

Speaking Up for Orchestras

From spurring collective action to detangling tax policy and smoothing the visa process for touring musicians, the League has long embraced an active role as a national advocate for orchestras.



The League's work advocating for orchestras often takes it far afield. Last fall, League Vice President for Advocacy Heather Noonan took part in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Johannesburg, South Africa. Noonan was a voice for the music community in treaty negotiations over international protected-species that affect musicians and orchestras, and partnered with music organizations and conservation leaders to find solutions for musicians.

by Heather Noonan

Advocacy was a founding principle of the League of American Orchestras. In 1944, the need to create a broad-based constituency to repeal a 20 percent federal ticket tax levied amid World War II led orchestras of all sizes to band together in common cause. Establishing a unified voice, delivering compelling messages about the public impact of orchestras in communities, and developing coordinated advocacy strategies was then—as it is now—the key for being heard among the many competing policy priorities being considered in our nation's capital.

The broad geographic reach of orchestras in the U.S. continues to be one of our best advocacy points, and that breadth usually comes as a surprise to policy lead-

ers on Capitol Hill. The sheer pervasiveness of orchestral music-making, and the hundreds of people per orchestra invested in the endeavor, often makes a compelling start to an advocacy conversation. Policy leaders love to look at maps. They pay close attention to the area that they represent: the voting constituency to which they are held accountable. The League's own map of member orchestras includes ensembles in every state, and in 316 out of 435 Congressional districts. Acting together, orchestras can reach 100 percent of the Senate and 72 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives. That is a sizable constituency. And with our members represented almost equally by elected officials from both major political parties (53 percent are in Republican House districts and 46 percent are in Democratic House districts), continued bipartisan support for issues that affect orchestras is a realistic goal.

Since the League's founding, orchestra policy advocacy has been achieved by direct representation in Washington, D.C., strategic partnerships with other national organizations, technical assistance on complex policy matters, and custom-made resources to help orchestras increase their advocacy capacity in their own communities. The League has two policy advocates in the Washington, D.C. office, where Najean Lee and I represent orchestras before Congress, the Administration, and policy leaders in our fellow national service organizations. In my 20 years at the League, several key policy themes have appeared and re-appeared that intersect with the work orchestras do in service to their communities and inform the League's ongoing work on behalf of orchestras.

Collective Action

As 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, orchestras can and should directly engage in nonpartisan issue advocacy on the full array of policy areas that relate to their work. While the mid- and late- 1990s are often remembered for the threatened elimination of funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, they were also an era of intense threats to the rights of nonprofits to engage in advocacy. Multiple pieces of legislation introduced by former Rep. Earnest Istook (R-OK) would have, in various ways, prevented nonprofits from speaking



Najean Lee (left), the League's director of government affairs and education advocacy, moderates a panel discussion at the Arts Education Partnership National Forum in Denver, October 2016. Participants in the discussion include (left to right) Sharmila Mann, director of the K-12 Institute, Education Commission of the States; Lynn Tuttle, director of public policy and professional development, National Association for Music Education; and Loretta Goodwin, senior director, American Youth Policy Forum. The League's advocacy work for orchestras involves strategic partnerships with other national organizations.

up, but were ultimately defeated through—you guessed it—policy advocacy by nonprofits of all kinds, including the League. Given the speed at which policy is moving this year, we've revised, updated, and relaunched our online guide *Playing Your*

But, thanks to collective action over the last 20 years, the context has substantially changed. Coordinated efforts by orchestras—in strategic partnership with the broader arts community and with support from influential voices from the business

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Part: An Orchestra's Guide to Public Policy Advocacy (at americanorchestras.org/playingyourpart), which lays out how to make the most of your role as an advocate, and is informed by years of collective action by orchestras.

In 1996, when the League was still headquartered in Washington, D.C., and John Sparks was my boss and at the helm of the League's advocacy strategy, orchestras were immersed in the nationwide effort to defend the National Endowment for the Arts, and to argue convincingly that federal arts funding plays a unique role that can't be filled by philanthropy and other funding sources. Today, orchestras are well aware of the current policy challenges of the Trump Administration calling for the elimination of the NEA.

and civic sectors—have helped Congress to understand that there is a vocal constituency of public support for the essential work the NEA accomplishes in communities across the country.

