



Orchestral Fellowship Report

Advancing Equity Collectively



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Executive Summary and Collective Approach

Diversity Fellowships for professional orchestras have long been seen as a compelling means through which to build diversity in orchestras and offer intensive training as BIPOC musicians pursue their professional goals. While there is merit to this idea, there are myriad important considerations to ensure that the environments in these programs are conducive to fellow development, well-being, and success upon completion of the program. The League of American Orchestras has reported quite extensively on fellowships programs for African American and Latino musicians, examining the impact of these programs on orchestras' efforts to diversify their musicians over nearly half a century.

The League has consistently reported that BIPOC representation in orchestras still lags well behind the U.S. population. While fellowship programs remain intriguing, there is still extremely mixed opinion as to whether they are a viable means through which to build meaningful diversity within orchestras. Certain issues have persisted over the years that dissuade musicians of color from pursuing fellowship programs, or to continue pursuing orchestral careers after having completed their programs.

While the future of diversity fellowships remains to be determined, Equity Arc is interested in learning more about the programs that are currently operating, identifying the issues that they continue to face, and exploring the opportunities and potential solutions that may come through collaborative action.

A primary tenet of Equity Arc's values is collaboration. We are actively working collectively with partners at different phases of the musical journey, and have found time and again that this approach is successful and leads to greater growth. The Common Application for Summer Study is a key example of the innovation that comes from joint action. That initiative has already broken barriers to participation in key learning experiences, provided important support and guidance, and has accomplished something that has been elusive to date: a shared audition list accepted by all participating institutions. With 17 partnering programs for summer '24, the number of musicians who will benefit from this initiative will continue to grow.

The National Collective for Musical Pathways is another of Equity Arc's most impactful examples of collective action and joint learning. The Collective currently includes 18 different pre-college pathways programs operating across the country. In addition to producing programmatic opportunities specific to the growth of the Collective and their musicians, this approach has created important opportunities for shared learning and growth. The willingness to share information and lessons strengthens individual programs, ultimately strengthening the entire pathways ecosystem.

A factor in the success of pathways programs is the explicitly stated goal for their musicians to successfully audition into top collegiate music programs. Their curricula, standards, and activities are all focused towards achieving that goal. This commitment has led to an incredible record of success, providing clear evidence of the impact of the pathways approach. Demonstrating impact on a national scale has also resulted in unique funding opportunities, such as the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation's special funding for members of the National Collective for Musical Pathways. In January, the Foundation awarded over \$1.8M in funding for the Collective, an incredible investment that has provided crucial support at a critical moment in pathways work.

With the work in which Equity Arc is engaged at the pre-college phase of musical development, we are connecting with some of the most talented young musicians whose ambitions and current trajectory are aimed at the orchestral space. Many of the musicians in this cohort may be interested in fellowship programs, and many would be ideal candidates for recruitment into these programs. With our emphasis on providing support throughout the musical journey and ensuring that the learning and professional environments that these musicians will enter are prepared to steward their growth from musical and inclusive perspectives, it is imperative that we work with partners at the later stages of the arc.

Musicians must invest in preparing themselves to be competitive, continuing to hone their skills. It is incumbent on the institutions that wish to recruit them to ensure that the environments that they offer are conducive to furthering their success. Fellowship programs cannot be the primary means through which an orchestra addresses racial homogeneity of its musicians. The importance of investment in building meaningful diversity and equity throughout the institution and in ensuring that they are providing a space that empowers musicians to flourish cannot be overstated.

Equity Arc is excited to have representatives from some of the major professional training programs across the country to explore some of the key challenges and opportunities in this space. We look forward to engaging in strategic discussions to test the waters of what may be possible.

Background, Challenges, and Shared Issues

Over the past year, Equity Arc met with representatives from 18 different professional ensembles that currently run, have run, or are interested in establishing diversity fellowships to learn more about their programs, goals, and challenges. These conversations provided important insights about what works with regard to program design, challenges that were shared regardless of design, and willingness to come together to explore what it might look like to build further relationships to strengthen the professional training space.

Exploratory conversations were conducted with the following institutions:

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (new)
Charleston Symphony (new)
Chautauqua Festival
Chicago Sinfonietta
Chicago Symphony Orchestra (new)
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
The Cleveland Orchestra (in planning)
Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Fairfax Symphony
Handel + Haydn Society (new)

Hartford Symphony
Iris Collective (restructured)
Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra
(restructured)
Los Angeles Philharmonic
New Jersey Symphony
Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (inactive)
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
Virginia Symphony Orchestra

Of these 18 institutions, there is significant difference in programmatic structure. A certain degree of variation in structure is expected as no two orchestras operate in exactly the same way. Some of the differences include (but are not limited to):

- Standalone programs.
 - These programs are self-contained within the institution and do not have external requirements.
- Programs with a degree component.
 - These programs are setup in partnership with a university or college and fellows earn a degree or certificate during their tenure.
- Program expectations and curricula.
 - Some programs require teaching or other community-based activities in addition to service within the orchestra, where some fellowship programs are exclusively performance-based.
- Programs that only have string fellows.
 - Many programs only offer fellowships to string players, as they can be more easily integrated into a section.
- Programs that have wind, brass, and string fellows.
- Number of fellows accepted in a given “term”.
- Duration of fellowship program.
- Overlapping cohorts.
 - Some orchestras have distinct fellow terms. The terms of incoming fellows do not overlap with fellows who are currently in the program.
- Relocation expectations.
- Full-time, salary employment with comprehensive benefits.
- Select service week programs.
 - Smaller and regional orchestras may not be full-time orchestras. Fellows in these programs often are offered most, if not all, of the services in a given season, though this does not constitute full-time employment.
- Fellow opportunities upon successful completion of the program.
 - Some orchestras guarantee sub opportunities or first-call sub list placement to fellows who have successfully completed their fellowship.

