

Audiences and Community

Cutting Through the Forest

By Greg Sandow on May 30, 2008 9:28 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

There are -- obviously -- a lifetime of good ideas in the agenda. One conclusion I'd draw is that almost no research has been done. If we're asking so many basic questions...

We just don't have case studies -- from a business or management point of view -- of how orchestras really function.

But where to start? I can't believe that all of the things mentioned -- or even a significant minority of them -- really can or will be studied. There just aren't enough researchers available. So where to start?

Some modest suggestions. First, we might separate the various research proposals into one group largely of interest to social scientists, and another group, largely of interest to people who do practical work in the orchestra world. I'm not saying that this could ever be a hard and fast dividing line, or that items in column A might not interest people in column B (and vice versa). But at least we'd sort through the cornucopia a little, and perhaps could set at least a few priorities, based on what our individual needs might be.

(Note: I realize that I might have opened a pure research vs. practical research Pandora's Box here. But even so, we'll have to prioritize.)

Secondly, I might suggest some approaches, based on practices in other disciplines. First, anthropology. Some of you might know a smart, thorough, edgy, and highly critical book by Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*. It's an anthropological study of IRCAM. The institution doesn't come off well, but that, perhaps, is its own fault. What matters for us might be that IRCAM gave Born considerable access, so she could hang around the institution day and night for quite a long time, interviewing everyone, formally and informally.

The result is a remarkably thorough picture of how the institution works. Many of the questions Paul asks about orchestras are answered, but horizontally, so to speak, not vertically. That is, Born didn't go to IRCAM to answer specific questions about, let's say, its funding, its decision-making processes, or how it makes its musical choices. But because she simply hung around, observing everything, she ends up shedding light on those subjects, as well as many, many more.

And you don't have to be a social scientist to do this work. There's a journalistic version of the same kind of book, in which a journalist gets access to something, observes it from the inside, and then writes about it. A famous (and addictively readable example) is , Julie Salomon's book on Brian de Palma's film version of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, one of the great movie disasters

of all time. Neither Salomon nor the producers knew, of course, that the film would be a bomb, but she was there to document exactly how the bomb went off.

And then there's a genre of sports books, where you spend an entire season watching something from within -- a year on the professional golf tour, a year with a baseball team. John Feinstein is the best-known writer doing books like these. You can search for him on Amazon to see how many he's written. Someone could, similarly, watch an orchestra from the inside for a year, with an eye on many of the questions our agenda asks.

There's already been an orchestra book like that, but not a good one, or at least not good for our purposes -- William Barry's *A Season with Solti: A Year in the Life of the Chicago Symphony*. I haven't read it thoroughly, but from browsing it, I get the idea that it deals with easy stories, and isn't much inclined to probe into areas that might be troublesome. The best writing of the kind I'm talking about, where orchestras are concerned, is an article about the New York Philharmonic by Arthur Lubow, which appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on June 24, 2004. The Philharmonic let Lubow be a fly on the wall during some planning meetings, and he proved to be a very wise and observant fly.

Would some orchestra(s) allow a wise and fair journalist to observe what goes on from the inside for a year?

Finally, there's oral history. Somebody could debrief, at great length, important players in the orchestra world, with regard to some of the questions in the agenda. Not to get general answers on how these problems are solved industry-wide, but to see how individual orchestras solved them. Do enough of these interviews, and we might build up at least the start of an important database.

Thanks, Joe

By Greg Sandow on May 30, 2008 9:48 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

To my last comment -- so temperate, I hope, and thoroughly constructive -- I want to add another one to this effect: Joe Horowitz asked the most important question so far. Maybe not important for research, but important for orchestras' future.

I'll add some parallel provocations. To what extent are orchestras artistic institutions? We take for granted that they are, but do they do one of the most important things that art is supposed to do -- help to forge our culture's common consciousness? I don't think they do that. In fact, I think that comic strips and American idol do it far more. And then if you look at epoch-making (or at least era-defining) works on other artforms, like *Angels in America*, or Godard's films in the '60s, or *The Color Purple* (the novel) or *Beloved*, or even a delightful but smart and deep movie comedy like *Juno* -- well, orchestras simply don't rate. One thing we pretty well know they do, and that classical music generally does in our culture, is produce a vague but heightened sense of inspiration, of contact with something better than everyday life. But to what extent is this a reaction to what anyone could seriously call art, and to what extent is it, on the other hand, only a form of heightened nostalgia, an escape from contemporary life and all its problems?

Or, to put it differently, what kind of people, in our culture, want to go to orchestra concerts, and what do they get from them? And would this turn out (once we found out what it was) to be something we'd want our culture to encourage?

I know these are harsh questions, but they're motivated above all by the obvious cultural split that's been widening for decades, between classical music and the rest of our culture. A new culture has emerged. It has its own art. Orchestras don't address it. Things have gone so far, in fact, that many composers coming out of music schools will say straight out that they don't have much interest in classical music, as it's traditionally defined. I've heard this many times, from the composers themselves, and just heard it again, yesterday, when NPR did a story on a new composers' record label in New York. As one of the composers said (I'm paraphrasing, but this is pretty close to his words), "I don't really call what I write classical music, but my classical studies did give me tools for the kind of music I want to create." The group, in its press release, calls their music "indie classical."

And, fine, that's nice, Greg likes it -- but I wouldn't highlight it so strongly if this kind of music wasn't (as I said at the conference) turning out large young audiences in New York, audiences that wouldn't go near the New York Philharmonic (or, for that matter, boutique operations like Orpheus or St. Luke's). We all talk about the young audience that orchestras will have to attract - - either now, or when people young now grow older -- if they want to survive. But all indications now are that younger people have oriented themselves in an entirely different cultural direction, one that orchestras haven't even begun to look at. What good will better understanding of their internal processes do for orchestras, if no one's coming to their concerts?

[Collaboration and Partnerships](#)

By allison vulgamore on May 31, 2008 4:00 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Orchestras are often cited as poor initiators, instigators and invites to "external" collaborations and partnerships. Communities and Donors, indeed some constituents of Orchestras seek civic stature through these alliances or affiliations.

What are the differing definitions of these two programatic and business ventures? What does an orchestra success look like for each? How does your community uniquely define same? What's the sustainable balance between committing to multiple projects or creative affiliations and financial soundness? What ratio of commitment is necessary to achieve your Orchestra's civic stature?

Tools: LAO's Civic Stature work in their strategic plan, Case studies

[Full-time Orchestras](#)

By Henry Peyrebrune on June 1, 2008 6:10 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Joe Horowitz mentions Henry Krehbiel's nostalgia for the 6-concert Philharmonic season, but he fails to mention Philharmonic conductor Theodore Thomas's response when asked if he would consider moving to Chicago to conduct a full-time orchestra: "I'd move to hell if they would give me a permanent orchestra."

I would like to respond to the postings of Joe Horowitz and Greg Sandow, by presuming to share a little history, if I may.

