

**Alternative Ensembles:  
A Study of Emerging Musical Arts Organizations**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In an effort to analyze viable models for successful classical music ensembles, Paul Judy, founder of the Symphony Orchestra Institute and chairman of The Chicago Philharmonic Society, and Emily Wozniak, an Eastman School of Music graduate student, conducted a study of a select group of cooperating professional organizations that appear to be pursuing non-traditional music-making paths and organizational practices. We are denoting these organizations as “alternative ensembles.” The study was undertaken to better understand what makes these organizations thrive and specifically what they are doing similarly and differently to spur such apparently positive artistic and financial growth and job satisfaction for the performing members. We then speculate as to how the patterns exhibited by the alternative ensembles might apply to larger-scale music ensembles and organizations.

The alternative ensembles studied consisted of chamber ensembles, contemporary music ensembles, and chamber orchestras. Eight ensembles were selected from New York City, Boston, and Chicago. The selection was not meant to be a comprehensive representation of the musical activities in these cities, but rather a sample of the variety of organizations that are emerging and coming to the forefront in the performance world. The ensembles range in size (from a percussion quartet to a 40-person chamber orchestra), repertoire (from a focus solely on contemporary music to music of all genres and time periods), and presentation mode (from the inclusion of multimedia to cross-disciplinary collaborations). All of the participating ensembles exhibit positive growth, both artistically and financially.

The final comparative analysis summarizes and reflects on the mission, leadership,

programming, structure, and financial growth of the cooperating organizations. The authors conducted online research, interviewed musicians and administrative personnel from each group, and attended concerts and rehearsals when possible. This report identifies organizational and artistic approaches that are unique to the individual organizations as well as approaches they share. Overall, the goal was to identify common practices that contribute to the success of these organizations and to the satisfaction of the participants and their audiences.

## **II. ENSEMBLE DESCRIPTIONS**

Ensembles are presented according to membership size, ranging from smallest to largest.

The year of founding is indicated in parenthesis.

### ***Third Coast Percussion (Chicago, 2005)***

Membership (4)

Percussion – 4

Considered a percussion version of the string quartet, Third Coast Percussion (TCP) was formed by four students who performed together at Northwestern University and in the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. Still based in Chicago, TCP is comprised of musicians David Skidmore, Owen Clayton Condon, Robert Dillon, and Peter Martin, whose careers are divided roughly in half between professional work with TCP and other performing and teaching engagements.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the fall of 2013, all four TCP ensemble members will work full-time for the ensemble as performers and administrators. The core artistic mission of TCP is to excite and engage audiences by creating a range of diverse

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<sup>1</sup> TCP recently announced that Sean Connors will replace Owen Clayton Condon, who is leaving the group to pursue solo and composition projects.

sonic experiences unique to percussion. Perhaps the group with the most specialized instrumentation in this report, TCP places a heavy emphasis on the "art of sound," specifically the unique spectrum of sound available for exploration in percussion chamber music. It is the goal of TCP members to share a diverse body of percussion repertoire through performing, teaching, and commissioning new works.

TCP's dedication to the art of sound is evident in the diversity of works they perform and commission. In concerts at cutting-edge music venues and chamber music festivals, the group has performed works by such contemporary composers as John Cage, Steve Reich, and George Crumb as well as commissioned works by today's up-and-coming composers, including works by ensemble members Skidmore and Condon. TCP's most recent commission, *Resounding Earth*, a work by internationally acclaimed composer Augusta Read Thomas, uses over 120 bells from around the world to build an unprecedented blend of sounds. *Resounding Earth* was commissioned by the University of Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center and presented on a program with works by Steve Reich, John Cage, and TCP member Owen Clayton Condon. The staging for *Resounding Earth* is an example of one of TCP's programs that involves a myriad of percussion instruments, which creates both an interesting sonic and visual experience at concerts.

TCP also places a heavy emphasis on engaging students and communities through residency programs at the collegiate level and through involvement with local Chicago communities that have limited access to the arts. Past residencies in higher education include Dickinson College and the University of Notre Dame. At Notre Dame, TCP collaborated extensively with the Engineering Department to explore the physics of

sound. This residency was especially successful and resulted in an iPhone app and spectrographic analysis of various bells. In the fall of 2013 TCP will begin a multi-year ensemble-in-residence position at the University of Notre Dame where they will continue to explore connections between music and science, in addition to bringing performances and teaching to the university and surrounding communities. Ideally, TCP would like to continue to broaden their Chicago audience base through partnerships with Chicago-area universities and other institutions.

TCP has produced two recordings: *Ritual Music*, which features works from The group's first season concert, and *John Cage: The Works for Percussion 2*, which is available on CD and DVD. Four other recording projects will be released in the next two years, including music by Augusta Read Thomas, David T. Little, Philippe Manoury, and ensemble members Condon and Skidmore.

Regarding its organizational structure, TCP is run predominantly by the four members of the quartet. Skidmore composes and serves as executive director, Dillon as program director, Martin, finance director, and Condon composes and serves as the technical director. While the musicians make the artistic decisions, TCP operates with an artistic advisory board and also a board of directors composed primarily of people with managerial and professional backgrounds. Under a strong chairman, the board is dedicated to helping the quartet become self-sufficient and sustainable in the long term. To avoid a conflict of interest, only one quartet member is on the board and serves as a non-voting member. The board is also active in strategic planning and fundraising. A financial goal of TCP is to have total revenue comprised of 50 percent earned and 50 percent contributed income.

***eighth blackbird (Chicago, 1996)***

Membership (6)

Flute – 1; Clarinet – 1; Percussion – 1; Piano – 1; Violin/Viola – 1; Cello – 1

The “dictionary” definition provided on eighth blackbird's website succinctly depicts the group’s character:

**eighth blackbird** \ 'ātth 'blāk-, bərd\ *slang* (orig. and chiefly U.S.).

**1. verb.** To act with commitment and virtuosity; to zap, zip, sock.

**2. adjective.** Having fearless (yet irreverent) qualities.

**3. noun.** A flock of songbirds, common in urban areas since 1996.

Self-described as combining “the finesse of a string quartet, the energy of a rock band and the audacity of a storefront theater company,” the sextet was formed when four of the six current members worked together as a chamber group at Oberlin Conservatory. In the early 1990s an Oberlin composition professor wanted to create a contemporary chamber ensemble with a handful of current students. The original members of the ensemble came together and had instantaneous chemistry. The ensemble then traveled to Northwestern University for graduate school.

Now a full-time career for all members, the mission of eighth blackbird (ebb) is to perform contemporary music at the highest level and to create a unique, entertaining, and relevant concert experience. The ensemble embraces all music by living composers and creates concert experiences that are often theatrical and involve a myriad of art forms from multimedia to choreography and acting. Simply put by flutist Tim Munro: “One week we might collaborate with an indie rock drummer, the next with a dance

choreographer, the next with an opera singer.” Ensemble members consider the groundbreaking Kronos Quartet a major influence but always look for influences outside of music, according to Munro: “In the past couple of months I've been inspired by Philip Larkin's poems; Wim Wenders' intense new 3D Pina Bausch documentary; Louis CK's brutal comedy; and Nicholson Baker's epic miniatures.” Another defining characteristic of the ensemble is that the performers play some of their repertoire memorized, which they believe frees them to interact more intimately with each other and the audience on stage.

An overview of eighth blackbird's activity for the past seventeen years shows the ensemble has covered major ground with commissions, a variety of repertoire and projects, and numerous recordings (three have received Grammy Awards): six recordings on Cedille Records, *Double Sextet* by Steve Reich for Nonesuch, *On a Wire* for ASO Media, and multiple appearances on other labels. The ensemble has commissioned over 100 works, and for their inaugural composition contest in 2011, they received 504 submissions. Out of the pool of submissions, the members picked three finalists who each received a cash prize and the opportunity to workshop and perform with eighth blackbird. For concert programs available to book, eighth blackbird has a variety of projects: Jennifer Higdon's concerto for sextet and orchestra, *On a Wire*; *Slide*, a concert-length music/theater work combining the talents of Rinde Eckert (actor and singer) and Steve Mackey (composer and performer); and an original production of *Pierrot Lunaire* that combines elements of music and theater.

eighth blackbird holds residencies at the University of Richmond (since 2003), the University of Chicago (since 2000), and the Curtis Institute (since fall 2012). The group

has also held short-term residencies at The Colburn School, University of Michigan, Oberlin, Southern Methodist University, and Rice. Ensemble members are "passionate about raising the bar of chamber music performance across the United States." eighth blackbird shares its creativity and unique skill set through a wide range of residency programs, which are highly interactive and can include lectures/demonstrations, master classes, coachings, open rehearsals, discussion sessions for performers and composers, movement coaching, panel discussions, composer workshops, side-by-side rehearsals, and composer reading sessions.

