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## The Jurassic Symphony: Part Two Taking on the Dinosaur: Strategic Options for Symphony Organizations

by

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## Editor's Digest

### ***The Jurassic Symphony: Part Two***

*Taking on the Dinosaur: Strategic Options for Symphony Organizations*

**J**ust one year ago, authors Robert Spich and Robert Sylvester led our readers on a fascinating ecological tour of what they characterized as the "Jurassic" symphony. In this issue, they explore a range of strategic choices that may be available to symphony organizations.

Robert Spich brings to this essay the perspective of a professor of management and international business; Robert Sylvester brings that of a professional musician and performing arts school dean.

### **Recognizing a Problem; Understanding a Strategy**

The essay opens with a discussion of the need for a true understanding of an individual symphony organization's challenges, and the suggestion that fixing operational problems or making incremental adjustments are not strategies. The authors then offer a detailed explanation of strategic response, examining both "hard-approach" and "soft-approach" strategies.

### **The Transformational Symphony**

Following a brief discussion of the pluses and minuses of both "solo" and "cooperative" strategies is an extended explanation of transformational strategies and ways in which symphony organizations might employ them. This section includes contemporary examples from several U.S. orchestras. The essay concludes with presentation of what the authors call "crazy-but-maybe-not-so-crazy" ideas for both solo and cooperative strategic actions.

Although this is an extended essay, it reads easily, as our West Coast writing team throws just enough curve balls to keep their readers' attention. Also, be prepared for several good laughs!

## **The Jurassic Symphony: Part Two Taking on the Dinosaur: Strategic Options for Symphony Organizations**

*Editor's Note: Part One of this essay appeared in the April 1998 issue of Harmony. The essay's title derives from a cartoon metaphor that appeared in the New York Times depicting a conductor in the middle of a Jurassic-period scene.<sup>1</sup> To refresh readers' memories, the population ecology perspective is an important form of organizational analysis based on the application of known Darwinian principles to understand better the dynamics of relationships between and among organizations in their environments. The value of this approach lies in its analysis of the symphony orchestra industry's issues in a systematic way, and providing an understanding of the dynamics of those issues. Part One began with some assumptions that unpinned the analysis. It is worthwhile to recapitulate them here to set the tone for Part Two.*

### **Some Basic Ecological Assumptions**

- ◆ There is a diversity of forms in any ecology of organizations such as the musical arts community. This reflects a unique but dynamic set of relationships between a grouping of organizations and the environment.
- ◆ The symphony orchestra is just one type of musical organizational form within a greater classical music community made up of populations of different types of musical arts organizations. It is also the largest. Because the focus was on the aggregate (industry level of analysis) of symphony orchestras, the discussion analyzed the general conditions of the population of symphony organizations, rather than the specific conditions or fates of individual symphony orchestras.
- ◆ The ecology of an organizational environment is the pattern of conditions, institutions, and organizations that describes a known community. Resources determine the mix of organizations, and the nature of relationships among them, in the musical-arts community. Over time, these communities develop webs of interdependencies and power relationships. Modes of interactions can range from strong competition to neutral observation to cooperative partnerships, depending on the resource profile of an environment (quantity, quality,

distribution, utility, substitutability, and access), and the demands made on it.

- ◆ Larger organizations, such as symphony orchestras, need greater amounts and varieties of resources to sustain them. The relationship between the resource state of an environment and the use pattern create a dynamic and ever changing set of industry conditions that can change more rapidly than any organizations' ability to keep up with the changes. This implies that survival strategies that worked in the past can be inappropriate and dysfunctional in the present. Organizations which monitor and adapt to this changing profile tend to survive and thrive. Those that do not, can fail and disappear.
- ◆ The onus of organizational survival lies with the organization and/or its community. Because the ability to adapt is distributed and developed unequally, a population (industry) of organizations is rarely stable, as new organizational types and forms continually arise, grow, and disappear. The demise of any one organization is not cause for alarm and is considered a natural outcome of population dynamics. The larger industry trends that affect the survivability of the population of symphony organizations are, however, an issue of concern.
- ◆ Successful music organizations represent successful adaptations to surrounding environments. Adaptation takes form in changes in organizational outputs, structure, internal process, and culture. Species variation demonstrates that more than one survival strategy is possible for an organizational form. There is no single unitary symphony organization form that is superior and must be copied and mimicked by others. Rather, there is a range of adaptations that are possible given variations in environments.

## **Don't Take Survival for Granted**

Having laid out a set of ecological principles and their effects, the authors explored the cultural conundrum of free choice: given free choice, most people would not choose to support (i.e., pay for) a tradition which they neither share nor value highly. This raised the possibility that symphony organizations are really facing a much larger cultural-cycle issue, one that points to the roles that internationalization, multiculturalism, and "Americanization" of the symphony orchestra play in shaping this music's future.

Part One closed with the message that symphony organizations cannot take their survival for granted, no matter the glory of their traditions, the quality of their products, their associations with former success, or the rightness of their intentions.

With the causes of decline and the sources of challenge that make change so difficult to manage now identified, this second installment moves to the issue of response to these challenges and the strategic options that seem to be available to symphony orchestras as an industry.

## Taking on the Dinosaur! Beyond Metaphors

As poignant as the Jurassic metaphor may be, as with all metaphors, it has its limitations. For one, it breeds a certain passivity in viewpoint if taken too literally. We know that the logic of Darwinian selection points to an ever changing mix of life forms due to the eventual demise and extinction of those that do not adapt. It is an inexorable and “necessary” change achieved through selection among the candidate life forms that spring up, and not through any willingness of a particular life form to change itself, to metamorphose into something else. The brontosaurus could not willingly change itself into one of the adaptable mammals that succeeded it in the chain of time. Time and adaptive selection define the palette of life that paints the landscape of any time period. Depending on the nature of the web of community interdependencies, demise of one form can be either detrimental or beneficial to the rest of the community’s members, depending on how resource profiles change with the corresponding shift in mix of community members. The message is simple: environments are just a given set of circumstances and forces at work—nature is neither for you, nor against you. The problem of survival rests essentially with the organizations and not with nature.<sup>2</sup>

*“... environments are just a given set of circumstances and forces at work—nature is neither for you, nor against you. The problem of survival rests essentially with the organizations and not with nature.”*

The symphony organization has just that problem of long-term survival. Being a large-scale musical beast, it exerts a heavy demand for resources to sustain it. Its size, and the weight of tradition it carries, makes it slow to respond to changing conditions. However, the symphony orchestra does not have to remain a fixed organizational form stuck in an era and particular ecological niche for all time, waiting for its declining fate. Symphony organizations are willful human constructs and artificial inventions that can change themselves. A hallmark of human organizations is the ability to anticipate and prepare for the future. Unlike the brontosaurus, symphony organizations have choice. They can anticipate the future and forecast trends. They can take initiative, change direction of effort, move operations, and reinvent themselves. This suggests that passive acceptance need not be the logical response to environmental conditions that seem beyond control. The essence of strategic choice is the freedom to fail. But to exercise that freedom, one must make some choices and take some risks.

## The First Step: Problem Recognition

Recent developments show that individual symphony organizations and their professional associations have not remained passive or distantly ignorant to the declining fortunes of orchestras over the last decade. There is a record of industry analysis by the American Symphony Orchestra League and purposeful experimentation in programming by various symphony groups. Past issues of

this journal and other industry publications record those efforts.

A relevant example of problem recognition of symphony “fit-to-environment” was the task force effort to identify an overall strategy of “Americanization” of the U.S. symphony orchestra as the necessary next step in a larger industry-wide effort at change.<sup>3</sup> Having been born of European traditions and mastered the techniques, U.S. symphony organizations now face the question: what next? Full adaptation to the “New World,” with all of its contradictory forces and energetic impulses, might be that next challenge.

