

The Symphony Musician in the 21st Century

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Abstract: Although symphony orchestras have been faced with challenging business decisions for decades, the musicians who perform the music endure numerous tribulations as well. We consider the careers of the musicians who comprise the symphony orchestra and discuss ways to improve their choices. Given the improbability of obtaining a position in a symphony orchestra, we discuss options that will allow young musicians to earn a living in music, such as “arts entrepreneurship” programs. In addition, we consider the impact of COVID-19 on musicians.

Keywords: musician, symphony orchestra, retirement, entrepreneurship, COVID-19

Introduction¹

Beginning in the 1960s, U.S. symphony orchestras (SO) experienced a rapid growth due in large part to public and private initiatives. The Federal government established the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, and in 1966 the Ford Foundation produced a report about the challenges facing SOs and announced a grant program “to help symphony orchestras build large endowments in order to thrive” (Lehman 1995, 38). In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation (1965) released its assessment of the performing arts, *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*, that encouraged greater public support for the arts. In the following years, SOs – both established and new ones - expanded their seasons, with the major SOs offering full-year employment for the first time.

However, the years of expansion have ended and in recent decades, SOs have experienced numerous challenges. After a period of limited cooperation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, discord between management and musicians has increased, which has led to extended strikes and lockouts (e.g., the Minnesota Orchestra had a 15-month lockout and the

¹ We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

Detroit Symphony a 6-month strike (McCauley 2019)). SOs have encountered increasing financial challenges, especially since the recessions of 2001 and 2008, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Revenues from ticket sales do not cover costs, and increasingly, donations and endowments are not sufficient to cover the remaining costs (Flanagan 2012). Indicative of the financial difficulties is the case of the Philadelphia Orchestra filing for bankruptcy in 2011.²

Decreasing concert attendance has exacerbated financial problems. A recent publication by the National Endowment for the Arts (2018, 10) reports that attendance at classical music concerts decreased by 2.3 percent between 2012 and 2017, while attendance at all other performing arts increased slightly during that period. Attendance at nonmusical plays increased by 13.3 percent, for example. Of all performing arts attendance, classical music is the only art form that decreased over all 4 NEA survey years (2002, 2008, 2012, and 2017). Even more troubling is the declining number of season ticket holders, on which SOs depend. A recent study (Voss, et. al. 2016, 4) concluded that “2013 was a moment of transition in ticket buying, as single ticket revenues and group sales exceeded subscription revenues for the first time.” Given that subscribers are the most committed attendees and donors, this portends an increasingly troublesome future for SO.

Even before the disruption to performances from the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have raised troubling concerns about the future of SOs and the musicians who perform in them.³ Lehman (1995, 47), for example, warns that, “... if the typical symphony orchestra organization fails to increase its perceived value and efficiency, is it so farfetched to think that the orchestral

² The bankruptcy involved a dispute with musicians, who claimed that the one purpose of the bankruptcy was to shed pension obligations.

³ See Flanagan (2012) and Pompe and Tamburri (2016), for example.

musician of the 21st century might indeed go the way of the pit musician?”⁴ To continue this examination of SO culture, we will focus on the musicians who comprise the SO. In the following sections, we consider the careers of these skilled musicians, the impact of COVID-19, whether it is appropriate to implement a retirement age for SO musicians, and how the options of musicians can be improved.

SO Musicians Employment

As the supply of musicians is much greater than the demand, opportunities for SO employment are extremely scarce and competitive. Although there are 1,224 professional SOs in the U.S. (Voss et. al. 2016), very few positions open up each year, and for a particular instrument there may none. Although there are about 160,000 musicians performing with SOs (LAOa 2020), opportunities for full-time employment are especially limited as there are only 26 “major” orchestras.⁵ For example, in 2010 there were only 126 total positions in 61 U.S. SO that Van Waeyenberghe surveyed (2014). In addition, he found that from 1982 to 2010 there was a 50 percent decline in the number of positions.

