

Senza Sordino

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The NSO's Northern Exposure

Last October, the National Symphony Orchestra embarked on a two-week trip to Alaska. The entire orchestra of 102 musicians spent seven days in Anchorage and four in Fairbanks; because of the size of the stage and the cargo plane (!), only two-thirds of the orchestra could go to Juneau, the state capitol.

This was our first residency, with orchestra members becoming a real presence in each community—far beyond the usual formal evening concerts of a standard tour. Besides major evening concerts, our activities included formal evening chamber music concerts, young people's concerts, and a host of optional outreach activities using small groups or individual musicians.

Our management had requested that an orchestra musician accompany them on a preliminary trip to assist in planning for the residency. As an orchestra committee member who is very active in education and outreach, I was asked by the committee to go on the advance trip. So, in March, a management team and I spent a week in Alaska, meeting with representatives of local arts councils, symphonies and youth symphonies, school administrators, and music teachers. At these meetings, I presented ideas for projects that had been suggested by my orchestra colleagues.

Ideas evolved into planned activities. Although some musicians had misgivings, more than half of the orchestra members chose to participate in the extra activities. Musicians signed up for various categories of outreach, thus deciding individually whether and how much to participate. A committee of musicians and management chose the programs, and virtually everyone who wanted to participate was able to. We do many outreach activities in Washington, as the NSO has extensive chamber music and educational programs. We simply adopted the fee schedule from our local programs as a basis for remuneration for the optional performances in Alaska.

Outreach activities that took place in all three cities included coaching and sectionals at every level in the schools and the youth orchestra; in-school concerts by small ensembles, for which we all wore red NSO/Kennedy Center sweatshirts; masterclasses at the high school and university level; preconcert lectures and meet-the-performer forums; Alexander Technique classes; jazz lectures; seminars for music teachers; private and group lessons; and a great deal of mentoring.

Perhaps the most dramatic events, and certainly the most experimental, were the "cultural exchange runouts" by four chamber music ensembles to smaller outlying communities, including Kodiak, Dillingham, Naknek, Homer, and Barrow, a place that is inhabited by a few hardy people and many large polar bears. The concept of the cultural exchange runout was in a constant state of evolution, as local arts councils and school music teachers assembled their wish lists of what they wanted to happen during the various two-day excursions. Each runout was unique, and the whole process seemed to have a life of its own. The cultural exchange runouts included a full-length evening concert, in-school concerts, and coaching of school instrumentalists, and gave us opportunities to learn about native culture, music, and dance. For example, a wind and percussion ensemble gave an evening performance in the new, state-of-the-art concert facility in Kodiak and spent two days in local schools. The musicians were served a traditional native/Russian meal in the Russian Orthodox church. They then visited a newly-built *barrabara*—a traditional, in-ground native structure—where they learned about the Alutiqs' struggle to preserve their culture; and were taught, and performed together, the Kayak Dance!

The NSO received an outpouring of warmth in every city. Members of each section of the Fairbanks Symphony hosted

potlatches (feasts) in their homes for their counterparts in the NSO, so that local and visiting colleagues could get together for great food, socializing, shoptalk, the trying of mouthpieces, etc.

The Anchorage Youth Symphony provided a potluck for the entire orchestra in conjunction with an open reading rehearsal of the combined NSO and Youth Symphony. The Alaska Performing Arts Center in Anchorage has a very fine large concert hall, and the students seemed genuinely thrilled to participate in filling it with so much sound. Our Young People's Concerts in Anchorage featured a local high school horn player, chosen by taped audition, as soloist. A small group of promising music students selected during

