

Senza Sordino

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A First Report Post-Maria

By Natalie Lorch

The musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (OSPR) would like to express our deepest gratitude to our fellow ICSOM musicians for their support in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Your show of solidarity has brought us priceless encouragement and hope in a difficult time.

A handful of our musicians have suffered significant and even catastrophic property damage from the storm and subsequent flooding. Many need to repair leaks, replace broken windows, repaint, fix cisterns, and attend to water damage. Your extraordinarily generous donations will help them rebuild their homes.

Even the most fortunate of us are feeling a financial burden due to the lack of electricity and safe drinking water. We have to buy bottled water every week (when we can find it, anyway), because tap water is still of questionable safety in some neighborhoods. Many of us have lost clothing, furniture, sheet music, and other items due to water damage or mold. For those of us city-dwellers who don't own cars, the



The OSPR rehearses in preparation for a concert in Utuado

right to charge our phones usually entails making a purchase somewhere. In addition, some of us are running low on musical supplies (reed-making equipment, strings, etc.), and we will soon have to pay abnormally high shipping costs to receive them in a timely manner. All these little expenses really start to add up after a month, and they show no signs of stopping soon.

Currently, we are very fortunate to have the support of Puerto Rico's governor and first lady, Ricardo Rosselló Nevares
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San Francisco Symphony Fire Relief Benefit Concert

By Barbara Bogatin

It was around midnight. I was getting ready for bed on Sunday, October 8th, when I began to notice the unmistakable smell of smoke. I was alone in my house and quickly checked room to room, willing myself to stay calm as I made sure my cello was packed and ready to go at any moment. When I was sure the house was okay I went outside, walking up and down the block. Though the acrid odor was even more pronounced, there were no fire engines, no sirens, no red glow in the distance. Back inside, I closed all the windows tightly to keep the smell at bay, anticipating a fitful night of sleep.

I did not know at the time that the fateful scent marked the beginning of the most destructive week of wildfires in California history, 40 miles north of my house. My windows would remain shut for three weeks while fire-fighters from a

dozen states struggled to contain 21 separate blazes.

Many SFS musicians smelled that smoke and watched in daily horror as our neighbors in the North Bay were devastated by fires that destroyed over 245,000 acres and 8,900 structures, including homes, businesses, wineries, hospitals, arts centers, and schools. The displaced included one of our own, SFS librarian John Campbell, whose home of 22 years—and everything in it—succumbed to the flames that first night.

In addition to donating clothing, food, funds, and volunteer hours, we musicians wanted to do something that would show our support and solidarity with the fire victims in the best way we know how—through the healing power of music.

Our Players Committee leapt into action. With the inspired leadership of Chairperson Melissa Kleinbart, the committee enlisted the support of the orchestra, San Francisco Symphony
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The Author with Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi after the concert

Courtesy of Barbara Bogatin

President's Report

By Paul Austin

Creation of an Online Conductor Evaluation Program

As stated in our bylaws, the duties of ICSOM President include the responsibility of supervising ICSOM's conductor evaluation program. This is an area where I have had much experience, having served as the administrator of ROPA's conductor evaluation bank for nearly ten years.



ICSOM's conductor evaluation program had its origins exactly 50 years ago. In 1967, the results were hand-tabulated. Musicians were asked two questions on that historic form: "Do you, or would you like to play under this man as a guest conductor?" and "Do you, or would you like to play under this man as a permanent conductor?" By 1982, the language had evolved to be gender neutral, just in time for the milestone of the first female Music Director of a fully profes-

sional US orchestra—Catherine Comet, in 1986 in Grand Rapids. (Note: A great general resource for the history of ICSOM's conductor evaluation program is Julie Ayer's book, *More Than Meets the Ear: How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History*. A link is available at <http://www.icsom.org/links/laborLinks.php>)

It took nearly 15 years before computerized forms were used for ICSOM's conductor evaluations. Cathy Compton, Emeritus member of the Detroit Symphony, is to be thanked for her work in developing ICSOM's system with Wayne State University in 1982. That relationship between ICSOM and Wayne State continued for thirty years, until the university ceased its participation in September 2012 (when the professor who oversaw the project retired).

