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## The Future Of The Orchestra

### Introduction

The symphony orchestra is undoubtedly one of the great cultural achievements of European civilisation. It is also one of Europe's most significant cultural exports. What began as relatively small collections of musicians in the courts of central Europe in the seventeenth century has not only grown in size but also achieved a wide geographical spread. Indeed, it is now reasonable to speak of the orchestra as a truly world-wide phenomenon, and such globalisation can largely be explained as a result of two significant factors. First, European expatriation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whereby migrant communities from various European countries settled elsewhere, inevitably resulted in the transplantation of numerous aspects of European culture; Western art music and its most significant ensemble, the symphony orchestra, were invariably part of this process. Second, as Western culture generally and its music in particular became more widely disseminated, helped later by the growth of the recording industry and the global domination of a small number of Western record companies, Western art music achieved a degree of popularity - and sometimes cultural ascendancy - in areas where it was not part of the indigenous culture. Along with Western-style institutions of music education (conservatoires and exam boards, for example) the symphony orchestra became seen as an acceptable, even desirable, organisation, for rather complex and variable reasons relating to local cultural and political aspirations.

Yet after this period of expansion and popularity, many orchestras since the second world war have found the social climate in which they operate rather more challenging, and they have struggled to stay afloat financially and to retain audiences. Thus the outlook for these orchestras is not unproblematic, and in this chapter I shall review the present position of the symphony orchestra as an institution in the West, and consider some of the strategies proposed by both musicians and administrators as they seek to face the challenges of the future. I shall also contrast the situation of Western orchestras with their newer counterparts in the East, who perhaps have different agendas and thus face slightly different challenges.

## **The symphony orchestra in the West today**

In many parts of Europe and America the symphony orchestra as an institution appears to be in difficulties. Orchestras all too frequently suffer from a perceived lack of support from local or national funding bodies, with diminishing subsidies or other income often in stark contrast to the huge fees demanded by star conductors and soloists. Musicians find themselves increasingly stressed, even within the context of what is by nature a stressful occupation, with expanding workloads, long foreign tours and unsociable hours. And often this is in the context of dwindling audience numbers, leading to questions from the press and politicians as to why public money should be used to support this 'minority' art form.

Some explanation of the funding mechanisms which underpin orchestras will illustrate these dilemmas. Most orchestras in the West are organised according to one of three possible models. In the first, the orchestra is financially supported by a civic authority or other body - the BBC in London is an obvious example, Berlin City Council is another - and the musicians are employed by that authority; they are technically civil servants or staff members, and although theoretically under the control of their employers in practice they do have considerable input into the way the orchestra is run. This is the model which prevails in much of continental Europe and occasionally in Britain. In the second model, more common in the United States, the orchestra is run by an independent non-profit organisation, with a non-professional board overseeing professional managers who run the day-to-day affairs of the orchestra; the New York Philharmonic or Manchester's Hallé Orchestra provide examples. In these cases government agencies may contribute modest amounts, but the orchestras are also dependent on private benefactors, trusts, and foundations. The third model, less common but found in some orchestras in London and others such as the Vienna and Israeli Philharmonics, is where the players form a co-operative. Thus the orchestra is both owned and organised by the players themselves, although usually with professional managerial assistance. Government agencies frequently provide financial support, but these orchestras are often more reliant than others on earned income in order to survive.

None of these models provides complete security, however. Civic authorities or other employers may institute budget cutbacks which affect orchestras and the musicians in them. Charitable foundations or private donors may redistribute their largesse elsewhere. And government subsidies can be notoriously fickle, as well as being dependent on macro-economic cycles against which the orchestras have little protection.

As an example of what can happen when orchestras get their figures wrong, we might consider the case of the Oakland Symphony Orchestra, a regional orchestra in North California. In 1986 this organisation went bankrupt after a series of difficulties with

endowments, the purchase and renovation of a performance space, the sudden death of the artistic director, etc. Yet during these troubled times the orchestra found it difficult to gain the public support necessary for it to continue. As Marcia Herndon has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> although the people of Oakland *said* that the symphony orchestra was important, in fact considerably more pride - and economic support - was actually invested in the local football team. This illustrates the difficulties orchestras have in competing with other organisations for the limited amounts of public sympathy (and finance) available, further compounding the economic difficulties they sometimes experience. However, in the case of the Oakland orchestra, it should be noted that it was later reconstituted into the present 'Oakland East Bay Symphony', which perhaps reveals something of the underlying resilience of the musicians in such situations.

