

*Broadening the reach of music:
the US perspective*

Callum
Thomson

Finzi Trust Travel Scholarship 2010: report

Broadening the reach of music

From 1 May to 6 October 2010 I lived in the United States on an unpaid sabbatical funded by a Travel Scholarship Award from the Finzi Trust.

My aim was to find out how two organisations based in the state capital of Minnesota, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and American Public Media, were broadening the reach of classical music in uniquely American ways.

I am passionate about music: I trained as a pianist at the Royal Northern College of Music and until leaving for the United States I worked for the musicians' professional body, the Incorporated Society of Musicians. I am interested in ways of sustaining and developing an audience for classical music to ensure it has a bright future. My two host organisations, based in the same city, are leaders in this field.

I hoped also to learn new skills in arts fundraising and classical music radio production that would enhance my career prospects in both arts management and broadcasting.

I am pleased that the whole experience was both enjoyable and immensely rewarding. I am very grateful to the Finzi Trust for giving me this opportunity, and to the friends and colleagues I met in Minnesota for making my experience so worthwhile. Thank you.

CALLUM THOMSON
February 2011

The Twin Cities



Above: the Minneapolis skyline (Flickr/Steve Lyon)

Saint Paul and Minneapolis are known as the ‘Twin Cities’ and the Mississippi River, which flows from its source in north west Minnesota for around 200 miles before snaking through the centre of each city, can be thought of as their shared umbilical cord.

Saint Paul began as a fur trading post in the early nineteenth century and expanded in a piecemeal fashion, becoming the capital of the new state of Minnesota in 1858. The small city boasts grand architecture, both civic and private, but local people joke that its streets were designed by a drunken Irishman.

Minneapolis, just 20 miles west, was more of a planned industrial development. The vast disused General Mills and Pillsbury mills on the banks of the river are most significant relics of the lumber and flour industries that established themselves in the city after the American Civil War to harness the power of the St Anthony Falls. Minneapolis expanded outwards from the river to become Saint Paul’s larger and more prosperous neighbour; the grid-based downtown area is tightly packed with skyscrapers.

The tired-looking Amtrak railway station, Midway, is situated amongst the urban sprawl that connects the two cities. I arrive there from Chicago late on Saturday 1 May and am met by my main contact at American Public Media (APM), Brian Newhouse, the Director of Classical Music. Brian has arranged for me to stay with a colleague in the East Isles neighbourhood of Minneapolis until I am able to find more permanent accommodation. From June to August I rent a room in Minneapolis, and for my final five weeks in the Twin Cities I lodge in a doctor’s house in Saint Paul.

The Twin Cities are known for their rich cultural scene. Several tourist guidebooks repeat the claim that they offer more theatre seats per head than New York, and during the last decade’s economic boom several arts venues expanded into modern facilities: the new riverside home of the Guthrie

Theatre, the United States’ first repertory theatre; the 2005 expansion of the Walker Art Center by the architects behind Tate Modern; and Frank Gehry’s jagged metallic extension to the University of Minnesota’s Weisman Art Gallery.

As if to illustrate the vitality of the arts scene, my host – a senior producer at APM – is not able to meet me on my first night because he is attending an event that combines music and visual art. The Chicago-based contemporary music ensemble, Eighth Blackbird, is performing at the Walker Art Center and he is hosting a fundraising reception afterwards.

The overall co-ordinator of my project is the president and managing director of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO), Sarah Lutman, who until 2008 had been a senior executive at American Public Media. Sarah is therefore uniquely placed to facilitate my sabbatical between the two organisations, which are based within three blocks of each other in downtown Saint Paul.

Sarah and I agree that I will spend half of each week as a member of the SPCO’s development team and the other half at APM, helping to produce the daily classical music radio programme *Performance Today*.

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

History

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra was founded in 1959 and is the only full-time professional chamber orchestra in the United States. The orchestra has a core of 34 musicians and concentrates on repertoire for smaller ensembles, specialising in Baroque, Classical and contemporary music.

From 1959 until 1988, the SPCO was run along traditional lines, with a music director who was in charge of the artistic direction of the orchestra. Between 1988 and 1992 the orchestra experimented with a tripartite 'Artistic Commission', made up of two conductors and a composer, but reverted to a single music director again from 1992.

In 1999, the orchestra appointed a new president and managing director, Bruce Coppock. Around the same time the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which had been frustrated by the poor results of its funding of American orchestras throughout the previous decades, established its Orchestra Forum. This was a long-term project to examine the way American orchestras were run and encourage innovation. The SPCO was selected to receive funding over ten years, between 2000 and 2010. Immediately it began consulting with staff, musicians and board members to produce a new strategic plan which was published in 2002.