The creation of the full-time symphony orchestra that was begun in Boston in 1881 and spread over much of the country in the 100 years following is one of the great American cultural achievements. In 1881, the idea of an orchestra devoted to the symphonic repertoire and unaffiliated with opera, theater, court or church was extremely rare, if not unique in North America or Europe. And, it is an idea that maintained its hold through two world wars and the Great Depression before coming to fruition in the rest of the country during the past 50 years.

One of the actions that helped a great deal was the Ford Foundation's decision to give matching grants to orchestras from 1966-76, but you have to look back a little further and ask what on earth possessed them that they thought they should give \$80 million (more than \$500 million in today's dollars) to leverage growth in orchestras.

In fact, there was strong leadership from the philanthropic, political, academic, media and business sectors of our society, all calling for the spread of top-quality, professional fine and performing arts throughout the country, instead of mainly on the East Coast. It was viewed as an important measure of the historical value of American civilization.

Some highlights:

- 1958: Van Cliburn wins the Tchaikovsky Competition and the use of classical music as cultural propaganda in the Cold War begins in earnest.
- 1952 and 1956: The CIA covertly sponsors Boston Symphony performances in Europe.
- 1959: Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals calls for government to "encourage art for its own sake as an expression of what is noblest in people's lives."
- 1960: The Democratic Party presidential platform calls for Federal funding for the arts.
- 1961-2: Congressional hearing on Economic Conditions in the Performing Arts held in Washington, NYC and San Francisco.
- 1961-63: JFK hosts many prominent musicians and composers at high profile White House dinners, the most famous of which being the Casals performance in 1961.
- 1965: The Rockefeller Panel report on the performing arts calls for the creation of 50 full-time orchestras across the US.
- 1965: LBJ signs legislation establishing the NEA. The number of state and territorial arts councils grows from 2 in 1960 to 55 by 1974.
- 1966: The Twentieth Century Fund publishes the report on economics in the performing arts that it had commissioned from Baumol and Bowen.
- 1966: Ford Foundation grants of \$80 million to 61 orchestras.
- 1967: Following the recommendation of the Rockefeller Panel, the Business Council for the Arts is established. BCA estimates that corporate support for the arts doubled between 1965 and 1968.
- 1963 – 1971: Total attendance at the performing arts doubles in the US.
- 1962 – 1969: 173 arts centers and theaters were completed in the United States, while another 179 were in various stages of planning or construction.

- 1963 – 1974: The number of cultural special broadcasts on network TV more than quadruples - from 11 to 47 annually.

The creation of full-time orchestras did not happen out of the blue. It was a conscious effort brought about by leadership from diverse sectors of society in order to demonstrate the greatness of American democratic civilization by making the best of the fine and performing arts available throughout the country.

Are orchestras viewed with the same esteem now as they were in the 3rd quarter of the twentieth century? No. In fact, the idea of 100 artists submitting their wills and energies to one person's interpretation of another's vision of Beauty is profoundly counter-cultural. The leadership in nearly all the sectors I listed above no longer values the arts in this way, and in several cases is hostile to the values our art has represented. But, I travel around the world, or play at home in Cleveland and witness audiences responding with absolute delight to a really well-played Haydn symphony or Strauss waltz or Shostakovich symphony or (last night) Kim Kashkashian playing the Bartok concerto. The idea of beauty and the aesthetic that "classical music" realizes transcends time and culture – and it does it every day, around the world. There's a reason Beethoven 9 was played when the Berlin wall came down and there's a reason the mullahcracy in Iran has banned it.

The idea that classical music forges a common cultural identity the way that pop culture does is erroneous as the idea that everyone in the concert hall is fully experiencing and appreciating the complete artistic content of the most hallowed repertoire. Mozart's operas were popular but not in the way or to the degree that American Idol is (was). I'll bet that even Verdi operas in Italy did not reach the same proportion of the population. (How many seats in how many performances, etc.?) Yet, let's look at classical music in Bugs Bunny, John Williams' soundtracks, Pirates of the Caribbean, 4th of July concerts, Homer Simpson singing "The Musical Fruit" etc. and you see that American culture has internalized a lot of what classical music is. Compared to these, Angels in America and Godard don't rate, at least in terms of forging a common cultural identity.

I do agree that the structure of orchestra seasons confines us artistically in our relationships with our communities. I'd love to see more rehearsal time, more time for collaborative outreach, some way of participating in the most vibrant art form of our time – film. I'd love to give a few weeks of "lab time" to some of the successful contemporary composers who are too busy to bother pursuing the logistical impossibility of trying to write for orchestra and have the music performed – Don Byron and Matt Shipp come to mind. But I think that orchestras as full-time institutions, if they can broaden their vision beyond overture-concerto-symphony week after week, could be well-suited to make that possible, in the same way that universities make non-commercially viable research possible.

Orchestras + Music Education

By Carol J. Oja on June 3, 2008 11:43 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Given that I could not attend the Princeton retreat, I am leaping into a conversation at a neighboring table! But I want to make one point, which has to do with the demise of music education in the public schools and its ripple effects in the realm of American classical music.

Many of the previous blog postings take an historical perspective, trying to understand the current state of American orchestras in relation to various moments in the past. This is essential, and I would encourage you to fold music education into the mix (both in terms of historical studies and of analyzing the present scene). The assault on music education appears to have run parallel to the marginalization of classical music in the culture at large. Item IV-4 in the summary of the Princeton meeting deals with this, and I wonder how public-school education might be addressed by this group?

To my mind, music education needs serious advocacy. The major academic professional associations in music should be addressing it (i.e., the American Musicological Society, the College Music Society, the Society for American Music, et. al.), and in fact they do so in various ways. Yet they would have a far greater impact if they joined forces with ASOL and other performance-based organizations to mount a united lobbying effort on behalf of music programs in public schools.

The current orchestra study group hasn't been convened for that purpose (or so I gather). But I wonder what kind of research might be devised to explore the inter-relationship between music education and the life of urban orchestras? A few cities could be targeted. This might build on the idea proposed by Greg Sandow --that is, to consider undertaking ethnographies of orchestras. Those studies could embrace broader community issues, such as music education.

To jump-start this kind of work, major foundation support would be needed. An interdisciplinary cluster of scholars could be commissioned to do this -- perhaps scholars at the early stages of their careers. Their methodology could be hybrid, and the results could make a real difference, both in boosting our historical understanding of orchestras and in imaging future vistas.

[Research Agenda](#)

By Thomas F. Lee, AFM President on June 4, 2008 5:32 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Hello all. I hope you don't mind if the AFM shares some of its thoughts.

As you know, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) is a national union that plays a supporting role to local unions and their symphonic members in the negotiation and administration of symphonic collective bargaining agreements. It is the stated mission of the AFM to have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect these groups. The AFM believes its input and viewpoints are valuable to this kind of process.

The AFM is particularly interested in the setting of a research agenda for the field because the path between research and policy is a two-way street. Research results can drive policy but in some cases desired policy outcomes can drive research agendas. This makes it all the more imperative that research projects are conducted with the inclusion of the thoughts, ideas, and

agreed upon facts of all parties who may be affected by the potential findings of the researcher. None of the parties are served well when the conclusions of a researcher are based on faulty information or when the researcher is unwilling to seriously consider all of the input of the parties involved.

