

Bridge to a Reflective Orchestra – 10/18/16

Genesis

In November 2015, Stanford Thompson, Founder and Executive Director of Play On Philly sat down with Howard Herring, President and CEO of the New World Symphony. Aware that American professional orchestras are not addressing diversity and inclusion to their detriment, they began to explore options for changing the situation. After many years of programs, fellowships, millions of dollars spent and countless hours of effort, only 1.8% of the nation's orchestras' musicians are black and 2.5% are Hispanic. By contrast, the nation is growing increasingly diverse: in fact, in many parts of the United States, the term "minority" for populations of color is now statistically incorrect. It stands to reason that diversity on stage and on boards/administration will increase the ability to reach more communities, will expand and diversify their audiences, will potentially provide access to new funding.

In March 2016, NWS Executive Vice President and Provost John Kieser and the Musician Advancement team convened a group of students, administrators and professionals from around the country to discuss solutions. At the League of American Orchestras conference in June, a half-day working session was held that addressed five areas affecting inclusion in American orchestras. On September 21 and 22, 2016, the Knight Foundation and New World Symphony convened a meeting of musicians, administrators from best practices of programs, schools of music, orchestras and pre-college music educators. The purpose was to design a national instrumentalist mentoring and audition training initiative that was inspired by the LAO conference sessions on diversity.

At all these meetings, the issues raised could be grouped under the issue of cultural equity. Americans for the Arts describes cultural equity as embodying the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources. Their "Statement on Cultural Equity" of May 23, 2016 stated, "Cultural equity is critical to the long-term viability of the arts sector."

It became clear at these convening that a solution needed to include two parallel paths. The first is teaching and mentoring the student and training and mentoring the young professional with the goal is to widen the pathway for musicians of color so they can be successful in the field. In essence, building a bridge consisting of phases from pre-student to professional and establishing piers to support the span of the bridge. The second is overcoming inherent and sometimes unconscious racism in orchestras with the goal of creating a level playing field for all musicians. This paper will address both paths outlining potential concepts for discussion. And it is also a call to action – how can your organizations be one of the piers and what can you contribute?

Concepts

Shea Scruggs, an advocate and participant in all three of the above convening, created a matrix that divided the early life (or the bridge span) of a musician into five pivotal points or phases and each phase into five attributes. This matrix is appended and provides the detail and context to the concepts outlined below. It is clear that all institutions involved with the bridge and the pillars that support the span need to work as a networked consortium. The journey across the span from one institution to another is critical in widening the path for talented musicians of color (TMC).

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The Pre-Student and Early Student – Phase 1 and Pillar 1 – Entry and Early Years

The first pillar is the entry point - In-School and After-School programs, El Sistema programs and community music schools – that provide exposure for the TMC to classical music and get them started. From these programs, a certain number of musicians will be identified or self-identify for the step into Phase 1. Phase 1 calls for the teaching and mentoring of the TMC by senior students or Fellows at the local conservatory or school of music. Part of the design would be hand-offs to other students to ensure there was no gap when the teacher/mentor graduated. A potential partner would be Big Brothers/Big Sisters. The BB/BS organization would provide the mechanisms, training and monitoring of the teacher/mentor and student relationship. This would be a win-win situation as the senior student or Fellow would benefit from the experience of teaching and mentoring and the TMC would benefit from the training.

Essential in the above scenario is the support of the TMC's family and mentors will be encouraged to interact with the families where possible to provide an example of music as a viable career choice. Any issue associated with working with minors will need to be addressed and lessons need to occur in appropriate venues. Students will have access to peer support and mentoring groups such as NWS Connect. The senior student/Fellows' sense of commitment will also have a direct effect on this scenario and must be carefully monitored.

High School/Pre-College Student – Phase 2 and Pillars 2 and 3

A pillar made up of the District/State Ensembles, private junior youth ensembles that these musicians can join to further their experiences, supports this part of the span. During this phase, there is a continuation of the program of Phase 1 with an addition of guidance for post high school and summer opportunities. During the junior year, the Senior Students/Fellows will act as advocates and references for the TMC at Conservatories/Schools of Music and will train the students for auditions. Every effort will be made to have a faculty member at a target Conservatory/School of Music teach the TMC to further chances for acceptance. The institutions of the senior students/Fellows will be encouraged to create a side-by-side experience for all TMC in the program to give them the experience of playing with a senior ensemble.

As the TMC starts making their choice for post high school the need for continued communication and open dialogue with the family of the student by the senior student/Fellow is critical. All other aspects of Phase 1 still apply and in addition, instrument acquisition will become a priority. The institution of the senior student/Fellow can play a role in helping the TMC create an online campaign or a more traditional form of fundraising.

The third pillar/support of the bridge span helps the TMC prepare for college/conservatory via private teaching (potentially with faculty from the target institution, summer music camps, local advanced ensemble programs such as ASO's Talent Development Program, Nashville Symphony's Accelerando Program and Project STEP).

