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Special Section

Women in Leadership Roles in Symphony Orchestra Organizations

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Women in Leadership Roles in Symphony Orchestra Organizations

To stimulate more thought and discussion about the leadership complexity and patterns in symphony organizations, we decided to highlight one dimension of that topic. To concert audiences, it has been obvious for many years that women compose an increasing proportion of the orchestra. Perhaps less obvious is the proportion of women on orchestra organization boards and staffs. And we suspect readers know even less about the degree to which women occupy leadership roles throughout orchestra organizations (at levels which are substantially greater than in most businesses, and many other nonprofit and government organizations).

We thought it would be interesting to hear what women in the key administrative leadership roles in symphony organizations had to say about their responsibilities, tasks, and styles. We thought it would also be interesting to consider to what degree gender differences and similarities affect the ways women carry out these roles, and how women as symphony leaders might compare with leaders in other fields.

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Methodology

We initially determined in which North American symphony organizations women were currently serving, or had recently served, as board chairs, executive directors, and orchestra committee chairs. We then invited six women from each group to participate in our project. Ultimately, five board chairs, six executive directors, and six orchestra committee chairs said yes. As you will learn, these women represent orchestras across the continent, as well as orchestras of varying size.

An editor was assigned to each group—Marilyn Scholl for the board chairs, Sara Austin for the executive directors, and Margareth Owens for the orchestra committee chairs. The participants then completed written questionnaires to provide background information and an initial exploration of their thinking about leadership.

Following receipt of the questionnaires, each editor held individual phone conversations with the participants in her group, and each group then held a conference call to allow for interactive exploration of the leadership topic. The reports that follow represent a synthesis of the thinking that evolved over a period of several weeks.

The number of women currently serving as professional music directors and conductors in North America is small. We were fortunate to have one of these women agree to write an essay on the subject of women as music directors as part of our exploration of leadership.

To further our explorations, Institute staff prepared a quantitative analysis of the numbers of women holding a variety of positions in North American symphony orchestra organizations. And to complete our investigation of this topic, we interviewed Alice Eagly, a psychology professor from Northwestern University, who has spent years researching differences and similarities between the sexes.

The project became more fascinating as it evolved, and we think readers will enjoy perusing what we uncovered.

Fresh Dents in the Ceiling: Women as Chairs of Symphony Orchestra Boards

The year was 1895, and the "captains of industry" were expanding west the centers of American enterprise. As many cities grew rapidly, the formation of symphony orchestras kept pace. In fact, 16 of the 22 largest U.S. orchestras were founded between 1880 and 1920.[1] The decorative ceilings of the day were tin, not glass, and in the world of symphony orchestras, those ceilings had dents. As the current president of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (you will meet her in a minute) shared, "The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1895, and the first three presidents were women, who collectively served until 1929. Then there was a gap of 67 years until I became president in 1996."

A quick trip to the archives revealed that the Cincinnati experience was not unique. In Cleveland, Houston, Detroit, and Philadelphia (all cities with orchestras founded between 1880 and 1920), women played major roles as founders, funders, and leaders.[2]

Fast-forward to 1998, and our research indicates that approximately one in four North American symphony orchestras currently have women chairing their boards.[3] These women serve as "fresh dents" in the glass ceilings of the late 20th century.

Contemporary Leadership

As part of the Institute's project on women in leadership roles in symphony orchestra organizations, we invited five women who currently chair their orchestras' boards to share their thinking about the leadership that these organizations require at the board level. The five came together for a telephone roundtable discussion as the project progressed, and what follows is an edited transcript of that discussion.

Institute: Let's begin by asking you to tell us a bit about yourselves, your orchestras, and your boards.

Trish Bryan: I am president of the board of trustees of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Our orchestra has 97 full-time members and an annual budget of $26 million. We have 39 board members, plus 6 who serve ex-officio, and 7 trustees emeritus, for a total of 52. There are 16 other women on the board, 3 of

whom also serve on the executive committee. The board meets 10 times a year, and I would characterize attendance as very good. I have been involved with the Cincinnati Symphony for 27 years in a variety of roles, and it may amuse some of your readers to learn that my husband does not care for symphonic music. I usually attend concerts with my mother and my sister.

Susan Early: I am president of the board of directors of the Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra in California. I am also the co-owner of a commercial printing business in Fresno. Relative to Cincinnati, our orchestra is small, with an annual budget of $1.1 million, and our musicians play on a per-service contract. As many of your readers will know, the Fresno Philharmonic nearly closed its doors in a funding crisis, and while I would describe our situation as still "delicate," we are no longer deciding weekly if we can continue. Our board has 27 members, of whom 17 (in addition to me) are women. We meet 10 times a year, and generally 25 to 27 board members attend. I must admit that I have been surprised by the huge investment of time that chairing this board has taken.

Shirley Helzberg: I am president of the board of trustees of the Kansas City Symphony. The Kansas City Symphony, as it now exists, is relatively young, having been formed in 1982. In the American Symphony Orchestra League groupings, we are a "Group 2" orchestra, with an annual budget of $6 million, and our orchestra has 78 full-time musicians. There are 18 voting members on our board, of whom 6, including me, are women. There are no other women on the executive committee. Our board meets every other month, and attendance is wonderful. We are in the midst of a search for a music director, and that has taken a lot of time.

Jean Riley: I am chair of the board of trustees of the National Arts Centre of Canada. I also have had my own communications company for about 15 years, and have recently focused on strategic planning and fundraising consulting. My situation is actually quite different from that of my fellow roundtable members, as the National Arts Centre certainly includes a symphony orchestra, but somewhat akin to the U.S. Kennedy Center, also encompasses much more. My appointment is political, made by the government. We are a 10-member board intended to represent the entire country of Canada—with 2 members serving ex-officio—and by statute, we meet quarterly. Attendance is always excellent.

Marie Langlois: I am president of the board of directors of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra. I am also a partner in an investment management company in Providence. Our orchestra has 75 musicians and an annual budget of $1.6 million. Our board is large, with 65 members, and we meet quarterly. I would estimate meeting attendance at about 70 percent. Currently, women compose approximately 50 percent of both the board and the executive committee. I would note that our orchestra has a long history of women in prominent roles. We have had women as executive directors and managers, and there are many very generous women in Rhode Island.

Institute: Let's dive right into our discussion of leadership. What are the most

important leadership skills required to chair a symphony orchestra board? Jean, you offered a very comprehensive response on your questionnaire. Why don't you lead off.

Riley: Interestingly, my model, and the best chair with whom I've ever served, is a man. When I am looking for inspiration with my own board, I think about how he earned my trust. The keys were his intelligence and his familiarity with every aspect of the operation. I also admired his courage, and his ability to be up front about any difficulty. So I certainly consider those to be important leadership skills. To courage and transparency, I would add an ability to see far ahead, a sense of humor, a very strong intuitive sense of when trouble is lurking, an ability to listen, and, occasionally, an ability to bully!

Bryan: In preparing for this conversation, I made a list, and it certainly includes several things Jean mentioned. One needs to be confident, credible, diplomatic. One needs to be organized, and above all, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. I completely agree that the ability to earn trust is important, as is courage. Additionally, one has to be honest, and to have vision.

Langlois: The Rhode Island Philharmonic has a very large board, and one of the challenges is to be a facilitator and to engage other people. The CEOs of many Rhode Island companies sit on our board, and they are used to being in charge. I think a participative style is important so that everyone feels that they are included in the decision-making process.

Early: I made a list, too, Trish. Vision is important, as are listening, information gathering, written and verbal communication, strategic thinking and planning, and honesty. But I think most important for me is to lead by doing.

Helzberg: Answering last leads me to want to just say "ditto"! But I would add to the list having good time management, and by that I mean being considerate of other people's time, setting agendas, and working within the agreed time frame. I think a board chair must be able to network in the community, know who the players are, and know how to get things done.

Institute: Collectively, you have provided a very comprehensive, useful list. With that as a backdrop, let's turn to the fact that each of your predecessors as board chair was a man. Tell us how your leadership style differs from that of your predecessor.

Helzberg: I've mentioned that the Kansas City Symphony is only 16 years old. There had only been four presidents ahead of me—all men—and the board functioned on a very informal basis. During my tenure, we have established a regular bimonthly meeting schedule, formed an executive committee which also meets regularly, and established a number of working committees.