Recent music school graduates add to the glut of musicians who are out of school and auditioning. In 2017, 4,004 bachelors, 2,153 masters, and 448 doctorates degrees were issued in music performance at U.S. colleges and universities (Snyder, et.al. 2019). Those music school graduates who become very proficient generally begin their careers by freelancing with a string of smaller ensembles and working day jobs. It is unlikely that young musicians will win a

⁴ Rising production costs, shrinking orchestras, and electronically produced music have led to fewer musicians employed in the Broadway orchestra pit.

⁵ The League of American Orchestras defines SO by budget and artistic expenses. There are approximately 16 “major” orchestras defined as Group 1 SO, which have budgets of \$20 million or more and approximately 20 Group 2 SO that have budgets from \$5 to 20 million per year.

position with a major SO, but instead will start with smaller, regional SO that pays per service and does not provide a full-time position.

A major SO is comprised of approximately 100 full-time musicians, but there are only a limited number of openings each season, perhaps two or three. With the large quantity of unemployed musicians, and the small number of vacancies each year, the number of applications for a particular position is usually extremely large. It is common to have more than 400 applicants for a single position with a major SO (Bloom 2014). In one audition example, a clarinet opening for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra generated 208 resumes, of which 68 musicians were invited to the initial live audition (Short 2014). Clearly, the odds of winning a position in a top SO are slight, and given the increasingly challenging financial conditions for SOs, the odds will only get worse.

A significant innovation in the audition process was the introduction of “blind” auditions, which became prevalent in the 1970s and 80s, and the democratization of the process to select a member for the orchestra. The previous selection process to fill a vacancy was often controlled by dictatorial music directors, and auditions were often mere formalities. Today, the process is much more democratic and unbiased, with musicians playing behind a screen for a committee of musicians and the director, at least in the preliminary stages of the audition. Before blind auditions, which would be expected to decrease bias and discrimination, SO were comprised almost entirely of white males. In an often referenced study, Goldin and Rouse (2000) collected SO audition records and personnel records and found that blind auditions increased the hiring of women. Similarly, Fang and O’Flaherty (2020) found that the advent of blind auditions increased the number of Asians in the SO.

Although these two studies suggest that blind auditions improve diversity in SOs, some research indicates that this conclusion is questionable. Gelman (2019) notes that although Goldin and Rouse declare their results to be “economically significant”, they did not show a statistical significance, and therefore the results lack conclusiveness. Hiscox, et. al. (2017) found that “blind” hiring by managers in the Australian Public Service, *reduced* the number of women hired. They suggest that managers practiced a form of affirmative action on their own, and therefore were more likely to hire women when they knew the identity of the candidates.

Whatever the reasons are, U.S. SO have become more diverse. Between 1980 and 2014 the proportion of non-white musicians in SOs increased from 3.4 percent to 14.2 percent, although the majority of the increase resulted from an increase in Asian / Pacific Islander musicians (League of American Orchestras 2016). The percentage of women in SOs increased from 38.2 percent in 1978 to 47.4 percent in 2014 (League of American Orchestras 2016). It is likely that other factors aside from “blind” auditions are responsible for increased diversity in SO. For example, more women and minorities may be graduating from music schools, and changing cultural stereotypes create greater acceptance of non-white males. This is not to say that blind auditions are not desirable, only that other factors may be more responsible for the increased diversity in SOs.

Along with expansion of SOs beginning in the 1960s, musician salaries and working conditions began to improve significantly. In addition to the increased funding for SOs from organizations such as the Ford Foundation, the emergence of International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) was instrumental in improving work conditions. ICSOM, which was formed in 1962, has become a powerful advocate for SO musicians. It is

notable that ICSOM has been able to help generate the wage increases despite the large supply of available musicians.

