

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

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Report of the President

“E pluribus unum”

Dan Dressen

St. Olaf College

Andre Previn served as the Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1976 until 1984. For three years in the late 70s, he and the orchestra were featured in a television series on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) titled, “Previn and the Pittsburgh.” Each episode featured a topic with Previn interviewing guest artists and scholars punctuated with performances by the orchestra. I found the episodes that I watched to be quite stimulating, particularly because Previn was such a skilled interviewer; an interviewer in the manner of Dick Cavett, for those of you old enough to remember that erudite television personality. Specific elements from that series are still burnished clearly in my memory. The episode that focused on Stephen Sondheim was a masterful combination of dialogue between conductor and composer and skillful performances of Sondheim’s music. I recommend it to you if a search of some kind can provide you access. But it is the episode about conductors that I wish to highlight today. In it, Previn invited orchestra members to entertain the television audience with their favorite stories or experiences with a conductor. The first flautist, for instance shared his story of a rather histrionic conductor that in one of his flourishes fell off, not only the podium but the front of the stage as well. The orchestra continued to perform in spite of their shock and concern but soon their concern was relieved by a single hand with baton appearing over the lip of the stage, missing nary a beat.

It was Previn’s own story in that episode however, that I remember most clearly. He described a period in London as a guest conductor preparing for performances with one of its storied symphony orchestras. Previn shared with his television audience the professional practice in London of the deputy system; that is...if a member of the orchestra had to miss a service for some reason a deputy was simply found to substitute for that service. At the conclusion of the final rehearsal, Mr. Previn lay his baton down on the podium and congratulated the 2nd horn player. From the conductor’s perspective, he was the only member of the ensemble that made every rehearsal. At which point the 2nd hornist raised his hand to speak and said, “well maestro, that was the least I could do since I cannot make the performance.”

Leadership can be a humbling exercise, to be sure, even for the most gifted and experienced among us. A misstep from a podium, a 2nd hornist, a faculty colleague that challenges common practice, an inquisitive student that simply asks “why” can stop us in our tracks. And yet we persevere. We must persevere. We pick up our pride and renew our sense of purpose and move forward as best we can.

But I wish to focus less on our specific work as leaders but instead on the culture and milieu in which we are trying to lead and positively affect the purposes we have set for our departments, schools and conservatories.

Let me start by reminding us of the obvious. The nature of our art form is found in community, and not only in the myriad types of musical ensembles that populate our culture, be they symphony orchestras, garage bands, hand bell choirs, string quartets, gamelan ensembles or gospel choruses. I submit that even those of us who often make music in a more solitary fashion, say the pianist in a recital of Chopin or a solo violinist performing a Bach Partita must acknowledge the community of players, though perhaps less

visible, the community of players who have made powerful contributions to that performance. Might we start with the composer and the publisher, the instrument maker and the intendant who supports the performance with space, lights and finding an audience...and then there is the audience, whether live or virtual. All of these and likely countless others together make a performance a performance.

Given the nature of our art form, it stands to reason that we, as music makers, teachers and leaders in music, are prepared to stand and serve as a beacon of hope and reason in our current culture, where community appears to have broken down in significant ways.

I now wish to leave the musical world for a moment to provide some context that will attempt to explain the loss of community and declining social capital in our contemporary culture. The expression, social capital, not coined, but significantly clarified by Harvard Professor of Public Policy, Robert Putnam in his book, *BOWLING ALONE*, finds its clarification early in the book. He writes, "Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to parties of individuals, social capital refers to connection among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. - - - A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."

BOWLING ALONE is a weighty tome of over 400 pages that includes an extensive collection of evidence and analysis. It provides insight into the decline of social capital in several areas of society:

- Political participation and work of public governance
- Civic participation in support of the well-being of communities
- Religious participation and engagement in faith communities that Putnam described as arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America
- Connections in the workplace, whether measured in membership to unions or business and professional organizations
- Informal social connections, be they having coffee with regulars, sharing a barbecue picnic, gathering in a book club or joining a bowling league

...all examples of social capital that have withered in the last 30 years of the 20th century and clearly continue to decline in the 21st.

Putnam proposes that the benefits of social capital, on the other hand, would appear to be self-evident. Solving collective problems is easier when we trust all, or at least that most of all, are contributing to the solution. The trust that social capital cultivates allows communities to advance smoothly rather than spending time and effort to see that others will uphold their end of the arrangement. The author suggests that social capital widens our awareness of connectedness and linkages to others. We become more tolerant, less cynical and more empathetic.

Now, we must acknowledge that community has constantly stood in contradiction to the other powerful current of our culture, individualism. From the Pilgrim's fleeing religious persecution and obeisance to prevailing practice, through the 19th century champions of the individual, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, to the *BABBIT* of Sinclair Lewis and *ATLAS SHRUGGED* of Ayn Rand, the individual has found significant pride of place in the American identity. But, according to Putnam, "powerful movements...swept across American society in the twentieth century...where a dominate theme emerged."

