



Royal Philharmonic Society Lecture 2015

Alan Gilbert
Orchestras in the 21st Century; a new paradigm

This lecture was given by Alan Gilbert at Milton Court Concert Hall, London on 15 April 2015.

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Good evening. It is an honor to be here, addressing the Royal Philharmonic Society. I have been aware of this distinguished organization for almost my entire life, and my admiration for it was brought to an even more tangible level recently, in 2013, when the Philharmonic Society and the New York Philharmonic collaborated on a project that combined Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, commissioned by you and which we gave in its US premiere, with a new jointly-commissioned work by Mark-Anthony Turnage. Still, I never could have hoped to have been invited here to talk about one of the ideas which I live with every day, and which I have been exploring as a vital concern since first becoming a music director: **what it means to be an orchestra today. What is it that orchestras, and the musicians in them, do, and what can we mean for the societies for which we perform?**

Do people NEED music? When we talk of needs, we usually are referring to the essentials of life—food, water, air, shelter, medical attention, and the like. Obviously attending symphony orchestra concerts doesn't fall on that list, but I will be bold enough to say that all of us here do feel that they are also essential, albeit in a different way, one that is aesthetic, life-affirming and spiritual. We all believe there is more to life than mere physical existence.

Surely music—and indeed, all the arts—are crucial elements in giving human life its greater meaning and sense of possibility. They help define what it means to be human.

The Royal Philharmonic Society has demonstrated an active commitment to this belief, and to a perpetual reinvigoration of the world of orchestras, through your longstanding commissioning program and by hosting these lectures for people in a position to effect leadership and change, to name just two examples.

But I'm not actually here to debate this. The questions before us now are about the ways in which orchestras can meaningfully be a part of people's lives and can serve the communities that support them. Orchestras will continue to do what we have always done: play powerful, intriguing, uplifting, thought-provoking music. But the challenges facing people in today's world call for something new in the way that music and musicians can touch people's lives on all levels: emotionally and spiritually, of course, but also socially, psychologically, and even medically.

Let's step back and ask ourselves why orchestras today talk about changing to meet new audience expectations in order to nourish future live concert attendance. Is it just a matter of self-

preservation, or is it something along the lines of what Abraham Maslow wrote about in his theory that psychological health is predicated on fulfilling innate human needs? Obviously, I believe the latter, and I feel that what we now have can be seen as a “What Can You Be?” moment. **What orchestras can be for their audiences is changing, and that actually presents a wonderful opportunity for us to grow.**

I recently read a tweet by the distinguished music journalist Justin Davidson that caught my attention because it seemed to sum up in a concise and brilliant way a lot of what I have been thinking about in preparing this talk:

“Sometimes at concerts”, he tweeted, “I feel like the people on stage are there to provide background music for the audience’s expectations.”

That’s deep. Does it mean that the audience’s preconceptions about what they are hearing make it impossible for them to react honestly to what is happening on stage? Perhaps the critical dialogue surrounding music has become more important than the music itself... and the fact that these thoughts were transmitted on a relatively new social media platform implicitly supports the

need for careful consideration of media's new place as part of the equation. All are fascinating topics for exploration.

And then I realized that I had misread the tweet: "Sometimes at concerts I feel like the people on stage are there to provide background music for the audience's expecorations."

We recently did a world premier performance of John Adams' new symphonic violin concerto at the Philharmonic with Leila Josefowicz, who is truly a force of nature on stage. Her utter mastery and the deep humanity of this ferociously difficult new piece made this one of the most significant concert experiences I have had in a long time. And the people in the hall clearly felt it as well. There was a palpable shared concentration in the room—you can tell when an audience of thousands is really with you because then the quiet becomes even more so—a kind of wonderful charged quiet that has an inspired power to it. There was no expecoration—it was concert magic, and clearly something that only could happen live.

