

Diversifying your Audience Through Non-Classical Programming

June 16, 2023

SHELLY: Welcome, good morning. I'd like to have my colleagues introduce themselves, starting with Steve.

STEVE WEISER: Steve Weiser, executive director of the Erie Philharmonic.

BYRON STRIPLING: Byron Stripling, principal Pops conductor in the Pittsburgh Symphony.

DARCY KOZLOWZKI: I'm Darcy Kozlowzki. I'm the director of popular programming of the Oregon Symphony.

SHELLY: Great. So I'd like to start with picking apart the title of this session, and just start with the word diversifying. Byron, I'd love for you to talk a little bit about what we are calling diversity.

BYRON: Well, I think diversity is a complex word in this day and age. A lot of feelings and emotions bubble to the surface when you are even told the word. It means so different things to so many different people. For some people it can mean, you about to take my job. And that's the truth. That's what some people feel when they hear that. But if we were to — you know, it's interesting, Kierkegaard, the great philosopher, said once you label me, you negate me.

So labels can be something that can be negative in that sense. And so if we look at the power of what diversity is, if we're talking about using diversity as a strength, because we like to simplify things so much. Sometimes people say, "Diversity, what's that?" In terms of our orchestra, we just need to get the best people. First of all, that presupposes that the best people aren't people who are diverse.

These are the truths that we have to confront. And as I'll talk later today in my keynote, it's so important that we confront the truth. And that's what diversity does for people. It makes them confront the truth. And what we know is that the truth will set you free, we've been told. So when we look in the mirror, Michael Jackson told us to do that, right? Talking about the man in the mirror. I'm

asking him to change his ways. And no message could have been any clearer. If you want to change the world, look at yourself and make a change.

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But many times we're immovable in that change. We get obsessed, and we get marred down in the cement of rigidity. And we get psychosclerosis, which is a hardening of the attitudes. So the thought first, and I'm almost done. What if we didn't call it — you know, we've got the labels, but I don't use those words, diversity, inclusive, all that — you know what I call it? One simple word. Love.

Love for our fellow man, and women. And the desire that if we want to welcome and have an open tent, the ideas that come from people from diverse backgrounds lift all those boats. We need their music in our orchestra, we need those musicians our orchestras, and lord do we need them in our audiences. So the question is, does your orchestra look like America? Does your audience look like America? And if we're still stuck in that thing of like, it's good like it is, we just get the best people.

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What about your donors? What if your donors demand to you that your audience is more broad? They should demand that. If I'm a company, and I'm supporting you, I want the people that come to your concerts to look like the people who buy my products and my business. So let's think of it as love and acceptance of our fellow man, realizing that every race, creed, and color, gender, LGBTQ+, whoever those people are, they are a part of everything that we need to make ourselves the best. Our orchestras need that, and we need that, and the world needs that. And we can be the shining example of what happens when we put all this stuff together and make the world a better place. Love.

SHELLY: I'm just going to clap. [LAUGHING]

[APPLAUSE]

SHELLY: Thank you, Byron. So we are taking age, we are taking economic background, economic status. We are talking all of it, all people. And then the next part of the title I'd like to pick apart is non-classical. I always chuckle at my title, which is popular programming, okay? Non-classical, which assumes that our orchestras are classical music institutions. Can we just agree to call them symphonic or orchestral, and just break it open. It's music, right?

The hip-hop orchestra session yesterday said that genres put music into boxes. So let's just call it music, right? So those are the assumptions we're working with now. I would like to kick it over to Steve. He has data, which I am terribly jealous of this data, about his, call it programming. And tell us about that.

STEVE: Sure. So in looking to diversifying the audiences that Shelly kind of discussed, we looked at not just the race and background of who's coming into our concerts, but where do we see new households coming in to see any of the programming that we look at as well as where do we see the student ticket and families coming in. And was sort of putting some flags in our system, for patron manager we've been able to discover some incredible things over just the past two years. Because the world's really different coming out of the 2019/2020 season. Anything before that, at least from our sense, is incredibly different.

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So looking from FY22 and 23 forward, we've been able to see an incredible uptick in new households specifically for this programming that we're talking about today. And we're looking at, well, we do five concerts each year that are in this symphonic realm but are on sort of the non-classical track, whatever we would want to call that.

SHELLY: I don't know what to call it.

STEVE: Exactly. But that would include, we have our movie series, our holiday Pops concerts, our Cirque concert, Broadway concert. Anything that is still symphonic in nature, but more on that sort of lens of the spectrum. And not only have we seen incredible numbers in how many new, but it's higher than just the symphonic music that we're doing. At a 63% rate, we're seeing higher new households coming into these movie concerts or holiday Pops, the Cirque show that we did.

But if you look over the course of two years, that's 2,500 new households came to just basically 10 new concerts that we did. When you add all of that up, just the cash spend alone of what that brings in is half a million dollars of new revenue just from these new households that we're seeing. And that's only two years worth of data from five concerts each season. So as you look to extrapolate that across groups that do such more concerts, and over the span of five to ten years, I think you can really see where this starts to shift the paradigm of bringing new audiences in, which I think is equally as important when you look at diversifying your audience, is getting those new households in the door in the first place.

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So much of what we heard over the past couple of days is how do we get our audience to come back, how do we reach new people, how are we finding the new person to become a donor. Well, they're not going to be involved in reorganization if you don't get them in the first place. And so many of these concerts — what we're seeing is bringing those families in, bringing those new households in for the first time. But 2,500 new households is an incredible number when you multiply that out by — that's at least going to be two, three, four people coming.

And then you look at how much cash they spend, we can see how much they come back to buy a second ticket and a third ticket. They're already starting to donate at about \$30,000 plus. Just in the past two years they're really starting to bring in so much new income to what we're doing. And then we looked a little bit further to student tickets, where if a student ticket is coming you can really start to extrapolate that into new families. And a similar thing, we saw 2,500 new family households of young students bringing sort of young people to these concerts.

And again, 2,500 households for that. That's another about \$250,000 of new income coming in from these young families coming to see — like *Toy Story* brought in 700 new households that had a student ticket come along with it. We know those are going to be people that came in the door for *Toy Story*, but once they see that we're doing *Harry Potter* and other movies and things like that, they're going to keep coming back. But we've really found this as diversifying our audiences, has just been a gateway to get so many new people, new families, and young families in our doors.

SHELLY: Great, thank you. So I think one of the barriers that a lot of us find is licensing. What shows are out there. What might our audiences like. As Scott mentioned, I went to him because I saw his show was advertised for performing arts centers, and I said, "Can we turn this into an orchestra show?" But I'd love for Darcy, as she takes a sip of coffee, to — perfect timing. To address a little bit more of just how we work with agents, and maybe changing the perspective of our relationship with agents.

DARCY: Definitely. Thanks Shelly. I am a former agent. So I now have experience on both sides of the table. I used to work at Opus 3 Artists. And you know, bringing the experience I had as an agent over to the orchestral side, it's kind of tough. Like there are definitely walls between us. We kind of — I think we can forget that, you know, we all kind of have the same goals. We want to present good shows, agents want to be booking good shows with you.

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And you know, competition out there is really, really tough. There are the massive agencies of like the William Morris, CAAs, down to the many, many tiny boutique agencies. And I know it's tough as a presenter when we have so much on our plate every day, to then have agents reaching out, phone calls, emails. I laugh with my former friends at how, you know, as an agent I'm so frustrated I can't get so and so to call me back, call me back.

And then the second I became a presenter, I was then behaving the exact same way as the other presenters that weren't getting back to me. And I'm like, I get it now. But I learned the million things that we have to be doing day to day. The — it's really important to foster relationships with agents and artist management. You know, in the same way that I have to manage relationships within the Oregon Symphony, and have difficult conversations, and you know, keep open, positive conversations so like we can all do our jobs. And I find that that same principle does really apply to the agency side.

