

*Harmony*TM

FORUM OF THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA INSTITUTE

NUMBER 11 • OCTOBER 2000

Symphony Orchestra Organizations in the 21st Century



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Symphony Orchestra Organizations in the 21st Century

About a year ago, the Institute initiated a review of its own strategic development. Since our mission is to help symphony organizations become more effective through positive organizational change, we decided that an important element in our planning should be to learn more about how persons in and closely observing symphony organizations viewed the future of these organizations.

As a step in this direction, we turned to our Board of Advisors, saying: “We are gathering views about the future environment for symphony organizations and how they might be functioning in that environment, including attaining a better understanding of the factors and forces which will foster or impede organizational change.”

We provided our advisors with 11 very challenging questions, thoughtful responses to which would clearly take a commitment of time and intellect. We also promised those who participated that we would feed back to them their collective views. We were pleased and grateful that 13 current and former advisors stepped up to our challenge.

With the tireless assistance of a volunteer, Dr. John Boaz, a retired faculty member and administrator at Illinois State University, we integrated these responses into a report for our board which was shared with the participating advisors, and obtained from them permission to share the report with the readers of *Harmony*, and more broadly, with all those who are interested in the future of symphony organizational development into the 21st century.

The full report is posted on the Institute’s Web site in a format that can easily be downloaded and printed. Below, almost in the form of a “slide presentation,” are the 11 questions addressed in this report and a set of sentences which, in a highly condensed form, characterize whole series and sets of responses by the participants. From these “bullet point” summations, we hope to convey to our readers a hint of what is available in the full report on our Web site, < www.soi.org > .

In order to provoke even more thought about the symphony organization of the 21st century, we have interspersed in the condensation below a range of

quotations about the future environment in which symphony organizations and their audiences will function. These quotations will be more fully referenced in the full report available on our Web site.

1. WHO, IN YOUR VIEW, WILL BE THE “CUSTOMERS” OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS? HOW WILL CUSTOMERS AND THEIR NEEDS CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 25 TO 50 YEARS?

- ◆ Consumer demographics will not change.
- ◆ The customer’s basic reason for coming to the symphony will not change.
- ◆ But their musical interests will be more complex and demanding.
- ◆ The trend away from subscription sales will continue.
- ◆ And real “customer service” must be at the top of the agenda.
- ◆ The limited number of young people in today’s symphony audience should not be disconcerting.
- ◆ But educating children to symphonic music is the key to assuring future audiences.
- ◆ And orchestras will play a more direct role in their music education.

“World population is now about 6 billion, and a century from now is likely to be around 10 billion and growing only slowly.”

– *Anonymous*

“Never . . . have so many races, nationalities, and cultures mixed, and the combinations have only begun.”

– *G. Pascal Zachary*

“[L]ife spans of 100 years or more could become common.”

– *David Gardner*

“ [T]he Census Bureau predicts that the over-85 population will grow to 18 million in 2050 from 5 million today.”

– *Anonymous*

“The mental capacities of our grandchildren . . . will be dramatically greater, on the average, than our own.”

– *Christopher Wills*

2. HOW WILL COMMUNITIES (IN WHICH SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS FUNCTION) AND THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 25 TO 50 YEARS?
- ◆ Community preferences in programming, scheduling, and even locations will change.
 - ◆ People are returning to the city, and arts organizations can stimulate economic development.
 - ◆ Several communities will receive major funding and become centers of symphonic music.
 - ◆ There may need to be a different funding template altogether.
 - ◆ There will be more community-based orchestras. And many present city-based orchestras will become state- or region-based.
3. HOW WILL TECHNOLOGY (AND OTHER ADVANCES WHICH WILL DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY IMPACT SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS) CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 25 TO 50 YEARS?
- ◆ Technology will change the way symphony organizations do business.
 - ◆ But the orchestra industry will probably resist technological change.
 - ◆ Technology will be used to bring customers to fairly traditional concert experiences and will not fundamentally alter the experience.
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“We all have this huge schizophrenia: We hate sprawl, but we also hate density. We want the freedom of the suburbs.”

– *Hooper Brooks*

“Leisure is becoming more embedded in people’s lives.”

– *David Yeske*

“In five years, most Americans will be enjoying broadband Internet from home, maybe 100 times as fast as dial-up modems and always on”

– *Bob Metcalf*

“. . . as people live longer, lifetime learning invariably plays a larger role in their quality of life.”

– *Laura D’Andrea Tyson*

“[T]otal giving by individuals—which reached nearly \$135 billion in 1998—could well top the \$200-billion mark in the next 10 years.”

