

THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY PRESENTS

AMERICAN ORCHESTRA FORUM

TALKING ABOUT CREATIVITY
Roundtable
Transcript

John Adams, composer
Brent Assink, Executive Director, San Francisco Symphony
Mason Bates, composer
Mark Clague, professor of music, University of Michigan
Margo Drakos, cellist and co-founder, InstantEncore
Ed Sanders, Director, Creative Lab at Google
Steven Winn, arts journalist and critic, San Francisco

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[Beginning of recorded material]

[Audio gap]

00:00:26 Steven Winn: [Applause] Thanks. Thanks, everyone.
Welcome back. As promised, you all will have your shot at the assembled panel here now. If you do have a question, there are a couple of mics down forward, so we're going to ask you to come forward. And there are two folks attending the mics. As opposed to standing and lining up, well, there are places to sit down here.

00:01:00 So if you do have something, we'll try to get to you, and we'll go from there. You know, we were sitting backstage for a moment, trying to decide where to go out of all the material that came up in the three panels, and we decided that Brent had some good, light and current material to open up with. So Brent has kind of a relevant piece from just this morning.

Brent Assink: Relevant and slightly irritating. [Laughter] So I don't know how many of you heard Wait Wait. . . Don't Tell Me today -- great show, right?

00:01:30 And they talked today about the news of this past week, and one story they brought forward was the fistfight that happened in a Chicago Symphony Orchestra concert last week.

Margo Drakos: I heard about that.

Male Voice: [See, the audience is changing].

Male Voice: [Unintelligible] [boxing at the concert] [Cross-talk] [Laughs]

Brent Assink: In box seats, and loud enough to actually distract Muti for a second -- I can't remember what piece they were doing, and it was relatively early on in the piece.

Male Voice: Brahms.

Brent Assink: Now the only reason I bring that up is that, you know, Wait Wait. . . Don't Tell Me pokes fun of absolutely everything, and I guess the orchestra world could have a sense of humor about itself -- I guess.

00:02:04 But they talked about how the fist was so loud that it woke up the audience [Laughter] -- and they talked about this all with a faux British accent. And that's fine, except that for those people who have never been inside our halls, it just reinforces a stereotype that we are in fact high art, and you better be prepared to have a good nap, and an expensive one, if you're going to come inside our darkened halls.

00:02:37 Steven Winn: Yeah, well John and Mason both touched on this in their conversation with Mark about the -- [unintelligible] called it the sort of bourgeoisie, forbidding -- you know, the sign over the orchestra. I wonder how the others on the panel or how anybody wants to pick up on that idea of sort of the image of the orchestra and how it plays out. [Laughter]

00:03:00 John Adams: Well, it's a marketing challenge, and, you know, it was -- I can actually remember when the marketing started to change and you got photographs of young, very gorgeous violinists in, you know, very small gowns. [Laughter]

00:03:29 And then chamber music groups, instead of posing while playing a Bartok or a Beethoven quartet, would take their Strads and go out to Central Park and hang on a tree, and try to make it look like they're regular people, [Laughter] even though they were dressed in tails.

00:03:54 You know, and it is a really funny thing, because we were just backstage, and the strange subject of tweeting during concerts came up. And both Mason and I are against it, believe it or not, because we both think that a concert, particularly a classical music concert, is a place where you go to concentrate. And the invitation to an audience, no matter how well motivated it may be on the part of the marketing staff, the invitation to an audience to tweet, or text, or this, or that, is an invitation to break one's concentration.

00:04:36 And we already live in a society where we're constantly challenged by distraction. I mean, each one of us has an itchy click finger. You know, if I don't like Bill Maher tonight, click, he's dead. If I don't like that article, I'm on to another Internet page.

0:04:57 And when you come to Davies Hall, or you go to the San Francisco Art Museum -- or whatever -- you really are going for a very deep

experience, and you can't have a deep experience unless you concentrate and stay on message. [Applause]

Male Voice: But where are you on fisticuffs in the hall? [Laughter]

00:05:30 Male Voice: Well, I noticed that that was in the expensive seats. [Laughter]

Male Voice: We should want people fighting over the seats, right?

John Adams: No, but I do think that's interesting -- the joke about it woke people up -- because that really is a, you know, it's such a snarky way of picturing what concert life is.

0:05:56 And, you know, we know that when we come and we hear something like the San Francisco Symphony playing a Mahler symphony, it's just a red hot experience. And if you're asleep at that [Laughs] --

Male Voice: You may be dead.

Male Voice: [Cross-talk]

Male Voice: Stay home.

Steven Winn: Margo, you wanted to pick up on something [there].

00:06:16 Margo Drakos: I just wanted to support -- actually, I think, from a marketing standpoint I wish it was sometimes promoted that -- or I'm sure somebody has done it; I just haven't seen it -- where because we live in this age of constant participation and this constant flow of information, that this amazing opportunity to come into an intimate concert, a live experience, and to actively engage in that here in the now for that period of time -- which takes effort if you're really going to get something out of it, in my opinion -- but I think that's something that I wish you kind of actually heard promoted in an integrated way to what the live concert experience is.