You know, the more — the better relationship I have with someone that not — you know, understands me, what I'm about, the programming I'm trying to do, what, say, my orchestra is struggling with, succeeds with, new projects. Like the more that someone knows about me and what I'm doing, the better that an agent has like the ability to do their job, and suggest more things that make sense. You know, know that like I — I know something isn't going to work, say, for Darcy, I'm not even going to, say, even like bring this up in a meeting because I know — like that shows her that I've been listening, and I know what product could do really well.

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So you know, I would really encourage everyone to take the time to form relationships with agents. And not saying — I mean, there are some that are going to be really difficult and you may never want to work with, and blah blah blah. Like that can happen. But like the more that you get to know someone and like form a relationship, the better you will be able to work together. And you know, that can come with advantages down the road, where you know, say I have a great relationship with someone, and they've booked something at like a neighboring orchestra, and know that I was looking at it.

It's like, hey, you know, you could pick up something that's going to be in your neck of the woods, you could maybe get it for a lower fee. Like being in the loop with more people as much as possible, it just — it can really make our jobs easier. So yeah, I would really encourage that like — again, it's kind of — it is the same team, you know?

We are all — we're in this world. We have the same goals. And I think these are just as important relationships as part of the day to day, you know? You have these relationships with your coworkers. You have relationships with other organizations. Bringing agents and artist management to that side of it is just really helpful. Anything else I could touch on on that, you think?

SHELLY: No, I think that's great. I mean, it's just the idea of men what we're all doing here, and networking and meeting our colleagues. Darcy and I are on a text chain. [LAUGHING] Of five lady Pops people. And we text every day all day. And so many interesting projects just get in front of my face, because a colleague has talked to a producer, manager, agent, whatever you want to call them. But also we were in a meeting in January. We go to the APAP conference.

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And I would say about 10 artist managers that came in to meet with us, the first question is, "What shows aren't you seeing out there? What do you want? And how can we help?" So I think that's a really important thing to remember. If you don't see something that you want, start asking for it. Because I know I've committed to building a program next year, which I'm now greatly regretting. It is so much work. [LAUGHING] The casting, the arrangements, and everything are so much work, and I don't know if it's going to live beyond our performance.

So that's just — it's so important to have these relationships with people producing concerts and your colleagues. Speaking of arrangements and show content, I'm going to put Byron on the spot a little bit. Because I have the great pleasure of working with him on a regular basis. Byron is a masterful person on stage. Personality and builder of shows. So can you talk to me about, or talk to us, or just me — just kidding. [LAUGHING] It's so early, y'all. Just about like what you find a successful program, and how you engage your audiences, and even, you know, past what you do on the stage.

BYRON: Certainly. Only if I can have a sip of your water.

SHELLY: Yeah, I haven't drank this.

BYRON: I was hoping that you had drank it.

SHELLY: Oh gosh. [LAUGHING] It's almost nine o'clock everyone.

BYRON: So you know, since we're using that word diversity and talking about that, this is the perfect opportunity with your programming to involve people that you don't normally have on your stage. And certainly this can also help — look, if somebody sees somebody on stage that looks like them, it's very helpful to motivate them to come to your performance. I mean, it's just a fact.

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So I certainly try and lean in, and you know, I've worked with my mentor, Jeff Tyzik. I mean, he does that. As you know, he works in Oregon with her. I have worked with him for most of my life. And it's like Latin shows, it's like whatever it is. Shows with minority entertainers, on and on and on and on. No limits as to what you can do. And once again, once we get that on the stage, that's what we aspire to, and again, that's what America looks like. If you don't mind, I'm going to go a tad bit off topic, and do something crazy.

SHELLY: Okay.

BYRON: Paul, that's you back there from Springfield, right? Can I just tell you how Paul — because I'm going to do this again later. Sit down, Paul. No, no, stand up. Stand up, I want everybody to see, and I want everybody to clap for Paul.

[APPLAUSE]

BYRON: Now you can sit down. I'm going to tell your story, and you should tell it too, and then I think that you should all meet with Paul after. Here's my story of working with Paul. CEO of Springfield Symphony Orchestra, right? I come into perform with his orchestra, I had a great Zoom call with him before that. I was like, this is a nice guy, I like this guy, right? This is all about relationships.

Paul calls me up before the first rehearsal, says, "Hey, today before rehearsal like around 11:30, could you go to like a little reception for me?" And I said, "Yeah, absolutely." He says, "Good, I'll pick you up at 11:30, go. It's kind of a lunch thing. Go in there." When Paul walked in this place, everybody he saw, everybody that was there, shook his hand. The church ladies gave him a kiss. The mailman was there. The barbers were there. The big whigs were there. Everybody knew Paul, he knew them all by name, he introduced me to all of those people.

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The missing link in this story, in case you didn't notice, Paul is white. The missing link in the other part of this story, everybody in that room was Black. And Paul knew every one of those people. If you want people to show up, you have to show up to them. Paul was their friend. If you have no friendships that are diverse, then you're starting from nothing to try to build relationships. That's the first thing Paul did. I mean, he — those people love Paul.

So we give the concert that night. I have a show, I can't remember what it was. Was that — Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras show. Had a great band I brought with me, great organ player, Bobby Floyd, who blows people away, so forth and so on. Great show. After the show, I think it's important for me, when I'm conducting a show, or if I'm the soloist of a show, to if we can meet with those people. It's the relationships.

If more people can meet me, the big Black guy, and have no fear, this is much better, right? I have to be mindful of that. That's probably something that you don't think about, but I'm the big Black guy. If people are watching TV and watching rap videos all day, and they expect me to get on stage and curse and do all that stuff. So you know, I have to be conscious of what I'm projecting to an audience.

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We go and we shake hands for about — Paul and his staff, they stuck around the whole time. We shook hands with people. Paul was again hugging everybody and loving on everybody. That was the most diverse audience I've played to maybe ever. Because my people don't come out. Not because they don't like the music, but they don't feel welcome. If you don't have any friendships, if you don't have any relationships with people that can bring folks to that — the table, then why would they come? Why would they show up? Like we're so confused, where's my Black audience? Where's my Latinos? Where's my this?

Well, that's because you don't talk to none of them. Now, these are truths. Uncomfortable truth. But if we speak from the truth, if we learn from the truth, then it can inform a better tomorrow. The biggest thing is to accept those truths. And like I said, like go to your churches. What does your church look like? Do they accept all? Where are the gay folks in your church? Some of y'all tell them not to come.

Where are the Latinos in your church? Some people would wish that they not come to the church. This is the truths that we are afraid to talk about, that we are afraid to confront. And once we confront them, then we can address them. So I say all that, and hopefully — sorry if I went too off track — say that for you to recognize what Paul is doing. One of the things he also did is he used to run the NBA Hall of Fame. Is that what it's called, Paul? Yeah.

Basketball Hall of Fame, sorry about that. And so he's used to dealing with minorities. Oh, final thing on Paul, is he didn't walk in there, and go, "Hey baby, slap me five." No, Paul was just himself. He's not going to quote Jay-Z songs to people and fist bump. Paul is just Paul. He's like this beautiful guy. So when you leave, talk to him more about his strategy, because that's one of the most diverse audiences I've ever played for. And it was done by little Paul over there. You're doing great work. Would you please give Paul a big round of applause?

[APPLAUSE]

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BYRON: Yeah Paul.

SHELLY: So now I want to be Paul's best friend. Great. So I will acknowledge and admit I've had what some might call failures, I think we all have. And we have to be okay — I'm now talking to the mirror. We have — I'm like Stuart Smalley affirming myself right now. You know, we have to be okay with it. [LAUGHING] It's hard. And I will tell you, we took a chance here at the Pittsburgh Symphony, and did a show with a drag queen.