When Wayne State discontinued our program, ICSOM's Governing Board formed a subcommittee to investigate options. In 2013, ICSOM Treasurer Michael Moore—at that time also the Administrator of the Conductor Evaluation Program—recommended that individual orchestras develop their own system to evaluate conductors.

Over the past few years, Cathy Compton and I met several times to discuss the history of ICSOM's conductor evaluation program. The Governing Board has had ongoing discussions about what to do with all the archived material from the discontinued Wayne State program, all of which have now been transferred to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In March 2017, ICSOM Delegates were surveyed about their interest and potential participation in an online Conductor Evaluation Program. The results of that survey led the Governing Board to include the topic for in-person discussion at last summer's annual ICSOM conference, which occurred during a delegates-only session. As a result, the delegates passed a resolution calling for the creation of a pilot program for evaluating conductors and a report about the program at the 2018 conference. (Note: See "Resolutions" in the October 2017 issue)

The purpose of the program remains as before: to evaluate >



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music directors and guest conductors of ICSOM orchestras, to give musicians of ICSOM a vehicle for providing data in a confidential way, to provide information to committees of ICSOM orchestras in a protected manner, and to respond to requests from OCSM and ROPA orchestras for conductor files. (As a result of resolutions adopted at their 1990 conferences, ICSOM, ROPA, and OCSM could access each other's conductor evaluation information. Both ROPA and OCSM have active conductor evaluation banks today, with OCSM having moved to an online system in 2011.)

There are two main differences between ICSOM's online system and the previous system with Wayne State. The obvious one is that we now will be administering the program electronically. The second difference is how the information will be sent, and to whom.

Because management agrees by submitting the release form that it will indemnify ICSOM, musicians, and others for liability arising from any breach of confidentiality, it makes sense that management should be the party that receives the information. To protect musicians and avoid potential legal liability, and out of ethical considerations, the information contained in the evaluation file is not to be posted or made available to the orchestra at large. It can be shared with any search committee members, who may include musician representatives, but the information will be under the control of the managers who have indemnified ICSOM. We are aware of managers in the past who would not use the conductor evaluation program because they were forced to accept legal responsibility yet were unable to see the file directly. The new system will alleviate that concern and place the file with the person who ultimately is responsible for it.

We have spent months creating an online conductor evaluation program for those ICSOM orchestras who wish to participate. By doing so, we also have created a position for handling this important and confidential work. I am pleased to announce that Barbara Corbató of the Grand Rapids Symphony will be the first Administrator of our online Conductor Evaluation Program.

To use the program, an ICSOM delegate will request a conductor evaluation survey from the Administrator, who will email to each musician a unique, one-time link to the survey. The survey will contain the standard set of questions from ICSOM's previous evaluation program, with slight updates. The option of tailoring the survey to include a few additional questions specific to the orchestra's needs is available. Once the surveys have been collected, and an evaluation file has been established, managements of ICSOM, OCSM, and ROPA (full member) orchestras can request the file for their use whenever hiring or renewing a conductor. This file would be sent to the manager electronically via a password-protected link from the Administrator.