In terms of organizational structure, eighth blackbird musicians originally handled all administrative work. Now they have a managing director, Jen Richards, who works with four other staff members (production stage manager, sound engineer, office manager, and director of development). The activities of the ensemble broadly break into two segments—touring, which is booked by David Liberman Artists’ Representatives and has a very businesslike character to it, and local concerts, residencies, and outreach work, with a strong community character. All the musicians serve on the board of directors. There are sixteen administrative subcommittees, each composed of one to three musicians who, with staff, make decisions covering the group’s defined area of responsibility. Programming decisions involve all six musicians.

***Fifth House Ensemble (Chicago, 2005)***

Membership (10)

Flute – 1; Oboe – 1; Clarinet – 1; Bassoon – 1; Horn – 1; Piano – 1; Violin – 1; Viola – 1; Cello – 1; Bass – 1

Known for pioneering a new genre of performance art centered around storytelling, Fifth House Ensemble (5HE) was founded in Chicago by former members of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, some of whom were also classmates at Northwestern University. Flutist and Executive Director Melissa Snoza most enjoyed working with Musicorps, a program for selected chamber groups of the Civic Orchestra devoted to music education and outreach. Snoza and several friends wanted to continue similar projects when their work with the Civic Orchestra ended, so they formed Fifth House Ensemble. The mission of 5HE is highly collaborative and focuses on creating engaging concert and educational experiences by “forging meaningful partnerships with unexpected venues, artists of other disciplines, educational institutions, and audiences of every type.” The 5HE mission embodies five core values: creative interpretation, audience engagement, revitalization of classical and modern chamber music, curriculum-integrated education programs, and entrepreneurship in higher education. All members of 5HE are currently active freelance musicians and teachers in the Chicago area, but their long-term goal is to make 5HE a full-time endeavor.

5HE presents classical and contemporary music for all ensemble configurations possible with its instrumentation. “Caught,” a program from 5HE’s signature series, is an example of the ensemble's creative programming and collaborative spirit. The program for “Caught” includes music by Shostakovich, Britten, Barber, Jan Bach, and Clint Needham, and its content was developed through community workshops led by members of 5HE. At various workshops, children and adults were asked to tell stories in response

to a thematic prompt provided by 5HE members and playwright Stan Richardson. The stories were paired with classical and modern music, and 5HE worked with a group of visual, dance, and theater artists to create accompanying multimedia content for the concert. This year “Caught” was presented at the Chicago Cultural Center and neighborhood venues through the Chicago Park District free of charge.

To develop such imaginative and involved programs, 5HE engages in a “collective dream-list process,” in which all ten members submit program ideas. Collaboration is an essential element of the program development process, and 5HE has worked with some of Chicago’s top artists across a variety of disciplines, including writers, graphic novelists, and animators. Some of the music included in these collaborations, along with other musical selections, can be heard on two recordings produced by 5HE: *Black Violet* and *Vitruvian Man*.

5HE’s involvement in education is extensive and includes collaborations in schools, residencies, workshops in higher education, and a recently launched summer festival. As a response to major cuts in arts funding in schools, 5HE engages in customizable educational programs for students in grades K-12. 5HE is currently in residence at Carthage College, and during the summer of 2012 launched “fresh inc,” a two-week chamber music festival that combines chamber music and arts entrepreneurship.

Regarding 5HE’s organizational structure, two of the ten musicians are part of the six-person staff that manages aspects of education, operations, and marketing. The organization’s first full-time managing director joined 5HE’s staff last fall and is supported by approximately ten unpaid interns. 5HE has a group of artistic advisors,

professional advisors, and a board of directors that includes one rotating musician post.

While Snoza is responsible for the majority of the business decisions, the artistic decision-making process of 5HE is highly democratic, with final decisions resulting from the input of all ensemble members.

*A Far Cry (Boston, 2007)*

Membership (16)

Violin – 9; Viola – 3; Cello – 3; Bass – 1

Conservatory students nearing the end of a degree program often confront a seemingly narrow array of options for employment: you land a big orchestra job, your chamber group “makes it,” you gain employment through teaching, OR you fail. Founding members of A Far Cry (AFC) wanted to challenge this traditional scenario, so the group of musicians, connected through various summer festivals and performing engagements, took charge of their own careers and formed their own group. Most of the group members have some connection through the New England Conservatory, but members come from Maryland, Cleveland, San Francisco, and New York. As the ensemble gradually involved more friends, the final group configuration evolved into a conductorless string orchestra of 18 core “criers,” who founded AFC in 2007. Now the group is most likely one of the most democratic musical operations—musical leadership and administrative work rotate—and the goal is to make AFC a full-time job for all members.

At the core of AFC's mission is the desire to shake up the classical music scene by “experimenting with the ways music is prepared, performed, and experienced.” The ensemble performs a wide spectrum of music, ranging from the traditional classical

canon to contemporary and commissioned work by today's composers. The performances for AFC's most recent (sixth) season are comprised of concerts at home in Boston and on tour throughout the United States and Europe. The musicians in the ensemble design the concert programs for the various venues in which AFC performs. In Boston, AFC performs self-produced concerts in which they play predominantly classical music at their resident church in Jamaica Plain (four per season) and at Jordan Hall (two per season). AFC is also a resident ensemble for two series at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston: the Avant Gardner, a showcase of contemporary music, and a classical Sunday concert series. Currently, the series at Jordan Hall, which seats roughly 1,200, is the only series that falls short of selling out. AFC has made a major effort to work within the community to establish an audience base in their hometown of Jamaica Plain, where concerts now sell out. The group has produced four recordings, which include music by Mozart, Piazzolla, Copland, Tchaikovsky, Golijov, and Handel.

The conductorless, musician-run ensemble presents a diverse repertoire with an incredible amount of energy. AFC is interested in crossover collaborations and this summer performed with ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro at Ravinia. The group is open to working with cross-disciplinary artists and multimedia but has not explored these options thus far. For their Avant Gardner series in December 2012, they performed an all-Cage program and ended with Haydn's *Farewell Symphony*. This program included staging, choreography, and lighting to enhance the music.

Developing these programs is an intricate, involved task for the criers, and they've developed a complex "axle and spoke system" to generate their concert programs. The "axle" is the crier who organizes the programming process by setting a due date for

everyone to submit program ideas. Members can submit open-ended ideas for programs, or they can flesh out a detailed description of an entire concert concept. A two- to three-hour meeting is scheduled where criers pitch their programs, and everyone discusses and challenges the ideas and listens to recordings. After ideas are discussed, the group determines which programs would be best suited for AFC's variety of audiences at Jamaica Plain, Jordan Hall, the Gardner, and touring locations. The group then takes a vote to determine whether or not each proposed program makes it into "the vault," which holds all present and past program ideas with the assumption that they may be produced at some point. The criers then get together on a three- to four-day retreat and unlock the vault to determine the programming for an entire season, which is typically established a year in advance. Ideally, the group wants to get to the point where they establish programs two to three years in advance. Many factors are considered: Will the program be well received by the audience? How many musicians and subs will be needed? Will all musicians be available for all of the performances? It is, the criers admit, a huge juggling act. Once the season's programs are decided, the group refines them over a period of two to three months.

