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# Feed the Soil, Not the Plant: Case Studies in the Sustainability of Ontario's Regional Orchestras

LAURA CHAMBERS

*Abstract: Although Western Art Music (WAM) may not (yet!) be classified as a music-culture "at risk," many of Ontario's professional regional orchestras operate under increasingly unstable and difficult conditions. Using the theories of Jeff Todd Titon — whose evolving scholarship on the sustainability of musical cultures explores sustainability through a relational epistemology with the science of ecology — I examine the institutional health of two organizations within the WAM landscape of Ontario: The Niagara Symphony Orchestra and the ensemble previously known as Orchestra London.*

*Résumé : Bien que la musique classique occidentale ne puisse pas (encore!) être qualifiée de culture musicale « en danger », de nombreux orchestres professionnels régionaux de l'Ontario connaissent de grandes difficultés et une instabilité grandissante. À partir des théories de Jeff Todd Titon — dont les recherches en constante évolution sur la viabilité des cultures musicales explorent cette durabilité sous l'angle d'une relation épistémologique avec la science de l'écologie — j'examine la santé institutionnelle de deux organisations du paysage de la musique classique en Ontario : le Niagara Symphony Orchestra et l'ensemble connu auparavant sous le nom d'Orchestra London.*

*Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures* examines a diverse group of musical cultures using models of musical and cultural sustainability that are based in principles from conservation ecology (Schippers and Grant 2016). While the editors caution that "there will be no simple solutions to understanding or influencing the sustainability of specific music practices" (333), they suggest that "examining forces of music sustainability through an ecological perspective may help identify and clarify the vibrancy, strengths, and weaknesses of a music genre, and the ways in which the factors in its vitality and viability interrelate" (340).

In the academic discourse surrounding the sustainability of musical

cultures, scholarship examining Western Art Music (WAM) is limited. When it is included, it has been presented, for the most part, as a thriving tradition (Schippers 2015: 147). When I first encountered this viewpoint, I was struck by its difference from my own experience as a professional musician who performs primarily WAM repertoire. Questions about the sustainability of the art form that is the basis of my livelihood persist in my thoughts and frequently inform discussions with my musician colleagues and personal community. Changes to WAM culture in North America within the last decade have been significant and widely experienced: bankruptcy is increasingly common and has started reaching some of the genre's most prestigious institutions, including the Detroit Symphony and the New York City Opera Company (Robin 2014). Several major orchestras are reducing their concert offerings, lacking the funds to support a traditional full season. Musicians are increasingly confronted with the decision to accept salary cuts or go on strike, and a disturbing air of normalcy has been established around the large operating deficits run by many of Canada's symphony orchestras (interview with a member of the Canada Council for the Arts, March 28, 2016). These changes suggest that recent shifts in our cultural value system are significant enough to truly threaten the survival rates of these organizations.

Within the collection of case studies in *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures*, John Drummond examines the strength of Western Opera. Drummond's work is large in scope. It includes sixty-five interviews across four continents and, as such, it allows Drummond to examine the larger economic theories with which these operatic institutions interact. Drummond finds challenges to sustainability that are similar to those revealed in the case studies below, despite the difference in scope. For example, Drummond notes that the high costs of most opera productions cannot be sustained by audiences alone. Most opera, therefore, relies on potentially volatile government and private funding bodies (Drummond 2016: 181). He also highlights opera's institutionalized training system (universities and conservatories across the globe) that is producing too many highly skilled performers "than can expect to find employment" (186). Finally, Drummond identifies a "sense of entitlement" felt by many participants and performers, who are surprised that "opera is not automatically supported by society" (183). I found these same issues — unsustainably high production costs, an over-saturated talent market, and a disconnection between practitioners and society in general — confronting the groups I chose to study in my own investigation of Ontario's regional orchestras.

The challenges for opera described in Drummond's study deepened my disagreement with Schippers' assertion that opera is thriving (2016: 4). My reaction to this statement prompted me to delve further into the existing

literature on the sustainability of musical cultures, leading me to Jeff Todd Titon's recent scholarship on the sustainability of musical cultures, which explores a relational epistemology with the science of ecology.

When I first engaged with Titon's work on sustainability, I was attracted to the parallel he draws between what is necessary to achieve ecological sustainability and what is necessary to achieve cultural sustainability (Titon 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015). I could immediately see its relevance to WAM, and its ability to open up new ways of thinking about long-standing problems within various local WAM communities. The idea that WAM communities must personally engage with the larger communities surrounding them to ensure the continued viability of their art is not new. It is my hope that this descriptive case study, explored in relationship with Titon's theories, will reach my orchestral musician colleagues in the WAM community and ignite much needed dialogue around these ideas.