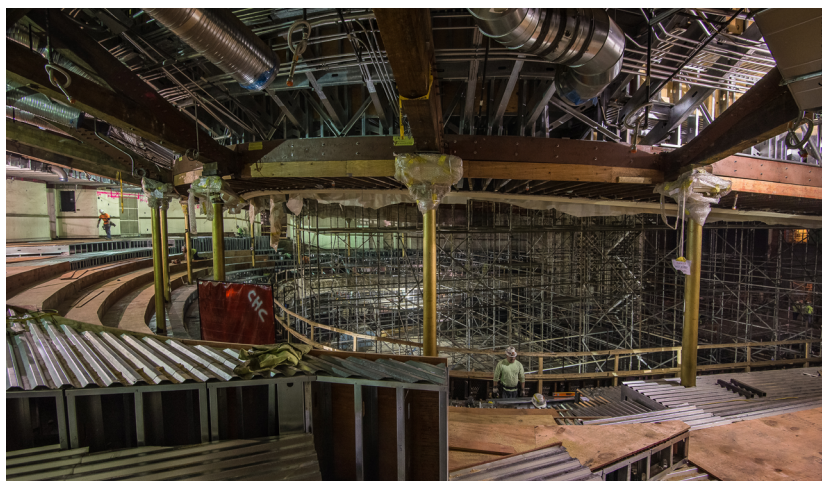
Establishing the program has involved much time and preparation, for which I must thank *Senza Sordino* Editor Peter de Boor, Treasurer Michael Moore, ICSOM Counsel Kevin Case, and Conductor Evaluation Program Administrator Barbara Corbató. ICSOM's online Conductor Evaluation Program will begin January 2018, and we are pleased to offer this option to orchestras that wish to participate.

Cincinnati Music Hall Renovation

By Ted Nelson, CSO ICSOM Delegate

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra is back in Music Hall! After a lengthy renovation, the hall reopened with a five-week celebration of opening galas featuring each of the five performing arts organizations in residence. The CSO managed to navigate some very stressful and difficult territory with a lot of success, thanks to a thoughtful approach and willingness to discuss openly the potential and real problems we encountered. Although the actual construction took only nineteen months, as every veteran of a major hall renovation or construction project can tell you, the process is much longer than the construction.

In 2011, an ambitious plan for the renovation of Cincinnati Music Hall was laid out, including major modifications to the interior of the auditorium (including a reduction in the seating capacity), vastly improved and expanded patron amenities connecting the hall to neighboring Washington Park, and a great deal of much-needed repair of outdated and failing infrastructure. Unfortunately, although progress was made



The interior of the hall under construction. More images of the project can be found at www.matthewzory.com

on the first steps of the process, the project ultimately needed to be set aside for a time as the result of financing difficulties.

In 2014, a new financing plan was devised, involving ambitious historical tax credits, a diminished scope for the project, a county tax bond, and most importantly, a 72-year lease agreement from the city to the Music Hall Revitalization Company, the non-profit created in 2010 to spearhead the renovation. The project survived a temporary setback when the tax bond intended to link the renovation of Music Hall with the renovation of Union Terminal, another Cincinnati landmark, was modified to exclude Music Hall—the Cincinnati philanthropic community stepped up and filled the resulting shortfall in the \$143 million project.

A unique feature of Music Hall as the home of a major American orchestra is that it is not a symphonic hall, but a multi-purpose hall that is also home to the Cincinnati Pops, the Cincinnati Opera, the Cincinnati Ballet, and the Cincinnati May Festival (an annual festival of choral music with orchestra). Each of these groups requires a different stage or pit configura- >

tion and demands different support from the infrastructure of the auditorium. This made planning the renovation a complex balancing act involving tradeoffs between the needs of each performing group in the context of a limited budget.

The renovations backstage were necessarily fairly minimal. A large percentage of the budget was taken up by infrastructural needs, and the patron experience in the auditorium and in the public spaces was given priority throughout. As a result there remain problems backstage, and we are currently in the process of determining which resident company bears responsibility for which issues. Our management is still communicative and working with us to resolve the outstanding issues, but in a project as vast as this one, there are many to address; although our issues loom large to us, the importance of things such as working telephone systems for the box office are also important to the organization as a whole.

When the project was getting established again, one of the aspects which helped to make it successful was an extraordinarily high degree of cooperation and communication on the part of CSO stakeholders, and amongst the resident companies at Music Hall.