This kind of **transcendent happening** is why people go to concerts, one of the reasons why people have always gone to concerts. People want to feel a deep connection with the music,

and with the performers, as well as with each other in the audience. Increasingly, though, these connections can happen outside of the concert hall, and in fact you don't need to get anywhere near a live performer to experience an incredibly wide offering of musical treasures. People tend not to argue overtly against the notion of live performance, but you do hear a lot of discussion about the primacy of new ways of delivering the product: the importance of the internet, social media, You-Tube, live-streaming, Netflix, you name it. No new concert hall is planned these days without thinking about how events could be filmed (yes, we still use that word!) and captured for digital dissemination.

Nothing is wrong with this—it's all terrific. One of my favorite things to do is to meander around You-Tube to discover the gold mine of footage and recordings of great musicians from all eras. How fantastic it is that we can watch and hear things on MediciTV, or the Berlin Phil's Digital Concert Hall, or the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's streamed concert series?

But the reality of this new media landscape has become one of challenge for orchestras and performing arts organizations. Concert tickets are expensive, instant-gratification choices for

entertainment are myriad and not more than a click or two away—and again, while no one is calling for an end to live performance, it is feeling more and more necessary to sharpen our sense of purpose and implicitly to define and justify our very existence.

The last few decades have seen orchestras become involved in an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink range of activities, apparently designed to draw people in. Non-traditional programming, casual concerts, film nights, singles events, education, community outreach, open rehearsals—the list could go on and on. And don't get me wrong—many of these activities are powerful and very worthwhile.

The problem has been that as orchestras are involved in more and more areas, it is often not clear why they are doing what they are doing. When you get the sense that something might as well be a stand-alone venture, that it actually does not connect to the core of the organization that is behind it, you might reasonably start to wonder what the point is.

This has led to a kind of industry-wide existential soul-searching in which at least some forces have pushed back, not wanting to see their beloved old-world musical traditions altered. The

growing-pains of this seismic shift have led to there being two competing choruses: the chorus of “Things must change” and the chorus of “things must stay the same”. It’s a little bit like the Matthew Passion gone wrong. However it’s also a bit of an artificial conflict, since clearly things must adapt while we at the same time fight to preserve much of what has characterized orchestras for centuries. We obviously don’t want to throw out the baby with the bath water—the question is really: where is the balance point, and can we change without selling out or compromising our artistic souls.

The world of orchestras has reacted to external forces and embraced **education and outreach**. This shift away from merely presenting concerts to becoming organizations that think of education as central is fairly universal. There are a number of factors that pushed this trend: one for sure was the desire to make up for the dwindling presence of music in schools, particularly in the States. Cynically, there was also a period some 30 years ago when education and multicultural outreach was where a lot of the grant money was. Happily, we have moved beyond those superficial motivations and are now in a later chapter of this trend: now virtually all orchestras have educational wings and have made access central to their very missions.

As Simon Rattle said at the press conference announcing his recent appointment at the LSO,

“What is an orchestra now? I think it definitely has to have access and education at its centre”.

The potential for music and orchestras to be a significant force in education and even social change is now firmly established and the need to be forceful and pro-active in those areas is no longer a question of if, but how.

So now, as virtually all orchestras have education and digital media departments, not to mention development and community outreach sections, the growing challenge of connecting the dots and achieving clarity of profile and mission is greater than ever.

Different orchestras have achieved varying degrees of success in this, in creating a unified sense of vision that ties everything together.

I would like to tell you a couple of stories taken from my time up until now at the New York Philharmonic, that will hopefully illustrate one Music Director's attempt to answer that challenge.

The first story begins way back at Harvard College, and although it won't be clear why until later, I call it the **Petrouchka Parable**.

I was a freshman, in 1985, when I was introduced to Jim Ross, a conductor, and then a music advisor at Harvard. He became a good friend and mentor, and he introduced some novel ideas to me about new ways he dreamed of presenting concerts. I had no idea at the time that these out-loud musings would grow into a lifelong evaluation of what it means to be an orchestra musician. When Jim became Director of Orchestral studies and professor of Conducting at the University of Maryland some ten years ago, he started really acting on those theories: Working with students, he said he felt liberated to explore and take risks. At this time, he brought in Doug Fitch, a friend of ours from Harvard to help develop some innovative performance projects. Doug had, among many other things, collaborated with Peter Sellars on a number of endeavors, including the celebrated Ring with Puppets, and turned out to be the perfect creative partner.