Using Titon's evolving theories, I examined the institutional health of two organizations within both my own professional experience and the WAM landscape of Ontario: The Niagara Symphony Orchestra and the ensemble previously known as Orchestra London. I focused on these two orchestras because they represent two divergent situations in which regional orchestras in Ontario find themselves today. I began substitute work with Orchestra London in 2013, at a time when the orchestra was being invigorated by a dynamic music director and the impending development of a new concert hall in the city. Over two years of regular substitute work, I watched this enthusiasm quickly crumble and, despite a valiant effort, the organization fell (very publicly) into bankruptcy in December of 2014. Now, the group #WePlayOn, The Musicians of Orchestra London (#WPO) is endeavouring to rebuild. In contrast, the Niagara Symphony Orchestra opened its 2015/2016 season in a brand-new performing arts centre (similar to the one planned in London), deficit free, and with a growing $1 million operating budget (Turner-Smith interview, March 30, 2016).[1]

As a part-time member of the communities examined in my case studies, I am aware that personal experience has influenced my research and analysis. Many of my interviewees are also members of my professional and personal circles. These relationships enabled a level of trust that I believe led to greater candor on many subjects. Several of my questions were difficult for my colleagues to hear, but they were also important and necessary. Ultimately, I believe this insider perspective has enriched my data.

As my primary methodology, I conducted interviews with members of the orchestras' administrative and artistic staffs,[2] a renowned member of the arts management sector, and a member of the Canada Council for the Arts.[3]

I also sought information from local newspapers, the websites and blogs of the Niagara Symphony Orchestra and #WPO organizations, and various other web pages specific to these regions and their artistic communities. This paper summarizes a larger project that took place over several months. In this paper, I limit my investigation to these two orchestras, and while I do not generalize my findings to comment on Canada's — or even Ontario's — WAM culture, I do hope that these case studies will contribute to a larger conversation about the sustainability of Canada's WAM landscape.

## Titon's Theories of Sustainability

"Sustainability" is in vogue in contemporary society. Theories on how best to achieve stable viability in areas such as business, the environment, and the economy are numerous. Scholarship on generalized theories of *cultural* sustainability, however, is limited (see Throsby 1995, 2005; Shockley 2004); even fewer focus specifically on music culture (e.g., Titon 2009; Schippers 2015). The world heritage organization UNESCO has developed a system for intangible cultural preservation, which includes music, but as Titon points out, "safeguarding" greatly differs from sustainability (2009: 129). Titon's work, and that of the few scholars who have expanded on it, are the basis of research dedicated exclusively to the development of a sustainability model for musical cultures. While it is true that some research in areas such as community music-making (Schippers and Letts 2013; Nethsinghe 2013), musical diasporas (Grant 2011), and isolation within music cultures (Grant 2010) also deals with sustainability, given the scope of this paper, Titon's work has proved the most fruitful in examining the sustainability of the WAM subculture of orchestral music. Although his idea that musical cultures behave as ecosystems first appeared in his seminal 1984 text, *Worlds of Music*, his linking of ecology and cultural sustainability was not expressly articulated until his 2009 article, "Music and Sustainability: An Ecological Viewpoint." In the eight years that have followed, Titon has revised and expanded his thoughts (2010, 2013, 2015).

Connecting with and engaging the participation of a community whose musical culture is at risk is a persistent tenet of Titon's model of sustainability (2009: 121-122). This observation has led Titon to identify four transferable aspects of "New Conservation Ecology" that are applicable to the intangible cultural sphere:

1. The encouragement of diversity
2. The fostering of interconnectedness

3. The importance of stewardship
4. The establishment of limits to growth (2009: 123-124)

These concepts have remained touchstones in the evolution of Titon's sustainability scholarship.

Nature possesses no agency, and therefore cannot privilege a certain organism because of its intrinsic "value." For expressive cultures, diversity generates greater numbers of performers, participants, and audience members. A diverse natural environment means the presence of more species; within expressive culture, a diverse environment means the presence of more arts organizations and more art. Diversity increases the likelihood of an interconnected network forming between like-minded organizations. This network can help these organizations gain strength by sharing expertise, collaborating, and pooling resources.

