The Symphony in America: Maurice Abravanel, and the Utah Symphony Orchestra: The Battle for Classical Music

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THE SYMPHONY IN AMERICA, MAURICE ABRAVANEL,
AND THE UTAH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:
THE BATTLE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History
Brigham Young University
December 2002
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

THE SYMPHONY IN AMERICA, MAURICE ABRAVANEL, AND THE UTAH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: THE BATTLE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC

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Master of Arts

Between 1947 and 1979 the Utah Symphony Orchestra was transformed from an obscure, part-time, amateur orchestra into one of the major symphony orchestras in America. By 1947 the orchestra, which had begun as a Works Progress Administration organization, was barely hanging on. The symphony struggled to remain financially solvent, performing only a few concerts per year. Thirty-two years later the Utah Symphony Orchestra was one of the most prestigious musical ensembles in the country—receiving rave reviews from critics around the world, touring extensively, and with more than a hundred albums to its credit. The remarkable growth of the Utah Symphony Orchestra during this period is largely attributable to the efforts of one man—Maurice Abravanel.
Abravanel’s unwavering commitment to furthering classical music was responsible for the changes that altered the symphony as an organization. His drive to further cultural education throughout the world, and specifically in the American West provides a remarkable story of dedication and commitment. To place Abravanel’s ideologies and organizational successes in the context of American classical music, this thesis examines the history of the symphony, as an institution, in America, before turning to a study of Abravanel’s personal efforts and the Utah Symphony Orchestra’s consequent growth.

This thesis argues that the Utah Symphony Orchestra, specifically while under the direction of Maurice Abravanel, provides an example of positive growth in community education and classical music promotion. The particular programs that Abravanel implemented were generally successful, and ultimately responsible for the symphony’s unprecedented growth. Further, by examining the challenges and solutions that Abravanel confronted in his work to build the symphony, it is possible to understand better the ingredients necessary to the development of professional classical music organizations.

This study uses Abravanel’s work with the Utah Symphony as a model for successful community music programs, with the intent to communicate insight into successful methods for the promotion of classical music. Such an examination provides a new and imminently practical method for the historical study of musical institutions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful for the efforts of many advisors, friends, and family who have helped me during the past two years. I particularly appreciate the direction given me by my advisor, employer, and friend, Thomas Alexander. I would like to thank Harrison Powley for spending considerable time and effort going over the manuscripts of various stages of this thesis. Ignacio Garcia has always been generous with his time, advice, and support. The direction of these three men has made this an immeasurably better document.

Additional members of the history department at Brigham Young University that have taught and instructed me and given me a greater understanding of history are Neil York, Susan Rugh, Brian Cannon, and Rodney Bohac. I am also indebted to Douglas Bush and David Brown in the music department for their infectious love of great music. My friends James and Renée Allen have provided home, employment, and love over the past years. I am grateful to Nick and Claudia Norton, Utah Symphony Orchestra members, for opening the doors of the world of symphonic music—appreciation for them and musicians like them inspired me to study this topic.

Finally, my parents Don and Carlene Smith, and my wife Rachel, have given unceasing love and support. This work is dedicated to them.
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INTRODUCTION

WRITINGS ON AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS

The vitality of classical music is, and has been for the past century, in question. Whether or not classical music truly is in danger of becoming an obsolete elitist art, the popular perception is that classical music is losing interest and support. In urban Utah, however, classical music has enjoyed a continuously healthy existence, largely due to the cultural musical interest of the Mormon community. On the other hand, the status of professional classical music in Utah can largely be attributed to the efforts of one man—Maurice Abravanel.

Through his thirty-two-year tenure as conductor and musical director of the Utah Symphony Orchestra (USO), Abravanel succeeded in bringing the symphony from the obscurity of a community, part-time, amateur orchestra to one of the nation’s major symphony orchestras. Abravanel’s emphasis on the programming of new and creative modern works, particularly by American composers, and an understanding of the importance of a prolific recording program were necessary to the remarkable growth of the symphony.

1 The term “classical” will be used in this paper as it is among the general populace: to encompass “legitimate” or “serious” music from the Renaissance through Modern periods—not simply the period from the death of J. S. Bach to the third decade of the nineteenth century, as it is often defined in scholarly music circles.
Following a brief narrative history of Abravanel and the Utah Symphony Orchestra, to provide context, this essay examines the historiography of American symphony orchestras. Secondary peripheral works will be discussed first, and evaluated for their significance in addressing the issues of the particular topic of Abravanel, the USO, and the specific programs designed to increase cultural progress through classical music education. Some comparisons with histories of other orchestras or American music in general are included in this portion. Moving inward, I turn to secondary sources that relate specifically to the topics of either Abravanel or the USO. Finally, after a discussion and evaluation of available primary sources, the objective of this thesis, and its contribution to the field, is stated.

Utah’s musical heritage began a full century before Abravanel took his post in 1947. Through the history of the Mormons in Utah many local, civic, and church instrumental and choral groups had developed, some with more success than others. It was not until 1940, however, that a permanent professional orchestra was formed, as a Federal Works Progress Administration project. The “Utah WPA Symphony Orchestra,” as it was then called, functioned at a minimal local level until Abravanel’s predecessor, Werner Janssen secured the tabernacle as a concert hall for the symphony. Janssen resigned from his position as conductor when the symphony board denied his demand for twenty-five imported musicians to fill the major positions in the orchestra. Following Janssen’s resignation, the symphony board was inundated with forty applications for the position. The board eventually reduced its list of applicants to two: Maurice Abravanel and Walter Hendl, assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. After deliberation
and an extensive interview process the board chose Abravanel (due to strong recommendations from Kurt Weill and Bruno Walter), giving him a one-year contract.

Maurice Abravanel, born in 1903 in Salonika of Spanish-Jewish decent, became a music student of Kurt Weill, in Berlin, after his family moved to Switzerland, and began his conducting career with an opera company outside Berlin. From Germany, Abravanel moved to positions in France, Australia, and finally to the United States in 1936, for a position with the Metropolitan Opera Company. After a few years with the Met, Weill asked Abravanel to conduct some of Weill’s shows on Broadway, a position that Abravanel gladly accepted. Shortly after he stopped conducting Weill’s shows Abravanel heard about the Utah Symphony Orchestra’s position opening.²

During the first few years together, Abravanel and the Utah Symphony Orchestra went through a period of financially tenuous times, to the extent that during the second season the orchestra performed partially without pay, because Abravanel’s requested the musicians to do so. It was Abravanel’s relationship with the musicians, and his devotion to music and the community that carried the organization through this troubling time. Abravanel employed local musicians whenever possible, and his charisma, determination, and business skills, along with the significant efforts of others, notably Wendell Ashton, eventually resulted in the acquiring of sufficient funds to keep the young symphony alive.

Funding was not the only difficulty that confronted the symphony during Abravanel’s early years. Support from the community and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was also a significant concern. Though the church leadership was positive toward Abravanel and the orchestra, some members were not as supportive. In

² The biographical information in this paper has been taken almost entirely from Lowell M. Durham, Abravanel! (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).
particular, the Tabernacle Choir refused, for many years, to perform with the symphony. It was, in fact, not until almost three decades after Abravanel came to Utah that the choir finally performed with the symphony. This was due to the attitude of some choir leadership (particularly conductor J. Spencer Cornwall) who felt that the church’s musical organization and the state’s had no business mingling.³

The eventual success of the orchestra was due, in part, to Abravanel’s efforts in community music education, both through the public school system and public concerts. Abravanel’s willingness to perform new and unfamiliar music, as well as monumental works rarely performed because of their scope and technical difficulty exposed the Mormon community to a far greater variety of music than they had ever known.

Recording was the most significant contributor to the symphony’s growth in prestige and international acclaim. Abravanel shepherded the organization through an incredibly prolific recording career, totaling some 111 disks. Under Abravanel the USO was the first orchestra to record Handel’s oratorios Judas Maccabaeus and Samson, and the first American orchestra to record Israel in Egypt. In addition, the symphony performed the first recordings of Milhaud’s Pacem in terris, William Schumann’s Symphony No. 7, and the complete set of all ten of Mahler’s symphonies.⁴ The symphony’s recordings met with international acclaim, being hailed as leading interpreters of Mahler, including receiving the Gustav Mahler Society’s award for the best performance of Symphony No. 5.

