

**Applied Pragmatism:
Seiji Ozawa's Plans for the Tanglewood Music Center**

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Over the past year, a large fraction of the senior artistic staff of the Tanglewood Music Center, the nation's premier summer program for the training of instrumentalists, conductors and composers, has been fired or resigned under pressure from the Executive Director or the institute, Boston Symphony Orchestra Music Director, Seiji Ozawa. So far the shakeup has precipitated four substantial columns in the New York Times, at least as many in the Boston Globe and Boston Herald and several mentions in papers as far away as Houston and Los Angeles. In our business dominated culture, it is by no means obvious why a reorganization of what is no more than a small to medium size commercial enterprise should receive so much attention. Probably the best explanation for all the fuss is nostalgia-Tanglewood is a relic from pre-Friedmanite days when it was understood that an uncontrolled free market does not provide a healthy environment for the development of the high arts. Having long since abandoned such quaint Keynesian notions, we are now accustomed to applying the same standards to a MacDonald's franchise or a chamber music series.

Every now and then a library, a museum, or a regional theatre comes out a loser in its bout with the marketplace. Its demise will

be greeted by appropriate hand-wringing but rarely with any mention as to the root causes in unchallengeable economic assumptions. The collapse of Tanglewood, an internationally recognized institution, would be an international scandal. And it would be seen as having real economic consequences in that property in and around Lenox, much of it belonging to the New York and Boston wings of what used to be quaintly referred to as the ruling elite, would decline in value. These two factors probably will add up to Tanglewood's being placed in the "too big to fail" category.

That it will continue to survive, however, does not mean that it will be spared the sorts of market disciplines considered the appropriate therapy for virtually any ailment these days. That the Ozawa "vision" has at its core an unquestioned assumption of the salubrious effects of the market on music was identified in the resignation letter of former Tanglewood Artistic Director Leon Fleisher. "The only thing Tanglewood will not survive" Fleisher wrote, "is commercialism. So please, Seiji, beware; you have already put one foot on the dangerous slope. The criteria of the marketplace are inapplicable to Tanglewood. TMC's mission is such that it must not be made susceptible to the forces of that marketplace."

The substance of Fleisher's letter was met with almost total incomprehension in the press. The response of the Boston Globe's Richard Dyer was typical: "It's hard to imagine exactly what Fleisher might be talking about in this instance, because very little at the TMC can be charged with the taint of overt commercialism." In characteristic lapdog style, Dyer and others relayed uncritically the assurances of Ozawa and the BSO administration that the steps they were taking were "painful" but "necessary." Insofar as there was controversy

surrounding the reorganization, it was assumed to involve conflicting interpretations of the "Tanglewood mission." None of the coverage took seriously Fleisher's concern that less savory motives were behind Ozawa's "correctives."

Like any corporate propaganda campaign, various claims were circulated by management to justify the necessity of Ozawa's executive intervention. Among these was that "the quality of the students has been gradually slipping in recent years" possibly because "room and board fees had been required of TMC fellows" making Tanglewood unable to compete with other summer music programs or, more dubiously, due to "Leon Fleisher's conducting (which) was driving away students." Entirely absent from the press coverage of this affair is that none of these claims have any merit whatsoever. A minimally skeptical press would have discovered, for example, that there has been no decline in the quality of Tanglewood fellows, a fact attested to by (until last year when the center was known to be on the ropes) the continuing high competition for a small number of fellowships, as well as by favorable critical response to the TMC orchestra and ensembles. As far as the financial conditions of the fellowships themselves, TMC students have, for a decade or more (thanks to the fund-raising of TMC administrator Richard Ortner, later fired by Ozawa) been given free room and board at the Miss Hall's School dorm. Finally, the anonymous attack on Fleisher's conducting, amounting to no more than three or four appearances in as many years is simply a gratuitous insult and does not merit comment except insofar as it demonstrates that Ozawa and the BSO, following standard corporate PR practice, will not hesitate to

"go negative" when it suits their purposes.