It was fantastic. Thorgy Thor, fantastic. The audience was less than what we had hoped. And the night before the concert I went to a birthday party of a friend of mine who is a gay man, and the people at the party said, "I don't understand why Thorgy is playing Heinz Hall." And I said, "What do you mean? The symphony is bringing Thorgy Thor." But our venue wasn't where drag queens play.

But also we didn't market it — I'm not bashing marketing. Let me stop there. We're not meeting people where they are. We need to find out how they communicate, how they receive information, which may seem easier now in a social media time, but I think it's actually more difficult because there are so many ways that people get their information. So I like to call that a drive-by concert because we aren't continually doing concerts for the gay community, which we are trying to be better at.

So I'm just throwing that out there as something — you know, we need to look at all these demographics, and figure out what programming we're doing for whom, and how we get the information to them. We can't take the way that we advertise symphonic — I'll call them classical, just because I don't know what else to call them. Core repertoire concerts. You can't slap a drag queen on that marketing and say, here it is, come please. [LAUGHING]

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You know, we have to just — we have to do it differently, and for every genre. We're working with a rapper on Monday. Whoa, that's coming fast. It's a totally different audience. It's a completely different thing.

BYRON: You should tell them about that show. The whole thing. I mean — can I tell them?

SHELLY: Please do.

BYRON: So we're doing a Juneteenth show. I think probably the only orchestra in the world that is doing a show that, you know, talks about that — what happened Juneteenth. We're not going to do a historical retrospective, we're just going to be there as an orchestra to be part of this — it's a weeklong thing.

SHELLY: It's the weekend. If you see the tents out in front of the hotel, the Juneteenth festival starts tomorrow right there.

BYRON: So that's a chance for the orchestra to acknowledge what happened there, but then we do it musically. And so I have great musicians that will come in and, you know, I'll conduct that show. And it's a varied show. But of course we're going to — how do we program for that audience? Because it will mostly be a Black audience. So we've got some gospel, we've got some jazz, we've got some blues, we've got some Irving Berlin. We've got, you know, all these different things.

And then we will deliver to those people in the streets of Pittsburgh a show with that theme as a backing. And of course that helps our relationship with that community, because once again, we showed up for them. And we're allowed and allowing ourselves to, in some places, where doing a concert with that theme would be controversial. But I don't care. Because we're doing what we need to do to reach — again, it's about reaching out to that community. So we're, once again, going to show up for them.

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And the one thing I want to happen, I want to happen for your orchestras, I want it to happen for the Pittsburgh Symphony, and whoever I work with, is that when they finish that concert, like the concert

I did for Paul in Springfield, I want at the end of that concert the people say, “That’s my orchestra. Who’s that? That’s Springfield Symphony. That’s our orchestra. That’s Pittsburgh Symphony.”

And I know all the little Black ladies would come to Juneteenth and the — that community of people, that’s what they will say at the end of that concert. Yes, we’ll have minorities in the orchestra playing certain things, but I’ve got a young lady named Jennifer Orchard, who plays the violin. She does — what do you call that — ?

SHELLY: Fiddle.

BYRON: Fiddle style of “Old McDonald Had a Farm.” She plays the crap out of it. When she finishes playing that, all them old Black people in that audience are going to go, “That white girl can play, let me tell you something right there. That girl, I like her. I want to talk to her afterwards.” Because you heard her play, she’s killing.

SHELLY: But can I be honest? And so this is all just learning and growing, which frankly is what we all have to do to survive, whether an orchestra or a human being. When we were programming this, and Byron suggested that piece with that soloist, I pushed back and said, “Uh, are you sure about this? [LAUGHING] Really? Are you sure about a fiddler?”

BYRON: I’m absolutely sure.

SHELLY: And I lost. But yeah, I mean — but it’s a conversation, you know? We all just have to have a conversation. We can’t know everything. Continue. I just had to own the fact that I tried to cut it down.

BYRON: No, I’m done. I need to stop.

DARCY: I can —

SHELLY: Yeah, please step in there.

DARCY: Yeah, building off of what Byron said about, you know, meeting people where they are. You know, we — even kind of when I first started my job, I found like my big hurdle was, you know, I’d make — having to sell things internally, and getting my organization on board to present a show. And then you get there, okay, we’re doing it. And yeah, putting it up on sale. And just expecting saying an [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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audience or a certain demographic, like that they're just going to see that in common. That does not happen.

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And you know, too often — like I work with our community engagement person on this, of you know, you can't just say enter a new space and come in with like — you know, I'm wanting something from you. And even if, yes, I'm wanting you to come see the Oregon Symphony, and yes, we're offering free or reduced tickets, but it's just coming in, you know, kind of kicking the door in, and being like, we're here now, and you know, come now in our space.

And you know, that doesn't work. Especially for marginalized communities who just continually kind of having things asked of them. But the extra step of just, you know, coming in and just being like, tell me about you, like what are you all about? Like I want to learn. Because then it — you know, to foster the feeling of like, this is a partnership together, and how — like yes, the end goal like I want you to be coming to our concerts, I want you to want to be coming to our concerts. Then to get to the point where you then seek them out.

And you know, sure that can start with like an entry of a really cheap or comp ticket, you know? Giving things away to community partners. But then it's kind of like a strategic process of then how do you build that in a way where then people see that you understand them, they trust you, they will then seek out different programming. But it's a lot more work, and it is really tricky, you know?

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In Portland, like Portland's been in the news a lot for not a lot of really great reasons. And that's really tough. Like there is a wall up. Like we — I'm actually kind of — I'm like jealous in a way of how Pittsburgh views the Pittsburgh Symphony, where you know, you're like a cultural — a jewel that like so many people love and respect. And honestly, in Portland it can be kind of tough, like we are seen as like — we are the — I think we're the biggest nonprofit arts organization in the state and kind of seen up on this white ivory tower of privilege, and in a not necessarily always friendly space.

And you know, when we — yeah, say you have the core symphonic subscription. Yeah, core symphonic subscription. Like that — you know, we — I am lucky where I am — I have the ability to do a wide range of programming, you know, from rappers. We did Thorgy Thor. So I don't have maybe as many hurdles there. But like kind of getting people to come out, like the same model does not work. You know, like we have had — we don't own our venue, so then the whole — like the usher staff, they're not our people.

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We've had to have, you know, like very serious sit-downs with ushers on, you know, how you treat an audience that may be in for a subscription week is completely different from someone that's coming in to see a special of a commercial artist. And because having an usher go hush someone that's maybe being — you know, talking a little bit. But even just like maybe cheering too much. [LAUGHING] And for someone to come over and be like, "You need to — shh." Like that can ruin an experience.

Like someone will never come back ever if they are made to feel once that like they are not welcome in this space. So you know, it's a lot. It's really a lot of tailoring to make people that for a very, very long time have not felt welcome in a concert hall. And I know — you know, I've had for say some other programming — watching people like come into our hall, and you see like, "Oh wow, this is really beautiful." And someone — [LAUGHING] and will, you know, someone will be like, "Oh, you know, where are you from?" And they're like, "Oh, I've lived here my whole life. And like this is the first time I'm stepping in this building."

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And like those are just like a really — it's like a really sacred moment that we really need to put the effort into not mess up. Because you know, what's that saying? It's like one — or ten attaboys for that one negative thing, that one negative thing, it will take a thousand positive moments to rewrite that. And so yeah, really you've got to change the vibe of what you're doing. Because yeah, to diversify your audience means like it's diversifying your approach and your execution and everything about it. But like that absolutely pays off. But you know, it's tough, and it's work.

STEVE: I think the one thing to kind of connect the dots between what Byron said, and what, Shelly, you talked about. Owning your failures a little bit. In 2018, we brought in Byron to do his incredible Mardi Gras concert. The year after that we brought in Scott Coulter's Aretha Franklin show. And last year we did a world premiere commission about a Harriet Tubman piece with Harry Lenox from *The Blacklist* as a narrator. And we kind of had gotten into a good groove.