One of the largest constituencies mobilized in opposition to the NEA was led in the 1990s by the Christian Coalition, and in an effort to understand what was behind their strategy, I attended their conferences, which included a session each year laying out a path to eliminating funding for the arts. There were many memorable moments from those gatherings in the Washington Hilton that left a big impression (including a chance encounter with now-Senator, then-comedian Al Franken who, like me, was taking in the context of the gathering), but the most

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1964
The Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

1965
National Endowment for the Arts is established.

1967
Hippies, drugs, and rock 'n' roll—and social upheaval.

1968
Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated. Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated.

1969
The Queen Elizabeth II makes its maiden voyage.

1973
The World Trade Center opens in New York City.

1964
Women's Council established.

1966
National Endowment for the Arts contracts with League and American Music Center to administer Composer Assistance Program of grants-in-aid.

1968
Ford Foundation announces five-year \$360,000 grant to League for expansion of services to orchestras.

1970
Helen Thompson named manager of New York Philharmonic, receives League's Gold Baton Award.

1971
Symphony Newsletter becomes *Symphony News*.

1973
Ralph Black named executive director.



The League's advocacy work in Washington, D.C. includes spotlighting orchestra leaders who make the case for orchestras' value to their communities. On March 18, 2015, Melia Tourangeau, then-president and CEO of the Utah Symphony | Utah Opera, spoke in favor of increased funding for the NEA before a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives. While in D.C., Tourangeau also met with the legislative staff of Utah's federal representatives.

lasting memory is the moment when one of the most influential advocacy machines in Washington conceded defeat concerning the NEA. On September 25, 1998, the League faxed (handy little devices, weren't they?) a report to our members describing the exact moment when the leader of the "Defunding the NEA" session announced, "We just got slam-dunked by advocates for the NEA." The group would shift its focus to other policy priorities. The vice president for government affairs for the Heritage Foundation, a speaker at the session, explained that they "were not going to win the funding battle," because there was no strong core of opposition to the NEA in Congress and many on the Hill had high regard for the agency.

Committee and Appropriations Committee said the proposal to eliminate the NEA is "not a fight worth fighting." Keeping the momentum will require ongoing collective action by orchestras and others who are putting federal dollars to use in service to their communities, and by the wider public that benefits from that investment, to continue to demonstrate that there is a base of support for federal funding for the arts.

Grassroots, Grasstops, and Geography

Mail campaigns, phone calls, nationwide fax blasts, emails, Facebook, and Twitter. Over the years, the League has used every possible channel available to let orchestras know when their advocacy on a key policy

Mail campaigns, phone calls, fax blasts, emails, Facebook, Twitter: the League has used every possible channel to let orchestras know when their advocacy on a key policy issue matters most.

Fast forward to today, when it is clear that challenges to funding the NEA persist, but it is also clear that continuous efforts by advocates to describe the public impact of NEA grants—and the impressively successful work by the agency to increase public understanding of what the NEA does—have ensured that ground has been gained since 1998. Following coverage of proposed elimination of the NEA earlier this year, House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ken Calvert (R-CA) said, "The NEA and NEH have a lot of support from the American people and Congress." Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), a member of both the House Budget

issue matters most. Initiating field-wide action on an issue is usually called "grassroots" strategy, and it's the most visible form of League advocacy among its members. Our current calls to action land in the email box of every orchestra stakeholder for whom we have an address, and the messages direct advocates to a customized online action center with background information, talking points, and ways to get in touch with their elected officials.