Ozawa's vision for the new TMC

Ozawa's reported comments on this subject, while long in pretentious generalities--e.g. "to innovate, to embrace the future, to take risks"--have only recently been accompanied by a specific agenda in the form of a five page letter which was released only after the faculty resignations had taken place. The most significant of these is for the TMC performing fellows to serve within an "orchestral apprenticeship program" under Boston Symphony musicians, apparently relegating to a secondary role chamber music coaching and performance. I say apparently because not even in Ozawa's letter is he specific on this point. However, comments by BSO administrators such as "The school is driven by what our students need to learn in view of the issues in the field today" (apparently a reference to the shrinking audience for chamber music) and "needs to return to its orchestral source" can only be interpreted, and were interpreted by the chamber music staff, most of whom resigned, in this light.

Ozawa's objective in diminishing the role of chamber music at Tanglewood in favor of the more commercially viable enterprise of orchestral music is consistent with the trend towards what Barbara Ehrenreich has referred to as "premature pragmatism" in secondary education. For a generation, college students have felt intense pressure to forsake English and History for pre-professional training in Business, Economics and Finance. Ozawa's prospective Tanglewood curriculum will consist of analogous musical/vocational training: the "orchestral apprenticeship program will teach students to function as cogs within a

orchestral machine, implementing the executive "vision" issued from the conductor's podium. Chamber music, which involves fashioning an individual interpretation poses a direct challenge to the top down model and Ozawa's hardline against it is understandable, if not defensible.

Reorientation of the composition program towards "interdisciplinary" projects, specifically film music.

Ozawa's expressions of concern for the contemporary music program at the TMC must strike any composer who has been through it as very odd. No composer I have spoken to can recall having had any contact with Ozawa during their eight weeks there. My one encounter with Ozawa in the eight weeks which I spent there in 1992 was his speeding by me in his Lexus. Strangely, he waved at me. I was later told that he mistook me for a groundskeeper. Equally characteristic and indicative of Ozawa's attitude towards new music is his routine absence from the entire week of concerts of the Festival of Contemporary Music. Ozawa's lack of interest in living composers and new music is particularly striking in comparison with his professed idol Bernstein whose late-night hang-outs with the TMC composers have become the stuff of Tanglewood legend. Also glaring are Ozawa's comparisons of his role with that of Koussevitsky, the pre-eminent patron of new American orchestral works. Ozawa's record in the commissioning and performance of new American works during his quarter century tenure at the BSO has been simply deplorable, to the particular chagrin of the many gifted composers in the Boston area.

Given Ozawa's complete lack of interest in and awareness of

new music at Tanglewood and elsewhere, his concern for the malaise of the contemporary music program must be dismissed as being based on nothing other than ignorance. What cannot be dismissed, however, is his "vision" for reinvigorating it with a healthy dose of "interdisciplinary" activity, most notably, film music by importing two of its leading figures, John Williams and Andre Previn. The appearance of the former is nothing new; he has been a frequent guest at seminars including the summer when I was there. While encouraging and cordial, he gave very little indication of any interest in recent trends in contemporary music.

Interestingly, Williams' companion on his visit to the seminar was Steven Paul of Sony Classical, an executive on whom the Sony corporate axe was falling at just about that time owing to the anemic performance of Sony Classical "product." At the time, Paul was attempting to "reinvigorate" the Sony classical line with new "product" from Williams' catalogue of film scores, several of which accompanied film properties belonging to the Sony parent company, in so doing achieving the corporate "synergy" so beloved of media conglomerates. Paul's idea would be picked up by his successors, leading to the Sony recordings of Itzhak Perlman's rendering of Williams' themes from Schindler's list. Further moves towards synergy between the Hollywood and highbrow wings of the Sony conglomerate include Sony Classical's promotion of film scorer Elliott Goldenthal as a "legitimate" composer by releasing his Vietnam Oratorio as well as commissioning him for a trumpet concerto for Sony Classical property Wynton Marsalis.

It is likely that Ozawa's vaguely stated interest in "interdisciplinary" composition is nothing more than an attempt to

achieve such "synergy" on the back of the composition program. Perhaps what he has in mind is a film-scoring apprenticeship program along the same lines as the orchestral apprenticeship program he envisions for performance fellows. The goal will be to channel composers towards careers in film music based on a recognition of the economic "issues in the world today." Just as performers should "get real" and abandon their unrealistic aspirations for an artistically and emotionally satisfying life as chamber musicians, so will composers abandon their hopes for achieving a self-contained compositional language, perhaps only meaningful to themselves and a small audience. Ozawa's real-world pragmatism demands that composers reject such delusions of grandeur, and recognize that their role must be as part of a team in producing "software" for the entertainment conglomerates, possibly including that of Ozawa's good friend, Sony Chairman Norio Ohga.