Brent Keogh, one of the few scholars to comment critically on Titon's work, suggests that Titon has failed to reconcile nature's lack of agency in his relational epistemology to ecology, and that the act of sustaining a specific culture (or organism) would never occur in the environment naturally (2013: 5). However, although the origins of Titon's theories are extracted from observations of ecosystems unaffected by humans, the bulk of his research is inspired by the field of ecological management. There, biologists intervene in systems to counteract intentional or unintentional human impacts. They do so as efficiently and minimally as possible. Titon hopes that the actions inspired by his model of sustainability will be adopted by ethnomusicologists and members of musical communities in a similar vein, helping to sustain musical cultures through the engagement of these members with minimal intervention on the part of the ethnomusicologist (2009: 121).

In "Nature's Economy" (2010), Titon builds on his four principles, steering them toward applied ethnomusicology and the cultural worker's role in achieving sustainability. The paper's title and core idea reference a principle drawn from organic farming: "agriculture should wherever possible imitate nature" (Titon 2010). From here Titon sets up the following design and management strategies for culture workers acting in stewardship of the public interest:

1. Observe patterns in Nature that connect all living beings and design with these in culture. Do not impose form; in Nature form follows function. Manage for whole systems; do not offer single solutions.

2. Encourage cultural and biodiversity as a strategy for sustainability through adaptation and dynamic change. Encourage revitalization movements that recycle tradition and know that in order to survive, tradition must be dynamic.
3. From organic agriculture to culture, apply the principle "Feed the soil, not the plant." Do not intervene to bolster specific expressive cultural genres — these will come and go naturally, and today in the internet age all are capable of staying in one form or another. Direct support to the social, political, and economic conditions or the cultural soil under which expressive cultures flourish and upon which they depend.
4. Nature rewards cooperation and demands local expertise; culture workers should partner with local scholars and practitioners, ascertain their desires and goals, and work towards mutual ends and rewards. (Titon 2010)

## Two Regional Orchestras Explored Through Titon's Theories

Titon's ecological approach to sustainability emphasizes the importance of considering all aspects of an expressive culture's "ecosystem" — the political, social, and economic — in one's assessment (Titon 2009). Therefore, in the cases of Orchestra London and the Niagara Symphony Orchestra, it is important to broaden beyond the arts organizations themselves to include their respective cities.

Demographically, the London and Niagara regions share many commonalities. Both regions amalgamate a number of smaller cities and have a similar overall population size of approximately 400,000 (Statistics Canada 2011). Poverty and unemployment rates have historically hovered around the same levels in both cities (slightly above the national average) (City of London n.d.; Niagara Region 2006a). Each region is home to several of Canada's wealthiest 1 percent (Statistics Canada 2011). The median age for both regions is around 40 years (Statistics Canada 2011). The most distinctive demographic difference is that approximately twice the percentage of London's population identifies as a visible minority (16.5%) (City of London n.d.), compared to the population of the Niagara Region (6.3%) (Niagara Region 2006b).

Ontario's regional orchestras are directly affected by changes in their surrounding political and economic climates. While they do have the ability to indirectly impact these aspects of their environment, their greatest, most direct and immediate impact is made socially, at the community level. Therefore, I

will primarily focus on this element of the soil in which these organizations have been planted in the analysis that follows.

*Case Study #1: The Niagara Symphony Orchestra*

In 1978, The St. Catharines Civic Orchestra changed its name to The Niagara Symphony Orchestra in order to "reflect its increased regional responsibilities" (Niagara Symphony 2015a). Currently, a modest administrative staff (a 24-member volunteer board and 7 paid general staff members) and average-sized artistic staff (associate conductor, operating director, librarian, and per-service 44-person orchestra) are run through the combined leadership of managing director Candice Turner-Smith and artistic director Bradley Thachuk (Niagara Symphony 2015a).

The Niagara Symphony opened its 2015/2016 season with an operating budget of $1 million and a modest endowment of approximately $200,000 (with a goal to grow the endowment to $1 million within the next four years) (Niagara Symphony 2015b). Its 2015 season saw its total revenue increase by approximately $250,000, with an income breakdown of 32 percent earned revenue, 52 percent private sector revenue, and 15 percent public sector revenue (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). In comparison to other Ontario orchestras with similar operating budgets (between $800,000 and $1.5 million), Niagara's earned revenue falls very close to the mean; however, the percentages of their funding from the private and public sectors fall, respectively, at the high and the low ends of the scale (Canada Council member, interview, March 28, 2016). The organization's predominant reliance on private sector funding is acknowledged by the managing director as "not her ideal of 33 percent, 33 percent, 33 percent" (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). Her current goal is working toward this "more stable" ratio (interview, March 30, 2016). The Niagara Symphony Orchestra's 2015/2016 season opened in St. Catharines' new $65-million, state-of-the-art performing arts centre. This venue, the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, is unanimously seen as an acoustical upgrade and is thought by many to add prestige to the orchestra's public image (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016; Mackenzie, interview, March 25, 2016; Canada Council Member, interview, March 28, 2016).

