

...

June 4, 2020

LEAGUE OF AMERICAN ORCHESTRAS

So You Want to Know About

Sensory-Friendly Programming?

\*\* Communication Access

Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. \*\*

(Music)

>>> Welcome to the League of American Orchestras' online conference. I'm Najean Lee. I'd like to acknowledge this was postponed from its original time slot. Thank you to the participants for your flexibility and accommodating the scheduling change. We intended to hold this conference in the Twin Cities. Today's session was going to be part of a larger conversation with community engagement presented by our host

orchestras. We will learn about sensory friendly programming, and there are elements of intersectionality to consider. None of us would suggest that any one program or statement can begin to address the deep wounds our society, especially the black community, grapples with. There's a lot of work to be done. Let's encourage one another, in taking strides to increase representation, dig into the sources of injustice. Sensory friendly, or relaxed programming, is one of many ways orchestras can engage. We will take audience questions. Please use the chat function in PheedLoop or Zoom and we will answer as many questions as possible. A recording of today's session along with other materials will be available in the session schedule by tomorrow. As a tip, if you navigate away from this broadcast in the browser window you will leave the session. But you can easily rejoin. Just click on the session. I want to give acknowledgment

that there may be members of the press in the audience. we would love to hear about your experience today. You will find a link to a brief survey. The feedback is invaluable to us. Please take a minute to complete it. Joining us are Jessica Ryan and Roger Ideishi. Their credentials are online. Jessica worked with a community team to develop the Pittsburgh's first sensory friendly experiences. In 2016, she played a leading role in developing and expanding the Minnesota Orchestra's relaxed family concert. Roger Ideishi is director of occupational therapy and professor of health, human function and rehabilitation sciences in the school of medicine and health sciences at the George Washington university. His area of interest and research is community engagement for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities. He has advised a large number of organizations in the U.S. and internationally. A few include the

Minnesota Orchestra, Philadelphia  
PhiladelphiaOrchestra, Pittsburgh  
Orchestra. Jessica, over to you.

>> Thank you so much for the  
introduction. Roger and I will be  
talking about sensory friendly and  
relaxed programming. It's been a tough  
week, beginning with the murder of George  
Floyd. We are in mourning, there's a lot  
of anger about the systemic racism that  
led to this point. As the orchestra, we  
participated in, benefited from many of  
these racist systems. We need to do  
better. We will talk about  
intersectionality, and we are aware that  
it's a small starting point in terms of  
the work we need to do to be sure these  
programs are more equitable to audiences  
of color.

We will lay groundwork with  
sensory and cognitive processing, what  
the terms mean, and what sorts of  
features typically go into the concert  
experiences. We will talk about feedback

and the impact of the programs and leave 15 minutes for Q&A at the end. Roger, to you.

>> Good morning, everyone. I will start with some background on why these initiatives began developing, with leaders, Jessica Ryan and others. And the accessibility team at the Kennedy Center. We discovered there's many reasons sensory friendly initiatives have emerged. I will discuss two of them, social and moral reasons, and the neurodevelopmental reasons. I will give you some ground from data and research collected in Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C. and the clinical understanding of those with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Art is really not for everybody. Society was constructed for some people, but really not for everyone. Particularly in the disability community. There's a great deal of social isolation, still a struggle in society. With live cultural

arts there are rules and expectations, such as sit down, be quiet, don't move, only get up during intermission. A lot of don'ts, in a negative connotation with live arts etiquette. Is it really for an enjoyable experience for all patrons? We are really asking, which patrons, that enjoy experiences, is for.

There are no official regulations in the cultural arts. We may learn from our parents, mostly through social awareness and pressures, and when we consider people with sensory and cognitive disabilities, they are often experienced differently for the patron. For people with sensory and cognitive processing disabilities, such as autism, intellectual disabilities, and other neurodevelopmental disabilities, they are often ridiculed by the community, such as being called crazy, even parents being directly called poor parents, by strangers.

