



HOW WE GOT HERE

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TO BORROW THE PHRASE from Tolstoy, all successful orchestras are alike; each struggling orchestra struggles in its own way. And yet, beneath the variable surface layer composed of business tactics and community-relevance initiatives, there is an underlying theme to the struggle that all orchestras today share. It is the same struggle that engages classical music itself.

I began to think seriously about the problems facing symphony orchestras early in my career as an orchestral musician. I was invited to join the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO) 13 years ago. But before that I played with the Israel Philharmonic for nearly a decade. Back in Israel we had 30,000 subscribers – down from 36,000 – and we were only *beginning* to ask ourselves, “What do we do if all these old people die out and their kids don’t come to replace them?” At age 31, I was one of the few youngsters in the orchestra and so I was enlisted with trying to figure out how to “get more young people” to attend, trying tactics that should now sound familiar, such as casual dress in a series called *The Philharmonic in Blue Jeans*. We had begun also to entertain the notion that we were going to need considerable philanthropic support beyond ticket sales to meet our costs.

I arrived at the BSO in time to watch it snatch itself from the jaws of victory, to witness its subsequent “lost decade,” and to see it emerge again in time for the approach of its 100th anniversary. In the meantime we’ve

all watched as many of our nation’s other orchestras, large and small, stumbled in their turn. It has been a critical decade for the student of orchestral and nonprofit management.

The Future Symphony Institute (FSI) was founded on the premise that the deep, foundational crack underlying the struggles of our orchestral institutions can be identified, understood, and repaired; and that once it *has* been repaired, the specific problems that remain, that appear as the surface cracks in the unique facade of each institution, can also be solved. In fact, we believe that they *have* been solved already, probably many times over, by the thinkers, businessmen, and craftsmen who have been reconciling art with human nature for all of history.

The Narrative

So, in surveying the foundational damage, first of all, it’s appropriate for us to ask: where are we, and more importantly how did we get here? How did orchestras come to find themselves on their knees before the chopping block, so to speak, in the 21st century?

What is often overlooked in the dire obituaries declared periodically and popularly in the press is the fact that interest in classical music has multiplied worldwide. There are more people listening to and participating in it now than ever before. In fact, there are more people

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participating at a higher level of technical and musical mastery today than there ever has been in the past. We have an embarrassment of riches measured by the number of expert musicians and the growing number of orchestras that play better than any that came before them. What's more, classical music is now more widely performed throughout the world than at any point in history. Notably, China, Brazil, Venezuela, and Japan have got into the act with significant investments – including first rate concert halls and conservatories – and already they boast several generations of the world's top musicians to show for their dedication. Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, and Singapore are also now boasting terrific orchestras thanks to major investments. For proponents of progress, there it is.

And yet, overall, attendance at major concerts in the US and Europe has declined. Charitable gifts to institutions of classical music are shrinking. Orchestras are closing their doors. How do we understand these facts?

The popular answers seized upon and broadcast so widely and persistently that they've already become platitudes tell the story like this:

Classical music is no longer relevant to us or to our modern society. Johnny and Suzy – or today we should probably call them 'Brayden and Madison' – can enjoy a perfectly active childhood, be accepted to and graduate from a top-tier university, climb to the heights of success in their careers, raise their own children, and pass from this life without ever having known or heard a symphony. In fact, it's worse than that: even if they are exposed to classical music, Brayden and Madison will not necessarily know anything more about the modern world in which they live than they would have otherwise.

And that's because classical music was written for and by people in another time and place – in a world wholly unlike our own. That was the world we swept away in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Justice (or something very like that). Symphonies were written for aristocracy, and therefore orchestras represent the bastion of an oppressive and offensive elitism. And anyway, Liberty, Equality, and Justice

have not been properly served and are still more imperative and deserving of our philanthropic efforts than any frivolous art form belonging to a vanished class of elites.

