

Season 3, Episode 3 (Russell Rybicki and the San Antonio Philharmonic) Start

Russell Rybicki: ...what almost every musician's mindset needs to be nowadays; like it has to have that entrepreneurial sort of passion where you have to be willing to almost roll with the punches while still leading it in the right direction. Because, like, you can have a vision for something, but it's kind of seeing how the process plays it out. I think it- it takes certainly some people with expanded minds to find new ways to make it relevant; kind of keeping an open mind with trying new things, kind of letting go into the new process of what leading an orchestra is like.

{Intro Music}

SB: This is the Institute for Music Leadership.

Jeff Dunn: Welcome to another episode of Create, Inspire, Lead. I'm your host Jeff Dunn. On today's podcast, we're joined by Russell Rybicki, a horn player and Eastman alum from 2013. An Austin, Texas native, Russell spent time performing with the Vancouver Symphony before moving back to Texas and taking a one-year position with the San Antonio Symphony. Russell's time with this orchestra was far from the norm, however, as this was the 2019-2020 season, which was interrupted by COVID. As you'll hear, the struggles in San Antonio eventually led to a strike, long negotiations between the musicians and management, and low morale amongst the orchestra. On June 16th, 2022, the Symphony's Board declared Chapter 7 Bankruptcy and the dissolution of the San Antonio Symphony. But the musicians persevered, believing strongly in the potential to have a successful, community-minded orchestra in their city. The result is the San Antonio Philharmonic, which opened their season on September 16th of 2022. Russell had the pleasure of performing with this reinvigorated orchestra and shares with us his journey navigating the ups and downs of the orchestra world. I want to extend a huge thank you to Russell for sharing his candid story with us and hope you enjoy the conversation. The views expressed in the podcast are the interviewee's, and do not represent the Eastman School of Music or The Institute for Music Leadership. We'll jump right in with Russell's background.

(Transition music)

So if you don't mind, maybe you can just do a quick introduction of yourself, your Eastman journey, and you know a little bit about your experience at Eastman, and then when you left.

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, sure, so I grew up in Austin, Texas, which is actually where I currently live right now; went to Eastman and graduated - yeah, 2013 December like we just said. Uh, and yeah did Performance and Education, and then did my Masters at Northwestern. I studied with Gail Williams and John Bowen, finished my Master's there, and then was in New World for a year. And then, won my first job in the Vancouver Symphony the day before my birthday, actually that same- or, that following year. And then moved to Vancouver, was there for two years, but then I ended up leaving and I moved back to Austin for a summer; and Vancouver plays into that because the bass trombone in Vancouver used to be the bass trombone in San Antonio, and he's very good friends with Jeff Garza, former principal horn of San Antonio...but he – Elon, is the bass trombonist, he recommended me to Jeff, um, at least for some sub work and stuff; Jeff contacted me, I went and played a couple weeks and then they were like, "Oh, we actually have 4th utility open, would you be open to auditioning for that?" So then I got that one year and that was the 2019-2020 season, so I think we can guess what happened, you know, 2/3 the way through that season. And luckily, San Antonio's only about an hour, hour and a half away from

home, so my landlord was very lenient. Moved back home to Austin where my dad lives, and then I kind of just haven't left.

I played some of the COVID year where we were all spread out on stage and stuff; I think we did...there were eight weeks, but it was only two horns and two of them were still living in San Antonio, so I just kind of came in when they needed me; and then the next year, or like I guess like September, Andrew and Peter – were the other two horns that were left after Jeff went to Oregon – it was just very, very tense because we could tell there was stuff happening- I could tell there was stuff happening! And they knew way more than I did, but they just kept saying, like: “You're going to get a contract. Sign it immediately and send it back.” And literally like the day I signed the contract, 4 hours later is when they declared the strike. So I was like technically part of the San Antonio Symphony for the strike year. And then during that whole year I was living in Austin, just kind of seeing how things would play out- it was literally like a month-to-month kind of thing. We were just kind of waiting to hear...there were – we had orchestra meetings on Zoom like once a month; it was mainly just the orchestra committee kind of telling us what management was doing during the negotiations; at least, they were trying to tell us as much as they could, how the union was getting involved. And then actually me and the principal flute of San Antonio – we were in the Sarasota Opera back in February and March – so that was when like things were coming to a very tumultuous head, kind of getting ready to explode it seemed like, so all of the orchestra meetings were like pretty intense with like what people were saying. So I mean, I was just kind of taking the back seat, I never said anything in the meetings. I was just listening to see what was going to happen for the rest of the season. And then the principal flute had, you know, we would talk about it a lot, and he was, he was just you know like, “Sure.” He, like most of the people, predicted this would happen. So I think that's how, kind of the “MOSAS” thing started, where, their- like a lot of those people, this has been happening for a long time, management has kind of done these or tried to play these kinds of things to reduce the orchestra and the salary. They've tried to do it many times when contract negotiations were happening, but either the union or the negotiating committee was able to, not really take many concessions, if any?

