

League of American Orchestras
A Time to Embrace Change
Thursday, June 17, 2021

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>> DOUG HAGERMAN: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the annual meeting and closing session. I'm Doug Hagerman, board chair of the League of American Orchestras. I would like to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for supporting our gathering here today as well as so many other initiatives of the League.

The Mellon Foundation is a long-time supporter of the League and a preeminent funder of the arts and humanities. It's funding is unprecedented, unparalleled. To kick off our annual meeting, we are honored to welcome Jennifer Chang, White House adviser to chief of staff for the National Endowment For the Arts. The essential role of the NEA in support of orchestras and wider creative sector across the U.S. reaches far beyond direct grant-making. Just as the full effects of the pandemic were being stood in March 2020, the NEA released economic analysis data charting the profound role of the arts in support of economic activity and workforce development.

Anchoring the case for dedicated relief and recovery

resources. Jennifer brings to us today insight from the NEA's role amid and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. A view on the new administration's priorities for our nation and its creative sector as well as deep personal experience in the performing arts as Jen holds a master's degree in viola performance, Jenn, our online audience is no doubt applauding that, especially the viola section. Thanks for joining us, Jennifer, and we welcome your thoughts.

>> JENNIFER CHANG: Thank you so much, Doug, and Simon and David and a whole host of others who helped to put together this incredible conference. A lot of the themes that you touched on in the past couple of weeks surround moving into action and sustaining durable change are certainly top of mind for us at the NEA, so it's especially exciting to be a part of this today.

Speaking of viola slides, I have a couple of them here and a special thanks to Heather Noonan, we in the entire arts field are extraordinarily lucky to have your leadership, Heather. You are an expert in these issues today, shuttered artist venues to artists visas. Thank you for your leadership.

My name is Jenn. I use she/her pronouns and I'm in Maine. I'm proud to serve as the White House liaison and senior advisor here at the NEA. I was sworn into office on the 20th at noon and the past couple of months have been a real whirlwind. Today I would like to tell you about my experience so far as the agency tried to embrace a changed and chaining world. As a

Violist, I like to listen to everything happening around me, not being front and center most of the time but really trying to figure out what's going on and driving direction from the inside of the orchestra and really it's ultimately about being part of something larger than yourself.

And I tried to bring that mentality to my work here at the NEA asking how can I help amplify others' voices? What support can I provide and how can I move the whole thing forward together collaboratively? My main role at the agency is to connect the work of the White House and with the agency tying together arts priorities and policies. I think a lot about arts and the economy, arts and public health, arts and racial equity.

I truly had no idea what to expect when I got here a couple of months ago, but I will say it's a privilege to work for a president who since the day he welcomed Amanda Gorman onto the national stage, recognized the way the arts lift people up. We see it in direct collaboration with the White House so far.

These with a couple of photos from a Black History Month event we collaborated on along with an event that featured Native American Pacific Islander artists and musicians, and the second gentleman has made visiting a priority. We see it in funding priorities.

The administration has remedy substantial increase for the NE's budget for 2022. With all of this support our job is to take the priorities of the administration and look at them through

an arts lens.

Since five months ago I was very unfamiliar with what the NEA does just a quick overview. It's always been at the intersection of public service and the arts, 80 percent of our budget goes directly into grant-making for the arts organizations. And we also do research on subjects like the way the arts impacts the economy as we mentioned before. We also find ways to partner across the government with the Department of Education, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of State, among many others as well as with other nonprofit organizations.

Acknowledging this long history of public service we are also deep into the work of understanding and unraveling a lot of the same forces that you all have been talking about for the past couple of weeks. The way that we are framing it our priorities are to advance racial equity and climate justice, heal the nation, rebuild the creative economy and serve the arts field. I will go into a couple of these areas.

Over the major priorities we have this in some ways is the most fundamental. There are opportunities to advance equity in every single action we take, every single decision we make. So this work really undergirds everything we are trying to accomplish. The good news is the mandate from the administration is really clear and very specific.

On January 20th, President Biden issued executive order 13985 I first encourage you all to read the executive order.

I wasn't in the habit of doing so more than five months ago. But it's a really interesting blueprint. They are not just telling every agency to vaguely bet better. They have specific guidance. We have to write progress reports. And they offer a lot of support. We have weekly office hours we can attend, trainings for field leaders and resources that really bring us all it's a whole of government approach trying to tackle this issue all together.

There's a lot of long-term policies and laws that won't be changed overnight, but I'm certainly encouraged by this approach thus far. In a lot of these settings and in our own agency work, we are deep in discussions not only about how to make the NEA and the arts field more equitable, but also how to incorporate the arts into the parts the equity work of a lot of other parts of the government as well.

Since January of course a major priority has been to do our part in defeating COVID-19. We are at a very exciting turning point. I'm exiting my home state for the first time in the past year and a half on a trip right now. But as we know, getting vaccinated is the best way to get back safe together with family, friends, wedding, travel and of course concerts.

More than 150 million Americans have been vaccinated, but we are not our goal of 70 percent yet. There's work to go done and musicians have been stepping up. Across the country we see hundreds of examples. From Yo Yo Ma playing to arts organizations across Illinois, a band partnering with the city of San Antonio.

Musician also telling the story of public health.

Musicians are fundamentally communicators who have the trust of local audiences, so the more we can do to bring our audiences back safely, the better. We invite you to use the hashtag artists can do this which is the one we have been starting to use.