Or, it's even through indirect

means such as disapproving stares, people avoiding contact by any means possible with people who are different than them. The disabled person, care givers, notice the stares, the turnaways, walk aways, even when the public thinks they are being discrete. Parents of children with autism say to me, that they're on very high alert all the time for the safety of their children and also on alert for the public ridicule. The medical community knows the physiological stress of constant stress. It lowers life expectancy. Knowing the impact of stress, what would you do to reduce stress, know that going out in the community causes stress? Their answer sometimes is to self isolate. They feel bad about themselves, when returning home.

There's an increasing rate of depression among people with autism and intellectual disabilities, and that's partly due to the social isolation.

Sometimes, implying they did not understand that a person with autism can get depressed. I say this because we need to be sure we're seeing everyone as fully human, and all humans have emotions, regardless of disability status.

Children with disabilities are one of the largest, fastest growing groups becoming obese. It's a public health dilemma. The life long implications of obesity for the nondisabled person, added compounding factors related to disability, and those with disability, health risks, become higher.

Socialization and community participation is a mediating factor. But if those opportunities don't exist, and they are justified have this predisposition for self isolation, it placed the disability community at higher costs, for maintaining their health status.

While going to live cultural arts is not an end all cure, you can



accumulate all the potential and infinite life activities a person has in the community. Those opportunities need to exist. That's what many orchestras across the country are doing now. People with disabilities really wish to go out into the community, going to restaurants, museums, theaters. But in order to do that, the opportunities and supports, they need to exist.

It's really for the disabled person, the decision to self isolate is not a difficult decision. They need to feel safe when they go out. Art is for everybody. It can be for everybody. There are statements reflecting experiences that people have said about going to sensory friendly events. Here's one. My dream was that I could take all my children and this year my dream came true. I had to show her what I loved about the world. I'm relaxed, not on alert. We do this as a whole family. I get to be who I am.

A life without art, there are some significant applications here. As a family social unit, so on the slide, there's an image of a young boy in a theater, looking forward with others around him remaining seated. The other image, there's a youth standing in the steps of a theater with his arms over a woman's shoulders and his head leaning against her. In sensory friendly experiences, these situations are quite natural to occur.

Imagine, not sharing your dreams with your children, or imagine not showing your child what you love about the world. Imagine not doing things with your whole family. Imagine that you don't get to be who you are when you leave your home. These social and moral reasons are profound. Especially with what's happening today, we all need to take reflection on how we look at other people.

Many of you refer to sensations

around the five senses. We all know what they are. Vision, auditory, tactile, smell, and there are actually eight senses. In addition to the five senses, there are three others. Balancing our body, to remain up right, PROPRIOCEPTION and kinesthesia. When the information is not received, that's a different process. So sensory processing is the series of activities happening in the brain.

When the information is not received, that's essentially the definition of being blind or deaf. BThe brain is not even receiving the information so the person can't see, or can't hear. For sensory friendly programming sensory, even that term, a person who is blind or deaf has a sensory disability. But for purposes of sensory friendly, the most commonly used term, we refer to those with sensory processing disorder or cognitive processing disorders, in relationship to sensory friendly experiences.

Sensory information travels to the brain in order to be perceived. For many people, we receive the information, adapt to it and respond to the information in ways that allow us to engage with what's happening around us. Part of the reason these experiences are called sensory friendly is because for people with autism, many of which have a sensory disorder, that process happens in a different manner, in how they perceive and process that information.

Sensory processing is how we receive, perceive, and interpret information from outside of us. Everyone perceives and responds differently, to different sensations, as you can see on the slide. The young girl, sitting beneath a tree, looking at a book, or the boy covering his ears. Or the boy kicking a ball on the field. A woman sitting on the edge of a rock on a high cliff. Taking each potential situation, related it to yourself, how would you

respond to a crowded space, to a quiet afternoon under a tree? We will experience that very differently. The same sensation is experienced differently by different people.