Besides, people just don't like classical music anymore. Popular taste has evolved to prefer more spectacular and low-brow entertainment. That orchestras have not learned to compete with the television that Brayden and Madison can watch in the comfort of their own home and their own yoga pants is really the orchestras' fault. Perhaps ticket prices are too high considering the lack of demand – and considering, also, all those whom Liberty, Equality, and Justice have somehow overlooked.

Orchestras are failing to compete with the other technology-driven entertainment products. They do not fit into the modern way we live our lives; they are clumsy with technology and social media. They have fallen behind the general rate of innovation and progress – in technology, society, and business. In fact, their business model is all but dead. And so, as it happens, are their audiences.

Sound familiar? Well, it's not a new story. It's been told and retold by cultural and music critics in roughly this way since at least the 1920s. This is how the problems of the symphony orchestra have been framed by the leading opinion-makers and ideologues of our age. And orchestras have been struggling to answer them.

At the meetings and conferences of the League of American Orchestras and the major granting foundations, in the hallways and boardrooms of our symphony orchestras, and in the print of our nation's respected newspapers you will hear the scramble to answer these questions:

- *How can orchestras become more relevant to their communities?*
- *How can orchestras effect social change?*
- *How do we make classical music more fun and engaging for today's audiences?*
- *How do we lower ticket prices far enough so that everyone comes to concerts?*
- *How should orchestras embrace technology and*

innovation?

- *What should the new business model look like?*
- *And the ever popular and desperate: How do we get more young people to attend the symphony?*

You will not hear that here. To be certain, much valiant effort and good will have gone into answering these questions. But here we are, after almost 100 years of asking and answering them, still with our head on the chopping block. When something is not working, the solution is rarely just to do more of it.

Still, let's pause a moment to examine how these questions and our attempts to answer them have failed us.

Failing to Answer the Question

In the search for relevance, we have seen orchestras initiate after-school and educational programs in their communities, coordinate outreach efforts with hospitals and prisons, feed the hungry, save the salmon, and make heroic efforts to match programming to local demographics. All laudable measures, certainly, but are any of them helping to convince people that classical music is relevant to our modern lives?

What lies beneath these efforts is the assumption that relevance is measured in terms that have little to do with the symphony orchestra or classical music itself. Let's take for our example the most successful and rightly admired of the tactics I just mentioned. If our orchestra is relevant because it provides a place for kids to go where they will be safe and busy until their parents come home from work, then what distinguishes it from a daycare?

Obviously, the answer is that the orchestra is reaching out to underprivileged children whose parents and school districts could not otherwise afford musical instruction. The orchestra is relevant because it brings about social equality, and that is something we all can appreciate. But what makes the orchestra's program different from any of the other welfare or outreach programs offered in the community? The music, of course.

Yes, now we get to the music. The music makes these kids' lives better. *And we do all believe it because it is true.* But the skeptic asks, how is it true? We must be able to

demonstrate that classical music is relevant to these kids' lives if we base the argument for such a program, and hence the argument for the symphony orchestra, on the assertion that it makes their lives better.

To the outsider and the skeptic, maybe it is completely irrelevant and we are only running a daycare. Maybe the program is completely replaceable. And in that case, what is to stop it from *being* replaced with something more easily identifiable as relevant when that comes along? If you can't imagine that ever happening, then imagine instead the derision that would greet the idea today of an after-school program designed to teach underprivileged kids Latin and Greek. There was a time, however, when the idea would not at all have been considered absurd – even Malcolm X studied Latin from prison once he decided to change the direction and momentum of his life.

So how is classical music relevant to our modern age? We are faced again with the question. Give us a measurable proof, we are told because the skeptics in our communities remain unconvinced. Well, we have this after-school program, you see, that reaches this number of children.... and we're back at the top again.

The fact remains that if we cannot explain how classical music is relevant, then we cannot explain how our after-school program or how the symphony orchestra is relevant. And despite the undeniably important difference we have made in some little lives, we have come no closer to answering the original question. Which is not to say that there is anything wrong with our program – or that it *isn't*, in fact, an incredibly beautiful and important thing. Only that we still have to face the question. And we had better *do* so before our children's programs are in danger, too.

