex during the last quarter century (and changes ahead may be even more dramatic), and “marketing” is now a vital ingredient in symphony organization activities.

Orchestra Boards

Both *Orpheus* and *Americanizing* have interesting things to say about boards of directors and the general governance of orchestra organizations.

There is no question that many orchestra boards need wider community representation, not only of other business interests but also of diverse ethnic and social groups and artistic personnel. Nor is there any question that orchestra musicians and government professionals have much expertise to offer symphony boards, by direct representation, via contacts with management, or through formally established and effective advisory committees. (Hart, pp. 481-482)

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Many orchestra boards have become large, entrenched structures that include people who have not kept abreast of changing community dynamics and values. The criteria for board membership, born out of a competitive nonprofit environment, may emphasize access to wealth and little else, thus severely limiting the breadth of community representation. (*Americanizing*, p. 41)

Nor can anyone familiar with the internal power forces within symphony boards ignore the problems created by the interplay of the personalities involved. Most board members have strong characters: in their own lives they are accustomed to wielding authority and enjoying the respect and obedience of their colleagues and subordinates. . . . Boards tend to be dominated by

strong leadership [by] an individual or a small group . . . most directors incline to go along. . . . Challenges are rare . . . boards tend to be “closed corporations” in observing the sometimes strained amenities of confidentiality and courtesy in times of dispute. . . . [There is a] reluctance to challenge leadership in the early stages of developing policy disputes. (Hart, p. 480)

The theoretical role of the board in the nonprofit organization is to represent the interests of the community that supports the organization. . . . Orchestra boards usually recruit individuals who can either “give or get” substantial amounts of money, often overlooking individuals who have other assets to offer, such as community perspective, influence within new constituencies the orchestra wants to reach, knowledge of education practices and needs, and artistic qualifications in other disciplines with which the orchestra could collaborate. (*Americanizing*, p. 177)

Going further back, some 40 years now, the American Symphony Orchestra League, under Helen Thompson, issued a “Report of Study on Governing Boards

Board Development

“Board development” is a phrase generally used to describe specific programs of boards of directors to evaluate and improve their own performance as a group. Toward this end, progressive commercial and industrial, as well as nonprofit, boards use various approaches and techniques. These activities are often “facilitated” by trained professionals and are sometimes referred to as “interventions,” i.e., efforts to review, discuss, change, and improve the processes through which the board functions.

One of the two leading academic journals in the field of nonprofit organization research, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, recently published the results of a three-year study of 24 boards of nonprofit organizations, 10 of which participated in development interventions, and 14 of which received no intervention. The conclusions of this study are reported as follows:

The most effective boards in our demonstration projects learned to attend to how board members worked together as well as to what work the board did. Their members began taking responsibility for considering the ways the board carried out its work and for seeking new ways to improve performance. Rather than treating board development as something separate from regular board responsibilities, these boards came to see how well

Continued on next page.

of Symphony Orchestras.” The study, based on research involving 20 orchestras and more than 700 board members, reported:

The League has spent many years studying various aspects of orchestra operations in an attempt to isolate those factors which seem to predispose an orchestra toward failure or success. . . . Invariably, investigation of these factors leads back to the orchestra’s governing board which holds the power to engage personnel, formulate and carry out basic policies of operation. The story of a successful orchestra is, in reality, the story of an effective orchestra board. Conversely, the reasons behind an orchestra’s lack of success usually are to be found in the existence of an ineffective board of directors. (Thompson, p. 317)

The report went on to list how boards function in successful orchestra organizations. The thinking is as good today as it was in 1958. To paraphrase:

Boards of successful orchestras really work at the job. They have etched out a sound philosophy of the value of the orchestra as a permanent institution in their community. They are composed of individuals well

they did their work as a part of their ongoing responsibilities. These responsibilities now included taking time for reflection on how the board was using its time, particularly after dealing with a difficult issue, as well as conducting more extensive and formal steps of board education, performance evaluation, feedback, and planning. (Holland and Jackson, p. 132)

