

Chapter 2. Music Education and How to Save the American Orchestra

Robert S. Freeman

The world of orchestral music is in dire straits, and it is time to take a closer look at music education and how it can help save orchestras from an uncertain future. The American orchestra's financial structure, developed by Henry Lee Higginson and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is outdated and subjected to increasing fiscal pressures and labor unrest. As Alex Ross observed, we need to make a new normal and build a lot of it from scratch. The state of orchestral music today is broken. As Alex Ross wrote in the *New Yorker*, "I don't think there is a return to normal in the performing arts, I'm sorry to say. We have to make a new normal, and build a lot of it from scratch. This period has shown an unbelievable amount of inequality and rotten practices rooted in the foundation of what we do."

This chapter focuses on the changes in the curricula of professional music schools, which must be made if the orchestra is to survive the current century. In order to do so, music schools must revise their approach to education, which has remained unchanged for over a century. They need to train their students to be not just performers but also critical thinkers who can use words to articulate their ideas about the music. To understand the need for change, it is worth looking back at the history of music education.

The ancient Greeks regarded music as a subject that encompassed not only what we think of as music today but also poetry, dance, and elementary education. Aristotle once wrote, "Why need people learn to perform themselves instead of enjoying music played by others? And we may consider the conception we have about the gods. Zeus does not sing and harp to the poets himself. But professional musicians we speak of as vulgar people, and indeed we think it not manly to perform music, except when drunk or for fun." They regarded music as feminine and impassioned, superheated. Music was seen as separate from intelligence, without articulative meaning, except in support of word-related ideas. This

perception persisted in the West, and it is imperative that we reevaluate and reshape the role of music in education to recognize its intellectual and emotional significance.

This split between music and thinking has persisted through the centuries. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century musicians worked for the monarchy and the church, and members of the nobility looked down upon professional musicians as part of the middling classes. The Earl of Chesterfield in 1749 even wrote to his son, then making the grand tour of Italy, “If you love music, hear it; go to operas and concerts and pay fiddlers to play it for you. But I must insist on your neither piping nor fiddling yourself. It puts a gentleman in a very frivolous and contemptible light. Few things would mortify me more than to see you with a part in a concert, bearing a fiddle under your chin.” Even in the nineteenth century, the institutional split was maintained, with conservatories focusing on performance and composition, and music departments in universities studying music history as a scholarly discipline.

When the Paris Conservatory was founded in 1795, the idea was to supply men who would perform music in concerts or operas, preparing for such a life by practicing their instruments, learning how to sight-read, and studying elementary harmony but carefully avoiding studies related to words. This was a continuation of the split initiated by the Greeks, implying that music study was something quite apart from thinking, which in olden days made use of words only. Though Franz Liszt learned how to play the piano from memory as a kind of party trick during the 1830s, he spoke of the Paris Conservatory as “a rest home for mummies and the apotheosis of the peruke [i.e., old-fashioned man’s wig].”

Throughout the nineteenth century, the institutional split persisted between conservatories, which focused on performance and composition, and university music departments, where music history was studied as a scholarly discipline. Important conservatories were founded in Vienna, London, Madrid, Geneva, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Berlin, Antwerp, Leipzig, Rotterdam, Munich, Barcelona, Dublin, Cologne, Dresden, Stuttgart, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow. Early musicologists included John Hawkins and Charles Burney in England, Johann Nikolaus Forkel in Germany, and August Wilhelm Ambros and Eduard Hanslick in Austria. Philipp Spitta, whose biography of Bach was published in 1872, was appointed to a professorship of music history at the University of Berlin in 1875.

In the United States, this institutional split continued. Performance was first taught in 1835 at the Oberlin Conservatory and then, immediately after the Civil War, at the Boston Conservatory, the New England Conservatory, and the Peabody Institute, all founded in 1865. The Institute of Musical Art (later the Juilliard School) was established in New York City in 1905, and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia in 1924, both focusing exclusively on

developing musical soloists who might rival the careers of famous European virtuosi. As in European schools of performance, the emphasis was on a Protestant work ethic, marked by grueling hours in the isolation of the practice room.

In America, a third option emerged, which I have called the comprehensive school of music, an approach still without parallel in Europe. These institutions—most often founded within, or eventually absorbed into, a college or university—comprised faculties of several dozen full-time members: composers, singers, instrumentalists, conductors, music historians, music theorists, and those responsible for developing music teachers for public schools. Oberlin is believed to be the first, followed by the University of Iowa in 1866, the predecessors of the College-Conservatory of the University of Cincinnati in 1875, the University of Michigan in 1880, the University of Southern California in 1884, Yale in 1894, and Northwestern University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Wisconsin in 1895. The Eastman School of Music was founded in 1921 by George Eastman as a division of the University of Rochester, a school of music which, then and now, has had a music library unrivaled by any other educational institution in the world.

