

# Senza Sordino

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## STUDY EXAMINES STEREOTYPES OF ORCHESTRA MUSICIANS

In the opening chapter of his entertaining memoirs of life in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, *Gentlemen, More Dolce Please*, Harry Ellis Dickson presents a personal appraisal of the characteristics of musicians who play certain instruments. Cellists, he asserts, are supersensitive, suspicious, conceited, quarrelsome prima donnas. Oboists are slightly less troublesome only because there are fewer of them. Flute players are quiet and gentlemanly dandies, clarinetists are cry-babies, bassoon players tend to be intelligent and affable hobbyists. Trumpet players are handsome, debonair, and dashing; trombonists tend to be quiet, dull, very moral and ministerial; horn players, rebellious individuals, usually drink a lot. Percussionists are the virile he-men of the orchestra, the tympanist its grand potentate. Why are these musicians this way? Suggests Dickson, "Someone should make a scientific study."

Someone has.

Dr. Jack P. Lipton of Union College in Schenectady, NY, and Robert S. Builione of Columbia University reported on their study, "Is It True What They Say About Classical Musicians?: Stereotypes and Personality Traits," last summer at the 91st annual convention of the American Psychological Association in Anaheim. Summaries have appeared in the musical press. We thank Dr. Lipton for making available to *Senza Sordino* an expanded version of the report as presented at the International Conference on Psychology and the Arts, held at the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology, Cardiff, September 5-9, 1983.

The authors reviewed anecdotal literature and the few systematic formal investigations done to date in the relatively new discipline of psychomusicology. Among the more interesting findings noted:

- Children with favored socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to develop high levels of musical ability.
- Psychologically androgynous persons appear to be better endowed temperamentally for success in music than those with more highly stereotyped sexual identity.
- Respondents in one study chose the clarinet, flute, and violin as suitable for study by girls; trumpet, drums, and trombone were suitable for boys.
- Children's books about music are potent sources of verbal and pictorial stereotypes of instruments and musicians.

To empirically test the validity of the anecdotal evidence and to expand upon earlier studies, the authors developed a questionnaire to assess the personality and stereotypes of classical musicians. The sixteen U.S. and Canadian orchestras involved in the study, including eight ICSOM orchestras, responded with

varying degrees of cooperation and enthusiasm.

Using a 7-point scale, musicians rated the four orchestra sections, including their own, on a series of personality items dealing with introversion-extroversion, enjoyment of alcohol, sense of humor, confidence, athletic ability, and sensitivity. One trend that emerged from the analysis of these ratings was that strings and brass were consistently at opposite ends of the spectra. Contrary to the way the strings viewed themselves, the brass saw the strings as introverted, enjoying alcohol, unathletic, somewhat humorless and insensitive.

Musicians were also asked to "write the first thoughts that enter your mind when thinking" of each of the other sections. The results?

Responses had a strong tinge of general negativity, even in the musicians' descriptions of their own sections. There was also considerable consistency in the stereotypes, particularly in describing the brass and percussion sections. The brass section was described as loud, macho, aggressive, and sexy, while the percussionists were described as unintelligent, fun, wild and crazy, and deaf. Woodwind players were described as quiet, meticulous, finicky, and intelligent, while the strings were described as frustrated, stuffy, prima donna wimps.

The strings, who characterized themselves most frequently as "sensitive," were more negative about themselves than other sections were in their self-appraisals. Woodwinds most often called themselves "meticulous" and percussionists top-rated themselves as "fun," self-appraisals not inconsistent with evaluations by the other sections. The brass, self-rated most frequently as "gregarious," were characterized by all the other sections most often simply as "loud." Differences between brass and strings seem reinforced by the subjective ratings; The brass players, who demeaned the strings as "chicken-shit," were referred to by the strings as "brass-holes."

Speculation in *The Psychology of Music* (1978) by John Booth Davies, a chapter from which inspired the present study, suggests that differences among musicians and in their perceptions of themselves and others may be related to the varying difficulties, performance requirements, and tonal power of the instruments they play; to whether the parts they play are unique or duplicated by others; and to the different sociological histories and associations of instruments. Both Davies and Lipton agree that further study is necessary to establish any ultimate causal links between personality traits and musical instruments. Are traits noted enduring ones, or are they present only in the musical situation? Are certain types of people attracted to particular instruments, or does playing an instrument for a period of time alter a musician's personality?

### Tax Case Reminder

ICSOM and its legal counsel are seeking ways to effectuate the decision in **Drucker vs. IRS** permitting musicians to deduct home studio expenses from their income tax. It is imperative that musicians whose claims for this deduction have been denied notify counsel as quickly as possible. We caution musicians that unsuccessful independent litigation could jeopardize the effectiveness of a centralized effort. Contact I. Philip Sipser or Leonard Leibowitz, 380 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017, Phone (212) 867-2100.

