



TALKING ABOUT AUDIENCES

Roundtable Discussion

Transcript

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[Start of recorded material, Disk 3]

0:00:00 [Applause]

0:00:11 Steven Winn: Well, thanks again for sticking around and giving us your participation this afternoon. You know all the players so I won't do introductions. We are going to take questions from you. There are mics on either aisle here, so if you would approach the mic at that point, we will get to that in a bit.

But there were some things that were raised here in the first three portions of the evening, or the afternoon rather, that we want to pick up. And one was Sunil's sort of provocative and interesting statistic about what's happening to the seeming core audience, the forty-five to sixty-four, a kind of a sharp decline in those numbers. And with both Matthew and Brent here. Matthew from New York and Brent from San Francisco, orchestras, are here to talk about how they might have digested some of those numbers, which I'm sure they are intimately aware of, and how you think about them and what ways there are to address them and how the audience may be changing in both their age and behavior.

0:01:12 Brent Assink: Well, hi everyone. We've taken it as an article of faith over the years in the orchestra management biz, that if somebody experiences an orchestral concert at some point in their life prior to the age of fourteen or so, or better yet, they've played a musical instrument, that they are then going to disappear from us

for say a few decades. By that I mean in terms of regular attendance. They might come back on special occasions, but they will disappear while they go to school, they are busy getting established in their career, while they have young families, all those kinds of things.

00:01:49

But, when they reach that age when suddenly the house is empty, and they are looking at their partner, spouse, and they are saying, what are we going to do tonight, that the symphony starts to achieve some relevance, some re-connectivity back to their lives. And so they remember that they really enjoyed the symphony at some point in their lives. Or, again, as I said, better yet, much better, they played violin, or some other instrument as a child, and then that's when they come back. That's been received wisdom for many, many years.

00:02:27

So when they don't come back at the age of forty-five to sixty-four, whatever it is, that's when we really get nervous. Or, if they do come back, but they don't come back as often. We used to have them come back twelve times a year, or twenty four times a year, and now maybe they are coming back six times, or four times, or three times. So, to fill this wonderful hall, we have to find more people like them, or different types of people, to fill all of these seats. So that's been the received wisdom for a long time. So many things now so much have been turned on its head. Matthew, I don't know if that's...

00:03:11 Matthew VanBesien: Well, I think that's absolutely right. I think there has been that era of resignation and that sort of middle period of people's lives. And yet I keep coming back in my own mind about something I just made a quick reference to earlier and certainly that Elizabeth would have alluded to, which is that people are consuming the product in a different way now. The delivery is, there is so much more possibility now for both the live experience but, you know, capturing the experience and consuming it later on demand, which we all know is a trend that is really happening.

00:03:43 So, part of me says that if they are not coming back, is there a way to deliver the product in such a way that they would come back? When I think about my own peers, they love great music, they love coming and hearing the orchestra. But they don't necessarily like the way in which we deliver it over the course of two and a half hours with a twenty minute break, starting at eight p.m. And those are my peers who are not musically trained, but who really, I think have an interest, the people we absolutely want in.

So it's the live delivery experience, but also for the people who are raising children and have busy lives, are there ways that we can deliver what we do to them in some way to keep that connection over those years, which will better ensure they do come back to us at the appropriate time.

00:04:24 Brent Assink: Absolutely.

Steven Winn: What do you two make of the seeming decline in that core audience? You wanted them to come back, not only are they coming back less frequently because the subscription model seems to be, still an important part of your business but less so that it was a decade or two ago -- what do you make of the change in behavior?

00:04:46 Brent Assink: Well I think, again, we've talked often about the diminished availability of leisure time, and there's a complexity in the lives people are experiencing right now, and I think Matthew's exactly right. We have to do a better job of -- we simply shouldn't take it as a given that people disappear for a couple of decades. Now I kind of went to an extreme. I kind of made the case, we do a lot of family concerts, we have a lot of opportunities for kids and so forth, but I think you are right about the delivery mechanism, that we need to experiment more about how this great music is delivered to the audience. Much more context is provided; some of the mystery is removed; some of the times of day, the duration of the concerts, all of those kinds of things need to be experimented with such that those people, say, in that age group who aren't coming, give us a try.

00:05:48 Mark Clague: I was thinking about Davies After Hours, I mean, because you have been experimenting with some of that already, sort of an after party, maybe more targeting young people, but also young at heart people...

Brent Assink: Yeah. And also communities' music makers, which has been talked about earlier today, has been designed to provide another way in, another door, so that people feel comfortable here. I thought your comparison about the sleepovers at AT&T park, I didn't even know they did that, but that's, that's fantastic.

Elizabeth Scott: They've done it at some parks, but I think they've done it there.

00:06:25 Brent: Ok, well anyway, it's great, This is...

Mark Clague: These seats look sort of comfortable, do the backs let down?
[Laughter]

Matthew VanBesien: Do the arms go up?
[Laughter]

Brent Assink: I remember when we started the community music makers a few months ago and I went out onto the stage here and I -- this was for the first choral workshop -- and I came out to greet people. And I asked how many of them, had, for them, this was there first time on the debut stage. Well of course, most of them raised their hands. For many of them, I think the greatest experience for them was partly singing, but singing on this particular space really made the difference.

00:07:04 And even moreso, for the string workshop that we had a few weeks ago, and the winds and brass, because so many of our adult amateur

musicians -- and I use word amateur advisedly-- play in horrible acoustical spaces. And then to be able to do this here and to realize that, "Hey, I actually sound pretty good! I can actually hear myself. And even moreso, I can hear that person sitting across the stage." It's that connectivity that really matters such that then when they are in our audience sitting out, you know, half-way back, and they are picking up the communication that is happening from say the principal cello to the concert master, they can hear in their minds ear, if you will, kind of what that experience is like.

