

Senza Sordino

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THE AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN ORCHESTRA: A Comparative Study—Part 2

By David Sternbach

My last article dealt broadly with issues of benefits and working conditions in European ensembles; I would like to start this article by discussing audition procedures.

Ads for openings are placed in prominent musicians' journals, describing the jobs in full, and in Germany, offering, in a brief code, the level of status and pay-scales established in the government financial system for that orchestra. (The Berlin Philharmonic is rated at the highest salary level in Germany, while spa orchestras and police bands lie somewhere at the other end.) An orchestra committee selects contestants from their letters, evaluating past experience as a strong factor; the more important the orchestra, the more experience expected. However, there are so many orchestras and opera houses, at so many levels, a player from the conservatory is assured of being invited, even with little or no experience, to some audition somewhere. Musicians obtaining positions then may proceed to better orchestras, as their talent will take them.

Audition Procedures

Auditions are handled by orchestra committees, conductors being most usually discernable by their absence and non-involvement. Not everywhere. If, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic picks a player but Karajan says no, they can in theory override his veto but probably will not. This occurs rarely.

In addition to the committee, in the West Berlin Opera any orchestra member may attend auditions, so perhaps one might face an audition there with 60 or even 70 musicians attending.

Travel expenses are paid within the country. At the audition, players pick their audition sequence from numbers in a hat. Each plays completely through, with piano accompaniment, a concerto of his choice. In a second round he plays the announced contest concerto. In Denmark, clarinetists are asked to play the entire Carl Nielsen and Mozart concerto. Some eliminations may now take place, and in the third (or fourth) rounds, sight reading, either material composed specially, or more generally known excerpts, is presented.

At the end of the day in nearly every case, a decision is reached and announced. The new player may then be asked to play a short trial period with the orchestra, and if all works out well, the player then proceeds through the longer trial period (6 months or as long as two years). Auditions can occur any time during the year, there being no special audition season.

Ethics in Audition Procedures

In many places, auditions are held behind a screen. In Denmark, no committee member may offer commendations on a competitor; if directly asked, members may only reply that a contestant is their student. Period. There is little evidence of manipulation of these procedures.

The idea behind this time-consuming audition process has been explained to me at great length, and deserves presentation here. *Europeans believe the purpose of an audition is to discover the best possible musician for the job and specifically not the best audition-taker.* It is understood that once past the first few minutes of initial nervousness, a very fine player may be revealed. They

simply do not want to risk passing up such a player. The American system of a brief, one-shot ten or fifteen minute appearance seems to them less likely to uncover what they are seeking. Certainly, they say, a case can be made for such a procedure as the European one being far more likely to reveal a player's tuning, ability to lead on a phrase, respond in turn to an accompaniment, and to develop in a convincing way a musical wholeness. While excerpts of course can show much, they argue, there are many shadings and nuances essential to ensemble performance which may not be uncovered by performance of brief excerpts taken from their contexts, learned perhaps mechanically. A trial period is essential.

The Conductor's Role

Why are conductors so rarely involved in auditions. For one thing, many are themselves engaged by the orchestra members. But the European musicians' point runs deeper, too. Conductors have heavy responsibilities in the selection and preparation of works, and of soloists—often prior rehearsals with soloists. They ought, rightly, to be free of as many administrative tasks as possible to carry on the kind of high level musical leadership orchestras expect.

Implicit, argue the Europeans, in this arrangement, is the concept that selection of colleagues must be the orchestra's responsibility. This falls in the area of the ensemble's responsibility to be fully prepared to carry out the conductor's musical ideas. The conductor ought no more be involved in auditions than, for example, to advise on, or select for individual players, their practice material. This is an interesting logic and perhaps explains the meticulousness and pride with which orchestras go about selecting new members. It is not intended to be unfair to conductors, who, if they desire to see orchestras mold themselves in their image, need only rise to greater heights of musical insight and communicate it to their orchestras. In all fairness, one can legitimately ask if this is not perhaps a liberating policy for conductors as well as orchestras.

Civil-Service and Performance Standards

Although this may seem a delicate subject, in fact, this issue turns out to be pretty well defused, really a non-issue. If a player in a European orchestra seems to be slacking, the members of the section get on him a bit, work together in sectionals, work it out amongst themselves. In a certain Swedish orchestra, the week-end free-time drinking exploits of a particular brass section were becoming obvious by the results in Monday and sometimes even Tuesday rehearsals. The problem was solved by the first chair player gently but quite firmly scheduling special pre-rehearsal sectionals at 8:00 A.M. Monday mornings. And heaven help the player who came in anything less than stony-sober and well warmed-up! This rather neatly solved the "Sunday binge" problem.

