

Seen and Heard: Conference 2017

The League of American Orchestras' 2017 Conference brought together a rich array of views about the present—and future—of orchestras. Here are excerpts from three key sessions. Find more about the 2017 Conference, including videos of multiple sessions, background information, and presentations, at <https://americanorchestras.org/conference-2017>.

The *Classical Musicians of African Descent: Perspectives, Aspirations, and Outlook* session brought forward the unique points of view and lived experience of today's musicians of African descent. League President and CEO Jesse Rosen moderated the panel, which included Judith Dines, flute, Houston Symphony Orchestra, principal flute, Gateways Music Festival; Lee Koonce, president and artistic director, Gateways Music Festival; Alex Laing, principal clarinet, Phoenix Symphony, principal clarinet, Gateways Music Festival; Michael Morgan, music director and conductor, Oakland Symphony, artistic director, Gateways Music Festival; Ann Hobson Pilot, former principal harp, Boston Symphony Orchestra; and Kelly Hall-Tompkins, violin, Gateways Music Festival.

JESSE ROSEN: Ann, you have an incredible story and legacy and have been a pioneer. What supported you and made it possible for you to prevail in an environment that was not all that welcoming?

ANN HOBSON PILOT: I found the harp. I could say I found the harp or the harp found me. My mother was a concert pianist and when I got to high school I wanted to take up a different instrument and discovered the harp through a

music teacher at school. Because of the piano background, I made progress pretty quickly. When I graduated, I went to the Philadelphia Musical Academy and then continued.

JESSE ROSEN: Did you encounter adversity along the way?

ANN HOBSON PILOT: There definitely was adversity. From Washington, D.C., the National Symphony Orchestra [which Pilot joined in 1966] used to tour down south a lot. There were times when some of the hotels did not want me to stay there. And a credit to the orchestra, they said that I had to stay. Sometimes on the bus tours we'd arrive at Little Rock, Arkansas or somewhere on the outskirts of Alabama and find restaurants with signs that said, "Whites only." I hadn't experienced that before.

I had some experiences with colleagues that were not very pleasant. I learned to handle that. In Boston, someone actually said the N word to me. That is the only time that ever happened. I didn't want to create a scene. But the next day I said to him, "Don't you ever use that word in front of me again." His response was, "Richard Pryor uses it all the time. I was just kidding." I said, "Well, don't you ever use that around me." He apologized and said he would not. And he did not. That is the only time I experienced that.

JESSE ROSEN: We're a long way

from institutionalized segregation, but I'm curious if anyone else has experienced anything that Ann has talked about. Are we past all these things?

KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS: Gosh, there are so many ways we've moved forward and there are ways that we've moved backward. What comes to mind in some limited cases is the soft racism of low expectations. There's also hard racism. I became a substitute with a major orchestra because I was runner-up at the audition. On one of my first few days there was an innocent joke, but kind of revealing. I happened to pass by a male dressing room and somebody was knocking on the door and said, "Is Donald White there?" And somebody responded, saying, "No, he turned black and they kicked him out." They all had a good laugh. And here's 22-year-old me playing with this orchestra for the first time.

MICHAEL MORGAN: Sadly, conductors cannot audition behind a screen. My entire career would be completely different if that were true. I find the whole notion of dealing with race is that you cannot tell why you're being advanced and you cannot tell why you're being held back. I'm constantly trying to get students and conductors of color to move past that and not let people stop them, because you will never know the actual reason that they didn't take you.

JUDITH DINES: I won my job very young. This is a nice story, by the way. It was my first audition. Somebody else was playing the job and they really enjoyed her playing and it was presumed that she would win the job. When I won, I was a little nervous because I wasn't sure why they picked me over her, because they were happy with her. I remember my first rehearsal. I play second flute and I had to play the *Moldau*, which begins as a second flute solo. Because of that, people were able early on to hear me play and say, "Okay, she is good. She did deserve to win this job." I feel lucky in that it was very



At the *Classical Musicians of African Descent: Perspectives, Aspirations, and Outlook* session, from left: Judith Dines, Alex Laing, Kelly Hall-Tompkins, and Ann Hobson Pilot. At the session but not pictured: Michael Morgan and Lee Koonce.

clear, very early that people did enjoy my playing.