The facts above describe a relatively healthy arts organization on a growth trajectory both financially and artistically, but this has not always been the case. In the fall of 2010, the organization was faced with the decision to either declare bankruptcy, or for the board to help support the symphony through the rest of the season and hope that the orchestra could fight its way back to financial

health. At that time, the Niagara Symphony had also lost its artistic direction, with the sudden departure of its music director (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). The organization's turnaround is impressive and remarked on by those in the regional orchestra community (Eck, interview, March 28, 2016). Its critics note, however, that a large part of this revival was funded by a relatively small number of philanthropists, which leaves questions about its permanency.

The turnaround of the Niagara Symphony, as well as the hopes of the key players in the organization for its future, demonstrate many of Titon's principles of cultural sustainability, most notably: a strong understanding of the orchestra's role within its community; a concerted effort to maintain interconnectivity with other regional ecosystems through shared work and local expertise; and a stewardship of the organization that privileges the interests of a common community trust. The necessity of placing limits around the organization's growth has also been considered by both the symphony's Music and Managing Directors (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016; Thachuk, interview, March 28, 2016).

To improve soil, one must understand its composition and what it lacks. An arts organization's role in its community can be seen in an analogous way: to effectively engage with and improve the surrounding community, it must understand the community's makeup and what is lacking. In 2010, at the Niagara Symphony Orchestra's most perilous point, the organization knew very little about the community that supported it. "The orchestra didn't know who its audience was, who its subscribers were, who the single ticket buyers were, who went to which show," noted managing director Candice Turner-Smith when expressing her incredulity over learning in 2009 that the orchestra lacked a comprehensive database (interview, March 30, 2016). Creation of such a database was an important first step in the orchestra's rightsizing.[4] Knowing the orchestra lacked the information necessary to understand the makeup of its audience, one can presume that even less was known about the larger regional community.

The composition of the community soil that surrounds the Niagara Symphony is varied, with some areas more hospitable to the arts than others. A large part of the region's arts activity takes place in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which is home to the Shaw Festival and the Niagara Jazz festival, as well as numerous art galleries and small performance spaces. Brock University, located in the Niagara Region city of St. Catharines, is home to a competitive theatre program (Rogers Media 2015). However, very few of the other cities in the region possess facilities necessary to host a large symphony orchestra, and until the recent campaign to revitalize St. Catharines' downtown core, the area was

regarded as a bit of a "ghost land" (Thachuk, interview, March 28, 2016).

Once the orchestra identified its current audience and how to best serve them, the next step was a strategic effort to increase its visibility and engagement with the region as a whole. In 2010, a permanent position was offered to Candice Turner-Smith, a 35-year resident who possessed an extensive knowledge of the community. Turner-Smith credits this knowledge with giving her the ability to gather board members who are largely representative of the region's industries, communities, and political sphere (interview, March 30, 2016). This expertise also helped the orchestra engage the support of key philanthropists from the Niagara Region. Western Art Music might be a passion for these philanthropists, but they also see their gifts as an "investment in their community" and in the arts culture of the Niagara Region as a whole (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). The orchestra's reliance on a few wealthy donors for the majority of their support is not a financially stable model. One can speculate that greater engagement with the community will be necessary to secure the organization's continued health. Titon's model would recommend this increased investment in the community in accordance with the adage "nothing comes for free."

The orchestra's artistic director also acknowledges the importance of his own personal investment in the region. Originally splitting his time between multiple cities, Maestro Thachuk quickly realized that this needed to change for the orchestra to be successful:

> I feel one of the turnaround points for [the orchestra] is when I gave up my Toronto residence and fully began living in Niagara ... I got to Niagara and I realized if we're going to properly serve the arts and make WAM relevant in Niagara, I have to spend more time here and create a climate in which that is possible. You have to figure out the community. (interview, March 28, 2016)

Thachuk has made it his priority to become an "identifiable artistic leader in the community" (interview, March 28, 2016). He attends local OHL hockey games, participates in city hall town meetings, and grabs drinks at the local pub in hopes of striking up an informal conversation with a concert goer (or concert goer to-be).