After the programs are finalized, a "spoke" is assigned responsibility for each piece on a given program, which means that person decides the principals, researches the piece, and listens to recordings to gain a total grasp of the work. Spokes and principals work together along with the creator of the program to map out the rehearsal schedule and the overall interpretation for the program. In the rehearsals, the spokes follow a strict set of rules for each piece, which dictate such factors as how many times each musician is allowed to speak and the nature of the comments. In each rehearsal, a "spanker" keeps

track of the commentary and makes sure everyone's voice is heard. While these rules might seem like overkill, they are essential for the productivity of rehearsals. AFC is continually refining the rehearsal process and rules. Without any structure, criers believe completely democratic rehearsals would most likely be unproductive (more talking than playing).

With this kind of devotion to the details that supports the artistic side of AFC's operation, the group feels that they are starting to operate like a well-oiled machine artistically. AFC has a relatively small board of directors with four external members and two criers. They also have a board of friends who have no fiscal responsibility and just provide support in generating a buzz surrounding concerts. AFC is now managed by Lisa Sapinkopf Artists, which has helped their touring season take off. Surprisingly, touring ends up supplementing their budget for Boston concerts. For example, AFC often loses about \$8,000 at their self-produced concerts at Jordan Hall.

AFC still faces challenges in managing the administrative details of the organization. Although the group has grown tremendously, they are not at the point where any of the members can be paid a full-time salary. The group has a policy that commits members to performing two-thirds of the organization's services. The musicians and administrative assistant Kelly Reed, who joined AFC in its third year of operation, do everything from marketing to grant-writing to website maintenance. Most members will admit the administrative work is time-consuming. There are several criers who put in about 20-30 hours a week of administrative work for which they are minimally compensated. Other members cannot take on additional work or do not want to. This has created a slight point of contention in the group, and members are trying to determine

how important it is for everyone to equally share the administrative work. The group strongly opposes handing off the administrative work to a large staff.

To organize the administrative work, the criers have developed committees for marketing, development, operations, and education. There are chairs for each of these committees. The chairs meet regularly with Kelly Reed, and entire committees meet monthly to discuss artistic and administrative issues. For the time being, AFC does not want the core group of musicians to grow in number. The group has a solid guest list (subs) and acknowledges that increasing the size of the orchestra would challenge their democratic set-up.

AFC is still developing the educational aspect of their mission. The group has worked extensively with two elementary schools in Jamaica Plain and with educational programs at the Gardner. AFC also holds workshops with college and high school orchestras. As a featured group at the Entrepreneurial Musicianship expo at NEC, they help encourage current NEC students to think entrepreneurially. Still, they are trying to determine where the core of their educational mission lies: in grades K-12 or in higher education or in both?

Several factors have helped AFC grow from a student start-up to a professional touring ensemble. First, the group of young musicians is able to combine their boundless energy with a slightly rebellious streak to work toward their goal of forging a potentially new path for professional orchestras. AFC also makes a genuine effort to connect intimately with their audience through post-concert receptions, in which all of the musicians stick around to talk to audience members. The democratic set-up of AFC

requires that the leadership is always rotating, and this characteristic combined with a variety of creative programming means the sound of the group is always fresh. AFC's bold and exciting approach to music-making has helped them develop a special bond with their audience: it's almost as if they are inviting the audience to come along *with* them on their adventurous journey. An audience member gets to watch the group grow and constantly wonder, "What could they do next?" This element creates an undeniable amount of excitement and electricity.

***Alarm Will Sound (New York City, 2001)***

Membership (16)<sup>2</sup>

Flutes – 1; Oboe/English horn – 1; Clarinet/Sax – 2; Bassoon/Voice – 1;  
Horn/Keyboard/Voice/Electronics – 1; Trumpet/Electronics – 1; Trombone – 1; Percussion – 2;  
Piano – 1; Violin I/Voice/Keyboards/Accordion – 1;  
Violin/Viola/Voice/Mandolin/Banjo/Electric Guitar – 1; Viola – 1; Cello – 1; Double Bass – 1

Alarm Will Sound (AWS) emerged out of two converging conversations of graduate students Alan Pierson and Gavin Chuck at the Eastman School of Music in 1996. Pierson (current Artistic Director) and Chuck (current Executive Director) gathered a group of friends to build a large ensemble dedicated to performing new music. The student organization they created, Ossia, is still a student-run new music ensemble at Eastman. When the founding Ossia members left Eastman, they decided to take the group outside of school and formed Alarm Will Sound, which played its first concert in New York City in 2001. Almost all AWS musicians are original members of Ossia and Eastman graduates who now have individual careers and come together about once a month to rehearse and perform.

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<sup>2</sup> AWS ensemble members frequently perform multiple roles in concerts. Aside from the 16 musicians, AWS considers Alan Pierson (artistic director, conductor, keyboards), Gavin Chuck (managing director, composer), Jason Varvaro (production manager), and Nigel Maister (staging director) as "part of the band."

AWS is "dedicated to the creation, performance, and recording of today's most innovative music." As an advocate for emerging composers, AWS gravitates toward works that lend themselves to incorporating theatrical and multimedia elements. As a result, AWS performances often end up involving choreographers, visual artists, designers, and directors. A core element of AWS is the specific combination and camaraderie of the individual members; thus, they never break off into smaller ensembles. Because there is a strong sense of personal commitment to the group, they always perform with all 20 members, even when a venue requests a smaller instrumentation. Given the busy schedules of the musicians, meeting once a month is the best arrangement and actually helps keep the group's energy fresh.

In terms of programming, AWS focuses mostly on new music and does about fourteen commissions per year. AWS are the artists-in-residence at the Mizzou International Composers Festival in Columbia, Missouri. At this festival AWS performs about ten commissions, selected from an AWS-sponsored composition contest held earlier in the year. The remaining commissions are performed at their concerts throughout the year.

AWS concerts are complex in multiple ways. For example, their program "1969" involved staging, acting, multimedia, and choreography. The program uses the music of Stockhausen, Lennon, McCartney, Berio, Bernstein, and Stravinsky to tell the story of these great musicians and their desire to create a new musical world during the turmoil of the 1960s. Extending their presence in Missouri beyond the Mizzou International Composers Festival, AWS announced a three-concert season in St. Louis for 2012-2013.

AWS has recorded six albums that include the works of Reich, Aphex Twin,

Michael Gordon, and Derek Bermel.

The organizational structure and decision-making process of AWS is “musician focused.” According to Chuck, the individual members—their ideas and personalities—are just as vital to the group’s production and identity as the music they perform. AWS has a board of six directors who have artistic and/or business backgrounds. The overall decision-making process is a hybrid between strong centralized decision-making (Pierson and Chuck) and a broad participatory process. Chuck handles most non-artistic decisions, circulating his decisions and thoughts throughout the ensemble and receiving comments and feedback. A similar process is used for artistic decisions: Pierson makes most of the final decisions but the entire 20-member group meets to discuss artistic matters and agrees collectively on programming ideas and approaches. On occasion, AWS works with a publicist or booking agent but mostly members believe in drawing a significant audience through the combination of innovative programming, music presentation, and a high level of artistry. Pierson believes this joint commitment from all ensemble members to AWS’s artistic approach unifies the group and improves the quality of performances. It is worth noting that to Pierson’s dismay, this commitment and participation in the artistic process from all of the musicians is lacking in the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the more traditional orchestra for which Pierson also serves as artistic director (see appendix).

***Ensemble Dal Niente (Chicago, 2004)***

Membership (20)

Flute – 2; Oboe/English Horn – 1; Clarinet – 1; Saxophone – 1; Horn – 1; Piano – 2; Guitar – 1; Percussion – 2; Harp – 1; Voice – 2; Violin – 2; Viola – 2; Cello – 1; Bass – 1

Acclaimed as "the best local cutting-edge contemporary music group" by music critic John von Rhein of the *Chicago Tribune*, Ensemble Dal Niente includes 20 musicians playing a range of wind, brass, and percussion instruments, often conducted by Michael Lewanski. The group was founded by Kirsten Broberg, a composition student at Northwestern University and originally was composed predominantly of Northwestern and DePaul University students. Dal Niente's mission is to increase exposure to contemporary music—"from the European avant-garde, to American high modernism, to styles influenced by popular music and jazz"—through concerts, commissions, and educational initiatives. The group performs (with or without Lewanski conducting) as a large ensemble with all members or in small groups depending on the repertoire.