And finally I would like to bring you some very exciting news about the NEA's use of the American Rescue Plan funds that we received or ARP as we have been nicknaming it. The way we are thinking about it really ties strongly to our healing and our equity work. We view it as a matter opportunity to reimagine precedent and rebuild in a way that works better for all arts organizations.

In April, we announced the allocation of 40 percent of our ARP funds to state and regional arts organizations and now we are focused on rolling out the remaining 60 percent. Two funding opportunities one for arts organizations and the other for local arts agencies to subgrant next week.

As a first step, in a departure from past emergency funding, arts organizations that have never applied for the NEA will be eligible and be encouraged to apply. Programs will offer flexibility as much as we can through non-matching offering support offering a range of award sizes and letting applicants choose what size would make sense for them. And then also through our state local and regional arts agencies partners we are hoping

to establish as many channels of funding as we can.

We know that getting the word out also is not enough especially to reach a lot of these organizations who have historically never thought about applying for an NEA grant. We also know that applying for federal funding takes time, resources, and knowledge that a lot of organizations don't have and don't have the capacity to create themselves.

So our engagement over the next couple of weeks and months is going to really focus on helping your organization succeed. We will be hosting workshops, answering questions in small group settings, creating videos, publishing FAQs on our website and much more. We will also be translating as much of these materials as we can into Spanish, Chinese, and American Sign Language again for the first time at the agency.

We recognize that we have a whole ton to learn and deep new relationships won't be built overnight. But we hoped this represents a first step into building a meaningful dialogue with communities that are new to the agency. Our first A RP workshop and Q&A will likely be in two weeks, the week of the 28th. So please stay tuned for more information.

So thank you again for your time. I hope that really this is just a start of a dialogue with all of you as well. As I mentioned, we are really here to listen, to understand your needs and to support you in the best ways that we can. The work that you all on this call do as scaffolding in the arts infrastructure

is extraordinarily important not just your audiences, not just to the classical music ecosystem, not just even to the field of arts and culture, but really to the health of American democracy.

So the more we can do to make your lives easier, the better off everyone is going to be. The other day I realized I have been doing all this talking about the power of the arts and healing and creativity, but I actually hadn't touched my viola I think since February. I had ten minutes to spare and picked it up and ran through a Bach suite which made me feel much better. With all of this charting a path forward, I hope you all have a chance to directly engage with the art form we all love in the next coming weeks and months. My e-mail is changj@arts.gov. And thank you very much. Doug, back to you.

Okay, great. David, can you let me turn my video okay back on, please. Okay. Okay. Great. All right. So thank you, Jenn. We are grateful for your passion and for the NEA's support of our members. Next we turn to the business of the League which faced a difficult year like all of our members did but which has risen to the occasion by providing extraordinary service to help orchestras overcoming the challenges of the pandemic.

I begin with some grief comments about the League's fiscal '20 financial results. That was the fiscal year that ended about a year ago. With a budget of 8 million years ago, the League ended with a deficit of '298 thousand. Cash in from funders and cash back out to our funders.

The lesion assets were \$11.3 million with three and a half million dollar endowment fund, \$924,000 in reserves and change capital totaling \$34,000. We are hoping for a small surplus in the fiscal year '21 that will end in about two weeks. We have two weeks of intense fundraising to go to get there. And like many of you, our FY22 budget next year is much more challenging than FY21.

So ending this year strong is a big priority for all of us and it's critical that we have your support during this recovery period so we can support the field. We really appreciate your contributions. So now we will proceed to the election of our board of directors, David, slide 2, please. But before we do, I would like to share with you the progress that we made on our public commitment two years ago to diversify our board at the League.

My full written report on this subject has been posted on our website and we will put a link in the chat in just a moment. In 2019, we adopted and published a board policy on diversity and inclusion. And we promised to report back on our progress. I'm pleased to report that at this .15 of our 49 board members identify as people of color, about 30 percent of our board. 23 of 49 board members identify as women.

We have also reviewed representation of individuals on other dimensions of diversity as well as the distribution of our board members by age, region, and orchestra size. These are additional types of diversity that also matter for our

organization. We attribute our success in reaching our representation goal and exceeding our representation goal for race and ethnicity to a few factors.

We made a concerted effort to identify and recruit people rather than relying on traditional networks and referral sources. In addition, the current board strongly supported the effort. And we readily identified high-quality candidate who is each bring remarkable talents and expertise and are contributing to the board. While representation is important, this increase alone will not achieve our ultimate goals.

We are dedicated to ensuring the League's board is a place that welcomes many voices and perspectives as we shape the organization's work. Having 15 people of color on our board has made a positive difference to our board dynamic in many, many ways and we are grateful to everyone who contributes their time, talents and treasure to our field in this way.

With that progress in mind, let me review who we will be electing today. Next slide, please, David. The governance committee has approved the following nominees and proposes them for election by the membership for three year terms: (Names on slide) and Ed Yim, chief content officer and senior VP at WQXR and former head of the American Composers Orchestra.

Next slide, please. In addition to these eight new board members, we are proposing for reelection the following individuals: (Names on slide) next slide.

We are saying good buy to two board members who are stepping down after years of service to the League and so we thank Anthony McGill and David Roth for their service. Each orchestra was given notice of the annual meeting and is entitled to a vote on the election of the board members on the slides we just reviewed. Instead of conducting a voice vote, we are adapting to what is possible for an online annual meeting. So I would ask people to vote yes or no on the slate of board members by the Zoom poll which is about to appear on your screen.

