

# WHERE DO WE STAND?

**Conductors of Western classical orchestras have almost all been White men. Few American orchestras hired Black conductors and fewer still put a Black music director on the podium, and many Black musical artists had to head to Europe to build careers. That’s changing—the past several years have seen an increase in the number of Black conductors and music directors at U.S. orchestras. But two decades into the 21st century, are things moving far enough, fast enough?**

By Rosalyn Story

Seventy years ago, when a young Black American conductor was canvassing Europe for conducting opportunities, a Swedish concert manager offered him an extraordinary proposition. If the conductor would consider wearing whitening makeup and white gloves, he told a *New York Times* reporter on July 19, 1970, “an engagement would be considered.”

It was a preposterous notion, even for 1952. Despite that request—which he ignored—Dean Dixon would go on to become music director of Sweden’s Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Germany’s Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and Australia’s Sydney Symphony, and he had a full calendar of international guest-conducting dates, leading as many as 125 concerts a year. In postwar Europe, he would achieve something that was nearly impossible for a Black conductor in the United States: to be regarded as a musician first and foremost, without regard to race. Europe was certainly no post-racial paradise, but during that period in the U.S. there was little hope for an African American with orchestral leadership in mind. The history of Black conductors crafting a career in America mirrors the journey of Black classical singers; before the war, Germany and Austria embraced the artistry of contralto Marian Anderson, tenor Roland Hayes, and others, and their European bona fides boosted their American careers. And if Europe was a more comfortable haven for singers and conductors, that was also true for instrumentalists.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, as Black Americans marched and protested to sit at lunch counters and integrate southern schools and transit systems, Dixon became one of the most successful American conductors in Europe, where he had moved because there were better professional opportunities. Dixon had tried in the U.S., and even formed his own orchestra while a student at Juilliard in the 1930s, but soon gave up on an American career. “I felt like I was on a sinking ship,” Dixon said of his decision to leave the U.S. and move to Europe. “And if I stayed here, I’d drown.”

Others felt the same way. Everett Lee, born in Wheeling, West Virginia just a year after Dixon, studied with Boston Symphony Orchestra Music Director Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood, and was hand-picked by Leonard Bernstein to

conduct *On the Town* on Broadway in the 1940s. In 1947, he founded an orchestra in New York, the Cosmopolitan Symphony Society, made up of musicians of multiple races and ethnicities. Interracial orchestras were exceedingly rare at that time anywhere in the U.S.

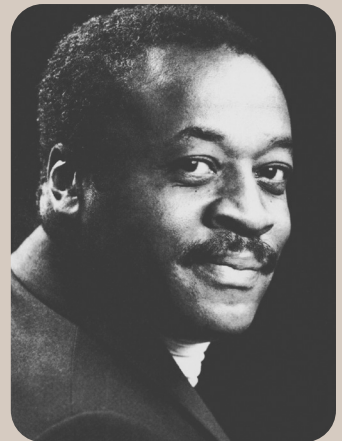
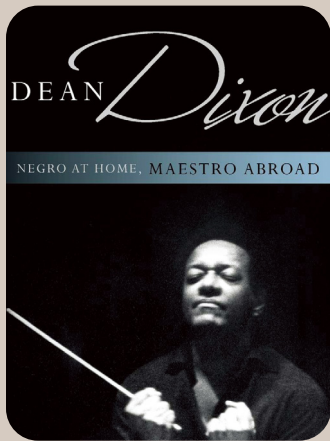
For Lee, there were some guest-conducting appearances in the States, including a New York City Opera production of *La traviata*, but racial bias was strong and opportunities were few. Oscar Hammerstein II, familiar with Lee’s reputation as a violinist and conductor, considered him to lead a touring orchestra for his shows, but rejected the idea: Southern theaters, Hammerstein argued, would not book them. Lee moved to Germany in 1954. (Lee died in Sweden in January 2022 at age 105).

Another conductor, George Byrd, born in North Carolina in 1926, trained at Juilliard and led more than 80 European and U.S. orchestras during his career; he studied with Herbert von Karajan and was mostly based in Germany. (Byrd died in Munich in 2010.)

