

Silver Linings from the Golden State: Stories of Collaboration within California's Orchestra Community

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SPEAKER: Sarah, do you mind if I speak, just real quick?

SARAH WEBER: No.

SPEAKER: If you can come closer we would love that. If you feel comfortable coming a little closer from behind the pillar we would love that, just so we can see you as colleagues.

WEBER: Thank you. This session is about collaboration, so we are requiring it of you as well.

Collaborate by coming towards us. Feel the magnetism.

All right, it is 11:16, so we are going to get started. Welcome, everyone, to this morning's session, "Silver Linings From the Golden State; Stories of Collaboration With California's Orchestra Community." I just want to thank you all for being here. My name is Sarah Weber. I'm the Executive Director of the Association of California Symphony Orchestras, or ACSO. It's long. It's a long name, so ACSO is just fine.

I would like to acknowledge before we get started that this session is dedicated to Michael Morgan, who was the music director and conductor of the Oakland Symphony for over 30 years. He passed away last year and it has been a real loss to our community, as he was a symbol of collaboration. An example, probably one of the best, of collaboration. So with Mieko's blessing we are dedicating the session to him and the work he has done in our state and for our field.

So this session is called, "Silver Linings From the Golden State." I have to give credit to my board member, Chelsea Chambers, who came up with that. She likes a good marketing, a good sound bite, a good semantic title. But it's true, because while we've talked a lot about the pandemic, and we are talking a lot about the pandemic, and we're still living and grappling with the recovery and the rebuilding, there has been so much that has come from the past two years that is worth keeping and thinking about and carrying on.

There's been a lot of transformation. And we have certainly found that, in California and within the ACSO community, in terms of the relationships that have been built and deepened during this time. So we really wanted to focus on some of those silver linings. And our goal here today is to tell some success stories of collaboration, but also to give you some, hopefully some ideas and inspiration and some actual, tangible ways that you can go back to your organizations and apply or try to be more collaborative.

So how this session is going to work today is, it's going to be a bit of storytelling. It's going to be a bit of conversation. And hopefully, if the timing works out, we'll have some time for you all to share with us or to ask questions or to talk together.

And this is all about collaboration. If this was a drinking game we'd all be hammered by the end, because we're going to say that word a lot, so apologies at the top. But we do have some distinct or different examples of collaboration. Collaborating with your peer group, building your peer group, which has been vital to us as a community during the last two years. Building collaborative networks with other arts organizations in your community for the collective good, which has also been vital. We're going to talk a little bit about collaborating with community partners during the pandemic and coming out of the pandemic, that have been able to create transformative, innovative community programs.

We're going to talk about rebuilding; using collaboration as a tool to rebuild through a very specific example, but I think it's all that is really relevant because we're all doing a lot of rebuilding right now. And then we're going to end with some big picture strategic questions. If your institution is thinking about being more collaborative or trying to operationalize or thinking about ways you can expand your collaborative footprint, some big picture questions you can think about as you are doing that work.

So before I turn it over to my panelists to tell their stories, I do want to just take a moment to give a shout out to ASCO; a very self-serving shout out to ASCO. But I like to believe that the reason collaboration has been so successful and continues to be something that's so important to this community is because we have had a state wide orchestra association for over 50 years. And I know there are a few other state wide orchestra associations out there. There are not many of us. I like to say we're kind of a unicorn.

But we were founded over 50 years ago by really, the League of American Orchestras has a part to do in our origin story, as well as our own state arts council. But really, it was orchestra leaders who

came together and realized there was a need for resource and information sharing. And why go it alone when you can do it together? And that's really been such a guiding principle of ASCO for our entire existence. And we were reminded how valuable that community is during the pandemic.

And I will say ASCO is a small organization. We don't have a ton of resources. But what we do have, and what we have built over the last 50 years, is the network, the community. We're the connective tissue. So all I could think of to do when the pandemic hit was just to activate that community. And we just started Zooming our heads off, which continues today.

We've just scheduled so many peer group Zoom calls that were meeting weekly and monthly. They are a little less frequent now, but these conversations and these community groups made all of the difference, because nobody had an answer. Everybody was trying different things. California was so, so restrictively locked down. The arts were so restrictively locked down for so long. And so it took all of us talking together and sharing, you know, what could we do? We got together for collective advocacy action, to try to work with our state officials. We shared how to do a virtual gala. How to—you know, all of these streaming—

I remember, I'll never forget this. Our 2020 conference, which was meant to be in person, of course, but we went virtual with. We had a session. We had some breakout sessions we were planning, and we were having some technical difficulties so we needed to vamp for a minute. And Michael Vitale from the L.A. Phil was on stage at the Hollywood Bowl via Zoom, and he volunteered to kill time by taking us out on stage and showing us how to use puppy pee pads to empty your brass instruments on.

And like a hundred peoples' minds were blown. And it was a total fluke. We just needed to kill time, but it ended up being this really memorable moment. And it was like, oh, yeah, that's a brilliant idea. So things like those moments only happened because we have the connective tissue of this community to begin with.

So I do want to say I would highly encourage you, if you don't have your own ACSO, to think about starting one. It doesn't have to be formal. It doesn't have to be state wide. It could be in your city. It could be in our county.

But if you are thinking about starting this kind of a network—which I would very much encourage—here are a few tips and tricks. It takes a few people. ACSO was started by a few leaders, and one of the first things they did back in 1969 was create a resource library to share scores. There was a common need. There were orchestra leaders who said, let's do this, and they did it.

It started with something very simple, and has grown. It was run by volunteers for the first 15 years of its existence before staff were hired. Volunteers, as you know, can move mountains. So it takes a few people to start. It takes identifying a common need. And it takes some people who are willing to give a little time. And share the load. People want to be asked to be included, and to provide expertise and help. And we'll talk about that a little bit in one of our stories, but it just takes asking someone. I need you to do this because I know you can. You have the ability. You have the resources. People are very responsive to being asked to help.

And then one of the big things that drives ACSO is, we listen to our members. All of these Zoom calls really feeds the workshops that we do, the webinars that we do, the conference sessions we put

together. We're just kind of constantly listening to what's top of mind for people and trying to be responsive.