Members of the group actively teach and freelance in the Chicago area and are energized by the sense of adventure the group embraces. Dal Niente's seasons are usually comprised of about 16 Chicago concerts. The ensemble has performed over 100 premieres. The group's concert programs, such as *Hard Music*, *Hard Liquor*, combine diverse solo and chamber selections with multimedia. In August of 2012 Dal Niente won the Kranichstein Music Prize, the highest honor for performers at the 46th Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik (International Summer Courses for New Music) in Darmstadt, Germany.

In order to connect with audiences and make contemporary music more accessible, Dal Niente musicians and guest artists offer pre-concert discussions. Furthering their educational values, the ensemble partners with local high schools to

perform works by teenage composers. Part of the group's mission is to redesign the concert experience and thus Dal Niente explores alternative venues and concert formats, which might include various multimedia projects. Dal Niente holds residencies at Columbia College Chicago and Northwestern University and presents a variety of workshops to college students across the Midwest. Workshop topics include rehearsal technique, contemporary performance techniques, and the business of running a contemporary music ensemble.

Regarding organizational structure, musicians of Dal Niente hold staff positions as executive director, program director, and director of development. The group hopes that eventually establishing an organizational structure that better provides resources to the artists will allow them to perform and present a broader scope of innovative works at the highest level possible. The musicians are active in the group's artistic decisions and form an artist "roundtable" to develop and select program ideas. The musicians work with a board of directors and an advisory board. The board of directors meets monthly and is responsible for a significant portion of fundraising. Aside from two interns, Dal Niente recently brought on a new director of development, who is the first non-musician member of Dal Niente's team.

***International Contemporary Ensemble (New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, 2001)***  
Membership (33)

Flute – 2; Oboe – 2; Clarinet – 2; Bassoon – 1; Horn – 1; Trumpet – 2; Tuba – 1; Percussion – 2;  
Piano – 3; Harp – 2; Guitar – 1; Tenor – 1; Soprano – 1; Violin – 3; Viola – 3; Cello – 3; Bass –  
1; Artist in Residence – 1; Sound Engineer – 1

The idea for the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) was generated by a group of Oberlin grads on a Greyhound bus. With \$600 in her pocket, flutist/CEO Claire Chase subsequently founded the ensemble. The group now operates as a 33-member ensemble, flexible in size and repertoire, with winds, brass, piano, and a tenor. While the group began performing in Chicago, ICE branched out to New York City about five years ago and focuses on building a national and international presence. Currently, ICE is working on making Los Angeles another “home” city.

ICE is dedicated to “reshaping the way music is performed and experienced,” and with an ensemble of 33 leading instrumentalists, presents instrumentation ranging from one soloist to a full ensemble. ICE emphasizes that the group is not solely a performing ensemble: the members function as performers, producers, presenters, and educators with a mission to develop new works and new approaches to audience engagement.

The organization declares that “ICE is a new model for a new century.” This new model is characterized as contemporary, innovative, modular, and artist-driven. This model is embodied in the ensemble's focus on music of today's composers, sense of exploration in concert programming, and emphasis on empowering the visions of the musicians. The major artistic decisions—regarding repertoire, production, and collaborations—are made by the musicians, and thus the innovation and creativity of the organization is fueled by the combined perspectives of all its members.

While ICE predominantly focuses on contemporary music, the ensemble is open

to performing anything and chooses to describe their repertoire as “experimental, sound art, and new.” ICE has also paired old and new music together in concerts, specifically at venues like the Lincoln Center, where the focus is on enlivening the concert experience without excluding the traditional audience base. ICE's music programs over the past twelve years (over 60 concerts) include everything from solo shows in small art galleries to sold-out Lincoln Center concerts to a tour through the Amazon in Brazil. The ensemble has premiered over 500 compositions and released 12 albums on such labels as Nonesuch and Naxos. An incubator for composers called ICElab fosters ICE's main commissioning projects. Each year, following a call for proposals, ICE selects six commissions and invites the respective composers to work with ICE musicians through collaborative incubation residencies.

ICE's performances often involve audience interaction and are designed to be theatrical by incorporating such visual elements as lighting and staging. ICE believes this contributes to the positive nature of the audience's response, which is almost always enthusiastic even when the music selection is especially out of the audience's comfort zone. Musicians and staff socialize with audience members before and after shows and extend invitations to everyone to free after-concert parties.

The educational portion of ICE's activities center around the *Listening Room*, a student composition project designed as a one-day workshop or semester-long or year-long residency for students of any age and musical background. The program has reached select public schools, usually with little exposure to the arts, in Chicago and New York City. ICE also has introduced the *Listening Room* to undergraduate-level students while on tour. In addition, ICE has reached a variety of audiences through residencies at

the Lincoln Center, Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, small art galleries, and casual spaces in New York City like Roulette and the Baryshnikov Arts Center. The ensemble's national tours have included Virginia, California, and Seattle; its international tours have included Brazil, Vienna, Berlin, and Paris.

The artist-driven organizational structure of ICE is clearly essential to its mission. Four ICE musicians perform staff duties: Claire Chase serves as artistic director, Joshua Rubin (clarinet), program director, Jacob Greenberg (piano), education director, and Ross Karre (percussion), video artist, manages all video documentation. Ten musicians are involved in a special "ICEcore" committee, which provides artistic input and evaluates programs and projects. Musicians are also involved in paid artistic liaison positions for each project and take on responsibilities for managing rehearsal schedules, corresponding with musicians and collaborators, and providing general production support. Initially, Chase performed all administrative duties, but now ICE employs one full-time and three part-time-non-musician staff members, plus several rotating intern positions.

It is not a goal for ICE musicians to be employed by the organization as full-time performers, but over the next couple of years ICE is testing a new approach—supplementing performance time with administrative task time, to make 4-5 musicians “full-time” like Claire and Josh. Such roles might rotate among musicians, depending on time commitment. ICE considers musicians performing with other ensembles and pursuing a variety of projects a strength: this activity brings in outside perspectives and new ideas.

ICE has no external music advisors, only a board of twelve directors from

Chicago and New York City. The staff works with the board on such organizational issues as finance and fundraising. Typically, Chase proposes various issues at board meetings and decisions are made by voting. In terms of financial goals, ICE hopes to increase its revenues but at a slower pace than over the last few years and anticipates that artistic expenses will account for the largest portion of its budget. The organization wants to keep administrative costs low and increase corporate support and fundraising efforts.

***The Knights (New York City, 1990's)***

**Membership (37)**

Flute – 2; Oboe – 2; Clarinet – 2; Bassoon – 3; Horn – 1; Trumpet – 1; Trombone – 1; Percussion – 1; Piano – 1; Violin – 12; Viola – 4; Cello – 5; Bass – 2

The Knights began with three things: friends, fun, and a love of music. The orchestra of friends, which grew out of informal chamber music readings, has developed into a critically acclaimed orchestra whose talent and genuine love of playing together has captivated audiences worldwide. Brothers Colin and Eric Jacobsen didn't start the Knights with the goal of putting together an orchestra. As kids, the Jacobsens were allowed to stay up late watching their musical parents play with friends during chamber music reading parties at their house. Eric, a cellist, and Colin, a violinist, followed their parents' example and eventually did the same thing—invited friends over who shared a mutual love and excitement for exploring music, both old and new. These informal gatherings led to public recitals and eventually fostered the formation of a chamber orchestra. Years later, Colin and Eric continued to play with their chamber orchestra of friends, and according to Eric, “The group was beginning to stand for a quest of sorts, always searching, seeking to bring new in and put new out. So the name—the Knights—

really means something bold and true to the cause.” While the group has grown into an orchestra of about forty musicians, the core of the group and its music-making centers on chamber music and is defined by camaraderie and collaboration.

