

Conference:

In Words and Images

From the very beginning, the League has brought together people from throughout the orchestra field. And at the League's annual National Conference, delegates meet their peers face to face, share knowledge, learn best practices, and discover the latest thinking and research. The Conference sparks fresh ideas, introduces new topics, and provokes discussions about critical issues that remain relevant.

Here's a look at moments from League Conferences over the years.



At League's 1955 National Convention in Evansville, Indiana (from left): League founder Leta Snow, President Alan Watrous, and Helen Thompson, who occupied several key positions at the League.



Richard Lippentholz



Mark T. Osler

The theme of the 2016 Conference was “The Richness of Difference,” and the closing session focused on key actions orchestras can take to become more responsive to the diversity of 21st-century America. From left: Gayle S. Rose, board chairman, Memphis Symphony Orchestra; Anne Parsons, president and CEO, Detroit Symphony Orchestra; Alex Laing, principal clarinet, Phoenix Symphony; Marin Alsop, music director, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; Monique Chism, deputy assistant secretary for policy and programs, OESE, U.S. Department of Education; DeRay Mckesson, civil-rights activist, educator, and organizer; and moderator Jamie Bennett, executive director, ArtPlace America.

The 2008 Conference, in Denver, introduced the Audience Growth Initiative, an authoritative study that examined how orchestras acquire, engage, and sometimes lose first-time ticket buyers. The Conference session drew an overflow crowd in the venue’s biggest hall, led to follow-up articles about audience “churn” in *Symphony*, and prompted industry-wide rethinking of marketing and audience retention.



The technology may have changed since the 1967 Conference in Los Angeles, but the ready welcomes for delegates and speakers at the League’s annual gathering continue.



Richard Lippentholz

Music plays a key role at League Conferences, but the spotlight is not only on the host orchestra—youth orchestras are regularly showcased, too. The Opening Session of the 2016 Conference in Baltimore featured a joint performance by the Baltimore Youth Symphony Orchestra and musicians from the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra’s OrchKids program.



Jim Coit

“Networking” wasn’t a verb when the League was founded in 1942, but the value of gathering to meet in person and discuss shared concerns is an enduring theme of League Conferences, as beneficial in 1975 (left) as in 2010 (right).



Jeff Rollman

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1953
Eighteen-year-old Elvis Presley pays \$2 to record two songs on an acetate disc in a Memphis studio.

1955
Vietnam War begins.

The long-running TV series *Lawrence Welk Show* debuts.

1957
The U.S.S.R.'s Sputnik 1 becomes first satellite to orbit Earth.

1959
In Cuba, the Batista government is overthrown. Fidel Castro becomes prime minister.

1952
...Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy.

1952-53
Major orchestras are given full voting membership status at the League.

1953
League hosts first national workshop for orchestral musicians, in Elkhart, Indiana. Chicago Symphony Woodwind Quintet serves as workshop instructors.

First workshop for music critics. Co-sponsored by the League, the Music Critics Circle of New York City, and the New York Philharmonic.

1954
First Rockefeller Foundation grant to League.

1955
League begins conducting workshops at Asilomar, California.

1958
League aids in formation of the Music Critics Association.

1959
Recording sessions at the League's West Coast Summer Workshop at Asilomar, with the Chattanooga Symphony, Julius Hegyi, conductor.

League Conferences often feature speakers from outside the orchestra world, among them comedian and "violinist" Jack Benny, seen here on the dais at the League 1967 Conference in Los Angeles.



Richard Lippenholz

At the 2007 Conference in Nashville, Bruce Coppock of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Larry Tamburri of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and business consultant Paul Boulian led a session entitled "A Radical New Revenue Model for Orchestras." The implications of their strategies resonated in a field open to new financial models.



Marianne Barcellona

William F. Buckley questioned government support for the arts while addressing other topics during his speech at the League's 1981 Conference in Dallas, generating provocative new ideas—and controversy—in his wake.

At the 2013 Conference in St. Louis, the League bestowed the Gold Baton to its Volunteer Council in recognition of the council's 50 years of strengthening orchestras by championing the work of America's orchestra volunteers.



Jeff Curry



Mark T. Osler

At the 2008 Conference, the League honored America's youth orchestras with the Gold Baton for the critical role they play in sustaining arts education and for continually developing the musicians, audience members, and orchestra supporters of tomorrow. From left: League President and CEO Henry Fogel; Louis Scaglione, chair of the League's Youth Orchestra Division, who accepted the award on behalf of America's youth orchestras; and NEA Chairman Dana Gioia.