The truth is, we *don't* know how we are relevant. And because we don't know, we seize on non-answers that work as diversionary tactics for a while. In this case, we pinned our relevance to the idea of social change. But what happens when the community begins to doubt that we are really changing anything, or changing it quickly enough? Did we give them a real reason why classical music is relevant to them? In fact, we only gave them a utilitarian tactic and an echo of their ideology – the same ideology, mind you, that pushed our back up against the

wall in the first place. We have in a sense told our skeptics that they are right.

We, as a community, are at a loss to explain to outsiders why we are so valuable, why we deserve to be supported. We can't even bring ourselves to declare that classical music is the greatest music ever conceived, unique among cultures without parallel, and that the symphony orchestra is its most ingenious invention. Many of us feel this, yet we don't know how to explain it, so we offer secondary benefits such as the utilitarian argument that it's good for one's brain.

And we are not alone in this conundrum. Actually, we are in very impressive company. Beside us on the scaffold stand Greek and Latin, Classical studies, the Western Literary Canon, Philosophy and Theology, Classical Architecture, and even History and most of the Humanities. All of these disciplines stand accused of irrelevance at best, and crimes against prevailing ideologies at worst. And as the great books are thrown out of our schools and the Classics programs in our universities wither, are our education programs improving? Are our nation's students becoming ever brighter and more adapted to the modern world? Or is the enrollment of college entrants in remedial reading courses completely unrelated?

Of course, we know to expect more of the same backslide if Classical Music is thrown by the wayside. Classical music is born of the accumulated wisdom of the ages, with a canon that represents, like all canons, the mind of a civilization. We are one of what T.S. Eliot called the *Permanent Things*. And yet we have not learned to articulate our own defense. Or rather, like our compatriots, we have *forgotten* how to articulate it.

We glimpse our future in the stories of the disciplines whose fates we will share because we also share their forgetting. The case of Architecture draws for us a particularly familiar scene. We see architecture as both a literal challenge for orchestras and the perfect parallel to illustrate their conundrum.

The Case of Architecture

Following the Second World War, in answer to the same cries for progress and relevance that now shout down our

orchestras, architects *en masse* abandoned the language and principles that represent their canon. Architecture's classical tradition was deemed irrelevant to our modern age. How could the architectural language developed in a tiny corner of the world, by civilizations lit with torches and linked by chariots, speak to and for us in our modern age, in our global community linked by telecommunications and lit by hydrogen bombs? Progress moves ever forward and architecture was required to "catch up."

And so we replaced our "irrelevant" classical architecture and vernacular with the brutalist concrete structures that now stand empty and vandalized, the contorted and faceless buildings that ape kitchen gadgets, the towering cliffs of glass and metal that stare unblinkingly into our empty city centers, and the crumbling apartment buildings that were built like boxes to warehouse people. Sadly, none of these monuments to progress speak to or for the people in whose communities they obtrude. In fact, they speak for nothing except the totalitarian hubris of an architect who thought that he had enough talent and inspiration to sweep away all that had come before him and to remake the world from scratch.

So we watch as these monstrous, inhuman buildings are left to decay, shunned and unloved, while people flee to greener suburbs and country lanes. They would rather spend hours on the road commuting each day than live in these deserted urban canyons. They pour their hearts and souls into acquiring, saving, and restoring modest cottages, grand Georgian buildings, lavish Belle Époque mansions, and old city halls built like Greek temples. It must drive the modernists mad. But it also says something about human nature.

We call this age, after this great modernist experiment performed on us where art wiped the slate clean from the past and "started from zero," *The First Great Extinction*. Orchestras experienced it, too, and it was their audience that was nearly extinguished.

Our Narrow Escape

In a bid for relevance, the ideologues often seize upon the notion that our orchestras must do more to champion living composers and modern compositions. Alex Ross said recently in an interview for NPR, that "I mean,

if anything is going to kill off classical music, it is the unwillingness of so many institutions to really invest and to support and to promote contemporary music.”

