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The Joy of an Audience

By Monica Fosnaugh

Following the concerts last week, the musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra heard something that has become incredibly rare, but was incredibly welcome: applause from a live audience in Orchestra Hall. Thirty audience members stood with appreciation for the 45 minutes of live music they had just heard. The subscribers and donors of the DSO had not been totally without music since March, but everything the musicians had been offering was delivered digitally, a virtual world separating audience from artist out of necessity. The COVID pandemic has forced all orchestras to reinvent how to provide world class music to their audiences. The DSO's main objective during this time has been to keep its donors and subscribers as engaged as possible with digital content produced just for them, in addition to the material available to everyone. This, along with a development department that refused to substantially alter its fundraising goals for the fiscal year, has led the DSO from suddenly shutting its doors in March, to live webcast concerts in the hall that are also open to a limited number of audience members.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra first started venturing past virtual performance into live concerts in August, benefiting from both cooperative weather and a lightening of safety protocols from the state government. These concerts were held throughout the city of Detroit in multiple outdoor venues. They were short, chamber music concerts, which often included an interview element, and several were simultaneously webcast live. The audience was limited to fewer than 50 people, with full safety and disinfecting protocols in place. The concertgoers had to bring their own chairs, set them up six feet apart, and keep their masks on, despite being outdoors. All of these performances were voluntary by the musicians, and were considered a continuation of the virtual performance and teaching work the entire orchestra had been participating in since mid-March.

While these concerts were going on, our negotiating com-

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The State of the Art

Michael Kaiser interviewed by Keith Carrick and Meredith Snow

ICSOM invited Michael Kaiser to speak with Member At Large Keith Carrick and Chair Meredith Snow on the current state of the arts as we progress through this pandemic. Currently Chairman of the DeVos Institute of Arts Management, Kaiser served as president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts from 2001 to 2014. His work leading other arts organizations, such as the Kansas City Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, and the Royal Opera House—in many cases leading them out of financial peril—has made him a much sought-after arts management consultant. He is also the author of several books about arts management (*Note: see a review in the October 2013 issue*). Here are some highlights; the complete interview can be found at www.icsom.org/senzasordino/2020/11/the-state-of-the-art-complete-interview/.

Keith Carrick: Why don't we talk about those phases that you have outlined previously:

Phase I: the sudden

stop at the beginning, the lockdowns

Phase II: where we are waiting to get back into our theaters and trying to stay relevant—

Michael Kaiser: —that's where we are right now—Some of us can do some performance with socially dis-

tanced audience and a tiny orchestra—it's good work to be done, but it's not full orchestras playing for a full audience and this is the hard period because we've run out of our [Paycheck Protection Program] money. A lot of our funders are still being generous but not a lot of them are making these extra grants anymore, so that money's gone and we don't know when this

ends. It's a very uncomfortable period—wanting to be of service, wanting to keep in touch, needing to stay solvent, still having very little earned income and who knows when we can go back. And then having major contractual is-

(Continued on page 9)



Courtesy of Detroit Symphony Orchestra



President's Report

By Paul Austin

PA on P2A

ICSOM recently launched a highly-successful Phone2Action (P2A) initiative to support the musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (PRSO) in their "Save the Symphony" campaign.

Long before the global pandemic, the salaries and pension of the PRSO musicians, as well as the funding for their prestigious Casals Festival, were in jeopardy. With a proposed 50% cut to the orchestra's budget by the government's Fiscal Oversight Board (FOB), announced in early 2020, musicians and management were deeply concerned that this would destroy the musical and educational mission of the PRSO, which has been a steadfast presence in Puerto Rico for many decades (most recently in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria).

With the capable assistance of ICSOM's Public Relations consultant Randy Whatley (President, Cypress Media Group), ICSOM worked with the PRSO Musicians and AFM Local 555 (Puerto Rico) to prepare a P2A letter in both English and Spanish. The P2A was announced and launched during the September 15th Facebook Live "Save the Symphony" event hosted by AFM Local 555 and the PRSO Musicians (recorded and available on their Facebook page, @TuSinfonicaOSPR Músicos de la Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico).

It was an honor to be a panelist for this hour-long Facebook Live event, along with ICSOM Chairperson Meredith Snow and former ICSOM Chair Bruce Ridge. We spoke of the many reasons that the PRSO should be funded and preserved. ICSOM Delegate Miguel Rivera (PRSO trombonist and President of AFM Local 555) joined our panel and provided Spanish translation of our statements as well as his personal insights.

Within 72 hours of its launch, ICSOM's P2A campaign generated thousands of email messages from hundreds of participants to the candidates for Governor of Puerto Rico, urging them to include support of funding for the PRSO in their campaign platforms as well as arrange a meeting with PRSO musician representative Miguel Rivera to discuss the orchestra's concerns.

As a result of these efforts, the PRSO situation was included as a main topic of a political debate of the candidates for Governor of Puerto Rico, which addressed the importance and impact of the arts and cultural institutions. In addition, the FOB agreed to consider releasing financial resources that had previously been unavailable to the PRSO.

This was a tremendous win! The requests outlined in ICSOM's P2A letters had been honored by those in political power. While our P2A played an important role in the success of the "Save the Symphony" campaign, it is the tenacity »



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of the PRSO Musicians and AFM Local 555 that must be recognized. Jose Manuel Villegas (Secretary-Treasurer AFM Local 555 and PRSO violist) and Felipe Rodríguez (Board Member of AFM Local 555 and Principal Trumpet of the PRSO) were a driving force in this masterful campaign, coordinating multiple social media posts each day which included many members of the PRSO. Their stories personalized the campaign, and all posts concluded with ICSOM's P2A link. I would also like to recognize and thank José Martín, former ICSOM Delegate and PRSO Timpanist, for his contributions to "Save the Symphony" and the P2A, and for his many years of dedicated service to the orchestra.

In all, this was a very significant advocacy campaign, for which ICSOM's P2A played a key role. In less than three weeks, over 1800 people sent more than 25,000 letters to the people who may control the future of the PRSO. The majority of the P2A responders were Puerto Rican residents, which enabled the gubernatorial candidates to hear from their constituents.

In order to have a successful campaign for the PRSO, it was vital to reach the people in power very quickly. Thanks to this P2A we did so and, in the end, our voices were heard and honored.