Jeff Dunn: And when you say MOSAS, you mean the “Musicians Of the San Antonio Symphony”, who's kind of the operating group of players-

Russell Rybicki Yeah.

Jeff Dunn: -kind of working outside of the normal organization?

Russell Rybicki: Yes- it was kind of like the governing union body within the union? I don't know, we would just call ourselves MOSAS. So, we kind of, or the musicians kind of banded together and they wanted to play concerts. So I know that they did a bunch of like porch concerts, little community chamber concerts to kind of raise awareness of what was going on, to try to get money, get support. It

worked really well, lots of new segments. My grandma actually lives in San Antonio, so I would stay with her every now and then for concerts and she would just say like almost once a week there was something that the news would be reporting on, which was pretty, pretty cool that they were doing that. It was just a lot of- management was claiming there wasn't money to be found, but then the musicians go and find a lot of money from the community. I'm not sure how much it is, so I'm not going to quote a number; I was told several different numbers, but it was enough to- to play the concerts that we did in March, April, May and June. There was one, one week of each of those months that we did concerts, like full orchestra concerts, and then they raise enough money to do pretty much a whole season this season. Not like a full symphony season...I've been going down there like twice- two to three times a month, two to three weeks a month, just like Wednesday through Saturday stuff, but it's close to a full season. It's been a lot of very even classics and school shows; so their community outreach has seemed to be a pretty big focus for them. Um, but there is the church that's actually right next door to the Tobin Center, where most of the management of the San Antonio Symphony or, most of the *board* of the San Antonio Symphony is also on the board of the Tobin Center, which was the big concert hall that was made to house a symphony orchestra, and then that board wanted to kick the symphony out. That was a *big* part of what was going on.

Jeff Dunn: And if I remember correctly, and this has actually been an ongoing conversation now of, you know: "Hey we've got this orchestra in San Antonio, we'd like to play in the real space," right?

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, so the Tobin Board actually has another chamber orchestra, I guess? I think it's called Classical Musical- Classical Music Institute, CMI, that they're trying to also get money from the government to help support them? Not totally sure on what was happening with that. I believe the union *did* blacklist the CMI because it was trying to basically boot the former symphony out of the city.

I don't- I'm not 100% certain on that, but there were a lot of- I got a lot of emails around these sorts of things that were like, "We're going to petition to the local government that was going to grant CMI a bunch of money," and be like "You shouldn't do this." So they even had a bunch of band directors, and all of these other people in the area that were gonna try to say: "They don't need the money, give the money to like the community and so we can build education and all of these other things that are going to you know, can like help the symphony and music thrive in San Antonio," rather than this, like very wealthy organization of the Tobin Center. But across the street, like I said before, is a huge Baptist church, and the music director there, Aaron Hufty, he basically has donated the church for us to use. Which is, I mean, amazing. It's a really cool space to play in, like: the front of the church is basically like a tiered stage as it is.

Really nice to play in and it kind of like- it reduces the space between us and the audience, like the first violins are like *right* there, at the first row of the audience. So it's kind of cool, and every time I go on stage I have to like, kind of walk through the audience. So it's kind of nice- a new way to like interact a little bit? They also have like food at intermission and stuff, so like we can go back and chat with people, so that's been kind of fun to engage with the community in a new way.