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Yet despite good intentions, many symphony program and organization-change initiatives remain somewhat troubling because they tend to revisit traditional problems and offer only minor adjustments in standard activities and musical products. These “innovations” seem to be based on an implicit “fix-this-try-this” model of change. Whether it’s a change in program times, the addition of TV screens and preprogram lectures, two-for-one ticket offers, or “Moms and Daughters Days,” these changes are not fundamental and do not seem to solve any major problem. This approach can, in the aggregate, create momentum for more significant changes later, but without a larger vision to guide them, these actions can simply be ad hoc, piecemeal, opportunistic, incomplete, wrong, wasteful, or potentially harmful. While a decision to offer “Mahler Past Midnight” might appear to be an innovation, it is not much different from a long-ago circus ringmaster’s trick to “fool” an audience into attendance. It helps pay the bills and gets the organization through the season, but it does not address the fundamental strategic

problem of audience creation and development.<sup>4</sup> Fixing operational problems and making incremental adjustments are not strategies. They are actions taken in hope of solution and resolution.

This raises a basic concern among boards and long-term industry observers: Are these programmatic changes a case in which the more things change, the more they stay the same? Are the right problems being addressed? Do all of these adjustments add up to real functional adaptation? Or are the adaptations and modifications we see simply a case of “deck-chair management” of symphonies with potentially Titanic fates? This brings us to the question of strategy.

## **What Is Strategy in a Time of Troubles?**

The very notion of a choice in strategies may seem a luxury to organizations that are in trouble. Developing a new theory and vision for the business does not seem a relevant option, especially in mid-season. Performing arts

organizations often do not have the important resources to work through their problems, nor the time or right skills to do the kind of quality analysis needed. They often see their hand as being forced by crisis circumstances. Management and membership under pressure often feel driven to “do something” and will

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base their actions on cursory analysis and simple one-step extensions from current experience and practice. As with most people who are experiencing change, they find themselves having to develop ex-post rationales to give the appearance of purposeful and rational actions, making the decisions seem more acceptable to themselves as well as others.

A key to understanding strategic choice is to differentiate reaction from effective response. Often, organizations that have lived on the margin for a long time, or that have experienced a run of recent failures, develop a reactive style of decision making. Reaction is largely habitual and circumscribes decisions via organizational culture and procedural norms (e.g., “the way we do things around here”). Such “at risk” organizations tend to become concerned with procedures and control over the basics out of fear of the implications of failure. They develop norms for framing problems or handling difficult situations that tend to constrain their decision analysis. Their norms for reporting “bad news,” supporting innovation, or managing conflict tend to reflect a restrictive style concerned with self-protection. They fail to see opportunities because they are preoccupied with uncertainties in information, the risks involved, and the potential downside results of decisions.

A recent book review in the *Los Angeles Times* noted how an obsession with tradition prevented Frenchmen from seeing the possibility of a resistance to the Nazis being initiated outside of France after 1940. This was based on a culture that treated the fact of no experience, memory, or tradition to sustain an external resistance action as grounds to treat such an option as merely an abstraction.<sup>5</sup> Experience, past results, organizational culture, and reward structure often support the continued use of traditional decision modes whether or not they remain appropriate. Thinking “outside of the box” occurs infrequently in reactive organizations.

In contrast, the modes, styles, and cultures of responsive organizations differ considerably. Strategic response is a long-term, whole-organization perspective that is concerned with placing the organization into a favorable future environmental situation (market/resource/competitive space, in the language of business) that is competitively advantageous to the organization and sustainable over a long period of time. Strategies are purposeful, calculated bets. They are human judgments based on judicious analysis of organizational strengths and weaknesses juxtaposed against the opportunities and threats the organization faces. Decisions rest in the top management because these people tend to have overview positions. One cannot underestimate the need for quality, experienced, and capable strategic leaders. A look at what Michael Eisner did

for the economic fortunes of the Walt Disney Co. makes this point well. Leadership makes a difference. Choosing the right leaders is yet another matter.

***“Successful strategies of standing organizations tend to be nothing less than the overhaul of an organization’s accustomed way of doing things, where new values become the new criteria for decisions about people, programs, and resources.”***

Strategic decision making is not democratic by nature. However, it is highly dependent on the quality of information needed to identify new directions. Strategy making, therefore, must include good internal information and communications processes to sense environmental change and assess organizational ability to deal with that change. The active participation of a larger number of stakeholder members who provide key information and communicate important perspectives is an important part of the strategic-decision process. Strategic changes which require active member acceptance and buy-in for implementation point further to the importance of a valid and legitimate process for wider participation in decision analysis and preparation. However, the final decisions rest with the leadership.

Strategy requires the commitment of substantial resources to a new direction for the organization. That is why it tends to be the responsibility of top leadership, including the board. At the same time, strategic decisions require a clear understanding of the implications for implementation, the balance of

costs and benefits, the importance of first successes, and the inevitable pain and disappointment at the displacement of favored projects and people. Substantial change in direction, and redefinition of basic mission, policy, and people may be the result. Successful strategies of standing organizations tend to be nothing less than the overhaul of an organization’s accustomed way of doing things, where new values become the new criteria for decisions about people, programs, and resources.

The business world presents a large number of case examples of organizations which were responsive to the challenges of their environments and went through major and fundamental strategy changes. The Xerox Corporation’s early technological lead contributed to a complacency that nearly sank the organization until a very major turnaround effort in the 1980s. Similarly, Harley-Davidson found in the fierce competition of Japanese motorcycles the best teacher for its need to shed old ways and become a more competitive organization. Companies which are in rapid growth modes also face the risks of having organizational capabilities that do not match the strategy’s ambitions, as in the cases of Barnes & Noble Inc., Starbucks Corporation, and the Home Depot Inc. In these cases, midstream changes to strategies are often no less wrenching and difficult. The same lessons apply to such nonprofit organizations as Planned Parenthood, the U.S. Postal Service, or even the venerable British Museum which itself is presently

involved in a large-scale change of modus operandi and identity. In all of these cases, the organizations faced serious environmental challenges that required serious, committed, and difficult strategic responses.

## **Two Common Modes of Response**

Competitive situations and environmental challenges leave organizations with a few basic strategic choices. They can do nothing, build up defenses, and wait out the problem. They can move from the unfriendly environment and seek a better place under the sun. They can put resources and efforts into changing, or at least influencing and reducing, those aspects of the environment that are most detrimental to organizational survival. Or they can take actions to adapt themselves to better fit a set of environmental conditions. Some combination of these four fundamental choices underlie all strategic change.

When mature organizations face declining environmental conditions, two common modes tend to characterize change strategies. The first is the “hard” mode, common to Wall Street industry takeovers, forced mergers, and the like that involve abrupt, structural, uncomfortable, but decisive, decision making. The second approach is the “soft” mode of organizational improvement and renewal, often consultant led, that focuses on reinvigoration of the present organization through a focus on problem-solving processes, cultural modification, and limited organizational “tinkering” with structural aspects of organizations.

These two modes demonstrate differing world views of dealing with organizational problems that in appearance also represent stereotypes of the modes of the two human genders. They are not extremes on a continuum as much as they represent general tendencies to treat choices as dualistic. There is a wide variety of specific strategies that could be used in either of these modes. The case of the Denver Symphony Orchestra’s Chapter 11 declaration eventually led to a harder type turnaround strategy with some softer process issues included.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the American Conservatory of Music, the turnaround literally decimated the organization down to one person—firing 29 of 30 administrative staff members—and started all over again.

