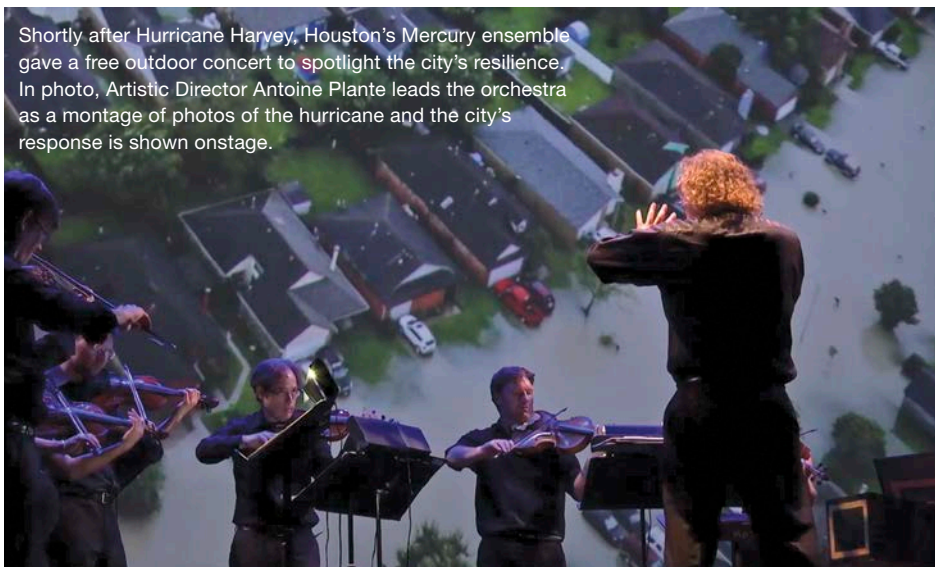


Roads to

This fall, orchestras in several states were hit hard by natural disasters. Yet even as they suffered the same blows as their neighbors, orchestras and musicians stepped forward to encourage and help rebuild their communities. Beyond offering the solace only music can, orchestras need to have their own contingency plans in place to cope when disaster strikes.

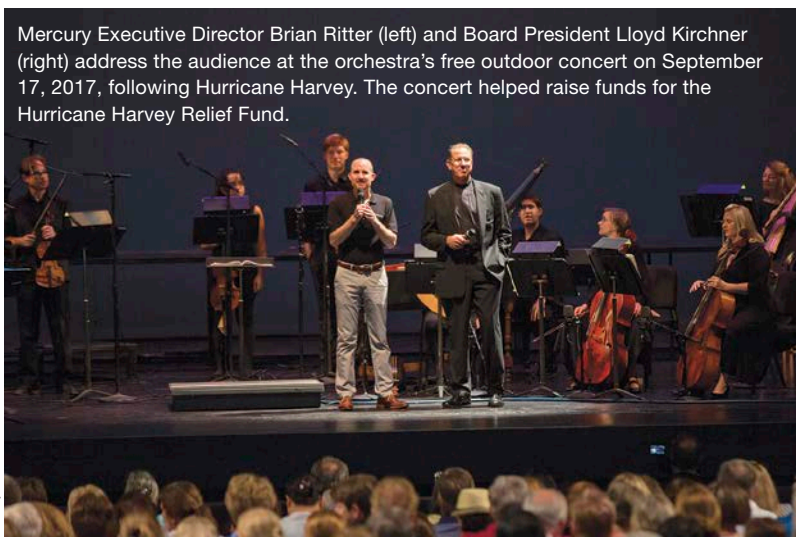
By Steven Brown

Shortly after Hurricane Harvey, Houston's Mercury ensemble gave a free outdoor concert to spotlight the city's resilience. In photo, Artistic Director Antoine Plante leads the orchestra as a montage of photos of the hurricane and the city's response is shown onstage.



Runaway Productions

Mercury Executive Director Brian Ritter (left) and Board President Lloyd Kirchner (right) address the audience at the orchestra's free outdoor concert on September 17, 2017, following Hurricane Harvey. The concert helped raise funds for the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund.