Jeff Dunn: That sounds like a totally different dynamic. Rather than like, you know, it feels very sectional at concerts where you just: you go on stage, you play the concert, you might go off stage and the audience like does their own thing. This sounds like a very different experience, yeah.

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, it has been. It's a much smaller venue, but every concert has been like pretty full in the church. I mean, it's a big Baptist church, but it's not a concert hall. I don't know how many people can fit in, but like, it feels quite substantial when you know I'm seeing most of the church filled. I'm not sure what the end goal is with it, but I can- I can like feel the energy of being like, we need to like really keep this momentum going so that we can perform in the spaces that like we should be performing it. I know the goal is to like eventually petition to be back in the Tobin Center, but I don't know how soon or how successful that would be. I know there were talks of going back to the Majestic Theater, which was the theater they played in before the Tobin, like 8 years ago or so. It's kind of just like a big community theater like right in the heart of downtown. Not as nice to play in as a- as a church, but...

Jeff Dunn: (chuckles)

Russell Rybicki: it's got that dead theater sound, which is fun.

Jeff Dunn: Right wow...wow.

Russell Rybicki: Yeah.

Jeff Dunn: So, I mean your experience over the last several years has been a whirlwind, to say the least. But it sounds like being in Texas is still very meaningful for you: if you're from Austin, you get to live there, you have friends and family nearby. Would you say that despite all the challenge that there's still been something very meaningful for you in your career to be in the locations that you're in, and working alongside the people that you're working with?

Russell Rybicki: Not in Austin? Austin is a little bit, I mean, this kind of, it gets a little personal when I talk about that because that 'cuz, you know... When I left Vancouver, it was like a depressing time, a lot of: "Am I even going to continue music?" And honestly, if it weren't for- for Jeff and Peter and Andrew in the horn section in San Antonio, I probably would have quit that following year? But, they were just so kind and so welcoming that I felt right at home when I got to play with them. That was just... you know, I don't think I've ever told them that, but I definitely plan to. It was, yeah, very meaningful. And I mean that orchestra is- is just as professional as any other. I remember we played 'Scheherazade', and it was like every single solo like- I was just sitting there on 4th, just you know, having a good old time and I could- just listening to everybody. I was like these are all top-notch soloists, pretty much. Always inspiring to play next to them, so it's like, I just –

A lot of the time you could- you could kind of feel the frustration in that year leading up to COVID, and just because like... they knew it was a negotiation year. So there were people- there was always that background chatter of like: "What's gonna happen on this negotiation, this time? Are they really gonna try to cut us out?" You could hear the frustration in people's voices where it was like: "Do you hear how good we are? Like, do you realize what orchestra is here in this city? You should- you should be praising this orchestra!" Like this is not... it's like just on par with a lot of the bigger orchestras and Texas, like San Antonio, Dallas and Houston. Just the consistency, the people, just everyone is so hard-working. And then when we got to play again as MOSAS, like that energy was just like exponentially heightened. Even though a lot of people did leave, because they needed to find other

work they needed to make money. There was still like a- a high sense of optimism. People were just like, I think their passion of playing was really showing because they were just so happy to be playing together again. At least maybe that was my own personal thing rubbing off? That I was like- I was kind of coming out of, you know, my own downward spiral a little bit. So, I was like super happy to be playing with like good group with people that I like. Like I could sit down, and I knew that like playing with this group I would get better. It's just been like, yeah, optimism is just the word that keeps coming up. I can feel them wanting to continue that momentum.

Jeff Dunn: Yeah, when and when you said that umm- I mean you already alluded to this, that when the- when some of the announcements came out from the board that the Symphony would be dissolved, you know, there were some, you know, I guess it was filing for Chapter 7? That it wasn't the surprise to the musicians, that everyone already maybe saw this coming. Did you feel like, you know, over the last couple of years, there's- there's been highs and lows in terms of morale and energy with the musicians? Or, has there always been a consistent sense from the musicians that they're, you know, you've always known the possibilities with that orchestra, with the potential, and that there would always just be forward momentum?