But I think it's very easy to think that you're going to program a piece like that, and all of a sudden your audience is going to magically be different and come out to see these shows. And I think to Byron's point, by the time you're doing the concert on your main stage, I think we would view that as that needs to be the tenth thing you've done in order to get people to be able to come to that concert. That can't be the first, second, or third thing.

And for us, I think we're starting to look at what does our outreach look like, what do our school
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concerts look like, where are we taking our guest artists before the Saturday concert, what school are we taking them to, where are we doing a free church concert, where are we building up the community so that by the time we're asking them to come to our home, we've gone to their home nine times already, between the schools and the other places that we're actually taking all the things that we do.

And I think that's something we learned over the first two years between, again, Byron's show and Aretha Franklin. I think we sort of magically hoped that, oh, but this is going to bring out a diverse audience. It's not that easy. You really have to do the legwork to sort of earn the trust, as Byron talked about. It's not just the one and done thing. We need to really show that we're a part of it, every part of the community of what we do.

[0:34:04.8]

SHELLY: Yeah, and I would also jump on that. I know I talk a lot about drag queens, so here we go. I was — I'm working with Tabitha to try to bring this program that the San Francisco Symphony developed called Holiday Gaiety. And we are working on it for this year. And frankly, we're putting it on hold because we don't have inclusive restrooms in Heinz Hall yet. But there was a suggestion made that we print up a sign for that concert and put it on the door.

And that is where my brain goes to intent and impact. Wonderful intent. Horrible impact. [LAUGHING] I mean, can you imagine coming to a concert and seeing a printed sign on a door. I would think, oh, I'm welcome to this concert but not any other ones. So you know, thinking through all of those things, the audience experience from the moment they walk in the door, it's exhausting, but it's important to think through how all of these things impact people.

For our movie concerts we're starting to do more — it's not immersive, but like for *Harry Potter* we bought the little house ties. I'm not a *Harry Potter* fan, I'm sorry. But our ushers wear them, and they have a great time. But from the minute people walk in the door, there's a little taste of *Harry Potter*. And those bring in families. We were terrified of films.

But I know a lot of you are from different sized orchestras. I used to work for the Evansville Philharmonic, so I understand a lot of these things may seem out of reach. But I do urge you to look at other orchestra's websites, see what they're doing, call them, and really lean on agents and managers, you know? If a fee quote is something, is there a way to modify a program? Is there a way to have less soloists? Is there — you know, what can we do to make this work for our orchestra?

[0:36:00.2]

Ask someone to build a program with you. I know Scott's building tons of programs with Jacksonville and — I don't know. So I've lost my train of thought. Oh, I wrote down something when Darcy was talking. Byron, we had — I think it was a Motown show that we did, and there were audience members like run down front, dancing their tushes off, having a great time. Fantastic. And we had a long time subscriber write it, and I won't go into all of the horrible things that she said about the patrons that were dancing, and their body shapes.

But just furious that we would allow this to happen. How can we let these people dance and ruin her experience? So this is another really hard thing, that you don't want to lose anyone, and so we're always dancing this fine line. But where I've come to is if this isn't for you, I'm sorry, and maybe we can direct you to other concerts.

But sometimes you might have to have some people fall off as your programs evolve, as your programming evolves. You know, to make space for new people with new ideas and new tastes that might have to happen. But I don't know why I threw that out there, but that woman's email came directly into my brain. [LAUGHING] Okay —

DARCY: Can I kind of — or like building on that, we have — we created a show with a local Portland rapper who's kind of on the up and up, Amine. And you know, a lot of people are having success with the hip-hop artists, like Nas, Common, the new ones, great. Amine, who is like 28 years old, is like next level explicit. I'm not even saying like in your average rap explicit, like really, really next level.

[0:37:54.3]

And you know, this was a conversation internally, because we're not going to change the content of his music. We wouldn't bring him. But it's like, you know, is this something that the Oregon Symphony is willing to take on. And you know, thankfully it was — will this bring in a new audience, like is this what his fans will be expecting. He wanted to work with us so that was already easier, and I mean, thankfully we decided yes, you know?

And we — like there was a lot of messaging done to core subscribers and — of just saying like, you know, this has explicit content. Like I know our CEO had some donors that were like, "Oh, I'm interested in going to that." And he's like, "You shouldn't. You shouldn't go."

[LAUGHTER]

DARCY: And you know, like the — and I mean, that was kind of funny, and they were like, “Oh, thank you for that feedback, we won’t go.” But yeah, the taking — taking the risks like that in knowing like these — like people are going to be upset, and like you have to — it’s not the avoidance of necessarily upsetting people, it’s just kind of like having a plan or an idea somehow of just how you’re going to manage those people being upset.

Because you know, there were people that were offended by that show. I mean, I know a lot of even the symphony staff were like, “You know, this was not for me.” But we had a sold out house of like 19 year olds, many of which have never been in the hall before. And you know, that show was — it was absolutely like a success in any way.

And like that just — that can open the door to so much more because then these, you know, kids are like, “The Oregon Symphony is doing cool stuff. They’re like kind of now on my radar a bit.” And so it’s like having the communication internally of like how do we manage maybe what will be going into something, like we’re going to have negative reactions to this, so how are we going to deal with it? Because it’s important for us to still make this happen.

STEVE: I think for us a risk in a whole different sense was we kind of look back to where our trajectory changed as an orchestra our size, and we do 10 concerts a year, five non-classical, five core symphonic repertoire, whatever the new terminology is that we’ve made up right now. But as we’re looking at those 10 concerts we do every year, we really changed our history in February of 2017 when we took a leap and did our first film. We did *Casablanca*, and that was the first time we had ever done a movie.

[0:40:22.3]

And we look at sort of our history before and after that. Since 2017, we’ve probably sold out 30 concerts in our hall, that before that we would only ever maybe sell out the Christmas concert, and maybe one other show every five to ten years. And since we started those films, it not only started selling out all of the movies that we’ve done between *Casablanca*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Bugs Bunny*, kind of going through the whole progression of them, but it sort of just opened us up to a whole different, I think, realm of pride in our city, of people seeing like, oh wow, look, the Erie Phil sold out a concert. There’s *Casablanca*, I understand that. Maybe I’ve never thought about going to a concert, but I get *Casablanca*, I get *Wizard of Oz*.

And for us and for our board, that was a little bit of a leap because you had to explain like, okay, we’re going to do a thing and it’s going to be tens of thousands of dollars, and we think it’s going to sell well.

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And the first time we did *Casablanca*, it sold out with two months to go, and we just kind of sat on our hands and didn't know what to do. But it's —

SHELLY: Add another show.

STEVE: Exactly. Nowadays we would add another show, exactly. But I think that really kind of opened up a whole new world for us. Because again, you take the leap. But as Shelly talked about with *Harry Potter*, you can create these immersive experiences. But it gives you marketing that will cut through the clutter, and all of our cities were fighting for so many precious dollars and time, and you have any one of those things, you can put up one social media post, do anything that gives it instant recognition for what you're doing. But that really for us is what sort of opened up the cascade of success, was the first time we took a leap to do *Casablanca* in 2017.

SHELLY: So interestingly enough, we had the opposite experience. So when we put the classic films on our Pops series, the audience was furious. They hated it. They didn't want to see it. They felt as though the orchestra was not the star. That the film was the star, and the orchestra was just sitting there, no one was paying attention to them. Which we also found out 20 years ago when we took the orchestra off of two Pops shows.

[LAUGHING] And the beautiful thing we found out through this stack of letters was that that audience was there to see their orchestra. This was their symphonic experience. It didn't matter if it was core or classical, whatever we call it now, core repertoire, or this, they were there to hear the symphony. This was their symphony. So the other thing I would love to just put out there is that I think long ago we were trying to get people in through Pops or whatever we call it, and transition them to core repertoire.