Nevertheless, a strict division between playing and thinking persisted in most American music schools, with a singular focus on performance until the last quarter of the twentieth century. It was during this time that innovations partially developed at the Eastman School sought to produce a new kind of musician who could not only play well but who could also use words to think about the relationships between music and a broad range of issues relevant to society at large. This approach, imitated by other American schools of music, has dramatically changed the nature of music graduates that American music schools have been producing ever since. The comprehensive schools still, even today, offer both the Bachelor of Music degree and an array of liberal-arts options, including a strong emphasis on the development of teachers. The typical curriculum guides students through the standard school of performance while requiring them to pursue a full academic course load, including courses in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The historical separation of music from intellectual pursuits has had a lasting impact on music education and the perception of musicians. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize the value of integrating critical thinking and verbal skills into music education, cultivating well-rounded musicians capable of navigating and contributing to a rapidly changing musical landscape.

Reforming Music Education: The Eastman Study

In 1972, I began my tenure as the fourth director of the Eastman School, where I served for twenty-four years. With the help of a brilliant faculty and staff, I was able to make significant strides in bridging the gap between “applied” departments (studio teachers and

ensembles) and “academic” ones (such as music history, music theory, and humanities). In my inaugural speech to the Eastman faculty, I emphasized the potential of maintaining high professional standards for performers while also offering a new and broader education for musicians. At Eastman, I envisioned specialists collaborating and, in doing so, becoming better musicians together.

At many conservatories, students working with a single professor on a specific instrument miss the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others studying the same instrument in an adjoining studio. The same missed opportunities apply to young composers who lack the chance to hear their works played in a live performance or music historians who miss out on the opportunity to evaluate a work in the context of a live performance. However, at Eastman, we fostered an environment that enabled us to avoid these missed opportunities. We strengthened the faculty and governance, and the original facilities were entirely renovated. New buildings were constructed for the Sibley Music Library and the Student Living Center. The school’s relationship with graduates improved, and significant fundraising efforts supported the school. In the mid-1980s, the faculty unanimously approved the idea that inappropriate conduct by faculty or staff concerning our students could lead to the dismissal of even a tenured member of the faculty. This policy was ahead of the #MeToo movement.

In response to the curricular questions I raised in the early 1990s, five faculty committees provided excellent responses that led to the Eastman Initiatives, Paul Judy’s periodical (*Harmony*), and the Institute for Music Leadership (IML). The IML now educates more than half of the school’s enrollment and focuses on the fiscal and managerial aspects of orchestral survival, creating new festivals, and examining new ideas in music. One of the IML’s most innovative series, the Eastman Case Studies (founded by musicology professor Michael A. Anderson), is based on the Harvard Business School’s case studies and focuses on orchestral survival and the fiscal and managerial aspects of new festivals.

Future Considerations for Music Education Reform

One of the central concerns for a young musician is how to allocate their time to various curricular questions that are sure to intrude. The student must consider how much time to devote to practice, courses that involve words and ideas, physical exercise, recreation, family, and sleep. However, it is important to note that each of us has only 168 hours a week, and we all aspire to long, productive, and happy lives. When it comes to practicing, Robert Schumann suggested nearly 200 years ago that it is not just the number of hours one spends practicing an instrument, but rather the focus of one’s attention while practicing. However, this is not always an easy task, as it requires constant effort and attention to

achieve one's musical goals. It is important to focus on warm-up exercises to ensure that all five fingers on each hand are working flexibly, independently, and with equal strength. But it is not enough to simply play on and on. Rather, one must require oneself to listen very carefully while playing, ensuring that the arms, hands, fingers, and feet are achieving the musical goals in mind. If that is not the case, one must work on developing exercises designed to better accomplish these musical goals, all while paying careful attention to whether or not they are being achieved. This is harder than it sounds, and it is not an excuse for giving up too easily. Balancing practice time with other activities is crucial for a well-rounded and successful musician.

At the age of fifteen, as an oboist at Tanglewood in 1951, I had the privilege of playing principal oboe in a Koussevitzky Shed performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Conducted by Lorin Maazel and supervised by Leonard Bernstein, this performance marked my first time playing in such a professional setting, with an extended solo at the beginning of the second movement. The day before the performance, my father suggested that I take a small white pill at noon, another at 4 p.m., and two more before going on stage at 7:15. Unaware of what I was taking or the potential long-term effects of the medication, I followed my father's advice. It remains unclear whether the pills were placebos, but I had no reason to worry about getting nervous, and my performance was a resounding success. I suspect that similar unsupervised situations continue to occur today, raising concerns about the potential negative effects of uppers and downers on young musicians' health. To address this issue, I strongly advocated for the implementation of scientifically administered research to safeguard the well-being of young performers. During my tenure at the University of Texas, I initiated a collaborative program involving faculty and students from the Butler School of Music, the Department of Theater and Dance, the College of Pharmacy, and the Phobia Avoidance Clinic of the Department of Psychology. This program aimed to educate young musicians about the dangers of unsupervised medication use and promote healthy habits.