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, I think it's, there are- there are a lot of people that have been there for years, and then there are a lot of young people who are there for a few years and then kind of leave, you kind of alluded that to that in one of your questions, and it was like- a lot of people have been there for a while. like really care about the city and they really care about that orchestra. If they were paid an amount that like, equated to how good they sound, that would be a destination orchestra where people would be going out of their way to audition there. Just yeah, some of the concerts I played there, I was like: "How am I still living in like a garage apartment with, with ba-barely making a living doing this here." And I couldn't imagine, but yeah, just all the young people there are just still in the hustle, and then still showing up and laying it down every week, and then having to, like, go and take auditions still.

Yeah, it's something that I wish that- that the management saw for all those years, like what they had rather than trying to... Yeah, it's it kind of felt like they were; they had this vision of something else, and like they had something else just as beautiful right in front of them that they were like "No, we want this instead. y'all can... y'all can just go away." It just felt like that was the- the tension between the management and the musicians.

Jeff Dunn: That's very interesting. Because you're right, and that's certainly the impression I always got of that orchestra. And I say that that, I'm- I'm a trombonist myself, and there's just a long line of trombonists who have been in that section, and have gone through that orchestra and it has that reputation for being a stellar section. And, you know, a lot of folks that have moved on to great jobs afterwards, too. You talked a little bit there about the management's vision, maybe in comparison to what the musicians vision for that orchestra was. Is there a way that you might be able to describe what the management's vision was, and where there was a disconnect, and how that related to the musicians themselves?

Russell Rybicki: Umm... I mean, I don't know many specifics on that? Just, that it's been something that's been going on for, I don't know- Peter, that one of the horn players had been there, he's been there I think twenty-five plus years? He's seen all the cycles of- of what's been going on, and it was, yeah, it kind of just felt more like: "Hello, we're right here!" Like, "We're great if you would just like pay attention." That's kind of- that's kind of the dynamic that I got? I just thought it was interesting how they built this

like massive, definitely a symphony orchestra / opera / ballet hall, and they wanted to reduce it down to a b-contract orchestra with like 36 full-time musicians. My job would have been cut; like, I think the salary that I was getting on the one year that I was there was like around 30-ish? But it would've gone down to 8, and then no health insurance, no instrument insurance, like not- it wasn't even really livable before. Definitely not livable now.

Jeff Dunn: Did you find, especially in your one year, umm... how did you feel like the management communicated with you guys? You know, w-were there people there that saw rehearsals that saw concerts? Or were these people that were making some decisions, like, did you feel like they were just faceless names that worked in some building, in an office and you never really even saw them?

Russell Rybicki: Sometimes. But there were, I mean, we had at least... before COVID, like the couple weeks before COVID we had... Um, I guess it was the president, Cory, he came- would come on stage at rehearsals and kind of tell us what was going on. We had a few, like, early season meetings; they would talk to us, but other than that, it was a bunch of emails.

Jeff Dunn: Yeah, yeah...

Russell Rybicki: So I was, I mean, I came into it with absolutely no knowledge of it and then it was chatter, kind of- kind of thrown at me sometimes, so I didn't really know... know what to think at first. But then, just kind of seeing what happened during the strike year, it was obvious this was something that had been building for a while. So like, the musicians were almost ready for it in a way. That they were like "We just need to completely separate from that management and that board and like start our own thing." The management and board saw COVID as an opportunity to like make all these cuts, and then it seemed the musicians kind of took advantage of the strike year and coming out of it and being like "How are we going to build something that's stronger, more sustainable, and going to like really be part of the cultural fabric of the city?"

Jeff Dunn: What was the strike like? Can you describe any sense of the feelings amongst the musicians, the way that they worked together through that?

Russell Rybicki: I was living in Austin at that point, but yeah, I got pretty much daily emails of strike events, picketing outside of the Tobin Center when they would be having concerts of some kind. They had a lot of like jazz concerts, I think like Chris Botti played there, and I know they picketed that event. There were a few events that the Tobin Center management got involved, and we had to cancel the picketing last minute. There are a few just like "We're going to go downtown and play while we picket the management." There were a few, like, silent pickets outside of some of the homes of the board and stuff. Uh, it got pretty intense with some of the things that were happening, but I think it was a totally valid, you know, emotional response to decades of this kind of behavior.