Bryan: How long did it take to accomplish that?

Helzberg: It didn't take long to set up meeting schedules, but it took about a year to really get the committee system functioning.

Langlois: We've made some significant changes in Rhode Island, too. We considered and rejected the idea of forming a smaller board because, although a 65-member board can be unwieldy, we did not want to risk alienating those who have supported our efforts so strongly. So we have developed mission statements for all of the board committees, and have tried to push more of the actual work down to the committee level where people could get together in smaller groups to really work on a project.

Riley: Marie, in terms of size, the National Arts Centre board is at the opposite end of the spectrum with only 10 members, but in some ways our assignment is more complex. Canada is a big country! And all of our board members are political appointments. So one challenge for me has been to make sure our board members understand what it means to serve on the Arts Centre board. In terms of differences from my predecessor, I think I brought an ability to be candid—sometimes disturbingly candid—and an ability to say "I don't know." I do know we have done a lot of rethinking, and I hope the board would agree that we now have a project that is stimulating to the intellect, and fun.

Early: The situation in Fresno was one in which leadership from a strong, long-term executive director made for a board which had become pretty lackadaisical about its responsibilities. My immediate predecessor's important role was to sound the alarm about a serious financial crisis; my watch has involved finding solutions. One big change has been to reassert the important role that the board has in the organization, and I have tried to make sure that everyone has an active, hands-on role, and receives recognition for that. I want everyone to walk away from every meeting with a task. Meetings are not merely for information exchange.

Bryan: For 67 years, presidents of the Cincinnati Symphony had been men who were corporate executives. In asking me to serve, the nominating committee acknowledged that it might be useful to try somebody who had a passion about the product, who had been involved, and who was knowledgeable about the interactions among staff, musicians, the music director, volunteers, and the board. And I have credibility with all of these people, because I know them and understand them. And, perhaps, it was because I was a woman.

Riley: Trish, if you wonder if gender played a role in your nomination, my appointment was flat-out because I am a woman. The government thought that would be a good idea. And of course the reaction was, "Who's she?" When I was appointed, my counterpart at the Kennedy Center was president of the World Bank, and initially, I felt a distinct lack of gravitas. But there were tradeoffs. I was allowed to be more creative, to take greater risks, and to be far more up front about some of the difficulties in what, for me, was all new. Not being stuck in any previously perceived role gave me a great deal of flexibility.

Institute: We at the Institute have maintained from day one that symphony orchestra organizations are complex, and require different kinds of leadership than do many other nonprofits. Would you agree? And if you do, how do those leadership skills differ?

Bryan: I would agree. Compared with other Cincinnati-area nonprofits in which I've been active, the symphony requires dealing with many different kinds of people. You deal with a community which believes the orchestra belongs to them. You deal with a board. You deal with a volunteer group. You deal with staff, musicians, the music director. It's a lot more balls to juggle than I've found in other organizations.

Riley: I'm often struck by how astonishing it is that you can hear a piece of music at a rehearsal, and two hours later hear the same piece of music performed by all of the same parties, and it is totally different. The complexities of that are what make the music world so fascinating, and so demanding. You are dealing with highly intelligent people and something of an antique construct—people who wear 19th-century clothes and play 18th-century instruments. The psychology is far more demanding than any other arts organization of which I've been part. Symphony orchestras require a real delicacy of attention.

Early: Jean, I agree entirely with what you just said. And if I can expand on that, the "product" that we are "selling" is a fleeting, intangible one. Much of the Fresno orchestra's identity comes from our music directors, who can also be fleeting. So maintaining an identity in complex circumstances is a special leadership challenge, and not one about which I had been educated in advance.

Langlois: I also sit on the Brown University board, and I find many similarities in working with musicians and faculty. But I agree with Susan's point about identity. In an orchestra the size of Rhode Island's, there is a change in artistic directors every four or five years, and it is a real challenge to maintain an identity under those circumstances. And that's very different from dealing with a university or a hospital whose critical mass is much larger and identity more constant.

Helzberg: Here I am answering last again! And agreeing with what I have heard. My experience in Kansas City—and I have served on a lot of boards—is that the orchestra is complex, one might even say full of "factions." The leadership challenge is to get different groups of highly intelligent people to work together, and that's been a real learning experience for me.

Institute: Shirley, that's a great lead-in to the next area we want to explore. As part of this whole project on women leaders, we have asked you to consider whether you have gender-based personality traits that make you particularly effective in your current roles. Susan, on your questionnaire, you indicated that you think you do.

Early: My experience, and the experience of what I've seen and studied in other people, is that we were raised as women. I was raised with different value systems and different skill focuses than most of the men I know. What I'm experiencing in this leadership role is carrying those skills and strengths and celebrating them. I try to stimulate an exchange of ideas by blending my feminine skills with the traditionally masculine skills.

Bryan: I have to tell you that the men, particularly those on the executive committee, appear to treat me more gently than they treated my predecessor. Has anyone else had that experience?

Langlois: I certainly haven't! People feel I am very approachable. I'm very soft spoken so no one is intimidated by me. I think I encourage participation, and that probably does relate to my gender.

Helzberg: I would prefer to think that my leadership skills are not gender related, but I do know that there is more communication and our focus is more clear. And this board has shown more compassion than they might have under the leadership of a man. For example, in the past, relationships between the board and the musicians could be characterized as "us" and "them." As we have developed a committee system during my tenure as president, we have included musicians on those committees, and as board members have come to know musicians as individuals, the level of concern for the musicians has certainly gone up. Is that a gender-related leadership style? I don't know.

Riley: I'd like to say that from where I sit, I think leadership is what we would normally associate with masculine characteristics—a strong strategic sense of attack and mental toughness—combined with an ability to facilitate, to draw out, to listen, to nurture when necessary, to intuit when that is an advantage. For me, the ideal chair combines both masculine and feminine characteristics, so this is not a subject on which I care to linger. And, Trish, I have to tell you that my board has not treated me more gently. I have a real appetite for change, and when I get moving, I know that some of the men on the board feel threatened. But we work together, we are friends, and we've brought about enormous changes.

Institute: Continuing in the vein of women as leaders in orchestra organizations, we know that the ranks of women as executive directors are growing, as are the ranks of women as chairs of orchestra committees. However, the ranks of women as music directors are still very small. From your perspective as a board chair, is there an explanation for this?

Riley: We are in the middle of a music director search for the National Arts Centre symphony right now, and it's my observation that whatever the mix of hormonal chemistry that makes an ordinary person an orchestra conductor requires an extraordinary dose of testosterone! It takes a very strong person to get all the personalities of an orchestra to perform with unanimity. There are probably relatively few women music directors because we, as North American women, have been acculturated to downplaying our egos.

Bryan: Are you considering a woman?

Riley: No. Our initial list probably included 200 names, of whom 2 were women. And they were eliminated early in the search.

Bryan: We've never conducted a survey on this question, but Cincinnati is a very conservative community, and I wonder whether this community would accept a woman as a music director at this time. I really don't know.

Helzberg: We also have a search for a music director going on in Kansas City. And we have had two women among our candidates. One conducted our orchestra as a guest conductor prior to our official search; the other conducted recently. I can tell you a bit about the reaction when they were here. They were well received by the audiences, and the executive committee of the board wondered if we might not have an opportunity to be on the cutting edge by having a woman music director. Of course, because we are in the middle of our search, I can't tell you how this will turn out.

Early: Shirley, I think your comments about the different constituencies that need to accept a music director are really important. We had a woman guest conductor in Fresno last season, and she was well received by the audiences. But I was disheartened by the evaluations she received from the orchestra. Many of the comments were based on gender, not artistry. So it must be a terribly difficult field for a woman to succeed.

Langlois: I think one obstacle to women becoming music directors is that other conductors do not mentor women the way they do men. And that must be a constant challenge for women who aspire to conduct major orchestras.

Riley: A few years ago, I was involved with a chamber orchestra when we selected a woman—who has now gone on as the artistic director of the Vienna Boys' Choir—as a music director. And I would observe from that experience that there are more demands made on women, and the judgment is less generous. People talked about her appearance, her hair style—things they would never mention about a man. So I would say that the field of music direction is not one of égalité.

Institute: On that note, let's move to the final leadership area we want to explore in this conversation. An important activity for orchestra board chairs is funding, and several of you have been involved in major fundraising projects for your orchestras. We would like you to share your experiences as women in approaching major funders.