## **The “Hard” Approach**

Hard-approach strategies are often undertaken when the crisis has grown to such proportions that only radical and strong approaches are seen as viable. The strategies are often initiated by key outside stakeholders and their agents who intervene in normal decision processes. The targets of change are largely structural in nature with little focus on process change. The initial focus is internal, on cutting costs and “stopping the financial bleeding,” which means cutting out whole programs, dropping commitments, unilateral adjustments to agreements and contracts, and “downsizing” units. This results in abrupt changes in personnel with sudden dismissals, firings, and forced resignations. Externally, the organization pleads with creditors for time extensions, makes expensive deals for short term resources, drops products and services that do not meet

new rigid financial standards, seeks help and intervention from governmental authorities in the form of subsidies or less restrictive regulations, while promising customers everything will be back to normal on Monday morning. The decision making is usually unilateral, decisive, and major. The period of change tends to be short and is characterized by much “weeping and gnashing of teeth” as uncertainty about the organizational future looms large. Past contributions are forgotten or ignored, promises are broken, key norms and expectations are violated, everything is possible, and no one is safe! One can only very painfully imagine a symphony board calling in an outside head-chopper executive to “clean house and make things right again”!

The business management literature is, in fact, full of cases of such hard strategies often presented in heroic terms loaded with macho symbolism. The recent past CEO of the Sunbeam Corporation, before falling on his own chain saw, is an example of this *Fortune Magazine*-type hero having made his hard-mode reputation in a fairly brutal way. (The CEO became known as “Chain Saw Al” for his less than elegant approaches to restructuring organizations. But remember, his tactics were well known when he was hired by boards of directors.) Yet, in the face of certain failure or slow death, hard approaches can be justified, even if ex-post. Their relevance for cultural-organization change remains distant, but still on the shelf.

*“... hard-mode strategies can leave a legacy of long-term costs.”*

But hard-mode strategies can leave a legacy of long-term costs. The list can be long:

- ◆ Negative reputation effects with clients, suppliers, or the market.
- ◆ Lingering organizational-justice issues that tend to create tentative and tepid commitments on the part of remaining members.
- ◆ Increasing use of “arms length/cash nexus” agreements that lead to the necessity to pay higher entrance fees for new recruits to cover their risk of joining the “new, risky” organization.
- ◆ Pay differentials not based on talent, experience, or reputation can then lead to internal tensions among new and old members, as well as potentially pricing the product out of the market. (Note the National Basketball Association’s fee structure for professional basketball players as the key issue in the recent lockout; performers are paid for skill—and at market rates.)
- ◆ Loyalty and commitment, often the critical glue and grease of arts organizations, become chance byproducts as people’s motives become opportunistic and self-centered. (Note the problem of “roving” conductors maximizing their career potentials at some cost to orchestra development.)

- ◆ Higher costs of resources as external providers raise prices to cover the new risk premium of an untried strategy.
- ◆ Questionable top-management motives, and suspicion of hidden agendas, leading to lower levels of effort and risk taking because of that distrust.
- ◆ Inadvertent or purposeful destruction of subtle relationships and cooperative motives that are key to artistic production, such as volunteerism, goodwill, or attraction of artistic affiliation.
- ◆ Time-driven and brusque, decisive actions that often “throw out the baby with the bath water,” failing to recognize continued and important value in selective ongoing organization activities.

Hard-mode strategies tend to be quite insensitive to the human factor because they are action- and short-term-results-oriented. They focus on efficiencies, productivity, cost control, and short cuts. Saving the impersonal organization and satisfying outside interests, not maintaining the critical web of internal relationships, is often their main goal. These strategies often assume that the human factor can be taken care of after the hard economic choices have been made. The critical role that skilled professional human resources play in contemporary arts organizations makes this approach risky for orchestras. To choose hard-mode strategies, the first decision is the declaration of crisis, and that is itself a difficult judgment call.

### **The “Soft” Approach**

Soft-approach organizational improvement strategies focus primarily on facilitating evolutionary organizational adaptation of stable-environment organizations by using a variety of internally focused, gradualist, and planned change strategies which are designed to change members’ attitudes, behaviors, and thinking at work. The belief is that gradualist approaches improve organization processes and activities without disruption of important aspects of the organization. This then is thought to lead to improved performance, growth, longevity, and survival.<sup>7</sup>

There are, however, some problems that confound a facile application of soft-change strategies for music performing arts organizations. Unlike stable mass-production, large-scale organizations, symphony orchestras produce a large variety of related, but essentially custom, products in which the cycles of activities are not as predictable. Annual programming changes the configurations of people and activities, making it hard to institutionalize a new culture that needs to be “grown” or gradually derived.

Symphony organizations can be characterized as loosely configured networks of interest groups in which activities are coordinated more by common shared values and common experience in the “know-how” of producing the cultural product and less by formal hierarchy and bureaucratic control. Soft strategies tend to be more appropriate for loosening the culture of a formal organization

to make it more responsive and flexible. Symphony orchestras have a certain amount of the flexibility already built in because of the constant change in programming. The problem is perhaps one of using this flexibility more effectively.

Musicians' original culture is often formed in conservatory training where the emphasis is on artistry and musicianship, not on creating good working organizations. A lack of knowledge and training in the running of music organizations means that most management learning, even self management, is "on the job" and often naive to the subtleties of soft-change strategies.

Because orchestras are populated with independent-minded, highly trained professionals, there tend to be multiple conflicting views about artistry and the performance product. A certain amount of conflict is constant and perhaps necessary to work out an artistic vision. Soft strategies tend to deemphasize the creative tension in favor of more general "pleasant" norms. Differences in artistic vision and taste may not be readily worked out in a soft strategy. A case in point is the structural tension between the need to protect and maintain tradition while remaining contemporary and relevant to society.

Soft-change strategies imply egalitarianism and a common goal to create a unitary culture (a symphonic family) because of a wider participation of individuals in the change process. Yet symphony organizations are status-conscious organizations where differences are important and defended. Status matters both within and without the organization because important opportunities, rewards, and privileges are tied to status. While there may be common concerns about fairness, equality is often not necessarily a central issue. Deference to artistic vision and recognition of greater talent remain common motives for compliance and cooperation in musical organizations. (This recognizes that biases toward gender, musical pedigree, instrument, and historical affiliation continue to be common problems of prejudice in these organizations.)

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Artistic organizations tend to have more open organizational boundaries, allowing a wider variety of people to have influence over the direction of events, pulling the organization in many directions. Because soft strategies seek participation and agreement from the widest number of organization stakeholders, finding agreement among varied constituencies is a costly process, and once achieved, however imperfectly, a process that needs constant maintenance.

Symphony management style—and the resulting organizational culture—is often a carryover from the symphony tradition in which the conductor is the final and major authority figure, and deference to his or her interpretation of tradition is common. Thus authoritarianism and central control over all decisions

has been the hallmark of symphony organization culture. It is not clear that “getting rid of” or seriously modifying this culture in the name of greater democratic participatory arrangements is a good thing for the organization or the art form. In the business world, leaders often leave a powerful mark on their organizations and industries. The history of conductors shows a similar pattern in the symphony orchestra world.

Soft-strategy interventions that increase organizational performance through seminars or consultants may improve the working climate, morale, and the efficiency of some ongoing activities. But such interventions will not necessarily lead to functional adaptation to the environment. Increasing people’s satisfaction with doing the wrong tasks may end up protecting the formal organization from the more dramatic changes that conditions warrant. There is always the problem of means/ends reversal in which the machinery of organization becomes more important than the ends of producing great performances of music.

In summary, soft-mode strategies are long-term commitments to changing the way people think, behave, and feel about work. They are, by nature, complex processes which are time consuming and often require the assistance of skilled change agents for guidance. Their focus is on changing the organizational culture gradually by focusing on the people, the tasks, and processes of getting work done. Presently, there are a number of major, as well as regional, orchestras that are involved in such change processes. While it is too early to assess these change efforts, the above caveats should allow symphony organizations to avoid some of the costs of this general mode of strategy.