[0:42:54.0]

Okay, that's — who cares anymore? [LAUGHING] I'm actually just at the Pittsburgh Symphony trying to get us to cut the brands out altogether and just have concerts. That'll take probably a 10 year thing. But yeah, I mean, I'm just putting this out there. If they're coming in your hall and hearing what you're putting on stage, that's a success. No matter what repertoire it is. Just get them in there.

So when we finally took the leap for like the *Star Wars* — you know, the blockbuster films, we were white knuckling, like, oh, how's this going to go? Turns out now they're our greatest successes. We're probably going to be up to next season seven films in one season, which is nutty and terrifying. But they do well, they bring new audiences in. The other thing I would say too is this feeling of inclusion.

The last time we did *Harry Potter*, I was watching — I go out into the front of the hall because I love to see who's there, and what they're saying, and how they're experiencing coming in the hall. And every — you know, people in costumes and dah-dah-dah. But when they see other people in the costumes and they're commenting to each other, it is kind of a beautiful thing. It's like the safe space. Almost like a Comic Con situation.

[0:44:12.5]

And that can translate to so many different communities and experiences. So it's really inclusion is what we're going for here, and doing styles of music that speak to people and move them. And it doesn't matter what it is, right?

DARCY: I have this conversation internally of, you know, so since I do all the, say, non symphonic [UNINTEL; OVERTALK]—

SHELLY: You can use non-classical, it doesn't matter.

DARCY: Thank you, Shelly. And it can be, you know, mine is like, okay, diversity, building new audiences, has to be making money, and it can be sometimes like billed as entertainment, and it can be this conversation of like, what is art and what is entertainment. And it's a language battle that I think about all the time, because there are, for a lot of people, maybe even more people that are into your traditional classical music that may say that, you know, the first *Harry Potter* and a John Williams score like is high art to so many people.

Nas, the rapper, his album *Illmatic*, that is art. He is like the top of his craft. So I get really sensitive to the box of like, you know, this needs to make money, and of course it needs to be high quality, but like we don't — there's not like that as artistic investment I guess, thought about it as much like that. And that's something that I agree with Shelly, I'm trying to change. Like it's not the — to me the ultimate goal of like moving people into the classical subscription, it's getting people to come to our concerts.

It's, you know, yeah, meeting them where they are, presenting things that they want to go see. And that could — you know, I try to look at my programming as like I want every single person in Portland will have something on our season that they would want to go see. And so like that lens is the one I look through. And I want to be presenting like the highest level of whatever it is.

[0:46:08.8]

SHELLY: The other thing I would say is I'm always looking for artists who want to experience their music in our medium. Because when we put artists on stage that, you know, come with a huge band, and you can't see the orchestra anyway, and frankly, it doesn't matter if they're there, I think the audience knows the orchestra looks bored and pissed off, which by the way, the audiences see that.

I mean, Ben Folds is a great example of this. Through his experience with orchestras, he has actually completed rearranged his concert to have nobody else with him. He doesn't bring a drummer anymore, he doesn't bring any support people. And the way that the audience hears his music is completely different than on the record. That is for me the ideal.

So I'm saying that because as like we're working with this rapper on Monday, and we're talking about developing a show with him, a full show, and you know, it's a long conversation of, okay, how would you hear your music differently. And I would say that to the producers, managers, agents in the room as well. You know, for me that's what I'm looking for. I want the audience to experience something different than going to see them at, you know, the little venue up the street where they could pay half the money.

Because frankly, our concerts, especially the movies, although movies are getting expensive to go to now, you know, you're paying five times what you would pay to see a movie in a cinema, to see it with the orchestra. And then you said John Williams. The audiences that come to these films now know exactly why they're coming. They stay through the end credits. And when the composer name comes on the screen, they lose their business, right?

[0:48:02.5]

Lose it. The other thing that we've started doing, and thank god we're doing it every time, is if you're sitting in the balcony, and I don't know how many of you went to Heinz Hall the other day, but if you're sitting in the balcony, the movie screen covers the entire woodwind, brass, and percussion. The audience up there can only see the strings.

So what we've started doing is, after the credits, taking the screen up, and I've experienced the reaction of the people up there. By the way, the cheap seats are the ones we want to come back. [LAUGHING] You know what I mean? Like it's a lot of new people up there. But when they see the dramatic forces that have been playing that score, I just got chills.

BYRON: We are going to steal that idea.

SHELLY: You're welcome. Conference money well spent. There you go, everyone. Have a nice — and we're done.

[LAUGHTER]

SHELLY: So I mean, it's just like realizing those kind of things, you know, those are really great moments for people.

STEVE: That's the last complaint we got when we did — we did *Empire Strikes Back* in November, and we got that exact complaint of someone's like, "I mean, the concert was great, but we couldn't see the trombones." It was like, man, there's a screen the size of a barn over the stage. Like I know you can't, it's not our fault. But fixing it, that's really good.

SHELLY: You have to fight for it, especially the *Harry Potter* people. They do not want you to mess with the screen. But I will tell you that our trombone section, and I'm a trombone player, so — they thanked me afterward. They said, "My students were up there, and they loved seeing me." And then, you know, when we acknowledge all the sections, I mean, people lost their minds.

STEVE: That's cool.

SHELLY: But the musicians felt it, and immediately, you know — you know that reciprocation that happens. So —

STEVE: We're doing that.

SHELLY: Okay. I would love to hear from you. Because I think that's another one of the things on my list here, is that I don't pretend to know everything. [LAUGHING] I try to foster an open environment with our staff, and audience members to bring me ideas. I don't even have TikTok, y'all. I don't understand it. I don't spend all day on YouTube. But people bring great ideas. And so that's the other thing I would really urge you to do, is to just talk to people. Because they'll give you great gems.

[0:50:27.4]

And the other thing is, I think we've said this, this is not *Field of Dreams*, which people at the Pittsburgh Symphony are tired of hearing me say that. [LAUGHING] But like we said, if you play it, it doesn't mean they're going to come. We have to reach them, we have to welcome them, we have to invite them. So does anyone want to share any successes, failures? Has anything spoken to you? Carl? Oh, Steve Weiser from the Erie Philharmonic. Yes, thanks Carl.

BYRON: Hi Carl. Love you.

SHELLY: Carl Topilow, Cleveland Pops. Kevin?

[OFF-MIC QUESTION]

SHELLY: Oh man, I've got so many thoughts. [LAUGHING]

DARCY: That's a bummer. I'm sorry.

SHELLY: I'm going to let someone else take this, because I would —

BYRON: You're getting ready to lose your stuff.

SHELLY: I'm going to lose my business.

[0:52:08.5]

BYRON: Well, I could quickly say, orchestras immediately feel from the beginning of a rehearsal, you start playing, they're judging the quality of the arrangements. Pops can really suck. I mean, just it can be bad. And so if you don't have quality arrangements, and that's the first thing I go to, because that's my success of that concert is gauged by how good the arrangements are. I mean, of course you would not want a concert where you're playing whole notes the whole concert.

So my goal in Pops is to always engage the strings, and everybody else as much as possible. That makes sense. And that's to your point about how this is not like playing at the bar. This is a whole thing. So it — the quality is what musicians are looking — and that's why they're not showing up. And again, that's almost another 10 year repair, when people — when they've got to have their friends say,

“Hey, it was really a good concert. There was stuff for us to play. The quality was good, the chords and the — there was no dissonance, stupid stuff, that the charts were good.”

So I think that’s the baseline of having them buy into it. The other part is that, you know, the tradition is also what they’re angered at. And I get that. What we’ve been discussing today, there’s been a lot of talks of how things could be done differently. And those conversations are tough for folks who want to be immovable, that refuse to move. Jack Welch, the great businessman said, “When change outside of the organization is moving faster than change within the organization, then the end is near.”

