

# *Harmony*<sup>TM</sup>

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## Preliminary Results of the Symphony Organization Participant Survey



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## Preliminary Results of the Symphony Organization Participant Survey

In 2000, the Institute completed its fifth year of operation, a landmark for any new organization.

Our symphony organization and participant support base has grown considerably since we first opened our doors. *Harmony* is now being mailed personally to some 5,500 people, of whom more than 5,000 are employees or active volunteers in 230 symphony organizations. Of these institutions, 163 became Supporting Symphony Orchestra Organizations for 2000, that number having grown from 17 in 1996, the year we initiated the supporting organization concept. In 2000, we fostered the formation of a community of individuals committed to achieving more effective symphony organizations, the Advocates of Change (AoC), and 108 individuals became founding members.

However, given five years of development, we decided to take a fresh look at our strategic development, and particularly at our communications program. Having made considerable progress, but believing there is much yet to accomplish, we thought we should “take stock” by inviting those persons most directly served to give us feedback in three basic areas:

- ◆ Perception of the Institute.
- ◆ Readership of *Harmony*.
- ◆ Use of the Internet.

We were gratified to receive responses from 470 symphony organization participants, just under 10 percent of those polled. We have been analyzing the results over the past few months and reporting our findings in stages, as they emerged, on our Web site. We will continue to analyze responses in some detail, but have now completed the primary overview. We are pleased now to share this integrated report of results with all *Harmony* readers.

We are cognizant, as our readers should be, that respondents to our survey—given the time and thought it takes to answer and return such a survey—are likely to be more favorably disposed toward the Institute and *Harmony* than was the average survey recipient. We believe that this bias would affect the answers to some survey questions more than others, and we will take into account these potential biases. We suggest that our readers do the same.

## **Institute Perception**

As to how the Institute is perceived, the following was reported:

- ◆ 90% of respondents feel that the Institute increased their awareness (24% extensively) of how symphony organizations function and might better function.
- ◆ 92% feel that *Harmony* increased (24% very extensively) their knowledge and appreciation of symphony organizational issues.
- ◆ 81% believe that the Institute has had a positive (27% very positive) effect on the symphony orchestra field.

*Our thoughts.* We are of course pleased to receive these views, and, even taking into account their likely positive bias, they make us feel that our efforts are appreciated and worthwhile. Our goal will be to maintain our good effect and continue to be valuable to all those involved in North American symphony orchestra organizations.

## **Harmony Readership**

The survey posed a range of questions about *Harmony* readership and the responses can be summarized as follows.

Where is *Harmony* usually read?

- ◆ Most respondents (58%) usually read it at home.
- ◆ Some respondents (25%) usually read it at work.
- ◆ A few (9%) read it while traveling or elsewhere.
- ◆ The balance (8%) don't read it or their responses are not clear.

How long after receipt is the reading of *Harmony* completed?

- ◆ Some respondents (10%) complete their reading within a week.
- ◆ More respondents (18%) take two weeks.
- ◆ Most respondents (44%) complete their reading during the month after receipt.
- ◆ Most of the balance (24%) complete their reading in more than a month.
- ◆ A small group (4%) don't read the publication.

How much of a copy of *Harmony* is usually read?

- ◆ Somewhat fewer than half of the respondents (44%) read most or all of an issue.
- ◆ Many (22%) read about half.
- ◆ A somewhat larger group (30%) read only some portion.

- ◆ And, again, a few (4%) do not read any part.

Are articles from *Harmony* discussed with colleagues?

- ◆ A few respondents (9%) often discuss articles with colleagues.
- ◆ Most respondents (63%) discuss articles with colleagues occasionally.
- ◆ The balance (28%) do not discuss their reading with colleagues.

*Our thoughts.* Since its inception, we intended that *Harmony* articles be well-written, serious, thought-provoking, and formative. With these objectives, we anticipated that reading an issue of *Harmony* might take more than one sitting and be completed over a period of time, probably involving quiet, concentrated reading, at home or while traveling. So, in many ways, respondents are confirming what we expected, and what, over recent years, we have inferred from comments. Of course we wish that there was a more comprehensive reading, and wider and more intensive discussion, of *Harmony* articles than apparently takes place, but we recognize that, as in the offerings of a cafeteria, not every morsel will be equally appetizing.