The SPCO's 2002 Strategic Plan proposed a radical overhaul of the way the orchestra was run. Most significantly, it abolished the position of music director and brought the musicians into the artistic planning process and onto the board. The orchestra also began working with a roster of three or four 'artistic partners' – both conductors and soloists – who would make repeat visits during their three-year terms.

Learning about leverage

My first working day, Tuesday 4 May, begins with an early start. The previous evening I had received a text message from the orchestra's Director of Development, Theresa Gienapp, who asked me



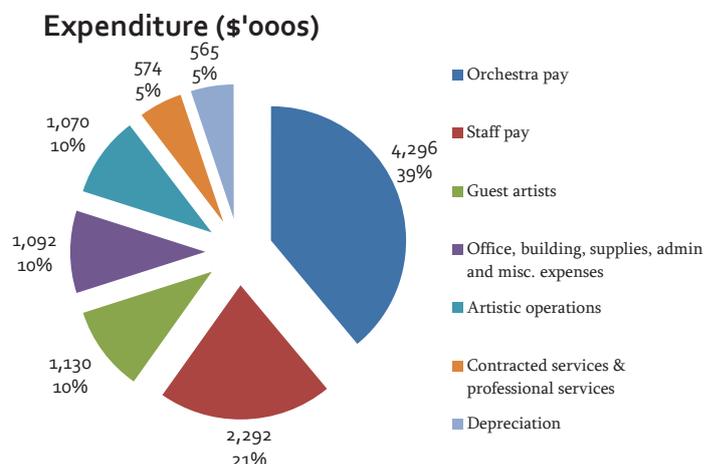
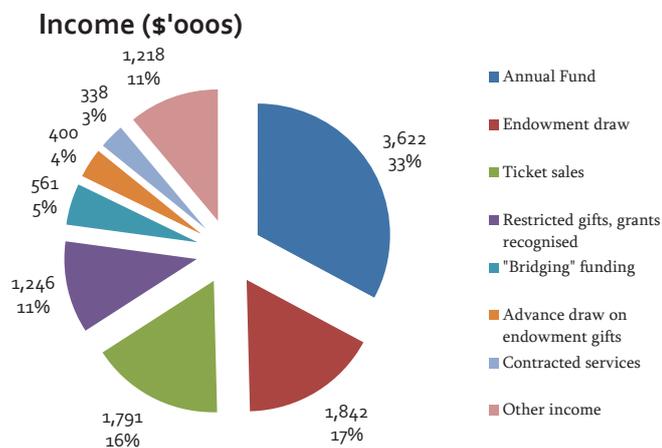
Above: The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO)

to attend a breakfast meeting at the offices of Wells Fargo bank in downtown Minneapolis. Around the table are some of the SPCO development staff and four members of the board's development committee.

Many US orchestras, theatres and dance companies seek to recruit influential people to their boards, selecting potential trustees as much for their financial support as for their love of the art form. Generous donors are often referred to as 'leadership investors' because they inspire others to give. Trustees of the SPCO are obliged to contribute at least \$7,500 each year and are expected to offer their strategic know-how, financial expertise and contacts. At the breakfast meeting, the board's four designated 'whips', mainly corporate lawyers, work through a spreadsheet to check that their peers are pressing enough flesh. The orchestra wants its 56 board members to solicit donations from friends, family and colleagues, taking advantage in particular of business relationships in which they have 'leverage'. Every phone call, email and meeting is noted.

Sources of income

The meeting focuses on the SPCO's 'Annual Fund', the main fund for philanthropic contributions. Money donated to the annual fund is unrestricted, meaning that it can be used for general operating costs, not just specific musical projects. In 2009/10, the SPCO's total operating budget was \$11 million,



Above: SPCO actual income and expenditure, 2009/10 (Source: financial statements)

lower than in recent years because of the economic downturn: the \$3.6 million Annual Fund represents a third of the orchestra's income.

The orchestra's endowment fund was built up during a philanthropic campaign in the late 1990s; at the end of 2009 it stood at \$31.5 million. Each year the orchestra withdraws 5% of the endowment's average value over the preceding three years. In 2009/10 this yielded \$1.8 million, or 17% of that year's income.

Ticket sales provided 16% of the orchestra's income. This unusually low proportion by American standards is partly explained by the SPCO's deliberate decision to set low ticket prices (see 'Fundraising philosophy' below).

