

To paraphrase the Grateful Dead, what a long, strange year it's been. Twelve months ago, nobody outside the scientific community had heard of novel coronaviruses, and now the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 has surpassed 400,000. Concert halls shut down in compliance with health regulations.

Orchestras postponed and then cancelled performances and entire seasons to safeguard musicians, audiences, and staff. The usually hyperactive classical music scene was, in large measure, shut down. Closures, though essential, meant big drops in box-office revenue—and drastic loss of income for orchestras and musicians. Orchestras regrouped, moved ahead, went online, and regrouped again when coronavirus cases spiked.

Despite the enormous challenges and human cost, the pandemic raised new possibilities suggesting that perhaps 2020 was not entirely an *annus horribilis*. Orchestras demonstrated flexibility and creativity—timely adaptations in a field that often relies on tradition. The pandemic accelerated the move to digital media, and online, virtual, live-streamed, on-demand concerts kept the music and the musicians playing. New questions arise: how to define a concert in the digital era? What are orchestras' roles in society?

The national focus on racial equity raised by the police killing of George Floyd and subsequent global demonstrations were wake-up calls to the orchestra field, with its longstanding lack of racial equity. Soul searching, moves toward equity, and programs to welcome more diverse stakeholders are now part of what many orchestras do, and may foreshadow classical music's post-COVID reboot.

This issue of *Symphony* looks at how orchestras are adapting to the new landscape—and looks ahead at what might be.

Robert Sandla

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symphony®, the award-winning quarterly magazine of the League of American Orchestras, discusses issues critical to the orchestra community and communicates to the American public the value and importance of orchestras and the music they perform.

EDITOR IN CHIEF **Robert Sandla**
MANAGING EDITOR **Jennifer Melick**
PRODUCTION AND DESIGN **Michael Rush**
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR **Stephen Alter**
ADVERTISING ASSOCIATE **Danielle Clarke-Newell**
PUBLISHERS **Simon Woods
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EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING OFFICES

520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10018-4167
E-mail (editorial): editor@americanorchestras.org
E-mail (advertising): salter@americanorchestras.org
Phone (advertising): 646-822-4051

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about the cover

We asked 21 people in the orchestra field, from executive directors to composers, educators, and activists, what they'd like to see classical music blossom into in America, and how they're working to make these hopes and visions a reality in 2021. Some of their answers appear on the cover. The full story is on page 36.