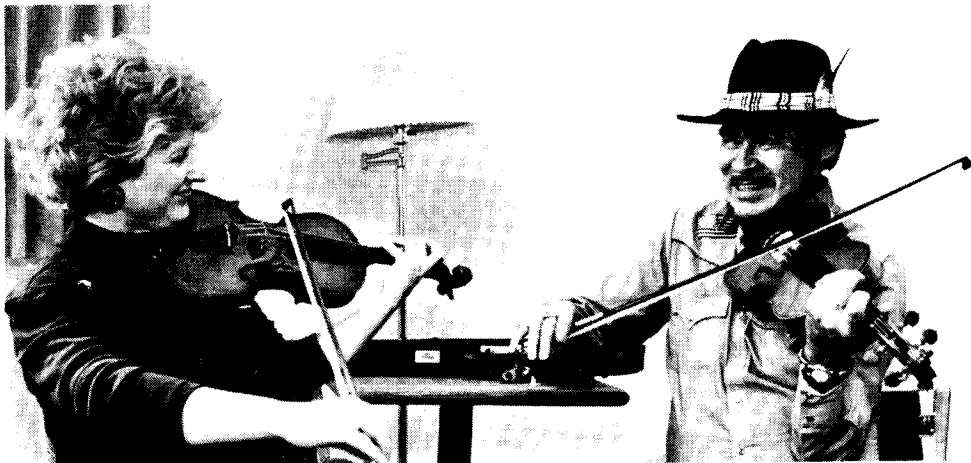


photo by Joan Marcus

NSO violinist (and fiddler) Paula Sisson Akbar jams with leading Athabaskan fiddler Bill Stevens in Fairbanks.

the residency and through taped auditions will participate in three weeks of training activities, including the NSO's summer youth chamber music program, at the Kennedy Center. NSO members have sent reeds, music, and other supplies and advice back to students in Alaska, so the connection continues.

In Anchorage, the Anchorage Festival Chorus and the NSO were joined by the Kamchatka Choir from eastern Russia for a stunning performance of *Alexander Nevsky*. Perhaps the most touching musical moment of the tour was the performance of the beautiful Alaska *Flag Song* by the Anchorage Festival Chorus, the Kamchatka Choir, the NSO (Rostropovich conducting), and the entire audience. (The *Flag Song* had been written out phonetically in the Cyrillic alphabet so that the Kamchatka Choir could read it!) The reception following this concert was a colorful multicultural event, with native dancers and drummers, Russian and Alaskan chorus members, audience members, and NSO musicians from the Lower 48 all getting acquainted and having a great time.

The issue of accessibility was given major attention on this trip. Many special arrangements were made for children with hearing loss or other disabilities. The Kennedy Center's Director

of Accessibility and a professional sign language interpreter travelled with us for the entire tour and were an integral part of the residency. All concerts were signed. At one concert, hearing-impaired children were given balloons to hold in order to feel the vibrations of the music.

Our Alaska residency was a truly gratifying experience, with much personal warmth exchanged and many strong bonds formed. It was a unique opportunity for the musicians of the NSO to experience our individual importance, as well as our collective impact on the musical community of Alaska. Many of us in the orchestra also felt a new sense of our own identity as distinct from that of our highly visible music director. It goes without saying that the singular natural beauty of Alaska, as epitomized by the view from our plane of Mt. Denali rising up out of the clouds, added yet another dimension to our experience. It was such a successful venture that American residencies seem sure to continue; a site for the next residency is already under consideration!

*Linda Harwell, bassoonist
NSO Orchestra Committee Member*



Left to right: NSO trombonists Matt Guilford, John Huling, and Jim Kraft with The Barrow Dancers

photo by Joan Marcus

The Orchestra Librarian

Orchestra librarians recently surveyed as to what they consider to be the most important part of their job responded almost unanimously, "To have the right music in the right place at the right time!" As to how they view their role in the orchestra, they replied emphatically, "As musicians!"

While these answers may seem obvious, less evident is the highly involved process which precedes putting music on the stands, as well as the musical knowledge, expertise, and background of the librarian who puts it there. One librarian recalled an incident from a tour in Leningrad. "There was a forty-five-minute break between the rehearsal and the concert. The conductor called me in to explain changes he wanted; passages had to be moved between woodwind parts. I had approximately half an hour to do this, standing working at the music trunk in a virtually non-existent backstage area, while 100 players talked, tuned, and crowded around literally at my elbows."

This was certainly an occasion with no room for error; not only did the librarian have to find space on the pages to insert the changes, but had to transpose the parts accurately, notate them in the correct clefs, and explain the changes to the players involved, as there would be no rehearsal. This librarian's musical expertise was critical and very much "on stage" at that performance.

Virtually all major orchestra librarians begin their musical training as performers. While in the past it was not unusual for orchestra members to retire into the library from the ranks of performers, it is much more common today for young musicians to acquire the training and vast working knowledge required and choose the profession as a first career pursuit. In many orchestras, the librarians are now members of the bargaining unit, and are frequently active participants in orchestra committees and negotiations.