The other great thing about ACSO, and I would recommend this if you try to start your own ACSO, is diversity is your super power. We have orchestras. You know, the L.A. Phil is a member of ours, Pacific Symphony, very large budgeted orchestras. And we have very, very small, less than 100,000 community orchestras all in the same network. And to get people in the same room, it's a super power. We learned that the learning goes both ways. It's not just big to small, it's small to big. It is incredible to have diversity of voices and experiences in your group.

And then I would say these kinds of associations are fertile ground for the next generation of orchestra leaders. It's where so many orchestra leaders can get their start, can participate, can be heard, can have leadership experiences. So this is—we hope these kinds of associations help orchestra leaders grow and develop in their professional strengths.

So include emerging voices in your associations. And stay open to change and evolution and changing your thinking and embracing new ideas. This field is constantly changing. The last two years have transformed everything. So be open and be willing to put new ideas forward and champion them, and be a model of them.

So those are just a few tips. Oh, and where do you find people? We're going to talk a little bit about how you find your people for these kinds of associations, but Google is really helpful. GuideStar is really helpful. LinkedIn, you can do a lot of great professional stalking on LinkedIn. And your local arts councils. You know, if all else fails, who are the other arts organizations? Who are the other

orchestras? Especially for those little guys, if you might not know where they are, your arts councils are great resources.

So that is my framing of this session and my talking up of ACSO, which I'm very proud of. So I'm going to quickly introduce our speakers, and then we're going to start storytelling time.

So I would like to introduce my esteemed panelists, friends and ACSO members. Scott Vandrick, who is the Chief Development Officer at the Pasadena Symphony Association, and he is also Vice President of the ACSO board and governance chair. Anna James Miller, who is the former Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo Symphony and currently the director of grant funding support and foundation relations at Fresno Pacific University.

Jim Tibbs, who is the outgoing Executive Director of the Berkeley Symphony, so we're so happy to have him here today before he fully retires and lives the dream that we're all hoping for someday. We all hope to be able to retire someday. Mieko Hatano, who is the Executive Director of the Oakland Symphony, and who is also an ACSO board member. And John Forsyte, who is the President and CEO of the Pacific Symphony.

So we are going to start with Scott and work our way back here. And everybody has got a story of collaboration to tell, and then we're going to talk a little bit afterwards. So Scott, I'm going to turn it over to you.

SCOTT VANDRICK: Thank you very much, Sarah. Good morning, everyone. So as Sarah mentioned, I'm Scott Vandrick. I'm the Chief Development Officer for the Pasadena Symphony Association, and I am going to start by going backward.

On March 18, 2020, the Pasadena Symphony and Pops team gathered and made the decision to pause our programming. And we started the whole process of scenario building. Does this sound familiar? Scenario building; getting in the room with your team and saying, what happens if this happens and that happens? But what if this happens and then that happens? And then what if this happens? We did about 18 to 24 scenarios of what could happen if our programming paused for a week or two, or if our programming paused for two years; a year or two.

So during this time, we were getting, of course, stressed out about what would happen if we lost our identity as an arts organization? When you present, your identity is the music that you share with your community, with your supporters. When you don't have that, you lose your identity.

As a development professional, my identity is connecting people with what they love. So I didn't have that power. I wasn't able to connect people with what they loved, and I thought, well, who am I then, if I don't have that power? If I don't have that ability?

So I started to look outward of what my colleagues were doing. What are my colleagues doing who are doing major fundraising events and major fundraising campaigns right now, when they can't be face to face with their donors? So I did that locally, I did that regionally, and I did that nationwide. And one of the most impressive ones was the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Three weeks after the shutdown they did this amazing virtual—they pivoted and did this amazing virtual event that I bought a ticket to. They were honoring Kate Blanchett and I was excited to see her in her house. So we went in and out of people's houses and in and out of countries, and all the while they showed how you could give digitally. And I thought, wow, how interesting. This pandemic is giving me the opportunity to actually have touchpoints with my colleagues across the nation and regionally.

And if you know me, you know that I love calling people out of the blue. I love cold calling especially colleagues, and just introducing myself and saying, I saw your presentation. I really liked it. I want to talk about it.

So I called the BAM team in New York and I said, will you have a meeting with the Pasadena Symphony team and talk about how you did your virtual event? And they said, yeah, sure. Yeah, you're like our 30th call. So sure, yeah, let's do this.

So we had a Zoom meeting with their development team and they talked about what really worked for them and what was really challenging and what not to do. And I was taking that information in, and Sarah called and she said, we should have a development peer forum for ACSO. We do those normally every quarter or twice a year, and they are great, but this time there was an urgency to it.

And I said, absolutely, I am actually exploring inwardly and outwardly of what my role is and what our organization is doing. Of course my colleagues are feeling that. So yes, let's do that.

And then I mentioned, you know what? I think it's important that I have a co-facilitator. I love facilitating the peer forums. I love doing them, but I think it's important to have other voices in the room as a co-facilitator. And Sarah said, that's a great idea. Who do you think? And I said, well, let's have representation of budget size and geography.

So I cold called my colleagues across the state, who are now my good friends, at the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera, at the Marin Symphony, at the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, at Long Beach Symphony, and I said, will you join me as a co-facilitator and start talking about how we fundraise when we can't be face to face? When we can't share our product and our music. And all of my colleagues after that initial pause, like, who are you? Now why are you calling? They said yes. They signed on and they said yes.

For the last three years, we've been doing these development peer forums, and I have a structure that really works, which is connecting with people who have signed up for the peer forum before. Pre-forum calls. And I asked my co-facilitators, will you join me in this network building and this connection building exercise? And they all said yes, which was awesome.

The calls actually do three things, three major things, but they do more than that. But the three major things they do is they connect the participant with the co-facilitator. They have a friend in the room when they join the peer forum, so that's really important. They are able to talk about how their organization is handling these times, and how they, as a professional, are handling these times.

And finally, it shows that the field cares. That the Association of California Symphony Orchestra cares, that the co-facilitators care, and that this is a forum of open communication, of active listening, and of caring.

So we had those calls. We had five sessions of development peer forums. And they were—I will tell you, the first peer forum was a support group, where we talked about how nervous we were. About how scared we were to be fundraisers during a time when we did not have the tools that we normally have to be fundraisers. How nervous and insecure we were with our identity. And there was a lot of coming together as a community.

As we scheduled them out, the five of them out, they were like stepping stones for the development teams of orchestras across California; that they could see into the future of an uncertain time. So they provided that stability, which was awesome.