– *Henry Goldstein*

4. GIVEN YOUR PREDICTIONS ABOVE, WHAT SERVICES AND PRODUCTS DO YOU ENVISION THE SYMPHONY ORGANIZATION OF THE FUTURE WILL NEED, OR HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE, IF IT WISHES TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE AS AN ORGANIZATION?
- ◆ Symphony orchestra organizations' core service will still be to provide great works of music performed at the highest levels of excellence.
 - ◆ Programs should appeal to smaller "special interest" groups.
 - ◆ Education and outreach may not be the whole answer.
 - ◆ Symphony orchestras must become teaching and learning organizations.
 - ◆ The impersonal manner in which the business with audiences and the community has been carried out in the past will not be the model for the future.
 - ◆ And symphonies will need to become very savvy about technology.

"Men have all the money today . . . [but] it is clear that money is going to become more feminine."

– *Lynn Asinof*

"The next century is going to turn our world upside down. The Internet combines people and ideas faster than they have ever been combined before. And that combination changes everything."

– *Tim Berners-Lee*

"Younger people have an inherent comfort with technology."

– *Lynn Asinof*

"One of the . . . difficult challenges in trying to predict the future of technology is to distinguish . . . [the] commonplace from [the] merely feasible. That which is feasible may not be economical for any but the most special of circumstances."

– *Vincent G. Cerf*

5. WHAT ASPECTS OF THE WAYS SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS TYPICALLY BEHAVE, FUNCTION, DO WORK, AND ARE STRUCTURED WILL HELP OR HINDER THEIR ABILITY TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

The following will be helpful:

- ◆ Commitment to core purpose will be vital.
- ◆ Communication will be essential.
- ◆ Balance between fiscal conservatism and daring innovation will need to be struck.
- ◆ Symphony organizations must serve customers at a much faster rate.
- ◆ Symphony organizations must become more effective or face extinction.

The following will be hindrances:

- ◆ Hierarchical structures pose a major obstacle to needed change.
 - ◆ Goal ambiguity leads to poor results.
 - ◆ Isomorphism can be damaging.
 - ◆ Human relations practices need to be improved.
 - ◆ Narrowly focused audition and hiring protocols should be reexamined.
 - ◆ Structures that hinder tapping the full potential of people must be dismantled.
-

“The increased communications bandwidth that’s coming is going to have a huge impact. To be able to move visual images and voice with high fidelity and high quality will create possibilities that are hard even to imagine.”

– *Kim B. Clark*

“By 2007, high-quality virtual reality with convincing artificial environments, virtually instantaneous rendering, and high-definition displays will be comfortable to wear and available at computer game prices.”

– *Ray Kurzweil*

“If Bach were alive now, he would be all over the synthesizer, especially the sequences. All over it!”

– *Quincy Jones*

6. WHAT ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS WILL EITHER BE NEEDED OR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED TO ADDRESS THE EVOLVING DEMANDS, EXPECTATIONS, OR OPPORTUNITIES SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS WILL FACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY? SPECIFICALLY, DO YOU ENVISION THE NEED OR ADVISABILITY OF SHIFTS IN THE FORM OF ANY OR ALL OF THE REASONABLY DIFFERENTIATED ORGANIZATIONAL GROUPS (NAMELY, THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS; THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF ORGANIZATION; THE ORCHESTRA; THE MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTING STAFF, INCLUDING GUEST CONDUCTORS; AND THE VOLUNTEERS) WHICH CURRENTLY EXIST IN THE TYPICAL NORTH AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORGANIZATION? WHY DO YOU HAVE THIS VIEW? DO YOU ENVISION THE SUBDIVISION, DISAPPEARANCE, BLENDING, AMALGAMATION, INTEGRATION, AND SO FORTH OF ANY OF THESE GROUPS, OR OTHER CHANGES OF ORGANIZATIONAL FORM, TO BETTER ADDRESS THE CHANGES YOU ENVISION IN THE FIRST QUESTION ABOVE? WHY DO YOU HAVE THIS VIEW?

About overall symphony orchestra organizations:

- ◆ Orchestra organizations should become flatter and more holistic.
- ◆ Artistic decision making should involve more teamwork.

As to boards of directors:

- ◆ Board members should be active and independent.
- ◆ They should be educated about music.

“The term [sound art] seems to connote the activity of working directly in sound, without musical notation or interpretive musicians as intermediaries. . . . As digital technology invades all aspects of music making, the line between ‘music’ and ‘sound art’ is already blurring, and unlikely to hold. . . . Soon all new music may be sound art.”

– *Kyle Gann*

“[T]he producers of products and services based almost exclusively on the output of human brains is going to increase.”