In addition, as discussed below, we believe many symphony organization participants are pressed for time and will increasingly diversify the way they gather information, pursue learning, and gain knowledge.

Survey respondents were asked to rate various topics covered in *Harmony* as to their relative usefulness and interest. Here is a summary of that feedback and some thoughts we have about it.

The following topic was favored by respondents by a significant margin over all others:

- ◆ Case studies of specific symphony organizations undergoing change.

*Our thoughts.* This is good news! We have devoted substantial effort and print space to presenting stories (case studies) about organizations pursuing organization change, as authored by the participants themselves through “roundtables.” We are delighted that survey respondents who are organizational participants throughout the industry find these stories interesting and useful, and thus, we trust, “educational.”

The following topics were rated, about equally, to be relatively useful and interesting to some 7 out of 10 respondents:

- ◆ How symphony organizations generally function.
- ◆ Trust, communication, and information sharing.
- ◆ Artistic decision-making processes and issues.
- ◆ Strategic planning for symphony organizations.
- ◆ Economics of symphony organizations.

***Our thoughts.*** Once again, good news! These topics are central to the Institute's mission. We are pleased that respondents favored these topics, since fresh thinking and learning in these areas will be vital if symphony organizations are to change and become more effective.

A reasonable percentage of respondents found another group of topics useful and interesting—the first three listed somewhat more so than the second three—but, as a group, less useful and interesting than those above.

- ◆ Roundtable talks with people in specialized roles.
- ◆ Societal environment for symphony organizations.
- ◆ Impact of technological change.
- ◆ Insights of organizational change consultants.
- ◆ Symphony organization research.
- ◆ Historical development of symphony organizations.

***Our thoughts.*** These results are not surprising and are basically positive. These topics, overall, are “scholarly” or “background” in nature and are not going to have quite the near-term impact on thinking and action toward organization change that the Institute is attempting to accelerate. At the same time, some content in these topic areas is useful background to symphony organization participants who are prepared to lead or engage in imperative change. Thus, we will continue to be interested in communicating material in these areas on a selective basis, both in print and electronically.

Survey respondents rated three topic areas as distinctly less useful than all others, and content in these areas was less read as compared with all other *Harmony* material.

- ◆ Gender and minority issues.
- ◆ Symphony organizational patterns outside North America.
- ◆ Reviews of books relating to symphony organizations.

***Our thoughts.*** In any comparative process, some alternatives will end up at the bottom of a listing. But we think these ratings are instructive. Information and ideas in these areas are very interesting to some symphony organization participants, but not broadly. And, although there is learning to be gained by exposure to and thinking about content stemming from these areas, that learning, with some exceptions, is not as efficiently convertible into the kinds of action the Institute is fostering. So, we will take into account this feedback from our survey respondents and publish material in these areas when we believe it is pertinent.

## Internet Usage

Somewhat surprisingly, 95 percent of survey respondents reported being connected to the Internet. This level of participation compares with results of a recent national survey, as reported by Susan Stellin in the February 19, 2001, *New York Times*, that indicated some 56 percent of American adults are Internet users. Of course, we could have some kind of bias in our survey responses, or perhaps symphony orchestra participants rely on children or grandchildren as computer secretaries more than the average American adult. We think neither condition is likely! It appears to us—verifying recent, growing anecdotal evidence—that the community of symphony organization participants is highly Internet connected.

Further, survey respondents spend a good deal of time connected to the Internet.

- ◆ Almost 70% of respondents report spending at least 5 hours per week.
- ◆ Well more than half of this group report spending at least 10 hours.
- ◆ Just more than 20% of respondents report spending between 1 and 5 hours per week.

