

# Annual Meeting, Gold Baton Award, and a Conversation with Deborah Borda

June 15, 2023

DOUG: It's great to see everyone here. Thank you for coming to our annual meeting. Today's session is generously co-sponsored by our friends at Akustiks, HGA Architects, and Schuler Shook. As I'm sure many of you have heard already, these three well known and well respected architecture, acoustics, and theater planning firms are currently renovating the historic Jacobs Music Center in San Diego. The revitalization plans include the addition of a choral terrace behind the orchestra, new finishes in seating, superior acoustic enhancement, and the reconfiguration of the stage just to name a few.

Jacobs Music Center is scheduled to reopen in November this year. Akustiks is represented here by Paul Scarborough, one of its principals. HGA Architects is represented here by national arts market strategist, Amy Braford Whittey, principal, Jim Moore, and design principal, John Frane. Schuler Shook is represented here by partner, Joshua Grossman. We thank all three of these firms for their generous support of this session, and can't wait to see the Jacobs Center in San Diego.

So we're going to start our annual meeting by recognizing the winners of the Volunteer Awards. The volunteer council gave awards to volunteer associations across the country, and the representatives are listed on the slides. If your orchestra is one of the orchestras that won one of these awards, would you please stand now?

[APPLAUSE]

[0:01:50.1]

DOUG: Thank you. Thank you for sharing your hard work, your creativity, and your best practices with your fellow orchestra volunteers. Now, let's officially open the annual meeting starting with our audited financials for last year. This is the summary of the numbers, and I'm not going to talk through the numbers. Just want to point out that we're — the League is about a six to seven million dollar organization.

And we've put some key takeaways on the next slide. You can see that we had a good year end result last year, but like many of you, this was due in part to pandemic related one time funding. In addition, we had a special fundraising campaign from some board members. So we were able to run a \$400,000 surplus which we're very proud of. Strong earned revenue due to the great conference in LA. Modest growth in individual giving, and you also see on there that we had some investment losses. And the staff is doing a great job of continuing to manage expenses. So those are our numbers for last year.

Going to the next slide, I'd like to present to you six new directors who we're going to have an opportunity to elect today. We have Pam Carter from the Nashville Symphony, Bill Gettys from the Asheville Symphony, James Haswell from the Santa Rosa Symphony, Leslie Lassiter from the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, John Loder from the Boston Symphony, and Mitch Menchaca from Phoenix. And so the six of them are standing for election. Is there a motion to elect them as directors? All in favor say aye.

MULTIPLE VOICEDOUG: Aye.

DOUG: Any opposed, say nay. Okay. In addition, we are — they are elected to the board. In addition, we are reelecting the directors listed on this slide. All have served admirably, and so we'll entertain a motion to reelect these directors. All in favor, say aye.

MULTIPLE VOICEDOUG: Aye.

DOUG: Any opposed? Okay, thank you very much. On the next slide you'll see our slate of officers for next year. This is the same group that has served as your officers for the past year. The officers are not elected by the members, but rather by the board, and this is the group that we intend to elect in July for your information. Next slide please.

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The next slide lists our retiring directors, and we thank them very much for their service to the board. This group has been engaged, committed, and generous with the League. Next, I'd —

[APPLAUSE]

DOUG: Next, I'd like to recognize two new emeritus directors that the League board elected this year. Our emeritus board is our closest friends who have served in the past. Many of you know these two, especially Jesse, but he is now on the emeritus board together with Marian, so congratulations to them.

[APPLAUSE]

DOUG: And our last outgoing group that we want to thank is our outgoing ex-officio directors. You probably all know that we have representatives on our board from all orchestra group sizes, as well as youth orchestras and the volunteer council. These are the ex-officio directors who are leaving us, and again, let's thank them for their service.

[APPLAUSE]

DOUG: Our next group is, just for your information, to let you know, for the new fiscal year that's starting in a couple of weeks, these will be our new ex-officio directors representing each of the groups on the board. And we're grateful to them as well. We look forward to their service. And then finally, we lost a few people this year, some close friends of the League. These are — all four of these were emeritus directors of the League with a distinguished record of service to the organization, and to the orchestra field. So we remember them. And those of you who don't know Albert Webster, that's Nick Webster, which was his typical name.

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So with that said, we've concluded the formal business of the meeting. But I'd like to ask Simon to come up and give his report as the president and CEO.

[APPLAUSE]

SIMON WOODS: Thank you very much, Doug. Good afternoon, everybody. I can't even start my comments without just saying kind of collectively, wow about last night's concert. Was that not just an incredible concert?

[APPLAUSE]

SIMON: Absolutely amazing. So Melia and everybody at the Pittsburgh Symphony, you should be incredibly proud. Well, I know you're incredibly proud of this orchestra and this organization. It was — it's really an incredible thing that you've got going here. And the concert was really an amazing concert. I mean, you threw — we had everything there. A violinist, a new commission, dancing, a great orchestra. I mean, it was incredible. It was a really wonderful evening. So thank you so much to all of you at the Pittsburgh Symphony for that.

And it's been great to see you the last couple of days. We've had a — experienced a tremendous amount of energy. It's just amazing to walk off the elevator and be hit by that kind of wall of conversation and energy. And it's very exciting, and I know how much everybody's enjoying being back together again. So the annual meeting is at the moment of conference when I just get to give you a short update on a few things that have been going on at the League.

And I want to start off by just drawing your attention to the impact report, which we've put on your chairs. That talks a little bit about what we've been doing in the last year. We're genuinely proud of what we've accomplished. So please take a moment to have a look at that if you haven't done already. And I'm also happy to report, as you may have noticed, that this year after a tremendous amount of energy and planning we launched our new strategic framework, which took a lot of input from the field, a lot of conversation among people in this field.