London provides another example of the challenging financial climate in which orchestras have to operate, since particular circumstances prevail there which makes life for the city's orchestras especially demanding. London has five major symphony orchestras, four of which are established on the co-operative model outlined above. They are obliged to compete with one another for shared use of a limited number of performance spaces, since none has its own venue in which to create a significant identity for itself, unlike, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic or the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. This is coupled with a funding system which is not only based on short-term cycles - that is, the orchestras can never be sure how much subsidy they are going to receive more than one year in advance - but is also considerably less generous than some European equivalents.

The end result is that London's orchestral musicians are often less well paid than their European or American counterparts, and frequently have to undertake more work than is desirable in order to balance the orchestra's books. Added to this already difficult cocktail is the fact that the Arts Council of England, whose financial support is considered essential to sustain each of the four freelance orchestras, frequently commissions reports into London's orchestral scene in order to ascertain which of the orchestras should receive what level of grant. Indeed, the Council has on occasion threatened to remove its support of one orchestra or another. This inevitably sets the orchestras in direct competition with each other for their very survival, further encouraging a rather difficult and stressful existence for the musicians involved.

Clearly, the economic foundations underpinning many orchestras are problematic. Even in cities which were previously notably generous, such as Berlin, significant cutbacks have recently been instituted. For the foreseeable future many orchestras are resigned to the fact that they will continue to survive through a complex mixture of state support, endowments, grants, benefactors, and commercial income. Although this uncertainty would alarm other

businesses of a similar size, orchestras and their managers have become highly adept at dealing with such vicissitudes, and there is no reason to believe that, in most cases, they will not continue to do so. However, they have given considerable thought to the ways in which they might transform one of their most important income streams, the live orchestral concert.

### **The changing face of the orchestral concert in the West**

Perhaps the most pressing problem for many orchestras in the West is the difficulty they have in maintaining and increasing audience numbers, particularly in trying to encourage younger people to attend orchestral concerts. Orchestras are only too aware that not only do they often struggle to fill seats in their concert halls, but those which are filled are occupied by a disproportionate number of the over 40s. Together with a rather stagnant repertory in which the majority of music performed was written by a small number of (usually dead) composers, there is a frequent concern that orchestras might be seen as 'living museums', simply providing a showcase for the musical relics of the past.

In part such attitudes arise from the ritualised format of orchestral concerts themselves, and people unfamiliar with such events frequently have a misguided perception as to their exact nature. Indeed, discussing this issue with one orchestral violist he remarked, only partly joking, that 'some people think we still wear wigs!'. While this may be an extreme view, it does illustrate the difficulties orchestras have in persuading certain sections of Western society that there is something of interest for them at an orchestral concert. The perceived 'stuffiness' of these concerts no doubt relates to the formal dress worn by the orchestra (a hangover from the nineteenth century), which is traditionally matched by the equally formal dress worn by the audience. Together with other patterns of behaviour (such as being relatively silent during performance, having specific points for polite applause, the conductor turning his back to the audience, etc.), this all generates what is often seen as a forbiddingly formal environment for those unfamiliar with such practices.

Orchestras are sensitive to these difficulties, however, and have at various times suggested strategies to overcome them. The following newspaper quote relates to London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the mid-1990s:

Concert-going is about to change. The Royal Philharmonic has big plans, which include training a camera on individual musicians and the conductor's face to magnify their images on to a screen; taking the orchestra out of evening dress for some concerts; holding concerts in the round, and as a spokesman says, 'have drama, lasers and maybe a camera right down the clarinet'.<sup>2</sup>

The clarinettist's response to this last idea is not recorded, and little of what was proposed actually came to pass, but this quote does underline that orchestras are at least considering how to break down the relatively static ritual inherent within their performance events. At some concerts the conductor or an invited guest will introduce the works from the platform, developing the relationship between the audience and those on stage. On other occasions musicians will change into less formal attire, particularly for early evening or afternoon concerts, or in concerts which are deliberately conceived to attract a new, often younger, audience. Concerts may occur outside of the traditional setting, in parks, amphitheatres or other open-air venues, and these again may help to reduce the formality traditionally associated with the event.

But the difficulty for orchestras contemplating such innovations is that there is a balance to be struck between tradition and change. Some people attend orchestral concerts precisely *because* they feel comfortable with hearing music they know, under circumstances which are both familiar and comfortable. They may be put off by too many innovations in style or content, and there is little point in attracting new audiences if the strategies employed simply alienate existing ones.

