



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON  
ENGAGING WITH  
ORCHESTRAS



## Who Are We?

- **Lindsey Nova** (Pittsburgh, PA)

Executive Director of Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras

Incoming Chair of the League of American Orchestras Youth Orchestra Division

- **Sonja Thoms** (Nashville, TN)

Vice President and General Manager of Nashville Symphony

Founder of Orchestras Careers



## **What do we hope you get out of this presentation?**

- A perspective shift
- Prompting reflection on what you could do differently to engage with youth
- Some hope for the future!



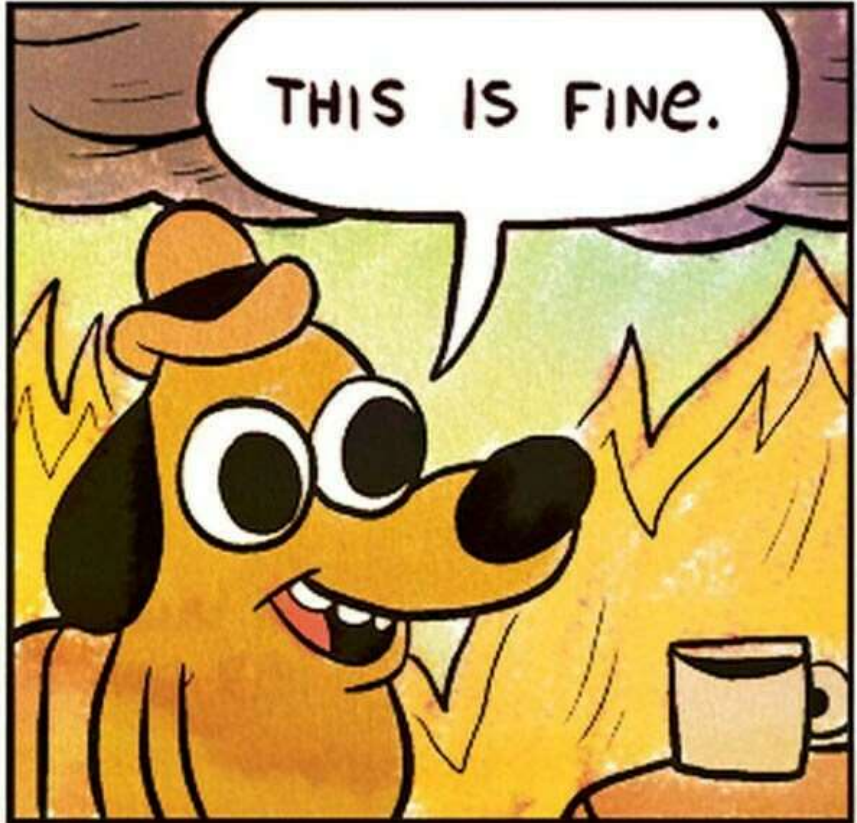
**VISION 2043!**  
**WHAT IS IT?**



**Why Should  
You Care?**



**HOUSE  
ALREADY  
ON FIRE?**



**TOO  
BUSY?**



**THINK IT'S  
THE WRONG  
TARGET?**



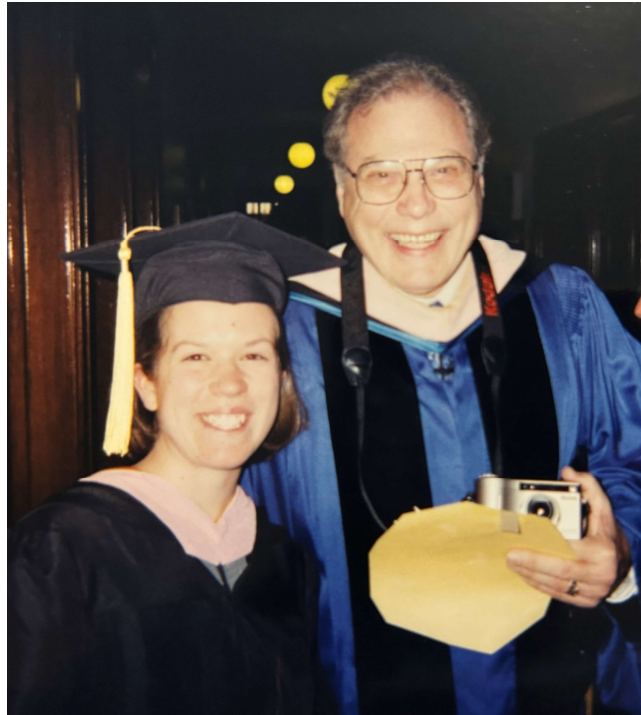


*Long-time friends!*



*20 years??*





**WE ARE  
VISION  
2023!**





# VISION 2043!

## WHAT IS IT?

*SPOILER ALERT: We're about to tell you the end of the story first...*



# So what is VISION 2043?

## Former music students...



- ...are significantly engaged with orchestras in some capacity.



- ...are financially supporting orchestras.



- ...expect that orchestras have shifted in terms of DEI.



- ...see orchestras communicating with audiences differently.



# METHODOLOGY

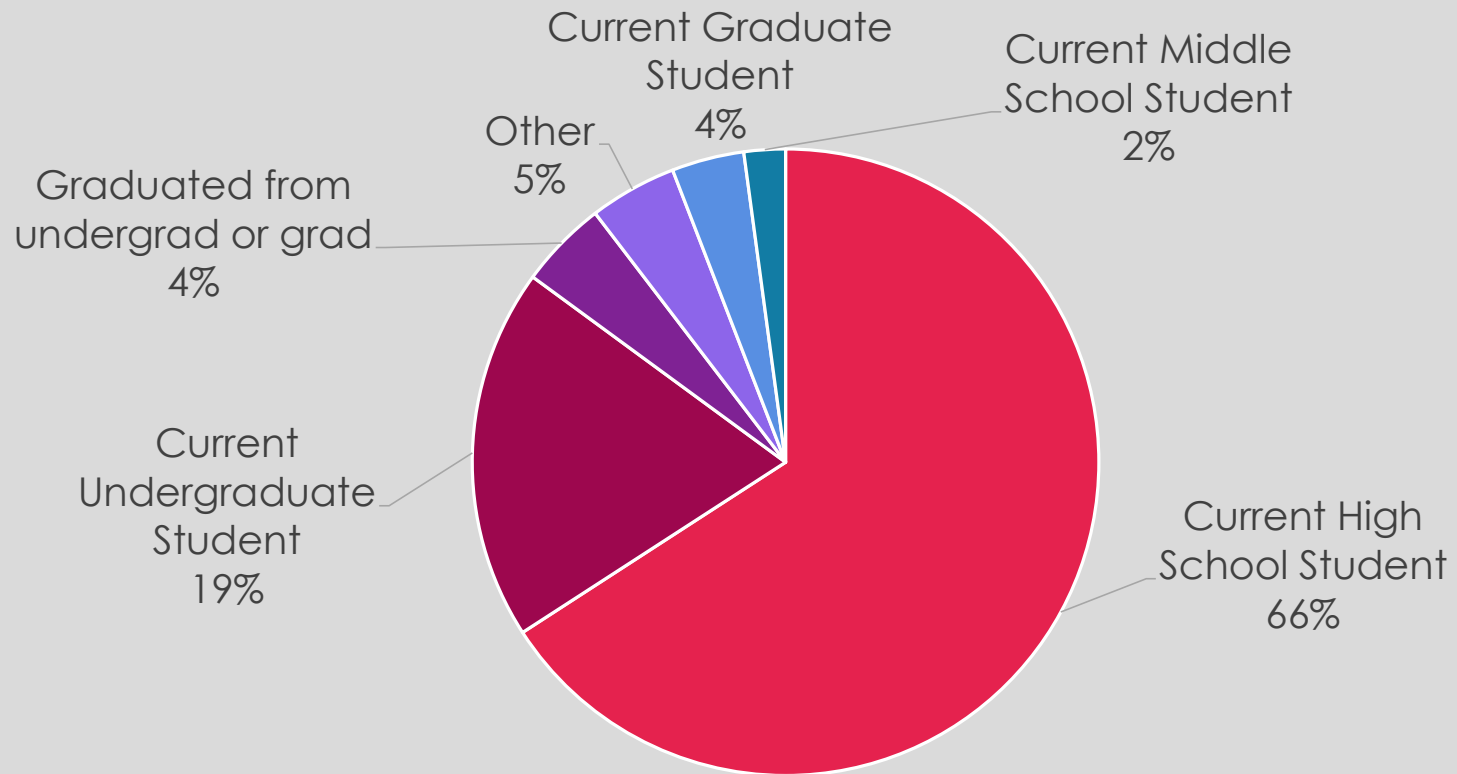
- Two focus groups with Pittsburgh students.
- Formation of Survey:
  - Questions generated after focus groups
  - Limited Open Answer
  - Simple and easy to fill out
- 500 respondents (275 responses to completion)
- Targeting current or recent music students
- Survey Distribution:
  - League of American Orchestras Youth Orchestra Division
  - University contacts
  - Orchestra Careers mailing list