Jim and I had long agreed that concert performances of Petrouchka often failed to bring the story to life, and that it would be desirable to tell the story in some way so that the audience (and the orchestra musicians as well!) could follow along. Jim and Doug had come upon a crazy, brilliant solution: a production in which the orchestra would be in on the acting as well — moving around, interacting with puppeteers and, fundamentally, becoming part of the story-telling.

I was intrigued, but felt removed from the idea. I had been conducting professionally for some years but I hadn't gotten to the point of taking risks with orchestras in that way—that kind of thing was fine for students but after all wouldn't work in the **real** world, I thought.

I didn't make it down for the performances, but the video of this early version of the Petrouchka we are performing in a few days at the Barbican stuck in my mind.

It was still there, somewhere in my sub-conscious, a few years later when I had just been asked to be the next Music Director of the Philharmonic. Jim casually said to me one day, “wouldn't it be

great if you could get the New York Philharmonic do Doug's Petrouchka?"

By this point I was actively thinking about what I hoped to accomplish as well as assumptions I hoped to shatter. I answered Jim: I would love to do it, but it will take four years before we are ready, and I won't even bring it up for the first two.

Because, honestly, it was unthinkable at that time to ask these most distinguished musicians to put on costumes, dance around the stage, memorize passages of the piece, actually do anything that might possibly be construed as taking attention away from the music.

My plan was to build up to it, starting with a staged production of Ligeti's masterpiece, Le Grand Macabre. We brought Doug Fitch in to design and direct.

I have to insert a few words here about a small point that I find irritating: the insistence of some in calling this kind of production "semi-staged". If you can see the orchestra must it be "semi-staged"? Conversely, if an opera production in a traditional theater chooses not to have sets or costumes does that become semi-

staged? This was a fully realized show, that required as much planning and rehearsal as traditional stagings—when we have spoken with other opera companies about doing this production we make it clear that the orchestra will be on stage even if there is a pit that we could use. It is an artistic choice to have the orchestra in full view, a choice that is integral to the drama. I find it similarly strange that the Sweeney Todd that we introduced in NY and that just closed at the ENO was billed as semi-staged. Why? It seems to me to make a lot of unwarranted assumptions about what staging must be. I mention this point not to air a personal annoyance I carry around, but rather because doing away with this false distinction happens to be a central tenet of my own re-imagination of what an orchestra does and the role it plays. But I digress!

Anyway, in this staged version of the Grand Macabre in NY the orchestra was in view, and they were asked to take part in modest ways that we were sure they wouldn't object to: the main thing they were asked to do other than play their instruments was at one point to crumple up paper and throw it at me—obviously something they would be happy to do.

What a relief that the Grand Macabre was so well received—naturally I wanted it to be a success in and of itself, but even more importantly I needed it to be a success in order to pave the way for future projects.

The irony of the Grand Macabre is that I didn't talk about its place in my long-range thinking at the time, and that even within the Philharmonic very few people knew what they would be getting when we firmed up plans to present it. In interviews that first year I spoke in innocuous terms about wanting to find the specific chemistry between me and the orchestra, when in fact what I wasn't saying was that I was already hoping fundamentally to alter the way the musicians think about their jobs and the way the orchestra is perceived from the outside. I felt that I would in the long run be better served by keeping that goal to myself, and by hopefully being able one day down the road simply to say, "look what has happened."

In my mind LGM, as the marquee event of my first season, had to shoulder a number of different burdens—I also used it implicitly to articulate my vision to the administrative staff of the Philharmonic.