So we had these, and afterwards we also engaged in post-forum calls, where the facilitators had a back and forth about what worked and what they really want to make sure that they emphasize for the next one. And we all agreed as facilitators that we were going to go to all five of them, to show continuity, to show engagement, and to show collaboration together.

So they have been incredibly successful. And what I'm going to leave you with is a challenge. I challenge you to Google organizations in your community and in your neighborhood that you admire, but don't know. You don't know a colleague there. Google them. Find someone that you really admire; something that they're doing, a campaign, an event that they are doing, and call them.

And the call goes something like this. Ring, ring. Hello, this is Emily. Emily, hi, this is Scott Vandrick. I'm the Chief Development Officer of the Pasadena Symphony and Pops. How are you? Um, fine, thanks. What can I help you with? I was really excited about the event that you had going on, and about the

success that you had. Could you talk to me a little bit about how your team did that, and what you would suggest if I decided to actually take on that project?

Oh, you want to know about our event? You want me to tell my story? Of course. So as they're talking to you, you hear a clicking in the background, and they are Googling you. They're finding out, who is this person that just cold called me? And they're trying to find out, oh, that's who they are. Oh, the Pasadena Symphony. Oh, interesting. We should connect with them. That's really interesting.

Five minutes happens, and then the next thing that you know, you're at an event or you're at a networking, and they see you across the room and they say, oh, you are the person that called me. How fun. Let's have coffee. And pretty soon, they are good friends of yours. You have strengthened your network. You have strengthened the community. You have strengthened the industry. And I challenge you to do that. You will be amazed at the resonance that it has, both in your community, in your organization, and in your career. Thank you, Sarah.

WEBER: Thank you, Scott. Scott has made networking an art form. If you want to know how any of the finer points, or hone your personal networking skills or style, find Scott. He is a master. He's a master. He's done master classes for ACSO before at our conferences on networking. It's a real skill, especially on Zoom. So thank you, Scott.

So we're going to switch gears now, and Anna is going to talk a little bit. Scott just talked about building your personal network. Anna is going to talk a little bit about building your peer organization network in your community. Other arts organizations, working with other arts organizations and getting outside of your own silo in your organization and finding others. And she's going to talk about how that happened in San Luis Obispo County. So take it away, Anna.

ANNA MILLER: Thank you, Sarah. And thank you, Scott. I think I was one of your friendly calls in the last two years. I appreciated that.

So, hi, everyone. Thanks for having me here today. Thank you, Sarah. I'm Anna James Miller, and I am currently over with Fresno Pacific University now, but I'm a former symphony executive director for the last 13 years. And as Sarah mentioned, I'm here to share about community collaboration and collective advocacy. And I'm going to share how I started a community network that successfully solved a problem that my orchestra was facing during COVID and provide you with the tools to replicate this.

And my story starts right about when your story started. So this was kind of like in the early COVID time that we all remember so well. And so for me, after 10 years in arts executive director roles in Washington State, I was offered an opportunity on the central coast. I accepted that job one month before COVID started and then moved my family down to a new state to start a new job at an interesting time.

And so being unfamiliar with the area, I was really thinking a lot about, where was I going to go to get to know people at a time when you can't go anywhere? You know, how was I going to get up to speed? How am I going to make connections, and just do the work that I'm hired to do in this new community that I'm unfamiliar with, in a new place?

And so it can really be isolating and lonely to be an executive director, for those of you that have done that work. And so kind of that tapping into networks and just that very activity is kind of one of the best ways to kind of free yourself of that loneliness, I found. So it's really important.

And so after a few weeks on the job, I learned that I had a Seattle connection in San Luis Obispo. And that was my colleague, Chris Miller, who runs the performing arts center at Cal Poly, which is kind of like the big home venue in San Luis Obispo County. And so I said, Chris, where do I go? Where is the group where all of the art leaders get together and they talk about stuff? And they have drinks and they complain and they get to know each other and it's really fun? And we always do that in Seattle. Where do we do that?

And he said, well, we don't really have that here. And you know, after the shock of that wore off, I realized that that was exactly what we needed to do. We needed to create a group like that. And so that was our concept for the Central Coast Coalition of Arts Leaders, which we decided then and there to start. And after kind of talking over how best to do that, we decided that it was going to have the best chance of gaining traction if he, since he was a venue manager in the community, kind of a neutral third party and not—it's a very competitive community. So he wasn't like one of the competition, he is kind of a—he's the venue that all of the companies, organizations, go and perform with.

So he was a great person to kind of help initiate and do the inviting. And so he reached out to each of the individual performing arts groups in the county, and that included ballet, theater, opera, film, other venues, and even our local visual art group that did like a monthly art walk. Well, not during COVID, but way back.

And so we meet via Zoom at first, this coalition. We kept it informal. And the first meeting was literally just everybody going around the room introducing themselves and saying, yeah, well, we used to do da, da, da, da, da, but now I have no idea what we're going to do. And so we kind of, right away, found a lot of middle ground in our shared challenges in what each group was facing, and just in that kind fellowship of sharing the space.

Being these kind of like lonely little islands of executive directors trying to do this impossible work at the beginning of COVID. And so over time, we really made that a space for breaking down siloes and even breaking down the historical sense of competitiveness within the arts community.

We shared information, concerns, and brainstormed. And you know, really at the beginning Chris and I said, well, let's just do this for a few months until COVID is over. You know, we'll just kind of help each other with some short term ideas and then once it's over, we'll just do whatever. But, I mean, that really did not happen like that, as we all know. And so we decided to instead kind of focus on finding, as Sarah said, finding a shared question or a shared problem to work on. So we kind of did that in three different ways that I'll describe.

So the first one was we all had this question right at the beginning of COVID. Once the venues do open back up, when is the audience going to come back? So not when they are allowed to come back, but like, when are they actually going to come back, and when is their dollar going to come back, you know? And what does a unified arts patron experience look like during COVID?

And so we developed a shared audience safety perception survey, and each venue sent that out to the individual patron list. It touched over 40,000 households in the county, which it's not that big a county, so that's like a pretty good reach. And we got about, like four to five thousand respondents

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per time, so it was decent. And along the way we learned that a lot of the responders actually attended multiple performing arts groups at multiple venues across the county. And so that was a really good realization for some of those kind of in that old school thinking of, well, that's my patron and that's your patron. And like, no, we actually really have the same patron base.