The Joy of an Audience (continued)

mittee (NC) was back at work, creating a Memorandum of Agreement with management for the 2020–2021 season. The NC had successfully negotiated a new CBA back in January, and rose to the challenge of continuing their work under an entirely new set of circumstances. Management had scheduled and publicized four months of live webcast concerts from Orchestra Hall, starting after Labor Day, and so they were under the gun to come up with an agreement that adequately paid the musicians, while allowing individuals who were high risk or uncomfortable performing to work somehow and earn a salary. The MOA, in place until next September, details a 20% pay cut for all musicians' salaries, which includes base pay, overscale, and seniority. All benefits remain intact. Additionally, it allows for the expectation that musicians will participate in alternative work, based on the amount they are performing. Most alternative work consists of virtual teaching for our Civic Youth Ensembles, which are in full swing despite not actually being able to meet. Other options have included short outdoor recitals (until the weather stopped being acceptable), and lots of projects for our development department, including making thank you phone calls and notes, both in paper and video form.

Our 2020–2021 season began with four live webcast concerts conducted by our new music director, Jader Bignamini, and have continued weekly since then. Each week consists of two short programs that are rehearsed within four 90-minute rehearsals. Any musician playing in a given week is tested on Monday, with the first service being held on Wednesday. Entrance through the stage door requires a daily self-assessment and temperature check, and the backstage area is closed to anyone who has not received a negative COVID test that week.

In an attempt to provide something of interest for all our

subscribers, our classical, pops, and education concert series have all been represented. The classical programming has been an interesting mix of old and new, highlighting the achievements of minority composers. Sinatra, acrobats, and our traditional Holiday concert are all featured in the pops series, and we even managed our annual Halloween Spooktacular, with musicians sending in pictures of themselves, their families, and their pets in costume.

While we do not know exactly what is taking shape after the holidays, we are operating under the hope that we can continue to progress to more musicians on stage, different repertoire, and bigger audiences, while maintaining high standards of safety. There are many unknowns ahead of us this winter, but regardless of the future, the Detroit Symphony will make it a priority to keep the music playing!

Note: the author is ICSOM delegate for the DSO. Since this article was written, changes to state policy have again closed the door to live audiences, though live webcast concerts continue.

Collaboration in Grand Rapids

By Barb Corbató

The Grand Rapids Symphony is among the many ICSOM orchestras forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to reinvent their seasons, develop safety plans, and figure out how to financially survive. The Grand Rapids



Martin Hoan

Symphony Society has worked hard to successfully keep their musicians employed and visible in the community, through a wide range of performances, while keeping musicians and staff safe and healthy. This has been possible due to a strong sense of trust and cooperation between all parts of the organization.

When the orchestra paused live performances in March due to COVID-19, the musicians continued to be paid in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement. Using the Volunteer Promotional provisions of the IMA, musicians recorded videos for the GRS to use online as part of a series. Two of the larger and more notable projects were a widely-viewed video of Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* and a special Mother's Day video featuring Sonia Goulart, mother of GRS Music Director Marcelo Lehninger (*Note: see <https://www.womenslifestyle.com/2020/05/08/311303/grand-rapids-symphony-launches-virtual-international-performance-for-mothers-day>*). Thanks to a matching grant, this "From Our Home To Yours" series met its targeted financial goal and raised over \$100,000.


As COVID-19 had suddenly become a part of the equation, the Musician Negotiation Committee and GRS Management agreed that a one-year extension of the current master agreement, with several work-rule changes, would be the best path for the organization. Ultimately, in September, a 5% base wage reduction also was agreed upon, in order to help the organization financially. In August, the orchestra musicians also ratified the AFM's IMA side letter for COVID-19, which has enabled the GRS to use technology to reach our audiences.

During the GRS's four-week summer season, which was moved from July to August, orchestra members were able to perform several different types of outdoor concerts. All performances included mask wearing and social distancing by both performers and audiences. The first week of the summer season, Porch Concerts were given outdoors at musicians' homes. Solos, duos, and trios were performed for neighbors and friends. The next three weeks included chamber music pop-up concerts in neighborhood parks, performed by a wide range of ensembles, yet with limited audience size due to mandated restrictions on outdoor gatherings of more than 100 people. Also during this time, "Sidewalk Serenades" were offered to donors at a cost of \$300 per 30 minute concert. These short concerts, with an invited audience limited to 10 people, allowed the orchestra to interact with donors, while also fundraising. The marketing department has also been interviewing individual musicians on YouTube Live once a week. These opportunities to perform for neighbors, community members, and donors were a wonderful time to connect on a personal level with audiences, and many will likely continue post-pandemic.

Throughout the summer, a Health and Safety Committee, made up of Orchestra Committee and Management, met to develop safety protocols in preparation for the return to indoor concerts. These protocols include health screenings, masks at all times (with exceptions for brass and woodwinds while playing), COVID-19 testing for brass and woodwinds, spacing of strings on individual stands, increased spacing of brass and woodwinds, plexiglass, short rehearsal segments with long breaks for air exchange, and shorter concerts. A Safety Manual was created and ratified by the musicians.

Due to renovations occurring this fall at the performance hall where the GRS regularly performs, the GRS has been performing livestream concerts from the downtown Arena, and several other venues (*Note: see <https://www.livedesignonline.com/theatre/grand-new-spaces-for-grand-rapids-symphony-livestream>*). The performances include collaborations with the Grand Rapids Ballet, Joshua Bell, and Larissa Martinez. The month of December includes Holiday Pops and a performance with Music Director Marcelo Lehninger performing (piano) and conducting. The GRS will also be collaborating with the Grand Rapids Ballet for virtual *Nutcracker* performances. All of the con-

certs are using reduced string sections and arrangements to reduce the numbers of brass and woodwinds on stage. Several smaller performances will also take place, including an online fundraiser and a streamed performance in conjunction with an area church.

The relationship between the Grand Rapids Symphony Musicians, Management, and Board was extremely collaborative and transparent before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it continues to be, as the entire organization continues to navigate these uncharted waters together. 

Note: the author is ICSOM delegate for the Grand Rapids Symphony.