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And it outlines our strategies and directions for '23 to '26. And one of the things that I think, in addition to the strategies that are laid out in it and also the League's own business strategies, which you'll find there, one of the things I think is really important is the League's new mission statement, which is up here. The second line here, the mission statement, to champion the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, support the orchestra community, and lead change boldly.

And that nexus of support for orchestras and their people, and on the other side for thought leadership and advancing change, that really is at the core of the League's being, and it's called out here in this mission statement. We are here for all of you, and your organizations today, and we're also here for the future of music and the future of orchestras tomorrow. I want to make a passing mention of a few other important things that have happened in the League's orbit this year.

As I mentioned in the opening session yesterday, by far the most anticipated piece of research the League has issued in a very long time was the demographic report that we — the field that we released just a couple of weeks ago. The new data around representation in American orchestras is really essential for conveying the state of the field. And the reports relied on, not only by all of you, [520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018](https://www.americanorchestras.org) [1602 L Street, NW, Suite 611, Washington, DC 20036](https://www.americanorchestras.org)  
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and by orchestras as you think about your context in the national picture, but it's also used very heavily by the media and is referred to on a regular basis.

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And it's been since 2016 that we haven't updated this report. So it's overdue. And honestly, I have to say it's a remarkable piece of scholarship thanks to Karen Yair and the team who put it together. It's dense, it's long, it's incredibly thoughtful about the way in which it actually does explain the kind of demographic experiences by racial and ethnic groups. And so it's been done with all the kind of most thoughtful principles of equitable data use. And it's a very, very important document, so please have a look at that. And we are expecting some press coverage about that in the next few days.

And by the way, we've got an elective session about this tomorrow morning, at which we're going to unpack some of the data, and it will be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss it. So that's one of tomorrow morning's sessions. So at the League our most important response to this latest data is the new program that we've sort of soft launched. We've announced it, but we haven't actually launched the details of it yet, which is the new program which we're calling Inclusive Stages.

And this is specifically targeted at the goal of increasing musician diversity on stage. Because if you look at the report, one of the things that the report is really interesting about is that progress is being made in orchestras, diversifying their boards, diversifying their staffs. We know about the change in repertoire and how orchestras are thinking differently about programming and who's on stage conducting, and the conductors. All of that, there is progress happening.

In the area of musician diversity, the progress is very slow. And our commitment is to do everything we can at the League to advance that more quickly. And so the new Inclusive Stages program, when it launches really has two aspects. The first is about data, and the second is about coalition building. So on the data front, you know, we really strongly believe in the importance of starting from an accurate fact base.

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So we're not just making assertions about what we think is going on, but we're really actually reporting what actually is going on. And as one of the many different pieces of work we'll be doing this fall, there's a new tool which we'll be launching which will be available to everyone, which is being put together in partnership with Accordant Advisors, which is a company that's been working for quite a few orchestras across the country.

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And this new tool is called the Inclusion Index, and it'll be a way for orchestras to help measure on a quantitative basis different aspects of their own cultures, and also benchmark themselves to the total field. So this is something you'll hear about. Stay tuned for that information about that in the coming weeks.

And then on the other side of it, on coalition building, it's really clear that we cannot change and advance the diversity of musicians on stage in any other way but through coalition and collaboration. And so the most important work that we probably have embarked on for a very long time is going to be our goals to bring together the voices of musicians, music directors, executive leadership, the union, and board members all together to work collaboratively on finding ways that are within our capacities of increasing change on stage.

It's a very, very exciting project, a very important project, and we're very grateful to the Sakana Foundation in San Francisco who is funding the first pilot year of this work, which we hope is going to be a multi-year project. So standby to get a lot more information about this in the months to come.

So changing tact here, another thing I want to just mention a little bit is about something you may have heard about, which is the whole question of pernambuco wood. And this is, you know, as you may know, pernambuco is the wood used in the majority of fine bows in musicians worldwide. In all of your orchestras virtually every musician is using a bow which has pernambuco. And I still think that our whole field hasn't realized what a huge disaster was averted here. Because thanks to the incredible hard work of Heather Noonan and Nedger Lee[?], we were very involved in a —

[APPLAUSE]

[0:14:28.7]

SIMON: Yeah, right. Thank you, yes. They were deeply involved with an international coalition, including the AFM, bow makers, performing arts organizations, and also conservation groups as well, so that we could arrive at a solution which avoids draconian restrictions that would have come in on orchestras and musicians traveling across border. But at the same time, also upholding appropriate commitment to conservation.

And so we've just issued — just last week Heather was in Geneva at the convention, and we launched this new thing which is on our website, Know Your Bow. Please share it with your musicians, it's really important, it's really excellent piece of work, and they should look at it and know what's going on [520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018](https://www.americanorchestras.org) [1602 L Street, NW, Suite 611, Washington, DC 20036](https://www.americanorchestras.org)  
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here. So spread the word. This was a major victory for the field, so thank you very much to Heather and Nedger for that work.

And while we're thinking about important work the League does, you see up on this slide a picture of a famous, or should I say infamous report 30 years ago called Americanizing the American Orchestras. This Americanizing the American Orchestras, this was a landmark League report 30 years ago, 1993. And this was an example of the League actually back then being really ahead of its time. If you read this report, which was written on a very collaborative basis with a huge amount of buy-in from people across the field, it seems it's prescient because virtually everything in it are the issues that we talk about today.

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It was extremely confidential — controversial. It was — [LAUGHING] confidential, no. It was extremely controversial at the time, but it's time has definitely come. And tomorrow morning I'm actually leading an elective session where we're going to unpack it a little bit. Kathy — is Kathy here? Anyway, Kathy French is going to be — who was the CEO of the League at the time is going to tell the story of Americanizing, and we've got some smart people who are going to interpret it and think about what it means for us today. So 30 years of Americanizing the American orchestra.