Like Dixon, Lee, and Byrd, Rudolph Dunbar also had a fine musical pedigree. The Juilliard graduate and native of British Guyana was a dashing figure on the podium, and broke color barriers when he conducted the London Philharmonic in 1942. Dunbar, a clarinetist, trained at the Sorbonne and had a wide-ranging career that included work as a jazz musician, World War II correspondent, and music critic. Dunbar returned to America and conducted at the Hollywood Bowl in the late 1940s. The war was over and Americans were coming home. As Brian Lauritzen reported at KDFC radio in 2018, when Dunbar was asked if he would now settle in the U.S., he replied, “I think I will make my home in Paris where, if you are good they will applaud you whether you are pink, white, or black.”

## Incremental Change

It has been many decades since the era of Dixon, Byrd, Lee, and Dunbar, and for most of the ensuing years Black conductors were rarely hired as music directors at U.S. orchestras. There have been notable exceptions. In 1968, the New Jersey



Left to right: Conductors Dean Dixon (1915-76), Rudolph Dunbar (1907-99), Everett Lee (1916-2022), and George Byrd (1926-2010) all built their careers primarily in Europe, after being denied opportunities to lead orchestras in the United States. Dixon is shown on the cover of Rufus Jones's 2018 biography conducting Switzerland's Tonhalle Orchester Zurich.

Symphony Orchestra tapped Henry Lewis as music director. James DePreist was a long-time music director of the Oregon Symphony, serving from 1980 to 2003. At the Oakland Symphony in California, Michael Morgan had a lasting impact on the community during his 30 years as music director, and he also served as music director of the Gateways Festival Orchestra, which connects and supports professional classical musicians of African descent. Morgan was also music director of the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera and of California's Bear Valley Music Festival. (Morgan died in August 2021 at age 63.) Thomas Wilkins has been a longstanding podium presence in the States: from 2005 to 2021, he served as music director of the Omaha Symphony, and he continues to hold positions as principal conductor of the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and as the Boston Symphony Orchestra's artistic advisor, education and community engagement. William Henry Curry has served as music director of the Durham Symphony Orchestra in North Carolina since 2009. Leslie Dunner, currently conductor of the Interlochen Arts Academy Orchestra in Michigan, has held many music director posts, including the Nova Scotia Symphony, Annapolis Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra, Joffrey Ballet Company, and the South Shore Opera Company of Chicago. While there are these and other mid-career Black music directors in the U.S., their rarity indicates that they are the outstanding exceptions that prove the

rule. And the near-total absence of Black women being hired as music directors raises further concerns.

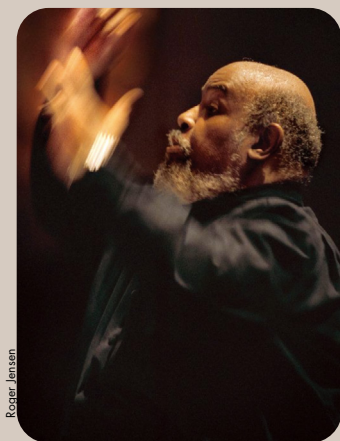
More recently, there has been an uptick in the number of Black music directors. From 2013 to 2021, Andrew Grams served as music director of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra in Illinois. Joseph Young became music director of California's Berkeley Symphony in 2019; the same year, Anthony Parnter was hired as music director of California's San Bernardino Symphony. Meanwhile, the number of assistant, associate, youth, and pops conductors has increased exponentially, and the many Black artists making a living on the podium today are too numerous to mention all of them here. Their ranks include Kevin John Edusei, recently appointed as principal guest conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony; Kenneth Bean, assistant conductor of New Jersey's Princeton Symphony Orchestra and Symphony in C; Byron Stripling, principal pops conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra; Jonathan Rush, assistant conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra; Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser, principal youth conductor Canada's National Arts Centre

**WHY ARE THERE MORE  
BLACK CONDUCTORS  
NOW IN AMERICA?  
WHAT HAS CHANGED?**

Orchestra; Kalena Bovell, assistant conductor of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra; Kellen Gray, assistant conductor of the U.K.'s Royal Scottish National Orchestra and associate conductor of the Charleston Symphony; Damon Gupton, principal guest conductor of the Cincinnati Pops; and Antoine Clark, assistant conductor of West Virginia's Wheeling Symphony Orchestra. (Roderick Cox and Joseph Young, who were interviewed for this article, are alumni of the League of American Orchestras Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview.)