And further:

The findings from these projects provide evidence that boards of a variety of nonprofit organizations can take intentional steps that improve board effectiveness. Focused and sustained efforts to improve board performance can realize measurable gains. Such efforts take long-term work by a board; they involve moving members out of familiar territories and comfortable habits and supporting their experimentation with new ways of doing business. As one board member observed, "Just as our board members expect staff to show improvements in productivity and gains in impacts, so we should model the behavior we want from them." Ongoing attention by a board to its own performance leads to a culture of active responsibility for continuous improvement in the quality of its work and greater satisfaction among members. It enables the board to improve its leadership of the organization and demonstrates to others inside and outside how the board expects value to be added to the organization. (Holland and Jackson, p. 133)

qualified to serve in a capacity of leadership. A high percentage of board members have a strong interest in the arts. There is a close relationship between effective management and effective boards. Finally, periodic board self-analysis is a valuable task. (Thompson, pp. 320-322)

A few years later, a panel assembled by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to study the problems and prospects of performing arts organizations reported:

Board recruitment remains much too casual in most organizations. Meticulous auditioning procedures are used for second violinists . . . but people about whom practically nothing is known often are chosen to be trustees. . . . Board members should be as carefully screened as performers. . . . The potential for serious and prolonged damage to the organization is as high in the board room as on the stage. (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, p. 327)

Artistic Direction

Let us move to another topic raised in *Orpheus*—the issue of the nonresident music director. What did Hart observe in the early 1970s?

I find every indication of a strong trend toward loosening the close bonds that have traditionally tied conductors to their orchestras. (Hart, p. 457)

Profound changes have occurred in the role of the conductor . . . in his institutional relation to the orchestra he serves. . . . [Conductors now have careers which have] seriously undermined the traditional concept of the resident conductor in many communities. (Hart, p. 456)

Outside the central subscription season, many musical directors take little interest in their orchestras' overall artistic function in a community. . . . There are . . . important exceptions, [but] the trend seems definitely pointed toward a decreasing rather than increasing involvement of American symphonic music directors in greater diversification of their orchestras' activities . . . creating a vacuum in artistic direction. (Hart, p. 460).

“ . . . the trend seems definitely pointed toward a decreasing . . . involvement of American symphonic music directors in greater diversification of their orchestras' activities . . . creating a vacuum in artistic direction.”

Twenty years later, in many organizations, the nature of the music director's relationships with the orchestra, the orchestra organization, and the orchestra's overall artistic direction and development has changed somewhat.³ *Americanizing* reports on the phasing out of the maestro-era in American symphony orchestras and only discusses lightly and indirectly the non-residency aspect of many music directors' relationships with their employers and orchestras. Instead, *Americanizing* concentrates on the emergence and requirements of the “triad” of leadership involving the board chair (as senior participant), the music director, and the executive director. About this arrangement, the report observes:

Where the [triad] orchestra leadership structure is working well, the leaders are working as a team: the team's members possess the specific skills and knowledge they need to be effective; they have mutual trust, respect, and appreciation for one another's roles; they share a mission and goals that are communicated both within and outside the organization; they have knowledge of, and appreciation for, the organization's history; and they all play strong, visible, and appropriate roles in the community.

If things are not working well, any number of factors may be involved. Board members may not be adequately prepared to lead and may lack

the necessary commitment to spend the time and resources required to be effective. The artistic leadership may not be setting standards, advancing the orchestra's quality and repertoire, or paying sufficient attention to the needs of the community. . . . The management staff may be so dispirited and burdened by the daily pressures of keeping the orchestra afloat financially that they are unable to consider the long-term health of the institution. Finally, poor communication and an absence of structures and relationships that naturally promote understanding, collaboration, and sharing of views among staff, governance and direct-service volunteers, and musicians, may be adding to the difficulties. (*Americanizing*, pp. 175-176)

Further comment on both nonresidency and triad leadership is provided by a group of orchestra organization leaders assembled last year by the Mellon Foundation to discuss industry issues. The panel considered music director absenteeism to be the most critical aspect of a lessening of artistic direction within the symphony institution. In addition, the group identified the ambiguity of "tri-party leadership" and unclear responsibility and accountability as major factors in the artistic underdevelopment of many orchestral institutions.⁴ Obviously, in some organizations, the triad is not working well.

