The Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University
THE NEXT NORMAL: Arts Innovation and Resilience in a Post-COVID World
Wednesday, February 10, 2021
Music Leadership Panel, 1:00 pm

TRANSCRIPT
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Fred Bronstein: Welcome. We've got a wonderful panel of folks representing administrative leadership across the industries. I want to bring them on. Afa Dworkin, who is President and Artistic Advisor of the Sphinx Organization - welcome, Afa. Deborah Rutter, President of the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts - welcome, Deborah. Marc Scorca, President and CEO of Opera America - welcome, Marc. Margaret Lioi, CEO of Chamber Music America, and Simon Woods, President and CEO of the American Symphony Orchestra League. Welcome all of you, and thanks for being here with us today. We'll structure this conversation similar to what we did this morning at the artist's panel, so we'll do 15 minutes of opening responses from you to a question I'd like to pose to the group, and then we'll have 30 minutes of additional questions, dialogue, and conversation, and then take some questions from our participants for the last part of our hour. With that, let me begin by posing this question for you:

What for you is the single most important takeaway from the last year as it pertains to the future of your organization or the sector in the industry you represent in a post-Covid world, and why? Maybe we can start with Afa, if you would.

Afa Dworkin: Sure. Well, it is a pleasure to be here with my esteemed colleagues. A wonderful question. Probably the single most important lesson for me can be summed up in one word - and that's "opportunity." What I mean by that is an opportunity to reimagine ourselves as institutions and agents for social impact, an opportunity for us to reimagine what the sector can do for our communities. An opportunity to put artists forward and empower them to lead, rather than essentially dictating what leadership looks like in terms of the future of the field. And an opportunity to do what we haven't done before, which is connect and establish reciprocity to insist on representation, and really to create an overall better ecology in our field and the communities in which we reside. I think this year has taught us that even the most stringent of circumstances and most unfortunate of circumstances can present us with opportunities greater than what we would otherwise be able to calculate or hypothesize about.

Fred Bronstein: Thank you, Afa. Deborah.

Deborah Rutter: Greetings everyone, and thank you, Fred, for the invitation to join with friends for this conversation. I think we can collectively agree that we're all eager to get back to live performance, that even live performances shared digitally do not really meet the soul-changing experience of live performance. So, I think that what we're most looking forward to is certainly that. But I would say that the recalibration of priorities is really perhaps around the issue of anti-racism, and in our organization - the dedication to anti-racism and addressing this systemically, not just with our organization but in the field - and being a role model to the degree that we can for the field is topmost priority for the Kennedy Center.

One might say, well, hold on. How does that really relate to the last 10 months? And it's not just the Black Lives Matter movement. It's really also all of the inequities that we have experienced in these last 10 months, and how that has rolled over our society and certainly rolled over and through the arts world very specifically. Many of you know that I have dedicated nearly four

decades of my life to supporting orchestral music and opera, and I still do at the Kennedy Center through the Washington National Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra. But in the last six years, I've also had the good fortune to work across all art forms and to really engage with artists of all backgrounds.

And what I've come to really understand is no amount of good intent, no amount of believing that I am working towards the right things, has been sufficient and that we as an institution from the bottom up really are committed to addressing the issues of anti-racism. For me, this is work that's really quite active now. It actually is not brand new to the Kennedy Center by any stretch of the imagination, but it is actually one of our top priorities, and for everyone in the institution to be a part of this. So, for me and for us, it is about understanding our roles, the power that we have and that we as allies can give to addressing this issue.

Deborah Rutter: Thank you, Deborah. Marc.

Marc Scorca: Well, thank you. And thank you, Deborah, for saying what you said so very well. I applaud and want to amplify in our own work what you've just described at the Kennedy Center. In answer to the question you sent us a couple of weeks ago, Fred, I put together four points. I'll skip over a few of them. One I'll skip over is how interesting recently that the federal government in making us eligible for PPP loans and Save-Our-Stages grants, in allowing arts workers to be eligible for unemployment benefits, that the importance of the arts and culture to the health of our communities has been revealed, and we can't allow the federal government to take a step backward on that. But I'm not going to talk about that.

I'm also not going to talk about the importance of centering artists in our work, because in so many of our industries we live in a gig economy, and in opera alone twenty thousand contracts have been canceled, and artists have borne the brunt of it. So, we need to come out of this with a new way of centering artists in our work, including in the business model. I'm not going to talk about that.