³ According to Durham, the Choir’s official reason for not performing with the orchestra was that they had access to performing with the Philadelphia Orchestra and therefore no need to perform with an inferior local Symphony. Ibid., 126.

⁴ Only part, however, of Mahler’s unfinished Symphony No. 10 was recorded by the symphony. See Maurice Abravanel, “The Utah Story: No Deviltry, Just Good Sense: How Recording Put a Fine American Orchestra on the Map, Made it a Better One, and Enriched the Repertory to Boot” High Fidelity & Musical America 24, no.8 (August 1974): 18, 20.
Verdi’s *Requiem*, which Abravanel had introduced to Utah many years earlier, was performed on 21 April 1979 as the maestro’s last performance. This emotional concert ended a fifty-five-year conducting career, making Abravanel’s thirty-two years with the symphony the second longest in American history, following only Eugene Ormandy’s forty years with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Abravanel’s prestige as a conductor earned him guest conducting opportunities with the world’s major symphonies: the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Berlin Philharmonic, to name only a few, including a twenty-three-year position as musical director of the Music Academy of the West, in Santa Barbara, California. For the remainder of his life Abravanel remained an outspoken champion of the music to which he had devoted his life.

The study of music history as a historiographical genre is a relatively recent development. To any reasonable degree this study began in the mid-nineteenth century as scholars began to study baroque music (music composed between roughly 1600 and 1750). The mid-nineteenth century witnessed an interest in “re-discovering” lost musical treasures of the preceding centuries. Scholars, using historical methods, sought to arrive at an understanding of historically authentic performance practice. This period performance objective only became a significant course of study in the early 1900s. Over the past half-century, however, this topic has become increasingly popular, to the extent that it is now a significant subject in musicological discourse. Leading figures in this movement, such as Thurston Dart, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Howard Mayer Brown, and Christopher Hogwood have forced the academic community to discuss the reasons for the recent infatuation with early music.
Nikolaus Harnoncourt, in the first chapters of his book *Baroque Music Today: Music as Speech*, argues vehemently that the reason for the growth of musicology during the last century can only be attributed to a failure of modern legitimate music to reach and move the majority of the populace. Harnoncourt, while original in his vocalization of the dilemma, is not alone in his fear of the demise of quality music. Harnoncourt contends that the accessibility of classical music is one of the main factors responsible for this problem.\(^5\) Maurice Abravanel, a notable advocate of the popular education of classical music, expressed a similar sentiment, comparing the availability of music in everyday life to Christ’s Sermon on the Mount being continually broadcast in train stations, stores, and other public places, in which case it too would lose some of its poignancy in the lives of listeners.\(^6\) If we accept the views of Harnoncourt and Abravanel, the perceived demise of classic music has contributed to the growth of musicological study.

In the development of musicology, two areas that have been largely neglected are institutional and community history. Early works in institutional music history, specifically orchestral histories, were devoted primarily to world-renowned organizations. Some of the first of these are Philo Adams Otis’s *The Chicago Symphony Orchestra: Its Organization, Growth and Development, 1891-1924*, Hugo Leichtentritt’s *Serge Koussevitzky: The Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the New American Music*,

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\(^5\) Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Baroque Music Today: Music as Speech*, trans. Mary O’Neill (Portland, Ore: Amadeus Press, 1988). Harnoncourt feels that the problem is even more fundamental, that a breakdown in the morals of society has removed the ability to create and appreciate meaningful music.


Philo Otis’s history of the Chicago Symphony, a groundbreaking study in symphonic institutional history writing, follows the work of the orchestra through its first three decades, devoting a section to each season. Of particular significance is the chapter on the 1893 World’s Fair Exposition. This chapter depicts a particular challenge faced by the conductor and exposition director, Theodore Thomas, and provides some insight into the philosophies and frustrations of an orchestral director.

_Serge Koussevitzky_ by Hugo Leichtentritt deals almost exclusively with the development of American music, as seen through the programming efforts of Koussevitzky with the Boston Symphony. Leichtentritt’s work provides an excellent format for dealing with one man’s efforts to educate his local community to new and diverse forms of classical music. Like Koussevitzky, much of Abravanel’s programming of music was determined by a desire to expose his audience to unfamiliar and creative works.

Howard Shanet’s _Philharmonic: A History of New York’s Orchestra_ may well be the best example to date of an institutional history of a specific orchestra. This work is an extremely beneficial model. Particularly relevant to the present thesis are Shanet’s chapters on the musical and cultural background of his geographical region before the creation of the New York Philharmonic. In an enlightening comparison with the Vienna

Philharmonic (created in the same year—1842), the author demonstrates the necessity of a culturally prepared community to the successful growth of an orchestra. In a remarkably honest introduction, Shanet opposes the statement that the orchestra shaped the course of its community’s culture, arguing instead that the orchestra represented the state of affairs in the area, and the artistic desires of the local populace.

Recent works in the genre of orchestral histories have included Beryl Bowen James’s *First in the World: The Story of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales* and *The Philadelphia Orchestra: A Century of Music* edited by John Ardoin.\(^8\)

At the time these specific orchestra histories began to appear, musicologists began to write about the orchestral institution itself. This genre includes works such as Reginald Nettle’s *The Orchestra in England: A Social History*, *The American Symphony Orchestra: A Social History of Musical Taste* by John Henry Mueller (one of the most prolific of American institutional music historians), *The American Symphony Orchestra* edited by Henry Swoboda, and Louise Elvira Cuyler’s *The Symphony*.\(^9\) *Perspectives on American Music, 1900–1950*, edited by Michael Saffle, is one of the most recent contributions to the field.\(^10\)

*The Orchestra in England*, a social history by Reginald Nettle, was one of the earliest histories of the societal impacts of the symphony orchestra. In the preface to this

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influential work, Nettle states that as recently as the early years of the twentieth-century orchestras began to become a popular music idiom, only recently edging out choral works. While this statement may have been true for England (which Nettle admits was somewhat musically insular), it seems that in continental Europe and America this musical institution was vibrant well before the turn of the century. Nettle’s point is valid: the institution that seems such an established cultural tradition is a relatively recent invention, and has continually grown in popularity. The continual rise of new orchestras to challenge the established dominant philharmonic orchestras seems to support this hypothesis.

John Mueller’s *The American Symphony Orchestra* is a staple in the historiography of professional American music. Particularly significant is the section on the role of the orchestra in the community. Mueller argues that the symphonic concert is perhaps as much (or even more) a social event than a musical one. One of Mueller’s sources for this section is Nettle’s earlier work on the social aspects of the English orchestra.

Recently, Jan Younghusband wrote a book titled *Orchestra!*, that includes a foreword by the late Sir George Solti, long-time conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a Grammy Award record holder. Younghusband’s book was the result of a BBC Channel Four Television program. As well as describing the history of the orchestra as an institution, this work devotes some time to each of the instrumental sections of the orchestra.11

One of the great synthetic works on the topic of the American symphony orchestra is George Seltzer’s *The Professional Symphony Orchestra in the United

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States. This work is really a compilation of periodical articles and chapters from books that deal with such varied aspects of the orchestra as the history of the orchestra, the conductor, the role of the audience, the business and economics of orchestral management, and the possible future of the institution. This wonderful collection provides countless articles of importance, for instance those dealing with the economic results of performing twentieth-century music, musician unions, and the dictatorial role of the conductor.

While chronologically paralleling the growth of American social history, community music history—though growing in very recent years—has not enjoyed the success of the larger body of community social history. This is doubtless because most of the musicologists who write these histories are more closely tied to the field of music than of history. Most of the organizational music histories fall under the category of commemorative works or promotional tracts, rather than with the intent to evaluate the effectiveness of the specific programs that have led to the enjoyed success of the various orchestras.

Significant works that deal with the larger topic of general American musical history are Louis C. Elson’s The History of American Music, Gilbert Chase’s America’s Music: From Pilgrims to the Present, and Charles Hamm’s Music in the New World. Other works include Ronald L. Davis’s three-volume A History of Music in American Life, the Essays in American Music Series, edited by Michael Saffle and James R.