Here is a story within a story:

As we were in the months leading up to the performances, efforts were under way to market the event, but it became clear to me that at best there was a lack of focus and consistency to the messaging, and at worst not everyone knew what the opera was about, let alone why we were doing it. I called a meeting of everyone in the administration who was involved in any way in the production: marketing, press and PR, operations and organization, copy-writers, program annotators, finance, you name it. As people filed in, you could hear some muttering, “why so many? What is there to talk about? We’ve never needed this kind of company-wide gathering.” To an extent, people’s confusion was understandable, because the meeting had been billed as one of marketing strategy, although I in fact wanted to talk about much more. I started the meeting by talking about how this masterwork, the piece that has had the most performances and productions of any contemporary opera had never been staged in NYC, and that in my opinion, its apocalyptic message, with its subversive wit and social commentary, coupled with the virtuosic writing for orchestra made it the perfect fit for the New York Philharmonic. I also said that such an unusual undertaking could go very wrong if there were not 100% buy-in organization-wide, but that I thought that we would have a runaway hit on our

hands if we figured out just how to talk about it. I then introduced Doug Fitch, who presented his fabulous sketches and concept for the production. Doug's aesthetic is wildly imaginative, as I hope you will all see very soon in his *Petrouchka*, and it has a deliberately home-made aesthetic. Much is hand-drawn and looks (purposely) unfinished.

SLIDES Sketches

At this point, I could start to feel that a kind of understanding and a current of enthusiasm had crept into the room, along with a slight sheepishness about some of the glossy publicity materials that by now were clearly wrong for the show we were actually presenting. In fact, as an aside, **one of the main reasons I brought Doug in to work at the Philharmonic was that I hoped he would help take the edge off the perfectly burnished, slightly cold image that I knew some people held of the organization.**

SLIDES LGM

A huge amount of good came out of the meeting. I had never seen the staff galvanized in that way—they started planning

regular task-force sessions to coordinate activities and to make sure that efforts in different departments were not duplicated, and that nothing was missed. The publicity materials we developed were drawn by hand, and a stealth campaign of a series of videos was sketched out in which Doug and I explained our approach and what the show would look and feel like. Our PR department also launched a subversive series of three video shorts, which aimed to capture the tone of the production and, through it, to create a new kind of connection between audience and musician. I will show you one now, even though the actor isn't very good....

VIDEO Guitar Hero

The show was a tremendous hit, and you still hear people talking about it's being one of the best things they've seen in NY in the last 20 years—we certainly could have presented several more performances than the three that were conservatively allotted. (I had asked for five when we planned the season and had been reminded of the humiliation we would have had to endure had it not taken off. I still wish we had taken the risk!). In a way the best thing for me was the new understanding and trust I felt within the Philharmonic—a new initiative I had brought in was manifestly a

success, despite the strong measure of internal skepticism that it had understandably started out with.

And we were on the way to creating a new normal for what the musicians expected to be asked to do on stage. LGM has been followed by a string of out-of-the-box presentations (I actually hate that term because of how it implies that what's in the box is the real thing—I'd rather think of it as a bigger box): a staged Cunning Little Vixen, Magnus Lindberg's Kraft, with its 10 stations around the hall that musicians must walk to and from in procession as the piece goes on. We've also done Philharmonic 360, an evening-long event that occupied the magnificent Park Avenue Armory and explored spatial music, including Stockhausen's Gruppen. Each one of these asked for slightly more from the musicians...

SLIDES Vixen, Kraft, 360

...and that brings us back to Petrouchka.

I don't want to give too much away because I really do hope that you get the chance to see it for yourselves this weekend at the

Barbican, but I do want to share a few pictures from the recent rehearsals; rehearsals that I found strangely affecting. Most of the musicians are returning to the show for the second time and that has made the most recent process run smoothly. It was striking how a real understanding of the story is informing the acting the musicians are being asked to do. At one point in the rehearsal I found myself deeply moved by what I was seeing—here were the musicians of the New York Philharmonic playing a brilliant *Petrouchka*, but also throwing themselves whole-heartedly into something they never were taught to do at Juilliard.