In order for the findings to have merit with the participants the projects and processes should be designed so that the collective attention is focused on how to best use the results for the betterment of the field rather than on how to challenge the research.

There is a common ground between the interests of the AFM and the interests of other industry stakeholders. It is in everyone's interest to give priority to research that has the potential to help symphonic organizations adopt best practices towards fulfilling their mission of presenting outstanding performances to engaged communities.

There are many excellent suggestions on the draft agenda. These are a few where the AFM believes that its insights can be helpful.

Organization

I-D. A general comment: Any research that focuses on musicians or collective bargaining will have a vastly better chance of being accepted as useful to the field if the elected representatives of the musicians are involved in all phases of the project.

The Audience and Community

II-2. This question is most likely based on the findings of Professor Flanagan in his 2007 report entitled "The Economic Environment of American Symphony Orchestras" in which he found that per concert attendance declined over a period of time from 1987 to 2003. Question II-2 fails to note Prof. Flanagan's finding that even during the difficult period of time that he studied, overall concert attendance was up. Question II-2 seems to suggest that the orchestra field has been and remains in a downward spiral. This is not true and researchers would do harm to the field by presenting a picture of decline or reinforcing any perception of decline that the public might have.

The field would be better served by studying the reasons behind the remarkable rebound that the field has enjoyed since 2003. The period of time that Prof. Flanagan's studied ended with the severe economic downturn following 9/11. Data from subsequent years show far better outcomes for 2004-06 in terms of fundraising, ticket sales, and overall fiscal health. Data that has been received from the LAO shows that paid attendance at classical concerts for American orchestras in 2005-06 was up 11% from the previous year. Attendance for concerts of all types was also up 11%. Many orchestras have enjoyed significant success in increasing concert attendance. Future research should focus on case studies and on the study of factors that lead to such successes.

II-3. This is a great example of a vastly more productive way (compared to II-2) to try to understand attendance.

II-6 and II-7. The AFM's comments interact with both questions. The AFM has been told by organizations that are involved in electronic media (new and existing platforms) that there is an indirect but very real link between contributed income and the extent to which the organization has a meaningful national/international presence in recording, broadcasting, internet, and other media platforms. It might be useful to try to improve the understanding of that connection.

The Music

What a wonderful set of questions! Just a couple of comments:

III-10. This is very interesting but its relevance escapes me. Can someone help?

III-11. This appears to suggest that collective bargaining is an impediment to the performance of new music. Such problems are unknown to the union; the AFM's experience is that the answer to the final question is an emphatic "yes!" The AFM would suggest that collective bargaining should be viewed as an effective means of resolving the issues that have been raised here, not as a problem in and of itself.

The System

IV-4. Regarding the "Toolbox," the AFM recommends the addition of case studies of symphonic organizations that have taken steps to increase both "direct participation" and "passive exposure." There is a lot of good work being done out there.

[Still More Research Topics](#)

By David Snead on June 5, 2008 2:06 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

I'd like to see more study of price elasticity. Some orchestras seem to act as if they can charge pretty much whatever they want and it will have little effect on attendance. Is this true? I know Flanagan got at this a little bit, but I think there's room for much more work in this area.

[Objectivity/Subjectivity](#)

By Larry Tamburri on June 6, 2008 1:36 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Following the conversations among Henry, Greg and Joe has been terrific. However, all of my objectivity was lost this morning listening to the dress rehearsal for this evening's Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra concert with guest conductor Louis Langree. At the rehearsal I experienced an electrifying performance of Shostakovich's masterpiece – Symphony No. 11 "The Year 1905." I was totally swayed to Henry's point of view.

We employ 100 talented artists, who live in our community. They perform with astounding quality great works of art on a regular basis. How can all of this not be a great good on many levels for our society?

My thought is related to what appears to be the "irrational behavior" that is so often exhibited by, even embedded in the daily functioning of symphony orchestras. How does the art form, and the visceral responses to it, shape the decision making by the various constituency groups within our organization?

Objectivity

By Greg Sandow on June 8, 2008 4:00 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

I'll end with one wistful thought that came to me, as I read Larry and Henry's reaction to exciting concerts their orchestras just gave.

And I guess my thought is "Well, yes," but also "no." I've been to exciting concerts myself (more on the latest one in a minute), and I also have a wonderful time with recorded classical music. Lately I'm deep into Berlioz, because I'm writing about his operas for *Opera News*. I can eagerly recommend the earlier Colin Davis recording of *Benvenuto Cellini*, which must be one of the most exuberant, liveliest opera recordings ever made. And Nicolai Gedda, in the title role, is just beyond belief. His *mezza voce* high D-flat in the first act duet, to cite just one small example, is amazing -- true *mezza voce*, not falsetto, and as he comes down from it, he ends the long phrase in perfect comfort. (Unlike Gregory Kunde, in the second Davis recording of the piece, who sings a healthy falsetto on the high note, which does work, but then sounds like he's about to die at the end of the phrase.)

But does my delight in this recording mean that classical music's future is guaranteed? Here's where I get wistful. Of course it doesn't. And, Larry, Henry -- I'd think also that your delight in those hot performances doesn't guarantee anything, either. Nor does the audience's applause. It's so easy to be surrounded by something we think is wonderful, and think we're somehow speaking for the entire world. We all do this constantly. I remember, just for instance, the excitement about George McGovern's nomination in 1972, how for one brief moment he looked like the wonder of the age. You could, I imagine, have been at the Democratic convention that year, and not imagined -- amid all the enthusiasm -- that anything could go wrong.

I imagine, too, that the Czar had lavish balls at his palace in -- pick a year close to the revolution that killed him -- maybe 1915. "Ah, Countess," says one courtier to another, "how lovely this is! How civilized! Our glory will surely last a thousand years." And yet in two years it was gone.

I don't mean to say that anything so drastic will happen -- at least in two years -- to orchestras. But I do submit that anyone's excitement over any current concert -- Larry's, Henry's, mine, anyone's -- isn't useful data. It doesn't tell us where things are going. It doesn't tell us, just for instance, about people in the community who are educated and artistic, but don't relate to orchestras (or classical music) at all. Are there more of them than there used to be? And if so, what does that mean for orchestras' future? We have to avoid what I, quite honestly, consider faith-based arguments, in which we rhapsodize about something we love, and then somehow assume that our excitement (along with the excitement of others closely concerned) translates into future health and happiness. It might not! I'm not saying that Larry or Henry or I quite go this far, but we'd all better be careful that we don't.

So now let me say something about the most exciting concert I've been to lately. This was the annual Bang on a Can marathon, which I went to in New York last weekend. Twelve hours of new music by a variety of composers, lasting all through the night, performed in a public space free of charge, with the audience welcome to come and go as they pleased.