## **The Problem of Going Solo**

In addition to problems inherent in the two modes described above, there is also the issue of ability to carry out a strategic action. Symphony organization leadership has to decide which activities are best done by the organization alone and which are best done in cooperation and coordination with other organizations.<sup>8</sup> Symphony organizations can choose to put resources into a competitive solo strategy, seeking their own survival over that of other arts organizations, or they can enter into collaborative strategies at the regional or national level, and attempt a collective turnaround of the symphony music industry. There are good reasons why birds flock and fish school.

In pursuing solo strategies, organizations forgo the possible benefits of collective action and absorb more of the risk themselves. However, if the strategy is successful, they capture most of the benefits for their own organization, and can avoid the costs of coordination in working with other groups (e.g., resources use, time, talented people committed to joint projects). If the strategy is bad and they fail, they can always say, “At least we tried and we probably would have failed anyway given conditions.” So the natural choice tends to be to go it alone.

However, the success of a solo strategy depends on some specific conditions and assumptions:

- ◆ The strategy is new, unique, and has measurable potential of success. This is, of course, a judgment call.
- ◆ The organization possesses unique competencies and/or specific conditions that competing organizations do not possess.
- ◆ The strategy cannot be readily copied or imitated in advantages protected by contract, commitments, or unique conditions.
- ◆ The strategy is sustainable (and assumed able to be implemented) over time, enough so to earn the organization its payback and some risk premium for the investment.
- ◆ The potential exists for strong and active competition (direct and indirect) that is ready to respond in kind to solo strategies.
- ◆ The strategy creates a first-mover advantage. That is, the organization that moves first and fastest improves its chances for long-term success.
- ◆ The organization has enough resources to run risks and absorb failures.
- ◆ There is a strategist—usually a single person—who has a vision, a willingness to take risks, and a commitment to lead a solo strategy.
- ◆ Price/efficiency, niche, or differentiation strategies are possible in the industry and marketplace.

In reviewing this list of strategic conditions, it becomes apparent that many of these assumptions and specific conditions may not hold, either in general across the symphony orchestra industry or for individual organizations. This industry is very homogeneous, with all orchestras drawing players, music, and audience from a common tradition, culture, and repertoire. Competition is a general, indirect condition of relationships within this industry, not a direct-market, confrontational relationship. All arts organizations in this environment compete, in a general sense, for resources, only some of which come from market audiences. Major urban centers usually have only one large symphony orchestra which often exerts informal, quasi-monopoly control over the regional cultural environment. This orchestra generally has no direct competition, which reduces the need to be highly competitive (and efficient). These organizations do not compete on price because their audiences seldom have a choice of symphonies on the nights they choose to attend.

In major urban centers, the niche for high-culture, sophisticated music is also generally filled by one orchestra. Finding and cultivating specific niches is what regional and smaller local symphonies do to survive, because the large orchestras tend to draw from large, local, urban populations and do not compete directly. Within a global market, it is possible for certain niche strategies to take place, for example, when a major symphony becomes the single guest company at a festival year after year. Niche strategies seem less possible in a more global society where, as industry practice indicates, niche possibilities are quickly discovered and absorbed by the larger players.

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If both price and niche strategies have limited relevance, differentiation emerges as the major solo strategy for most orchestras. Here, the lessons of toothpaste and cereal companies suggest that when the products are very similar, if not the same, differentiation is the act of making and marketing a specific value-laden image to the minds of the consumers. A strategy that is fine-tuned around marketing activities focuses on customer-generated product, value pricing, competitive quality, power packaging, instant, easy access and delivery, guarantees, and after-market services. It does not focus on building and maintaining a cultural tradition.

Decisions become very pragmatic: what works and yields specific results? Tradition is not valued for its intrinsic merits, but only for its utility in achieving other goals. In addition, marketing strategies are not cheap nor are they permanent solutions. They are merely constant investments and costs. It is not presently clear, given tradition and industry structure, that becoming marketing-driven is where these artistic organizations need and want to go. Yet, much of the present industry programming and promotion activity could be characterized as marketing-oriented. There may not be much choice about a marketing emphasis in the overall strategy. The choice is in the mix of variables that a particular strategic effort emphasizes.

In the past, the major orchestras differentiated themselves through the development of unique and pleasing sounds, as in the case of Eugene Ormandy in Philadelphia or George Szell in Cleveland. These strategies depended on long-term residency and leadership of committed conductors whose constant presence was needed to get to know the players and shape the sound over time. Again, with conductors and music directors (and perhaps the boards who hire them) showing shorter-term tendencies, such strategies may not be warranted or even possible in contemporary times. Other confounding factors in using differential strategies include the real possibility that the new audiences may not be able to appreciate subtlety in musical expression, and the fact that the desires and feelings of the players are probably as motivated by the making of artful music as by the prospects of steady employment as players.

Thus, the choice of solo strategies is clearly risky and depends on specific sets of conditions and capabilities to be able to “pull it off.” Given a homogenous industry with a semi-public purpose, a cultural mandate, a heavy burden of tradition, a time-stressed market, and strong competition from substitutable cultural experiences, the idea of strategy is perhaps a more subtle undertaking. For these reasons, it may be that cooperative strategies are the bigger challenge. Cooperative strategies may in reality be the de facto or default option under these circumstances.

## The Challenge of Cooperation

If symphony organizations choose the collective strategy of collaboration with other orchestras, they can use fewer resources, share the downside risk with others, create an assurance association for the “bad times,” and benefit from creative ideas and synergies of common implementation. However, in cooperative ventures, a symphony organization risks some part of its fate in the hands of others. This has several downside effects:

- ◆ Resources may be wasted if a generalized strategy does not allow the organization to capture important specific benefits for itself or avoid specific costs. In addition collective benefits may be too dispersed and small to be of real value to the individual organization. This might be the case if the American Symphony Orchestra League were to engage in widespread promotional campaigns in large urban centers, campaigns from which regional orchestras would derive less benefit.
- ◆ The collective strategy may be wrong or irrelevant for the individual organization whose situation varies from the general industry mean, as in the case of a resource-rich orchestra programming and publishing program brochures jointly with other orchestras to save money.
- ◆ Costs of coordination can be high in the invested-time costs of key staff, as well as opportunity costs—the cost of the road not taken. A symphony orchestra which decides to participate in a joint CD-publishing effort forgoes the option and benefits of other choices that might have been more lucrative as a solo venture.
- ◆ Gains from collective action may be distributed unequally, without differentiation, or “undeservedly.” This creates costs of conflict and increased barriers to further cooperation.
- ◆ Collective strategies generally need champions who have clear interests when important goals and benefits are expected to be obtained in this manner. Because the benefits of cooperative strategies are shared, diluted, and generalized, their specific benefits are less clear. Without champions (from within or outside the industry), the initiation and sustainability of cooperative actions may be difficult to develop.
- ◆ Problems of evaluating and insuring equal inputs creates equal problems for determining how benefits and costs should be shared. This might be the case when an orchestra which lends its stars to a benefit concert does not receive matching inputs from the other organizations participating in the effort. The resulting inequity creates problems for future cooperation.

*“... in cooperative ventures, a symphony organization risks some part of its fate in the hands of others.”*

Problems of cooperation are, of course, not insurmountable. The logic of cooperation is well established in both theory and practice. The boom in strategic alliances and international partnering in business has come about specifically because cooperative ventures have some very specific benefits of risk sharing, knowledge networking, synergy of efforts, and joint learning. The point here is to show that in the face of big problems, collective strategies are not necessarily better because they are bigger. Most strategies involve a judicious mix of cooperative and competitive solo moves that need to be assessed both separately and for joint effect. It is not clear a priori that one or the other is always superior. Contingent conditions determine the relative value of each.

## **The Transformational Symphony: An Ideal Theme**

One might view transformational strategies as a third way of looking at strategic choice for symphony organizations.

Of course, there are the fantasy transformations in which the organization's wishful thinking leads to a hope that it will wake up from its nightmare of down times and find itself magically transformed into some princely organization destined for happy-ever-after times. Fantasies are fun and always work out well as long as you don't wake up a frog or, at worst, a cockroach on your back in bed!

