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MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY  
EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

Journal of the  
Music & Entertainment Industry  
Educators Association

Volume 8, Number 1  
(2008)

Bruce Ronkin, Editor  
Northeastern University

Published with Support  
from



MIKE CURB COLLEGE of  
ENTERTAINMENT and MUSIC BUSINESS

**BELMONT**  
UNIVERSITY

# Keeping Classical Music Alive: Strategies of Three Orchestral Titans

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*The MEIEA Journal occasionally features outstanding student papers. This undergraduate research paper was written by Mary Jarchow, a 2008 graduate of Berklee College of Music.*

Some of the world's orchestras are on the vanguard, forging new ground as they develop their organizations, establish commitments to their communities, and generate receptive relationships with individual supporters. In our current strained economy the classical music world has experienced a drop in support from local communities on many levels, and traditional methods of sustaining and strengthening support are no longer consistently dependable. Leading orchestras have cultivated ways to survive and maintain vital support, have seen steady growth in terms of monetary and in-kind support, and have acquired ways to stimulate true interest and involvement from local community members of all ages.

Three comprehensive organizations have been chosen to illustrate how their efforts have resulted in orchestras that are not only enduring but also thriving with music that is alive and inspiring to their patrons. These three organizations are the Boston Symphony Orchestra of the United States, the London Symphony Orchestra of the United Kingdom, and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra from Australia. Each of these organizations (and others) have implemented new practices such as creating a brand, increasing connections with their audiences, adding consistency and variety to their programs, expanding their educational commitments, cultivating new donors in innovative ways, and associating their product to the digital movement.

The first season of the Boston Symphony Orchestra commenced in 1881 with the comprehensive support of an American Civil War veteran, Henry Lee Higginson, who donated over \$1 million over the course of thirty-seven years (BSO.org). Higginson helped to create its mission of being "dedicated to the making of music consonant with the highest aspirations of musical art, creating performance, and providing educational and

training programs at the highest level of excellence” (BSO.org). Today, the BSO’s performances have swelled to over 250 concerts per year, and the organization has grown to parent the Boston Pops and Tanglewood, its innovative music education center.

Established in 1904, the London Symphony Orchestra was the first independent orchestra in the U.K. to be solely owned by the musicians and is therefore self-governing. This position has made listener convenience a mission and a reality, offering nearly eighty concerts at the Barbican Centre in London and forty-five additional performances on tour. The LSO aspires to “make the highest quality music accessible to the widest possible audiences through [its] international concert performance, recordings on LSO Live, and through LSO Discovery, [its] music education and community program” (LSO.co.uk).

A central and leading element of Western Australia’s music culture, the West Australian Symphony Orchestra formed in 1928 with a simple goal, “to touch souls and enrich lives through music” (WASO.com.au). The WASO has over 170 annual concerts, and performs with other local arts companies and festivals. It also hosts three main educational programs tailored to accommodate a range of age groups and interests.

Experiencing some drastic changes in the business, traditions, and the audience, progressive affiliates of the music industry have helped to break trails and evolve with the trends. The current struggling U.S. economy is not surprisingly weighing heavily against the arts community around the world. Donors, who were once highly valued and reliable for generous support season after season, are now faced with having less money to contribute, and are confronting the decision to donate to either the arts or to science and humanitarian aid.

In most cases, it is no longer just about “art for arts sake,” but coming to a compromise with the patrons and finding creative ways to connect with the audience. To start the shift, many arts organizations have begun by looking inward at their images projected toward their communities, and then reconstructing their brands by performing a simple or serious overhaul.

The BSO has created quite a name for itself, and an equally impressive brand. One of the major contributing factors to the BSO’s success is generated in-house via its website. Created in 1996, BSO.org attracts close to 5.5 million visits annually, generating nearly \$10 million of income per year, a mature feature helping the BSO enjoy a 90% subscriber renewal

rate (BSO.org). Through the website, the organization maintains a youthful vitality, while staying rooted in tradition and committed to longtime supporters. Even the colors, applied to every page, create a chic yet sophisticated harmony, reflecting the soft lighting and elegant ambiance of Symphony Hall itself.