And so that was really important, and it paved the way for a future collaboration and resource sharing, which was really positive. It helped many of us plan our budgets. And knowing that our single ticket revenue was likely to be about half of the pre-COVID level, which, as we all know, that proved to be accurate. So it was kind of like a magic mirror into the future.

As COVID wore on, the food and wine industries opened back up. But as Sarah and others will share, here in California, for those of you local, you know that we really couldn't do much of anything in the performing arts. It was really tough. And there were just no clear guidelines for the state reopening plan, including the performing arts. And so we just literally were left out of those reopening plans.

And so I, from my position in the symphony, began individual conversations with the local health officials at San Luis Obispo County kind of saying, hey, you know, what's the deal? We just renewed 100,000 in subscriptions. We need to deliver these concerts so we don't have to give the money back. Like, what are we going to do?

And I really wasn't getting any response. I was getting vague answers. We're looking into it. We'll get back to you. I don't know. And eventually, our chief health officer got kind of terse with me and he was like, well, we don't have guidelines, so we don't know what to tell you. Just, you just can't do anything. And I mean, I'm not someone who takes that for an answer, personally, and so I kind of got into it. We did.

But you know, soon, once the frustration wore off, I realized that my lone voice, as squeaky of a wheel as I can be when I set my mind to it, it was too small for this issue. And although I was expressing an issue that was facing our entire arts community in the county, I wasn't going to gain any traction unless I could find a way to amplify that message.

And so you know, I realized in our conversations with the coalition that each individual member of the coalition was having those same unsuccessful conversations, and they just weren't going anywhere. And so I brought up the concept of a coalition signed advocacy letter with the idea that we could all make a unified message, and then maybe that could be amplified and listened to, and shared with local officials. And indeed, we did. And that letter is included in the handouts, if you'd like to use it for a reference or a template. And if it isn't, Sarah will tell me how to do that.

WEBER: I think we're going to upload it to the app at some point.

MILLER: Yeah, yeah.

WEBER: It's a nice advocacy letter as a template.

MILLER: Yeah. So we got over 50 signatures, including some from the really well known and well connected restaurant and winery owners, which, if you know, San Luis Obispo County, like, that is wine. That is the other wine country, but those are really like the big money industries there. We got some of the big board members of the major organizations signing the letter. We got individual

artists and supporters. There are a couple of key donor that are on, or have been on, every single arts board in town, and so we got some of those names signing the letter, and that really made an impact.

And so the letter was shared with our elected officials as well as our local media, and it attracted really a lot of exposure in the media. And it kind of turned up the heat on the county health department, and they were like, okay, you're serious. And so really, they started listening, and they started engaging with us in a generative dialogue instead of just being like, oh, my gosh, Anna is so annoying. So that was good.

And so really, we started, through that kind of grassroots advocacy, we started to position our group as a partner and an ally with the county health department instead of just kind of a nagging pest. And really what we learned through those one on one conversations, when we finally got invited to the table to have those, is that they also had a problem. They had no guidance from the state on what to direct us to do.

And the counties weren't allowed to do anything less strict than what the state was doing. And so if the state had no guidance, the county had no guidance, and couldn't do anything. And so you know, maybe it was their attempt to pass the buck and say, hey, you know, talk to the state. But again, not being willing to take no for an answer I said, okay, I sure will.

And so that's what we did. We directed those letters up to the state level, began individual conversations through Californians for the Arts, who was doing a lot of that kind of—they were kind of a conduit, connecting all of the questions and all of the answers. And Sarah was also very connected with them. And so through that, I actually got invited to become a part of the Californians for the Arts Reopen the Arts Safely Taskforce.

And so those were the conversations we were really getting first hand from GO-Biz, which is the state office that's making those decisions about the guidelines. What is their reasoning? What is their timing? What are the metrics they are looking for? When is this going to happen? And so finally, we kind of had the chance to ask the right question of the right people, and that was so helpful in kind of this particular challenge that we had.

And so soon after that, we actually did get some state guidelines through, which was huge for really all of us, I think. And then sometime later, the state, kind of at a state level, had those new guidelines, and things kind of seemed to be going better.

And then in our little slow county, however, our health officials determined that the K-12, which was the music education guidelines, they decided to apply those to professional orchestras and music and opera and theater programs. And so for example, at the symphony, we couldn't have winds and brass on stage. That was it.

And the county health department said, well, just have them bag their instruments, you know? Have them wear these modified masks and do all of this stull that the high school and middle school band teachers are doing to keep the kids safe.

You know, they just didn't understand that that's not appropriate. We had Broadway shows coming in the performing arts. We're not going to ask the national tour of Hairspray to wear masks on stage. They're just not going to come. But because of our previous inroads, we were able to be part of the dialogue. We were able to sit down. I was able to speak to that chief health official personally and I

really—instead of my previous tactic of trying to be annoying and kind of put pressure on her, I really tried to be as much of an ally and a partner as I could.

Because those government officials, they do have a lot going on, and they do have a hard job, especially during COVID. They don't have a handbook for it, either, just like we don't. I think my exact conversation was, hey, I know you have so much going on. You literally signed my daughter's birth certificate last month. And now you're trying to decide how to keep us all safe on stage, and how to keep the children safe in the high school and band practice.

So you know, I get it. We don't expect you to know how that is impacting our industry, but I'd really like to help. I'd like to be part of the solution and I'd like to have a conversation. And I need to share that these practices are just not working for our artists, and they are hindering our ability to deliver the programs that we have promised to our audiences and to our donors.

And that impact is possibly going to have really bad financial results on a lot of these local groups. So how can we come together? You know, how can we find a middle ground, and how can we go forward?

And I just really felt like having a seat at that table made a difference in the leeway we were able to gain. And about a week later, the county did release specific guidelines for performing arts to give us our own specific set of kind of exceptions to the previous rules, which really helped. And so finally, we could return to the stage. Maybe, what, six months after the rest of the state? But you know, better late than never.

And that brought us back to April, 2020, which we asked, how do we get the audience to come back?

And so from my time working with community foundations and serving on grant panels, I kind of fell in love with the concept of broad collaborations, and how one financial gift could kind of lift all ships and kind of impact a lot of different areas.

And so in sitting down with our local community foundation, we developed the idea of a shared—at the time we called it the Return to Stage Festival. You know, kind of a broadly, they called it radically inclusive effort to bring all of the performing arts back to the stage. And they actually allocated their entire spring arts grant fund pool to this project.