As one might expect, 80 percent or more of Internet usage by the respondents was devoted to e-mailing, either personal or organizational in nature, along with acquiring general and reference information. Other uses trailed by some gap. Even with such a relatively high percent of usage, most respondents (93 percent) reported that they expect to increase usage over the next few years, especially in the following areas:

- ◆ Communications with friends and family (more than 80% of respondents).
- ◆ Communications with organizational colleagues (just less than 80%).
- ◆ Obtaining general and reference information (more than 80%).
- ◆ Purchasing goods and services (a little more than 70%).

Respondents indicated from what setting they access the Internet, as follows:

- ◆ Some 80% access the Internet from a home computer; of these respondents:
  - Less than one-half (40%) connect only from home.
  - Half (50%) connect from home and also from work.
  - Some (10%) connect from home and from work, and also via a portable.
  - 9% of all respondents connect only from work.
  - 10% do not connect or didn't respond.

Quite often, it is mentioned that the Internet is used primarily by “younger people.” Among our respondents, this does not seem to be the case. Some 87 percent who reported being 65 or older also reported being connected to the Internet, and an even greater percent of this respondent group anticipate increased usage over the next few years.

At the same time, 100 percent of respondents who were 35 or younger reported being Internet-connected. Quite naturally, a few of them reported that they did not anticipate increased usage. Some people may already be satiated with the Net!

***Our thoughts.*** There is much to “chew on” in the respondent reports of present and anticipated Internet usage. Overall, subject to further analysis, the data appear to support the general impression that we have formed over recent years that the symphony organizational audience for *Harmony*, which is significantly congruent with the group of symphony organization participants the Institute is primarily interested in reaching and serving, is already highly involved in the Internet and is likely to increase its participation over the next few years, especially as regards personal communication and the accessing of general and reference information.

### **Age and Organizational Group**

Most survey respondents reported the range of their ages.

- ◆ 15% were 35 or younger.
- ◆ 43% were between 36 and 50.
- ◆ 32% were between 51 and 65.
- ◆ 10% were 65 or older.

Respondents also reported their organizational affiliations.

- ◆ 22% were board members.
- ◆ 34% were on the administrative staff.
- ◆ 32% were orchestra members.
- ◆ 3% were on the conducting staff.
- ◆ 2% were volunteers.
- ◆ 7% did not categorize their participation.

### **Overall Thoughts**

First, let us again thank the 470 respondents for their very helpful feedback and for giving time and thought to our survey questions.

We are already finding the survey feedback analyzed to date to be very helpful as we pursue a communications program which we believe must increasingly combine print, electronic, and integrated media efforts. The Institute wishes, as effectively and efficiently as possible, to influence positive change within North American symphony organizations. Some of that effort will be carried out directly in the field, through physical, face-to-face means, and will in part, provide insights that need to be propagated through wide communications. Much of our effort will continue to be carried out through distant communications—always as personal, interactive, and interconnective as possible—but nonetheless, at a distance, through words and symbols. In the much longer term, the physical and the distant may merge into the virtual. But, for some time, we think it is just a matter of electronic media increasingly supplementing (but not replacing) print media, with growing potential for integration in these forms of communication.

We will continue our analysis of survey data on a more detailed and segmented basis. To the extent there is further interesting information from this work, we will post it on our Web site. As was mentioned on the face of the survey, it was coded so that we might compare responses by various groupings, and that analysis is still underway. In some areas, this segmented analysis may be of limited value in that some groupings may turn out to be too small for purposes of data reliability. But in other areas, the results may advance our knowledge of how the responses of our “customers” differ by “groups” in the three areas covered by the survey.

Finally, we again thank L. C. Williams & Associates for that firm’s early pro bono assistance in this project. This guidance was then assumed and pursued in depth by an independent volunteer, Dr. Kathleen Holt. Kathleen’s advanced education as a psychologist and psychometrician, her solid experience in survey design and analysis, her training in music performance, and her experience as a symphony organization volunteer, provided us with a wonderful combination of enthusiasm, interests, talent, and experience. It has been a great joy to work with her, and we look forward to completing this project and working on others with her in the future.