Before accomplishing the eye-catching and user-friendly website, the BSO reached out for guidance to restructure its brand. It sought assistance from a local firm, Sametz Blackstone Associates. The president of the firm, Roger Sametz, found ways to “create individual yet cohesive styles” for the three components of the organization: the BSO, the Boston Pops, and the Tanglewood Music Center. From an article in *Symphony* magazine titled “Who We Are,” by Peter Panepento, Sametz expressed the importance of having a working brand represent an organization such as the BSO. “You’re not going to get the loyalty unless people know what you are,” Sametz said identifying the need to have a clear, appealing, and consistent brand to relate to current and prospective benefactors.

In the same article Panepento offered an example of how simple changes to another organization’s brand, the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra, revamped representation within its community, garnering more awareness and support. The executive director, Barbara Zach, recognized its brand was communicating, “This is what we have to offer,” but in order to be a true asset to its community, the orchestra should instead be saying, “What can we do for you?” This realization led to a simple, almost unidentifiable change in the orchestra’s name, from Lincoln Symphony Orchestra, to Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra. This modification filtered through a few other aspects of its image and resulted in a more successful relationship with patrons, including an “increase [in] subscription sales,” for 2007, “by 28 percent—a significant jump.”

Sustainability of an orchestra largely depends on how well it relates to, and gratifies, its audience members. It’s not to be forgotten that the baby boom generation, representing a large portion of supporters of classical concerts today, is followed by later (and smaller) generations who seek out a wider array of musical options. Encouraging patrons to commit their support to their greater community has become an integral part of running a successful orchestra.

Fortunately, interest in classical music is being cultivated among young professionals. A 2006 *New York Times* article reported the number of middle-aged listeners and supporters is steadily rising for reasons

such as “changes in taste, a desire to expand their musical experiences, [or] a lack of interest in current pop [music]” (NYTimes.com). While this may contribute to the growth of a younger audience, a major factor for overall audience development is no accident: orchestras are responding to their audience’s needs, including offering creative solutions to selling more tickets, and forging new methods to appeal to current and prospective donors.

Jacob Hale Russell, a writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, brought this issue to the surface in 2006 in an article appropriately titled, “Hunger vs. the Arts.” Russell identified how the BSO was currently tackling these issues and tailoring its methods of fundraising by recruiting “younger board members who...can solicit donations from within their own circles,” helping to engage them in the social offerings of their local symphony orchestra. To encourage interest and support across the board, the BSO presents celebrities from the pop music scene to “up the glamour factor at benefits,” and is also formulating its brand to assimilate with greater Boston’s future community goals by showing that it can “buttress the city’s economic expansion.”

Routinely courting its audience, the WASO makes a point to perform both classical and contemporary music throughout its seasons, collaborating with pop musicians from around the world and commissioning original compositions from Australia’s top composers (ARTSHUB.com). These alliances satisfy the audience’s expectations for fresh and contemporary performances and attract younger audience members. Musical partnerships like these also help dispel possible perceptions of a classical orchestra’s sophisticated and stuffy attitudes.

Unique ticket or subscription package deals offer another opportunity to help achieve sold out seasons. David Snead suggests in the article, “Years After” in *Symphony* magazine, that the old dependable method of relying on an audience of season subscription holders to attend concerts no matter what’s on the program is no longer dependable. These conventional methods, supported by Danny Newman’s book *Subscribe Now!*, have largely become passé. In order to appeal to a wider array of patrons, Snead suggests offering “shorter series or even Create-Your-Own series that allow customers to choose their own mix of concerts,” thus acknowledging the individual differences and tastes the audience represents. Similar to the Starbucks method of allowing customers to create their own drinks, it presents pre-consumed satisfaction.

Eager to encourage interest from a wider array of patrons, the WASO offers several avenues for involvement and support—and appealing benefits for doing so. It has established the create-your own packages, where patrons select four or more concerts from the season to create their own series. They receive a twenty percent discount as an added incentive. As another ticket subscription benefit, it offers a prize incentive for buying a full series subscription or a create-your-own package, enabling a patron to win a trip for two to London with Emirates, one of the WASO’s major benefactors. The WASO also offers group discounts and benefits.