'Restricted' income is money that has been given on the condition that it is spent for particular purposes. This includes, for example: grants from the federal arts agency, the National Endowment for the Arts; major sponsorship from the supermarket chain Target for family concerts; and foundation funding that must be used for improvements to the orchestra's website. In addition, there is one philanthropic fund that is restricted – the Fund for Artistic Initiatives. This is specifically designated for the orchestra to undertake bold, experimental programming outside the scope of its regular concert season.

'Bridge funding' is additional money provided mostly by the orchestra's most generous donors, to help overcome the organisation's structural deficit – ie the gap between its fixed costs and its sustainable revenue. There is an understanding that this funding is temporary and accordingly the board is planning to eliminate the gap in the next few years, through a combination of generating more reliable sources of funding and lowering the orchestra's cost base. Bridge funding raised \$561,000 in 2009/10 but has been removed from the budget next year.

A peculiarly American source of income is the

'advance draw on endowment'. This is the income accrued on amounts donors have pledged to give to the orchestra upon their death. (But donors keep the capital until they die.)

The orchestra earns smaller amounts from its 'contracted services', for example serving as the pit orchestra for the Minnesota Opera and being the University of Chicago's orchestra in residence.

Towards 30 June: Annual Fund

As part of the SPCO's development team, much of my effort is concentrated on helping the orchestra reach its Annual Fund goal. With around eight weeks until the end of the financial year on 30 June, there is still \$1.3 million (35% of the total) left to raise. This is far from unusual: in common with many American non-profit organisations, the last quarter – and in particular, the last month – brings in the most contributions: in each June between 2000/01 and 2008/09, an average of 21% of that year's eventual total was pledged to the annual fund.

When I first arrive, the development team is in the final weeks of preparation for the main fundraising gala of the year, the Spring Soiree on 22 May. The event is held at the University of Minnesota's concert hall in Minneapolis and tickets cost \$250 each, however patrons are invited to swipe their credit cards at the door as they arrive to make bidding at the live auction easier.

Larry Kroshus is a former livestock auctioneer who has turned his hand to big arts fundraisers and he has not lost the rapid-fire patter of the Midwestern cattle market. There are a dozen lots, from dinner for six cooked by the SPCO concertmaster and assistant concertmaster, to an afternoon's fishing with the principal keyboard player and five bottles of 1982 Bordeaux from the board chairman's wine cellar. Most of the bidders are in the first few rows

and graciously give way to each other, exchanging smiles and nods with their partners before catching the auctioneer's eye. As prices rise, my colleagues in the development team encourage the bidders by leading ripples of applause. Each of the lots sells for between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and the whole event raises more than \$100,000.

I am struck by the willingness of the donors to give in such a public forum. Afterwards, the auctioneer tells me that bidders at the livestock mart are motivated by 75% emotion and 25% ego. "But at events like this," he says, "it's the other way around."

I spend much of the early part of my sabbatical at the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra attending the numerous internal meetings, asking questions of staff members and conducting research into potential new donors from the Twin Cities' business community. The development team consists of seven full-time staff members, headed by the Director of Development, Theresa Gienapp, and reporting to the orchestra's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Jon Limbacher. Other staff members are responsible for a different division of giving: corporate gifts, trust and foundation grants, and individual gifts, divided into bands. Every week the whole team meets to share progress, confirm who is responsible for acknowledging gifts, and plan ahead.

Throughout June a somewhat frenzied atmosphere takes hold in the office as staff chase up long-promised pledges and wait to find out which donors will increase their contribution. A colleague hands me a list of so-called LYBUNTs, explaining that they are donors who gave Last Year, But Unfortunately Not This. They may already have received four or five letters, several emails and some phone calls from the outsourced telefunding company, but the orchestra does not give up easily and I pick up the phone.

To buoy up the development team there is a theme to the final month's fundraising and this year *Braveheart* has been chosen in my honour. As I spend the morning reading a prepared script into a succession of Minnesotan answering machines, I am put off my stride by colleagues emerging from other departments in conga formation. They have smeared their faces with a blue toothpaste woad and are dressed in improvised copier-paper kilts.

By 30 June even the lunchtime fitness instructor has been roped in to make calls. Many audience members choose to donate around \$100 a year, on



Above: Spring Soiree auction (SPCO)

top of the cost of their tickets, and the orchestra cannot do without these smaller sums. In the last few minutes of the working day, staff leave final messages to remind patrons that their donations still count if they are made online before midnight.