ALEX LAING: There are challenges that come from being the only anything—being isolated. I feel poignantly the separation that orchestras have from their communities, because it’s a community that I identify with. It’s challenging to not be able to move the needle in terms of making that an institutional priority. That doesn’t mean that change can’t happen.

KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS: I always preface this kind of discussion by saying I didn’t get into the field to be a black violinist. I got into the field because I’m a violinist.

JESSE ROSEN: This is a room full of people in orchestras and I think it’s safe to say they are committed to leading their orchestras in ways that are inclusive, supportive, diverse. Is there anything that you want to share that you think would be helpful?

LEE KOONCE: What orchestras can do is work on learning how to be comfortable in communities that are different than their own. Going out into the community and being there and being present is something that orchestras can do. When I was at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, we did lots of programs in the community. [Former Chicago Symphony Orchestra President and former League of American Orchestras President and CEO] Henry Fogel is probably the most authentic community engagement ambassador on the planet. He believes that everybody in the world should wake up singing Mozart or Beethoven. We did programs in the community, maybe at an African-American church, and they’d have a reception afterwards. Henry would be there, 10:30 at night, still talking to

everybody. It’s not his community, but he was committed to learning about that community and being a part of that community. I would like to see that from all orchestras.

At *Market Smarter: Insights and Strategy for Digital Marketing*, Eric Gensler, president of Capacity Interactive, a digital marketing firm for the cultural sector, examined the new ways that orchestras and other arts organizations are embracing digital media in order to market their offerings.

ERIC GENSLER: My presentation today is all about getting your digital marketing priorities straight. It is very easy to be distracted by shiny buzzwords, new channels, sales reps, articles, new targeting techniques, and there is so much you can do with digital marketing. Just because you *can* do it doesn’t mean you *should*. The point of today’s presentation is to help you prioritize, to understand what’s important.

In the last ten to fifteen years, how human beings communicate has changed faster than any time in history. For many years arts and culture were sold through print advertising. If you wanted to sell a concert you would buy a big ad in your local newspaper and you would put it next to the music and arts coverage. Now, most information is consumed on small mobile devices. This requires a completely new approach to how you’re marketing, positioning, communicating about your organization. About 90 to 100 percent of you have Facebook accounts that you check every day. But when you look at allocations of marketing budget, many organizations are completely misaligned. Why are we marketing differently than we are behaving as individuals? I’m going to

say it many times: Facebook should be the number-one line item on your marketing budget. It is the most powerful advertising and marketing tool and is incredibly effective for arts and cultural organizations. Cut a print ad. Instead, create video and amazing social-media content.

How does that work in the digital world? First and foremost, it’s about creating content in the form of videos, infographics, imagery, e-mail. We often forget that e-mail is content and not just the “buy now” tool. It’s about investing and reallocating your budgets to create amazing content, content that potential concertgoers or your fans will get excited about, content that they are going to engage with and share. When you do a good job creating content, you get people’s attention. Then you get leads. Leads is someone raising their hand and saying, “Hey, this organization is a great content creator. I’m going to like them on social media or join their e-mail lists or go to their website.” Which organization is going to be more successful—the one with 10,000 e-mail addresses or the one with 100,000? Of course the one with 100,000. When it comes time to sell your season or to sell a concert, if you have a larger base you’re going to be successful because people trust you. You’re giving them great content, so they’re already further down the funnel.

When someone has joined you on e-mail, it’s not about sending promo codes and “come to this concert” and “donate now,” it’s about telling your story in a compelling way. Ultimately you will get a ticket sale, they will have a great experience, and that cycle will continue.

The point of this is that *then* it was about buying media. *Now* it’s about creating and promoting content. We’re still in a world where you have to buy media. I’m not saying you need to be 100 percent digital, but you need to be more than 5 or 10 or 20 percent digital. About 30 percent of advertising budgets are now spent on digital across the 200 arts organizations that we surveyed.