Last year's marathon, 26 hours long, was amazing, attracting, at its height, maybe 1000 people that nobody in the new music world recognized. This year's was even more exciting, with many more people attending, maybe 2000 at a time. And these were new people -- a completely new audience! I stayed for seven hours, and when I left at 3 AM, the audience (maybe 600 people, by that time) had finished whooping in response to a half-hour percussion piece by David Lang, one of the Bang on a Can composers (and of course this year's Pulitzer Prize winner in music). The piece was rigorous and restrained, utterly without any crowd-pleasing elements. As I headed out of the space, David was greeting a large group of people lined up to have him sign their CDs.

Now this, I suggest, is something to be truly hopeful about. New people -- a new audience -- excitement over something truly new. And I've been at other new music events in New York that seem to turn out more or less these same people, 1000 of whom might show up at a new music event which hasn't even been advertised. This all appears to come from the interplay between the music young composers are writing now and the music alternative rock bands are creating; the similarities are striking, and the two kinds of music turn out to be more like each other than either is like any other kind of music. The composers' music especially has nothing much to do with the classical mainstream (though it's fully notated, like standard classical music), and the alternative rock has nothing to do with mainstream pop music.

But that's a story for another time. The point for now is that there now exists in New York an excited audience for new classical music, made up of people who otherwise don't go to classical concerts. This is, if you ask me, a terrific sign of hope -- though the kicker, for many of us, is unfortunately that this audience isn't likely to go to anything mainstream orchestras ever do.

I'll finish with one last thought. Often many of us will defend the artistic programming of orchestras, saying that they function quite properly as museums, preserving the great art of the past. And that's an honorable argument. It has one big flaw, though -- museums no longer work like that! It's not that they don't preserve past art, but they often make their mark in their communities by showing contemporary work.

Case in point: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which is surely the nation's leading museum that mainly shows old art. Yet when I went to its website a few weeks ago, I found that the museum was promoting three current shows, and only one of them was art from centuries past. The other two were contemporary -- Jeff Koons (whose work is highly sexual, to put it mildly) and a show at the costume collection, documenting the influence superhero costumes in movies and comic books have had on fashion.

So the Metropolitan Museum doesn't look like an orchestra at all! If the New York Philharmonic functioned the way the museum does, their website might be featuring (along with, let's say, a Handel festival) an exploration of David Del Tredici's recent gay-themed music, and a retrospective look at the influence of heavy metal on orchestral composition (which certainly

could feature a work or two from Christopher Rouse, and also some recent music by young composers).

If orchestras ever learn to program that way, then they'll truly be like museums -- and will share some of the museums' artistic health.

FINANCE

Comment on I-B-6

By Robert Flanagan on May 27, 2008 3:00 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

The theater sector includes both for-profit and not-for-profit subsectors. Rather than comparing two types of not-for-profits (orchestras and theaters), it might be more revealing to analyze why some theaters survive as private entities while others must organize as not-for-profits.

Any comparison of orchestras with colleges and universities should pay close attention to some vary salient differences in demand, as anyone trying to get a child into collect recently will have noticed.

Financial issues

By Randy Adams on May 27, 2008 11:53 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

How do you compare endowment importance between top private colleges and top symphony orchestras. Both type of organizations appear to suffer from the Baumol productivity curse. Posit - earned revenue (symphonies) and net tuition after scholarships (colleges) are decreasing as a percent of total expenses for both types of organizations. How important is endowment in each "industry" to offset the decline in earned/tuition revenues? What are the trends over a 50 year cycle?

Financial issues

By Randy Adams on May 27, 2008 11:48 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

What is the price elasticity of classical programs; can total revenue be enhanced with a price reduction

How can the major orchestras make a larger portion of their expenses "variable" in order to respond to cyclical changes in revenue.

Item 1-A-1: planning can focus on financial structure, artistic programming, facilities, etc.

What is the earned revenue contribution from various "products", e.g. classical, pops, chamber, education concerts

What trends exist in guest artist (conductor and soloist) costs as a percent of total artistic costs.

2 Comments

By Thomas Wolf on [June 2, 2008 6:12 PM](#)

I agree that we need to significantly expand our research into pricing. To what extent is the audience problem a pricing problem and to what extent does it have to do with lack of interest or something else. Price creep now makes a symphony concert beyond reach for casual attendees who just might want to try it out. In the old days I could sit in the peanut gallery of the Academy of Music in Philadelphia for two bucks. The people who stood in line with me represented a broad cross-section of the city -- young and old, ethnic, the well dressed and the not-so-clean. But it was an affordable adventure. Are the experiments in Saint Paul demonstrating that the rest of us have simply assumed too much price elasticity of demand?

By Bill Luksetich on [June 5, 2008 11:01 AM](#)

There are a number of articles by economists that present estimates of the price elastic of symphony orchestra services as well, as other issues pertaining to orchestra pricing policies and those raised by individuals developing the initial Agenda. I have made some contributions in this area as has Bruce Seaman, another member of this panel.

In a book of readings (A Handbook of Cultural Economics), I have published an article titled "Orchestras," that is a review of a number of the contributions (sic) of economists to the literature on the economics of orchestras. You will find that a number of the topics mentioned in the agenda have been addressed by economists and it would certainly be useful to update some of these works and extend them with more recent data.

As a quick comment on the issues raised by Mr Wolf and Mr Adams. I believe all estimates of the price elasticity of demand for orchestra services indicate that it is price inelastic. Raising price would therefore increase revenues and, it appears, that while contributions might decline they would not decline by the amount of revenue raised by the price increase. These "estimates" are not written in stone.

[Financial](#)

By Bill Luksetich on May 28, 2008 10:53 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

General Statement: I have read through the Agenda and accompanying documents several times and found it as complete as I could imagine. The Agenda deals with many issues that are beyond my area of expertise which is limited to empirical research on economic issues facing symphony orchestras. Consequently, my initial comments to the discussion will more along the lines of "How is this to be accomplished?" rather than adding additional items to the Agenda. Most of these comments will fall into the "tools" category that appeared at the end of numerous

questions. Moreover, I will mentioned specific works dealing with some of the issues with the intent of noting where existing research is available and should be either re-examined or expanded.

An overriding issue facing researchers attempting to answer the questions raised in the Agenda is “Where are the Data?” To address most of the issue raised necessitates orchestra data, be it from The League of Symphony Orchestras, IRS 990 forms, or data from specific orchestras. Some are readily available, some less so. Nevertheless, to undertake studies examining these issues either cross-sectional data from a number of orchestras or time-series data fro one orchestra (or better yet, panel data) are needed.

I-A-2 Perhaps add, “Do they maximize attendance (cultural experiences), quality, or budget? “ If a revenue source becomes less available, what are the alternative sources of funds? Which revenue sources are most reliable (stable)? In this sense, can orchestras become pro-active to avoid (lessen) potential financial problems, rather than re-act to these problems? Hughes and Luksetich examined this issue with respect to art and history museum financing and alternative sources of funds. (Nonprofit Management and Leadership, Fall, 1999). Tools: Orchestra data on sources of funds; simultaneous equation econometric models.

I-B-2 Perhaps add, “Do changing or different revenue sources explain these percentage differences in revenue allocations? Why? Why do they vary across orchestras? This question also relates to I-A-3. Do these expenditures patterns reflect differences in orchestra goals? (see previous comment). Given orchestra goals, are these allocations inefficient?

