

# Embracing a Changed World

The world has radically changed from just a year ago, as orchestras have grappled with the pandemic and have sought to confront racial injustice. The League's 2021 National Conference will explore what must change from the past, what the future might look like, and how we will get there.

by David Styers

Orchestral music has evolved over centuries and it will continue to evolve and thrive—differently. The time is right for orchestras to now embrace a changed world and build an inclusive and open future. With light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, and an overdue need to address racial equity, this time presents new opportunities for a vibrant reinvention of our art form and our institutions.

The League of American Orchestras' online 2021 National Conference, June 7-17, will pose big questions, examine where we are, and look ahead to the future. Providing actionable, engaging content; diverse perspectives; provocative, timely discussion; and network development, the Conference will focus on five critical questions:

1. Concert Hall vs. Digital: What new opportunities and challenges are emerging, and how do we balance the need for both engagement and revenue?
2. Better Together: What responsibilities and opportunities do orchestras have to deepen their relationships with their communities?
3. Showing Up for Racial Equity: What shifts across the board can we make, in order to progress towards a more equitable, post-pandemic future?

What new tools and approaches do we need, in order to sustain and expand this work?

4. New Directions: How has a year of adversity and awareness changed our approach to programming and the concert experience?
5. Reframing the Narrative: How do we make a compelling case that resonates with government, funders, and the public as a new chapter in the work of orchestras begins?

We must thank all the individuals and organizations that have helped us put together such a vibrant gathering of people, perspectives, and ideas at this year's National Conference, among them the consulting firm McKensie Mack Group and many others.

For a list of the League's funders and sponsors for this year's Conference, visit <https://leagueconference.org/2021-sponsors-funders>. The League sincerely appreciates their support.

Here are just a few highlights of what to expect this June.

## Conference 2021

The League of American Orchestras 2021 National Conference, "Embracing a Changed World," takes place June 7-17 online. Visit [leagueconference.org](https://leagueconference.org) for more information and to register.

## Inspiring Music and Speakers

The Conference will showcase the rich range of music-making by American orchestras of every description from across the country. The Interschool Orchestras of New York, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Omaha Symphony will give live-streamed concerts, and the Albany (NY) Symphony, Great Lakes Chamber Orchestra, Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, New Bedford Symphony, and San Diego Symphony will be featured in previously recorded concerts.

World-renowned musician, composer, and bandleader Wynton Marsalis will kick off the Conference on Monday, June 7 in an interview by League President and CEO Simon Woods. Marsalis will share his core beliefs, which are based on the principles of jazz: individual creativity (improvisation), collective cooperation (swing), and facing adversity with persistent optimism (the blues). In 1983, Marsalis became the first and only artist to win classical and jazz Grammy Awards in the same year; he won in both categories again in 1984. An educator and leading advocate of American culture, Marsalis will reflect on what he sees as the future of the arts and orchestras in expanding musical offerings and audiences. Marsalis co-founded Jazz at Lincoln Center, the first-ever new, permanent constituent at the NYC performing arts center since its start. A prolific and inventive composer, he has performed and composed across

the full jazz spectrum—from its New Orleans roots to bebop to modern jazz—and has composed a violin concerto and four symphonies that introduced new rhythms to the classical canon.

In "A Time to Embrace Change," the closing plenary session on Thursday, June 17, a conversation between Elizabeth Alexander, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Emil Kang, the Mellon Foundation's program director for arts and culture, will address how we must place the arts and artists at the center of thriving, healthy communities. The largest supporter of the arts and humanities in the U.S., the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is committed to ensuring equitable access to excellent arts and cultural experiences.

The League's online 2021 National Conference will pose big questions, examine where we are, and look ahead to the future.

## Thematic Days

Each of the five critical questions will frame a day of the Conference by providing an in-depth look into issues most affecting orchestras.

On Tuesday, June 8, "Concert Hall vs Digital: What new opportunities and challenges are emerging, and how do we balance the need for both engagement and revenue?" will explore what we have learned during the pandemic about digital content: it will always be part of our future, yet it will never replace live performance. This day is about the future interplay between live and digital—and the different experiences and potential of each medium.