Finding a Way

By Michael Sutton

The Minnesota Orchestra has been working hard to make things happen. Ever since we took the stage in our formalwear in an otherwise empty hall to play our final Friday night radio broadcast in March, we have been



finding a way. We started with Minnesota Orchestra at Home, voluntarily recording videos as a thank you to our patrons. Some major donors got a private concert in their driveway. Our Artistic Advisory Committee put together a six-week series of outdoor chamber music concerts, and local radio and TV stations broadcast archived concerts every other week. And we negotiated a CBA extension

of two years, with a COVID side letter that ICSOM counsel extraordinaire Kevin Case called "a solid agreement," which I believe is Kevin's highest form of praise. I have it in writing.

How did we get here?

One of the main drivers of this success is the fact that we have a board, management, and musicians who are all on the same page, working tirelessly and methodically towards a common goal.

For the outdoor chamber music this summer, we were able to set up a small tented stage with a strong PA system in the public plaza adjacent to our hall. With safety protocols in >>

2021 Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service applications now open

Orchestra musicians are increasingly working to support community engagement and educational activities that extend beyond the concert hall, and pivoting in new and creative ways to deliver this work virtually during the pandemic. To recognize the commitment of extraordinary musicians and the impact of their achievements, the League of American Orchestras seeks applications from musicians as well as nominations by orchestra administrators for the 2021 Ford Musician Awards for Excellence in Community Service.

Now in its fifth year, the awards program, made possible through the generosity of Ford Motor Company Fund, celebrates and honors these musicians, their orchestras, and their communities. Five musicians will be selected through a competitive application process; each musician winner will receive a cash award of \$2,500; and each winning musician's orchestra will receive a grant of \$2,500 to support professional development for its musicians. The deadline to apply is Monday, February 8, 2021. To learn more and to apply, visit the League's Ford Musician Awards site, americanorchestras.org. Questions? Contact James Barry at jbarry@americanorchestras.org.

place, we were guided through very specific routes of foot traffic backstage, and given limited arrival and departure windows. Each ensemble (two per concert) had a separate space for their cases, and specific timing to and from the plaza, so as not to run into the other group. Some rehearsals were at the hall, but my particular string quartet rehearsed in my yard. (Neighbors loved it, squirrels not so much.)

The plaza audience of between 100 and 200 was socially distanced on folding chairs, escorted in and out by wonderful (but strict) staff ushers.

Our safety measures came about because we have a wonderful tour physician, Dr. Jon Hallberg. He has donated his time and considerable effort to help us achieve our performance goals safely; he guided the drafting of our protocols (36 pages worth). Aside from a full-time private practice, Dr Hallberg also is on faculty at the University of Minnesota. He reached out to his colleagues in the mechanical engineering department, and set into motion the two-part aerosol study, testing our wind and brass players first in the lab, then on Orchestra Hall stage. The engineers were also able to ascertain our air turnover rate in the auditorium to be eight times per hour. The average turnover for any given ICU is six times per hour, so we are in good shape! Having had new HEPA filters installed in our 2012 renovation, we were ready to put our plans into motion.

The broadcasts are happening because of our long-standing partnership with Minnesota Public Radio, and a newer relationship with Twin Cities Public Television. Our board of directors quickly put together a fundraising drive (\$150K) to rent the high-end video equipment we were lacking. A large room backstage has been turned into a video studio.

In our current phase of protocol, we are limiting occupancy on the stage to 25, conductor included. Each program is about an hour and 15 minutes long, featuring the different orchestra families separately. COVID tests happen on Monday, rehearsals start on Tuesday. All rehearsals and concerts have no intermission. Each player has their own assigned stand and chair, at least six feet from the nearest person, and only the stage crew moves anything. Music is provided by the librarians online, and then a hard copy at the first rehearsal. We are then in charge of our own music until the end of the concert. Some players choose to play from their iPads. In November and December we are gradually increasing our numbers to the low 50s. Utilizing a stage extension built by our amazing crew, we hope to be able to play Beethoven Symphony no. 1.

Our concerts are archived, and may be seen at no charge (for now) on our website, under the heading This is Minnesota Orchestra.

There is an empathetic provision in the side-letter that allows anyone uncomfortable performing with the group, high-risk or not, to take on modified duties (donor thank-you calls, etc.). Or, they may choose to do nothing at all, and the management will pay their COBRA fees to keep them on health insurance after their 13-week sick-leave period ends.


And now for the numbers:

We ratified a 20% pay cut on June 28. Until then we had been receiving 100%, due to a \$4.5 million PPP loan that our management obtained. All of our insurance was untouched, and will remain so through the 2022 CBA extension. Our con-

tract had expired on August 31, putting us in what should have been a weak negotiating position. However, we were able to simply extend our current contract through August 31 of 2022. This was ratified on September 16, and it all went into effect on October 1.

The COVID side-letter pinned on top of the extension lowers everyone's pay to 75% of what they normally earn. Our Music Director and upper management took slightly steeper cuts. Our base annual salary with EMG is now \$82,953. As soon as we are able to move off the side-letter, this will revert back to \$110,604.

I was thrilled to see this quote in the paper from Brad Eggen, president of our Twin Cities Musicians Union: "In this time of extreme challenges, this group crafted a solution that preserves inspiring performance in a creative agreement respectful of the musicians' careers and the well-being of all involved."

While pay cuts of this magnitude are never easy, we believe that this agreement will help us to remain stable during the pandemic, and that it puts us in a position to thrive again when the pandemic ends. 

Note: the author is ICSOM delegate for the Minnesota Orchestra.

Music On Our Own

By Laura Ross

The Musicians of the Nashville Symphony have been furloughed, with little or no expectation of returning to work, since management cancelled the entire 44-week 2020–21 season on July 1. *(Note: after this article was written, the NSO musicians ratified an agreement under which they will begin receiving a modest weekly stipend in January; the details will be in a forthcoming settlement bulletin.)*



Robby Klein

As musicians, we never expected to be dealing with permits, insurance, stage plots, audio systems, advertising, concert banners, choosing repertoire, assigning rosters, and setting up an account to accept donations. And of course, this was all the more difficult to accomplish since COVID is restricting many businesses, which caused unexpected delays. We wanted to continue performing, but knew we had to do it safely. Initially we began making short videos to post on our new website www.musiciansofthenashvillesymphony.org. The entire month of August was dedicated to celebrating J.S. Bach with various suites, sonatas, partitas, chorales, a very creative animated cartoon by our piccolo player, Gloria Yun, and for a finale, the first movement of Brandenburg 3, all edited by our own musicians. Beginning in September, we began featuring a weekly video of works written or transcribed by Fritz Kreisler (all written before 1925, so we didn't have to deal with copyright issues). We've also worked with the AFM to assure protection of these videos by filing Joint Venture Agreements for each video, including our concert videos.