And then there are the long-march transformations—stories of change and development that would put Mao Tse Tung to shame. These are the stories of wars and battles waged over the years that are often characterized by ambitious goals of redefining the very nature of the organization's purposes, missions, strategies, and design, usually transforming the organization into a different entity. The Xerox Corporation and Harley Davidson went through this type of change before they emerged as totally different companies.

True transformational strategies differ from adjustment and tinker strategies in that they seek to reenvision the organization in a new way.<sup>9</sup> Older missions, core values, basic assumptions, working culture, organizational roles, fundamental structures and practices—all of the design features of the older organization—come into question and analysis. This requires organization members to give up favorite notions they have about the organization and to accept the possibility that the organization will be a very different one from what they now know.<sup>10</sup>

Transformational strategies are difficult to articulate and communicate. Their focus is on creating flexible, adaptable collections of smart people who are sensitive to the direction and possibilities for change and always ready to respond to it. They require intense and creative investment in thinking differently

*“True transformational strategies differ from adjustment and tinker strategies in that they seek to reenvision the organization in a new way.”*

about an organization. Transformational terminology is often strange and unfamiliar because it may turn old ideas on their heads and require a new way of looking at things (e.g., Tom Peter's notion of managing in chaos). And these strategies often focus on counterintuitive insights, nuance and subtlety.

Transformational strategies result from observations of contemporary life in highly developed, urban-oriented societies that recognize and accept the complexity, hectic pace, and dilemmas as part of the modern organizational condition. Information is seen as the key currency and focus of activity in modern organizations. Organizational form is considered an organic, loose, amorphous, sometimes boundaryless, and fluid characteristic of organization. Formal structure is often seen as "beside the point" and a barrier to effective response to opportunity or problems. Informality in relations and presentation, the absence of strong hierarchy, skill-based status, reward for performance not person, and modernity seem to be touted core values of the transformational organization's culture. In a sense, eschewing tradition defines the organization's basic attitude.

### **From Dinosaurs to Rabbits**

Can the symphony orchestra transform itself from a dinosaur to some other beast more of this day? The answer is simply that it probably cannot under the present structure, culture, and functioning of the symphony orchestra. Transformational strategies require a willingness to change in such ways that the past might become unrecognizable. A contemporary example from the telephone industry shows how the telephone companies have transformed themselves—under considerable financial, legal, and technological duress—into information and communications services companies. Telephone companies looked at the basic functions they were performing and then redefined those functions to make them consistent and responsive to contemporary conditions. The wired telephone has been slowly giving up its once traditional and central role in personal communications. Now the fax, beeper, e-mail, and audio chip implant are competing forms that address the fundamental market need for information management and communications. With the great convergence process of entertainment, computer technology, cable communications, data management, and interactive technologies, there is even more challenge to become transformational companies.

In like fashion, the symphony orchestra industry may one day evolve and transform itself into the "summa art/new serious music" industry. Imagine the Dallas Symphony Orchestra redefining itself as a "crossform-musico experience," an organization that creates leading-edge, high-art music using high-technology sound mixing to combine newly instrumented, traditional high-art music forms, computer-generated sound, and high-art visuals (borrowed from local museums) to invent unique new listening and feeling experiences for audiences interested in the "new serious music" and higher forms of sophisticated art! While this imagery borders on the low-art form of "fantasy fiction," there is something distinctly possible and potential in it, especially when one realizes that the Web as we know it was just an idea 15 years ago.

The symphony concert, as a form of musical expression and centerpiece of the present orchestral organizational form, will slowly give way to other variations of musical form that will, in time, also be considered high art and serious music. This has been the function of the symphonic form over the past two centuries: to be the icon of serious, sophisticated musical taste! The fact that the symphony

***“The symphony concert, as a form of musical expression and centerpiece of the present orchestral organizational form, will slowly give way to other variations of musical form that will, in time, also be considered high art and serious music.”***

has been the de facto standard of high, sophisticated musical art means that it has been without real competition from alternative musical art forms. The power of traditional culture to control and mold musical taste cannot be underestimated. But by looking beyond the limits of musical form itself into the fundamental function of this music, the symphonic orchestra can free itself of structural and cultural constraints, often self imposed, and begin to transform itself into another kind of organization.<sup>11</sup>

For those worried about the future of traditional music, we might point out that original instrument ensembles, medieval music, and religious chants continue to grow as segments of a wide musical-market audience. There is always appeal for good past things. Secondly, great music is its own reward, as many generations will continue to learn. While efforts to keep this repertoire available for choice is important, Bach survives for his music, not his hairdo! Lastly, if in the end, there was a need for a societal-

level response, true musical museums could be founded using technology to conserve and present music forms much as any other museum artifact that society wishes to save. Knowing that society formally took on the mandate of conserving musical traditions, the present symphony organization would be free to truly redefine itself, a very scary proposition that no orchestra has yet faced.

In the end, transformation is about people changing. Presently, symphony orchestras are populated by creative, energetic people who see themselves as artists for the most part, and artists are often change agents. While tradition and the fundamentals hold sway against change, the people—who are the most important element in the organization—are primed to be innovators and creative problem solvers. There really is not an impossible dilemma between being traditional and being modern. It merely requires being able to work effectively with a mindset that is able to hold contradictory ideas at the same time—to be postmodern traditional organizations!

Stripped to its barest essentials, the grand strategy for symphony organizations is essentially one of co-optation. The trick is for musicians to get the rest of society to support them in their wonderfully “bad” habit of making great and beautiful music. It’s a bit like the ruse that Huck Finn used in getting other

*“The trick is for musicians to get the rest of society to support them in their wonderfully ‘bad’ habit of making great and beautiful music.”*

people to paint his fence and like it. This is not a cynical observation. Since history shows that budgets never really get balanced, symphony organizations have always needed society’s continued support. The challenge has always been to get society to pay the bill and like it. That might have worked well in past times. Today, society is asking questions about fence painting that show a change in the cooptation game. The trick now is to get that continued support without paying too high a price in change. It is not clear if that will be possible.

No doubt, some very difficult tradeoffs will have to be made. Society’s support will come at a price. That price might require adjusting, adapting, eliminating, inventing, and destroying some traditions, core beliefs, venerable practices, essential values, and favorite notions about the symphony organization’s art that seem untenable and “non-negotiable.”

This breakthrough thinking, imagining the unimaginable, is a first step in a renewal and perhaps transformational strategy. This will happen when there is either great inspiration or great pain. The former often follows from the latter. “Things” have to get very bad, and important people have to be hurting, before most organizations realize they are in serious trouble. That does not yet seem to be the case for most symphony orchestras. However, the trends are there and the data show problems with finances, audiences, competition, venues, and the like.

In summary, hard, soft, and transformational models are presented as modes of strategic choice. All have their pluses and their minuses. No one is the perfect fit for any organization. The relevance of each will be determined by the situations individual organizations face. The presentation here has been for illustrative purposes: to demonstrate that strategic analysis of the environment creates opportunities for choice of modes of change. While environments do have long-term generation effects on organization life cycles, in the shorter run, the people who run organizations still have choices that can make a difference in a lifetime. The dinosaur can be something else no matter how much effort and make-up it takes. It remains a leadership issue of identifying and taking opportunities, and believing that futures can be shaped.

### **No Single Solutions; Many Efforts**

One fundamental conclusion, looking at the differential responses to industry crisis, is that there is no singular strategy that will work for all symphony organizations. The symptoms of the crisis are generalized across a whole industry, but are shared differentially and specifically: some symphony organizations find themselves in friendlier sectors of the arts culture environment, or in supportive special niches of a generally difficult arts environment. Some are

doing better than others and may or may not agree about the nature and degree of a crisis. And, of course, organizations will respond to their own reading of the crisis. One thing for sure, there is no dearth of trying new things whether or not they lead to true functional adaptations.

