

# Backstage

With the Seattle Symphony and Opera Players

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**A bass player performs behind a row of screens as audition committee members listen in Benaroya Hall. Personnel Manager Ron Simon sits nearby onstage.**

## Symphony auditions: Exhaustive and exhausting

Musicians work very hard in deciding who they want as orchestra members

**M**aking decisions by committee is the subject of many good jokes. But, when it comes to choosing new members of the orchestra, the Seattle Symphony musicians rely on exhaustive committee work. And they wouldn't have it any other way.

Orchestra members' input in deciding who to hire for vacancies is a responsibility they take very seriously, and one they have struggled to win over the years. Their role on audition committees is spelled out in detail in the contract between the SSOPO and the symphony, in a process devised both to be fair to all applicants for orchestra positions and to ensure that the winners satisfy everyone—from musicians to Music Director Gerard Schwarz.

The audition procedures are being implemented as never before this spring, as the symphony fills an unusually large number of vacancies. Between late April and late June, the orchestra will choose up to eight new members.

### How the process works

Audition preparations are largely handled by the symphony's two personnel managers (see article on pages 4–5), who ensure that openings are internationally advertised several months in advance. Ron Simon and Sande Gillette schedule three sets of auditions for each instrument: a preliminary round, semi-finals and finals, all of which must be arranged around the orchestra's rehearsal and performance schedule. And they notify bassoonist Paul Rafanelli that audition committees are needed—which sets off an intense round of work on his part, and on the part of those who serve on the committees.

The current SSOPO contract (implemented in 2001) stipulates that the orchestra will provide an adjunct committee of 10 players to judge the applicants for each vacant position. Thus, this spring Paul's assignment was to organize elections for five different audition

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*Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this issue are the work of clarinetist Larey McDaniel.*

PHOTOS AT TOP: ROBIN BARTHOLICK (LEFT AND RIGHT-CENTER), DAN LAMONT (LEFT-CENTER AND RIGHT)



# Our biggest challenge: balancing artistic excellence and fiscal viability

By Tim Hale, viola

*Tim is completing his 19th season with the Seattle Symphony. He chaired the Orchestra Committee for several years, and he has negotiated collective bargaining agreements covering more than 15 consecutive symphony seasons.*

The front-page feature article in this issue focuses on auditions, and the tremendous amount of effort the musicians contribute to choosing new members of the orchestra. We do it because it's an essential part of our professional life. The players work very closely together, day after day and night after night, and most of us will spend the remainder of our careers in the Seattle Symphony. It is, therefore, crucial that we choose the right people for the orchestra.

It is also crucial that the symphony provide a wage and benefit package that will attract and retain the highest-quality musicians. Part of the responsibility for crafting that package falls on us, the players, through collective bargaining. It is always a delicate balance: the parallel and sometimes conflicting priorities of artistic growth and financial stability.

## Taking the lead

Last fall, the musicians voted to send a representative group to meet

*“ . . . the most important long-term goal we are intent on achieving is for the symphony to finally accrue an endowment that is appropriate for the size and status of the organization.”*

with management to look for ways to ease current financial challenges. We offered to delay the pay increase mandated by our current contract to begin in February, to cancel a raise contractually required to begin next season, and to share in the rising cost of health care benefits. These concessions would require significant belt-tightening on the musicians' part, but we were willing to make sacrifices for the long-term viability of the symphony.

What we sought in return was an extension of our current contract. Symphony management and board representatives were unwilling to consider our ideas because of their inability to make commitments affecting any future seasons, so the talks stopped.

Several months later, management asked to revive the talks, and the musicians readily agreed. In addition to re-considering salary adjustments and novel ways of handling our health care premiums, we provided a long list of suggestions about new options the musicians might support to help improve the symphony's financial situation.

## Pension considerations

While management has expressed concern about the cost of maintaining our pension plan, musicians' pensions are so low that no one is suggesting we make concessions in that area; rather, we are applying our creativity to devise ways to improve the pension benefit without adding to the symphony's financial burden. We

have even offered to help fund improvements by drawing down the account containing our aggregated recording royalty payments.

This and the other strategies we are suggesting stem from our determination to help balance artistic excellence with budgetary constraints for the long-term health of the organization.

## Our best interests

Perhaps the most important long-term goal we are intent on achieving is for the symphony to finally accrue an endowment that is appropriate for the size and status of the organization. The musicians agree that this task is crucial to the orchestra's future. Readers of *Backstage* will recall that two years ago the players pledged \$100,000 of their work dues toward the endowment as a tangible symbol of its importance. We are asking that symphony management and the board of directors also make a specific commitment to raise funds for the endowment.

