

The Public Value of Orchestras: notes for the FIM 4th International Orchestras Conference

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May 12, 2017



Presentation Structure

1. Land acknowledgment
2. Why orchestras are hard to advocate for
3. Options for tailoring our message
4. Practical advice
5. Following up

Land acknowledgment

We gather today in the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe. Nous nous reunissons aujourd'hui dans le territoire traditionnel des peuples Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.

Because of their careful stewardship over the centuries, we are able to meet in this glorious city.

Why it's hard to advocate for orchestras (1)

We live in an ever-more pluralistic society.

Orchestras are culturally specific

Why it's hard to advocate for orchestras (2)

Orchestras cost a lot.

Do we pass the definition of sustainable development—that is, do we give at least as much back to the eco-system as we take out?

Why it's hard to advocate for orchestras (3)

Musicians, management, and board members are challenged to “sing from the same songsheet”.

Can we present a simple and coherent message about orchestras when the stakeholders hold such diverse perspectives?

Why it's hard to advocate for orchestras (4)

We don't have good research to work with.

We cherry pick and resort to anecdote.

Why it's hard to advocate for orchestras (5)

Are we playing a zero sum game? if we succeed and get more, do others get less?

Do we really win, in that scenario? Does anyone?

So...?

Given all this:

We need a lot of material to
work with!

Options for tailoring our message

My inspiration:

John Holden: *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy: Why culture needs a democratic mandate (2006)*

<https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Culturalvalueweb.pdf>

Options for tailoring our message

Holden's contention?

We need to be prepared to make the case for culture in ways that make sense to different people, that are sensitively pitched to their concerns and preoccupations.

Options for tailoring our message

Intrinsic value:

How does orchestral music touch us, move us, bring us in contact with our essential humanity?

The audience for intrinsic value arguments?

A public that is already inclined to love us.

Options for tailoring our message

Instrumental values of the work we do: how other things are achieved through the work of orchestras. Economic value, social value, educational value, therapeutic value, aspirational values, the value of a sponsor associating its brand with the work of an orchestra.

The audience for instrumental values arguments? Orchestras' authorizers: funders, sponsors, collaborative partners outside our field.

Options for tailoring our message

Institutional value of the work we do: how orchestras symbolize and model ways that people—caring, smart, gifted people—solve problems together, and create great beauty from chaos.

The audience for institutional value arguments?

The general public, people unlikely to come to our concerts as they currently understand them to be, but whose appreciation for us is vital.

Practical advice

All politics is local. Start close to home.

You don't need to get a meeting with the Minister or Prime Minister to make your case.

Practical advice

Participate in every available public consultation process.
Put orchestras on the agenda.

Practical advice

Pitch your message to meet the concerns of the people you're meeting with. *Whenever possible, emphasis local impact and local contacts.*

Practical advice

Be nice to people. Lay the groundwork. You never know who will be able to help you down the road.

Practical advice

Be relentless. Bore yourself.
Repeating the same message over and over again can make us tired, but it's only through repetition that we can get the message through.

Practical advice

There may be a time for confrontation, but if it's inconsistent with your own or your organization's values AND you want to sustain the conversation, consider different approaches.

Practical advice

Be empathetic, personable, and genuine. Politicians are tired, overworked, and often asked to do things entirely outside their power. *Make meeting with you the highlight of their week.*

Questions/follow-up?

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