What I am going to talk about is the word "inventiveness," and this builds off what Afa said with opportunity, because in a way in the last 10 months, we've seen the birth of a new kind of opera called digital opera, which includes a range of activities that have expanded the definition of the art form. They have broken down barriers of participation, whether it is streaming, film activity, outdoors activities, that our industry has found a new way to deliver opera in some fashion to audiences while our theaters have been closed down. In so doing, they have awakened a level of creativity and inventiveness and access that has turbo-charged the potential for our future as an art form. Included in this is the freedom to experiment that Covid has allowed us to try things and fail and to say, "Oops that didn't work" or "Let's try something new." And I'm hoping that that sense of experimentation and possibility live with us as we come out of the pandemic. And finally, just to hearken back to something Doug McLennan said at our online annual conference back in May, that the hardest part of change is erasing or undoing what came before. What Covid has done is it has cleaned off the chalkboard, and all of us have an opportunity to write new

words on that chalkboard and not just use muscle memory to go back to the way we used to do things, but to be intentional in our choices of what we put back on that chalkboard artistically, administratively, in terms of business model and other practices. Building on what Afa said about opportunity; for me, invention of a new kind of opera going forward.

Fred Bronstein: Thanks, Marc. Margaret.

Margaret Lioi: Thank you, Fred, and hello to all my wonderful colleagues and everyone who has joined us. I'm glad, Marc, that you're not talking about artists at the center, because I'm going to talk about artists at the center. Chamber Music America was founded by artists 43 years ago, and they remain at the center of all of our work and all of our discussions, and at the center of our industry, because without the artists there is nothing. Without the creators and the interpreters there is nothing, and yet musicians are not cared for in our society, in the music system. As freelancers they don't have the security that all of us as administrators have. They don't have the regular paychecks, most of the time, much of the time. They don't have health insurance. They basically do not have a safety net. And we knew this. Nothing really has changed from pre-pandemic, but I think no one was able to ever imagine that the entire performance presentation system would be so dramatically halted from one day to the next.

And so, while some artists were able to adjust quickly, particularly with having a digital presence, not everyone was, and some artists were really left behind. They were left behind in the sense of performance, and they were left behind in the sense of emergency relief because they weren't fast enough. They just weren't fast enough to apply. When I think of those artists, many of those artists are our elders, and my concern for the future of artists and musicians is really the same concern that I have for working mothers and for teachers.

What is the position in our society where we put them? Do we value them? Do we value them as full contributors to the economy? When I think of this past year and what is a great concern for Chamber Music America moving forward, it's that the tributary of advocacy be taken up and utilized much more by us as an organization. And we ask ourselves, we all in Chamber Music America ask ourselves, what can we do. What changes can we advocate for that will create a post-Covid environment where artists are valued not only through the compensation they receive, but also that they are appreciated for the importance that their work contributes to society.

Fred Bronstein: Thanks, Margaret. Simon.

Simon Woods: Thank you. Thank you, Fred. Hello, dear colleagues. Nice to be with you again. These are the disadvantages of going last. Of course, everybody has already made great points, and I don't think I'm going to say anything very different to what you've all said, but I'll perhaps frame it in a slightly different way. The title of this day, Fred, that you've organized for everybody is called the Next Normal. I think that as I consider what the biggest takeaway for our field is and where we are right now, I guess I have to say, more than anything else, I hope that

there won't be a next normal. That's my biggest thing right now, and I am really worried when I hear people, when I hear talk about when we're going to get back to normal. “The vaccine’s going to come when we get back to normal.” And I have a lot of anxiety about that. But let me just be clear about one thing. First of all, I hope that the normal comes quickly as it relates to, particularly, what Margaret was just saying to aid the musicians and people working off it, because there's no question that our institutions will survive. Our arts institutions are resilient, and they have a way of reinventing themselves, but the suffering over the past year has been very much individual suffering. Musicians have been suffering; that work has often gone to zero. Administrators have seen jobs disappear; everybody is working with reduced salaries. I hope for everybody that we do quickly get back to the employment, and the work comes back. That comes first. But I hope that as we put our organizations together, we don't have the mindset that we're going back. I was reflecting on this just this morning, and I was imagining what it would be like to go back and sit in a classical orchestral concert. What it would be like to go to the New York Philharmonic, to sit in Geffen Hall and watch a concert, or in any other hall across the country.