Bryan: In Cincinnati, we have just successfully completed a $35.4 million capital campaign which was headed by a husband and wife team. But interestingly, the men who served on the campaign cabinet approached the major corporations and banks.

Helzberg: Trish, my experience in Kansas City has been exactly the opposite. My term of office began in May of 1995, and we were facing a June 30 fiscal year end with a shortfall of about $500,000. So I marched out to request year-end gifts from long-time supporters and corporations. I went alone, armed with lots of facts and a three-year plan for the future, and I got the money. I think our board felt I was the one who should go because it would be hard to say no to the president of the board.

Early: When I took office in Fresno, we had a $450,000 deficit which had been accumulating over seven or eight years. We also lost an important source of funds when Fresno's "Arts to Zoo" local tax was ruled unconstitutional. What we learned was that during the time we had a reliable stream of tax revenue, we had let our fundraising muscles atrophy. Ours is not a community of major corporations, and our fundraising must have many grass roots. We discovered that we had to reestablish our credibility as a viable organization that adhered to businesslike principles; an organization that could be trusted with people's money. And I have had no experience in which my being a woman was a hindrance in the area of fundraising.

Langlois: When I think about Cincinnati, I realize Rhode Island's tiny! We have a $3 million capital campaign under way right now. A woman who has also served as president of the board and I are co-chairs of the campaign. In the Rhode Island community, many women are active in fundraising, so there have been no questions about whether a man or a woman should make a particular corporate contact.

Riley: Here again, my organization is a bit different. The National Arts Centre has always been funded by government. However, we have had significant decreases in that funding, and are starting to look to corporations for funds. My experience is that it is always best to have someone make the call who already knows the person being approached. And "big pockets" tend to listen to other "big pockets." Being a woman who does not have particularly big pockets, I'm at somewhat of a disadvantage. So when I am making one of those calls, I always make sure that I have someone with me who does have big pockets.

Bryan: That's exactly the point. And I need to say that I was not upset when it was suggested that a man make a particular call, because I certainly wanted the best representative to make every call.

Institute: You have all been most generous with your time and thoughtful in your answers. Are there any other aspects of women's leadership that you think we should cover?

Riley: Yes. I never thought it would be possible to work as hard as I have on this job. And listening to this conversation, I think we are all working terribly hard at our jobs. And while I want to be one of the naysayers, I wonder if there is a gender aspect to that?

Bryan: I certainly agree about working hard. And I also agree about wondering if there is a gender aspect. Do we have to prove ourselves more than men?

Langlois: I have not had that experience. The two men who preceded me gave every bit as much time to the orchestra as I do. That may be because we are such a small organization, and everyone has to draw on the board more than they do in larger organizations.

Early: I have been completely surprised by the demands placed on this board, and particularly on me. I feel as though I will have acquired a Ph.D. in trusteeship,

as well as in symphony management, by the end of my term. Is that gender related? I'm not sure. But I do know that I have wanted to spend a great deal of time with each individual on the board.

Helzberg: Our entire board has invested tremendous amounts of time because we have completely restructured our organization. And Jean, while I, too, want to be one of the naysayers, I do think that there are changes that women would recommend that men might not.

Riley: This entire conversation has been fascinating, and I keep thinking of more avenues to investigate. Some of our answers seem to vary based upon the size of our communities, and I wonder also about the dimension of the presence of power in our communities, and what effect it has on the acceptance of women as leaders. But I guess those are explorations for another time.

Notes

[1] The "Group 1" orchestras as defined by the American Symphony Orchestra League.

[2] Craven, Robert R., ed. 1986. *Orchestras of the United States: Selected Profiles*. New York: Greenwood Press.

[3] From material developed for A Quantitative Analysis of Women in Leadership Roles in Symphony Orchestra Organizations that begins on page 91 of this issue.

Room at the Top: Women as Executive Directors of Symphony Orchestras

True story: An accomplished woman is the logical choice as the next board chairman for a Midwestern symphony orchestra. But the current chairman confesses to the orchestra's manager that the organization may not be ready to have a woman in charge. "Then why on earth did you hire a female as executive director?" she asks. Flustered, he responds: "We don't look for the same level of leadership in a manager."

Women professionals lead symphony orchestras in wide and increasing numbers. In 45 percent of the largest 200 American symphony orchestras, a woman leads the professional staff; nearly 3 in 4 of the smallest-budget orchestras are led by female managers. And the majority-female staffs of most orchestras—60 percent on average—suggest that the ranks of female executives will continue to swell in the coming decade.

Just what level of leadership do orchestras expect of executive directors? And does gender have any bearing on how orchestra managers do the job—or how they are perceived to do the job? Conversations with six accomplished women who manage symphony orchestras provoked lively, thoughtful, and divergent opinions on these questions.

"I am not a believer in women having certain traits that make them better or worse orchestra managers," says Rebekah Lambert, executive director of the Eugene Symphony Orchestra since early 1996. Lambert formerly served as executive director of the Symphony of Southeast Texas and orchestra manager of the Honolulu Symphony. At the $1 million-budget Eugene Symphony, she joins a long list of female leaders, including a previous executive director, several female board chairs, and former music director Marin Alsop, one of the preeminent female conductors in the world.

Kathryn Holm began her career with The Florida Orchestra more than 20 years ago—as principal harpist. When the orchestra fell into debilitating financial crisis in 1990, she found herself appointed interim executive director. "I was drafted and backed into this career, " she says. When offered the chance to take the job permanently, she recalls, "I could have returned to playing. But after a lot of thought, I realized management held more new challenges than did playing, and that's what I wanted." After a tumultuous time of crisis and cutbacks, the

$6.3 million-budget orchestra has steadied under Holm's leadership, running three consecutive seasons in the black.

Susan Franano, too, left a thriving performance career for orchestra management. In 1982, she put a professional singing career on hold to help the new Kansas City Symphony get off the ground. By the time the orchestra was securely up and running in 1986, she says, "I was hooked on orchestra management. The decision not to return to a pretty healthy and busy performing career was a very happy one. It was obviously the right thing to do to stay in orchestra management, a field that turned out to be such an incredibly good fit for so many of the things I want to do." Franano left the Kansas City Symphony in 1995 to join the $8 million-budget Columbus Symphony Orchestra as executive director. She stepped down from that position in December 1997.

"I think the most important leadership traits, such as honesty, consistency, integrity, confidence, commitment, and credibility, are gender neutral," says Jane Hunter, since 1987 executive director of the $2 million-budget Portland Symphony Orchestra in Maine. Hunter has seen the orchestra field evolve over a two-decade career that includes stints at the Springfield Symphony in Massachusetts, the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, and the Midland Symphony in Michigan, where she also served as principal cellist. "The stress of what is happening to the institution is really bearing down on management, more than anywhere else," she says. "The managers are the ones who are expected to make everybody's expectations come to pass, and make everybody happy. Sometimes that's impossible."

In 1971, Barbara Richman moved from Boston to a remote fishing village (population: 75) on the south shore of Nova Scotia. "I picked up and followed my husband to Canada," she says. "And I threw my whole life and my whole career over to do that. I suddenly had to find a way to make a life and a career for myself." Richman managed Canadian dance, theater, and music organizations for a total of 11 years before joining Symphony Nova Scotia as managing director in 1995. "I lead from within," she says. "My preference is to build teams, processes, and skills, and to establish an organization that has a life of its own, that is not dependent on any one individual."

Seattle Symphony Executive Director Deborah Card is one of four female executive directors currently employed by the twenty-five largest North American orchestras. Card joined the $15 million-budget orchestra in 1992, after six years as executive director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and eight years on staff at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She had her first baby in March. "I don't know any female managers of the big orchestras who have families," she says. "I think it will be interesting in the next five years to see whether this job can be done, because the model has been that you are all things to all people. Being able to balance motherhood with filling the executive director's role will be an interesting challenge."

All six women hesitate to make generalizations about gender and leadership, noting that their experiences as orchestra managers varied widely depending on the orchestra's community. Kathryn Holm, whose orchestra serves four Florida cities, noted distinct cultural differences between cities less than a twenty-minute drive from one another. Oregon, Florida, Ohio, Maine, Nova Scotia, and Seattle have individual personalities, as do the symphony orchestras that serve them and the managers who lead those organizations. During a series of conversations condensed here, they discussed from their unique perspectives leadership styles, orchestra management, and their own career paths.