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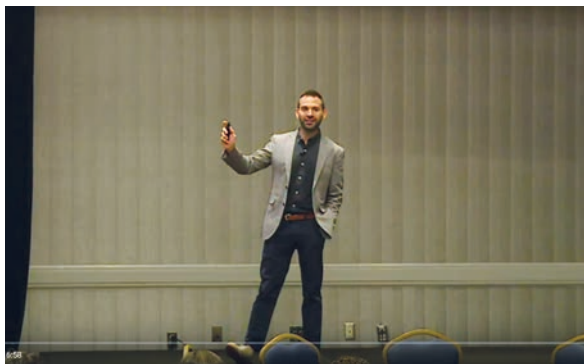
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Bold and Informed: Researching Audiences on a Budget explored the best low-cost ideas for researching target audiences from arts organizations around the country. Including examples drawn from the Wallace Foundation's *Building Audiences for the Arts* initiative, the session also revealed why audience research matters. The speakers were Sara Billmann, director of marketing and communications for the University Musical Society, and Bob Harlow, an expert on researching arts audiences and head of Bob Harlow Research and Consulting, LLC.

SARA BILLMANN: The University Musical Society is a presenter that's been around since 1879, with about 60 performances a year. Our budget is \$7.5 million, we're itinerant, don't own a venue, and our audiences are about 21 percent students, which comes from being on the campus of the University of Michigan.

One of our programming threads has been "Renegade," focusing on artistic game-changers from the past and the present—and that included artists like Gesualdo, Monteverdi, Beethoven. We wanted to target entrepreneurs and cre-



The *Market Smarter: Insights and Strategy for Digital Marketing* Conference session, led by Eric Gensler, can be viewed at <https://americanorchestras.org/conference-2017>.

ative placemakers as audience members, thinking that they also had that innovative mindset. We started our research with support from the Wallace Foundation in 2015. We began with in-depth interviews with previous "Renegade" attendees about their arts-going habits, and used that information to develop a protocol for focus groups and an online survey. That was incredibly valuable, because it helped us figure out the right questions to ask and what we should be looking at.

In focus groups with "Renegade" attendees and tech-industry people and artists, as well as with prospects that we identified based on our online survey, we learned that there was a lot of confusion about that past-and-present focus. When we programmed Monteverdi's *Vespers* on "Renegade," people were scratching their heads and saying, "That doesn't feel very contemporary." We realized that we needed to reduce the complexity. We reframed the curatorial product, and we continue to have ongoing debates about that. I always say to our programming director that when I'm doing audience research, we're not trying to tell you what people want and to program what people want. But we have to figure out a way to make that programming legible to the target audience.

We think that there's potential to use a combination of online surveying, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, and then apply that data analysis to help make marketing more successful.

BOB HARLOW: Audience research is important because it can do three things. First, it helps you learn about audiences, pinpoint the barriers that are keeping them away—and also figure out what's attracting them. Audience research helps

create more effective marketing, so you learn how to talk to people. We know how to talk to our current audiences, but new audiences sometimes need different language or images. Audience research also helps track progress.

Organizations on tight budgets have to be smart.

They don't have time. They don't have money. Low-cost research follows some very good, effective principles of more expensive formal research.

There are two types of research for two types of questions. Sometimes the questions we have are quantity: how many, how much, what number. If your questions are how many people went to the website and read the program notes, how many people went to the café during intermission, then you want to do a survey. There's another type of data that we get, and Sara's project really spoke to it, where the data isn't numbers. Sometimes it's stuff that a survey could never tell us, like how to build loyalty. That's when you ask how and why questions. If you have how and why questions, you want to do things like focus groups or in-depth interviews.

One great example of how to use focus groups is the California Symphony's Orchestra X project. They wanted to build their audience with Gen X-ers and millennials. So they had some attend a concert and then talk about their experience later in a local craft brewery. The orchestra learned that its website did not have information that would help these newcomers figure out which concert to attend. They don't know what a concerto is. They don't know the significance of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony. The California Symphony, like many of us, was so used to talking to the current audience that they didn't realize you have to put that stuff on your site.

All the same, every comment about the performance was positive. Many newcomers were awed by the live experience. No one asked for a shorter concert or called out composers they didn't want to hear. They just needed a way to get into it. **S**