Numerous attempts are presently underway to recapture the symphony orchestra audience.<sup>12</sup> For example, recognizing that 25- to 55-year-olds have become musical omnivores, some symphony organizations have contemplated the creation of “adult” children’s concerts to educate this audience. And the precedent set by the success of “Three Tenor” concerts suggests that there will be more one-time, grand-event presentations designed to carry a higher-priced ticket to a one-time purchase market. In addition, there is some thinking about how to metamorphose orchestral players from faceless clones to MTV-acceptable personalities. A recent public radio program from Lincoln Center in New York featured individual orchestra members in interviews designed to give them faces and personal stories that the public could understand.

*“... there is no singular strategy that will work for all symphony organizations.”*

Rethinking the symphonic performance space has been a prime initiative of the New World Symphony in Miami. There they are examining more listener-friendly spaces, which emulate a more informal, popular-musical-culture audience. There is a discussion of moving the orchestra from place to place within the venue during performances, or centering the orchestra in a symphony-in-the-round presentation. The Philadelphia Orchestra has experimented with projection screens throughout the concert hall, to show close-ups of the performers simultaneously with the live performance. This mimics television coverage of symphonic music, where changing camera shots and angles are required to hold audience attention. While the Philadelphia experiment has been less successful than expected, it is from such initiative that industry learning occurs. This might be an example of an area in which cooperative, industry-wide experimentation, under controlled conditions, might yield a really effective melding of visuals with music in the concert hall for the benefit of the entire industry.

Proposals have been offered and plans are underway to utilize media and the Internet in winning back audiences. In San Antonio, the symphony sent out program notes with audio cassettes promoting its “Casual Classics Family Series.” In Los Angeles, the Philharmonic created “Symphonix,” a World Wide Web site offering video and audio samplings of future concerts. And in Seattle and Los Angeles, as well as in a number of other venues, the opera projects supertitles above the stage. The Metropolitan Opera in New York City is offering its audience the choice of a seatback title system that each audience member can use at his or her discretion.

In cities that have long traditions of symphony attendance, subscriptions offering a quasi-curatorial programmatic emphasis create a sense of cultural

history through music. While still being offered as a “new formats,” crossover and pops concerts are being used as program innovations. However, they are already being characterized as ineffective in attracting audiences to regular orchestral programming. In another attempt to give the audience a greater feeling of freedom and a complete night out, the Oregon Symphony has offered such events as “Mozart to Midnight” programming. This marathon event, with an emcee, encourages audiences to come and go as they please and to partake of catering, exhibits, and special booths. These activities are reminiscent of those that were promoted in the Crystal Palace at the height of London’s growing frenzy to attend large-scale concert extravaganzas!

In Europe, we find a more successful example of creating the “mega-orchestral experience” in a festival held in Amsterdam that offered the complete works of Mahler. Three major European orchestras—the Royal Concertgebouw, the Vienna Philharmonic, and the Berlin Philharmonic—performed concurrently, with offerings of symposia, and exhibitions of art, photographs, manuscripts, and archival material. While the quality and depth of the entire event was extremely successful, one must remember that the audience for this festival possessed a tradition, education, and codification perhaps unequaled in the world today. It is important also to note that this event could only be successful in the major capitals of the world where the tourist audience plays a significant role in attendance growth. Simplistic transfer of an innovative musical event to a new setting can often lead to unsuccessful mimicry, one of nature’s more challenging strategies for adaptation.

In the category of questionable ideas, the recording industry has attempted to create audiences by repackaging products under such titles as “Mozart in the Morning,” “Debussy for Daydreaming,” and “Beethoven at Bedtime.” This approach may sell some CDs, but its effect on building audiences for live performance remains speculative.

As for the local and regional orchestras, we believe they may well have different solutions.<sup>13</sup> An example deals with the orchestral situation in upstate New York. For many years, the Rochester Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, and Syracuse Symphony have all suffered from serious financial woes and audience attrition. It is clear that within a certain period of time, these three orchestras, geographically fairly close, would fold. However, in a very different scenario that envisions the symphony as an organizational opportunity to make great music rather than a cumbersome cart carrying the baggage of tradition, combining the best players of all three orchestras into one upstate orchestral unit would give significant market opportunity, as well as a high-level musical experience. This however requires transformational thinking, something many individual orchestras are beginning to show in their creative programming responses to the decline problem.

In a different case, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra is a variation on a theme that may become a more common tune whistled in the symphony world. First of all, one must note that the mindset of leadership in New Jersey

government, and in the private sector, does not seem particularly hampered by ideological purism of adherence to free market ideals at all costs. In New Jersey, people often look to the government to play a coordination and set-up role for public programs, be they the preservation of open space or giving a state symphony orchestra a home. And that thinking can be seen in both major political parties.

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's new home in Newark represents a dual strategy of urban renewal of a major city, as well as the creation of an independent arts center capable of attracting good talent and effectively competing with the big city across the river. Growth in audience over the last three seasons has shown that to be the case. In the process, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra has created a true regional identity by clearly offering their programs statewide in the other major cities. This allows them to draw on the loyalty and resources of a much larger population while serving a larger public mandate for good music. This has not taken resources from local symphonies which continue to thrive as well.

***“The more varied the strategic responses are to the crisis, the higher the probability that a set of successful and perhaps industry-wide transferable strategies will be identified and shared over time.”***

The value of differential responses and experimental programming lies in the favorable possibilities that variations in program create for niche and local environment adaptations. The more varied the strategic responses are to the crisis, the higher the probability that a set of successful and perhaps industrywide transferable strategies will be identified and shared over time. However, given a fragmentation of the environment, the development of a national-level strategy may not be possible. The symphony industry may become populated with a lot more eclectic forms of organization adapted to local regions than tradition has expected. Perhaps this is the real diversity challenge of multiformism—living with many different organizational forms, all calling themselves “symphonies”!

The pattern of adaptation will depend on whether the “Americanization” strategy has an implicit model of pluralism or multiculturalism guiding it. If pluralism dominates, there will be a blending of musical cultures that still recognizes original cultural traits and forms, but mixes them into new forms of music (i.e., perhaps the melting pot equivalent in music). However, if multiculturalism is the dominant cultural milieu, then blending and experimentation might become subservient to the wish to conserve and celebrate the individual cultures at the cost of blending. This leads to a potential “Tower of Babel” problem in which a thousand different musical tongues talk at once, creating neither tradition nor unique crossover innovations, other than a tradition of no diversity.

## History and Conjecture

We sense that since music is such a robust art form, it can stand to be shaped and reformed in any combination, in any environment. Witness the music created at the death camps of World War II. We suspect that symphony organizations are in for some surprisingly creative transformations in the years ahead, and that the only barrier to continued existence will be the organizational form that constrains expression. In this section, we speculate about some of the new forms the “dinosaur” might take.

*“We sense that since music is such a robust art form, it can stand to be shaped and reformed in any combination, in any environment.”*

Might one create a music organization capable of playing large-scale pieces of music that resembles a symphony but is not a symphony? What might that organization be and how would it function? Is the “hollow symphony,” mimicking the hollow corporation, a possibility, one that merely contracts and organizes events within a corporate identity but which has no real home, a sort of virtual symphony organization with a Web site? An example that comes to mind would be an orchestra made up of numerous ensembles that could be utilized by the composer according to artistic decision. The 21st-century orchestra could consist of a string ensemble, two or three woodwind quintets, two or three brass quintets, an early music ensemble, a multitude of keyboards, a percussion ensemble, a jazz big band, a battery of synthesizers and digital acoustic recreative equipment, a host of electronic instruments, some developed exclusively for a particular performance, and a multitude of world-music ensembles. The composer would choose among these self-contained units the ensemble of choice for a particular composition culminating in public performance.