In fact, ultimately the morale of orchestras, as with individuals, devolves as the result of the kind of musical decisions being made on behalf of the orchestra by management and by the kind of inspiration offered artistically. The problem is the same everywhere;

not enough truly great conductors to go around. My observation, both in Europe and here, made as free from pre-judgement as possible, is that in both our system and the European, people are people, and slacking off can crop up anywhere. But let a really first rate conductor come in, a sincere artist who also treats the players as colleagues and as human beings, and the results will be equally successful anywhere. It is ultimately people who make up a system, except that there are manifestly elements about the European civil-service system which tend to humanize those involved in it, and to perhaps, in the long run, free them from many of the concerns that a competitive society inevitably imposes.

These articles have presented the "bare bones," but one working in European orchestras experiences everyday in depth what cannot briefly be communicated, but is of great value, and I would like to close this article with an invitation to anyone interested in responding to these articles to do so. If you wish, by corresponding directly with me on any of these points, and on any other questions you may have about the European systems, I will respond as well as I can, since I intended these articles to open lines of communication, and perhaps some new lines of thought too.

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ISO-METRICS ARE VICTORS



Photo by Frank Proto

The handsome countenances above are really those of two musicians. On the left is Tom Akins, tympanist with the Indianapolis Symphony and on the right, Ron Arron, violist with the Cincinnati Symphony, barely able to muster a smile after his Fantastiques lost to the Indianapolis ISO-Metrics, 13 to 5. Bush Stadium, Indianapolis, was where the rematch took place. Cincinnati was attempting to retain possession of the "Conquered Cornet," shown above, symbol of victory in what has developed into a pleasant inter-orchestra rivalry.

Playing before an Indianapolis-Wichita doubleheader, the ISO-Metrics took a staggering 13 to 0 lead into the last inning. Spurred on by threats from Wichita Aero ballplayers (the Fantastiques were sharing their dugout) to fumigate the dugout if Cincinnati didn't score, the Fantastiques scored five runs in their last turn at bat to retain some semblance of dignity.

The "Conquered Cornet" has changed hands. As he left a Cincinnati musician was heard to mumble, "maybe it was the long bus ride."

STRESSED MUSICIANS

Reprinted from the New England Medical Journal with permission.

To the Editor: I read with interest the recent letters in the *Journal* pertaining to musical matters (N Engl J Med 292:322 and 705, 1975), and should like to contribute some additional observations. A few years ago I had the opportunity to telemeter electrocardiograms from professional singers, symphony musicians and conductors during actual public performances and observed the frequent occurrence of arrhythmias, including marked tachycardias and, in certain wind players, dramatic Valsalva-like responses. Since physicians may encounter musicians as patients I consider it important for them to be aware of these stresses. Whether or not such stresses are ever harmful seems an individual matter but one that should be considered if the cardiovascular status of a patient is ever in question.

Too often, music making is considered a benign labor of love. It may be, but to the professional it can also be very hard work. For instance, I saw conductors maintain an average increase in heart rate of 89 per cent during performances. The belief that most conductors invariably live to ripe old ages just is not so. In actuality some do and some don't. The average life-span of the 112 conductors indexed in Schonberg's *The Great Conductors*¹ who have died within this century from noncatastrophic causes computes to 71.2 ± 10.1 years — a respectable but hardly remarkable figure.

A study of Tucker et al.² notes that the life expectancy of musicians is 22 per cent under the national average and that coronary disease accounts for almost 5 per cent more deaths than in the general population. These statistics are more sober than might be appreciated at first glance.

San Francisco, CA

STANLEY D. DAVIS, PH.D.

¹ Schonberg HC: The great conductors. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1967

² Tucker A, et al: Electrocardiography and lung function in brass instrument players. Arch Environ Health 23:327-334, 1971

A LETTER FROM YURIKO

In October, 1973, we were shocked by the news of Dave Smiley's untimely death. For new ICSOM members not acquainted with Dave, we repeat that he was a dedicated musician, a violist with the San Francisco Symphony who contributed immeasurably to the development of our organization. Following his death, the David Smiley Memorial Education Fund was originated by friends with the purpose of insuring the musical education of Dave's two talented children.

A lovely letter from Yuriko, Dave's wife, is filled with satisfying news on the progress of both Dan and Mariko. Dan, 19, has just finished his second year at Julliard. He studies with Galamian and recently was fortunate enough, as a substitute, to travel to Japan with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Mariko, 17, is also a violinist and will attend Julliard starting this fall. She will study with Dorothy Pelay.

Dave would have been very proud.