00:07:00 It's an opportunity to actually -- how is the music making you feel? What mood are you in -- to have some time of reflection to be transported, perhaps for a moment, away? And I think the challenge sometimes with orchestra is that unlike dance, or unlike opera, or ballet that you're seeing, you're seeing it really requires you to be actively listening and be giving something to it to receive.

00:07:27 But I think that's a wonderful thing, and perhaps the more the world goes into its chaotic -- you know, just the rate of change and everything that's around us -- I hope that it can be used as a very special marketing tool to have moments of respite and reflection.

Male Voice: I think that's a really good point -- and that we have to be proud of the things that make what we do really special -- you know, that it is a kind of live experience. It forces us or invites us to be present in a

way that maybe when you're driving a car, and juggling the coffee, and the cell phone's buzzing in your pocket, and you're dealing with traffic reports, and radio, and everything all at the same time, that we don't have that kind of focus.

00:08:03

And really it's interesting to me this idea of the orchestra being snooty, I mean, in the sense that the roots of that marketing move really go back to the 19th century, in a time when most people in the audience probably also played an instrument -- you know, there was a little bit more of an amateur culture -- and also where people were really proud of the fact that -- the kind of spiritual ambience that the concert hall has. That sort of ability to experience this intense emotion with your community was something that was really celebrated.

00:08:34

You know, there are certain things about being elite, about having a professional orchestra, that takes all of what the amateurs are doing and puts it on the next level with something that we really wanted everybody to enjoy. But it was the idea that there actually wasn't quite as much of a gap. I mean, there are no recordings. You can't go on, you know, your CD player and just listen to Mahler. You really had to be there, or you had to be at home playing it on the piano in a two-hand arrangement. You know, that was really the way you learned Beethoven, for instance -- all the symphonies.

00:09:04

And so I think part of the mistake was when we made this a professional experience. [We] wanted to say this was really special

and was really valuable. We also discounted what the amateurs were doing at home. And part of it is really to celebrate the musicians among you. We all have this relationship to music, and in making us on stage feel more special, we sort of forgot that people in our audience also are musicians -- have a relationship.

00:09:31

And that's, I think, where technology has some interesting things, because maybe it's not -- we can debate about whether we want tweeting happening at the concert hall, but to have -- I think with my daughters, for instance, who are tweeting 100 times a day -- or texting 100 times a day -- that's the way they focus. That is part of the way they concentrate [about] what they recognize out of all of this multi-sensory flow of experience. What is worth saying? What is worth putting in a text and sharing with somebody? So it's a way of highlighting something of their life.

00:10:00

And so to say, you know -- for instance, John, in your piece, when the brass come in there towards the end, you know, maybe it wouldn't happen in the concert hall, but maybe if there were live streams, and there was this chat, and people say, whoa, listen to the brass. You know, I mean, that's what you want people to recognize. And for some people it's probably helpful to have that cueing so that they get the experience, and I don't know if there are different ways to bridge that connection. But it's crossing this gap between our stage and our seats that is really the key.

00:10:27 Male Voice: Just to add to that, I think it's interesting when you -- they're obviously very different -- but if you look at when getting lost in the emotion at a sporting event, or if you look at what Shakespeare at the Globe was originally like, it was a very noisy, boisterous affair, with a lot of interaction between the players and the people in the audience. And so things have evolved, and people experience these visceral feelings in different ways -- and when you're talking [about-about -- the] way that people express that has changed.

00:10:55 And, you know, I think doing anything in a concert which is going to distract from other people's enjoyment, ranging from tweeting to fisticuffs, is potentially dangerous. But I think we have to be very careful about -- I don't think it's so much what happens in the concert hall; it's actually getting to the concert hall where the onramps are perhaps steeper than they might otherwise be.

Margo Drakos: You know, just as an aside, with the YouTube Symphony Project in Sydney, I remember sitting back -- and I was sort of in the back of the hall in one area -- and you were watching so many people, especially early on in the concert, taking photos, uploading things.

00:11:40 And I was in front of some people that were so excited to be there, and, you know, not sure -- perhaps it was one of their first times or early entrees into a concert experience. And it made me, you know, put a sock in my own snooty thoughts, because I thought, you know, it was amazing.

00:11:58 These people were so excited to be experiencing it, and they wanted to share that at that time. So it made me question -- you know, it's like, again, I think in moderation -- as we said on our thing -- or having options, or there are times, or whatnot. But it was kind of humbling to just watch that enthusiasm from those people, which, you know, was moving to them and something they wouldn't forget being a part of, which at the end of the day made me excited, you know.

Male Voice: Yeah.

Steven Winn: It's fun to be talking about the live concert experience, and it's interesting that we got our first applause when John celebrated the fact of, you know, concentrating and being there in the moment.

00:12:31 And to bring this into the Twitter world, we did receive a tweet today during the earlier sessions about the issue of technology and different ways of experiencing music. I often think of this when I watch people walking around town, listening to most of the music they hear through earbuds, which is acoustically a pretty poor way to listen to music.