Royally enhancing its brand, the London Symphony Orchestra connects to its audience through a user-friendly website. From its clean and simply designed site, emerges effortless service and entertainment that is somewhat advanced in the orchestral world of websites. By clicking on “2008/09 season overview” the viewer finds several enticing series offers structured around distinctive themes. The web pages include a video (which requires no downloading or extra steps beyond clicking “play”) representing each series. The videos are friendly, artistic, and educational, with short interviews with musicians from the LSO, bits of history, and music included in the series. This method reflects innovation in that the site provides an easy interactive connection to its patrons and emphasizes the wide range of concert selections and ticket packages.

In addition to pulling in a larger and more diverse audience, this concept offers the orchestra another benefit. Accommodating a wider audience with an array of musical preferences means that the orchestra itself gets to greatly diversify its programs and explore pieces beyond the traditional classical repertoire. Recently hired by the Baltimore Symphony as the first female conductor of a major orchestra in America, Marin Alsop is pushing current unspoken boundaries in her industry as a promoter of new music. In an article by Alex Ross in the *New Yorker* (January 7, 2008), Ross enlightened his readers as to how Alsop is leading the Baltimore Symphony to new heights, and out of its recent financial struggle, by performing concerts consisting of new and classical music. Previously working for the Colorado Symphony in a comparable mode, she showed what Ross described as, a “knack for charming both players and audiences into enjoying music that they think they won’t like.” By “simply trying to treat all music the same,” Alsop attempts to translate her love and convictions for classical and new music to the orchestral musicians and the audience. There is a balance that needs to take hold between performing classical

pieces, programming works by contemporary composers, and also crossing over into other current popular genres, thus widening an orchestra's local influence.

A crucial way for an orchestra to expand its reach and welcome more patrons is to help educate its audience about music. To some, music can seem like a daunting language—difficult to comprehend or follow. By offering educational programs, audience members will come to feel more comfortable at a performance, will likely appreciate the music and musicians further, and may even attend concerts performing more abstract pieces. Education is also vital for cultivating younger audience members.

Noted violinist and conductor (and professor at the Manhattan School of Music in New York) Pinchas Zukerman believes outreach programs for the youth are now more important than ever. In an interview with the *Denver Post* in November of 2007, Zukerman discussed how efforts to revitalize classical music must involve more than training young performers who will grow to have a natural love for music. Efforts must also include shaping awareness of, and appreciation for, the beauty of classical music in young listeners (MacMillan). Music education programs involving younger generations make the appeal to a wider audience and open doors for donations and partnerships that otherwise would not exist. A crucial way to maintain a respected reputation within an organization's community is by maintaining a youth education program that is directly run and influenced by orchestra members. This educational component is an integral part of the BSO, the LSO, and the WASO.

Created by the BSO in the 1930s, the Tanglewood Music Center (TMC) has become a model youth music education program. Edwin Barker, currently the Chair of Tanglewood's Instrumental and Orchestral Studies, notes, "The presence of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its artistic resources enables students to learn the art and craft of orchestral performance with master teacher-performers in orchestral and master class settings" (Tanglewood.org). Musicians from the BSO who are active during the summer seasons at TMC help to guide and challenge students in instrumental and vocal studies, composition, and conducting. Students endure vigorous training in an extensive range of musical styles, honing a "regard for artistic excellence that makes the festival unique" (Tanglewood.org).

Bank of America announced it would serve as Tanglewood Summer Music Festival's exclusive sponsor beginning in the summer of 2008

through the 2012 season. Robert E. Gallery, the Massachusetts State President for Bank of America, said that a main concern for the bank is to make the arts available, “particularly to underserved populations...providing opportunities for everyone to experience the BSO’s premiere programming” (Tanglewood.org).

The London Symphony Orchestra recently developed its own music education program, LSO Discovery, with a mission to “bring a world of musical opportunities to everyone.” One aspect, the Young Talent Program, offers young musicians master classes, conducting and composing workshops, and year-round coaching and performance opportunities with the LSO (LSO Discovery). Other involvement opportunities include youth choirs, community choirs, free lunchtime concerts, open LSO rehearsals, and chamber group performances to local schools (LSO Discovery).

Aiming to include everyone, the LSO created workshops for disabled children, including “visually interpreted” concerts for deaf students, composition and performance projects for blind musicians to “literally get their hands on the Orchestra,” and music-making groups, informal concerts, and songwriting classes for students with mental health problems or learning disabilities (LSO Discovery). A resource center and a teacher-training program are also available to help expand the benefits teachers can offer students (LSO Discovery).