[0:53:59.5]

So change is the reality of what has to happen, and the American orchestra of today can’t look like it looks — sorry, the American orchestra in the future can’t look like it looks today. If it does, it won’t be here. So things have to change. Are we still going to be married to a tuxedo as the dress? Or is it more welcoming to see something a little bit more casual? Because if I feel like, man, like what’s — who are these guys? This is like George Washington with the wig and everything, let’s go back that far.

SHELLY: What’s a dinner jacket, by the way? [LAUGHING] Nobody knows what a dinner jacket is anymore.

DARCY: It’s made up, it’s not real.

SHELLY: We’ve cut the white jackets. We’re done with them.

BYRON: Yeah, so there’s those changes. And you know, by the way, when you get complaints about people dancing in the aisles for Motown, if everybody thinks everything you do is great, then you’re not really successful. Somebody’s got to bitch at something. And then you know you’re doing your job. There should be some tension there, right? I mean, nobody liked *Rite of Spring* when it came out. People leaving and all that kind of stuff. And now we praise it. And of course because it’s great art. Well, Pops has to evolve to that place where you can finally see it as an art. And if you don’t know Jeff Tyzik, he’s a master at doing that. And you work with him too.

DARCY: Oh yeah, yeah, no, Jeff — the way Jeff and I kind of describe our Pops series, our goal is to try to — you know, we try to lure people in with what they know, and then kind of dazzle them with what they didn’t know kind of within that program, and that’s been a helpful hook. You know, that musician

component, it's really tough, you know? I find — because I mean, that's a big — that's like a value judgment, you know? What are we valuing?

[0:55:56.6]

And you know, I — because I do book shows that are — that can be rough on our musicians. You know, it can be — they sometimes can be boring, they can be really loud. So you know, I have found, say, if you know musicians are, say, complaining at rehearsal, that attitude can sometimes change when they're at the evening show. It's a sold out house, and that energy, it can kind of make you forget maybe what I was angry about during the day, but — I mean, I don't know, as far as any advice, like I find that musicians, and especially people whose minds you're never going to change, the people that are like, "I'm never going to be as excited about a John Williams concert as I am about Brahms. Never." Like that sometimes can't be a goal.

But just making people feel heard, you know? And be like why — like explain this to me, like I want to understand your side of this. And even saying like, you know, I maybe don't agree with you, like here's my perspective. I don't know necessarily that — I mean, one, I'd be fired in a week if I was ever a personnel manager, so god bless all the people that have to deal with that, couldn't do it. But — so whatever the nicest way to say is, like, well friend, if we were cutting all of this programming, we would go out of business. So like do you want to be keeping your job?

[LAUGHING] So whatever nice way to —

STEVE: That totally works. That was nice. That was good, yeah.

DARCY: Thank you.

STEVE: I think for us a lot of it has to do with how we change the attitude, of how we presented all of the works. I think before our current staff and our board was in existence, we would have board members that would be like, "Oh, well we have the symphonic concerts, and then there's the Pops orchestra." They didn't even view it as the same Erie Phil, they almost thought it was two different groups that did concert A and concert B.

So I think us showing that we treat all 10 concerts that we do with the utmost seriousness, with the marketing, with the pushes that we do, with the fact that we're selling out both sides of it both on the core symphonic classical subscription — whatever. All 10 concerts we're seeing sell out on both sides of the equation. But I think us — by us as a staff and our marketing presence, showing that we value

this just as much as we do a Brahms and a Beethoven, the musicians I think from our side started to take it just as seriously.

But we had to change that culture across the board with our subscribers, our board members, our musicians, everybody. They almost viewed it as like orchestra A and orchestra B. And I think to your point it's all the Erie Phil, it's all the classical symphonic music that we're doing just has different tinges to it. But we definitely had to fight that early on for sure.

[0:58:24.4]

SHELLY: Yeah. Okay, so many thoughts. The first thing that comes to mind is, in a way, they're being forced to go to a concert of music they wouldn't go to. It's like having, you know, an audience member — or someone off the street like, "You're going to sit here and listen to this whole thing." But they don't like it, right? So just we have to acknowledge that not everybody's going to like everything. An instance comes to mind, Marvin Hamlisch [?], as Scott mentioned, was our principal Pops conductor.

I remember walking backstage with him at intermission, going to the dressing room, and a violinist stopped us and said, "I didn't go to Juilliard for this." And he very quickly said, "Well, I did," and kept walking. [LAUGHING] It's very, very true. So you know, it's also — it's managing expectations, it's being kind, but I think it's also being transparent. You know, if you have your musicians committee and you're talking financials, if these other concerts are selling out or making money, maybe we need to say that, you know?

We need to survive. We need to pay the light bill, so — and also it — this is a perfect full circle moment. It's bringing new audiences. You know, we see different people. I mean, to give you an example, there are some core weekends that we don't have Saturday concerts. So I booked BabyFace, Kenny BabyFace Edmonds.

BYRON: You have a crush on BabyFace.

[1:00:01.9]

SHELLY: He's so gorgeous.

BYRON: So please just go ahead and be transparent.

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SHELLY: I mean, he took off his shirt during the concerts. [LAUGHING] Yes. Anyway, I put it on a Saturday between two core subscription concerts, and whoo boy did I hear about it. You know, how dare you, you're going to affect our Sunday matinee, blah blah blah. Well, fun fact, it sold out.

And it was a very, as Kenny put it, multicultural audience, who was losing their business, and we made very good revenues on it. And I never heard about those complaints again for that concert. And they were just blown away at the audience that was there. So you know, I just think it's — we're evolving, we're changing, right?

BYRON: Well, can I say another thing about something that you did, is — so Shelly worked her tail off and got Sting for two concerts. So everybody who was like, "I don't want to play this pop music, blah blah blah. I sub out the Pop shows." They didn't sub out that Pop show.

SHELLY: They did not sub out.

BYRON: They were there, and they had their cameras there, and they took selfies with Sting in the rehearsal and all that stuff. So watch it.

SHELLY: Yeah, I mean, we all pick and choose. I mean, the thing I would say about the Sting concert as well is it was shocking, our concerts for three months after that sold incredibly well. There were people next to my friends that said, "I've lived in Pittsburgh my whole life, and I've never been in this hall." And they're people that can afford the tickets, because to bring Sting the tickets were not cheap. But you know, it just rose our profile in the community. People started paying attention to what we were doing. Now, it was the golden goose, it will probably never happen again, and the stars aligned. Thank god.

BYRON: But people left and they said, "That's my orchestra."

SHELLY: They did.

DARCY: Shelly, didn't you say that like all programming increased sales? The Sting effect, as you were saying?

SHELLY: Yeah, all programming. Like Planets sold — it was just everything for three months, people were paying attention to us. So now, you know, I'm trying to think like what's the next thing that will get us in the news and get — you know, get people talking about us. And that's what we want. We
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want to be relevant. And I think that's what expanding our styles of music — ugh, we are coming up with terms up here.

[1:02:27.3]

Expanding styles of music gets people talking about you, right? It's things they're not expecting, but we need to get them to expect us to just play good music. End of list, right? Thank you for sparking that conversation. Anybody else want to talk to us? Please?

[OFF-MIC QUESTION]

SHELLY: Yeah, and do you want to use a mic or just turn — yeah, probably turn it on because I had him turn it off. Everyone knows how to turn on a mic here. [LAUGHING]

SPEAKER: I'm a trumpeter, not a singer, so —

SHELLY: Yes!

BYRON: Yay!

SPEAKER: So this is kind of weird. So I'm principal trumpet and I'm on the board of directors of the orchestra that I'm with. And we do something kind of different where each of our shows has a theme, but we combine both Pops and classical. So getting through COVID, we never actually had a problem, we didn't really have much of anything going on like all of you guys. But when we came back it was like, okay, how do we get our audience back? And we were pretty worried about it. And we've sold out almost every show going forward. And it's interesting though, what we were talking about about all of the musicians are just like, "My god, I hate this."