Sensory processing disorder refers to how a person perceives the information, so many people with autism or intellectual disabilities often have a sensory processing disorder. Not everyone with autism has that, but many do. I will describe sensory processing disorders using almost polar opposite perspectives. They are sort of extreme but it highlights, helps you understand what it is. In reality, it's a lot muddier. With various combinations and degrees of that disorder. Even though I'm going to describe the polar opposites, I want you to know that most things fall somewhere in the middle with some variation. Some people perceive sensations greater, or with lesser intensity. Each of you do, too. Some

may tolerate a bright light and others, it doesn't impact very much.

We have our own base line or midpoint of what we can tolerate. Sometimes, we strain to gather the sensory information to understand what the sensation is. Think about your own responses to different sensory conditions. Hyperintensity means a person experiences sensations with greater intensity than others. The girl may be reading under a tree because she prefers quiet spaces. She may retreat from loud situations, and needs a calm environment. Hypo intensity means someone feels less intensity. This person hanging often the rock works his feet, might be doing this because gravity sensations are not enough for him to remain, to keep his body in a calm state so he seeks out higher intensity sensations to satisfy that sensation he's not getting enough of.

Let's examine hyperintensity of

sound. A person perceives sound with more intensity than other people. The sound is too loud. It may feel as if someone is yelling at you. What would you do in that situation? Cover your ears, move away, might change your location. Might tune out. You may just become distressed, anxious. There are many responses, and think about yours under those conditions. The sound is too loud for you. For an autistic person, they will display the same responses.

But when the non-autistic person sees those responses, we will describe that behavior as odd, different, when it's really the same response that you might do under the same conditions. There's a difference because a person with autism may not have control over the environment. They may not be able to move away, or the person may not have the strategies to manage stress, anxiety, whatever that might be. You might have other skills to navigate and manage that

situation.

The autistic person may experience these hyperintense situations with more frequency than other people. What would you do? You might avoid those situations whenever you can. You may avoid them, walk away, run away. Often, you may be forced into those situations and may want to tell someone, I want to leave, or express some other expression of behavior for that lack of control that you have. These sensory processing disorders, at its core, when you think about them, they are really similar responses that you would do under similar conditions if you can tolerate something.

Hypo intensity, you might be squinting to see what the small blue circle on the slide says. You may tune out. It might be that important, you don't think it is, because you just can't process the information. Or you just don't pay attention because it's unreadable. In a hypo intense situation



related to sound, imagine I whisper through the entire presentation. What are you doing now? You might be leaning in, getting closer. You're straining really hard. What were you doing while my volume was going down? I'd bet some of you were leaning closer to your laptop, straining, putting your ear to the speaker. You probably focused your attention a lot more than you were a few seconds ago.

If this was in a person to person situation, you may have raised your hand to ask me to repeat myself. Yet, I'm still going to whisper. So you may raise your hand again, can you repeat yourself, again? Still can't hear. You may ask me again. At some point you may just ignore me because it seems I don't care whether you can hear.

Those are pretty natural responses to the situation. If we think about when a person with autism exhibits those behaviors, we quickly categorize those

behaviors as odd, different, it must be part of their problem. Reflecting on your own responses, they are very similar. They're doing exactly what you might do to either gather the information, or remove themselves from the situation because it's overwhelming.

You can see how variable the intensity and responses to intensity might be for the same sensory information for different people. What is the sensation that movement is perceiving? Gravity. Gravity is the sensation of falling to the ground. Put that analysis to the experience of gravity, of falling down. So hyperintensity, you are feeling the sensation greater than other people. You feel the sense of falling to the ground with greater intensity than other people.

When you fall down, what do you do? Tighten your body, may move slower. Gravity happens all the time. It can happen even with a simple turn of the

head. There's a slight weight shift. So while many of us can perceive that slight shift in, and manage that, if you are feeling that slight weight shift with more intensity than someone else, turning your head might trigger the feeling of falling down. What would you do?