So lastly, I just want to acknowledge the extraordinary accomplishments of the League's staff this year. We're a small but mighty group, 25 people. And what you may not know is that the League pre-pandemic was 25 people in New York. We are now only about 13 of us in New York, because the rest of us are spread out across this country. We've become a very virtual organization, and we now have team members of course in Washington, D.C. but also Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Milwaukee, Dallas, Houston, and Austin. It sounds like we should move the League to Texas actually.

So we've got now staff members who are in your cities, working in your cities. They're available to support you and, you know, feel free to reach out to them. But it is a great team. We produce a tremendous amount of stuff every year. Just everything from reports to data to constituency meetings. It's a heavy lift for this group. And as is this conference. And I'd like to ask you to just join with me in thanking the League staff who could please stand up. Thank you very much to the League staff.

[APPLAUSE]

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SIMON: And I'll just close by saying thank you to Doug and the League board. You know, the League board is just a fantastic group. It's a wonderful board. You don't join the League board for social advancement. You join the League board because you care passionately about the orchestra field, about music, and the work we do. And it's a great group of people who love to gather together every year, four times a year, and we are tremendously grateful to all they do supporting our work. So thank you very much, dear League board members who are here, we appreciate you very much. That's the end of my report, thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]

DOUG: And with that report the annual meeting is closed. I want to introduce you Giuliano Kornberg, executive director of the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera to talk about his leadership of a smaller orchestra, and how grateful we are for everyone's philanthropic support. Come on up, Giuliano.

[APPLAUSE]

GIULIANO KORNBERG: Well, good afternoon everyone. I'm so pleased to be with you all this afternoon, and I think either Melia or the county executive from last night said there were 1,100 people who were attending this conference, which is just an outstanding number, and it's nice to be able to see so many of those 1,100 here today. Like Doug said, very nice introduction, Doug, my name is Giuliano Kornberg, I'm the current executive director of the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera.

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And I'm delighted to share a few thoughts with you all today as we've gathered here for this session and conference about why supporting the League of American Orchestras is so crucial, and why giving today on the League giving days is needed. And I'm also really happy and excited to share my own story of how my relationship with the League was established, and really how instrumental to my career and professional development the League has been for me.

My relationship with the League started in 2016. I was fortunate enough to participate in the essentials of orchestra management program that year. And then I later participated in the emerging leaders program in 2019. And as an aside, it's a wonderful thing that there's about 800 alumni now who have participated in those various programs. So there is certainly a wonderful wealth of experience and knowledge base in that. But anyway, I can absolutely say that without those [520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018](https://www.americanorchestras.org) [1602 L Street, NW, Suite 611, Washington, DC 20036](https://www.americanorchestras.org)  
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experiences, first with essentials in 2016, and then with emerging leaders program in 2019, I certainly would not be in the position standing up here literally right now, but certainly not in the position I am professionally with the philharmonic and opera without them.

In 2016, in essentials, I was a student fresh out of college, no experience, didn't really have any sort of knowledge at all about what it meant to work in a professional orchestra field. But going through that legitimate crash course of sessions and learning from such an esteemed cohort of faculty. There are about 30 other members in the program. It was really just amazing, terrific, introduction about fundraising and marketing and strategic planning and artistic planning, all the different aspects that go into orchestra.

It was an incredibly formative experience, and there wasn't a lot of doubt really at the time, but after participating in that program there was certainly no doubt that this field was the field for me. And then in 2019, when I was very fortunate to participate with 11 other people in the emerging leaders program, that was really the start to my professional leadership journey, where again, from a terrific group of faculty and a wonderful cohort, I learned how to think more critically, certainly ask the right and at times tough questions to those that I reported, report up to, develop way more of a self-awareness, and really hone my leadership style to benefit my organization, the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera, and certainly the community in Sacramento.

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Like I said, without those two situations I would certainly not be in the situation today. And the fact that the League can have these programs along with conferences with all of you here today and 1,100 people, where everyone can come together, catch up, share ideas, trade stories, and really solve problems together, plus the other throughout the year forums, seminars, sessions, things like that, where information can be shared freely. The fact that this resource exists for all of us is absolutely amazing, and I personally believe critical to the field's future success.

And it's a little hard to believe that the onset of COVID was about three years ago, but as that onset gets further and further away, and we as organizations get back to more of a sense of normalcy, whatever normalcy is for your community and organization, I'm confident that the League both can and will continue to be an absolutely wonderful asset for all of us orchestras who, without a doubt, are so instrumental to enriching our communities.

So with that, I'm delighted to ask all of you to join me in supporting the League by making a gift today or tomorrow on League giving days. Every amount makes a difference, whether it's a large gift or a small gift or a first gift or a second gift or a tenth gift. I was inspired after a session this morning, so I

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gave my second gift this morning. So hopefully you can join me. Really all it matters. And you might have seen some thermometers outside. We've raised about \$35,000 so far today. The goal is \$50,000. We can certainly get there I think if we all work together, and I think that's absolutely achievable.

So you can see on the slideshow there there are a few ways to give. Text the keyword League to 345345. There are a couple cards, or there's a card on everyone's table. You can scan the QR code. You can also complete that donor table on the table — donor card on the table. There's also a donor engagement center just outside this ballroom on level two where you can make your gift in person. The League certainly tries to make it very easy for everybody. Plus you get a pin and a sticker, which is kind of fun.

But lastly, I would encourage everyone to share their own personal story about the League. You know, some of the best conversations that I have both at this conference and in conferences past is just hearing how everyone's come to participate, whether it's their first year with the League, whether they've been involved for 50 years in the League. And some of the most enriching conversations are about how the League has been so beneficial to everyone's organizations and themselves, professionally, skill development, career wise.