Musician Involvement

To fill the vacuum left by the increasingly absent music director, and perhaps also to draw on unused human potential, Hart proposed that orchestra musicians should become involved in the artistic direction of their institutions.

Orchestra musicians could provide a major resource of artistic expertise that is now largely neglected. They can tell the laymen on an orchestra board a great deal about the musical repertory, and about the competence of soloists and resident and guest conductors. . . . [They] can make a very real contribution to artistic policy. . . . [They have experience of] great value in formulating education policy . . . [and] are sensitive to the opinions of [the community's] most culturally aware citizens. . . . When orchestra associations concern themselves with "broadening their base," they should give serious thought to the ways in which the important "input" of their musicians can constructively affect overall policy. (Hart, pp. 465-466).

Philip Hart was familiar with the ways in which the self-governing London and other European orchestras functioned. He felt they might be an example for American orchestras in the area of artistic decision making, among other things.

It may well be that in the long run orchestra musicians themselves will assume a more important role in policy direction. . . . [The] European experience may provide an example . . . cooperatively governed orchestras . . . seldom [are] closely identified with one conductor as musical director in the American sense, [they] have developed among

their members a sense of artistic responsibility not evident in this country. . . . There are alternatives to the American tradition of building great orchestras under the autocratic control of one resident artistic director. (Hart, p. 461)

The European experience . . . may provide a fruitful example to our symphony musicians, many of whom envy their colleagues' control of their orchestras, although without recognizing that this power involves responsibilities unknown in this country. . . . These cooperative enterprises are governed by their members with considerably greater sense of artistic and financial responsibility than is evident here. (Hart, p. 464)

European players undertake symphonic activity because they want to and because the cooperative nature of their association gives them a direct stake in its success. If they select a musical director who may be personally obnoxious to them, they do so because his artistic qualifications override their personal feelings. When they detect a falling-off of a colleague's performing ability, they find some way of retiring him. . . . [Personal dissension arises, but] their professional attitude produces different resolution of their differences. . . . I do believe that American musicians can learn much from their European counterparts. (Hart, pp. 464-465)

“European players undertake symphonic activity because they want to and because the cooperative nature of their association gives them a direct stake in its success.”

Americanizing also devotes space to the fully cooperative model of orchestral organization, but does not champion its features; nor (perhaps in light of its “Americanizing” theme) does it mention the existence of the London and European models. Regarding other possible organizational designs, *Americanizing* outlines a “multi-party partnership” involving four constituency groups (musicians, board, staff, and direct service volunteers) in the cooperative leadership of the organization—an idea which may well have some role in the future of American symphony organizational development.

Throughout *Americanizing* there is extensive commentary (if not explicit or implicit recommendations) about increasing involvement of musicians and volunteers in the affairs and decision making of American orchestra organizations. Here are some examples:

The relationship of musicians to the institution affects everything the orchestra does or might do. (*Americanizing*, p. 7)

Musicians are the orchestra institution's primary communicators through their music, their activities as teachers, and their visibility as artist and role models. They can be an abundant source of the ideas,

creativity, and energy needed to accomplish new goals. Indeed, the collaboration of musicians and the orchestra institution of which they are the core is essential to the evolution of the new American orchestra. (*Americanizing*, p. 67)

In most orchestra organizations, board members, administrative staff, and the music director all have a role in setting organizational goals and determining operating procedures. This triumvirate . . . makes decisions regarding financial, administrative, programming, and operational activities. Artistic decisions are made primarily by the music director, who has final say over the orchestra's musical output. The musicians do not have a defined role beyond the business of rehearsing and producing music; they mostly are not included in other aspects of orchestra operations and decision making. (*Americanizing*, p. 70)