### A NEW APPROACH TO SOLVING PROBLEMS

*Stephen Sell, executive director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, was a guest speaker at the 1983 ICSOM conference in Baltimore. During a seminar on orchestra finances, he broadened the scope of his comments to address the larger subject of musicians' access to boards and managements. His remarks are transcribed below.*

We are entering a time in orchestra history unlike any we have observed or enjoyed before, an age of greater maturity.

Until recently most boards and managements believed—and many still do—that the musicians are adversaries and that the information they ask for will be used against them [managements], especially in negotiations. The prevailing mentality, especially on boards of directors who have had less opportunity than have managers to interact directly with musicians, is one of fear. Accordingly, it is important for musicians who request information today to indicate that they do so because they have a fundamental stake in the health of the institution, that they are interested in how the institution looks and feels, in whether it's healthy or sick, and that if indeed there are problems there is no group with a greater interest in addressing and solving those problems than the musicians themselves.

I suggest that such approaches first be made outside the collective bargaining process and that there be an effort to build a sense of sincerity, of exchange, of true personal investment in the welfare of the institution.

It will take time to build mutual trust, confidence and credibility. Attitudes must change on both sides, but people change very slowly and reluctantly. We have all too long been adversarial, and negative attitudes are very deeply entrenched. There will inevitably be moments of contention in any relationship, professional or personal, but contentions can be reduced considerably from what they have traditionally been. Those who have an interest in changing attitudes, initially a minority, must patiently do what they can to educate and persuade those not of like mind.

Different tactics must be used. Orchestra members collectively have heretofore had only negative power, the power to stop something, to impede something, to withhold services. The forums have not existed to exercise positive power and accept positive responsibility. Managers and boards have heretofore reacted only to this negative power and have had to respond in a like manner. This has become a reflex response from managers and boards. Any initiative by musicians is automatically regarded as a gesture of negative power. The manner in which the approach is made, the expression offered, must be thought through in order to avoid this entrenched reflex response. If one desires a different response, one must take a different approach.

For example: We are undertaking long-range planning in Philadelphia, something the orchestra has never done before and which few orchestras have done. This is an activity in which the musicians can participate in a constructive and non-threatening way if the opportunity is structured carefully. We decided that it would be useful to invite the musicians to participate in every stage and to comment on every subject. We set up meetings with the full orchestra and presented our topics to the musicians. We passed out a draft of a mission statement, a statement of governing principles and lists of goals and objectives. More meetings followed, and more will take place.

Similarly, we have invited musicians to staff meetings on particular planning subjects. In several cases the participation and input of the musicians has been more instructive and insightful than that of the staff. Attendance and participation are voluntary. Those who are interested and want to get involved are welcome.

The orchestra committee was asked to consider these actions before we extended the general invitation, and it raised the question of who had the ultimate responsibility for decisions. That authority belongs to the board of directors, but the board will make better and wiser decisions about the future course of the organization if it is informed with the broadest range of expertise and opinion. For this reason the musicians' input, while not binding on boards or managements, is essential to the present and future health of symphony orchestras.

This seems to be an idea whose time has come.

### ASOL, NASM ANNOUNCE NEW STUDY

A study by the American Symphony Orchestra League and the National Association of Schools of Music will explore issues related to the performance of orchestral music in America. The project will entail gathering resource information to provide an overview of professional orchestra life and of orchestral training programs, including employment opportunities for, and career development of, orchestral musicians and conductors; current training institution curricula and teaching methods; and perspectives of musicians and educators about the orchestra profession and preparation for it.

A goal of the project, entitled "The Orchestra and Music Training Institutions: The Orchestra Player and Conductor," will be to develop and facilitate greater interaction of ASOL and NASM constituencies in addressing issues and problems of mutual concern.

### UNIONS TO WORK TOGETHER

On April 3, 1984, 25 representatives of Washington, DC, musicians, stage hands, wardrobe, ticket sellers, AGMA, Equity, and hotel and restaurant employees unions met at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies for a day-long session on upcoming contract negotiations with the Kennedy Center, National Symphony, and other organizations.

Members of the National Symphony Orchestra and Kennedy Center Orchestra committees attended, as did Robert D'Arcy, president of AFM Local #161-710. Those present discussed mutual concerns and goals and reaffirmed a desire to cooperate during these negotiations.

This coalition of unions has been meeting monthly for over three years, communicating to avoid problems of independent action and to coordinate contract negotiations which affect each other. The spirit of unity is strong and will again be a positive factor as it was in negotiations three years ago.

*Carolyn Parks  
Kennedy Center Orchestra Delegate*

## 1984 ICSOM CONFERENCE IN LOUISVILLE

Louisville will be ICSOM'S Kentucky home for the 1984 annual conference, August 27 to 31.