One of the most effective, but least visible, parts of the League's advocacy work is our database indicating which orchestras are located within Congressional districts and states of members of Congress who sit

on key committees with jurisdiction over the issues that matter. For example, when the House Ways and Means Committee was discussing nonprofit tax policy in 2007, and officials raised questions about how the full spectrum of nonprofit organizations serve community needs, orchestras could reply with specific examples of their concerts and programs in action. In these cases, the League contacts orchestras with a highly personalized message explaining why their advocacy is needed at a given moment, how their elected officials

Before committee hearings were broadcast live and archived online, the only way to get insight was to show up outside hearing rooms and stand for hours on the marble floors of hallways in hopes of claiming a seat.

have previously voted on the issue at hand, and what they can do, in turn, to deliver a highly personalized communication to the member of Congress when it is needed most. These one-to-one efforts provide insight into “grasstops” contacts within the orchestra family who might already have a relationship to policy leaders and are able to capture their attention. The reach of orchestras across the country means we can usually make the match when it is most urgent.

Unintended Consequences, Unexpected Allies

Given the surprising range of policy topics that affect orchestras, the number of Congressional committees that matter is vast. Before committee hearings were broadcast live and archived online as they are today, the only way to get insight into what was happening in the room was to show up outside hearing rooms early, and stand for hours on the marble floors of the hallways in hopes of claiming a seat when the doors opened. A good deal of business got done in those hallways. (This is still the case; even in the digital age, showing up in person matters.) While striking up casual conversations, other advocates are often perplexed to meet an orchestra representative waiting in line to enter a Judiciary Committee hearing on immigration, or to hear the Natural Resources Committee debate a new piece of legislation. Part of the League’s role in advocacy

is to look out for any instance when policy could help or hurt orchestras’ ability to deliver on their mission, however unlikely the topic might seem.

February of 2014 brought just such a moment for both the League and its member orchestras. In response to serious threats to African elephant populations, the Obama Administration initiated an effort to put in place a ban on trade in African elephant ivory. The consequences for orchestras and their musicians were immediate, but not well understood by policy

leaders: many older bow tips and stringed instruments contain small quantities of antique ivory that were subject to the restrictions. The most immediate impact was felt by orchestras and individual musicians departing for international tours, for under the new U.S. rules and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, “trade” encompasses both commerce and travel. The League embarked on a successful and ongoing effort to understand the conservation goals behind the new rules, explain the rules’ unintended consequences for cultural activity, and strategically partner with environmental organizations, global music organizations, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work out a policy solution. Our continuing work in this area placed the League—for the first time—in the center of international policy discussions and at the negotiating table when 183 global parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) met in Johannesburg, South Africa in October of 2016.

The League’s work in the protected species arena actually began years before this recent focus on the African elephant ivory trade, however. In 2007 when the endangered Brazilian Pernambuco tree was being considered for a higher level of protection under the CITES treaty, an exemption for finished products, like the many bows that are made from the wood, was secured. Keeping the exemption in place was then, and continues to

1974
At League Conference in Memphis, conductors meet informally to discuss shared topics.

1975
Youth Orchestra Division launched.

League forms Conductors’ Guild at its Conference in San Diego. It continues for a decade as a League subsidiary, becoming an independent organization in 1985.

1979
Philip Yasinski becomes League’s executive director.

1980
Women’s Council renamed Volunteer Council.

Catherine French appointed president and chief executive officer.

1981
Orchestra Management Fellowship Program inaugurated.

1974
President Richard Nixon resigns.

1975
Vietnam War ends.

First season of *Saturday Night Live* airs.

1976
First Apple desktop computer is released.

1979
Margaret Thatcher is elected prime minister of the U.K.

Iran’s Revolution results in overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, replaced by the Islamic Republic of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini.

1981
Lady Diana Spencer weds Prince Charles.

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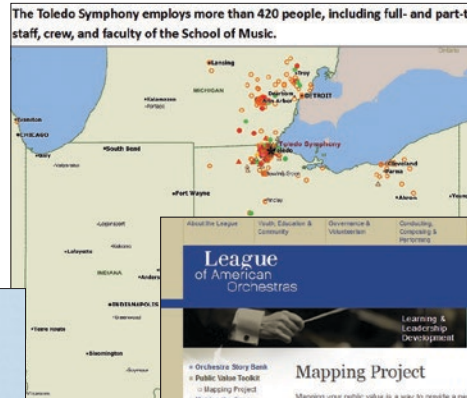
League of American Orchestras
Advancing the orchestral experience for all

Orchestras and Congress speak up for arts policy
March 31, 2017

SHIFT festival brings orchestras to nation's capital

The long-anticipated **SHIFT festival of American orchestras** is taking place this week in Washington, D.C., celebrating the vitality, identity, and extraordinary artistry of orchestras and chamber orchestras. Washington Performing Arts and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts are hosting the Allianta Symphony Orchestra, Boulder Philharmonic, The Knights, and the North Carolina Symphony in an immersive festival experience including full-orchestra performances in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall and community events throughout the city. The festival also included a **symposium** that featured League President and CEO Jesse Rosen at the Library of Congress.