The players are willing to consider concessions like foregoing the pay increases we were guaranteed and paying more of our own health care costs because we understand the imperative of reaching a balance of artistic excellence and financial stability. The musicians believe our offers achieve that balance.

At press time, we have yet to reach an agreement with management. But we remain committed to this institution, to this city, to our audiences, and to the music we cherish. 1

# Auditions: exhaustive and exhausting

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committees, based on the stipulations in the contract—which include specifications for the composition of the committees.

The entire orchestra votes via ballot on the candidates for each audition committee. “In effect, the players are giving their proxy to hire someone. So the balloting for audition committee members is very important and is taken seriously,” according to Paul.

Each audition committee elects its own chair, and that individual and the music director then choose the repertoire that candidates will be required to play. The committee’s work begins with listening to tapes rather than “live” candidates, because of an unusual feature of the symphony’s audition procedures.

## Two ways to audition

Job candidates, usually numbering in the hundreds, submit resumés as the first step in the application process. They are reviewed by the personnel managers, who typically invite about 40 percent of the candidates to play an audition on the basis of the resumés. However: those who are not immediately invited are asked to submit an audio tape or CD of their playing, to provide additional evidence of their expertise. “The tape/CD process is a very, very important one,” according to Sande. “We have had several people win jobs in recent years by sending us tapes as a first step. Asking for a recording ensures we hear the best candidates, including those who do not yet have a strong resumé with significant orchestral jobs because they have only recently completed their education.”

Audition committee members listen to the submitted tapes, without seeing the resumés, and vote on which additional individuals should be invited to play an audition. This portion of the audition process alone is very time-consuming, since there can be as many as 50 tapes per audition.

From the tape review sessions onward, the protocol for the audition committee is guided by an important consideration: the members are to know nothing about the identities of the candidates until the final round of playing—not names, not alma maters, not the orchestras with which they currently play. “It’s an essential part of our commitment to fairness,” according to Paul.

Consideration of applicants’ time and expense is also a key factor in the procedures. During the preliminary round of playing, when



***A violinist prepares for his audition in one of the practice rooms backstage in Benaroya Hall. These spaces win kudos from job applicants because they provide the musicians a place to warm up and wait for their audition in privacy—an amenity not found in many American orchestra halls.***

there may be 50 or more contenders for a single seat, an individual may be thanked and dismissed midway through the specified repertoire if his or her playing is obviously below the level required. But those who make it to the semi-final and final rounds are always allowed to play the complete repertoire, as a mark of respect for their professionalism and effort.

A member of the SSOPO Orchestra Committee sits in on all auditions, functioning as a steward to ensure the procedures are followed exactly. “The entire process is scripted in the master agreement,” according to Sande. “Even the scope of the allowable conversation among the members of the audition committee is spelled out.”

## Screened for anonymity

All three audition rounds are held over an intense period of three to four days, so that candidates (who compete at their own expense) make only one trip to Seattle. During the preliminary and semi-final rounds, applicants play onstage, behind a screen, while the audition committee members listen from the audience. They vote on which individuals to advance to the next round, with five out of 10 “yes” votes required. The applicants are immediately told who has been selected.

For the final round, the screen is removed so that committee members and applicants can see one another, and Maestro Schwarz sits with the

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# Auditions: exhaustive and exhausting

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**Bassoonist Paul Rafanelli, who organizes the audition committees**

committee. Any candidate who gets six or more committee votes of approval is eligible to be offered the job; the music director makes the final choice.

There is no way to know in advance exactly how many candidates will be heard in each round, since the choices are based on the quality of playing at each step rather than on filling a set quota.

Fifty-five musicians came to Seattle in April for the English horn auditions, out

of more than 200 who initially applied, and Ron says those numbers are not unusual. The largest audition in symphony history, to his knowledge, brought in 132 candidates for two clarinet vacancies—out of hundreds more who initially applied.

An example of the workload for the audition committees and the personnel managers: During the English horn auditions, the “listening”—not counting the review of recorded music before applicants were invited to appear—consumed 25 hours.

## Unexpected outcomes

Sometimes, after exhausting effort on everyone’s part, no candidate is hired at the close of an audition process. This has occurred three times in Seattle in the past year, and the phenomenon is an unfortunate trend in many orchestras,

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## Personnel managers guide auditions—while playing fulltime in the orchestra

Two key individuals in the Seattle Symphony Orchestra’s audition process are its personnel managers—who symphony patrons regularly see onstage, because they are also performing musicians. Personnel Manager Ron Simon plays the bass, and Assistant Personnel Manager Sande Gillette is a second violinist.