- **Making Connections: Leveraging Symphonic Strengths in a Pandemic-Impacted Nation** with Colleen Dilenschneider, chief market engagement officer for IMPACTS, a global leader in predictive market intelligence and related technologies
- **How Has Technology Changed**



Musician, composer, and bandleader Wynton Marsalis will launch the League's 2021 National Conference on Monday, June 7 in an interview by League President and CEO Simon Woods.



Anwar Nasir, chief revenue and advancement officer of the Omaha Symphony, will moderate the June 8 *How Has Technology Changed Orchestras Forever* panel discussion.



Colleen Dilenschneider, chief market engagement officer for IMPACTS, a predictive market intelligence and technology firm, will lead the *Making Connections: Leveraging Symphonic Strengths in a Pandemic-Impacted Nation* session on June 8.



Blake-Anthony Johnson, CEO of Chicago Sinfonietta, will moderate the June 8 *We Do This Work Together: Creating Pathways for Meaningful Action in the Face of Racial Injustice* panel discussion.



Denise Wilmer Barreto, co-founder and executive producer of Serget Productions, Chicago, will lead the June 8 *When We Don't Give Up: Facing Resistance to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Work* session.



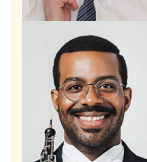
Laura Reynolds, executive director of the Boise Philharmonic, will moderate the June 9 *Survive to Thrive: Why Community is Central to Our Success* panel discussion.



Marc Bamuthi Joseph, vice president and artistic director of social impact at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, will lead the *Arc of Art and Community Solidarity* session on June 9.



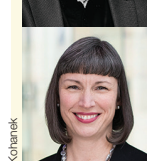
Ed Yim, chief content officer and senior vice president of WQXR 105.9 FM Classical Music, will moderate the *Artistically Responsive Orchestra* panel discussion on June 15.



Titus Underwood, principal oboe of the Nashville Symphony, will moderate the June 15 *The Summer of 2020* discussion with a panel of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color orchestra professionals.



Kiran Singh Sirah, president of the International Storytelling Center, will lead the June 16 *Your Values, Your Impact, Your Stories* session, which focuses on the story-telling skills that orchestras must sharpen to communicate their value.



Michelle Burns Miller, president and CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra, will lead the June 16 *Making the Case in 2021* panel discussion on how orchestras can articulate their roles in society.

Each of these five days of the League's 2021 Conference will conclude with a facilitated online open chat space for attendees to reflect upon and share their thoughts and surface ideas about implementation and impact, following the presentations and discussions of the day.

**Orchestras Forever**, panel discussion exploring the changing role of technology and the rise of the orchestra media company, moderated by Anwar Nasir, chief revenue and advancement officer of the Omaha Symphony

On Wednesday, June 9, "Better Together: What responsibilities and opportunities do orchestras have to deepen their relationships with their communities?" will address how orchestras' relationships

with their communities will be redefined after the pandemic and will examine the roles orchestras play in the economic revival of their cities and towns. This day is about how orchestras can build even deeper relationships with their communities and create new dimensions of cultural belonging.

- **The Arc of Art and Community Solidarity** with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, vice president and artistic director of

social impact at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

- **Survive to Thrive: Why Community is Central to Our Success**, panel discussion sharing strategies, insights, and actionable ways that orchestras can authentically engage with communities to increase access, deepen trust, and develop enduring sustainability, moderated by Laura Reynolds, executive director of the Boise Philharmonic

On Thursday, June 10, "Showing Up for Racial Equity: What shifts across the board can we make, in order to progress towards a more equitable, post-pandemic future? What new tools and approaches do we need, in order to sustain and expand this work?" will examine the commitment necessary to advancing values and actions of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all facets of American orchestras. Made possible by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, this day will examine ways

The 2021 Conference will showcase the rich range of music-making by American orchestras across the country.

to support a paradigm shift that holistically embeds EDI values in our organizations' cultures, practices, and norms. It will also continue to advance discussion and action for orchestras at all stages of their EDI work.

