

*Harmony*TM

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Publisher's Notes

by

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Once again, America's symphony orchestra community is in a state of heightened anxiety about the fiscal condition of many of our orchestras. Over the past two years, worrisome fissures have surfaced in some of our gold-standard organizations, and in some smaller orchestras, these fissures appear to be of life-threatening proportions. From time to time, perhaps with a sense of *déjà vu*, it can be helpful to take a long look backward in order to see ahead more clearly. What have we learned? Are we repeating mistakes of the past? Did we ask the right questions in the past? Are we asking the right ones now?

In the world of the performing arts, it is sometimes said—quietly to be sure—that members of the academic community do not understand, or perhaps care very much, about our world of applied arts. But there is increasing evidence that there are thinkers who are committed to using academe's unique resources and position to influence policy and cultural affairs.

Douglas J. Dempster is such a citizen of the academy. Doug is currently senior associate dean of fine arts at the University of Texas at Austin. He formerly served as dean of academic affairs at the Eastman School of Music. There he created the Orchestral Studies Program in collaboration with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. He is committed to developing orchestra musicians who are not only accomplished performers, but who also have an awareness and curiosity about our orchestra organizations as institutions. For years, he has included the Wolf Organization's report, *The Financial Condition of Symphony Orchestras*, as part of his curriculum.

In 1990, the American Symphony Orchestra League commissioned the Wolf Organization, Inc., to study the financial condition of America's orchestras. Thomas Wolf delivered the findings of that study during the League's 1992 conference, and ever since, the study has been referred to throughout the industry as the "Wolf Report." It was for years the subject of vigorous debate, not only for what its implications seemed to be for the future, but also for some of the Wolf Organization's hypotheses for future change. In this issue of *Harmony*, 10 years after the Wolf Report's publication—Doug Dempster, having the perspective afforded by time and the advantage offered by the extensive discussion the report initiated—takes a new look at the study. It is a serious look, it is thoughtful, and it is provocative.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has a long history of being among the most interested and generous supporters of the performing arts and the manner in which arts organizations relate to their communities. Ten years

ago, the Knight Foundation began to consider a new initiative which, two years later, became known as the “Magic of Music.” At yet another 10th anniversary, the Knight Foundation, in order to see ahead more clearly, is having a good hard look at what its funding has accomplished.

Penelope McPhee is the foundation’s vice president and chief program officer and occupies a learned place from which to comment on the field of symphony orchestras. In April of this year, Penny delivered a speech to a convocation of Knight orchestra grantees in Portland, Oregon, and we are pleased to share that speech with *Harmony* readers. She is eloquent about lessons learned and she brings a sobering reality to those lessons. She conveys the foundation’s deep commitment to our art and to our organizations. Transformational change is slow and difficult, but it must happen. Sometimes difficult lessons feel like tough love.

Two years ago, in *Harmony* #11, members of the Oregon Symphony family shared with enthusiasm the results of their work to change their organizational practices. In this issue, we again converse with members of that organization about their recently concluded search for a new music director. They make a compelling case that the changed practices have taken the organization to an even higher level of participation in making important decisions. Their search process provided for broad participation and meaningful delegation of responsibility, and fostered a level of energy they say would not have been possible otherwise. Bravo to the Oregon Symphony for finding a unique process that worked so well for them as they searched for a new music director. And our thanks to roundtable participants **Niel DePonte**, **Kathryn Gray**, **Lynn Loacker**, **Mary Tooze**, and **Tony Woodcock** for sharing the story.

Some participants in and observers of our industry think symphony organizations ought to be structures created to allow artists to go about their art without concern for more secular matters. They often describe the seemingly “ivory tower” conditions of European orchestras for which, historically, private funding has not been an issue. **Robert Wagner** and **Tina Ward** are American symphony orchestra musicians who thought we might all learn something by observing the practices of a selected group of European orchestras. Funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation made it possible for Tina and Bob to visit with members of those orchestras to learn firsthand about their organizations. One of the orchestras they visited was the Lahti Symphony Orchestra in Finland. There they found some enlightened practices which were made even more interesting to the Institute by the fact that Osmo Vänskä, the chief conductor in Lahti, is the music director designate of the Minnesota Orchestra. My reaction to Bob and Tina’s Lahti discovery is a new resolve to watch developments at the Minnesota Orchestra closely.