In addition to the leadership team's community-centric ideology, the organization continues to actively develop relationships within the region. Currently, orchestra members are teaching at Brock University, and the symphony plans to add to its existing outreach programs with a full-time string quartet (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). This quartet will perform over 50 concerts in the community next season. Being part of a network of

regional ecosystems has provided a key source of support during the turnaround. As Artists-in-Residence at Brock University, the orchestra was given access to their previous performance space (the university's theatre) for free (Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). Currently, they are utilizing this network to garner the collective strength needed to ensure the continued feasibility of their residence in the new FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in downtown St. Catharines. As Turner-Smith states, "We have a very strong arts community surrounding the orchestra. Now we [the arts organizations that are current tenants of the FirstOntario Centre] are all trying to fight the fight of the cost of the new performance centre. If we are going to be in that building, we need to go in as a collective group" (interview, March 30, 2016). By creating this informal collective, the community has empowered itself. This investment in interconnectivity, another tenet of Titon's sustainability framework, has proved advantageous.

As opposed to drawing in the community with flashy popular repertoire, Thachuk has focused on introducing the community to the collective musical identity of the orchestra:

> [As] an orchestra our evolution is to stop apologizing for [playing classical music]. I think that is what we have done in Niagara ... our Pops offerings haven't expanded at all, our tickets sales are purely based on WAM offerings. I've got Brahms and Beethoven. My innovators are in house. (interview, March 28, 2016)

In Canada's symphonic environment, where "pop" concert programs — such as "red hot weekends" and "Friday night at the movies" — are often seen as the fastest way back to black, Niagara's ability to generate its highest revenues from WAM offerings is perhaps the most convincing argument that their investment in the community soil has allowed them to thrive.

The organization's leadership also understands Titon's important distinction of stewardship vs. ownership. A difficulty the orchestra currently faces is managing the balance between outside players and local players. No professional symphony orchestra membership is entirely born in its local community. Because the Niagara Symphony is unable to provide full-time living wages that would allow its musicians to live in the region, a certain percentage of talent must be drawn consistently from elsewhere, a decision not unanimously supported by its members (Mackenzie, interview, March 25, 2016). However, as Thachuk states, "it's not their orchestra, it's not my orchestra, it's not Candice's orchestra, it's not the board's orchestra, it's the community's orchestra" (interview, March 28, 2016).

The Managing and Music Directors also articulated their goal for the organization's continued health beyond their tenures and have thought carefully about plans for a smooth and viable succession (Thachuk interview, March 28, 2016; Turner-Smith, interview, March 30, 2016). In addition to the personal pride they take in their work rebuilding the symphony, this management team also sees securing the continued success of the symphony as a task entrusted to them by their region. This added dimension to their approach may have allowed them to make decisions that otherwise might have resulted in a less viable outcome.

Perhaps the most personally surprising discovery of how this organization embodies Titon's framework was the strategic limiting of its growth and the choice to add depth to the organization over continued expansion. Currently, the organization is attempting to "slow the [rate of] growth" compared to its development over the last five years (Thachuk interview, March 28, 2016). In a performance-based field, ego can drive continued, unchecked expansion. Conversely, careful analysis of the amount of nutrients present in all aspects of the community soil (social, political, economic) provides a determinant for growth, and protects against the resource depletion that so commonly results in an organization's failure to thrive.

The outlook for the Niagara Symphony Orchestra is bright. If managed well, it will avoid the crippling cycle of deficits that can destroy an organization. This recent period of stability has also allowed the orchestra to begin to transition from a reactive style of management to an adaptive one, with a focus on resilience. It is important to acknowledge that a large part of the Niagara Symphony's recent funding has been from large, unpredicted philanthropic gifts that arrived at the final hour. Without this infusion of funds, the symphony would not have existed long enough to experience its turnaround, as impressive as it has been.

*Case Study #2: Orchestra London, #WePlayOn*

Orchestra London's recent history sharply contrasts the one experienced by the Niagara Symphony Orchestra. Orchestra London was formed in London, Ontario in 1937. At that time, it was known as the London Promenade Orchestra. Similar in its roots to the Niagara Symphony, the organization started as a community orchestra. It began its transition to professional status in 1957 and achieved full-time professional status in 1971. The orchestra made its final of several name changes in 1981 to Orchestra London. In its last operating year (2014), Orchestra London performed a 28-week season with a professional core of approximately 40 musicians. That year also marked the difficult departure of

its last full-time music director Alain Trudel (Baldwin and Novak 2015).