Such difficulties become particularly crystallised in relation to contemporary repertoire (largely post-1945) and new music. Here many orchestras find themselves attempting to resolve an irreducible paradox. On the one hand much contemporary art music is unpopular, and does not attract paying audiences; indeed it often has quite the opposite effect. While there are some composers who may generate good box-office returns - names such as John Adams, Henryk Gorecki or Michael Nyman spring to mind - many programmes that feature contemporary music, particularly of the more 'difficult' kind, do very badly at the box-office. Furthermore, orchestras are themselves often rather traditional in their outlook, and orchestral musicians can be deeply ambivalent about the contemporary pieces put before them. In contrast, many of the funding authorities which subsidise orchestras make it a condition of their support that the orchestra is committed to playing new music, either by introducing unfamiliar works into their programmes or by commissioning new works from living composers. Often orchestras prefer the latter course because of the additional kudos it brings with the funding authorities, plus the possibility of attracting the attention of newspaper critics and the publicity this generates.

Although this paradox has no simple solution it has prompted many orchestras to develop various strategies to accommodate contemporary music in their programmes. Pre-concert talks, where the composer and possibly the conductor or other significant figures discuss the work to be performed, have become more common. Such talks are usually free to ticket holders for the main concert, and have both an educational value, in that they seek to inform

the audience about the structure and context of the new work, as well as perhaps making the composer and the performers rather less 'anonymous' or remote than might otherwise be the case. Similarly, shorter chamber concerts immediately before the main evening event have also been used to introduce unfamiliar works and composers to interested concert-goers. Certain conductors, such as Simon Rattle, Esa Pekka Salonen or Michael Tilson Thomas, have become well-known for their commitment to new music. With careful programming and/or judicious use of the subscription series, audiences feel they can develop a relationship with a particular conductor. They come to trust him (or very occasionally her) to make decisions about contemporary music on their behalf. Another ploy has been to appoint a composer-in-residence, more closely identifying the orchestra with the work of that particular composer. All these innovations attempt to develop better relationships between musicians, composers, and audiences, and to alleviate some of the difficulties associated with the integration of contemporary music into the standard orchestral repertoire. Clearly, if the tradition of symphonic orchestral music is to move forward, it cannot rely on a relatively small number of works endlessly reconstituted for a devoted but diminishing audience. Although the performance of unfamiliar pieces presents many challenges to orchestras and their managers, these are challenges which are being met, and must continue to be met, if they are to face the future with confidence.

A further paradox relating to concert programming is that in order to preserve their status as art organisations, orchestras cannot be seen to be simply providing the most popular pieces in 'lowest common denominator' programmes. An endless diet of all-Tchaikovsky or all-Mozart concerts might be easier to sell, but it would be unlikely to satisfy the funding criteria for many of those organisations, public or private, which support orchestras; it would certainly become tedious for the musicians involved, and would ultimately be self-defeating by failing to attract new audiences. Yet many orchestras have developed either particular concerts or series of concerts which concentrate on 'the popular classics' at the expense of more challenging programming. Some, following on from the success of the Boston Pops Orchestra, have actually marketed themselves under a slightly different name, to distinguish this particular facet of their corporate image from their 'serious' concerts. Their defence would be that the income generated is a useful part of the complex financial equation they must resolve in order to support themselves; few if any would wish this to be the main focus of their work.

In a further attempt to appeal to new audiences concerts have also been revitalised through the introduction of musical styles and/or instruments not traditionally associated with standard Western art music repertory. Thus jazz composers and performers, and occasionally even pop and rock musicians, have been enticed onto the concert platform, either to write for or perform with an orchestra. Although such collaborations do not always

appeal to traditionalists, and have on occasion drawn sharp words from critics, they do succeed in drawing popular attention to the work of orchestras, and can generate widespread publicity that might otherwise be hard to achieve. Paul McCartney's Liverpool Oratorio, Mark Anthony Turnage's work with the jazz drummer Peter Erskine, or the San Francisco Orchestra's sessions with Metallica and the Grateful Dead, to take just three of many possible examples, have all taken traditional orchestral work into new territories.