00:12:55 In fact, I remember reading a study once that kids who have grown up with this -- younger people who have grown up with this -- actually prefer what is measurably poorer sound because that's what they're used to, which is a fascinating thing. And it's always -- even

for those of us who are regular concertgoers, it's always ear-opening, I think, as it was for me last night sitting in the hall. Wow, listen to the way that thing sounds in the orchestra, whatever timbre or quality is coming across. But someone asked on Twitter this question. Isn't quality an issue when it comes to streaming a concert on the web? And I wonder how some of you would respond to that.

00:13:32 I suppose it goes to recordings and all these kind of ways that we experience music now that we didn't, you know, 50 or 100 years ago.

Mason Bates: Can I say something about that?

Steven Winn: Sure, of course.

Mason Bates: Please do it. Please stream concerts on the web. They will never cannibalize the concert experience. I mean, one of the great things about the orchestra in the digital age is that because it is this acoustically unique experience, nobody ever is going to say, oh, I heard the Beethoven Nine on my tinny computer speakers, and therefor I don't need to go. [Laughter]

00:14:09 You know, if we can figure out a way to get to a place with the complicated arrangements we have with our musicians, and management, and all that, to stream stuff, I think it would be huge. I mean, it would be phenomenal to be able to let people know -- even just dip in for like a preview of what's going on.

- 00:14:31 That will never replace what's happening here. It really will not. I mean, even if you rig it up in a pretty sophisticated studio, I mean, acoustic sound trumps all things when you're talking about, you know, the human ear. So I think it's almost immaterial whether it sounds great or not. I mean, we just want to get something of the experience out there.
- 00:14:54 And all these tools that we're talking about -- I mean, Twitter, it can be used as a tool to relay information to people, to put people on to things. We can do things like we had at the first Mavericks festival with video, and get information to people so that they don't feel like they know nothing. Even though they might be the most sophisticated friends you know, they'll say, oh, I don't really know much about the Symphony. And you're like, wow, when you went to the modern art exhibit last week, that was a bunch of crazy digital video art. You know, how can you not come to the symphony? People are intimidated.
- 00:15:28 But once we get in here, there's just a bathing in the acoustic experience that I think suddenly is -- as John mentioned -- really this very special thing in contemporary life. So, you know, if we can webcast it, fantastic, and if it doesn't sound great, even better. [Laughter] Come here and check it out.
- 00:15:55 John Adams: I have experienced music through -- in Walter Benjamin's terms -- mechanical reproduction all my life, because I

grew up in a very small town, a long way away from where you could hear a good live performance. So I had most of my primal experiences with great music on a little hi-fi set.

00:16:29 And I wouldn't say that those experiences were compromised. They were different. You know, I remember the very day that I heard the Eroica Symphony for the first time [Laughs] on a scratchy LP. And more recently, in the last couple of years, I've had this experience where I've had two operas done at the MET.

00:16:59 And while I've been in the hall -- either because I had to be there to go up on stage and take a bow, or when we did Nixon in China, I was conducting -- I never got to go to one of the MET simulcasts, but other people that I know did go, and they said it was just an extraordinary experience -- completely different from being in the hall, but that it was illuminating, and it was not a substitute experience; it was a different experience.

00:17:34 So in that sense, you know, a technological reproduction can bring a whole added new world to the experience of [consuming] art.

Male Voice: It's just so interesting, because those of us who work in this world, and have worked in this world for so many years, have invested so much thought and time in the sound quality. So we are very proud of our CDs, and our SACDs, and we spend a lot of time making sure that not only is the playing perfect, but also the technical quality of it is perfect.

00:18:08 And for a segment of the population, that really matters. But now you're saying -- and others are saying -- well actually they can have a totally different type of encounter with our music, where that in fact is not necessarily the kind of investment that really ultimately matters -- number one.

00:18:25 And then also, as it relates to the acoustics of this venue, again, the quality of the sound that emanates from the stage and that you receive out there is something that we think a lot about and have spent, frankly, a lot of money improving over the years. And yet people coming into an acoustical environment like this probably do -- for the first time -- they do so having had the earbud experience as their definitive interaction, potentially, with classical music.

00:18:58 I can't tell you how many times I'm asked whether these microphones above here -- they certainly must be reinforcing the sound of the orchestra. The assumption is that we live in an electronically enhanced environment, and people are really quite surprised when they find out that in most cases that is not true.

Mark Clague: Actually, I find with my students that there's a bit of an opposite effect, which is in my lecture hall back at the University of Michigan, we have a pretty old set of speakers. And when I first started teaching there about 10 years ago, students were pretty disappointed in the quality of the sound system.

00:19:32 And we did upgrade it recently. But the students who come in now are pretty much blown away by the recordings, because they're used to hearing them on earbuds. And they do appreciate the difference. I don't find that they -- I think in some ways they might be more excited. This might be something like a marketing pitch of, you know, blow your earbuds; come to Davies. [Laughter]

Brent Assink: Let me write that down.

