

## GREAT MUSIC MATTERS! OUR NEW CHALLENGE

As the weather turns colder and we move closer to end of 2010, I decided to take a moment to look back on all the pieces that contributed to the success we experienced last season and the hard decisions made to keep our promise to provide an outstanding artistic product and create even stronger connections to your orchestra. One thing became very clear to me – the North Carolina Symphony is nothing without you. Because of you, the combined efforts of donors and ticket buyers, the orchestra reached the \$8 million threshold in private support to secure the \$1.5 million challenge grant from the State.

your community. Thanks to you, the North Carolina Symphony has begun its path to recovery – finishing the fiscal year with a balanced budget and retiring more than \$1.25 million of accumulated debt. Our story is changing from the impossible to the possible all because of you. You have earned a standing ovation! So, are you ready for your encore?

The North Carolina Symphony has been given a second challenge grant from the State of North Carolina – an unprecedented opportunity that illustrates the fascination we all have with great music. We must again secure \$8 million from our patrons

## You have earned a standing ovation! So, are you ready for your encore?

Knowing that you have been regaled with the details of budget cuts, leadership changes, and musician sacrifices, the goal was accomplished in the midst of the continuing economic tsunami because these challenges bring into sharp focus the things that matter most in our lives. J. Mark Scarce, composer and NCSU Music Department Director, noted in a letter of support, “it is no exaggeration to acknowledge the millions of North Carolina school children – now our very own senators and representatives, business and civic leaders, scientists, farmers, lawyers, and yes, artists – who credit their acculturation to exposure to the higher arts was first brought to them by the North Carolina Symphony. And yet we must remind ourselves repeatedly in times of crises that when we don’t readily register the direct correlation of such a common good to its people we must resist labeling it a superfluous, extravagant, elitist, unnecessary. The North Carolina Symphony is as necessary to the future of our state as the air we breathe. It is not so difficult in the face of such disposable ‘culture’ to credit the enduring, the time-honored, the proven. All we have to do is recognize the difference.”

In 4000 households, you did recognize the difference and made your voice heard. The message is clear: the orchestra matters to

before June 30, 2011 and the State will award the Symphony \$1.5 million to support what the orchestra does best – serve our state with great performances. The fact that the Symphony was born during The Great Depression and continues to be supported by both private and public sectors of North Carolina tells much about the state’s resilience and commitment to a rich cultural life. This second challenge grant offers a tremendous prospect for continued success. As readers of *Opus*, you are a part of this effort and though you may not be able to hear the applause from our musicians and staff, you should know that it is enthusiastic and heartfelt.

Don’t miss your chance to be a part of our new challenge. Buy a ticket, make a gift. As one Chapel Hill patron stated in a note enclosed with her gift, “A mere drop for such hefty needs. But many drops can a wave produce!”

In gratitude,




Left to right: Beau Brummel, Lang Lang, Grant Llewellyn

# BACK IN BLACK

by Suzanne McKeon

Step into any orchestra concert hall around the world and you will not only hear wonderful music, but chances are you will see a sea of black on stage. The question of why musicians wear black is a fashion mystery and many urban legends attempt to explain the universal decision to cloak all orchestra musicians in the color of night while performing.

But the question remains.  
*Why do orchestra musicians wear black?*



The simple answer is this – so that the audience can concentrate on the music, not the musicians themselves.

So why not wear navy blue or dark gray? Historically speaking, black is the original bourgeois color. Depicted in many paintings by the Dutch Masters, which give us insight into history, commerce and daily domestic and social life, the more educated segment of the population typically wore black with stiff white collars, while the lower class – or peasants – wore natural colors of beige and yellow.

*Les hommes en noir* – or “men in black,” were seen more prominently during the industrial revolution. During the Neo-Classical Period (1800-1825), original dandy Beau Brummell famously became the arbiter of male sartorial fashion in England and was noted for wearing only black with a white shirt for formal evening wear.

During this same period of time, women were widely considered and categorized as more “emotional” creatures whose fashion was diminished to frivolous frocks while men’s attire was viewed as more serious with a black and white palette.

From the death of her beloved Albert in 1861 through the end of her reign in 1901, Queen Victoria wore black exclusively, again establishing the elitism of wearing black through the association with nobility and elevated social rank.

The orchestra itself was originally positioned as a bourgeois institution replacing the lowly court band. Therefore, the seriousness and elite position of the orchestra was facilitated through the attire and choice of black apparel.

Today’s orchestras have not changed much and black still dominates the stage.

Generally speaking, an orchestra organization wants the musicians to look professional and not underdressed or looking underpaid. The organization’s “look” is determined by what sort of image they want to project to audiences, as well as what is most comfortable and workable from the musicians’ viewpoint.

Variables like restriction of arm and leg movement, environment and temperature challenges are taken into consideration. Matters such as where a jacket sits, how a

shirt is tucked or tied, or the construction of the shoulder can affect the performance level for some musicians.