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Heintze, and Richard Crawford's recent works, *The American Musical Landscape* and *America's Musical Life*.\(^\text{13}\)

Of particular interest in Chase's book is the foreword by Richard Crawford, an excellent historiographical essay dealing with the few synthetic works that have been written on American music. Crawford gives some background about Chase's book, recognizing Chase's reliance on John Tasker Howard's *Our American Music*,\(^\text{14}\) which Crawford describes as "the only general history of the subject written between 1916 and 1955." Howard's work, according to Crawford, was the first study of the subject that treated American music (at least in part) as a truly American art form, rather than simply as a European cultural tradition transplanted onto American soil.\(^\text{15}\) The last portion of Chase's book, "America and the World," covers the period of music that concerns this thesis.

Charles Hamm's *Music in the New World* is primarily concerned with early American music, but the last portions are of benefit. Hamm argues that the post-WWI years witnessed a turn in interest from purely American composers to an international (particularly European) emphasis. European composers who resided in the United States, such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, and Sergei Rachmaninoff (all of whom came in the first decade of the century) were extremely popular and brought their European-style

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\(^{15}\) Oscar G. Sonneck, dubbed by Crawford as the "pioneering American music historian," complained of this tendency among American music historians to belittle their own country's accomplishments by minimizing the distinctly American aspects of the art. Chase, xi.
art with them as they took up posts and residence in America. In the next two decades, Hamm writes, Sergei Prokofiev, Darius Milhaud, and Igor Stravinsky followed. Maurice Abravanel, arriving in 1936, would have been part of this growing immigration movement of European composers, performers, and artists who brought their influence to American.

As recent as 1980 Ronald Davis made the statement that, “there are those around who remember well when music that was considered any good at all came from Europe, and native works still have difficulty finding their way into American concert halls and opera houses.”¹⁶ Davis is responding to his predecessors who have only considered European music to be “legitimate” and of value. This was a particularly heartfelt issue with Abravanel, who continually fought to promote the works of American, and even local Utah composers.

Davis emphasizes American cultural influence in orchestral and popular music, a theme shared by Michael Saffle and James R. Heintze, in their recent Essays in American Music series. The last two works in this series—*Perspectives on American Music, 1900–1950* and *Perspectives on American Music since 1950*—are dominated by articles on such topics as Jazz, electronic music, Hollywood’s musical contributions, New Orleans composers, and even HIV and AIDS music. Less common in this series are studies on orchestral music and recent trends in “legitimate” instrumental music.¹⁷

The first part of Richard Crawford’s *The American Musical Landscape*, entitled “Histories,” is another historiographical essay by Crawford, though more detailed than

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¹⁶ Davis, ix.

his foreword to Chase's book. This portion of the book, first given as the Ernest Bloch Professor lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, compares the works of Gilbert Chase, Wilfred Mellers, and Charles Hamm, among others. Crawford argues that these synthetic works on American music history do not agree on what American music history is. Crawford devotes the second section of this book to the economics of music making in America, focusing on the principle of patronage in composing and performing. Crawford’s book is one of the most recent in musicology and could mark the beginning of cultural history works interested in music history.

Other recent histories that deal with the role of classical music in American society are Samuel Lipman’s two books, *The House of Music: Art in an Era of Institutions* and *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture*, and Ivo Supicic’s *Music in Society: A Guide to the Sociology of Music*.¹⁸ Both of Lipman’s works cover a variety of topics such as audiences, funding for the arts, and the recent history of symphony institutions, while maintaining the underpinning theme of the questionable vitality of classical music. Supicic’s *Music in Society* is one of few truly scientific social studies of music history. This work touches on an amazing array of subjects, ranging from the evolution of musical taste to professional music organizations and the sociology of ethnomusicology.

Two collections of essays that demonstrate the transformation of musicological approach over time are *Studies in Musicology 1935–1975* by Charles Seeger, and Nicholas Cook’s and Mark Everist’s, recent collection of essays entitled *Rethinking_
Music. A comparison of these two works offers valuable insights into the changing ideologies, theories, and interests in the field of musicology.

Histories of musical institutions in Utah have received considerable attention because of the strong role of music in Mormon culture. Two Brigham Young University M.A. theses that deal specifically with the topic of early Utah musical institutions are Deane Wakely Brown’s “Growth and Development of Utah Professional Symphonic Orchestras Prior to 1940” and Martha Tingey Cook’s work “Pioneer Bands and Orchestras of Salt Lake City.” These works provide insight into the institutional music history of early Mormon settlements in Utah.

Brown’s thesis, written during the early years of the USO and Maurice Abravanel, examines the music organizations that preceded the symphony, in an effort to describe the cultural heritage of Utahans prior to the creation of a full-time professional institution. Brown deals specifically with the Salt Lake Symphony Orchestra, which was founded in 1892, but did not begin truly functioning until the first decade of the next century. Brown’s sections on community support attest to the musical interest expressed through patronage, in the area, long before the arrival of Maurice Abravanel. One helpful appendix at the end shows the programming of this symphony, detailing the musical works that were performed in the first half of the twentieth century.


The best synthesis of Mormon musical history is Michael Hicks's recent book, *Mormonism and Music: A History*. This work concentrates on the role that music has played in the development of Mormon culture. Hicks's book does not deal specifically with either Abravanel or the Utah Symphony Orchestra, but provides excellent background in the form of Utah's music culture, and support for the argument that social music has been central in the lives of Mormons and Utahans.

Published works dealing exclusively with the Utah Symphony center on Maurice Abravanel, due to his pivotal role during the maturation period of the orchestra. Lowell M. Durham's biography, *Abravanel!* is the most extensive biographical work on the life of the conductor. Durham was Professor of Music at the University of Utah, long-time music critic, and close friend of his subject. Durham bases his book to a certain extent on a University of Utah KUED interview, and on the collection of Abravanel's papers housed in the University of Utah's Marriott library.

Durham's work is beneficial on the subjects of Abravanel's feelings about the symphony, life in Utah, and career as conductor. Sections on Abravanel's decision to come to Utah and his emotions about retiring at the end of career are particularly insightful. *Abravanel!* discusses the symphony and community politics more completely than any of the other published works dealing with the symphony. Durham's scattered comments about the relationship between the symphony, the church, and the Tabernacle

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22 Durham, *Abravanel!*. 

23 Maurice Abravanel, Maurice Abravanel Papers, 1890–1996, University of Utah, Marriott Library Special Collections, MS 517 (Hereafter cited as "Abravanel Papers").
Choir provide a foundation for research on this topic, but are told entirely from Abravanel’s viewpoint, and therefore give a necessarily incomplete view.

The only other significant book on the subject is Conrad B. Harrison’s *Five Thousand Concerts: A Commemorative History of the Utah Symphony*, published three years before Durham’s biography.\(^{24}\) Harrison’s work is more directly concerned with the symphony organization, and covers much more extensively the pre-Abravanel years than does Durham’s book. *Five Thousand Concerts* was commissioned by the Utah Symphony Society for the commemoration noted in the title, and contains a straightforward narrative history of the symphony, with some pre-symphony background.

In addition to symphony papers, Harrison’s book relies extensively on interviews with past symphony managers, presidents, conductors (including Abravanel, Ardean Watts, Verujan Kojian, and Joseph Silverstein), musicians, financial contributors, civic leaders, and University educators (including Lowell Durham). The entire first third of the book describes the symphony before Abravanel’s entrance, and the end proceeds through the beginning years of Silverstein’s direction. Chapters on the symphony guild, international exposure and touring, hall building, and the benefactors of the symphony are particularly helpful in describing the growth of the organization.

The notable difference between Durham and Harrison’s works is the extent of credit given to Abravanel. While recognizing Abravanel’s pivotal role in the organization’s development, Harrison considers the significant contributions of many others, such as Wendell J. Ashton’s tremendously successful efforts in fund-raising for the symphony. Durham’s book, on the other hand, focuses almost entirely on

Abravanel's musical accomplishments. Both works emphasize the rise in status of the orchestra without thoroughly examining the recording projects and community programs instituted by Abravanel that were ultimately responsible for such growth.

Numerous published articles exist, either about or by Maurice Abravanel. These articles are available in the special collections departments of both Brigham Young University's Lee library and the University of Utah's Marriott library. Magazine and newspaper articles about Abravanel and his work with the symphony center on the growth achievements of Abravanel and his personal dedication to the propagation of the art. In the December 1982 issue of Symphony Magazine, Scott Cantrell's article titled "America's Musical Conscience Speaks Out" interviews Abravanel shortly after his retirement.25 Abravanel speaks forcibly on the low pay rate for musicians in this country, reiterating his frequent complaint of the poor government support for the arts in this country, particularly when compared with national financial support in European countries.