Questions of organizational ownership and involvement can be addressed first by recognizing and acknowledging needs and then by shifting perspectives. . . . Boards, managements, and music directors need to recognize that musicians in the orchestra feel strongly about all issues that affect their lives—not only repertoire, guest artists, schedules, and acoustics, but marketing, public relations, education, finances, and fund raising as well. If mechanisms are implemented to include musicians in identifying and addressing those issues in ways that the musicians find fulfilling, a big step will have been taken toward realizing substantive musician involvement in decision making. (*Americanizing*, p. 79)

“Orchestra organizations can increase their effectiveness if musicians participate in a meaningful way in achieving the orchestra’s mission.”

Orchestra organizations can increase their effectiveness if musicians participate in a meaningful way in achieving the orchestra's mission. (*Americanizing*, p. 182)

What has kept America's orchestra organizations from better involving musicians in their overall affairs? *Americanizing* suggests some underlying factors, beginning with:

an appropriate description of current relations between musicians and orchestra institutions. Musicians, board members, and staff in orchestras around the country have used words such as *acrimony*, *conflagration*, *confrontation*, *division*, and *catastrophe* to describe tumultuous instances of conflict and current conditions of anxiety and mistrust. (*Americanizing*, pp. 67-68)

The three-legged stool structural model is so ingrained in orchestras that few variations exist. Although the traditional organizational triumvirate may work well for some, if it is rigid, it can isolate orchestra

participants from one another; foster internal competition that keeps people from learning, consulting, and communicating; and close the organization to information and ideas from its environment. In orchestras where musicians are insufficiently involved in decision making, strategic planning, advocating, and representing the orchestra in the community, relations can become adversarial and damaging to the health of the organization. (*Americanizing*, pp. 177-178)

Musicians . . . represent an underutilized resource of talent, ideas, and creativity. Yet often a spirit of acrimony, suspicion, and constraint pervades their relationship with [others in their institution]. (*Americanizing*, p. 10)

Lack of access to honest, complete, and regularly communicated information contributes to [a] mutual lack of trust . . . and to a perceived gap between “us” and “them.” . . . Musicians may see the origins of orchestra financial problems in a lack of competence or effort on the part of boards and managements, while those boards and managements may blame what they see as unreasonable demands for salaries, extended seasons, and benefits on the part of the musicians. (*Americanizing*, p. 71)

A culture of conflict seems to have developed in which issues of control predominate over questions of mutual interest. . . . This conflict puts at risk the orchestra’s fundamental relationship with its community. Any organization preoccupied with internal difficulties tends to overlook its external relationships, potentially misreading the community’s tolerance for and interest in the organization’s troubles, and missing opportunities to build allies and institutional support. (*Americanizing*, p. 72)

Speaking as an individual 20 years earlier, Hart scolds all parties for the adversarialism that had been developing in many symphony organizations over the previous decade or so.

The hostile, adversary attitude of both musicians and management long pervading personnel relations still constitutes a barrier to the constructive growth of our orchestras. . . . Removing this obstacle of adversary confrontation will not be an easy task. (Hart, p. 463)

Orchestra associations and the managers who do their bidding have all too long shared with their players a narrow employer-employee approach to personnel relations, which actually involve sincerely dedicated supporters of the art on the one hand and equally serious musical artists on the other. Board members tend to lump their personnel problems in the same category as labor relations in the industrial world, bringing to the symphonic bargaining table an implacably conservative outlook derived from their private business experience, an attitude sometimes accompanied by a patronizing paternalism. . . . They expect the players to make financial sacrifices in lower pay comparable to

their own contributions of money and time . . . forgetting that while musicians depend upon the orchestra for all or part of their living, board members do not. (Hart, p. 466)

Musicians, for their part, have . . . talked and thought in terms of militant unionism, using a rhetoric that [has] inflamed their colleagues and frightened their employers. . . . There is a grave danger that this militance will become an end in itself, continually seeking new issues to justify its existence. (Hart, p. 466)⁵