Looking back on the renovation attempt from 2011, the musician representatives of the CSO realized that how the acousticians had operated made us highly uncomfortable—their engagement was shrouded in a great deal of secrecy, and they had a reliance on computer modelling and a seeming lack of regard for the input of the musicians and artistic staff. In a series of meetings, first with our management and subsequently with 3CDC, the project managers, we figuratively lay down on the tracks and demanded that the project be reopened to bids from other acoustical firms. We wanted to guarantee that no matter the result, there would be a higher degree of buy-in and engagement from the start of this new project. Although this put an already tight schedule under even more stress, the entire project was re-opened for bids, and after an extensive search process, 3CDC engaged a new acoustical firm, Akustiks.

The new acousticians worked with musician representatives, and in open meetings with the entire orchestra invited us to determine our priorities inside the auditorium. We identified the existing positive acoustic qualities of Music Hall, and what aspects we wanted to see improved. We engaged in a series of acoustical mock-ups prior to the closing of the hall, to determine as best as possible if the proposed changes to the interior of the hall would be beneficial. Over two days of rehearsals, a stage extension was built so the orchestra could be moved further into the hall, the existing acoustic shell towers were reconfigured, the existing acoustical canopy was raised, lowered, and removed; the orchestra filled out detailed surveys regarding each configuration.

During our nineteen months out of Music Hall, our acousti-

cians also worked to improve our experience in our temporary home at the Taft Theater. They designed a re-purposed acoustic shell from our outdoor summer home, and designed an easy-to-construct adjustable ceiling for our stage managers to build and install. Although our experience in the Taft was difficult in almost every way, I am confident that we had a better experience because of the acoustical work done.

Upon our return to Music Hall, we again tested various configurations of the adjustable aspects of the hall. The new acoustical clouds were raised and lowered and their angles were adjusted. Soft goods were added to and then ultimately removed from the shell towers at the rear of the stage and around the auditorium walls surrounding the thrust stage. The orchestra was again surveyed regarding the results of each change, and we played a series of acoustical test concerts with an audience in the hall.

Throughout the process, musicians representatives were consulted and engaged at every step of the way. The final result, although still in process, is a vast improvement over the previously muddy and indistinct acoustics of Music Hall. The patron amenities are greatly improved, and we are thrilled to be performing in a hall which reflects and showcases the quality of the world class orchestra we have here in Cincinnati, and we are looking forward to an inspiring future. 

War of the Worlds

By Paul Gunther

In 1939, Orson Welles created and broadcast “fake news” that led panicked listeners to believe that aliens were invading Earth from the planet Mars.

One of this year’s MacArthur Fellowship (“genius grant”) winners, director Yuval Sharon, has taken the original radio script as the basis for a new one-hour performance piece heard around downtown Los Angeles in three November 2017 performances. Composer Annie Gosfield’s use of radio sounds and other-worldly effects, along with traditional instruments and ensembles, made her the ideal collaborator for this event. Structurally, Gosfield modeled her piece very loosely on Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*—or at least on the first four planets of his suite.

And “around downtown Los Angeles” was literally that: performances occurred simultaneously at Walt Disney Concert Hall as well as at three outdoor WWII-era siren sites, where each of the sirens, all slated for removal and discard, were able to be repurposed for one final swan song, with near-instantaneous two-way communication, by utilizing the latest microwave audio transmission technology for the greatest simultaneity.

War of the Worlds could be experienced with ticketed seats for one of the Walt Disney Concert Hall performances, or through attendance at one of the three siren sites where seat reservations and unreserved standing room were free and open to the public.

Thanks to the technology available, actors, singers, and musicians could participate at all four locations simultaneously, and all audiences—at all locations—could hear everything. Audio transmissions passed directly and with complete suc- ➤

The 2018 ICSOM Conference will be held in Cincinnati, OH, August 22-25, 2018 at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel. All attendees must register for the conference in advance with ICSOM Secretary Laura Ross. Online registration will be available by early June. Anyone interested in attending the conference and wishing to receive a conference packet should contact the ICSOM Secretary.

cess between all four sites, with audiences wherever they were located able to experience the work in its entirety.