Move slower. Reduce your movements. Keep your body rigid. Just to prevent from falling down and keeping your body safe. So think about the live cultural arts. The concert is over, let's move, leave. And the person is trying to figure out how to keep their body safe. They want me to move. I'm concerned about falling down. Then you get this, come on, let's go, increasing anxiety, you're speaking in or more hurried manner, may not understand why the person is not responding to me more quickly. So you could actually be increasing the stress of that person versus allowing that person the time to process the sensation, and figure out

what he will be doing with their body in order to rise from the chair.

If we take the gravity example, apply it to hypo intensity, feeling the sensation with less intensity. You don't feel gravity as much. The example of the man hanging upside down on the rock by his feet is looking for the sensation. You don't feel gravity as much so you will do things to feel the sensation so it gives you, you're grounded in the environment. So what's one way to increase gravity sensation? By moving a lot. Someone might be moving more, fidgeting, just moving, may need to walk around to get that sense of calmness in their body.

When an autistic person exhibits these behaviors, we call it odd. But think about yourself. When you're running, or playing sports, we try to ground ourselves in gravity. We move, orient ourselves, move our bodies more, pay attention to our bodies. Someone

hypo intense with gravity will move more. We may call it hyperactive. But they're trying to orient to space, just like everybody else is. There are differences because the person with a sensory processing disorder may experience the sensations with greater intensity than others, or may not have the same control over the environment or the internal coping mechanisms that others have. That's in part what many teachers and therapists try to help support the person to learn some strategies. Live cultural arts organizations, you're not there to provide this kind of therapeutic intervention but there are many things that can be done to support a person where they are and they get to be who they are.

You can gain understanding of the underlying sensory processing disorder. The examples I gave you are the polar opposite, extreme examples. People may fall on the far ends. Just because

someone is hyperintense, in one situation with sound or vision, it doesn't mean they will have the same response in another situation. Context is important, about learning associations, so a lot of how a person understands the situations is tied to the learning association with the context. That's why it's important to create a safe environment in the cultural arts spaces.

They may change their response or hyperintense or hypo intense perception, that might change within the same situation. Even though they start out hyperintense, as time goes on, even in the same scenario, they might accommodate and reach an equilibrium base line, or they might become hypo intense as well. You may initially identify someone as one way or the other don't mean that's carried out their entire life, in every situation in life and may even mean they may change within the scenario you're experiencing at the same time. So part

of that is, everybody perceives sensations differently. Another person is not perceiving the sensation in the same way I am. So when I observe someone responding differently, the question I ask is, how are they experiencing this? How are they perceiving this? That helps us get to a better understanding of why the person might be engaging with me in a particular way.

Jesse Jessi will talk about some of the programming strategies and ways we can provide a supportive environment.

>> Thank you, Roger. We started our program with sensory friendly chamber concerts in 2015. They were for all ages, abilities, particularly for those with autism. They were started with a local musician therapist, who runs a studio for clients with autism. They worked on a format, and the clients would perform at a couple points during the program so they got opportunities to public performance and direct

participation in the concert. The whole audience got involved with a sing along and a chance to play instruments at the end.

These are really informal concerts, in a smaller place called the target atrium. There's one musician, showing a family her instrument before the concert starts. It's a concert where people can be very close to the musicians and ask questions during the concert. There's one of the clients performing during the concert on a cello. Someone is playing with a fidget during the concerts.

There's fidgets handed at the door, in case you want something to move around with your hands, and other things like noise cancelling head phones. You can also find a new seat closer to the orchestra, or if you want less, you can go to the back of the hall. There's a quiet space, where you can go if you want to be part of the space. There are



volunteers there, with relaxing activities. The front of house staff make a huge difference in terms of setting the tone. Roger talked a lot about families feeling they are afraid to get judged when they get out into the community.

The tone that you set in, from the musicians, volunteers, is so important in making patrons feel welcome. They won't get stared at if they respond to the music in a way people consider different. Training is a big part of preparing for these concerts. The musicians were trained, would learn about the concepts Roger discussed, helping people understand differences in sensory processing and there aren't always a lot of experiences in the community that are accessible for patrons with autism.