The WASO has found successful ways to inspire and promote youth involvement in classical and contemporary music by providing unique workshops, concerts, and events for a range of ages and attention spans. Programs have been created to actively connect with children ages two to five years old, involving meeting the musicians, introducing the children to the different instruments played in a full symphony orchestra, seeing the instruments close up to possibly touch and play them, and listening to excerpts of suitable classical pieces and recognizable children tunes. This kind of special treatment toward younger groups of children is a wonderful way to introduce the world of classical music, generating interest, and encourage appreciation at an early age (WASO.com.au).

Appealing to older children and young teens, the WASO offers The Time Traveler, presenting composer-in-residence James Ledger who discusses his commitment to music and shares some of his favorite pieces and the composers who have influenced his own work. The students are introduced to different compositional techniques and familiarized with fundamental music theory concepts. Once the students come to appreciate



those elements, the analyzed pieces are performed. The WASO also offers a general program, Keys to Music, for listeners of all ages who want to develop a better understanding and appreciation for classical music. The barriers to enjoying classical music are explained and surmounted, allowing the listener to learn about basic musical concepts, and analyze chosen pieces by popular classical composers. The hour-long show is recorded live with the orchestra for the ABC Classic FM Series, offering the program to a wide range of listeners (WASO.com.au).

Once the individual patron's needs have been met, creating relationships with local, national, and global companies, large and small, is fundamental to the sustainability of an orchestra. The BSO, the LSO, and the WASO have all developed successful fundraising methods and partnerships on this level, and therefore are able to maintain a central role in their local communities.

Mark Volpe, the Managing Director of the BSO, acknowledged the struggle that scores of music and arts organizations are dealing with, noting that, "Many of the country's top orchestras and arts organizations have seen challenging times due to the difficult economic climate" which continues to persist today. Volpe said that even though the BSO has dealt with some tensions because of the "economic slow down," the BSO has "been very fortunate to be able to maintain [its] financial equilibrium" (BSO.org).

One of the BSO's major corporate sponsors, the United Bank of Switzerland, renewed its support as the BSO's 2007–2008 exclusive season sponsor. The Chairman and CEO of UBS, Robert Wolf, said in support of the commitment to the BSO, that it manifests the bank's "philosophy of working collaboratively with clients to deliver the customized solutions that help them pursue their goals" (BSO.org).

EMC, an IT product company, is another major supporter of the BSO. It sees great value in the Tanglewood program and the BSO's commitment to "commissioning new works from today's most important composers" (EMC.com). In alliance with the BSO and Women Waging Peace, one of EMC's missions is to help support "concerts around the world with the theme of peace and diversity" (EMC.com).

The London Symphony Orchestra also has a secure relationship with UBS, which is enduring and progressive. In the spring of 2007, the LSO and UBS were recognized as the Arts and Business Champion of the Year, awarded by the Arts and Business network (A&B), a national charity

based in London. A&B values its ten-year partnership, which has helped to widen the listening and supporting audience, both representing “extremely strong brands, founded on shared values (including) teamwork, commitment and excellence” (AANDB.org). After restoring St. Luke’s Church for LSO Discovery, new projects developed through the relationship including the Sound Adventures project, commissioning British composers to write for the LSO, and providing the support to fund two concerts on the LSO’s annual international tour.

Rolls Royce is another major partner with the LSO. After a highly successful tour to Beijing in 2004 to celebrate the centenaries for both organizations, Rolls Royce became the exclusive sponsor for the 2007 LSO tour to China. Because China is a key market for Rolls Royce, these performances benefit the company by acting as a way to support the Chinese communities. The tour has also opened doors for the LSO to provide educational opportunities to students in Beijing, internationally expanding its commitment to music education.

Generating roughly twenty relationships with a wide scope of businesses, the WASO received AUS\$3 million in corporate support in 2007, equaling twenty percent of its annual income. Chief Executive Officer Keith Venning said that although it receives Commonwealth and State Government grants, and has generated in-house revenue from ticket sales, “corporate and private sector [support] is imperative to the ongoing sustainability of the company,” which has exceeded its funding from the state government. Venning said he and the WASO “pride themselves on their ability to meet the needs and expectations of their corporate partners.” It is crucial to sustain the orchestra’s varied corporate partnerships (WASO.com.au).