Institute: What are the most valuable leadership traits for an orchestra manager, male or female?

Barbara Richman: I think it really depends on where the organization is in its development, what the organization requires. But if I could have the perfect package, then I would like to see a team builder. Someone who had good human resource skills, and who also had strong fund-raising abilities. One who had real vision about where the orchestra could go, and a clear, broad context of understanding of the orchestra's position in its own community and its broader national and international role.

Jane Hunter: Any orchestra manager has to be able to listen, first of all, and to communicate. A manager needs to be able to articulate a vision for the organization. That's a vision that certainly the manager is responsible for helping to inspire, but I don't believe it's solely the manager's vision. I think that the trick is to help the organization come to a collective sense of vision in itself, and then to communicate that to the community and all parts of the organization and to make sure that everyone feels that he or she is invested in that vision.

Deborah Card: I think that having a vision, understanding the vision, and being able to articulate the vision is critical to the institution. It's then important to have the technical skills to back up one's vision. I believe caring about people is really important to being able to motivate others and encourage them to share in the vision. Whether you're caring about your music director, musicians, staff, patrons, or volunteers, ultimately you do what you do because you care about them. In this business you can't just walk all over people, you need to inspire them. In a symphony orchestra, you can't live for the music alone. You should care about the people, what music will do for the people, and believe that the sharing of this great art form will make people's lives better. I frankly feel that ego is something that doesn't have a place for the executive director of an arts organization, because you have so many other egos to deal with. Certainly we need to have enough ego to do our jobs, but if you are here for self-aggrandizement, you're in the wrong place.

Institute: Is it important that the manager be a musician?

Hunter: I've only come to this role as a musician. But I've found it very important. It shapes the mission and thus the vision. I find myself arguing for things that don't make economic sense but that I know are good for the orchestra.

Card: I think it's really important to have been a performing musician, or at least have that empathy with the musician and the musician's life. One of my biggest roles is translating between the musicians and the board members, who ask questions like, "Why do they need so much time off?" and "Why do they only work 20 hours a week?" You need to have a good understanding of musicians' lives and lifestyles.

Kathryn Holm: It has taken some time for me to overcome the "only a musician" label. It has been a struggle to gain the credibility, but what has done it for me has been three years in the black. The remaining challenge is being executive director at the same place I was once in the orchestra. When budget cuts were necessary, and impacted their salaries, many musicians felt I had abandoned and turned against them. Any disagreement with management is amplified by this dynamic. We are implementing an orchestra relations committee to work on this. I've also had to acquire, both with help and by trial and error, particular tools such as time management, structural organization, meeting effectiveness, employee evaluation. It has been work, but I think it's easier to teach an artist business, than it is to teach a businessman about the art!

Richman: I am not a musician; I come from a dance and theater background. And it's terrible. The ideal thing would be to have someone who has a broader musical background. I think a good manager needs to have a really contextual understanding of the artistic vision. You need to be able to support the artistic director, particularly in this day and age when artistic directors fly in and out. That's harder to do when you don't have the background.

Institute: All of you describe yourselves to some extent as consensus builders. Do you think that this approach is particularly appropriate to symphony orchestras, where there are so many different constituencies invested?

Richman: So many of the problem areas in orchestras now relate to the adversarial relationship among boards, management, and orchestra. At this time in history, it's really key that there's a shift in that. At Symphony Nova Scotia, I've tried to relationship build. I've tried to have very broad sharing of information and to see that there was very little in the way of closed doors. I've tried to involve the orchestra in administrative decision making. In my situation, the orchestra has been a fairly continuing group, but the board turns over almost 100 percent every three years and the staff also turns over very, very rapidly. So the people who understand the history and the culture and have experienced it are the players. The orchestra is a resource that we should be drawing on more.

Rebekah Lambert: I think I was brought in to the Eugene Symphony as a healer, as someone to bring our diverse and historically divided constituencies together. I think I'm making progress. We held a joint board-orchestra retreat last February. And this past November we held a board meeting prior to a rehearsal at the concert hall, invited the entire orchestra to attend the board meeting so they could see the board work, and then invited the board to stay for the rehearsal so they could see the orchestra work. I also do a monthly, bullet-point synopsis of

the state of the orchestra: where we are financially, where we are we with ticket sales and development, what the major issues confronting us are. That goes to every orchestra member. And I know people read it, because when it doesn't look good, I get calls! I'm at every rehearsal. I came in here with the trust factor already there because my sister was a former musician in the orchestra. My aim is to let them know that trust was justified. I want to understand the issues and want to bring people together.

Hunter: We can operate by majority rules. But because orchestras run largely on peoples' passion—whether the musicians' passion for the music or the volunteers' passion for the art form—I think that building consensus or helping people reconcile themselves with whatever result is reached is important. You might not be able to get everybody to agree on a particular point, but it is important that when somebody in the family, be it an orchestra member or staff member or volunteer, disagrees, that you take the time to listen and hear the concerns. You have to acknowledge the concern and provide some kind of encouragement that what is really at the bottom of the concern is going to be addressed in some other way.

Card: You have to build consensus, but then somebody has to be the person to make the tough decisions. Certainly I have lots of opinions about the way certain things should be handled. But basically my way of building a team is to try and have a complete understanding throughout the organization from the senior directors all the way down through the staff of "how would we do it?" And so consensus building is really developing a shared ownership and a shared knowledge of the way we do business. When I first came to the Seattle Symphony, it was clear that the decision making was very centralized and that all of the information was held very closely amongst two or three people on the board, without even a whole lot of staff involvement. And it has taken a very long time to change that. We're building a new concert hall, and this is the kind of thing that can be a catastrophe because there are either too many people involved or not enough people involved. And I think we've worked really hard at getting the right balance. It feels like a community project rather than two or three people who have made the decisions. But it's a lot more work. In my previous position at the L.A. Chamber Orchestra, I did have people saying, "Look, forget it, you're in charge, you just make a decision." I don't think that's the right way to manage an orchestra. Consensus building is more labor intensive, but the shared ownership is much more rewarding.

Holm: Crisis taught me a lot about teamwork. It gave me a real appreciation of everybody's job in the institution, because I did all of them. I learned very early on the necessity of bringing everybody on board with decisions, that even in crisis I couldn't fly by the seat of my pants and do it my way. If anything was going to work, particularly in crisis, everybody had to be committed to the plan. It caused me to have a collaborative style, and in more recent times a very empowering style. I've learned to hire really, really good managers and let them run their departments their way.

Institute: What about fund raising? Does being a woman have any impact on fundraising success?

Holm: It's a little cliché, but I do think in many situations being a woman is an advantage in fund raising. Women—this is the cliché part—focus more on relationships, and that's what fund raising is. I think women are really good at building those relationships, maintaining them, and nurturing them. I think in terms of individual donors, that's a real strength for most of us. In the corporate world, frankly, I think that's where you can use the feminine side to make it difficult for a male executive to say no to you. I think they find it harder to say no to a gracious woman than a guy they can blow off. I know that's a somewhat sexist view, but I think that's a reality.

Richman: There are situations where it's easier for men to raise money. If the power base is primarily male, then male board members are often better plugged in to the network. That can be a real plus. I've seen it be tougher for female fund raisers and board members if they didn't have a way to make those connections.

Franano: I've had both experiences. I think in the 13 years I was with the Kansas City Symphony, I raised money I couldn't have raised if I were male. One former business leader in Kansas City used to laugh and tell people that nobody had ever fleeced him as well as I did, that he could never say no to me. And that was a subject of cocktail conversation that people enjoyed and laughed about. In Columbus I would agree with Barbara that because it is still an old boy's network the corporate dollars don't as often go to women. On the board there are a number of women who haven't been very successful. One in particular, though, has been very successful because she has tremendous resources herself, and is willing to throw them behind her own ask. I think it has nothing to do with her gender; it has everything to do with her money.

Institute: The orchestra field seems to be in a state of great flux and change. Do women leaders have any advantage in managing that change?