Runaway Productions

As Hurricane Harvey approached Houston last August, Kyle Victor had college auditions on his mind. So the Houston Youth Symphony cellist put in some practice time in his family's dining room. At the end of his night's work, Victor put his cello aside, as he usually does, rather than packing it into its case. He eventually went to bed. "When we woke up about 4 o'clock in the morning, my mom told me the house was flooding," Victor recalls. "I immediately thought about my instrument. I remembered that it was lying on the floor. We ran out to get it, and it was floating."

The cello, face down, had filled with water. "It was pretty much a lost cause," Victor says, repeating the cello maker's post-hurricane verdict. "It can get mold. The glue can unstick. It can crack." The family started a GoFundMe online campaign to raise money for a replacement instrument. Then the Houston Youth Symphony stepped in: It launched a fund drive to help budding musicians who had been hit by the devastating storm. Part of the money from the drive bought Victor a new cello, which he takes to center stage in January as top prizewinner in the orchestra's annual concerto competition. And the bulk of the proceeds—which include donated instruments in addition to cash—went to

Recovery



Lauren Moore, Houston Symphony Staff

Musicians from the Houston Symphony performed at many shelters for displaced Houstonians after Hurricane Harvey, including the George R. Brown Convention Center.

public-school music programs that lost instruments, sheet music, or equipment in the hurricane.

One spark for the fund drive came from a surprising source. Houston Texans football player J.J. Watt set an example with the \$37 million fund drive he spearheaded right after the storm, says Sarah Loudermilk, the Houston Youth Symphony's executive director. "Everybody was wanting to do something for the community," Loudermilk recalls. "Everybody was paying attention—as they should—to the food and housing issues. But I wanted to help the kids in our music programs. Our mission is providing quality music-education opportunities for the region's youth. We're a strong youth orchestra because of the strong music programs in our school community. We wouldn't be where we are without them." So the youth orchestra decided to give back in a highly focused way: by helping to fill the needs of public-school programs for young musicians.

Last year's hurricanes and wildfires showed that orchestras and musicians suffer the same blows as their neighbors when natural disaster strikes. About 10 percent of the Houston Youth Symphony's 400 members suffered damage to their homes or instruments, but the organization was far from the only Houston arts group impacted by Harvey's devastation. The storm also flooded the homes of fourteen of the Houston Symphony's musicians and staffers, some of whom lost everything. In California, the wildfires that struck Sonoma and Napa counties in October destroyed the homes of 22 families connected to the Santa Rosa Symphony's musicians, board, and youth orchestra. And the ensembles themselves? Damage to the Houston Symphony's home, Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, forced the orchestra to cancel seventeen concerts, including its pops season-opener. Houston's Mercury period-instrument orchestra had to relocate its main concert series for the



Courtesy of Houston Symphony

The Houston Symphony's musicians organized twenty concerts in shelters on their own initiative, says Interim Executive Director and CEO Amanda Dinitz.

entire season because Harvey knocked out the Wortham Theater Center, where the group usually performs.

But even as Mercury's leaders crafted a Plan B in the wake of the storm, the orchestra performed a free outdoor concert as "a celebration of a community that was showing great resilience," says Mercury Executive Director Brian Ritter. Artistic Director Antoine Plante and others urged the 4,000 to 5,000 Houstonians at the concert to donate to the just-founded Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund, the same charity that benefited from Watt's drive. The orchestra performed a Handel concerto grosso to accompany a photo montage that depicted the hurricane and the city's response. The montage began with "the preparation for the storm," Ritter says. "Then the storm itself and the immediate aftermath. There were some pretty horrifying photos. And the third part was about the heroism we were seeing: our community coming together, and incredibly moving photos of neighbors helping neighbors and people doing miraculous things. It was a great statement about what Houston is and who we are."

Helping Hands

Like Mercury, orchestras throughout the areas hit by storms and fires have looked beyond their own challenges to help encourage and rebuild their communities.

Beginning less than a month after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rico Symphony performed free



Kyle Victor, who plays cello in the Houston Youth Symphony, lost his instrument in the flooding from Hurricane Harvey. The Houston Youth Symphony launched a fund drive to help Victor replace his instrument—and to support young musicians in the city’s public schools.

concerts across the island, hoping to lift residents’ spirits with music ranging from folk dances to Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.

During Hurricane Irma’s assault on south and central Florida, a chamber group from the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra played for evacuees taking refuge in their Panhandle city’s Bay Center. The Naples Philharmonic made its October performances free as a thank-you to first responders and a salute to the community.

After Harvey drove thousands of Houstonians from their homes, Houston Symphony musicians—some of whom had also been uprooted—performed in shelters across the city. The Dallas Symphony

sponders and people who lost their homes. “Although we as an institution are going to take a financial loss (this season) because of canceled concerts and canceled financial campaigns, I told the board that we’re in good shape,” says Santa Rosa Symphony President and CEO Alan Silow. “We can do what we were really meant to do: serve this community, first and foremost. Rather than think internally, we have to think externally, and share the healing power of our music.”

The idea for the San Francisco Symphony’s fundraiser came from the orchestra’s musicians, who made the concert possible by agreeing to squeeze two additional services into an already crowded schedule, Executive Director Mark Hanson says. There and in Santa Rosa, the musicians, conductors, and soloists donated their services. The Association of California Symphony Orchestras covered the Santa Rosa concert’s production costs, Silow says, so the charities will get all the money that came in.

The Houston Symphony’s musicians instigated and organized their twenty concerts in shelters themselves, Interim Executive Director and CEO Amanda Dinitz says. Some of the musicians took part as a respite from dealing with their own devastated homes. Four feet of water invaded violinist Annie Kuan-Yu Chen’s apartment,

Houston Symphony Interim Executive Director and CEO Amanda Dinitz says, “We’re a nonprofit organization—we’re here to serve the community. The city arguably has never needed it more.”

donated the single-ticket revenue from its first subscription programs, totaling nearly \$50,000, to Houston’s Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund.

In response to northern California’s inferno, the San Francisco Symphony raised \$75,000 through a benefit concert for fire-relief charities. A special concert by Santa Rosa Symphony, which is based in fire-ravaged Sonoma County, brought in \$112,000 for recovery efforts, and for the rest of the season, the orchestra will give free tickets to classical concerts to first re-

destroying her and her husband’s sheet music, personal mementos, and other belongings. But her violin was intact. “The second day or third day we were out of our apartment, my husband and I were very flustered about the things we needed to do,” Chen recalls. “But at that point, we couldn’t do anything. I thought that some music might de-stress the situation. And I thought some music would make people’s lives a little easier, when they were in the same position I was in. It did make me feel better—to do what I was able to do as a musician.”

A relief fund established by Houston Symphony Board President Janet F. Clark raised \$100,000 that will go to musicians and staffers whose homes were damaged, Dinitz says. But they could not wait for that when it came to clearing out flooded houses: musicians and staff members had to move fast, lest mold take root in waterlogged walls and flooring. “There was a grassroots system for staff and musicians to go to one another’s homes and help,” Dinitz recalls. “We would get an email from Human Resources at 8 o’clock in the morning, saying, ‘We need ten people at so-and-so’s house at 9 o’clock to pull up hardwood and pull down drywall. Bring boots and work gloves.’”

While Jones Hall was shuttered for repair, Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music let the orchestra perform the season’s first three classical programs in

Houston Symphony violinist Annie Kuan-Yu Chen was among the orchestra’s musicians who performed at shelters for displaced Houstonians, even though her own home had been damaged by the storm.



its concert hall. The group opened the first two to the community for free. “We made a conscious decision to forfeit that revenue,” Dinitz says. “We’re a nonprofit organization—we’re here to serve the community. And in my time in the community, the city arguably has never needed it more.”

Sometimes, musicians and orchestras far from the disasters step in to offer support. In Ohio, musicians from the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Oberlin Conservatory, and Credo Music banded together for a benefit concert on September 8 at Severance Hall, with proceeds going to the American Red Cross. In October, the Philadelphia Orchestra raised \$34,500 for Hurricane Maria relief efforts in Puerto Rico during performances of *West Side Story* in concert. All proceeds from the fundraiser, held with the Kimmel Center for the Per-



Florida's Naples Philharmonic and the Baker Museum share the Artis-Naples campus, and in preparation for Hurricane Irma the museum deployed storm shutters to protect the artwork, according to the disaster plan that was in place. Artwork was not damaged, although the building was.

The Naples Philharmonic made its October performances free as a thank-you to first responders and a salute to the community after Hurricane Irma. In photo: Music Director Andrey Boreyko led the Naples Philharmonic in Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony and the Dvorák Cello Concerto with Alban Gerhardt.

forming Arts and the Philadelphia-based Latino arts and cultural organization Taller Puertorriqueño, went to relief and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and surrounding areas, distributed through the Pennsylvania-based relief organization Unidos P'APR.

Not all disasters are natural. Following the heartbreaking shootings in its hometown this fall, Las Vegas Philharmonic changed the musical selections for its October 14 concert, and invited first responders from the city's police, fire, and EMS services and hospitals as well as the victims and their families, or anyone seeking the refuge and solace of music, to the concert at no charge. Music Director Donato Cabrera stated, "Music heals, and in response to the tragic events of October 1, we are changing the program for our upcoming concert to honor and reflect upon what makes us stronger when we face the future together. We will now perform a program of works by Barber, Beethoven, and Mozart that pays tribute to our citizens and their resilience."

What Happens Next

As the hardest-hit communities rebuild following natural disasters, their orchestras have to consider the effect of the upheavals on attendance and charitable giving. The work may be especially arduous in Sonoma and Napa counties, where the fires destroyed 10 percent of the housing stock. "It's time for everyone to come together," Santa Rosa Symphony's Silow says. "We had our fifteen minutes of national exposure" in the news when the fires first hit.

"But there's a long road to recovery. There's still a lot to do for many people. Nobody really knows what the new normal is. But we know it's not going to be the way it was." The Santa Rosa Symphony is currently trying out candidates to be its next music director, and the group expects to unveil its choice this spring. The orchestra hopes the new leader's naming will help rejuvenate excitement and attendance, Silow says.

Hurricane Irma did little harm to the Naples Philharmonic's home, even though the adjacent Baker Museum—the orchestra's partner under the Artis-Naples umbrella group—suffered damage that will keep it closed for repair the entire season. The Houston orchestras' venues are city-

owned, so the groups are off the hook for the cost of repairing the buildings.

But Harvey struck Houston on the very weekend the Mercury ensemble intended to hold a board retreat, at which its leaders would unveil plans to build a cash reserve and launch an endowment drive. As Mercury watches how attendance and fundraising fare after the storm, Ritter says, it still hopes to promote those longer-term goals.

The Houston Symphony expects Harvey's disruptions to cost it \$2.5 million to \$3 million in lost revenue, Dinitz says. But the orchestra expects to make up some or all of that. A board member offered a \$500,000 challenge grant to help propel a campaign to shore up the budget. And

Recovery and restoration of the Nashville Symphony's Schermerhorn Symphony Center following the 2010 flood took nearly a year.





Flooding of the basement of the Nashville Symphony's Schermerhorn Symphony Center in 2010.

the group is adding concerts it expects to be lucrative, such as screenings of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* with the orchestra playing the score.

Nonprofits only became eligible for post-disaster support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency beginning in 2006. The League of American Orchestras partnered with national nonprofits to successfully advocate for the change through an act of Congress, and by working with FEMA to iron out regulatory guidance.

Orchestras, Recovery, and FEMA

When torrential rains inundated Nashville's Schermerhorn Symphony Center in May 2010, they drove the Nashville Symphony from its home for nearly seven months and left it with a \$40 million repair bill. But on reflection, President and CEO Alan Valentine says, "The good news is: in a way, the storm was our finest hour. Today, we're a much stronger organization than ever. You know that thing about what doesn't kill you makes you stronger? It's really true. We have dramatically increased our revenues. We have reimagined a lot about how the institution works, it's relationship to the community is like. It's a much stronger relationship now."



Alan Palmer

Nashville Symphony President and CEO Alan D. Valentine at a free outdoor concert the orchestra gave after the torrential 2010 flood, which devastated the orchestra's home and much of the city.

The 2010 storm waters crested on a Monday, Valentine recalls, and the orchestra and pop singer Christopher Cross performed a free outside concert in the center of Nashville the following Friday. The city's newspaper devoted the front page of the next day's edition to the concert. The layout was built around a dramatic photo showing symphony Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero in action with the crowd behind him. The headline proclaimed: "Money, Music & Muscle: Nashville Opens Its

Heart." "I think doing that concert right away gave everybody a sense of normalcy," Valentine says. "The front page of *The Tennessean* the next morning was the turning point in the press coverage of the storm. It went from, 'Look how awful it is over here. Look how awful it is over there,' to, 'You know what? It's going to be OK.' And the symphony was the emblem of that."

After seven months of rebuilding, the Schermerhorn Symphony Center reopened with a New Year's Eve gala. But the orchestra faced a second hurdle. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, state of Tennessee, and other sources would eventually cover the bulk of the repair costs. But the orchestra first had to

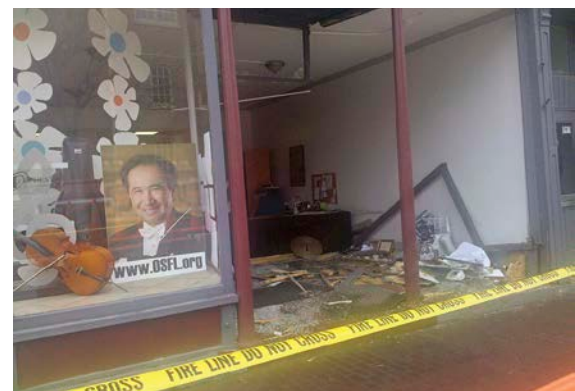
finance the \$40 million repair job on its own, Valentine recalls. The group's finances were already coping with the debt from the center's construction and a decline in the endowment caused by the Great Recession. But the lender and the orchestra restructured the debt, and the aid from FEMA and other sources began flowing. The orchestra's last dollop of FEMA money finally arrived—in 2017. The federal agency had also helped pay for beefing up the building so it can better withstand future storms, insofar as anyone can envision them. "We all know what the weather is doing. It's getting worse and worse," Valentine says. "If we have a similar flood, we'll probably be fine. But if we have a worse flood, we may not be."

Be Prepared

The Nashville Symphony was one the first cultural groups to benefit from Federal Emergency Management Agency aid. Nonprofits only became eligible beginning in 2006, says League of American Orchestras Vice President for Advocacy Heather Noonan. The League partnered with other



Janet Newcomb, performing arts coordinator for the Performing Arts Readiness Project, says that many arts groups fall far short of the emergency planning they need.



Not all disasters are natural. Several years ago, a car crashed into the wall of Janet Newcomb's office at the Orchestra of the Southern Finger Lakes in Corning, N.Y., damaging the building and rendering her work inaccessible.



Gregg Puchkowsky/Pensacola News-Journal

Musicians from Florida's Pensacola Symphony Orchestra, including bassoonist Abigail Walker, performed for evacuees seeking shelter from Hurricane Irma at the Pensacola Bay Center.

national nonprofits to successfully advocate for the change through an act of Congress, and by working with FEMA to iron out supportive regulatory guidance. "Only a few years prior to our flood, the League and some other organizations had gotten the FEMA regulations changed to help cultural groups," says the Nashville Symphony's Valentine. "We're extraordinarily grateful to have had the League's help in securing this support."

Federal money can assist with needs from urgent remediation to permanent repairs. But the process from first application to final check involves significant bureaucratic checklists and procedures, as witness the Nashville Symphony's seven years from storm to final payout. And a disaster-hit orchestra may seek help from its state or other groups at the same time. (The Houston Symphony received a \$5,000 grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts to help cover the costs of its office and concert disruptions.)

"Advance preparation is very important," Noonan says. Orchestras that have no threat bearing down on them should "use this time—now—to plan ahead, and

"We can do what we were really meant to do: serve this community, first and foremost," says Santa Rosa Symphony President and CEO Alan Silow. "Rather than think internally, we have to think externally, and share the healing power of our music."

to understand how these policies work. A lot of folks don't think about the impact of these policies until they've been subject to a disaster. At that point, it's very hard to be prepared to seek assistance."

Many groups fall far short of the planning they need, says Janet Newcomb, performing arts coordinator for the Performing Arts Readiness Project. Launched in 2017, the three-year effort is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and run by a consortium of regional cultural agencies. Through webinars, workshops, information on its website, and other resources, the project helps arts groups figure out how to navigate through emergencies. "We're kind of appalled at the number of organizations that do not have any inkling" about emergency preparedness, Newcomb says. "They're averse to planning. That's what came out of the focus groups and the surveys that spurred the project's creation. People just aren't geared that way. That's what we have to break through."

Make Plans

Nature's calamities are not the only emergencies a group might face. Newcomb thinks back to when she was the executive director of the Orchestra of the Southern Finger Lakes in Corning, N.Y.: A car crashed into the wall of her office, and she couldn't get back in to retrieve what she needed to go on with the day's work. Because the buildings on the street date back to the middle to late 1800s, there was also concern about structural damage. Today's most-fearsome prospects include active shooters and cyber crime. "When we do our introductory webinars, we realize how few organizations even have telephone trees," Newcomb says. Communication is one of the first components of a plan. In order to get up to speed on emergency preparedness and recovery, arts groups also have to ask themselves such things as:

- What's our chain of command for different kinds of emergencies?



Susan and Neil Sherman Photography

Audience members donate to recovery efforts at a benefit concert by the Santa Rosa Symphony following the recent wildfires. The free concert raised \$112,000; throughout the season, the Santa Rosa Symphony is giving free tickets to first responders and people who lost their homes.

- Who decides whether a performance is called off?
- Who are the public-safety officials in our city?
- Are our ushers trained for an emergency in the audience?
- Is our music library organized and safe?
- How secure is our financial and donor information?

When a disaster strikes an entire region, Noonan says, help may begin at the state level. "Usually, the state's congressional delegation or state government will hold workshops and identify dedicated staff personnel who can guide folks through the process," she points out. "In the case of Texas after the hurricane, the Texas Commission on the Arts was



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Susan and Neil Silverman Photography

The Santa Rosa Symphony presented a free concert on November 20 that raised \$112,000 to benefit those affected by the recent firestorms. The musicians, conductors, and soloists donated their services. In photo: Music Director Bruno Ferrandis (right) salutes Conductor Laureate Jeffrey Kahane, who was the soloist in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1. Also leading works at the concert was Conductor Emeritus Corrick Brown.



"It's time for everyone to come together," says Santa Rosa Symphony President and CEO Alan Silow.

very involved in gathering the resources that could help the arts community through that process." The system doesn't offer as much help to individual artists, Noonan says. So one of the League's next goals is to work toward more disaster assistance for them, such as

aid for replacing instruments.

Luckily for young Kyle Victor in Houston, the Houston Youth Symphony's fund stepped up to provide his new cello. He and his family, who have been living in temporary quarters since the storm, have a longer wait to get back into their home: That may not happen until spring. But Victor downplays that. "Honestly," he says, "as long as I have my cello, I'm OK."

STEVEN BROWN, a Houston-based writer specializing in classical music and the arts, is the former classical music critic of the *Orlando Sentinel*, *Charlotte Observer*, and *Houston Chronicle*.

Disaster Preparedness Resources

Advanced preparation is essential to navigating natural disasters and other unexpected emergencies. The League of American Orchestras offers resources for musicians and orchestras affected by natural disasters, including links to federal and state organizations that give support; general information on disaster response, recovery, and readiness; and ways to help orchestras and musicians affected by natural disasters. Visit <https://americanorchestras.org/disaster> for more information as well as for links to the Performing Arts Readiness Project; ArtsReady.org, an online emergency preparedness service for arts and cultural nonprofits; the American Federation of Musicians' Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. League members with questions may contact advocacy@americanorchestras.org.

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