And this was all to our little volunteer run coalition, which was just like 40 executive directors sitting together on Zoom. So it was pretty cool. And that was \$55,000. We got another \$20,000 from another foundation and got an in kind sponsorship as well for marketing. And the concept really kind of shifted and morphed, thanks to COVID a lot of times, but we did finally get that done. And it was our Spark the Arts Festival, which was a county wide effort. So that was really exciting.

And so yeah, so I recently, just to kind of wrap up, I recently made a values based shift away from symphonic music over to higher education advancement. And I'm really happy to say, and important for you all to know in your own groups that you might start, that because Chris and I implemented a good succession planning right from the outset, the group seamlessly carried on and the festival was carried out under the second wave leadership, which was really awesome. And absolutely everything that I just described, it could be repeated by you or someone in your organization or your community if you have a heart for service and collaboration.

And so I'll just wrap up with my own simple step by step if I can have two more minutes, Sarah?

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WEBER: Maybe 30 more seconds.

MILLER: Thirty seconds only? Okay. So find your community networks or make them. Identify one or two leaders in your sphere. Engage them in regenerative conversation. Test the waters with an initial meeting. Repeat through regular meetings. Let things be organic and then you get a sense of the needs. Create your shared purpose. And protect your safe space, being ready for big personalities. Over time, establishing ground rules. And then eventually, transition to new leadership to ensure that the group reflects the needs of the community.

So yeah, thank you so much for including me. Please reach out. And we're also going to be hiring a manager for our new performing arts center at Fresno Pacific University. So if you know anybody interested in that, please get in touch. That's my shameless plug. Thank you.

WEBER: Thank you, Anna. Thank you. Look what can happen when you start looking for somebody to drink with, and then all of a sudden you have reopening guidelines and a festival. That's amazing.

All right, now we're going to jump to Jim Tibbs with the Berkeley Symphony, and he's going to share a story about creating community partners to amplify programming, during the pandemic and coming out of the pandemic. So take it away, Jim.

JIM TIBBS: Good morning, everyone. So I'm actually going to talk about two examples of partnerships that we have forged in the last couple of years. But before I do that, I'm going to set just

a very little bit of context so that you will be able to appreciate the importance of these partnerships that we have formed.

So Berkeley Symphony is celebrating its 50th anniversary this season. We have been committed to performing new music and supporting the work of diverse composers really for our entire history. I mean, it's part of the DNA of Berkeley Symphony.

We have commissioned over 50 new works in our 50 year history, and have performed countless West Coast premieres in that history as well. And in addition, which is probably not a surprise, given that we're in Berkeley, we are really committed to music education and we have a close collaboration with the Berkeley Unified School District, and have been working with the school district for the last 30 years on our Music in the Schools program.

So given all of those successes and achievements, you would think that Berkeley Symphony is a well-known entity in Berkeley, but unfortunately, that is not the case. We somewhat kiddingly say that Berkeley Symphony is one of the best kept secrets in Berkeley. We have a real brand awareness problem.

So back in 2019, when we hired our new music director, Joseph Young, that was in June of 2019. We decided that strategically, this was an ideal opportunity to double down on community engagement, because we had a music director from outside the area to introduce. And the best way that we could invest our resources was to create a really visible presence in the community, and to start building awareness for the Berkeley Symphony, but also for Joseph Young.

And we were well on the way to executing that strategy. We had had some really wonderful events in and around Berkeley. But then, of course, the pandemic hit in March of 2020, and we were like, okay, what now? How are we going to engage with the community? Where do we go from here with this strategy? And of course, we are a \$1.3 million orchestra, so we are resource constrained in terms of what we could do.

So we had a brainstorming session in March of 2020, in terms of looking at what the needs of the community might be, and what value can we bring? And what type of project can we take on that we could actually execute that would help us deliver on our engagement opportunities, but also serve the community?

So we decided, with all of the school children that by that point or shortly thereafter would be at home, that something that was both educational as well as entertaining, and would be available online, would be a good starting point. Especially because we, at least, have a long history with music education.

So we came up with the idea of doing something that combined storytelling with music. And we weren't exactly sure how to execute it, and we didn't really think that we had the resources to be able to do it all on our own. So I cold called the head of the Berkeley Public Library Foundation to say, Cathy, you don't know me, but—a conversation very similar to the one that Scott described.

So I pitched the idea of Berkeley Symphony and the Berkeley Public Library working together to create some sort of video series. And she just jumped all over the opportunity. As it turns out, they had had a similar brainstorming session in terms of trying to figure out how they could create digital content. And Cathy, being a music lover, and knowing that many people in Berkeley are music lovers, 520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018 1602 L Street, NW, Suite 611, Washington, DC 20036 americanorchestras.org

she thought it was just a brilliant combination in terms of doing a storytelling series that incorporated music and making it available free online.

So the outcome is, Reading is Instrumental, which is the name of the series, has produced 15 videos. We have had over 40,000 views. Our celebrity readers have included Rita Moreno, Andy Samberg, W. Kamau Bell, and a variety of other local celebrities, many of whom you wouldn't have heard of. And it's now become a regular part of our music education program. It has been so successful that it's something that we want to continue with moving forward. And it was launched literally during the worst part of the pandemic. And I'll talk at the very end in terms of what it has done for Berkeley Symphony strategically.

So now we're going to fast forward to summer of 2021. And by that point, the reality of reopening seemed like it might really happen, so we once again started to think about, okay, what type of reopening does Berkeley Symphony want to have? We knew that we had an anniversary coming up, so we started to formulate this idea of some sort of outdoor music festival in downtown Berkeley that we could use as a way of celebrating the 50th anniversary, but it would also be a way of attracting people back into the downtown area to support the businesses that were struggling. Because Berkeley, like cities all over the country, have had a lot of retail closures, restaurant closures.

So once again, our dreams were bigger than what our budget can afford in terms of taking on something of that magnitude. So I called our good friends at the Downtown Berkeley Association, which is similar to the Chamber of Commerce, except that the Downtown Berkeley Association is this amazingly functional, well-funded group, and they know how to get things done.

So they loved the idea of creating some sort of festival. And in April of 2022, on April 9th, we were the finale for the Front Row Festival, which occurred right in the heart of downtown Berkeley. They closed Shattuck Avenue, which is the main thoroughfare that goes right through Berkeley. And at five o'clock that afternoon, Berkeley Symphony performed in the middle of Shattuck Avenue with an 80 person orchestra. And it was 40 professional musicians and 40 student musicians from the three—we have three spectacular youth orchestras in Berkeley.