I-B-3 Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) can be used to evaluate relative efficiency. DEA is a linear programming technique that allows for multiple inputs and multiple outputs. One orchestra can compare itself to its peer group and ascertain whether its input allocation is efficient relative to its peers. A research note by Hughes and Luksetich in NVSQ (March, 1997) is an illustration of this technique – it examines the relative efficiency of symphony orchestra development expenditures. This technique can also be used to determine some of the issues raised in I-A-3 and I-A-4.

There are numerous articles dealing with the issue of whether too much is spent on development. Most report that too little is spent, i.e., the marginal dollar spent yields more that one dollar in revenue (studies on the effectiveness orchestra and museum development spending). Experimental studies dealing with the effects of matching contributions versus rebates cast along with other types of experimental studies yield much light on their relative effects. (Eckel & Grossman ‘Subsidizing Charitable Contributions’ forthcoming in Experimental Economics. Case study of Minn. Public Radio).

Items I-B-5 and I-B-6 assume that cost disease exists. Excuse my cynicism, but if cost disease exists then the solution is to rely on government to alleviate the problem. Good luck. More seriously, since this was first introduced in the 1960’s, few serious studies have found evidence of it. Perhaps, the questions in these sections could be phrased more in the line of what options are available for orchestras to enhance revenues and become more efficient in resource allocation.

Probably because of the lack of appropriate data, little has been done regarding the costs of performing symphony orchestra services. I have been fortunate to have been allowed to use American Symphony Orchestra data over the years. There is clear evidence that for large orchestras, scope economies are available, but much less so for smaller orchestras. (Journal of Cultural Economics, 1993) The implication is that cost enhancing measures are available to some. M. Victoria Felton found that increased diversification of services by major orchestras increased efficiency (JCE, 1994-5) and in an unpublished Masters thesis, Joseph Volpe showed that it also resulted in greater revenues (UNLV Economics Dept., 1991).

Case studies of individual orchestras and other studies updating demand determinants, cost efficiencies, fundraising and marketing effectiveness are called for.

I-D-6 Included in his PhD dissertation concerning the transformation of symphony orchestras from government departments to corporate entities, Stephen Boyle has a chapter on musician behavior and attitudes toward the changes. (Dept. of Economics, Marquarie University, Australia) Musicians as board members is a topic discussed in this chapter. Surveys and comparisons with previous and subsequent regimes can provide an guide to examining this issue in the U.S.

Efficient and Sustainable Income

By Larry Tamburri on May 28, 2008 2:03 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Given short-term pressures, decisions can often be made for immediate financial gains. An analysis to determine the most efficient forms of income and the least efficient forms of income might provide some guidance to the field.

What is the linkage between subscriptions and annual fund gifts in contrast to single ticket purchases and annual fund giving?

Additionally, since we are concerned about the future of orchestras: which forms of income help to develop commitment to maximize long-term sustainability?

Are long-term subscribers more likely to make endowment gifts?

While this is not purely a financial question, art and money are inextricably linked: How does one determine what role programming plays in creating patron commitment?

Financial Price Elasticity

By Bruce Seaman on June 6, 2008 12:39 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

With apologies for posting late due to technical problems, Bill Luksetich's observation is certainly correct that any empirical evidence for demand price inelasticity regarding orchestras (and other nonprofit art organization) is not written in stone. My chapter reviewing empirical studies of the demand for the performing arts (published in the Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture, 2006; a longer version is an SSRN paper) finds conflicting evidence on this, and many other demand elasticities, but a few conclusions can be identified: (1) price elasticity of demand estimates are biased downward toward being inelastic when more aggregate data is used instead of art organization specific data, and when proxies for actual ticket prices are used such as "total ticket revenue divided by attendance" which generates an average price that is not actually paid by anyone; (2) while one might view current orchestra prices as being historically very high (although of course that is less so when adjusted for overall inflation and regional differences in the cost of living), it is commonly believed that non-profit organizations of all types tend to price lower than would be justified if net revenue maximization linked solely to admission revenues were the goal, and this lower price strategy also biases downward empirical estimates of demand elasticity; whether this strategy is adopted due to a recognition of the interdependency between patron admission expenditures and tax-deductible patron contributions (as suggested by important research done by Luksetich and co-authors, and mentioned in Bill's posting on this topic), or due to other factors such as a recognition that the demand for classical music is greatly affected by "learning by doing" and the creation of "consumption capital" at earlier ages, a goal of expanding audience demographics, or achieving other "socially laudable" goals, the price elasticity of demand is generally (unless the demand curve is of a special type) lower at lower prices, hence creating the perception that price elasticity of demand is "naturally and inherently" lower than it really is; (3) in those rare demand studies attempting to examine price elasticity at different seating section price levels, or otherwise using more refined actual transaction prices for individual arts organizations, price elasticity estimates are more likely to be "elastic," generally (but not always) in price ranges likely to be purchased by lower income and more price sensitive consumers; (4) demand studies in the sports sector, including many related to for-profit professional sports, are generally much more sensitive to the issue of price elasticity estimates being biased downward when tickets are "underpriced," as they are likely to be relative to profit maximizing ticket pricing when substantial revenues from merchandise, and food and beverage sales are recognized as increasing substantially when more tickets are sold at lower prices (and even TV contract revenues might rise with more TV friendly large and lively crowds in the stadium); in fact, sports economists routinely explain demand price inelastic results as due to such "strategic" ticket pricing rather than any evidence for a "natural insensitivity of ticket demand to prices," which is the much more common arts commentary explanation.

Two main areas needing more focused research, despite some work that I and others have done, include the development of a better understanding of how price discrimination strategies are being used and could be improved en route to increasing "earned" revenues, as well as the complicated but fascinating issue of how various "tying" strategies between ticket prices and tax-deductible contributions can be better utilized by orchestras and other nonprofits. Some work has been done (but with limited results) trying to determine whether the implicit "prices" being charged for "status" via the schedule of rewards for making donations (\$100 to become a patron; \$500 to become an exalted patron etc.) represent anything but largely convenient pricing segments as opposed to contribution maximizing strategies (and when viewed in combination with the optimal ticket pricing schedule across seating sections and various season packages, this

becomes an especially fascinating, but frustrating problem to attack). Also, while I have tried to rejuvenate interest in systematically examining how competition (both within and across the various art forms) affects pricing strategies (with a paper published in the Journal of Cultural Economics), this issue remains substantially under-researched and poorly understood, and with currently quite limited, although suggestive, empirical evidence. By contrast, many models of orchestra and other non-profit organization behavior tend to treat such organizations as “local monopolies” with no explicit reference to any competitive constraints linked to other suppliers of performing arts “products”

INNOVATION

"Product" performance differences

By Randy Adams on May 27, 2008 11:57 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

Given major product categories such as classical, pops, chamber, etc., how do they compare in various factors such as: cross-over of audiences, price elasticity, participation in annual giving, etc.