I will go ahead and go on with my presentation while all of you do the voting. Next slide, please. In addition to the board members elected by you as the members, we also have ex officio members designated to represent member orchestras on our board. In a very important move designed to increase representation of our members on the board, this year the League amended its bylaws to add the chairs of the group 2 and group 3 and 4 orchestras as ex officio members of the board League as those groups hadn't been historically represented.

So now all categories of member orchestras will have a voice in the strategy and direction of the League. And we encourage you to work with them to make your voice heard. Next slide, please.

Following elections by your constituency meetings this week, the following people will serve on the board as ex officio members. Melia, in group 1, Dan Heart from Buffalo, group 2, Jeff

vom Saal group 3 and 4, Ronda H. on the South Carolina Philharmonic representing group 5 and 6, Katherine Boucher, group 7 and 8, Rosina from Vermont representing the youth orchestras and the volunteer council is represented by Julie Meredith of the Utah symphony.

Next slide, please. The League board of directors will elect officers later this semester and the following is the slate of officers proposed for election. In addition to myself Melanie Clarke and Steve Parrish. I want to thank Burt who is stepping down after serving ably as our treasurer for the last five or six years.

I can now report to you that based on the vote you've been conducting, we have sufficient votes to elect our new board members. I congratulate all of them and that concludes the business of this annual meeting. But before I finish, I have one more thing to tell you. A year ago at our national conference, we promised to reveal details of how we intend to honor Jesse Rosen who retired from the League after a long and distinguished career.

We are planning to save this announcement for a future date, but with the news just a few days ago that Tanya Leon was won the Pulitzer Prize, it seems appropriate to let you in on our plans a little bit. The exciting news is that Tanya has agreed to write a special new work in Jesse's honor. This is happening thanks to the generosity of a group of current and former League board members who joined together to underwrite the commission.

So we are looking forward to that celebration and to Tanya's new piece.

Those of you who were at our national conference in 2019, you experienced Tanya in person as our closing keynote speaker. She's truly a phenomenon in our field, a delightful person and I was thrilled to hear that she won the Pulitzer. Now let's bring in our new president and CEO, Simon Woods for some comments and updates, welcome, Simon.

>> SIMON WOODS: Thanks, Doug, thank you very much. Hello, everyone. Nice to be here. This is my first annual meeting as CEO of the League which, of course, is a tremendous honor. Those of you who started new jobs during the pandemic will know just how weird and hard it is to start with a new team remotely. So I'm tremendously grateful to the League staff for teaching me the organization and helping me on my learning journey.

While we have been working hard on supporting orchestras through the pandemic, like any new CEO, I have been watching and listening and thinking about what the organization's strengths and opportunities are. This will gradually come into play as we start to form strategy for the longer term future. Although for now I suspect like for many of you most of the decisions are near to medium term with long-term over the horizon.

I think the League like many associations in fact has really comes into its own and I want to share a list of some of the things we have done this year, because it's fairly

extraordinary.

We produced 24 webinars with over five thousand people registering. We hosted over 80 constituency meetings. We produced two virtual conferences and a virtual mid-winter meeting. We launched a new website and we dramatically updated our social media giving us new capacity to tell the stories of orchestras and the field.

We did regular COVID surveying and reporting. We posted over four hundred items in Symphony Magazine and the hub about how orchestras were coping with the pandemic. And we launched the Symphony Spot website to aggregate the incredible range of virtual programs put out by orchestras in that sort of extraordinary historic pivot that happened last spring.

Meanwhile, Heather was advocating day and night in Washington, D.C. We fielded literally hundreds of individual calls for assistance during this period as well as helping orchestras to navigate the complexity of the different federal relief options.

Through the futures Fund, we were able to give 18 orchestras the option to convert their grants to general operating support. And thanks to the Mellon Foundation, we granted \$500,000 to 28 orchestras in this new round of catalyst funding to advance their own EDI work.

Of course as we talk about EDI work and this critical moment of racial reckoning, we issued a statement on racial

discrimination last August which I truly think ushers in a new era in the League's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. It was followed up with a statement on violence and discrimination against Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders and multiple publications to support orchestras with their EDI work as well as just last week the launch of our brand new EDI resource center on the website.

And this is by the way by no means a complete list. Perhaps all this is the explanation for why we saw a fund lower down turn in membership dues than we expected to. We took that as a real validation. Orchestras stretched and we didn't exclude anyone from membership benefits.

One executive director said to me a few weeks ago I literally think we would have opinion out of business without the League this year. So we are grateful to you for the support. And as Doug mentioned, continued commitment as we go into the next couple of years which like for many of you has some pretty significant challenges about it.

Now, as we think about the future, the next few years and where we are headed, I will say a couple of brief things. First, I take very seriously our commitment to thought leadership and advancing change as we come out of the pandemic, especially in the area of equity diversity and inclusion. Nothing we do is more important than this work. And you have seen it every day of the conference. If there's one thing that the last ten days has

proved, it's that the dialogue about antiracism is more alive than it ever has been in our field. The words optimism that is not naïve which I feel is absolutely the right lens.

I don't think any of us are naïve and I don't think we can afford to be naïve about the mountains that need to be climbed and the work that lies ahead, but I'm optimistic that the change that is happening that we've waited so long for. The fact is we are finally vectored towards a different future, and my commitment is that the League will always be on the leading edge of that journey.

And the other thing I will say about the future is that because of my own experiences in orchestra CEO, I definitely approach the League's work through the lens of membership. We have already significantly sharpened our internal focus around member needs and I'm really pleased with the increase in CEO representation on our board that you just heard about.