In the last thirty years or so, like other small- to medium-sized companies before them, orchestras have learned that diversification is the key to sustaining their position in the market place. New strategies have been developed to compete with the many other attractions - film and video, theatre, television, jazz and pop concerts, etc. - which their potential audience has as a means to occupy its leisure time. Such innovation and imagination in the use of orchestral resources will doubtless continue to be important through the coming century. The days have passed when orchestras in the West could survive simply by giving concerts of standard repertoire, supplemented by film and recording fees. They must now be much more pro-active in generating work for themselves at home and abroad, in attracting new audiences, and in presenting and promoting themselves as vigorously and resourcefully as possible. It is no coincidence that most orchestras now have full-time employees with particular responsibility for marketing and promoting the orchestra's work. Orchestras know that audiences will no longer simply come looking for them, but need to be enticed into the concert hall.

The issues surrounding both the presentation and the musical content of concert programmes will continue to be at the centre of debates among orchestras and their managers for the foreseeable future. As urban Western culture continues its increasing reliance on digital technology and the rapid communications it allows; when visual and aural stimuli can be consumed with ease from numerous sources - CDs, DVDs, Video, TV and Radio, the Internet, etc.; when three-minute pop songs and televised soundbites make ever-reducing demands on our concentration span; and when the individual can exert such enormous and immediate control over his or her personal listening environment, the orchestra is in danger of appearing an anachronistic throwback to a previous age, bound up in ritualised practices which many in the present generations feel has no relevance for them. Orchestral musicians and those who work with them are clearly aware of these dilemmas, and many have put forward bold and imaginative solutions which will become increasingly widespread as the century progresses.

### **The future for the orchestral musician**



We must not lose sight of the fact that orchestras are of course composed of individual musicians; thus the future of any orchestra is inevitably bound up with the aspirations of the individuals within it, at least to the extent of their influence upon the orchestra's activities. It is something of a paradox of Western art music training that it concentrates greatly on developing individual skills and interpretation, and emphasises the importance of individual musicality, yet in its most significant ensemble, the symphony orchestra, it requires of the individual musician that many of their own musical ideas must be subsumed to the will of the conductor, or at least moderated to complement those of the other musicians around them. Thus the extent to which musicians feel genuinely recognised as individuals within orchestras can be variable, particularly if one considers the collective requirements of, for example, any of the large string sections.

It is fortuitous, therefore, that the diversification of orchestral practice outlined previously has often also allowed individuals within the orchestra to have more prominence in the work they undertake. Performing smaller-scale concerts before the main evening event, for example, whether of mainstream or contemporary repertoire, usually involves the musicians in chamber ensembles, work which many of them find a satisfying contrast to the symphonic repertoire. Indeed, groups put together for such events sometimes continue as active ensembles themselves, when the orchestral schedule permits. This is particularly common among wind instrumentalists, who may form quintets or octets to perform music written for these combinations. Yet, even the entire cello section of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, for example, gives concerts separately from main orchestral engagements, allowing the spotlight to fall on them in a rather different way than when they perform as part of the orchestra.

Educational work is another area where musicians can develop skills and interests which build on their central role as orchestral performers. Many orchestras in the West now have education departments, often with a full-time administrator who liaises with local schools or other youth groups, creating projects which involve members of the orchestra. This has several advantages. For the musicians it breaks up the orchestral routine by allowing them to work in environments where professional musicians are seldom found. For the students involved it brings them into direct contact with these musicians, in a less formal setting than the concert hall, and allows personal relationships to be forged, albeit often transitory ones, with individuals who may otherwise appear rather forbidding and unapproachable when fully attired for a formal concert. It also helps to counteract the tendency towards ageing audiences by involving younger generations in the work of the orchestra, which hopefully generates potential new audience members in the medium term. For the last reason in particular, the funding authorities which support an orchestra insist on active and imaginative educational work as a condition for continued financial support. Thus work of this sort is

seen as beneficial for the musicians, for the orchestra and the community it serves, and for the future of orchestral music in general.

