

Closing Session: Gold Baton Awarded to David Hyslop

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SIMON WOODS: It's time to present our second gold baton of the year. This year, we had a wonderful, wonderful ceremony with Sphinx on the first day, and now we're able to recognize—and we're honored to recognize—one of the most remarkable careers in orchestra management in recent history. Not only was David Hyslop, for three decades, executive director of the Oregon, St. Louis, and Minnesota Orchestras, but he's subsequently achieved the most remarkable feat of being interim executive director for 14 orchestras over the past two decades. This is a literally unprecedented achievement. There's never been something like that in our field. David's commitment to helping orchestras and to jumping into the fray in incredibly difficult transitions has been a really remarkable service to our field. And we are just incredibly honored to be able to present the Gold Baton to him today.

And as you know, we always like to have somebody to introduce the Gold Baton. And we wanted to have somebody this year who could talk very authentically about David's work. So it's my very great pleasure to introduce our friend Jennifer Teisinger, executive director of the South Dakota Symphony, to make a few words about David, and then we'll hear from David. So please welcome Jennifer Teisinger.

[APPLAUSE]

JENNIFER TEISINGER: Good afternoon. So I've only been in this orchestra management industry for 29 years, which is just under half the amount of time as my friend and mentor, David Hyslop, who has been at it for 61 years. [APPLAUSE]

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David started his career in the orchestra administration field at a workshop in New York City run by the American Symphony Orchestra League, as it was called way back then. And after that seminal workshop, he began his career as a fellow at the Minnesota Orchestra, and he would return there later to run the big show as CEO. He served as CEO of the Oregon Symphony and then the St. Louis Symphony, before going back to the Minnesota Orchestra.

But as Simon said, we are not really honoring David today just because he ran three major orchestras. After retiring from the Minnesota Orchestra in 2003, it didn't take David Long to realize he wasn't done working. So he failed retirement when he got a call from the board chair at the West Virginia Symphony because they needed some help during an executive

director search, keeping the orchestra's train on the tracks. Would he come and serve as interim executive director? Sure. David was happy to help out in the interim.

And from there, he went on to serve as an interim executive director 15 more times. Fourteen of the 16 interim executive director positions that David helped out with were orchestras.

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Here's the list. West Virginia Symphony, Tulsa Symphony, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra, Stockton Symphony, Sun Valley Summer Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony, Omaha Symphony, South Dakota Symphony Orchestra, Orlando Philharmonic, the Amarillo Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Reno Philharmonic, and the Albany Symphony.

This means David spent a lot of time on airplanes. I don't do a great David Hyslop impression. So here's a direct quote. "I was going through TSA, and the fellow looked at me and he said, 'Mr. Hyslop, are you going to Dallas, Louisville, or Stockton today?'" Not only did the TSA guy know his name, but he knew all the places that David was going.

As an interim executive director, David is a calm, steady hand during tumultuous times. Sure, he keeps orchestra operations moving forward. But he also finds the biggest problems and starts solving them. He's a quick study, and very importantly, he passes on everything he learns—the good, bad, and the ugly—on to the incoming CEO to give that person the best opportunity to be successful. So by passing the baton to the incoming executive, David was inadvertently mentoring that newcomer.

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Similarly to not really planning to make a second career out of being an interim executive director, he also didn't really plan on being an orchestra executive mentor. But he is, for me, and for many of us in this room. So when David gives you advice, he does it through a story. And he tells the best stories with such vivid detail. But by the end, you realize that you weren't just listening to a story, but you were learning a really important lesson.

David says that enriching lives through great music is greater than ever right now. Is it easy? No. But when was it ever easy? I am a super fan of David Hyslop, and I adore this man. Congratulations. And on behalf of the League of American Orchestras, and all of the orchestras in the field, it is my great privilege to present you with the Gold Baton Award.

[APPLAUSE]

[00:08:26.5]

DAVID HYSLOP: Well, first of all, this is an overwhelming thing. Thanks to Simon and the League on this award. I want to mention some people when I started that are long gone, but had a direct influence on me. Way ahead of her time, Helen, M. Thompson was phenomenal. John Edwards and Jesse Rosen's dad, Cy. I was so naïve. I took that seminar at the League in 1965, and there was a Horn & Hardart across the street. And I went over, and they basically bought me a cup of coffee. And they were interviewing me, and I didn't realize it. So anyway, it all started well.

I also want to thank my lovely wife, Sally, who is sitting here. [APPLAUSE] And I'm sure our son, Alex, has the record for coming in for this event. He came in from Canberra, Australia. That's where he lives. So thank you, Alex. [APPLAUSE]

And Jennifer is correct. I flunked retirement. I retired for a little while, and I got bored. And I've done a lot of other stuff besides interim. But what's been tremendously satisfying with the interim is you give your knowledge, you hope it's taken, and you recognize what Jennifer said, and you turn around and you try to help get things done.

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I have a fun story when I was doing the interim work in Amarillo. I'd been there before to help open the hall that they built there years ago, when Nathan Newbrough was the CEO of the Amarillo Symphony. One of the younger staff members gingerly approached me. And she was basically saying, "Why are you doing this at your age?" That's what she was saying. And I said, "Well, number one, I'm in pretty good shape. I've got a lot of jock basketball injuries, but other than that, I'm in good shape. I'm lucky enough to be in a field where—the law of supply and demand. Your knowledge is needed. And if you can help, it gives me great satisfaction." And the other great satisfaction is working with people like her and with other people that keeps you growing. And it's made a huge, huge difference.

That story that Jennifer told about the TSA guy is actually true. He knew me. It was a little like, "Whoa." So they've been tremendously rewarding. When Simon called me, I said, "Why me?" And he said, as he said earlier, a lot of people have had three orchestras, but you're the only one—what he didn't say is, "You're the only one that's crazy enough to do this." Though there's a guy named Jonathan Martin right now that looks like he may be crazy enough to do that.

This has meant a huge amount. I'm deeply honored. And I want Gold Batons to go to all of you. Bravo, and bravo to all of you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]