SLIDES *Petrouchka*

The *Petrouchka* parable doesn't end there, though; this is only a chapter that must finish by noting that most of the performances of the score on this European tour are straight concert versions. We played the piece this way in NYC a couple of weeks ago, and I wasn't the only person who noted that the playing was as flawless as ever, but that now it seemed as if the Doug Fitch Experience had rubbed off and that everyone was playing with even more joy and insight. That's really what I was hoping for all along.

I believe that for the New York Philharmonic, *Le Grand Macabre* and *Petrouchka* have been fundamentally transformative, and have redefined the organization in numerous ways. How we interact with our audience, and the orchestra's place in NYC's cultural landscape are just two of them, and what is significant is that we are now able to reach our audiences in a new way in everything we do—even traditional concerts--because of the new lens through which we have been seen.

The kind of connection that should happen all the time between performer and audience is only possible if all the parties involved somehow intuitively believe in its power and consciously bring that belief to bear. The formality of a traditional concert can feel like a relic of a bygone age, and one can well understand that there exist doubts about the relevance of the traditional live concert experience in this modern, technologically transformed age.

But there is a power to the ritualistic and formal nature of a concert. I would never want to give up the heightened, special

dimension that concerts can have: the thrill of entering a beautiful room with other audience members who have dressed up for the occasion; the dignity of the protocol observed on stage. There is nothing more tragic, though, than people missing out because they believe that classical music is beyond them because they don't have formal attire, or that they won't know when to clap, or that there is something too sanctified for them to be able to identify with, or that there is a secret language or lore about which they are not-in-the-know.

There is, and probably should be, something mythical about what happens on stage and the people who make it happen. But if an audience does not feel the musicians' humanity, or cannot sense a generous impulse pouring off the stage from the musicians' open hearts, the invisible veil of the 'fourth wall' will remain impenetrable. Trying to avoid this has been one of the primary motivating forces behind the projects we have done in NY—we are consciously breaking down the traditional buttoned-up image that some people still hold of musicians on stage by giving them new roles to fill. Even such a simple idea as having orchestra musicians speak from the stage to introduce moments in a concert can be an easy way to create a real bond with the

audience. For the audience, this is what maximizes the chance that they will always come back for more.

Sometimes they don't come back, or don't even show up in the first place, and we all know of orchestras and opera companies that are struggling or have stopped operations. There are obviously as many explanations for why orchestras fail as there are orchestras that fail, but I am pretty sure that a common feature one can find in all such unfortunate situations is the sense, in some form, that there are simply not enough people in the community who care about what the orchestra provides. This is clearly not an earth-shattering observation, but it does give the foundation for a meaningful discussion about what can be done about it.

First of all we have to posit that the product, that is, music, is axiomatically worthy. It is worth mentioning that it does, in addition, matter how well it is played, and the passion and quality of the musicians definitely have something to do with how what they offer is received, but the *reductio ad absurdum* implicit in blaming the music itself for orchestras woes is hardly necessary to go into, although it has to be said that this line of argument is

frighteningly prevalent from those who can't or won't wrap their heads around an admittedly complex situation.

It is disheartening how many people are willing to blame new music for an orchestra's woes. You actually hear some people prescribe a steady diet of 19th century music as a panacea for classical music's current challenges—they say that obviously audiences are staying away since there is too much music being played that people don't want to hear. I am not going to litigate this here—there is too much evidence and good will for contemporary music's rightful place alongside older masterpieces for that to be necessary, but I would like to discuss some of the ways different groups deal with the issue.

You don't hear a lot of people saying straight out that orchestras should do NO contemporary music, but there are many who say that it's ok as long as they don't have to hear any of it. One model was suggested to me early in my time in NY: approach it like a business and create different products for different audiences. Some people want to hear only Stockhausen, so have a Stockhausen series. Some want Gesualdo and Dowland—give them what they want. Ok—I'm being silly and a bit unfair, because there is some real merit to that approach; it would be

absurd to make audiences every week listen to music that clearly has limited appeal just to be perverse.