"During the first two-thirds of the (twentieth) century Americans took a more and more active role in the social and political life of their communities - - in churches and union halls, in bowling alleys and club

rooms, around community tables and card tables and dinner tables. Year by year we gave more generously to charity, we pitched in more often on community projects, and (insofar as we can still find reliable evidence) we behaved in an increasingly trustworthy way toward one another. Then, mysteriously and more or less simultaneously, we began to do all those things less often... We maintain a facade of formal affiliation, but we rarely show up. We have invented new ways of expressing our demands that demand less of us. We are less likely to turn out for collective deliberation — whether in the voting booth or the meeting hall — and when we do, we find that discouragingly few of our friends and neighbors have shown up. We are less generous with our money and (with the important exception of senior citizens) with our time, and we are less likely to give strangers the benefit of the doubt. They, of course, return the favor.”

“More of our social connectedness is one shot, special purpose, and self-oriented. As (University of Chicago) sociologist Morris Janowitz noted, we have developed ‘communities of limited liability.’ Large groups with local chapters, long histories, multiple objectives, and diverse constituencies are being replaced by more evanescent, single-purpose organizations, smaller groups that ‘reflect the fluidity of our lives by allowing us to bond easily but to break our attachments with equivalent ease,’ here quoting Princeton Sociologist, Robert Wuthnow.

We can certainly understand some of the causes of this loss of social capital, be it the pressures of time and money, mobility and sprawl and the time and energy it takes simply to get to anywhere, and technology, mass media and television prevalent in the time of the publication of *BOWLING ALONE*, but now twenty years later challenged with exponential growth in social media. But the most important factor, according to Putnam is generational, “the slow, steady and ineluctable replacement of the civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren.”

And why should this matter to us, we the leaders of our respective institutions dedicated to educating and training the next generation of musicians? Why should this matter?

The many ways we are linked through NASM, the network of social capital that is nourished by the continuing spirit of volunteerism that is at the heart of NASM’s enduring strength, the fact that you are all here today, that hundreds of you are currently serving as visiting evaluators, commissioners, committee members, regional chairs, officers, palpably demonstrates the bond of participating in something larger than any one of us, and that holds as its central purpose the care of one of civilizations most sensuous, most spiritual and life-affirming creations.

May I ask that we begin to reinvest in the social capital that is NASM. We can begin with the smallest of gestures. Look across this vast room and acknowledge how many here you do not know. May I ask each of us to seek out one of these friendly strangers, to extend the hand of fellowship and engage in the simple act of connecting.

May I ask you to volunteer or agree to serve when asked.

May I appeal to you to acknowledge that you are the heart of the matter. There, in your position of leadership in which you find yourself at your respective institution, you are the light of knowledge and understanding about the value of participating in this Association, something larger than any of us, individually and institutionally, and participating in this community of scholars and artists that form and nurture a broad and abiding commitment to excellence.

The NASM *Handbook* serves as the guiding document for that which we mutually aspire to accomplish. That document begins with a set of six aims and objectives that charge us to: ...preserve and advance standards in the field of music, ...uphold the position of music study in the family of fine arts and

humanities, ...provide leadership in music training that supports growth of individual musicians as artists, scholars, teachers, and participants in music, ...establish standards of achievement in music curricula without restricting the freedom to develop new ideas and to innovate, ...foster inspired and creative teaching that will lead to new content, and ...acknowledge that the prime objective of all educational programs in music is to provide the opportunity for every music student to develop individual potentialities to the utmost.

I find that every one of these objectives is telling us that if music is to thrive, our mission needs to embrace a broad constituency of musicians, both professional and amateur, all of whom make important contributions to our musical cultures.

This is good and important work, which we can choose to do alone, or we can choose to do it together. And by alone, I mean alone individually or alone institutionally. Your presence today at this annual meeting strongly suggests that you understand and appreciate the value of participating in a community of artist-scholars, and administrative leaders to learn from each other, to challenge and be challenged, and to probe collectively the means that propel our aspirations forward.

Professional associations that NASM exemplifies are born of the premise that all of us together are smarter than any one of us alone. We need each other in these associated unions of common mission just as these unions need the full participation of each and every one of us. Or as Robert Putnam declared, “Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action.”

E pluribus unum, my friends. “Out of many one.” This the motto of the United States for nearly 200 years and still visible on our currency and on the Great Seal of the United States. This motto appears to me to be the perfect emblem for the work of NASM, for the big tent of approximately 650 institutions that comprise our membership and our cause.

It is an honor to serve as your president and to be able to share with you these thoughts that I hope in some small measure may stimulate your continuing commitment to our common purpose.

Thank you. Thank you very much.