And when it comes to the guest-conducting circuit, there are yet more Black conductors making their way onto orchestral podiums: American conductor Kazem Abdullah, based in Germany, with an active career on both sides of the Atlantic; Canada's Kwame Ryan, who was general music director of Germany's Freiburg Opera (1999-2003) and music and artistic director of the National Orchestra of Bordeaux Aquitaine (2007-13) and has guest-conducting dates in the U.S. and Europe; and Jonathan Heyward, chief conductor of Germany's Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie. In addition, some conductors have blazed their own paths: Jeri Lynne Johnson founded the Philadelphia-based Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra in 2008, and Jason Ikeem Rodgers founded his own orchestra, the Atlanta-based Orchestra Noir, in 2016.

Why are there more Black conductors now in America? What has changed? It could be argued that leaps



Bozener Jensen



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Ken Ceril



Four 20th-century American conductors who served as music directors of U.S. orchestras were among the exceptions that prove the rule. Left to right: Oregon Symphony Music Director James DePreist, Gateways Music Festival Orchestra Music Director Michael Morgan, New Jersey Symphony Music Director Henry Lewis, and Chicago Sinfonietta Founder and Music Director Paul Freeman.

SEVERAL BLACK CONDUCTORS SAY THEY ARE WORKING TO CREATE STRUCTURAL CHANGE SO THAT THE NEXT GENERATION CAN SUCCEED AND BENEFIT FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES.

of progress, where race is concerned, are cyclical. If that is true, it explains the success of Dixon when he returned to the United States in 1970. It was the height of the Civil Rights movement. After a 20-year absence during which he was largely forgotten in his homeland despite rave reviews abroad, Dixon returned to the U.S. to conduct not only the New York Philharmonic, but also orchestras in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. When an Australian reporter asked about the belated invitation from the Philharmonic, Dixon replied, “It was not because I was suddenly a better conductor, but because black was suddenly beautiful.”

After the marches and sit-ins of the '50s and the racial unrest and consciousness-raising of the '60s, Black artists were having a defining moment in the '70s, and the argument could be made that the resurgent Black Lives Matter

movement, after assaults on unarmed Blacks and galvanized by the murder of George Floyd by police, produced a similar moment. At the same time, pandemic lockdowns forced many orchestras to take a critical look at themselves and take steps to address the lack of Black musicians, onstage and on the podium. Several people interviewed for this article said they are working to mentor younger Black conductors, to create structural change so that the next generation of Black conductors can succeed and benefit from their own experiences.

### Atlantic Divide

I spoke with Blake-Anthony Johnson, who in 2020 became president and CEO of the Chicago Sinfonietta, an orchestra founded by Black conductor Paul Freeman in 1987 with a stated vision of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Johnson, a cellist and Atlanta native, notes that when he was on the orchestral audition circuit, he found more full-time work in Europe, playing with ensembles such as Chineke!, the London-based orchestra composed of musicians of varied racial backgrounds, and Sinfonia Polonia in Poland before returning to the U.S. With the Chicago Sinfonietta appointment, he became one of the very few Black CEOs at any American orchestra. He says that as a Black American classical musician in Europe, he found a greater sense of acceptance as well as a thriving, welcoming community of Black “ex-pat” instrumentalists, filling out the ranks of orchestras in countries throughout the

Continent. Johnson notes that opportunities may be greater with European orchestras because in Europe, Blacks from the U.S. are considered American first, while racial identity is secondary. “In the States, you are Black first,” he says, whereas in Europe “you get to navigate the world and your artistry without the baggage that you have in the States. It’s the release of that baggage that allows you to focus on your artistry.” He took a position in administration, he says, because many mentors he admires, including Michael Tilson Thomas and Yo-Yo Ma, encouraged him to find his own path and not limit himself to the concert stage. In his new role, Johnson is addressing issues of inclusion and diversity head-on; he moderated a session at the League of American Orchestras’ 2021 National Conference titled “Showing Up for Racial Equity.”

