

I. ORCHESTRA FINANCING

3. Visionary orchestra management

Bruce Ridge (United States)

Chairman, International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM)

It is a great honour to be with you all today in Amsterdam, representing the musicians of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, or ICSOM. ICSOM was founded in 1962, and is comprised of over 4000 musicians from America's top 51 orchestras, and we are a Players' Conference of the American Federation of Musicians. The "international" part of our name might seem a bit of a misnomer, but when we were founded we had Canadian members as well until they formed the Organization of Canadian Symphonic Musicians. We remain in close contact with musicians across the world, and are eager to be advocates for the arts everywhere.

I believe that, in a world that occasionally slumps with the weight of its burdens, the musicians that comprise countless orchestras around the world offer a message of hope that citizens of every nation are eager to hear. Supporting the arts is not just a mission that keeps the past alive, but it is in fact a mission that empowers the future. Countless studies have demonstrated the value of the arts in educating the next generation, where students who participate in music and other art disciplines are far more likely to stay in school and actually enjoy learning.

There is nothing about our message that is about the past. Indeed we are here to imagine and plan for a greater future... a future articulated by John F. Kennedy when he said:

"I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft. I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens."

As the artistic quality of our orchestras continues to rise, the standard of achievement has indeed been elevated, but the recognition of the value of musicians in many places is still sadly lacking.

When we speak of vision, of visionary managers or visionary musicians, we are describing a quality that inspires by seeing opportunities that others might overlook. We must see every crisis as an opportunity. In the worldwide economic downturn, many orchestras in America have faced just such a crisis.

We work in a field that uses a lot of nebulous catch phrases and engages in a seemingly constant and largely ineffective self-study. For the orchestras that comprise the membership of ICSOM, this has resulted in a phrase widely used among managers that calls for "a new model", as if there is a national solution for the local environments that cause an orchestra, or other entity, to succeed or fail. We find that, oddly enough, there is a tendency to study our industry's failures in order to create a so-imagined new model, while orchestras that have thrived and been innovative throughout the recession often go undocumented. What other industry studies its failures while overlooking its successes in order to create a new business model?

Our belief is that the symphonic field too often promotes a negative message from within. And simply put, people will donate to and invest in organizations that inspire them, and they will not invest in organizations that question their own sustainability.

Every arts organization depends on a great deal of good will to accomplish its mission. Everyone in this field would agree that we should aspire to create positive relationships among all facets of our organizations. However, few truly perceive the building of positive relationships as a prerequisite for achieving an orchestra's mission.

Currently in the United States, several of our member orchestras face great difficulties. The Honolulu Symphony, which was founded by the people of Hawaii over 110 years ago, currently

resides in bankruptcy. The Louisville Orchestra, famed across the world for its recordings of music by American composers, has fought off a bankruptcy claim from its management, and the musicians have emerged as positive advocates for their city and community and as effective fund raisers for their own orchestra.

And of course, as is well known to us all, the great Detroit Symphony remains silent as it seeks to negotiate an agreement with its management after a strike of over 20 weeks. It is there that the rhetoric of a new model emerges as a focus and concern for many American musicians.

But elsewhere, visionary orchestras have been led to a period of new heights. The Metropolitan Opera appears in 1500 theatres in 46 countries as part of its international broadcasts. The Los Angeles Philharmonic has just appeared in theatres across North America. The New York Philharmonic has announced it has nearly doubled its fund raising goal. And of course, the Nashville Symphony, led by our friend and panel member Alan Valentine, has emerged from a crisis that flooded its renowned new concert hall to achieve an even higher level of acclaim among the citizens of its city, and with three new Grammy awards as well.

Visionary leadership of our orchestras will serve to inspire us all, and can guide our profession and art form into a future that can be greater than our past.

Many see the landscape before us as treacherous for the arts. But artists with vision, and in that group I include both managers and musicians, can see things that others might not. We must set visionary goals as we aspire to new heights for our civilization and our children. Together, we can imagine and create a future where our orchestras are even more relevant to a world that endlessly seeks inspiration.