00:07:55

This is, ladies and gentlemen, a big generational shift too, more so than I think sometimes we realize, because it wasn't all that long ago that we not only had a fourth wall -- that is this wall between the stage and the audience -- but we were proud of it. We being the field. The musicians. You know that this way, there was, there needed to be an elevation between the professional musician and the audience, protected at all costs. I don't think of myself as all that old, but I've been in this field a long time, and I remember talking to a musician on our stage here, and I was trying to persuade him to talk to the audience, or at least greet the audience at some point, and he said no, because they have to look at me with a bit of mystery.

00:08:47

Matthew VanBesien: This is a very, very important point.

Brent Assink:

So, that wasn't all that long ago, really.

Matthew VanBesien: I think we would have to admit that as orchestras we are culpable in having nurtured and fostered an era of whether you want to call it mystery, or god forbid, elitism, we have fostered that. And yet now we are working to figure out how do we can pull back from that and actually strip some of those barriers away. Interestingly enough, Gilbert Alan sort of referred to it earlier, is that people still want some of that mystery. So there's, you have to figure out how do we still accommodate that sense of mystery, that sense of elevation, and yet provide enough opportunities to do these sort of participatory, high impact sort of experiences like being on stage with San Francisco Symphony musicians or chorus members. That's something that those people will take away, and that they will never forget. So, I think we have to do both. We have to...

00:09:44

Steven Winn: I wonder if what they want is mystery, or if what they want is magic, in the sense that, part of what's amazing about watching a great baseball hit or an incredible catch at the morning track is that you can imagine doing it yourself. The feat is incredible, but it's incredible because you can relate to it and you can connect to it. And so in some ways, this connection can strengthen the appreciation of what's amazing about these artists, and why they can play faster or higher or louder than anybody else. And really what's incredible about the athleticism, that's another connection with baseball. I mean we have a unique park, in a sense, right? Every hall has its own design, its own special flavor and color just like Candlestick or the Green Monster or whatever, every

park is a little bit different, but also, these are athletes, and we want to get to know them a little bit.

10:35

I think the term orchestra has sometimes been a kind of barrier: does it mean the institution? Does it mean the ensemble? You know, the individuals are often lost and the conductor becomes the figure head. But we don't usually meet the other people, and technology seems like a great way to get to know the players. I think, you know, I know from myself as a music student, I was a bassoonist, and you know, I knew every principal player in the United States and I knew who they had trained with and who their teachers were and how they made reeds and what kind of tools they used and, you know, my students now are the same way. They know who the all-stars are in their little world. We don't celebrate the stars in our orchestras very effectively, and I think we could.

00:11:18

Elizabeth Scott: What I keep hearing, as we talked about, what technology can do, is it can democratize an experience that has been this very, historically-laden, at least, elitist one. And this is great in many ways, but it is also unnatural for the industry in other ways. But I would suggest that Maestro Gilbert, making himself available for an interview where he gets all wired up and we get to understand from a kinesthetic and physical standpoint what it means to conduct, that no mystery has been lost here. If anything, we have been given another way in for folks.

00:11:59 Mark Clague: Let me approach that question from the same slide: does democratizing through technology open the doors, or does it in some ways change the way the doors work? For example, what's being much discussed now is the success of the Met's HD broadcasts all over the country and now all over the world, they are expanding all over the world, a little less applicable to ...

Brent Assink: You mean "Mets" the baseball team? Or the..
[Laughter]
I mean, which "Mets" do you mean?

Steven Winn: Yes, both, exactly.
[Laughter]

00:12:35 Mark Clague: It's been much written about -- is it changing the way opera audiences see or want to see opera, because they get close-ups in a way that you can't from the second balcony, or even from the tenth row of the orchestra. And indeed, there's even questions about whether the Met -- they've been a little bit dicey about this -- is whether it has changed the way they are staging their productions. The way in which technology can inflect the way we see, and indeed the way things connect to the audience.

We've had a little with the LA Phil Live, there is a little sort of experience with this in your world, it's probably more of an issue across the street, but I wonder how you all are thinking about that,

and how it's just changing something very fundamental about audiences and art.

00:13:17

Brent Assink: Well I think it speaks to the power of the art form too because I think one of the things that we all struggle with is that there are so many doors into the art form of the orchestral music, that we are not sure which doors we should have open at the same time. I feel personally that having screens above the audience is a terrific experience, but it is a different experience. I'm not making a value judgment here, but it is a different experience. It is a little bit like if I were listening to the Beethoven's 3rd symphony performed by the symphony but I was following along with the score -- I would enjoy it, but it would be a different experience.

So I think sometimes we struggle with which doors to have open, which ones will speak to which audience, which ones will frankly turn off which audience. We do not have a bashful audience and we hear from people who say that they find various things very distracting, and we have to respect that. And we really do have a lot of conversations in this building about who we really are and who we are going to be in the future, and what that all means for the delivery of this art form.

00:14:40

Elizabeth Scott: Our audience is not monolithic. So I think that means that it is our job to give as many doors a key, right? And have that key sit in the hand of the consumer, as possible. So, you are absolutely right, there may be some who find the screen

distracting. With the opera, we see you have the choice of shows you go to where the IMAG, or the image magnification technology, is active or not. Last night I thought it was fantastic with the Barbary Coast concert, but there might be those for whom that would have been a distraction. Maybe it becomes something that they can curate or not in their own seat.

Maybe there are program notes or something they can read or not in their own seat. I think part of the issue with the brand of elitism that we have been given is this idea that, one, we will say what your experience will be, rather than our saying, here are the different ways you might have this experience.