Jeff Dunn: And certainly, I mean these kinds of stories amongst orchestras nowadays are not uncommon by any means. And, especially the history of San Antonio Symphony was, you know, it seems like a recurring- recurring problem. So what about the morale now? You know, as the musicians have kind of changed the structure and are leading the way. As the San Antonio Philharmonic. Is there a renewed sense of energy and- and optimism?

Russell Rybicki: I certainly feel that; all the concerts that I've played, I just, I can feel like so much joy that people get playing them. And it's not like they've watered down the rep (repertoire) at all! It's been really fun, at least not having like a consistent job over the past few years playing, just getting to play "The Planets" and Shostakovich 5 and *Tristan and Isolde*. Like week after week, it's been- it's been really fun, and there's definitely an emphasis on, like, "How can we present ourselves still at the level of the San Antonio Symphony, but like in a new way?" There's just a bigger effort on the community and school engagement. Peter actually told me we've reached over 15,000 students since September. So yeah, there were several, I think three weeks, that we did like two school shows a day, in different high school auditoriums around the city, where they just like bus in tons of schools. We would have open rehearsals where the church would be filled; like a dress rehearsal and then it would just be filled with students. So that's pretty cool too. Any of the orchestras I've played in for school shows that's never been to like that degree of wanting to reach that many kids. It's- there's obviously a concerted effort in it, and hopefully that kind of like fires up the city a little bit more, knowing that there's an emphasis on the education.

Because I mean, orchestras are just like living museums, you know. We're- we're playing art that was created hundreds of years ago, sometimes yesterday, and it's like, a preservation of that art that's in a living, breathing manner by people who are living now. Umm, it's just like a cool museum thing to go to, that, I think is something that could be tapped into a little bit more so it's nice to see it being done. On this scale, with like a full orchestra in the schools that much. Yeah to hear- I mean, we did Scheherazade for one of those school weeks and to hear some of these people like have to play these solos over and over again, so well. And like they did it consistently every single time. Once again, it's a testament to just like how good that orchestra still is.

Jeff Dunn: So what- what would you say is different then? You know, obviously what you're doing now it's not unlike what the San Antonio Symphony was doing. Obviously things have changed and maybe on some level things are even, you know... Especially, it sounds like the engagement of the community is even improved, so why? How would you attribute that? What's actually different now about the approach that the leadership is taking compared to what was going on just a handful of years ago?

Russell Rybicki: I think a lot of the- there's like a small core of the people who have been there a while, that have kind of taken ownership of the direction. Even some of the musicians are now on the board that they're starting to create. So musicians are helping to make decisions for the future, which I think is a- a good bonus to have that kind of voice there and to you know, bridge the gap between the musicians and the management and the board. I know that's not what they want to do because like, I've seen –

I can see how tired Peter is like sitting... sitting down the line from him a little bit. Having to, you know, play principal on Shostakovich 5, but then also like make sure tickets are being sold at the door; that's just so much to put on one person.

Jeff Dunn: It is! That- that's a big job, right? To be in those kinds of leadership roles, but also have to be on the stage. Right, that's a lot of hats to wear. So does it feel like this model is transitional? Or, is this maybe a more permanent model of how orchestras can function?

Russell Rybicki: From what I have talked to people about, it's definitely transitional. I know they- they want to hand it off to people who they deem competent enough to trying to find people who can market the Symphony well. I know there was like big chatter over like how the San Diego Symphony was

advertising some of their concerts before to younger audiences. And I know that they want to find someone who can really generate some more buzz about what's going on. Because I think they've done a good job of rebranding the Symphony; it doesn't feel like a new organization when I look at it, which is what I was kind of afraid of? Because then it would be like starting over from scratch rather than, it's just a new name with the same great people. So that's, I think they did a good job with making that transition.