And I realized that this extraordinary year when we have elevated the discussions about race and race equity to a level that they have not been seen before, this has been a wakeup call for many of us. And I think it's been a wakeup call for all of those who've been in this business for a long time, especially all those of us who've been in this business for a long time who are white, about our accountability for what hasn’t happened in the last couple of decades. And I think now we're seeing finally, we're having this conversation, and this has been a year of remarkable conversations and in many cases, a remarkable commitment to action. But it's been happening in a situation where mostly we haven't been doing concerts, and I just imagined myself going back and sitting in a concert and looking around, and the shock that will feel after a year's gap to actually be in this environment where there is so much that needs to get fixed. And I hope that when we go back it won't be a new normal. I hope we'll sit in concert halls, and we will feel angry, and we will feel frustrated, and we will feel sad about who isn't there and about the role we're not playing in our communities, because I think that we have a tremendous opportunity to capture this moment of realization that we've all been through about what we're not achieving as organizations and who isn't involved and who isn't part of it. And I really don't underestimate what that is going to feel like to go back into a white concert hall and look at a largely white orchestra on stage.

And so, as Deborah said, there really is nothing more important to me as we come back than to convert this moment of thought and discussion into real change because we have a future ahead of us, which is about really being part of our communities and really representing our communities in the work we do. And it's time, but it won't be time if it's a new normal. It has to be a new app.

Fred Bronstein: Thank you, Simon. Thank you all for really thoughtful responses to my question that I posed. I'm going to use what you just said, Simon, as a springboard for this next question, or actually two questions I want to ask, because one of them is shorter term and one of

them is longer term. And that's my hope in our conversation today, that we're thinking about the long term because that's the opportunity. But the two questions I want to ask are, how do you place the Covid experience in the context of past audience and likely future audience trends? I know this is on people's minds and in your organizations. Do you think audiences are going to come back completely or partially, and what does that look like? But I want to couple that then with a second question, which is the longer term, which relates to the diversity question. And it's a question I posed to the artist panel this morning. Classical music has, we all know, no surprise, a huge demographic challenge - I would argue, largely of its own making - and how does Covid as well as the growing movements around racial justice (you talked a bit about that, Deborah) combine the impact or even accelerate the challenge that you have around audiences? What do you see short term - and I had deliberately linked these two. What do you see short term from the audience challenges around, frankly, the return of your existing audiences, and then couple that with this longer-term question of how we break the code, if you will, on the challenge that we continue to face in the industry around diversity. Whoever wants to start with that. Who would like to take a crack at that? We'll get to everybody, I promise. Deborah, do you want to start?

Deborah Rutter: Sure. I'm happy to. What we have learned through the analysis and market research is that the audience for all of our digital product has been much more dispersed and many of them new to us. This is related to, perhaps, the desire to sample in the safety, the noncommitment of coming to a space, or not spending any money to do so, or even to wonder if you would be the only person like you in the audience, which is something that I think we have to really understand is that extension of invitation and welcome. So, understanding that during this period of time we've actually had a more diverse audience and a younger audience than our traditional audiences means we need to think about how we serve them and how we do provide that invitation and welcome. And it's all about who's in the room, who does the inviting, and what happens when you get there. We also have to acknowledge that in the near term there's going to be a hesitancy to come back. And in fact, as we've been thinking about some of our important programming including BLUE, Marc, that I know you know well, we've decided not to do BLUE right away because BLUE actually, in terms of timing, might be inviting an audience that isn't prepared yet to come into a group gathering.

You have to be very, very thoughtful about what you're programming when, what that invitation is like, and who's in the room. How do you feel like you're welcome in that space? This is something we don't generally think about, and I think we really have to be very thoughtful, very careful, in imagining how we create the right environment for the near term that will lead to the long term.

Simon Woods: Could I just build on one thing, Deborah, you said there? The digital thing, I think, is a really interesting question, which I just would put out that we think about. Yes, we know that during this year a lot of digital work has been done thankfully and impressively, not only by large organizations but by small organizations as well. It's been a tremendous equalizer, actually, in terms of how organizations have been able to reach audiences. And yes, we know that digital takes us to a younger and more diverse audience. I'm going to say that we keep it in

the back of our mind that there is built into digital access also tremendous inequity. There is urban inequity and world inequity. And you know, even within digital, it's not a level playing field for those who don't have access to computers or access to resources. Now we know that rural broadband is a really serious problem, so I totally agree with you. I just think we have to have this other lens as well and say it's not a substitute for also doing the real engagement work in communities to reach people beyond digital, that's what I mean.