Those orchestra members who so desire, may make contributions to:

THE DAVID SMILEY MEMORIAL EDUCATION FUND
c/o Dr. Gordon Tomkins
5 Eugene St.
Mill Valley, Calif. 94941

GOVERNMENT AID FOR THE ARTS

The Dilemma: A Starvation Budget

By Roger Ruggeri

In the midst of a Sunday morning shower, I got a call from Henry Shaw requesting an article for *Senza Sordino* regarding my activities with the National Endowment for the Arts. As I returned to the bathroom, I mused wryly that my lack of attire was rather appropriate for a call from I.C.S.O.M., because in a sense, I am functioning as an unelected representative of my 15,000 colleagues in American symphony and opera orchestras. Although I am serving on the Planning Section as an individual, I am extremely aware of my tacit responsibility for the greatest good of this country's musicians.

An independent agency of the Federal Government, the National Endowment for the Arts was created in 1965 to encourage, strengthen and preserve the cultural life of the United States by giving grants to worthy organizations and individuals in the arts field. Congruent with the structure of other arts programs, the Music Program consists of a permanent staff and a number of advisory panels, all sagely guided by the Program's Director, Dr. Walter Anderson. In addition to specific area panels, there is a larger group known as the Planning Section, which is composed of the area panel chairmen and a few others, including myself. All the panels vote upon recommendations for matching project grants; these recommendations are further considered by the Presidentially appointed National Council on the Arts and the grant is finally made by the chairman of the Endowment, Nancy Hanks.

The complexity of this year's deliberations precludes any truly comprehensive summary; however, it is possible to make a few general comments. I was impressed by the amount of research and consideration that goes into making a grant. In addition to an exhaustive financial statement and project description that the applying organizations supplies, a grant is not made until an actual on-site visit is made by a team of experts. These evaluators make written reports upon such matters as artistic excellence, financial responsibility and depth of community support. In short, the Endowment's limited funds are spent very carefully.

Of the more than \$11 million which the Music Programs allocated in 1975, more than \$5,500,000 was granted to orchestra projects and more than \$2 million was granted in the field of opera. When representatives of other areas complain that the opera and orchestra receive the major share of the available funding, I reply that they have the largest overhead, employ the most musicians and generally are the focal point of any area's cultural life. The real problem is not that one area or another gets too much financial assistance . . . the real problem is that the Endowment is working with virtually a starvation budget.

The Planning Section devoted a great deal of time this year to the considerations of policy and the establishment of priorities for new concepts. A wide gamut of subjects were discussed: the training of musicians, the preservation of native American music, expanded recognition of "non-establishment" musical arts (generally in the Jazz/Folk/Ethnic category), and the establishment of apprenticeship and residency programs for musicians. Of particular interest to I.C.S.O.M. members was the fact that the problems of recording American orchestras was brought into the conversation. The Endowment does not presently fund recording projects, but I have made a point of recommending that if a project is generally funded by the Endowment, any subsequent recordings should be made by American orchestras. It will also be of interest to know that the Planning Section has shown strong interest in starting a funding category for solo and chamber performances. There are many good ideas and a multitude of potentially worthy applicants . . . again, there is not sufficient funding at this time.

In discussing the root problems of the art of music in America, it would seem that the consensus is that the average citizen is not aware of the contribution of non-commercial music to the quality of his life. It is my personal opinion that we can begin to erode this antipathy toward classical music by encouraging the organizations in which we work to play well planned and publicized concerts for the broadest spectrum of people. Actually, I suspect that the American people are not as apathetic about culture in general and classical music in particular as we might think. If those who are interested in cultural activities would let their legislators know that they are concerned with the current levels of government spending in this area, we would begin to see a further blossoming of America's cultural life.

Our elected representatives in the Senate and Congress approve appropriations largely to the extent that they feel supported by their constituency. Thus, the appropriations are a rough barometer of the perceived interest of the people. In 1975, the appropriation for defense was nearly \$91 billion, that of the Office of Education was over \$6 billion, the National Endowment for the Arts received nearly \$75 million and the Music Program had not quite \$12 million. These are astronomic figures; let me reduce them to more comprehensible levels. If we divide these budgets by the number of seconds in a year (31,536,000), we find how much each agency has to spend per second: the Department of Defense has \$2,884.77, the Office of Education has \$190.26, the National Endowment for the Arts has \$2.37, and the Music Program has a paltry 37c per second to spend.

When a government agency is authorized, it is given a ceiling for its appropriation in each fiscal year. The National Endowment for the Arts has *never* been given its full appropriation. In Fiscal Year 1976, it has been authorized for \$126 million. President Ford has requested \$82 million and there is real concern that this request will be cut still further.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior voted out only 79.5 million dollars for the National Endowment for 1976. If the final figure is to be higher, we will have to convince Senators by letter or telegram.