While orchestras will continue to provide the major musical events which are the cornerstones of their work, they can no longer be viewed as cultural monoliths whose only *raison d'être* is the performance of late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century masterpieces. Rather, they should perhaps be seen as a resource centre, a collection of highly skilled musicians whose talents can be put to use in a variety of contexts. Such views are becoming increasingly common in the West, and they have been particularly well articulated by Ernest Fleischmann, one of our most respected orchestral administrators, who has managed major orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic. In an address given at the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1987, Fleischmann put forward in uncompromising fashion some of the difficulties facing orchestral musicians:

For the musicians, life even in some of the great orchestras [is] increasingly frustrating: repetitive or boring repertoire, loss of musical identity, particularly for string players, incompetent conductors, bad halls, not enough money, much stress. No life for a real musician this, with little opportunity to develop as an artist, let alone as a human being. Dissatisfaction, frustration, antagonism, boredom – all these still exist among musicians in orchestras everywhere...Why the hell should anyone then contemplate an orchestral career?<sup>3</sup>

As a potential solution to these difficulties Fleischmann advocated abolishing the concept of orchestras entirely (in fact he suggested burning them!), and replacing them instead with 'Communities of Musicians'. These would comprise some 140-150 musicians, who could then be employed in a variety of situations often covered by several different ensembles at present. Integrating them into one large group would allow more cross-fertilisation between the various performance genres than is often achieved within any given orchestra. Those normally confined only to symphonic repertoire would get much more opportunity to play chamber music; the contemporary specialists would be given their own programmes but with more rehearsal time, and would also be used in other areas as the situation demanded; a similar approach would be taken towards early music specialists; musicians particularly predisposed towards educational work would lead residential projects, but all the various ensembles within the community would be available to schools and other institutions for concerts directed towards younger audiences. As yet Fleischmann's proposals have not been implemented in full anywhere, but they provide an imaginative blueprint for a model which would tackle many of the problems the orchestras face in the immediate future.

Fleischmann's views are resonant with those of Basil Tschaikoy, another influential administrator, who in the 1980s was the director of the National Centre for Orchestral Studies in London, a training institution for musicians hoping to embark on an orchestral career. Tschaikoy also felt it was important to enlarge the role of the orchestra, distribute its resources in other ways, and present fresh horizons for the orchestral musician:

Dividing the orchestras into a number of smaller groups and ensembles creates many problems, especially for older players. But those preparing to be musicians who will serve audiences well into the twenty-first century, must have broader aspirations than their parents...Our best players should be doing some teaching in the schools...And they should play in the schools too, sometimes in small ensembles, sometimes in larger ones...Musicians have a special place in societies where either unemployment or the shorter working week gives many people much more leisure time. Here they have a role as animateurs, as well as performers.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere he writes of his concern for what he describes as the rather 'abstract' nature of orchestral concerts, which, he suggests, is 'clearly no longer economically, socially or musically suited to the requirements of the future'.<sup>5</sup>

Evidently there is a consensus emerging that if the symphony orchestra as an institution is to survive for another century, then both the orchestras themselves and the players within them will need to be as flexible and adaptable as possible. And orchestral managers will need to show considerably more imagination, both in how resources are deployed and in the ways in which their concerts are presented, than might have been necessary for orchestras in the past.

### **A view from the East: orchestras in east Asia**

If the perspective offered above is slightly negative – the symphony orchestra in the West in a gentle but continuous decline from its heyday of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – this is in notable contrast to the situation in certain parts of east Asia, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. Here, there has been a growing interest in certain types of symphonic Western art music – largely the nineteenth-century romantic tradition – which has in turn provided the impetus for the establishing of numerous orchestras to recreate the masterworks of this tradition.

There are a number of related reasons for this. The twentieth century has, in some of these Asian countries, seen the rise of a middle-class urban population in a similar fashion to that which arose in many areas of Europe during the nineteenth century. Richard Kraus has

suggested that, in the case of China at least, 'the artistic preferences of the Chinese middle class flow also from the social implications which are embedded within this [Western] musical culture'.<sup>6</sup> Although a sociologist might reasonably ask just *how* these social implications come to be 'embedded' in a symphony by Beethoven or Brahms, the parallel affinities within the two different contexts deserve to be noted. Furthermore, the migration of European citizens to various parts of Asia laid the foundations for tours by numerous European and American orchestras during the early twentieth century, in which they reconstituted the great nineteenth-century symphonies for the émigrés, as well as introducing them to particular sectors of the indigenous population. This in turn meant that, as Western art music and the instruments associated with it became more popular, many instrumentalists and composers from Asia came to Europe to learn the associated compositional and performance techniques. On their return they sought not only more performance opportunities with local orchestras, but also to establish a music education system of conservatoires and competitions which again paralleled that in the West. Moreover, the widespread availability of commercial recordings, allied to radio broadcasting, also contributed to the extensive dissemination of Western art music.