Deborah Rutter: If I may just respond to that - that's what I mean about who's doing the invitation and what is happening as a result. For instance, we've created locally a group called our Culture Caucus; by and large those 26 people do not represent any traditional art form. And if they do, they represent it on a grassroots level, and those individuals are building the infrastructure of programming that we're offering that's new and different and helping ensure that as we invite people we do so with the right invitation and that the environment is right when they come. It is absolutely about doing it authentically on a local grassroots level.

Fred Bronstein: I want to come back to the technology piece of this, but I want to give Marc - and I know Margaret - had a comment on that.

Marc Scorca: A couple of things. One is from before Covid. I'm a bit of a research geek, and if you read the general social survey that was issued by the NEA a few years ago, the SPPA (Survey of Public Participation in the Arts) from the NEA, some of the Wallis research, some of the Cohen research, it all combines to give an insight that audiences are looking for a total experience that includes socializing with friends and family, food and beverage, and the performance itself. And certainly, the food and beverage dimension is an important competitor for the time and money of our arts goers.

Now as we are returning from the Covid hiatus that we've been on and people will be torn between - do I want to go to my favorite performance, do I want to catch up with a restaurant I wanted to go to for a year and a half, do I want to see friends and family - as we come out of this, I think we need to be careful to think about the audience experience more holistically than just going back to our 8 p.m. curtain time to 10:00 curtain down for orchestra, or midnight down for opera performances. So that we come out of this thinking about the audience experience as a healing experience where they are being welcomed back into the public square, seeing friends and family for the first time, experiencing food and beverage out of their home for the first time in a long time, and a performance. And finally, to Simon's point, I don't want to say that our programmatic activity is limited to digital. There has been so much experimentation - look at San Diego Opera and its *La Boheme* in a drive-in movie theater, or the film projects at drive-in movie theaters in Austin, Texas, at the portable stages in Boston, or the big tent experience in Atlanta.

A lot of these outdoor experiences that are lower ticket price and shorter in length overcome the barrier of length, place, cost, formality. It's not just that we have used digital platforms, which is fine, fine and good, but there's been a lot more activity, and our research indicates that many more people who are new to the art forms are coming to these because of the diminished barriers.

TRANSCRIPT
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They are more diverse, and as we rewrite on the chalkboard, we can't go back to the way we were performing and exclude these people who have discovered us in these new ways. How do we integrate the new performance platforms - outdoor, casual, digital - into the work that we do?

Fred Bronstein: Margaret, do you want to get in?

Margaret Lioi: I do, and I want to slightly reframe the idea of classical music facing a demographic challenge, and then I'm going to kick it over to Afa because I think that one has only to tune into a Sphinx competition or hear the Sphinx Virtuosi to see that musicians of color are performing classical music at the same high artistic level as white musicians or any other musician. In the artist panel I think Sean Jones said, "You know there's only two kinds of music - good music and the other kind of music."

When we think of a demographic challenge, are we talking about who's coming to hear classical music? If we're talking about that, then I think a lot more grass roots work has to be done among the community presenters. It's sort of the same thing that Deborah was saying about how are people made to feel welcome. And I think there has been a model for many, many, many years of "We are the presenter - we know the repertoire, we know the good music, and we're going to present it. And you should love it because we love it and it's great." And that's just not the way. It never really was the way, but now it has become brilliantly apparent that it's not the way to be a part of your community. Fred, I hope you don't mind, I'd like to kick it over to Afa because attending the Sphinx conferences for so many years is actually where I was able to reframe how I thought about Western European classical music and presenting.

Afa Dworkin: Thank you so much for that, Margaret. I loved much of the commentary from my colleagues. I do agree there are many kernels there that will resonate. I think, kind of capitalizing on the spirit of what Margaret is sharing, there are a couple things that are observations, and again, opportunities. I keep returning to that concept, and that's why I love the framing of the whole convening that Fred organized. We've seen incredible exercises in innovation, resilience, reimagined definitions of what classical music or performing arts in general need today. With examples from Marc, and here in our own backyard, there's opera in a parking garage. The kinds of things we're seeing are both exhilarating and motivating, and yet mind boggling to me, in that we've seen how necessity has forced us to invent even for a field that isn't particularly known for innovation and risk taking. Let's just be honest.