With so much variation in program design, it can be challenging to find opportunities to evaluate fellowship impacts and make blanket statements or recommendations. Throughout the exploratory conversations, certain issues were nearly universal. While the following is far from an exhaustive summary of issues, it presents important context for conversations.

Stigma and Culture

One of the most critical considerations is the overall culture of the institution and how Fellows are viewed and integrated into the ensemble. The League of American Orchestra's report shared that many Fellows felt isolated in their programs, and that they did not feel supported by other musicians in their participation. A core issue involves the ambiguity around Fellows' roles and how they are viewed within the ensemble. In different contexts, they have been viewed as peers, as students, and as a means of providing diversity to an ensemble. The latter is especially problematic; when Fellows are the primary means of diversifying an ensemble, not only might they feel that they aren't valued for their skills and contributions, but they may not see the environment as a viable learning opportunity. In addition to potentially being made to feel that they haven't earned the Fellowship based on their merits, musicians in the orchestra may view Fellows as not deserving of a seat in their section. This can breed resentment on both sides, especially if tenured musicians feel like a Fellow may not deserve the position.

The orchestral culture is essential to success in a given program. Musicians need to be fully bought into a Fellowship program for there to be any degree of success. Musicians need to be involved in the planning and execution; if these are initiatives that are driven by administrators without engaging musicians, the most important partners who will steward Fellow growth and success are less likely to buy into running a program at all.

Clarity around a Fellow's role within the ensemble is crucial. A lack of clarity impacts Fellow success and makes relationships unclear. Are Fellows students? Is the expectation that they aren't at the same level as other musicians in the ensemble? This can exacerbate feelings of otherness that may already be present. Fellows may also find it challenging to become immersed in the orchestra while they are also trying to plan for their next career opportunities.

The number of Fellows in a program can also impact a Fellow's willingness to advocate for themselves. The more isolated a Fellow is in a program, the less comfortable they may be to advocate, to provide feedback, and to ask for support. It is critical that there is a respected member within the orchestra who can serve as a mentor, who truly believes in each Fellows' capacity and who is committed to ensuring a sense of belonging in the ensemble.

Fellowship Duration, Relocation, and Next Steps

The duration of a fellowship program can be an important factor in success. If a fellow is only in an orchestra for one year, they will not be able to take advantage of what a program has to offer. They will need to focus on having next steps for their career and income planned, which may prevent them from being able to adequately prepare for auditions or actually immerse themselves in the program offerings. From a network perspective, shorter programs also do not offer Fellows enough of an opportunity to forge relationships with the other musicians in the orchestra. There simply isn't enough time for a yearlong, or possibly even a two-year, program to be effective.

Programs that require prospective fellows to relocate present another set of challenges, especially if it is a brief course of study. Developing a professional network can take years, and it must continually be cultivated. Temporarily relocating to another city may require a musician to sacrifice their network, leading to a greater sense of instability upon completion of the program. Some programs have opted to not require relocation, instead allowing fellows to travel in for service weeks. While this alleviates the uncertainty of uprooting your professional life, it can also prevent fellows from engaging wholly with the orchestra.

Professional training programs that have strong track records of success typically share several key components. Mock auditions and support for audition travel are consistently mentioned as some of the most impactful aspects of a program. Programs with multiple fellows have shared that being surrounded by peers who are preparing for auditions at the same level of intensity can spur their own preparation. The time investment in audition preparation leads to important considerations around balance. How do fellows find the balance of meeting the rigorous expectations of playing with a professional ensemble while intensively preparing for auditions?

Recruitment and Alumni

Recruiting is essential for any program, regardless of the level of musician that is of interest. Ensuring that your program has clarity around stated goals and consistency between these goals and outcomes is only part of the equation. Clarity of the role that a prospective fellow will play and what can be expected through and upon completion of the program are also important considerations.

Alumni can be some of the strongest ambassadors of any program at any phase of musical development. They can help to recruit new talent, to provide invaluable feedback to improve curriculum and experience, and can serve as a testament to the impact of a program. While virtually all orchestras running fellowship programs recognize the importance of staying connected with their alumni, resources to do so are limited. Many fellowships do not have a designated person who works exclusively for the program and staff capacity to manage so many additional responsibilities. Institutional willingness to engage alumni to strengthen their programs is an important consideration. Ensuring alignment between a stated goal and the actual experience of musicians in the program is crucial, but it can be challenging to accept negative feedback and use it productively. Challenges aside, it is incumbent upon any institution running a training program to be receptive to and proactive with feedback that is received.



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