Fundraising philosophy

The SPCO's fundraising philosophy is one of the ways the orchestra aims to achieve its long-term organisational goals, established in the 2002 Strategic Plan and revised in 2006. Colourfully termed Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals or "bee-hags" (the phrase was coined by the business consultants Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in 1996), they are:

- To be widely recognized as America's Chamber Orchestra,
- To be clearly distinctive in artistic profile,
- To be the symbol of excellence in the Twin Cities, and
- To be exemplary and robust in financial performance.

The last goal is perhaps the most relevant to the orchestra's approach to fundraising. In recent years deficits have been anathema to the SPCO, and it has balanced its budget in all but one of the last 15 years. Unlike many American orchestras, it has no accumulated deficit and no external debt.

In April 2009 the orchestra was forced to make severe spending cuts in response to the economic downturn: musicians agreed to accept salaries 12% lower than those dictated by their collective agreement, the salaries of senior management were cut by 15%, pay was frozen for other staff, and 7.5 positions (17% of the staff) were made redundant.

The Vice President and Chief Operating Officer,

Jon Limbacher, tells me that cultural organisations are competing more than ever with other social causes for philanthropic support, especially among younger donors. In order to strengthen the case for support, he says the SPCO is positioning itself “not as a product but as a cause”.

The orchestra aims to build a broad base of supporters from the local area by encouraging more people firstly to attend concerts and then to become donors. In recent seasons it has significantly reduced the cost of tickets at all venues – most tickets cost \$10, and 84% of tickets cost less than \$25; it has also increased the number of ‘neighbourhood concerts’ outside the city centre. Both moves are intended to break down the barriers of price and location that have stopped people coming to classical music concerts in the past. The orchestra is also investing in a major project with Minnesota Public Radio to make its concert archive available free online.

By making concerts affordable and accessible, the orchestra’s argument for philanthropic support is stronger. It also creates a culture and expectation of giving over and above the cost of the ticket. Jon Limbacher admits that in some respects, concert tickets are “a loss leader” in order to encourage people to come and contribute to the orchestra.

There is a month-long ‘pledge drive’ once a year where the musicians get involved directly in fundraising. At one concert in the Ordway Center for Performing Arts, the principal keyboard player bounds downstage from the harpsichord, introduces himself to the audience, then whips out a contribution envelope from the concert programme and asks the audience to do the same. Having urged generous contributions, he returns to the keyboard to begin the second half.

When these pledge drives began a few years ago, some subscribers were furious. Soliciting donations during an orchestral performance “violated the sanctity of the concert hall”, declared one indignant punter. In all probability this approach would be regarded as crass in the UK, but the musicians and audiences in Saint Paul have become accustomed to it over time.

The SPCO wants to turn single-ticket buyers into subscribers, subscribers into donors, and donors into super-donors, in a process it calls the ‘patron development pipeline’. The key aspects of this strategy are:

- Collaboration, not competition, between the marketing and development teams, so that direct communication (emails, mailings, etc.) with customers and donors is co-ordinated
- Moderate use of rewards for those who give (a ‘Liaison’ scheme offers subscribers who donate

more than \$300 access to special events and a named staff member to help them with their ticketing needs)

- Increased access and involvement with the orchestra as donation increases, through the ‘Friends’ and ‘Governing Members’ schemes, and eventually a place on the board

The collaboration between marketing and development is particularly relevant to me, given my marketing background, and several of the projects I work on fall into both camps. Over the summer I liaise with artists’ managers to compile the 2009/10 programme book, co-ordinate the Musician Sponsorship Programme (which pairs generous donors with particular musicians for the season), and produce the orchestra’s first in-house fundraising video – for use on the SPCO website and in emails. I also participate in several ‘retreats’ involving various combinations of staff from both marketing and development, who meet to review ticket sales and donations for 2009/10 and plan for the coming year.



Right: SPCO fundraising video on YouTube, featuring principal bassoonist Charles Ullery

One of the most surprising aspects of how the SPCO is run is the size and involvement of its board. In 2009/10 there were 56 members (including three musicians) and within a few years the orchestra aims to increase this number to around 75, to create as wide a sphere of influence within the philanthropic community as possible.

The three board meetings I attend, on 5 May, 23 June and 15 September, are strikingly open. Apart from a brief executive session at the end of each meeting, staff and musicians are welcome to attend as observers. Board members and staff sit together at round tables and participate in breakout discussions, making the meeting feel more like a seminar than the somewhat passive small board meetings of many British arts organisations.

Much of the board’s work is delegated to ten specialist committees (Artistic Initiatives, Audit, Community Engagement, Development, Finance, Governance, Human Resources, Investment, Marketing/PR and Patron Development) which periodically make reports and recommendations to the full board. Administering these committees takes a lot of staff time, but the orchestra believes

that involving the board as much as possible in the strategic direction of the orchestra creates engaged and loyal board members.