College/Conservatory – Phase 3

The Posse Foundation provides a model for this phase. Their three goals are: to expand the pool from which top colleges and universities can recruit outstanding young leaders from diverse backgrounds; to help these institutions build more interactive campus environments so that they can be more welcoming for people from all backgrounds; and to ensure that Posse Scholars persist in their academic studies and graduate so they can take on leadership positions in the workforce. On campus, freshmen are paired with seniors who act as mentors. Each mentor meets weekly with the Posse as a team (usually 10 students) and with each Scholar individually every two weeks during the first two years in college. They have been successful in reducing the drop-out rate and increasing the quality of life on campus for these students. Higher education institutions that already participate in this program include Bard, Northwestern and Oberlin. This plan calls proposes a collaboration with this organization in similar manner of the BB/BS relationship in Phases 1 and 2. In the absence of such collaboration, the alternative would be to identify mentors in either the college or the symphony orchestra of the area. This would be made less daunting if the all institutions work as a networked consortium

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Pre-Professional – Phase 4 and Pillar 4

The fourth pillar consists of various programs such as the New World Symphony, Summer Music Festivals (Tanglewood, Aspen), Manhattan School of Music Orchestral Training Program, Sphinx Connect, Chicago Civic Orchestra, Project Inclusion,

Creation of intensive audition training sessions. A few schools of Music (e.g. Manhattan School of Music and The New World Symphony) have developed a comprehensive audition preparation system. The training and mentoring students receive from faculty and staff plays a key role in the successful pursuit of jobs. The sessions will use the expertise of these institutions to work with a group of talented musicians of color who are on the verge of becoming professional musicians. The process will begin with recruitment from a variety of sources of approximately 35 musicians, who will come together to form a chamber orchestra at several locations for periods of intensive audition training. Each session would combine audition training with learning ensemble skills. The goal would be for three such periods, each three weeks long, during the academic season and located one each in Miami, Philadelphia and Detroit. Following the sessions, relations that had developed with faculty/mentors would continue and advance the work one-on-one with the participants.

Elements of the Audition training sessions:

- Audition training seminars: violins, low strings, and winds and brass with expert faculty.
- Screened mock auditions with comment and immediate follow up with a coach to work on those comments.
- Seminars, panel talks, and Q&A related to auditions with visiting faculty/mentors.
- Global Audition training program – connection with faculty in other cities and countries via the Internet.
- Students organize and stage their own mock auditions with feedback from their colleagues.
- Visiting faculty/mentors provide lessons and coaching throughout the session and attend all ensemble rehearsals to provide insight along with the conductor.
- Lessons/coaching (in person or over the Internet) with key orchestra members of the institution that is holding the auditions
- Wellness training – performance psychology, yoga, Alexander technique, Feldenkrais, and meditation.
- Financial support on a need basis for tutoring, travel and accommodation for auditions.

As to the audition process itself, there is a need to keep these completely blind right through to the finals. During the convening of September 2016, there was compelling evidence that those orchestras that have completely blind auditions seem to award more positions to musicians of color. It was recognized that each orchestra has control over their audition process and to change that aspect would require intense lobbying. The first place to start that lobbying will be with the American Federation of Musicians and then extend to individual orchestras. This task will be made easier with the strategy for the third path as outlined below.

Young Professional – Phase 5

This is potentially the most difficulty part of creating the reflective orchestra. At each convening, musicians shared their stories of the racial obstacles they had to overcome as students and young professionals. These were in addition to inherent feelings that they needed to be better in every way than their white counterparts. A mistake would count against them far greater than if a white musician had made that same mistake. Obstacles ranged from access to opportunities/socioeconomic situations to outright sabotage.

A solution revolved around a refined version of mentorship – identify a mentor/ombudsman in the orchestra where the audition winner is pursuing tenure. These mentors would be alumni of the institutions where the musician had studied during college and it would be the responsibility of these Schools of Music to make that connection. The

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mentor/ombudsman would not have to be a player of the same instrument. Her/his role would be to advise the musician on the politics and culture of the organization, design an on boarding program based on a template designed by members of the consortium. The mentor/ombudsman would also run interference for the musician in matters that could be affected by racial bias – from the treatment by stage door security to the scheduling of critical tenure meetings with the Music Director to connecting with the community at large.

Outcomes

How many institutions of each type would come on board initially? at 3 years? at year 10? How many musicians would be served/in the pipeline initially? at 3 years? at year 10? How many auditionees/finalists/winners/tenured at 3 and 10 year marks?

Governance

It is imperative that no one organization imbed this project into their organization. The need for impartiality is crucial. The creation of a not-for-profit organization with a Board that is representative of the consortium members would have the independence and the credibility to be effective. The mission would be built around creating pathways for talented musicians of color from student to tenured professional.

Funding

The support would be primarily from foundations, individuals and in-kind contributions from the consortium members.

Budget

Rough estimates put the operating costs of the consortium around \$1M per year.