



TALKING ABOUT AUDIENCES

Keynote Conversation Transcript

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Matthew VanBesien, Executive Director Designate
New York Philharmonic

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00:00:51 Brent Assink: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Brent Assink, executive director of the San Francisco symphony. It's very nice to see you here on our third and final American Orchestra Forum event, and this one is titled talking about audiences. I'm pleased to see you here today, and to share with you the role of the arts and orchestra in our lives, and thank you for spending this afternoon with us, and happy mother's day to those of you who are mothers out there.

00:01:19 We're glad that you're here.

As you know, today's forum explores the question of how a live musical performance -- which is, of course, the essence of what an orchestra offers -- fits into our increasingly virtual online, distracted, disconnected audiences. How can we as orchestras respond to this, and really think through about how to connect our music with these audiences? What is changing, and what needs to remain the same?

00:01:52 At our last forum back in March we considered how orchestras balance their many rich traditions with creativity and innovation. That same question applies to today's conversation, but today we'll be hearing from some perhaps surprising new voices. In just a moment it will be my great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker, New York Philharmonic music director Alan Gilbert.

00:02:16 But first of all I need to let you know that he is fresh off the softball field, where this morning the Philharmonic Penguins politely allowed the San Francisco Symphomaniacs to defeat them [applause]. I told them that's what I would say. That's the essence of being a polite host, right?

00:02:42 This was a Davies Cup rematch of a softball rivalry dating back to the early 1980s when Alan, who is a son of two Philharmonic musicians, was a young boy on the sidelines. Today's sporting endeavor is all in good fun, but it sets up an interesting metaphor, doesn't it? For our discussion this afternoon. Baseball and the orchestra world don't necessarily seem to have that much in common until you realize that we're all about the live experience, we're all about drawing audiences, and we believe that we all also represent our cities for whom we are named.

00:03:18 So we believe we have much to learn from each other.

The other announcement I have to give to you today is that after Alan's keynote conversation we will have two spotlight conversations rather than the three that are in your program. I'm very sorry to inform you that Ben Cameron of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation cannot join us today due to a death in his family. We will miss having his energetic voice today. If you've ever heard Ben speak, you know that he can put more words into one minute than most people can into an hour.

00:03:53 But I encourage you to read the blog he wrote for the forum on the challenges that he sees facing arts audiences today. So just two spotlights today, then. At roughly 2:00 and 2:30, and we'll have a break around 3:00 and come back with a roundtable discussion with all the spotlight speakers, so that they have a chance to respond to each other as well as to your questions.

00:04:16 As in previous forums, today's proceedings are being live streamed on the Web, thanks to our partners at San Francisco Classical Voice. We are also recording everything and full videos will be available in the coming days on our project Web site, symphonyforum.org. That Web site is also home to ongoing blogging on these topics, and we invite you to share your comments on the site. We are also producing podcasts from these conversations, and you can find those on the site as well.

00:04:45 If you are using Twitter, you can follow today's conversation through the American Orchestra Forum Twitter feed, which is at [amorchforum](https://twitter.com/amorchforum), or use the hash tag #amorchforum. You are welcome to use your handheld devices to participate today, but in consideration to our panelists and of our recording, we do ask that you please silence them. And since this is not a concert, feel free to come and go as you wish this afternoon.

00:05:15 And again, welcome. We are really glad that you are here. We are also pleased to acknowledge the support of the Andrew W. Mellon

Foundation for its support of this groundbreaking project. And now it is my great pleasure -- as I said, fresh off the softball field -- to welcome Maestro Alan Gilbert and the new executive director of the New York Philharmonic, Matthew VanBesien. Thank you.

[Applause]

00:05:52 Matthew VanBesien: Good afternoon. We're delighted to be here this afternoon. I had some very nice words to open about the San Francisco Symphony's centennial and the great work that they have been doing, but in light of Brent bringing up the softball game from this morning I'm thinking about revising those remarks. But in all seriousness --

Alan Gilbert: We got killed.

Matthew VanBesien: Brent's diplomacy doesn't reflect the truth of the situation. But we are delighted to be here.