All of this led to a vigorous expansion of Western-style orchestral music in this part of the globe, and the creation of a surprisingly large number of ensembles in a relatively short period of time. The following list gives some flavour of this: in Japan The New Symphony Orchestra was founded in Tokyo in 1926, and after a period as the Japan Symphony Orchestra became the house orchestra of the broadcaster NHK in 1951; Tokyo alone now has numerous orchestras of various descriptions, with others in different Japanese cities. The Central Philharmonic Orchestra was established in Beijing, China, in 1951, and, having only just survived Chairman Mao's profoundly nationalist 'Great Leap Forward' from 1958-1961, today finds itself one of the longest established of the many orchestras now resident in China's major cities; a Chinese radio orchestra was briefly established in 1949, before being disbanded and then re-established in the 1970s. Across the Taiwan Strait the Taipei City Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1969. In Korea the Seoul Philharmonic was established in 1948, to be followed by the Korean Broadcasting Service's own orchestra in 1956. Hong Kong, notwithstanding its colonial history, only established its Philharmonic Orchestra on a professional basis as late as 1974.

This hotbed of activity suggests that orchestral music-making is in a healthy and vibrant state on Asia's eastern shores. But this analysis glosses over some important differences, as well as some significant similarities, with orchestras in the West. For example, east Asian audiences for orchestral music, even more than their Western counterparts perhaps, are rather conservative in their expectations of orchestral programming; the major works of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries account for by far the greatest proportion of works

played, with little interest in modern works nor in the music of earlier periods. Again the essentially static nature of the repertoire may be off-putting to younger audiences, particularly as orchestral music now has to compete with a considerable amount of locally-produced popular music. It is noticeable that, as in the West, audiences for classical music have been declining in recent years.

One area of repertoire development which has been explored in an attempt to combat this is the use by local composers of traditional Asian instruments in the orchestral context. Such instruments have not found a permanent place in the orchestra, but are occasional visitors, rather like the saxophone or the guitar in the West. Although the incorporation of these instruments has not been universally successful, they do provide a particularly Asian dimension to the evolution of orchestral music. Certain works, such as those by the Chinese-born but now American-based composer Tan Dun, have proved successful enough to have received performances in other parts of the world. These meetings between traditional local musics and Western symphonic forces remain potentially interesting areas for exploration, although whether the results of such fusions become widely accepted by the listening public, either at home or abroad, is another matter.

Orchestras in the Far East have also suffered by often not being able to secure major recording contracts in the way that many of their Western counterparts have done. Whereas Western orchestras have (at least until recently) buttressed the insecurities of their performance activities with often lucrative session work, either by recording standard repertoire for global distribution by the major record companies or through film scores and other commercial work, this option has been less available to the newer orchestras in the East. There are a number of complex reasons for this. Partly it is because the more established orchestras of the West have been better connected with both the record companies themselves and the conductors who play such an important role in the provision of these contracts. Equally, it has taken some time for any east Asian orchestra to achieve the technical standards that have long been common among the top Western orchestras. But there is also perhaps an implicit assumption in certain quarters that Western musicians simply play Western music better, because it is somehow more 'their' tradition. For all these reasons, east Asian orchestras have not had the same exposure from the major record companies as their Western counterparts. Although the situation is changing slowly, it will be some time yet before any of these orchestras manages to establish itself in the way that, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic or the Philharmonia Orchestra has done, on the back of a large catalogue of significant recordings.

The lives of individual orchestral musicians have also in part begun to parallel those in the West. Just as an orchestral career now makes considerable and varied demands on

Western musicians, with basic funding insecure and diversification inevitable, so similar situations are beginning to arise in the East. Kraus notes that under recent Chinese reforms, for example, financial stability has been eroded:

Arts ensembles have been urged to become financially self-sufficient...The Central Philharmonic has had to record film soundtracks for income, at the expense of rehearsal time for the music it wants to play. The Shanghai Symphony must divide into 'light music groups' which provide background music in hotels and restaurants...Individual musicians also supplement their low incomes by moonlighting as teachers and pop performers.<sup>7</sup>

While such specific difficulties may not apply in every case, it seems clear that, despite their apparent industriousness and vitality, east Asian orchestras and the musicians within them face many of the problems shared by their Western counterparts. They may also in future need to consider some of the solutions presently being adopted in the West, if they are to secure their positions both at home and abroad.