And I'm kind of the cheerleader trying to be like, "Hey, isn't this Pops great?" And of course like a trumpeter loves playing John Williams, but the clarinetist is like, "Oh my god, kill me if I have to play another western movie theme, you know?" So it's been kind of hard to bridge that, but it's been working really well. And I just thought, you know, it's nice that we don't really say, oh it's classical, it's Pops, it's just everything, and it's working.

[1:04:00.2]

[APPLAUSE]

SHELLY: I'm just curious, can you give like an example of what one of those themed concerts were?

SPEAKER: So we did — we just did a western. So we're in Arizona. We just did like a wild west kind of theme, but we also did the entire Copeland Rodeo suite. We did all of these — I mean, we did *How The West Was Won*, we did *Silverado* movie theme. We did Grofe, Grand Canyon Suite. I mean, it was a little bit of everything. Next season we're doing kind of a sports, and the human achievement theme. So we have *Chariots of Fire* on the concert, but we also have Beethoven *Egmont Overture*. So it's kind of this weird mix. But everybody's really excited about it. So it's working.

SHELLY: What is your orchestra?

SPEAKER: We're the North Valley Symphony in North Phoenix.

SHELLY: Fantastic.

DARCY: That's great, because it shows like equal footing. Like equal level of all of this programming. That's awesome. Good for you.

SPEAKER: So I just wanted to share.

SHELLY: Yay, come on down. I've always wanted to be on *The Price is Right*.

BYRON: [HUMMING]

SHELLY: [HUMMING] I'm a trumpet player, thank you. [LAUGHING]

SPEAKER: Yeah, so I was just curious — I kind of have a question that maybe is a little uncomfortable, but I think it's a good one to ask. I'm just curious how we think about making decisions about programming that are really positive revenue makers for us, but may make connecting with certain audiences more challenging. We talk a lot about *Harry Potter*, obviously there's been a lot of baggage with that this year obviously.

And you know, I moved to Richmond in December of this last year, and I've wanted to bring Thorgy since I got there. And so as soon as I got to Richmond, I started going to drag shows, started going to the community, trying to understand how we could connect with them so that they would come to our show obviously. Right, going to people where they are. And the second we announced we were doing *Harry Potter*, all of those talks kind of took a huge step backwards with it.

[1:06:02.5]

But we weren't in the position to turn down something that was such a major revenue generator for us that year. But it's given — I mean, it literally took probably 10 steps back with us with that community. And so these types of things happen not just with *Potter*. There's other things that we do that have baggage associated with it. And so I'm just curious how everybody is dealing with that, how we're addressing those things.

SHELLY: I can take it. So we're having this struggle right now internally. But like Darcy says about the rapper, and just addressing it, you know? Where we have come to on the *Harry Potter* thing is that for the most part it seems that the Potter community is boycotting anything new. But that because the film stars have spoken out so much against JK Rowling, that people are still okay with the movies. But if you're seeing a backlash, I mean, talk about it, you know? Just have a conversation with the community. If you've built those relationships, I think it warrants listening to them, and you know, understanding, and addressing it. Is it selling horribly or is it just the — ?

[OFF-MIC CONVERSATION]

SHELLY: Okay, it hurt the relationship? I think you need to have a conversation.

DARCY: Yeah, I think he was saying like, say, progress, say, towards bringing someone like Thorgy, that community's like, "Well, clearly you don't care about us if you're supporting *Harry Potter*."

SHELLY: Yeah, I mean, don't you think having a conversation about it though?

DARCY: Oh yeah, no, definitely. Like I — you know, like whether it's even, say, like a part of a *Harry Potter* performance is like a pre-concert talkback or or a post-concert something, or even a — I don't know, like reception or — I don't know, like say something in a bar, whatever, like with the people that you're trying to, say, like rally to get on your team for Thorgy, to — you know, I'm always — I'm very all about transparency.

[1:08:03.1]

And kind of saying like, you know, this is why orchestras are doing *Harry Potter*. It is there's a huge revenue component for us at a time when we really, really need it. Here is like our philosophy about it, and like yeah, pointing to like what the kind of actors have done. You know, saying — like I don't know if there's some, you know, community partner that could maybe — that would also understand this and, say, maybe be on your side of like, you know, yes, we can have *Harry Potter* and we can have Thorgy and not alienate communities to get like a — I don't know, a help — stamp of approval or like someone outside of your organization on the team about it. You know, you could also say for every — you know, for *Harry Potter*, for every ticket purchased we're donating blank to blank organization, or something like that.

SHELLY: The Trevor Project or something.

DARCY: Sorry?

SHELLY: Trevor Project or something.

DARCY: Yeah, the Trevor Project or something like that. So — but I mean, like that is tough. Like and I can understand why members of that community would just be like, “You can't have this cake and eat it too,” and like that can be a rough narrative. But yeah, I would hope it's possible. Because I know like other people — I mean, we do both, you know? And we've kind of amazingly not had a lot of backlash about *Harry Potter*, which is kind of impressive for Portland, who likes getting upset about everything.

But yeah, I think it's like that — the side of, you know, here is what we — I understand that, we're not ignoring it, we're facing it, and like even kind of here's how we're counteracting it, you know? Yes, there's like the cost of — price of doing something with JK Rowling attached means, we are putting extra resources towards like what's fighting that.

STEVE: We did a similar thing not from this side of a repertoire but on our symphonic side. We were supposed to do *Alexander Nevsky* this past May as our season finale on a program that also had Tchaikovsky on it. And we had to be very transparent as to why doing *Alexander Nevsky* is not something that was appropriate right now but we were still going to do the Tchaikovsky piano concerto, and we enlisted a local professor, we donated proceeds to a local Ukrainian refugee group just to sort of kind of work our way through it.

[1:10:12.0]

But we had a discussion about it, we were open and honest with how we put it on our social media, and we engaged the local refugee community and worked with a professor to help us tell that story. But the biggest thing is we talked about it and had a discussion, which I think is valid for anything like this that you would have to deal with.

SHELLY: Yeah, I mean, even just having a statement saying we don't support JK Rowling. I don't know. No, it's a — I'm sorry you're going through that. That's awful. Anybody else want to — ? Yeah, come on down. I can't, I have to stop. [LAUGHING]

STEVE: Getting louder every time.

SPEAKER: As administrators, were there any — and as decision makers for your orchestra, were there any specific experiences or conversations that you had that led you to start making these changes, and to change your mind about different kind of performances?

DARCY: Zinger.

SHELLY: I mean, so I think for me, it's — I'm having a personal journey of trying to understand and open my mind, and read, and acknowledge my privilege, and listen to other people. And so — I mean, I think it has to start with ourselves, frankly. And then that, you know, has really opened my mind to all of these things. More music. And also trying to understand who our audience is, and how to make our audience look like our community, like Byron said. I don't know if that addressed your question. Okay, yeah. Somebody else take it, because I've got to think on that. It's a great question.

[1:11:58.4]

STEVE: I think for us, again, it kind of comes back to what I talked about earlier, and what Byron said, and again, we engaged the composer, Tim Adams, to write our Harriet Tubman piece last year.

SHELLY: Our former tympanist.

STEVE: Tympanist, exactly. But as Tim said, he was like, “This is — you have to be in this to five to ten to twenty five years. You can’t just — you can’t expect to do a commission on Harriet Tubman and expect the world to change and expect your audience to just magically be there. You have to be invested in it.”

And I think that really changes our perspective as an orchestra, is how do we look at a five to ten year plan of we need to do the outreach, the community concerts, we need to go to the churches. We have to be like Paul, to walk into a room like that, but that doesn’t happen overnight. So I think it’s us acknowledging our shortcomings and where can we actually make the difference that we want to see happen over time.