00:06:20 We're honored as the New York Philharmonic to be included in this centennial celebration and in this American Orchestral Forum with you today. So we're charged with talking a little bit about audiences today, and the relationship with audiences as a major orchestra like the New York Philharmonic is. And so as Alan and I talked in preparation for today, we talked about a wide range of things.

00:06:49 But one of the things I will tell you that I've been very energized about by coming to the New York Philharmonic and working with Alan is the new approach and the new way of thinking about the relationship with the audience, and what we might do for the future to further enhance that relationship. And I thought I might just start by asking Alan to briefly talk about his approach, as this is now his third season as the music director of the New York Philharmonic.

00:07:17 Having grown up around the orchestra, having grown up in New York City; and I think he has some really interesting ideas about what he wants to -- what he has done and wants to do in terms of the relationship with the audience in New York and outside of New York. And I thought I might just start off with that question, which is what do you see as the end goal? What do you see as the ideal? In terms of the relationship you have as music director and the orchestra has with its audiences?

00:07:48 Alan Gilbert: Well, it's obviously something that occupies my mind and our minds kind of all the time, because as Brent has mentioned in his remarks it really is about the audience, and it's about in some sort of elusive way building the audience. I guess I'd like to start by talking about myself as sort of an example of an audience member. Because I have a long relationship with the New York Philharmonic.

00:08:16 Obviously my parents were -- and my mother still is -- a violinist in the orchestra, so from a very young age I was enjoying the New

York Philharmonic from the seats. And the world is small, and the fact that I come from New York is I guess of interest in a certain way, but actually for me the most important point is that I have been able to appreciate and know what the New York Philharmonic has been able to mean for me personally.

00:08:48 And it's been enormous, both as ultimately a professional musician, but as someone who simply loves music. And I've been able to follow the New York Philharmonic over along arc, and experience three different music directors before me, and see some of the same players over all these years.

00:09:09 And in a sense -- although I'm obviously an unusual case as far as that goes, because I was connected really to the inside of the orchestra -- I hope that that kind of long-term arc, and long-term relationship can be a model for what we're trying to achieve with our audiences. Because it really is about a relationship.

00:09:35 We talk about what the constitution of our audience is. Who are the people who come? There are some tourists, obviously; people who come one time. But I'm interested in building this long-term relationship. And I think what's possible over a long period of time is a building of trust. And a building of a sense of understanding, and maybe I'm getting ahead of the discussion now.

00:10:06 But what I'm looking for is the possibility to build a connection and a trust and a relationship with the audience that is the basis for

exploration and risk-taking. And the possibility to essentially program something that might be totally unknown and have it received with open arms and with enthusiasm, despite the fact that many of the people in the audience may have never heard that before.

00:10:35 If people trust that we're going to come up with interesting ideas and interesting projects, and if they believe that we're selecting the music we play and playing it with heart and sincerity and honesty and enthusiasm, maybe it doesn't become such a question of are we going to play this piece or that piece. It's more about the experience of what we can share within the four walls of the concert hall.

Matthew VanBesien: Do you perceive it to be different, or more difficult, or more complicated? I mean Brent alluded to the distractions of our world today.

00:11:05 I think we all know that the world is a different place than it certainly was 20 or 30 years ago. Do you feel that there is that element of distraction, and that delivering music at the highest level in order to earn that trust is more complicated? Whether there is a cell phone going off during a performance or whether it's just the noise and the busyness that we experience in everyday life?

00:11:32 Alan Gilbert: Clearly the world has changed. And people are very connected to their phones. Did you bring your phone?

Matthew VanBesien: It's off, actually.

Alan Gilbert: You know the alarm still goes off, even if the phone is off? As we learned. It cuts both ways. The world is -- it's possible to access so much information, so quickly, anywhere, anytime. And it's possible to -- the whole nature of surfing the Web, going from one Web page to the next, is almost necessarily sort of short-term.

00:12:11 And following something through and allowing somebody else to determine the pace at which you receive information, or choosing what information you're processing, is -- well, it's maybe not as evident as it once was. There is an immediate gratification that is perhaps different from following a Bruckner symphony through from beginning to end, and allowing it to take the course that it takes.