After George Floyd’s murder, suddenly arts organizations became aware of a glaring lack of inclusion and diversity within their ranks. Statements supporting the movement sprang up on orchestra websites. “There were more Black people that got university and conservatory positions. I’m sure some of it was because of George Floyd,” Johnson says. But he argues that the reason more Black Americans were hired is irrelevant. “If people are thinking I was a diversity hire, so what? It doesn’t matter what it is. At the end of the day you still have to produce.”

The spring of 2020 also saw the beginning of a pandemic lockdown, allow-





Surie Knoll

“We are starting to see gradual and meaningful expressions of interest and championing by institutions, some more than others,” says **Andrew Grams**. “The shift that has happened has forced the hand of organizations.”



Surie Knoll

American conductor **Roderick Cox**, currently based in Germany, conducts on both sides of the Atlantic.



Marco Borggreve

**Kevin John Edusei**, the incoming principal guest conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony.



Konstantin Golovchinsky

**Anthony Parnter** is music director of the San Bernardino Symphony. In April, he conducted concerts by the Gateways Festival Orchestra in Rochester, New York and at Carnegie Hall.



Jeff Reiffman

**Joseph Young**, music director of California’s Berkeley Symphony.

ing more time not only for news-watching, but also reflection, as concerts, tours, and performances were cancelled worldwide. During the shutdown and Black Lives Matter demonstrations, Germany-based American conductor Roderick Cox was at home in Berlin. “I was in Berlin, going to a huge march, and it surprised me that there were so many German people, and to see such support,” says Cox. He says that looking from the outside into the U.S. was sobering: “It was distressing, the hate groups, the leaders that were not setting the right tone for calming and bringing people together, too many forces that work on pulling people apart on the left and the right.”

Cox, a former Minnesota Orchestra associate conductor and 2018 recipient of the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, is the subject of an upcoming PBS/FilmNorth biographical documentary titled *Conducting Life*. A native of Macon, Georgia, Cox has an active guest-conducting career in the U.S. and Europe, and he has been active in efforts to ensure that others are able to follow in his path. In 2019 he founded the Roderick Cox Music Initiative, a scholarship program to support teenage musicians of color for things like summer music camps, instrument purchase and repair, advanced training, private lessons, and mentorship.

When the pandemic shutdown found him with an empty schedule, he hosted an online video discussion with three other Black conductors: Jonathon

Heyward, Thomas Wilkins, and Michael Morgan. For four Black men representing two different generations—Heyward and Cox were in their 30s while Morgan and Wilkins were over 60—there was a lot to talk about. “I wanted to get their viewpoints,” Cox says. The discussion was candid and wide-ranging. All four agreed, Cox recalls, that orchestras are eager to hire Black conductors during February—Black History Month—but afterwards, not so much. In that discussion, while Wilkins maintained that every job was an opportunity for learning and growth, Cox says, “For many African American conductors I’ve spoken to, they’ve talked about the community concerts, the education concerts and the pops concerts and the classical roots concerts and the MLK concerts, and it stops short of going further than that. This can sometimes pigeonhole conductors into doing repertory that orchestras deem them ‘qualified’ to conduct.”

Michael Morgan said, “Almost every orchestra has something about Black Lives Matter on their website, but if you look at their season, there are almost no Black composers. Don’t tell me about Black Lives Matter, and then none of it’s reflected in your season.”

Hiring more Black conductors should result in more diverse programming, challenging audiences to reconsider old traditions, perhaps by pairing Black composers’ works with familiar pieces, for example canonical works by German composers. As with the rediscovery of the lost music of Black compos-

er Florence Price, conductors and music directors are reimagining programming choices. In 2021, Andrew Grams, after completing his time as music director of the Elgin Symphony, conducted a concert with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra modeled on the traditional overture/concerto/symphony format, but the overture was by Black composer William Grant Still, and the concerto was by Florence Price. The program ended with Beethoven’s Third Symphony.

“It was really great to bear witness to how these two unknown pieces stood up to the masterpiece,” Grams says. “The music of the first half was based on the teaching of people like Beethoven but composed with a uniquely African American vernacular and meaning, definitely a specific voice, but using the language of serious Western composition.” Other orchestras and ensembles, inspired or challenged by the Black Lives Matter protests, have performed similar programs.