So it was this amazing community event that was so uplifting. And of course, really, quite honestly, I can't think of a better way of celebrating Berkeley Symphony's 50th anniversary than the festival that we created.

So are we going to be able to show the videos? We've got a 90 second clip. So the first part of the clip will give you a few highlights of, Reading is Instrumental. And then we've got some fun video from the concert.

[Video playing]

So just to highlight a couple of things in terms of how Berkeley Symphony benefitted from this. As I had mentioned at the start, we are a very small organization. And we made the decision that we wanted to partner with larger organizations where we could leverage their resources in terms of helping us achieve our goals.

And just as an example, Berkeley Symphony has a mailing list of 6,000 patrons. The Berkeley Public Library has a mailing list of 120,000. So they are literally, in terms of their reach, it's 20 times the size

of Berkeley Symphony. And as I've already said, the Downtown Berkeley Association is incredibly influential. So for the small organizations out there, I would highly recommend that you be very targeted in terms of identifying the organizations that you want to work with, because this model has worked very well for us.

But the caveat is that it has to be a win/win situation. And we had to think long and hard in terms of, what are we bringing to the partnership? What investment are we willing to make in terms of time and resources? Because it's got to be mutually beneficial or why would a large organization want to bother working with a small organization?

And I feel like we did an excellent job of creating that value for both the library as well as the Downtown Berkeley Association. And as proof of that, it has been my honor in the last month to accept two different awards, one from the Berkeley Public Library, and the other from the Downtown Berkeley Association, as Community Partner of the Year for Berkeley Symphony. So they were so appreciative of the ideas that we brought to them, and the way that we worked with them, that they actually gave us awards for doing it, when if anything, we should have been giving them the awards.

So anyway, that's my story.

WEBER: Thank you, Jim, and thanks for sharing the reel. That was so inspiring. All right, so now we're going to once again switch gears to Mieko Hatano with the Oakland Symphony, and she is going to talk about collaboration as a way to rebuild, restart, but then just take it and run with it, so much so that your organization is nationally known for being collaborative. Which I think the Oakland Symphony is. So Mieko, share your story. Take it away.

MIEKO HATANO: Thank you so much, Sarah. And actually, I want to start our story pre-COVID. In fact, probably when I was maybe in fifth grade. So a long time ago.

Before we were known as one of the most collaborative and inclusive orchestras in the country, we were actually known for something kind of sad. Arts managers, how many of you have read, Autopsy of an Orchestra? All right, maybe not as many. Maybe it's not required reading any more for arts managers. But we were actually known as the first symphony orchestra in the country to go bankrupt. And this was a really scary thing, and funders and granters, Hewitt Foundation, Ford Foundation, Irvine Foundation, all of the big foundations, they couldn't understand why this happened.

And so they commissioned this report to figure out why. And so I do recommend you all read it because frankly, it's actually still really relevant to our orchestras today, unfortunately. But that was something that we kind of became known for.

But we also knew that Oakland still needed an orchestra. And the community realized that, and the city realized that, and that was when our first collaboration happened. It was a group of volunteers, a group of dedicated musicians. And Kaiser Permanente and the city of Oakland came together and provided the nest egg for the first two years of Oakland Symphony restarting. So 50/50. So we had a corporate, government and community partnership in order to get this really valuable asset to our civic community restarted.

So fast forward from there, you know—well, not too much, but we start the orchestra, and trust had been broken by the bankruptcy. All of the donors, all of the patrons, the subscribers, you know, all of that was just broken, so there was literally no audience. So we can kind of relate to that today, where about 50 percent, 40 percent of our audiences have been decimated by COVID.

And then Michael Morgan, who we are honoring today, he was hired as our first music director of the restart. And the question was, how do we rebuild trust and how do we rebuild an audience for this orchestra that is trying to restart, and be that asset to the community once again? And that became the start of ours strategy to collaborate with our community, and community arts organizations. Most specifically, choruses.

So chorus culture is actually really, really important to our orchestra. And so we reached out to the Oakland Symphony Chorus at the time after the bankruptcy. They continued on on their own, and had their own organization. And really started to lean into doing multiple choral concerts every year.

We had a holiday concert that incorporated that chorus, high school choruses, you know, any kind of chorus we could bring, because choruses bring their family members, their kids, their friends. I mean, if you're in a chorus, you have on speed dial all of those people, and they are all expected to come. I mean, like chorus members will tick off their guest list and just make sure. Otherwise, you are going to hear about it. So it is one of the most effective ways to get an audience in right away.

So that was one way that we started really rebuilding trust, through these choruses and through, again, these community trusted groups of people. So then, after that, Michael started really getting involved into the community. And he was board members on multiple other arts organizations, and he would bring those groups to perform on stage with the symphony. Again, enriching the

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partnership culture, doing cross pollination of genres on our stage. And again, building the trust though these other trusted organizations in the community.

And throughout the years, as we got much bigger, our audience grew to outnumber any of those organizations. But we were founded in all of those groups, and we still, today, have people who support both parts of it. And now, we have the opportunity, 30 years later, to be giving back to those organizations to make sure that awareness is constantly going back to them as well as back to us.

So it's something that we never forgot where we came from. Part of that, Michael Morgan having been a part of that restart, and understanding how tough that was to begin with. And how grateful we were to our community and to our community partners to help us get restarted.

So today, we've kind of leaned into that more as we have continued to want to bring in more people, more audience members, more institutional awareness in our community in Oakland. So we started a hall pass program, in partnership with social service organizations all around Oakland. We started with Alameda County Social Services, and we have little membership cards that we give out, and that they can then give out to their people. We have partnered with Planned Parenthood, the free clinic. We have recidivism programs that we are involved with, affordable housing units. I mean, you name it and we have tried to partner with them. And we have learned a lot from that.

But again, to go out and utilize the networks of these social service organizations to bring awareness and to build our audience. One piece of research, you say, well, if they are getting free tickets, how does that help us financially? Well, studies show that people who receive services like from the State of California Social Services, they don't tend to stay on that for more than two years.