Mark Clague: Yeah, write that down. [Laughter] You heard it here first. But I do think there is something -- we're not very good at talking about the live experience and what that really means.

00:20:02 There's just a different -- I mean, Michael Tilson Thomas was saying about this earlier, about he could feel it with the Feldman. I think we can feel it when we're here -- you know, where we're here with our friends, when we're here with our spouses. It's just there is a magic that happens that you can't reproduce any other way. And those other experiences are important, but they're not the same.

Steven Winn: I don't want to leave the audience out. If there's someone who has a question -- do we have questions at either of the mics down here? Margo, you had something you were --

00:20:28 Margo Drakos: I just -- two quick things to highlight Ed's human story about the individual who was in a rural area and was able to go YouTube to watch old Heifetz or whatnot things. You

know, it's wonderful that that's there, and sometimes I think that remembering that that access -- to support Mason's point -- the fact that that child was hooked, and was able to advance [their technical], and was able to receive that, had that democratization of access to that content through the YouTube channel is fabulous.

00:20:57

So, you know, whether or not -- you know, I've been part of -- I've recorded a number of things, and some movements there were 100-some splices or whatnot for that one period of time, and I think kind of stepping outside from the musician hat and remembering to some extent if an individual has a chance to connect. And I always come back -- point number two, and then I'll be quiet -- is the Grateful Dead, which had a soundboard and allowed people to come in in their early concerts and tape them. They had a soundboard that allowed them to plug and make their own tapes. And it certainly didn't cannibalize their entrepreneurial business, and music making and things.

00:21:34

So I think that's kind of interesting. When you allowed people to actually -- you know, what if we allowed people to record and make their own mashups on top of things? You know, it might be treasonous, but they'll be active participants of that.

Steven Winn:

I was thinking, listening to [unintelligible], you know, if a portion of the audience doesn't care about the sound quality so much, maybe you can afford to make sort of lousy CDs now. It'd be cheaper. [Laughter] Let's take an audience question.

Audience Member: I'd like to shift gears and ask a question to Ed about a comment you made earlier.

00:22:01 You mentioned that in many organizations, the technological knowledge is in the hands of people who aren't at the table when it comes to decision-making -- and I know that there are a lot of young arts administrators watching on this streaming channel, thanks to Twitter. And I was wondering, living here in San Francisco, I've noticed that there is a big cultural divide between the Silicon Valley community, where we have a lot of tremendous business leaders with great management knowledge, who know how to use those assets, those younger people with the technological capability.

00:22:38 And then working in the classical music sector, it's often a very different experience. So I was wondering if, from your business experience, you might be able to speak to -- maybe offer some advice to the orchestra community about how they can better take advantage of those resources within their own organization, within their own community, so they don't have to go off spending money bringing in an expert from outside.

00:23:05 Ed Sanders: Yeah, good question. I mean, I think that one of the things -- and it's not limited to the music community. I mean, I think that right around the world there's a natural tension between people at the top who are very experienced -- for a reason -- and

they know what they're doing. And when something comes along like technology, which shakes foundations, it makes people nervous.

00:23:30 So, to me, it's always a question of balance. I mean, I think it's about letting -- finding people with specific skill sets and letting them run free, to a certain extent -- with adult supervision, if you want to call it that. [Laughter] But I think it really is a fear thing. I think if people in power, people with specific skills that they don't understand themselves -- letting that kind of frolic is incredibly empowering and powerful as a result.

00:23:59 I think that it's easier to do that in a technological space than it is in some other spaces. But I would encourage young people -- particularly creative young people -- to make things. I think that a lot of what we -- my group at Google -- tries to do is there's a lot of talk; there's a lot of recommendations; there's a lot of reports; there's a lot of consultants that come in, and it takes months, and months, and months, and months. Whereas you're in a position now where you can actually make things.

00:24:30 And whether it's, you know, a snippet of an idea that is somehow physical or somehow made as opposed to just an idea, just go off and do it. And, you know, ask forgiveness, not permission, if that makes sense. And I think that if you have senior people in your organization who are frowning on experimentation that's actually taking something forward, then you're probably in the wrong place.

00:24:57 You know, we don't always get it right, but I think being encouraged to make, and having a making culture, is something that Silicon Valley has done very well. I think there are a lot of lessons that more traditional institutions can take from that.

Steven Winn: Great. Shall we take another question? We have one from this side.

Audience member: John mentioned an allusion to an association between British accents and culture, and [it's the power of these] [unintelligible] being affirmed by "Wait Wait Don't Tell Me" then I feel a little trepidatious about standing here.

00:25:29 However, I did want to build on the question, which I think was taken somewhat askance as to whether composers actually think about their listeners. And I'm sure, of course, they do think about their listeners. But I would follow that with a question of, well what do they think about their listeners? [Laughter] And it seems to me that this is actually a very important issue, because there are two things that have come out of many things that people have been talking about, in terms of the assumptions that we bring to our musical experience.