In fact, there are some examples of stand-alone initiatives that are doing extremely well. The San Francisco Symphony has created **Soundbox**, a wildly popular series housed in a rehearsal space in their hall. At night, the space hosts contemporary concerts, cabaret-type events—a wide range of cool, eclectic happenings that is branded on its own website without mention of its parent organization. Here in the UK, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment has its Nightshift series, which also plays down its connection to the OAE's other activities. I sometimes wonder if the New York Philharmonic's Contact! New Music Series would have invited less critical questioning if it had not been burdened with people's prejudices that come with its having been clearly branded as a NY Phil offshoot.

But in any event, total compartmentalization is dangerous because it is necessarily limited by the inherent limitations of the categories themselves. That is to say that, for example, a brilliant program such as the one Tom Ades recently conducted in NY that featured Beethoven, Berlioz as well as his own music probably would have to have a new category specially created for it, which

kind of defeats the original purpose of having categories in the first place.

This is one of the ways that I see a true melding of education and the main-line concerts: one of the things we are doing by coming up with meaningful and fresh juxtapositions of pieces from various eras is creating new contexts and hopefully new resonance to works that our audience doesn't know, or knows in a certain way. I am sure that even someone who says that all they ever want to hear is Beethoven will get more out of Beethoven if they venture away, and have the chance to make connections with other music.

Which leads me to another possible way of dealing with the Contemporary music issue: what I call the **Bolero approach** to programming. In a nod to those same people who think that they don't want to hear new stuff, go ahead and program it, but wash it down with something so enticing that they take a deep breath and go to the concert anyway. Again, not entirely stupid, but very likely backfiring in the long run if the new work is shoehorned into a program that is not organically conceived, in which the not-so-subtle subliminal message is that we think it needs to be balanced out or, to be more jaded, that you can 'get away' with new music

as long as there is something else on the program that will sell tickets.

The worst thing you can do is to program contemporary music for the wrong reasons, out of a sense of duty or whatever. I have in the past stated that I don't program contemporary music out of a sense of obligation. This has been used against me by some whom I suspect might be deliberately misconstruing my words—what I of course mean is that I truly want to play every single piece I program, and that I feel that every piece has its place in creating the maximum resonance for all the music we play.

The important thing is to build up a sense of mutual trust and connection with the audience—something I aspired to when I began six years ago in NY. I envisioned a situation in which our audience knows and believes in our track record, and will come give any piece of music a try, simply because Gilbert and the Philharmonic are playing it. The point is never that every piece will necessarily be a masterwork that will go down in the ages, or that every audience member will love every piece we play, but rather that there is always a compelling motivation behind every piece's placement, and that what we are doing for Music with a capital M makes the journey of discovery important to share.

I keep coming back to **connection as a recurring theme**—it is even in the background of such initiatives as the Grand Macabre, and the Gruppen projects. These efforts are intrinsically collaborative—they had huge casts and production teams—but they also created actual ties to other NY institutions. The Park Avenue Armory has become a major presenter of cutting-edge arts events; it is only one of a long list of NY entities that have made it possible for our activities to be based city-wide. Even our connections on campus at Lincoln Center are ever stronger: we are together initiating a major contemporary opera venture this summer that truly (and finally, I might add) lives up to the original vision of cross-fertilization articulated at the Center's inception. I have always felt that orchestras need to position themselves within their communities as central cultural nexus —it seems obvious that meaningful and palpable ties with the communities served will only increase the impression of relevance and the base of support.

In these turbulent times there are wonderful and inspiring examples of orchestras that are getting it right. What they share is a site-specific understanding of what their communities need, and what they can uniquely provide with their musical powers.

In the states, the Detroit Symphony with Leonard Slatkin has done a marvelous job of coming back from the brink, and they have done it by intensely focusing on their local community. The Detroit Symphony Live Streams make all of their concerts available to anyone who has internet, and their trade agreement gives the orchestra great flexibility in what they can ask of the musicians. So, for example, if a musician is not needed for a given concert, he or she might be asked to go into schools of nursing homes to perform.