We've done so in one area, and I think we've done so in an area that is more or less existential, or it can be interpreted as such. We have to survive and as such, we're imagining new ways to look at it. We're trying to survive, and things don't look the way that they usually do because they really can't. And yet on the framework of the other crisis of the year, the racial reckoning, and the other pandemic, we've done a lot of conversing and the decibel level of the dialogue on racial equity and representation is louder, so I'm thankful for that. The choir is larger to which we're preaching, also thankful for that. None of us can sit here and say that we have exercised the same level of not performative but actionable innovation to reimagine how we define representation,

reimagine what we think of as good programming, reimagine our whole vocabulary, so that we don't say things like: there is a special community power artist-led group that's helping to inform our programming, or we literally reimagined from the ground up and also from the top to the bottom what it is that we call good artistic programming, and what do we call new ways of thinking about content. We have not that much moved beyond performative statements and visions and investment into research and trying to figure it out. I think a lot of these things are just evidence for themselves, even the composition of our panel.

I'm thinking that things will change as we look forward if we simply focus on - and I know this is not a terribly popular way of looking at things, and I'm often criticized for it, which I welcome - but until such time as we set ourselves numeric and measurable accountability-infused goals and then practice them not for one season, not for two seasons, not during the one hybrid season to which we will return, not for the new normal or abnormal, but for ten years where we will continuously build upon some of these good lessons we're learning about our audiences being more diverse, what we really think about access.

Until such time that we set ourselves goals and then we hold ourselves and one another accountable for what will be the new normal, I don't think much will change. We will reassemble annually, we will talk about some of these short-term successes, we will share some stories that might be inspiring and kind of short-term lessons that might help one another to rethink how we even empower the next generation of leaders, how we do this one thing visually so that we can have a more diverse audience. But it won't fundamentally change until we fundamentally take the lessons of Covid and have them absolutely in a mandatory fashion inform what we do with lessons on racial equity and representation. If we exercise at that level of risk taking, courage, humility, and decisiveness at the same time into the core of what we do, then I think we will see a new normal that's going to be far more just fair, representative, fulfilling, vibrant, engaging, all kinds of words.

Fred Bronstein: Afa, it's very powerful, what you just said. And I would say that add to the stating of the goals a public declaration of those goals.

Afa Dworkin: We've gotten better at public declarations. I'll say I've seen some beautiful statements of solidarity; I want us all to look past those statements and declarations, and I want us to practice it, and then fall and get up, and make a mistake and get up, and help one another. We can't be expected to do it right when we've done it wrong for so long, but we are asking ourselves as a field and one another for different results, so we can't go about the same methodology. The methodology needs to change, so as such it'll be experimental. We will not do everything right, but we will do. But I want us very much to move past the declaration.

Fred Bronstein: I think you're saying that it becomes strategic – it's as important as talking about the quality of our product, which generally, as a field we love to talk about and rightfully so. It's proud of that. But it's elevating it to that extent, I think. That's the only way, really.

TRANSCRIPT
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Afa Dworkin: Yes, absolutely. And elevating it, that's absolutely right, I think, Fred. And also, there's great news on the horizon. As Margaret said, we don't need to succumb to the Columbus effect - we don't need to discover anything. The talent is already here. It's poised and prepared. It's present in scores, we don't need to do too much work other than listen and look and uplift, sometimes get out of the way. There is so much talent and good music, good art that's here. We just have to see it and give it light.

Simon Woods: And if I just could say one thing. I think it's interesting for us who are running this kind of service overhead umbrella organizations like Opera America and the League – we're in a very interesting place right now. And this place that I have often talked about is actually holding ourselves to numbers and to accountability and getting beyond statements. I think that is so profoundly right. We're in a very interesting place, and I often look at our memberships of our organizations a bit like an orchestra does to its audience. We have to both follow taste and lead taste. I think, in a sense, you're always going to be beholden to a certain extent to your membership, but the really interesting thing for all of us running these organizations right now is that we're actually being asked to step up into a different place, and we're asked to step up into a place where we are actually exerting our power of oppositions to help create change. And I think this is a very interesting opportunity for us. We had a very interesting full staff meeting this morning. One of my staff members gave an analogy which I thought was really beautiful and said, "You know the work that the League does, and by extension all of us, is we're like an arrow." He said, "We're the tip of the arrow, and we're creating that slipstream for the arrow to move." I think this was such a beautiful analogy, and so incredibly true. I'm very interested in how we hold ourselves to that unique place we have as organizations as we come back. It's an amazing opportunity.

