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.
Prelude by Robert Sandla

The Score
Orchestra news, moves, and events

Forward Thinking
League President and CEO Simon Woods examines new opportunities and roles for orchestras in a post-pandemic world.

Board Room
The COVID-19 crisis and the national focus on racial justice have spurred calls for equity, diversity, and inclusion. by Cathy Trower

League Webinar

Studying Safer Concerts
Orchestras and scientists are studying the spread of the coronavirus so they can bring back live music—safely. by Michele C. Hollow

What’s Next for Orchestras?
21 classical-music figures on what’s ahead for 2021. by Janaya Greene

Sounds from a Distance
Orchestras’ audio engineers move center stage. by Brian Wise

New Directions
Emerging artists re-envision 2021. by Heidi Waleson

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This season, small is the name of the game. by Rebecca Winzenried

Podium Launches
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League of American Orchestras Annual Fund

Coda
With the Chineke! Orchestra, Chi-chi Nwanoku is creating opportunities for classical musicians of color in the U.K. and Europe.

Text marked like this indicates a link to websites and online resources.