00:25:54 One of which is that a lot of modernism I think indeed does set out to shock. And leaving aside the musical world for a moment, certainly if we look at the world of visual arts, then we have experiments with excrement, and putrefaction, and sexual detritus,

and all sorts of things which are validly there to shock. Now maybe the musical world doesn't go quite that far, but I think some musicians are certainly out to shock. So is there a boundary as to what's appropriate in terms of shocking? I mean, certainly Beethoven, I think -- maybe he wasn't a maverick, but he set out to shock in a certain sense. So is there a boundary, and how do we explore it, and how do we know whether we've gone beyond it?

00:26:30 That's at one extreme. At the other extreme, what should we assume of our listeners in terms of the point, again, that John made, about you assumed a certain sort of sympathy -- if you like -- with your musical world, your musical experience, and so on. And from reading your book, I think it's clear that you have a very deep sense of what you expect of your audience, what you could expect of them, what you should expect of them.

00:26:56 But again, with these new audiences we're talking about, how do we actually go about deciding, what are the appropriate expectations? And with the various options that we talk about in that context, when is one set of assumptions appropriate versus another set?

Mason Bates: Madness lies there. I mean, I will tell you, trying to figure out exactly, you know, all the different hierarchies of what education level might be going on in the audience I think is a recipe for artistic madness.

00:27:33 I mean, I think it's important absolutely we think about we're in a communicative field -- I mean, art is. And so exactly what John said earlier about this I think is totally dead on. You know, it's absolutely a part of our equation. I think it's difficult to think about the kind of demographic make up of everybody.

00:27:57 I think, in a way, for me it's about a space. I mean, the symphonic space is a place where you hear music a certain way. If you're in Mezzanine -- you know, it's this club over near the Mint -- you know, and you're spinning electronic music for three hours, you know, it's a difference space, not just realistically, but like psychologically, and people process that music differently. Is it background music? I don't know if you could say that. You know, people are feeling that dance music in their gut, and they're involved with it in a very deep way.

00:28:30 But the time's different. The perception's different. When you're hear in this space, you're in a much more focused listening world. And so like I find that my needs here are totally different. You know, something that might work in a different space, psychologically, when you're here, you might need something more dynamic. So I feel like in terms of the specificity about what's going on from person to person in the audience I think really becomes a kind of a slippery slope.

00:29:00 I think absolutely one has to think about things like, you know, what is perceptible in this piece? You know, like if I want this

particular musical idea to transform over this piece of music, well if it can't be heard -- I mean, if it actually just can't even come out through the textures or something -- then you're going to have a problem making that work.

00:29:25 I think if we think about this as a kind of a psychological space, and, you know, really imagine that what we do have in here -- we don't know all the details of what everybody's backgrounds and prerequisite education is, but we do know that people are paying attention. They're hopefully not tweeting. [Laughter] And, you know, that allows you, I think, a huge amount of freedom to do what you want to do artistically, while also acknowledging that yes, there's like a room full of listeners who are experiencing this.

00:29:59 John Adams: Yeah, can I respond to the gentleman about English [Laughter] -- British accents and culture.

Male voice: Only if you speak in a British accent.

John Adams: First of all, Heathrow is the only airport in the world where I've on numerous occasions had my passport checked and they've said, oh, Mr. Adams, I love Harmonium. [Laughter] And my favorite London story, I got in a cab, and this wizened up, old cockney guy was driving, and he was just so small and old.

00:30:34 And he said, [so what do you do, mate]? And I said, oh, I'm a composer. And he said, oh, rock and roll? I said, no, no, no. Oh,

yeah, like John Williams? No, a little [unintelligible] no. Harrison Birtwistle? [Laughter]

00:31:01 Mark Clague?: One thing I can add to that question is that I think this technology actually makes this a very exciting time to answer your question of, what do composers think? Which is that when I think back, again, in American music history of composers like Copland and Ives, they were actually great authors. So one of the best selling books of all time on music is Copland's What to Listen for in Music. But everybody on this panel pretty much has a Twitter account. Everybody has a blog. You know, but composers today tell you a lot about what they're thinking, but you have to sort of go and see what they're talking about, what they're thinking about.

00:31:34 And a lot of orchestras I think could do a lot. I mean, you talked about content and time, and much of it is just making the connection, is having somebody in an orchestra institution who has the bandwidth to be able to make these connections with all the stuff that's going on -- to draw people's attention to that. Because composers are out there telling us what they think, and we just have to read it. It's really interesting how technology is facilitating that.

00:31:58 John Adams?: You know, the problem that I have with so much conversation about technology is that it's about the medium, and that it's so rarely about the content. [Applause]

00:32:14 You know, we talk about how fabulous it is to communicate via one system or another, and how fast it is, or how many people it reaches, or how many friends you have on Facebook or whatever, but I'm very concerned about the cultural depth of our society, and particularly with younger generations who are so involved in the communication, the medium, but not the message. And you know, that I guess is another reason why I think if you love classical music and you're informed about it, it's a portal into a much larger cultural awareness.