A preceding issue of Symphony Magazine contains an article titled "Utah's Abravanel: Still Fighting for the Cause of Orchestras."26 This article was written about Abravanel's reception of the "Gold Baton Award" at the 1981 American Symphony Orchestra League conference. Abravanel discusses some of his motivations for taking the position in Utah, largely because he claimed he wanted a chance to get away and relax after working at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway in New York. It is doubtful, as will be demonstrated, that this was the primary reason for his move,


considering the apparent desirability of the post, witnessed by the number and quality of applicants. Again, Abravanel voices his frustrations about the poor condition of federal support in the arts, and particularly music. Interestingly, this magazine issue also contains an article by Isaac Stern titled “Preserving the Magic of Music in Stressful Times,” in which this famous conductor laments the same problem. The prevalence of this complaint, both in the writings of Abravanel and others, testifies to the wide-spread belief that this is a major problem in the development of orchestras in the United States, and perhaps symptomatic of deeper cultural and societal problems.

John Barker’s review, “Maurice Abravanel Conducts the First Recording of Handel’s Oratorio: Samson,” in American Record Guide, is somewhat representative of reviews during the symphony’s prolific recording career under Abravanel. Barker praises the symphony’s willingness to bring historical masterpieces out of obscurity. The author also reviews the quality of the performance, noting the strengths and weaknesses of the primarily local musicians and vocalists used in the recording.

An article written during the years of Abravanel’s tenure with the symphony is “Abravanel: Permanent Maestro” in High Fidelity. In it, Abravanel relates some of his own biography and mentor influences. Abravanel cites community support, particularly of his “Salute to Youth” concerts, and personal dedication of the orchestra members as the reasons for the growing success of the orchestra in recordings and longer concert seasons.

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The December 1968 issue of *International Musician* featured an article titled “Increased Wages and Benefits for Symphony Musicians,” relating Abravanel’s and Utah’s work to increase the growth and status of the symphony. This article was part of a series designed to look at the major United States orchestras to determine how negotiations were handled between the symphony managers and local musicians’ unions to build the orchestras. This article primarily deals with the history of the Utah Symphony, again remarking on the rapid progression from a WPA orchestra of five members to one of the nation’s major symphony orchestras.

In 1968 the USO published a pamphlet titled, “An Appropriation to the Utah Symphony Orchestra is an Investment in Utah’s Progress.” This publication contains a wealth of information regarding the operating costs of the symphony. The costs of youth education and community concerts are described in detail, along with a call to the community’s businesses and private donors to invest more money in the orchestra, based on the symphony’s benefits to the community (also citing the New York Times as rating the symphony consistently in the “Top 15” in the nation). This publication is representative of the promotional works during the time of Abravanel’s tenure.

The January 1968 *Newsletter of the American Symphony Orchestra League* included a report stating that the “Major Symphony Orchestra Managers’ Conference” had voted to admit the Utah Symphony Orchestra into the “major” category. This


marked tremendous progress for Abravanel and the symphony. Requirements for this classification included operation on an annual budget of over $500,000. The other symphony that reached these qualifications at the same time was the American Symphony Orchestra that, amazingly, had only been founded six years earlier, in 1962. This classification made the USO one of thirty orchestras in the United States and Canada with "major" status.

Abravanel, a life-long and ardent supporter of the cause of orchestras, wrote a number of articles on this subject during his life. One of these was "A Summer Experience: A Foretaste of Professional Life," in *High Fidelity & Musical America.*

This article relates to the Music Academy of the West, where Abravanel spent his summers for many years. Abravanel advocates the need for more commitment to—and love of—music, among performers. He states that this dedication to the art will have a greater effect in improving the quality of performance than will talent and ability.

Abravanel argues that superior performances are the key to increased concert attendance.

In "The Utah Story: No Deviltry, Just Good Sense," Abravanel writes about some of the factors that contributed to the growth of the Utah Symphony. He lists some of the symphony’s recording premiers. The subtitle of this article, "How Recording Put a Fine American Orchestra on the Map, Made it a Better One, and Enriched the Repertory to Boot," describes Abravanel’s attitude regarding the importance of this medium in developing an orchestra. Abravanel’s willingness to experiment with previously ignored

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works, even in recording, enabled the symphony to gain a reputation as a pioneer in various genres of music, such as Handel’s oratorios and Bruckner’s and Mahler’s symphonies.

Abravanel’s “Music and Today’s World,” allows close insight into Abravanel’s deepest concerns for the future of classical music.\(^{34}\) In this article, Abravanel laments that music is being killed by its prevalence—namely as background music being aired in restaurants, shops, and other public places. This, he explains, detracts from the significance of the music and diminishes the significance of the spiritual messages that the music is designed to convey.

The American Symphony Orchestra, edited by Henry Swoboda, includes a chapter called “The Utah Symphony Orchestra: An Orchestra in the Deep Interior,” containing an extensive interview with Abravanel.\(^{35}\) The most pertinent parts of this interview deal with community support and the unusual dedication of the performers. Swoboda quotes a review from Esquire magazine that states that the USO was better than other symphonies from cities four or five time the size of Salt Lake City, and asks Abravanel why this is the case? Abravanel responds by crediting the diligence of the performers and the Mormon interest in music and fine arts. A particularly interesting statistic that Abravanel quotes is that nearly eighty percent of the orchestra’s $500,000 annual budget comes from ticket sales and program advertising—three times the percentage for most

\(^{34}\) Abravanel, “Music and Today’s World,” 4–5.

\(^{35}\) Swoboda, ed., 43–56.
orchestras. According to Abravanel, this is a result of the community’s cultural interests.

In addition to published articles, the University of Utah Marriott Library holds the ninety-seven-box Maurice Abravanel collection, containing the maestro’s personal papers, concert programs and reviews, symphony personnel correspondence and financial records, and a host of other applicable sources. Karin Hardy’s register divides the collection into personal materials, correspondence, financial materials, Utah Symphony Orchestra files, institutional files (of the American Arts Alliance, American Symphony Orchestra League, Berkshire Music Center, Music Academy of the West, National Council on the Arts, and the Utah Arts Council), news clippings, and miscellaneous materials (including over thirty additional articles about and by Abravanel and the symphony).

This Abravanel collection provides the foundation and majority of primary source-work for this thesis. Particularly heavy use will be made of the extensive interviews with Maurice Abravanel. These interviews, conducted at various intervals and for a number of venues, taken together, form an impressive collection many hundreds of pages in length that provides keen insight into Abravanel’s history, philosophies, and musical insights. The majority of the Utah Symphony Orchestra’s history included in

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36 While 80% income from ticket sales is extremely high, it is not three times the average. Helen M. Thompson, Executive Secretary of the American Symphony Orchestra League, “The Orchestra Situation in America,” National Music Council Bulletin 23, no. 3 (Spring 1963): 4–6. According to Thompson approximately 55% of the roughly $30 million annual gross expenditures from American symphonies (in 1963), came from ticket sales. Thompson’s calculations, however, are inclusive of the approximately 1300 orchestras in the U.S. at the time, and it is quite possible that many of the smaller orchestras collect proportionally more of their budgets from ticket sales than do some of the major symphonies.

37 Swoboda, ed., 46–47.

38 Abravanel Papers.
this thesis is taken from these sources. The section of this thesis on Abravanel's ideologies will also be derived largely from these interview typescripts.

To provide a context for both Abravanel and the USO in the larger world of American orchestral institutions, additional information comes from the bulletin of the National Music Council. This periodical contains not only articles on the present state of classical music, but also regular reports that furnish such detailed information as the percentages of works by American composers performed by major U.S. symphonies and the number of regular subscription concerts given each year by these same orchestras.

In addition to the Marriott library collection, the University of Utah's music library, located in Gardner Hall, has recently become the home of an Abravanel room and display. This room reconstructs Abravanel's study, including his piano, desk, countless awards and certificates, and an astounding collection of Abravanel's music scores, including his copious notes for performances of these works. The library also contains a considerable collection of Abravanel's recordings with the symphony.