[Musicians] cannot relieve [workplace] tensions by imposing on management and the conductor more and more restrictions copied from a book of union work rules. It seems to me that they would be far better advised to work cooperatively with management on the development of diversified musical activities to their mutual advantage. (Hart, p. 468)

Much of the initiative in reducing adversary hostility must come from the orchestra associations themselves: they must put aside their fear of losing control over the artistic destinies of their orchestras and implement institutional procedures and organizations that will bring the now untapped resource of their players' musical knowledge and experience into the decision-making process of their orchestras. (Hart, p. 469)

In their respective preoccupations, if not obsessions, with financial problems and union-oriented working conditions, both management and the players have lost sight of their broader obligations to the art of music and to making that art an enriching experience for the communities which they serve. . . . [This] demands imaginative and progressive initiative from both groups. (Hart, p. 469)⁶

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Hart was also quite cognizant of the “artistically stifling life of a majority of symphony musicians,” of their “artistically confining work,” of their “sense of alienation from their work,” and “the routine of playing the same music in an artistically debilitating manner.” (Hart, p. 467)⁷ He was also conscious of the long-standing tensions in the conductor-orchestra interaction:

The subjection of individual artistry to the interpretative ideas of a conductor; the absolute technical discipline, the fear of playing a wrong note, and the possible humiliation of being called harshly to task . . . place a symphony musician under severe psychic strain. Over . . . years,

this experience can have a devastating effect on the self-respect and emotional stability of a sensitive man or woman. . . . [Players can lose their] sense of artistic mission [through] subservient performance in the orchestra. (Hart, p. 468)⁸

The role that orchestra musicians play in the American symphonic institution gives them little artistic responsibility: though their training has, in most cases, included a broad musical education, and though they have been motivated since childhood by a strong commitment to music, they are, by and large, artistic eunuchs once they enter the orchestra. (Hart, p. 462)

A Mandate for Change

Philip Hart's belief in the need for serious, deep, and constructive change in American symphony organizations comes through strongly in his book's concluding chapter. The effort that produced the *Americanizing* report was equally aimed at organizational reevaluation; it was, after all, part of "An Initiative for Change." The nature and substance of this needed change are sprinkled throughout the report:

Old ways of thinking and talking about orchestra issues and problems have become less productive in our changing society and have not led to many widely accepted, practical solutions. (*Americanizing*, p. 4)

Orchestras that are willing to explore altering the status quo as a positive response to a changing environment may advance themselves substantially as artistic and community institutions. . . . Each orchestra will have to find its own way to initiate, carry out, and measure the success of change. (*Americanizing*, p. 12)

The establishment of multiple means of communicating, and the sharing of organizational information among all participants, are vital to improving the musicians' relationship with the orchestra institution. (*Americanizing*, p. 77)

Ongoing communication . . . [characterized by] disclosure of information, open discussion, and cooperative action [should] become the norm, not the exception. (*Americanizing*, p. 80)

Finally, *Americanizing* outlines some excellent ideas about change which can be paraphrased as follows:

“Orchestras that are willing to explore altering the status quo as a positive response to a changing environment may advance themselves substantially as artistic and community institutions.”

Change is necessary and demanding. Change takes place only over time and is comprised of many small efforts. It can be heard in how the orchestra sounds and can be seen visually throughout the organization. Change is often spurred by a few committed individuals as leaders. Change will usually engage the community in which the organization operates, and often involves strengthening community relations. Change is not free; it requires an investment of energy and resources. Change benefits from recognition and acknowledgment of successes. Lastly, change involves dynamic feedback processes through which organizations learn regularly to evaluate and reinvent themselves on an ongoing basis. (*Americanizing*, pp. 12-14)

Can deep transformational change take place in the American orchestra institution? Is it just a dream—of Philip Hart’s, of the authors of *Americanizing*, of the typical orchestra organization participant as paraphrased earlier, or even of the Symphony Orchestra Institute? There is some evidence, however slight, that the industry might be turning a bit toward dreamland. Let’s keep our fingers crossed and our hopes high.