The Louisville Orchestra is another success story that owes a lot to a dynamic and perceptive leader: the orchestra was in bankruptcy and had a major crisis of identity. Teddy Abrams, a previously unknown 27-year-old has been their Music Director for just over a year now and he has effected an amazing turnaround by introducing cutting-edge innovations informed by tremendous enthusiasm and belief in the power of music and its place in everyone's life. Among other things Teddy did a very popular and successful project that brought together local students and amateur choruses for a massive performance of Carmina Burana with the orchestra. They are already running a surplus, and Teddy is planning a large-scale American music festival for next

season—not the type of programming you would expect from a recently struggling ensemble.

I have been impressed in the UK by the Aurora Orchestra, which has had outreach at the heart of what it does since its inception. Their Learning and Participation program is geared to children with diverse backgrounds, and their concerts for young people are specially tailored for venues around the country.

The Manchester Camerata is running a project called “Music in Mind”, in which the ensemble works alongside music therapists in care homes and community settings across the North West of England to conduct pioneering group sessions for Dementia sufferers and their care-givers.

All of these groups have taken honest looks at themselves and have allowed themselves to be redefined. The music making remains central, and of the utmost importance. The common thread through all of these examples is that the actual musical soul of the organizations is present in all of their initiatives—the new “bigger-box” elements are not off to the side and separate from what the musicians bring to the equation.

One question I am very often asked is what the differences are between Europe and the States. Do lessons learned in America apply over here? Are the same solutions prescribed? I would state emphatically, “Yes!”, allowing, of course, for the need for every community and orchestra to develop their own individual chemistry. It is not that the issues are the same, or that we State-side have figured it all out. Actually, while I am loath to make overly sweeping generalizations, I would say that classical music’s place in society’s consciousness may well indeed be slightly more established in Europe, and that perhaps the need to “save” it may be less acute. But similar cultural trends do exist: classical music education is dwindling even here, and, externally, the ability to access any performance anywhere through the internet is just as pervasive. Orchestras great and small around the world can no longer take anything for granted.

Sir Simon and I have spoken at great length about this, and he has specifically asked me to bring some of my orchestra-stretching ventures to Berlin, because he feels that what is working in NY would be a natural fit over here, and would support what he has been fighting for as Chief in Berlin. When he asked me to do Magnus Lindberg’s Kraft, I was initially hesitant, because first of all it’s not the kind of project one usually brings to

Berlin as a guest, but also because in order for that logistically complex piece to succeed, it requires the kind of total institutional alignment I have been talking about. Before we decided for sure to proceed I had discussions with the players, the production staff, and even the Digital Concert Hall Crew to make sure all knew what they were getting into. I must say that they did in the event go all the way in realizing the piece—the experience showed how deeply Simon has altered the DNA of this magnificent institution. When I first conducted the Berlin Philharmonic years ago it was in a program of Schumann and Brahms; I frankly never dreamed that I would one day get to do a work such as Kraft there.

It was also a confirmation to me that it is possible to shift the global paradigm and not compromise on musical values.

Orchestras need the best musicians—that will never change. But what is asked and expected of these musicians is constantly evolving. **Just as the educational and outreach efforts of orchestras only achieve full resonance when they connect meaningfully and organically with who the musicians are and what they do, musicians in today's orchestras are only doing their jobs fully when they understand and invest in their expanded portfolio that is demanded by the wider definition of what an orchestra is.** I want to see orchestra musicians held

up as heroes in their communities—both for their brilliance as musicians, but also for how they use that talent to touch the lives of those around them through music. How this redefinition is seen by the audience is equally critical: people must get used to seeing musicians as the crucial agents of change in communities, as teachers, leaders and role-models.