We are entering a period in which I expect there to be a challenging gap what the field is asking from us and the needs and the financial resources available to us at the League. We are going to have to be extremely intentional about where we invest our time and resources. And we expect you and need you to guide us on that. Tell us what you need. Tell us what you don't need. Tell us what's working and what isn't.

We really rely on your input to help us help you. And I hope that every single person in our orchestral community feels

free to reach out to me personally and directly at any time. And by the way, please fill out the evaluations for this conference that you will receive on e-mail shortly. It's incredibly important for us to hear what you think as we plan the activity for the coming year.

So in summary, for all the trials and challenges of this past year, this has been an important year for the League. The urgency of the moment as it relates both to the pandemic and to the racial reckoning has galvanized us as an organization, there's no question.

And as I said at the opening of the conference, all of us at the League continue to be in awe of the resilience and creativity and ongoing commitment to change that we see in the field. So I thank you for your support and for me, the biggest joy will be to get out on the road this year and finally be able to see quite a lot of you in person with your wonderful orchestras.

So now it's a great pleasure to introduce our friend Amanda Stringer, executive director of the Tallahassee symphony who has a special message hi.

Hi, thank you, Simon. Colleagues and valued volunteers, greetings from Florida's capital city. What a fantastic conference we have had full of the thought provoking and inspiring ideas we have come to expect from these convenings. Today it's my honor to ask you to join me in supporting the League by making a giving days gift N2009 when I developed an interest

in orchestra management, I was fortunate to be accepted into the League's essentials of orchestra management course, an experience that changed my life.

2009's program was the last one headed by the esteemed Peter P., and I left New York galvanized both hyperstimulated and exhausted, exhilarated thinking about the exciting work ahead of me as I entered the field. Those of you who have taken the course and mentored by Simon know exactly what I'm talking about.

How 11 conferences and midwinter meetings later, numerous webinars, peer-to-peer calls and participation in the League's emerging leaders program, I can say unequivocally that membership in the League has provided me with the tools I have needed to do this complicated creative and very fulfilling work.

The education and professional support I have received through the years has been invaluable to the success I have enjoyed in Tallahassee. The friendships I have made with all of you have enriched my life. This year has been immensely challenging for all of us. I know that all of you like me recognize that the League has been a critical partner in our continued success.

For example, what will we all have done without Heather Noonan's wise council during the SG process in? Thank you, Heather.

Today I encourage you to think about all the League has to offer us and I encourage you to give a gift. All gifts are being matched dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 thanks to the Julian

family foundation. Your gift today will make twice the impact. We all know that ticket sales alone don't cover the cost of a concert.

Simply click on the screen, support the League at the bottom of the left-hand side of your screen or visit the League's website. Together let's help support this organization that helps us so very much. Thank you for your generosity and I look very much forward to seeing all of you in person next June in the city of angels. Thank you.

>> Thank you, Amanda. Really appreciable your generosity and huge thanks to everybody who has made gifts so far. We could not be more appreciative. I want to drop in a personal thanks to Jenn for dropping in from NEA this afternoon. Just so incredibly encouraging to have someone like her in this position to work with. And I don't know if she's still around, but if you are, Jenn, thank you so much for joining us.

Okay, so it's now time to move onto our closing keynote discussion. As Doug mentioned at the beginning the Mellon Foundation has been an extraordinary supporter of orchestras for a long time. I want to give a shout-out to Susan for her tireless support of our field, love of orchestras and her probing and frankly often difficult questions that always push us to be the best versions of ourselves.

And of course the catalyst fund continues to be transformational in the way that it has helped so far almost fifty

orchestras to integrate EDI into their culture and to move from talk to action. Catalyst goes far beyond impact for a few organizations. As it provides the models that help to show the whole field what success looks like when we move our EDI work from the margins to the center.

And that process, of course, is already well under way at the League. So now a couple of words about our speakers. Emil Kang is program director for arts and culture at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, having previously served as executive and artistic director of Carolina performing arts at University of North Carolina, multidisciplinary performing arts program he founded in 2005. In 2012, he was appointed by President Barack Obama to the national council of the arts and of course he has long experience with our field as president and executive director of the Detroit symphony in prior roles with the Seattle symphony and American composers orchestra.

Elizabeth Alexander poet, educator, memoirist, scholar and cultural advocate is president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Prior to joining the foundation in 2018, Dr. Alexander served as the director of creativity and free expression of the Ford Foundation. She was professor at Columbia University 2015 and between 2015 she taught at Yale University where she was professors in the department of African-American studies, and English. She's the author or coauthor of 14 books and has received many accolades throughout her career.

Dr. Alexander is a member of the American Academy of arts and sciences, a chancellor of the academy of American poets and serves on the board of the Pulitzer Prize.

So please give a warm welcome to them both. Emil and Elizabeth. Thank you so much for joining us today. And we look forward to an insightful discussion. Thank you so much. Welcome.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Thank you, it's great to be with everyone today. I sure wish that I could see you all, but we feel you. Hello Emil.

>> EMIL KANG: Hi, Elizabeth. Good afternoon, everyone and thank you, Simon, adding my thanks. I am Emil Kang. I use he/him pronouns and I'm Zooming in from the unceded lands of the Lenapehoking people, also known as Manhattan. It's my sheer pleasure as always to share any space with my dear friend, colleague and ever inspiring boss Elizabeth Alexander. Hi, Elizabeth.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Hello. Together across the void.

(Laughter)

>> EMIL KANG: We would like to thank you, Simon, for the invitation today and extend our appreciation to the entire League board and staff for your tireless efforts to advocate for and serve the orchestra field and the arts overall. Elizabeth, you and I have regular one-on-one conversations, but I think this is the

first time we have ever had an audience both anxiety riddling and exciting, I would say.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Yes.