- Orchestra Story Bank
- Public Value Toolkit
- Making the Case: Advocacy Resources
- Be Heard!
- Music Education
- Tax and 501(c)(3) Policy
- Visa and Tax for Foreign Guest Artists
- MEA Funding
- International Cultural Exchange
- Travel with Instruments
- Electronic Media Policy Issues
- Disaster Relief for Nonprofits
- News and Alerts



League of American Orchestras
BEST DEFENSE
A Guide for Orchestra Advocates

League of American Orchestras
Advancing the orchestral experience for all

Mapping Project

Mapping your public value is a way to provide a new picture of the work your orchestra does in the community. The breadth of your orchestra's engagement is displayed powerfully in a set of maps and accompanying lists that show the number, variety, and geographic spread of the schools, community, and business partners with which you interact. Contact [Mapas.Lee](#) in the League's DC office to get started.

- Basic Maps
- For all League member orchestras, we offer a PDF of our basic mapping report, which entails a 1-hour call to discuss the data collection process, and 1-hour call to discuss finished map. The basic map from a single database includes 6 maps and accompanying partner lists selecting from these options: best view of all partners; county-level; city/zipper; Congressional district; median household income. The mapping process and PDF of the finished product are available from the League free of charge, on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Basic Sample Map
- Customized Maps
- A larger and more customized mapping report is available to all orchestras at a cost of \$300 for members, \$500 for nonmembers. This report includes up to 12 maps with lists including the basic maps, plus selecting 2/3 from the following options: race; median age; partners by duration; numbers served; supplementary maps based on additional dataset (i.e. employees, residents). The range of what can be provided will depend on the type of data supplied and require a more detailed consultation with League staff. All customized mapping reports will come with finished PDF and the original PowerPoint and jpeg files.
- Customized Options

Among the many resources created and shared by the League's advocacy department are (above from left) news alerts; the online *Best Defense: A Guide for Orchestra Advocates*, by John D. Sparks; a Public Value Toolkit (not pictured); and a mapping project that provides a visual representation of the work individual orchestras are doing in their communities. Opposite page: The League's www.artistsfromabroad.org online guide to immigration and tax requirements helps orchestras obtain visas required for presenting international guest artists in the U.S., along with other processes.

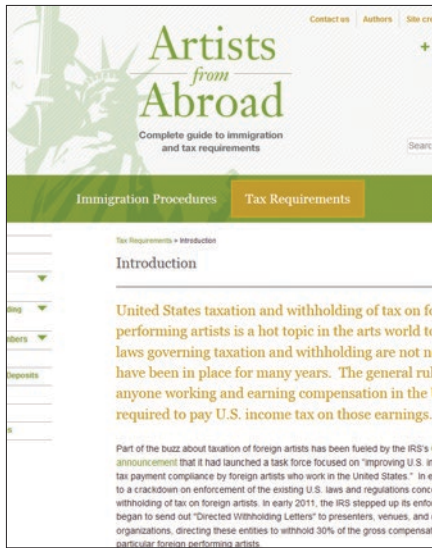
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ARTISTVISION



be, dependent on the sustainability of the Pernambuco tree. The League's advocacy role included informing orchestras about how to comply with the rules and how to participate in the conservation of the Pernambuco tree, which earned the topic a cover story in the September/October 2007 issue of this magazine.