This raises an interesting question. If the present symphony orchestra has difficulty existing, how would an ensemble of a multitude of units and divisions such as this, which may represent in number many more musicians than a symphony orchestra, be affordable? The answer is simply that it already has.

One modern organization coming close to this model was the Columbia Symphony. The NBC Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini was a close second. The Columbia Symphony was not a symphony organization with a board and a complex management team, but rather a semi-corporation. It worked as follows: Columbia Records wished to record major artists, soloists, and composers, while behaving as a corporation rather than a symphony organization board. In many cases, their time frame was much shorter than is typical of program planning by a symphony orchestra. The traditional symphony orchestra is not terribly flexible in terms of available time for recording or isolated concert dates. In addition, while the Columbia Symphony was hired and sanctioned through the musician’s union, the cost of assembling an ensemble, especially for a particular

project, was significantly less than hiring an established symphony orchestra whose negotiated fees would have been much higher. The Columbia Symphony was a responsive and flexible organization, a virtual-type organization that could be created over and over again, each time including only the actual musicians needed, and each time dispersing after a particular project.

History also shows how the sociopolitical environment influences the formation of music organizations. The issue deals with the future thrusts of multicultural artistic life versus pluralistic artistic life. We presently live in an age in which music from a hundred countries—traditional, historical, contemporary, and popular—is at our disposal. This music exists in concert halls, bars, cultural centers, museums, pavilions, superdomes, and coffeehouses around the world. One hears music on radio, television, CDs, tapes, on the Internet, to say nothing of in buses, terminals, and elevators. There are specialized record stores, journals, popular music arenas, academic institutes, national ensembles, embassy presentations, all celebrating distinct cultures through music of the past, present, and future. In recent years, there have been significant examples of symphony and opera music being composed with major ethnic musical influences. If the trend towards a pluralistic approach to composition and musical organization continues, such a pool of smaller musical units making up new 21st-century orchestras may well become a significant possibility. Technology to extend the power and talent of single musicians will no doubt become a central means for transformation.

Throughout history, cities, especially large regional urban centers, have also been important factors in the survival of symphonies. In the same manner that symphony orchestras were developed and sustained within major cities which enjoyed the benefits of the Industrial Revolution, it is most likely that symphony orchestras will continue to function in major cities, because in those cities the major elements of environmental support are in place: a concentration of educated people with higher incomes, convenient and multiple facilities and venues to reach larger markets readily, continued immigrant and international citizen populations who support classical music, tourist support of symphony events, corporate headquarters support, and elite concentrations. However, the organizational form of the symphony will have to better reflect the dynamic conditions of modern cities and take on their challenges and demands for responsive, relevant, and valuable music services.

### **Some “Out of the Box” Ideas**

Tradition-bound organizations develop cultures of politeness. People know when and how to self-censor themselves whenever they get “nutty ideas” that will probably stir the ruffles and cause embarrassment. This 19th-century stereotype of symphony culture dies hard, and is probably the reason that any number of good “nutty” ideas originating within the symphony have a hard time getting a hearing.

These authors do not feel that restriction and so will, before we close, offer some “unusual” ideas for strategic consideration. We note that the limits to strategic choice are mainly in the minds and imaginations of the strategists in charge. What is possible depends on what you dare to think is possible. If symphonies are not daring, someone else might be and to the betterment of the genre. Here are nine “crazy-but-maybe-not-so-crazy” ideas about possible solo and/or joint symphony strategic actions designed to help create a favorable environment for the arts.

*“... the limits to strategic choice are mainly in the minds and imaginations of the strategists in charge.”*

### **1. The “Got Music?” Campaign**

This would encompass cooperative alliances created to gain the benefits of common, coordinated activities. Note how the dairy industry has posted billboards and very effectively used star personalities with very simple but powerful messages about milk. The symphony industry, under American Symphony Orchestra League direction, could start an “Everyone’s a Star” national, generic billboard campaign to encourage and create further opportunities for amateur classical musicianship. There might be a series of billboards of people in their places of work, (e.g., a brickmason with trowel in hand, a plumber under a sink, a mailman facing a dog, an office worker at the water cooler, or even a busy “yuppie” executive at her computer keyboard), all with daydream clouds over their heads, imagining themselves playing an instrument at a concert or conducting a symphony—all in their work clothes. The first message is that music is fun, inspiring, and a great escape! The second says it is for all of the people, not just the “tux and tails” crowd!

### **2. The Arts Advantage Gambit**

Research and experience have demonstrated that arts education, and particularly music education, is clearly associated with higher performance in learning in general. The kinds of thinking and mental skills developed seem key for success in such other areas as science, mathematics, and computer programming. The advantage this education gives a child is clear. The California legislature has recognized this fact in its recent passing of legislation to support arts education. Yet in many communities, music budgets in schools have continued to fare poorly. It seems, therefore, only logical for parents to document these gains of arts education and make their political will felt at PTA and town meetings. The evidence and data are there for all to see. Even football coaches could agree to this. Imagine a poster of a football team in uniform singing in a choir!

### **3. The Family Values Strategy**

The recent history of the National Endowment for the Arts supposedly shows that there is a strong divide between conservatives and others on issues of public support for the arts. Such a divide might be false when it comes to

education. Music education can be supported by a conservative agenda because it is quite pro-family. Think about the music learning experience in schools: children are doing something constructive after school in playing their instruments in the school band or jazz group; music requires practice at home which keeps the kids in sight and very busy; music is essentially a cooperative venture which encourages people to get along in groups and coordinate in unique ways; music is hard work which requires discipline, concentration, and stick-to-it determination, some very old-fashioned values not often displayed in video game playing or TV watching! Music is a natural pro-family agenda that can unite very different political tendencies around a good solid pro-children/pro-music issue. Imagine a poster that says, "I know where my kid is!" and shows various pictures of young people playing music with others and having fun! This could go a long way to reducing the stress and worry of parents who are often at wit's ends trying to figure out how to give their kids good learning experiences. Music education is a simple solution and not a simplistic one. It works.

*"Music is a natural pro-family agenda that can unite very different political tendencies around a good solid pro-children/pro-music issue."*

#### **4. The Umbrella Group**

Formation of art "keiretsus" (a Japanese collective-type business organization that is very powerful) through which a huge umbrella organization uses cross-subsidization among arts groups to allow for a balancing of cycles, lending of resources, and possible synergistic gains of scale and audience sharing.

#### **5. Corporate Ensemble Partnering**

Corporate partnering could involve individual corporations taking active roles in sponsoring and supporting the development of small ensembles. In turn, the ensembles could represent the company in formal public settings and provide internal musical education, entertainment, and ambiance for official activities.

#### **6. Go Global**

This would involve going international through true expansion into foreign markets, including setting up operations, and not just touring. The symphony organization can use foreign market opportunities, venues, and resources to help support domestic and other international activities. Why assume that the Denver Symphony has to be from Denver? Does IBM still represent Tarrytown? Is Microsoft really still a Seattle company? Why can't Korean arts investors put money into helping the Atlanta Symphony develop a topnotch symphony in Argentina? Why can't the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra have a summer training camp in Spain? Music is not necessarily local. It's how you think about it first that gets the ball rolling. After the idea comes the argument and the money.

### **7. Politics Is Not All Dirty**

Strong activism by minority interests linked with media strategy can yield important political payoffs. A large-scale political action among music lovers, as has been the case with Christian activism, to change the tide of conservative thinking and “public-tize” the musical arts might be a good collective strategy of changing an environment which is unfriendly to symphony orchestra interests. Politics is yin and yang—pendulums, not concrete posts. Things change and activism helps them move faster. Perhaps even advocating for a cultural post at the Cabinet level might be an idea whose time has come.

### **8. Music Research and Development**

We often think of musical creation as the work of solo artists and creative geniuses writing alone and in the middle of the night. Yet in most business organizations there is some significant portion of resources spent on looking to and creating a future. The motives are pragmatic and utilitarian but aimed at increasing the longevity of the organization.