Colin and Eric are undoubtedly strong leaders who together and individually have made major contributions to the field of classical music. Most recently, the brothers were selected as recipients of the United States Artists Fellowship, a prestigious honor awarded to some of the top artists in the country and accompanied by an unrestricted \$50,000 grant. The Jacobsens' contributions and influences extend far beyond their experience as string players with the Knights. Colin composes and has premiered several works with the Knights and other well-respected ensembles while Eric serves as the Knights' conductor. Together they also founded the string quartet Brooklyn Riders, in which they play with fellow Knights Johnny Gandelsman on violin and Nicolas Cords on viola. NPR has credited their quartet with “recreating the 300-year-old form of string quartet as a vital and creative 21st-century ensemble.” Eric and Colin and other Brooklyn Riders also play with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Through their involvement with Silk Road, their friend network has literally extended across borders and has led to collaborations between the Knights and virtuosic artists from such countries as Iran and China. The diverse talents embodied by the musicians in the Knights has led to an exciting exploration of old, new, and world music.

Rather than define their core mission as an effort to do what hasn't been done before, the group's true desire is “to bring the intimacy and camaraderie of chamber music to the orchestral stage,” and as a result, they have ended up organically transforming the concert experience. The musicians of the Knights have busy and multi-

faceted careers: they include soloists, singers, teachers, and four different string quartets. Thus, it is not the goal of the group to become a full-time orchestra. Instead, they hope to become the “go-to orchestra” for new, exciting projects. However, whenever the Knights come together, there is an intensity that accompanies the “fun.” They rehearse much more than typical orchestras, sometimes all day, to adequately prepare the music. In order to maintain the energy and rehearsal schedule of the group, their ideal performance model is to come together for three blocks of time during the year: early fall, winter, and spring. This approach and goal aligns with the desire to keep the group fresh and fun: most of the busy musicians view their time with the Knights as “playtime.”

Overall, spirits of collaboration and exploration inform the Knights' programming. The musicians are not just talented classical musicians: they play in different genres, collaborate with artists outside of the United States, and compose in a variety of genres. In programming, the Knights consider everything equally. There's no push to be exotic or new—the Knights try to embrace the talent of their group members and friends and interesting collaborations have followed. According to the *New Yorker*, “Few ensembles are as adept at mixing the old with the new as the dynamic young orchestra.” Similarly, this versatility and sense of adventure has transferred to the Brooklyn Riders, which has been described as “offering true new-music chops, genre-bending innovation, and risk-taking moxie.”

While Eric and Colin are the artistic directors of the Knights, about five of the musicians are on a program committee, through which ideas circulate for various concert programs. Program ideas are generated from the creativity of members within the orchestra, and sometimes choices are venue-driven. But often the approach is to pair

pieces, over varying time periods and genres, that have a clear connection. It's the common thread between pieces on the program that they believe helps them communicate more effectively with their audience.

Regardless of what music they're playing, the Knights strive to bring their own voice and energy to the music. Says Eric, "I think the projects we've had the most fun with and that have been most fulfilling for us as a group are when we've been able to sink our teeth into a big, older piece like a Beethoven symphony or a Schubert symphony, but to also do something from our time or by one of the Knights." The Knights make an effort to program works composed by their members. For example, Colin, violinist Christina Courtin, and horn player Michael Atkinson wrote/arranged works for soprano Dawn Upshaw to premiere at a Ravinia performance of the Knights during the summer of 2012. Another example of unique programming is their collaboration with cellist Jan Vogler, which paired Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 and waltzes with the music of Jimi Hendrix in concert and on CD. This year, the Knights will tour the United States with Chinese pipa<sup>3</sup> virtuoso Wu Man performing works by Stravinsky, Harrison, Debussy, Milhaud, and Wu Man.

The Knights also stand out in their democratic rehearsal style: every musician has a voice during rehearsal. When Eric conducts, he is more of a catalyst and facilitator than a dictator, and the Knights vote whenever they reach an impasse. With all the talent in the group, there are often strong, conflicting opinions, which sometimes makes rehearsals challenging. This rehearsal style is time-consuming, and at times inefficient, but perhaps one of the most vital characteristics of the group. Eric says it "brings power and interest

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<sup>3</sup> Four-stringed Chinese instrument

to the group. It enables us to trust each other and to be free in performance. People see the collaborative spirit in which we work. Whether that brings us international acclaim or not, we are doing something we believe in.” Through this communal way of rehearsing, everyone is encouraged to contribute to the decision-making process. Although this democratic style of operating might be one of the Knights’ biggest challenges, it is a major source of growth. All of their hard work has led to many concerts, tours, and residencies across the United States and Europe. While on tour, the Knights have performed outreach activities such as side-by-side rehearsals at local schools. The Knights also have recorded five albums, two for SONY.

Besides rehearsing and performing, the Knights also come together for “Knights Camp,” a retreat they started this year so the group could spend time together that isn’t attached to a concert or professional engagement and to stress that playing with the Knights isn’t just a job with a paycheck at the end: it’s a rich and meaningful life experience. The goal of Knights Camp is to get together just to play, eat, and drink for fun. This year the retreat was at Colin and Eric’s home in Brooklyn, and the Knights cooked, improvised, did yoga, and even took baroque dancing lessons together. In the future, the group would like to take this retreat somewhere outside New York City.

The administrative organization of the Knights has developed in sync with the growth of the orchestra. The artistic director positions held by Colin and Eric are unpaid and do not rotate. While the two brothers initially did most of the administrative work themselves, they now have a managing director, Liz Mahler, as well as an administrative assistant. The Knights also work with a public relations company, 21C, and have a booking agent through Opus 3 Artists, Mary Pat Buekle, whom they view as a Knight in

her own way. Most of the administrative work is handled by Eric, Colin, and Liz, but musicians volunteer to serve on various committees for such activities as outreach, fundraising, and programming. A board of directors provides advice, helps make important connections, meets with musician committees, and assists with finances.

Financially, the majority of the group's revenue comes from performance fees. While touring is a vital part of their season, it is also very costly. A long-term goal is to increase the donor base, ideally so the income ratio reaches about 60% earned and 40% contributed. The Knights are continuing to develop their presence in New York City, where their work is limited compared to the number of concerts they play on tour. Ultimately, they want to identify their community, determine how they would like to serve it, and establish a strong presence.

### III. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Although each of the eight ensembles has its own distinct personality, the groups share a number of common characteristics.

#### *Artist-Centered*

The most common and defining characteristic of these ensembles is that they are artist-centered. Each group was conceived, founded, and developed by musicians who carry out almost all aspects of each organization's operation. In all cases, ensemble musicians choose their own leaders, establish their own work rules, and work collectively to determine and carry out the group's vision. Musicians in the participating ensembles not only have a say in the interpretation of the music they play, they also have the opportunity to have an artistic voice in almost every aspect of the organization, if they choose. Programming decisions, such as repertoire and method of performance, are also entirely musician determined. This democratic process, in which members choose to make both creative and organizational decisions together, empowers individuals, and consequently, empowers the group as a whole: individuals are encouraged to think independently and make a contribution and are given the opportunity to vote on major decisions, ranging from phrasing to programming.

#### *Chamber Music Performance Style*

While the ensembles range in size from four to forty members, each group was formed as a chamber music ensemble. Regardless of size, chamber music performance features are prevalent in each ensemble. These features include:

- a conductorless environment
- artistic equality within the ensemble
- interpretation discussed and determined collectively
- intensive listening
- rotation of musical leadership
- communication among musicians through eye contact and movement

### ***Dedication to New Music***

A strong dedication to the commissioning and performance of new music is a central characteristic of all the ensembles. While several groups focus solely on contemporary music, all the groups emphasize it and embrace the challenges and risks associated with new music. This “new music” encompasses works of different styles and genres, incorporates improvisation, and often showcases works by ensemble musicians.

This abandonment of traditional approaches to programming and presenting music enables the artists and ensembles to embrace a sense of exploration and adventure, which appears to be central to their music-making. Building a distinct and original body of repertoire not only feeds the musicians’ desire for adventure, it enables the groups to form distinct identities and personalities. To accompany their unique repertoire, some groups are exploring cross-disciplinary collaborations and creating a dynamic concert experience involving multiple art forms. Perhaps most importantly, the adventurous and exploratory mindsets of these groups keep the music-making new, fresh, and exciting. There is no sign of artistic stagnation in any of these eight ensembles.