Soon after the announced furlough, a few of us were approached by the Director of Music at St. George's Episcopal >>

Church, Dr. Woosug Kang. He and the Rector, Dr. R. Leigh Spruill, had discussed an extremely generous offer to help support our Musicians while continuing the church's outreach to the community. They offered to expand their annual concert series of sacred music performances, called *In Excelsis*: once a month from September through May 2021, Musicians of the Nashville Symphony would provide a concert that would be streamed live from the church and the archive would be available for 30 days afterward for viewing on



Stephen Drake

the St. George's website. The church is covering all the production, equipment, and publicity costs, they are providing the performance and rehearsal space, are making a financial contribution to the Musicians' financial aid fund, and are actively directing audience members to the donation site. Two concerts have been live-streamed so far, with the third upcoming in mid-November. As a special surprise, country superstars Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood put together a special public service announcement in support of the musicians and encouraged audience members to make a donation at <https://www.musiciansofthenashvillesymphony.org/donorbox-form>.

In October, the Concert Committee got busy presenting a series of outdoor concerts with 12–14 members of the string section before the weather became uncooperative. The Concert, Artistic Planning, and Safety Committees worked collaboratively to approve the locations, choose the repertoire, fill the rosters, and assure that masks, social distancing, and appropriate signage were in place before each concert. Each week it was touch and go as the weather threatened rain and low temperatures. Yet each Sunday, the rain held off and we were able to play to appreciative crowds who brought their chairs, wore their masks (even in counties that didn't require them), and socially distanced. Our "stage crew" set up banners, measured and taped the stage so each musician was socially distanced, moved the stage location as needed, and set up the audio equipment. We're thankful that Marcus Wanner, son of our assistant principal bassist, is lending his AV knowledge, expertise, and equipment to this cause. (Marcus also helped edit many early videos.)

We're trying to follow CDC guidelines, and continue to search for local health experts to advise us. Although we're not concert promoters, fundraisers, stage crew, publishers—everything required to produce and promote concerts—we're learning and doing a decent job. Kip Winger (a member of the band Winger, and now a classical composer living in Nashville), purchased black masks embossed with Musicians of the

Nashville Symphony in red. Our logo has been changed from green to red for the duration. Our banners have an embedded QR code to direct people to our website so they can sign up for our newsletter, view videos, and donate, and we have laminated social distancing signs. (Our Governor refuses to mandate mask-wearing, leaving it to the determination of cities and counties.)

We've come a long way in just a few months but there is growing concern that as unemployment compensation ends for many at the end of this year, we will still have nine months without a paycheck. We could have been working together with our management, fostering a partnership to serve our community, and demonstrating unity of purpose to keep our audience and community engaged with the orchestra; but we're not.

Note: the author is ICSOM secretary, and a member of the Nashville Symphony's violin section. Nashville Symphony assistant principal bassist Glen Wanner and principal violist Daniel Reinker also contributed to this article.

No Cuts

By Buddy Bray

COVID-19 has presented no fewer challenges in Fort Worth than in the rest of the world, but the musicians of the FWSO feel fortunate that our salaries and benefits have been neither diminished, nor interrupted.



Renee Photo

On April 30, 2020, the musicians ratified a one-year extension of the previous four-year agreement. The number of weeks remains 46, pay remains exactly the same; benefits change with a new carrier, but do not decrease at all.

The orchestra is performing regularly, though with diminished audience capacity and with fewer players onstage. The FWSO's longtime home is Bass Performance Hall in downtown Fort Worth, but the venue has decided against reopening at this time. Fortunately, FWSO leadership had, in advance, identified an alternate venue for the orchestra's performances. Will Rogers Memorial Center, in Fort Worth's cultural district, had been the home of the Fort Worth Symphony in an earlier era, and gladly stepped up to provide us a home during this uncertain time.


The FWSO currently performs a reduced, but consistent schedule: we have performed three classical weekends, and two pops weekends so far. Strict health protocols pertain, both onstage and off: musicians are seated at least six feet apart from one another (and sometime more, in the case of winds and brass), string counts are reduced but a rotation system is in place, and both plexiglass and vinyl shields have been used as safeguards from respiratory droplets. Audience capacity is limited to 25%; we are averaging about 350 at each classical performance, and 400 at each pops concert. Will Rogers Auditorium seats 2800, so measures for patron safety and comfort have been easy to put in place.

Musicians are tested for COVID at least 5–7 days before the beginning of every production, and all staff are, as well. >>

The FWSO Players Committee worked closely with the administration in developing these protocols, as well as policy relating to travel to and from the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area, and how that might impact musician safety. This is particularly important for an upcoming pops weekend: the orchestra's long-standing tradition is to do a holiday pops weekend just after Thanksgiving, so we've made it a cornerstone of our safety protocol that all musicians and staff should notify Human Resources 14 days before any planned travel from the DFW area.

Miguel Harth-Bedoya had his last concert as Music Director in late June when the orchestra filmed a patriotic concert at the 14,000-seat Dickies Arena. There was no audience, and the concert aired on Dallas's ABC affiliate on July 4 in the evening. We had hoped to say a more proper goodbye to our music director of 20 years, but he begins a new relationship with us now as Music Director Laureate, and we will again perform with him later this season.

A music director search had begun the previous season but has been deferred for now; we're not in our normal venue, we're not playing with a full complement, and we're not performing for full audiences. We are, however, having guest conductors in every production.

The FWSO board and administration have shown remarkable steadiness and leadership during this time. President and CEO Keith Cerny was very prompt at securing a PPP loan, and longtime board chair Mercedes T. Bass made a very generous gift some weeks ago, as well. The Players Committee have a weekly telephone conference with Dr. Cerny and with Chief Operating Officer Becky Tobin, and we appreciate their transparency, their collegial attitude, and their tenacity at keeping the music playing here in Fort Worth. 