One local business with whom the WASO developed a prosperous relationship is Yacht Grot, a small business supplying boating and marine hardware. AbaF, an affiliate of the Australian government, promotes private businesses that support the arts. In 2004 AbaF named the WASO and Yacht Grot as the winners of the Senses Small Business Award. Yacht Grot was the first small business to become one of the WASO’s Orchestral Partners—a sponsorship usually undertaken by large corporations (AbaF.org.au).

The partnership between the WASO and Yacht Grot was created in an unusual manner. Board members and musicians were asked to widen their roles by making it everyone’s responsibility to help cultivate non-

etary and in-kind support. This approach to help the WASO enhance its presence in the community offered the musicians a clearer understanding of the hardships arts and music organizations confront, and the “commercial realities associated with securing income in a competitive environment” (Abaf.com.au).

Another major contributor to the WASO is Ernst & Young, a financial company with 140 locations across the world. A corporate partner for the past ten years, it supports two of the WASO’s principal concerts: Pops in the Park, and the Contempo Series. This partnership demonstrates how businesses with significant investment and influence in global markets can acknowledge the importance of supporting the communities in which they are located, and respond to the needs of local organizations including the music community (EY.com).

The intent of this study, to outline some of our world’s leading orchestras and their progressive approaches to maintaining dedicated supporters and dependable donations, also recognizes the importance of creating a presence on the digital stage. Initially, the movement from the tangible CD to digital seemed too massive and daunting for even major players in the pop world to adapt. Of course, we’ve progressed beyond that. If any orchestra aims to be a valued leader within its community, this is the bandwagon to join.

Classical music enthusiasts around the world are slowly adapting to the digital phenomenon. Listeners have begun searching for internet radio programs featuring classical music and they are downloading classical music from iTunes. (Classical music accounts for twelve percent of iTunes’ annual sales) (NYTimes.com). Starting in 1913, the LSO was the first orchestra to record performances onto gramophone records. It has sustained this tradition by recording live broadcasts and film soundtracks including *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. LSO Live, the orchestra’s own label, is one of the best selling, and perhaps *the* best selling, classical label representing a single orchestra in the world. It is consistently rated number one on the iTunes classical download charts (LSO.co.uk).

Naxos, the world’s leading classical music label, was highlighted as a chief guide in Jayson Greene’s 2007 *Symphony* magazine article, “The Sky’s The Limit.” Greene cited Naxos for “offering its catalogue of more than 60,000 tracks” on its website and for joining eMusic, offering the same number of tracks for purchase. With a growing subscriber base exceeding

200,000, eMusic's "surprisingly diverse classical catalogue" is marketed to a "much wider audience share than the 3-4 percent" of recorded music sold in your hometown store (which is now probably out of business due to this trend). Thus, digital distribution is an effective way for an orchestra to expand its reach around the globe, offering interactive sites where listeners can discover new music, interact with an orchestra's own site (and hopefully buy tickets to an appealing concert), and gain awareness of the local or neighboring organizations contributing to the community.

An appreciation and excitement for classical music continues to enthrall audiences of all ages and to inspire new works by contemporary composers. But this momentum can only be sustained if the organizations continue to perform exquisite concerts, offer innovative and inspiring music education programs, and maintain current relationships with patrons while also cultivating new fundraising methods. Equally important is the role of the donor and concert attendee in providing support to these culturally enriching organizations that are a vital part of their communities.

The BSO, the LSO, and the WASO are exemplary leaders in the classical music industry. They provide accessible music to local communities and have demonstrated a strong commitment to music education. These approaches have garnered enduring and committed benefactors who value the cultural imprint and leadership such organizations provide.

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The *MEIEA Journal* is published annually by the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association (MEIEA) in order to increase public awareness of the music industry and to foster music business education.

The *MEIEA Journal* provides a scholarly analysis of technological, legal, historical, educational, and business trends within the music industry and is designed as a resource for anyone currently involved or interested in the music industry. Topics include issues that affect music industry education and the music industry such as curriculum design, pedagogy, technological innovation, intellectual property matters, industry-related legislation, arts administration, industry analysis, and historical perspectives. The *MEIEA Journal* is distributed to members of MEIEA, universities, libraries, and individuals concerned with the music industry and music business education.

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The *MEIEA Journal* (ISSN: 1559-7334)  
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