00:33:06 It draws you in. Last summer, I was asked to write a book review of a new biography about Mahler. And just the month and a half or two months that I spent immersing myself in Mahler's life, and all the historical resonances of that -- whether it was Vienna, or Freud, or anti-Semitism, or just in general European history -- was just a profoundly deep and complex experience, so something with the same kind of cultural voyage that MTT's whole Mahler cycle and his programs have been.

00:33:47 But I just -- there's so much chatter in American society about technology, but it's ultimately such a superficial thing, because it's not about anything. It's just about itself.

00:34:02 And I think we just have to, you know, remind ourselves that the technology is just simply a way of transporting information, but the information is what's important. [Applause]

- Brent Assink: I've also been thinking about this, and the relationship with the composer and the audience. And I think one of the deadliest words that's so often used right now is the word like, not only in the context of Facebook, but the sense that we must like something.
- 00:34:35 Like is, first of all, too gray an area, I think. And also there's the assumption, I think, if you are spending your money to come to an orchestra concert, you better like everything, however one defines like. And so when I ask people to describe their experience at an orchestra concert -- people on our staff or whatever -- I tell them to specifically avoid the word like, partly because, like I said, it's too gray, and also because it's okay not to like something.
- 00:35:08 It's okay -- you know, we do 106 subscription concerts per year, generally three or four works on each program. There's going to be something there that -- I hate to say it -- you probably won't like. But will it leave you changed in some way? Will it leave you having had a different type of experience or an encounter, or give you some glimpse into life? Or some other thing will have had that affect on you; that is our hope.
- 00:35:37 It does not mean you have to absolutely fall deeply, deeply in love with every piece of music that you hear -- and I'm not only talking about contemporary music now.
- Steven Winn: To pick up something that Michael had said earlier in the day about how, you know, when you hear a piece of music, whatever happens

to you, you're not the same person afterwards. And I was thinking that as Mason was speaking just a moment ago about the audience. I think we tend to think of the audience as this monolithic thing. Everybody comes into the hall and they file in.

00:36:03 Somehow all these chairs look alike, and that somehow -- we're never the same -- first of all, there's obviously huge diversity in any hall. But also even as individual listeners, we're different when we're at a club. Maybe we're different listeners for the first movement of Beethoven's Eroica as we are for the second -- or certainly for a John Adams piece than we are for a Mason Bates piece. I mean, that's part of what it means to be an audience member and be alive, is that you -- marketers have to think of them in monolithic ways, and about putting -- you know, how do we deliver the content, whether it's technology, live, ticket sales, marketing, or whatever?

00:36:37 But it's been great to talk a lot about the live experience today and how we are not -- it's a very individual, and specific, and febrile thing that changes all the time, and it's great to have people touching on that in different ways today.

Male Voice: People [standing up]. [Laughter]

Male Voice: We've been talking about how basically we're going to try [Cross-talk] -- oh, sorry

00:37:03 Audience member: I guess it's my turn?

Male Voice: You got it.

Audience member: Yeah, Margo and many of you have talked about, I guess, what is a crisis in the classical music world of diminishing audience. And I come to many concerts. And now if I misunderstood you, I'm sorry --

Margo Drakos: Yeah, that's okay.

Audience member: But sometimes I feel I enjoy many of the concerts or large portions of them. Some of them I don't so very much. That's fine.

00:37:33 But I wonder -- like Margo, you did mention, many people in San Francisco or the Bay Area could name members of the baseball teams or the football teams. I might not be one of those people, but many people could --

Margo Drakos: [Me neither] [unintelligible]. [Laughs]

Audience member: And most of us could not name many of the Symphony musicians. Maybe the Symphony might provide us with some ways of -- you know, meet some of the players, and not just describe them in the program materials, but kind of open up that experience some.

00:38:08 Or have them discuss my experience of this flute part, or this viola part, or what I liked about it, or what I found challenging. And the other part is sitting in the audience can be a very passive experience. I mean, my head is spinning. I have lots of thoughts going through it. But I'm not supposed to move, or, you know, do this thing and sort of conduct from my seat. [Laughter]

00:38:35 And the expectation is that we sit. We're well behaved. Hopefully we shower before we come. [Laughter]

Male Voice: Well, it's the Bay Area.

Audience member: You know, we're in clean, presentable clothes, but we're not supposed to do anything. And I wonder whether on occasion there could be a little bit more -- like in rock concerts people get up and dance. Maybe we could do that for this piece -- you know, if you could talk about expectations of the audience. And thank you.

00:39:04 Margo Drakos: You're welcome. Nicely said.