00:12:35 But on the other hand, I think that if anything highlights the beauty and the sacred nature of what we do in a concert hall in a live music performance. There was a lot of chatter and quite a bit of coverage about the cell phone that went off in our Mahler nine concert back in January. The story was -- it was what it was.

00:13:02 But for me, the takeaway was that on some sort of intuitive level people responded so strongly to that event because I think there is this kind of inherent understanding of the inviolable quality of what happens in a concert hall. I personally believe that's why it was so exciting. That's why music lovers and classical music aficionados

and lay people on the street found it interesting, because it just seemed incomprehensible.

00:13:31 How could you stop a concert? And to me that's actually gratifying, to realize that people were disturbed by the notion that the live concert experience was interrupted.

Matthew VanBesien: One of the things that I struggle with, or I've been thinking of is, are the different messages that we are sent as orchestras -- we have a ritualistic history and tradition which Alan alluded to before, the sense of being in a sacred place and hearing music in a very controlled environment.

00:14:03 I feel sometimes as someone who is running an orchestra that there is pressure to get rid of that formality, to break away that sense of formality and sacredness, if you will, within the concert hall. And I think that's -- I'm not sure that there is an answer for that. I think --

Alan Gilbert: As is the case with so many things, I think balance is of the essence. I think throwing around a word like sacred can be dangerous, because it can sound unapproachable.

00:14:35 And lofty, and sort of removed. But I mean it in the most immediate human sense. If that dimension can be preserved, while at the same time making sure that people are not intimidated by the ritualistic, sort of formalized aspect of concert going. I mean it doesn't happen so much anymore, which I think is a good thing, but I remember I

used to hear people say, "I can't go to a symphony concert. I wouldn't understand."

00:15:06 I wouldn't know how to behave, or I wouldn't know when to clap. I don't have a tuxedo. Seriously, you hear these things. And it's in response to that that many orchestras have had casual concerts or wear your jeans, or have the orchestra not wearing clothes that -- let's face it -- nobody wears in real life. You know, these tail penguin suits and things.

00:15:35 I like preserving the tradition and the sort of Old World ritual of the concert, because I think it should feel special. But that doesn't mean you have to do all concerts that way, and that doesn't mean you can't break down the concert format and speak from the stage so that the audience can hear that the people onstage actually are -- hopefully; it may not be the case, but -- normal people.

00:16:07 Or have a chamber music piece in the middle of a symphony concert, or -- you know, why not a poetry reading? That happens sometimes, if it's somehow connected to the music. Or a jazz combo. There are a lot of things that I think are absolutely fair game that can disrupt people's preconceptions about what unapproachable classical music concerts are but still not actually get in the way of the essence of what we're doing.

00:16:40 Matthew VanBesien: For me, that's that question of delivery. For lack of a better way to put it. Which is that it's not about changing

the music we play, but maybe thinking -- being willing to consider a wider array of ways in which we actually deliver music to people. Like you say. One of the things that I was really fascinated to watch from a distance over the last couple of years are some of the most innovative projects I think even within all of the orchestral sector around the world.

00:17:14 Groundbreaking, innovative projects like the presentation of Ligeti's Le Grand Macabre last year. The performances of Janacek's Cunning Little Vixen. Coming up at the end of June the Philharmonic and Alan will present a spatial music concert, Philharmonic 360, at the Park Avenue Armory with Stockhausen's Gruppen, Ives, Pierre Boulez -- this idea of expanding the notion of a concert -- of what a concert can be.

00:17:43 Can you talk a little bit about thinking now and what's happened thus far and where you think that might go?

Alan Gilbert: First of all, it's nice to hear these projects pitched. Thanks very much for bringing them up. I'm really excited about these projects. For me, it's about what we're doing. You may know a little bit about the staged opera productions we've done.

00:18:08 And now were going out of the hall for this music -- the spatial music concert that is all music that relies on the physicality of the space in which it's performed. This armory is an enormous, empty, sort of tabula rasa in the middle of New York on Park Avenue, and

it kind of begs to be used in creative and innovative ways. And I think it's going to be very exciting.