Here are some differences you will see in terms of make the environment inclusive. In terms of buy in, we found that everybody responds positively. It's

a pretty easy sell once they hear that there's lots of families who are not comfortable going to events. Of course, we want them to be able to enjoy the music. So of course, we will do this and perform this concert. It's not a big deal at all. That's been key, in developing the buy in. Sometimes the musicians, especially enjoy looking out and seeing people dancing to the music, or clapping at different points in the program. You can see really enthusiastic responses to the music. There is someone leaning out of their seat trying to get a better look at what's happening.

These concerts are intended to be performed in a relaxed environment, where any response to the music is welcome at any time. You can get up and move if you need to, to process the music. You can vocalize, clap at different points, whatever the music leads you to do. To reinforce that, we put in all the marketing materials, front and center,

and have an artist from on stage at the beginning of the concert tell everybody at the beginning that it's a relaxed environment. So there's no way you will miss that, that it's okay to have this be relaxed. That's crucial to put the reminders to families, especially coming from an artist. Lots of families, sometimes they still shush their child because it's so engrained that you sit still at an orchestra concert. Some people are afraid their child will disrupt the performers, so it's important to have the performers say we welcome you as you are. Enjoy the music as you are.

The last photo is a screenshot of one of our materials. Roger talked about how people process and respond to music, and also people having different strategies they use in different environments. There are different options available, like quiet spaces, head phones, so you can adapt during the moment and help you plan. Here's a tip

sheet walking through logistics for the group leader. Things like what do I wear, where do I park? What sorts of services will be available, what about head phones, should you bring your own? Things specific to the relaxed event.

We put out the play list because we want people to hear the music in advance if they are worried about if the music gets loud at some point. There are pre-visit stories available. They walk through the experience, when I get to orchestra hall, I will be greeted by a doorman. I might have to wait in a line at the box office, walking through the basic steps. What might happen, so you can be comfortable know what to expect and how to adopt to thing that may be challenging.

We remember general accessibility, as well. We have open captioning, accessible seating, large print programs, and Spanish translations of the materials. We want to make this as

inclusive an experience as possible so people don't have to ask for accommodations.

Before the performance, we have pre-and post concert activities. We worked closely with a team in Pittsburgh and Minnesota. We got diverse perspectives on the team. Music therapists, occupational therapists, parents of children with autism, making sure a lot of different points of views were represented. In terms of the preconcert activities, usually we have different options, offered on a drop in basis. They're really flexible. You can go for a couple minutes, if you just like to scratch the surface, try different things. If you want to go all in, you can say a half hour, working on a project. We have the activity providers offer flexible products, not just one specific thing, but general guidelines, and there's a lot of freedom to explore.

There are options in terms of

engaging different senses, movement activities, art activities with different types of materials. Maybe you prefer the feeling of clay more than the feel the paints. You can meet the musicians. People like that chance to get to know the musicians, and ask questions, see how their instruments work up close. Patrons get to know the musicians, and in Pittsburgh people felt excited, getting to know someone on stage. There's an art project, collaborative project, where patrons made a mosaic on the Firebird.

We try to provide different ways for people to connect with the theme of the program. All the other activities will tie in with what's happening on stage. There's a photo of a family, before a concert. We provide things for them to get a keepsake, whether a photo or something else. This may be the first time for a family that they can be there together. Concerts are often geared towards families. We try to remember

that it's not just families with young children looking for opportunities to engage in these experiences. People of many different ages might be looking for this type of experience.

There's an older woman playing an instrument in the instrument petting zoo. This is run by the music therapists. They facilitate experiences where patrons can try out different instruments. A room with a lot of sound to be a challenge if you're sensitive to sounds so the therapists are equipped, knowing how to navigate that. In terms of the location, the instrument petting zoo is in a room off the lobby.