For those fortunate enough to earn one of the year-round positions with a Group 1 SO, wages and benefits can be excellent. The average wage for SO musicians has increased at a faster rate than the wage of the average U.S. worker. As reported in recent newspaper articles, the base pay in 2020 for the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony Orchestra, was \$137,800, \$153,504, and \$162,000 respectively. Principal Chairs make a great deal more, in some cases more than \$400,000; for example, in 2016 the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic received \$622,421. In the major orchestras, the season goes for approximately nine months. The remaining SOs provide seasons of 9 months or less, but at a reduced wage so that musicians need to supplement their wage with secondary job such as teaching at a university.

Tenure and Early Retirement for SO Musicians

Once a musician passes the probationary period (which is usually one or two years), generally, lifetime employment is assured. Flanagan notes that tenures often last 20 to 40 years (2012, 65).⁶ It is not uncommon for SO music directors and management to wish to remove some older musicians, as skills are likely to diminish with age, due to declining mental and physical abilities. Certainly, it is likely that a musician will be less proficient at age 70 than at age 55. Musicians admit that declining performance due to aging is a problem (Reynolds 2018), and medical studies show that health problems, such as hearing loss and stress have deleterious

⁶An interesting anecdote that illustrates the longevity of many careers is the story of Jane Little, the bassist who played in the Atlanta Symphony for 71 years, a Guinness World Record. She died in 2016 at the age of 87 after collapsing on stage while playing "There's No Business Like Show Business."

effects on performance. Lazear (2018, 201) chronicles some of the effects of aging that have been identified in assorted studies:

“For example, age at some point brings a decline in the ability to conduct logical thinking and reasoning (Ruth and Birren 1985), a diminution of creativity (Florida 2002), and declining abilities to store and process information, solve problems, deal with complexity, and adjust to new situations (Kaufman and Horn 1996; Ryan, Sattler, and Lopez 2000).”

In a survey, German SO musicians verified that aging causes performance to deteriorate (Gembris and Heye, 2014). The musicians stated that performance begins to decline between the ages of 40 to 50 due to a range of age-related factors such as physical problems, cognitive problems, sensory organ problems and psychological problems.

It is difficult to remove musicians even if they are playing below the high level of performance that is the standard in SOs. In part, this is because SO members, who are included in the vote on dismissal, are reluctant to vote against a fellow member even if justified. The musician’s union, which is likely to support musicians, and the Collective Bargaining Agreement between management and musicians also limit the ability to remove tenured musicians. Older musicians have challenged SO management when dismissed from the SO, contending age discrimination, as was the case in a recent lawsuit by a bassoonist in the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra (Reynolds 2018). In addition, proving declining performance may be problematic because of the subjectivity of a performance.

Currently, no U.S. SO has a mandatory retirement, unlike many European SO (Reynolds 2018).⁷ Both SO quality and financial performance may be improved if musicians are required to retire at a certain age. A possible mandatory retirement age could be 65 or 67, for example,

⁷ In general, voluntary early retirement is more prevalent in European countries than in the U.S. In Germany (50.0 percent) and Portugal (54.2 percent), more than half of the early retirees’ state that their retirement has been ‘not by choice’, while in the U.S. only 9.4 percent are ‘not by choice’ (Dorn and Souza-Poza 2010).

which many European orchestras have in place (Reynolds 2018).⁸ Alternatively, when a musician is hired, a contract for a period of years could be agreed upon. For younger hires this would mean a contract of more years than for an older musician, but for both there would be a date set when the musician would no longer be employed with the SO. This could be an advantage for an older musician. For example, management may be willing to hire a 55 year old who would agree to retire at 65, but not a 55 year old who may be protected well past an age where performance is detrimental to the SO. There could be some flexibility to the retirement rule. Extension beyond the mandatory age could be possible if both the SO and the musician agreed, for example. This would avoid the possibility of losing especially high quality musicians who continue to perform at a high level even when beyond an accepted retirement age.