Mark Clague?: Can I say something about that -- interesting tidbit about audience behavior? You've got a concert last night, and, you know, we actually didn't have a lot of multi-movement pieces. But, you know, generally speaking, you get to the end of, say, the first movement of not even sentimental music, and if everybody does not clap, we could put a man on the moon with that amount of repressed energy. [Laughter]

- 00:39:37 I mean, as long as people aren't interrupting the piece, I think it's absolutely incredible to have a living response. I mean, not everybody agrees with that. But that's the vibe; we're not supposed to clap. That's behavior. Afterhours last night we had this thing up on the third floor that's been happening here, and there's a little bit of DJing and hanging out.
- 00:39:57 And, you know, it's funny, because -- I mean, everybody was very great. Everybody showed up. We had an awesome time. You know, the audience was kind of observing the DJing in the way that you would observe a classical performance, [Laughter] which is actually -- I mean, just for what it's worth -- I mean, it's fine. It's just not the way you necessarily behave if you're seeing -- you know, if you're going out and checking out a DJ or something, you're just kind of existing in the space. So behavior is kind of hard for everybody involved, no matter what space you're in.
- 00:40:31 I don't know how you change it. I'm sure that, you know, we'd all agree it's not a great idea to have fistfights. But I think making it okay for people to respond if there's an actual appropriate moment, I think, is certainly welcome on my part, I mean, as long as people don't start clapping while the orchestra is playing.
- 00:40:58 I mean, just to mention -- one thing I'll say, just as -- there seems to be a general thing about, what is wrong with everything? You know, there's a lot that you can find out about what's going on with

the Symphony musicians. They've got a great Blogspot with the SFS web community. A lot of musicians will write in stuff about what they're doing. The stuff is out there. And I don't necessarily know if everybody's going to be able to name Sasha and all the great players in the orchestra, but the Symphony has been doing a lot hear to make people available.

00:41:33

And I think more than just about any institution in the country, I think there's a digital awareness. And there are even people on their board who are plugged into the digital community in Silicon Valley. So there's actually a lot of stuff out there. We can always do more. But you should really check out -- the website here really does have a lot of portals into specific player's thoughts about what's happening.

00:41:59

Steven Winn: The gentleman on the left here was cut off.

Audience member: Hi. We've been talking a lot about -- or you have been talking a lot about reaching a wider audience through technology and popularizing the music. And one of the things I remember growing up as a kid in Boston studying with a concert pianist was, I asked him, well what am I in for? And he recommended that I go see Pumping Iron with Arnold Schwarzenegger. [Laughter] And I thought, he's out of his mind. He's crazy. Why should I go see this movie about this guy lifting weights?

00:42:35 And I went to see the film -- it had just come out -- and I realized, oh my god, he's doing the same thing I'm doing -- different muscle group, smaller repertoire, but he's essentially going through the same process. And I started laughing, and I realized I was taking the music much too seriously.

00:42:59 And since then, I've sort of expanded my emotional attachment to the music, and when I listen to performances, I hear the humor. I connect with the sadness and the joy a lot more readily in pieces. And sometimes -- I was at an Ives performance -- [BSO] Ives performance with Ozawa -- and there was one passage in one of his -- this work is a symphonic work.

00:43:28 And I was in hysterics; I was laughing so hard. And the other audience members near me were looking at me like I was out of my mind. But all this to say that one of the things with sports -- the sports analogy we've been using -- is that people have this tremendous visceral, emotional attachment to what they're witnessing. They readily identify with that. And I'm wondering, how in reaching a wider audience are we going to get people excited and understand that these composers are just people.

00:44:03 They've witnessed things. They've experienced things. And that's what their music is about. And, you know, how are we going to make that emotional, get people excited and emotional about the music again, because I don't see that happening.

Brent Assink: Well from the Symphony's perspective, I think it's interesting that you bring in a sports analogy, because we also think about that. And I suspect -- I don't know for sure -- but I suspect that the most engaged people at a baseball game know the rules of baseball.

00:44:35 You can go for all kinds of other experiences, but it helps if you know how many innings there are and just exactly what the catcher really is doing. The same applies to a certain degree for orchestral concerts. And it is not lost on us that there are fewer and fewer opportunities for people to learn how to play a musical instrument -- getting to the point that Mark made some time ago about the amateur culture versus the, for lack of a better word, professional culture.

00:45:00 The Symphony is paying attention to that and is launching -- I think probably many of you know this -- Community of Music Makers program -- multi-year program to provide people with opportunities to dust off that violin that last got used in your senior year in college, pull it out, and have an opportunity to find people who are interested in making music with you such that could also be on the stage at Davies Symphony Hall at some point, such that the number of people who are in the hall on any given night appreciate, understand, have context for the music that is being made here.

00:45:40 It doesn't mean that you're putting it up on a pedestal -- quite the contrary. You're understanding it a little bit more, and you're appreciating what the professional musicians are doing. I don't

know if I've answered your question, but that is getting at some of, I think, what you were talking about.

Male Voice: I would like to see people playing music as much as they play sports. That's really [Cross-talk].

00:46:00 Brent Assink: That's right. So would we. It's the greatest predictor of future attendance of an orchestral concert -- is if you played a musical instrument as a child. It's 70%.

Male Voice: You know, the sports -- you mentioned sports, and I actually think a lot has to do with what the models are in our culture, because when my kids were in high school -- or my daughter played the violin, and she was on the swim team.

00:46:34 And the school, they didn't even have an orchestra. They had sort of like a chamber music program. It meant one afternoon a week. But you couldn't even join the swim team if you weren't committed to practice five days a week, and then meets on the weekend -- and that's pretty much standard for any varsity sport.