Note: the author is Players Committee Chair of the FWSO.

A Year to Forget, Progress to Remember

By Brian Prectl

In many ways, 2020 has been a year we'd all like to forget, but it is helpful when we get discouraged to remember all that we've accomplished this year. The Baltimore Symphony Musicians remember vividly the difficulties of the past. We were walking a picket line just last summer,




and in 12 short months we have made enormous strides in so many areas. We have established a new decision-making process with the establishment of the Vision Committee; participated in a work group at the state level led by former state Senator Ed Kasemeyer; shepherded a new bill through the Maryland General Assembly that would have provided for ongoing bridge funding for the BSO; engaged Michael Kaiser to help us write a 5-year strategic plan; and subsequently worked together to raise a nearly \$10 million transformation fund to provide for a bright future for the BSO.

And then came COVID-19. We had a difficult decision

about how to move forward. Thankfully all of the work we did to establish a collaborative approach to our future propelled us forward in the face of a scary and uncertain future. BSO leadership and the musicians agreed that we should continue to stay the course that Michael Kaiser laid out for the institution, which included getting a long-term agreement. We met continuously beginning on March 20 all the way through the summer until finally reaching a tentative settlement on August 27. This historic agreement provides for many things that are essential for the continued health of the BSO. We agreed to sacrificial salary cuts in the 2020–21 season of between 26% and 35% for most of the musicians; however, this historic 5-year agreement makes great progress on rebuilding the complement that has been badly depleted over the last 10 years due to financial constraints. The stability of a long-term agreement will not only drive donor confidence, but it will allow many of the newer musicians to put down roots and consider Baltimore a place they can build a life for themselves and their families. Finally, it's important to recognize that the salary gains in the later years of the contract will allow us to attract world-class musicians.

All of these things are worth celebrating in a year when there is so much bad news. Another thing to celebrate is the debut of our new digital season. BSO Sessions began streaming on October 17. Each week a new episode features the orchestra performing on stage at Meyerhoff Symphony Hall along with interviews and snippets of rehearsal footage. It gives the viewer a glimpse behind the curtain of what goes into the incredible musical experience of a major symphony orchestra. Each episode is available to stream for \$10 per episode, or viewers can purchase a monthly, all-access plan for \$20 a month. In addition to BSO Sessions, the BSO will be offering a new virtual line-up of educational concerts and interactive curriculum-connected content for students, teachers, and families navigating the challenges of virtual learning. Violinist Kevin Smith put it beautifully: "It's such a pleasure to be back on stage with all of my colleagues, and hear the warm sonorities in the Meyerhoff after so many months away. I'm looking forward to the day that we can play music live for our amazing audiences."

While many of our colleagues returned to the stage to participate in BSO Sessions, those that fell into high-risk categories and who had notes from their primary care physicians attesting to that fact, have been able to stay on the payroll by performing at-home activities on a regular basis. This has been a developing palette of activities, but it has allowed the institution to connect with many of our stakeholders virtually, including the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestra and many of our supporters. The list of ways that we have been reinventing ourselves in this most unpredictable year continues to grow. It has been a year to remember even though we look forward to putting this pandemic behind us. Most of all, we feel grateful that our work at the outset of the calendar year positioned us to be able to weather the COVID storm when so many of our peer orchestras have struggled to stay solvent. 

Note: the author is a percussionist, chair of the Players' Committee, and ICSOM delegate for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Fighting COVID-19 with Music Presented with Great Care

By David Matthews

COVID-19 has turned our world upside down. The Dallas Symphony Orchestra has been riding the COVID-19 rollercoaster along with every other arts organization in the world. Somehow we have found a way to continue performing music and engaging our audiences with



music through the Internet and live, while still being paid. I think much of the credit should go to our CEO, Kim Noltemy, who came to the DSO in January 2018, from the position of Chief Operating and Communications Officer for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. With her experience there—including a temporary shutdown after the Boston Marathon bombing—and

great leadership skills, she moved the DSO very quickly into the mindset of, “what can we do to stay engaged with our audience” and “how can we provide concerts while being safe.”

As most of the country went into shelter-in-place mode, one of the first things we were able to do was negotiate a one-year contract extension. Several months later we were asked to take a 10% cut across the board, which the musicians accepted to help the association.

Management and musicians also began brainstorming ways to accomplish the goal of engaging our audience. The musicians were asked to do this in several ways: by posting social media videos of all kinds; preparing concerts from home that the DSO could post on their page and social media sites; and calling donors to thank them for their support and to encourage them. Additionally, to reduce the financial burden on the association, DSO musicians took over the teaching of the students in our South Dallas Initiative. This program, which was started soon after Kim became CEO, introduces many kids who cannot afford lessons or instruments to instrumental music. Previously, the DSO had been paying highly qualified musicians not in the orchestra to teach these lessons.

We were chomping at the bit to do what we could. Many didn’t need to be asked and were already finding ways to perform collaboratively while staying safe and reaching out to audience members. One of my favorites is the “Special Delivery” concerts that began when weather permitted, in which small groups of musicians upon request would play outdoor concerts at someone’s home, masked and socially distanced. This became an opportunity to give the gift of music and create excitement.

There was also an opportunity during this time to provide food for some of our South Dallas Initiative kids who were no longer getting meals from their schools. Staff and musicians variously gave money, shopped for the food, created packages for each family, and delivered them every other week.

During this shelter-in-place time, the DSA also began developing a reentry plan for the musicians to return to the hall, working with a world-renowned epidemiologist at UT South-

western to assure that when we began performing in June, all musicians would be as safe as possible. The reentry plan included COVID tests for anyone the day before each day that they would be at the hall for rehearsals or concerts, health questionnaires, temperature checks upon arrival, separate areas for each performer to unpack their instruments, special HVAC filters, deep cleaning, etc. Along with all of these precautions, management made it clear that everything was voluntary and anyone could opt out of anything they were uncomfortable doing, with no penalty or questions asked. Our concerts in June were chamber ensembles that were video recorded and offered online. These went beautifully and bolstered our confidence for the fall.