Notes

¹ In the concluding chapter of his book, looking toward the future, George Seltzer reprints an interesting essay by retiring orchestra concertmaster Rafael Druian which appeared in a 1974 issue of *Symphony News*, a publication of the American Symphony Orchestra League. Musician Druian shared Philip Hart’s then contemporary view that money was not the crux of orchestra organization’s problems:

I think if a real effort is made to identify the problems that arise as the orchestras develop, solutions can and will be found. But one must be ready to adjust or abandon many practices that were right in the past but were not able to encompass the changes brought on by the passing of time. If the objectives are simply to keep going somehow, I doubt that even massive Federal aid can be of much help. For the problem is not really money; money is the symptom. When the contributing factors to the problems of an orchestra are not identified and dealt with, they usually translate themselves into “more” money.

The musicians want “more money”; the association has to raise “more money”; the public is asked to contribute “more money”; and the tickets cost “more money.” No matter how much money is raised or paid in salaries, the sum will never be sufficient to eliminate the cause which necessitated raising the money in the first place. The preoccupation with money only creates the need to raise more money. (Druian, pp. 426-427)

² Programming choices and challenges facing orchestral ensembles are an ageless issue. In this author's view, they should be looked upon as a normal, integral, risky, and community-specific aspect of being an orchestral institution. More than 100 years ago, in his unfinished autobiography, Theodore Thomas discusses the "repertory" issues he faced in his early days as conductor of the fledgling Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

The [summer evening concerts had awakened] a general love of music, but it was chiefly music of a lighter character, with symphonies administered in very small doses. The people expected the same class of music at [my regular winter season concerts] and found much fault with my programmes, which they thought too severe.

It was a very discouraging time for us, for while Wagner had to some extent interested the people, he had also accustomed them to strong doses of excitement, and contrast, and everything without tonic properties was regarded with indifference. Indeed, the announcement of a symphony was enough to keep many persons from going to a concert . . . [By pointing out the program content and standards being maintained by the Boston Symphony] . . . I was able to keep up the standard of my programmes, notwithstanding all opposition, until finally the intelligent and influential minority were ready to give up their musical trifles for broader forms, carrying with them the rest of our musical world, and at last I risked arranging programmes for a cultivated audience, though with many fears as to the result. But behold! it was said that I had never made such good programmes! That was true enough, but had I offered them a few years previously, it would have been our ruin. It never occurred to our concert goers that it was they who had progressed. (Thomas, pp. 104-105)

³ Through the centuries, orchestras have grown in size, complexity, and specialization, as have the overall organizational systems of which they are the central component. Looking back some 250 or so years, Adam Carse tells us that things were simpler. According to Carse, a top 18th-century musician was an "executant"—today, we might even use the word "generalist." The senior musician was a keyboard or bowed-string instrumentalist in ensembles that played music the senior musician had composed, and in which he took the solo or lead parts. This musician was often the ensemble's "conductor," playing the keyboard instrument and reading the full score, providing a base line, filling gaps in orchestration left open by less skilled colleagues, and therefore providing "harmonic stability." Alternatively, the player working from the first violin position was the "leader," setting the tempi of the performance and keeping the ensemble together with his head, shoulders, arms, bowing, body, or foot movements. Some musicians had both competencies. As time passed, the "leader" role began to predominate, with the leader standing in front of

the orchestra, increasingly using his arm and bow to “conduct” the ensemble. By around 1820, with the further growth of orchestras and increasingly complex orchestra works, the lead musician was transformed into a non-playing conductor (though still quite often the composer of some or all of the music being played), equipped with a stick or baton and referring to a complete score. For a period, conductors faced the audience, but later began to face the orchestra. As time passed, conducting and composing, as well as a wide range of other tasks related to the symphony orchestra, began to reflect the specialization which has overtaken most all occupations and organizations in modern times. (Carse, pp. 7-10)

⁴ Mellon Foundation. 1998. *The Orchestra Forum: A Discussion of Symphony Orchestras*. New York: The Foundation.