1 Comments

By Allison Vulgamore on [May 31, 2008 4:23 PM](#)

Excellent -

Also Orchestras as Presenters: How far could a business model be inclusive of presentations as a key net margin contributor to financial and artistic excellence sustainability?

an unpopular suggestion

By Joe Horowitz on May 28, 2008 8:55 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

I would like to blunder into an unpopular suggestion -- an elephant in the room.

It seems to me that the elephant is that orchestras, in general, give far too many concerts -- that the supply far exceeds the demand. And that an important reason that this has happened is the notion that orchestral musicians deserve a "living wage"

I don't know how much of this may be traceable to the Ford Foundation grants of the 1960s, but all those expanded contracts and commitments created a superfluity of services that in turn mandated more fund-raising and more marketing -- mandated, in effect, that orchestras become fund-raising and marketing machines.

Frankly, it is not obvious to me why an orchestra, especially in a mid-size city, should feel obligated to furnish full-time employment to its members.

Orchestras without such an obligation are frequently positioned to get more done, artistically, than those with full-time salaried players.

What to do? The most obvious option is service conversion, but has it ever been attempted as anything more than a marginal frill?

I suppose orchestras can continue to muddle through for some time to come, in a kind of controlled panic, without the time or resources to plan and implement a considered artistic strategy.

Can research help? Are there resourceful ways to reduce the number of concerts without alienating players and unions?

And might there be a cadre of young orchestral musicians ready for something really different -- musicians who aren't predisposed to play 45 weeks of concerts in the first place? How can conservatories best instill a broader understanding of the role and purpose of cultural institutions? How can we best produce and utilize players whose commitment to an orchestra transcends rehearsals and concerts?

JH

[Are orchestras cultural institutions?](#)

By Joe Horowitz on May 31, 2008 1:36 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

I of course agree completely with Greg's musings on whether orchestras are actually "cultural institutions."

I happen to have spent yesterday at the Boston Symphony archives exploring the orchestra's crisis of 1918 when its music director, Karl Muck, was arrested and interned as an enemy alien. The archives are full of correspondence documenting the BSO's scramble for someone -- anyone -- willing to undertake 120 concerts a season. Rachmaninoff, for instance, was offered the job but turned it down partly because of the work-load. A symphonic season of 120 concerts was a phenomenon unknown abroad, so far as I can tell.

Anyway, reading these 1918 clippings, I came across a comment from Henry Krehbiel, my favorite American music critic. Considering Arturo Toscanini's rumored candidacy to take over the BSO, Krehbiel wrote: "Signor Toscanini's greatest admirers here had grave doubts as to whether he is constitutionally and temperamentally fitted for the onerous task which a fundamentally wrong system of concert-giving has forced upon the symphonic organizations of Boston and New York."

By a wrong system Krehbiel meant: too many concerts. He remembered the glory days of the New York Philharmonic under Anton Seidl when the orchestra gave half a dozen programs a season -- and every one of them mattered.

To study the history of the American orchestra (read my books) is to realize how arbitrary and unprecedented was the template -- multiple performances of a weekly program from fall to spring, with additional tours and summertime concerts -- instilled by Henry Higginson in Boston and emulated elsewhere, a process reaching fruition in the 1960s and after.

Actually, Boston was (and still is, very likely) a city with a robust appetite for weekly symphonic concerts. But of how many other American cities could this possibly be true today? As a result, our orchestras, it seems to me, have become fund-raising and marketing machines without the leisure to seriously consider what cultural purposes they serve.

Museums are far ahead of orchestras in this department, so far as I can see. Look at the way they curate thematic programs. Look at the publications they produce, the scholars they engage, the manner in which their programming interfaces with history and literature, with the contemporary life of the mind, with society at large. They don't have to spew out a different exhibit every week.

I feel the issues at hand can actually be meaningfully addressed, but only once they are acknowledged and scrutinized. Historical context helps. So does the broadest possible purview of culture and society.

1 Comments

By Allison Vulgamore on [May 31, 2008 4:29 PM](#)

Are not also Amateur and student musicians constituents of Orchestras?

MUSIC

[Responses to the Draft \(Part 2\)](#)

By Timothy Dowd on May 29, 2008 4:21 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

I also have two comments pertaining to music (in a broad sense).

II-8: Here and elsewhere, the phrase “new music” is invoked. While I very much appreciate this term, it’s good to emphasize that it is not a singular category. For instance, “new” could refer to very old compositions enjoying their first performance in the repertoire. As for works that are relatively recent in origin, they can vary widely in terms of style / material (e.g., serialism vs. minimalism – pardon the broad categories). Also, some “new” works can make their way into orchestral repertoires via film soundtracks and other domains of “popular culture” (for lack of a

better term). I'd be interested, then, in seeing the category of "new music" unpacked a bit (like "classical music" is in III-13). This unpacking could include some attention to what orchestral personnel have in mind when marketing and presenting what they deem to be "new."

III: Questions in this section on music address variability among orchestras, especially in the type of music that they choose to perform. Perhaps we could address that variability by comparing the practices of large / major orchestras to small orchestras – thus tapping into the generalist / specialist argument. Similarly, how do older orchestras compare to newer orchestras

1 Comments

By Susan Feder on [May 31, 2008 3:25 PM](#)

Further to TD's comments on "new music": one could research the role of repetition in regard to audience appreciation, either of particular pieces of "new music" (as Koussevitzky did in Boston in the 30s) or by different works by a single composer (which might be explored in those orchestras that have committed to long-term composer residencies). And how interesting that in the breakdown of categories thus far, "Audience and Community" dwarfs "Music."

NEW TOPIC

Leadership?

By Lowell Noteboom on May 26, 2008 1:05 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#)

"Leadership" is mentioned only twice in the Agenda, once in the context of what happens when an orchestra loses it unexpectedly and the other in the context of the potential value of continuity in leadership.

I think we need to develop a broader and deeper set of research questions around leadership in the orchestra world. What is it? Where does it come from? Are there important differences between/among musician leaders, management leaders, board leaders, music director leaders? Are there styles of leadership that work better than others in the orchestra environment? Are collaboration and leadership compatible?

Lowell

3 Comments

By Randy Adams on [May 28, 2008 12:14 AM](#)

Great question. My question about the different "profiles" of major constituents in the organization relates to this

By Gloria dePasquale on [May 28, 2008 9:29 PM](#)

Those of us in orchestras have done a good job of developing leadership within our own constituent groups but have done an even better job of utilizing our leadership "silos" in oppositional ways. I'm very interested in learning outcomes of research on Lowell's question, "are collaboration and leadership compatible?" We as a field would benefit from a close look at this question.

By allison vulgamore on [May 31, 2008 4:26 PM](#)

Research should further include asking what are the key components of retaining Leadership. What are avenues of renewal to counterbalance "burnout"?

Leadership? Yes!

By Mary Ann Glynn on May 26, 2008 11:32 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

I agree that Leadership is an important topic on the Agenda. A pivotal leadership role in the orchestra is that of at the Music Director, who sits at the interface between the creative aspects of the orchestra (and the musicians) and the more business-oriented aspects (that typically concern the board).