During what would have been our July and August break, many musicians continued producing online content and reaching out to donors and audience members. The DSO also received a donation that enabled us to have robotic cameras installed in the hall for our fall concerts and going forward.

The precautions used in June proved to be a success, and planning for the Fall season continued. It was crucial that we find a way to perform live safely for many reasons, not least of which was that this is the inaugural season of our fabulous new music director, Fabio Luisi. Using the same protocols, we have been able to perform concerts each week starting in September, although with smaller groups and modified programs. Our largest programs have included just over 50 musicians with soloists and conductor. We have used our Christmas stage extension for every concert, to give performers more room to spread out. Everyone is required to wear a mask. Winds, brass, and vocal soloists are allowed to take them off once in place on stage. We have plexiglass dividers that are available for all players who want them for protection from aerosols.

With no immediate end to COVID-19 in sight, the DSO is continuing to plan concerts through March that are modified to allow the musicians and our audience to socially distance while enjoying the experience of live music. Being able to do this has been a collaborative, creative effort between management and musicians.

Note: the author is the ICSOM delegate for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Utah Symphony and Utah Opera Airflow Study

By Keith Carrick

A scientific approach to orchestra staging

In the early stages of planning our return to the stage, Utah Symphony musicians were actively searching for information regarding airflow and aerosols from wind instruments. There were some very preliminary aerosol studies, but none seemed sufficient to answer our most important question: how safe is it to be onstage at Abravanel Hall? We began to wonder if a study could be done here, to give us specific information that we could use to help form our safety plan.



Utah is a state with very few restrictions on holding live concerts, but we also have limited access to testing and a virus that has moved through the community unabated. The lack of government restrictions meant that we had the opportunity to return to work (and paychecks), but the burden of determining how to do so safely fell directly on the musicians' "COVID" committee, elected for this purpose. Accurate scientific information would need to be a part of our safety plan if it were to have any chance of standing up to record-high case counts and overwhelmed hospitals.

The musicians initially inquired about an airflow study for Abravanel Hall, but it was our acting CEO Pat Richards who first made contact with the University of Utah. She was directed to the chemical engineering department, specifically to two scientists, James Sutherland and Tony Saad, who work in fluid dynamics. Tony and James were hired to design a study that could help us arrange the orchestra onstage at Abravanel Hall and at our opera venue, Capitol Theater, in such a way as to mitigate aerosol spread and buildup as much as possible. They arranged times to have the halls to themselves and set up sensitive equipment to track the airflow from the air vents across the stage and out through the returns. They also experimented with different arrangements of the HVAC system, and opening and closing the stage doors. They did not use any Plexiglas barriers and instead relied solely on the HVAC system and the space.

After taking measurements in the space, Tony and James entered this information into a computer simulation that tracked the airflow and air speed for the entire stage area. Then, they inserted markers into the simulation that represented individual 'musicians' playing different instruments. Included in this simulation were three each of clarinets, flutes, oboes, bassoons, and horns, two each of trumpets and trombones, and one tuba. Each of these instruments was assigned an amount of aerosol production for a 15-minute period, which was calculated using the University of Minnesota study, "Aerosol Generation from Different Wind Instruments". By combining airflow information and the amount of aerosols generated, and by moving the wind instruments around in the simulation, they were able to calculate just how many aerosols would build up around individual instruments on specific parts of the stage, all the way down to one aerosol particle per liter of air.

So, what were the findings? The scientists observed that at center stage at Abravanel Hall, (precisely where the winds would normally sit), there is a 'vortex' where the air circulates between the floor and the ceiling but not out of the return vents for 40 minutes or more. The study suggested ways to mitigate this problem: placing wind instruments over air vents and near the doors; and opening the stage doors and making a few adjustments to the HVAC system, by which we can move nearly four times as much air off the stage over a 15-minute interval compared to leaving the doors closed.

At Capitol Theater a scrim placed at the front of the stage between the vocalists and the orchestra (which would be seated onstage behind the singers, not in the pit) was effective at keeping aerosols from the vocalists from washing over the orchestra. However, the scrim caused any aerosols produced by winds onstage (behind the scrim) to build up around the

musicians, requiring an additional mitigation. To achieve this, Tony and James designed a 'plenum'. The plenum acts as a sort of air duct by directing air pushed onstage by the HVAC system out the back doors. Its design is so effective that aerosols produced from the wind instruments can be removed from the space in less than a second.

The study did not consider the use of Plexiglas shields. These shields can actually disrupt airflow onstage in ways that may be dangerous by collecting aerosols in certain areas, directing them towards other musicians, or blocking them from moving out through return vents. I strongly urge any orchestra using Plexiglas shields to reconsider their use until an airflow analysis can be completed. Tony and James explained that they would need significantly more time to analyze how shields might change the airflow onstage, and that it is much easier to use the existing air patterns to our advantage. Shields would best be used to correct serious airflow problems that already exist in the space.

As a result of the airflow study, the Utah Symphony Safety Plan includes an extra layer of safety and allows us to make informed decisions about how to properly stage the orchestra during services, giving us greater confidence in our ability to keep musicians safe. We share many safety requirements seen in other safety plans around the country: symptom checks, staggered arrivals, distancing, shorter services, and testing, and it would be my hope that airflow studies will become routine as well.

Note: the author is an ICSOM Member-at-Large and a percussionist in the Utah Symphony

The State of the Art (continued)

sues with orchestra members and other union artists. What makes sense to have as a contract right now? It's a very hard time.

KC: Yes, of course—I think we share your opinion that this is the hardest phase for all of us. We don't know how long it's going to last and it's probably the longest phase, honestly.

MK: —yes, except for Phase IV which goes on forever. But Phase III, which is the recovery phase, is an interesting time to think about. Obviously when we have a vaccine, when it's widely available, and when it's trusted—which are all separate things—and when we can go back into the theater and the audience is comfortable, the challenge that I'm seeing at that phase is everyone is going to be starting up at the same time. And by everyone, I'm not just talking about our cultural institutions but I'm also talking about sports, hotels, cruise lines, you name it—anyone with something that's entertainment related. They will all at once be there—trying to recoup, trying to build back, trying to regain their audience, and it's going to be highly competitive.