In music, there is no formal “R&D” function, per se. Conservatories can play this role, when they are not busy inculcating tradition into the heads and hands of a new musical generation. Private music corporations (e.g., Sony, Geffen, et al) actively search out this R&D talent and bring it “in-house” where they will enjoy a monopoly of the benefits of the creative talent. This is how capitalist music works. Yet, why not? Why can’t there be a cooperative R&D function that creates value for the larger community of musicians? There is no reason why symphony orchestras or consortiums of musical-arts groups should not create think-tank functions to invent, develop, and test-market music forms, instruments and instrumentation, and technology for better music playing and listening. What if a serious music research center (basic and applied), such the Cité de la Musique in Paris, were developed in Los Angeles?

*“ . . . in most business organizations there is some significant portion of resources spent on looking to and creating a future. The motives are pragmatic and utilitarian but aimed at increasing the longevity of the organization.”*

### **9. Classical Music TV**

MTV is successful because it effectively joins audio and video entertainment and matches them for a pop music youth market. Since its founding, MTV has expanded to become a global “youth station” with programming that attempts to reflect some of the more pressing interests and concerns of young people. We would conjecture that there are possibly large segments of the youthful population whose real and maturing needs are not being addressed by MTV. It is possible that a “CMTV”—which addresses young people’s life issues maturely, without resorting to mindless entertainment, immature posturing, or gross championing

of consumption—might just work. Such a station could be staffed by hip and sharp young people who are also into serious music and who are interested in helping their peers develop the critical skills of appreciation and comparison. This is something someone like a contemporary Lenny Bernstein might champion. CMTV could also be about lifestyle, choices, and real adventures grounded in sensible experience, without the hyperbolic imagery of life created by constantly fast, loud music, fleeting images of self-centered people, relentless advertising, and persistently complaining singers. Surprisingly, CMTV, or some variation thereof, might be a tremendous relief for a youth culture presently assaulted and romanced for its role as “a market” and not as people. Young people are smarter and more cynical than ever. They do listen to some of the very interesting alternative serious music that speaks to them. CMTV could be that voice.

### ***The Final Strategy: Genre Begets Organization***

There is an intimate link between genre and organization form. Cultural organizations are often synonymous with the very products they create. In cultural organizations, innovation in musical product form, content, technology, and presentation more often drives organizational change and adaptation. In a sense “the show drives the organization,” not the other way around. Success or failure provide the feedback which signal the organization where to go. Over time, audience and critic acceptance signal success of the cultural innovation, and the organization adapts its internal structures and decision processes to support the further development and perfection of that product. If symphony orchestras suddenly found that crossover music, mixing electronic music and instruments with classical formats of performance, was becoming both popular and representing a fundamental shift in audience interest, that genre would begin to dominate the performance output over time. Eventually, the symphony orchestra would become populated with digital “techies” who had a different set of organizational and equipment requirements for support and development. This is the adaptation process which eventually fits the organization to the conditions of its environment. Would the resulting organization be a symphony orchestra? Does that really matter? The resulting organization would both survive and thrive no matter what name you gave it. Pragmatism would dominate the culture, and tradition would have to evolve to include this new entity of human musical expression.

The argument here contends that cultural organizations would better renew and transform themselves by focusing primarily on product and performance outcomes rather than focusing on improving internal organizational matters as the primary agenda. By emphasizing innovation and development of artistic genre, the change of organization design becomes “secondary and natural” as the organization struggles to create new cultural products and achieve market success. Survival would be the natural outcome and not a desperate goal.

## **Encore Thoughts**

We hope that this essay will stimulate continued interest in the more effective development of cultural organizations. Without the higher arts and the appreciation of more sophisticated aesthetics, a culture will become that much poorer in the expression of high ideals and high purposes in living. The arts have a powerful civilizing effect on a society that pretends to be more than a collection of swirling interests. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy acknowledged the importance of the arts to national cultural development, stating, "I have long believed . . . that the quality of America's cultural life is an element of immense importance in the scales by which our worth will ultimately be weighed. . . ."<sup>14</sup> In 1997, President Clinton's Commission on the Arts and Humanities again noted the importance of the arts in creating and preserving cultural heritage and personal identification with the society.

Technology tends to isolate us as individuals reachable only via our electronic machines. The musical arts do the opposite. They take us away from the mundane of that which we must do and give relief from task and toil. The arts stretch our imagination and open up possibilities for seeing things very differently. And it is in seeing things differently that we improve the possibilities for survival in a turbulent and changing world.

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### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Cozzolino, Paul. 1996. *The New York Times*, December 8: Section 2, 1.
- <sup>2</sup> The record of which individual symphony will survive or die is impossible to tell. As in actuarial statistical practice, we cannot know who specifically will die, but data and trends simply suggest that in the absence of effective strategic change, more symphonies will falter and close their doors as time goes on.
- <sup>3</sup> American Symphony Orchestra League. 1993. *Americanizing the American Orchestra: A Task Force Report*. Washington, D.C., ASOL.
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- <sup>5</sup> Khilnani, Sunil. 1999. Review of *Realms of Memory*, edited by Pierre Nora. *Los Angeles Times*, 14 February, 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Atchison, Sandra D. 1993. Grand Ole Symphony? Staid Orchestras Are Forced to Change. *Business Week*, September 6, 76–78.
- <sup>7</sup> Smither, Robert, John M. Houston, and Sandra A. McIntire. 1996. *Organization Development: Strategies for Changing Environments*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers. See also, French, W.L., C.H. Bell, Jr., and R.A. Wawacki. 1994. *Organizational Development and Transformation: Managing Effective Change*. Burr Ridge, IL: Richard Irwin. Cummings, T.G., and C. Worley. 1993. *Organization Development and Change*. New York: West Publishing Company. Porras, J.I., and R.C. Silvers. 1991. Organization Development and Transformation. *Annual Review of Psychology* 42: 51–78.
- <sup>8</sup> Cummings, T.G. 1984. “Transorganizational Development.” In *Research in Organizational Behavior*, edited by B.M. Shaw and L.L. Cummings. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. See also Feneuille, S. 1990. A Network Organisation to Meet the Challenges of Complexity. *European Management Journal* 8 (3): 296–302. Lorange, P. 1994. *Implementing Strategic Processes: Change, Learning and Cooperation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- <sup>9</sup> Naisbitt, John, and P. Aburdene. 1985. *Reinventing the Corporation*. New York: Warner Books. See also, Berquist, W. 1993. *The Postmodern Organization: Mastering the Art of Irreversible Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. Forsell, A., and D. Jansson. 1996. “The Logic of Organizational Transformation: On the Conversion of Non-Business Organizations.” In *Translating Organizational Change*, edited by Barbara Czarniawska and Guje Sevon. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- <sup>10</sup> Margolis, Howard. 1993. *Paradigms and Barriers: How Habits of Mind Govern Scientific Beliefs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>11</sup> American Symphony Orchestra League. 1991. Celebrate the Past, Design the Future, a symposium held during the League’s National Conference, Chicago.
- <sup>12</sup> Bula, Frances. 1997. VSO-Opera Merger Dismays Players. *The Weekend Sun of Vancouver, British Columbia*, January 11, 1. See also, Rodes, Nevin J. 1996. Marketing a Community Symphonic Orchestra. *Marketing News* 30 (3), 2. Reiss, Alvin. 1992. Bringing Arts Groups Back from the Brink of Collapse. *Fund Raising Management* 23 (10), 44–48.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacobs, Tom. 1997. The New West Symphony: Envisioning the Orchestra of the Third Millennium. *Performing Arts* 31 (4), 44–50.
- <sup>14</sup> Swoboda, Henry, ed. 1967. *The American Symphony Orchestra*. New York: Basic Books.