The Ozawa-Sony Connection and Tanglewood

It is by this point an open secret that Ozawa's tenure with the Boston Symphony, unprecedented in terms of length if not quality, is based on something other than a general consensus as to his unique brilliance as a conductor. The explanation resides in the BSO's coffers which are filled to the brim with corporate donations, the bulk of these from Japanese industry, a fact which can be confirmed by consulting the "corporate benefactors" list in a Boston Symphony program. Since dumping Ozawa would result in the severing of this umbilical cord, all movements to do so have been quickly dispensed with by the Orchestra Board.

The deepest pockets of this collection of industries appear to belong to Sony. It is Sony Chairman Norio Ohga who personally donated \$2 million towards the construction of the new Ozawa Hall on the Tanglewood grounds, an imposing hardwood structure which, one can safely assume, made a significant dent in the few remaining acres of teak forests in Myanmar and Indonesia. Like any other corporate donation, Ohga's financing of Ozawa Hall was, as usual, blandly reported by the press as an expression of gratitude for the joy which Ozawa has brought into all our musical lives for the past generation. That corporate CEOs are not motivated by such public spirited concerns in dispensing cash is by this point hardly needs to be argued. The cynical and predictable flip side of a society operating on market principles is that one no longer asks whether there was a quid pro quo in such transactions, one asks, what was the favor which was doled out in exchange for the reward.

Ozawa's friendship with leading figures in Japanese industry such as Ohga go back to the very beginnings of his career in Boston. It should be remembered that a Japanese born and trained musician assuming this position (wearing at the outset, love-beads, no less) represented a public relations triumph of the highest order, particularly given the lingering World War II racist stereotypes of the Japanese as devious, unimaginative and militarist. Ozawa's victory was seen as Japan's, and it is partly because of his august stature there that he maintains his primary residence in Tokyo and has never learned to speak English fluently. (One indication is that the present director of the TMC Ellen Highstein took her interview for the position in Japanese.) Ozawa's celebrity was soon converted

into access to elite sectors of Japanese industry and finance. Consequently, Ozawa's connection with Japanese industry are more than business, they are personal. It is therefore difficult to assess whether his solicitousness about the interests of the Sony corporation is based on personal allegiance, or is a routine business transaction. Probably it is a mixture of both. Ozawa is comfortable with the values of his financial backers, and he would not need multi-million dollar perks such as Ozawa Hall to serve their interests.

There is considerable circumstantial evidence, however, that Ozawa's relationship with Sony is at least partly based on the normal fee for service arrangement. A likely instance of such a transaction is what lies behind the entire TMC controversy, and it is one which has been completely missed in all of the press coverage which Ozawa's dismissal of the TMC artistic staff has generated. The bare facts of the matter are these. In the summer of 1994, Sony undertook the production of an educational video starring Wynton Marsalis accompanied by the TMC orchestra conducted by Ozawa. Initially, Ozawa proposed that the student orchestra would not be paid for their services. After threats from the union, Ozawa agreed to file a contract with the AFM, one which provided for minimal compensation for the mostly non-union ensemble and, not insignificantly, work dues for the union..

The students, taking largely on faith that the experience would be a positive one, signed onto the project. By the end of the production, there was near rebellion in the ranks of the fellows, as they became aware of the extent of the sacrifices required of them.

The filming demanded considerably more time than initially requested, and much of this consisted of waiting in enforced silence, as Marsalis flubbed his lines under the glare of television lights. The video crew was surly and condescending and many orchestra members recall working under conditions which were seriously unsafe: the barn in which the video was shot was crammed with people and equipment. Had there been a fire, not unlikely given the presence of dry hay and hot television lights, many members were concerned for themselves not to mention the millions of dollars in instruments which were accumulated there. The production dragged on for days in the middle of the summer preventing the student ensembles from preparing those chamber works which they had been looking forward to playing. When the Marsalis video was completed, they could look forward to two weeks of intense rehearsal of the contemporary music festival. The summer would end without most members having the opportunity to perform or even work on any chamber music.