Headquarters will be the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the center of downtown. The hotel's amphitheatre conference room promises to be a pleasant place to conduct meetings. The daily agenda can be viewed on in-house television. Delegates will have 24-hour access to the pool and tennis court. The hotel has a revolving restaurant with a view of the city and the river, a gourmet restaurant, and a luncheonette.

A block from the hotel is the new Galleria, a glassed-in atrium with a variety of shops and eating facilities. Delegates who like to dine in style may want to try the Oak Room or Rathskellar at the Seelbach Hotel, recently restored to its old-world glory.

Two blocks north of the Hyatt is the Belvedere, a park overlooking the Ohio River and a nice place for a box lunch near terraced pools. Visible from the Belvedere is the Kentucky Center for the Arts, new home of the Louisville Orchestra, open to visitors.

Louisville's image as a cultural center complements its reputation for horse racing and tobacco products. Those who want to visit Churchill Downs to view the grounds and museum or to see summer racing can use convenient public transportation.

The weather could surprise by being pleasant, but statistics favor hot, muggy days and cooler nights. Rain is not common except as brief thundershowers. Delegates should have sweaters or jackets available for the Wednesday evening boat ride on the Belle of Louisville, one of the few remaining paddle-wheel river steamboats and a beloved link with the past.

Louisville is a growing city which hasn't lost its friendly hometown qualities, a wonderful setting for the busy work that faces delegates.

### Conference Business

The annual conference is always an important event which broadens perspectives. Each symphony, opera, or ballet orchestra has a limited vision and understanding of what is happening in other orchestras in the US and abroad. Geographic separation makes it almost impossible to explore interesting new ideas. An orchestra often feels it has been innovative when in fact it has reinvented the wheel or joined a parade that is almost past. The annual conference provides the opportunity for representatives of many orchestras to share information.

In addition to the regular agenda and organizational matters, this year's conference will focus on new ideas in collective action and collective bargaining.

The 1984 conference will feature a close look at the collective action initiative for new relationships between musicians, managements, unions, and boards of directors. A number of orchestras, the Denver Symphony being perhaps the most visible recent example, have established joint labor-management and long-range planning committees. Although there are decided advantages to such committees, orchestras may attempt to establish them without understanding what is necessary to their successful operation. How do these committees work? What can they accomplish? Why might some succeed in one place but not in another? Should other orchestras be emulated? Stephen Klein, executive director of the Denver Symphony, will present his views at conference.

As to collective bargaining, ICSOM legal counsel I. Philip Sipsper and Leonard Leibowitz will clarify recent Supreme Court decisions on bankruptcy and labor contracts and recent court rulings on picketing. Len will conduct his workshop on collective bargaining, and Phil will lead an extensive workshop on pensions. Pension alternatives and pension supplements (tax law designations 401k, 403b, and TEFRA amendments) will be

examined in a general session; Ms. Judy Mazo of Martin Segal, pension actuaries, will be a guest speaker.

Orchestras are urged to send to the conference those leaders who are most familiar with these subjects and who are in a position to work directly with their managers and trustees.

*Thanks to Louisville Orchestra ICSOM delegate Pat Brannon, her stand partner Marilyn Willoughby, and ICSOM chairman Frederick Zenone for their help in preparing this article.*

## A LOOK AT MUSICIAN DISCONTENT

Elsewhere in this issue are articles which address musicians' attitudes. A psychologist at Union College has studied how we musicians perceive ourselves and our colleagues; he notes "a strong tinge of negativity." An orchestra manager suggests attitudinal postures which may help musicians, managers, and trustees work together more effectively; he is concerned that negative attitudes are deeply entrenched and work against cooperatively solving the problems of the orchestral institution. A project jointly undertaken by the National Association of Schools of Music and the American Symphony Orchestra League will include a look at how musicians view their profession and their training for it; preliminary source material for this project includes Gunther Schuller's celebrated remarks a few years ago at Tanglewood when he warned aspiring professionals not to be corrupted by the cynicism, apathy, and disaffection of those already in the ranks.

No doubt there are musicians in every orchestra who display negative attitudes and behavior. We find such persons in every walk of life and would find them in any collection of 100 individuals. Some arrive in an orchestra unhappy by nature, others may become so over decades of professional activity.

For many years low pay, poor working conditions, job insecurity, exploitation and overwork, subjugation to tyrannical conductors and managers explained musician disgruntlement. Although there are many orchestras still fighting these problems, others now earn decent wages, have excellent touring and working conditions, and perform for respectful and tactful conductors. These improvements haven't necessarily brought happiness.

Some of the additional problems cited below, which overlap and interlock, are developed at length in Dr. David Coplan's research survey of 1981 on the professional problems of symphony and opera musicians, a copy of which is in the possession of each ICSOM orchestra.