Music-history faculty should offer at least a one-semester course on the history of musical institutions, focusing particularly on music schools and symphony orchestras. Such courses should explore alternative business plans for the future of orchestras and discuss the differences between professional string quartets and orchestras. Addressing the importance of fostering more collegial relationships with management and board members is also crucial, as is contemplating how an orchestra can represent the community they serve. Another one-semester course covering topics such as fundraising, accounting, organizational behavior, and the history and future of audience development should be offered for aspiring orchestral musicians. Although these subjects are typically addressed by administrators, an

orchestral player adept at fundraising, for example, would likely be a more appealing lunch companion for a music-loving millionaire. The course should explore why orchestras often face lockouts or strikes, while string quartets never consider such actions. It should also delve into the administrative work of a chamber-music ensemble and strategies for turning an orchestra into a better functioning team. Lastly, the course should encourage students to contemplate the motivations behind audience subscriptions and attendance, the demographics of the communities they serve, and the future relevance of organizations such as the American Federation of Musicians and the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians. Furthermore, music-theory departments should develop an undergraduate course aimed at enhancing students' abilities to communicate about the repertoire they are preparing. Leonard Slatkin's concise introductions to Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and Stravinsky's *Greeting Prelude* (1955, based on the "Happy Birthday" tune) with the BBC Symphony Orchestra serve as excellent examples to emulate. The skill of delivering brief verbal introductions should be encouraged not only among conductors but also soloists, chamber music players, composers, and orchestral players, potentially garnering recognition from the organizations they serve.

I am aware that budgets are tight, but I would suggest that if our music schools can allocate funds to invite a distinguished visitor for two or three days, they should ask the visitor to spend an hour with the school's entire freshman class, comprising roughly one hundred students, discussing their outsider's perspective on the students, the school, the city, and the broader field of music. Ideally, the visitor would then spend the rest of their time interacting in small groups with the school's faculty and students, with at least one public lecture included. Such a visitor could be a musicologist, conductor, performer, composer, or someone experienced in audience development or public relations. A key objective of the visitor's visit would be to provide a constructive external view of the school's current state and what could be improved in the future.

Music schools typically aim to produce musical specialists in various areas, such as pianists, violinists, oboists, composers, conductors, scholars, and public-school music teachers. Although most of these schools focus on developing individual specialists, some have successfully produced musical all-stars who perceive the musical universe from a broader perspective. Examples of such individuals include J. S. Bach, Franz Liszt, Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, and Leonard Slatkin. One wonders if a breadth of vision should be a goal for first-class music schools and whether such institutions should concentrate on cultivating new musical audiences for the new century.

The issue of cost is also a natural concern, particularly in the United States, where people often assume that a higher price must equate to higher quality. However, the best

public education in the United States, as found at the universities of California, Michigan, Texas, New York, and North Carolina, is every bit as exceptional as the best private education offered by institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, Yale, and Princeton. Additionally, financial aid (like scholarships) is available to students who demonstrate promising musical abilities, with the availability of such assistance often depending on supply and demand. Some schools, including Curtis, Colburn, and Yale, provide full tuition scholarships (and occasionally living costs) to all admitted students. However, such schools tend to prioritize reasonable salaries for faculty and staff less highly.

The quality of the faculty is of utmost importance, particularly the skills and dedication of the primary teacher. It is noted that some very famous teachers are often on tour, so the regularity of lessons should be a central concern. In addition, the willingness of the music historians and theorists on the faculty to address the long-term needs of pianists and conductors should also be considered. The presence of a faculty member who attends most of their students' rehearsals and performances is invaluable, and an ideal school should have regulations in place to dismiss faculty who exploit the vulnerability of young people for self-serving purposes.

A truly excellent school will reflect regularly on the rapidity of change in the world of music and on the skills that will be needed in the musical world of tomorrow. It is important to focus not only on an orchestral curriculum but also on the development of a new kind of orchestral musician who sees their role as an advocate for the orchestra more broadly than has been normal until now. The ideal balance between full-time and part-time faculty should be carefully considered, as well as the geographical location of the school. It seems that a list of the "best ten" should be subordinated to the idea of campus visits of a day or two duration to each of the institutions a family may be considering. Informal conversations there with current students and faculty will provide the best basis for what will inevitably turn out to be a very important decision.

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