It's true that the art of composition for orchestras – and to a lesser degree all classical instrumentations, such as quartets and opera – has slackened to a slow, uninspired grind. While modern art museums manage to create massive material successes from art that is bizarre and abstract, its musical equivalent, modernist avant-garde music drove our audiences away, without even gaining much support among the musicians who perform it. We are told that new music has always been harshly received during every era, but this time, I think, it's different.

As *New York Times* critic Bernard Holland wrote in 2003:

[Composers] have indulged the creation of a narcissistic avant-garde speaking in languages that repel the average committed listener in even our most sophisticated American cities. Intelligent, music-loving and eager to learn, such listeners largely understand that true talent and originality must find their own voice. What they do not understand is why the commitment to reach and touch listeners in the seats does not stand at the beginning of the creative process, as it did with Haydn and Mozart. This kind of art-for-art's-sake has much to answer for. 'New' has come to equal 'suspect' among wary patrons.

Holland continues: “Fleeing audiences are one more symptom, the cause being a public art that has been abandoned by its avant-garde and uses up its given natural resources with profligacy. Audiences are not to blame. They are smarter than Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt want to think they are.”

When composers switched to the alien languages that repelled normal people with normal instincts and drives, as Holland pointed out, the core of our audience headed for the door. For a time, we officially joined the modernist cult where everybody is required to compliment the Emperor's new clothes in order to fit in and to keep up with the fashion.

Today's composers suffer from, in the words of Léon Krier, “the fear of backwardness.” I would add that orchestras, too, not unlike teenagers, feel awkward –

trapped in a “fear of backwardness.” We want so much to be cool. We want everyone to like us. Eventually we will have to grow up and realize that trying to be all things to all people, copying all the trends and fads in an effort to be liked, is a fool's game. We have to recall that the cool kids usually peaked in high school; it was the nerdy or socially unimpressive kid who went on to do something truly remarkable. We are that nerdy kid. And we are *already* doing something that's remarkable.

Orchestras are sitting on an embarrassment of riches: enough music for any one person's lifetime of daily listening. If there were never another new work written for orchestra, we would still somehow survive on what has been composed so far. In fact, we have been doing just that for the last 40 years. Every day, there are a third of a million children born in this world who have never heard Beethoven's 5th symphony, and a good number of them will count hearing it as one of the most exciting moments of their lives – some will even insist on playing it themselves. In any case, they will want to hear it again and again.

And that is because the very nature of classical music makes it a thing that isn't disposed of after listening – it is perennial. It even improves upon repeated listening, revealing more of its value. The classical music experience is about coming back over the years to reconsider a piece, living with it, knowing it intimately. New compositions become part of the canon only as they demonstrate that they, too, possess that perennial quality, that they belong among the *Permanent Things*.

During this cold war of sorts with living composers, we have let a few come over the border for supervised visits, but our audiences still don't trust them, and frankly, neither do the orchestral musicians themselves. Too many of us have felt betrayed by the fashionable 20th-century composers with their ugly and inhuman sound art – rather like the obnoxious cityscapes of concrete, glass, and metal that have chased human settlement into the suburbs.

Our audiences, voting with their feet when they smell a modernist lurking, have actually been our best friends in this regard as they have been the firewall that prevented us from jumping head first into the shallow end of the avant-garde kiddie pool.

But some happy and notable exceptions exist in the popularity of new music composed for video games and film. What should be pointed out is that both of these genres employ perfectly understandable and coherent musical ideas in order to drive real human emotions, without any avant-garde agenda to be original or groundbreaking. The top compositional talent is going into these applications of orchestral music because there's a living to be made there. There's also a big lesson to be drawn from the way audiences embrace new music that plays on real and natural human responses.

On Human Nature

The big lesson for the symphony orchestra at the end of the day may just be a lesson in human nature. It seems to be something we moderns are particularly good at forgetting. Or rather we prefer to think of ourselves the way we wish we were, based on some ideal or ideology, instead of the way we actually are. Either way, the error multiplies when we begin to make calculations based on our delusions.

