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# symphony

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Valentina Stadil

### about the cover

Clockwise from top: The Oklahoma City Philharmonic performs a section of Jerod Impichchaachaah's Tate's *Lovak Shoppala* (credit: Shevaun Williams and Associates); a student violinist in the Richmond Symphony Youth Orchestra participates virtually; San Francisco Symphony percussionist Jacob Nissly and Stan Muncy perform an online concert (Kim Huynh); Louis Scaglione leads a Philadelphia Youth Orchestra rehearsal (Bachrach Photography); the Bravo! Vail music festival presented concerts from its Mobile Music Box last summer (Tomas Cohen Photography); French horn players from the New Jersey Youth Symphony perform at an outdoor concert (Jon Sicat); Angel Reverol, a student in the Nashville Symphony's Accelerando program, and Leslie Fagan, assistant principal flute with the Nashville Symphony, share an e-score (Walter Bitner).

It sounds like sci fi: “the before times.” But before COVID-19, orchestra seasons were planned down to the hemidemisemiquaver, announced half a year before opening night, and then launched like so many swans—gorgeous and unruffled on top, paddling madly below. Change—when it happened—was difficult, protracted, in part because of practicalities like the availability of in-demand guest musicians, the need to honor contracts and regulations, rehearse unfamiliar rep, alert audiences, sell tickets.

All that changed when the pandemic hit. Concerts were announced, canceled, postponed, rescheduled. Musicians popped up on streets, backyards, front porches. Everyone headed online. When in-person concerts became possible, strings prevailed, to limit spread of aerosols from wind instruments. Along with familiar scores by Tchaikovsky and the usual (wonderful) suspects, Mahler 4, of all things, showed up in chamber versions. And something else happened. Strings-only scores like George Walker’s *Lyric for Strings* and Jessie Montgomery’s *Starburst* were being played nationwide. Works by more a diverse range of composers, so long ignored, are suddenly being performed, often by a more diverse range of musicians. Sparked by the fierce urgency of the need for racial equity, what had been an aspiration may be headed toward becoming a reality.

This issue of *Symphony* looks at these paradigm shifts from multiple perspectives. Incoming and departing board chairs—all of them women—discuss governance. Native American composers talk about the increase in commissions and performances of their music by orchestras. A panel of Black musicians examines how to rethink blind auditions so that orchestras become truly representative. And we report on how youth orchestras are adapting and looking ahead.

Robert Sandla



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