Pick your metaphor—roller coaster, crapshoot, whack-a-mole—the sheer unpredictability of the global pandemic and the swift spread of the Omicron variant have forced life once again into a state of near-constant recalibrations, revisions, shutdowns, returns. That’s not to make light of the tragic impact of COVID-19, which is real and heartbreaking. Still, it’s no small irony that when orchestras began to return to relatively normal music-making this fall with in-person concerts, Omicron became omnipresent. Just as we were getting used to them, vaccine mandates and mask requirements for audiences, musicians, and staff suddenly seemed inadequate. As this issue of Symphony went to press, orchestras were postponing and then cancelling concerts out of, as the phrase goes, an abundance of caution. While that’s absolutely the right thing to do, enormous changes at the last minute are making uncertainty a certainty.

Orchestras have risen to these challenges with resilience. And at many orchestras, the nation’s reckoning with social injustice means that a growing expansiveness in programming is now expected. Works by women and composers of color, whose contributions have for too long been ignored, are being commissioned, performed—and, in a shift from the past practice of one-and-done premieres—getting multiple hearings. Orchestras are continuing to find fresh ways to connect with their communities. Artists often show the way forward, and this issue reports on how composers are responding to the issues of the present day with new scores, new solace, new provocations. At the same time, canonic works are being reconsidered in ways that bring novel insights into music we all thought we knew. Maybe, to use another metaphor, it’s a sea change for orchestras.
2 Prelude
by Robert Sandla

6 The Score
Orchestra news, moves, and events

14 In Memoriam: Chester Lane
Chester Lane worked as an editor at Symphony for nearly four decades and was the League’s longest-tenured staff member.

16 Forward Thinking
League President and CEO Simon Woods speaks with Lang Lang about the roots of his success: the pianist launched his career performing with U.S. orchestras.

22 At the League
Essentials of Orchestra Management, one of the League’s signature professional-development courses, is getting an update, staying relevant to the present—and future—of orchestras. by Heidi Waleson

28 Changing the Face of Volunteerism
Volunteer groups at orchestras are seeking younger and more diverse volunteers to better reflect today’s society and to connect with their communities. by Rita Pyrillis

34 Coping With COVID
The League of American Orchestras is helping orchestras by researching and reporting what they—and their audiences—need as they deal with the pandemic.

38 Transfigured Nights
A recent concert road trip proved how much in-person concerts have been missed by audiences and musicians alike. by Jennifer Melick

44 Time Signatures
How are composers responding musically during a fraught time? Five creators share their experiences. by Hannah Edgar

50 New World Stages
Many emerging musicians were about to make their marks at orchestras nationwide when the pandemic hit. As concert life gradually returns, what’s next? by Brin Solomon

56 Guide to Emerging Artists

66 League of American Orchestras Annual Fund

68 Coda
Violinist Ray Chen’s social-media embrace has expanded with a virtual space where musicians can connect while maintaining practice and high skill levels during the pandemic.