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Publisher's Notes

by

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Students of symphony orchestra organizations continuously learn about the complexity of these organizational systems, a complexity that never ceases to amaze me. This issue's content, as it came alive, nicely extends the path of discovery. As you read on, perhaps in quiet concentration, I hope you will join me in reflection and learning. Symphony organizations are, indeed, unique, and their sustenance and enhancement calls for special organizational awareness and study. For the many readers who are active participants in symphony organizations, we hope this issue will advance their knowledge and add to the momentum for improvement of these vital community institutions.

A few years ago, on my annual summer sojourn from Chicago to Nantucket, I stopped to visit **Joe Goodell**, a retired businessman who had recently been drafted to fill the position of executive director of the Buffalo Philharmonic. Since Joe had no symphony staff experience, many felt that under his leadership Buffalo's prospects for remediating deep and long-standing organizational problems were very dim. During lunch, I came to a contrary prediction, and asked Joe to write about his symphony management experience at some future date. Joe has responded and, as you will soon learn, he minces no words. Participants in every role within a symphony organization will find his point of view to be sharp and thought provoking.

In the next two articles, the perspective shifts from that of an organizational participant to that of an organizational observer and reporter. We juxtapose case studies of two orchestral institutions, one German and one American, which are quite different in age, size, and reputation, but which have in common many organizational features and practices distinctly different from those employed in the traditional North American organizational form.

The **Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra** was founded as a cooperative orchestra in 1882, as a successor to a proprietary entity originated 14 years earlier. **Erin Lehman**, a long-time student of orchestral organizations, has summarized how the Berlin Philharmonic functions as a "self-governing" orchestra. As readers will learn, the basic authority for artistic decisions has long been vested in the orchestra and is exercised through elected representatives, as well as by the orchestra acting as a whole. Administrative and financial-support decisions involve intertwining orchestral leadership with a general administrator and staff, and a municipal government. As is the case for most of the world's orchestral systems, the Berlin Philharmonic is having to adapt to environmental changes,

but will address these challenges through decision-making processes which are quite different from those of almost all of its North American counterparts.

The **Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra** was founded as a cooperative orchestra, succeeding a traditionally organized New Orleans institution established in the mid-1930s which went out of business in 1991. Based on field interviews and institutional documents, we summarize how the Louisiana Philharmonic was founded, how it is organized, and how it makes artistic, operational, and financial decisions. In a striking contrast to the long-term, evolutionary development of the Berlin Philharmonic, the way in which the Louisiana Philharmonic generally is organized and functions was designed from scratch and in thorough detail just eight years ago, and, in good part, around a kitchen table. And further, the orchestra was created, with some subsequent adjustments, to fit within the American framework of a charitably supported, nonprofit corporation, with a large and active volunteer constituency. Given the depth and breadth of the role of the orchestra (as a whole and through its elected representatives) in the overall affairs of the institution, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra is perhaps the prime example of how far the boundaries of “self governance” can be successfully extended.

The Berlin and Louisiana case studies describe how two institutions, literally worlds and ages apart, have incorporated organizational assumptions and patterns which are quite counter to the traditional North American model. Although there is much to be learned from the principles and practices followed by these institutions, they do not provide a pat formula for changing the traditional North American model. Since its founding, the Institute has taken the position that each symphony organization must decide, within and among the participants of its various constituencies, and with community representation, how it is to be organized and function. In this process, we believe that it is fundamental to develop or affirm a common, shared vision, employing widely inclusive and participative processes. Then, in the pursuit of these goals, a central question to be asked is: “How can we become more effective as an organization, and more satisfying and rewarding, on an enduring basis, to our internal and external constituencies?”

Along these lines, the role of an orchestra’s board of directors in seeking and achieving organizational effectiveness was the topic of a panel presentation during the June 1999 annual meeting of the American Symphony Orchestra League. Joining me in this presentation were **Nancy Axelrod**, an organizational consultant and founding chief executive of the National Center for Nonprofit Boards and **Thomas Witmer**, a retired business executive, member of various corporate boards, and of the board of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Tom has been active in Pittsburgh’s organizational improvement program. We think you will find many common threads in these presentations, and we commend them especially to symphony organization board members.

As Tom Witmer noted, “performance excellence” is synonymous with “organizational effectiveness,” and is often denoted “high performance” in the world of commercial organizations. With this in mind, a recently published book addressing the “high performance nonprofit organization” caught our eye, and on page 89, this book is cogently reviewed by **Roland Valliere**, executive director of the Kansas City Symphony.

Two other pieces complete the primary content of this issue. First, we present a roundtable discussion illuminating the role of the orchestra librarian, one of a number of unique roles within a symphony organization. For this excellent overview, we thank **Marcia Farabee**, **Margo Hodgson**, **Karen Schnackenberg**, **Larry Tarlow**, and **Ron Whitaker**. Then, the challenges to and issues to be confronted in “marketing” the modern symphony orchestra and its musical product are outlined by **Stephen Belth**. After reading these two pieces in sequence, we hope that all participants in symphony orchestra organizations will reflect on the complex, cross-constituency, interactive decision-making processes, based on fully shared information during long lead times, which are required if these organizations are to function optimally.

In the score fragment on our cover, **Phillip Huscher** once again challenges our knowledge of music and orchestral history. A hint: there are some subtle connections between the cover story and one of the institutions mentioned in this issue. To confirm your knowledge, or to enhance it, see page 86.

On page x, we summarize the latest developments in the Institute’s organizational research and consultation programs. And in the announcements on page vii, we are pleased to welcome **Fred Zenone** into a more active role with the Institute, and to report other personnel developments, as well as to share other matters of importance to our readers.

Finally, we wish to extend our gratitude to all of the participants in the 146 symphony orchestra organizations which have provided 1999 support to the Institute, as listed on page xi, and especially to the participants in the 44 institutions which provided first-time support in 1999. We are truly appreciative and energized by the growth in interest and commitment to the Institute’s work. As announced at midyear, and as summarized on page 91, we will focus our future publication services toward participants in supporting organizations. Sincere thanks to all involved.