The economic rationale for a profit maximizing firm to institute mandatory retirement is based on the principle that while a worker's earnings increase with experience, productivity declines with age (Lazear 1978).⁹ It may be more important to have a mandatory age in a SO than in most other firms. In a SO, for example, the performance of an individual musician is likely to have a much greater impact on productivity than a worker in a factory. Mandatory retirement for older workers, would replace high wage, lower productivity workers with lower wage, higher productivity workers. For a profit maximizing firm mandatory retirement would be a desirable policy, because hiring younger workers would increase profits, *ceteris paribus*.

⁸ Legislation in the United States makes mandatory retirement illegal for most occupations. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 forbids employment discrimination against anyone at least 40 years of age. U.S. Rep. Claude Pepper (then 86) led the passage of a 1986 amendment to federal age discrimination law, which generally made it illegal for employers to force a worker to retire because he or she had reached a certain age. Occupations that are too perilous or that demand elevated levels of physical and mental skill still have mandatory retirement policies. E.g., the mandatory retirement age of airline pilots and air traffic controllers is 65 and 56, respectively.

⁹ SO are especially cursed by worker productivity. Unlike most industries where worker productivity is likely to increase over time, due to technology improvements, for example, a SO today is no more productive than a SO from centuries past. That is, performing a Beethoven symphony today requires the same number of musicians as were required in the 19th century (Baumol and Bowen, 1966).

Although SOs are nonprofit firms, and therefore not ruled by profit maximizing strategies, they must be run in a business-like fashion. As discussed above, financial pressures require SO management to control costs. Musician's wages have become a substantial percentage of the total costs of operation for SOs, and wages and benefits are highest for older musicians.¹⁰

In lieu of mandatory retirement, firms can encourage early retirement with incentive contracts such as defined benefit pension plans, non-wage benefits, and severance packages. The share of 'involuntary' early retirements is particularly high in countries with low labor market participation rates of older persons (Dorn and Souza-Poso 2010, 436). Some occupations are more likely to encourage early retirement (Lazear 2018, 205). For a worker whose productivity can be easily monitored and measured, an output-based pay would encourage workers to be productive, and employers would find it less necessary to encourage older workers to retire. If, however, output is more difficult to measure - as is likely the case for SOs - employers would be more likely to encourage early retirement. If an early retirement policy were to be implemented, it would have to be introduced gradually, grandfathering in musicians who are already employed in a SO.

Improving the Life/Culture of SO Musicians

There are some new opportunities for young musicians that will allow them to refine their craft, making the possibility of success more likely. Post-graduate training programs such as

¹⁰ SO managements have been transitioning from defined benefit plans because of their cost and risk. In order to reduce long-term expenses, most SOs have switched from defined benefit pension plans to defined contribution plans, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which implemented the change following a seven-week-long strike in 2019. Although defined contribution plans will lead to large cost-savings for SO, early retirement could still lead to cost savings with either pension plan. If a SO negotiates an early retirement, for example, it would save defined benefit costs and income increases above the minimum. Removing musicians from the defined benefit plan early, before they reach a cap - usually based on age and years in the organization - creates sizable cost savings over time.

Ensemble Connect, Orchestra NOW, and the New World Symphony, are dedicated to training the modern musician and to encouraging greater community engagement. Ensemble Connect, for example, is a two-year fellowship program that offers young musicians performance opportunities, and encourages advocacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Ensemble Connect is a partnership between Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, and the Weill Music Institute, and the New York City Department of Education.¹¹

SOs could create innovative programs that expand opportunities for musicians. For example, Fleischmann suggested the creation of a “Community of Musicians” – perhaps 150 – that would be a combination of music ensembles in a metropolitan area (Symphony Orchestra Institute 1996). The “Community” could perform, symphonic repertoire, opera and ballet, and chamber music, as well as a variety of audience development and educational services throughout the region. Programming could include new music, folk, jazz, and other popular music. The broad range of cultural and educational services would provide teaching and performing opportunities for musicians.