00:47:03 And this was, you know, a very good school, but clearly the value, which is completely agreed upon in this society, is that sports builds character. And if you're going to be good at sports, you need to practice -- you know, you need to stay after school and spend one, or two, or possibly three hours, five days a week, and then on the weekend.

- 00:47:31 And then everybody here marvels at El Sistema in Venezuela and how wonderful that is, but there's no school in this United States that I know of that would demand the kind of devotion and time commitment of a high school or a junior high kid that the Venezuelans do. If you're going to be in any of those Sistema programs, you have to do five days a week and concerts on the weekend.
- 00:48:02 So it's really an issue of [values], and in this country, much more value is placed on sports than on the arts.
- Steven Winn: Margo, you looked like you were ready to come in on [unintelligible].
- Margo Drakos: No, I actually -- to step back for a moment on one point, from the musician -- since I'm, I think, the only one here -- well, Mason, you've played in an orchestra, but not as a member of a full-time orchestra.
- 00:48:33 But since speaking from mistakes and lessons that I look back on with my own, I would say, very poor attitude that I had as a 21-year-old going into a leadership position in a major American orchestra, I think to the point -- the thoughtful comments before -- I also think that the culture within -- you kind of come into an orchestra environment.

00:48:59 And I wish I had somehow actually -- [that] mentorship, or I had thought more about the privilege and responsibility that I had as a member of. . . I have been thinking a lot lately about being somebody who's carrying on the things of the past into the present, the great traditions of the past and the new composers of the present, and our world around us, to share with the audience.

00:49:25 Somehow I actually didn't feel -- you know, you're so like an athlete. You're so trained into your very narrow thing. And I actually really lost any perspective on what my role was as a cellist to communicate to my world. And I've actually come back to that now full circle, but I really didn't have that in my professional career beyond to be quite bold. I think I was actually kind of self-absorbed about my instrument, my playing, what my colleagues felt, how I was communicating with them in my performance.

00:49:57 But I think that's something to -- some of the points [Todd] touched on -- being proud, just like in a business sense. If you run an organization, whether it's a janitor or the COO of an organization, how are you making your employees feel like they're stakeholders, and really active participants, and proud of that organization. And somehow I think that -- I'm sure people are familiar with the Harvard Business School study that showed sometimes that orchestra musicians' job satisfaction ranked equivalently to prison guards.

00:50:33 Yeah, I know, and people -- you know, you kind of laugh, but it's really not that funny, in a way, at all. So how do you kind of -- I think that I at least -- I can't speak for anybody else -- but in myself, I'm saddened that I didn't have a more perceptive concept of that in my early-20s -- for that privilege and how to share that. So I hope that's something that changes, and [more is] going in the future.

00:51:00 Steven Winn: There is so much to think about. So many great ideas have been raised. The panels have all been tremendously generous. You've been a great audience. We're going to let Brent bring the curtain down.

Brent Assink: No, really?

Audience member: One more question -- one more. [Laughter]

Steven Winn: Make it short.

Audience Member: Steve Winn, I know you. This is a big one for John. The context is, isn't this institution in a conflict with itself in the sense of, are you to flatter your audience and make it feel safe in this wonderful expensive building, or are you supposed to expand its awareness of the world?

00:51:38 That's the context. Now the question to John is, you explained that the function of the composer is to express fundamental emotions, and yet fundamental emotions is so limited. It's such a reductive

notion. And when in fact you should actually express intellectual and worldly notions, and in fact you have tried it. But you say that the object of the composer is to limit themselves to only expressing emotions --

00:52:06 John Adams: No, I didn't say that.

Audience member: No, well that's what you said -- fundamental emotions --

Male Voice: [Cross-talk]

Male Voice: I've got the tape in my back pocket.

Male Voice: Rewind the --

Male Voice: We've got to check the transcript on this, huh?

Male Voice: Okay, I'm glad you're going to change your mind. But in any case, if you don't --

Male Voice: I said it was a fundamental [Cross-talk].

Audience member: If you do include other things besides emotions, then it's likely institutions like this will attract a lot of younger people, or other people who might be very dynamic.

00:52:34 Male Voice: I knew we'd get to fisticuffs eventually.
[Laughter]

Steven Winn: Thank you for your statement. [Laughter] Thank you all.
[Applause]

Male Voice: Thank you.

Brent Assink: I do want to say one more thing. Please come to the last event on the [series of] orchestra forum projects, which is Sunday, May 13, in connection with a visit by the New York Philharmonic.

00:53:02 Our guests will be Alan Gilbert, music director of the New York Philharmonic, and we also have, interestingly enough, panelists representing the National Endowment for the Arts and Major League Baseball, among others. So we'll be talking about audiences. So thank you again for spending the afternoon with us. Please pick up your free copies of our book on the American mavericks, and the CD, American Mavericks, available in the lobby. Please take one on your way out.

00:53:28 Thank you so much for being here. Thank you. [Applause]

[End of recorded material]