00:15:38 Steven Winn: So just thinking about it from managing resources kind of view, if you are the owner of the orchestra or not owner, manager, director...

Brent Assink: Owner works.
[Laughter]

Steven Winn: I tend to think lofty.
[Laughter].
Are we at a point where we really are trying all of these different doors in very much that fashion, like, let's give as many variety of options as possible, or do you feel that now, in the last few years, some of these have kind of consolidated? Do you feel that there are a few doors that are definitely tried and true, other than the obvious,

coming to see a performance, that, I mean, has it worked? Like a family night kind of thing, or, seeing a live rehearsal, or HD, or do you feel they are all equally unknown and equally viable in their own way?

00:16:23

Matthew VanBesien: I'm not sure that we, especially within the orchestral world, have really found the sweet spot, if you will, when it comes to the visual capture and delivery of what we do. If you look at the LA Phil's foray into this, if you look at the Berlin digital concert hall, which I'm talking about live delivery or streaming of concerts. Where I think there has been more successes, something that has been heralded here in San Francisco Symphony, which is the behind the scenes, the insides behind the music, the things that help prepare people or enlighten people further to what they are going to experience.

I sort of feel that that is probably the direction in which we need to head. It might enhance the actual live experience in your seat, which I think is very interesting, and we have for instance a digital archive where we have all of Bernstein's scores digitized, and you can look at a score on an iPad and see his markings of the Mahler Symphony. Someday I'd love for conducting students or interested people to be sitting in the back of the hall with their iPad following the score -- not just any score, Bernstein's own score -- of the Mahler Symphony.

00:17:31 But I do believe that the things that will help us most are the things that help drive people into the live experience because that is still the wind for us. Whisperings without screens, experiencing music having a shared experience in the concert hall, in the same way that for major league baseball -- I was going to ask you Elizabeth about that -- is television changing baseball in the same way that we wonder if the media is changing what we do? I still think that the win is us driving people into the concert hall for that live experience with new media.

00:18:05 Elizabeth Scott: We may debate what makes sense to make available in the hall for sure, and I do think ultimately-- when you say, how we are going to resolve this? It will probably come down to what we can let people control, because people want to control it. What can they control without me interfering with your experience? Because you might want that absolutely pure experience tonight, and whatever I'm doing should not interfere with that. I think we'll all agree with that.

But I think what we have seen in sport is by having a ubiquity of the availability of this content, multiple touch points with it, whether it's with a subscription to something that lets you know the latest that has happened to being able to watch the entirety in mobile devices or in broadcast, that has corresponded with strong attendance.

00:18:52

I don't know that one is the cause of the other, but I was just thinking actually as I sat here right now, last year, at least four clubs had milestones of their own best ever attendance, including the local San Francisco Giants. The same year in which *The Franchise*, which documented their every doing off the field, happened. Is there a connection? I'm not going to for a minute suggest that one caused the other but, those multiple points of connection with what media allows with the sport. That's one of the things we had to contend with, and I think that the performing arts are certainly contending with, is this idea that offering multiple media platforms is somehow going to cannibalize rather than lift the attraction of the live. If you give exciting ways in through media, you will want to come in the hall.

19:49

Steven Winn: I wanted to pick up one thing, really important point that even in the live experience, we all do experience things in our own way. I was thinking about baseball and the Beethoven scores. Some people sit there watching the game, keeping score, and that improves their experience; for me that would be torturous. Or, people who want to listen to the game on the radio while they are at the game. And we all do this in the hall here no matter what we are doing.

I sometimes feel guilty when I pick up my program in the middle of the piece and say, I really shouldn't be reading this now but I kind of forget what happened in the third movement . . . I mean, I kind of forget what the commentator had to say. And sometimes I do it, and

by god, it improves my experience-- I'm a better listener, even though I'm reading at that moment. I mean it's sort of a trivial example, but we all do have our own experience, I think as audience members, and we should feel that that's something that individually and as organizations that we should embrace.

00:20:44 Brent Assink: But someone made the point earlier today, and I can't remember who it was, about the role of the, I think Alan said it actually, about the role of the audience member and how visceral that feeling is that's coming back from the hall. And so in that way, it's very different from Major League Baseball games that I've been at, where the crowd is doing practically everything, and sometimes they are watching the game, sometimes they are doing all kinds of other things. I cannot stress strongly enough, the quality of the performance that comes from this stage often depends on the kind of feedback that is coming back from the audience. You might be reading a program book, and people might not be feeling that here necessarily, but we've all been in arts experiences, maybe not only orchestra, where we leave surprisingly uplifted. But it was in part because of what happened on the stage, but also because we felt we shared an experience with the audience that we were all kind of stunned by, surprised by, and that we all had a role in making it happen.

00:21:47 And we've done surveys of our audiences over the years and so many people say they come here for a spiritual, a deep experience, and they share it with a room full of 2500 strangers. And that's a

very individualized experience, but a shared one. So there is that distinction, that I think those of us who run orchestras are really, really nervous about losing, because then we feel that we have lost the real core, the distinctiveness, the uniqueness of what we're all about.

00:22:23 Matthew VanBesien: You're in a different business at that point.

Brent Assink: To a certain degree, yes.

Matthew VanBesien: You're in the media business, or some other business.

Brent Assink: Or something else. So, what do we do here Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Scott: Well, I think we should not have a narrow notion of what it means to participate in the performance. That's really what it's about. Because that, what you've just described, that magical moment where rapt, we all sit here and afterwards, it's like, "Wow, we've all just experienced that." Which doesn't happen every night, but when it does, it is unparalleled. That can't be the only thing -- I don't think -- we are aspiring to. Because there will be, and there are, other ways to feel like you are participating as an audience member. And honestly, if we don't give those to the audience members, I think that will be at our peril.