SO need to address the problem of the lack of diversity among the musicians. Although SOs have become more diverse in recent years, there remains a concern about the limited number of non-white orchestra members. For example, between 2002 and 2014, the proportion of Hispanic / Latino musicians only increased from 1.8 percent to 2.5 percent, while the proportion of African American musicians remained at 1.8 percent (League of American Orchestras 2016). In an attempt to remedy this problem, programs to encourage more diversity have been implemented. The League of American Orchestra’s Catalyst Fund, for example, is “a three-year program of annual grants to orchestras that aims to advance their understanding of

¹¹ <https://www.carnegiehall.org/Education/Programs/Ensemble-Connect>

equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and to foster effective EDI practices (League of American Orchestras2020).” The League of American Orchestras is one of the sponsors of the National Alliance for Audition Support, which is “a national initiative to increase diversity in American orchestras by offering Black and Latina musicians a combination of mentoring, audition preparation, and financial support.” In addition, many SOs have programs that support minority musicians.¹²

However, some suggest that in order to correct this lack of diversity, it is necessary to change the blind audition format (Tommasini 2020). Because of the high quality of musicians auditioning for a position, there are likely to be dozens of musicians who all possess the ability to perform proficiently at approximately the same level. Removing the screen would allow the auditioning committee to favor a non-white candidate when appropriate. This may be a necessary change that will allow SO to better reflect the diversity of their communities.

The fact that there are so few non-white SO musicians suggests that factors other than eliminating “blind” auditions may be important in order to create greater diversity in SO. Certainly, qualified non-white musicians would be just as likely to win blind auditions as women and Asians. Recognizing that there are talented young musicians of color that face challenges, the Sphinx Organization, founded in 1997 by Aaron Dworkin, mentors and provides stipends to young musicians in order to develop and support diversity in classical music at every level. Given the interest in the Social Justice Movement and a national debate about racism in American institutions, SO will be expected to improve the diversity of their organizations.

Colleges and universities need to do a better job of preparing music students for the poor job market that awaits them on graduation. Although it is no secret that achieving a position with

¹² For example, the Pittsburgh Symphony and New Jersey Symphony have the EQT Orchestra Training Program and Colton Fellowship, respectively, to enhance diversity in SOs.

a professional SO is extremely difficult, young performance majors are often ill prepared to utilize their talent in an alternative occupation, unlike music education majors who have options. Performance majors should be more adaptable and better prepared to work in music-related fields that make use of their musical training. This can be achieved by majoring in programs such as Arts Entrepreneurship and Arts Management which have become more available in recent years.

Arts Entrepreneurship is a relatively new field that is being increasingly discussed in the arts. Beckmam (2007, 87) notes that “interest in arts entrepreneurship education is strong, widespread, and rapidly growing.” Entrepreneurship programs can help students to learn how to find and create opportunities for them to perform their music. Flutist Claire Chase, who founded the International Contemporary Ensemble and won a MacArthur Fellowship, is a prime example of a successful “arts entrepreneur.” Although few could expect to be as successful as Ms. Chase, students recognize the importance of obtaining such valuable skills. In a survey 114 music students, fifty-two percent of respondents valued entrepreneurial skills as important for their careers (Toscher and Aksel 2019). More colleges, universities and especially conservatories, need to follow the examples of Eastman School of Music, Purchase College and the University of North Texas by offering these programs that make musicians more employable.

In addition, more colleges and universities should follow the practice of Bard College Conservatory of Music that requires music majors to earn a second B.A. in a field other than music; other schools, such as Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Lawrence University Conservatory offer similar options. This provides important career options that allow music students to be employed if a performance position is not achievable. Many colleges offer the

double major as an option, but requiring the double major increases the number of music students who will be better prepared for the evolving professional workplace.

Music schools could follow the model of dance schools where students are encouraged to prepare for a second career when they begin their training, knowing that physical limitations will end their career at a relatively young age, generally in their 30s. Popular second careers for dancers include teacher, choreographer, and arts administrator. A similar encouragement for musicians could allow them, although at an older age, to make a successful transition from an orchestral position to other performing arts positions such as administrators, and at an age that allows for a second career. Clive Gillinson, for example, began in the London Symphony Orchestra cello section in 1970, joined the Board of Directors of the self-governing orchestra in 1976, became Managing Director in 1984, and the Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall in 2005. However, dance conservatories have a much better track record than music conservatories at preparing students for career transitions.