**Anonymity.** Even in the most famous orchestras few members receive individual recognition, nothing like that accorded conductors. Tutti players are eclipsed by, and may come to resent, the more famous and better-paid principals. Intra-orchestra inequities and rivalries are common.

**Subordination.** Orchestra players, managed professionally and subjugated musically, suffer a decided lack of autonomy, playing music written, selected, and interpreted by someone else, often participating in performances that are mediocre or worse. Despite their expertise and experience, orchestra musicians are allowed little input into the artistic and administrative decisions that affect their professional lives. Problems with conductors and managers rank high among musicians' concerns.

**Training deficiencies.** Music schools and conservatories prepare instrumentalists as though they will be soloists; orchestra playing is looked upon as an inferior vocation. Divisiveness and animosity on campus between educators and performers and musicologists provides a model for professional life. The orchestra musician rarely gets a well-rounded education in music theory and history or a broad general education that helps

*(Continued on Next Page)*

**MUSICIAN DISCONTENT** (Continued from Page 3)

him relate his profession and art to the rest of life. Personal and social development is often sacrificed during early years of intensive musical training.

**Public apathy.** A small percentage of the total population has any interest in the arts, classical music, or the symphony orchestra. A large segment of society seems to regard our activity as elitist, irrelevant, and peripheral in social value. Musicians may also feel that they and their art are unappreciated when audience members are noisy and inattentive.

**Constant criticism.** The margin for error in our art is small indeed, and we are constantly scrutinized and criticized by conductors, journalists, audiences, our colleagues, and ourselves. We are trained to find fault, and when high standards are not attained by ourselves or our colleagues, disappointment and frustration set in.

**Preoccupation with detail.** Attention to the minutest detail is indispensable in the pursuit of excellence, but it is easy to lose the joy of music-making in anxiously striving for precision. Recording reinforces this mentality. It is easy to become preoccupied with the details in one part, lose any overview of the entire musical context, and become assembly-line practitioners, turning out notes faster or slower, louder or softer, higher or lower, placing them dispassionately on other spectra.

**Entrapment.** Limited opportunity for advancement within an orchestra or to another orchestra can lead to a negative and enforced stability and stagnation. A sense of economic entrapment occurs with the realization that earning power is not likely to increase significantly over the course of an orchestra career. Entry level salary does not differ substantially from that of senior members. Mobility is maintained only by sacrificing the rewards of settling down.

**Stress and other health hazards.** The pressure to deliver error-free performance on difficult musical instruments while having only partial control over the artistic situation makes the profession of orchestral musician one of the most stressful, an assertion confirmed by several scientific studies. Long periods of such stress can cause serious fatigue problems. Orchestra musicians are also exposed to high sound volume levels which can be painful and even lead to some hearing loss. Stage fright is a reality. Physical ailments, especially hand and arm problems, can arise from long years of playing certain instruments.

**Atypical schedules.** Musicians work while others play. Not

following a 9 to 5 schedule can be a plus, but it can also play havoc with social life. Musical commitments may leave little time for activities outside music.

**Management-Labor woes.** An historical legacy from the early sixties, reflex militance has become entrenched and adversarial relationships among musicians and managements perpetuated and intensified. Preoccupation with extramusical concerns about policies, procedures, and contract violations can be draining.

**Saturation.** In repeating a limited repertoire over many years, even masterpieces may lose their special appeal. Familiarity breeds a certain contempt, especially if it's familiarity only with a particular set of notes and not the total work of art.

Some solutions over and above better pay and working conditions have helped alleviate some of these problems: equitable rotation of the work load; revolving seating to replace hierarchical seating; chamber music programs featuring orchestra musicians; committees to facilitate greater interaction of musicians, conductors, managers, and trustees; publicity featuring the orchestra rather than the conductor.

Still, that list of professional problems is imposing. Small wonder one of my colleagues, spotting a young student carrying a violin case down the street, called out, "Turn back before it's too late!"

Yet, even with having to cope with such problems, even if some musicians do show considerable disaffection, even if some through years of militance necessary to improve their lot in life may have lost the ability to deal with others in any other way, are the vast majority of orchestra musicians really jaded, embittered, disenchanted, cynical, apathetic, unreasonably belligerent? Have we through years of professional activity lost touch with the values that led us to our art in the first place? Is negativism so pervasive that accusations of it accurately and fairly characterize our constituency?

Surface day-to-day grumbling should not be mistaken for fundamental unhappiness. Erich Leinsdorf is perceptive in stating that "even behind the most veteran musician there is still the enthusiastic youngster; all you have to do is scratch the surface and whatever veneer of blasé that might appear to be there comes off very easily." The opportunity to perform with excellence the world's great symphonic and operatic masterpieces is granted to few in this life. Such activity affords us a profound satisfaction denied to many in other fields. *Tom Hall*

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