00:23:17 Today, entertainment experiences generally, and we are one of them -- I don't know that we can say that we are something other than

them, we are one of them - entertainment experiences, when you are sitting in the chair of the audience, you don't want to be merely a passenger. You want to be a participant. You want to be able to co-author your meaning of that experience. You want to give feedback about it. And insofar as we are facilitating that, we are making them feel like they have a voice in that experience somehow. Which is more than "bravo" and standing at the end.

00:23:58 Male Voice: That's almost an invitation for the audience.

00:24:06 Mark Clague: Well, I can give a little sense while people are getting ready about what that might result and the intriguing thing for me about Steven's reminding us of this internal spiritual experience is that if you can get people to share those internal experiences there is another kind of magic that happens. I've done this with my students. Asking them to go to a concert and then they have to write an online response within two hours. Not come to class next Tuesday and tell me what you think you remember about it, but tell me what you thought immediately after, and what they write about are things that are very personal, they are not things from music history textbooks. They are like, "My grandfather took me to hear this piece when I was seven, and I still remember him holding my hand as we walked past." "I thought..." "I was really scared about..." and they were these incredible -- they had nothing to do with Beethoven, they had nothing to do with the symphony, but they were these intensely moving emotional things. And what happens is when one person shows that, then other students in the

class say, you know, there was this other part that reminded me of my grandmother. And it's this totally different aberrant memory, but there is a whole level of listening that happens in our audiences that we know nothing about, that we didn't author, and we don't sanction, and therefore it doesn't exist as far as we are concerned.

00:25:19 Steven Winn: Which may have everything to do with Beethoven, finally. [Laughter]

Matthew VanBesien: There's more to it than that, and that is you cannot put a value, or it's very difficult to put a value on the energy and buzz, if you will, during a week in which something special and magical is happening in performance. You feel it in the anticipation leading up, whether it's from the orchestra. You feel it during the first evening's performance which then translates into the successive nights. You know when you have it, you can't always put your finger on exactly what is happening. But in some ways it's the greatest marketing tool in a short period of time. It transcends any amount of, forgive me, print media, or advertising online that you could do which is that sense of word of mouth, because there are so many ways for people now to send that message to one another. It used to be if you happen to be talking on the phone the next day. Now there are a hundred different ways for people. So the more we can tap into that real-time feedback. I'm very interested in the notion of the spin-room concept right after a performance, which is that people really get a chance to say what's on their mind about [unintelligible].

00:26:25 Elizabeth Scott: We elicit emotion as a part of what it is that we do. We are not a carpet cleaner or a carbonated beverage or car. I mean, they are out there dying to leverage social media, and that's the challenge for them. That shouldn't be it for us, right?

Steven Winn: Exactly. Let's go to a question here.

Susan Key: Thank you. I wanted to pass along two questions that have come in through our internet, through our live broadcast. One is from the Classical Voice live feed. Both of these deal with specific topics that you have talked about about audience, and different ways of constructing the live experience. One is, "What about lowering the stage level of the orchestra? The platform creates a forbidding fortress-like effect." Then, from Jeremy Peters, through our live feed, "What are you doing about emerging audience adult-segment concerts that related to people my age?" He didn't say what his age is, but I'm guessing it is below that forty-five to sixty-four that we have been talking about. So if you could just explore a little bit more about those two ideas. Thank you.

00:27:30 Brent Assink: Lowering the stage. [Laughter]
I guess that's a metaphor for kind of removing the sense that there is some kind of elevation here or some kind of sacred space. I think there are some real practical considerations to keep in mind. Because we are in the business of acoustic music, we pay attention to how the instruments project and how exactly the musicians are seated here. It does get to the point though of how much we really

listen with our eyes. And when Davies was remodeled in 1992, we went from the prairie-style of seating, where the orchestra was all on the flat, to these tiered risers. And the result was that the sense from many people out in the hall that they were connecting more with the individual musicians in the orchestra. It's only logical that that would happen. I like the concept though about removing the elevation of the stage. How it works practically of course is a whole other thing.

00:28:35 Mark Clague: What year did you say that it was remodeled?
Just curious.

Brent Assink: What, sorry?

Mark Clague: What year was it remodeled?

Brent Assink: 1992. 1992 to 1993. Yeah. Huge change to the whole [unintelligible].

Audience Member: When you do your Armory concert, what will be the [set-up]?

00:28:46 Matthew VanBesien: So, it's really interesting. So, you've obviously got this huge canvas with which to work, so the Stockhausen *Gruppen*, which really is the centerpiece of the performance, has three orchestras. So there are three orchestras equidistant from one another in a sort of triangle shape around this huge space, and all the seating is done then in between. So up on risers, and actually,

Alan will conduct from a single podium in the middle, not connected to any of the three orchestras, and they are seated in circles all around him. And I think it's a great idea, it's a great concept, and I think what the question sort of alludes to: Are there opportunities to put the orchestra in a different configuration?

00:29:29

The time that I actually have had the chance to hear and witness Stockhausen *Gruppen* was actually at the proms when they actually had two of the orchestras in the promming area. If you know the Royal Albert Hall there is this huge open area where people stand during a concert. Well the orchestras -- two of the orchestras were right there -- and you could get right up next to where they were playing and people could see their music. And I thought how fantastic for people to be able to physically witness what artists do in close proximity. So I think week-in week-out it's tough to do that in an acoustically designed hall but are there opportunities for us to present music in a completely different way; in a way that people can experience it in a much more up close and impactful way.

00:30:12

Elizabeth Scott: I'd like to hear the question in the metaphorical sense, so how do we take down the platform and make things more accessible? One thing that comes to mind as that question is asked, was actually something that I thought was done quite phenomenally with the San Francisco Symphony's *Keeping Score* project. What comes to mind immediately was a piccolo player being interviewed about a Stravinsky passage -- in either *The Rite of Spring* or *Firebird*...