Better preparing musicians for career changes will make early retirement from SO a more feasible program to introduce. Encouraging early retirement may have health benefits for orchestral musicians, who have often indicated a dissatisfaction with work in SO, some of which is the result of a lack of control over work environment. Studies on medical issues as well as specific problems experienced by musicians, such as performance anxiety, are catalogued by Gembris and Heye (2014). Allmendenger, et. al., (1996) surveyed 13 different occupations and found that SO musicians ranked 7th for general satisfaction, notably behind Federal prison guards. Although Tindall's (2005) insider's expose, "Mozart in the Jungle," is scandalous and provocative, it explains many of the problems and irritants that musicians experience, even when

finding some success. For example, musicians are fortunate to receive low-paying jobs in far wide ranging locations, that don't provide health-care benefits or retirement plans.

Performing in a SO creates numerous health problems for musicians such as chronic pain, hearing loss, and carple tunnel asyndrome that make performing in a SO more arduous.

Gembris, et. al., (2018) surveyed a cross-section of 2,536 musicians from 133 professional symphony orchestras in Germany to determine how performing in a SO affected their health and how physical problems changed with age. They found that more than 55 percent of the musicians were suffering from physical problems that affected their playing and that the prevalence of health problems increased significantly with advancing age.

Another benefit of early retirement would be the creation of more spaces for younger musicians, as well as more opportunity for minorities and women, who are underrepresented in SOs. In addition, this would provide more opportunities for talented musicians to attain principal positions.

SO Musicians and COVID-19

The Coronavirus Pandemic is having a near-term impact on SOs and SO musicians, as seasons have closed down and salaries have been curtailed. However, the long-term impact is likely to be significant as well, creating additional challenges for SOs and their musicians, challenges that some SOs may be unlikely to survive. Innovative musicians have created entertaining on-line streaming, with groups such as Quarantine Opera putting together quarantined musicians from around the world for performances of the Habanera from Carmen. Of course, novel attempts such as these cannot suffice to make up for lost paid performances, although some SO are experimenting with different formats. For example, some SOs are

performing with limited seating and special preparation (Houston and Dallas Symphonies), others to an empty hall and streaming (Cincinnati and Atlanta), and many others have cancelled all programs until August 2021.

How long before musicians can perform live in concert halls is difficult to predict. Even when an audience could be spaced out to achieve social distancing, SO musicians must sit close together when playing most of the standard repertoire. Social distancing will decimate concert audiences, and older people – who are the bulk of the audiences – may be unwilling to fill the seats in the SO auditoriums. Unfortunately, it is likely that the troublesome trend of declining audiences and subscription ticket sales will continue. While the federal government is plowing billions of dollars into the economy to help businesses and individuals to cope with the damage from Covid-19, the little help that SOs may receive will fall far short of the amount of lost revenue that will further stress SO finances. SOs will need to make significant adjustments to their performances. Music listeners have become accustomed to streaming music performances, and even after returning to the concert hall, likely will be expecting to continue streaming concerts. SOs may need to offer a hybrid concert series that provides combinations of recorded and live performances.

The full impact of the pandemic will not be known for a number of years, but it is likely that the fragile nature of SOs and the musicians who comprise them will be even more precarious. Although most SOs recovered from the last severe recession, which occurred between December 2007 and June 2009 – known as the “Great Recession” - it required several years to recoup the lost revenue from diminished attendance. The situation now is much different and will likely have a more severe and longer lasting impact. The authors expect that some regional SO are unlikely to survive the pandemic, and other SO will be required to cut back on performances,

forcing musicians to look for new jobs. Clearly, musicians will need to be more innovative and resourceful than ever.