So what are you doing for them in their time of need? Especially emotionally, financially. If you are there for them, they are going to remember that, and they're going to continue to come back to you and support you. And so that's something that we now have people who, you know, it's single tickets, but at the same time, many of them do actually use it like a subscription. They just say, I'll take my tickets to every single concert.

And we love to welcome them. And they are not only grateful, but they feel like part of it. And it's not a charity as much as it is an invitation to be part of something that is really special in the community. And we appreciate their presence as much as they appreciate being there.

So as we've continued that culture, right now with COVID and that decimation, chorus actually has now been kind of really hard to incorporate. And we have continued to try to do it, but it has been really, really tough. But it's still an opportunity to continue to be able to engage. And as we try to rebuild our choruses and our communities and our arts organizations, being able to continue forward and engage with everyone.

And again, rebuild not only the trust in the safety of gathering and all of that, but also just getting out there and inviting people and ensuring that people get out of their houses eventually and come back. And so we need every individual community member to be going out there and encouraging their family and friends, again, to come back. So those are some of the tools that we used at the very beginning, when we literally had nothing and no one. And that's really what we are going to be relying on going forward.

So we have expanded, obviously, beyond the choruses. We have the Purple Silk Ensemble, which is a Chinese traditional instrument orchestra, for example. We partner with Oakland School for the Arts. We always partner with a high school chorus. You know, all of those different tactics that have been really, really effective.

WEBER: Thank you, Mieko. So we may not have a lot of time for group dialogue at the end or audience dialogue. We'll see how it goes. But we are now going to John Forsyte, who is going to take all of this and his strategic thinking, and sort of wrap it up and bring us together.

JOHN FORSYTE: That's a tough bill.

WEBER: It's a big job, and I'm glad someone else has to take us home. So I'm just going to cue up the tech. Do you want to start while I'm getting the tech going?

FORSYTE: Sure. I'm going to date myself. This is my 29th national conference. I wasn't seeking any—but I say that because a silver lining for me in looking at the trajectory of this field for so many years is that the kinds of topics we're talking about at this conference so far have been completely unique, in my opinion. We're talking about massive networks. We're talking about alliances, inclusion in ways that I don't think we've ever really discussed.

Just yesterday's session, with the L.A. Philharmonic, it's really—I think the silver lining is how resilient this field is, and how optimistic we should be that we have the capacity to create positive change in our communities. And that there's really a very positive future for our field, despite having the most challenging couple of years pretty much for any industry.

So I'm really proud to be on this panel. And I just want to also call out Sarah and ACSO. Are there any non-Californians in the room? Oh, good. So it's obviously a monumental idea to start a network, but these little tips that we've heard today are really, really helpful.

And I'm going to say, my silver lining is to think a lot more about mental health. And how important it is to really focus on relationships and deepen relationships when you are not together. And I'm going to just start by saying that the musicians of the Pacific Symphony gave me my mental health in the early days of the pandemic. They just came out and exploded online and in sort of guerilla ways in the community that really just was so moving. I think to not just to the symphony staff, but to the board, the community. So we're very lucky to have the orchestra members we do. Thank you.

So I wanted to contextualize where I thought, you know, where are we in the disaster? And ironically, this is not a new slide. This was actually produced by social psychologists in 2000, after analyzing earthquakes, hurricanes and epidemics. And you know, we all went through this kind of pre-disaster assessment. What does it mean to cancel a weeks' worth of concerts? What about a month? You know, 18 different scenarios, right?

There was a heroism stage for all of us, and I think that is one of the biggest silver linings, which is how strong we can be if we pull together as organizations. And that included orchestra members. That included board philanthropy.

I mean, our earned revenue dropped from \$8 million to \$300,000 in about 24 hours. It was really frightening. But there was a heroic call out to support the organization. And then, of course, this is

going to last a lot longer than we anticipated. There was a lot of disillusionment. And there was, frankly, national divide. And some of that divide crept into our organizations. Philosophical, about wellness and how we care for each other, and what does it mean to care for each other?

And you know, throughout all of that there are little ups and downs of hope, right? And I would argue that we are certainly not at the end of the process. I think it's pretty obvious that we are in a reconstruction phase. But the silver lining should be what we're learning together about resilience and collaboration.

Another interesting piece of data is from McKinsey. This was relatively early in the pandemic. But they assess that it's a five year journey to recovery. So as we are building our scenarios, we probably have to be looking at '25 or '26 in terms of recovery. I was in the Group One orchestra meeting yesterday. The median was about 40 percent down in ticket sales. And you know, some were better, were a little stronger, but it's a little slow in the return.

But this slide basically says that the arts and entertainment recreation small business aggregation is going to be one of the last to return to GDP contribution. That's what McKinsey's analysis was. One of the silver linings, as I sort of alluded to, were the orchestra members' own creativity. They started something called virtual symphony mixers.

Our concert master interviewed our principle trumpet player and it was a really interesting interview. And very creative, and very dynamic. And that went on. Our principle flutist, Ben Smolen, started the series. He interviewed everybody from composers to our artistic partners, and our audience became very engaged with how we make art.

So there was this like organizational focus on impact and mission. We all agreed that everything we would produce, and the Pacific Symphony produces over 2,000 discrete educational events, like moments. That everything we produce, which would be online, would be free. And that was a massive commitment.

Everyone on the staff, and I think this would be true for all of you, we suddenly become producers and digital editors and storytellers. That was a big shift for us. We had to, in the spirit of mental health, we started to reach out. We have an arts council convening that is fantastic. That would be maybe, I would just say, if you don't have an arts council, or you do, the local network, it wasn't orchestras. It was the performing arts center. It was museums. That actually proved to be really helpful in the advocacy effort you were talking about.

Just strategic collaborations to magnify impact. We'll talk a little bit more about that in a second. And then this field wide advocacy. California had a terrible record of state funding. And we are resurgent, and a lot of that is coming out of the pandemic. And it's a lot of the effort made by people in this room.

I just as a—and I'm going to speed through this—kind of, what does strategic collaboration mean, and how do you think about it? They are durable commitments. They are not pandemic commitments. They are things that stretch for, hopefully, decades.

There is a joint authority. Orchestras are not used to sharing power. We're a hierarchal organization, music director-focused, often. I think you've heard some incredible examples of how power and

authority are jointly shared. And when you look for partners, it's important to have common objectives, comprehensive planning, long term planning to launch your partnership.

I mean, there was expedience in our situations. But ideally, as we move forward, we are building a much more durable, long term, strategic alignment. Obviously, there can be the growth in customer base, and growth in philanthropy through these efforts.