This arrangement is neither unheard of nor universal among major symphonies. While there is no agreement among American orchestras about a “perfect” personnel system, members of the Seattle Symphony say they appreciate the fact that their personnel managers are performing professional musicians who intimately understand the demands of their work. For instance, they are uniquely qualified to choose musicians from the “extras” roster when additional players are needed for particular performances, because they know the repertoire backward and forward.

Both Ron and Sande are long-time members of the orchestra: Ron is a second-generation player whose father, also a bass player, was the symphony’s personnel manager from 1973 until his retirement in 1985. Ron had watched the seemingly endless obligations his father fulfilled as both a musician and a personnel manager, and he accepted the latter job 20 years ago only on the condition that he could have an associate. Thus Sande, who had joined the orchestra in 1967 with a brand-new master’s degree in music performance, became assistant personnel manager later in 1985.

## Administering the contract

The pair describes themselves, first and foremost, as contract administrators. The SSOPO’s master agreement with the symphony spells out personnel policies and procedures in exquisite detail, and it is Ron and Sande’s job to ensure the procedures

are followed to the letter. Sande had been the union steward and Ron had participated in SSOPO negotiations before accepting their personnel jobs, and thus had developed the insight into management issues that has proved crucial to the many responsibilities.

Their dual roles make them two extremely busy people—even without the additional demands of auditions, tours and other special events. Ron’s personnel job is a fulltime one, and Sande’s is two-thirds—although they accrue far more than the designated hours. One of the two is always onsite when the orchestra is rehearsing or performing—including the times when the players are divided, with some comprising the orchestra for a Seattle Opera production while the others play Baroque concerts or other performances that do not require the full complement of 85+ musicians. During the run of an opera

according to Paul. “Sometimes no one meets the musicians’ expectations in terms of expertise, style and ‘fit’ with the orchestra. And sometimes candidates are offered the job but end up turning it down. Those are difficult situations; it’s demoralizing for both the audition committee and the applicants when we work through the entire audition process and don’t end up with a new orchestra member.”

### **Seattle hospitality— and professionalism**

Orchestra members work at ensuring that all job candidates feel well treated, whether or not they advance beyond the preliminary round. Sande says there is ongoing evidence the players succeed in their commitment. “Most of our applicants have also played auditions for numerous other orchestras, and we often get compliments on how we handle auditions here in Seattle: how helpful and friendly everyone is, how smoothly and fairly we run things.”

According to Ron, “We use the review of resumés and tapes as a way to limit the number of candidates invited to Seattle to audition. Some orchestras invite virtually everyone who applies, and then have to deal with overwhelming numbers of people. We, however, don’t want applicants to go to the expense of making a trip to Seattle unless they are solid contenders for an opening. And we don’t want the process to be like a cattle call. We know how much work and money have gone into a musician’s preparation for an audition, and we are committed to treating our applicants accordingly.” 1

***For a revealing look at the intense competition facing symphony musician hopefuls, check out [www.musicalchairs.info](http://www.musicalchairs.info). The site lists the openings in orchestras all over the world—a pitifully small number, considering the hundreds of highly qualified individuals who graduate from conservatories and prestigious university music departments each year.***



***Bass player and personnel manager Ron Simon***

***Sande Gillette, second violinist and assistant personnel manager***

production, one of the personnel managers works from their backstage office at Benaroya Hall while the other is at McCaw Hall with the opera orchestra.

The demands of personnel work are presumably a key reason behind an apparent trend for orchestras to have non-playing personnel managers, according to Ron. “But most seem to have managers who were players at one time, usually with other orchestras. It would be difficult for an

individual who was never a member of an orchestra to understand the musicians’ needs and perspective.”

### ***Walking the center line***

Ron and Sande “walk the center line,” as Sande puts it, between musicians and symphony management. Where personnel matters are concerned, they report to Orchestra Manager Jennifer Adair. But they are also voting members of the SSOPO, the musicians’ bargaining unit. Because they interface with management and are considered supervisors, they absent themselves from SSOPO meetings when personnel matters are discussed. “The musicians need to be

able to speak freely when there are issues,” Ron says, “and we wouldn’t want our presence to interfere with that. Our job requires that we be able to provide advice and feedback to both musicians and management.”

A complication of this system of musicians-as-personnel-managers is that Ron and Sande must fit their personnel work, including the arduous auditions process, around the orchestra’s rehearsals and performances. The two have been virtually living in their backstage office this spring as a result, and they say there is no alternative. They remember what it was like to be competing for an orchestra job, and are determined to ensure that the process is as fair and comprehensive as it can be—for the benefit of both the musician applicants and the orchestra, which is likely to have the successful candidates in its midst for many years. 1

# Retiring musicians went the extra miles—literally

The Seattle Symphony Orchestra is populated with musicians who went the extra mile to study classical music. They gave up other endeavors; they borrowed money; they spent untold hours practicing.