Turning "Pain Points" into Policy Improvements

Getting up to speed on compliance with current rules and regulations is often a key strategy toward helpful policy changes. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as well as prior devastating flooding in Houston, the League partnered with orchestras to document their unsuccessful efforts to obtain FEMA support, due to regulatory language that was narrowly written to exclude performing arts facilities. That documentation formed the basis for a successful 2006 advocacy campaign by the League in partnership with the broader performing arts community to expand FEMA eligibility. Following flooding in 2010, the Nashville Symphony Orchestra was among the first to access relief toward the substantial cost of renovation under the newly improved regulations.

That same strategy of documenting problem areas and making a case for needed improvements spills over into nearly every policy area in which the League and orchestras are active. Orchestras have long turned to the League for help in obtaining the visas required for presenting international guest artists in concerts in the U.S. In the late 1990s, after our two-page memo of guidance we were faxing to or-

chestras began to grow steadily in length (our fax machine really got a workout in those days), the League decided to literally write the book on the visa and tax requirements for foreign guest artists. With the help of specialized legal counsel, what began as a binder of printed material became what is now the only comprehensive online resource on the topic, www.artists-fromabroad.org. From the creation of specialized visa categories for the arts in the Immigration and Naturalization Act in

streamlined procedures and, as reported in the *New York Times* on July 23, 2010, the agency publicly pledged to reduce processing times for artist visas to two weeks, as required by law. It is a goal the agency still strives to meet.

Partnerships, Public Perception, Participation

The League's advocacy work is fueled by and dependent upon partnerships with other national organizations that repre-

Even in the digital age, when it comes to advocacy, showing up in person matters.

1991, to current debates over immigration reform, the League has been a persistent advocate for improving and streamlining the visa process, with the end goal of encouraging international cultural activity. In order to bring our strongest case to policy leaders to change the visa process, we first had to prove that the existing rules simply didn't work. Since then, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has

sent a large universe of arts, education, and nonprofit organizations. Having a seat at so many coalition tables multiplies the impact of orchestras' advocacy work and provides an opportunity to familiarize others with the work orchestras do in their own communities. The League is currently the lead convener of the Cultural Advocacy Group, an ad hoc coalition formed in the mid-1990s whose work continues through



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today. In 2016, that group created a unified statement for the new Administration, *Advancing the Arts to Support National Policy Priorities*, which was endorsed by a group of more than 70 national arts and cultural organizations. We're also an active participant in the Arts Education Partnership, which fuels the League's many resources that help orchestras get engaged in music education advocacy at the local level—where it is needed the most. The insights we gain from the Arts Education Partner-

ship help the League inform orchestras of key opportunities to close gaps in access to music education through implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The League's participation in national nonprofit coalition meetings related to tax policy—where we work alongside the American Red Cross, Feeding America, YMCA of the USA, and the full host of charities—not only advances our work on tax policies that directly affect charitable giving, but has also helped us hone

the messages that convey what orchestras accomplish in partnership with their communities. Those tax policy developments in 2007 spurred the League to gain a better grasp of how orchestras are perceived as nonprofit organizations, sparking not only the development of the League's Public Value Toolkit but also provoking ongoing conversations about how orchestras can more deeply and authentically engage with their communities. After all, any message delivered to Capitol Hill through collec-

The League has been a persistent advocate for improving and streamlining the visa process. The goal: encouraging international cultural activity.

tive action must be rooted in real work back home.

At the League's 2005 National Conference in Washington, D.C., more than 500 orchestra representatives spent a day meeting with Congress. In preparation for the meetings, orchestra administrators, musicians, volunteers, and colleagues were seated at tables organized by state and Congressional districts. Many participants commented afterwards that although they are geographically nearby one another, that occasion was the first time they sat down together in common cause. One other happy byproduct of that day on the Hill was that participants gained a lasting understanding about how simple, effective, and satisfying it can be to directly engage policymakers. "It filled me with pride and satisfaction taking part in this endeavor," said one participant. "Although it seemed like a huge undertaking, in reality it was an essential exercise in reminding me why we do what we do, and why music matters."

While the League's strategy for engaging in advocacy has changed to keep up with the times, one fundamental principle is unchanged from the very founding of the League to today. The capacity for collective action by orchestras is our strongest asset, and it can make a real difference in public policy. **S**

HEATHER NOONAN is the League's Vice President for Advocacy.

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