These circumstances led to a gripe session where the students communicated their dissatisfaction to the TMC administrative director, Richard Ortner, the chamber music director, Gilbert Kalish, and TMC artistic director Leon Fleisher. These directors decided to relay the students' complaints to Ozawa. The repercussions of their having done came in stages. The following summer, Kalish found himself cut out of performances with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players after having been an annual participant for some years. Fleisher, who had only recently recuperated from a catastrophic case of carpal-tunnel syndrome, was not asked to perform by the BSO

upon his return. Ortner would be fired in 1996 and replaced by Highstein. As he had in previous year, Ozawa mounted a mid-summer performance which demanded a nearly total commitment of the entire student body for a protracted period, this time a production of the Benjamin Britten opera, Peter Grimes. The chamber music staff was again made largely superfluous and some students expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of available opportunities for chamber music performance. When the staff attempted to communicate with Ozawa, they were ignored.

In the summers of 1996 and 1997, the chamber music staff continued to be cut out of the Tanglewood curriculum as Ozawa mounted major opera productions which, much like the Marsalis video, required that the musicians spent much time sitting in silence while stage and lighting cues were being worked out by the technical crew.

When the staff questioned Ozawa on whether their role would continue to be downgraded, he made no response other than to suggest, bizarrely, that the atmosphere of "a little fear can be a good thing." Finally, following the summer of 1997, Ozawa made no attempt to inform the artistic staff of auditions for the following year, and again refused to discuss matters with them when they tried to contact him. Correctly sensing that they had no place at the new Tanglewood, Kalish, Fleisher and Julliard Quartet cellist Joel Krosnick resigned, as did the well known string bassist and mentor Julius Levine.

Ozawa's actions against the TMC artistic faculty were in retaliation for their general opposition to the Ozawa philosophy of refashioning Tanglewood as a pre-professional orchestral

apprenticeship program at the expense of the chamber music curriculum. However, it is clear that they were also in retaliation for the staff's specific failure to crack the whip on the students who took umbrage at the conditions of the Marsalis project: those who attempted to assert their rights as a labor force being exploited by a multinational entertainment conglomerate. In adopting a Nixonian madman strategy against those who dared cross him, Ozawa asserted both his authority and the authority of his corporate subsidizer Sony.

Not entirely coincidentally, the summer of the Marsalis project saw the completion of Ozawa Hall. While Sony could not have known that Ozawa would have to assume the role of a cop in protecting the right of Sony to exploit a non-union labor force, it was certainly aware that, when push came to shove, he would behave responsibly. Sony's strategy of supporting Ozawa payed off, and it is likely that the Tanglewood enterprise will continue to pay dividends in the form of providing an "outsourcable" pool of musicians, keeping in line what is seen as a "pampered" orchestral workforce.

The Larger Context of the Ozawa/Sony Victory

While this particular case might seem like an isolated incident of no real significance in the larger context of triumphant multinational capital, it should be recognized that Ozawa's success in engaging a student orchestra for recording and broadcast purposes violated a significant precedent in labor history and can be seen as a symbolic victory for the media concerns against the union. It is also one which will continue to have major consequences in terms of musicians' declining ability to obtain decent compensation

for their services.

A basic fact of which few musicians have any awareness is that from the very beginning, the broadcast and recording companies have been engaged in a continual war against what they perceive as excessive labor costs for music. One of many responses by management was to subsidize academic programs working towards the development of the first generation electronic instruments, work which would eventually culminate in commercially available digital synthesizers and samplers. The massive reduction of employment in recording studio work in the eighties, as large orchestral string sections were replaced by a single keyboardist, was the ultimate vindication of the wisdom of, for example, RCA's \$50,000 gift to the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Studio in the mid 1950s, to mention the most high profile corporate subsidy of this type. Another strategy has been the industry's huge investment in forms of music such as rock and roll which require neither large musical ensembles nor musical literacy. Small groups of inexperienced young musicians are now the norm for most music which is produced, broadcast and consumed. The attractive consequence from the standpoint of the balance sheets of the media conglomerates is that these groups are easily prey to the practices described by Frederick Dannen in Hit Men, as rockers desperate for celebrity will accept any deal in exchange for the prospect of stardom.