Franano: I think it depends on the nature of the change needed or desired. In my own experience, I led tremendous change throughout a community when we built a brand new orchestra in Kansas City. I didn't know a thing about doing it at the time; it was all very instinctive. Looking back on it I suspect that it's the sort of thing that I probably was better at than most of the men I have observed in similar situations. I think I listened better. I gave the change the time it needed in that particular situation; I wasn't impatient about it. I was able to convince others that change was the order of the day, and it would happen in a good way if we gave it a chance and stayed the course. But if it were the sort of change that needs a "slash-and-burn" kind of technique that we're seeing so much of in corporate America—with downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, and so on—I don't think I'd be very good at that. I think it would be my own feminine sensibilities that would get in the way.

Hunter: I think that women may have an advantage when it comes to managing change because, as an executive director, you are at the eye of the storm of a number of egos, and I think women have a great deal more facility at managing around other egos as opposed to their own. I think they are a little more flexible. I also think that women are more process-oriented than men are by and large, and also are less territorial in terms of responsibilities and investment in tasks. All of those things I think really come under fire when you are talking about change. Women are more adaptable.

Institute: Is there anything you wish you could change about your own management style?

Richman: I would try to find ways to be more accepting of the power that I have. That is actually not easy for me. I would like to internalize some of those "male" qualities in terms of being very able to use power, obviously not in an abusive way, but sometimes I'm a little threatened by the dangers of being a powerful person. I manage a flagship arts organization in my community, which means that a tremendous amount of power accrues simply because of the position. You open your mouth and people listen to you and think you've actually said something very, very important simply by virtue of the fact that you do this job. I'm a big believer in not abusing power, but sometimes you can go the wrong way and not use it effectively as it's presented to you.

Franano: Ooh, did that really hit home! It's exactly that. It's knowing those moments when you shouldn't sit back and keep your counsel, because in your position you want to be giving counsel. It probably would serve me well to lead a little bit more, to be a little more definitive and not wait so long for consensus to form. To be flexible about the means, but make it very clear what the ends are up front.

Card: Five years ago I might have said that I have problems accepting the power of my position. But not today. The first thing that comes to my mind is that I am so accessible to everybody that it puts me in a bad position in terms of my own ability to succeed with the work I do. Part of what I have always tried to do is to have an open-door policy, walking around, talking to staff members, making them feel that they can ask me questions and that I'm not just this aloof person that only talks to my senior directors. But now there are just too many demands on my time, people want me too much. I need to restrict my availability somewhat to remain effective.

Lambert: I am getting better at feeling comfortable with the role, the authority. Because it is something to become habituated to. Likewise I would echo that especially in Eugene, where everybody's opinion is regarded as being equally valid, it's been very hard to encourage anyone, whether it's board or staff, to make decisions and to lead people to understand there are cases where someone just has to make a decision. Where it's not a group effort. There has been some discomfort, especially with my staff, when I just make decisions.

Holm: The hardest thing for me is to let go of all of the detail and the sense of responsibility directly for everything like it used to be when we were in crisis. I'm now accepting and rejoicing in and flourishing in the ability to delegate and to actually let go and let people do their thing. Because most of them do it better than I do. But I'm still learning how to give them the support they need. I like it, but it's not a natural experience in this organization, and it's something we're all working at. It's a letting go and a holding hands at the same time.

Institute: What do you think of the idea that there are *generational* differences in leadership style as opposed to, or in addition to, gender differences?

Franano: I think there's a greater generational difference in leadership styles in males than females. I do think I have seen a shift to more inclusive management styles in younger men than in older men, and maybe that's because there are more women in the work force, and because some of those young men have observed women's leadership styles as they have gone through the beginnings of their careers, and without even realizing it perhaps they have patterned themselves after somebody they've seen to be successful who just happened to be a woman.

Hunter: And they also have wives who work, so the management at home is very different.

Lambert: I have seen some possible generational differences within my own staff. We have an opinionated and stubborn, but dedicated and talented, group of people that often has troubles working together. When I think of women I know who are unable to work together as a team, I wonder if it's not gender but education and generation. When bemoaning these women to my own mother, she commented that she was never taught how to work in teams or how to build consensus. On the flip side, I attended a graduate school at Yale that stresses team work and doesn't give out formal grades in order to build cooperation and camaraderie.

Richman: I'm seeing more young women who are more assertive. They have been in the workplace longer and more of them see themselves as career directed as opposed to family directed. And they are patterning on men the same way that men are patterning on women. I do think there is some crossover there. I'm seeing quite significant changes in the young women that are here now versus the young women I worked with 20 or 30 years ago. It definitely makes them more successful. There is a larger-base body of women to network with, there are more women to exchange ideas with, and there are more opportunities for women now. And I think that the fact that they have these skills, and that they have different sets of values and different sets of visions opens doors for them.

Institute: If younger women are being more assertive and taking on some more traditionally "male" leadership qualities, do they lose anything? Do they lose something valuable in terms of their ability to build a family atmosphere?

Franano: Maybe it falls under the category of "If you never had it then you

never know you miss it." My emotional response is a little bit of mourning that they can't feel what I have felt as a woman, which I treasure and which I think is very full and rich. Sometimes I look at traditional career men and feel they have lost out on some of the things I've been able to enjoy and hold close. But you know, that's my perspective. Maybe they haven't lost a thing. Maybe if I could go back and do it both ways, I'd prefer the new way.

Holm: I think also it's a matter of degree. We have several young women on our staff who show an interesting blend of the two. They are very hard driving, very goal oriented, always eye-on-that-target and very aggressive, and yet you see them at tears at a concert when they are moved by the music. That just feeds back to their drive to succeed. It comes back to an individual level, and I think the ones who will be the most successful will be the ones who find that balance. You want the feminine and the male, the yin and the yang. You take the best from both and really run with it.

Richman: Just the way we're most successful when we've found that balance, when we've been able to assimilate what we sometimes think of as the "male" characteristics that are important for us to do our jobs, too.

Institute: All of you have majority female staffs, and this is a trend throughout the field. With more women taking on top management and senior management positions, what do you see down the road? In 10 or 15 years, will the vast majority of orchestras be led by women?

Hunter: I think it will depend on the direction that orchestras take. And it's hard to know how that will be affected by some of the generational changes that we talked about. I think that orchestras are going to move toward more entrepreneurial approaches. In the past, that would have indicated that you might see more male executive directors. But I don't know about that now. I think we have more and more young women who are going into business school and who are functioning as executives, and may be just as comfortable and would gravitate naturally toward something that was more entrepreneurial in nature.

Franano: I think most boards of the largest symphony orchestras are still male dominated, and I think the funding of symphony orchestras is still more controlled by men. So maybe at those orchestras it's a natural inclination for them to want a man to work with. I'm told that in a recent search at a Group One orchestra they were pretty open about deciding that for their orchestra at this time, it has to be a man.

Institute: What is it that is attracting so many young women to orchestra management? Or, conversely, what is repelling the men?

Franano: It's exciting. It's also important. It's an opportunity to do something that you feel makes a positive difference. I believe so passionately in the importance of orchestras: the music that they create, what they bring to their communities, what they bring to a too-shallow culture that we have in this

country. Whether that's something that's more appealing to women than to men, I'm not sure. Popular lore might have you believe that, but I encounter both males and females in the business for whom making a difference is an important issue.

Richman: I think that often women are more human-resource-based. Because the profit motive isn't there in the arts, I think there is a better fit. You don't necessarily have to make the same kind of decisions, you're not driven by the same issues. In a corporate situation where you are really profit driven, and in this time particularly with all the issues relating to downsizing human resources, very often you are less able to protect your human resources. Whereas in the arts your human resource is still key, because your product is your people.

Lambert: Maybe women are naturally more drawn to nonprofits and service. But then again, I'm not comfortable with these gender stereotypes, so I say that with a lot of skepticism.

Holm: I do think that even amongst a male-oriented structure there may be a slightly greater acceptance of women in leadership in nonprofit and arts versus the regular business environment. As in, "Well, a nonprofit is a warm fuzzy thing so it's okay for a woman to run it."

Hunter: Not a real business. I agree with that.

Franano: I think our society still has men defining themselves much more by how much money they are able to make, and what sorts of things they are able to acquire in their lives. I don't think we place the same burden on women. And therefore it may be easier for a woman to make a decision to go into a career that everyone knows is not going to be as lucrative as the for-profit business world. Society seems in a funny way to accept women leaders in nonprofits more readily than in for-profits. I think we still have this notion that you've got to have that brutal, killer instinct that we don't associate with women—or we don't like to associate with women—to be successful in that dog-eat-dog business world, whose mission after all is to create a profit. We don't expect that from the nonprofit sector. We expect the arts to have more lofty ideals. I don't know. Maybe the pendulum is swinging back toward reverence of women as somehow more in touch with the better qualities of humankind?