### A Sense of Self

If the 2020 protests and the forced isolation of the pandemic lockdown did nothing else, they allowed Black conductors to reassess their purpose, their identity, and their place in the world of classical music. Grams is of mixed-race heritage (his mother is Black and his father is White) but identifies as Black. A native of Maryland, he studied violin at Juilliard and conducting under Otto-Werner Mueller at the Curtis Institute.

A self-described “light-skinned,



**Blake-Anthony Johnson**, president and CEO of the Chicago Sinfonietta, says, “In the States, you are Black first,” whereas in Europe “you get to navigate the world and your artistry without the baggage that you have in the States. It’s the release of that baggage that allows you to focus on your artistry.”



LeCrestia Kaliba

Roderick Cox conducts the Nashville Symphony at the League of American Orchestras’ 2016 Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview.

half-Black man,” Grams admits his own skin color has shielded him from negative racial experiences. Coming from a large family of darker-skinned siblings, and often mistaken for White, Grams says the BLM movement allowed him a view through a different lens. “Black Lives Matter opened my eyes to circumstances in Black people’s lives I wasn’t aware of,” he says. “I don’t think the public had any idea of police handling of African American men. Something like that would never happen to me.”

After stepping down from the Elgin Symphony in 2021, Grams sees this time as an opportunity to evaluate his own way forward. His list of guest-conducting engagements is impressive, including orchestras of Chicago, Detroit, Washington, D.C., St. Louis, Cincinnati,

Philadelphia, Baltimore, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and Philadelphia, as well as many orchestras in Europe. But he adds, “I wanted to free up time to work with young people.” He has worked with students at Indiana University, the Curtis Institute, and young musicians at the New World Symphony in Florida, among others. He also has used the time to contemplate the shifting grounds in the industry, as it relates to people of color. Looking back over the last two decades, he sees positive signs. “We are starting to see gradual and meaningful expressions of interest and championing by institutions, some more than others. The shift that has happened has forced the hand of organizations. But the greatest thing that we didn’t have before is an extremely wide and deep talent pool of

artists.”

There have always been more talented candidates than available positions, and that is truer now than ever. Some of today’s emerging podium stars come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring an unusual variety of experiences. San Bernardino Symphony Music Director Anthony Parnter, the son of a Jamaican father and Samoan mother, was an opera singer as well as a professional bassoonist. Parnter describes his parents as hard-working, “no-nonsense immigrants. It was all about work: achieve, achieve, achieve.”

Parnter studied at Yale and Northwestern before doing a two-year stint performing with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and has also conducted California ensembles such as the Inland



RL Wesley



Naima Burrs became music director of Virginia’s Petersburg Symphony Orchestra this year, and William Henry Curry has served as music director of the Durham Symphony Orchestra in North Carolina since 2009.



Valley Symphony, the Orange County Symphony, and the Southeast Symphony; he combines symphonic work with a thriving career as a recording-studio conductor. Of his audition for the San Bernardino post, he says, “You are expected to be overtly demure, respectful, perhaps extra kind. I was far more honest, blunt, and hard-edged than I had been in previous auditions,” he continues. “But they responded well.”

Not only did he get the job, he says he was the orchestra’s and the board’s nearly unanimous pick. Parnter immediately got to work to change business as usual. Testing the waters, he met with 80 Black business and community leaders, and learned that only two had been to hear the orchestra perform. Clearly, there was work to do. When he auditioned in San Bernardino, Parnter says, the orchestra was nearly all-White. After being hired, he insisted on a sub-list of players that would include qualified Black instrumentalists. For his first concert in January 2020, he programmed a Martin Luther King, Jr. tribute, including Black gospel choir and soloists. “It was a hard-hitting concert,” he recalls. “We performed music that tackled slavery, racism, lynching, Jim Crow, Emmett Till, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and much more—not easy for some audiences to sit through,” he says, but adds, “We got more post-concert donations than ever before in the orchestra’s history.”

“I wanted to nudge the orchestra to reflect the community,” he says. “My mission is to make good music with good people. My programming is based on what the orchestra needs to grow, what the community needs to grow, and what I need to grow.”