### ***Dedication to High Artistry***

The musicians in these ensembles are committed to an extremely high performance level, personally and as an ensemble, and go to great ends to achieve desired results. Each ensemble has a high rehearsal-to-performance ratio, and members rehearse and/or work (administratively) far more hours than they are paid for. Thus, it appears psychic income is at a high enough level to inspire unyielding dedication to each group, its mission, and the group's artistic growth. To become a professional artist and to sustain a career as one, dedication to a high level of artistry is required by default. However, the high rehearsal-to-performance ratio, which is not reflected in paychecks, provides another stark contrast to traditional orchestra rehearsals, where union regulations enable musicians to pack up their instruments according to the clock. While union regulations do protect musicians, there is a "big picture" difference between many orchestras and these ensembles: job dissatisfaction runs high in large orchestras while musicians in these ensembles display a genuine desire to play together and work hours that greatly exceed pay. Perhaps this is evidence of the impact an artist-centered approach can have on the overall morale of musicians, individually and collectively in groups.

### ***Conservatory Cohorts***

All members of the ensembles researched in this study come from top music schools and conservatories where they received classical music training. A number of the musicians played together in school or in training orchestras before formalizing their ensembles. Typically, founding members were inspired by the adventure of performing

new music and excited by the possibility of charting new paths for their ensembles and the musicians who perform in them. Musicians established tight bonds through this shared devotion to exploring non-traditional careers paths, all rooted in inspired music-making. More traditional post-conservatory career tracks were lightly considered or not at all considered by musicians in these ensembles, all of whom seem to prefer the creativity and freedom that come with being a part of self-formed groups.

### ***Camaraderie***

Even for groups whose musicians lack ties from particular conservatories or training orchestras, a deep sense of camaraderie and high level of enjoyment in playing together is evident. Not only are the members choosing to make both creative and organizational decisions together, they *want* to work and perform together because they are friends and have fun making music together. This camaraderie fosters a deeply rooted loyalty among the members—to the group and to one another—that is conducive to inspired music-making. For example, according to the Knights, “The unique camaraderie within the orchestra retains the intimacy and spontaneity of chamber music in performance.” Thus, the dynamic among the group members in each ensemble contributes significantly to the artistic production. Simply put, these groups have great fun playing together.

### ***Abandonment of Tradition***

In charting new paths, these classically trained musicians have abandoned many of the traditional practices in the classical music profession. This abandonment of tradition is sometimes purposeful and characterized by a sense of rebellion; other times, it

is simply a natural result of trying something new and forming a distinct group identity. Regardless, the groups operate with a sense of freedom and have effectively broken away from dependency on conductors, the traditional audition process, union regulations, formal presentation models, bulky administration, dress codes, and the assumed need of a grand concert hall. Conductor involvement varies among the ensembles: some will never need one (TCP, 8bb, 5HE); others do not want one (AFC); and some use them in new ways when needed (AWS, Knights, Dal Niente, ICE). Because there is a strong emphasis on camaraderie and a value placed on musicians with multiple skill-sets, the traditional audition process is virtually useless to most of the ensembles and members don't foresee ever having auditions. Union regulations seem to be completely out of the picture as groups are growing at their own pace and collectively determining and agreeing on wages and working conditions. As for presentation models, organizational structure, and venues: groups have organically invented or found their own.

### ***Flexibility***

The flexibility—in terms of size, artistic decisions, and venue choices—typical of chamber groups is also a significant feature of these ensembles. Although each group has a specific membership, performances involve the core group of musicians in a variety of combinations and often involve additional musicians, hired per concert or project. While the groups vary in size, they remain artistically nimble and able to navigate a wide spectrum of music and variety of venues and audiences. In addition, venues vary widely from traditional concert halls to bars and nightclubs. All these variables require members to have an attitude of flexibility and adaptability. There seems to be almost a preference for the diversity and change inherent in such creative work. In some ways, several of the

ensembles have no choice but to be flexible: many members live in different states and lead busy, independent lives. Thus, there is an element of virtuality that makes the existence of these groups possible.

### ***Small Administrative Staff***

In most cases, administrative work is performed by the ensemble members, partially for financial reasons, but clearly also to provide a greater sense of artistic control to the ensemble and its leadership. While it is time-consuming and often tedious for musicians to also manage administrative work, the result is a unified approach centered on the art itself which runs through all aspects of the organization. Overall, the musicians' skill-sets have expanded in all ensembles, so there seems to be an openness and ability to juggle tasks and embrace new territory which might be impossible for inflexible individuals and organizations. The ensembles have been successful in forming small committees for specific purposes, such as marketing and fundraising. Groups like A Far Cry feel strongly *opposed to* handing administrative work over to a hired staff, and so they operate with just one administrative director. Other groups seem to be gradually building a very small administrative staff. About half of the groups have a booking agent.

### ***Varied Involvement in Education and Outreach***

While the nine ensembles clearly share core artistic characteristics related to their mission, leadership, and programming, they differ in their emphasis on and approach to education. While education appears important to all groups, some have solidified their approach, while others admit they are still figuring out how education fits best within

their mission. All groups have some degree of a tie to top music schools or conservatories, including Curtis, Northwestern, Oberlin, the New England Conservatory, Eastman, and Juilliard. Whether ensemble members met at a music school or formulated their group at school, education was part of their development. It seems each group is trying to find its own way to fit education into the group's activities. Several groups target schools with little or no access to the arts. Two other interesting trends are apparent: cross-disciplinary educational programs and residencies within higher education. For example, 5HE has developed music programs that can be integrated with core subjects in public schools, while TCP held a residency with Notre Dame's engineering department to explore the physics of sound. Many groups hold short- and/or long-term residencies at colleges, universities, and conservatories, which provide significant income. 5HE also recently piloted a summer festival that has an entrepreneurial focus so students can learn the ins and outs of starting their own groups.

### ***Financial Growth***

All of the ensembles researched in this study are growing from a financial standpoint: they are seeking out and successfully obtaining an increased amount of financial support from year to year. The aggregate revenues of the eight ensembles for FY 2009 were a little over \$1.8 million. Three years later, for FY 2012, the aggregate revenues were just under \$4.0 million. This means the group as a whole was experiencing a 30% per annum compound growth rate for those three years, some higher, some lower, but still substantial. This is a high growth rate even in the for-profit world.

Looking a little more deeply, the aggregate contribution revenue of the group was growing during this period at a hectic rate of 38% per annum, while aggregate program

income was growing at a rate of 23% per annum. The growth in contribution income permitted a heady expansion of composition commissioning, which over the period resulted in a substantial addition to the inventory of new music by an increasingly diverse list of composers. The overall indication is that most of the ensembles are continuing to be in demand for concerts and residencies and will again experience positive growth in the current fiscal year.

It is interesting to note that except for ICE (net worth over \$500,000), the remaining seven ensembles had in FY 2012 an average net worth of under \$50,000. By most standards, these entities would be considered quite undercapitalized and just barely scraping by. This pattern has worked thus far, but a major need of these organizations is to obtain more support from foundations, corporations, and wealthy individuals. The ensembles need to be boosted with significant multi-year surpluses in order to achieve a capital base that will sustain them through changing organizational and economic circumstances.

Although all the ensembles report financial growth, questions remain regarding development and sustainability: Can members continue to work many more hours than they are compensated for as their personal and professional lives develop? Can the ensembles continue to grow financially without employing a larger staff, specifically in the area of development? How will the ensembles adapt to increasingly competitive funding? How will advancing age affect these entities as they face personnel turnover, the difficulty of sustaining vigorous performance schedules, and retirement?

It is difficult to speculate, but given the challenges facing the world of classical music today, it seems there will certainly be a demand for the musical services and skill-

sets these musicians are honing, both in the professional performance arena and in higher education.