Conference Speeches

WILLIAM SCHUMAN, composer, president of the Juilliard School and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts 1980, New York

In recent years there has been a good deal of talk about the orchestra's function being merely archival, the orchestra as a museum of music. Certainly a major function of the orchestra is to preserve and cherish the symphonic literature of the past. But what of other music? ...The twentieth century has been enormously rich in expanding expressivity in music. And this is the essence. Music does not progress, music does not get better. We don't think of Beethoven as better than Palestrina, or Verdi as better than Mozart. We recognize that the spirit and the intel-

These extensions give music its capacity for never-ending renewal. It is this muse that demands our consistent dedication and it is in this regard that the symphony orchestra is of such fundamental importance....

We ask that American music be systematically and consistently programmed. We will not have a secure American repertory until every American symphony orchestra recognizes that American music must be a basic ingredient of every season's programming.

ISAAC STERN, violinist, arts advocate 1981, Dallas

The arts, of all the disciplines, are central to the quality of life. The arts are not

an occasional social adornment. They are what this country is about. Think for a moment with what pride other countries send their artists, their groups, their dancers, their musicians, their athletes, to all kinds of international arenas to be recognized because they reflect the civilization of their countries. That is then equally true of every ballet company, every opera company, every symphony orchestra, every individual artist, as well as the athletes

who represent this country at its best in all arenas around the world. The greatest wealth of this country lies in the talent of its people, and that is being called upon today to be used as richly as possible. The question is: how do we use it together? ...

I would beg for you to remember that in times of stress more than at any other time, music proves its value, and its importance.... Remember that you are privileged to work with and for artists, and that artists are fortunate to have so many friends and supporters. Remember that it is wonderful to be moved—to sit in a hall and hear for a moment the dead silence of total



Isaac Stern delivered an address at the League's 1981 Conference in Dallas, and was given the League's Gold Baton at the 1987 Conference in New York City. In photo: Stern (center) with League Board Member Peter Pastreich (left) and Board Chairman Peter R. Kermani.

lect reflected in music encompass an extraordinary scope, especially when viewed with the perspective of time. And time is sometimes surprisingly swift in absorbing compositions that at first seem beyond the comprehension of lay audiences to hear and the competence of professional musicians to perform. An obvious case in point is Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, which in less than 70 years has come to be regarded by listeners and performers alike as an accepted masterpiece of the standard literature. What changes in music are the concepts of tonal organization which increase the resources of the composer's palate.

1960

First Institute for Conductors, Composers, and Orchestras in Orkney Springs, Virginia.

1961

League establishes first in-service orchestra management training program, funded by grant from Avalon Foundation.

Mrs. Jouett Shouse gives the League land and a building at Wolf Trap Farm, Vienna, Virginia, which will become the League's headquarters.

1961-62

League sponsors nationwide study by orchestras on proposed federal arts legislation.

1962

Gold Baton Award presented to the Women's Associations of Symphony Orchestras in the United States and Canada.

League headquarters move to Vienna, Virginia.

1960

The City of New York purchases Carnegie Hall to rescue it from demolition, after a campaign spearheaded by violinist Isaac Stern.

1961

U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union meet to discuss the relationship between their countries.

Final year of China's Great Famine that began in 1959.

1963

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech.

President John F. Kennedy is assassinated.

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Composer and conductor Morton Gould delivered an address at the League's 1983 Conference in Chicago, where he was also awarded the Gold Baton for helping build America's musical heritage. But he was no stranger to League Conferences. In photo: at the League's 1965 Conference in Washington, D.C., Gould greets Nelson Rockefeller, then governor of New York.

participation ... the moment when you smiled inside and out when you saw some-

thing very beautiful onstage in a ballet or you were moved to tears at the end of a scene in the opera. Those are the things that are worth working for.... Believe in it, think of it as a center.... And let's work together to get it.

MORTON GOULD, composer
1983, Chicago

Live performance is an ongoing fantasy, every performance differs from the previous one. The performing artists—individually and collectively—recreate a creation, and each live interpretation is a reassembling of the same event—a sort of music meet. Although music moves forward, we listen backward—only after a sequence of musical gestures can we discern the trajectory—after the initial impact has gone. To the extent that one can retrace and reassemble, is the extent of listener response. The ideal listener, therefore, is an active and sensitized recipient and *participant* in the sound of music. This perhaps might explain the seeming reluctance toward the new and unfamiliar, which impose an

active and alert listening discipline, and precludes the passivity that comes from an experienced habit....

Whether we like it or not, concert audiences are meat eaters. Can we make them into vegetarians? I doubt it—unless we make vegetables taste like meat.... The fact is, there are no substitutes for the much derided “chestnuts” of the concert repertory. The reason the Tchaikovsky symphonies, the Dvorák New World, the Beethoven Fifth, etc., have not been replaced is because they haven't been replaced in terms of all-embracing audience impact. And to the extent that the 20th century produced the equivalent visceral and communicative “blockbusters”—some of the Shostakovich symphonies, and at the moment Mahler—to cite obvious examples—then these works become part of the “meat and potatoes”—and still no vegetables! I think it nonsense to assume that audiences are philistines engaged in a conspiracy to eliminate contemporary music. It is not the contemporary aspect—but the unfamiliar.