Many library functions are clear to players: bowing string parts, inserting conductors' markings, providing pertinent information for current and upcoming programs, and, of course, putting music on the stands. Less apparent is the background work required. A tremendous amount of information and communication must be coordinated between publishers (including the negotiation and securing of quality parts and timely deliveries), conductors (determining marking and edition requirements), and personnel managers (providing accurate instrumentations, stage setups, and string section sizes). In addition, orchestra librarians are frequently called upon to provide a variety of miscellaneous services to orchestra members and the community: helping locate pieces, providing lost parts, and answering questions. And of course, there is the universal frustration of librarians: dealing with last-minute program changes.

The librarian must also address the important issue of the condition of parts, as discussed by Tom Hall, former Chicago Symphony ICSOM Delegate ("Music to Your Ears," *Senza Sordino*, December 1990), who called attention to the librarians' importance as a music review committee, representing the needs of players to publishers and management.

There are a variety of reasons why parts are sometimes below standard. Many parts purchased for orchestral use today are reprints of earlier editions. Reprint publishers use the best possible source material, but find occasionally that a poor manuscript or

substandard part is all that is available. Steps are being taken to clean up and improve reprinted material; vast lists of corrections have been provided to publishers by members of the Major Orchestra Librarians' Association (see sidebar). Rental materials pose a different set of problems. In large orchestras especially, music is generally rented only if not available for purchase; therefore, rental pieces are primarily copyrighted works or editions. Librarians are limited by the material the rental houses make available. Increased communication between librarians and rental agents has led to improvement in some materials. Publishers are becoming more aware of inherent problems and some have responded with fee adjustments for inadequate parts. Most rental houses are making a pronounced effort to reserve specific sets for major orchestra use only.

The formation of MOLA has been invaluable in improving orchestra libraries in the United States and Canada. The organization is using its collective voice to work with publishers to improve the condition of parts. MOLA recently published a brochure entitled, "The Orchestra Librarian: A Career Introduction" and is in the process of publishing guidelines for music preparation. Information shared between libraries has greatly improved efficiency, as has the computerization of library records. OLIS (Orchestra Library Information Service) was the brainchild of Boston Symphony librarian Marshall Burlingame, who developed a comprehensive card catalogue of more than 4000 pieces. Today, OLIS is an on-line system tying together repertoire, performance history, personnel needs, and a wealth of related information, thus bringing the orchestra library into the twenty-first century.

Players provide an invaluable contribution to the library in the form of constructive feedback. In order to serve their colleagues optimally, librarians need to know when problem-solving has been effective and what difficulties still exist with parts.

*Joann McCollum, Principal Librarian
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra*

What is MOLA?

The Major Orchestra Librarians' Association was organized in 1982 by a consortium of three librarians; today there are approximately sixty member orchestras. Between annual meetings in alternating host cities, members keep in contact through the quarterly publication *Marcato*. MOLA's many contributions include the preparation of extensive lists of *errata* (spearheaded by the efforts of the Philadelphia Orchestra Library) and the Orchestra Repertoire Reports, now published by the League. The organization has recently expanded its scope to include international members.

For more information, contact Philadelphia Orchestra librarian Clinton Nieweg, 1992-93 MOLA President.

Worth Noting

- In October, the ICSOM media committee met in New York City with representatives of the phonograph industry. The current agreement expires January 31, 1993. A new agreement was negotiated and sent for ratification to those musicians and orchestra members who, by virtue of the amount of their recording activity, meet voting eligibility requirements.
- In November, in response to an American Symphony Orchestra League initiative concerning the relations between orchestra musicians and their boards and managements, ICSOM chairperson Brad Buckley, chairperson emeritus Frederick Zenone, president David Angus, and ROPA president Diane Merrill met in Chicago with managers Henry Fogel (Chicago Symphony) and Deborah Borda (New York Philharmonic), and with Neil Williams, a vice-chairman of the League.
- ICSOM chairperson Brad Buckley attended the IEB meeting in Las Vegas on December 6 to discuss matters affecting symphony orchestras and to obtain funding for an internal organizing program for orchestras. This request for funding was in accordance with a resolution passed at the 1992 ICSOM conference.
- In January, the ICSOM media committee will meet with symphony managers to negotiate a new symphonic audio/visual (television) agreement.
- Stay tuned for the announcement of ICSOM's first venture into book publishing!

Receiving Her Due...



photo by Ken Ishii

ICSOM treasurer Carolyn Parks smiles in anticipation of the timely remittance of dues by member orchestras. Each orchestra should have received a bill for annual dues, calculated according to minimum salary and number of players in the orchestra. What a small price to pay to have a national organization working for you!

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