



# Building Bridges Symposium Report

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## Executive Summary

Building diversity on classical music's professional stages has been a priority for performing arts institutions for decades. While there have been numerous avenues through which these attempts have been made, it is crucial to be aware of the myriad considerations to ensure meaningful diversity is achieved. One of the most successful models that is an example for the field is equitable music training programs. These programs offer key access for musicians from historically underrepresented backgrounds, in addition to providing comprehensive support through technical training, mentorship, and resources needed to succeed in classical music.



The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's Talent Development Program (TDP) is one of the oldest equitable music training programs in the nation. For 30 years, TDP has identified, mentored, and nurtured over 100 middle and high school Black and Latino musicians to be prepared for careers as professional classical musicians. Providing intensive, comprehensive training early in musical development is essential to building meaningful diversity and equity in the field. TDP's programmatic design and approach is predicated on a holistic approach to musical training that emphasizes the artistic excellence

and high level of technical training required to succeed, in addition to extra-musical resources. This programmatic design and approach is now known as a “Pathways” program and has a track record of success: musicians graduating from TDP have gone on to study at top conservatories, perform in professional ensembles, and become leaders in the field of classical music.



TDP has also offered guidance to prospective Pathways programs, serving as a model upon which many programs have been developed. Beginning in 2019, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO) has hosted the biennial “Building Bridges” Symposium, offering additional insights and support to emerging programs.

As a national membership association, Equity Arc is committed to creating a level playing field for BIPOC instrumentalists in classical music. Our approach focuses on the five primary phases of development across the musical arc, from formative entry years to professional careers. We believe that building and fortifying connections across the arc will strengthen the trajectory of musicians of color and that a cohesive, collaborative approach to systemic issues will lead to tangible change. While many of Equity Arc’s programmatic initiatives have been focused in the pre-college phase of the arc, we have been actively exploring the professional training phase, working with over 15 professional ensembles across the country to learn more about the training programs that they administer.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra is one of few orchestras to operate an equitable training program in both the pre-college and professional stages of musical development. This offers the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the Talent Development Program, and explore how its tenets can be applied to professional training programs like orchestral fellowships. What lessons can be learned through examining the approach of institutions and orchestras that operate pathways programs? Although these phases of development present different challenges, a successful equitable training program offers robust mentorship and comprehensive support to help musicians advance in their careers. In order to have the greatest impact, a significant investment of human and financial resources as well as buy-in across the host organization is required.

As an early supporter of Equity Arc’s work and founding member of the National Collective for Musical Pathways, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra engaged Equity Arc to co-present the 2023 Building Bridges Symposium in recognition of TDP’s 30th anniversary. Through our collaborative conversations, we explored the challenges and responsibilities of operating an orchestral diversity fellowship, discussed the efficacy and impact of the pathways approach, and gauged interest in further collaborative work bridging the pre-college and professional training phases of musical development. This report offers an overview of the perspectives shared at the 2023 Building Bridges Symposium.

# 30 Years of the Talent Development Program

## Speakers:

- **Azira G. Hill**, Talent Development Program Founder
- **Malinda Logan**, Talent Development Program Volunteer

## A Brief History

Community leaders Azira G. Hill and Malinda Logan played a critical role in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's Talent Development Program's (TDP) evolution. Established in 1993, TDP has provided mentorship and resources to over 100 Black and Latino pre-college musicians.

TDP was initially operated by members of Atlanta's community, offering free private lessons to Black students. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra was an early partner, with musicians serving as private instructors. As the students progressed in their playing ability, the administrators looked to identify additional training opportunities, such as summer study, to further advance their students' musical development. The community fundraised for TDP students to attend summer music festivals, and summer study became an additional component of the program. This requirement made TDP one of the first year-round study programs.

As program leaders continued to evaluate TDP's impact, they determined that there was a similar need for musical opportunities in Atlanta's Latino community. This led to expanding program eligibility and reach. When the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra officially took over operations of the Talent Development Program in 1995, they prioritized maintaining close relationships with the founding leadership. The program has been sustained for 30 years, providing opportunities and access for Black and Latino musicians in the Atlanta metro area.