Fred Bronstein: There are a number of directions I'd like to take. I'd love to talk a little bit about technology, but I also want to ask you all - because you all are involved with organizations or have previously been involved with organizations - how will the relationship between arts institutions and the artists that they employ change as a result of what we've all experienced? Will it? It comes back to what we were talking about a little bit in the opening question actually, but I'd like to dig a little bit deeper on that organizationally, around expectations from both sides. How is that going to be different?

Margaret Lioi: Can I jump in, Fred? It's interesting that it's such an important question. And it also, I think, highlights a tremendous power dynamic between people who are in decision-making positions and artists. Artists, unless they are the most famous artists, they tend to not be in decision-making positions, and they're not brought in as partners with a presenter. At least in my field, it has been much more that we're going to present these artists on these concert dates, and the artists arrive, and they do a fabulous job, and they might do some sort of community activity. And then they leave. As we are thinking about reimagining and a better world for the arts and for artists, I would like to see more of bringing artists in to help be the problem solvers, to help look at what is the goal of the presenter in this community. Let's bring artists in who actually live in the community. I remember a jazz musician years ago left New York and moved

to Seattle because when he had been in Seattle he felt the audiences were so responsive, and he thought what a great place this is to move. Then he moved, and nobody hired him because he was just an artist who lived in the community. He wasn't coming from New York. And I think if artists in their communities feel more of an urgency to be part of the civic life and the civic dialogue in that community, and presenters partner with them to improve situations - I guess place making is a good example of that, where artists partner with community organizations for the betterment of the community - that to me is a sustainable model. And I so hope that is a way that arts organizations will begin to look at how they engage artists rather than just hiring them for a performance.

Marc Scorca: Some comments that go from the granular to the more conceptual. One is, certainly in the opera industry we have worked in a contractual framework that makes the artists a very transitory part of our opera companies. The singers come and go from city to city, and it has left them tremendously vulnerable to the Covid cancellations as we've discussed. I think as an industry, we must look at that, and I'm participating in a panel on Monday with some European artists managers about how we rethink the way artists are contracted and paid in the opera structure. Beyond that, I know that some of our opera companies are really looking at creating local clusters of artists so that there's almost a return to a kind of company concept for some cities that have a richness of talent. So that they are avoiding airfare and hotel and allowing the local artists to function as a kind of company, again placing the artists more in the center of the opera company than we've seen before.

OPERA America is in the middle of considering - and we'll have a governance committee meeting on Friday and a board meeting in two weeks - a complete reconfiguration of our leadership structure, because the old rules that govern our board structure and our committees are unacceptable to us in terms of achieving the kind of inclusivity, participation, and diversity we're looking at. During some of the last several months, we've developed a set of proposals for how we will reconfigure our entire leadership structure and to include many more artists in it because there is a rule or thought that was articulated some years ago - I can't remember who planted it in my head - the benefit of having an artist in every row, that an artist pays attention to the performance better than anyone else in the row. If you have an artist in every row, everyone in the row will pay better attention to the art that's on stage. We're taking that to heart about all of our committees, the councils we hope to establish, that having an artist in every row of our work will refocus our work through the lens of the artist, where they are inventing with us, informing us, adding their perspective, and feeling empowered to shape the opera field in a way that our old structure did not allow for. So, everything from new contractual procedures to the concept of an artist in every row in everything we do as a service organization from governance all the way on down.

Fred Bronstein: Thank you, Marc.