00:18:32 But at the root of all of this it's not just an expansion of what orchestras present, but even more fundamentally what orchestras are. And I'm interested in the discussion that will ultimately arrive at the point where people are not thinking about this kind of project done by a traditional orchestra such as the New York Philharmonic, as being a kind of special on the side, but as something that is absolutely straight down the center of what we are about and what we can provide as orchestras.

00:19:06 And I think that that will require a gradual sort of shift in the way both we internally think about ourselves and audiences think about orchestras as well. Of course orchestras are organizations -- organisms -- that produce symphonic concerts. That is one aspect of what we do. But more and more I think we are called on to be resources and catalysts for cultural and intellectual inquiry.

00:19:37 Of course the New York Philharmonic is not an opera orchestra. But the orchestra's role in these productions that we have done is so crucial and so important, it's something that the New York Philharmonic can do. It's a little bit -- be what you can be. And I think that orchestras can be leaders in education, can be focal points of connections between institutions within cities.

00:20:05 In short, I think that we are and should be recognized as so much more than just concert producing machines.

Matthew VanBesien: I would agree wholeheartedly. I began my career actually as an orchestral musician and was constantly wondering why we weren't expanding the very notion of what we are and what we do. I mean I think something like today is fantastic. It's a perfect example of the orchestra as resource.

00:20:31 Thinking of the centennial year not just as a series of great concerts, but as an exploration including the types of topics that we're discussing here today. I think as we've discussed that path for the New York Philharmonic I think it's terribly exciting, that idea of expanding the notion of what the Philharmonic means in New York, really making it an integral part of the city; how we think of the New York Philharmonic on a national scale, and certainly international.

00:21:03 [Unintelligible] has such a strong global presence and brand; I think the opportunities are really endless. The question is how do we make those decisions? How do we take those steps to be something more than we've been historically?

Alan Gilbert: Getting back to the sort of direct question, or the direct point of inquiry, audiences, I think the first thing we do is that we start making assumptions about what audiences want.

00:21:36 There's -- programming is -- it's well known that programming is something that I've been interested in and spent a lot of time and energy with. At the end of the day it's not so much about programming, though; it's about the connection with the audience, as I said. One thing that has been an impediment, I think, to letting the ideas really flow freely -- both at the New York Philharmonic and elsewhere as well -- I have found that I hear very often, "Oh, well.

00:22:07 "Our audience doesn't like that. Oh, our audience expects this." And I think that's pretty dangerous. Or you'll hear things like the older people in the audience only want to hear music that they know already.

Matthew VanBesien: We have some followers here.

Alan Gilbert: Really? I mean really? Oh, the young people just want to hear new music.

00:22:29 These gross oversimplifications that are obviously -- if you actually hold them up it doesn't even take a lot of scrutiny to realize that they're just complete nonsense. The point is that I think people can be led in a good way; can be shown things about themselves that they don't necessarily know; can learn things about what they can appreciate and enjoy. And that's one of I think the important functions. And that's why the relationship with the audience has to be more than just a point in time.

00:23:01 More than one intersection at one particular concert. It's about a kind of attitude. It's about a kind of atmosphere that will hopefully just glow around the New York Philharmonic or the San Francisco Symphony and it will lead people to want to take risks and experience things that they don't necessarily even know, or even know that they would be able to appreciate.

Matthew VanBesien: Do you like the fact that you have so many more ways to communicate now?

00:23:31 Certainly off the podium in terms of social media, in terms of -- I mean even the cell phone story was -- Alan was relaying to us backstage that he turned down multiple interviews from all the major networks to go on and do an interview about the cell phone incident itself. But you actually have an app that's out now which shows the inside of your studio. How do you reconcile that with what you do on the podium artistically?

00:24:00 Alan Gilbert: Well, it can be difficult because essentially I have to prepare my music, study it, and try to conduct it as well as I can and show up and deliver a good concert. That takes a lot of time and energy. The other side of what I do, which is the advocacy side, the public side, doing events like this for example -- I feel challenged and a bit daunted because it's a real responsibility.