In the orchestra Orchestra hall Hall lobby, you get a map and be offered fidgets. There are notes about where you can go for different services, volunteers are spread throughout the lobby and warmly welcome people at the door.

We started with our sensory friendly chamber concerts. There was a

lot of interest in making sure that what the orchestra does on a regular basis is more accessible for patrons. We perform full orchestra concerts, opening up more experiences to patrons. The access team helped us design the activities, and in the summer of 2018, our theme was courage and triumph. The theme rolled into the festival. It was a theme about being brave, someone at any age can relate to that.

We had the courage and triumph concert. We talked about the repertoire, and we always work with the conductor and education department. A music therapist was there, too. And an important point for any concert is because there are so many different responses to sound, you can't make everything quiet, or you only serve one part of the spectrum. Some people might like more sound. It's not possible to do everything perfectly tailored to everybody. We don't change the artistic product because we can't win



so we try to do something with some louder moments, some softer moments, but there's something for everybody. We are mindful not to water down what the orchestra does on a regular basis. We do concerts where the environmental features, that's what's different about these concerts. The relaxed environment, the options available.

The program itself often overlaps with what we offer for schools, so we think about shorter piece, accessible to children, but don't omit pieces that are longer. In terms of our concerts, courage and triumph, we had about 60 minutes in total, and we try to get guest artists in for variety. There is someone with head phones, above and a girl and her father clapping and having a great time.

The experience was well received by families. We also heard from some families, this was too loud. But someone people picked out the loudest pieces on

program, saying that was their favorite part. It became apparent that in Minnesota, versus Pittsburgh, Minnesota communities were making an assumption that sensory friendly meant quiet. In Pittsburgh, the organizations, we were one of the first to do that. Others did it similarly to the way we did. It didn't necessarily mean modifications in terms of reducing sound levels. It was just about making a more inclusive environment. In Minnesota, they established the expectation that sensory friendly things are quieter. We discovered we had to do a little bit more with communication to help people understand what approach we were taking and to be prepared for it.

We called this concert sensory friendly. We had a discussion before, whether to call it sensory friendly, or relaxed. The term relaxed appealed to me because a lot of people, often they think sensory friendly is for people with

autism. With our family concerts, we often see families with young children who are afraid their child will make noise or move around. It's not limited to people with autism. The label, relaxed concert, is broader and more descriptive of the heart of the experiences, which is the relaxed environment.

We decided with the full orchestra concerts we would call them relaxed family concerts. We kept the label sensory friendly, for some concerts. The terms are often used interchangeably, meaning an experience inclusive for people with autism and others. Be aware of what expectations locally are, and adopt certain parts of the experience to that.

Orchestra hall Hall in Minnesota, is a very loud space. A lot of contrast with Pittsburgh. Remember the specific qualities of your space. We had to do extra work in terms of buying more head

phones, in Minnesota, than in Pittsburgh. We started having volunteers distributing them during the concert and used occupational therapists, who know what to look for when someone might need headphones. We put it clearly up front in our marketing materials headphones quantities are limited. Please bring your own.

With the announcements from the musicians at the top of the program, talking about options, traditionally we start with music. People are here for the music. But we found people could have used that reminder before the first piece so they knew right away, that one is too loud, I don't have to leave. I can stay and maybe try the next piece. We try to, at the beginning of the program, before the music starts, let people know these are the options available.

Sometimes if the music is starting loudly, we might have a make shift spot

highlighting where the music is about to come from as another way to cue people in to expect something will be coming from this area. In the back it's hard to see what's happening, sometimes, especially if you're not familiar with the music.

We put out listening guides, talking about the sensory qualities of the music, and also, suggestions like you could try dancing around, or doing this in response to the music to remind people that there are tools, you can move around if that's helpful to you.

We see these things have really helped. People have a lot better idea was to expect. We have to keep working on it, to be sure the information is displayed well on our materials. We state up front we know there are lots of different responses to sound levels. You can expect a variety of the volumes in music. That's another way we help people understand that we know, we're doing our best to serve as many as we can, but

can't do it perfectly. So people are informed if they want to opt in.