# ORGS THAT DISTRIBUTED THE SURVEY

- Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (MA)
- Bryan High School (OH)
- Denver Young Artists Orchestra (CO)
- Duke String School (NC)
- Eastman School of Music (NY)
- Empire State Youth Orchestra (NY)
- Harmony Project (OH)
- Houston Youth Symphony (TX)
- Kalamazoo Junior Symphony Orchestra (MI)
- Le Moyne College (NY)
- League of American Orchestras
- Luther College (IA)
- Middle Tennessee State University (TN)
- Nashville Symphony (TN)
- New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJ)
- Orchestra Careers
- Penn State School of Music (PA)
- Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra (PA)
- South Carolina Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (SC)
- Tennessee Tech University (TN)
- The Kennedy Center - National Symphony Orchestra Youth Fellowship Program (DC)
- Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras (PA)
- Toledo Symphony Youth Orchestra (OH)
- Triangle Youth Music Philharmonic Association (NC)
- Texas Tech University Orchestra (TX)
- Wharton Institute for the Performing Arts (NJ)
- Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestras (WI)
- YOLA at LA Philharmonic (CA)
- Youth Chamber Connection (PA)

## Education Level of Survey Participants





**VISION 2043!**

**HOW DO WE GET THERE?**

**Ask yourself:**

TRUE OR FALSE:  
MOST SERIOUS MUSIC STUDENTS HAVE A  
GOAL OF BEING A PROFESSIONAL  
MUSICIAN?



