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Walking in Two Worlds: A Librarian's Perspective

by

Karen Schnackenberg

Symphony Orchestra Institute

P.O. Box 8619

Northfield, IL 60093

Tel: 847.441.5037

e-mail: information@soi.org

Website: www.soi.org

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This issue of *Harmony* is filled with articles about the collaborative work of orchestras organization-wide. But we also need to remain aware of smaller-scale, cross-constituent collaborations, as author Karen Schnackenberg reminds us.

Schnackenberg is chief orchestra librarian for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. In that role (about which you can learn more from the roundtable, "Behind the Scenes," in *Harmony* #9), she works daily in both the artistic and the administrative constituencies of her orchestra.

She opens her essay with a review of the reasons orchestra organizations need both artists and administrators, suggesting that the interdependence begins with the art. Schnackenberg then details two projects which began in the library and expanded to include participants from throughout the organization. She concludes her essay with some speculation about ways in which members of all orchestra constituencies might deepen their knowledge of one another's primary work.

The projects that Schnackenberg describes, particularly the music-acquisition project, should be worth noting for many orchestra organizations. May we be so bold as to recommend that you take your librarian to lunch to determine if you can invent a worthwhile project for your organization? We hope so!

Walking in Two Worlds: A Librarian's Perspective

We orchestra librarians are glad we have two feet. One foot is firmly planted in the orchestra; the other foot keeps us moving throughout the orchestra organization. And it is that two-footed perspective that has prompted me to write this essay for *Harmony*.

Orchestra librarians have a unique view into the operations of a symphonic organization. As a musician, the librarian's function is to acquire and prepare all the music for the orchestra and its conductors. In training, skills, logistics, schedule, and duties, librarians are musicians living first and mostly in the musical world. This means working closely with the music director and players about editions and musical markings, being available backstage and in the library during all rehearsals and concerts to provide for any musical needs that surface, and working the concerts as "stage librarians" during performances to get the right music in the right place at the right time. Librarians also keep track of the flow of repertoire and spend many hours marking parts.

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But to be effective and to serve the orchestra fully, librarians must also integrate themselves within the other parts of the organization. Librarians' roles as conduits for musical information and as curators of vast amounts of music and musical data take them into every department. At the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (DSO), I am privileged to be colleagues with talented players, as well as with experts throughout the administrative staff. I walk in both worlds daily.

Passion and Inspiration

One basic principle I see reinforced every day as a librarian is that there is no substitute for passion and a belief in what we do. This passion for the art needs to be exhibited consistently from the top—music director, executive director, and board executive committee—down to the players, managers, support staff, artistic staff, and all board members. Such an attitude can

be demonstrated in many ways, including programming, communication, publicity, accountability, work ethic, and even hiring practices.

First, some fundamentals. Without the talented and professional orchestra on stage, and all those years the players spent in practice rooms, there would be no “symphony association.” There would be no jobs for managers or support staff, and no reason to sell tickets, raise money, or mark parts. Our mission is to provide live orchestral music. The way in which we provide that music is for each orchestra to decide, as are the methods we use to enhance and sell our basic product. But let’s not forget why we are here in the first place.

There is another fundamental point. Without the skill and expertise of the administrative staff, and the countless hours they put into raising money, setting schedules, hiring artists, advertising to the public, and selling tickets, musicians might still give concerts, but certainly not at the level we have come to expect of a professional orchestra. Real jobs for the players would not exist. There would be no performances in fine concert halls, no touring and recording sessions, and no community and corporate support.

We really do need each other.

When there is an opening in the orchestra, the music director and audition committees select the candidate they think is most qualified for the position; the one who is the most skilled player and finest musician. Collectively, these musicians then go about making music on stage with great technical skill and also, hopefully, with great inspiration from the music and conductor, and with a belief in what they are doing. This passion moves the audience, and that is ultimately why we are all here.

When there is an opening in the administration, the executive director, department heads, and managers hire the candidate they think is most qualified for the position, the one with the best possible skills and experience. Collectively, these people then set about doing the business of art with great expertise, and hopefully are also inspired by their supervisors and the belief in what they are doing. This passion comes through to the public in the excitement generated and excellence created at every level.

I’m not suggesting that players or staff members can or should be selected on the basis of their exuberance for the orchestra or symphonic music. But just as audition committees are looking for something special in a musician’s playing—something that defies explanation and clearly transcends the technical—the same must be sought in a potential candidate for an administrative position. Ask questions from the outset: Why do you want to work for the symphony? What passion do you bring to this position that makes you different from the next person? Do you have a deep commitment to this art form and its importance to this community and the world? Will you go to concerts and visibly support our mission?