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So I would certainly encourage everyone to share with each other your own League story, and I think that will certainly excite everyone to give more and support the organization. So one more time, text the League — or text the keyword, League, to 345345, scan the QR code. Just go outside, the League makes it easy. And join me in supporting this organization. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

SIMON: He's good, right? He must be raising a lot of money in Sacramento if that's the energy. Thank you, thank you Giuliano, we really appreciate it. Very kind words. And we appreciate everybody's support. So now to a very special moment. As you know, every year we give the League's Gold Baton Award to somebody who has made an extraordinary contribution to the orchestra field. There's always a long list of people in waiting who we'd like to give the award to, but this year there was only one person who could possibly receive it, and I'm talking of course about Deborah Borda.

Deborah's list of achievements in our field is just breathtaking, culminating this year with the opening of David Geffen Hall and the appointment of Gustavo Dudamel as the New York Philharmonic's new  
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music director. She is a person of astonishing vision, limitless energy, and a courage and tenacity that allows her to walk right through even the most imposing obstacles in her path.

Deborah's been a personal inspiration and mentor to so many of us in this field including me. And I could go on for a long time about her achievements, but instead I'm going to pass the baton to somebody else to do that, and that's our dear friend, Jamie Bernstein, who has known Deborah for a very long time, and is going to make some introductory remarks, and then do a nice interview with Deborah about her career and her experiences.

So just to introduce Jamie, as an author, narrator, and filmmaker, Jamie Bernstein has transformed a lifetime of loving music into a career of sharing her knowledge and excitement with others. If you haven't read her book, *Famous Father Girl*, which came out a couple of years ago, I can recommend it with all possible enthusiasm. I actually had intended to bring my copy of it here and wave it, but so consider it metaphorically waved.

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It's an incredibly personal insight into her father, Leonard Bernstein. Even if you already thought you knew a lot about Lenny, it's really a riveting read, and a great telling of a very personal story of a life in music, and I really recommend it. So we're absolutely thrilled to have Jamie here today. Jamie, please be welcome. The mic is yours.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMIE BERNSTEIN: Thank you Simon. Hi everybody. What an extraordinary assemblage, 1,100 is a lot of people. I'm very impressed that you all showed up, and it speaks volumes for the excellence of the League, that they are able to gather you all together like this. So yes, you've all heard about the honors and the accolades. And so today we're adding one more to the pile. Deborah Borda collects honors like the rest of us collect lint.

Of course, you all know about the historic leadership positions that she's had at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic. Twice. And of course you know about all those ambitious building projects that she pulled off, and the visionary educational initiatives, the innovative ways of engaging community audiences, and you know that Deborah's the first arts executive to have joined Harvard Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership. And that she's the launcher of Project 19, the largest women

only commissioning initiative in history. And there are — yeah, let's give her a hand. Many hands today.

[APPLAUSE]

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JAMIE: Many hands, giving Deborah many hands. And there are of course honorary degrees galore. I will not even list them all. And on top of all that, she even had the wisdom to be born in New York, New York, which is all the more of a hell of a town for having Deborah in it. We can't help but wonder what is Deborah Borda's secret anyway. People frequently ask this question about another wildly successful person who is well known to all of us, and that is my own dad.

How was Leonard Bernstein able to excel at all the things that he did? And I think there's a big similarity here when we compare Deborah Borda to the Leonard Bernstein that we saw in action on the podium and on television. I think the magic ingredient they most have in common is, believe it or not, their sense of fun. That profound sense of delight they both bring to all things music and all things people. You can feel it when Deborah walks into a room. All her senses are alert, and she engages with every person she meets from CEO to security guard.

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My dad was also exactly like this in the way he exuded a palpable authentic curiosity about others. Deborah's just like that. In her presence you can feel Deborah's laser focused singularity of purpose. My dad had that too, that throwing yourself into it intensity. And the sense of fun is what makes it all work. The work is the fun. Mostly. But unlike Deborah, I don't think my dad would have been a very good executive. He just didn't have a head for business, and that is my understatement of the day, possibly of the week. Luckily he had some other talents.

Another secret ingredient Deborah shares with my dad is her irresistible sense of irreverence. When Deborah lowers her voice, and says something hilarious and maybe a little impolite about the goings on around her I feel utterly at home. The love of sharing jokes, laughter, and stories, stories, stories, stories for Deborah as with Bernstein, these are not adjuncts to their personality, they're not the fringes or the buttons, they're in the very weave of the fabric of who they are.

Bringing a sense of fun into your work and workplace is also I think an expression of faith in humanity. In the possibilities of human connection. Deborah's lightness of touch in bringing people together is a way of communicating that she believes in them, that the challenges can be overcome, and their goals can be reached. And in this environment that she creates, miracles really do start to happen.

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If Deborah experiences fear, it is undetectable. But I'm going to ask her more about this shortly when we're sitting over there. I so admire her courage in describing things as they are, and in not shirking anything that is difficult. Oh, sure, Deborah can be tough and challenging. I definitely would not want her to be mad at me. But even in confrontation, Deborah manifests an aspect of purposeful engagement that is itself a kind of play.

We could think of play, of the sharing of fun, as an expression of unimpeded communication, which means we're really talking about love. Deborah brings a lot of love into the room, whether it's a board room or a concert hall. And everybody feels it. In music, working is after all literally playing. Deborah began as a string player, first violin and later viola. So she understands that essential connection between work and play.

Later on, she switched instruments for a third time to become a player of that very difficult instrument, musical administration. And on that instrument, Deborah became a world class virtuoso. Brava. I am now thoroughly honored to present on behalf of the League of American Orchestras their Gold Baton of Excellence to Deborah Borda.

[APPLAUSE]

[0:33:55.0]

DEBORAH BORDA: Small but mighty.

JAMIE: [LAUGHING] Small but mighty, that's us. Here it is. Good luck picking it up. Whoa, my god! We're going to leave it right there for the moment. Okay, let me get out of your way. Take all this.

