

supporting the arts IN TOUGH TIMES

By the time this issue of *Opus* arrives in homes, Election Day will likely be behind us, and I'm hopeful that there will be some glimmer of evidence that the world economy is stabilizing. But I also know there's a real chance that what we're experiencing now will continue for months or years and perhaps become worse than we've imagined. I, for one, am quite clear that I have no crystal ball on such matters. What I do know something about, however, is our Symphony organization. And I'm here to tell you that in good times and in bad, what your orchestra does is important. Bringing a community together for the communal experience of hearing and appreciating some of humanity's finest achievements, offering a substantial dose of inspiration and introspection, teaching children not only about the technical aspects of music but providing them with real-world experiences and the hard work of being all that you can be – these are all things that are important no matter what is going on in the world.

In two respects I am immediately reminded of the years following 9/11. Long-time Symphony audiences will recall that the Symphony's annual Gala (that year, with violinist Itzhak Perlman) was scheduled for two days later. Perlman was grounded as were thousands of others by the FAA's ban on all air travel, and the world was grieving. Some chose to stay home. Far more, however, decided that the Symphony was precisely where they wanted to be – for some, where they *needed* to be – and came to Raleigh's Meymandi Concert Hall to hear their orchestra perform. The audience that night heard our own Brian Reagin standing in valiantly for Perlman and a concert that brought tears to many eyes. A *News & Observer* columnist took me to task for not cancelling the concert, but our assertion was that in the aftermath of 9/11 there were two things that must remain open: the churches and the concert halls. I'm tremendously proud of that decision and how skillfully the Symphony musicians were able to soothe souls and remind people of the importance of music in our lives, *especially* in tough times.

The second association with 9/11 is economic. In the months and year or so that followed, the Symphony was hit with a perfect storm or trifecta of economic difficulties. The state's tax receipts dropped and therefore state support for the Symphony contracted, the stock market declined dramatically and therefore the Symphony's endowment declined significantly, and corporate profits disappeared and quickly corporate sponsorships were withdrawn. The Symphony suffered, and more so than most people realized. Some programs were lost, but more importantly the musicians and staff of the orchestra were asked to make do with less financially. In hindsight, I think we and many nonprofits made a mistake in thinking it was inappropriate to talk about these challenges and to ask people for donations in those first several months following 9/11. Somehow it felt unpatriotic to ask people to donate to the arts when the focus of the world was elsewhere. I feel differently today, and I believe it is imperative that we demonstrate the importance of the arts in our lives and in our communities and that we take every opportunity to remind our audiences of the need for their continuing investment. We need our audience's support more than ever.

For a recent ARTS North Carolina blog, I wrote that we "believe that our ultimate success in creating America's Next Great Orchestra has everything to do with our ability to put in front of our community

a plan for doing just that... The arts offer our communities something that is absolutely irreplaceable and it's entirely possible that the more we see around us that is troubling (international conflict, oil prices, political strife or scandal) the more that we as human beings cherish that which is beautiful in our lives. Collectively the arts are one of the most reliable and successful economic engines for our communities and simultaneously they offer exhilaration and joy that can be found nowhere else. Watching one's retirement account balance go up and down like a yo-yo is not a lot of fun for anyone, but participation in and support of the arts is always a sound and forward-looking investment... (We are) absolutely confident that strength comes from growth and an undeniable vision for what we want to become. We've put long-term relationships in place with our exceptional musicians and our music director Grant Llewellyn as critical elements of this strategy, and we see significant financial growth over the next few seasons."

Along these same lines, in a very encouraging piece for the *Wall Street Journal*, Leon Botstein recently wrote that "Nothing can reproduce the sonic and emotional power of live performance... The real attraction of classical music is the power and sensuality of the live sounds. The excitement that ensues from the unpredictability and drama of live performance is comparable to watching spectator sports. Following a game on television is enjoyable, but to be cheering at the stadium or sitting courtside is incomparable... To survive and flourish we need to stop playing the same repertoire in concert and in the opera... To thrive, managements need to innovate and learn from the enthusiastic embrace of Western classical music around the world. Success will be found by adapting better to local circumstances and by looking beyond our borders."

Which is what creating America's Next Great Orchestra is all about. The world's economic struggles will certainly make our work more challenging. However, we believe that in good times and in bad what your orchestra does matters. As an orchestra that was founded in the midst of the Great Depression, we've certainly been through tough times before. Speaking about our endowment and whether we should change our investment strategy, one of the Symphony's Trustees recently urged calm, correctly noting that "our timeline is infinite." This community has demonstrated time and time again that the live performing arts are a source of inspiration and hope, and that it is worth supporting at every opportunity.

So, for the first time, in this issue of *Opus* magazine, you will find an envelope. I am asking you to consider using that envelope to make an immediate investment in your orchestra. Please use it to make a first-time or a special additional donation. Now more than ever, it is critical that you join with so many others around our state who believe this music matters now more than ever. Your entire community will benefit and you will have the pride of knowing that you are supporting one of the things that makes North Carolina such a unique and special place to live.

With thanks,



David Chambless Worters, President & CEO