

Newly Essential

The League of American Orchestras' *Essentials of Orchestra Management* program prepares orchestra professionals to be effective administrators by giving them the knowledge and tools they need. The long-running program is changing with the times, and participants in the 2018 edition of *Essentials* pondered the future of orchestras in the face of dramatic cultural shifts.

by Jeremy Reynolds

What will happen to the Boston Symphony Orchestra if the city of Boston is underwater due to climate change? How should orchestras adapt to demographic data indicating that white Americans will be in the minority by 2045? What sort of impact could robots and the automation of more and more jobs have on the orchestra field?

These questions may seem far afield from the practical know-how and real-world training you might expect in the curriculum of a professional development seminar. But at the League of American Orchestras' 2018 *Essentials of Orchestra Management* seminar, 34 emerging arts managers grappled with these hypothetical questions and others related to the future of the symphony orchestra—and acquired the requisite workplace expertise, too. “There was a moment where the participants had to decide how they were going to approach the future and

whether they were going to ignore these dramatic shifts or lean into them,” says John-Morgan Bush, director of Learning and Leadership programs at the League and one of the architects of the 2018 *Essentials* seminar. “Participants had to think and imagine in ways they’ve never had to before. Some people were uncomfortable, but everyone threw themselves into innovation.”

Essentials of Orchestra Management is the premier orchestra management course in the country. The course prepares orchestra professionals to be effective administrators, and takes place over the course of ten days at the University of Southern California campus in Los Angeles, where it relocated in 2015 from the League's offices in New York City. (Another part of the League's talent-development pipeline is its *Emerging Leaders Program*, an intensive, year-long program that develops leaders for the orchestra field.) *Essentials* attracts a cornucopia of talent, from emerging professionals in orchestra man-



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agement to career changers to musicians interested in the administrative, “behind the scenes” parts of the industry. Attendees represent orchestras and organizations of all sizes, from small regional ensembles to major orchestras to Carnegie Hall. Each summer, approximately 30 participants descend on USC's Thornton School of Music to learn from some of the most established orchestra managers, artists, and arts activists around. Since its launch in 2000, more than 400 people have participated in *Essentials*; alumni include orchestra professionals occupying myriad roles at a wide range of music organizations: Gary Ginstling, executive director

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At the League of American Orchestras' 2018 *Essentials of Orchestra Management* seminar.

of the National Symphony Orchestra; Liz Keller-Tripp, producer and artistic programs director at Silkroad, the cross-cultural music organization founded by Yo-Yo Ma; Katherine Lehman, executive director of the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra; Gary A. Padmore, director of education and community engagement at the New York Philharmonic; Maia Jasper White, a violinist in the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; Katie Wyatt, executive director of El Sistema USA, the national nonprofit that supports access to music training for underserved young people; and Barbara Zach, executive director of Lincoln's Symphony Orchestra in Nebraska.

The ability to adapt and think radically about the field was the top-line takeaway at the 2018 seminar last July, according to Simon Woods, CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and seminar director of *Essentials*. "There's a new balance to the curriculum, where we take the best of the past and then open up the class to a kind of think-tank atmosphere where we discuss technology and equity and race and demographics," Woods says. "All of those things are going to require us to think a little bit differently. The next generation needs to think outside of the box."

For the duration of the 2018 program, participants lived in brand-new dormitories on the USC campus. They attended

sessions together, broke into smaller focus groups to workshop and debate issues facing the field, and spent time in self-reflection. Among the sessions on the 2018 curriculum: *Arts Leadership in a Changing World*, *Acquiring and Sustaining Audiences*, *Artistic Planning, Finance and Sustainability*, and *Orchestra Operations*. Participants also met one-on-one with faculty mentors to discuss their specific career aspirations or ongoing projects at their organizations.



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Essentials 2018 core faculty and staff, from left: Jennifer Barlament, executive director, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; Alexander Laing, principal clarinet, Phoenix Symphony Orchestra; Scott Faulkner, principal bass, Reno Philharmonic and Reno Chamber Orchestra, former executive director, Reno Chamber Orchestra; John-Morgan Bush, director of Learning and Leadership programs at the League of American Orchestras; Jesse Rosen, president and CEO, League of American Orchestras; Derek Weagle, meetings and logistics coordinator, League of American Orchestras. Not in this photo: Simon Woods, CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and seminar director of *Essentials*.

New to 2018, before the participants arrived in Los Angeles, the League created a customized, comprehensive online resource site filled with studies and readings on the orchestra field, a head-start that Bush says elevated the level of discourse "through the roof." The reading list included materials ranging from two in-depth publications from the League (*Orchestra Facts 2006 to 2014* and *Of and For the Community: The Education and Community Engagement Work of Orchestras*) and "How Quitting Music Made Me an Artist," an article by Tanya Kalmanovitch (who posed the questions at the top of this article about Boston sinking during the *Essentials* session she led) to "Contemplation on Music," by Karl Paulnack, dean of the School of Music at Ithaca College and former director of the music division of the Boston Conservatory, and "How to Be a C.E.O., From a Decade's Worth of Them," by Adam Bryant for *The New York Times*.

League President and CEO Jesse Rosen says that the evolution of *Essentials* "has been to balance the functional skills with giving participants the ability to adapt." Rosen explains that the origins of the program extend as far back as the

1950s, with a series of League-produced professional development seminars. The program didn't come to be known as *Essentials* until the year 2000, when it was relaunched led by Peter Pastreich, former executive director of the San Francisco Symphony and Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and a graduate of the program's prior incarnation in 1960. During the 1960s and '70s the learning goals of the program focused on the functional aspects running an orchestra, developing expertise in marketing, selling subscriptions, fundraising, contract negotiation, touring, operations, and other skills. "This was the period when the institutions were being built and large orchestras were supported," Rosen says. But in the 1990s and 2000s the world began to change dramatically. Functional skills weren't sufficient to meet the evolving requirements of institutions determined to succeed. Something more was needed.