Deborah Rutter: I mentioned the Culture Caucus that we created here about 18 months ago. The intent behind creating this was really to break down the stigma of the Kennedy Center being

TRANSCRIPT
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impenetrable and that it only had experiences for people that were at a set time of day and if you bought a ticket, et cetera. That's why we created this environment of artists and arts leaders to come together to access our resources, primarily our physical resources but to some degree our financial resources as well, to really talk about how we could best be serving them. No agenda, we didn't know in advance what it was that we were going to be asked for, but that we knew with the onset of our new spaces and then truly further access to our other spaces, that we could actually be a resource to our local community, and that's how the culture caucus was formed. With any relationship, in the act of giving you receive perhaps more than you give, and so that's what I meant by saying we have learned so much more in this process with the individuals that we have led. And while we are a physical space, the others of us on this Zoom and certainly those who might be listening in these conversations, this is not just about the physical space.

We can all do this as institutions. Marc, I think you're right in speaking to this. But what was really interesting is that initially when the list of individuals we would invite was put in front of me, I was doing a little head scratching, but it reminded me that I have to break out of what I perceive as the traditional model of who my colleagues and who other artist or arts-led organizations might be, and that art comes in many forms, in many shapes, and a different level of appreciation and experience.

I think the other piece of it is that we have to go into this openly expressing the fact that we don't really know everything there is to know, and that is the other thing about our world that we have all held onto. There's the maestro, the teacher, the all-knowing being that will tell us what is the right thing to do. And I think Afa made a really great point about this, which is that there is a lot that's really great out there, we have been so hyper-focused in the one direction. For us being willing to take that risk and being really open to sharing and understanding that by sharing, you will get so much more back in return. We took it another step, which is to actually then create a program where we invite artists to come in and spend a week of residency and to give them the financial resources to have that residency to explore their art and colleagues and allow others to participate by viewing, observing, asking questions along the way.

It is not a huge investment, but it is an investment, and it has to be done with humility to really understand how much you don't know and how much you have to learn. We're at the very beginning of this journey, but it has proven to be worthy for all of our time. And as I said, we've gotten so much more out of it than any kind of sense of risk along the way. That's the problem with so many - in all my years working with orchestras, everybody was so afraid of failing. Afa, thank you so much for saying we're going to fall. But we have to get up again and try again. And that's the thing about art - that you have to fail in order for you to actually get better. If you're perfect from the outset, then you haven’t risked enough. I think that's the other thing - we have to change our expectations about how we approach the work, because we're so unused to having fallen down and then pick ourselves up again and asking for help, to acknowledge that we didn't do something right, that we can do something better. There are so many steps about humility that are not necessarily in the DNA of the work, the hundreds of years of history that we have around our work.

TRANSCRIPT
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Fred Bronstein: Thank you, Deborah. I'm going to ask for questions coming from our participants. There's one. How do we collectively as an industry create a clear vision of what racial equity in the arts looks like, and then hold each other accountable to it? Great question.

Afa Dworkin: I'd love to kick us off if we can. I love the question. I think within the question there emerges an answer to, or potentially a version of an answer. “Collectively” to me is the operative word here. To me, we do this in a way where we assemble a collective and work really hard to ride the line of not speaking on behalf of or interpreting what racial equity should look like or mean to black and brown artists or BIPOC artists or BIPOC communities. At the same time, we stay in the conversation, because there is no unified vision unless there is accountability. We have to hold ourselves and one another accountable. I think we do this first from making a sincere commitment to having a courageous conversation that takes the priorities and the needs of our communities that have been neglected for far too long into account, while staying right there at the center of it and essentially making the promise to carry it out.

There could be a variety of different visions depending upon what community we live in. Racial equity somewhere in the center of the country may mean something completely different than what it means in a community within the deep south, and certainly may look very different from where I am in Detroit. I think that's okay. There is the richness of what all is possible, but I think the accountability piece comes from standing together listening to everybody. Those who hold the power to make the decisions and really hold their entire collectives accountable will ultimately answer to the community, to themselves, and importantly, to one another.

Fred Bronstein: Thank you. Simon.

Simon Woods: I think that I'd like to join on this question about clear vision and accountability to what I just heard Deborah and Marc talking about, which is the question of what leadership looks like in this age that we find ourselves in, because we have many questions to ask ourselves about where the leadership is going to come from. Of course, we're going to look to answers to leaders. But we have big questions about who we actually vest the power and authority in to define that clear vision. And it brings us to a big discussion about artistic leadership, and as Deborah referenced, around the notion of the music director, and the role of the music director in forming the vision. It brings us to big questions about boards and how, and our very awkward question about our kind of persistence in associating power and money on our boards as it relates to defining a vision. And we have some really difficult questions around who actually is defining the vision. I hope we actually do have those discussions as we come out of this, because I don't think it's a simple linear path.