We can never go wrong if we start from the art and remember the reason we are here. Audiences know what they like, what captures their attention and emotions, and what is truly great. We can bring them into the hall in any number of ways, but the only way we will keep them is through the music, our passion, and our inspiration.

Walking in Both Worlds

There is no question that a great divide separates the music and business worlds. The divide is natural and fundamentally not a bad thing. It just is. The task is not to pretend it doesn't exist, to try to make it disappear, or to wish it away. We're lucky to have this difference! That's what makes the creation of art possible. Once we embrace this fact, the task becomes finding ways, tools, people, and projects to bridge the two worlds effectively and use the differences for creative excellence. This can be done. The orchestra librarian does it all the time.

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At the Dallas Symphony, I've been lucky to collaborate on a number of special projects that not only involved the library, but also many other parts of the organization. It's exciting to have creative input into such projects. It is also fascinating to watch others' ideas take shape, all working together to achieve a long-range goal for the future of the orchestra, as well as to make an immediate improvement upon organizational effectiveness. Two particular projects—the implementation of a repertoire database system and the development of a music acquisition fundraising campaign—especially illustrate

the power and potential of one idea in capturing the imagination of a group of people committed to excellence, inspiring their passion, and becoming a reality.

Information: The Librarian's Domain

The librarian's unique perspective is through the information domain. Not only responsible for large amounts of detailed musical and performance data, but also the funnel through which that information gets to the orchestra, librarians cannot afford to isolate themselves and avoid the rest of the organization. It's impossible to be effective in that role and be unaware of the whole. One learns quickly who needs what information when and how, and the disasters that can befall the orchestra if the specific details are incorrect. It also becomes instantly apparent when one part of the organization is not communicating well with another.

Information—whether it is the program repertoire, rehearsal schedule, instrumentation, personnel required, stage setup, media ads, tickets, or notes on a page—drives the success of concert production. Of course, correct data alone cannot produce a concert. But, except for the obvious importance

of the performers' craft and artistry in making the music, information is the next biggest factor in the creation of a smooth and successful concert experience.

When I was hired at the Dallas Symphony in 1990, the late Eduardo Mata asked me to "get the organization networked" with a repertoire database, so that we could be more efficient in sharing information. He expressed how important it was to have the whole administration reading from the same page. I couldn't believe my ears! Here was a music director—whose commitment was to the art—conveying his belief and understanding in a vision of organizational effectiveness that serves the art. He was ahead of his time within symphony orchestra administrations around the world, and I was thrilled to have this as my charge.

We did undertake this task. At first, while obtaining, learning, and using the existing industry repertoire database software—OLIS or Orchestra Library Information Service™ from the American Symphony Orchestra League—it was largely a function of the library alone. I talked, cajoled, pleaded, begged, taught, and pretty much bugged the other departments endlessly, until we began using the database for more than library data. My patient and friendly coworkers in the operations department were willing to give this system a try if it could be shown to save them time. At first it was instrumentation or durations, then performance data, then a program page, until we were finally depending on our "OLIS Worksheet" as an everyday necessity. Still, I pushed for networking, training, more data entry, and wider usages. These conversations happened between the librarians and anyone who would listen—operations, finance, executive director's office, personnel manager, marketing, and even grant writers!

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After a few years, a new company began to collaborate with the League on converting OLIS (a DOS application) to a new format called OPAS or Orchestra Planning and Administration System™ (a Windows application). Through my work at the DSO, and with the Major Orchestra Librarians' Association, I was fortunate to be involved in the early product development and beta testing for OPAS. A group of software developers had their own vision—to take this largely library resource (OLIS) and develop it into a more user-friendly format, design its capacities to include all of OLIS's functions, and add expanded features for widespread administrative use. Their goal was to help symphony orchestras minimize repeat work in different departments, to provide quick and easy report functions for artist and repertoire planning, to create a format for concert data that then became a living performance history, and to have all

of this driven by the repertoire information. With help from the community of librarians, and eventually many other people in the field, they accomplished this goal, and are continuing OPAS's development and upgrading today.

OPAS is now the most widely used repertoire database software in the industry, although there are others under development and in use at some orchestras. When I look back at the last decade or more of this project at the Dallas Symphony, I remember how excruciatingly slow the different stages were—acquisition, implementation, training, and usage. Symphonic organizations are reluctant to change quickly or to commit funds and support for something new and untested. We are equally reluctant to try to solve efficiency challenges in different ways. Everyone is so busy and pressed for time to do their jobs! But when looked at from a “global” standpoint within the organization instead of focusing on individual frustrations at learning something new, the potential of such a tool is enormous. The results can cut through layers of duplicate work; when one area achieves success, new doors open for everyone involved.