Broader Perspectives

To best prepare participants for the range of responsibilities they might encounter as neophytes or rising orchestra managers and staffers, the *Essentials* faculty is curated to ensure multiple backgrounds and viewpoints. The 2018 faculty included Seminar Director Simon Woods; Seminar Associate Director Scott Faulkner, principal bass at the Reno Philharmonic and Reno Chamber Orchestra as well as former executive director of the Reno Chamber Orchestra; Jennifer Barlament, executive director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; and Alexander Laing, principal clarinet of the Phoenix Symphony. More than twenty guest presenters led sessions on topics ranging from equity, diversity, and inclusion to the #MeToo movement, artistic programming in the twenty-first century, and audience development.

Laing, who made his *Essentials* faculty debut in 2018, calls the program a "brutal combination of a sprint and a marathon," and says he felt privileged to have been involved and intends to return next summer. "One topic that someone talked about was the role that orchestras might play as



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At the League of American Orchestras' 2018 *Essentials* seminar, from left: Nadia Kyne, Connor Schloop, Joshua Hall, Steven Yellen, and Maia Jasper-White.

it relates to bringing people together and providing comfort as things are fracturing," Laing says. "What's core to us? What could we still do if we didn't have a lot of the things that we associate with the orchestra?"

Essentials attracts a cornucopia of talent, from emerging professionals in orchestra management to career changers to musicians interested in the administrative, "behind the scenes" parts of the industry.

Presenters and participants alike spoke of the importance of incorporating ideas about equity, diversity, and inclusion into the core of each of the 2018 sessions. "I think that those ideas showed up because they are in all kinds of conversations between all kinds of people in all kinds of spaces all around the world right now," says Laing. "This topic touches every part of what we do. Who do we perform for? Whose story are we telling? Whose culture are we affirming—and how do

we affirm culture? For an orchestra just beginning to incorporate this language into its mission, how does this show up in practice?" Laing says that these questions permeated conversations about programming, community engagement, the makeup of an orchestra, collaborative partners, who's in the audience, and whether they feel comfortable. The concerns also fed discussions about nuts-and-bolts topics like selecting what vendors are used for a service and in what spaces an orchestra performs.

Ignacio Barrón Viela, a 2018 participant, describes *Essentials* as an opportunity to reflect on the impact of music beyond the concert hall. A trained cellist, Viela studied engineering and worked as a consultant in the energy sector. Since attending the *Essentials* seminar, he has accepted a position as executive director with the Billings Symphony Orchestra in Montana. Viela stresses the importance of discussing how artists are impacting the world, and he says that relating *Essentials* sessions about audience building and increasing donations back to the central concept of why musicians make art was perhaps the most heartening



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From left: Akilah Morgan, Shannon Farro, and Alexis Leon at the 2018 *Essentials* seminar.

component of the seminar. “This blew my mind: how much music can make a social impact in a community,” he says. “It was fantastic to get to know a group of people with such a different array of backgrounds and levels of experience. Everyone is so passionate.” Since the summer, the alums have kept closely in touch, according to Viela, who says that one of the greatest values to the program

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was the camaraderie and peer network that an intense program like *Essentials* fosters.

Another 2018 participant, Nadia Kyne, says that she attended the seminar due to her interest in studying the collective bargaining process. “Musician and management relationships are so front-of-mind for all of these participants,” she says. “Some of the best conversations at *Essentials* were with people who were desperate to know how they could facilitate the best experience for a musical audience. Those conversations involve both musicians and administrators.” Kyne has accepted a new position since the *Essentials* seminar: as foundations relations associate at Carnegie Hall. Previously, she was assistant principal flute and piccolo with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, with degrees in flute performance from the Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music.



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Participants in the 2018 *Essentials* seminar took a field trip to hear a concert at the Hollywood Bowl

Beyond the Classroom

Outside of the sessions and discussions, *Essentials* participants take field trips to experience concerts at the Hollywood Bowl. “It’s well studied that classes that have fun learn more, and the Hollywood Bowl is perfect for this,” Woods points out. The group goes one step further, however, and deconstructs the entire experience back in the classroom, everything from parking and customer experience to what the *Essentials* participants thought about the conductor and soloist, the audience reaction, the diversity of the audience, and so on. Woods explains that practicing observation skills such as these is crucial for managers, but especially for those seeking to remain versatile.

Looking ahead, both Rosen and Woods

say they plan to continue seeking ways to keep the program on the forward edge of trends in the orchestra world, and to equip participants to face the field. “We’re in a transitional place now because the field is in a different place,” Woods says. “We’ve been through economic crises and extraordinary technological advances—our whole field has changed. It’s become much more outward looking. Now, it’s about how to adapt and preserve the art form that we love.” **S**

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League Learning

The League of American Orchestras gives orchestra professionals the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to grow and learn. In addition to *Essentials of Orchestra Management*, the League offers the *Emerging Leaders Program*, which develops the leadership capabilities of high-potential orchestra professionals, guided by a faculty of leadership experts and leaders from in and outside the field. In the *Emerging Leaders Program*, participants engage in one-on-one coaching, mentoring by top leaders in the field, in-depth seminars led by leadership experts, visits with leaders and institutions from outside the orchestra field, and the opportunity to develop and present a capstone project at the League’s National Conference on a key leadership issue affecting the field. For more on these programs, visit the Learning and Leadership Development section of americanorchestras.org.