This thesis argues that the Utah Symphony Orchestra, specifically while under the direction of Maurice Abravanel, provides an example of positive growth in community education and classical music promotion. The particular programs that Abravanel implemented were generally successful, and ultimately responsible for the unprecedented growth of the Utah Symphony Orchestra. Further, by examining the challenges and solutions that Abravanel confronted in his work to build the symphony, we may better understand the ingredients necessary to the development of professional classical music organizations.
The previous works cited in this essay have either been strictly biographical about Abravanel or have been concerned only with the institutional organization history of the symphony. While I include both of these elements insofar as they provide necessary background information, this thesis focuses on the particular programs with which Abravanel sought to build the symphony and promote classical music. This approach offers valuable insight into the larger question of how recent musical institutions have been able to further their art among the general populace.

This study uses Abravanel's work with the USO as a model for successful community music programs, with the intent to communicate insight into successful methods for the promotion of classical music. Such an examination provides a new and imminently practical method for institutional music historical study.
To place the Utah Symphony Orchestra, and its remarkable growth, in its historical context, we must first turn our attention to the state of classical music in America generally, and in Utah particularly. First we examine writings of musicians and musicologists over the last century, describing the vitality of their art. This demonstrates both the continuous and changing perceptions that have dominated the field. After looking at the nation as a whole, our search narrows to focus exclusively on a brief history of musical interest in the state of Utah, Salt Lake City, and the Mormon people. With this background, it is then possible to appreciate the immense changes wrought on the Utah Symphony Orchestra by its dominant personality, Maurice Abravanel.

It comes as no surprise to anyone even moderately interested in classical music to learn that symphonic music in America is in a state of decline and is dangerously close to the brink of destruction—or so musicians and musicologists would have us believe. Anywhere we look this sentiment is evident. From Internet sites to music industry periodicals to pivotal and recent monographs such as Nicholas Harnoncourt’s *Baroque Music Today* and Sheldon Morgenstern’s *No Vivaldi in the Garage: A Requiem for Classical Music in North America* we learn that the American symphony and classical

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music may soon find a home only in the annals of history. It may, however, surprise the reader to learn that, according to music critics, American symphonic music has been at death’s door since its inception.

While it may be impossible ultimately to prove or refute the statement that classical music is dying, it is a simple enough task to demonstrate that this has been the single largest and most consistent theme among musicologists in America since the birth of the art form. An examination of some of the reasons proposed for this perceived decline, or at least limited interest among the general populous, provides a reference by which Abravanel’s personal philosophies may later be measured. While this discussion deals with works and ideas spanning more than a century, I give particular emphasis to the years during which Abravanel was associated with USO.

In 1928 a collection of essays by Daniel Gregory Mason was published, with the provocative title *The Dilemma of American Music*. Mason’s ideas, which seem extreme, were published in individual essays in a variety of influential periodicals, including *Harper’s, Virginia Quarterly Review, Musical Quarterly, and Musical America*. Whether he was on the fringe or not, his ideas were circulated widely and probably reflect the thinking of at least some of the early generation of musicians and music critics. Mason’s ideas are worth looking at in some detail, as they present a wonderful example of both the unique and the typical themes on the subject.

Before examining Mason’s ideas, we must recognize that Mason, while by no means the first critical musicologist, is writing from a point still fairly early in the history of American orchestral institutions. In 1890 historian Frederic Louis Ritter stated that

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there were presently, in the United States, only two permanent orchestras in existence, in New York and Boston.\footnote{Frederic Louis Ritter, \textit{Music in America} (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970), 478 (page citations are to the reprint edition).}

For Mason, many problems existed with American classical music, most of which were born alongside the musical institutions themselves. Mason believed that the real dilemma of American music was that it had no sense of identity. There was nothing inherently American about the art form, or the music presented, other than the too diverse combination of cultures of which it was comprised, which only served to add to the confusion of identity. World War I further complicated things by resulting in the dramatic increase of foreign-born composers and musicians who came to America in search of better economic prospects.

Mason complains of the quality of American compositions, a recurring and popular theme, stating that American composers have largely just been parrots, imitating their more profound and creative European predecessors, rather than attempting to create something new and distinctly American. Because of poor quality, audiences are reticent to accept new native compositions, which interest is a necessary ingredient to growth and development of a national music. In his typically blunt prose, Mason describes the practice of forcing new compositions on the public: "Why not stop leading un-thirsty horses to water? They only muddy it."\footnote{Mason, 100.}

Finally, Mason presents his most poignant and enduring argument of the depreciation of classical music. Mason explains that the root of the problem with American music is found in the cultural and societal failings of the people. Mason uses
the performance to demonstrate this principle by writing, “For all their brilliance and luxury, our orchestral concerts are obviously in many respects unhealthy, artificial, even decadent, as may be realised [sic] by noting the hectic character of their life, the ‘showmanship’ and constant advertising necessary to keep them going, the paucity of new music produced either here or abroad, and the sensational character of most of the new music that does reach performance.” \(^{43}\) With this scathing rebuke Mason has summed up many of the problems with American music as he sees them.

In 1950 one of the next significant contributors to the field of American musicology came along—Paul S. Carpenter, with his profoundly influential book *Music: An Art and a Business*. \(^{44}\) His message was the same as Mason’s, and the intellectual connection between the two was not veiled. In the first chapter of the book, in which Carpenter outlines his major argument, the only source that Carpenter quotes is Daniel G. Mason. Carpenter’s thesis, then, was that American music suffered from its unbreakable ties to European music. He blames music history teachers, whose continual message of indoctrination to young students is that the only music worth listening to is German music. Foreign-born composers, conductors, and musicians dominate the American musical landscape, and the process continues. Interestingly, Carpenter points out that the United States, in 1950, boasts of twenty-five orchestras with annual budgets of $100,000 or more, with 130 smaller orchestras. \(^{45}\) The dramatic increase in the number of major

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 90–91.


\(^{45}\) Ibid., 93.
orchestras over the first half of the century does not, we see, prevent musicologists from continuing to prophesy of impending doom for the symphony orchestra.

Moving farther into the century, we come to the time of Abravanel's tenure with the Utah Symphony Orchestra, only to find that many of Mason's fears still are being propagated. A few articles in the Bulletin of the National Music Council in the Spring issue of 1961 demonstrate the familiar theme. The first, an article entitled "What Can Be Done to Enlarge Concert Audiences?" by Richard Korn (then conductor of the Orchestra of America), touches on the popular theme of low percentages of the population that listen to classical music. Korn states that while more people are musically educated than at any period in the past, audiences for concerts are distressingly small, amounting to never more than two percent of the population, and usually considerably less than one percent. Korn writes, "There is a great disparity between the accessibility of high cultural values and the interest in making the effort to get them into the field of good music." According to Korn, then, the problem is that classical music is presented to the public too much in terms of entertainment value, a classification on which it will fall short of the more popular forms. He recommends, instead, that classical music concerts be promoted in light of their cultural and educational merit, similar to Museum exhibits.

The article, "Are the Creative Arts in Danger?," (which, like all of these titles, implies that they are) by Howard Hanson, returns to Mason's concept of declining cultural and social values. In the first sentence of the article Hanson answers his own question with a typically apocalyptic statement: "I believe that the humanities, and

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particularly the creative arts, are in serious danger in our country."⁴⁷ Hanson then offers the reasons for this situation: too great materialism, budget pressures, and the equation of creative arts with scholarship. This last is a new and interesting theory, that subjecting the arts to critique, examination, and historical inquiry has made them impotent. Like Abravanel, as we will later see, Hanson believes that the answer to the problem is arriving at a proper balance in works performed of traditional works and new creative works. As Hanson eloquently puts it, to “restore the balance between creation and preservation to that which produced the golden ages of the arts in the past.”⁴⁸

Nowhere is the problem confronting the American orchestra more clearly stated than by Samuel Grafton: “Whether an orchestra is big or small, world famous or only locally known, solvency lies beyond reach.”⁴⁹ As an example, Grafton shows that the New York Philharmonic, which collects over one million dollars a year in ticket sales and earns over $250,000 each year in recording royalties still comes up short of a budget near 2 million dollars. Grafton cites famous conductors who share his fears, Fritz Reiner and Eugene Ormandy. He quotes the latter as saying, “if something doesn’t happen, and soon, professional symphony orchestras may go out of business, except in the biggest cities.”⁵⁰

Fortunately, Ormandy’s prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. Of course, on a regular basis orchestras are going out of business, yet the overall position of symphony

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⁴⁷ Howard Hanson, “Are the Creative Arts in Danger?” National Music Council Bulletin 21, no. 3 (Spring 1961): 19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.