In overseeing this project from its inception, I learned a great deal about the flow of information. I've learned what works and what doesn't, who is responsible for and who benefits from which bits of data, how departments need to receive the information, and on and on. How can symphony orchestras improve their organizational efficiency? One way is to spend the money to acquire comprehensive and tested repertoire database software—but don't just stop there. Train support staff to use it, bring the experts in twice a year for updates and review, hire a data entry specialist to input records correctly and consistently, and utilize the software to its capacity throughout the administrative and artistic staff. The outcome will be increased productivity, smoother concert production, creativity in solving informational challenges, and long-term financial savings. Over time, the outcome will also be a lightening of the support staff's workload, as staff members all have access to the same information and are freed from the inefficiencies of duplication.

A Music Acquisition Campaign: Including the Audience

It started with a seemingly innocuous idea from a beloved and long-time board member. In addition to spending years raising and giving millions of dollars to the symphony, this friend of the orchestra wasn't willing to let the less glamorous needs—like those in the orchestra library—go unmet. Aware that we were desperate to buy a great deal of music for the orchestra, she began to encourage her friends and associates to make small donations to the library in memory or honor of someone. She knew that these gifts, separate and more spontaneous than major endowment gifts from the same people, could begin to add up. Twenty-five dollars could buy a score, one hundred a set of string parts; three hundred could buy a standard symphony, and five hundred a major work.

She didn't tire of this mini-crusade, even when she was the only one making such donations. There were discussions about whether or not the donations should go into buying music that had been programmed already to save a little money in the annual budget, but she wanted it to be used for whatever work we thought was important to have so the conductors could have more choices in programming. None of us saw her larger vision or thought that this would really help much.

After some time, it became evident that other board members were listening to our friend. One trustee was approached about his company's donating money for library shelving. He was willing to do that, but only after we agreed to make a five-year music purchase plan, listing exactly the works we needed, the editions, the cost, and the year in which we intended to buy them. He wanted eventually to help us raise money for music, which he found much more interesting than shelves, and believed we would need a ready and detailed proposal. Overwhelmed at this daunting task, and unsure that it was necessary, we nevertheless did the work, but with not much enthusiasm at first.

However, something happened when we began to create this plan. By looking over the library's holdings with a discerning eye; engaging the music director, conductors, players, and staff members to suggest works they thought were necessary to have; and using our own library knowledge of critical editions, public domain works, and industry pricing, the plan began to take on a life of its own. We became invested in the original vision and completed a long-range plan we could confidently show to potential donors.

Then, sadly, both board members passed away. The losses were a blow to the Dallas Symphony, as they had been with us for a long time. In our little library world, the spearhead behind individual music donations was gone, and the impetus for our music purchase plan was, too. Both projects languished. We hung onto our plan, and even referred to it when buying a set of parts. But that was about it.

Several years later, one of our development directors was putting together an ambitious endowment campaign that would focus on many different needs within the association. Ultimately extraordinarily successful, Vision 2000 was designed to carry the Dallas Symphony forward into its second century and the new millennium. Thinking about the orchestra's music library, she remembered the plan that had been put together but not fully realized. She also thought about her previous experience raising money for a public library in which there had been a book campaign. Putting the two together, she discovered an idea that was as yet untried: Go directly to our audience with a music campaign, listing the works needed, the price of each, and ask for donations in memory or honor of someone for particular works. She enlisted the help of our volunteer association, which agreed to match a portion of the donations, and got busy working out the specifics.

In the library, our job became updating the five-year plan into a single list of works, divided into the categories of classics, pops, and choral music at current prices. We reassessed the orchestra's needs and completed the tedious process of itemizing exact purchase costs. We collaborated on the mailing and website presentations and the process by which donations would be made, acknowledged, and recorded. Once again, we found ourselves working with a diverse group of people on a far-reaching project that would help ensure the orchestra's future. From board members and volunteers, to development staffers and conductors—to even the audience—the joint effort resulted in a sophisticated, well-received, and highly successful campaign.

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In addition to raising approximately \$75,000 for music, the campaign, in the words of our development department, “. . . increased the public's awareness of our need to have an extensive library, and, more importantly, created exceptional good will among donors who felt they could not be part of the symphony experience due to high ticket costs or other factors.” The added bonus? Even though the purchases could not logistically all be made at once, the money is designated for specific works and cannot be used for any other purpose. We continue to draw from this fund to buy materials on the list as we can incorporate them into our holdings.