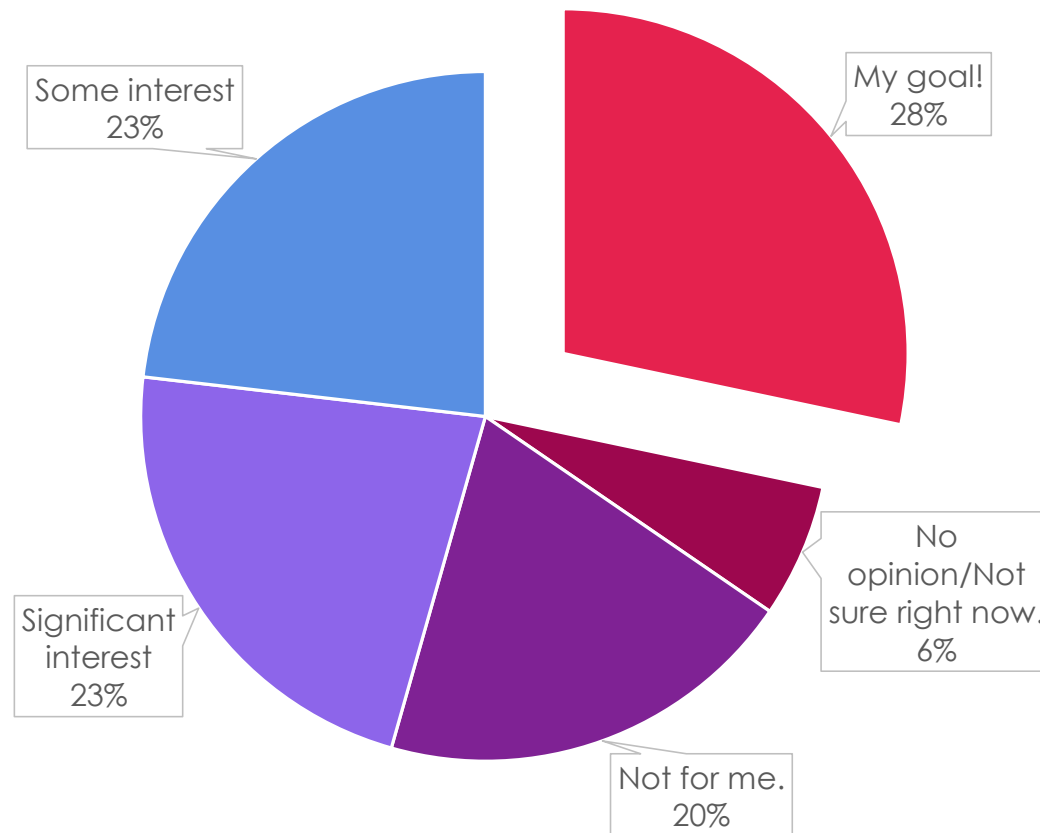


**FALSE**



**In 20 years,  
I want to be...**

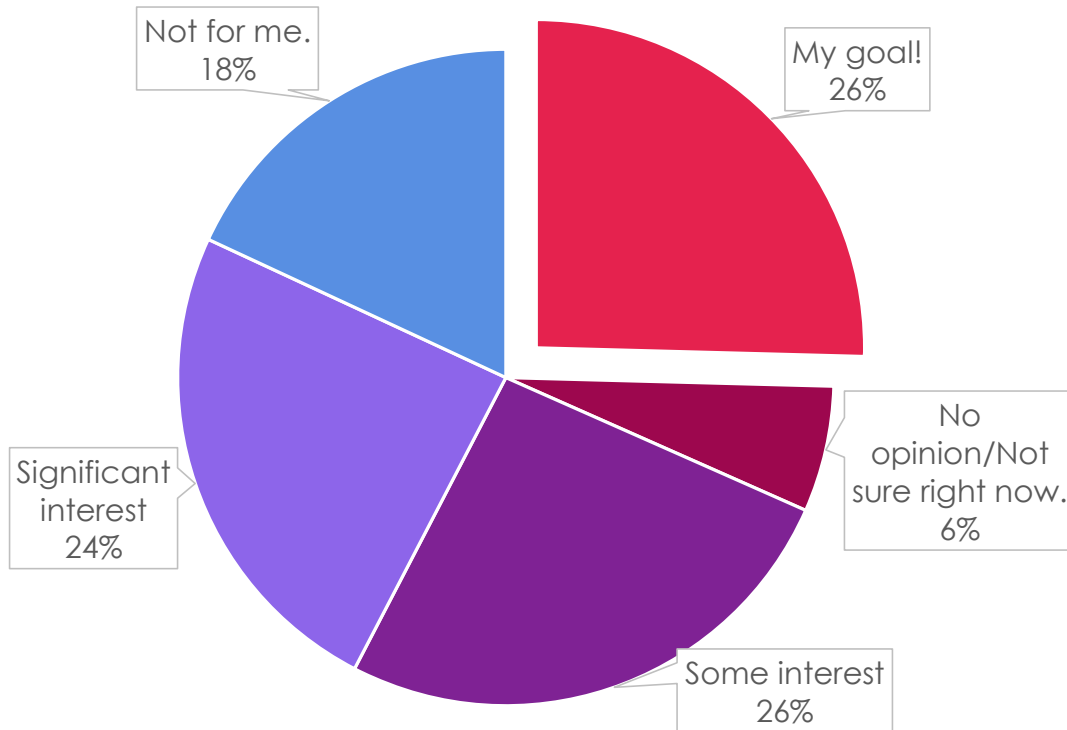
**... a professional musician**



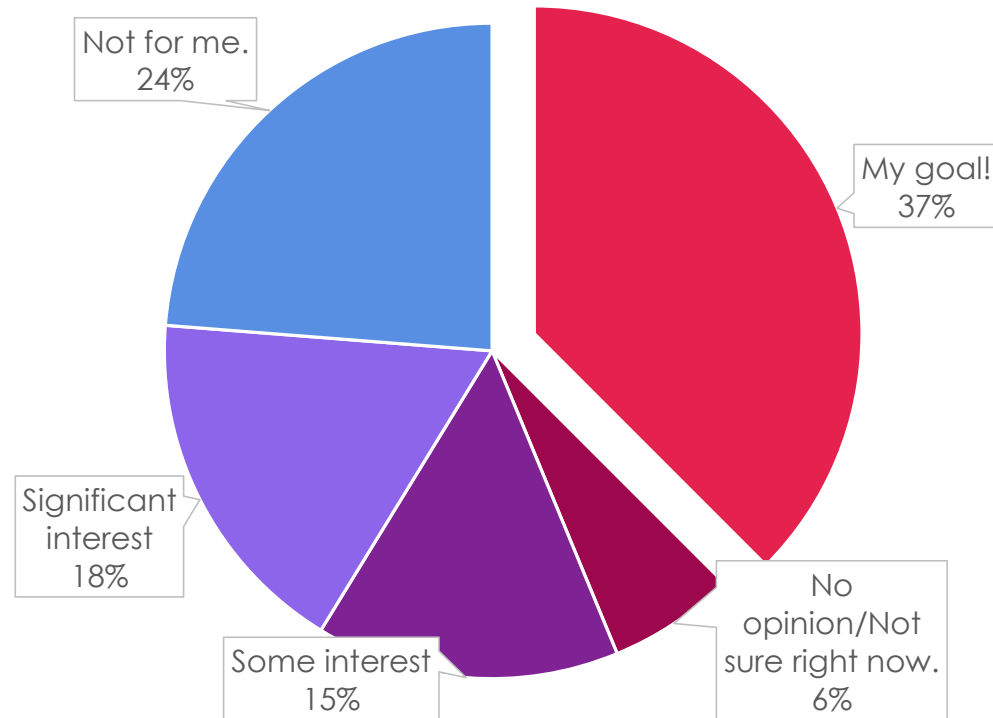
# In 20 years, I want to be...

## ... a professional musician

Middle School to High School Students)



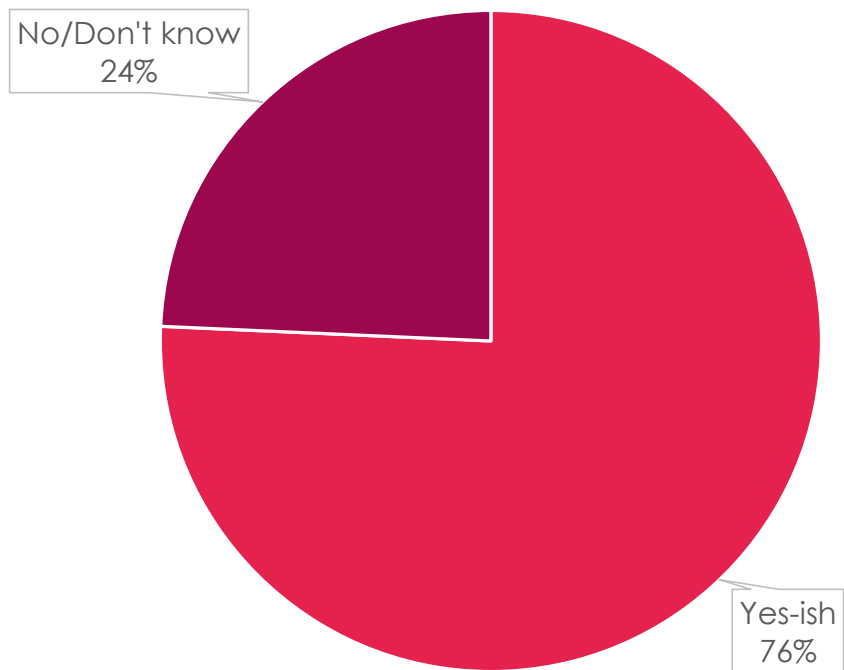
College students to Recent grads



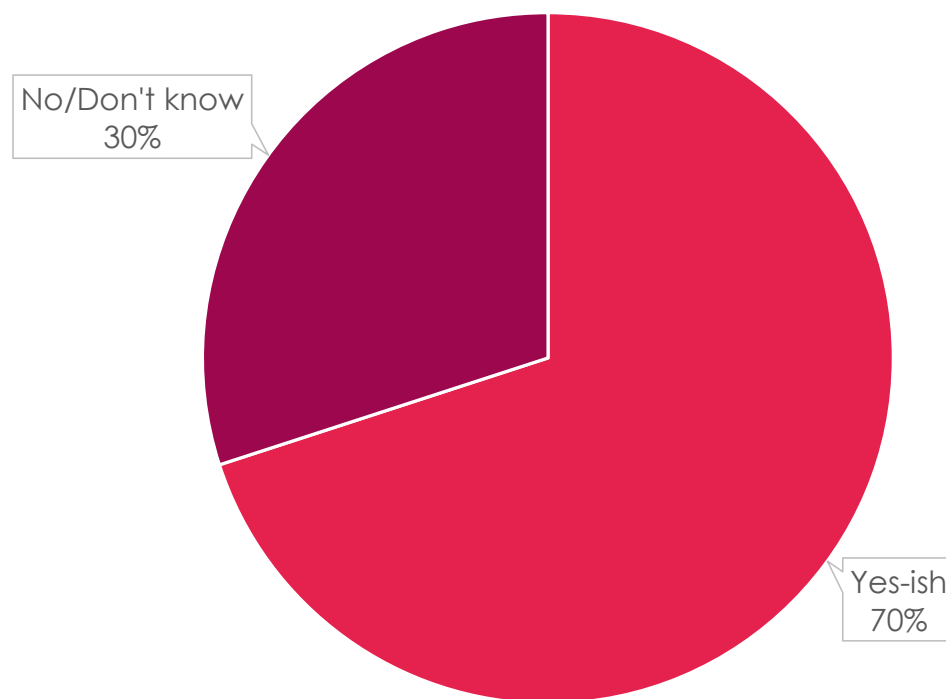
# In 20 years, I want to be...