- **When We Don't Give Up: Facing Resistance to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Work** with Denise Wilmer Barreto, co-founder and executive producer of Serget Productions, Chicago
- **We Do This Work Together: Creating Pathways for Meaningful Action in the Face of Racial Injustice**, panel discussion focusing on what commitments orchestras have made to racial-justice work and how orchestras will remain accountable, moderated by Blake-Anthony Johnson, CEO of Chicago Sinfonietta

# Embracing a Changed World

76th National Conference *Online*  
LEAGUE OF AMERICAN ORCHESTRAS



## Pre-Conference Seminars

Prior to the start of Conference, Pre-Conference Seminars will take deep dives into specific topics, June 1-4:

**Leadership in a Time of Crisis** with Susan Reinecke of the Center for Creative Leadership (extra fee, June 2): Participants will gain greater situational awareness of when to focus on crisis leadership versus crisis management; identify effective and ineffective crisis leadership and the impact of authenticity, transparency, compassion, and interdependence on success; learn how to prioritize, act, and communicate strategically at each stage of a crisis—no matter the chaos and ambiguity; develop skills to maintain agility and resilience throughout a crisis; and develop ways to pivot in order to thrive while taking advantage of new conditions and opportunities and reconfiguring the organization.

**What Do You Need in a Post-Pandemic Board?** with Susan Howlett of Susan Howlett Consulting (extra fee, June 3): As we emerge from the reverberating impacts of the last year, boards will have to think and behave differently if orchestras are to remain relevant. This interactive session will help participants: identify what you need from your board to navigate a shifting landscape; discern which board attitudes and behaviors no longer serve you, and how to move toward more useful ones; and equip board members to champion your orchestra's evolving identity. Expect conversations about equity, tools for addressing conundrums, and opportunities for real-time problem-solving.

**Embracing Changed Fundraising: Keeping Your Donors in a Time of Renewal** with Bob Swaney of Robert Swaney Consulting (extra fee, June 4): Now that orchestras are preparing for performances on the stage and for audiences returning to the concert hall, new donor expectations are emerging. Using the lessons learned during the shutdown, this seminar will help participants: retain generous contributors; address budding new best practices for donor retention, as viewed through a lens of fundraising; and experience interactive exercises to help equip your organization as it prepares to attract, keep, and grow the donor base in a pandemic-recovery environment.

On Tuesday, June 15, "New Directions: How has a year of adversity and awareness changed our approach to programming and the concert experience?" will provide a look at the future of repertoire planning and what orchestras' priorities should be. This day will explore how the past year has altered the way orchestras program and present concerts.

- **The Summer of 2020** with Titus Underwood, principal oboe of the Nashville Symphony, and a panel of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) orchestra professionals
- **The Artistically Responsive Orchestra**, panel discussion exploring how the concept of nimbleness could be the orchestra model of the future, moderated by Ed Yim, chief content officer and senior vice president of WQXR 105.9 FM Classical Music

On Wednesday, June 16, "Reframing the Narrative: How do we make a compelling case that resonates with government, funders, and the public as a new chapter in the work of orchestras begins?" will examine the story-telling skills that orchestras must sharpen to communicate their value. This day will look at orchestras'

ongoing responsibility to communities and the need for equitable access to music education.

- **Your Values, Your Impact, Your Stories** with Kiran Singh Sirah, president of the International Storytelling Center
- **Making the Case in 2021**, panel discussion looking at perspectives on how orchestras can articulate their role, moderated by Michelle Miller Burns, president and CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra

Each of these five days will conclude with a facilitated open chat space for attendees to reflect upon and share their thoughts and surface ideas about implementation and impact, following the presentations and discussions of the day.

### Networking and Learning

The Conference will also feature small-group Constituency Meetings by peer group, many of them taking place on Monday, June 14, to focus on each group's most pressing concerns. Whether you are connected to the orchestra field as an executive director, trustee, volunteer, staff member, conductor, composer, or musician, there will be Constituency Meeting

agendas designed specifically for you.

Throughout the Conference, the online Exhibit Hall will connect you with Conference exhibitors and sponsors. On Friday, June 11, attendees will have a full day to visit virtual exhibit booths and

Every day of the Conference provides in-depth looks at the most pressing issues facing orchestras.

attend innovation sessions to hear from experts in the fields of acoustics, finance, brand strategy, audience retention, and patron engagement, among others.

And we will be having meet-and-greet opportunities prior to the opening and closing sessions for everyone to connect with colleagues and make new friends.

So, join us online in June for your own professional exchange of ideas, resources, and tools to embrace the change necessary to lead, support, and champion your orchestra and the vitality of the music it performs. [S](#)

DAVID STYERS is the director of Learning and Leadership Programs at the League of American Orchestras.