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JANE ALEXANDER, actor, chair, National Endowment for the Arts 1994, Dallas

What exactly does artistic excellence mean in 1994? ... Were the symphony orchestras of the nineteenth century compromising excellence in a quest to reach a wide audience? Are we compromising excellence today as we try to build audiences for music and by considering the orchestra's place in the life of the community? ... Artistic excellence is a slippery concept, simply because each of us has different standards of taste, aesthetics, critical likes and blind spots.... Compounding the problem of a universal definition for excellence, we as a society argue over the very nature of art itself. Some people believe that art can only be that which is beautiful—the uplifting symphony, play or novel, the painting, sculpture, photograph and design that are pleasing to the eye.... This, I think, is at the very core of the difficulties the Arts Endowment and the art community at large faced in the early '90s: we have no complete agreement on what can

be called art, much less what can be called excellent art....

Our investment in education and outreach is such an important part of our efforts. We will continue to fund great art, excellent symphony orchestras of all sizes as well as efforts by organizations to educate and reach greater audiences.... We expect you to continue to challenge your audience to excellence. As you seek to bring more people into the concert hall, we can never forget that they, like those who are already there, come because they are seeking a form of excellence in their lives.

PETER SELLARS, director 2006, Los Angeles

My favorite part of the American Symphony Orchestra League is the word "American." This is a country in deep crisis, and we are setting the stage for a national catastrophe. Part of that stage is the attack on education.... We need to be in the schools, because we need the next generation of citizens who are informed, thoughtful, capable of listening, capable of

imagination, capable of a new set of solutions and possibilities, not just following the guidelines that have already been laid down and repeating back what they're told is right. That's why Beethoven wrote music, to break those boundaries—and to do it with fury and overwhelming power and overwhelming commitment and some humor. But *blazing!* Not being polite. This is not polite music. It's blazing with the seriousness of what we are up against. How serious can you be about your life? That is what a symphony concert is about. It has not one thing to do with leisure time. Not related. America's obsession with leisure is exactly the crisis, and we don't wanna be part of that....

You've heard *Appalachian Spring*. It's not about a glamorous part of America, Appalachia. It's about finding a way to say something in a time when our country was seriously suffering, finding a musical language and a dance language that could respond to the finest in the American character—the purity and intensity, the courage, a goodheartedness, a deep set of





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CLAIRE CHASE, flutist, founder of International Contemporary Ensemble Seattle, 2014

As a junior at Oberlin, in 1999, I assembled fifteen of my Oberlin classmates to commission a program of new works in celebration of the year 2000, and moreover to create a scene around their world pre-



Claire Chase at the 2014 Conference in Seattle

mieres.... We had this nutty idea that, in the face of all kinds of adversity, we could create a new kind of organization—part twenty-first century orchestra, rock band, circus troupe, startup—in search of new expressive means in our artistic and organizational practices. We didn't imagine having one concert hall as a home base. We wanted to be mobile, modular, and light on our feet. We could be a duo one night, and a cast of hundreds the next. We didn't want to exist in just one city. We wanted to be everywhere. We could play in a black-box theater one night, the back of a pickup truck the next....

As we view the demise of the subscription ticket model and what the news characterizes as the "death of classical music" (!), we're even more fired up. All along, it's been the ICE musicians—not managers, not market forces—that have been in the driver's seat of every one of these innovations. If the most creative people are artists, why not engage them as the engines of the organization, the necessary agitators of change? Where did we ever get this idea that there are people on stage who do creative things, and people behind the scenes who enable them? Isn't it time we challenged that binary?

ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, Representative of Maryland's 7th Congressional District 2016, Baltimore

I have come here to tell you that our diversity is not our problem, it is our promise. A few days ago I was at Marin Alsop's house, where we were raising money for [the Baltimore Symphony's] OrchKids. As I sat there and listened to the maestra and others I could not help but think about myself as a little boy in this city [of Baltimore]. A little boy some 50 years ago grew up not too far from here—you could walk to my house in five minutes from where we're sitting—in a segregated city with two wonderful parents, neither one of whom had more than a third-grade education.... I will never forget my father struggling to raise seven children. All I wanted to do was be in the band—a street band



Congressman Elijah E. Cummings addresses delegates at the 2016 Conference in Baltimore.

that would go up and down the street on the Fourth of July and Memorial Day and major holidays. I would watch them from the side and when the time came, I just wanted to be in the band. But you had to rent your horn for 35 cents a year, and my father didn't have it.... First time I ever went to a symphony I was 25 years old.

I would come asking, but I come begging you to do what you are doing in this Conference: putting a spotlight on incorporating all of us in what you do and making sure that all folks—everybody—has an opportunity to be a part. You may not think what you're doing is significant, but it is significant.... As I march towards the twilight of my life, there's nothing more important to me than seeing children have opportunities. **S**



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