Many of the positive organizational change practices that have been put forward in *Harmony* have involved initiatives undertaken at the overall-organization level. In *Harmony* #7 and *Harmony* #11, **Robert Stearns** related the success he had demonstrated as the “Hoshin guru” of the Pittsburgh Symphony

Orchestra. But Bob has a more diverse tool kit. In this issue, he shares ways in which organizational change can also proceed from microcosm toward macrocosm. If a single constituency within an orchestra organization seeks ways to function more effectively, the efforts can eventually permeate the overall organization. Bob uses specific examples from projects he has facilitated to elaborate on this thesis.

In this issue's final essay, **Penny Anderson Brill** brings to our attention a way in which bad personal news led to leading-edge organizational practice. We each try to deal with personal crises as best we can while continuing our commitments to our work and to those with whom we work. Penny, an orchestra musician, did better than that. She addressed a serious illness by engaging her deepest discipline and need for music with her longtime participation in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's evolving organizational practices. The result has been a remarkable discovery of yet another way in which an orchestra can serve as a valuable community resource.

From time to time, the Institute recommends new publications we think have relevance for our readers. J. Richard Hackman, a professor of social and organizational psychology at Harvard University, has been a friend of the Institute from its beginnings. In the Institute's earliest years, he chaired the Research Advisory Board. Richard has published important research about symphony organizations internationally and continues to be a vigorous observer of symphony orchestra organizations in the United States. In July of this year, Harvard Business School Press published his new opus, *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*. It is not a book about symphony organizations, but as I read it, I began to feel—as a lifelong member of symphony organizations—that maybe Richard was speaking to us, too. At the Institute, we thought we should test my reaction. We invited three people to review *Leading Teams*—one from the vantage point of an experienced executive director, another from that of an orchestra musician, and a third through the lens of a former board chair. We thank **Robert Jones**, **William Foster**, and **Margery Steinberg** for their thoughtful commentary.

On page 54, we update information on the Institute's field activities, and on the conclusion of the Conductor Evaluation Data Analysis Project (CEDAP). On page 78, we report the financial status of the Institute for its most recent fiscal year.

If you read music, you have probably identified the score fragment on the cover of this issue of *Harmony*, at least in its most well-known form. But can you identify its full orchestral connection? And identify what the composer and the Institute's founder have in common? **Phillip Huscher** explains all beginning on page xiii.

In the pages immediately following these notes:

- ◆ We celebrate **Paul Judy's** receipt of the Gold Baton award during the American Symphony Orchestra League's national conference.

- ◆ We acknowledge and extend our heartfelt thanks to the nearly 160 symphony orchestra organizations that have offered support of the Institute's activities this year.
- ◆ We recognize the commitment of individuals from every constituency of North American symphony orchestra organizations who have made contributions to the Institute as Advocates of Change.

In the course of these notes, I have twice referenced others who have looked back in order to move forward. As the Institute enters its eighth year of activity, I have done a bit of looking back myself. The list of individuals who have authored material for *Harmony* is long and distinguished. The publication's readership is loyal and encouraging of our efforts. The list of those who have served on the Board of Advisors includes some of the most forward-thinking participants in the industry. The list of orchestra organizations that have undertaken serious organizational development activities is showing signs of growing exponentially. I extend a personal thanks to each of you who has contributed to and guided the Institute's work for the past seven years. While not discounting those worrisome fiscal fissures I mentioned in the opening paragraph, we now look ahead to continue those activities that the Institute does well, to discard a few noble experiments that have failed, and to direct our energies toward the continued development of our symphony orchestras as effective organizations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fred Zeman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.