Woronkiewicz (2015) examined how the “Great Recession,” which created an unemployment rate of 10 percent, affected the employment of artists. She found that the recession caused many artists who were disproportionately adversely impacted to switch to non-arts-related work or leave the workforce altogether. As part of the cultural arts, musicians would be similarly impacted and it is likely that the COVID recession will have a greater impact on the careers of musicians with the loss of performances. A crucial difference between previous recessions and the COVID recession is the cancelled performances through the spring, summer and fall of 2020, and in most cases through the spring and summer of 2021. Performing a social distanced concert is not financially feasible because the generated revenue would be insufficient to justify the expense. The cancellations will force many musicians to make difficult decisions, perhaps even leaving the profession, although it is likely that musicians in major symphony orchestras would be able to weather the lost wages.

Florida and Seman (2020) examine the effect of COVID on the creative economy and observe that the performing arts will suffer the most. They calculate that the pandemic has wiped out as many as 315,000 musician jobs which is about half of the jobs before the pandemic, and \$24 billion of earnings each month.¹³ Many of the jobs may not be returning. The authors explain that the industry will need extensive help to recover, including “public-private partnerships between municipal governments, arts and cultural organizations, economic development and community groups, philanthropy, and the private sector, with support from federal and state levels of government, national philanthropy, and large corporations. (Florida

¹³ Their definition of musicians, which is very broad, is based on the North American Industry Classification System.

and Seman 2020, p. 21)” In addition, they explain that technical support that helps organizations to adapt to health and safety requirements created by the pandemic’s extended period of restrictions on live performances, is also needed.

Conclusion

Musician quality in U.S. SOs is extremely high; the top U.S. SOs are the equal of the best SOs in the world. Symphony orchestra musicians in the U.S are highly skilled performers and have enjoyed significant improvements in working conditions in recent decades. Musicians in top SOs have become well-paid, and SOs have become more diverse. Blind auditions decrease the bias and discrimination in the audition process, although it is unlikely that they are responsible for all of the improvement in diversity. Of course, the hiring of musicians of color remains a concern, but SO are striving to improve the issue. However, in an era when SO face numerous challenges that threaten their sustainability, including the coronavirus pandemic, SO musicians often face a stressful and dissatisfying career choice. SO positions are extremely difficult to achieve and not always satisfying for the few who win the stressful auditions.

As discussed above, some consideration of early retirement for SO musicians should be added to the dialogue between SO members, the union representation, and management. Given the investment of time, the difficulty of finding employment, and often a lack of outside interests, it is understandable that many SO musicians resist retirement from the SO. However, the quality of SO performances is very high, and encouraging older musicians to retire could sustain and improve performance quality. The high level of physical and mental demands placed

on SO musicians create working conditions that suggest some limit to the age at which musicians can continue to perform at a high level. The poor performance of an individual is more detrimental in a SO than in most businesses and there is no shortage of qualified younger musicians to fill the positions of retirees. With increased openings due to early retirement, programs to enhance diversity may be more successful. In addition, as the salaries of younger musicians are less than older musicians, earlier retirements would decrease operating costs, thus lessening financial difficulties for SO that will be facing increasing challenges. In general, a more vibrant and satisfied group of musicians could result. An open discussion between management and musicians would be a sensible first step towards improving the health of musicians and SOs.

Young musicians need to be better educated about the rigors of being a SO musician, the increasingly limited possibilities, and be encouraged to have options available if an orchestral position fails to materialize. Programs in entrepreneurship will widen the choices for musicians and are likely to become a more desirable option for musicians. Prospects following the Coronavirus Pandemic will be even more dismal, requiring greater perseverance and resourcefulness for musicians. Unfortunately, the pandemic is likely to leave SOs and the musicians who comprise them much worse off. Given the current trends in diminishing subscription ticket sales, the precarious financial conditions of most SO, and the likelihood that when concert auditoriums open again there will be fewer SOs playing in them, musicians will be more hard pressed to find a position in the SO of tomorrow. This is a sobering, but realistic, expectation.

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