Mar Scorca: I just wanted to also respond to the question and circle back around that word “collectively” that Afa talked about. I would want to substitute for a moment the word “individually.” How do we individually understand our own biases? How do we individually recognize the journey that we need to go on to be leaders in the field, in order then to have our own sense of where we need to go to be able to help the industry in a collective fashion? And I

think we who have been a part of the white privilege leadership structure too easily jump to a leadership role in facilitating collective discussion around this without going through the individual process of examining our own biases, of developing our own vision, and our own compelling energy around that vision. I just don't want to skip over the individual role here before we get to the collective.

Fred Bronstein: Thank you, Marc. Do we have another question? How has the word "excellence" changed from March 2020 to February 2021?

Simon Woods: In six minutes, Fred, on that one?

Fred Bronstein: It's a great question and a topic we love in this industry, not to be facetious. Who wants to take it? Who wants to go?

Margaret Lioi: I do, I do. I do, because you know this question of excellence is, again, a Western European classical white question. I feel that that segment of our arts and culture has established a standard. And that standard is called excellence and anything else that is not Western European classical music somehow is not measured in the same way. And there are so many different traditions, as we all know, different kinds of music, different cultural experiences that enrich a certain culture's music. But it becomes very murky, and it becomes a sense of, "Well, that's not as good as," and so in a way this question can be linked to the previous question about the idea of what real racial equity in the arts look like. Well, it looks like everyone's contribution of art and music being appreciated for what it brings to the whole, and not that one is more valuable, one is more excellent, one is higher quality. I think this is particularly true when we talk about classical and jazz, which we talk about a lot at Chamber Music America. And I think there are different traditions, but they each bring a richness that cannot be compared with the other. They are evaluated on their own terms.

Afa Dworkin: I very much agree. I think to answer the question "how has it changed," I don't believe that it has, ultimately, not in any substantive way. And perhaps in learning from other industries where it's standard practice to put folks in a room, digital or otherwise, who don't think like, look like, or have similar experience to one another in order to achieve excellence. We still do this kind of practice in the classical arts or performing arts very reluctantly, and when we do, we relegate it to a special convening, a special ad hoc committee, or something experimental that we're doing. I think if we really cared about changing what "excellent" means, we would commit to risk taking by inviting excellence from perspectives which have been neglected, because in my mind excellence should mean "more complete." And today it doesn't, not to us, not in this industry.

Fred Bronstein: It certainly comes down to how we define it, doesn't it? How we have chosen to define it. Any other thoughts on this? We are just about at the end. Rather than taking another question from our participants because we've got about a minute left, I just want to offer you all an opportunity of making final remarks. It's been a great conversation, and really rich, and we've

touched a lot of things. We could use two hours more, easily, and barely scratch the surface. That's one of the frustrations of a day like today. Any final thoughts from any of you that you'd care to share?

Simon Woods: I think we have to be comfortable with this topic. That to me is something that I personally have struggled about over the years, and I'm becoming more comfortable with being uncomfortable. And I think we need to call ourselves out. I've been watching the chat that goes along, and I know we're getting called out for the fact that there was a lack of diversity on this panel. And I think that's a great call, and I welcome it, and I think we have to be able to sit with that, and we have to be able to understand what that means. And we have to be uncomfortable with having these uncomfortable conversations and however difficult they are for the reasons that everybody in this panel has endured.

Fred Bronstein: Well, it's just an indication of the leadership of the industry. I mean, this is very true, which is what is comprising this panel. Deborah, were you going to say something?

Deborah Rutter: I think that Simon really said it. We have too much history of needing to be right, and to play that leadership role and not be willing to be humble, to learn how to be better at what we do, to keep our mouth shut, and to listen more, and to not hide behind words like excellence as an excuse to not welcome others into the conversation.

Fred Bronstein: With that, we are at the end of our time. I want to thank all of you again for a great conversation. For those of you that are listening, please do the survey to give us some feedback. If you've signed up for the design thinking session, you're going to your next room at 2:00 for the introduction for that. And I will see all of you back, hopefully at 2:30 with our funders panel for an hour conversation there. Thanks again to all of you for participating. Great conversation.