Onstage at Walt Disney Concert Hall was the main ensemble, conducted by Christopher Rountree, and comprising twenty-three musicians, along with a computer sound technician, actors, and singers. On the rear of the stage, a large high riser was partitioned with plexiglass walls and ceiling, to house a Percussionist with three stations; a Keyboardist (including a Theremin and another computer); and a Martian singing otherworldly sounds and text, in full green makeup and red military uniform, the invading alien otherwise known as *colatura soprano* Hila Plitmann.



Chris T. Matthew and Greg Gold/Chris T. Matthew

Featured in performance were actress Sigourney Weaver as the MC; and, for the first performance only, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti as himself.

Partnering with the Los Angeles Philharmonic were two other organizations as co-producers: The Industry, an independent, artist-driven company creating experimental productions that expand the definition of opera; and Now Art, a public arts artist organization specializing in installation art (as described by their respective websites).

Two of the three performances of *War of the Worlds* took place during *Noon to Midnight*, the new-music festival that allows audiences to roam the spaces of Walt Disney Concert Hall for a day of pop-up performances by top contemporary Southern California ensembles.

Note: The Author is a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and a former ICSOM Member-at-Large.

A New Theme in the Cuban American Overture

By Rena Kraut

The Minnesota Orchestra's tour to Cuba in 2015 took President Obama's promise of a new relationship between our countries and shaped it into a reality for Cubans and Americans alike. Those five days in Havana were a revelation to the 165-member coalition of musicians, staff, audio engineers, board members, press, and patrons. Flying on the first nonstop char-



Joseph Furman

ter flight from the Twin Cities to Havana, we landed with only the foggiest of ideas of what to expect in a country so long forbidden. With no expectations, no yardsticks, no barometers, we were as wide-eyed and open as children. And indeed, it was with children in Havana where some of the greatest impacts were felt. In educational workshops, masterclasses, and side-by-side rehearsals, our openness to new experiences made professional and student, Cuban and American, turn to each other with honest curiosity and a true desire for mutual learning.

Retired Minnesota Orchestra librarian Paul Gunther wrote of the tour in these pages in 2015, "It was the first of a number of firsts." (*Note: See "Minnesota in Cuba" in the July 2015 issue.*) Indeed, this continues to be the case even two years later. The energy around the 2015 tour sparked the inception of the Cuban American Youth Orchestra. CAYO will bring together Cuban and American student musicians for a musical and cultural exchange designed to broaden horizons, provide youth with the highest level of artistic training, and shed light on that which can bring our neighboring countries together. Early on, we were thrilled to welcome Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä as not only an enthusiastic supporter, but as our future music director. Three strong artistic partners—21C Media Group, Classical Movements, and Minnesota Public Radio—soon followed.

After receiving nonprofit status in July 2016, CAYO started building towards the goal of a full orchestra that will tour internationally in summer 2019. However, we were spurred to more immediate action by the changing politics around our countries. With the help of individual donors and a generous grant of seed money from a prestigious national foundation, we began planning a weeklong workshop, the CAYO Fall Academy. Our goal was to form an educational program that would build cultural understanding and hone musicianship skills for its pre-professional participants.

With the support of the University of Minnesota School of Music and Minnesota Public Radio, and assistance from the Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Fall Academy offered outstanding educational and performance exposure to eight students—four from the University of Minnesota and four from Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte. They observed both orchestras in rehearsal, received coaching and private lessons, attended workshops in business and arts administration, performed and spoke at local elementary schools, appeared on American Public Media's *Performance Today*, and gave free public performances, both in the Atrium of Minneapolis' Orchestra Hall (November 2 & 3) and at the University of Minnesota School of Music Collage Concert (November 4). Our guests from Havana, who now comprise the Crisantemi Quartet, were also celebrated in an after-hours Atrium performance at Orchestra Hall, playing Cuban music and joining Minnesota Orchestra principals Erin Keefe, Peter McGuire, and Anthony Ross, along with section violist Sam Bergman, for Mendelssohn's beloved Octet (November 3). To foster deeper cultural understanding, the Cuban students were housed with Minnesota Orchestra musicians. This initial cohort of eight will serve as mentors to CAYO's future members. Plans are underway for 2018, including a Winter Academy in Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago for wind players, and a summer chamber tour of several cities in the U.S. and Cuba. >