– *Arie de Geus*

“Cyber-savvy composers create symphonies and string quartets on their PCs with the help of sophisticated graphic notation software. The only thing computers cannot (and should not) do is supply the musical inspiration.”

– *John von Rhein*

- ◆ They should use their background and skills.
- ◆ Boards should be smaller, include nontraditional members, and be progressive.

Suggestions regarding management and staff:

- ◆ Symphony orchestra organization staffing should be flatter, more flexible, and more cross-functional.
- ◆ Staff members should have new skills, particularly technological.

Thinking about the orchestra:

- ◆ Orchestra members should be involved in core decision-making processes.
- ◆ Musicians should define the artistic mission of the institution and share a common enthusiasm for ensemble performance.

About music directors and other conducting staff members:

- ◆ Music directors should be more significantly involved in the business-decision process.
- ◆ And this requires longer residency than is currently typical among music directors.

“The source of commercial value will be people’s attentions, not the content that consumes their attention. There will be too much content, and not enough people with time for all of it. That will change our attitudes to everything; it will bring back new respect for people, for personal attention, for service, and for human interaction.”

– *Esther Dyson*

“A musician who uses computer/instruments to make music in live performance is in essence doing the same thing as a musician who uses any other kind of instrument. . . . [However,] the interaction of a group of people in live performance is a distinctly unique aspect of music-making that simply cannot always be effectively reproduced [electronically].”

– *William L. Cahn*

“Classical music has to trust in its material while at the same time divesting itself of the compositeness inherent in old rituals.”

– *Bernard Holland*

Regarding volunteers:

- ◆ We need to cultivate a younger pool of talent and friends.
- ◆ Volunteers should be involved in crucial and high-level tasks.
- ◆ And they should be more integrated into the overall organization.

7. IN CONNECTION WITH YOUR VIEWS ON THE ABOVE QUESTIONS AND TOPICS, DO YOU ENVISION SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS NEEDING TO CONSIDER OR MAKE ANY CHANGES IN THEIR OVERALL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, AND IF SO, WHAT CHANGES, WHY THESE CHANGES, AND HOW MIGHT THESE CHANGES BE MADE?

- ◆ All constituencies should be involved in product development processes through cross-functional leadership teams composed of blends of representatives of each constituency.
- ◆ There is widespread recognition that the relationship between management and musicians must be improved.
- ◆ Musicians should become more directly and actively involved in board and management decisions.
- ◆ The board should feel a sense of ownership and pride in the orchestra.
- ◆ Management should understand that survival demands developing a new style and method of doing business.

“An organization is no longer just [a] legal . . . entity. It’s the entire web of people and groups who contribute to conceptualizing, designing, making, selling, distributing, serving, and even using the products and services. Call [it] the virtual organization. . . .”

– *Patricia A. McLagan*

“Success will belong to [organizations] that are leaderless—or [more precisely] whose leadership is so widely shared that they resemble beehives, ant colonies, or schools of fish. [Organizations] that thrive will be ‘led’ by people who understand that . . . no one person can ever really be in control.”

– *John A. Byrne*

“Insiders resist paradigm shifts. Why? Because they are good at what they do and a paradigm shift requires you to give up what you are good at and learn something new.”

– *Joel Barker*

- ◆ There should be more team-based processes.
 - ◆ There should be more inspired leadership.
8. SOME PEOPLE HAVE SPECULATED THAT SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS, AS WE MOVE INTO THE 21ST CENTURY, WILL NEED TO BECOME MORE “FLEXIBLE” AND MORE “RESPONSIVE.” WHAT DO THESE WORDS MEAN TO YOU SPECIFICALLY? DO YOU AGREE? IF SO, WHAT SPECIFIC CHANGES WILL SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO MAKE OR SHOULD THEY CONSIDER MAKING?
- ◆ Symphony orchestras need to be more flexible and responsive.
 - ◆ Including being more responsive to consumers.
 - ◆ Being more flexible means different things to different people.
 - ◆ Symphony orchestras need to be more innovative.
9. THERE ARE VARIOUS ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER GROUPINGS WITHIN, SURROUNDING, AND SERVING “THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA INDUSTRY.” THESE ENTITIES INCLUDE SUCH ASSOCIATIONS AS THE AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA LEAGUE [ASOL], THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS [ICSOM], THE REGIONAL ORCHESTRA PLAYERS ASSOCIATION [ROPA], THE ORGANIZATION OF CANADIAN SYMPHONY MUSICIANS [OCSM], AND THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS [AFM] AND ITS LOCALS, AND

“[I]t is safe to say that human nature has not changed in the last 100,000 years, and maybe farther back than that.”