00:24:26 But it's also an incredible opportunity to be able to have an idea and actually realistically think let's find out a way to get a story in the New York Times. I mean 20 years ago if you had told me that just because I had an idea I might be able to get someone to write about it in the New York Times, that would have been ridiculous. I mean I feel incredibly privileged to have this platform and to be able to try to do something about which I really feel very passionately.

Matthew VanBesien: Some of you may have seen there was a wonderful piece by Dan [Waken] in the New York Times, which online also had these fantastic interactive components in which you were filmed -- you were actually filmed.

00:25:03 Can you talk a little bit about it? This was a piece about the art of conducting, the physical side of conducting.

Alan Gilbert: It was something -- I wasn't sure what it would be when I was first approached to do this, but it turned out to be really interesting for me and people who have seen the piece -- both the print article and the interactive feature on the Times Web site -- said it was interesting as well. Essentially I conducted an ensemble of Juilliard students in a piece by Stravinsky.

00:25:33 And I was outfitted with a kind of bizarre, space suit looking thing with reflectors at various points on my arms and head and face and things. And there were cameras around the room -- extremely high

tech, precise cameras -- that were able to record in 3D every gesture I made.

00:26:01 And essentially what you can see is -- it's the technology that they use to make video games. Say they'll outfit Tiger Woods in -- not that I compare myself in any way to Tiger Woods -- but he'll get into a studio and do exactly this. And then his motions become -- that becomes the avatar in the game. And it's amazing technology. And it was fascinating to me to see myself, and I thought they did the piece very well.

00:26:30 And this kind of thing is interesting -- my conducting students said it was interesting to watch what I was doing, but it's also a way of adding dimension and scope to what we represent to our public. So I don't think -- it took a lot of time, but it felt like it was actually part of what we're trying to do in the grand scheme of things.

Matthew VanBesien: I love this story. I thought it was sensational.

00:26:57 I also -- I already started saying to Dan, look; the next piece of that puzzle is really what happens besides the physicality of conducting. What happens with the connection with the conductor and the orchestra? What happens with the physicality of the conductor in the connection with an audience? Which is much more intangible.

Alan Gilbert: Dan said himself that it was a limited piece. That it was great as far as it went, but it was very consciously designed to talk about the physical gesture.

00:27:29 And he said at the end of course it's all about that indefinable kind of aura, or mental or spiritual connection, but he didn't really get into that. So there definitely is room for more pursuit in that.

Matthew VanBesien: How conscious of the audience actually in the concert hall are you during a performance? Aside from cell phones going off. How aware are you of that?

Alan Gilbert: It's interesting, because I think we've all experienced this.

00:27:58 Generally speaking, audiences are polite and quiet and are not making noise, but there is a certain kind of quiet that only happens when there is a real, special, magical connection happening. And it's uncanny, because you can feel it. It's -- I don't know if there were a sound meter in the hall if it would actually be quieter, but you know what I'm talking about.

00:28:28 When suddenly everybody is breathing the same breath, and everybody's heart is beating the same beat. And you're really aware of that. And it would actually be interesting to know if physically there is anything going on. I have a feeling it's more than that. That's an example of how conscious you can be of the audience. It depends on the hall; there are some halls -- you know, when you're

on tour as we are now -- you're aware of already, when you're coming out onstage for the first time, before the orchestra has played one note, you can hear the applause either more or less.

00:29:00 Sometimes it feels remote. Usually when the audience's applause feels remote, that means that from the other side the orchestra probably sounds a bit remote as well. So the acoustics work both ways, and this kind of symbiotic relationship is absolutely an essential part of the equation. That's why something -- it's rare that something absolutely at the end of the line, sort of over the top excitement happens in rehearsal, because you need the audience --

00:29:33 Matthew VanBesien: You need that energy. It feeds you.

[Crosstalk]

Alan Gilbert: -- to do that. The audience gives back. And actually speaking to audience members I think you may not realize how much influence you can have with your concentration, with your will, on the gestalt of the moment. It's fascinating, I think.

Matthew VanBesien: I think this is something that we can certainly learn a lot from the conducting standpoint, but within the orchestral world maybe historically we haven't been as cognizant of how we physically present a concert.