Brent Assink: I think it was Tchaikovsky Four.

Elizabeth Scott: Was it Tchaik Four? Ok. Well, it's one of the most perilous -- I could have sworn it was Stravinsky -- in any event -- it's one of the most perilous places in music for the piccolo player. And we hear candidly . . .

Brent Assink: You'll hear it tonight.

Elizabeth Scott: Ok, yes. That's right! We hear candidly the description of this as being fear instilling for all piccolo players, this is what they all have to play when they go through their conservatory and their audition processes, and by the time we get to that in the program, I'll tell you, the stage is gone. We are in the piccolo player's seat and we are rooting for her as she does it. And so I think there is that analogy that we can use media to take the stage away.

00:31:15 Steven Winn: I'm thinking of some of your research on festivals, and just the way in which the audience member at a festival has more choices and more opportunities and they feel more control over the situation -- it seems like there are a lot of parallels to this idea.

Mark Clague: Yeah, it's really interesting. A few years ago, we decided that we have been studying arts organizations, as you say hundreds of reports -- maybe not that many -- but we've done a lot of reports,

and they've tended to focus on specific types of arts institutions whether we are talking about museums as a whole, or orchestras, or theaters for dramas. And we thought, ok, let's look at festivals because clearly it's a species of its own, it doesn't really have anyone necessarily looking out for it, and its all over the country in all sorts of places and open air festivals of various kinds. We found the majority of them, by the way, were juried, and tended to be -- I would argue, very high quality things were brought to the floor in those festivals. That said, there's a great deal of interactivity, the same things we talk about when we talk about online media for example: the choice, the customization, the audiences being able to wander where they will. It's, you know, bring the family, go around everywhere. And, you know, there's that permeable aspect between the artist and the audience because they interact quite often as these festivals and fairs. And the other thing is it's like many doors at once, as you said. I haven't had the good fortune to be at a good classical music festival, for example, but I know that they often also have that same, like many other good festivals, have that strong vibe.

00:32:51

Steven Winn: Susan, could we hear that second question again? Sorry to have you sprinting down there.

00:33:38

Susan: We also just heard over the live feed that the young man who asked the question is 32. The question was about I think sort of alternative formats. What kinds of concert engagement

opportunities are you thinking about for that emerging young adult audience?

Brent Assink: Well, I think here we have a lesson to learn from what Michael Tilson Thomas is doing with the New World Symphony and the new venue in Miami Beach in two ways.

00:34:07 One is multiple stages. Talk about removing the stage. The stage there for the full orchestra is lower than the seating for the audience. It's very much the audience looking down at the stage. So that's one. The other is that there are multiple stages. So there are small stages up above the other stage. So in some performance concerts, there can be a full orchestra playing something, and then that will end.

00:34:33 And then the lighting will go on to another part of the building, where there's a small stage, where a chamber music group is already set up and playing something else. A totally different type of experience, almost by definition less formal, because you're moving away from one to the other. The other way that hall is so distinctive is the wall casts, where you can be sitting outside. And that really does remove the stage, and, again, gives a totally different entre into this type of music.

00:35:03 What I found so interesting about it was when I was sitting out there on the lawn on a balmy evening in Miami Beach, the director of the video was telling me what to watch -- was deciding for me what I could watch. I suppose it's like the Met broadcasts in that way,

right? So sometimes I might have wanted to be seeing what the principle bassoon was doing at that particular moment, but I did not have that option because the producer of the wall cast was deciding what I was going to watch.

00:35:37 Great. It's fantastic. It's really a wonderful way to, again, recognize that that is another door that has just opened for us to try and experiment. But it is a different type of experience.

Steven Winn: Do we have another audience question? We have one at the mic here, and we'll take you next.

00:35:58 Audience Member: I'm hearing two words from all of you today -- populism versus the sacred. And I really sympathize with you trying to figure out how to balance those two experiences. As an audience participant here in San Francisco, both at the symphony and at live theater, I'm wondering if you have thought, in this bringing in of the different experiences, how to educate the audience in reverse about how to participate?

00:36:38 One of my chief gripes are the people that bring the 7-year-old to a serious Mahler concert, and let the child bounce around in the chairs. Or the people that lean forward, blocking my view, because they think they can hear better by leaning forward. So are there things that can be done to educate the audience about audience participation?

Matthew VanBesien: Wow, okay. It's a very tricky subject for us, to be perfectly honest. Because if we become too precious about what we do in the concert hall -- shushing people, for instance -- then people have sometimes, if it's their first time, they have a very negative reaction to that.

00:37:38 And I think all of us who have worked in the orchestral business have seen or witnessed firsthand instances where somebody came to the concert hall, did something that they weren't supposed to do, and then probably never come back. So we're a little bit between a rock and a hard place, where we want the ritual, and yet the reality is we need people who have not been in the concert hall before, and we need them to have some latitude, at least initially, in terms of how they interact and how they sort of behave, if you will.

00:38:12 I'm personally never bothered by audiences clapping between movements. I mean the reality is that that's something we concocted at some point, artificially, in the art form. So that never bothers me. I know it bothers some people. Of course, there are times when it's more bothersome than others. I don't know that we have an answer for that. I think that hopefully we have to work to help the people who are long-standing patrons understand that people coming in who are less experienced, that that's a good thing.

00:38:45 And I would guess that while you're frustrated by some of your audiences' behaviors from time to time, you want us to be able to bring in new audience as well. So I'm not sure how we balance that in the end.