Jon Limbacher, the orchestra's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, uses an American gambling (and investment banking) phrase to explain the relationship between giving time and giving money: those with "skin in the game" are more likely to support the orchestra in hard times.

The success of this approach is borne out by looking at the financial commitment of the board since the 'patron development' strategy began six years ago. In 2003/04, the 55-member board contributed \$691,000 to the annual fund: an average of around \$12,000 per board member. In 2009/10, the board of 56 members contributed \$1.1 million: an average of more than \$20,000 each. The number of 'super-patrons' has tripled too. In 2004 only two donors gave \$50,000 or more; this year there are six making contributions at this level.

I spend part of my placement analysing a survey of board members and find they are very happy with their role. All but one of the 38 respondents say they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the leadership of the board and the orchestra. One comments that "the board members are eager, informed, willing, and outstandingly generous of time and money. It's the best board in the Twin Cities!"

I chose to visit the SPCO because its bold vision of accessibility and engagement has allowed it to develop a loyal base of supporters from across the community it serves. Over the past six years, it has positioned itself as a cause worth supporting by lowering ticket prices and taking concerts out of the city centre. The orchestra wants to increase accessibility still further by opening up its free digital concert archive. In parallel, the orchestra has aimed to enhance its fundraising capacity by bringing its most generous patrons into the heart of the organisation – its large and heavily engaged board – and setting high expectations of them: they must be prepared to fundraise.

As a newcomer to arts fundraising, working in Saint Paul enabled me to study a highly evolved system of private philanthropy from the inside. The SPCO has become a leader in patron development, sharing its strategy with other American orchestras and, in February 2011, the Association of British Orchestras.

In response to the reduction in public funding, arts organisations in the UK are looking to the United States for inspiration to boost private giving here. It is not possible simply to transplant the American system of philanthropy to the UK – we would need

to import their tax rules and deep-seated suspicion of government first – but I believe arts organisations in the UK could benefit from the SPCO's accessibility and engagement approach to fundraising.

Accessibility has been a feature of the subsidised arts in Britain for decades: reasonably priced tickets and concessions enable a fairly broad section of the population to come to performances if they choose to.

Engaging with donors could be trickier. Many British arts organisations are not good at thanking philanthropists and are wary of allowing them to become too involved in case they start to interfere with artistic plans. In Saint Paul I was not aware of donors trying to influence what music was performed, although board members were kept informed about artistic planning.

For the SPCO's strategy to work in the UK there would also need to be a fundamental reconsideration of the role of the board. Many boards in Britain act as passive guardians of the organisation, rather than getting actively involved in strategy and fundraising. Board members would need to be recruited for their ability to give time and effort (and, controversially, money) to the organisation.

I am confident that my experience at the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra will prove valuable to me in my career as an arts manager in the future. As arts organisations in the UK become increasingly dependent on private giving, my experience in the United States will be an instructive lesson in how to help British organisations build a broad and committed base of support.

American Public Media

Public media in the United States

The system of public service broadcasting in the United States is more complicated than in the UK. The closest American equivalents to the BBC are the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for television and National Public Radio (NPR) for radio.

However although both have a mission to produce high-quality public service broadcasting, the way they operate is very different from the BBC.

NPR has a substantial production facility in Washington DC, mainly concentrating on news programmes and running the npr.org website. Many Americans refer to all public radio stations as 'NPR' because its morning and afternoon news programmes, *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, are syndicated to almost all major public radio stations in the United States. NPR also acts as a membership body for public radio stations, advocating on their behalf in Washington.

However most programming on public radio stations across the United States is not produced by NPR, but by the local stations themselves – mainly owned by universities, colleges, and state arts/education boards – or by other production companies, including American Public Media and Public Radio International.

American Public Media, based in Saint Paul, grew out of Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) to become its national production arm and parent company. MPR, founded in 1967, is one of the most successful public radio services in the United States: it has more than 110,000 'members' (who support the organisation financially) and its 44 stations across the state have more than 900,000 listeners. These stations broadcast one of three services: News & Information, Classical or 'The Current', which

Below: The headquarters of American Public Media and Minnesota Public Radio in downtown Saint Paul (Flickr/Shiraz Janjua)



broadcasts 'adult alternative' pop and rock music.

