

## Opening Session Remarks by Marin Alsop

June 11, 2025

Maurice Abravanel Hall

It's my pleasure to be here today. Receiving this honor in Salt Lake is especially emotional for me—not only thanks to the eloquent introduction by one of my star students and Taki Alsop Conducting Fellow, Jessica Altarriba, but also because of my family's deep connection to Utah. My father, Lamar Alsop was born and raised here (welcome to my cousins).

Maurice Abravanel gave my dad his first job playing in the Utah Symphony—violin and doubling on bass clarinet!

Maurice also gave my dad the courage to pursue his musical dreams, and decades later, Maurice became my mentor, alongside Bernstein at Tanglewood. One couldn't hope for a greater role model than Maurice, a profound musician and compassionate human being.

There's no question that We're living in extraordinary times. Not just as orchestras, not just as musicians, but as people navigating a world of complexity, uncertainty—and, as a result, I believe, a world of opportunity.

If there's one thing I've learned on the podium, it's that moments of crisis can also be moments of possibility. They push us out of autopilot and help us take risks we might not otherwise take.

I believe we're at such a moment now.

Our industry is facing seismic shifts: audience behavior, cultural relevance, financial pressures, equity and access—all converging. The temptation is to retreat. To cling to what's familiar. But history doesn't go backward. And neither should we.

If we are brave—if we see clearly and act boldly—this upheaval can spark a more vibrant, inclusive, and impactful era for orchestras.

Let's talk about inclusion—starting with women conductors. My own path to the podium was not an easy one. When I began, the idea of a woman leading a major orchestra was unthinkable. There were no role models, no pathways, and few open doors.

That's one reason I started the Taki-Alsop Conducting Fellowship over twenty years ago—to offer upcoming women the mentorship and opportunities that I never had. What began as a small act of defiance—saying “We are here, and we deserve to be seen”—has grown into a global platform.

These fellows are leading orchestras, transforming communities, and changing the face of our profession. They prove that talent knows no gender. And they remind us that when we widen the circle, everyone benefits.

Looking forward, I believe that we must approach programming, audiences, and funding not with hindsight, but with innovation.

Orchestras are civic centers—physically and emotionally.

At OrchKids, the program I started in 2008, we use music to help students discover their strengths. From 30 kids, it now reaches over 2,000 families, providing music education, academic support, meals, and more. Many of the original 30 kids have now graduated with degrees in music performance, education and management. They are our future.

But the work isn't done. To ensure the vitality of our art form, inclusion must be systemic—not symbolic. Equity isn't charity—it's creative necessity.

At the same time, we must preserve what makes our work irreplaceable: human connection. Live music is about gathering, experiencing something beautiful, inspiring, alive and unrepeatable.

But we can't be purists. Our audience is not waiting in the lobby—they're scrolling, streaming, watching. Technology isn't a threat—it's a bridge, a tool.

That doesn't mean compromising quality. Beethoven and TikTok aren't enemies. A streamed rehearsal can spark curiosity. A video can open a lifetime of discovery.

We don't have to choose between tradition and innovation. We must do both.

And in times of uncertainty, the most dangerous thing we can do is play it safe.

Yes, challenges are real. But shrinking back, clinging to nostalgia—those won't save us. Courage and vision will. The courage to take risks, try new ideas, and believe that orchestras are not museum pieces—they are urgent, evolving cultural forces.

But platitudes only get us so far. To jumpstart your ASCENT, here are some concrete steps:

1. Include women and diverse leaders in strategic decisions.
2. Plan concerts optimized for social media sharing. Use the digital tools at our disposal.
3. Make community engagement central to your mission—not just an add-on.
4. And, of course, engage some of these super talented Taki conductors to bring a new perspective to your orchestra.

In closing, let's try. Let's push. Let's dare. Together, let's ASCEND.

Let's build orchestras that are diverse, innovative, and deeply human. Let's create a future where every child can see themselves on the podium, in the concertmaster's chair, or composing the next great symphony.

Creativity is our greatest human asset. And it belongs to every one of us.

Thank you.