# Trailblazing Mentorship for Musicians and Pathways

A conversation with TDP Program Managers from past & present

## Panelists:

- **FACILITATOR:** Sarah Grant, VP of Education and Community Engagement, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
- Suzanne Shull, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Volunteer
- Adrienne Thompson, VP for Enrollment & Student Services, Merit School of Music
- Ryan Walks, Talent Development Program Manager

## Background:

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Talent Development Program (TDP) has been administered by several program managers throughout its 30-year history. Program managers from the past and present shared how the program has evolved.

## Key Takeaways:

- TDP responds to students' individualized needs by building trust with families through regular meetings, providing education on the musical journey, and engaging alumni to share their experiences.
- The curriculum includes opportunities for accountability and feedback to ensure consistent progress. This includes juries, advisories, and communication between teachers, families, and program managers.
- TDP understands the importance of providing quality instruments to students and is working to develop a formalized process.



# Cultivating Young Talent

## Conversation with TDP Instructors

### Panelists:

- **FACILITATOR: Emily Brebach**, Oboe and English Horn, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
- **Michael Moore**, Principal Tuba, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
- **Ronda Respass**, Former ASO Violin, Franklin Pond Chamber Music
- **Todd Skitch**, Flute, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

### Background:

Members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra serve as mentors and guides for a TDP musician's journey. They provide high-level private instruction that prepares TDP students for collegiate and professional stages.

### Key Takeaways:

- Faculty recognize the significance of building a supportive community that goes beyond individual career pursuits. They appreciate the opportunity to pass on inspiration, support, and passion for music to the next generation.
- They desire for TDP graduates to make a positive impact on the world, emphasizing the broader societal contribution of the program.
- Teaching in TDP differs from a private studio by offering more performance opportunities, a requirement to attend ASO performances, and a focus on parent involvement.
- Faculty work to balance the teaching of culturally relevant music and diversifying the canon while ensuring students can meet expectations of the curriculum and repertoire in higher education.
- Summer study plays a transformative role in a musician's development by providing an opportunity for students to take responsibility for their progress in an immersive and intensive environment. Summer study is a requirement for all TDP students.



# Advancing Equity Through Collaboration

## Panelists:

- **Stanford Thompson**, Executive Director, Equity Arc
- **Magee Capsouto**, Associate Director, Equity Arc
- **Paula Wilson**, Member Services & Communications Manager, Equity Arc
- **Jade Garcia**, Programs Manager, Equity Arc

## Background:

Equity Arc is a national membership-based organization focused on leveling the playing field in classical music for musicians from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Equity Arc's achievements are driven by collaboration and a collective approach. In 2022, Equity Arc formalized a collective in the

Pathways space. These programs have historically been collaborative with and connected to each other, sharing best practices and advice for establishing and operating new programs. TDP has set the example of being a mentor in the development of programs nationwide. In formalizing these relationships, we seek not only to raise visibility of programs nationwide and their impact, but also to facilitate the growth of new programs and strengthen existing ones.

Equity Arc seeks to expand our collective approach across the arc of musical development, engaging new members and partners at each phase of growth. As we work to build systemic equity, forging and sustaining these partnerships are a key part of making tangible change.

## Key Takeaways:

- The Arc concept identifies phases of musical development, challenges faced, and resources needed to transform the classical music pipeline.
- The National Collective for Musical Pathways has proven the impact of the collective approach. Launched in 2022, the Collective completed its first ever Pathways Census, members of the Collective received over \$1.8 million in general operating funds through a special funding stream from the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, and Equity Arc hosted the National Pathways Festival in multiple cities. Overseeing the Collective is also a key responsibility of the Equity Arc Programs Manager.
- The Common Application for Summer Study simplifies summer study application processes, providing opportunity and access for BIPOC musicians. Partnerships with summer

programs facilitate accessibility, removing obstacles like application fees and multiple audition lists. Partners in the Common Application have operated as a de facto collective, demonstrating the impact of collaborative action.

- Future projects include an alumni network, an instrument fund, data collection, consulting, evaluation, and a virtual musician engagement series.