Minnesota Public Radio has built a strong relationship with the Twin Cities' two orchestras, the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, since it began broadcasting live concerts in the late 1960s. As a result, MPR and its parent company have developed a specialism in classical music broadcasting: APM is now the largest producer of classical music radio programmes in the United States, through the purchase in 2007 of NPR's classical programmes, *SymphonyCast* and *Performance Today*.

Performance Today

Performance Today (PT) is a daily two-hour programme of classical concert performances from around the world. It is carried by 255 of the roughly 800 public radio stations in the United States, and attracts around 1.3 million listeners per week, making it the most popular daily classical music programme in the country.

The programme was produced by NPR in Washington DC from 1980 to 2007 and has been presented by Fred Child since 2000. When American Public Media bought the programme, Fred Child and some NPR producers moved north but only Fred still remains with the show.

I join a production team of eight full-time staff and several part-time interns. Their roles are:

- *Two senior producers* are responsible for long term planning of the programme's content and for choosing the main recordings to feature each day, as well as building relationships with performing groups, festivals and artists that the programme would like to feature
- *Show director* edits the scripts, prepares any pre-recorded interview clips and short audio examples before the recording session (or 'showroll'), then works with the presenter in the studio to ensure the programme flows well and runs to time, as well as making any edits to the programme before broadcast
- *Features producer* works to research and set up interviews with artists and other interesting musical stories to feature
- *Two associate producers*: one is responsible for ensuring the programme has acquired the necessary rights to broadcast the performances, according to long-standing or ad hoc agreements (*Performance Today* has deals with several American orchestras and the European Broadcasting Union, enabling it to broadcast performances from the BBC and other European



Above: one of the *Performance Today* whiteboards (CT)

broadcasters) and for selecting some music from unsolicited recordings sent to the programme; the other researches and writes scripts for each programme and provides additional help with scheduling music

- Two audio engineers ensure that the recordings used on the programme sound as good as they can be, and as consistent as possible. Because *PT* uses recordings from venues around the world, the recording quality is variable and often quite a lot of audio engineering is necessary
- Interns complete a lot of the paperwork, update the website and audition recordings to make sure they are usable

All the members of staff, as well as the presenter, divide up scripting duties for each programme. I help with this, and am encouraged to think laterally when scripting, as the common anecdotes about a composer or a piece are heard too frequently. There is no overall programme editor, although I am struck by the control exercised by the presenter, who assumes a de-facto editor role, sometimes significantly rewriting scripts and vetoing choices of music. This is markedly different to the role of most presenters in the UK who, while contributing to the production process, do not have the final say. I learn that this is the case across radio in the United States, where programmes are much more personality-led than in Britain.

The *PT* production office is covered on three sides with whiteboards, each representing a week of programmes to come. Programming may be pegged to current events (eg Mexico's bicentenary on 16 September inspired a week of music by Mexican composers), or themed throughout the week (eg all the symphonies of a particular composer), or feature a music festival (eg the BBC Proms or Aspen Music Festival). Some of the best editions of *PT* are broadcast in early August from the Marlboro Music Festival, founded by Mitsuko Uchida and Richard Goode. The presenter and one senior producer gain unprecedented access to the private summer school, where the next generation of American soloists performs chamber music with older professional mentors.

The producers' choice of music is limited by a strict timetable that allows stations to insert their own local content. Each hour begins with a one-minute 'billboard' telling listeners what is coming up followed by a five-minute section containing a short piece of music, during which some stations broadcast a news bulletin. The programme must then 'restart' for listeners who have not heard the first part of the show, but avoid repeating the introduction for those who have.

Each hour must also contain one or two short interludes which stations can use for 'underwriting' – short messages from local sponsors, similar to

advertises on commercial radio, but regulated by a strict code that prevents companies from overtly selling their products. Finally, scripts must not refer to the previous or forthcoming hour of the programme, since some stations only buy one of the hours!

These constraints make me aware of the market forces at work within the not-for-profit public radio system. Producers like American Public Media have to sell shows to the programme directors of local stations. Experimental-sounding programmes risk offending listeners and underwriters whose contributions support the stations, so the directors tend to have conservative tastes.

As a result the music policy of *Performance Today* is more constrained than that of BBC Radio 3 (whose income is, of course, assured through the licence fee). Very little experimental music is played on the programme outside of the weekly '21C' slot, where a piece written after 2000 is broadcast, contextualised by an interview with the composer. Few of the works selected for broadcast are challenging to listen to, and the signposting of modern works in a dedicated section of the programme allows *PT* listeners to avoid most contemporary music if they choose.