⁵⁰ Ibid.
orchestras is very little different today than it was forty years ago when Grafton's article was printed. The logical assumption that Grafton makes is that a business institution cannot operate continually through deficit spending. This has, however, not always proven to the case historically, for arts programs in general or symphony orchestras in particular. Histories of these organizations are replete with examples of private (and in fewer cases government) donations rescuing them from the brink of potential ruin.

"[People] must wake up to the fact that we have a great cultural asset in our magnificent symphony orchestras that is in grave danger of being lost to our country."\(^{51}\)

So writes Stanley Ballard, Secretary of the American Federation of Musicians, in 1963. Ballard's complaint, which Abravanel continually harped on, was the poor wages for American symphony musicians (on average $3,500 annually at this time) and the lack of Federal aid for the arts. Ballard points out the dichotomy between European nations support of local arts programs and the lack of such funding by the American government. Unfortunately, the solution that Ballard proposes is a common, but incredibly ambiguous task—Americans must be brought to place more interest and investment in cultural development.

It would be well to ask what the long-term response of such pleas and passionate admonitions has been. Apparently, enough voices like Ballard's were heard, and in 1965 Congress approved the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts. In the beginning, appropriations were small, and never came close to the desired amounts. The following figures come from an article six years after Ballard's, under the ominous title, "Federal Funds Cut for Arts and Humanities." According to the report, a $200 million

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reduction in appropriations to elementary and secondary education, in 1969 resulted in a drastic reduction in the Arts and Humanities branch, and that of the requested $27.5 million appropriations by the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, only $11.2 million were granted.

Over time, the appropriations of the Endowment increased steadily and considerably. By the time Abravanel retired from the Utah Symphony, in 1979, annual appropriations had reached $150 million, less than $30 million short of the highest amount they have so far reached. After 1995 funds were reduced drastically, and since that time they have been between $97 million and $115 million.52

Before rushing to place all the accusations for the apparently poor state of American orchestras at the feet of the federal government, we must look at some of the contributions being made by the National Endowment for the Arts. Some of the substantial ways in which the endowment has benefited American musical institutions are (1) assistance to individual performers (and potential performers), (2) grants to composers, (3) aid to performing organizations, and (4) appropriations for education. The philosophy behind the appropriations seems to be to provide financial assistance to those individuals or groups that have demonstrated an effort to improve, expand, or build. For instance, in 1969, the Arts Council authorized awards of up to $50,000 to five orchestras that submitted proposals for activities that would improve or stabilize their organizations over time.53 While such assistance was of undeniable benefit to some

52 Statistical information here regarding the National Endowment for the Arts is found at the Endowment’s website: http://arts.endow.gov, accessed 22 July 2002.

orchestras, and would benefit classical music in the country over a long time, it still fell substantially short of the aid given to European orchestras, and left most American symphonies and musicians completely untouched.

What many should have recognized, and probably did, August Heckscher finally stated: interest in the high culture arts, and specifically the symphony orchestra, is "limited to an exceptionally educated, high-income, white-collar segment of the population." If he had written this today, he probably would have included "Euro-American" and "Asian-American." Heckscher, as the former consultant on the arts under President Kennedy and a member of numerous arts councils and businesses, was in a position accurately to evaluate the situation of the arts in the country. His conclusion was that the non-technical nature of art and the extremely limited audience were responsible for its unhealthy position. Like writers before and after him, from Mason to Harnoncourt, Heckscher came to the conclusion that the problem was ultimately one of ill-placed social values.

While it may not be possible to improve the moral being of the nation as a whole, there is no reason, according to Alan Rich, that the growing disparity between technology and the classical music world need be a division between our society and the art of our people. In a 1970 conference that featured numerous discourses on the tenuous future of classical music in America, Rich declared that creative art, employing new mediums made available by increases in technology, could improve the prospects of music. Using a historically based argument, Rich asked whether "the composer who draws his tones

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from an electronic synthesizer rather than an oboe is not a composer?" Though Rich's idea was certainly not new, it provided at least one example of hopeful speculation as to the direction from which deliverance may come. By suggesting that musicians, concert-goers, and the general populous maintain an open attitude toward new and creative compositions, Rich's philosophy was resoundingly healthy.

In many ways the most eloquent summations of the dilemmas facing symphony orchestras and classical music in the recent past have come from a European. Nikolaus Harnoncourt rose to fame as one of the pioneers of the movement to perform baroque music with a scholarly approach to period performance practices. Harnoncourt's ideologies are better understood in context of the irony of his own life's work. By devoting his time and interests to the performance of a period long past, Harnoncourt has blatantly refused to confront what he admits is the core of the modern music problem.

Harnoncourt believes that the moral decay of society is alone responsible for the decline of interest in things cultural, educational, and enlightening. In a process more thoroughly logical than any of his predecessors, Harnoncourt postulates that an immoral society cannot produce, understand, or accept beautiful artistic creations. He says, "music is but one aspect of our spiritual life and as such, can only reflect what is happening within it." In a vicious cycle, if the society cannot produce these glorious works, they cannot be uplifted or educated by them, which furthers their plight. As a result, those few who are interested must seek out brilliance in the creations of past periods—hence, the birth of interest in early music. To support his theory, Harnoncourt

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56 Harnoncourt, 19.
reminds readers that scholarly and academic research into past music and performance practice is, largely, a twentieth-century phenomenon.\textsuperscript{57}

The irony of Hamoncourt’s work is that his efforts, along with those of other extraordinary musical interpreters such as Thurston Dart, Trevor Pinnock, and John Eliot Gardiner, have awakened the world to some of the forgotten monumental treasures of spiritual and secular music—reviving the works of Monteverdi, Bach, Vivaldi, Telemann, Gluck, and to a lesser degree Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven. These men, and a movement that began in England as purely scholarly form of entertainment nearly a century ago, have accomplished more in the ways of increasing record sales and renewing interest in classical music than any other single effort or movement.

Many of Hamoncourt’s ideas were expressed earlier by other musicians, including Maurice Abravanel, for which reason they warrant some examination. Consider the following quotations: “Music is necessarily a mirror of the present; if we wish to change music, we must first change the contemporary world. There is no crisis in music; rather music is reflecting the crisis of an age.”\textsuperscript{58} Also, “Our musical life is in a disastrous state. Opera houses, symphony orchestras, concert halls abound, offering a rich program of music. But the music we play in these places is music we do not understand at all, music which was intended for people of quite different times.”\textsuperscript{59} With this last statement Hamoncourt has revealed an interesting and insightful concept. Is this the answer to the paradox that musicians have been relentlessly bemoaning the fate of

\textsuperscript{57} Though Nikolaus Hamoncourt has written more recent works his fundamental theories are still best presented in the first three chapters of \textit{Baroque Music Today}.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 22–23.
their art since its inception, while there has been subsequent, undeniable growth in the number and quality of orchestras? Does the general populous simply not listen because they do not understand?

Another idea proposed by Harnoncourt for the decline of interest in classical music is the prevalence of it through means of recordings. "A paradox has emerged: quantitatively, we have much more music today than ever before—almost uninterrupted music—but it is no longer very relevant to our lives. It has become simply a pretty adornment." Harnoncourt fails to explain, however, whether or not he believes the prevalence of music through recording mediums to be inherently responsible for the lack of interest. Finally, Harnoncourt throws out a provocative challenge by stating: "we should reflect carefully on the fact that current popular music plays an essential role in our cultural life, but no contemporary "serious music" plays a comparable role."

A few examples of chapter titles from Samuel Lipman's *Arguing for Music, Arguing for Culture* prove sufficient to determine this recent author's stand: "The Crisis Continues," "Dismal Thoughts on the Present and Future," "Dead from Lincoln Center," and lastly, the essay with which we are interested, "Is the Symphony Orchestra Dead?" With prospects like these, it is a wonder that after recounting numerous problems with today's orchestras Lipman can immediately, and consciously, provide statistics about the amazing growth of American orchestras. Because his study so admirably represents the paradox, which he makes no attempt to explain, it is worth reviewing.