I wouldn't trade these experiences, even though some days I thought we would never succeed and that all the effort might be for naught. It was often difficult to keep my eye on the long-range goals. Even 12 years later, we are discovering new ways to use the database system effectively and struggling to have enough data entry

help to make it more efficient across the organization. We also have not yet completed all the purchase, inventory, correction, and marking of the music funded in our special campaign. I try to remember that, unlike some other projects which are stamped “complete,” these never really will be finished. And that's the way it should be: a daily testament to all the challenges inherent in seeking and maintaining organizational effectiveness. These projects are also a legacy for those of us who have worked hard on them. We know we have contributed something *together* to help this orchestra be its best. Something which will last a very long time.

What Do Those People Do in Their Cubicles All Day Long? And Why Are They Working When the Orchestra Is Off?

One of the biggest problems in performing organizations today is that few people really know what anyone else's job requires. We have meetings and

parties, task forces and consultants, presentations and open rehearsals. We talk a lot about wanting things to be “non-adversarial,” that the orchestra is a “family.” But we don’t really know how we fit together into this thing called a symphony orchestra. How could we? There is the orchestra on stage and there is everyone else in the organization. We each have different training and areas of expertise, philosophies about how we should do things, and reasons why we are part of the organization. Some of us even disagree about what an orchestra’s mission should be. So all of us will never see things exactly the same way.

Bridging these differences takes more than just working for the same organization. Sometimes it takes putting ourselves in others’ places, to really think about someone else’s job, training, effort, or contribution. Such appreciation must start from the top, by example, and go across the administration—among the orchestra, conductors, board, and staff. How can we promote this? I suggest a program of volunteer exchanges among departments and employees, players, and board members throughout the organization.

“Bridging these differences takes more than just working for the same organization.”

What might these exchanges look like? Managers could go to those in their own or others’ departments and sit with them for a day, not to intimidate or monitor, but to observe and learn about their jobs. Ask questions, try some of the tasks, witness the expertise of others. Each could enhance understanding and appreciation. To lessen a perception of secrecy and exclusion, staff members could be invited to attend higher-level meetings to observe and hear the discussions. Staff and board members could sit in the orchestra for a day of rehearsals, either with a score or just watching and listening, to feel as closely as it can be approximated what it’s really like performing out there on stage. One of the most obvious and important exchanges? Everyone on the staff and all board members should be encouraged to attend concerts—lots and lots of concerts.

Orchestra members and conductors could benefit from similar exchanges. They would see a different side of the business if they observed marketing or finance for a day or watched what is done in the development or public relations departments. Players might be surprised at the sheer amount of detail that the production staff regularly attends to on the musicians’ behalf. Being included in planning meetings could also be useful to the performers as a general learning experience about the chain of events before and after their concerts.

And of course, everyone—managers, orchestra, conductors, staff, board members—should do a real stint in the orchestra library!

These exchanges could be done throughout the organization on a continuing volunteer basis, perhaps helping to minimize misunderstandings

and lack of awareness about what is going on around the building. I can't count the number of times I have defended a player's viewpoint to staff and administrators; likewise, I try to share with orchestra members many of the good things being done by the staff.

I don't subscribe to the idea that we should do each others' jobs, or that we could even begin to know how to do them. Nor is this a pat theory about all "just getting along." Sometimes we must operate from our differences, even standing our ground about our beliefs if what we hold dearest is threatened. There are appropriate times and reasons for staying in our own worlds. But on most days it might be best for everyone if we really looked at our talented and experienced colleagues to see their contributions. We should not be afraid to take that step and check out a project or performance someone is working on, paying attention to their vision and maybe helping them. Once one has crossed over into someone else's world or heard their story about a complicated task completed or demanding part played, it is more difficult to discount them and their contributions. We are all looking for that kind of awareness, support, and appreciation.

Despite our differences and, perhaps, conflicting viewpoints, we can work together for the good of the whole. I have strong beliefs about orchestras, collective action, and the rights of musicians to organize and negotiate for good wages, benefits, and working conditions. So the views presented here may seem incompatible. But they are not. In the end it's all focused on the same goal—the music. Our passion for this art, and our belief in presenting it at the highest possible levels of excellence, can and must shine through everything we do.

Karen Schnackenberg is chief orchestra librarian of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. She is also a member of the Board of Advisors of the Symphony Orchestra Institute.