

The headlines hit in rapid succession. The New York Philharmonic cancelled its season—for the first time in 178 years. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra cancelled concerts through March 2021. The Pacific Symphony postponed its 2020–21 season to 2021–22. It wasn't just big orchestras—orchestras of all sizes and types have had to cancel, postpone, regroup, rethink, as the pandemic continues to rage. While cancelling or even delaying a season is heartbreaking, with significant financial and emotional costs, it is also sensible: gathering to share live music, the central artistic act of orchestras, has become dangerous. To their credit, orchestras are adhering to health regulations, with the welfare of musicians, audiences, staff, and supporters paramount.

In fact, orchestras are responding to the unprecedented health crisis with alacrity and creativity, innovating like mad. Musicians are playing on their front porches for neighbors. Orchestras are performing at drive-in movie theaters. Pop-up concerts are bringing music to riverfronts, parking lots, town squares. Hybrid seasons balance in-person concerts, usually for smaller audiences and socially distanced musicians, with virtual concerts; casual online chats bring the artists into living rooms.

The country is engaged in an urgent, long-delayed national conversation about racial injustice. Musicians, orchestras, and other music organizations have decried the killing of Black Americans by police, issued statements of solidarity and support, and, most crucially, are taking action. They are performing works by Black composers and other underrepresented artists, connecting with once-overlooked communities, performing where they seldom did. Inclusion and equity have long been goals of orchestra leaders. The time for action is now.

Robert Sandla



Classical Action

Performing Arts Against AIDS

www.classicalaction.org

Classical Action: Performing Arts Against AIDS

is a not-for-profit organization which draws upon the talents, resources and generosity of the performing arts community to raise funds for AIDS-related services across the United States. Funds are raised through special events, private house concerts, recording and merchandising projects, individual donations, and foundation and corporate support.

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2 Prelude by Robert Sandla

6 The Score

Orchestra news, moves, and events

16 League Statement on Racial Discrimination

The League has issued a Statement on Racial Discrimination expressing how it is coming to grips with the history and impact of racism within the League and the orchestral field, and committing to sustained action.

22 At the League

Meet Simon Woods, the League's new president and CEO.

28 Research

A new Wallace Foundation/SMU DataArts report by Zannie Voss and Glenn Voss identifies strategies to achieve organizational health.

32 Music in the Present Tense

Orchestras are commissioning composers to connect listeners with new music that captures the turbulence of recent months. by Jeremy Reynolds

38 Hearing Her Voice

Works by women composers are being commissioned and performed in greater numbers, thanks to the Women Composers Readings and Commissions Program. by Janaya Greene

44 The Virtual Gala

Orchestras are pivoting to online galas during a time when we can't gather in person to raise money—and spirits. by Rebecca Winzenried

50 Changing the Channels

The pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital engagement and innovation at orchestras. by Rebecca Schmid

56 The Beat Goes On

During the pandemic, orchestras, pops presenters, and guest artists are adopting fresh approaches to pops. by Steven Brown

62 2020 Guide to Symphony Pops Advertisers

69 Advertiser Index

70 League of American Orchestras Annual Fund

72 Coda

Musicologist Naomi André is rethinking music history through the lenses of gender and race.

[Text marked like this](#) indicates a link to websites and online resources.

6



Erin Balano

22



Craig T. Mathew/Matthew Imaging

44



72



Michael Hough Imaging

about the cover

Orchestras and their musicians are taking on new roles during the pandemic and at a time of social change. Clockwise from top left: Utah Symphony musicians perform at a panoramic overlook for a video marking the orchestra's 80th anniversary (credit Madeline Adkins); Jennifer Arnold, director of artistic planning and operations at the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, at a violin vigil for Elijah McClain; Annie Vo (left) and Chaeyon Jang prepare to rehearse with the Greensboro Symphony Youth Orchestra (credit Khadejeh Nikouyeh); the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra String Ensemble, with conductor Reginald Fox, at a prayer vigil in solidarity with the Black community (credit Harry Washington, TSC Video and Photography Productions); Cleveland Orchestra horn players perform Beethoven at Progressive Field, July 30, 2020.