## **Conclusions**

Much of what has been written here has concentrated on the larger symphonic orchestra, and while the picture of eighty or so musicians wearing full evening dress is undoubtedly the image which springs to many minds when the word 'orchestra' is mentioned, it is important to observe that from the early twentieth century onwards other types of ensemble might equally have been connoted. In particular, the rise of the chamber orchestra has been especially significant. Such groups are smaller, cheaper and often more flexible than their larger siblings, and thus go some way towards mitigating both the economic and repertory difficulties discussed earlier. Some of these have carved a niche for themselves through specialising in particular repertoires such as contemporary music (for example, Ensemble Intercontemporain in France or the London Sinfonietta), or through performances of 'early' music (The Hanover Band or The Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra) with period instruments. These latter groups in particular have been very successful over the last two decades, although even here there has been something of a slowdown recently from the vigorous expansion of the 1980s. A number of these ensembles have proved to be rather transient, often put together by a particular conductor or composer to provide a platform for that individual's skills; yet others, such as the St. Pauls Chamber Orchestra in Minnesota or the Basle Chamber Orchestra, have achieved a permanence and longevity comparable to some of our major symphony orchestras, with a deserved reputation to match.

Being relatively recently established, many of these smaller ensembles have felt less encumbered by the traditions underpinning the older symphonic orchestras. But the adventurousness they have shown, not only in terms of their programming but also in how they have marketed themselves and generated new audiences, may provide some inspiration for their larger cousins as the latter seek to overcome the difficulties for their own future. In the twenty-first century marketing and corporate image-making are as important to orchestras as they are to any other medium-sized business; the symphony orchestra of today is akin to a small corporation, with a profile, employee numbers and a turnover to match, and both musicians and their managers have learned through painful experience that they must be as professional in their attitude to the business side of their operations as they are in their attitude towards their music-making. New media and information technology are at the heart of this business revolution. Orchestras are already making use of email distribution lists, websites and similar marketing ploys, as well as using more creative images and other artwork sometimes influenced by popular culture, in order to promote themselves both as widely and as cost effectively as possible.

Information technology presents other opportunities for the orchestras' future, particularly in relation to recorded music. Traditionally orchestras have recorded for large record companies, who have generally paid the orchestra, recording, production and distribution costs, and have then retained any profits (or borne any losses) that the disc might make. This is still the model that prevails in most situations, particularly with the major record labels. But there are now alternatives. Recording and production costs are lower than in the past, and the internet presents significant opportunities for the dissemination of orchestral recordings, either as a means simply to sell pre-recorded CDs as at present, or, conceivably, as soundfiles (mp3, for example) direct to the consumer. A few orchestras have already set up their own record labels to market and distribute their recordings, and adept use of the internet could boost this trend quite significantly. Potentially, orchestras could target niche markets for contemporary music, early music, or works by less well-known composers, without the need for expensive mass marketing. Recordings could be made available on a subscription basis, whereby a fixed number of subscribers to a soundfile would ensure that the recording was made, and it could then be transmitted direct to the subscribers home. Or, for a small additional fee, recordings of concerts could be subsequently transmitted into the homes of those who attended the concert. Such things may seem far-fetched at present, but the digital revolution has transformed so many aspects of global culture so quickly that it is difficult to foresee how orchestras may be harnessing its benefits in fifty years time.

The social and cultural contexts in which orchestras work have evolved beyond all recognition since the seventeenth century, and particularly in the last few decades. For many years orchestras stood still while the world around them moved on, and for some

people the orchestra remains a relic from a previous age. This need not be the case, and there are many musicians and administrators who are showing great imagination, flexibility and commitment as they lead the orchestra into the twenty-first century. But if this great cultural institution is to survive into the twenty-second century, such approaches must become the norm, not than the exception. The orchestra is too important to be allowed to subside into a cultural antiquity for an ever-diminishing group of interested historians.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Herndon, 'Cultural Engagement: The Case of the Oakland Symphony Orchestra', *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20 (1988), p.134-145.

<sup>2</sup> *The Independent*, 8 August 1994 p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Fleischmann, 'The orchestra is dead. Long live the community of musicians', address given at the commencement exercises of the Cleveland Institute of Music, 16 May 1987, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Basil N. Tschaikov, 'Preparation for the orchestral profession: which kind of symphony orchestra will we have in 2000?', *International Journal of Music Education* 9 (1987), p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kurt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, Oxford University Press, 1989, p.8.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.186.