The insistence that we lower ticket prices, either as our duty to relevance or else to increase demand, is worth examining in this light. It begins with assumptions about human nature that go largely unnoticed in popular debate. The first is that everyone has an interest in orchestral concerts – that there is a price low enough at which everyone would attend. Even more pointedly, we assume that the interest is equally distributed throughout the demographic categories we break our communities into and measure them by. And underlying that practice is the awkward assumption that demographic categories speak more loudly than internal motivations. This is also the problem of the widespread panic about “young people.”

If we look closely at the issue, the first error we should see is the fact that while classical music is for everyone, we cannot therefore deduce that everyone is for classical music. And that's quite all right. There is not a thing in the world, beyond our most basic needs, that appeals to *everyone*. Every successful businessman knows this, and he narrows his target to include only the people to whom his product does or would appeal.

My wife, for instance, is the very last person you'll ever find at a football game. And the NFL, which operates as a nonprofit and which has decided specifically to target women in its marketing efforts, never once puts itself in my wife's way. She does not see advertisements in any of the magazines she reads, programs she watches, or websites she frequents. Despite the fact that the NFL spends money on advertising to women in all those places, it clearly doesn't waste its effort on her. It is not targeting women indiscriminately. It knows that it will appeal only to some women and has made intelligent decisions about where it will and will not find those women.

This brings us to the second important error that orchestras are making in their assumptions. And that is that we assume more about people than we should based on the way they look. The only thing that should matter to the orchestra is a person's potential affinity for classical music – his deeply rooted desire to learn, to experience, to expand in the direction of classical music. That may coincide with other motivations, such as an interest in literature or wine, or a love of football or lawn ornaments. Who knows? Each person's list will be different, and it may change during a lifetime. But where all the lists of concertgoers overlap, we find a picture that tells us more about our audience than any tally of their appearances. More than a chart that tells us their age, their hair color, their skin color, their weight, their income bracket, or their shoe size, when we look at *psychographics*, the study of internal motives, what we see is some common chord to which they all vibrate.

This is what the NFL understands and why you'll find their ads in some women's magazines but not in others. They are targeting a psychographic, not a demographic. And this is a more important way to understand human nature. It's not only more dignified, it's also more *true*.

The next assumption to examine is that which tells us that lowering prices increases interest. Classical music, like so many other things that hold a person's interest for a lifetime, is an aspirational pursuit. When the wine industry learned that the key to increasing demand was increasing complexity and price, they created a world of connoisseurs and enthusiasts. These people enjoy the pursuit and attainment of ever-deeper knowledge and earned familiarity. Their striving makes their enjoyment

of a thing that much greater. This is the mark of the aspirational character. And it exists in all of us to some degree or another.

To make a thing easier to attain lowers its value in a very meaningful way. This is not news and business has understood it for a long time. But it is especially important that we consider it because the aspirational character is exactly that to which classical music appeals. Orchestras should be concerned solely with whether or not they are reaching everyone motivated by aspiration, regardless of their demographic assignment. And orchestras should be most aware that the thing they are offering remains something *worth* striving for. If they don't, they are working at cross-purposes with human nature – a very difficult thing to overcome, indeed.

Perhaps it makes sense, in light of these considerations, that our audiences should be older. In fact, it seems as though they mostly always have been. Without examining the nature and character of youth or the understandable time restraints that keep parents away from concerts, the reward for a lifetime spent learning and growing in wisdom may rightly be a greater love for classical music. There is even some new research to suggest that it *is* exactly so. But again, what makes young Brayden and Madison like their grandparents Johnny and Suzy, if they all do come to concerts, is their aspirational character. For our purposes, it makes them more alike than their age makes them different.

By now we should already be able to see the problem with the assumptions underlying cries for the concert experience to become more “fun” and engaging or more technologically advanced. The assumption is that these are the reasons people attend concerts. But we know no such thing. In fact, evidence suggests the opposite.

Early in my career as a musician, I heard critics cry that phonograph records were going to put live music out of business. After that was clearly not the case, the home entertainment center became the next technological predator to threaten our extinction. Now we fear the idea of streaming concerts or free recordings. Why would people leave their homes if they can listen to the Berlin Philharmonic in their living rooms? Why indeed? Maybe there is something else at work, something nested within human nature, to explain why people leave their homes

to be where others like themselves are to be found.