## ... a professional musician

Middle school to high school students

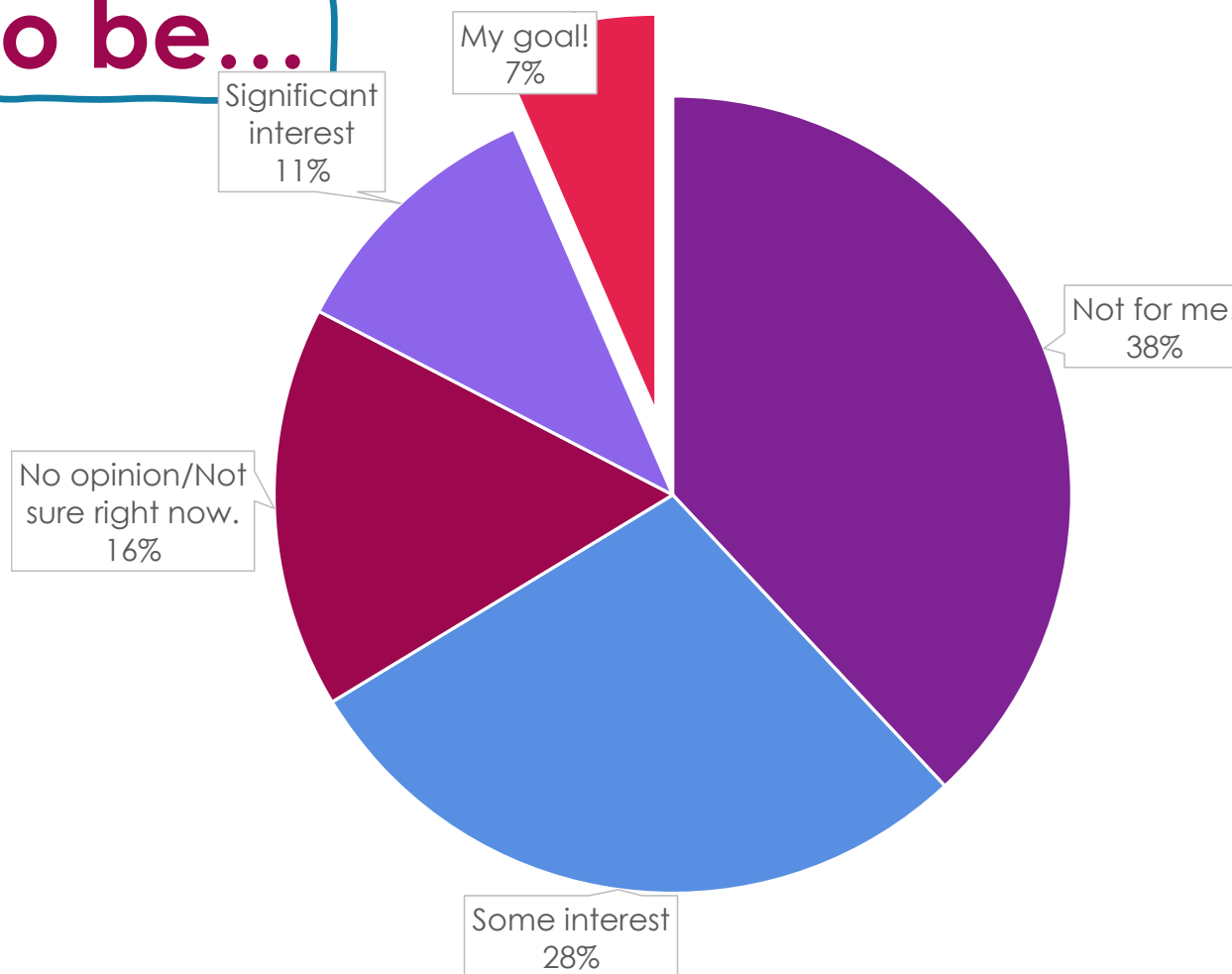


College students to recent grads



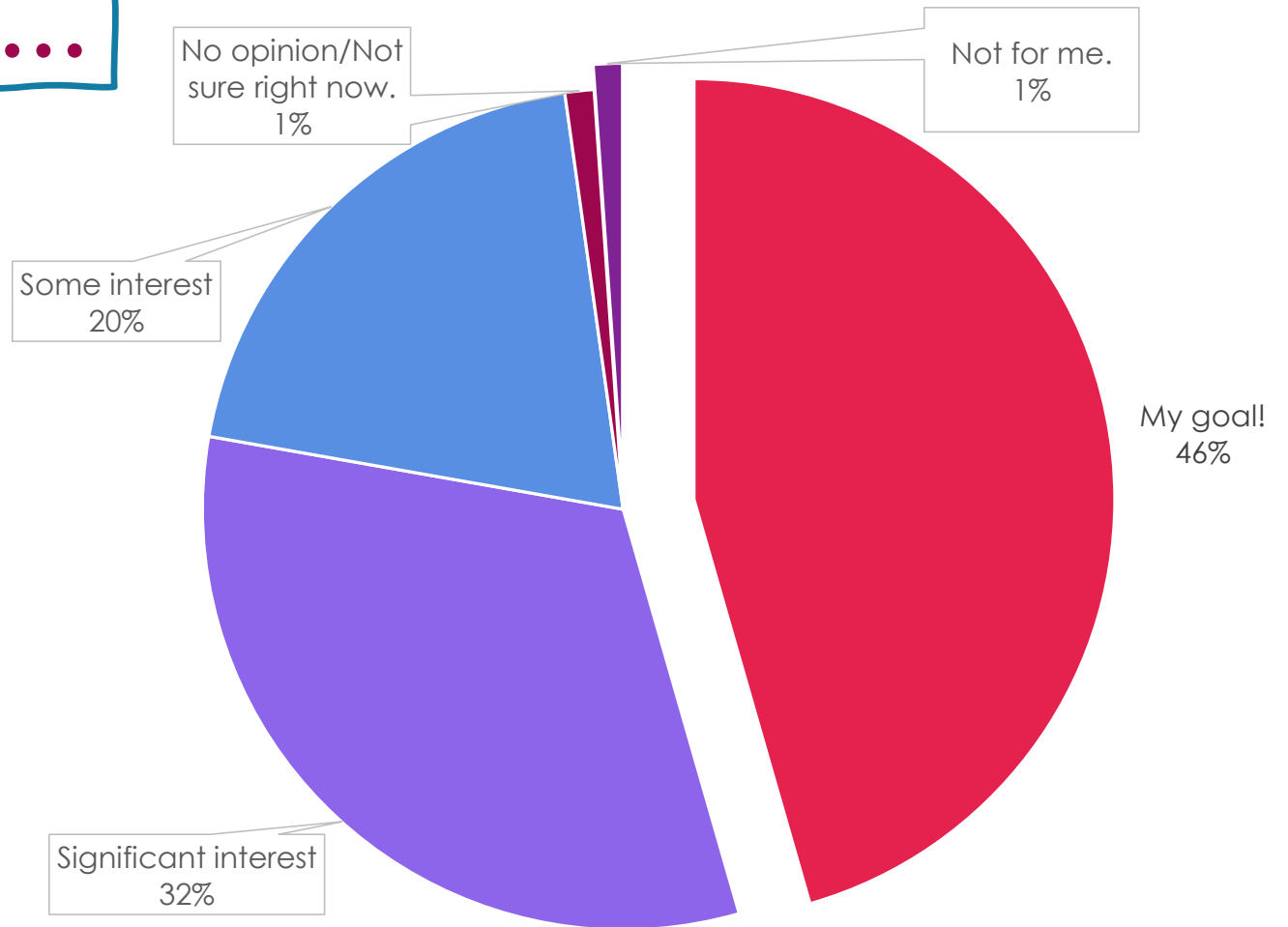
**In 20 years,  
I want to be....**

**... a staff member of an orchestra**



**In 20 years,  
I want to be...**

**...an audience member**

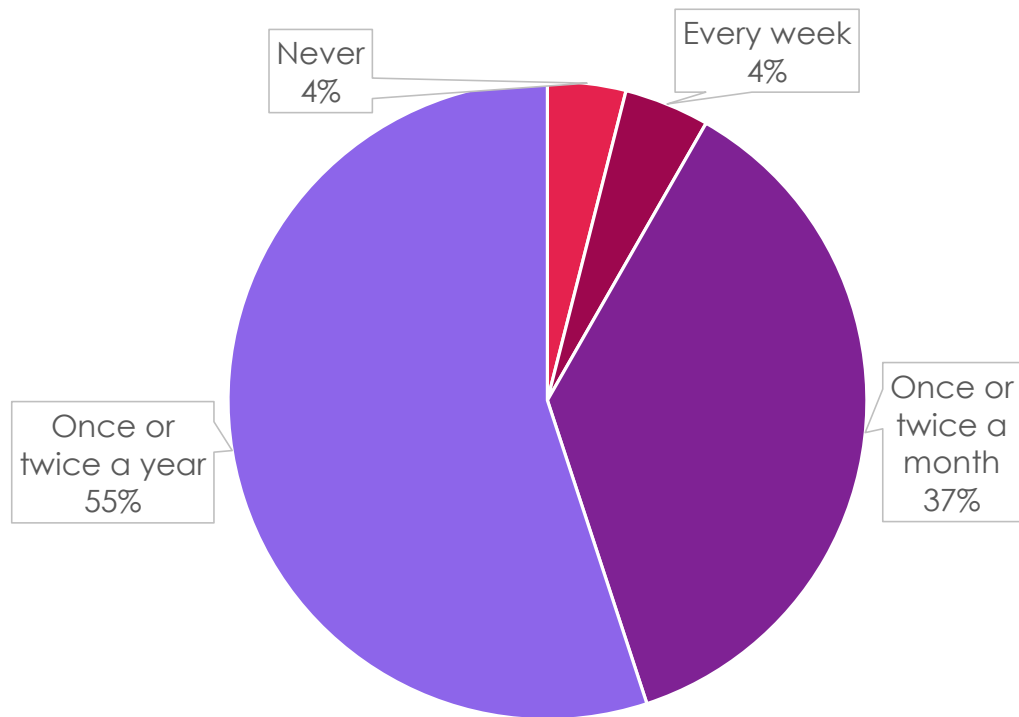






# ATTENDANCE

# HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND ORCHESTRA CONCERTS CURRENTLY?



# WHAT PREVENTS YOU FROM ATTENDING ORCHESTRA CONCERTS MORE OFTEN?

TOP TEN BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE – (pre-provided list generated from focus groups)		%
1	<b>I'm just really busy.</b>	<b>28%</b>
2	<b>Cost of the tickets.</b>	<b>17%</b>
3	<b>I don't want to go alone.</b>	<b>15%</b>
4	<b>Transportation.</b>	<b>12%</b>
5	My family doesn't want to go.	9%
6	I attend a lot already and couldn't attend more!	8%
7	It's boring/I don't know the music.	4%
8	My family does want to go, but I don't want to attend with them.	2%
9	Worried about health and safety.	2%
10	Something else.	2%

# WHAT IS ONE THING YOUR PROFESSIONAL ORCHESTRA COULD DO THAT WOULD HELP YOU ATTEND MORE OFTEN?

HOW TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE – open-ended questions		%
1	<b>Address the cost of Tickets</b>	<b>21%</b>
2	<b>Program specific pieces</b>	<b>19%</b>
3	<b>Better concert times (I'm just really busy)</b>	<b>18%</b>
4	<b>Better marketing</b>	<b>13%</b>
5	Nothing – I couldn't go more than I do!	7%
6	Bring concerts closer to me (transportation)	6%
7	Engage with me!	6%
8	Create opportunities to socialize and meet other people like me.	4%
9	Do more work to connect with school programs.	3%
10	Make the concerts less stuffy (elitism)	1%



## RE: ADVERTISING

”