At turning points in history, the arts can act as a messenger, sent ahead of the document signings, as a sign of goodwill and hope for our mutual futures. And because children are the most crucial recipients of that message, there is no better way to



The Crisantemi Quartet performs with Minnesota Orchestra members Erin Keefe, Peter McGuire, Anthony Ross, and Sam Bergman

deliver it than through arts education. CAYO is seeking ICSOM orchestra partners to provide mentoring and training on our future international tours and academies. Interested readers should contact us at rena@cayomusic.org. The unpredictable politics of our time only bolsters the argument for arts diplomacy. We look forward to working together to discover how music can strengthen the fabric of society, both at home and abroad. <

Note: The Author is the founder and executive director of the Cuban American Youth Orchestra, and a frequent guest musician with the Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

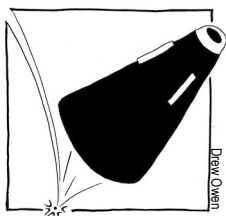
The Cuban American Youth Orchestra is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, operated and funded entirely independent of the Minnesota Orchestra. More information is available on its website www.cayomusic.org.

Dropping the Mute

By Peter de Boor, Editor

To Form a More Paperless Union

There is no question that the ways in which people obtain and interact with information have seen dramatic changes in recent years, all driven by advances in computer technology. While the (to some) utopian dream of the paperless office has not yet been realized, many people are becoming more comfortable with—even habituated to—the electronic exchange of documents.



ICSOM has embraced these technologies, from the creation of the orchestral listserv and the establishment of its Twitter feed (*Note: See the “President’s Report” in the October 2017 issue*) to the successful collaboration with the AFM and the other Players Conferences in adopting an online version of the Wage Charts. Two years ago we inaugurated a new online edition of *Senza Sordino*, which now reaches readers well before the print edi-

tion. (The most recent issue can always be found at <http://www.icsom.org/senzasordino/>.)

While the primary motivation behind these changes has been a desire to bring better services to our colleagues, cost savings have also played a role. The Governing Board seeks to use your dues in the most efficient and effective way possible. After conducting a survey of the delegates, the Board decided that paper copies of this publication will be sent only to members who affirmatively request them. All others will receive the email edition (which is currently sent only to those who have opted out of receiving paper copies). This change will take place with the first issue in 2018.

If you are an active or Emeritus member and wish to continue receiving the print edition of *Senza Sordino*, please contact your delegate or me (you can find my contact information in the masthead).

Additionally, earlier this year, Directory Administrator and former Editor Richard Levine devised a search portal for the directory database that allows members to access the Directory online in a secure way. The only requirement for members to use the portal is to have an email address—published or unpublished—listed in the database. (*Note: See the “Secretary’s Report” in the June 2017 issue.*) If you do not currently have an email address listed and wish to add one, please contact your delegate or me. Because of the smooth functioning of this new resource, the Governing Board has decided to move to biennial publication of the printed directory. The annual production of the Directory is one of ICSOM’s greatest single expenses, and the Board feels that the online search portal can better meet the needs of most users of the Directory. You should receive your copy of the 2017-19 ICSOM Directory in early 2018. <

Note: Active members of the following orchestras wanting a paper copy have already had their preference confirmed, and do not need to reconfirm it with me or their delegate: Alabama, Chicago Lyric, Chicago Symphony, Detroit, Los Angeles, the MET, National, NY Philharmonic, San Antonio, and Utah.

Newslets

Grand Rapids Musician Lauded

Grand Rapids Symphony violinist Diane McElfish Helle has recently been recognized with two important awards for her work creating and expanding the Grand Rapids Symphony’s Music for Health Initiative. Diane, who has been with the orchestra for 38 years, received the League of American Orchestra’s Ford Musician Award for Excellence in Community Service at the League conference in June. She was also presented with the Grand Rapids Symphony’s Bravo Award—only the second musician to receive this award in its 26-year history. This award honors individuals, couples, foundations, and corporations who have contributed to the orchestra in extraordinary ways.