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60 Ibid., 11.
61 Ibid., 20.
Lipman begins his chapter “Is the Symphony Orchestra Dead?” by listing some of the major causes for concern—or as he calls them, the “many elements in this plight.” Some of these are a less knowledgeable audience (this is inconsistent with Richard Korn’s statement), standardized and overly-familiar repertoires, the “complete failure” of modern compositions to impress musicians or listeners, a dearth of big-name artists, and the “encroachment of academic musicology” on the repertory! It is not the nature of Lipman’s list, however, that demands explanation—any and all of these reasons had been previously offered. What is noteworthy is what follows.

After pointing out the frailties of the symphony world, and the reasons for its impending doom, Lipman explains, “In a process that began as long ago as the late 1930s [Lipman need not have stopped here], American orchestras have grown in numbers.” Earlier, he tells of “the massive expansion orchestras have enjoyed over the past few decades.” To support his statements of orchestral growth, Lipman provides some statistics, which he has acquired from the American Symphony Orchestra League: “In the 1984–85 concert season 19,969 symphony concerts took place . . . attended by 23.7 million people.” “As the number of concerts has increased, so have the budgets for orchestras large and small. Our greatest orchestras are now projecting annual expenditures approaching twenty million dollars and more.” Lipman’s curious juxtaposition leaves the reader unconvinced. How can the end be “near, even at the

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63 Ibid., 318.
64 Ibid., 319, italics added.
65 Ibid.
doors,”66 in the face of such overt prosperity? Lipman’s answer is the same as everyone else’s—look at the financial difficulties.

To complete our study of American symphony historiography, we turn to Sheldon Morgenstern’s No Vivaldi in the Garage. This is, by the admission of the subtitle, more of a “requiem for classical music in North America” than it is a history. Morgenstern’s message, however, is the same. He writes of continually receiving depressing news of friends losing jobs in the music industry, music programs in schools being cut, and the like. Morgenstern, who at the time of writing this book had moved to France, looks on the United States music scene with doubt and despair. Morgenstern fails to draw attention that his own survey in the first appendix of his book shows that there are currently twenty-three class AA orchestras in America.67

In perhaps what Morgenstern views as a final plea to awaken the nation to a realization of bleak prospects, he makes the unsubstantiated claim that “the hazardous situation facing North American orchestras seldom makes the news and is rarely discussed outside musical circles. My purpose in writing No Vivaldi in the Garage is to make a broader public aware of the precarious state of live classical music performance in Canada and the United States, to examine some of the reasons for its decline, and to offer some solutions.”68 Again, Morgenstern provides no specific evidence of decline, but uses the familiar rhetoric to shock readers.

66 Matt. 24:33 KJV.

67 Meaning twenty-three orchestras with annual budgets of over ten million dollars, in addition to thirty-two orchestras with budgets between $3.6 million and $10 million, and sixty-six orchestras in the $1 million to $3.6 million range.

68 Morgenstern, xi–xii, italics added.
Statistics from the website of the American Symphony Orchestra League regarding the 1999–2000 season close off the history of the orchestra over the century. Income for the 1999–2000 season in all American orchestras was roughly 1.27 billion dollars (an increase of nearly $180 million over the 1997–98 season). The total rough expenses were $1.18 billion—about $84.5 million less than the amount of income. Individual orchestras followed the upward trend: seventy-one percent of surveyed orchestras reported surpluses (compared with fifty-one percent only ten years ago). Concert attendance also increased: an estimated thirty-two million seats filled (on par with the last five years and up roughly five million from ten years ago).\(^{69}\)

The purpose of this study has been to show the ideological consistencies in the historiography of the American symphonic world. The constant theme over the last hundred years has been that American orchestras are in immediate and utter peril—the classical concert is in danger of extinction. While the reasons offered for impending ruin have differed greatly—ranging from an influx of foreigners to inept native composers to the moral decay of society—the primary proof offered for the situation has remained the dubious financial condition of the institutions. Though many writers have acknowledged the tremendous and undisputable growth in the industry (from Ritter’s two permanent symphonies in 1890 to $1.27 billion annual income and 32 million concertgoers in 2000), apparently none have accepted this growth as a real indicator of the vitality and health of the industry.

\(^{69}\) All statistics in this paragraph are found under the heading “Quick Orchestra Facts From the 1999-2000 Season” on the website of the American Symphony Orchestra League at http://www.symphony.org, accessed 12 August 2002.
Having established some basis of reference against which to place our subject, we may now examine the musical culture of Utah and then continue through a history of the unsuccessful early attempts to establish and maintain a permanent symphony in the state.

The story of music in Mormonism is well documented. From the earliest days of the church sacred music played an important role in worship and secular music provided entertainment. When the Latter-day Saints followed Brigham Young to Utah, they brought with them not only their love for music, but also the physical means of making it—musical instruments—often at great expense and considerable sacrifice. Leaders of the church continually expressed sentiments regarding the importance of music in developing a mature culture in the community.

While the elevated status of music in the Mormon community is undisputable, the advent of symphonic music in Utah did not take place until long after the Saints entered the Salt Lake Valley. This chapter will begin with some of the earliest documented symphonic performances in Utah and chronicle many of the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to establish a permanent symphony orchestra in the territory during the first half of the twentieth century.

Early members of the church shared an interest in classical music long before any attempts were made to perform this music. The Deseret Evening News of 1 March 1855 contains an article asking for Saints coming west from Europe or the Eastern states to bring with them, if possible, sheet music of the major works of Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and others, with complete orchestral parts where available.

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70 Many of these instruments can be seen in the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Pioneer Memorial Museum, 300 North Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.

71 Harrison, 5.
to Salt Lake City were continually impressed by the unusually high percentage of musicians among the population.

The first professional (i.e., “paid”) music ensemble was the Salt Lake Theatre orchestra. The orchestra made its debut performance for the opening of the Salt Lake Theatre, built and paid for by the church, on 8 March 1862. Charles J. Thomas conducted both this ensemble and the Tabernacle Choir until 1865, when he moved to St. George and was replaced by composer and conductor George Careless. It was during Careless’s tenure that the ensemble was reduced in size and made a paid professional orchestra (with only seven musicians).  

Choral music, both in theatre and opera, preceded purely symphonic music in Utah by three decades. Perhaps the largest choral program conducted in Utah’s early years was Handel’s Messiah, conducted by George Careless in the Salt Lake Theatre in 1875. It was not until 17 May 1892 that the first symphony concert would take place—in the same concert hall. According to Conrad Harrison, the Salt Lake Symphony Orchestra was organized as early as 5 March 1888, but did not perform until 1892.  

This organization was conducted by Professor Anton Pedersen. Pedersen had become the most influential member of music society in Utah since moving to the state in 1875. Pedersen was the first of Abravanel’s predecessors who was not a member of the church (he moved to Utah because of his future wife, Mary Olive Larsen, who was a church member). The concert of 5 March 1892 featured portions of Beethoven’s Symphony No.

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72 Ibid., 5–8.

73 Ibid., 8–9. The years of Thomas, Careless, and Pedersen are described in detail in Hicks’s Mormonism and Music and Cook’s “Pioneer Bands and Orchestras of Salt Lake City.” Hicks mistakenly reports the year of the Messiah performance as 1876.
1 and Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("Unfinished"). Though the concert met with rave reviews, it was another ten years before another orchestral performance took place.\textsuperscript{74}

The second performance by the Salt Lake Symphony was held on Thanksgiving Day, 24 November 1902. The orchestra, conducted by Arthur Shepherd, performed only one symphonic work: Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. Again, the symphony could not get off the ground. In 1904, the orchestra performed its third concert, which the Deseret Evening News erroneously labeled Salt Lake's "first symphony concert."\textsuperscript{75} It was after this concert that the Salt Lake Symphony began holding concerts, though on a very irregular basis. While Shepherd was with the Orchestra a total of eleven performances were held, between the years 1902 and 1908.\textsuperscript{76}

The story of the Salt Lake Symphony during its first fifty years is one of continual starts and stops. A brief recounting of conductors and concerts demonstrates the transitory nature of the symphony prior to 1940. After Albert Shepherd (brother of Arthur and Charles Shepherd)\textsuperscript{77}, J. J. McClellan assumed direction of the symphony, and conducted eight concerts between 1908 and 1911.\textsuperscript{78} After the 6 April 1911 concert the symphony formally disbanded, with no intention of ever gathering and performing again.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{74} Harrison, 13–14.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{76} Brown, 6.