DEBORAH: Jamie and I were talking about the fact that we're both shrimps, but I feel about seven feet tall right now. My goodness, thank you so much, Jamie. We've been friends a long time, and my

life has been so intertwined with the New York Philharmonic. I fell in love with music when I was four watching the New York Philharmonic. My mom took me to Carnegie Hall, and that was back in the days when there was a conductor named Leonard Bernstein, and we played at Carnegie Hall.

And I remember we sat at the very top, and I — the steps to me were like a stair, like a ladder, I had to climb up because I was tiny then too. And I got to the top, and it was about to start, and I looked down and I saw — and by the way, I went back in our archives and it was Leonard Bernstein conducting. And I looked at the orchestra, and I asked my mom were they little toy musicians because they all looked about that big. She said no, they were real, and then they started to play, and I fell in love at that moment, little knowing that my life would be so intertwined with that institution.

But I want to begin, Doug and Simon, by congratulating the League on being so open minded as to present me with the Gold Baton. I don't think many managers ever hassled the League more than I did, honestly. Honestly. And Kathy French is here too. You know, I actually feel great that Kathy and Henry Fogle and Jessie and Simon are still my friends. I love you, but I'll talk about why I do that in a moment.

[0:35:54.1]

And I really do thank you for forgiving me. But I hope you know, and everybody would know, that what was behind my questioning, and what was behind my pushing was simply coming from a place, as you said Jamie, of love. And that is love of music. And love of this crazy business that we have all chosen to go into. You don't — guys, nothing is ever perfect. I remember we were wrapping up a negotiation in San Francisco, and we had a brilliant violinist who was actually a terrific chairman of the committee, her name was Zoya Laban [?], she was Russian. And it had been a difficult negotiation.

And at the end of it, I mean, we had basically taken the knee, and you know, given the orchestra what they wanted, which was not a bad thing at all, and she was complaining. And she was talking about this, and she goes, "Deborah, Deborah, this settlement is like apple pie without the apples." So I said, "Well, Zoya, you got really almost everything you asked for." And she thought for a second, she says, "Yes, that is correct, my dear. But we are Russians. Even when we are happy we are making complainings."

So — [LAUGHING] okay, so I did. And I'm not Russian at all. Except to get things done sometimes. So you know, what's important for life balance, I was thinking about this. Of course health. Younger folks here won't even think about that. Later on you will. But it's having a great partner. By the way, Jamie, my partner always refers to me as a golden retriever, because I rush in the room and wag my tail and kiss everybody.

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But friends, friends who are as close to you as your partner, because you need both. You need a sense of humor, but also you're so fortunate as I feel, and I think so many of you in this room feel, that I found a calling that really, really spoke to me. And that is a blessing. Even though sometimes it's like a Hollywood screenplay, and I can say that having worked in LA for 17 years with ups and downs. But it's really a remarkable ride.

I've always tried to make a difference. I think I've been called relentless, and I can tell you a hell of a lot worse than relentless. But I really did try to do everything I could, and I loved what I did. I've had wonderful mentors along the way. I hope for all of you you have people that helped you in the way that Peter Pastreich did, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Frank Erie [?]. And somebody who was a mentor to me, now maybe 20 years ago, who is much younger than I was, and am, and he's still younger than I am, damnit. Gustavo Dudamel. [LAUGHING]

[0:38:45.0]

So thank you to the League. This is a very special honor for me. But thank you to all of you for thinking that this is something that you love, that this is something in a time over the years where you can really make a difference. So I'm not totally hanging up my spurs. I'm hoping there will be other ways that I can still be useful to the industry, and to music. But in the meantime, we look to all of you, everybody in this room, to keep the great traditions, but also establish the new ones. So thank you very much, and Jamie, let's have a good time now.

[APPLAUSE]

DEBORAH: Jamie, our feet aren't going to touch, so you've got to sit on the edge of the chair.  
[LAUGHING] You do, I'm telling you.

JAMIE: I think they spaced us out very nicely.

DEBORAH: Yeah, it's good.

JAMIE: Yeah. Oh hello.

DEBORAH: Oh, hi Jamie. Hi everybody.

JAMIE: So I decided that there were three big questions that I was not going to ask Deborah. And they are, what's the secret of your success, number one. Number two, what is your advice for the health of American orchestras. And number three, what are you going to do next? I'm not going to ask those questions. Because they are just too obvious. And I am sure you get asked all those questions all the time anyway, so if anybody wants to know the answers to those questions, I bet you could Google it and find them.

[0:40:34.1]

But I thought it would be fun to talk about other things. And I mentioned this notion of fear and fearlessness, and of course you have this reputation for being, you know, so courageous, and so willing to confront challenges. But you know, I'll bet you there must have been times when things made you shake, and otherwise you wouldn't be a human being, which I'm pretty sure you are. So any chance you'd like to talk about that notion?

DEBORAH: Yeah, I would sure rather talk about that than the first three questions, because I don't have answers for those, so — well, I think there is one key in fearlessness, and this is really important. It's called faking it.

JAMIE: Thinking.

DEBORAH: Faking.

JAMIE: Oh, faking.

DEBORAH: Faking. F-A-K-I-N-G.

JAMIE: Faking.

DEBORAH: Faking. You don't have to think so much to fake. [LAUGHING] Because you know, there are moments where we're scared out of our wits. And really in those moments, and especially if you're in a leadership position, you've got to bring yourself through it somehow, but you've also got to help the people around you. And so I'll tell you a time I was actually — I was thinking about this the other day. And I think there are different kinds of fears.