But two who are retiring this spring may be the only ones who will admit to having routinely hitchhiked significant distances to get to and from their lessons and playing commitments.

**Glen Danielson**, who is completing 38 years as the principal English horn player, also resorted to hitching rides on freight trains a few times because he was attempting to simultaneously finish his music degree at Milton College in Wisconsin and play in the Waukesha Symphony. His evening rehearsals in Waukesha ended later than the last bus back to his campus 40 miles away, so Glenn either begged rides or talked a train crew into giving him a ride. He would wait at the café where they had coffee before departing, and then they would allow him to nap in the caboose on the way back to Milton.

## The Liberace factor

Glen had grown up in West Allis, Wisconsin: “Liberace’s hometown,” he says with his trademark grin. He didn’t start oboe lessons until ninth grade, but then was lucky enough to have “one of the very best oboe instructors of my whole life” as his first teacher. The teacher also played with the Waukesha Symphony, and it was through him that Glen was hired as second oboist when he began college. “So the very first orchestra I ever played with was a paying job . . . and Beethoven’s *Ninth* was the first thing we performed. What a start!”

Armed with a bachelor’s degree in music, Glen taught

music in parochial schools and played with the Milwaukee Symphony before enrolling at the University of Illinois to earn a master’s degree in music education.

After several more years of teaching, he won a job as second oboist for Chicago’s Lyric Opera, but the musicians went on strike during his second season there. “The Seattle Symphony manager called, looking for Lyric players who might be interested in an oboe opening they had, and I jumped at the chance. But, when I got to Seattle, I discovered that what they really needed was an English horn player.

“Milton Katims offered me an oboe job, with a good deal of English horn also required. I didn’t even own a horn at that time, so Bernie Shapiro loaned me his. A few years later I moved to a fulltime English horn position.”

## A “little obsessive”

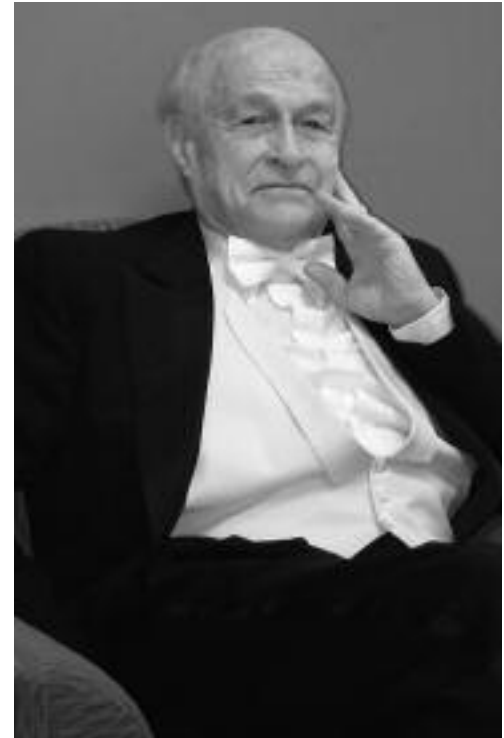
Like many of his colleagues, Glen has taught individual students throughout his career. “I liked working with just a few people, and very intensively. We symphony musicians are all a little obsessive, you know.” (The grin appears again.) “Healthy, normal people don’t work that hard on a single passage of music. I practiced at Benaroya Hall until 2:30 in the morning when we were getting ready for Carnegie Hall last spring.”

Highlights from his 38 musical years in Seattle? “Playing the Shostakovich *Eighth* with Gerry Schwarz a few years ago was memorable. He’s mad for both Mahler and Shostakovich, you know, and it made the experience all the more special. The *Eighth* has a 3½-minute English horn solo—which may be the longest solo in the English horn repertoire except for the one in *Tristan und Isolde*. For *Tristan*, which Seattle Opera has produced twice with about 15 performances, I was up onstage by myself, playing out of sight while a shepherd mimed the music.”

Glen, who is known in the orchestra for his good humor and quick wit, credits his fellow musicians with creating a convivial atmosphere among the players. “Among America’s great orchestras, I’m convinced this one is the most versatile and congenial,” he says. “The players really talk to each other, and they help each other out. My colleagues have been wonderful, and I will miss them.”