# Bridging the Pathways from Pre-College to Professional Training

## Panelists:

- **FACILITATOR:** **Denielle Wilson**, Cello, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra & TDP Alum
- **Laura Andrade**, Cello Fellow, Ensemble Connect
- **Maalik Glover**, Violin Fellow, New World Symphony & TDP Alum
- **Jordan Johnson**, Trombone Fellow, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
- **Lindsey Sharpe**, Cello Fellow, Civic Orchestra of Chicago & TDP Alum
- **Joshua Williams**, Tuba Fellow, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra & TDP Alum

## *Musicians' Words to the Field*

### Conversation with Orchestral Fellows & TDP Alumni

#### Background:

TDP alumni and orchestral fellows shared their perspectives on the successes and challenges of professional training programs. Key themes included mentorship, resources, and access for young professionals of color.

## Key Takeaways:

- There is a need to clearly define the role of a fellow in an orchestral fellowship. Orchestras must clarify whether the fellowship aims to be a training program that nurtures the fellow's talent or a temporary full-time position where musicians gain professional experience. This clarification will help determine the type of fellow best suited for the program, how professional musicians should interact with fellows, and the orchestra's goal for the fellows.
- Tangible resources like competitive compensation, instrument access, and travel support for auditions are valuable to the fellows' experience. Additionally, technical and career mentorship helps ensure the fellows advance to a competitive level upon completion of the fellowship.
- Creating a cohort of current orchestral fellows and alumni could help foster connection and support for BIPOC musicians who often feel isolated.







# Roundtable Conversations on Professional Training Programs

## Background:

Symposium attendees participated in breakout conversations about the future of professional training programs. Equity Arc will synthesize these findings and work strategically to determine the next steps for collaboration in this stage of musical development.

## Key Takeaways:

- There is interest in continuing conversations about how we can develop effective professional training opportunities for BIPOC musicians and exploring how orchestras can collaborate to achieve this common goal.
- There is a need for orchestra leaders/decision-makers to be in the room to propel the work forward. Building consensus around next steps will require support from leadership along with many voices representing the different strategic considerations.
- While many orchestras are starting fellowship programs with the goal of helping fellows land a job/diversifying orchestras, data from the League of American Orchestras' "40 Years of Fellowships" and recent DEI report implies the overall structure of these programs should be explored and discussed further.
- Orchestras should also reconsider their audition practices, including blind auditions, auto-advancements, and implementing guidelines from the National Alliance for Audition Support.
- Orchestras are thinking about the future generation of musicians by investing in Pathways work. The pipeline must be cultivated at earlier stages of musical development for the field to flourish.
- Orchestras must create a culture that can meaningfully accept and support BIPOC musicians.



- The field will benefit from consensus between national service organizations seeking to create equity in the orchestral field.
- It is important to be open to adjusting programs based on feedback, and evolving toward more effective fellowship structures.

### Action Items:

- Develop an assessment tool to evaluate orchestras' readiness for fellowship programs, addressing internal culture, misconceptions, and top-down buy-in.
- Implement anti-bias training in resume review processes, particularly in the context of fellowship programs.
- Establish a national collective of fellows for community building and support.
- Explore partnerships with existing organizations like Black Orchestral Network for broader networking and support.
- Use Collective Bargaining Agreements to address and codify elements around diversity initiatives and fellowship programs, including anti-harassment, anti-bias, and anti-racism training for all musicians.
- Determine whether fellowship programs should be rebranded as training programs and create a curriculum that establishes clear expectations and unified standards for fellowship programs.
- Orchestras interested in running fellowship programs should stay connected with pathways programs to learn about operating programs designed to advance BIPOC musicians and to build relationships with prospective fellows.