It's going to be a very exciting time—everyone's going to be so happy, I know I will be when I can go back and see performances again. But it's also going to be a competitive time with an awful lot of activity happening to compete for people's time and attention and money.

Why I think this is critical, is not that I'm pessimistic, but that arts organizations will need to be ready to come back with real excitement and vigor. And that puts pressure on us >>

now in Phase II. Phase II is not just about surviving, pivoting to what we can do online, and doing all the good stuff we're trying to do now. For me, Phase II, maybe as importantly, is planning what we're going to do in Phase III. So that when we come back, it's really great. Because if it's not really great, we're not going to have the audience we need. Right now, we're training our audiences to get the arts online for free wherever and whenever they want—maybe to enjoy a performance by a symphony in Sweden—because it's available online now. So we have to woo our audience back and the way I think we're going to do that is with great exciting work. I think that's the real challenge of Phase III.

KC: Right, the planning that needs to happen. Let's talk about Phase II since this is the part that's the most painful for the musicians of ICSOM. I know you've floated this idea of an orchestra hibernating and conserving its resources during this time.

MK: That was not a prescription, you understand.

KC: Yes, I think I'm asking about what this might look like in practice for an orchestra that ends up in this place.

MK: It's ugly. Hibernation is not a fun thing—I suggested that it is an option. It is not the first choice by any means. Hibernation basically says, "we cannot afford to live through this as a functioning institution and the only thing we can do is essentially go to sleep until there is earned revenue again." There are some organizations for whom that is true. If they try to keep paying people and doing work right now, they would end up closed before the end of the pandemic which is no one's first choice. The idea of hibernation was for those organizations that are simply too weak to last. The board keeps meeting to keep the legal entity alive. That's what hibernation means—it's not a great option.

KC: No, I would think this should be the last option.

MK: I agree. We want all furloughs to be as short as possible. We don't want to see people losing their livelihoods. That's no one's choice, first or second or third. It's the last choice. But I think what is more important, from my perspective and I would hope from the union musicians' perspective, is that the long-term future of your institution is secure rather than that you have this burst of glory until January 2021 and then you shut your doors forever. That's what I would like to avoid.

KC: Of course! It's never the union's position that we should drain the institution of all its resources.

MK: No, I know that. I'm not accusing anybody of that, I'm just saying that's where hibernation really comes into play. To be honest, most even mid-sized American orchestras don't have to look at hibernation because they have other resources upon which to draw. It's really some other kinds of smaller organizations with no reserves whatsoever, who simply can't survive any other way.

KC: One thing we're worried about is—I've titled it "creative drain"—where the pandemic will affect students and even our seasoned artists in orchestras, who might choose to leave the field. I wonder if you have any ideas on how we might prevent this drain on the creative side of our profession?

MK: I hope this won't go long enough that that will really have a major impact. Not that there will be no one who would ever decide to leave, but people may decide that anyway. For me, the thing that I believe keeps people excited and engaged, whether it's a musician who's thinking about their career or a donor who's thinking about giving, is talking about the exciting work you can do when you come back. I think when the discussion is only about the here and now and the loss, that's when we lose people—all kinds of people—musicians, donors, board members, administrators, whatever. If the conversation is more about what's awaiting us—in six months or eight months, not so far away to be honest—that to me is the compelling message.

I find that we sometimes extrapolate from one data point in this country—things are bad, so things are always going to be bad. Where I think that is really a problem is when we forget to inspire people. We have to inspire people all the time. I frankly would rather see orchestras do one less virtual performance and one more virtual Town Hall meeting where the leadership talks to the donor base about "Here's where we're going. Here's what's going on right now, but just stick with us

because this is the great stuff about to happen and you don't want to miss it!" That's the message that I always want to have—in a recession, in a pandemic, not that I've faced one before—this message of the exciting things to come. If we focus on the negative, then that becomes a

self-fulfilling prophecy. You lose musicians and donors and audience and everybody.

But the end isn't that far away. Let's hope we're back in September of 2021, that's not so far from now.

KC: This reminds me of the advice I've read in your books about long-term planning. It seems like you are advocating "stay the course."

MK: Yes, but I don't want to use the phrase "stay the course." It's the same advice, but it's "what's the most exciting thing that's going to happen." That's what inspires people. I think the work we did with the Baltimore Symphony last December—when they were not in good shape—we created a plan that was talking about what they wanted to do going forward. It's exciting stuff and we raised \$9 million in six weeks. And they are lasting through this pandemic in better shape than a lot of orchestras, having been, just a year ago, in dire straits.

People get inspired by the work we do. That's why they keep giving us money. People love the art you make—so let's focus on that. Let's not focus on the short-term challenge. We whine too much in the arts. We complain, we share the pain too much. It's a bad habit. That's not why people support us—no one gives us money because we're in pain or we're suffering, people give us money because they're inspired by us. We've got to be more disciplined about the way we talk about our challenges.

I'll say this: I think arts organizations did much better now, in this pandemic, than they did in the recession of 2008–09. Much better. But we still have a ways to go.

KC: I'm not an arts manager, but I'd like to know how we can better prepare our managers, and future managers, for crisis planning? We've dealt with recessions, we all expect >

them. How do we prepare for what we don't know is coming? Do we do enough crisis planning? Could we do it better?

MK: I think we could do planning better. None of us know what the next crisis will be. I spent this morning teaching a cohort of organizations in Puerto Rico. For them, the crisis was a hurricane—they didn't predict the hurricane, no one could predict a hurricane. How do you take an exogenous shock and then deal with it? How does that flow through your logic? What logic path do you have handy so you can say "I'm going to pivot this way" because of whatever is happening in the world. It can be something huge, like a big hurricane or coronavirus, or it can be something more modest, like, all of a sudden "*Hamilton* is coming to our city!.....uh-oh."

I think arts organizations don't plan well enough. They plan in a very cursory way, I find. What I do for most organizations is write a plan—so I see a lot of plans. They are way too abstract. They read like a series of wishes. "We will increase individual fundraising. We will strengthen our board. We will build our audience. We will engage our community." That's not a plan, that's a wish. How are you going to do that specifically? What are you going to do to accomplish those things? Most organizations don't plan in that depth. When something happens, they don't have a framework to say "OK, that happened and now we have to think through how we're going to accommodate this new reality." I think that's something that arts organizations, by and large, don't do well enough.