“ The advertising is really bad. The **advertising only targets older audiences**, by sending out physical mail, or by using half-functioning websites. Orchestras should use social media (instagram, not facebook) if they want to get a younger audience. And have younger people run the social media.

”

“ I believe that **orchestras don't do enough to try and advertise themselves to the larger population of people**. I also think that live performances are not very accessible to people that are more financially unstable and outreach programs to try and engage these communities would be helpful.

”

“ What do orchestras get wrong? Advertising to anyone under 60.



## RE: ACKNOWLEDGE ME!

”

“ Have more masterclasses and opportunities to meet with them and have them tell more about their professional orchestra life. Also shadowing the players while they are in rehearsal to see what's it's like to be one.

”

“ I like when conductors are more interactive with the audience, make jokes to keep us engaged, etc. I don't believe keeping the talking to a minimum between pieces is a tradition that needs to be kept.

”

“ Talk to the audience more to give background on music, make jokes, and make it feel like a more personal experience



## RE: ELITISM

”

“ This is not necessarily "wrong", but it would be nice to see more work in terms of defeating the stigma that orchestra performances are only geared towards a certain type of person, or that **performances are stuffy and have "rules" that only certain people know/understand**. It would be great to continue working to make orchestra performances more accessible to ALL populations, and really focus on the relevancy of how the orchestra relates to the community that it is in, and how the orchestra can serve that specific community.