### Finding Mentors

If Black men conductors must sometimes assert themselves into a new space, Black women conductors may have to create one. The history of American conductors has been overwhelmingly White and overwhelmingly male, and ascendant Black women conductors find a glass ceiling that is double-paned. Before forming the Black Pearl Chamber Ensemble in Philadelphia, Jeri Lynne Johnson says she had auditioned for a conducting job and after losing, asked

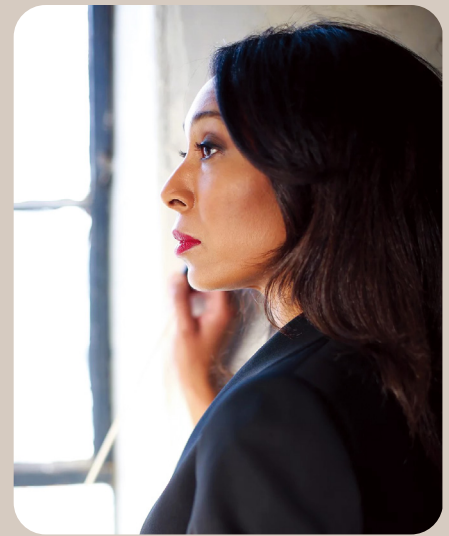
for feedback. “How can I improve?” she asked, and was told, “The orchestra doesn’t know how to market you. You don’t look like what an orchestra conductor should look like.”

Women conductors are rare—though they are gradually becoming less so since the days when Marin Alsop and JoAnn Falletta were the only names most people knew when it came to female music directors of U.S. orchestras. Black women have been even rarer. Kay George Roberts, now 71, trained as a violinist, played in the Nashville Symphony, studied conducting with Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood, and had a guest-conducting career in the U.S. and Europe. She settled in Massachusetts, joined the music faculty at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, where she conducted the New England Orchestra and got involved with the UMass Lowell String Project, a music education program. In a 2009 *UMass Lowell Magazine* article, she said, “As an African-American woman, I am a minority within a minority... You have to fight the isolation black classical musicians face, once they enter the mostly white world of symphony orchestras.”

Today, Kalena Bovell, the young Panamanian American assistant conductor of the Memphis Symphony, is beginning to make her way. Glass Marcano, a native of Venezuela, won the Orchestra Prize in the 2020 La Maestra International Competition for Women Conductors in Paris and is gaining notice as well. In February 2022, Virginia’s Petersburg Symphony Orchestra hired Naima Burrs as music director.

I spoke with Jeri Lynne Johnson about her conducting career. A pianist, she graduated from Wellesley College and won the Benjamin E. Mays Fellowship to study music history and theory at the University of Chicago. She won a Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship in 2005 and eventually would go on to guest conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and New Orleans Opera.

But long before she conducted those orchestras, when she was traveling on the conductor audition circuit, she did not receive employment offers from orchestras despite positive musical responses, because she didn’t look like what the audience expected “the Maestro” to look



Early in her career, conductor **Jeri Lynne Johnson** did not receive employment offers from orchestras despite positive musical responses, because she didn’t look like what the audience expected “the Maestro” to look like. She formed her own ensemble, Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, in 2008.

like. The rejection feedback, she recalls, “enraged” her. “That’s never a good place to be in and not a good place to plan a course of action,” Johnson says. “I was honestly ready to quit. But once I got into a head space where I was able to think, I understood that I had been released from the fantasy that talent and hard work alone were all I needed to succeed. Now I was free to do whatever I wanted to do.”

She wanted to start an orchestra. She learned from her business-savvy father, “it was a matter of having an understanding of just what it takes,” she says. “I do know how to write well, fill out paperwork, pay a fee, register with the state, the IRS. I put one foot in front of the other.” (She also founded DEI Arts Consulting in 2015.)

When she founded the Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra in 2008, Johnson was able to use some of what she had learned during her 2005 Taki Alsop

ASCENDANT BLACK  
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Kevin John Edusei guest conducts a Dallas Symphony Orchestra concert on January 7, 2022, shortly after he was named principal guest conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony, where he begins at the start of the 2022-23 season.