BYRON: You know, and to be fair to Paul’s thing, is he had already had a lot of relationships with those people. And you know, again, you should talk to him if you want to, because he really does a great job. So that’s another reason why they knew him so well, through the Basketball Hall of Fame, he knew a lot of people that he could bring in to the table. But the fact that he went and did this, and the five to ten year plan, what you’re talking about, is so important.

None of this stuff — your career’s like that. Trying to play an instrument is like that. This is not instantaneous. It takes time, and it takes putting your — you know, doing it consistently for a long period of time to see any real results.

DARCY: I’m a pretty selfish programmer. I want to book shows that I want to see happen. But you know, I’m a big believer in, you know, all music is music. I think there can be no greater magic than, say, putting an artist who typically does not perform with a symphony out in front of an orchestra. I think that just elevates — it elevates everything, you know? Audiences come. But like to see an artist that they were seeing in like, you know, some basement art that smelled like beer, and now this person is sitting in front of an orchestra, and you know, I’m going to like — I want to like dress up a little bit and like, oh, this is like just such a different, fun experience.

[1:14:06.0]

And I think just like there’s just absolute magic when like these partnerships are made, and you know, I do believe that like every single type of music can be done, say, with an orchestra, if it’s done the right way. And I think we’re seeing more and more of that. You know, people that play even at the Hollywood Bowl and all these huge summer festivals, these like commercial artists, stepping in with orchestras. That’s something that I really love the most, because — and that’s been successful for us on audience building, of you know, I’ve seen so and so at these places, and now I’m coming to see it with you guys.

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But yeah, I also — I mean, I absolutely start with what I like. And I mean, I've been doing this for four years now on the presenting side, and I want to see people my age and younger coming. And to like get that bug of like how great it is to go see my symphony orchestra. And when there's a million different things, and so — like something for everyone there, yeah, that's just — that's like how I look at it.

SHELLY: I mean, we have to. It's survival, right? I mean, we have to start getting new audiences in the door. We have to have younger people. And my husband is a music educator. And you know, the music education in schools now is so different than even when I was growing up, that in a way we have to step in, and we have to start presenting concerts that people will bring their kids to, that — you know, that we're really bringing along the next generation. And — or, you know, this is it. So I mean, I think some of it is survival, and it's also just fun to see new people experience us. So someone raised — thank you for that question.

[OFF-MIC QUESTION]

SHELLY: Are you Jeff? We have to talk. Yeah.

[OFF-MIC QUESTION]

[1:16:14.4]

SHELLY: Yeah, anyone?

BYRON: Well, I'll just say for me personally, I don't see why there should be any sensitivity. And maybe there is. But whenever I've done concerts, you know, for me it's I love gospel music. So it's the first thing I do if I can. And that's what we'll do — we'll do gospel music for the Juneteenth concert that's coming up. That's got to be a part. It's part of people's lives. It's, you know — and you don't have to preach at those concerts, you can let the music do whatever preaching that you want to do, and people who aren't religious will still feel the music.

You have to be dead not to feel gospel music. You don't have to be a believer, you just know that there's a message there and there's a feeling that you get. So that's why I know — I enjoy it so much, you know? So I hope that there's no issue for people. And I know that it also brings in people — and

the interesting thing is that you have to always be mindful. I've done gospel concerts with orchestras and big bands and stuff.

You know, my Black community will show up, and that'll be great. I'm like, wow, this is great, they're going to come for this Stravinsky. No, you know? But you're, again, building audience that way. Again, they say that's ours, that's mine. And then that means they have a little bit of ownership in it too of your orchestra. They own a piece of the rock.

SHELLY: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if we have a sensitivity around it. And to be very blunt, with the concerts that I am programming, I have to show a net positive. So if there's an audience for it, we're probably going to book it, you know what I mean? So I don't know. I think I have to take it on a case by case basis if there was a sensitivity. Just like a rap artist that might be explicit. I mean, the same kind of thing, you know? Just be very transparent and open and set expectations with the audience, and if it's not for them, well, you know, have a conversation, give a refund, I don't know.

BYRON: I had this dream of producing a religious based concert, and I would have four people I would invite to speak just briefly. A Catholic priest, like a Baptist minister, a rabbi, and like somebody from a Muslim thing. And then we bring everybody together in that way, right? So the thought is like, oh no, you just do one of those guys, because he's going to conflict.

[1:18:46.2]

There's places where those people agree. So we have the opportunity using music to bring people together in a — even in a religious sense. And I think that's the power of music. We can do that through music, and we need to use that to exercise bringing people together with this music.

DARCY: I would even, you know, maybe challenge someone internally of saying like, does this issue ever come up when we're programming *The Messiah* in December?

BYRON: Exactly, yeah.

DARCY: Probably not.

SHELLY: Zinger.

DARCY: Yep.

SHELLY: Get them. Thanks Jeff. Someone was waving their arms in the back. Hey, come on down.

DARCY: You're so good at this.

SHELLY: It's not getting old for me but it is for you. [LAUGHING] Don't give me a mic.

SPEAKER: Hi. Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Ichi, and I'm with the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra in Michigan. With the limited time, I would like to share our success with our Pops series this season. Back in the — probably a year and a half ago when we were planning our season, and this story I'm going to tell shows the importance of diversity. We had the artistic planning committee talking about, okay, what are we going to do for our Pops concert?

[1:20:04.2]

And growing up in Taiwan, coming from Asia, I have been always a big, big fan of Studio Ghibli. And raise your hand if you know what that is. So that's more than what we had in our committee already. So as soon as I mentioned that, the committee were like, "What is this? What are you talking about?" But that went on a journey of convincing our board members, hey, Ann Arbor, we have a very large Asian community. It became a huge collaboration within the orchestra — within the administration.

I was learning and community director back then. So we reach out to the local library. So we have — and the libraries were extremely helpful. They put on a series of Studio Ghibli relevant events, free events for the local community to come participate, and we were able to go out there, talk about the concert, provide a free ticket drawing. We connected with Japanese Culture Center of the University of Michigan, who then helped us to spread the news to the Japanese community, that they already have contact with, instead of us having to start from scratch.

We collaborated with the Michigan Theater in downtown Ann Arbor, who was having a series of Studio Ghibli films throughout the summer preceding the concert, and we were able to ad exchange, and also start promoting the event with them. In addition, myself would dress up as Totoro in the mascot costume.

[APPLAUSE]

SPEAKER: Walk to downtown Ann Arbor Summerfest, 90 degrees. Don't smell inside that costume.

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But that also — we also brought the costume to the rehearsals, and putting a little bit of shenanigans during the concert, and that really brought in the board members, the musicians, and we had the whole spectrum of board members and musicians who went from, like I said earlier, the, “Huh? What is that? Who is that? Can we really do that? Like is anybody going to come?”

[1:22:12.4]

And on the other spectrum we have musicians and board members who are like, “Oh my god, that’s my favorite thing. We’re so glad we are doing this. I have to get all my friends to come.” But at the same time they also take the leadership, willing to take the risk when they themselves don’t even know what it is. Our executive director, our board president, they are willing to jump in there and take the leap of faith and say, “We are going to do it. And even before we really see any significant ticket sales,” as many of you probably experienced the same.

Pops concerts, a lot of times the ticket sales happen at the very last minute. But long before that they decided, you know what, if we’re going to do this, we’re going to go all the way. And we added a second show. And of that, the result was two completely sold out shows this season. And it’s about diversity. You have a staff, a committee that has different voices, providing different opinions, and sometimes completely out of the blue. You have the collaboration within the orchestra, but also with the community partners that — and it’s also part of the finding the partners that convince the board that, hey, we really have the potential to do this thing.

So instead of just throwing out an idea, you present the possibility, the potential, and all these possible collaborations that could happen. And we sold — not only did we sell out, it was the very most diverse audience we have ever seen, both in ethnicity and age, and people from our long time subscribers to people who’s never been to the symphony before. And I just wanted to share the story about how sometimes things that nobody heard of could still make a real big difference. So thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

END OF TRANSCRIPT