The Grand Rapids Symphony’s Music for Health Initiative began in the 2013-14 season with six musicians, and has since expanded to 16 musicians participating. Diane worked with Symphony staff to develop the program, which introduced live music performed by symphony players into a number of healthcare settings. The musicians work with music therapists, performing duo arrangements of pieces of various styles for >



Diane McElfish Helle

patients during specifically designed music therapy sessions.

Diane coordinates all the musicians' services, and was the guiding force behind the development and recording of *The Music Therapy Guide*, specifically written and arranged for the Music for Health Initiative by composer, and former GRS cellist, Jeremy Crosmer. The *Guide* includes


pieces of different styles and a set of meditations. In the fall of 2016, four hours of the meditations from the *Guide* were recorded and paired with scenic pictures. This recording is now available to patients and families on a dedicated TV channel in five Spectrum Health facilities in the West Michigan area.

Motor City Munificence

On October 30, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra announced an exciting new \$15 million gift from the William Davidson Foundation, a longtime supporter of the DSO. Part of the gift will provide continued support for the William Davidson Neighborhood Concert Series, which, for the past seven years, has sponsored DSO concerts in community venues throughout Metro Detroit. Another portion of the gift is earmarked as a \$5 million challenge grant to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's endowment. This challenge has already been met more than halfway, thanks to a new \$2 million gift from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a \$1 million gift from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Foundation, and \$500,000 from the Dresner Foundation. All three of these organizations have given generously to the DSO in the recent past, including gifts to the annual fund and the DSO's Civic Youth Ensembles.

Los Angeles Announces Fellowship Program

On November 9th, the Los Angeles Philharmonic announced—along with its 100th anniversary “Centennial Celebrations”—the LA Phil Resident Fellows program. The LA Phil Resident Fellowship is an excellence-based training program to prepare early-career symphony musicians, representing and serving historically underrepresented populations, to successfully compete for positions in major symphony orchestras. The specifics of this program were arrived at in the course of contract negotiations between the musicians of the LA Phil and their management; both parties collaborated to find additional ways to serve and represent the orchestra's community.

Annual appointments of up to five Resident Fellows (strings and percussion) will play with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a minimum of 20 weeks per year for up to three years. Resident Fellows will focus on their artistic development through orchestral, chamber music, new music, and education concerts, performing at Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, and in community settings. They will also have the opportunity to tour with the Philharmonic. In addition, the LA Phil Resident Fellows program offers assistance with lessons, auditions, and housing. Applications are open now and the process for obtaining one of these positions is explained in greater detail on the LA Phil website (laphil.com/residentfellows). 

SFS Fire Relief Benefit Concert (continued)

and Opera choruses, administration, stage crew, and Music Director to create *Symphony Relief: A Benefit Concert for the North Bay*, held on November 19 at Davies Symphony Hall. Melissa explained, “During times of great suffering and loss, music can offer solace and bring people together to grieve and heal as a community.” Everyone in the organization donated their time, with 100% of the proceeds going to North Bay Fire Relief Fund and Sonoma County Resilience Fund. The sold-out crowd was treated to symphonic music by Aaron Copland and Tchaikovsky, plus thrilling *a cappella* spirituals sung by bass Solomon Howard, who then joined the orchestra and chorus in a stellar performance of the Finale from Beethoven's 9th Symphony.


In addition to the musical offerings, there were heartfelt words from Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, and John Campbell—but the most enthusiastic applause of the night went to the heroic first responders, whose tireless efforts were so deeply appreciated by everyone present. We musicians were grateful to have an opportunity to reflect back to our community the love and support they have shown our orchestra for so many years. 

Note: The Author is a member of the San Francisco Symphony.