>> EMIL KANG: And I will do my best to keep an eye on the clock. And since we only have 30 minutes, I thought we would just jump right in. Is that all right?

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: That's great, thank you.

>> EMIL KANG: So I have had the pleasure of attending a handful of these sessions over the past two weeks and have been inspired by what I saw as the rigorous honesty that we've heard throughout. I thought Elizabeth that we might begin by reflecting on the title of the conference embracing a changed world.

Elizabeth, considering the important concept of a changed world more precisely, as we emerge from the pandemic, in your view, what has changed with regard to what most needs our attention?

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Well, I think what I would first remind us of, we know this, but let's remember that the world is always changing. The Earth is always changing. Our bodies are always changing. We are always moving from birth to death. We are hopefully always evolving and evolving in evolution is a word that as you know, I use a lot and I want to use it a lot today.

So I think recognizing that this whole life of ours is a response to constant change is important because hopefully it allows us to be a little less fearful if we know that that is a

mode we are always going to need to be in in order to optimally move through time. That said, this last year and a half has been absolutely extraordinary. None of us having lived before through a global pandemic and the fear and isolation that it created.

And what I would say about that to the work that we are all committed to which is making and sharing art, I think that what we have seen that, you know, all of us 17,000 of us again who have chosen to be here today know that art matters. But I feel that surely we have learned that art matters even more, that it is essential as an expression of the human spirit and as an expression of the collective spirit, that art shows us what we are living through, that art calls up our emotion, that art expresses our emotions for us in a way that in the case of music listening, can create and I find that for me of all of the art forms that I cherish and consume constantly, it's music that gets into my viscera.

It's music that if I'm trying not to cry makes me cry. It's music that I think suffuses the body in a way that in a year of sorrow, we have seen the power of what it can do. And I think that also and we've talked about this a whole lot, one of the reasons that we've worked so hard to think about how to support artists in this time of crisis is that we believe that without the art that they make we would not even know what we've lived through.

I have found it miraculous and I have had daily gratitude during this pandemic that on my little tiny television that every day I could listen to music, that I could be surrounded

with music, that I could be not alone, that I could feel with music. So I think the things we've always known about the power of art have only been amplified.

I think also what we have seen and what you and I and our colleagues have been working on is this understanding of artists as essential workers, as artists as workers. Because what we have seen in the economy of the arts is, you know, complete shutdown, near shutdown, huge unemployment rates. We have tried to be creative when things loosened up a little bit and your creativity was so extraordinary in thinking about how can we bring people together?

The way I tell the story in my fanciful way, I was like Emil was watching a basketball game, and saw that the MBA figured out how to put those people in a bubble so they could do their body work and said a-hah, dancers, if you put them in a bubble, they can do their body work.

So really trying to articulate over and over and over again that the economy of the arts and that that includes individuals and not just institutional people has suffered tremendously in the real change of the last year, and how can we continue to support that?

Now, I know this is a long answer, but I will sort of lay it out out. Another aspect of what was called the changing same is that last year though we know that racial violence and, you know, the long history of racism that is a part of this country

is something that it began at its inception and is a current that's run through and that isn't solved yet.

But I do think last year with the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, of George Floyd, of Breonna Taylor, many, many, many, many more people began to understand that this was a problem unsolved that would take this country down if it wasn't addressed, that having lived with all of the hate speech and the hatred and fear that was regularly pumped into the air, that there are ongoing consequences if we don't address that.

So I do think, you know, though my own work over a career in addition to making art has been about teaching African-American literature and culture at university, and also encountering regularly students who say why did I never know this? Why did I never study a Black musician before? A Black artist before? A Black poet before?

Look what was kept from me. So I have been doing this, but I think that more of us now see that, and, you know, the movement of people, the political movements of people raising their voices and marching and protesting have shown more and more and more of us the necessity for sharp change, for sharp evolution.

So on two fronts, that's what I think we have seen over the last year.

>> EMIL KANG: Wow. Such a rich response, Elizabeth, as always. And I guess maybe start or referring back to what you began or just beginning with, the real razor-thin line between fear

and courage and yet how that drastically makes a big universal difference where one ends up. How do you see the opportunities that might exist for those who have actually, who take on this challenge, who take on this challenge in this critical time in terms of addressing the things that you just shared?

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Well, I think that, you know, taking on the challenge, to me, means learning more, making more space, listening more. You know, Marsalis, our friend spoke to this group, and he often uses the phrase what does it mean to wood shed? And, you know, the way that jazz musicians use that is about practicing your craft. But I think that I've also heard him use it as a way of what does it mean to kind of go down to the studs and say this is what I need to learn?

What does it mean to put some of our eternal verities to the side to make space for expansion? What does it mean to quote the poet Claudia Rankin. She said what you are feeling is discomfort. Discomfort won't kill you. We can be uncomfortable as we stretch in our skins to learn more. And so I think that that is something that is, you know, an ongoing challenge, a life challenge, one that I try to take and I love to be comfortable.

But, you know, I also know that to learn and to be challenged and to be stretched is what I'm here to do. And I feel lucky to be able to do that. So to extend that from the personal to our institutions, you know, that's the sort of activity.

>> EMIL KANG: Well, I guess as a poet, as a cultural

advocate and as a scholar, and of course a national leader in philanthropy, I wonder what you think orchestras can learn from other art forms about tackling all of these challenges, the issues of systemic inequity and social justice?