Fun, engaging, flashy: the mall, the stadium, the movie multiplex. But these are not places we go to commune with others like ourselves. In the modernist model, the greatest sin is being behind the times, being backwards. However, our little corner of society has already purposefully turned its back on “keeping up.” The people who would be our next audiences are weary of the gigantic, the mega, the bigger-as-better. They keep using the word “authentic” to describe a certain something, an experience they want for their lives, a way to connect with each other, something to heal their world-weariness. There has been just about enough excitement drummed into their lives.

We know that people are becoming increasingly put-off by the slick technology that keeps their lives hurtling forward at a fast-paced frenzy. There is a growing resentment towards the feeling that we are chained to our gadgets. The idea that technology will save us comes from the giddy technophilic culture of gadget consumers who haven't got the joke yet that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Even while our technology changes, human nature does not.

Why do we envision an orchestra hall full of flat-screen TVs, like a sports bar for nerds? Why on earth would we think that people fiddling on devices during concerts would help them immerse themselves in the music we are fiddling? It's one thing to stream a fine concert around the world, it's quite another to have a person in the live event taking themselves *out* of the experience of real life in order to observe the virtual. Why do we think common courtesy or the basic etiquette of remaining still and quiet in a concert hall is a barrier to attendance when that's everyone's most basic expectation of decorum in a movie theater?

There are even those who think that a selling point for audiences would be to have musicians perform while using iPads instead of sheet music. Do we really think it's interesting for people to watch someone else using an iPad?

The Slow Food Movement that started in Italy became the worldwide phenomenon behind the rise of farm-to-table restaurants and the concept of cooking as craft. Its purpose was to put the brakes on industrialized food

and to bring people together again at the table. This is a backlash phenomenon and should not be underestimated. Human beings have a reset button.

Perhaps we need a Slow Music Movement, though I am not meaning we should offer entire concerts of Bruckner's greatest Adagios. What is wonderful about live classical music is that it *is* authentic. It needs no technology other than electric lights. It *does* slow down the pace of our frantic lives, and it *does* bring us together.

The Reality Check

We are here this weekend to propose that the problem is not that classical music hasn't kept up with the times. On the contrary, it has become sick and lost, caught in an identity crisis, because it has, in fact, very successfully kept up with the times – and our society is in deep aesthetic and social crisis. We are collectively in denial, or at least a state of forgetting, about human nature and the human experience. Classical music, as one of the permanent things, points us back to the truth. It's little wonder that in an age of ideology, the truth, or what points to it, is in danger.

We are not going to be able to escape who and what we are: A traditional European music, with at least half of its parental lineage traced back to the Church; highly competitive and meritocratic; elitist; with a widely loved, hierarchical canon composed by dead, white, European men. In this age of multiculturalism, we should simply be part of that plurality. Let it be what it is, for it surely cannot be what it's not.

We all know the danger in trying to be something one is not. It is the quickest way to become ridiculous. And orchestras today, because they don't want to be what they are, are more like a guy in a midlife crisis: they start comparing themselves to youth culture, trying to be cool, forgetting that there is nothing as uncool as trying to be something you're not – especially trying to act younger than you are, cooler relative to a youth culture you have no business hanging around. They even adopt the rebellious stance of the ideological movements of youth, shake their fists at their heritage and vow to make the world a better place by repudiating anyone over age 30. Their new spaceship-shaped concert halls are like Ferraris, driven by

old lawyers with toupees, compensating for what they think they lack. One caveat, of course: there could be no more fitting a concert hall for Los Angeles than Frank Geary's embodiment of that city in the Disney Hall. If architecture is frozen music, then the song they froze was "Hooray for Hollywood." Context does matter.