Most classical music radio in the United States consists of a presenter simply introducing a selection of music from CDs, so stations regard *PT* – which includes concert performances, artist interviews and features – as a premium programme which they could not afford to produce themselves.

A day in the life of *PT*

At 9:00 each morning the presenter and director record the programme that will be broadcast the following day. The show is recorded 'as live', with as few interruptions as possible. Throughout the day, producers listen to concert recordings, research and write scripts, edit pre-recorded features and email broadcasters, record companies and artists to make arrangements for performances to be broadcast. At the end of the showroll, usually after 11:00, the team meets to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the show that has just been recorded, before looking ahead to the next day's programme – and to what is coming up later in the week. The team aims to have pre-recorded features prepared around a week before the transmission, and scripts written at least four days in advance. In the afternoon the director will edit the next day's programme for transmission and begin preparing for the following day's showroll.

Production

My background as a broadcast journalist and producer on live news programmes means that I am happy working to daily deadlines, researching and writing script segments (although my American English did occasionally need correcting). However I am keen to learn the different skills needed for music programmes. One of my first projects is to edit a 'perf-chat': an extended interview with a musician in which he/she also performs. Working in APM's editing suites using ProTools editing software, I cut down an interview with pianist Joyce Yang in which she talks about Schumann's mental state and performs pieces from *Carnaval*. The perf-chat is broadcast on *Performance Today* a few days later and is subsequently syndicated to the NPR music website.

I work closely with the features producer, Suzanne Schaffer, and suggest topical musical stories for *PT* to cover, like the US premiere of the documentary film *Kinshasa Symphony*, about an orchestra in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I arrange for Fred Child to interview the director, and include sound clips from the film.

Music That Matters is an occasional feature on *PT* which tells the stories of people for whom music has made a profound difference to their lives, for example a terminally ill woman who had learnt to play a specially designed harp, or young Palestinians in Gaza learning string instruments as an alternative to violence.

These features require a lot of production effort; each story is told across two or three days, with around 25 minutes of material. Suzanne is only able to produce one such feature per month, and sometimes not even as often. As a result, the *Music That Matters* strand is not establishing itself in listeners' minds as a recurring feature of *Performance Today*.

Shortly before I arrived, APM had discovered that the title of the strand had been trademarked by another broadcaster, so the name was about to change. We decide to use the opportunity to reformat the strand so that it takes less effort to produce and becomes a recognisable regular part of *PT*.

Suzanne and I hold two sessions with the full team to establish the purpose of the strand, and the kind of stories we want to tell. We want to continue to focus on music changing lives, so we choose the title *Transformations*, which had fortunately not already been taken by another broadcaster! The new strand will be broadcast in series of six short (6-8 minute) weekly episodes, each telling a different story, that would require much less production effort. By giving *Transformations* a regular weekly slot,

listeners will begin to recognise it and hopefully engage with it more. I suggest that the first series should be a combination of new stories and shorter edits of the existing *Music That Matters* material, and agree to produce one of the new episodes as well as reversioning an old one.

In mid-August I travel to Chicago to spend a day at the Sphinx Performance Academy, a two-week-long summer school for Black and Latino string players aged 12-17. The scheme is run by the Sphinx Organisation, which aims to increase participation in classical music by people from ethnic minorities. Sphinx runs an annual competition for Black and Latino string players, and several of the former winners are coaching the young people in Chicago.

I interview several young people and their coaches, the founder of the Sphinx Organisation, and the violinist Rachel Barton Pine, who is giving a masterclass on the night I visit. The finished report, which I edit more precisely than I had ever done for news programmes, is around seven minutes long and begins the first series of *Transformations*. This experience is one of the highlights of my sabbatical, both because the Sphinx Performance Academy is inspiring and because it is rewarding to manage a discrete project that helps to shape the future direction of the programme.