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Well I think, you know, one of the things, you and I share a reverence for, an understanding of what individual disciplines and fields can bring, can mean. What does it mean to achieve excellence in a field? But I think also what is important is that you and I are committed interdisciplinists, which is to say believers in the criss-cross, believers to bring people together who aren't necessarily supposed to be together and see what happens in the space.

What does it mean to look at other models of organizing yourself, of doing things, and knowing that there may be mistakes. There may be spills on the floor. But that I think all artmaking even when we are talking about leading to the Platonic ideal of a great performance is also about process.

I mean, to me, that's what being around artists teaches us, is that there's no great artist who doesn't start from scratch every single day. There's no great artist who isn't aspiring to learn and get better. I don't think it exists in any, in any art form. So I think that, you know, because of the institutional-ness of orchestras and the need for a certain level of resources, just when you have more than a few human beings, you need resources to make a thing happen.

Working in poetry, you know, you can make it for free. That's not true of being in an orchestra. I think the interesting challenge is to think, okay, but what can we learn from the people who can do it for free? What can we learn from the people who are porous and criss-cross in their practice? It because I think that that can help growth institutionally, but also I think that it gets to what are the art forms and modes that orchestras are presenting? And how do we think of even defined canons as being always susceptible to growth and change?

What do you think, though? I wonder what you think about that.

>> EMIL KANG: Well, you know, you have talked quit a bit in the time I have known you about precision and the importance of precision in language, in intention, and explication. And I think it's fairly, it's really easy for institutions to state that they are committed to something. And I'm confident that, you know, in art in this case today, many orchestras have references to their commitments to challenging inequity and injustice.

But yet, I think I speak more about, I think about sort of the rigor that's required. And I guess this is where artists can be very helpful. The rigor that's required to acknowledge the deep and sometimes sinister reach of inequity across institutions, and, you know, how the nature of artistic work goes beyond the sort of the head count of inequity, that the head counts that we talk about to try to address it is really just simply the symptom rather

than the illness itself.

And how, what is it that we are doing to really truly reflect the truth of the artist that we seek to represent in our work in these institutions? And are there ways that we can use precision to go deeper and acknowledging what I think of as the challenges caused by institutional cultural norms and practices and all the challenges around the issues that we are speaking about today and the ways that artists help us see beyond these limitations.

And artists are the ones who actually challenge these norms. And what are we doing to invite artists in to consider these norms and these practices, and the challenges of all that I think confronts the nonprofit sector at large, I would say, including the white philanthropy, Eurocentric attendance rituals, even classist ticket selling models, all of these things.

So I guess I go all back into I would say we need precision. We also need rigor. We need creativity. I think and artists bring that. And so what are we doing to make sure that artists are at the table to introduce and think about those very matters? And I guess I would end this by saying that I think it's foregrounding collaboration is really essential in my mind to these issues. I feel like so often and this does come from my own experience that legacy institutions like orchestras and art museums should do more to intentionally share space in their communities with artists outside of their sectors, to your point

about criss-crossing and interdisciplinarity. Legacy institutions often unintentionally and arrogantly think they should be shouldering the burden of addressing these issues in isolation, and that both individuals and institutions really benefit from accountability partnership and acknowledgement that expertise actually does lie elsewhere.

And so I guess I imagine a new model where large legacy institutions enter really and true equitable partnerships with smaller institutions outside of their sectors, especially those led by people of color and serving communities of color, and that the legacy institution should recognize and, in fact, competent that smaller organization for that expertise and to value the skills sets and the talent that they bring to actually help support the challenges that these institutions are trying to face.

If I can, I just want to sort of lift up one great example for the work that you and I have seen quite regularly, and that's our friends at the center for the art of performance at UCLA. Our friend Christy Edmunds. They developed a collaborative model in the acquisition of a new theater whose main goal was to generate the conditions to allow next Jen artists to drive while UCLA shouldered the burden of running the theater. The underground, and others benefit from use of the space. So instead of programming more performances in Royce hall, they kept focusing their resources on elevating others through the collaborative development of what they call the Nemo theater.

For Christy Edmunds our heroin, bigger is not better. Different and more impactful is better. Anyway, so just feel like there's so much in everything you are saying and obviously I have some thoughts on this, too.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Yes, well I'm glad you mentioned those great exemplars and the whole concept of sharing space and really learning from people doing things other ways. Sometimes we can be very much in our own worlds in the process of attaining a certain kind of expertise or a certain kind of achievement or success.

And that's why it's just so important to get out and look. You mentioned the underground museum, and I think about a time that I came straight from the airport to the underground at 11:00 at night because Jason Moran and Kyle Abraham were doing a thing. They were doing a thing in the underground museum. And, you know, as we know, Jason Moran could, I mean, you know, was it Carnegie Hall with his extraordinary two wings that he created with Alisa? So many different amazing artists out of different traditions.

Or he could be I think he's going to be in the park. I'm trying to find there's this thing on Sunday he's supposed to be in something called the Red Room that the artist Johnson is making outside, or he could be at the Village Vanguard. He can be anywhere with his piano making things. And so I think that understanding that and understanding that whenever we hold onto

ideas of purity, there's trouble.

>> EMIL KANG: Yeah.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: And it's really important to let go of that. I think since we are talking about some of the brass tax of what it means to meet change and what it means for organizations to embrace not just the principles of equity, but do it, and what it means to diversify, do like to throw out there that, you know, at a very architectural level and this is back to your point about precision and I'm not playing when I say this. Thing number one, just do it.