The reception from the audience has been very positive. Every conductor that comes in- I think they've been getting people that have either solo'd with us or have conducted us before? So they're able to speak on like, what it was like before and what it's like now. And they're all saying: it's just been a joy to come back, hearing the passion in- in how they're playing. It's just so much fun to conduct and play again, like, which I feel the exact same way. The level of artistic merit hasn't dropped at all; people are really just happy to be playing and happy to be seeing where this is going, and it's like it's just something new and... I don't wanna say it's like *making history* (chuckles), but it's just definitely something that's like a new model that hasn't really come out of any of the strikes recently-

Jeff Dunn: Mmmhmm.

Russell Rybicki: - around the country, so it's- it's certainly experimental. Maybe that's the word for it: a little more experimental.

Jeff Dunn: Sure, sure. Yeah, it certainly reminds me, or when I was reading a lot of the news and seeing the start of the new season, it reminded me a lot of what the Syracuse Symphony went through.

Russell Rybicki: Yeah.

Jeff Dunn: You know what it makes me think about, is just, the qualities and the mission that it takes to have great leadership over a modern American orchestra. Right? You've kind of mentioned about some of the energy and the benefit some of the musicians are bringing in leading the new way. And of course, how challenging that is for them to have to, you know, have so many different roles to juggle. While also, you know, having searches for- for the next group of leaders that are really going to take the orchestra in the, you know, bring them into the future. So, could you perhaps define, or give some qualities of what would make those leaders successful, right? What kind of values do they need to bring to the table, what kind of mission do they need to have in order to engage with the musicians well, and have the orchestra be as successful as it can be?

Russell Rybicki: I think it's more- because that's kind of like a what almost every musician's mindset needs to be nowadays; like, it has to have that entrepreneurial sort of passion where you have to be willing to almost roll with the punches while still leading it in the right direction? Because like, you can have a vision for something, but it's- it's kind of, seeing how the process plays it out. So I think people that are obviously passionate about classical music, and how you can kind of transition it into the present-day media / present-day, like, social constructs and all that stuff. I think it takes, certainly some people with expanded minds to find new ways to make it relevant; because obviously the old model, as we've seen with many orchestras making cuts, people going on strikes, it's not as sustainable as it used to be?

So just, kind of keeping an open mind with trying new things, kind of letting go into the new process of what leading an orchestra is like. And I think having musicians, who are in it, being able to

speak on like, the passion of why they do what they do, is really important in the management aspect of it. So, that's certainly hard to find because a lot of musicians, kind of- well, like: "I feel safe behind my instrument, rather than getting in front of the whole organization and leading the way," that can be pretty challenging. Because, I mean, I guess I kind of did that a little bit? I started like a chamber ensemble in Houston during the pandemic with a couple of friends, and now it's blown up into a whole Houston-wide community chamber ensemble. But it's like, we've had to wear a bunch of different hats, so I've seen what that's like on a small scale, and it can be very overwhelming, yeah.

Jeff Dunn: Again, you're right about that, and something I think you're saying it so well? That there's new demands on the modern musician. And we, you know, all of us, I- I think you'd agree, enjoy what we do and playing our instruments or singing, or you know, performing whatever- whatever our medium may be. But there's new demands on us to have different skills to be successful, but it also sounds like for those people that are in those leadership roles, it sounds like having strong musical conviction, for them, is also equally important. Would you agree with that?

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, absolutely. That's kind of- the music director at the church, Aaron Hufty, is clearly so passionate about music, and he was like a big supporter of the Symphony, supported us all through the strike. He, like, donated the space, and I know that he is on the board now, but he's always on top of everything. He's almost- he's at every single rehearsal. Like, it kind of takes that kind of energy- I think people see him and they're like "This guy really cares!" And then that's like, what musicians would gravitate towards of like: "I want to do well, because there's someone like *that*, supporting us like so wholeheartedly and so genuinely." It's really beautiful to see. "I wanna, like, up my game, to like, help support that," and then hopefully it's like, everybody's supporting each other.

When... maybe that was part of the issue before, is that like the tension with management were so high that the musicians almost were just, like over it at that point. Where, they were like "I don't see a way out of this. What do we have to do? We have to, like, get rid of this management and this board. We're just the musicians on stage, we have no say." But now I think people are seeing, now the musicians are in a little bit of a position to control things a little bit more, to at least have more influence over what happens. So, I think there's excitement in that. And just the fact that we're playing regularly again; like you can feel the joy, um, in every rehearsal, and it's just like it's really been fun.

