

**Music: Vocation vs. Avocation;  
Limiting of Music Study as a Trade vs. Accessibility to Public; Employment Issues (Part II)**

**Luis C. Engelke**

“The Juilliard Effect: Ten Years Later” offered insight into one graduating class from one of the most prestigious institutions in America. Many graduates had difficulty finding either sustainable employment within the profession of music and artistic fulfillment. How does this relate to all schools of music? In two excerpts from *Mozart in the Jungle*, author Blair Tindall provides insight into this question based both on her research and work as a former freelance musician based in New York City. The research regarding the number of graduates and positions available is particularly relevant in understanding the issue of the sustainability of particular arts programs.

Through the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the selection of orchestral musicians was often informal. A teacher might receive a call from a music director, personnel manager, or other member of an orchestra with the request of a recommendation of someone to fill a position. As the musicians union – The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) – strengthened and other various factors arose, the audition process became more formalized. Almost all American orchestras now advertise positions nationally and hold auditions, although sometimes some musicians are allowed to bypass early rounds or are invited for trial weeks. Orchestras and/or local chapters of the AFM determine the specific audition practices, and usually all rounds up to the finals where musicians may be asked to perform with members of the orchestra are held behind a curtain to preserve anonymity.

Some orchestras do undertake a screening process by the evaluation of a one-page resume and/or taped round. However, the process of what is sometimes known as a “cattle-call” audition is more economical for the organization and requires less time by the audition committee. Applicants are not provided with any financial support to undertake the audition. This may include airfare, hotel, and other expenses. Often, more than a hundred applicants will perform a preliminary round that can encompass more than one day. Each player may play as few as three (or even less) passages. Auditions are usually advertised with the notice that “Musicians not meeting the highest artistic standards will be dismissed immediately.” After a committee has heard hundreds of highly trained musicians, it is not uncommon for nobody to be hired. Sometimes this has been the case for multiple auditions for the same position: hundreds of applicants pay their way to attend auditions multiple times without anyone being hired. There are many reasons for this such as no candidates meeting the expectations of the committee, disagreement of the committee, and often the veto power of the music director.

Some musicians cite that this audition system is not the best way to select candidates: having individuals perform a number of the most difficult passages in succession out of context and for a committee that may be exhausted listening to countless auditions. The article “What’s Happening to the Audition System?” discusses some of these problems. “Surviving the Cut” and “The Audition” provide further insight into the audition process and how a relatively inexperienced newcomer who was successful winning the position of Principal Flute position for the Oregon Symphony and an experienced percussionist who auditioned for but did not achieve his goal of joining the Boston Symphony. Moreover, the entire process of auditioning and securing tenure is addressed. There are many pressures encountered by the individuals presented.