Over the next couple years, we did a lot of great programs, seven relaxed family concerts. Most of the changes were in terms of communications, expectation setting. Other changes, we decided to make all the concerts in our family series relaxed concerts. We want to have an inclusion model. There are a lot of people in the family audience who might not have come to the first event, but have been coming to the relaxed family concerts and appreciated having that environment.

It's been great to see the organization adapting to the learnings, and taking them to other programs. Our staff know we have these head phones on hand, and they get them from the education team during school concerts or movie concerts because they know those things are available.

We see we're getting a lot of families, and hearing from patrons who are a little bit older, or teens, young adults, they're bothered by some of the younger children, finding it disruptive. We are exploring that. We were going to have conversations about carving out spaces that's just for -- it's important to make sure we have different options available for people. After all, most patrons can choose, I want to go to family, to the pops Pops concerts, to classical. Right now, our relaxed concerts are just in the family series. Patrons looking for relaxed environment should be able to have other choices, too. So it's not check the box, it's all done. But it's a starting point so we have more options available for people in the future.

The orchestra in general has a lot of work to do in terms of connecting with people of color, in many areas. We have done some work with people in the Latino

community, we started doing translation materials, marketing in Spanish language news letters. Minnesota has a large Somali community. The rates of autism might be more prevalent than in some of the white communities in the area.

We had some meetings with people in the Somali community. We want to keep building those relationships over time. In general, with school and family programs, we try to make a big effort in terms of the compose, guest artists, whether the dancers, host, who's there in terms of pre-concert activities. We want to be sure the whole community is served. In terms of better serving people of all ages, people of color, we have the people to plan for the first experience. We will reconvene an expanded version of the team and be even more mindful of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Yuo You may have questions about COVID and what we're doing. We're planning to live stream some old concerts



and in many ways it's easy to make the experience sensory friendly for people at home. We will continue offering multi sensory activities suggestions for different types of learners and putting out listening guides so people can be aware of the music, and what to expect.

I have a quick video that includes testimonials from some people at these events.

(Video)

>> A lot of people have a narrow idea of what accessible means. They think it's just wheelchair ramps. It's also about people's attitudes, making things financially accessible and making people feel welcome to come as you are and be yourself.

>> He likes to play the what?

>> The cello.

>> We think it's extraordinary that the Minnesota Orchestra would have a sensory friendly concert. We can't

bring kids with special needs that wouldn't fit into a regular concert, so they never go. To feel the music live is a memory maker and to feel part of that community, from one concert, so much can grow.

>> I'm sure you recognize that evaluation as important. The most common methods are surveys, focus groups, interviews. A slight word of caution, many in the disability community have survey and focus group fatigue. They have been voicing their needs and willingness to work with others for decades without true commitment action. So many times, the disability community may not be as enthusiastic to do yet another survey, for things they have been telling society for decades. I encourage you to work with your community advisory group to explore the best evaluation methods, naturally embedded within the experience. It may included surveys, but

some places are looking at creative ways to gather information. There's the smiley face response buttons, feedback walls. It might be artifact based, creating a product showing the connection of how someone is relating to music. So your visitor group will be key to gathering information.

We will take questions, if you have any.

>> Thank you so much. On a personal note, I found it so helpful at the beginning that you had the thoughtful concept connecting people through hypo-and hypersensitivity as it's important to put ourselves in the mind set of what the experience is like. We can't offer help unless we know what help is needed.

A musician is appreciative of this session and wants to advocate for inclusive audition processes.

I'm sorry if you already answered this. You mentioned COVID-19. There was

a question, whether you have experience offering online programming that's sensory friendly and is there video to share?

>> We don't really have the experience offering online programming yet. At Minnesota orchestraOrchestra, our team has been mostly involved, publishing activities, instructional videos, but we are planning to share some old concert performances and that will be our first experience, the project I was talking about where we look to share the multi sensory activities and support materials around those. I don't know, Roger, do you have good examples from other organizations?