Institute: How do you all define success? Is it monetary?

Holm: It can't be, if you're in this business! I think it's having an impact. It's seeing the results of what you're doing have an effect on the programs of the institution and meeting the challenges and overcoming the impossible.

Hunter: Well, I do have some monetary measures of success, though I suppose in the world of the corporate lions they would be laughable. To me being financially successful means being able to support myself and being secure enough to provide for my future. I also think a measure of success for me is pushing my boundaries, being able to explore new things, acquire new skills, and being able to take calculated risks.

Card: It's really hard for me to deal with this issue of ambition, and what I feel means I'm successful. It's not monetary—which may be a bad thing, because I will forever be paid less than the men are. It's actually a source of great discussion in my family, because I know that I get paid less than a man in my position, and yet I still do it because I believe in it. I haven't ever been motivated by money, but sometimes maybe should be. Probably the greatest reward is having people come up to you and say, "Wow, that was a great concert," or "Wow, the symphony is doing so well, and I really want to be a part of it." Then you feel successful.

Lambert: That's exactly it. It's standing in the lobby after a youth concert and listening to the kids chatter about it.

Franano: I absolutely agree, and I would take all of that as an important part of success. But I would not consider myself a success unless I also felt that I was in control of my life. And by that I mean being able to keep things in balance between professional responsibilities and personal life stuff.

Lambert: I've been in situations where I didn't pay attention to the personal side of my life. And my personal and professional lives got all blurred together, and I think I suffered on both ends of it. So I'm very conscious that for the way I am made up as a person, I need to take good care of the nonwork part of my life and have that be fulfilling, to be content there, and give it the time it needs in order for me to function well in everything I do.

Card: My pregnancy gave me an opportunity to assess the things that I have to do versus the things that I want to do, but don't have to do. It gave me an opportunity to provide greater balance in my life long before I had a mandatory call for something like that. In the past six months I felt an incredible calm and understanding that I had never felt before. I can't decide whether this is because I was pregnant, because I turned 40 last fall, or because before I became pregnant I had decided I needed to either change professions or change my attitude. In any event, it's different now. But I still struggle every single day with whether I'm giving enough time in either place. If you want to know the truth, that's the biggest difference between a big orchestra and a small orchestra—the incredible demands on your time. When I was eight months pregnant, I was still working fourteen-hour days. There are so many different things that pull at you; balance is something you have to work on all the time. I'm not sure it works for all people. I work really hard at it all the time—I'm getting better, but it's still not there.

Hunter: I want to emphasize that this is a phenomenon that is not exclusively feminine. I think many of us in the field are thinking about balance in life, and looking at the field and the amount of burnout that occurs, how we want to live our lives. The organization man of the 1960s is dead, at least in this field.

Must One Play Viola?
Women as Orchestra Committee Chairs in Symphony Orchestras

The orchestra committee of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra (five elected members and the ROPA[1] representative, ex-officio) includes two men and four women. And four of the committee members are viola players. The on-going joke is that the viola players are taking over.

As it happens this story very much reflects some of the dynamics of collegial relationships, gender issues, and leadership among symphony orchestra musicians that emerged in our discussions with six women (two of them viola players) who serve or have served as chair of the orchestra committee (players' committee, musicians' committee) in their orchestras. That they are women and leaders does not seem remarkable to their colleagues; that, within the orchestra, the players see each other first as players with particular skills and traits they bring to the group enterprise of making music is a matter of course.

The women musician-leaders who shared their insights and experiences for this report include:

- Bonnie Bewick, a violinist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who recently completed a one-year term as chair of the players' committee of that orchestra;
- Diane Dickson, an oboist and english horn player in the Fort Wayne Symphony, who has served six years as orchestra committee chair;
- Clara A. Markham, a violist in the Louisville Orchestra and chair of that orchestra's musicians' committee;
- Ruth Rhodes, a clarinetist in the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra and also dean of the graduate division of Vandercook College of Music in Chicago, who served as orchestra committee chair for nine years up until 1996;
- Patricia Daly Werne, a violist in the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and a member of the orchestra committee. She also served as orchestra committee chair for three years between 1991 and 1995; and
- Paula B. Wright, a cellist in the Austin Symphony Orchestra, whose experience includes three terms as chair of that orchestra's orchestra committee.

Women's Leadership in Today's Orchestras

We asked them why they were chosen to chair their committees, and most of the participants said they believed they were chosen on the basis of experience, or competence, or some other strength or trait that the orchestra members needed and valued.

Being able and willing to contribute their time to the work of the committee was also especially significant. Bonnie Bewick told us that her committee selected her their chair because, among other reasons, "I have more time than some other members of the committee." Diane Dickson, who says her orchestra "probably selected me because they know I'm really interested in this and there aren't a whole lot of people in the orchestra who want to get out there and do this, and deal with these things," also told us, "the fact that you do want to do this and are probably perceived as being very fair-minded and that you hold the interests of the orchestra and players first in mind, that will get you elected, no problem."

The issue of time and personal commitment to what can be at least a time-consuming role, and usually a demanding one as well, did prompt some wry comments about women's willingness to work hard, as well as Ruth Rhodes's assertion that she was selected chair precisely because she is a woman: "I was the only woman on a five-member committee and, therefore, got the 'honor' of doing all the work."

These six women think of their own leadership first in practical terms. Asked to describe the greatest satisfaction of their roles as committee chairs, they mentioned particular accomplishments: a pension plan offered to musicians for the first time in Austin; "one of the best growth contracts for this orchestra" in Fort Wayne; the ouster of personalities regarded by the musicians as antagonistic to the organization in Northwest Indiana; and the implementation of a compromise agreement that saved the Hartford orchestra.

What satisfactions and frustrations did they find in these accomplishments and in their roles? Here is what they offered.

Paula Wright: One of the most difficult things of the chair position in Austin is that that person leads negotiations, because the orchestra committee is the negotiation committee. And talk about things you never knew and had to learn in a hurry! Like how to read charts, all kinds of things. And you have to be able to reconcile both sides: you have to be able to assess the situation and decide how you're going to bring the two together, if you're going to make a successful closure and move forward. I think that in this role, you're forced to develop qualities you may not know that you have. And it's a joy to find out that you can do some things that you never even attempted before, or thought of.

Diane Dickson: My greatest satisfaction was one of the best growth contracts for the Fort Wayne orchestra. It was difficult because we came from a position, not of strife, but of great satisfaction in the way things were, and it's difficult to get things moving.

Ruth Rhodes: The greatest satisfaction I have is that, through the system—through the camaraderie of the orchestra members, as well as the huge support I received from symphonic services division and from Local 10-208 in Chicago and Local 203 in Hammond, Indiana—we were able to get rid of a CEO in our orchestra and a chairman of the board whose mission seemed to be to tear us apart. So that was a great satisfaction: the musicians won. Even though it was a horrible two years, we learned a great deal. The experience brought the members of the orchestra together in a way that might not have happened if we hadn't almost lost the orchestra. The biggest disappointment was not being able to get the entire story across to the community or, especially, to the board of directors. This is a sad thing, because, to my mind, it prevents healing from taking place if the whole story is not understood, or accepted, or if there are issues and doubts that still are not addressed.

Pat Werne: For me, the greatest satisfaction of being chair was combined with timing. I came onto the committee at a time when we were about to dissolve: we had been locked out for a year and a half, and we were talking about forming a co-op orchestra. I was voted onto the committee at that time and was able to help put through a compromise agreement and to help the board and the musicians and the management all work together. So I came in at a time of terrible strife, and the greatest satisfaction for me is to look back and to see how we turned around the whole situation in Hartford from one of hatred and animosity to a situation where all the groups are working together. And it has been very satisfying now, some years later, to see other musicians getting involved in board representation work and really becoming involved in the workings of the orchestra committee without this terrible animosity and hatred we had.

Their Own Leadership and Leadership Styles

We then asked the group to describe their own styles of leadership; to tell us whether or not they felt their own styles were shaped by the particular situations in which they found themselves (or felt that their style helped shape the situation); and to share their assessments of what it takes to be effective in the role of orchestra committee chair. Some common themes and characteristics that emerged here and elsewhere in our discussions were a desire to work for consensus, a quality of inclusiveness and emphasis on communication, a certain sort of activism, a willingness to put themselves on the line, and finding pleasure in involving or mentoring others in a manner rather akin to mothering.