#### **IV. APPLICABILITY TO LARGER ORGANIZATIONS**

Of the eight vibrant, dynamic, and entrepreneurial ensembles that we studied, the largest group has 37 members. Considering our interest in the functioning of larger-scale musical organizations, we posed the following questions: Do the common organizational policies and practices of these dynamic ensembles have any applicability to larger musical arts organizations? Specifically, could some or all of the shared characteristics of these ensembles be embraced by symphony orchestras? A typical symphony orchestra has a musician membership of 50 to 90 players as well as a supporting staff and an active oversight governance group, resulting in a total organizational size of 70 to 150 persons, excluding in most cases extensive volunteer support and auxiliary groups. Obviously, the difference in size impacts organizational structure. A central common characteristic of the ensembles in our study is that each was consciously established with an organizational structure and operating procedures that sharply contrast with those of traditional symphony orchestras. They operate, as we say, “without a dependency on conductors, the traditional audition process, union regulations, formal presentation models, bulky administration, dress codes, and the assumed need of a grand concert hall.” For many reasons, it is hard to imagine that the musicians, staff, and boards of a traditional symphony orchestra would so radically alter their long established

organizational structures and practices in these ways.<sup>4</sup> In which case, how might the characteristics that contribute to the vibrancy of the ensembles in this study be applied to larger musical organizations *other than* established symphony orchestras?

Could a large musical arts organization—one capable of playing symphonic repertoire and a wide range of chamber music—be created from scratch, or *de novo*, in such a way as to incorporate all or most of the common characteristics we have identified in these thriving “alternative ensembles”? We note that A Far Cry has already moved up to the size of a chamber orchestra and the Knights to the size of a small symphony orchestra, and both present symphonic repertoire in concerts either by using their core membership or by supplementing their ensemble with non-member musicians. The other six ensembles have expressed no interest in expanding beyond their present size.

Suppose a group like the Knights chose to add permanent members to perform works like Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 or a Mahler symphony? Would it be possible for a cohort of musicians to succeed in building a symphony orchestra following the policies and procedures of the alternative ensembles we have described? Or in another approach, might five to ten chamber groups join together and draw selectively on other individual musicians to form a symphony orchestra of approximately 60 to 80 members, which would play together for special occasions or on a sustained basis? These are some of the possibilities to explore.

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<sup>4</sup> We know from the long years of effort by the Symphony Orchestra Institute to bring about change in the structure, patterns, and practices of the traditional symphony organization that the institutional organizational model in this field is essentially impervious to change. Also, as part of our fieldwork, we completed a review of the Brooklyn Philharmonic (BP) and concluded that it was not of the same genre as the other eight organizations we were studying. It is, however, an example of a “change agent” working within a traditionally structured symphony orchestra in an attempt to bring about positive change. We thought it would be appropriate to include our observations of the BP in a separate appendix to this study.

It is clear even within our eight groups that the larger the membership, the more delegation and specialization are needed, which would certainly apply to a larger "alternative" symphony organization. However, the founders of even a large alternative orchestra might find creative ways to govern and manage, possibly drawing upon many teams, and teams within teams. On the other hand, there may be fundamental, "natural" limitations to incorporating small group behavioral practices and attitudes into larger organizations. For instance, a member of the Third Coast Percussion quartet, in rehearsals and performances, statistically spends between 15 and 25 times the amount of time engaged intimately with each colleague in music-making as compared with the time he would spend in a 60- to 90-member orchestra. Collegial listening and communication by eye contact and physical gestures become increasingly more difficult as the group expands toward orchestral size. The effect of size expansion is also a reason why a larger ensemble, generally in the 25- to 30-member size range, needs a conductor to provide a common beat and maintain cohesion and balance. Even with the most collegial of conductors, orchestras quite naturally begin to cede interpretation to the conductor, reducing the participative role of the musicians.

Besides being artist-centered, another common characteristic of our eight ensembles is their devotion to new music. This devotion involves commissioning new music and working extensively with composers, an involved creative process that essentially uses the ensemble as a laboratory for testing new musical ideas. As noted previously, new music generally assures an exciting and almost daring challenge to individual and overall ensemble artistry. The Knights and A Far Cry have a repertoire of "old music," and even AWS has occasionally performed repertoire that stretches back to

the medieval period, so it is clear that a motivation to play both old and new music in a fresh and exciting way is possible. However, it is unclear whether there are very many, if any, recently formed ensembles of orchestral size that remain dedicated to the old canon of classical repertoire, or even place a strong emphasis on balancing the new and the old. Why is this the case? First, new music appeals to a certain segment of younger, risk-oriented, highly talented, entrepreneurial musicians who choose to sidestep the constraining and bureaucratic aspects of the traditional musical arts "system" in their communities.

Suppose such musicians were encouraged to organize and build a symphony organization on their own terms: conductor(s) could be chosen and retained by the musicians; ensemble membership could be based on a high level of artistry and camaraderie without the formal audition process; participation in the decision-making of the organization could be shared by musicians; the size of staff could be minimized and musicians could contribute to administrative work; musicians could draw up a charter governing personnel policies and practices, eliminating the need for a collective bargaining agreement. The organization could be truly artist-centered.

A major barrier to the development of such alternative orchestra organizations, however, is funding. Once again, in most metropolitan areas, a traditional symphony organization occupies a central, monopolistic position. For many years, supporting the local symphony orchestra has been the *mantra* of classical music patronage in communities. Audiences do contribute and provide a strong financial base for most orchestras, but the funding gap that is the difference between life and death for most organizations is filled by a relatively few wealthy families, headquarter corporations, and

local foundations. Despite the conflict and dysfunction in many organizations and the “model being broken,” this method of funding continues. Some of these donors, especially local foundations, need to begin to provide encouragement and funding to the alternative orchestras that we believe could emerge in many cities.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Each ensemble in our study encompasses a group of musicians absolutely dedicated to their personal craft, to the artistry of the ensemble, to the discovery and performance of new music often generated by their own commissioning, and ultimately, to the engagement of a growing audience base and an expanding brand recognition. Each ensemble has some organizational practices that are unique and distinguishing, but at the same time, a number of characteristics run through all of the groups. This blend of characteristics seems to foster creativity and produce especially vibrant concert experiences: music-making is infused with an electric energy, multiple art forms are being explored to enhance the presentation of music, and groups are taking an adventurous approach to creating new works and unique performances. There is an enthusiasm and cohesiveness in these ensembles that is not generally found in larger musical arts organizations.

The dedication to new music, performed with high personal and group artistry, is a common characteristic and is drawing a rather special audience, many of whom are "fans" of a particular ensemble as if it were a rock band. Ensemble leaders tell us that their audiences are growing and diversifying. Through recordings, touring, and

residencies, some ensembles are building a national, if not international, reputation and audience base.

The larger ensembles are the size of chamber ensembles or smaller symphony orchestras and play some symphonic repertoire. On balance, however, there is little incentive among the studied ensembles to grow in size and test their successful organizational practices within a much larger context. Further, to the authors' knowledge there are relatively few, if any, symphony organizations that have been, or are being formed *de novo* to perform the "old" canon of repertoire with the same artist-centric, intensive chamber music style, zest, and joyfulness of the typical ensemble in our study.

Thus, it is unclear the degree to which the organizational practices followed by our studied ensembles can be applied to larger musical arts organizations, such as symphony orchestras. It would appear that a number of these practices could be adopted in modified ways. The authors look forward to experimentation in that regard, and institutional funding that encourages such innovation. It may well be that what will work in larger organizations will be more of a hybrid mix of traditional and artist-centered structures and practices of the type that are being developed in The Chicago Philharmonic Society.

## **VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This report represents an initial effort to study and compare eight unique, successful, vibrant chamber music ensembles with particular emphasis on their organizational patterns and structures, and to question the applicability of these organizational features to larger scale musical arts organizations. We believe we have just covered the surface of what is taking place in these organizations (and perhaps many others in the nation).

We hope, with the cooperation of ensemble members involved, that experts in organizational dynamics might find it of interest to study some of these organizations in greater depth over a longer period of time, and apply scholarly techniques and disciplines in their study and analyses.

We suggest that a further path for research is to learn more about the audiences these ensembles are attracting and serving—directly in their self-produced concerts and indirectly through university and college residencies. There is something rather magical taking place between these ensembles and their audiences and we believe a greater understanding of these phenomena—through audience research—might have significant implications for all musical arts organizations.