This history of Orchestra London is one of considerable financial instability, with cycles of budgetary issues dating back to the 1950s (Eck, interview, March 28, 2016). This cycle was ultimately broken in December 2014 when the orchestra declared bankruptcy. In its final year of operation, Orchestra London opened its season with an operating budget of $2.5 million, with an income breakdown of 15 percent private sector funding, 37 percent earned revenue, and 48 percent public sector funding (Canada Council Member, interview, March 28, 2016). Approximately $300,000 of the organization's revenue remains unaccounted for in its available financial statements (Donate 2 Charities 2014). In its final year, the orchestra had also accrued a debt of approximately $1 million (Donate 2 Charities 2014). The orchestra's mix of public and private income puts it at the opposite end of the funding spectrum from the Niagara Symphony. The large amount of public funding Orchestra London received from municipal, provincial, and federal sources perhaps indicates that arts councils made it a prioritized cultural institution. Yet, comparatively low numbers in earned revenue (ticket sales) and private sector funding (charitable donations and corporate support) seems to indicate the organization's inability to connect directly with its immediate community.

Since the organization declared bankruptcy, the musicians who have remained in the London community (who are the majority) have reformed under the name #WePlayOn, the Musicians of Orchestra London. This group has incorporated, achieved charitable status, and secured a modest amount of municipal funding through the trust of the London Arts Council (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016). In its new formation, the ensemble has presented eight sold-out concert programs and a variety of smaller pop-up shows throughout the London region (Musicians of Orchestra London n.d.).

The fall of Orchestra London has been linked to many causes, which change depending on which member of the organization or community you speak with. These include: the sudden withdrawal of an integral and promised financial gift, a long history of poorly managed finances, poor leadership, a lack of accountability and communication, and inflexibility within the organization. A deeper analysis of the orchestra's final year shows that Titon's indicators of cultural sustainability are also conspicuously absent.

The London region's community soil includes a level of artistic enrichment equal to, if not greater than, that of the Niagara Region. Musically alone, evidence of this richness is reflected in a strong choral presence, the second-largest Kiwanis music festival in the province, and a robust Suzuki movement. As one musician commented, "a disproportionately large number of musically inclined families live there" (Orchestra London

Member, interview, March 26, 2016). Despite this seemingly fertile cultural soil, Orchestra London had difficulty taking root.

In the years before bankruptcy the orchestra was featured in the local paper a maximum of twice a year. In its last year, over four dozen articles about the orchestra were published in the *London Free Press*. These articles featured headlines such as "Orchestra London rocked by massive budget shortfall" (Maloney 2015a), "No plan, No matter" (Maloney 2015b), "Orchestra's pitch to city falls flat" (Maloney 2014), and most presciently, "Orchestra revival looms" (Maloney 2015c). Most articles were negative about the orchestra's situation, although the odd article extolling the orchestra's value to the community — such as "Without orchestra, city's music scene suffers" (Robinson 2014) — was also part of the media coverage. Some of the orchestra musicians expressed surprise and hurt over the negative sentiments dominating both the articles and the comment pages that accompanied them. Others felt these articles reflected a disengagement that had been developing for some time:

> Trouble started brewing [within the organization] long before things hit the media, and as that stuff starts people become more and more focused on their own stuff, and less connected to those people in the hall ... Near the end, absolutely there was a disconnect. (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016)

This disconnect with the community was also present in the organization's operational management in the years leading up to bankruptcy. Instead of focusing on fundraising in the community — one of the most integral tools arts organizations use to establish relationships with residents — the orchestra's CEO, Joe Swan, directed the organization's primary focus towards building a new hall. Swan may have had personal reasons for this shift: he made an ultimately unsuccessful run for mayor of London in 2014 and construction of a new hall would have bolstered his profile as a candidate. A $1 million gift to the orchestra made it possible for Swan to shift his focus: "[the gift] was really just so that the orchestra manger could focus on the new hall, and not worry about fundraising for a couple of years" (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016).

Although the orchestra had a small but strong core of committed supporters whose contributions allowed the orchestra to "go on as long and as strong as it did," the orchestra's isolation from the surrounding community had been long standing (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016). This isolation was in place at least as long as concert master Joe Lanza had been an orchestra member: "I never felt like Orchestra London anywhere

near reached its potential in terms of integration into the community. It always seemed to be a falling down point" (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016). In the years immediately preceding bankruptcy, the orchestra's failure to prioritize community was reflected in cuts to its outreach budget, as well as the cancellation of "run out" concerts in smaller regional communities, such as St. Thomas and Chatham (Eck, interview, March 28, 2016). These changes were intended to aid the organization's immediate bottom line. Some members of the orchestra felt there were barriers, both administrative and budgetary, preventing them from reaching out to the community on a more grassroots level. Musicians also created their own barriers to outreach: concerned that any exception made to the terms of their hard-fought collective agreement would eventually lead to larger and more permanent concessions, musicians refused to go beyond the terms of their contracts, which extremely limited opportunities to reach out to the community through new programs or venues (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016). The orchestra's situation became worse both economically and emotionally as it focused less on the community. At the organization's most precarious point, focus became "minimal on all levels, at best. ... The players, the board, the musicians, whatever, [were] not taking a serious look at how they [could] participate in their region" (Eck, interview, March 28, 2016).