ICSOM urges that you send letters or telegrams to:

Your Senator's name _____
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Sir:
 As a concerned U.S. Citizen and a member of the _____,
 the future of the Arts in America is important to me. Thus, I urge
 that you support a full appropriation of 126 million to the
 National Endowment for the Arts in Fiscal Year 1976.
 Thank you,

SIGNATURE _____

ADDRESS _____

This same letter can also be sent to:
 The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
 Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C. 20510

OREGON CONTRACT SETTLED. GROWTH CONTINUES

Negotiations for a new contract covering members of the Oregon Symphony Orchestra have been completed. The contract was ratified by the Orchestra on May 29, 39 to 6 (there are 80 members in the Orchestra). Due to the uncertainty of the economy, the agreement is for one year. Salient provisions follow:

Wage increase of 10%, across-the-board, based on individual contracts.

Base scale increase:

Sideman \$29.50 to \$32.50 per service

Principal \$42.50 to \$46.75 per service

Increase in season length from 32 to 34 weeks.

Per service players' guarantee increased from 110 to 120 services.

Weekly players perform a minimum of 21 additional services, however, preliminary scheduling indicates they will probably play twice that many.

A most significant gain was establishment of an employer-paid Health and Welfare Plan (Blue Cross) for the playing season months of October through April, with the same coverage available to those musicians wishing to continue it at their own expense for the balance of the year via payroll deduction.

The AFM-EPW (pension) contribution was increased from 3% to 4%.

Out of town meal allowance increased from \$10.50 to \$12.50 per day (actual cost of room also paid).

Minimum compensation per out-of-town service increased 15% to \$46.00 sideman; \$69.00 principal.

Portal-to-portal pay (on sliding mileage scale) increased 10%.

The Orchestra Committee will function as both an artistic advisory committee and be consulted on tour scheduling and conditions. Regular meeting times are specified.

Improvement was made in scheduling back-to-back youth concerts away from subscription-concert days, a major complaint by musicians.

Extensive audition procedures are now set forth, including a complete folder of audition material for each instrument

being available year-round for examination at the Main Branch of the Public Library.

Negotiations were expedited by management's opening its records to the negotiators. It may be of interest to other metropolitan orchestras that our total budget has gone from \$527,000 during the last year of the prior contract (1971-72) to more than \$900,000 projected for next year (1975-76). During that same time the sustaining fund (local contributions) will have grown 77%. In a commitment to growth, management has budgeted the 1975-76 season based on sell-outs for all services and the second consecutive yearly ticket price increase. We are fortunate that audience response to the Orchestra has produced sell-outs for the past two years on the Monday/Tuesday subscription series, pops series, family concerts, youth concerts and Salem series.

After the negative report submitted by the Oregon Symphony three years ago following a six-week strike, it would be no more than fair to acknowledge the actions of Maestro Lawrence Smith and Manager David Hyslop in dealing with the musicians and the Union as "partners in the arts," rather than just applying the rhetoric. We hope this will continue.

Negotiations were carried out by Bob Jones and Patricia Miller with able assistance from orchestra committee members John Richards, Cherrie Ann Egbers, Audrey May and Stephanie McDougal.

REP. FRED RICHMOND, HAL DAVIS TO ADDRESS ICSOM PARLAY

Representative Fred Richmond, D. N.Y., has accepted an invitation to appear as a guest speaker at the ICSOM conference to be held in Indianapolis this month. Representative Richmond is sponsoring a unique Arts and Humanities bill, H.R. 8274, passage of which could result in a dramatic increase in funds available to arts organizations.

President Hal Davis will also be present to address the delegation on Federation efforts on behalf of Government support for the Arts. Recently an authorization for 126 million dollars for the Arts was slashed to 79.5 million by the House Subcommittee on the Interior. It is a setback that will take extra effort to overcome.

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Frederick Zenone, National Symphony
2237 Williams Ave., Vienna, Va. 22180, Phone: (703) 560-1320

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SOUTHERN ORCHESTRAS

Crawford Best, New Orleans Symphony
1809 Mason Smith Ave., Metairie, La. 70007, Phone: (504) 887-0215

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5258 Boulevard Pl., Indianapolis, Ind. 46208, Phone: (317) 251-2566
Chicago Lyric Opera, Chicago Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Minnesota Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony.

WESTERN ORCHESTRAS

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415 Garfield St., Denver, Colo. 80206, Phone: (303) 388-1333
Denver Symphony, Honolulu Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Oregon Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, San Diego Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony.

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41 Nichol Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, Phone: (204) 257-0098
Montreal Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony.

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