A New Approach

But we'll have none of that. And rather than beat the bushes for more answers to the same misleading questions, in the vain hope that more of what has not been working will somehow work better, we propose that it's time to look more closely at the questions themselves, and to reframe the problems that face classical music and the symphony orchestra if necessary. This is where our work begins. And it's rather more important than anything that comes after.

It has become a ubiquitous and lazy habit in our modern age to speak in soundbites and to think in ideologies. But you cannot penetrate a problem very deeply unless you're willing to challenge that way of thinking. And we intend to dig down to the very foundation. We intend to understand who and what we are as human beings, as an art form, and as institutions. From there we can hope to learn why we are. And when we know ourselves in this way, then we will also know our place in the great stream of human history – past, present, and future.

Our mission is to relegitimize classical music. The problem is a philosophical one. And as I pointed out earlier, we are in this predicament in very good company. There are around us brilliant and passionate minds working on this same problem for the sake of many other important disciplines. And they are immediately sympathetic to our cause. It is our great encouragement, here at the Institute, that every one we approached, however high their station and achievements, was moved to join us in our work without reservation. This is a testament to the power of classical music, and points us to where we will find its friends.

When, with their help, we have repaired the philosophical foundation and we have something firm to build upon, we can address seriously the structural damage above. We start with the conviction that every tactical challenge and problem that orchestras face has

been confronted already in other business sectors. The problems can be broken down, prioritized, and ultimately solved.

Some of those problems we have already identified; and we'll even broach some of them this weekend. The first is orchestras' need to understand the unshakable principles of a branding strategy based on longevity and a culture of excellence. This is not something that businesses make up as they go along. It is very well understood by the leading and oldest brands in the world, and orchestras should count themselves among that particular company. But it requires above all a very strong conviction about who one is and what one represents.

The second problem we'll mention is the need for orchestras to seriously consider the architecture of their concert halls. Huge investments are made based on ideology and whimsy; and too often they turn into costly mistakes that an orchestra has to live with for all its foreseeable future. A hall that doesn't serve either the tradition inside it or the community outside it is a waste twice over. For example, consider what happened to the Philadelphia Orchestra after they built the Kimmel Center. They moved into the new compound after abandoning the opulent and exquisite Academy of Music. If you haven't seen it, do go. It's right there on Market Street – the one that looks like the headquarters of an insurance company. Or just compare the way your local high school was built in 1930, beautiful and inspiring in any town, with the ones we see nowadays, built to look like “replacement-parts wholesale distribution centers,” in the words of Tom Wolfe.

Another looming challenge we must confront is the fact that charities have become a massively profitable business for which we must compete for the philanthropic dollar. Our true competition is not other art forms but breast cancer, AIDS, Africa, and the latest and newest causes that posit life-or-death and poverty issues as outweighing the needs of the arts. Even Bill Gates recently admonished the public for giving to culture when Africa's problems awaited our attentions. To call it a war of emotions for people's contribution is not to overstate the case of philanthropy today. And it's not likely to change.

We also need to begin a serious discussion about the role of unions – both the musicians' and the stagehands'

– in orchestras' present troubles. Again, this means a long, hard look and a willingness to question what we have previously taken for granted. Unions have the opportunity to take the lead and to help shape the changes our orchestras need, rather than wait for change to be inevitably forced upon them.

Whereas recordings were once profitable, with pieces of the pie to be shared, they now have no more value than do promotional tools. If the management that employs musicians is trying to promote them, why should the musicians stand in their way? And if they made some money, too, perchance, shouldn't it be encouraged? Right now there is no incentive for orchestras in the US to compete for soundtrack recordings and new music, which would go a long way in promoting them. The union needs to do everything it can to allow orchestras to record, regardless of what it might mean for special interest groups within the union. The stagehands union has effectively priced their participation in such a way that it's often cheaper for orchestras to do nothing, sitting on their hands rather than incurring the cost of turning on the lights for a Monday night concert or lecture. It cannot continue to be more profitable *not* to do business than to do it.