In direct contrast, the musicians of #WePlayOn have actively taken a Titon-style approach to building their connection with the community. Perhaps negative reactions from the community over the end of Orchestra London brought a focus to the deficit of community engagement that some of the musicians had not noticed or had felt powerless to change previously. Many of the members felt as though they had let their community down: "We had the most generous grant per capita from the city of London in the entire country ... it's shameful" (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016).

The tag line on #WePlayOn's home page, "The people behind the music" (Musicians of Orchestra London, n.d.), attempts to put a decidedly relatable face on an organization that had previously been seen as set apart from its community base (Orchestra London Member, interview March 26, 2016; Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016).[5] The orchestra musicians admit this is a conscious rebranding:

> Well, it's all that we've got left; the idea of #WePlayOn is that it is running on determination, and commitment to the community, and that a lot of us who live there [London], who bought houses there, are just like other members of the community, we have our roots there and we care about the quality of life. (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016)

#WePlayOn has taken to social media, using Twitter, Facebook, and their blog, which features regular entries that read like personal letters to their supporters. They have moved their concerts off the stage into community spaces: churches, malls, schools, and parks. Concerts regularly feature a shared meal or drinks, and personal interaction with audience members is paramount (Mackenzie, interview, March 25, 2016). All these efforts to enrich the depleted soil of the community around them appear to be taking effect. The image of the orchestra presented by the media is shifting, observable in recent headlines such as "Spectators give standing ovation to Orchestra London members at a concert to make up for cancelled shows" (Brown 2015), and "Besieged orchestra musicians resolve to play on" (Cornies 2015). The overall tone of the public's comments is also becoming more positive, with some finding new ways to relate to the musicians, such as through the artists' experiences of losing their primary income. As one Londoner commented to the *Free Press*:

> I have never understood or been a patron of the musicians of Orchestra London, but I do understand what it is like to lose your job, and admire their determination, I've never been to a concert before, but I will go to stand by a group of my neighbours and offer my support. (Brown 2015)[6]

How long this new support will last and whether it eventually translates into a larger permanent audience remains to be seen.

The #WePlayOn orchestra is also cultivating another aspect of Titon's framework of sustainability: interconnectivity. This aspect was severely lacking with Orchestra London:

> By the time the orchestra declared bankruptcy, the breakdown of its surrounding networks was so deep that even the musicians themselves were divided. The trauma of the bankruptcy and lack of transparency within the organization had affected these artists deeply and decisions around how best to handle things, and which face to present to the media caused a split in the orchestra ... a certain degree of polarization, which in the end played a role in … important relationship[s] disintegrating. (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016)

In contrast, #WePlayOn is actively seeking to make inroads with the many locally based cultural and community institutions that exist in the London region through cooperative projects and shared music-making. #WePlayOn is

reaching out and recognizing the value of relationships that Orchestra London had previously neglected:

> The youth orchestra, New Horizons Band, we reached out to the community orchestra. We'll have a potluck, playing a performance at the airport, these things are really important and I don't think they should ever be lost. What's wrong with the old model is these things were seen as the ancillary activities that you are supposed to do. Rather than this is what we have [to] build our orchestra on, and it's through these activities, and the community that we build, that makes playing of Pictures at an Exhibition and these Haydn symphonies possible. That's how we grow the support to play the art music. (Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016)

It remains to be seen whether or not these changes in #WePlayOn's approach will allow for a more sustainable orchestral organization to grow. Titon might predict that although #WePlayOn might not successfully take root, the efforts the group is making to enrich the soil around them and to increase connectivity to their environment will eventually allow for something to grow again. Titon might also caution the ensemble against rapid growth. It is advisable for #WePlayOn to carefully evaluate just how much support the soil around this new ensemble can provide as they rebuild their organization.[7]