00:30:05 That sense of commitment. You know when it's right, and yet to do it consistently and to really capture the audience's imagination each and every night is a challenge. But I think this is something that you and I have spoken about already, which is that -- are there ways to physically commit an orchestra in a way that even pulls the audience in closer?

00:30:34 Alan Gilbert: There are so many levels on which to discuss this, and to offer a stab at an answer. I think there is a responsibility on both sides. And there are things that are often not spoken about on the orchestra side, like how the orchestra looks onstage. How -- whether they smile or not during the bows.

00:30:58 These things actually matter. And I think that they're fundamentally about this kind of two-way channel of communication and respect and trust and understanding. We're doing the best we can, and all I can say is that over time I think that there has been an evolution -- at least in New York; I can start to talk about three years now. It's hard to believe.

00:31:26 But with for example Magnus Lindberg, our composer in residence -- he wasn't unknown. He was already, three years ago, one of the most important living composers. You'll hear tonight if you're at the concert his piano concerto -- amazing, amazing new piece that we premiered last week. But he wasn't a familiar figure. Certainly people didn't necessarily know what he looked like. But now when

he comes onstage after three years there is a palpable sense of recognition. An identity.

00:31:57 And oh, that's our guy. And that's been really gratifying.

Matthew VanBesien: Yeah. Well, he's such an effusive sort of personality as well. I mean he really has life as he comes out. But I would say -- not to embarrass Alan -- but my opportunities to hear the New York Philharmonic even over the last year have proven to me that there is something very special happening with this orchestra right now. And I don't mean that in a gratuitous way. I think it's really -- there is a sense of intention. There is a sense of commitment that I think is really translating to our audiences.

00:32:30 And to New York. And hopefully here this evening and tomorrow evening here in Davies Hall. So I see that we are at the end of our discussion. But I'd like to thank all of you for being here, and thank Alan for his thoughts and his words.

Alan Gilbert: Thank you, Matthew, for the kind words. And thank you, everybody here -- Brent and the people who have invited us -- for giving us this chance to really barely scratch the surface of something that's incredibly complicated and incredibly fascinating.

00:32:58 And hopefully a discussion that will be going on for a long, long time.

Matthew VanBesien: Indeed. Thank you very much.

Alan Gilbert: Thank you all.

[Applause]

[Extended period of silence]

00:33:55 Female Voice: Are you finding the audience acceptance of new works, of contemporary -- sorry. Okay. Are you finding that audience acceptance is greater of new music, or of new methods of presentation of more familiar music? Or do you not segregate those in order to find out what audiences are looking for?

00:34:26 Alan Gilbert: Well, it's an interesting question. Just to repeat, in case you didn't hear it. Are we finding that there is more acceptance of new music, or new ways of presenting old music? I don't know that I could answer that; but I will say that we are conscious of both. I've said this in what I hoped would be -- it was deliberately provocative. I said I don't feel that I'm an advocate for new music.

00:34:55 That was seized on in a kind of unusual way in some quarters, because obviously I'm interested in new music. But I don't consider myself a specialist. And when we program, we don't think, oh, we need to get this many new pieces into the season. It just doesn't happen. That's not something we talk about. We talk about the

range of composers that we feel should be represented in our season, that should be played by our orchestra -- because that's an important component, too.

00:35:25 It's important for the orchestra to remain challenged and to be presented with new material to play, and that we feel our audiences should hear. There are no quotas involved. And what I hope -- this is maybe not a direct answer to your question, but again, related to what I said earlier -- what I hope is that when we play a new piece there is a much bigger context that it can be listened to than just the fact that it's a new piece.

00:35:55 It's music. It happens not to be music that has been played before. It may be by a composer that the name of whom people don't know. But there is not a slot on a program that we say, okay; here is where we're going to put the new piece. We try to create programs that are organically and holistically conceived, and that make sense -- that create a context in which each work on the program can be appreciated to the fullest.

00:36:26 And what I've been observing -- and it's anecdotal to an extent -- is that people are taking the new pieces that we play more and more seriously. And I believe -- I certainly want to believe, but I do in fact believe -- that that's because we're getting away from any notion of tokenism. That we're presenting these new works out of a sense of duty.

