

Distributing the workload: better performances, fresher musicians
by Bo Olsson (Sweden)

Dear colleagues! Today's way of life and living are often described as a 24 hour society. All kind of services are provided at any hour of the day, which of course means that the regulation of working hours needs to be more and more flexible.

The last is also true for orchestras. Today, we are requested to seek new audiences, new venues and to reach out in society in a much broader way than before. As a result, the planning of rehearsals, concerts and other outreaching activities gets more complicated and demands more flexibility.

One way of handling this new complexity is to shorten planning periods and, as a result, produce less detailed and more unsecure working schedules and conditions for individual musicians.

This, to define flexibility as shortsightedness is, in my opinion, a serious mistake. A much better way, both for employers and employees, managers and musicians, is to recognize the need for a system of long term planning suited for today's orchestras.

So, what would such a system look like? One solution is a frame-work model. This means that the long term planning gives the frame for a specific period. The length of this period is of course negotiable, but one easy definition of this period is to equal it with a concert season. The frame can be constructed in different ways, but one example could be that it regulates all days off, the maximum span of working hours for each day during the period and also, if possible, the concerts/performances during the period. The frame work model also requires that precise working schedules, hour by hour, are decided upon and presented for the musicians on a regular basis within the frame-period. A reasonable demand, in my opinion, is that the individual schedule for each musician should be presented at least on a 8 week basis.

I believe that this model is suitable for all kinds of orchestras, given the possibility to adjust the length of periods to the needs of the individual ensemble.

There are of course many orchestras who already have planning systems superior to what I described above, often covered by agreements, national or local, but I am quite sure that other orchestras do have a need to find a functional long term planning system.

But, regardless of our systems for planning, do we have a common interest with our employers in creating a healthy long term planning? My answer is yes, and I think we have a win-win situation.

One argument from managers/ employers regarding planning is the need for flexibility for both artistic, economical and practical reasons. But what is that argument worth? In my view, it is more a defence for bad planning routines and an unwillingness to change those routines.

Bad routines are almost always costly routines, so with a little effort from our employers, they can save a good amount of money and at the same time create a better long term planning, which means better abilities for us to plan our lives, both at work and at home.

So, we are hopefully able to create a long term planning situation where musicians are given the possibility to have control over and feel secure about their situation, which give us healthier and better orchestras, and where management, administration and economy departments works in a more efficient way, which give stronger organisations.

In other words, a win-win situation. So, how do we achieve this? This is of course up to each orchestra, as every ensemble is unique in its own right.

Therefore, I will stop here, and look forward for comments and shared experiences from the other panelists and, of course, from the floor on this issue.

Thank You.