– *Edward O. Wilson*

“ [N]ow we have a conscious, rational, intellectual way of explaining both the [resistance to] and the necessity of change . . . companies [can] say, ‘We are going to institute a paradigm shift.’ It is a conscious, purposeful, anticipatory act.”

– *Joel Barker*

“If [leaders] are really focusing on the present tense, you have a problem.”

– *Joel Barker*

“What will people be listening to in the year 3000? That I cannot say. The technology of our times already gives us sounds that we haven’t heard before.”

– *Kurt Masur*

SUBGROUPS WITHIN THESE LARGER GROUPS. THERE ARE VARIOUS “PROFESSIONAL ROLE GROUPS” WITHIN OR SERVING THE INDUSTRY, SUCH AS THE ASSOCIATIONS OF PERSONNEL MANAGERS, ORCHESTRA LIBRARIANS, MUSIC CRITICS, AND SO FORTH. THERE ARE FOR-PROFIT BUSINESS GROUPS WHICH REGULARLY WORK WITHIN AND AROUND THE INDUSTRY, SUCH AS ARTISTS’ REPRESENTATIVES AND PRESENTING ORGANIZATIONS. ALL THESE GROUPS ARE PART OF AND CONTRIBUTE TO SOME DEGREE TO THE MAINTENANCE OF TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF HOW SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS FUNCTION. IN YOUR JUDGMENT, WHAT IMPACT, EITHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE, MIGHT THESE ASSOCIATIONS OR GROUPINGS HAVE ON INDIVIDUAL SYMPHONY ORGANIZATIONS AND HOW THEY FUNCTION IN THE FUTURE?

- ◆ Service organizations have a profound impact on the field.
- ◆ They are an integral part of our national political support system.
- ◆ Their main advantage is independent vigor; their main danger is sectarianism.
- ◆ They should become more focused but their roles may be reduced.
- ◆ They should become catalysts for positive change.
- ◆ They are all here to stay, for better or worse.
- ◆ There should be more dialogue among them.

“In 2099, your great-great-great-grandchildren will be able to quiz a reconstituted you about what it was like to work with computers so big and clunky they had to be held on your lap.”

– *Otis Port*

“One of the next century’s great challenges will be coping with the awesome power that will become ours as we slowly read the surprising stories in our twisting strands of DNA.”

– *John Carey*

“[W]e are not simply reaching out into space to use extraterrestrial resources and create opportunities here on Earth. Rather, we are laying the foundations for a series of new civilizations that are the next logical steps in the evolution of human society.”

– *Frank White*

10. WHAT FORCES WILL BE AT WORK WITHIN SYMPHONY ORGANIZATION PARTICIPANTS AS INDIVIDUALS, THE ORGANIZATION AS A WHOLE, OR THE WORLD IN WHICH THE ORGANIZATION FUNCTIONS TO KEEP THINGS FROM CHANGING AT A PACE REQUIRED?
- ◆ Inertia is a major force against change.
 - ◆ Complacency, fostered by a currently robust economy, inhibits change.
 - ◆ Contributors could influence the pace of change.
 - ◆ Fiefdoms lead to inward thinking.
 - ◆ Traditional stereotypes will impede change.
11. IN YOUR OVERALL JUDGMENT, WHAT FORCES OR CONDITIONS NEED TO EXIST FOR POSITIVE CHANGE TO START AND BE SUSTAINED IN THE TYPICAL SYMPHONY ORGANIZATION?
- ◆ A supportive external environment needs to exist.
 - ◆ Bold leadership needs to be exercised.
 - ◆ There needs to be a strong sense of joint ownership.
 - ◆ Musicians need to be considered as individuals.
 - ◆ Positive attitudes and organizational pride will contribute to successful change.
-

“It is not enough to say that life has simply evolved and gotten more complicated. Life—the ‘it’—is now in some crucial ways a new substance, and this basic fact must be contemplated deeply.”

– *Sven Birkerts*

“In the next century, technology will transform our lives, even more than it has in this century. It has already given us many choices, and in the next century it will give us many more. But the new choices will not drive out the old choices. Often, the old choices will still be the best.”

– *Paul Raeburn*

“The future is not an overarching leap into the distance. . . . It begins in the present.”

– *Daniel Bell*

- ◆ It is vital to have trust and respect among participants and constituencies.
- ◆ Excellent, continuous communication is also vital.
- ◆ Organizations will need to take a broader view of mission.
- ◆ And yet maintain fiscal realism.
- ◆ Audience attitude and taste will also drive change.

The Symphony Orchestra Institute wishes to express special thanks to the 13 current and former members of the Board of Advisors who generously contributed their time and intellect to the project which culminated in the report which is summarized here, and to Dr. John Boaz, who spent enormous hours evaluating, organizing, annotating, and preparing the report.