[0:42:05.4]

There are personal fears we have that, you know, our professional life will be destroyed, there are personal fears about our personal lives, but then there are also moments when you want to protect institutions. And I think for me, we were negotiating at the New York Philharmonic, and this is back in my first term of office, and I thought it was going well. You know, we were moving along, and they had a very famous, I can talk about him now, because he's passed away, lawyer, labor lawyer, Phil Sipzer [?]. And suddenly the entire — it was the concert was going to begin at, you know, seven thirty that night, it was a Tuesday or something.

And suddenly the negotiations just sort of collapsed, and I mean, they really went into a terrible place. And I knew we were in trouble. This is sort of funny. This was the bad Hollywood comedy. When Phil Sipzer picked up a chair and threw it across the room at me. But he was 84 years old, and it sort of clunked down.

[LAUGHTER]

DEBORAH: So we just got out of the room, because it was funny, but it wasn't funny because they were serious. And so we tried to sort of having interlockers, and we're trying — you know how it is, you're trying, you think you can get past this, but we weren't getting past it. And it was seven twenty eight, and they said, "We're not going on the stage." We have — and this is probably bad judgment that I didn't cancel the concert. You know, we have 2,800 people in the house.

So I called the staff together earlier to pretend everything was going to be okay, and we had come up with a plan of how to deal with it. So I said, "Well, can you — we have a few more minutes, and let's just keep talking." And I went out on the stage, and I explained to the audience what was happening, and they were very nice. They were a New York audience but they were very nice about it.

[0:43:52.6]

And then I went back, and it still wasn't going well, and now I literally just had fear coursing through my body. And I had to go out a second time, because it still wasn't over. I still thought there was a chance. I wasn't going going to give up that we would get the concert on. So this time when I walk on stage and I'm announcing the delay, I get booed really big time. You know, Sir Rudolph Bing used to go out on the stage at the Met with a Valkyrie shield sometimes. [LAUGHING]

I maybe could get the hat or something, but it was too late to get anything else at that point. So finally we got something together, and they agreed to play. And just before I walked out on stage to give the good news to the audience that there was going to be a concert, Sipzer grabbed me by my arm and said, "This will destroy your career." And I remember thinking, I'm sure my career's destroyed. This is it. And I walked out on stage and people booed me again, then we made the announcement, they clapped, and then when the orchestra came on stage, of course everybody loves the orchestra, which is right, we want them to love the orchestra, I love the orchestra.

And after that, I was so upset I did — and I'm a regular concertgoer. If we have four concerts in the old days, I might go to all four, but I'd go to three at least. I wouldn't go to a concert. I didn't go for a couple of weeks, which is really odd for me. And one day I bumped into our former principal horn, Phil Smith. He was a mighty horn and a mighty person, quite large. And he literally bumped into me on the street, he said, "Where the hell have you been?" So he — and I said, "I haven't been coming to concerts." "Yeah, why not?" I said — I thought about it, and I said, "I guess I'm angry at the orchestra." He said, "Well, get over it and get the hell in here."

[LAUGHTER]

DEBORAH: So I thought, okay. Yes, Phil. And so I — but what I took from that, because when you fail, the only failure to me is like if you don't learn something from it and try to change it. And so we got to a settlement, nobody was really happy, but then six months later we started a task force with the union committee, with the orchestra committee, and we laid out a way that we would negotiate the next time. And we negotiated a new contract two years early.

[0:46:01.5]

But I remember just literally — I think you've all had this, just this wave of fear going through my body. There's another kind of fear that — it's when you don't want to hurt an institution. It was about seven thirty, seven fifteen at night, and I was in my apartment changing. In those days we did live TV shows. Live on New Years Eve. And what's it? Oh, Olga Borodina, [UNINTEL] was conducting and Olga Borodina was singing.

And literally at seven fifteen I'm about to walk out the door, I get a call from Olga's manager saying she had a terrible fight with Valerie [?] and she's not going to sing tonight. And I said, "Well, that's ridiculous, she has to sing, it's national TV." She doesn't care. I said, "Well, it's her contract, she has to

or she's liable." She said, "She doesn't care." So he was right, she doesn't care. I called Valerie, he goes, "She's crazy."

You know, so — and now this wasn't fear for me. This was more fear for the Philharmonic. Eight o'clock, national TV live. We don't do that anymore. You know about that when it's live. And so I thought, what the heck am I going to do? And then I remembered who was my guest that night who was sitting in the box with me. It was Marilyn Horne. So I go like, "Jackie, how are you? Are you going to pick me up soon, aren't you?" "Oh yeah." I said, "How are you feeling?" "Oh, I'm feeling great."

I said, "Well listen, Olga just had a fight with Valerie, she's not going to sing. And we just need three arias from you like [UNINTEL]." And she goes, "Well, I don't know if, hm, could do that." I go, "Oh, thank you." So she goes, "All right. Three things. Have a dresser there for me with a steamer, have a person for hair and makeup, and you tell Valerie he has to be there 10 minutes early." Now, Valerie was famous for walking in five minutes past when the concert started.

[0:47:55.0]

So this is maybe why I get a reputation of being tough. So I call Valerie and nicely explain to him he had to be there 10 minutes early. And he got there, and she went out and sang. But that was another moment where the stomach clenching things happen. But I think it's — it really is just pretending to be calm. And coming up with a plan. Because even if your plan is going to fail, because Jackie might — it might have failed. When you take action, you feel better. But it's certainly — not that I haven't felt fear, and I've — those are just two stories. I mean, there were plenty of other times. Because it was like a script. But that's what makes it fun.

JAMIE: How did it feel when the COVID pandemic suddenly reared its head? That must have been very scary.

DEBORAH: Oh, that was more despair. Despair. I mean, there was fear because we thought it was going to come under our doors in New York and just kill us. Remember we left the newspapers out for a week. We'd bring the food back and in we —

JAMIE: We washed our groceries.