Thing number 2, follow the law. Okay. You know, thing number 3, acknowledge that we live in a multicultural society and that all decisions and products are made better with different perspectives around the table. These things are true, right. And so how do we manifest that?

Then when it comes to the precision of the questions that we ask, I think it's really important to say, you know, because too often we turn to the idea of the community. We are going to bring in the community. You know, as though well, let's think about what we are bringing them in to see or listen to. What are the values of what we are offering to the community?

Who is the community? Courtney Martin, director of the British arts center in New Haven, I heard her at a talk yesterday where she said I don't like to use the word community. When people use it, I say are you talking about your neighbors?

You know.

>> EMIL KANG: Right.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: There's an othering of the community. And if you think about, okay, we must bring in the community or we must bring in the children, you know, I believe more than anybody, you know, give children every cultural thing. That is a good thing. But arts organizations know that that is secondary to the true goal of creating and presenting great art.

So I feel like if questions of equity and justice are not being addressed at the main thing itself that's the heart, then the work is not really being done.

And I think again, how do we think about canons? I'm an English professor. I worked for many, many years thinking about what does it mean to expand the canon? What does it mean to understand that there are beautiful simultaneities when you have an expansive view of the canon? What does it mean to say that there's a lot of excellence and greatness and sometimes some things need to be put to the side for a while.

Some things need to be rotated, just like we talk about rotating resources to our grantees. It's not always your return. It's not always your resource. But that doesn't mean you can't keep working and learning and thriving and being a partner and as you said so simply and beautifully, sharing space.

>> EMIL KANG: Elizabeth, just on the last point, I'm checking our time, I think we are just a few minutes left in our

session. And we have so much more to talk about.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Yes.

>> EMIL KANG: But I think you just talked of course about the canon and the simultaneity of the expanse of that canon and of that. As an artist yourself and in your work, I'm guessing, I think I know what the answer is, but do you view the art of the past as an inspiration or a burden or do you not see it that way? How do you think about that simultaneity? And how do you think about, there are obviously connections back to the orchestra world and how they think about music of the past versus music of the present and what they, I think, and again, I come from this field where the cliché is the inherent tensions that lie in between the two.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Yeah, well, first of all, I come as a scholar to, you know, what is the past? What past? You know, trained in the English canon, you know, when I took my comprehensive, there were no books by people of color on that. There were two books I think by women, one named George.

(Laughter)

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: But what my work and the work of the people I was alongside was doing was saying hey, wait a second. You know, what was everybody doing in 1850? What was everybody doing in 1776? In 1619? What were people doing simultaneously? I think that the reopening of MoMA has been so brilliant and thoughtful in the kind of, you know, bringing up the question of

how can we define modernism in a different, more multivocal way than we, the Museum of Modern Art, have frequently defined modernism?

So when I start working as a poet on the scholar work of Gwendolyn Brooks and no one has been talking about her alongside her peer, Robert Lowell, wow, Wallace Stevens used racist epithets against her when she won the Pulitzer Prize. Let's understand this more deeply.

I think the first job is to revise the past, revise history, look at what else was happening. And then I think, you know, every contemporary artist is in dynamic conversation and wrestle with the past and the present. So I feel like, you know, just like when you watch, I was watching in Riverside Park the other day, I sat for a long time watching a bird make a nest. She was amazing. She would go and find a little tiny piece of yarn, a little twig. She would go over here. She would go all the way up. She would put it in her nest.

And I feel like that's what artists do and sometimes you are digging back for it and sometimes it's right there right next to you. But that is what is productive and yeasty and gorgeous and full of, you know, the art that we haven't yet seen that we are waiting for.

>> EMIL KANG: I hear you saying some things that I have said for a long time, which is the complexity of the past, the present and the future, again, ought to be considered at the same

time and what are we learning from these continuing to move forward? Just like that bird making the nest, it's a beautiful thing and it's actually it is both in that case both a utility and it's actually beautiful at the same time. I think we have maybe time for one last question.

I think maybe it would be good just to zoom out a little bit. As we know, the pandemic has caused tremendous suffering in this country, and we all know that. As we have been saying just now for the last half hour that art is a source of solace, both individually and to communities during these difficult times. How do you think we can best harness the power of art to help communities heal and come together again?

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Well, I would first say that, you know, what constitutes art looks and sounds a lot of different ways. And I just think it's important to remind ourselves of that. You talked about different audience habits, different ways that people receive art, even as simple as is the expectation when you enter the space that you can or cannot make noise, that you can or cannot open your mouth? That there is or isn't call and response, or does call and response get you kicked out of the space, make you unwelcome in the space?

So what is art and what are the variety of expectations of how you engage with it is something that I would put out there to begin with. And also I keep thinking of our wonderful poets today and Lucille Clifton said I come to comfort the afflicted and

afflict the comfortable. So what you may need, some people if you think about how the pandemic so disproportionately affected Black and Brown people and poor people, some people with experiencing loss a different way.

I talked to someone who went to their country home, was out of New York City, and we had an entirely different last year and a half. You know, and then I saw a work that Bilty Jones made that started with the sound of the clamor of the clanking out the windows at 7:00 for the emergency. That's what he heard and the sirens were in it. That's what he heard.

So I think, you know, I'm answering you a little bit impressionistically, but I think it's important to think about the different things we hear and the different things we need healed which to me means we need a wide range of art made maximally available for the maximum number of people to come to it.