I will speak to two strategic alliances that we have formed. We have been producing a lunar new year event. It was put online. And our Lantern Festival was produced online virtually through partnerships with the South Coast Chinese Cultural Center/Irvine Chinese School. They are a joint organization. And then to your right you will see some of the online coaching that [indiscernible] did with San Ana Strings, which is a boys and girls club partnership. All pre-dated the pandemic.

But what was so wonderful about this was really just their desire to continue these partnerships, even as their income, their staffs were being challenged and in some cases reduced. They felt very strongly about continuing.

With the South Coast Chinese School/Irvine Chinese School, for the Lantern Festival you can see produced here. Five thousand people come onsite for free in our concert hall. It's a full day event. It was unaltered during the pandemic except it went online. Highly collaborative.

One of our other partnership elements was to form a multi-generational orchestra of parents with their kids, called Strings for a Generation. In Asian-American culture, the relationship between parent

and child in the cultural milieu is really important, so we formed that orchestra. The artistic work seeped into other things we were doing in the subscription series.

We learned a lot. And one of the things we learned is it's not just Chinese-American culture, Korean, Vietnamese. We started to incorporate multiple streams of Asian cultures in this event. And there was great media visibility. And from media that we don't always relate to, foreign language media, and sometimes you're getting international viewers, which was exciting.

Almost everybody is new to file that comes into the hall. We ask for a ticket and data input. We issued tickets even though it's free.

Some keys to partnership. I queried one of the leaders on a symphony staff, Allison Levinson, about how she thinks about these partnerships, and she shared some thoughts with me; mutual gain, humility and listening. I can't emphasize that enough. When we approached the Irvine Chinese School, it didn't start with us. It started with, is there a role for us in advancing your organization that you can think of? And we just started brainstorming.

A lot of joint decision making, finding partners with similar goals. The goal of the South Coast Chinese Cultural Center, Boys and Girls Club, is elevating children, elevating the emotional experiences. We found common links.

You know, artistic quality. If we focus on these traditional notions of execution, ensemble perfection, don't make mistakes, it doesn't really resonate with a lot of other organizations in the same way.

And I think that's often been an inhibitor with partnerships. So we have to redefine, what does artistic quality mean? And it doesn't mean lesser or greater. It's not so objective. Based on meaning; success is really about the meaning to the participants, the outcomes, the wellness, the reporting. When we did a survey of what we were an antidote for as an orchestra, 40 percent of the respondents said, stress. I don't know, maybe that's the pandemic.

We have to find multi-year partnerships in the philanthropy community, because if we start these partnerships and they erode over one year, it's a lost trust; a loss of sufficient time to develop trust and co-create programs. You've heard about the investment.

I want to just report on this amazing partnership with John Wineglass, who is a member of the ACSO board and a beautiful composer. And he wrote a stunning piece, but it was initiated by smaller orchestras in the state of California. It wasn't a Pacific Symphony initiated project, but we signed onto it. And we learned a lot about this collaborative way of producing art, and how a work can immediately have multiple performances in a close in regional way.

So John wrote this piece, about a 10, 12 minute piece for strings called, "Alone Together," his response to isolation, racial unrest, and hope. And it's an extremely beautiful work. It resonated in every community in which it was performed. And I think as a result, our music director got to know John, through, again, small orchestras that had the idea.

And he is a friend. And he is going to be writing a violin concerto for our concert master next year. So I think there is just so much artistic work we can do in the state, regionally, if we're not already.

I'll just comment on the fact that because I'm an old-timer, I have been hanging with the same CEOs since 1991. We go to places where there are bison roaming. Once a year, we find a yearly retreat site, we rotate destinations. So we see each other as parts of the country. It's intense. We exercise together. We get hurt physically together. I have fallen off bicycles, horses, turned over in rafting experiences. You know, now these people run the San Francisco Symphony, Baltimore Symphony. They are major leaders.

But we were running Rockford, Kalamazoo, Elgin. We grew up in the field. And I just would strongly urge you to find friends with whom you stay close as you are going on this journey. You will stay in the field longer. You will stay. I mean, I've been in my job 24 years. I need the relationships to stay fresh, to be challenged, to think differently. It's critical you have those relationships.

We do bring consultants in. You know, people that you see that the conference will Zoom in. That's a powerful tool. And we just move through life together. We talk about children, raising kids as orchestra managers or spousal relationships. And it's a safe place.

Lastly, because we're almost out of time, these are just some of the questions I'm asking myself about the future in a long recovery scenario. How do ongoing partnerships strengthen your impact? What capacity did you develop that you don't want to lose?

And if you haven't documented your own capacity changes, write it down. Because in two years, as things return to normal, you kind of forget. Or incorporate them into a new strategic plan. What types of partnerships are critical for your strategic goals, obviously. Who are your most trusted resources on programming, policy strategy? Do you have relationships?

And within that cohort I was describing, we're not all good at everything and we don't pretend to be. So we have a few people who are really thoughtful about programmatic design. We have people who are incredible financial analysts, and they can describe scenario development in great detail. So diversify your network of friends.

And then lastly, how will you stand out? So we're asking ourselves—and it's really a difficult thing to go back to core purpose. But we're asking ourselves, what is our differentiated purpose as a symphony orchestra? Because we compete with all of the visiting orchestras in our concert hall; with the major performing art center; with the L.A. Philharmonic, 40 miles away; with Pasadena; with Long Beach. What is our unique gift to the Orange County community?

And I think it's time to just reassess. It doesn't mean we are discarding our traditions, but do we have a differentiated purpose? And one of the things that we have been talking about is, what is our role in care and mental wellness? And how would we look through that lens to programming design? So thank you very much.

WEBER: Thank you, John. Well, we have truly run out of any time for conversation, which is not very collaborative. I'm sorry. But I wanted these stories to be told, because they are so important. And I hope we've convinced you, by the end of this session, that in a post-pandemic world, we cannot go it alone in any respect or capacity.

Personally, professionally, in our organizations, in our communities, collaboration is what is going to continue to make us a relevant art form, continue to make sure our orchestras survive that five year rebuild timeframe.

So please find any of us, chat with us. I think we'll put some of these resources on the conference app. And thank you so much for being here. I'm sorry we couldn't hear from you, but come talk to us. Yes, yes, thank you very much.