>> No, unfortunately. This is such a new realm, particularly for cultural arts education. There's an organization in Philadelphia called art reach, that's trying to get as much information on the website, at least creating conversations, and potential

strategies for online experiences.

That's all I know right now.

>> Another question, wondering if, are people in the audience commenting negatively, talking about people with hypersensitivity, and how have you responded?

>> There is a subset of patrons who find it disruptive. It seems more prevalent in Minnesota than other places. A lot of it seems to be in terms of the age of the people attending. Concept The concept of people being disruptive often references children some patrons think are too young to attend concerts. : "The children shouldn't come until they know how to behave." There is judgment sometimes, while others find it helpful for themselves if they can be in a quieter environment. That's why we want to expand beyond the family series so people can separate, go to the experiences more suited to them rather than everybody fitting one type of

experience.

>> I agree. It's looking at expanding the programming, the opportunities available. We see that in other places, Philadelphia, and other places, looking to expand programming because of the feedback.

>> We have a question specifically to for Roger. You spoke well about the hypo-and hypersensitivity. This person is curious, can you help us understand why people with autism are perceived to have poor or underdeveloped social skills or have trouble reading body language or social cues?

>> Social behavior is a hallmark of autism. We still don't completely understand why this exists. But in part, when you're in situations, the heightened anxiety, or withdrawal from the experience are natural responses. When you're limiting the, self limiting the experience, you have less exposure to develop the strategies and mechanisms to

engage. When the outside world, whether other people or the environment, is not recognizing, supportive, accommodating, to these variations, what are the choices the person with autism has, except to create their own space where it's safe. Everyone else is either judging, or not creating a safe environment. Those are some factors. Creating that environment, providing supports, options, so people can manage, know there's spaces in the public that allow to do that so it's safe to begin experimenting, trying different things out there. We really don't know why this exists.

>> Many people have different responses and explanations for that. We can't get to all the questions, but I will pose this. Have you partnered with specific organizations to promote concerts and connect with sensory friendly audiences, and have you taken chamber groups into the community, like at libraries?

>> Absolutely. That's been very important. We rely on an accessibility team to help us put the word out. There are people from occupational therapy centers and other organizations, especially when we first started, why should people trust us? If an organization they know says to check this out, I've been part of the planning process, that's helpful, in selling the experience. We definitely do a lot of that and try to have a good amount of general marketing, family magazines, social media, because there might be people who are not connected to the disability community or don't have a disability but are still interested in this relaxed environment.

In terms of taking chamber groups out of the concert hall, we have done it a few times. When I think to how we went to schools serving students with disabilities, I know same thing at the PSO. Those, sometimes the smaller



experiences help generate buy in when we start full orchestras. Musicians talk about how meaningful it was to develop relationships with students and teachers, at schools.

>> Would you recommend general admission where people can move around wherever they wish, or a fixed house, where people can ensure they get a specific seat?

>> We always do specific seating because it's easy, we don't need to worry about someone taking the accessible seating, if they don't need it. We don't want people to worry about getting in and reserving this seat when the house opens. We offer buffer seating, too, so if you want to reserve empty seats around you, you can do that at no extra cost. We leave the last four rows open so you can go there if you want a new seat. We also offer flexible refunds. What if the first song is too loud and they have to leave? You can buy tickets, but have a

flexible refund if you need.

>> All life is on hold, but there are many other questions people would have. I encourage people to reach out to Jessica. You will find her contact info posted. Thank you so much to Roger and Jessica for leading this discussion. Thank you to the audience for joining us. Please complete the survey. It's so helpful to us. The link is in PheedLoop. Please check your meetings in the schedule. There may be additions or updates. Remember to visit our online exhibit hall, in the panel. We had a change in programming for today's 1:00 session. We hope you will join us in the session exploring racism in the orchestras. Thank you all so much.