00:38:58 Brent Assink: It's a really good question. I wonder if we could approach it also from a positive angle, and just find a way to tell the audience that the musicians can feel, can sense when there's undivided attention coming this direction, and just maybe use that as a way to encourage certain kinds of etiquette happening. I always sit there, and I've noticed this season that there's an audience member sitting over here who is at almost every concert -- not all of them, but certainly a lot of them.

00:39:30 And he absolutely loves the music, and makes no apologies for that, to the point where he is conducting sometimes. Really, really thoroughly energized by the music. I think for some people out here, it could be a distraction. I don't think we've heard from anybody yet that that person is distracting. But isn't that great? I mean really, fundamentally, isn't that wonderful?

00:40:00 Part of the joys of live performance -- and some of the frustrations of live performance -- is its unpredictability. And I do find myself sometimes irritated with some audience members' behavior, but we're a community. And community etiquette is, I guess, changing maybe in some ways. But I think we should think about finding a positing way to frame it.

00:40:25 Mark Clague: I think you mentioned it and you alluded to it, that the convention of etiquette in concerts and how they're conducted is completely a cultural contract. I mean 200 years ago,

people ate. And as Ben Cameron said in his blog post, going to a concert 200 years ago was a very different kind of experience than what it is now. And what's to say that that –

[crosstalk]

00:41:03 Steven Winn: We had a question down front here. Do you mind going to the microphone? Thank you. Sorry, while she's going, yes, let's take yours.

Audience Member: Yes. Because I'm around here a lot as a volunteer, I've gotten to know quite a number of the orchestra members. I find that really helpful, and I wish there were more opportunities for people to get acquainted with them, as I am. I know Peter and Amos and Larry, and know what's going on with them. That really gives me a connection.

00:41:36 When I go to New York, for example, I don't know those people. I like them, but I don't know them.

Matthew VanBesien: I can probably arrange an introduction or two.

Audience Member: What was your name again? I'll be there next month.

Steven Winn: It's a really good point. And we have heard that as kind of a recurring theme in these discussions, is that they should be as known and as recognized as the baseball team members are.

00:42:04 Matthew VanBesien: Yeah. What I find fascinating about all this is there's a real plurality of interests here. I mean I don't know if everybody would say what she just said, but I think a lot of people would. But then other people would be with the guy back here, conducting. I mean it's almost like putting the research hat on. If you could identify these kinds of segments and really target them, and find ways strategically through your repertoire.

00:42:29 Male Voice: I think there's a cultural issue -- and it's getting much, much better -- is helping our musicians and the orchestra understand how important the relationship is between them and the audience. I think sometimes they underestimate how powerful that can be. But I've seen it with my wife, for instance, who's not a musician. Once she started to know people in the orchestra, she'd come back from a concert, "Dave had a big solo tonight." You know, she notices things in a way with personal connections now. I was actually going to ask Elizabeth, because I saw a story the other night on the news about the demise of the baseball card industry.

00:43:06 And forgive me for asking, because I'm sure this is an obvious answer. But how has baseball transitioned from the physicality of baseball cards, which kids collected when I was growing up, to being able to have people have that -- I mean that was their own connection with individual players, I suspect.

Elizabeth Scott: That's a great question. If you think about what the card did back in the analog era of paper assets being able to tell us important things -
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Steven Winn: That's as analog as it gets, I think.

00:43:33 Elizabeth Scott: Yeah. I mean it told you the stats, the success of this individual. It was necessarily limited, only allowing for one image, and telling you whatever stats had been compiled at the moment of printing. Fast forward to today, you're right, that's a different proposition in this era. But I would argue that the new and improved and vastly more dimensionalized version of that is something like the companion second screen offering that MLB app is.

00:44:11 Which you could turn on your game, or you could go to the ballpark and have in your lap something that gives you another way in, and a whole bunch of stats and information about who you see on the field at that given moment. So it's just a dynamic version of the baseball card.

00:44:30 Steven Winn: A question over here?

Audience Member: Thank you so much. I would like to just preface this by just saying that not only have I been attending music since I've been a child, but I have been a music teacher, I am a musician, and I have performed. And I run music programs where I wrote my own

material and programmed the music, specializing in 20th century music.

00:45:00 And I also am always interacting with students, many of them from other countries, and a great many of them, of course, coming from pop and rock. And I want to bring up something that I have so much to say because of this very, very broad experience from my whole life, but there never is the opportunity. This is not the time for it, and I'll just limit myself to two things.

00:45:27 One thing that is never really considered -- and this, I think is something very crucial and very, very critical -- especially where we are considering trying to maintain and to build and outreach on new audiences, where there is a crossover from musical genres. And the very, very first contact that someone will have who has not been brought up in classical music is the box office.

00:45:58 And I will say that I'm a native of San Francisco, and so I've dealt with opera, symphony, ballet all my life, and, of course, writing it in as a subscriber. But dealing with the box, there are many, many young people -- and when I say young people, I mean people who are under 30. I don't mean just teenagers -- who are curious, and very, very interested in classical music. Because they get strains of it as excerpts or as adaptations in their pop music, and they want to hear the real thing.

00:46:33 And they want to hear it here because they know we've got a world-class orchestra. And so they're dealing with trying to buy tickets. And, of course they're single tickets, they're not subscribers yet. They may never be. And their first experience is with the box office. I work with a lot of college people, and so I know this. And they're not only buying tickets to concerts, to SF Symphony, not just pop concerts that take place in Davies Hall, but actual symphony concerts.

00:47:09 They're also dealing with opera and with ballet. And one thing about our San Francisco Symphony box office -- and this has been a trend through many, many years -- is that they don't find a graciousness and a warmth and a welcoming tone, especially over the telephone.