A further path of research related to audience research would be to explore the musical programming of these and other similar ensembles. Such studies would 1) probe the significance of the new music emphasis on the ensembles' longer-term success and sustainability, 2) help determine the role, if any, for the traditional classical canon of repertoire, and 3) determine implications regarding repertoire choices for traditional musical arts organizations predominantly performing the classical canon.

Finally, these ensembles would benefit from a comparative analysis of their financial operations—along with some forecasting and projections—to better understand their sustainability and what needs to be done to assure their longer-term success and the economic needs of their members.

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## VIII. APPENDIX

### ***Brooklyn Philharmonic (New York City, 1957)***

Membership (59)

Violin – 20; Viola – 7; Cello – 6; Bass – 6; Flute – 3; Oboe – 2; Clarinet – 2; Bassoon – 3;  
French horn – 1; Trumpet – 2; Trombone – 2; Timpani – 1; Percussion – 2; Harp – 1; Piano – 1

Alan Pierson's talent and creativity had to extend into the more traditional realm of classical orchestral music in 2011 when he became artistic director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Founded in 1957, the Brooklyn Philharmonic in most ways doesn't fall under the category of a "new, emerging ensemble," but the direction in which Pierson is taking the orchestra *is* alternative and exciting and has been characterized as a "rebirth." Pierson joined the Brooklyn Philharmonic, an orchestra that faced major financial challenges and needed rebooting, after a canceled season and a long history of turmoil. Because the orchestra's approach clearly needed to be revamped artistically and financially, Pierson set out to make the philharmonic *Brooklyn's* orchestra. Both Pierson acknowledged the importance of fitting into the community. Pierson noted, "The nature of really connecting the orchestra to its community is NOT to go in and say, well, this is what an orchestra does, so this is what we're going to do here." Instead of imposing a traditional concert series on Brooklyn residents, Pierson picked three of Brooklyn's culturally diverse neighborhoods and designed programs that embody and reflect the culture of the given communities.

With Brighton Beach, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and downtown Brooklyn as concert platforms, Pierson created programs *after* asking residents from each neighborhood what musical experiences would be meaningful to their communities. In Brighton Beach, a

predominantly Russian immigrant community, Pierson found a Russian composer to transcribe the music of old Russian cartoons, which community members remembered fondly from childhood, and the orchestra performed the cartoon music with video footage of the cartoons in the background. In Bedford-Stuyvesant, a neighborhood home to many well-known hip-hop artists, the Brooklyn Phil held a competition for local DJs to submit remixes of Beethoven's third symphony. At the Bedford-Stuyvesant concert, the winning remix was played alongside the original version of the symphony and the concert featured famous hip-hop artist Mos-Def, a Bedford-Stuyvesant native. Under Pierson's leadership, the repertoire of the Brooklyn Phil now clearly crosses genres, styles, and time periods. The orchestra also initiated *The Outside-In Fellowship*, which pairs non-orchestral musicians with Pierson and Brooklyn Phil's resident composer-mentor Randall Woolf to create new orchestral works. Through Pierson's bold efforts, the Brooklyn Phil is possibly forging a new direction for symphony orchestras. Composer David T. Little has said, "Alan's vision and the direction the Brooklyn Phil is taking now—it's really reconsidering what an orchestra concert can be."

While the Brooklyn Phil does not hold any official residencies, its commitment to education is clear through its in-school programs, youth orchestra, and family workshops that make the orchestra "the largest provider of free education to schools in Brooklyn and the second largest (after the Carnegie Corporation of New York) in New York City."

To Pierson's dismay, the organizational structure and decision-making processes of the Brooklyn Phil are quite traditional: the CEO, music director, board of directors, and small staff mostly work separately from one another and without the input of the musicians. Pierson acknowledges the difference between his role as artistic director for

Brooklyn Phil and AWS: while AWS members contribute to most artistic decisions, Brooklyn Phil musicians rarely participate in the artistic process of developing a concert series. While Pierson is trying to bring musician-focused decision-making into the picture, he admits there are challenges. “Orchestral musicians don't necessarily expect or want that type of involvement...I think it's challenging to try to take an ensemble that was created around one sort of model and convert it to another one.”

Given its unstable financial history, the Brooklyn Phil will need time to regain stability. However, everything about Pierson and Dare’s first season with the orchestra points towards growth. Dare has detailed strategies for bringing innovation into the traditional nonprofit business model, which has suffered in many arts organizations, and Pierson's creative ideas for programming appear to be endless.

## **IX. ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Each of the authors currently is highly involved in an “orchestra organization.”

Emily Wozniak is a hornist, educator, and entrepreneur actively realizing a vision to make classical music vital and relevant to contemporary culture. A graduate student at the Eastman School of Music, Emily is the founder and artistic director of Sound ExChange, an organization devoted to reinvigorating the way music is presented and experienced. Through Sound ExChange, Emily leads a variety of community-based musical projects involving collaborations within the fields of medicine, visual art, multimedia, and modern dance. Emily has secured funding for Sound ExChange initiatives through Eastman’s New Venture Challenge, the New York State Business Plan Competition, Kickstarter, and a grant from the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

Emily continues to build upon administrative and artistic experience to further her vision. Most recently, she was hired to join the Development Department at the Aspen Music Festival during the summer of 2013. Previously, she interned with the Arts and Cultural Council for Greater Rochester, Eastman Community Music School, and the Rochester Oratorio Society. As a performer, she has participated in summer music festivals at Aspen and Sarasota and with the Youth Orchestra of the Americas. An advocate for music education, Emily taught extensively in Houston public schools for two years and continues to design educational programs for Sound ExChange. Combining her interests in performance and education, Emily wrote a semester-long outreach curriculum and received funding to partner Sound ExChange musicians with a local Rochester public school in the fall of 2013.

Paul R. Judy was raised in Indiana, graduated in 1953 from Harvard College cum laude and from the Harvard Business School in 1957 with high distinction. He was employed by A. G. Becker & Co. Inc., investment bankers, from 1958 to 1981, having served as Chief Executive from 1965 to 1978. Mr. Judy founded the Symphony Orchestra Institute in 1993 and in 2004, upon the termination of the Institute, conveyed its resources to the Eastman School of Music.

In January, 2012, Mr. Judy became Chairman and Chief Executive of The Chicago Philharmonic Society, the parent organization to the Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra and its various chamber music groups. The Society was founded in 1988 by a group of players from the orchestra of the Lyric Opera wishing to perform a symphonic repertoire. Over the years they were joined by a range of highly talented classical musicians in the Chicago area to form what is now a “community” of over 200

performing members of the Society. All through the years the Society has had strong musician leadership. Commencing in early 2012, the Society embarked on the establishment of a musician-governed and artistically driven organization with musicians taking important leadership roles in the board and its committees dealing with artistic programming and musician personnel matters. In addition, a musician advisory council has been formed consisting of some 30 performing members who have committed to high organizational interest and involvement, and who serve as a sounding board for management and a proxy for the larger musician community.

The Society currently presents five symphony orchestra concerts per annum in Evanston, a northern suburb of Chicago; a number of chamber music presentations in other suburban venues; and a range of contracted orchestra services for Ravinia, the Lyric, Salute to Vienna, and a Musical Paradigm, along with over 50 performances per annum as the exclusive orchestra of the Joffrey Ballet.

A musical ensemble, also known as a music group or musical group, is a group of people who perform instrumental or vocal music, with the ensemble typically known by a distinct name. Some music ensembles consist solely of instruments, such as the jazz quartet or the orchestra. Some music ensembles consist solely of singers, such as choirs and doo wop groups. In both popular music and classical music, there are ensembles in which both instrumentalists and singers perform, such as the rock band or the But any future successes for Purdue Musical Organizations seemed far from certain. To broaden the horizons of his students and to begin sharing music and business beyond the Purdue campus, initial contacts were made with a potential show sponsor in Indianapolis, sparking what would soon become a steady stream of income-generating performance opportunities. Additional ensembles culled from the already-existing membership of Purdue Musical Organizations also played an important role in the history of PMO.