”

“ Something orchestras are getting wrong is the **policing of audience members to look/act/ be a specific way** to feel welcome and comfortable.

”

“ I feel that the orchestra industry still struggles with driving general public interest. This is in part due to the sometimes accurate stereotypes and concerns of elitism and inaccessibility. I feel that **more can be done and explored outside of tradition and norms** in order to make orchestral performances and “classical” music more accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

**Ask yourself:**

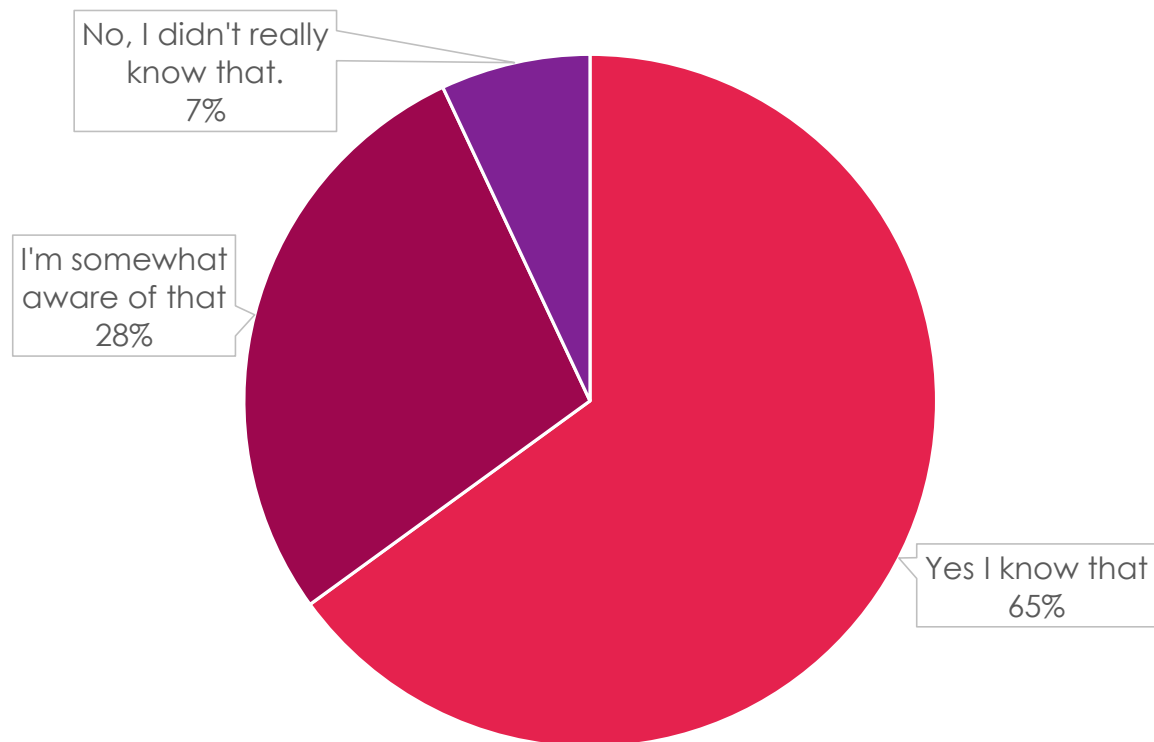
TRUE OR FALSE:  
MOST SERIOUS MUSIC STUDENTS KNOW THAT  
FUNDRAISING IS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF  
ORCHESTRA SURVIVAL?



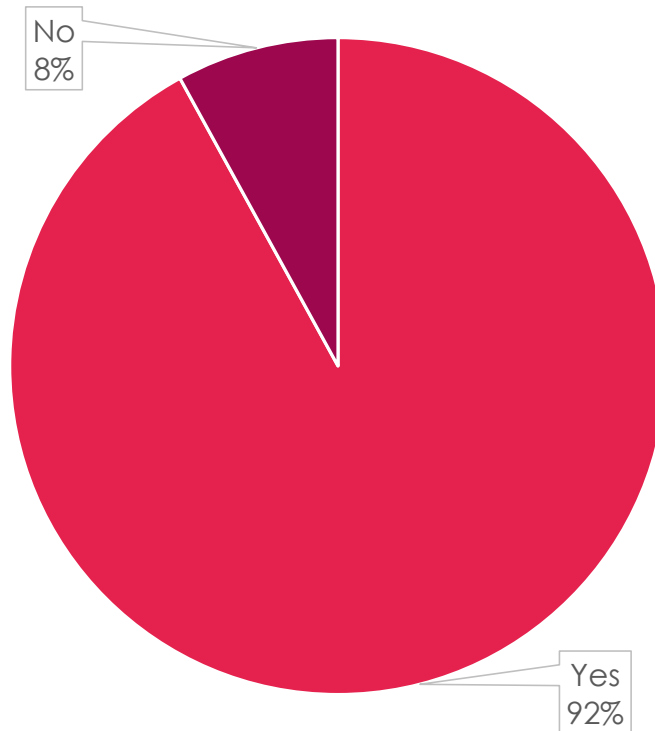


**TRUE**

# Did you know that orchestras rely heavily on donations?



**In 20 years, do you see yourself financially supporting orchestras?**





## DI·VER·SI·TY

All the ways in which people differ.



## EQ·UI·TY

Fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people. One's identity cannot predict the outcome.