Werne: When I was first on the committee, my style was shaped by what the orchestra needed just then, and, to a certain extent, by my temperament. I think I was chosen because of my temperament, because I have a pretty calm approach, and because I find it pretty easy to get along with most people. And that's exactly what the orchestra needed right then.

I was active on the committee as chair for three years. Now, after three years off the committee, I am back on just in time for the second round in our new contract renewal process. I see my role as one of ensuring continuity, facilitating

better communication, and encouraging the musicians to become involved in governance. I enjoy the involvement with my colleagues and feel a deep sense of fulfillment in this work, but I am also tremendously relieved and satisfied to see other musicians taking responsible roles.

I think the effectiveness of the chair is how you communicate with your committee, how you are able to get them involved in being as active as possible, giving them as much responsibility as you can, and relying on them. I think it should be more of a process of delegating, but in practice one person does have to answer. You asked if we bring anything to this position particularly because we are women. I keep going back to family life: in my family, I am in a pretty traditional mother role, where I keep the family integrated and do the planning and keep everyone on an even keel. I definitely did that with the orchestra committee, too. I think I was mothering in the sense that I tried to make sure that everyone was working effectively as an orchestra committee participant and making sure that all of my colleagues in the orchestra were tuned in to what was going on. That, to me, is a very important aspect of being a chair.

Wright: My leadership style is direct and hard-working, and I would certainly hope, principled. I try to be as honest as I can, and when I served on the executive committee of ROPA, I would say that I was very direct. I did not always agree, and I would state my reasons for disagreeing. You certainly have a stronger position if you let it be known exactly where you stand. I think I was elected because I was perhaps perceived as competent and not easily manipulated or put off.

I have a good relationship with members of the orchestra, I have a good relationship with the union, and I have a good relationship with some of the members of the board. I think that I can draw on those if the matter is pressed. I feel if you establish relationships over a period of time that you can draw on those positive experiences.

Rhodes: As a leader, I am usually very understanding of the opinions of others. I can put up with a lot of the way people are—the way they do things, what they say—and when a compromise needs to be made, I usually can make it. However, when something is wrong or not fair, I will stand by my convictions. I have a very keen sense of right and wrong that I use in my role as leader. Diplomacy, kindness, and patience will always be apparent in my dealings with others, but they will never be in doubt as to my opinion of any issue, particularly in situations where my standards or somebody's position are at stake.

To be an effective orchestra committee chair, it is very necessary to know your collective bargaining agreement inside-out and backwards. The agreement is the tool by which the chair protects and helps the musicians. I think it is very necessary to have the ability to listen, understand, and weigh the urgency of any situation that arises. I have seen some chairs always take the side of management (out of fear of recrimination) or always take the side of the musicians, regardless of the facts. I truly believe that all decisions should be

made with the good of the organization in mind. Management is not always right, nor are the musicians. Everyone must give in order to continue the success of any organization.

Bonnie Bewick: As a leader, I tried to get to the bottom of something, to realize everyone's best intentions, and to come up with a solution where everyone felt like a winner: the win-win situation. It didn't work all the time, but it wasn't a bad modus operandi to start with.

Did my style of leadership change the situation? I'd like to think so. I liked the team that I worked with: we had five personalities on the players' committee that seemed to really take over for one another. I was always responsible for knowing the most information and for coming prepared to meetings. But when things got heated, if one person, whether it was I or someone else in the group, got a little testy, or got fired up, that person would automatically back down, and another person would step forward. It seemed like this was all intuitive with our committee. There was some really good teamwork.

Markham: I would characterize my leadership style as inclusive. Each committee member needs to know that the extreme amount of effort extended by each person is in direct correlation to his or her influence. The chair needs to rely on—and the chair's effectiveness depends on the extent to which the chair does rely on—the whole committee.

Dickson: I like to plant seeds for ideas, and build consensus. I don't always come off as having an agenda or a strong point of view and have often wondered if this is a weakness! I like to ask questions and use subtle means to steer the committee to a decision. Conciliatory skills are a must, towards players, management, and board members.

Communication is the key. That is something we can never forget: sometimes it takes so much trouble to do, but it is the best investment you can make. Communication with the committee and with the orchestra is absolutely essential. At the beginning of my first term as chair, the committee started a newsletter, *The Players' Voice*, as a means to communicate the activities of the committee to the players. It is an excellent communication device, and the players have grown to expect it. We want the musicians to know the kinds of thing the committee does. In other words, we let them know the kind of business we are taking care of on their behalf. We found that when we kept people more informed about what was going on, that, in and of itself, generated interest in coming to the general meeting. The overall purpose of doing that is to try to get the group to be a cohesive unit, in other words, for people to feel on board with one another on a variety of issues, so that when you get to the third year of a contract, there is some background for the committee to be able to unite the group on major issues for negotiation.

Feminine Traits and Leadership

There was a reluctance among the six women to equate gender with leading in any particular way. While they acknowledged that there are traits that many women tend to have developed to a greater degree than most men, overall, the view is that leadership depends on the individual.

Markham: I think the quality of leadership is altruistic and defies the boundaries of gender, much as other ultimate ideals do. Of course, ability and opportunity are two different things. It is evident to me that, quite often, men and women communicate differently and approach problem solving differently.

Rhodes: In general, I think women have added a new dimension to the business world. There is a certain sense of caring and nurturing that most women will bring to the job as a result of their years spent caring for children, spouses, and elderly parents. That is not to say that men don't have the same capabilities, but they have not developed these skills to the same extent as women because of the traditional male/female roles that society still fosters. So, I do think women have certain gender-based traits, but none that necessarily makes them better leaders than men: they are simply different leaders in some cases. Women are sometimes less authoritative or domineering in a leadership role than men, though in the case of our orchestra's recent history, that was not true.

Dickson: I'd have to say that leadership traits really depend on the person, whether male or female. Many qualities—persuasion, consensus building, and collaboration, on the one hand, and also authoritarian decision making and confrontation, on the other hand—come into play in key leadership positions. That is, you have to be able to put your foot down, to hold the focus of the group, and also to be able to build consensus. Balance is everything.

Bewick: When I think of women who have been in leadership roles in the orchestra, I think of them as very intelligent, very level-headed, very articulate. I think those qualities are valuable leadership traits and are respected regardless of gender.

Werne: I believe leadership traits depend on the person. It may be that women are particularly well suited to leadership roles due to experience managing family issues, or because women traditionally have served in volunteer positions, or because they possess skills particular to organization and communication. But I prefer to think that we all bring unique gifts to what we do and that each situation calls for the best person for that specific time and place. More important than gender is the sense of selfless love that that person is able to bring to the work and the sense of trust among colleagues.

Wright: What the committee has to do is a lot of hard work, and I think that sometimes women are willing to work harder and to get the details. Maybe that's a silly remark, because it is all individual. But still, I have found that women frequently are willing to put in the detail work.

Rhodes: In Northwest Indiana, the orchestra committee became much more responsible as individuals when the committee turned from four men and one woman to four women and one man. It did. Those women came to my aid and were constantly calling to say what can I do to help, and that's when the delegating could take place, because they were much more willing to take part, to put themselves on the line more than the men were.

Acceptance of Women as Leaders

The participants in our discussions agreed that gender is not an issue when it comes to leadership within the orchestra. Several also noted that their orchestras have had women in leadership positions in management and on their orchestra boards as well. They seemed to echo one another in describing the situations in their orchestras.

Markham: There have been a good percentage of women serving as committee chairs in Louisville. I have no feeling that there is discrimination within the orchestra concerning women serving on the orchestra committee or chairing the committee.

Werne: In Hartford, women have participated fully in the orchestra committee positions over the years. About half the time we have had a woman chair. I believe these people are selected because of their abilities and not particularly because they are women. The committee chair is seen as a very important role, and the musicians really care who is chair.

Bewick: We have had women in leadership roles in Boston, both on committees and as principals in different sections. As more women join the orchestra, it matters less and less who fills what role. It matters more whose talents are best suited to each position.

We then asked the group to think out loud about why it is that women are so readily accepted as leaders within the orchestra when this is not the case in many other organizations, or even, so universally, at the administrative level or on the boards of directors of symphony organizations.