>> EMIL KANG: Thank you, Elizabeth. I guess I just want to mention that I was on Instagram earlier doing this whole scrolling, and I saw a post by our friend Hank Willis Thomas who said that art helps us see beyond our own limitations. And of course it's something that I think we live every day. I think also in the context of this conversation that we have to understand that our job is to actually make that front and center for everyone.

So what does it mean to show our communities, especially those that have been comfortable for so long to actually see beyond their limitations and how do we actually use artists

to do that work? Just wanted to mention that, too.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: And I think alongside that, how we each have our own work to do.

>> EMIL KANG: Absolutely.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: You know, so for each of us to take that responsibility to, you know, to do our own work and to do work with consequence, to do work with consequence and share space, share space.

>> EMIL KANG: Share space well, Elizabeth, I think it's time. It felt like it flew by.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: It sure did. But it was so wonderful to have this conversation.

>> EMIL KANG: Thank you so much. It's always as you know just a pleasure for me to be in dialogue with you for work or for life for both.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Yes.

>> EMIL KANG: And I want to thank everyone for joining us today. I know Elizabeth will join me in urging everyone to remember that there is no moral defense for reverting to a way things used to be. Just does not exist. We must continue this work today, tomorrow and beyond. Thank you all for joining us. And I would like to just turn the mic back over to Simon Woods. Simon.

>> ELIZABETH ALEXANDER: Thank you.

>> SIMON WOODS: Thank you so much, Elizabeth, Emil.

That was a rich and dense and generous 30 minutes. I think we all have so incredibly much to unpack in that. And I just, it's hard to know where to land out of all those incredible ideas. But the notion that you are stressing a need for a sharp change, that we should be uncomfortable as we stretch in our skins to learn more and extending that to our institutions.

The thought of what can we learn as legacy art forms from those who can do it for free? And then this very powerful idea for me that what does the world look like when large legacy institutions enter partnerships with small organizations outside their art forms? I think that nexus between community relationship, sharing space, thoughtful collaborative programming and equity is for us in our field still sits out there as a great unexplored territory which we need to understand better.

So deepest thanks to you both. So before I wrap up conference I want to say a huge thank you to all the orchestras whose performances we highlighted over the past ten days. It was wonderful to hear one of our keynote speakers, Kieran, say that he loved all the sessions, but as a nonmusician, the thing he loved most was the sessions. We must never lose artistry. As it came out so compellingly, artists will lead us to the future.

We are thrilled to be able to show what the future looks like the past ten days, such a wide range of orchestras, and incredible programming and perhaps promptly as Hawaii is always the last place in the U.S. to see the sunset every day, our final

concert tonight is from the Hawaii Symphony in a program that's a rich expression of the island's cultural roots as well as including Florence Price's fourth symphony and Tchaikovsky's Hamlet overture.

A few thank you's, first to our sponsors for their generous support. You are tremendous partners and we are so grateful to you for sticking with us for a second year of virtual conferences. And then a big thank you to Brittany and McKenzie for adding so much value in the chat alongside the sessions.

Big thanks to -- for pulling all our concert together and streaming it live. Not a small job when you have ten concerts in less than two weeks. And especially because for some of those concerts he was actually doing it from a hotel room in Mexico City. But that's another story.

And of course to all our contributors, not only our keynote speakers (names) who unlocked extraordinary revolutions which I am personally still processing, but also MCs panelists and facilitators. We had more than 120 speakers in total. What a roll call of insight and expertise that represents.

And finally, I want to thank the League staff from the bottom of my heart, conference is a gigantic production. This conference has had over 80 separate events. So there's enormous complexity just in the things we can control, let alone the things we can't control. Such as the inevitable technical challenges of doing a virtual conference with so many remote participants. But

my admiration to the League team is boundless.

It's hard to sum of what we have heard and experienced this past ten days. But I will end with a brilliantly framed question from Mark Joseph. What is the relationship between present soul and see and social justice? To me that gets to the heart of where we are with this exact moment in time. As pointed out, budgets are moral documents. We are making decisions now that matter. As orchestras blossom after the pandemic, with more ideas and fewer resources, I think we will all be searching for an answer to that most poignant and provocative question.

But for now, let's look forward to next June when we will gather in Los Angeles. It's impossible to overstate the magnitude of this event and how it's going to feel for us all to come together for the first time in person. It's going to be emotional and uplifting and the late night bar scene will be fully alive as we reconnect with so many friends from across the country.

We will be hosted by the LA Phil, of course, such an exemplary association. And the California association symphony orchestras would will be integrating their own annual gathering into the League's conference. We thank both the LA Phil in advance for their partnership as we ramp up planning for this absolutely tremendously important event. So to send us off we will close with a message from the LA Phil's music director Gustav Dudamel. Please take care, stay well and most importantly, enjoy the live music this summer and fall. We will see you soon.

(Video played)

>> Oh, hi, everyone. Caught me taking a selfie. We have one more message to share with all of you during this year's League of American Orchestras' digital version of the conference and that is just to say we are so looking forward to welcoming you all next June to Los Angeles in person for the League's annual conference. We already have some incredible and important conversations and discussions planned around the most relevant topics. We have some inspiring performances coming together.

And most importantly what I love most about the conference is opportunities built in for us to gather and share informally as friends and colleagues around the ideas that are percolating within our industry. So on behalf of everyone here at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, we can't wait to open up our city to all of you next June. See you June.

On behalf of the entire Los Angeles Philharmonic family, we can't wait to welcome you to the League of American Orchestras 77th national conference taking place right here in the city of Los Angeles. Marks your calendars June 1st through June 3, 2022, when we can finally put our computers away and be together again in person. See you in LA.