An orchestra’s management dictates a dress code is so that they can present a uniform appearance to the audience. As women started to become a more regular part of the orchestra world, the choice of dress became more complex.

What women’s attire goes with men’s black tails? Traditionally, women musicians have worn long black evening gowns or skirts.

Dress codes have been part of the orchestral musician’s life since the beginning of time. And while black is still very much the color of choice, there is more that goes into making the decision than meets the eye.

In 1987, the North Carolina Symphony experienced a women’s fashion dilemma and formed a “women’s dress committee,” whose sole role was to establish an acceptable dress code for the women of the orchestra. After several months of lengthy discussions and polls amongst musicians, several “rules” for compliance were established:

- No revealing outfits
- No patterned hose
- No “shiny or showy” materials
- No slits in skirts unless in the back and must be below the knee
- The shade of black between jackets and skirts must match
- Focus on formal and conservative – “you don’t have to be ruffled and bowed or silked and satined to be formal.”
- No open-toed shoes, no boots
- No untucked blouses
- No sweaters
- No “flashy” jewelry or belts
- Only conservative hair ornaments

And while black was still the color of choice, in 1987 it was not the only color being suggested. Bowed-back bridesmaid dresses in jewel tones were proposed – and promptly rejected by women musicians. So it was back to black with a limited selection of “approved” items.

Today’s dress code is not far off from what was initially discussed in the late ’80s. For formal evening concerts women are

# black is the original bourgeois color

still asked to wear something “comparable to and compatible with men’s tails outfit.” This is typically a black full-length dress or skirt, black full cut pants with a long or three-quarter length blouse or jacket. Black shoes and hose are required. (Navy blue has also been introduced to the current choice offerings)

Some exceptions are made for both men and women – mostly surrounding holiday concert events.

On New Year’s Eve women can wear a formal gown in their color of choice. For Holiday Pops shows men can pull out a festive cummerbund, vest or bow tie while women can wear a solid color representative of the holiday spirit.

The summer allows both men and women to lighten up a little and wear white shorter sleeved shirts although black pants, skirts and shoes are still required. “No tank tops, casual pants or jeans” are allowed.

## Casual-ization

While the orchestra world is still a fairly formal and conservative environment by most accounts, some organizations are trying to bring in new audiences by offering more “casual concerts” where the musicians wear blue jeans or perform in more casual clothes. This is designed to strip away the perceived elitism that may discourage attendance.

## Guest Artists

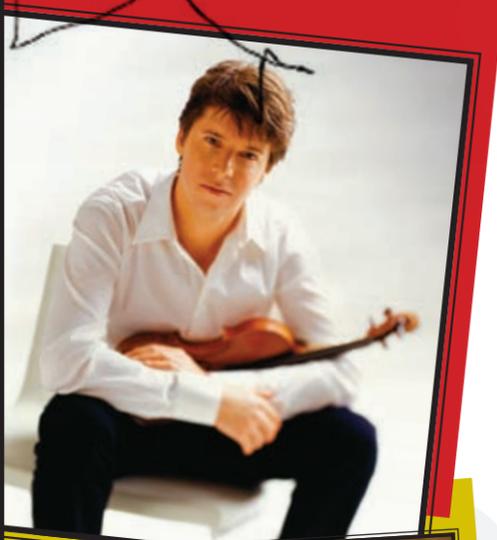
While orchestras as a whole still strive to appear in uniform and in sync with each other, guest artists are more playful with their attire selections and have the freedom to “up” the flash factor for the audience.

Violinist Joshua Bell typically appears in black slacks, a loose shirt and funky black shoes or boots. Pianist Lang Lang likes to wear colorful jackets, shirts and wild patterned pants. Violinist Nicolaj Znaider can be seen in a casual black turtleneck or dark suit with notable red lined jacket with an open-necked shirt and no tie.

Some symphony goers still prefer a more traditional style of dress when attending

concerts. And for the classical genre, that is certainly to be expected. But as orchestras broaden their repertoire to attract new audiences, a loosening of the old dress code rules is bound to be part of the proposition.

No matter what a group of orchestra musicians are wearing, it’s about the music after all – and that makes everyone look beautiful. 🎻



Middle: Joshua Bell  
Bottom: Rembrandt’s “The Sampling Officials,” 1662

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Roy C. Dicks  
News & Observer

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[www.rr.org](http://www.rr.org)

**Saturday, December 4, 2010 – 8pm**  
Thalian Hall | Wilmington, North Carolina

**Sunday, December 5, 2010 – 4pm**  
Carolina Theatre | Greensboro, North Carolina

**Saturday, December 11, 2010 – 3pm & 7:30pm**  
**Sunday, December 12, 2010 – 3pm**  
Meymandi Concert Hall | Raleigh, North Carolina

**Thursday, December 16, 2010 – 8pm**  
Seby Jones Performing Arts Center  
Louisburg College - Louisburg, North Carolina

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