00:47:34 Many of these people, they can't even pronounce the composers names. Some of them can barely make themselves understood. But from their own countries, they have been exposed to classical music. They want to hear it here. And it's very scary for them to buy tickets, especially over the phone. They find that it's bad enough in person at the box office here. But they find it especially so over the telephone.

00:48:01 They've told me this, and I, myself, have noticed it, but I just let it pass because I know how things are. But I think this is something that's very important to address. Their second exposure then, once they have the ticket, is that they come into the hall, and they are

immediately exposed to and received by the ticket takers and the usher staff. They are wonderful. Despite their tuxedos, the tuxedos don't intimidate these newcomers.

00:48:34 They could, but they don't. Because this staff is warm, accommodating, welcoming. They treat you like you're really, really special, even if you've been to this place over and over. They recognize me. They know I've been here through all these years. And they still treat me like I'm really special. This matters to those people who are coming in new to classical music.

00:49:00 And I've wanted to express this for years, and I've never had the opportunity. And I took that chance today because I know that it's risky because I'm not saying flattering things. But this is an important aspect -- very important, because it is the very, very first face and voice that they are presented with when they try to attempt to cross over the barrier from rock and pop or no music into classical.

00:49:30 The other thing that I wanted to say is I mean I love what I call the SOB. It's like blood corpuscles to me. It's symphony, opera, ballet. And I love opera and ballet when it's on the stage, in the house across the street, and when it's on the big screen. And I wonder if there's a possibility. I mean we did have the LA Phil with Dudamel.

00:49:58 Why can't we also have a series of concerts that are filmed for a different kind of subscription for people who have grown up with

films and with video, who want to hear a big sound because they've grown up with rock sound, hearing our concerts in the theater? And then they can also be transferred into DVDs and sold that way. I come to the symphony, and there are certain performances, certain interpretations I want to hear again, over and over again, and I can't.

00:50:28 It might be broadcast on KDFC, but once, that's it. They might rebroadcast it four years later, but they don't know. Why can't we also have that and build a different kind of audience, which would also, through the side door, bring them into the concert hall? Those are the two things. I have lots of stuff to say. I'll limit myself to two, and that's two.

Steven Winn: Thank you for that. Brent, she's given you a big menu there.

00:50:56 Brent Assink: Thank you. Point taken on the box office. And I will say that we work very, very hard to make sure that our box office staff is cordial, friendly, and aware that they're talking to people for many of whom this is a first time experience. I'm not disagreeing with your point, but we get regular raves too about the box office staff. But the other thing I was going to say is that so many of the new people who are coming in are now not even talking to people.

00:51:29 They've just coming in through the Web sites. So to that extent, the Web sites has got to be extremely friendly, easy to navigate, so that the first timers can click on the sound clips and say, "Yes, that is the

piece that I thought it was, and yes, I am going to buy a ticket for that." So we can always do better. You're absolutely right. The public face of our organizations really, really matter. From the second that you first try and buy your ticket until you get home after the performance, it's an entire package.

00:52:04 To your second point, the answer is yes. We should and wish we could do much, much more. Cost is always an inhibitor. Rights is always an inhibitor. But we would love to make the performances, the music basically in your lives -- anybody's lives -- every step of the way. So Keeping Score was part of that.

00:52:30 We're working on new elements of Keeping Score, such that it is more ubiquitous, more available, more easily accessed in smaller chunks. Again, there's just so many doors that we can open using technology.

Steven Winn: Speaking of the box office, I can't believe we've talked about audience for almost three hours now and haven't talked about what is a huge factor for audience, and that's ticket cost. Baseball talks about dynamic pricing all the time. They're very sensitive. When the Dodgers are in, a tickets to the Giants game is more expensive than when the Pirates are here.

00:53:00 How are you all thinking about dynamic pricing? And like an airline, you'd like to sell every seat, even if it meant deeply

discounting some of them. How are you dealing with the audience on that -- to them -- very important matter?

Brent Assink: Do you want to go first on that?

Matthew VanBesien: Sure. Look, we're an arts organization. We're a not-for-profit. But we have financial pressures, and part of our charge is to maximize our revenue generation, and part of that is through ticket sales.

00:53:30 So we do from time to time employ dynamic pricing. It's not incredibly commonplace, and we certainly don't do it with the spirit of making a performance inaccessible to audiences. We try to respond to the market, but also temper that with a desire to make things accessible. I guess from my own personal feeling, those are things that we need to do in order to be fiscally responsible and live up to the business operation mandate that we have.

00:54:00 Having said that, I think especially on the lower end of things in terms of availability of tickets for young people to core performances, I think there's more we should do. I think we should figure out a way to strip price as a barrier out of the equation as much as possible. There should still be a transaction. There should be still a sense of value from that transaction in coming to a performance. But it would be great to see our own organization move in some directions to strip that price barrier away. I think there's lots that we can do on that front, to be sure.

00:54:38 Brent Assink: Yeah, I agree. And I think the word value really comes into the equation here. I think many people don't realize that you can come to practically any concert here for \$15 for various seating sections. So I would suggest that price is perhaps not as much of a barrier as the perception that it is expensive is a barrier. That's one.

00:55:01 And then the other thing is many of us have gone to things that were expensive, or that we thought was expensive, but we thought, "This is great. This is worth every penny." And then there have been other things that were not so expensive, and it wasn't great, and we still felt that it was ripped off. So the question is, is the price value equation aligned? And so many of the things that we've been talking about today are about delivering the value such that price is not the issue.

00:55:36 So I think that your reference to value really, really hits home.

Elizabeth Scott: We've got one question there.

Steven Winn: Yes?

Audience Members: Yes, thank you. My perspective, I guess, on new audiences is as a cello dad -- my daughter, who's 13, is a cellist. She definitely enjoys going to the orchestra much more because of her active participation in music.