An Agenda might usefully pursue questions of when – and how -- the leadership of the Music Director might matter most or be most effective. In times of aesthetic conflict or economic crisis, does the Director become the site of that conflict? What leadership strategies are most effective in addressing and resolving conflicts between musicians and the board? Can leadership bridge the cultural divide when it is under duress? Alternatively, in more stable (or settled) times, does the leadership of the Music Director matter? Or, does the Music Director simply become a buffer that compartmentalizes potential or latent conflict within the different interests, roles, and sensibilities of the orchestra? Are there any leadership substitutes (e.g., unionization, musicians' association, policies, practices, cultural standards)?

- Mary Ann

Energizing Ideas and Valuing Complexity

By Allison Vulgamore on May 31, 2008 3:48 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

ALL:

I am energized by the potential depth of engagement this project can motivate. The topic overviews and detailed work already imagined is terrific. Thanks for the invite to join in.

COMPLEXITY OF THE ORCHESTRA BUSINESS MODEL

I am always amazed how prone to the presupposed "failure" of Orchestras any great inquisitive process of research or journalism seems to leave the "listener" with. Save for perhaps Hospitals and Universities, both with naturally reoccurring "audiences", Orchestra business models and governance cultures amaze most CEOs and CFOs beyond their analytical imagination. In fact, it is the very complexity of Orchestras that draws such attention and interest in understanding the operating options and social value they offer. How can the communication of this project embrace this art form and propel the research users to own complexity rather than silo research paths it will generate? The topics of managing complexity and creating shared ownership of outcomes is missing in the project and could serve as an approach "lens" to the users upfront.

Governance Culture

By Allison Vulgamore on May 31, 2008 4:13 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Interdependent and collective leadership is emerging slowly in Orchestras. The extraordinary benefits of constituent ownership and attraction to their Orchestra's agenda today and tomorrow is paramount. What defines a shared culture? How can it be achieved through what process? What decisions artistic and business could be propelled when rooted in a dialoging "culture of citizenary" based on action?

Tools: Case Studies, Center for Creative Leadership studies, Corporate horizontal integration models.

ORGANIZATIONAL

Organization constituent differences

By Randy Adams on May 28, 2008 12:09 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

If a symphony orchestra has four major internal constituents (music director, staff and executive director, musicians, and board of trustees), how do they differ if you profile them by various "characteristics" such as: average tenure w/ the organization, communication styles, decision making styles, full time or part time presence, knowledge of the art form, core values, affiliation w/ external entities (e.g. labor unions, agents, donors), etc.

For example, the musicians have an avg tenure of 20 yrs, the staff 5 yrs, the music director 4 yrs and the Board 5 yrs. And the Music Director and the Board are present on a part-time basis. Which constituent group has the most invested in the organization and how does that affect their values?

Can constituents with dramatically different "profiles" work together in a common organization?
How?

Responses to the Draft (Part 1)

By Timothy Dowd on May 29, 2008 4:18 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Having read the document that Paul compiled, I found that it nicely covered themes raised in our meetings – both central themes and those interesting themes lurking at the margins. Consequently, I have just a few things to offer in response. I start with two on the topics of "organziation/system."

I-A-4: I like the idea of studying organizational failures among symphony orchestras. That said, it also strikes me useful to analyze the longitudinal pattern of foundings. Indeed, when taking an organizational demography approach to failures, one would benefit from information on foundings.

IV-1: I'm especially interested in how musical recordings provide competition for orchestras (if at all).

Musician activities and satisfaction

By Thomas Wolf on May 29, 2008 9:58 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#)

I-D-8: The thrust of this question as it now reads has to do with musicians and teaching. It would be great to know the total range of activities that musicians are engaged in professionally and from which they derive the most satisfaction. For example, could we discover what musicians do when they ask to be "released" for a week? We all know that many play in chamber music festivals and do other work that stimulates them. Anecdotally I surmise that this provides them with a huge degree of musical satisfaction that, as one musician put it, "makes the rest of the year bearable."

3 Comments

By Gloria dePasquale on [May 30, 2008 11:07 AM](#)

In addition to asking what teaching and performing activities orchestral musicians participate in outside of the orchestra schedule it would be interesting to ask how and where musicians developed the "off stage/behind the scenes" business, fund raising, promotional, community-relations, and managerial skills that are requisite to so many of their successful projects.

By Alan Brown on [May 30, 2008 8:48 PM](#)

I second Tom's suggestion of expanding I-D-8 to include a study of ALL the income sources of musicians. What would happen if orchestras paid musicians a lot more, but required 100% of their professional efforts (i.e., no moonlighting)?

By Henry Peyrebrune on [June 1, 2008 3:09 PM](#)

Perhaps a broader view of the orchestra's and its musicians' roles in the community is needed. To what extent does the presence of the orchestra and its musicians subsidize the other arts organizations in the community financially and artistically? If musicians had to make their living teaching and playing other gigs would it attract the same quality of musicians for the same pay they receive now for these "extra" gigs or does the symphony salary subsidize the availability of musicians for these other organizations?

Perhaps we already have the "community of musicians" Fleischman suggested but it is informal and decentralized. Would the arts organizations in our communities benefit from centralized control?

[Cutting Through the Forest](#)

By Greg Sandow on May 30, 2008 9:29 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

There are -- obviously -- a lifetime of good ideas in the agenda. One conclusion I'd draw is that almost no research has been done. If we're asking so many basic questions...

We just don't have case studies -- from a business or management point of view -- of how orchestras really function.

But where to start? I can't believe that all of the things mentioned -- or even a significant minority of them -- really can or will be studied. There just aren't enough researchers available. So where to start?

Some modest suggestions. First, we might separate the various research proposals into one group largely of interest to social scientists, and another group, largely of interest to people who do practical work in the orchestra world. I'm not saying that this could ever be a hard and fast dividing line, or that items in column A might not interest people in column B (and vice versa). But at least we'd sort through the cornucopia a little, and perhaps could set at least a few priorities, based on what our individual needs might be.

(Note: I realize that I might have opened a pure research vs. practical research Pandora's Box here. But even so, we'll have to prioritize.)

Secondly, I might suggest some approaches, based on practices in other disciplines. First, anthropology. Some of you might know a smart, thorough, edgy, and highly critical book by Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*. It's an anthropological study of IRCAM. The institution doesn't come off well, but that, perhaps, is its own fault. What matters for us might be that IRCAM gave Born

considerable access, so she could hang around the institution day and night for quite a long time, interviewing everyone, formally and informally.

The result is a remarkably thorough picture of how the institution works. Many of the questions Paul asks about orchestras are answered, but horizontally, so to speak, not vertically. That is, Born didn't go to IRCAM to answer specific questions about, let's say, its funding, its decision-making processes, or how it makes its musical choices. But because she simply hung around, observing everything, she ends up shedding light on those subjects, as well as many, many more.

And you don't have to be a social scientist to do this work. There's a journalistic version of the same kind of book, in which a journalist gets access to something, observes it from the inside, and then writes about it. A famous (and addictively readable example) is , Julie Salomon's book on Brian de Palma's film version of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, one of the great movie disasters of all time. Neither Salomon nor the producers knew, of course, that the film would be a bomb, but she was there to document exactly how the bomb went off.