The role of ideas in the mix is impossible to overstate, but I also can't overstate how futile it is to try blindly to apply what works in one place somewhere else. What is essential is for ideas to be brought to life with passion and quality; each city and community needs to find the specific chemistry and unique way its orchestra can best be of service. It is the job of an orchestra's leaders—its music director and administration—to identify and articulate this chemistry for the community in an unmistakable way. Doing this, and then motivating the team, including the musicians, are the fundamental ingredients in assuring the inevitability of success within the community. For these leaders, having inspired vision supported by fresh thinking is basic, but the vision has to be aligned with the actual capacities and needs of the given situation. I read with amusement tempered by frustration the pathetic speculation in the press concerning certain music director positions that are currently open or about to be open, including

mine. Too few of the commentators adequately consider WHAT the orchestras need. Obviously WHO is primary in importance—musical quality, charisma and artistic magic are still at the top of the list of desirable qualities in a conductor, but I believe that the ability to motivate the wider community is as necessary in order to be a viable music director. Perhaps at the larger more established orchestras it is simply tempting to think that the wider challenges that the industry faces don't apply in the same way, that the need for forward thinking is not as essential. These historically iconic orchestras may have an aura of impregnable strength, but unfortunately I could give examples that you are probably already aware of at the highest level of the music world, where there exists a tremendous uncertainty, and where only serious rethinking will ultimately save the day. For these orchestras, as well as for others where the challenges have not yet revealed themselves as clearly, leaders and thinkers who bring an ambition to use new ideas and ways to connect their orchestras with their communities are of the essence. Vision and openness to connecting the music meaningfully in every way to the community will create an air of excitement and currency that invites enthusiasm and support.

For an orchestra such as the New York Philharmonic, well-executed ideas keep the organization in an appropriately prominent place at the center of a cultural dialogue and I hope you don't mind my mentioning how proud I am that what we have been doing in NY has been noticed and is being celebrated in Europe—on this tour alone we have been asked to do the Doug Fitch *Petrouchka* here in London as well as to give a special presentation of the work for a younger audience. Contact!, our contemporary ensemble, is giving a concert of new works at the Barbican, and in Cologne we are also giving the world-premiere of a new opera--something rarely done on tour. *Senza Sangue* is a major work by Peter Eotvos that comes as an outgrowth of our Kravis New Music Prize. As you know, there is a relatively short list of repertoire that you tend to see played by touring orchestras—I always find it a shame that almost as a rule anything innovative and fresh that orchestras attempt at home is considered too risky for local presenters. With the exception of the Eotvos opera and Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Nyx*, both 21st century compositions, every piece we have programmed on this tour is from the 20th century. I love that we have the chance out on the road to show not a watered-down version of who we are, but rather a real picture of what we have become.

I have enjoyed the chance that preparing this lecture has given me to take a step back and look at the world of orchestras I deal with on a daily basis. Sometimes when you are so close to something it can be difficult to really see it for what it is. There is much to celebrate. The new generation of orchestra musicians and conductors that is coming up now can approach things with an optimism that is unburdened by any sense of historical limitation. Music has an eternal power to move us, and increasingly, conservatories and professional music groups are embracing the new role that musicians can fill in touching people's lives both in and out of the concert hall.

The need for honesty, sincerity and specificity in any given musical situation should drive orchestras and their leaders to follow their musical intuition, to lead with vision, without fear of offending. Just as Steve Jobs famously avoided focus groups in determining the direction of his company, we in the music world should trust that what moves us, what we truly believe in, will also move others, and can become a meeting point for our common humanity. *Le Grand Macabre* probably would not have happened if we had run a poll to check its viability, and it ended up being described as **“an instant Philharmonic milestone”**.

Change is difficult, but possible, as well as necessary. It is also exciting. Nobody can possibly know for sure where exactly we are going, or what the answers are. Simply asking the right questions, though, is a huge part of finding those answers. Some of you no doubt recall the question Leonard Bernstein set out to answer in his Norton Lectures at Harvard: “whither music?”. Allow me to add a challenging follow-up: “whither orchestras?”. What if it has the same answer Lenny gave to his own question: “yes”? A “yes” that is an invitation, a challenge, a possibility? Who knows? But belief that music can be a catalyst for positive change, and that life’s hardships can be ameliorated by bringing people together with a shared musical experience, will take us far. How lucky we are to have music as a central feature of our lives. Thank you for your continuing reaffirmation of this beautiful truth.