Jeff Dunn: Yeah, do you feel like your individual role has played - if you can, you know, compare for the work you do now, when you're playing concerts, compared to like your- your one year with the San Antonio Symphony? Or does it feel very similar, in terms of just showing up to rehearsal, and playing and you know...

Russell Rybicki: Well, it's just me and Peter left in the section, so I guess I'm... I'm playing 3rd now instead of 4th!

(both laugh)

So that's kind of fun. I get to- I've always been like a low player, so it's just, you know, I'm getting to play- getting more experience on 3rd. I'm also the kind of person that's: "I'm here if you need help, let me know if you need help. Otherwise, I'm gonna do what I'm told." I'll sit down and do my job, tell me what you need. So, my role hasn't really changed, but I just try to support whoever is around me who is doing more. So it's been... it feels like a team effort from my point of view. Being someone who's on the

outside, but just like, I want to support this vision because I think what everybody- what they're trying to do *is* super important. They believe in what they're doing so much that like they started a whole new organization to hopefully, like weave its way into the culture of San Antonio. The people have been there a while really see how important the orchestra is to the city. It's the same size I believe as like Pittsburgh and Detroit, yet they can't support an orchestra, a full-time orchestra, like Detroit and Pittsburgh can. But it's definitely possible, and with all of the money moving into Texas now, it's- it's there, and I think they- the musicians realize it? And they're getting people on board who also realize it and who are willing to try to make it happen.

Jeff Dunn: Well, well, it's certainly a story that I appreciate you sharing. Not only your own personal journeys, but just something that's, you know, going on in the field. That- it behooves all of us to be aware of, to think about how the dynamics and the landscape of the profession is changing. Umm, so I- I really appreciate it. Do you have any, just, reminiscing on your time at Eastman? Any favored memories, experiences to share?

Russell Rybicki: Yeah, I was thinking about that over the past few days, but I mean, I guess it's the time of year, but Holiday Sing was always fun, playing in the horn choir. I do remember there was- we play like the last- it's like a big like Verne Reynolds arrangement. I forget, "cor... carol," like "cor," carol...??

Jeff Dunn: Yeah yeah, yeah.

Russell Rybicki: You know, we add stuff in for Holiday Sing because we're having fun, and then like the very last note, it's like a concert F-major chord, but like there's always one of us like playing a high C. And so I was playing at my senior year, and then I somehow hit it, and then PK just like looked at- like made a direct eye-contact me while I was playing it, and I was like "I don't know how long I can hold this for!" And I remember...

Jeff Dunn: (laughs)

Russell Rybicki: I remember that direct eye contact; I probably was beat red, yeah.

Jeff Dunn: Oh, that's great, that's great. Well gosh, thank you so much. It was just fascinating; I really appreciate you sharing your story.

Russell Rybicki: Certainly a wide array of things that I've had to... had to dabble in- or not, not *had* to, but certainly had to question, and have now, you know, made steps to make sure that I am well-faceted in the- in the professional music world. And it's certainly not... I achieved my dream, what, like six years ago? And then it feels like I'm back to square one sometimes. But, I don't think I would have achieved the growth that I did, had it not been for a lot of those setbacks and downfalls. So, people should know there's no timeline- no timeline to win your job, no timeline to succeed. You're succeeding if you're doing what you love, and you're happy doing it, and making just enough money to live.

(Outro music)

Jeff Dunn: Today's episode was produced by Kelly Jutsum. The music was written and produced by Stephen Biegner, Alexa Silverman, and myself. If you have questions, comments or ideas for episodes, please contact us via our website at iml.esm.rochester.edu. If you liked this episode, share it with your friends and colleagues, and leave us a review on your preferred streaming platform. This podcast is a production of the Institute for Music Leadership at the Eastman School of Music. The views expressed in

the podcast are the interviewee's and do not represent the Eastman School of Music or the Institute for Music Leadership. From the IML, I'm Jeff Dunn; see you next time.

Season 3, Episode 3 (Russell Rybicki and the San Antonio Philharmonic) End