Werne: In the orchestra, people are players, not men or women. There is a lot of equality in the music world, at least now, probably more so than in the business world.

Bewick: In the orchestra, it doesn't seem to matter whether the concertmaster is male or female, or whether the principal clarinet is male or female. We're all used to the idea that you won the position, you sit there. So in a way, there's no gender difference to begin with. Have you noticed that people play the way they are? Your personality really comes out in your playing. So it is a person's personality that we hired. It doesn't matter, when we've hired someone, whether that person is male or female, and the personality that goes with the playing is a set of traits that we value.

On Women Conductors

These women also feel that the musicians in their orchestras would be equally accepting of a woman conductor, but on the same terms that they accept their fellow musicians and leaders from within the orchestra: on the basis of ability. Most noted, however, that the pool of accomplished women conductors is still relatively small, and as Clara Markham reminded us in reference to women leaders overall, "ability and opportunity are two different things."

Dickson: There's absolutely universal acceptance of a conductor, whether that person is male or female. And that had to do with their competence on the podium. With perhaps the exception of some hard-core sexists that might be in the orchestra somewhere, I think respect on the podium has to do with the stick, and the knowledge of the music, and the choice of repertoire.

Werne: I think if it were a woman who seemed to be the most gifted conductor all around, the orchestra would choose that person. But practically speaking, if you look at the whole pool of conductors out there, there aren't as many female conductors, and their opportunities have not been as great: it is a new field for women. I don't think our orchestra would go looking for a woman conductor just to make a statement. I think the process would be considered the same as choosing a new concertmaster or clarinet player. My sense is also that the orchestra knows pretty quickly who is good: we see the conductor, so we know in a few minutes if a conductor is good, and if he or she is good, that person has our support. It really doesn't matter who the person is, or where the person comes from, or what the person is wearing: it's more based on what's inside.

Bewick: There's no reason why the traits that make a conductor good can't be male or female. Besides, the conductor is a musician, too.

They acknowledged, however, that a certain forceful personality that does not come easily to many women is still one of the traits expected of the conductor. And one participant in our group lamented the fact: "Conducting is such a male-dominated field that when a woman conductor comes through with the right amount of charisma and talent that it takes—whether you are male or female—to do the job, she has to push her talent and her charisma so far that some of her natural qualities as a woman are lost. And that can be disturbing and disappointing."

Women, Leadership, and the Future in Symphony Organizations

And what of the future? What sort of leadership do the women who participated in our discussion think we will see in symphony organizations? What sort of leadership do these organizations seem to need? Are women's traits or women's participation a part of this? Do traits that women bring to leadership match particularly well the needs and processes in symphony orchestras as these organizations remake themselves?

Several of the women led their committees in ways that differed from the leadership of their predecessors. A willingness to try new ways of doing things, a willingness to put themselves on the line, and an ability to hold the well-being of the whole organization in mind was evident in what they described of their work on the committees and how they thought of their roles as leaders. In our group discussion, Diane Dickson noted:

> As I listen to all of you, I observe that you are all activists in a way that previous chair people in your orchestras were not, and it is certainly true for my orchestra. And I don't know if this is because we are women: I suspect part of it is. But also, I think what has to do with this is the changing that orchestras are going through: the challenges and problems that orchestras are facing now require that the musicians take another hard look at how they conduct their business, and it requires a more activist approach. Previous chairs, previous committees maybe didn't have to do that, but things are changing. We have conflicts, or we are trying to grow, or, maybe, some of us are static, and that's very frustrating. But those kinds of challenges and changes require a different approach from an orchestra committee chair.

Happily, it seems those challenges are being met with thoughtful and committed leadership from within the orchestras.

Note

[1] Regional Orchestra Players Association.

Reprise

We extend hearty thanks to the 17 women whose spirited conversations provided many insights into the leadership that women provide to symphony orchestra organizations. They represent symphony organizations that vary greatly in size, but they generally agree about the nature of leadership, stressing consensus building, communication, courage, and enthusiasm.

The board chairs are hands-on leaders who believe that candor is important, and who want all of their board members to feel engaged and supportive of their institutions. As Rhode Island's Marie Langlois told us, all 65 board members are concert subscribers. Mincing no words, she said, "We don't want people on our board who don't care."

The executive directors stressed the importance of the organization having a clear vision, and the manager's role in articulating that vision to many constituencies. They agreed that having a background as a musician is a useful element of leadership. Seattle's Deborah Card spoke for the group when she said that she spends a great deal of time translating information between musicians and board members.

Orchestra committee chairs viewed their leadership in practical terms, and stressed the need to weigh the urgency of particular situations. They were willing to put themselves on the line, and saw themselves as mentors to their fellow players.

Dealing With Change

These women are undaunted by change. The board chairs shared example after example of changes that have occurred under their leadership. And they were enthusiastic in their storytelling. To them, mission and vision are important, as is an organized way of work. They also stressed the importance of knowing members of their orchestral families as individuals. They agreed that symphony orchestra organizations are complex, requiring different leadership skills than do many other nonprofits. Encouraging an orchestra organization's many constituencies to work together is paramount. Smaller organizations' leaders identified maintaining the orchestra's identity as a special challenge.

The executive directors stressed the importance of working to heal historically divided constituencies, sharing numerous examples, including inviting entire orchestras to attend board meetings, and inviting board members to attend rehearsals. Their use of words was interesting, and it was apparent that they thought of their orchestras as "families." They agreed that developing the concepts of shared knowledge and shared ownership were important changes to pursue. Several spoke of the growth and change that had come as their orchestras endured crisis situations.

The orchestra committee chairs also described new ways of doing things. They were obviously willing to invest substantial time for the sake of their organizations, and one noted, ". . . the challenges and problems that orchestras are facing now require that the musicians take another hard look at how they conduct their business . . . ."

The Roles of Gender and Generation

As to whether their leadership styles are influenced by gender-based personality traits, these women are ambivalent. Throughout each group's conversations, there was an undercurrent of "say it isn't so," but each project participant shared at least one example of ways in which her leadership might differ from that of a man.

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Several of the board chairs and orchestra committee chairs have raised families, and described their roles as leaders within their orchestras in terms similar to those they might use to describe their nurturing roles as mothers. All three groups readily admitted a "passion for the product," a term unlikely to be used by a man.

Generational differences were evident across the three groups, with the executive directors representing the "new breed" of career women. And the executive directors talked about the larger numbers of professional women with whom they have opportunities to network. But they also agreed that they are seeing what they refer to as a "crossover," with younger men becoming more inclusive in their management styles.

Only the board chairs and executive directors discussed the topic of fundraising. They see fundraising as a "normal" activity, although their experiences as women in approaching major corporations differ, apparently based on the size of the community which the orchestra organization serves. As Jean Riley reminded us, "Canada is a big country!"

What Is the Ceiling's Fabric?

To a woman, these 17 admitted that they are working hard—harder than they had anticipated when they accepted their positions. Some of this reaction is probably quite natural, given the stresses under which symphony orchestra organizations operate in the late 1990s. The executive directors, in particular, were eager to discuss finding a balance in their lives between professional and personal activities.

Yet, woven among their tales of hard work and long hours were equally significant stories of personal satisfaction and growth. Several were eager to tell stories of accomplishments they had not imagined possible.

The board chairs and orchestra committee chairs discussed the paucity of women as music directors and conductors. The board chairs expressed concerns about the acceptance by their communities of a woman in that role. One explained that her orchestra had seriously considered a woman as a candidate for music director a number of years ago, but in the end passed, not because the candidate was a woman, but because her thinking about repertoire was too advanced for the community. On the other hand, the orchestra committee chairs were confident that players would judge women conductors by the same standards that they judge other players. They explained that players attain their positions based on ability, not gender, and they would expect the same of music directors.

From our explorations, it is apparent that women do not flinch when offered opportunities to lead their symphony orchestra organizations in a variety of ways. Across all three groups, they share a commitment to the symphonic art form and to their own organizations. The discussions that we had with board chairs, executive directors, and orchestra committee chairs would indicate that the fabric of the "ceiling" is, indeed, changing as we approach a new millennium. It may soon be "glassine" rather than "glass." Because the Institute is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of symphony orchestra organizations, we would encourage all orchestras to undertake fresh assessments of ways in which women can contribute even more fully to positive development and change.