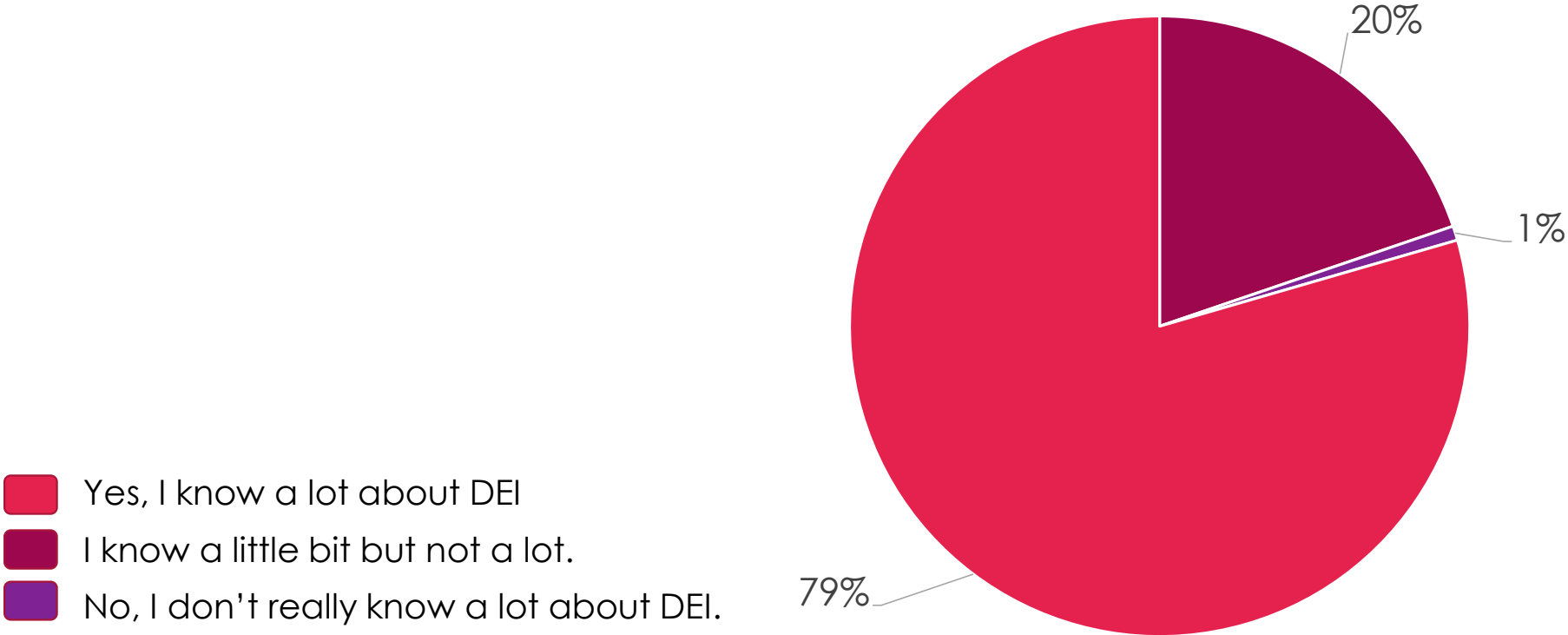


## IN·CLU·SION

A variety of people have power, a voice, and decision-making authority.

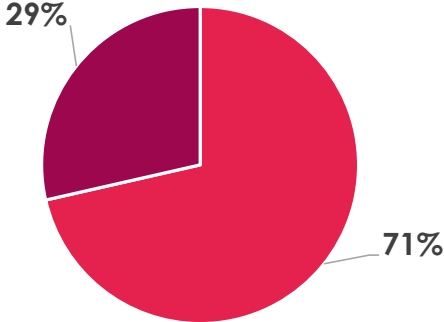


# DID YOU HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEI BEFORE THE SURVEY?

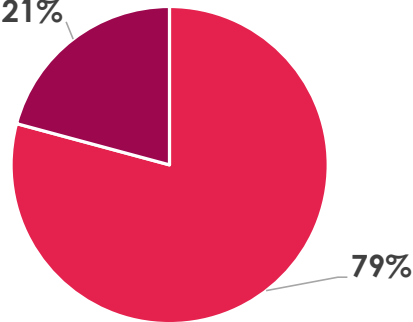


# DID YOU HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEI BEFORE THE SURVEY? (EDUCATION SPLIT)

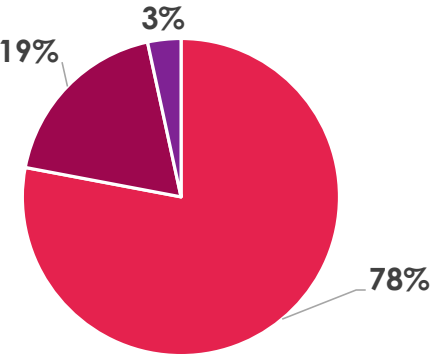
Middle School



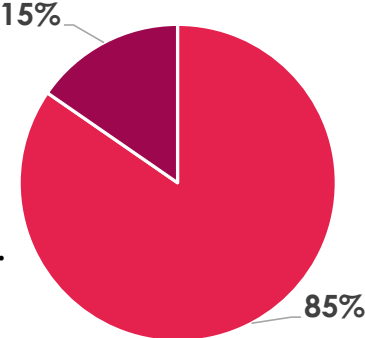
High School



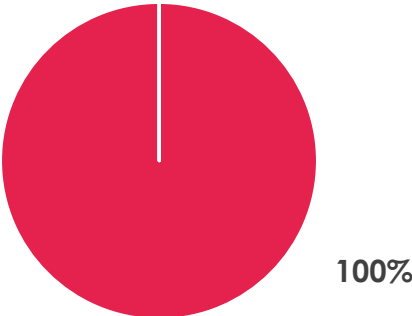
Undergraduate



Graduate Student

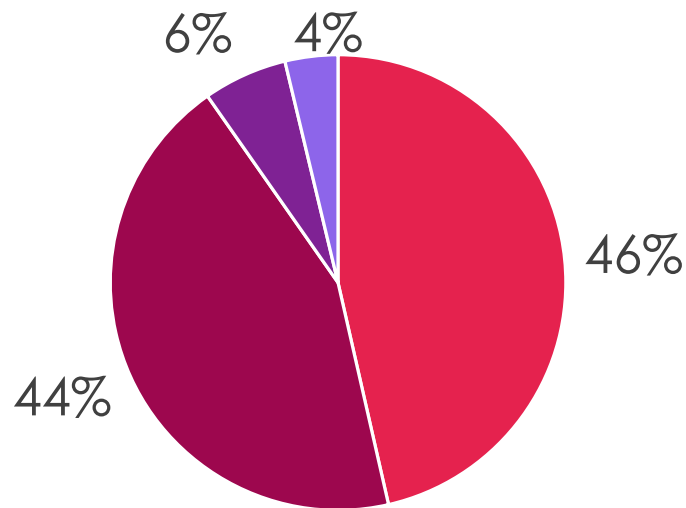






Recent Graduate



- Yes, I know a lot about DEI
- I know a little bit but not a lot.
- No, I don't really know a lot about DEI.

# DID YOU KNOW: ORCHESTRAS ARE THINKING A LOT ABOUT DEI AND HAVE SPECIFIC PLANS AND INITIATIVES.



-  I don't know enough about how orchestras are thinking about this.
-  Yes, I know a lot about the current discussion related to DEI and I think it's on the right path.
-  Yes, I know a lot about the current discussion related to DEI but I think it's going too far.
-  Something else.

# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING RIGHT: HOW MUSIC STUDENTS SEE THE GOOD IN DEI

- Concerts are becoming more accessible and also many orchestras are providing discounted tickets to certain groups.
- Encouraging many people to play/listen to orchestras.
- I have been seeing a more equal distribution of gender throughout the orchestras and section principals.
- The orchestra industry is making a step in the right direction towards playing diverse composers
- The orchestra industry is making strides in the right direction in
- Moving towards a greater DEI
- Moving towards some pieces composed by underrepresented groups or previously unknown composers
- Working on becoming more diverse and inclusive, working to impact communities.
- Playing more newly composed music and featuring the composer at their performances
- Shifting Artistic Planning based on DEI lenses

*20% of those who responded to an open-ended question on what orchestras are getting right chose to focus on DEI in their response.*

- I think we're on the right track to making it more accessible to everyone. (sometimes people feel like they can't participate in orchestra related things since it's "snooty" or something)
- Starting to perform music by more diverse composers and performed by more nonwhite soloists
- Implementing many DEI initiatives, and tailoring performances as a response to the current social climate and world events.
- Beginning to expand repertoire to more diverse music/composers
- Making some efforts towards DEI, programming more diverse composers, considering how to present more engaging concerts.
- Increasing accessibility and diversity, by offering more outreach programs, collaborations with diverse artists and musicians, and creating welcoming and inclusive environments for audiences and performers alike.
- Trying to be more diverse in their programs
- We are starting to see more music by composers of color and women. There are a lot of orchestra who do this very well, but I think some can come off as tokenizing.

# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING WRONG: HOW MUSIC STUDENTS WANT TO SEE DEI CHANGE

## FOUR THEMES OF RESPONSES

- Community Engagement, Wealth Disparity, Access
- The Anti-DEI response
- Racial and Ethnic Representation
- Authenticity and Repertoire

*27% of those who responded to an open-ended question on what orchestras are getting wrong chose to focus on DEI in their response.*

# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING WRONG?

Sample spontaneous responses related to DEI with a theme of **community engagement, wealth disparity, and access**:

”

- “• *Creating outreach and awareness to those with less access to music education and music generally, specifically those who are part of lower income communities.*
- *I think the orchestra industry still attracts mainly elderly, more wealthy people and I would like to see that change.*
- *There needs to be more opportunities for underprivileged musicians to become exposed to and participate in orchestral music. It is so expensive to get private lessons and to join youth orchestras are really crucial to a good professional career, especially because most schools don't have a symphony orchestra during the day. This would help get more people in general interested in coming to concerts.*

”  
“



# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING WRONG?

Spontaneous responses related to DEI opposed to orchestras' work in DEI:

- *Focusing too much on equity, etc. Focus on making high quality, entertaining music.*
- *Inserting politics and agendas into music performance.*
- *Saturation with DEI at the exclusion of organic artistry.*
- *Politics.*
- *Not playing enough of the music that audiences really love and musicians love and instead trying to preach to audiences through music about DEI like performing women composers or music of different ethnicities. It's annoying and it doesn't teach us the really amazing classics and standards.*

While certainly a minority voice (3% of those who completed this question), the anti-DEI perspective was still present albeit in a much smaller percentage than seems to be present in the nationwide debate.

# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING WRONG?

Sample spontaneous responses related to DEI with a theme of **authenticity** and **repertoire**:

”

“

- *Staying stuck with old music. Needs female programming, and POC. For at least 30% of their programs.*
- *Programming only a couple pieces by underrepresented composers then calling themselves "Diverse."*
- *Programming works by POC or diverse composers all on one program. It doesn't feel genuine, and I'd much rather these works be paired with classics, like a tour at an art museum. To stick all the diverse composers on the same program is missing the point.*
- *Playing the same token diversity pieces.*
- *DEI efforts are surface level and don't actually breach problems of inequality and accessibility. Programming is unoriginal and stuck in the 19th century.*
- *I think they could do a better job with performing music from underrepresented composers and acknowledging the controversy behind other composers, such as Richard Wagner, when performing their music.*

”  
“

# WHAT ARE ORCHESTRAS GETTING WRONG?

Spontaneous responses related to DEI with a theme of **racial** and **ethnic representation**:

”

“

- *Too much programming of old, dead, white men.*
- *While this is not specifically orchestra, there is very little diversity in conductors and composers represented. I think also beginning to incorporate pieces that branch away from typical classical western music could bring a lot more people into music.*
- *It's extremely white, both historically speaking and currently speaking so I think an active effort to encourage people of color as well as women to join would be good.*
- *Not increasing diversity within orchestras. Most of the ones I've seen are predominantly white and East Asian.*

”

“



**“HOW DO YOU FEEL AT AN  
ORCHESTRA CONCERT?”**







# WELCOME STUDENT PANELISTS!

- **Cooper Cromwell-Whitley**, trombonist, student at University of Michigan, current Ross Fellow at Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
- **Abril Linares Mendoza**, violinist, member of Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras, rising senior at Shady Side Academy (Pittsburgh, PA)
- **William Ryan**, violinist, member of The Worcester Youth Orchestras, rising senior at Worcester Schools (Worcester, MA)
- **Akari Ogawa**, flutist, certificate student at Duquesne University. Librarian and Operations Coordinator at Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras
- **Lauren Zwonik**, flutist, third-year DMA student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Graduate Assistant for the Las Vegas Philharmonic



## RE: MENTAL HEALTH

”

“ I also think there needs to be **more focus on the mental and physical health of professional and student musicians**. I think more needs to be done to protect the hearing of musicians as well as their mental health (and that of students especially) because if the industry continues this toxic view of self care and taking time for things outside of orchestra it is going to turn a lot of people away and may even kill them.

”

“ I think there needs to be more **discussion around company culture, professional development, and services for the musicians** to make sure staff AND personnel are being cared for the way they need to be.

”

“ What are orchestras getting wrong? Emotional and mental health of musicians, **allowing musicians to feel like they are providing purpose to the overall betterment of their community**.

## RE: PROGRAMMING

”  
“  
*20% of those who responded to an open-ended question on what orchestras are getting wrong chose to focus on Programming in their response.*

instrument that doesn't get represented a lot. Or perhaps, maybe

*35% of those who responded to an open-ended question on what orchestras are getting right chose to focus on Programming in their response.*

- [What are orchestras getting wrong?] Pandering to popular culture with pop music recitals. ”  
“



# THANK YOU TO OUR STUDENT PANEL!

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# Reminder: So what is VISION 2043?

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- ...are financially supporting orchestras.



- ...expect that orchestras have shifted in terms of DEI.

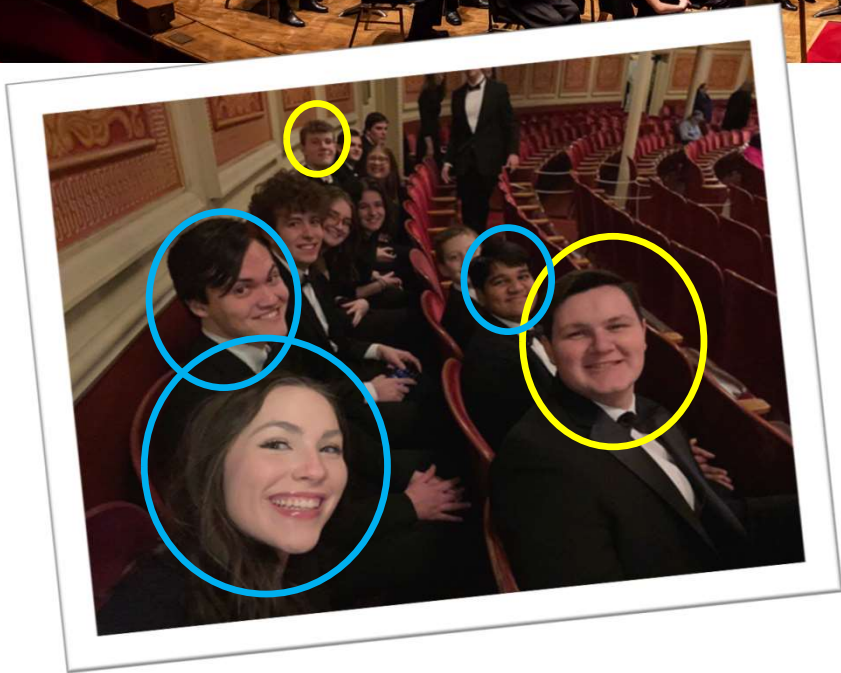


- ...see orchestras communicating with audiences differently.



**Why Should  
You Care?**













**Thank you!**