

## Foreword

### Mark Adamo

Like many other aspiring composers living in New York in the nineteen-eighties, I first learned of Leonard Slatkin through his musically exact and emotionally compelling recordings of contemporary music: his performance, with soloist Barry Douglas and the St. Louis Symphony, of John Corigliano's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra remains unrivaled to this day. By the nineteen-nineties, John and I had become a couple, and Leonard was leading Washington's National Symphony Orchestra, for which he was commissioning or recording (or both) more of John's scores; so I got to see, up close, how much skill, intelligence, patience, and sheer verve Leonard put into his work. To hear Leonard lead the rehearsals and recording sessions for John's Symphony no. 1 and *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy* taught me as much about music and musicians as anything I'd ever learned in conservatory. Later, in the aughts, I was humbled and delighted to join that elite group of composers Leonard commissioned: his brilliant premiere, with soloist Dotian Levalier and the National Symphony, of my *Four Angels: Concerto for Harp and Orchestra* in 2006, was one of the happiest moments of my artistic life.

All of which is to say that I thought I knew Leonard, as a musician and as a friend, pretty well; not as well as some others, of course, but pretty well. We'd shared dinners in London and New York and, memorably, Detroit, where Leonard and his family roasted what I am ready to swear is the single most succulent Thanksgiving turkey ever prepared by human hands; and I treasure the memory of Leonard's laughter when I couldn't resist describing a certain revered twentieth-century score (not to be named here) as "Liberace's transcription of Carl Ruggles." (You had to have been there.)

But then I read the essay of his which closes this book, and realized what I didn't know: that what we have in Leonard is not only a conductor and music director who has, over the past half-century, contributed to this country an historic career. We also have an analyst of

the state of our orchestral world as precise, impassioned, and visionary as anyone writing in English today.

I write this in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus has sent almost all American orchestral and operatic musicians on what Thomas Chatterton Williams calls “this malevolent holiday.” But concert music in this country was struggling long before COVID-19. If you have opened this book and read this far, I doubt you need me to recite the doleful list of reasons why: impossible economics, changing cultural tastes, more talented musicians than there are jobs for, and on and on and on. My eyes are glazing over as I write this; I can only imagine yours.

But despair, or inertia, are not solutions; nor is hope alone. We need hope and plans. We need clear views both of how we got to where we are and how we can build—not just yearn for—a future in which the power of this art we love can be channeled to foster a better informed, more united, and more emotionally intelligent citizenry.

Leonard’s essay—which, to my mind, lays out a persuasive plan of how to do just that—is the capstone of this book. But his vision is complemented and expanded by the work of Robert Freeman, the author of most of this text, whose long and distinguished academic career has given him another, equally compelling perspective. This is a musician and administrator who has spent a career observing, and often shaping, how students learn music; and what, for good or ill, happens after that.

The passion both writers share is for education: how best to design it, how best to make it available to the most students, how best to reap its benefits for the public good. Ask yourself this: what school practice—regardless if it leads to a professional career—makes students across the board better listeners, more intent workers, and, later in life, often higher earners? (Hint: it isn’t dodgeball.)

Both Robert Freeman and Leonard Slatkin outline here, in fine and convincing detail, many of the faults of our current music profession; and they offer smart and realistic ways to correct them. But even that urgent, urgent project is only secondary. The primary goal here is one that only education—whether embedded in a grade-school curriculum or offered as an orchestra’s lecture series—can achieve. It is to return the humanities to humanity.

Robert and Leonard are musicians, so music is the subject of this book. But their ideas are as applicable to drama and painting and literature. How do we place the study and practice of our arts at the very core of our educational project, so our nation can produce citizens as focused and self-disciplined as a solo pianist (or a novelist); as generously collaborative as a string quartet (or the cast of a play); as inventive as a composer (or poet); as communitarian as a choir (or a dance troupe); as imaginative as a jazz (or theater) improviser; as confident, yet attentive, as a conductor (or director)? Viewed this way, why

should we accept that antique view of the arts as mere hobby, mere ornament, when, if their energies are correctly tapped, they can build the very loom on which we weave a finer society?

Leonard and Robert don't have all the answers. Who could? But they're asking all the right questions; and the answers they do suggest—in this vital, learned, hopeful book—offer electrifying possibilities.

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