Boards and management also represent part of the problem. Too often management consists of former musicians who know much about music and little or nothing about the business principles that should define their new line of work. And boards too often know little or nothing about orchestras and the particular market principles that rule our art form. Much of the failure in current policies derives from the application of industrial or corporate theory to an art form that it won't and cannot fit. And when the board presents such policies, orchestral managements frequently are not armed with the proper business training to refute or to reject it.

We have today another sad story to tell about the seepage of corporate America's organizational tactics into the orchestral model.

The Corporate Fallacy

As I speak, the highly esteemed Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, which is to say its musicians, has been locked

out of its home by the very management and board that were entrusted to ensure its stability. After shifting away much of the funding that was meant for the orchestra, the board is now demanding that the ensemble be downsized, much of the labor outsourced, and their work load increased for less pay, all while its president (this is a nonprofit, mind you) received lavish bonuses – bonuses that amount to more than a musician would make as his entire annual salary.

Atlanta is a fundraiser’s dream: classified as an “Alpha World City,” site of the headquarters of six Fortune 100 companies and many Fortune 500 companies, and with 75% of the world’s Fortune 1000 maintaining a presence in the city. Why should an arts organization be having such a hard time raising funds in this place that is a piece of fundraising heaven?

For this, we can look at the gradual seeping of the American Corporate Culture and its organizational structure into the American orchestra. For an art form that thrived long before there were managers, this is what we call “the tail wagging the dog,” a situation where the “winner takes all” ethos has permeated the hallways of the concert hall. Boards simply accept in the US that conductors get paid 40 times what the players make and that the top soloists flow to the highest bidders, never mind that in this eco-system, there must be a balance at both ends of the food chain. There is something missing in our market responsiveness.

Perhaps the fact that Atlanta is a haven for the most powerful corporations in the world makes it a natural place for this seepage to occur through a board of trustees, especially given the fact that *their* world is what they know best, not ours. In corporate America, it is commonly accepted – unblinkingly – that the CEO makes an absurdly high amount of money while the corporate board looks out for its profits. Labor, the guys who make the “product,” are viewed as means to an end – in our case, the manufacturers of “pleasing sounds” – and like all labor, should be obtained at the lowest price in order to “stay competitive.”

Musicians, who should most accurately be understood as highly skilled craftsmen, are now referred to as “human resources,” or even interchangeable commodities by some mistaken leaderships. During a recent lockout, the

Louisville Orchestra searched for replacement musicians on Craigslist, indicating the esteem in which their positions were held.

The result is an organizational structure incompatible with the very art form, one that cannibalizes the goose that lays the golden eggs. Whereas managers were enlisted to support the daily work of the musicians, now, within the Corporate America Model, musicians are working to support ever-expanding ranks of management, and the managers manage the boards to keep it that way. New positions within the management structure are being created to address newly found issues. Of course, the boards don’t make money from this, but they get to keep winning the game they know so well, as it earned them the money that gave them the ability to be philanthropic in the first place. When you’re a hammer, all you can see is nails.

This scenario could be regarded as orchestra’s “Corporate America Fallacy.” To be clear, I do not point these flaws out because they are morally wrong; I describe this scenario because it won’t work and it is part of how we got here.

WHEN I STARTED thinking about these problems 20 years ago, I couldn’t have told you that this was where I’d eventually be – that I would come to understand the problems facing orchestras in this light. My goal has always been the truth, and it has surprised me as much as a journey like this may surprise anyone who starts out knowing so little. But like those who know little, I thought I knew much. Honesty keeps me on my path. It is important, however difficult, for us to be honest about what is and isn’t working, about how and why we do things, and about who and what we are, on the very deepest levels.

We already know very well *why* we’re here, and what’s at stake: it’s Atlanta and Minnesota and Philadelphia and Louisville; it’s the children who otherwise won’t hear Beethoven’s 5th symphony, who otherwise won’t be offered an instrument or learn to play it; it’s Mozart and Mahler and Mendelssohn; it’s Stradivari and Amati; it’s a lifetime of intimate and meaningful moments where we connect in wordless harmony with the souls who came before us and those who will come after. It is our place

in the endless tradition of a universal language. It is our opportunity to touch that most beloved of *Permanent Things*.