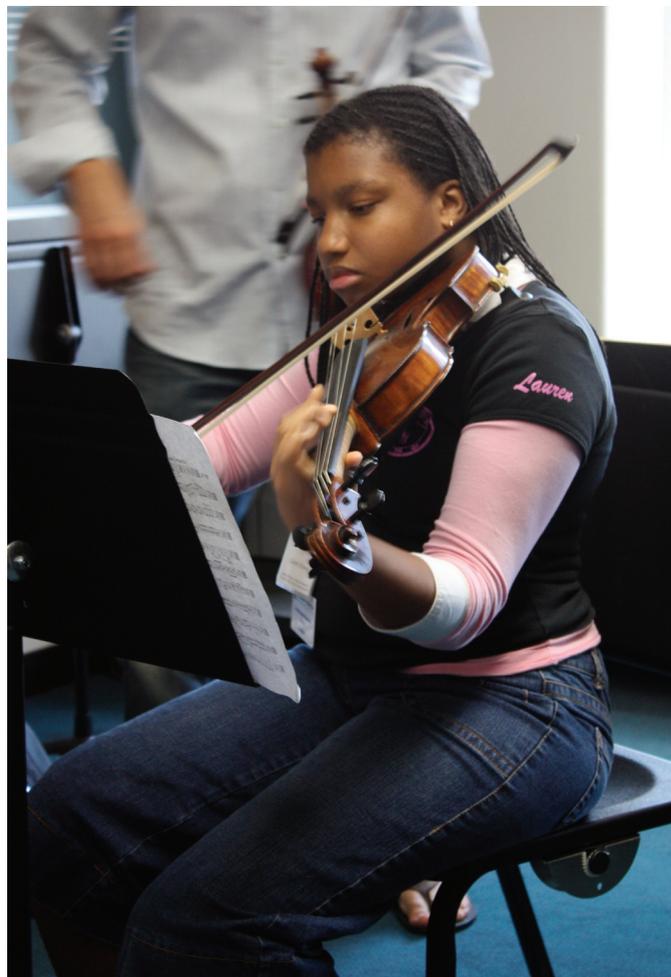
The future of *Performance Today*

One of my final, and most interesting, experiences at American Public Media, is to take part in a strategic review of *Performance Today*. Around mid-September, APM announces it will rebrand some of its biggest programmes, start some new ones, and review others. Senior executives within the 'National programming' division feel the time is right, three years after acquiring *PT* from National Public Radio, to examine how well the programme is working in its Minnesotan home.

Some staff members are concerned that the hidden agenda was to cut costs, and there is certainly a line of questioning that points in that direction. At least part of the aim is to free up producers' time by, for example, using commercial (studio) discs instead of concert recordings for some of the programme – thus avoiding the need to negotiate rights agreements – and to record Fred Child's links for each show without playing in the music, in order to save time in the studio.

There is also a bold proposal to offer stations *PT* as a two-hour product only, enabling producers to programme longer works and eliminating the necessity to create a break for news bulletins at the beginning of both hours. Senior producers are confident that the few stations who currently

Below: Tutor Bryan Hernandez-Luch coaches the students of the Inferno Quartet at the Sphinx Performance Academy, Chicago (CT)



broadcast only one hour could be persuaded to buy the whole programme.

Most colleagues agree that Fred Child's time should be freed up as far as possible to concentrate on writing and editing scripts, to create a personal connection between the host and the listener. These changes will only be implemented after I leave, but I am very pleased to take part in the programme review and glad that my contributions to the discussion seemed to be valued.

For two reasons, my placement at American Public Media was more hands-on than my more observational experience at the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra: firstly, my skills and experience in radio production was of more immediate use to APM, compared with my lack of any detailed knowledge of arts fundraising; secondly, the day-to-day workflow at *Performance Today* is easier to slip in to than the final stages of a long-planned Annual Fund campaign.

Working at APM was a wonderful opportunity to broaden my broadcasting experience to include music, and to work with a highly dedicated team of classical music radio producers. Many editions of *PT* have a refreshingly vibrant feel compared to much classical music radio in the UK. And while APM is not nearly as well resourced as the BBC, it punches above its weight in terms of persuading first-rate artists and orchestras to take part in its programmes.

I am grateful to all my colleagues at American Public Media for giving me the chance to experience innovative and original classical music radio, produced by a highly dedicated team.

The US perspective

Writing about 'the US perspective' is a difficult task. I believe that at both American Public Media and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, I experienced a US perspective – that of the Twin Cities. Minnesota is a generous state: its state legislature gives more per head to the arts than any other, and its citizens donate more to non-profit organisations than most Americans.

Compared to the UK system, public broadcasting and the arts in the United States depend to a much greater extent on the support of individuals. This creates market-like forces within non-profit organisations: producers feel they must pander to station programme directors; arts organisations must involve their wealthy donors in the running of their organisations; musicians have to help raise their salaries by appealing to donors.

While some British observers may regret the American dependence on private funding, subject as it is to the whims of wealthy individuals, the necessity of both APM and the SPCO to solicit their audiences has led to a greater understanding of their audiences.

I am optimistic that my experience of working for these successful US organisations will prove valuable to me in the future, in both public broadcasting and arts management, as both industries become increasingly reliant on the people they serve for support.

I would like to thank the Finzi Trust for providing the opportunity to widen my horizons on this highly rewarding project.