# Equity Arc Leadership

## **Board of Directors**

Michael Angell, Director of Performing Arts Grants, The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

Jennifer Bowman, Director of Learning and Community, Houston Grand Opera

Abra Bush, David Henry Jacobs Bicentennial Dean, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music

Mark Churchill, El Sistema USA, Founder

Anjoli Ferrara-Clayton, *Secretary*, Violinist, Symphonicity

Mark Gillespie, CEO, The Orchestra of the Americas Group

Charlie Grode, *Co-Chair*, President and Executive Director, Merit School of Music

Jenny Snyder Kozoroz, Program Director, Brevard Music Center

Katherine Drago Luellen, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid & Enrollment Management, New England Conservatory

Jonathan Martin, *Vice Chair*, President and CEO, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

Emily Liao Master, *Treasurer*, Vice President and General Manager of Operations, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Maria Mathieson, Executive Director of the Preparatory, Institute of Johns Hopkins University

Anthony Mazzocchi, Director, John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University

Ian Saunders, Artistic Director, Project STEP

Edgar L. Smith Jr., Founder, Chairman, and CEO, World Pac Paper, LLC

Jeffery Tribble Jr., *Co-Chair*, President and CEO, Levine Music

Stefanie Wakeman, Director of Community Partnerships, Astral Artists

## **Staff**

Stanford Thompson, Executive Director

Magee Capsouto, Associate Director

Paula Wilson, Member Services and Communications Manager

Jade Garcia, Programs Manager

## **ASO Planning Team**

Jennifer Barlament, Executive Director

Sarah Grant, VP of Education and Community Engagement

Ryan Walks, Talent Development Program Manager

Tammy Hawk, Consultant

# Symposium Attendees

Aaron Rib, Self-employed, Freelance artist  
Adam Calus, New England Conservatory of Music, Director of Partnerships for Expanded Education  
Adrienne Thompson, Merit School of Music, Vice President for Enrollment & Student Services  
Alan Valladares, New World Symphony, Musician Advancement Manager  
Allison Conlan, Houston Symphony, Director of Community Engagement  
Amy Rhodes, Carnegie Hall Director, Ensemble Connect  
Angela Hamilton, Washington Musical Pathways Initiative, Program Manager  
Aram Kim Bryan, Charlotte Symphony, VP of Learning and Community Engagement  
Caen Thomason-Redus, League of American Orchestras Vice President, Inclusion and Learning  
Carol Dary Dunevant, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Director of Learning  
Charlie Grode, Merit School of Music, President & Executive Director\*  
Dana Wilson, Community Member, Administrator  
Debora Kang, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Director of Education  
Elizabeth Moulthrop, El Sistema USA, Executive Director  
Emily Fritz-Endres, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Executive Management Fellow  
Emily Master, Goldsmith Strategies, Principal\*  
Ira D Pedlikin, Handel and Haydn Society, Vice President of Artistic Planning  
Jacqueline Cordova-Arrington, Ensemble Connect, Alumni  
Jade Garcia, Equity Arc, Programs Manager  
James Hall, Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative, Project Director  
Jenny Kozoroz, Brevard Music Center, Program Director\*  
John Kilkenny, The Sewanee Music Center, Director  
Kimberly McLemore, Nashville Symphony, VP Education & Community Engagement  
Laia Pujol, Colburn School, Associate at Center for Innovation and Community Impact  
Laura Andrade, Ensemble Connect, Alumni  
Lauren Generette, The Cleveland Orchestra, Director of Instrumental Pathways Programs  
Magee Capsouto, Equity Arc, Associate Director  
Michael Angell, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation Director of Performing Arts Grants\*  
Najib Wong, PMAY Artists' Initiative, Director  
Nishi Badhwar, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Manager of Orchestra Personnel  
Paula Wilson, Equity Arc, Member Services and Communications Manager  
Paul Johnson, Seattle Symphony, Vice President of People & Culture and Chief Diversity Officer  
Ricky Dean McWain, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, General Manager  
Samuel McDonald, New Jersey Symphony, Education Manager  
Shanna Lin, Paterson Music Project, Director  
Sheila Esquivel, New England Conservatory of Music, Director of Boston BEAM  
Solomon Leonard, Oberlin Conservatory, Violist  
Stanford Thompson, Equity Arc, Executive Director  
Suzanne M Perrino, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, SVP, Learning and Engagement Programs  
Suzanne Shull, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, ASO Advisory Council / TDP Volunteer  
Walter Bitner, Richmond Symphony, Director of Education & Community Engagement

\*Equity Arc Board of Directors