DEBORAH: You know, our apartment smelled like Clorox. [LAUGHING] You know, what we would say is the philharmonic made it though a civil war, the Spanish flu pandemic, World War I and World War

II. And I actually did worry. But the staff was great, the orchestra was great, we learned about Zoom, and we very quickly had a plan.

And I think pretty soon we knew that we would find a way not only to get through it, but for us, for us it turned out to have a crazy silver lining, which was we knew — I figured by the spring we weren't going to be back in the next season. So our board of directors and the Lincoln Center board came together and made a very courageous decision that we would raise \$450 million in that time and we would build the hall, rebuild the hall. And so that was turning fear into something productive.

JAMIE: Yeah, and productive is right. I hope you all get a chance to visit Geffen Hall and hear music in there, because it just sounds like a million bucks. And it's beautiful too.

DEBORAH: Yeah, and so don't believe what you read in the New York Times, okay?

JAMIE: Never. Never believe.

DEBORAH: Never, never, never.

JAMIE: They don't know what they're talking about, that's true.

[LAUGHTER]

[0:50:07.9]

DEBORAH: It was great though, I got to do a panel with Zach Woolfe, and — who was called the lobby, which people live in in New York. They just love it, we have a 50 foot video wall that streams every concert, every concert for free. There's furniture around, there's wifi, there's two coffee shops, there's a bar. And he called it cheesy. [LAUGHING] I know, but —

JAMIE: Well, what does he know? He's just a critic.

DEBORAH: Well, I didn't quite say that to him, but —

JAMIE: Yeah, right. Right. So I know you were telling me the other day about playing the violin as a kid, and then switching to viola. And so, you know, that whole experience of really being a musician in the [520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018](#) [1602 L Street, NW, Suite 611, Washington, DC 20036](#)  
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trenches yourself must have really come in handy when you wound up being on the other side of the stage as it were.

DEBORAH: Well, I think it helps to be a musician. Helps to read music. Now, I will confess that even though I spent years on the violin, I could not read the alto cleft. So I know there are a lot of jokes about this. So I'm going to reveal the truth about why I switched to viola, because you're probably going to ask me that.

JAMIE: I was.

DEBORAH: Why would you switch from violin to viola? Because I was actually a good violinist. Here's the truth. I was about 14, and I had an incredible crush on Ellen Garfinkel.

JAMIE: Ellen Garfinkel.

DEBORAH: And Kinhaven Music Camp had filled all the violin positions, so I said, I can play the viola, and that was it. And turned out I was the best violist, so I thought, well, better being the principal violist. So that's I switched. But I think — I didn't switch in other ways. [LAUGHING]

[LAUGHTER; APPLAUSE]

DEBORAH: By the way, Ellen became a psychiatrist and I became an orchestra manager, so I think we did similar things.

JAMIE: Yeah, I think it all worked out beautifully.

[LAUGHTER]

[0:52:07.3]

DEBORAH: But there's nothing — I mean, it's one of the reasons that I'm really excited about Gary Ginsling coming to the New York Philharmonic. He's at the New York Philharmonic already.

[APPLAUSE]

DEBORAH: Even though I don't think he went to Kinhaven Music Camp. To have somebody who was a terrific clarinetist, who actually played with the New York Philharmonic, I think that's essential. Now we've known great managers though who actually can't read — well, who can read music, but like Peter Pastreich, for example, who was a great manager. Believe me, he was not a great trumpet player. He graduated from Yale in classics or something.

So the love is very important, but I think that experience of sitting in the orchestra and knowing what it feels like to take orders, to be on time. I mean, I don't know about all of you who played in orchestras, but whenever I get to a party, and this is particularly challenging in LA, because you have to figure out, is the 405 congested, maybe I'll take the 101, should I go Fountain. There's a whole thing you do. Anyway, I would — I am always in my seat and ready to go five minutes early with a sharpened pencil, and in those days, an eraser, because we used pencils and erasers then.

JAMIE: Remember them?

DEBORAH: So I always get to parties early, and I have to either walk around the block or drive or do something. But I think it's that discipline, that discipline of doing your scales every day, that way of — I remember I was trying to learn a Hindemann [?] unaccompanied viola sonata, and I literally couldn't play it, and I said to my teacher, "I just cannot play this." And he said, "Just go one note at a time, and then connect that note to the next note, and then connect it back to the other notes. And then all those notes and the triple stops." And you know, I apply that same kind of focus and purpose to any problem that I deal with, or I try to. I mean, sometimes I play more in tune than others, I'll say that.

JAMIE: But overall it seems to be a good way to go.

DEBORAH: Yeah.

JAMIE: But I also really admire your ability to retain a kind of essential authenticity about who you are when you relate to the people in your world. And you know, everybody senses it, that you're just exactly who you are. And do you have any advice for all of the rest of us to how we can try to sustain that sensibility?

[0:54:27.3]

DEBORAH: I want to tell you, being yourself can really be a drawback. [LAUGHING] Because I think you said it, I — you know, I try to be — I have gotten much mellower than I used to be. I know that's  
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going to get laughs from certain people here. But I try to think a little bit more before I say things. But I think it's the work of our lifetime actually. It has nothing to do with music or our jobs. It has to do with finding ourselves, and finding who our authentic self is, who we really are, and getting comfortable. Just being comfortable in that place.

Because when there's a dislocation, we all have some dislocation, nobody's perfect, but the more we can relate to that within ourselves, I think that's life's work. That's life's work. And you see it when people compose. If it's a piece that really moves you. You definitely see it in soloists and conductors. And I think in people in general though. And it's — as I say, it's our life's work. And some people use music to get there, some use religion, some use all sorts of things. But that's what I've worked out. Or I've tried.

JAMIE: Well, that's good. So I hope you're all taking notes.

DEBORAH: Yeah, right.

JAMIE: We can all work on being exactly who we are. How are we doing on time?

DEBORAH: I'm waiting for Simon to give us the high sign or the low sign.