00:36:54 And I actually feel that that -- what is hopefully the true sincerity of the motivation behind our programming is actually translating into more and more acceptance over time.

Female Voice: Just one little addition to that question. What do you think about the role of places like Le Poisson Rouge, for example, in building audiences for more unusual or newer music?

00:37:23 Alan Gilbert: For those of you who may not know, the Poisson Rouge is essentially a club, at which different kinds of music events happen. It's a very exciting place downtown in Manhattan. I think places like that are very important, and one of the things that Matthew and I have already talked about is the identity of the New York Philharmonic with the city. And that means that we are hoping that the orchestra will gradually become known more and more as a creature with tentacles that go out into the city.

00:38:00 We actually haven't played yet at the Poisson Rouge, but we've done our contact contemporary music concerts at the Metropolitan Museum, at the symphony space. We're exploring ideas of other alternative -- perhaps surprising -- venues. Places like the Poisson Rouge or Bam, or different venues in the city do have their own audiences. And I think potentially what we do could be very interesting to those audiences as well.

00:38:27 So we're tracking that.

Female Voice: Hopefully it works in the other direction, too, that Poisson Rouge audiences will be more open-minded about coming to hear the Philharmonic.

Alan Gilbert: Sure. Absolutely. One or two more?

Female Voice: I just wanted to say that what is disappointing and yet at the same time -- do I need a microphone?

00:38:56 Male Voice: We'll repeat your question.

Female Voice: I have been, all my life since I've been very, very young, a believer and champion of 20th Century and contemporary music. And it's very invigorating, and yet at the same time somewhat disappointing, that there are these phases where there is a lot of 20th Century contemporary works that are presented in a season, and then perhaps the following year there is a pulling back and there is a greater percentage of programs that are featuring 18th and 19th Century music.

00:39:37 That's one thing. But the main thing that I want to say, and that was when Maestro Gilbert was talking about the formality of the wardrobe with orchestras and so forth, where earlier we were wearing tails and now we're wearing tuxedos, and there are many concerts where the orchestra members -- the gentlemen -- are just wearing black whatever.

00:40:04 And I just simply wanted to put in this observation, that the experimentation -- I hope it never gets beyond the black. When you have 100 to 120 people sitting onstage, if they were wearing different colors -- prints, plaids, different outfits -- it is extremely distracting.

00:40:28 This is one of the things that is a feature of excellence with the tradition of classical music and orchestras, that they are in black and so then there is no distraction with the visual thing and you're able to really concentrate on the music. We need this, because the pieces are long pieces.

Alan Gilbert: If I can just say -- I don't know if you all heard that, but just to sort of encapsulate.

00:41:00 We're going to run out of time with questions like this.

Matthew VanBesien: They will bring the hook out.

Alan Gilbert: I'll just say two things. About the idea that sometimes there is more contemporary music, sometimes less; that it goes in cycles -- that's probably true to an extent. But we did an examination of that, because the way the New York Philharmonic has been written about over the years is oh, this year they got it right.

00:41:25 This year they didn't get it right. You know, it seems to go up and down. That's perception. It's surprisingly consistent over the years, and that's not intentional, but how many new works, the types of American works that are done, and there's -- I think you have to be careful not to assume that because your perception is one way that that's exactly how it is. Because things do change, obviously, but it's not necessarily as much of a swing as you might think.

00:41:54 And as far as clothing goes -- one of my favorite topics -- but we'll make this the closing remark. I do feel that there should be a uniform. There should be a sense of, okay; you get dressed up for work because that shows a certain respect. It shows a dignity, a respect of the dignity of the occasion. I'm not quite so sure that it has to be tails; I happen to like wearing tails sometimes, but I also think that all black can look really good.

00:42:24 And sometimes the uniform -- you know, we've done colored shirts and dark pants -- I mean it should look like a uniform. The point is that maybe it doesn't so much matter what it is, because at the end of the day that's not really the most important thing.

Matthew VanBesien: Yeah.

Alan Gilbert: I think we should go. Thank you very much.

Matthew VanBesien: Thank you.