A First Report Post-Maria (continued)

and Beatriz Isabel Rosselló, and the mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulín Cruz. They have all acknowledged the cultural value of our orchestra, and they enthusiastically praise our social initiatives to bring hope and healing to the people of the island.

At first, I must admit that I personally questioned the value of presenting concerts to people who have lost their roofs and have no running water. I wondered, is a concert really what they need right now? However, after speaking with my neighbors in San Juan and observing our audience members' faces, I've become convinced that concerts are exactly what these people do need. For the first few weeks after the storm, people were in shock; they are just now beginning to process their emotions. They are feeling exhausted, angry, depressed, and afraid. Their minds are full of anxiety. They are also feeling bored—imagine a month without Netflix or Hulu (or work and school, for that matter)! My neighbors expressed to me a strong need to have something to do to feel normal again. Members of the orchestra have been sharing informal chamber music concerts with their communities and in shelters, schools, and elderly housing facilities all over the island.

Classical music offers people more than a temporary distraction from their problems. Orchestra concerts give people a safe place to process their emotions and begin to heal. While disaster relief organizations take care of people's physical needs, the orchestra has the unique ability to help people to restore their emotional and mental health. The Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra's social project concerts combine rich classical repertoire with high-quality arrangements of Puerto Rican folk and patriotic music. Our music director, Maximiano Valdés, 

has chosen selections from Elgar's *Enigma* Variations and Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 as cathartic musical experiences for the audience. These profoundly beautiful and emotionally complex works help people navigate through negative emotions to come to terms with loss and reach a more hopeful mindset.


We also perform colorful arrangements of popular Puerto Rican patriotic music. Every audience member knows the words to these songs; the lyrics celebrate the beauty of the island and the loyal spirit of its people. Some of these songs hold such sentimental value that Puerto Ricans see them as secondary national anthems. The orchestra always ends concerts on an upbeat note with fun works driven by fast, syncopated rhythms. These Puerto Rican pieces make the audience feel patriotic, proud, and united. Our concerts give them extra encouragement to keep working together to rebuild.

We started rehearsals on October 10th, less than three weeks after Maria tore through Puerto Rico. At our first rehearsal, we all felt a little tired and sweaty, but we were very relieved to see each other and to get back to work. Moreover, we eagerly looked forward to sharing music with hurricane survivors all over the island. We gave our first concert on October 13th at the San Juan Department of Recreation and Sports in Santurce, where people of all ages were receiving aid and shelter. We played a second concert on October 18th for people taking refuge at the Coliseío Pedrín Zorrilla in Hato Rey, San Juan.

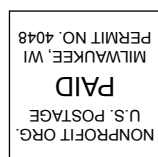
On Saturday, we traveled by bus to Utuado, one of the most dramatically stricken areas of the island. The highway bridges into Utuado collapsed during the storm, and people had to

invent creative ways to transport aid into the town (you may have seen the photo of a shopping cart attached to a zipline strung across a gaping gorge). Fortunately, at least one road into Utuado has been repaired. Along the highway, we saw hundreds of destroyed homes, many of which had blue tarps installed as temporary roofs.

On their own initiative, orchestra members collected and personally delivered a sizeable donation of bottled water, canned food, rice, and clothing to distribute at the concert. I was impressed by everyone's generosity at a time when some of us still struggle to find certain items. We performed at a military-run stop-and-go aid distribution center in a school gymnasium, and we treasured every minute interacting with the residents of Utuado. They were a delightfully respectful and appreciative audience. They kept excellent time while clapping along with our encore piece, "Seis Chorreo". Principal oboist Ivonne Pérez turned to me and remarked proudly, "They have great rhythm, because they're mountain people like me!" The audience left with lifted spirits and arms full of practical aid.

For the next couple of weeks, the orchestra plans to perform free concerts outdoors in the Plazoleta of our own concert hall in Santurce and in several shelters, housing projects, and churches. Please stay tuned for more information as details are confirmed. 

Note: The Author is a member of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. This article originally appeared on the blog of the Musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (www.musicosorquestasinfonicadepuertorico.com/).



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