

GETTING THE STORY OUT

THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT IS DEDICATED TO TELLING
THE BEST SYMPHONY STORIES.

BY EDDIE SILVA



Tod Bowermaster at Litzinger School

The best St. Louis Symphony stories are about its relationships with St. Louis. Symphony musicians are in schools, in places of worship, in assisted-living centers, in hospitals, in parks, and in colleges and universities on a nearly weekly basis throughout the orchestral season. They play for an audience of a few pre-K children sitting on a floor at a Head Start school. They play in hospital infusion rooms while patients receive their cancer medications. They play in children's hospitals. They play during lunchtime at the Old Courthouse.

It is essential for a symphony orchestra to do such things. "Relevance" is a critical word for a symphony orchestra. It is probably unfair, but a symphony orchestra needs to prove its relevance continually. It does this through its artistry, through its audience appeal, and through its commitment to its community.

So it is not only essential for a symphony orchestra to be in schools, places of worship, and hospitals, it is also essential that the community knows its symphony is in these places. Through the stories of these interactions, a symphony touches people's hearts and minds. It proves its relevance, probably more concretely than with how well it plays Brahms and Stravinsky. Although how well a symphony plays Brahms and Stravinsky is essential too.

The External Affairs department of the St. Louis Symphony generates and tells these stories. A unique hybrid of Education, Community Programs, the Youth Orchestra, and Communications, External Affairs (a.k.a. Ex Aff) came together

Getting the Story Out



Yo-Yo Ma (center) meeting with the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra

nearly three years ago. Its mission is similar to that of the St. Louis Symphony's: To enrich people's lives through the power of music by providing free, live events in intimate community settings.

Under the leadership of Adam Crane, Vice President for External Affairs, the Ex Aff staff seeks to fulfill that mission on a daily basis, although sometimes it seems an hourly basis. The department works collaboratively, in action and in spirit, making decisions together, and always asking, "What is the story?" "The story" is the primary criteria for many department decisions.

Berakiah Boone directs Education programs. She partners with schools and musicians, finding the right fit for classroom and artist. She also directs, produces, and conceives the programming for the Education and Family Concerts. Such activity is full of stories.

For example, the Symphony partnered with Litzinger School this season. Litzinger provides education for special-needs students. Because of the nature of the school environment, Boone needed musicians with an understanding of the challenges such students face, and who could perform and teach to that population effectively.

She found that in the trio of Shawn Weil, violin, Tina Ward, clarinet, and Tod Bowermaster, horn. The Symphony musicians performed Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, preparing the students for an Education Concert at Powell Hall. The musicians were clear and methodical in their presentation, as well as patient and enthusiastic about all the questions they received.

Good Symphony stories include a happy ending. When the full Symphony performed *Peter and the Wolf* with Stages St. Louis for Education Concerts in February, the entire student body of Litzinger School attended, and had a private meeting with the musicians and actors after the show.

Jessica Ingraham manages the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, only the

Getting the Story Out

third manager in the YO's 44-year history. In Ingraham's second year on the job she has implemented a transformation of the orchestra, both in mission and in practice.

Under Ingraham's leadership, the YO contains a curriculum designed to develop the "whole musician." YO musicians understand that the musician's role is not just "practice, rehearse, go home" any more. They learn about promotion, PR, marketing, and programming from members of the Symphony staff. They take the mic and introduce the music during their Powell Hall concerts. They have created their own chambers series, the Next Generation, which has played to full houses at the Tavern of Fine Arts. The music matters too, more than ever, as they participate in sectionals, with St. Louis Symphony musicians as coaches, on a regular basis.

All this is part of Beyond Rehearsal, an extra period that has been added to the regular YO Saturday rehearsal. During Beyond Rehearsal sessions they've met with composer Ingram Marshall via Skype, and in person with artists such as Augustin Hadelich, Leonard Slatkin, David Robertson, and Yo-Yo Ma. Ma's advice to the young musicians: get out and play to audiences, anywhere and everywhere.

Maureen Byrne directs Community Programs, which gets Symphony musicians in front of audiences anywhere and everywhere. Community Programs has evolved significantly under her leadership. Byrne is a master of finding and developing partnerships with a wide variety of organizations. She also shows marketing savvy, having categorized the various venues where community concerts are performed into easy to identify brands: Symphony Where You

...continued on page 60

Getting the Story Out

...continued from page 13

Worship, Symphony in the City, Symphony in Your Neighborhood, Symphony in Your College, and SymphonyCares.

Community Programs concerts exhibit innovation in programming and presentation, and offer intimate musical experiences for St. Louis Symphony musicians and audiences. Last season an ensemble performed a mini-tour of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* at three churches and a synagogue. This season Byrne introduced the Landmarks Series as part of Symphony in the City, with musicians performing at some of St. Louis' most storied locations: the Old Courthouse, the Saint Louis Art Museum, the St. Louis Science Center Planetarium, and the Jewel Box in Forest Park. Symphony in Your Neighborhood plays standing-room-only concerts at the Piper Palm House in Tower Grove Park. SymphonyCares brings musicians into infusion rooms, children's hospitals, and assisted-living centers. All of these activities have made for heart-tugging stories picked up by television, print, electronic, and social media.

Byrne works closely with Brian Owens, who manages the IN UNISON® program. The name In Unison may best be known as it relates to the St. Louis Symphony In Unison Chorus, but it is also a program that engages St. Louis Symphony

“RELEVANCE” IS A CRITICAL WORD FOR A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.

musicians with 40 predominantly African-American churches in the region. Under Owens, the program has intensified its scholarship program, providing opportunities to African-American youth pursuing music degrees at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Owens, a vocal artist and former scholarship winner himself, mentors the In Unison Scholar students. In just the past two years, three In Unison scholars became members of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra through the audition process.

With Education, the Youth Orchestra, and Community Programs generating the stories, the Communications team gets the stories told. Erika Ebsworth-Goold, a former television news producer, uses her knowledge of the local media and her extensive list of contacts to make the Symphony's good work known to a broad audience. She also gets the bulk of the credit for putting the St. Louis Symphony on the JumboTron in centerfield in Busch Stadium, playing “Meet Me in St. Louis” before every Cardinal home game.

None of these stories happen without the participation of the St. Louis Symphony musicians. Each member of the Ex Aff staff works closely with the musicians, making sure they are supported and prepared for whatever venue they may enter—whether a Head Start classroom, a child's hospital room, a television studio, or a Saint Louis Art Museum gallery.

The musicians are the story, always. Place them in the community—the story grows.

Eddie Silva tells Symphony stories in Playbill and on the St. Louis Symphony blog for the External Affairs department.