JAMIE: Keep going?

DEBORAH: Well, that was the only question she had. [LAUGHING]

JAMIE: Yeah, that's it. I'm out. Well, I never doubted that we could go on talking for —

DEBORAH: Yeah, well you should sit with us in a restaurant. You should just all come and have dinner with us tonight.

JAMIE: Yeah, right? But New York is a great place for you because we have such a good energy that you can — you absolutely match at every level. But you really liked it in LA too, didn't you? Even with the traffic on the 405.

DEBORAH: Yeah, I really — honestly though I do have a confession. When I first got there, wow, I really couldn't stand it for the first two or three years. And I remember they got me a car, and I was supposed to drive the car, and I — being a New Yorker I had a license but I didn't know how to drive.

[LAUGHTER]

DEBORAH: You know, my mom paid \$20 to somebody, gave me a license, you know?

JAMIE: Wow. That's so New Yorker of you.

DEBORAH: Well, I think that's how it happened. But at any rate, so I get in the car, and I remembered that there were car keys. You know, those like, you know, a key. And there was no key for the car, so I, "There's no key, what can I do?" And then it turned out you had this little thing you put in the car, and then you press the button. And I remember sitting there in tears, thinking how can I do this? But I did.

I was very famous in LA for being a truly terrible driver. Almost as bad as Ernest Fleishman. They had constant bills repairing my car, because it was a rental — what do you call it? Not a rental, whatever you call it. Lease. But you know — but I came to love it. First of all, the weather is great.

JAMIE: It is.

DEBORAH: But we had a fantastic group of people. Our staff was just really quite a group. I think I see some of them here. I think I see Dan Song here. Chad Smith. Gail Samuel. Kathleen Cane [?]. We had a very tight knit group. But beyond that, to be as involved as I was in the building of the hall, and to get to really become close friends with Frank Geary, who is a genius of magnitude, it's just you know when you're with somebody like that. He's — like we're on the planet Earth and he's on Jupiter or something. It's just remarkable.

[0:58:25.6]

And plus he's really funny, and he's very devilish. And he was just great. So working with him and with Esa-Pekka, we had dinner every Tuesday night at the same restaurant, at Vincente's [?], and we planned 60 — literally like 60 different programs for the opening of Walt Disney Concert Hall, and we eventually chose one.

JAMIE: Wow.

DEBORAH: But I think — again, I was talking about your partner’s really important. But it’s the group of people that are your friends and that you work with. And it doesn’t always happen. You know, that you stay close to your colleagues. I did stay very close to them. But the city was very open. Angelenos are open in a way that New Yorkers aren’t always.

And so when you would propose something, they go, “Yeah okay, that sounds good.” The only time I got turned down when I proposed something was when I made the first proposal to the board about YOLA. And they said, “That’s crazy, you can’t do that. It’s like adopting a child, you can’t get rid of it.” And I told the orchestra, and they said, “Well, that’s going to take money out of our paycheck.” Now everybody loves YOLA, and in fact you raise an enormous amount of money at the LA Philharmonic for it.

[APPLAUSE]

DEBORAH: So again, you know, we talk about authentic self. It’s about people. It’s about relating to people, and helping people to find, you can call it authenticity, you can call it joy. But getting there.

JAMIE: Yeah, well you sure are good at helping to bring that out of others, so —

DEBORAH: Yeah, well I like to have a good time. [LAUGHING]

JAMIE: Yeah, well that’s contagious, and everybody around you has a good time, and then —

DEBORAH: I mean, we have terrible days though. I mean, don’t think it’s always great. We’ve had bad days. Very bad.

JAMIE: We’ve all had bad days.

DEBORAH: And it’s just — again, I mean, it is funny saying fake it, but also trying to envision that you will get through it. You’re not going to be executed, you’re not going to be sent to prison, and you will get through it. Maybe it’ll be better one way than another way, but you’ll come through it and you’ll learn something from it.

[1:00:31.5]

JAMIE: And of course that's our great good fortune living in the United States is that we don't worry about going to prison, do we?

DEBORAH: [LAUGHING] Not in all states.

JAMIE: Not in all states. Generally speaking, we're kind of ahead of the game so that we can address these — the next level of all these issues.

DEBORAH: Well, you know, who could have imagined — yeah, who could have imagined that I could stand on the stage — we had a Central Park concert last night, and you know, that we have a pride button for the New York Philharmonic that so many of you do things for Pride Week, and that I would actually stand on the stage and wish people a happy pride — well, whatever we say, you know? Greeting Pride Month, I forget what we're supposed to say, but I said whatever I was supposed to.

Or that we had, you know, young diverse composers on our program. Yeah, we're not making as much progress as we all want to within the orchestra, but we're working so hard around everything else. And if we just keep working on it and believing in it, we will get there.

JAMIE: Right. You heard it here. If Deborah says it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMIE: Thank you.

DEBORAH: I can't pick this thing up. [UNINTEL] probably pick it up still.

SIMON: Thank you.

JAMIE: Thank you Simon.

[OFF-MIC CONVERSATION; APPLAUSE]

SIMON: Thank you. Thank you, Deborah. Congratulations on everything you've achieved. And thanks Jamie for making that such a lovable conversation. Lovable and funny. Wonderful. Thank you so much. Okay, so that's the end of this session. I wish you a great afternoon in your constituency groups and other things, and whatever you're doing this evening, dining with colleagues, coming to the League donor dinner.

Still lots of fun to be had. I want to remind you that tomorrow's closing plenary is a lunch, and the lunch is included in your conference registration. So please be here for that. And we're going to have a fantastic keynote from Byron Stripling, and we're going to hear from our youth panel, from our young people panel, which I'm really excited about. So looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. Have a wonderful rest of the day, thank you so much for being here.

[APPLAUSE]

### END OF TRANSCRIPT ###