⁵ In an essay published in the first issue of *Harmony*, I noted the “bondedness,” and the intellectual as well as physical “propinquity,” of the members of a symphony orchestra. (Judy, 17) This spirit of “togetherness” within orchestras may also result in part from a tradition- or myth-based view of “management and the board” as being “the enemy,” with collective, cohesive, militant action being needed to confront and battle this adversary. However, in 1955—some 15 years before *Orpheus* and the times of which Hart spoke—Charles Munch captured a more positive side of the spirit which binds members of a symphony orchestra:

And everywhere I have admired the spirit and the high ideals of the great orchestras. Each has its own character, its own color, and its own special quality. But the musicians always know that they are only individual cells of a larger body. They know that they are completely dependent on one another and they place all their talent at the service of the musical collective of which each is but a part. They teach us an important lesson in human solidarity. It is an honor to conduct them.

Sometimes the head of an orchestra section comes forward from the ranks to play a concerto. His comrades never fail to give him the best support and to applaud him without any reservation or any suspicion of jealousy. But a true orchestra musician does not dream of making solo playing his career. Outside of the orchestra, he is probably more inclined to chamber music and may well spend his rare free evenings playing quartets or trios with his colleagues. I know many world-famous ensembles of this kind that are made up of musicians who are still also members of orchestras and who consider the foundation of their musical lives to be still within this great family, which they will never abandon.

Next time you go to a concert, look at the orchestra on stage before the conductor’s entrance. You probably cannot connect any of the names in the program book with the faces you see, but they

deserve your respect and admiration just the same—and just as much as the famous virtuosi who prefer their glorious isolation to the splendid anonymity of the orchestra. (Munch, p. 161)

⁶ Some 10 years after *Orpheus* was published, Steven Sell, executive director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, spoke at the 1983 ICSOM conference. As reported in the June 1984 issue of *Senza Sordino* (the same issue in which Tom Hall presented his views about player discontent, as discussed below), Sell suggested that the then still prevailing mentality of adversarialism must change, on both sides. As he noted: “It will take time to build mutual trust, confidence and credibility . . . but people change very slowly and reluctantly. We have all too long been adversarial, and negative attitudes are very deeply entrenched. . . . Those who have an interest in changing attitudes, initially a minority, must patiently do what they can to educate and persuade those not of like mind.” Sell then went on to report steps being undertaken in his organization to improve relationships, particularly between the orchestra and board of directors.

⁷ One might think that these conditions became somewhat alleviated after the early 1970s, but clearly not. For instance, in 1980, Henry Shaw, a musician in the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, who was obviously interested in organizational psychology, published the following thoughts as editor of *Senza Sordino*, based on discussions with colleagues:

A favorite topic for discussion in the working place generally [is that] having a job is only part of making a living [and] that enjoying a job is an integral and even necessary ingredient to many in the work force. Many who can no longer find that ingredient . . . do not hesitate to look to greener pastures. . . . We are concerned with some of the discontent that is obvious . . . [and] the artistic dissatisfaction sometimes felt in the working place and . . . especially the need of professionals to enrich themselves musically and where necessary, to leave the main source of employment to find that ingredient. . . . One wonders if the discontent often found in the string sections of our orchestras is not related to a general feeling that section string players do not matter . . . as much as do players in other sections of the orchestra. (Shaw, 3)

Shaw went on to outline some basic tenets of job enrichment drawn from his reading of Paul Dickson’s *The Future of the Workplace*:

- ◆ Treating workers as educated adults.
- ◆ Allowing for decision making on all levels.
- ◆ Increasing the opportunity for using the mind on the job.
- ◆ Giving greater individual identity.

