

*Harmony*TM

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Publisher's Notes

by

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Symphony orchestra organization complexity has many dimensions. As an example, let's look at the different ways in which board, staff, and orchestra constituencies respond to formal and informal leadership.

The general leadership patterns of the boards and staffs of most North American orchestral organizations are quite hierarchical, and follow those of most public for-profit corporations. This is quite normal, given the historic development of the American symphony organization, coupled with its usual legal status as a corporation, albeit nonprofit. Typically, orchestral boards elect a chairperson and, usually with his or her consent, a small group of colleagues as officers or an executive committee. The board then delegates to this core group substantial authority to "run things" or, in the case of larger organizations, to coordinate, move forward, approve, and integrate the recommendations of a large group of specialized board committees, reporting to the full board from time to time—for implicit or explicit ratification—all the actions which have been or are being taken. Most orchestra staffs are organized and integrated in parallel with board committee specializations. After brief discussion, everyone is quite comfortable in following the lead of the executive director, the board chair, or the whole board, and marching forward in concerted action.

Orchestras, on the other hand, are larger and flatter organizational components, and their inner dynamics are quite different from those of boards and staffs, for many reasons. As an organizational form, the orchestra goes back to the late 16th century, and has evolved and expanded as a collective of individual craftsmen since those early days. In America, proactive unionization, emerging in full flower in the 1960s, in particular response to various forms of highhandedness within symphony organizations and the musicians' own union, enhanced the natural egalitarianism and separation of the players within the overall orchestral organization. Also, in most orchestras, although to differing degrees, players have nonorchestral work which gives them, at a minimum, an intellectual independence from their principal workplace. And, finally, each player's sense of individual participation and equality within a large, bonded ensemble is reinforced each time he or she joins other players in a relatively small, flat stage area to engage in an intense and unified effort in which, however, many individual parts stand out.

As a result, members of orchestras have an almost innate resistance to being commanded or governed. They certainly can't be managed. As a body, they often act very ponderously. On balance, orchestras are filled with highly intelligent

people who are quite able to respond sensibly and constructively to factual information, opinion, and belief, if information is presented consistently over time in an open and comprehensive way. Most players believe in democratic processes and have the ultimate respect for minority views, which sometimes draws them into dead-end courses of action. But, for the most part, orchestra musicians can and do respond to enlightened orchestra committee or personal leadership, and it is our observation that such leadership is increasingly emerging among North American orchestras.

In light of this observation, we thought it timely to gather the views of a small group of players who are current or former orchestra committee chairpersons, and who are acknowledged leaders within their orchestras. As in the case of other roundtable presentations, we asked these participants to address a varied set of questions and speak frankly about the particular challenges of informal and formal leadership within a symphony orchestra, and about representing the orchestra within the overall institution. Special thanks to **Bill Foster, Paul Ganson, Sara Harmelink, Michael Namer, Norbert Nielubowski, and Ron Schneider** for their candid discussion which opens the main content of this issue.

Throughout the world of organizations, and among academicians who study them, there are many schools of thought about “strategic development,” including debates as to the degree and extent of “choice” which organizations in fact have in controlling their destinies. “The Jurassic Symphony,” authored by professors **Robert Spich** and **Robert Sylvester** and published in the sixth issue of *Harmony*, laid out some interesting theory about the possible destiny of the symphony orchestra institution, as seen from an organization ecological perspective. In the sequel to the earlier essay, professors Spich and Sylvester now address the generic developmental choices which they believe symphony organizations might have, along with some challenging questions about innovations which might be considered. We think you will find this essay to be thought provoking and presented in an entertaining style.

In the next essay, **Bernhard Kerres**, who is based in Munich, Germany, brings to our attention the application of “system dynamics” as a technique to better understand the interaction among various operational components of a symphony organization, within the organization and in interaction with its external environment. This approach, as adapted to the conditions within and surrounding a particular symphony organization, may have real usefulness in bringing board, staff, and orchestra members to a more cohesive appreciation of the complexity of their institution and its key operations, their systematic relationships, and all the strategic implications.

A founding objective of *Harmony* was to publish historic, overlooked, and perhaps underread writings about the dynamics and challenges of North American symphony organizations, particularly when the clarion for positive change was sounded. Our final essay is a further step toward that objective. Students and supporters of transformational change in North American symphony

organizations will find many of this essay's quotations to be as fresh and applicable today as when they were written. Although there is some evidence of change taking place in a few organizations, readings of this nature remind us that the time has come for more deeply substantive, accelerated, and broadly based change.

And, elsewhere in this issue, we

- review the activities of the Institute during 1998 on page vii;
- welcome **Emily Melton** as program director of the Institute on page ix, and bring to your attention, beginning on page 89, her review of an excellent, fairly recent, and very readable book on leadership, which we can commend to all participants in symphony organizations;
- list on page x and thank the 86 symphony organizations which have already provided 1999 support of the Institute's aims and objectives;
- challenge our readers, first, to identify the music on the front cover. Hint: this fragment comes from the score of a famous overture. Have it? Well and good! But, now, for what major musical event of particular significance in American orchestral history was this overture played as the opening piece? See page 87 to verify or discover the answer, courtesy of **Phillip Huscher**;
- remind our readers that we maintain an extensive bibliography of literature and research about symphony organizations, and index of all articles which have appeared in *Harmony*, as well as the primary content of *Harmony* on a year's delay basis, at our Web site, < www.soi.org> . Please visit us there from time to time.

As always, good reading!