The specific precedent which Ozawa effectively nullified in his engagement of the TMC orchestra for the Marsalis project was the Music Code of Ethics, an agreement signed by AFM head James Petrillo and the Music Educators National Conference, enjoining student ensembles from acting in competition with the union on commercial

broadcast and recording projects. While little known today, the code prevented the industry from taking advantage of the proliferation of highly skilled students who could easily serve as a low cost alternative to the professional free lance studio orchestras. Many middle-class incomes of musicians around New York and Los Angeles came into existence, at least partly, through the protections the code offered, the passage of which made union head Petrillo the recording industry's pre-eminent bete noir and led to the congressional passage of the Lea Act, also known as the anti-Petrillo act.

Ozawa's violation of the code can, albeit on a reduced scale, be compared with Reagan's firing of the PATCO workers: as a high-profile rejection of the agreement, it has opened the door to many lower profile attempts to engage student ensembles as a replacements for union orchestras. One such incident occurred in the fall of 1996 and ironically, involved several veterans of the Marsalis project. The Paul Taylor Dance Company, which had previously dismissed its union orchestra, hired an orchestra made up mainly of students from New York Conservatories offering them wages considerably below union scale. The union, aware that it was in an impossible negotiating position (partly because of a near total incomprehension of, and indeed hostility to, the very idea of collective bargaining among young people) quickly signed an agreement with the company which validated the substandard wages with the proviso that the union would receive work dues from the players and would "work towards" a union contract.

Other instances of a new aggressiveness on the part of employers have been seen throughout the orchestra world which this

year has seen a record number of strikes from San Francisco to Philadelphia. Most of these are defensive, as the union responds to management attempts to force both wage and benefit concessions. It is significant that these concessions are being demanded at a time of relative prosperity for orchestras, most of which have gotten on secure financial footing since the reduction of arts funding in the Reagan years. Whether Ozawa's hardballing of the TMC orchestra is more a cause or effect of such new found confidence of management to take on labor is not clear. What is clear is that Ozawa will go to considerable lengths to advance his own career and the interests of the industries which have maintained his career at the BSO and to whom he owes his primary allegiance.

What is also clear is that a response to Ozawa's high-handedness will require raising questions having to do with the relationship between corporate financing of artistic institutions and artistic independence, as well as the contradictions inherent in the application of the top-down corporate organizational model to artistic institutions. Most significant from the standpoint of the continued health of concert music, is whether the implementation of the Ozawa "vision" for the careers for which musicians are being trained will be a real deterrent to talented instrumentalists pursuing careers in music. There are indications that in fact, it has become just that. The best known teachers have resigned themselves to the reality that careers in the concert music industry as it is now constituted do not involve a level of professional satisfaction compensating for the sacrifice in time and emotional energy required to prepare for them. Instead of the single-minded devotion to the craft which was expected by the Gingolds and Galamians of previous

generations, teachers now encourage their students to develop marketable non-musical skills, taking for granted that joining a labor force in a musical economy where management exercises its prerogatives unchallenged is not an option for the sons and daughters of the middle class.

That neither critics, musicians, nor audiences are comfortable in raising these questions is indicated by the curious combination of outrage and passivity which has greeted this affair. Classical musicians have traditionally been dubious allies in labor management struggles, tacitly understanding that challenges to capital jeopardize the financial base of the patronage network which was their primary means of support, albeit in the more or less distant past. That high-arts patronage by economic elites is gone and probably never to return, has yet to penetrate the psyches of most classical musicians, many of whom maintain the increasingly Polyannish illusion expressed by the late pianist and New Criterion music critic Samuel Lippman that a new tradition of connoisseurship will emerge to bail out concert music. In the years since Lippman's death, nothing of the kind has occurred. The names of Gates, Buffet, Soros and Eisner continue to be notably absent from donors' lists to symphony orchestras, chamber music series and conservatories. Implicitly, (and entirely predictably, when one thinks about it) new money has gone along with the post-modern consensus in rejecting any distinction between high and low arts, regarding the high arts' ability to acquit itself in market competition as the ultimate validation of its real worth. Such are the real issues behind the spectacle of Tanglewood competing with homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and community centers for the ever diminishing pool of corporate charity, accepting whatever

ideological or artistic strings are attached and, under the enthusiastic leadership of Ozawa, adopting a labor management paradigm with which new lean and mean corporate machine is sure to be comfortable. As one does with global capital's increasing control of the worlds natural and human resources, one waits for signs of an effective opposition to organize itself.