Andrew Grams leads the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2013 to 2021.



Tom Pease

Anthony Parnter conducts the San Bernardino Symphony, where he was appointed music director in 2019.



Joseph Young conducts the Berkeley Symphony at Zellerbach Hall. He became the orchestra's music director in 2019, and also serves as artistic director of ensembles at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.



Jeri Lynne Johnson conducts the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's "Gospel Goes Classical" concert, February 7, 2019.

Conducting Fellowship. "When I won the fellowship," says Johnson, "it was the year Marin Alsop was appointed as music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. It was instructive for me to be behind the scenes"—part of the Taki Alsop fellowship involves mentoring by Alsop—"to watch her manage and negotiate that dynamic. There are always going to be obstacles and people who have issues with various images of authority. There are always going to be people to educate, whose minds need to be changed."

Alsop has inspired not just Black women. Joseph F. Young—music director of the Berkeley Symphony and artistic director of ensembles at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore—had a fortu-

itous meeting with Alsop in 2007. Raised in Goosecreek, South Carolina and the introverted son of a military father, Young had a dream to conduct. With a degree from the University of South Carolina, he seemed headed for a career in music education. "I just went up to Alsop and asked her, 'What should I do?' She said, 'Come and study with me.'" He began conducting studies at Peabody through the conservatory's Conducting Fellows Program in conjunction with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. "It changed my life," he says. At Peabody, he studied conducting under Gustav Meier and Markand Thakar, and he served as a student and assistant to Alsop at the Baltimore Symphony.

Like Jeri Lynne Johnson, Young

witnessed Alsop beginning her tenure, making history, negotiating the sometimes patchy terrain of newly broken ground as the Baltimore Symphony's first woman music director. It was a moment of inspiration for Young, he says, to "watch someone like that deal with issues she had to deal with, the first woman to come in and make a difference. It helped me translate it to my life. If she can find a way to persevere over adversity, how can I do the same as a Black man?"

As a young Black conductor emerging at a complex time, Young is thoughtful about the current moment and what it bodes for the future of the industry. "This renaissance that's happening now and where it's coming from—I hope it's not a trend," he says. "I hope we learn



something from it, use it to grow and develop as an industry.”

### What's Next

Kevin John Edusei, in his eighth and final season as chief conductor of the Munich Symphony, begins a new post as principal guest conductor at the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in 2022-23. A native of Bielefeld, Germany, he has spent time in the U.S. at the conducting program at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where he worked with David Zinman. He had studied orchestral conducting, timpani and percussion, and sound engineering, but the Aspen experience inspired him to focus on conducting as a profession. He returned to Germany and got a position as First Kapellmeister at the Bielefeld Opera.

Of mixed-race background (German and Ghanian), he identifies as Afro-European, and has performed and recorded with London's Chineke! Orchestra, which is majority-Black and ethnically diverse. Having grown up in situations where he was the lone person of color, he remembers the first time he conducted

Chineke! and looked down from the podium. “There was one moment before the first rehearsal in London,” he recalls. “The orchestra tuned, and I got to the podium. I was in shock of the beauty of the orchestra. I couldn't talk anymore, there was something that resonated so deeply with me.” Edusei sees this moment as a challenge to the survival of artistic institutions, in both America and Europe. Even in 2016, Edusei says, “I thought about my role as an artist, before Black Lives Matter took off. So when the debate sparked, I was already in that discussion.”

It's a discussion that intensified. “Cultural institutions can only benefit when they accept the challenge to look at diversity across the entire organization: the orchestra, staff, patrons and the audience,” he says. “Look at every factor that defines the artistic experience—in a creative way! How can we let people take part in this and let people know they belong?”

It's a question that leads back to orchestra leadership. With the numbers of working Black conductors on the

rise, a Black music director of a major American orchestra may be in sight—while we must also acknowledge the many Black conductors who have served as music directors of smaller orchestras over the years. “I see no reason why there would not be a minority figure to rise to the podium the way that Obama rose to the White House,” says Andrew Grams. “We now have a trend of organizations embracing diversity in programming and artists—for now. For things to not be trends but to be lasting cultural developments, it takes participants in those changes to rise to the moment and to keep carrying the standard forward.”**S**

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