## From Sustainability to Resilience

Titon's later scholarship incorporates recent developments in the adaptive management of complex systems, biological as well as cultural. In a recent article, he defines a new concept of "resilience," describing it as "a system's capacity to recover and maintain integrity, identity and continuity when subjected to forces of disturbance and change ... [neither] simply 'learning to live with it'... nor ... hunkering down in a defensive stance" (2015: 158). Adaptive management cultivates resilience through the proactive creation of strategies to manage future threats. Analysis of #WePlayOn and the Niagara Symphony Orchestra shows that neither organization can be said to be complete examples of Titon's more resilience-based model, perhaps because it is difficult to focus on resilience when you are faced with imminent demise. In the Niagara Symphony's new state of stability, one can observe the initial stages of Titon's model of adaptive management emerging. The symphony sees the issues with receiving the majority of their funding from a limited number of large donors.

They are actively working to diversify their private sector donations by securing corporate sponsorships and more individual donors from the region.

When speaking with members of both organizations, a common thread was the acknowledgment of the elitist image that orchestral music carries. Another common thread was the paramount goal of creating a high-quality artistic product. Some would argue that this goal is what has saddled them with the elitist image. While de-emphasizing the importance of the artistic product does not seem to serve anyone, it might be time for Western Art musicians to acknowledge that it is no longer possible to privilege the integrity of their art above all else.

A common conclusion that Schippers and Grant draw from the research of several scholars within *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures*, including Drummond, is that a sense of "local ownership" and a community's valuing of a musical genre are key factors in that genre's sustainability (Grant 2016: 23). Musicians must put forth an effort to invite, engage, and invest in their community, and must reconcile these activities as part of their artistic integrity, or as one London musician put it, "they [the community] have been coming to listen to us for a long time; perhaps in order to connect, we must start listening to them" (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016). Certainly, from Titon's viewpoint, the resilience of these organizations and the sustainability of the art they produce depend on it.

## Notes

1. I have worked as supplementary musician with the Niagara Symphony Orchestra since 2011.

2. Because Orchestra London's bankruptcy is fairly recent and is still in legal proceedings, many records of the orchestra's previous seasons are not public. Both the former CEO and music director of Orchestra London were unavailable for comment due to these ongoing legal procedures.

3. The interviews conducted with the member of the Canada Council for the Arts and select members of Orchestra London were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

4. "Rightsizing" is a colloquial term for an organization's restructuring efforts to improve its efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

5. When asked about their feelings, the interviewees from the ensemble previously known as Orchestra London stated openly that they felt disconnected from the London community (Orchestra London Member, interview, March 26, 2016; Lanza, interview, April 1, 2016).

6. Anonymous. January 14, 2015 (00:45), comment on Dan Brown, "Specta-

tors give standing ovation to Orchestra London members at a concert to make up for cancelled shows," London Free Press, January 15, 2015, http://www.lfpress.com/2015/01/14/some-1400-squeeze-into-pews-and-give-standing-ovation-to-members-at-a-free-concert-to-make-up-for-cancelled-shows

7. Since my research concluded in 2016, the ensemble known as #WePlayOn has continued to evolve. In January of 2017, the orchestra rebranded as the London Symphonia. At this time, the orchestra's $300,000 operating budget was drawn from a mix of funding sources. The orchestra was receiving approximately 48 percent of its funding from the public sector, 21 percect from a newly cultivated donor base, with the remaining 30-40 percent of funds generated through ticket sales (Chung 2018). London Symphonia's inaugural season featured six main series concerts by 28 core musicians (London Symphonia 2018). By the end of 2017/18 the orchestra's budget had increased to approximately $400,000 with an income breakdown of 22 percent private sector funding, 30 percent public sector funding, and 47 percent ticket sales and sold services (Chung 2018). The structure of payment for the musicians has shifted entirely from salaried employment with Orchestra London, to a per service contract format. Additionally, the organization's artistic staff consists of a three-member artistic advisory council chosen from its musicians (London Symphonia 2018). Its administrative staff is composed of a four-member administrative team and an eight-member volunteer board of directors (London Symphonia 2018). The orchestra has yet to appoint a musical director, and instead invites a variety of guest conductors to work with the organization throughout its season.

The orchestra appears to be taking both a conservative and community-rooted approach to growth. In 2017/18, the organization's main concert series remained at six performances, with the organization instead expanding its presence in the community through the addition of a chamber series (with concerts taking place in various new locations throughout the municipality), and special event concerts which featured collaborations with other organizations and corporations from the London area such as the London Pro Musica Choir and Budweiser Gardens (Chung 2018). Further research might examine this new effort in light of ideas of cultural sustainability.

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