00:56:04 She's in a youth symphony. She's had the experience of going to the orchestra and hearing the orchestra -- we live in Seattle, so Seattle Symphony -- play pieces that she's played. And I know that she's very excited to hear the same music that she works so hard on performed by professionals, and the results that they get. She's also a very acute critic of music she hears, and doesn't always necessarily find the interpretations of conductors that come through to her liking.

00:56:30 She actually is fortunate to have a teacher who is in the cello section of the orchestra, and at one of her lessons she said, "You know, I really didn't understand the cuing that that guest conductor was giving the orchestra in a performance." And he said, "Well, you know, I have to tell you, the orchestra didn't either." But the fact is, I can tell that she really is engaged with the performances, and I'm sure she'll be a lifelong orchestra goer.

00:56:58 And, you know, perhaps one of the keys to the concern that Mr. Assink brought up recently of having young people who participate, and who have been coming back in the past when they're older, is to encourage them not to put down their instruments. Joshua Roman, the cellist, recently posted on his blog a comment that, in the past -- in the 18th and 19th centuries -- audiences were made up much more of people who were amateur musicians themselves.

00:57:28 And now we have more of a model where we have consumers of classical music, who are passively receiving the product of very

highly trained professionals. And there's much more of a disconnect. And I think that's part of where that fourth wall comes from. So I guess my question for you would be what would be some of the ways that professional orchestras and other professional arts organizations can encourage amateurism, and encourage people to continue playing when they're in college, continue to play in their homes, and as chamber musicians, that doesn't take much in the way of resources to do, and to engage with these organizations to support their activities?

00:58:06

Brent Assink: Well, Community of Music Makers is designed exactly for that type of person. I do find it disturbing when people tell me that they've played a musical instrument through college, and then they set it aside. And then a few years later, they don't pick it up again because it is too frustrating, not rewarding anymore. For those of us who have played musical instruments, we found probably a part of who we are in the expression of making music on that instrument.

00:58:35

And then for us to decide that we've reached the age of 22 or 24 to whatever, and something else has crowded that out of our lives, we really shouldn't allow that to happen very easily. And I think you're absolutely right. We, as orchestras, have a really, really important role to play to demolish some of that false dichotomy between professional and amateur. And what's I think very hopeful for our field in the future is that people are less willing to be categorized in that way too.

00:59:07 They want to participate. They want to chart their own course. They want to be musicians themselves. And I think we've really tapped into a vein of great energy here with the Community Music Makers program, where we put an announcement out, and it sells out pretty much right away. We're turning people away. We have a waiting list. And it's something that is tremendously exciting. So thanks for sharing your story.

00:59:36 Steven Winn: Hopeful notes are always a great way to end. You have been a great audience today, and will be going forward. Do we have one last question here?

Male Voice: There's one over there.

Steven Winn: Okay. The audience gets the last word, always. It's only fitting.

Audience Member: It's just a comment. My name is Rosa, and I am from Chile. And I have visited most of the symphony halls around the world.

01:00:01 And talking about spirituality and happiness, in all those places I have seen that connection -- a wonderful connection -- people happy to be there, they understand why they are there, and a wonderful feeling contrary to other huge gatherings. When I go to a soccer game in Brazil, 80,000 people in that tension, who is going to win?

- 01:00:35 At the end, they leave sad, fighting. What about in Spain, the bullfights? An animal has to die. Or car racing, terrible things can happen. It's true at the Coliseum in Rome. People were killed by animals.
- 01:01:04 But the symphony is something that really is very positive. And I leave with that wonderful feeling, peace of mind. And I know that I will continue visiting the main symphony halls like this one.
- Male Voice: Thank you.
- 01:01:29 Steven Winn: Very quickly, to finish us off please. Yes.
- Audience Member: This is for Elizabeth. Perhaps you all are doing something that we all can learn from here in the West. What's going on with Lincoln Center then, in your position? Lincoln Center has three residents -- the opera, the ballet, the symphony. What is your relationship? Do you provide an umbrella of service? Are you an example of resource sharing among those three entities to improve their involvement with the media? Can you speak to that?
- 01:02:03 Elizabeth Scott: I love that question. There's actually 11 resident organizations on the campus. And Lincoln Center sits at the center of those, and does facilitate relationships, not only amongst them, but also it centralizes certain activities. A good example of that on a media front is the 36 year running PBS series, Live From

Lincoln Center, which features, more often than not, the performances of our resident organizations.

01:02:30 And that's a perfect example, in my mind, for the investing in one production outfit, if you will -- which is the Live From Lincoln Center production outfit -- can benefit multiple of the organizations on campus. I think your question intimates might there be the possibility for aggregated action amongst those constituents in support of any of the initiatives we might be talking about? And I think the answer is yes.

01:03:01 A perfect sort of small example of that is there's a digital infoscape that has recently been put on the campus as a part of the significant physically redevelopment of the campus. And the participation of all the performing arts organizations on campus contributing to that is something that's possible only because it's been aggregated in one space. I think there's that possibility on a media front for distribution, absolutely. And I think it could also very well happen beyond the campus itself of Lincoln Center. So stay tuned.

01:03:33 Steven Winn: Great, great. Thank you to the panel members, and to you, very much. Thank you so much.

Brent Assink: And in appreciation for your attendance today, I want to let you know that we have free CDs for you, the first five American Orchestra Forum podcasts, that are available in the lobby on your way out. Please do pick them up.

01:04:00 Please do share your comments with us. We've really loved sharing our thoughts with you, and hearing back from you. We'd love to continue the dialogue. Thank you so much. Hope to see many of you here at 7 o'clock tonight. Thank you.

[End of recorded material]