And then there's a genre of sports books, where you spend an entire season watching something from within -- a year on the professional golf tour, a year with a baseball team. John Feinstein is the best-known writer doing books like these. You can search for him on Amazon to see how many he's written. Someone could, similarly, watch an orchestra from the inside for a year, with an eye on many of the questions our agenda asks.

There's already been an orchestra book like that, but not a good one, or at least not good for our purposes -- William Barry's *A Season with Solti: A Year in the Life of the Chicago Symphony*. I haven't read it thoroughly, but from browsing it, I get the idea that it deals with easy stories, and isn't much inclined to probe into areas that might be troublesome. The best writing of the kind I'm talking about, where orchestras are concerned, is an article about the New York Philharmonic by Arthur Lubow, which appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on June 24, 2004. The Philharmonic let Lubow be a fly on the wall during some planning meetings, and he proved to be a very wise and observant fly.

Would some orchestra(s) allow a wise and fair journalist to observe what goes on from the inside for a year?

Finally, there's oral history. Somebody could debrief, at great length, important players in the orchestra world, with regard to some of the questions in the agenda. Not to get general answers on how these problems are solved industry-wide, but to see how individual orchestras solved them. Do enough of these interviews, and we might build up at least the start of an important database.

Innovation, Change and Standing Ovations

By Alan Brown on May 30, 2008 10:24 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Paul, you did an amazing job pulling it all together. I've read everyone else's comments and offer just a few of my own. I see that Greg has posted something even longer and much more

provocative, so I am a bit relieved. (:~>) You asked for help prioritizing, but I think that is a next phase of work, after all the ideas are on the table. For me, the litmus test is easy: If we knew the answer to a given set of research questions, would it create new opportunities for the orchestra field?

Organization

I-A-1. Has benchmarking become a substitute for organic planning work at the local level? What are the advantages and disadvantages of modeling orchestras on other orchestras? At what point does self-referential behavior become dysfunctional? Are there new or better planning models that orchestras might use to design their futures?

I-A-4. Your questions relate mostly to failure and resurrection (interesting choice of words). In a healthy ecology there is natural growth, competition and dying. Are there better models for dying and regeneration? What processes might be developed for planned obsolescence and re-launch? Would the orchestra field benefit from some sort of receivership program or regeneration model that allows orchestras to start over again from time to time? To me, this is the other elephant in the room.

I-C-1. Innovation as a subject of research is one thing, but I think there is a larger question missing here, which is what R&D capacity does the orchestra field need that it doesn't presently have? There is an important distinction between innovations that bubble up, and how they are adopted and diffused, and innovations that result from a planned effort to develop new practices and models on behalf of the field. What innovations are most needed by the field? What are the plusses and minuses of centralized vs. decentralized innovation?

I-C-2. This might be expanded a bit to look at different change models: evolutionary change vs. paradigmatic change. In what circumstances is paradigmatic change likely to happen? Can it be planned, or does it only follow from insolvency?

I-D-8. I would prioritize this, to get a complete picture of musician's incomes from non-orchestra sources. What would happen if orchestras paid their musicians a lot more money, but required 100% of their professional effort?

Audience and Community

II-1. You might want to break this into two pieces, the first piece about who attends orchestra concerts, and a second piece about how musical tastes evolve. I see this as a fundamental issue because it is driving demand. There are two parts to this second piece. Your existing question about how people grow a love for classical music is one question which might be expanded a bit (e.g., "What are the social, musical, and other pathways into classical music?"). The other question is about diversification of musical tastes, even among those who already love classical music, and what effect this is having on the orchestra field. There is some evidence to suggest that musical tastes are becoming significantly more eclectic, but I am not aware of any serious contemplation of what this portends for the orchestra field. A related question is what are audience perceptions of quality and how is this changing, and what explains the standing

ovations every night. While some might call this an academic question, I think it is not at all academic, because there are enormous financial trade-offs being made in the name of maintaining a quality standard that may or may not be relevant to audiences.

Not sure where this falls, but I think there is a set of research questions exploring the relationships between live and non-live consumption of classical music, and how that rapidly changing landscape is changing the way consumers experience the art form, and what are the implications on mission and programming for orchestras. You sort of get at this in II-7.

As others have mentioned, there is a set of questions about the role of setting in the concert experience, particularly among younger consumers. How do consumers relate psychologically to concert halls and other types of venues? What role does setting/venue play in the purchase decision process? What would happen if more orchestras started playing in different kinds of venues, or in unusual settings?

System

IV-1. Further to Bill Luksetich's suggestion, I think a market share analysis would be helpful to gain a better sense of the economic dynamics that orchestras face in their markets. What market share do orchestras have within the live classical/opera marketplace? What share do they have in the larger marketplace for live performing arts? How does supply of other forms of live performing arts (e.g., Broadway) affect demand for orchestra programming? I think it would be helpful to the field to have a better way of understanding what level of demand is reasonable to expect in their marketplace. This could be a longitudinal study of a cross section of markets.

RECRUITMENT/CAREERS/LABOR RELATIONS

Musicians and the Union

By Henry Peyrebrune on June 1, 2008 6:39 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

I'd like to see a little more texture to the thinking about the musicians union as it relates to orchestras. Since the 1960's, orchestra musicians have operated in a fairly pure democratic form of unionism whereby the musicians themselves (the bargaining unit) elect their negotiating representatives (the orchestra committee) who then generally have the power to choose their negotiating attorney. When one uses the term "the union" in reference to negotiations or administration of an orchestra contract, the term is virtually synonymous with "the musicians of the orchestra."

The major exception to this practice is in the area of media, where national contracts have covered recording and television, although these too are becoming more locally controlled. National standards have entered into local contract negotiations through the common use of a

handful of negotiating attorneys who have advised orchestras to set goals based on their negotiations with other orchestras. The mechanism toward national standards is peer pressure – the desire to keep up, or not to set a precedent that will be used against other orchestras – not directives from the national union. The national union and its orchestra player conferences (ICSOM and ROPA) provide support, communication, research and, for some smaller orchestras, negotiators.

As the choice of negotiating attorneys diversifies, and as orchestras involve musicians to a greater extent in decision-making, I am interested in seeing how a greater diversity in work rules and musician responsibility affects economic security.

From a labor history standpoint, I'd be interested in knowing how directly the LMRDA of 1959 affected musicians' taking control over their own contracts.

I am also curious about the effect of board members' experiences with unions – for example, trustees from a high-tech background vs. trustees from an industrial background.

SYSTEM

[How to Make Research Useful](#)

By Thomas Wolf on May 29, 2008 10:07 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

A general question not specifically related to the agenda: Is there any part of this effort directed at how research will be disseminated and how utilized (if at all). Academic studies are great for the few that read them but have they had a substantial impact on practice in this field? In addition to the challenge of developing an agenda, considerable thought should be given to how to make research easily digestible and actionable. How can we best utilize existing research let alone new studies? Also will the industry promote research even when it tells a story we may not like? Is an advocacy organization's mission compatible with that degree of objectivity and independence?