Meredith Snow: In light of the pandemic there has been worldwide recognition of the systemic racism that exists in our country. Is there a way for us to better position ourselves now, during the shutdown, to address this issue within our orchestras?

MK: First of all, inclusivity and equity are long-term issues that have to be addressed in the long-term. By which I'm not saying, "don't make progress now." What I mean is that you can't do something today and it's fixed. For me it's about a sustained and consistent decision to embrace diverse people in every way. Not just through your outreach activities but through the repertoire you program, the people you put in your orchestra, on your board, and in your staff, and the marketing tools you use.

It's about changing the whole quilt of work we do. This is a field that I spend a lot of time in and I care deeply about. I see too many organizations who think they can do one work by a Black composer and now "we have done it." That's not how it works. It's about consistently working to build a family of people who care about you.

And to build this family into a diverse family. What brings people to you is the work you do, the artists you have, and the way you market. Can it be done? I absolutely believe it can be. But it doesn't happen because it's the issue of the day. The organization has to decide to make this a consistent priority. I'll give an example: [The] Cleveland Orchestra made a decision to try to bring in a younger audience. They raised a lot of money and put in the effort for a decade. They made this priority a real focus of their work and they've had some very good results. We need to take the same kind of long-term, in-

stitutional approach to building diversity in our field. Our orchestras have to make a real, long-standing, commitment to diversity.

MS: I think every stratum of the organization needs to accept the responsibility and the desire to make this happen.

MK: I agree 100%. I'm afraid we're living in a period where a lot of organizations will—not with lack of integrity but just with lack of knowledge—write a nice statement, do a few things, and think they're now done.

MS: And then there's always the lack of money....

MK: Yes, but there's lots of money being spent on orchestras in this country right now. It's a question of where it's being spent, how it's being spent. Is this a priority in your budget or not?

KC: For orchestras that are literally not able to use their halls right now, we risk destruction of parts of our arts industry—or at least a serious scale back. How do we talk to our communities and our government leaders about the ripple effects this has in our community and on our future? How do we work with them on this issue?

MK: You won't like my answer. But I'm consistent and I say this all the time. I don't think we reach our government leaders by moralizing. It's our first inclination—"the arts are good for the community, you should give us more, you should be more supportive." Of course they should!

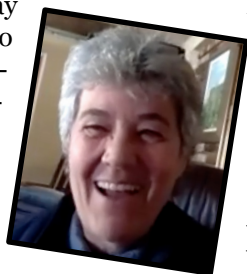
But we have this separation of Arts and State, and they are not supportive. The way I think we get more is by doing more, being more visible. Being exciting and being engaging, rather than moralizing "you should give us more." I think we tend to use moral arguments a lot and I don't think they work because their value system and ours are different. I think we have to win people over by showing how great our work is, how it brings communities together, how it helps them recover, and by being really excited about the great things we're doing as opposed to trying to pressure them, saying how important we are and they should give us money. We've tried that for a lot of years and it hasn't worked particularly well.

KC: The way I'm hearing this is that our leaders will respond to the way our community feels. If our community feels we are important, then our leaders will.

MK: I think that's true. I think the leaders will also respond when they are engaged by us. When they come to something astonishing and they think, "wow that was really great. I need to make sure that keeps happening in my community." As opposed to "you should give us more money." That doesn't mean we shouldn't do lobbying, of course we should. But I think my concept of institutional marketing, getting all segments of our community excited about who we are, is more effective than moralizing.

MS: Have you seen examples of orchestras successfully partnering with their neighboring cultural institutions? Concurrent exhibits or interactive performances?

MK: Oh sure, I do see them but I have to say I see orchestras doing it less than others. I see dance companies working with museums a lot. I think orchestras have been less flexible, in part because they are so large. It has to do with flexibility of planning, reaching out and building relationships across arts and educational institutions. Should it happen more? Absolutely. Could it happen more? Would it benefit everyone? Ab- ➤



olutely.

KC: Has the arts industry grown to such a level that we need a government department, like a Secretary of Culture?

MK: Oh, I would love it! But again, I don't see that happening. You know, our country was founded by the Puritans who thought music and dance were evil and we have had this separation of Art and State. The NEA grants are lovely but they're tiny and we don't have that level of commitment to culture from our Federal Government. We also have so many different departments that employ artists or do arts that I made a very minor and failed attempt to get one administration to actually unify these together. For example, the largest purchaser of musical instruments in the world is the Department of Defense. Imagine if we could collaborate the purchase of instruments between the military and our schools? And get better deals. But we can't at this point. I would love a Department of Culture—I don't think there will be one in my lifetime....but it would be fantastic.

KC: Well let's finish up with a few words of encouragement. I wanted to know what you would say to an artist, who in this moment is thinking about leaving the industry? Considering a career change?

MK: *Don't.* There's been a demand for art going back to the first cave dwellers who painted on their walls. People need inspiration, they need the arts, they need creativity. They value the work we do. It is a challenging industry to be a part of but it's also incredibly rewarding.

What we make is so beautiful and wonderful and inspir-

ing—our communities need this. To leave the field will make you poorer, not just your community poorer.

KC: What would you say to a manager who is trying to lead creatively, crafting that plan right now and trying to get the traction they need?

MK: Plan farther in advance. Think about those exciting projects and then give yourself the luxury of time to find the resources to make it happen. Don't just plan exciting work for six months or a year from now. Also be planning exciting projects for two, three and four years from now. You can always talk about them now and build excitement around them now but you also give yourself the time to make those big exciting projects happen, and to find the revenue to create them.

KC: And then, what would you say to a board who might be pessimistic about the future or is struggling to find the vision and inspiration for the path going forward?

MK: If they are still excited about the art form, if they still want to be on the board of that organization, they are not unique—there are people all over the community who are excited by that art form. The key thing is to organize properly, plan properly, and market properly to find that resource. It's not a lack of interest in the art form right now. That's a myth. There's a tremendous amount of interest in the arts—we just have to make it available at the right price and we have to talk about it in the right way and we have to be exciting enough and we have to go back to dreaming about what makes a great project, rather than saying “what can we afford to do next Thursday?”



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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS

