



To Screen or Not to Screen? (Transcript)

ESO Offstage - Episode 3

Behind The Screen series, Part Three of Four

Max Cardilli (00:00): The screened audition, also known as the blind audition, was adopted by most orchestras in the 70's and 80's in order to make the hiring process more fair and reduce bias when selecting a new member. From Silicon Valley startups like GapJumpers to double blind applications at The Hubble Space Telescope, organizations have looked to the orchestral screened audition model for inspiration to eliminate bias from the hiring process.

However, The New York Times recently published an article titled "*To Make Orchestras More Diverse End Blind Auditions*". As the title says, the article proposes that blind auditions are not helping with the racial imbalances that are seen onstage and that their removal may actually help orchestras achieve more diversity among their musicians. Welcome to ESO Offstage -as part of our "*Behind the Screen*" series, are taking a deep dive into the past, present and future of orchestral auditions, this episode we turn our focus to this topic.

[MUSIC - 01:09]

Bill Eddins (01:19): For the record I am very much a pro-screen kind of guy. I'm interested in hearing a person. I want to know how they play and I can tell you a lot about any individual in the first 20 seconds. I mean, that's why I had the Mozart rule at the ESO. Play me Mozart - if I'm still interested in hearing you 20 seconds later, you're probably going to be in the second round. And you know what? That happened every single audition! [laughs]

Max Cardilli (01:50): You might recognize the voice of Bill Eddins, Music Director Emeritus of the ESO. I had the chance to speak with him as he tended to his chickens in his backyard in Minneapolis.

Bill Eddins (02:03): I want to have the best orchestra I possibly could freaking have, period. But I know that the way of getting there is making sure that I have got the strongest, deepest pool of people to audition. How do I get there? It's by starting and when they're five years old, and no matter what anyone says the issue is not blind auditions, the issue is the disparity in music education. If you don't fund the idea that every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, should if they want to have access to learning a musical instrument and getting decent music education then you know you can put as many screens up, or pull as many screens down, 25 years later as you want. It's not going to matter; you're not going to get a representation of people who are auditioning. That's where the issue is.



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Max Cardilli (03:12): I spoke to Bill a few months after George Floyd was tragically killed by a police officer in the city of Minneapolis.

Bill Eddins (03:20): Three, four months ago my - the - city started to burn down here in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. You know, a couple weeks after things started to calm down here my phone started ringing off the hook. Emails started flooding and every music arts organization that I ever had any contact with was ringing me up going “Bill, can you join our Board of Directors?” And, I started noticing the trend and I realized that they went through this thought process like they looked at themselves going “my God, we are a bunch of lily-white privileged people over here. Maybe we should change that. I know! Let's get Bill, he's black, he knows what to do!” And after a couple weeks of this, you know, I kind of put my head in my hands and realized - look, I don't have all the answers. I don't even have all the right questions, I don't. But I do know a couple of things. I'm passionate about the concept of education - especially music education - and I have that bias, because I am a musician. But I am passionate about education.

Every child should have access to the best possible education. I believe that to the core of my being. And it doesn't matter what kind of education that is and we fail as a society until that is the end product. That's one thing. The second thing I'm passionate about - beer! [laughs] I've been there. A buddy of mine and I have been sitting around the last couple years getting better and better as homebrewers. There's something very musical about getting down and figuring out recipes. It speaks to that part of the musician's brain, you know. I just decided, all right I'm gonna put my money and my beer where my mouth is. We are starting a brewery. It's going to be called MetroNOME Brewery and it stands for Nurturing Outstanding Music Education in the Twin Cities. MetroNOME.

[MUSIC - 05:39]

Bill Eddins (05:41): Playing it forward, one pint at a time. That's going to be our catchphrase. It is going to be a socially-missioned public-benefit corporation. All the proceeds are going to go to funding music lessons and education and instruments for underprivileged youth in the Twin Cities. We're planning on having a Kickstarter in the early spring and we hope to have our first beers on the market in September of this coming year. We believe in playing it forward - literally - you know, and we want every kid here in the metro who wants to learn about music to have the opportunity to do that. So we have to be ambassadors for what it is that we do. It is no longer good enough to just walk out on stage and be able to drop a Brahms 3 on people that's going to knock your socks off. We have to be willing to walk out of our hall and meet people where they



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are. Instead of saying “well, you need to come here.” No, no, no, no, no - where they are is just fine. [laughs]

What is it that Spock said? Frank Zappa said it as well, you know “change is the one constant of the universe.” I don't want tomorrow to be today - I really don't. That would just be boring. I mean Groundhog Day is a great movie, but I don't want to live like that - lord no. It's much more interesting when things change.

Max Cardilli (07:34): There was a mixed response in the classical music industry to [The New York Times article](#) that I had mentioned. Several conductors, players, and administrators were included in a response article which The Times titled “[Musicians on How to Bring Racial Equity to Auditions.](#)” I spoke with one of these individuals to discuss their response and thoughts on the lack of diversity in orchestras.

Afa Dworkin (07:59): I'm Afa Dworkin, I serve as President and Artistic Director for The Sphinx Organization whose mission it is to advance diversity and inclusion in classical music. The gist of our response, really, suggests that incremental change is insufficient. And, on a practical level, blind auditions are but one component - and as such an insufficient component. Not so long ago, certainly, black and brown musicians wouldn't be invited to audition, wouldn't be permitted to audition for an orchestra. So, when you have decades up upon decades of explicit exclusion you cannot expect that by simply putting up a screen all will be fine.

In the essay, we suggest that there must be other criteria as we consider an entrance of an applicant into an orchestra. More than an audition process, it becomes an admission process - because I do think it's time for us to think about the audition as but one element of admission. One, make them entirely blind by all means. That means from the very beginning. Invite everybody. But then, so long as that process allows the committee of esteemed musicians to hear enough to want to hear more, then by all means let us hear more at that point without the screen. Let us hear how this musician communicates. Let us hear what this music means to them. Let us hear how they wish to relate to and engage with our community.

A member of today's orchestra has an incredible duty, and a privilege, and an opportunity to really revolutionize what orchestral music does and can do for the community. It is a far more interesting job, I think, than that of perhaps what was happening at the turn of the century - in that the music can say more, can mean more. An orchestra member in the 21st century is a citizen artist, a community ambassador, a teaching artist, and a member of the society whose mission it is to communicate the



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beauty and the significance and the impact of classical music to the community - while also listening to the community and bringing their needs and interests back on the stage. For every community, that may look a little different. In other words, Detroit is, you know, nearly 90 percent black. Provo, Utah might be different, Santa Fe might be different. So, I don't think the metrics must be exactly the same for every community. I think that's utopic. And I think our orchestras absolutely must look like our communities. I think that's very important. And, I think it falls upon our Musicians, as well as Arts Administrators within orchestras, and certainly Music Directors today to change that paradigm. To change what we play, how we play, how we communicate importantly, and what we consider to be our community. And, beyond that, the piece about the response that is very important to me is one that suggests orchestras should invest directly and for a number of years into committing to diversify what is on stage, committing to diversify their DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) efforts on staff, on their boards and saying you're doing so for the next five or ten years. Period. It is not a one-time thing. It is also looking at what we perform and saying - you know what, 25 percent of what is going to be on stage is going to be by non-white male composers. Period. To identify this incredible wealth of good music that exists - that we've been ignoring and not studying. We have to shift the canon. It would be an incredible journey to commit to. I say, "we are what we repeatedly play" because, the last actually recorded statistic - which I think is a little bit unfortunate - by the League of American Orchestras tells us that music performed during the main stage main season performances of American Orchestras represents less than one percent of composers of any colour.

So, that is who we are - and sometimes critics and well-meaning scholars and colleagues of mine will say "are you suggesting we do away with Beethoven and Mozart and Bruckner and Mahler?" I would in no way be suggesting that. I think it's a yes and approach. While we're playing Mahler, there's a black contemporary of Mahler's. You know, for choosing Mozart then we should also be choosing Joseph Bologne, Saint-Georges.

Max Cardilli (12:56): If you head over to sphinxmusic.org they have some amazing resources - including a Composer Resources Directory where you can find links to databases including the Living Black Composer's Directory, The Sphinx Catalog of Latin American Cello Works, and many more.

Afa Dworkin (13:12): If we're looking at the 20th century composers there is more than the *Afro-American Symphony* here. It's just volumes of really, really good music - and,



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no it's not enough to like once a year put up [The Rediscovered Florence Price Symphony](#). It's great, but there is much more than that. Historically speaking, obviously the art form is European despite the fact that there are volumes of absolutely fantastic compositions by, you know, certainly black and brown composers. There's works dating back to the Mexican Baroque, in terms of the Latinx heritage. You know, the art form itself isn't something that was devoid of diversity - it's just that for a long time, and systematically, we have buried it in all traces of existence of that music. We are robbing ourselves of good music - good art!

[MUSIC - 13:59]

Max Cardilli (14:00): The Sphinx Organization works within four different programming areas to achieve their mission of transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. This multi-pronged approach includes education and access, artist development, performing artists, and arts leadership.

Afa Dworkin (14:18): In all, Sphinx reaches about 10 000 people annually, through its programming and more than 2 million in our both live and broadcast audiences. For our purposes, the way we think of diversity is really representation that promotes a reciprocity and equity between our art form and our community. We look more specifically and with the laser- focus on participation/representation by Black and Latinx musicians.

We focus in this space because in this country, as you know, there's a great deal of disconnect between these two most represented minority groups so to speak, and their participation and inclusion in classical music. So, as such, we have focused in that space - full well knowing and understanding that we will need to get to other groups as well, because ultimately, we want there to be a balance that reflects the incredible diversity that is inherent in our ever-changing community.

For too long we have been operating based upon a false assumption that any time we invite a conversation on inclusion and diversity we have to be, quote, "ready to sacrifice" or perhaps diminish the sanctity of artistic merit. I think we have to do away with that fallacy. There's no substantiation for that anywhere, whatsoever. In fact, what we have to be ready to do is we have to be willing to, and interested in evolving on an artistic level. And, you know, in every other field - the tech field, banking, etc. It is understood that in order to achieve excellence we invite diverse minds, people, who think not like one another so as to invite and embrace innovation. Why can't we in classical music, in orchestral music? We need leaders within our community who are of color. We must



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engage them, invite them, listen to them, hear them, and frankly put them in the seats that are going to matter.

Afa Dworkin (16:33): I feel strongly that those practical steps must be taken sooner than later - because the biggest missed opportunity and a great shame, I think, would be wasting this time after the catalyzing events in our country of the past spring and summer, and frankly the forced respite imposed upon all of us by the pandemic. I think if we don't use this opportunity, I'm not sure we'll have another one to retake this effort and in an earnest way be prepared to be very uncomfortable trying some of these new things,

the murder of George Floyd didn't happen to a single community. It shook the world. The BLM movement helped solidify and help coalesce all these emotions into this one element that made the malady of race and racism universal. We mustn't delude things either, we have to call them what they are. Racism is alive and well, and we can't say "I live in a community where, say, the black population is tiny and as such I'll focus elsewhere". We can't diminish the fact that this is an illness all around the world - where we differentiate and discriminate based upon the tone of someone's skin. Orchestras here can't ignore those truths. So, whatever strategy they implement cannot be devoid of that understanding, and that reckoning. I'm speaking to allies - it's their turn, our turn - it's everyone's turn to push. And what better place than the arts? We should use our privilege to engage and invite as many Indigenous voices, as many black and brown voices - so that the chorus becomes as rich and representative as we know it can be and should be.

[MUSIC - 18:40]

Max Cardilli (18:42): In this episode you heard excerpts from Allan Gilliland's [Dreaming of the Masters iii](#), featuring the ESO, conducted by Bill Eddin's and with Jens Lindemann as trumpet soloist. You also heard excerpts of the Sphinx Virtuosi performing Philip Herbert's beautiful work [Elegy: In memoriam - Stephen Lawrence](#).

Thank you to our wonderful guests Bill Eddins and Afa Dworkin, who shared their time and voices for this episode.

In the show notes you can find links to learn more about [Bill Eddin's](#) and the [MetroNome Brewery](#), [Afa Dworkin](#) and [The Sphinx organization](#), and composers [Philip Herbert](#) and [Allan Gilliland](#). There are also links to The New York Times articles ([here](#)



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and [here](#)) that were mentioned - which if you don't have a subscription can be accessed for free through your [Edmonton Public Library](#) account in the Digital Content section.

This episode was produced in amiskwaciy-wâskahikan, also known as Edmonton, on the traditional lands referred to as Treaty 6 Territory - a place that has been a meeting ground, travelling route and home for many Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial including the Cree, Métis, Dene, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, and Blackfoot whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence and enrich our vibrant community. The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra is dedicated to ensuring that the spirit of Treaty 6 is honoured and respected.

This episode was written and produced by me - ESO double bassist Max Cardilli. If you ever want to connect with me about the podcast you can write to me at eso.offstage@winspearcentre.com

[MUSIC - 21:04]