- ◆ Removing a layer or two of supervision.
- ◆ Reconstructing work so that it is more coherent. (Shaw, 3)

Moving forward to mid-1984, Tom Hall, a thoughtful violinist still quite active with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, listed and elaborated on a range of factors he felt contributed to orchestra musician discontent, including anonymity; intra-orchestra inequities; a persistent sense of subordination; narrow early personal development and education; public apathy about classical music; a heightened emphasis on perfection and precision leading to constant scrutiny, criticism, and stress; career stagnation and entrapment; various physical and mental health hazards; atypical work schedules; working within a history and environment of adversarial relations with management; and repertoire saturation. Tom then went on rhetorically to question his colleagues as to whether these and other workplace factors have resulted in at least some musicians becoming jaded, embittered, disenchanting, cynical, apathetic, unreasonably belligerent, generally negative, and fundamentally unhappy. (Hall, pp. 3-4)

Of course, we have subsequently had the findings of Hackman, Allmendinger, and Lehman documenting and comparing the ongoing and pervasive workplace dissatisfaction of orchestra players.

⁸ According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Carl Flesch (1873–1944) was one the great violin teachers of the modern age. He initiated the violin department at the newly founded Curtis Institute between 1924 and 1928. As a performer, he was known for his versatility, command of the repertoire, purity of style, and superb technique. An international violin and viola competition is named after him. In the late 1920s, Flesch authored a book on violin playing, in which he presented a florid and amusing, but at the same time subtle and penetrating, description of the interaction between string players and “bad” (many) and “good” (few) orchestra conductors.

The member of an orchestra, to be useful, aside from those instrumental and musical qualifications to be taken for granted in his case, must, in addition, be able to comply with the following demands: the entire renunciation of his personality, of his artistic convictions, of his individual trends of taste; complete subordination to the will of the conductor, who forces him to accept his own human and artistic qualities—hence the denial of his own ego, the compulsory acceptance of an alien individuality. The essential signs of his usefulness, therefore, are a certain enslavement and negation of his proper will, a selfless waiving of every personal stirring of emotion on his part. A collaborator who attempted to force through his own artistic and human independence would soon have to be removed from the orchestra as unfit. The player who is to be of use

must follow every agogic and dynamic nuance prescribed by the conductor in the air, no matter how much it may go against the grain. Indeed, often enough unsympathetic fingerings, bowings and bow-divisions are prescribed for him. From the standpoint of the collective result to be gained, this entering into details is surely necessary, yet many an orchestra musician suffers greatly thereby. Instinctively the comparison with military drill obtrudes itself, yet with the difference that the orchestra musician must remain a subordinate his whole life long, and must obey blindly. So long as his superior is an artist, from whom he cannot withhold respect, to whose superiority he must bow, and who treats him humanely, so long is he ready to subordinate himself to the conductor's power of suggestion. Yet woe to both participants when the superior is not recognized as standing on a higher level, when he is not sympathetic as a human being, when he does not seem to be an artist of the first class! An abyss will then open between conductor and musician in whose depths the leader's intentions will vanish without a trace. The musician in such case girds himself in an armor wrought of contempt and indifference, one against whose impenetrability the leader's most obvious signals, his most violent outpourings of emotion rebound as would an Indian arrow from a modern concrete fortress. What a tragi-comedy does not such a duel represent, the contradiction between the yard-long movements of the conductor's baton, and the inch-long ones of the passively resisting violinist's bow! His bitter smile, mingling irony and contempt, speaks volumes when one of the conductor's remarks betrays his incapacity or when he even holds the orchestra responsible for some error he himself has committed. To this must also be added the extraordinary nervous tension and irritability due to overlong rehearsals and too frequent interruptions. It is true that there exists a type of conductor, unfortunately very sparsely represented, under whose guidance the musician is less conscious of a feeling of dependence, because he is conceded a minimum of artistic freedom and individual expression. A conductor of this sort, at the appropriate moment, allows him to throw himself into his work heart and soul, in accordance with his own feelings, instead of muzzling his personal sentiment, and thus secures for himself an enthusiastic collaborator who, inversely, may become the source of fruitful stimulus to the conductor himself. (Flesch, pp. 190-191)

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