**Glen Danielson, principal English horn**



**Violinist Martin Friedmann**

**Violinist Martin Friedmann** immigrated from Vienna with his family when he was 11. They settled in Goshen, Indiana, where his father, a historian, found work in a small Mennonite college and his mother taught piano. Because there was no good violin teacher in the community, Martin began hitchhiking 150 miles each way to bi-weekly lessons in Chicago with a violin teacher who had been a member of the Vienna Philharmonic. Martin paid for the lessons with his earnings from a paper route that required him to be out on the streets of Goshen by 4 a.m.

His determination helped him win a scholarship to Juilliard, where he studied with Ivan Galamian—probably the most famous of all violin teachers at that time.

After completing a master's degree in music performance, Martin decided to travel the world. "Two things inspired me to go to Asia," he remembers. "I wrote a paper at Juilliard on Indonesian gamelan music, and I read an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* called 'Around the World on Eighty Dollars.'"

Carrying only a backpack and his violin, Martin went first to Japan and then to India, where he taught violin for nine months before moving on: to Nepal, Burma, Singapore and Indonesia, frequently playing concerts in various cities. "Then I met someone who had just come from Africa and suggested I should visit Uganda, so that was my next destination. From there I went down the Nile, through Sudan, to Egypt and on to Europe."

### **Accounting for every penny**

It was a year and a half before he returned to the U.S. Martin still has the small notebook in which he recorded every one of his expenses during his adventure. He spent a total of \$2,999—most of it earned by performing during his travels.

Ready to be a student again, Martin returned to Vienna to study with Ricardo Odnoposoff at the Academy of Music. It was there that he met his wife, oboist Laila Storch, who was a Fulbright Scholar at the academy. In 1958 they returned to the U.S. to teach and perform in the Northeast.

After several years, Laila was invited to join the Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet, which was then

based at the conservatory in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The move to the Caribbean, Martin remembers, provided them with "three years of a retirement lifestyle while we were young enough to enjoy it: a beachfront apartment, a slower pace of life." Martin played with the Puerto Rico Symphony and taught at the university.

The couple moved to Seattle in the late 1960s when Soni Ventorum took up residence at the University of Washington. While Laila was teaching oboe at the university, Martin earned a D.M.A. in violin performance there, studying with Emanuel Zetlin.

### **Ten rich years at Cornish**

He accepted the chairmanship of the music department at the Cornish College of the Arts, and stayed for 10 years until joining the Seattle Symphony in 1980. The Cornish years were rich ones, Martin says. He created two ensembles at the institute, and also soloed for many concerts with the area's community orchestras: "I played almost the entire concerto literature." Summers he spent traveling to exotic places: New Guinea, Tibet, Bhutan.

And now, as he retires from the symphony? "I intend to continue playing the violin, and I would like to go to India again, to see all the changes since my first visit." He also intends to spend time on Orcas Island, where he and Laila have a home near the summer residence of their daughter, Aloysia, and son-in-law—and their only grandchild, six-year-old Sophie, who clearly has claimed Martin's heart. Sophie's father is pianist Jon Kimura Parker, a frequent soloist with the Seattle Symphony.

A few years ago, Martin gave Jon the Boesendorfer piano that his family had managed to bring to the U.S. when they had to leave Vienna in 1940. The fine instrument has had a long and interesting trajectory—just like Martin. 1

## Backstage...

...is published in the community interest by the Seattle Symphony & Opera Players' Organization, the collective bargaining unit representing orchestra members.

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This newsletter reflects the input of dozens of members of the orchestra. The project is guided by:

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*Roberta Hansen Downey*, cello  
*Nancy Page Griffin*, bass

*Virginia Hunt Luce*, violin  
*Larey McDaniel*, clarinet  
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### Your suggestions welcomed

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## A brief lesson on bass bows

Since the feature story on the symphony's bass section in a previous issue of *Backstage*, astute observers of the orchestra have pointed out that the article failed to describe one distinction among bass players: the way they hold their bows.

The difference actually stems from the bows themselves. There are two types, French and German styles. The former is held in an "over-handed" manner, while the German bows

require an "under-handed" technique. The differences in the two are most apparent when the section is playing pizzicato (or "plucked") passages: French bow users hold their bow up in the air, while those with German bows allow them to dangle.

According to Principal Bass Jordan Anderson, the choice of a bow style generally stems from a bass student's first influential teacher. The pupil tends to select the same bow used by that



***The German bow (bottom of photo) has a longer pin than its French counterpart.***



***French bow***



***German bow***

individual. If there is a continental trend, adds Nancy Griffin, it is that American musicians play French bows, while more bassists who studied in Europe and/or play in European orchestras use the German style.

It is rare, Nancy says, for a bass player to use both types of bows, because they require very different musculature and technique. 1