\textsuperscript{77} Harrison, 45. All three brothers: Arthur, Albert "Bert," and Charles conducted the Salt Lake Symphony at one time or another.

\textsuperscript{78} Brown, 7.

\textsuperscript{79} Harrison, 27.
Once again, interest arose in creating an orchestra to fill the needs of the Salt Lake community, and exactly two years later, on 6 April 1913 Anton Pedersen returned to conduct the newly organized orchestra, now under the name Salt Lake Philharmonic Orchestra. When Pedersen died the following month, he was replaced by his son, Arthur Pedersen Freber (taking the old family name), who conducted the orchestra for ten concerts, until the fall of 1917, when the trials of World War I made it impossible for the orchestra to continue. In 1920, under the baton of Charles Shepherd, the orchestra returned and performed nine concerts until 1924, when the name was changed back to Salt Lake Symphony. After 1925 two more years without any concerts elapsed. Finally one performance was given on 18 May 1927, after which the symphony ceased to exist.

The first symphony orchestra in Utah that demonstrated any potential of permanency was the Works Progress Orchestra, conducted by Reginald Beales. The W.P.A. orchestra was formed in December 1935 and first performed in January 1936. This orchestra was the last (and most successful) predecessor of the Utah State Symphony Orchestra. The W.P.A. orchestra, in its four years, reportedly performed 139 concerts. This orchestra was smaller than most of its predecessors, and generally performed music that was simpler and more appealing to the general public.

Sometime after resigning from the orchestra in 1941, Reginald Beales wrote a document entitled, “On the Genesis of the Utah Symphony Orchestra.” In the two-page document Beales tells briefly of the successful growth of the W.P.A. orchestra from five

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80 Brown, 7.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 8.
83 Ibid., 23.
musicians (2 clarinets, 1 violin, 1 piano, and drums) to an organization of 45 musicians that gave “hundreds” of concerts.\textsuperscript{84} Beales became dissatisfied with the organization in 1941 when the government cut funding by seventy-five percent and the new symphony board decided to take on Hans Heniot, first as a guest conductor, then with a two-year contract. According to Beales, “it was an unhappy and intolerable situation for me and to escape it, I resigned.”\textsuperscript{85}

Beales and others found the situation disagreeable and left. The W.P.A. orchestra, however, is inextricably connected with the birth of the Utah Symphony Orchestra. The musicians and board of the W.P.A. orchestra formed the backbone of the new USO. According to Deane Brown, at least twenty-four of the players in the new Utah Symphony Orchestra had been members of the W.P.A. orchestra.\textsuperscript{86} In addition to the musicians, the symphony board that Beales helped recruit became the heads of the new symphony. Some of these early members that would go on to preside over the Utah Symphony were “Ted” Brown, Adam S. Bennion (with Utah Power and Light), Fred Smith, Mrs. Glenn Walker Wallace, and Gail Martin (with the Deseret News).\textsuperscript{87} These men and women were among the most influential presidents and board members with whom Abravanel would work during the first two decades of his tenure with the symphony.

\textsuperscript{84} Reginald Beales, “On the Genesis of the Utah Symphony Orchestra” (typescript, [Salt Lake City, Utah], n.p., n.d.). Beales’s use of the word “hundreds” is misleading—the actual number seems to have been 139.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{86} Brown, 25.

\textsuperscript{87} Beales, 2.
The problems that faced Utah's early orchestras and resulted in their downfall were in some cases similar, and in some identical, to the challenges that confronted Maurice Abravanel during his early years with the USO. As always, the chief problems were financial, but others were also critical, such as poor public relations and a lack of support from the other musical organizations in the community (i.e., the Tabernacle Choir). Insufficient financial support and failure to draw enough at the ticket office were ultimately responsible for the sporadic and unsuccessful attempts to build and maintain the pre-W.P.A. orchestras.

To summarize, the Utah State Symphony Orchestra, formed in May 1940, was preceded by forty-eight years of symphony orchestras in Utah. Though nearly half a century of orchestral performances preceded the organization of the USO, they were years filled with repeated dreams, struggles, and failures of orchestra-building. The seven conductors and four orchestras that preceded the USO actually performed during only twenty-seven of the forty-eight years. The number of total concerts during the first forty-four years did not exceed forty-five. For comparison, within six years of arriving in Utah Maurice Abravanel was conducting more concerts in a single season than all of the symphonic concerts in the history of Utah prior to the W.P.A. orchestra.88

88 This comparison refers only to concerts that were either predominantly or exclusively symphonic—the early history of Utah is rich with musical theatre, choral, folk, and religious concerts by both amateur and quasi-professional ensembles.
CHAPTER 2

MAURICE ABRAVANEL

The story of Maurice Abravanel's early years with the Utah Symphony Orchestra is one of excitement and adventure, but also one of continual challenge. It was from the most tenuous of beginnings that the successful orchestra would later emerge, and no single individual can claim more credit for the orchestra's survival during these years than Maurice Abravanel. The real truth lies somewhere between the accounts given by Lowell Durham, who's Abravanel! can be most accurately described as an eulogy and Conrad Harrison's history of the symphony, Five Thousand Concerts, that lists Abravanel among many others who played a significant role. Of course, the efforts of many people are required to sustain an institution of this size, but Abravanel's commitment alone carried the symphony through its roughest times.

As the story unfolds, told largely by Abravanel, characters emerge and take their places either as helpers or hindrances. Some of the challenges that Abravanel confronted include insufficient funding, a lack of support from some elements in the community and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and opposition from board members with conflicting visions and programs. To place these challenges in perspective, and thereby appreciate the solutions that were employed to surmount them, it is helpful to recognize
the sacrifices and investments that Abravanel made personally by coming to, and remaining with, the Utah Symphony Orchestra.

Without reciting the biographical information presented earlier, some background on our subject is necessary. Abravanel’s move to Utah and his decision to take the position of music director were the result of a strong set of personal beliefs and ambitions. Abravanel left the Metropolitan Opera after only a short time, for Broadway, to conduct musicals by his friend and former teacher, Kurt Weill. Abravanel’s respect and admiration for Weill, perhaps augmented by a feeling of debt owed to him, led Abravanel to take the position on Broadway—a move that was hardly understood or agreed with by the musical community in general. At the time, this was considered a step down in circles of “classical” conductors and musicians. Abravanel may not have foreseen all of the implications of this decision. He states, “I had been offered the Cincinnati Symphony [at the time, an even more significant post than it would be today] and I did not understand at the moment [that if] I conducted anything on Broadway, even Kurt Weill, that it eliminated me.”

After leaving Broadway, Abravanel returned to Australia in 1946 to conduct the Sydney Orchestra for a ten concert series. He decided that America was the place for him, and upon returning to the states he became aware of the job opening in the USO. He learned of the position while reading an article in the New York Times, telling that Utah’s conductor was leaving for Portland. Abravanel approached his manager, Arthur Judson (among whose clients were such notable conductors as Arturo Toscanini, Bruno Walter, and Leopold Stokowski), who strongly advised him against taking the position. Judson went so far as to inform the USO board that Abravanel would never move to Utah. Other

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89 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 24 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 12, p. 9.
friends, including Weill, tried to convince Abravanel that this would not be a good idea, but Abravanel was intrigued.

The real test, which reveals Abravanel's motives for interest in the USO, came when Judson's secretary called Abravanel, advising him that Radio City Music Hall wanted him to sign a five-year, lucrative position with their newly enlarged orchestra. This position would quickly lead to international recognition, and started at roughly $30,000 per year. To put this amount into perspective, the National Music Council Bulletin, eight years later, featured an article, "Careers in Music," that listed the salaries of symphony orchestra conductors at between $6,000 and $30,000 per year. Abravanel amazed his colleagues by turning down the offer. His reason—he did not believe that this position would lead to conducting great classical masterpieces, which was his ultimate goal. In his words: "I became a musician in order to conduct Beethoven's Ninth and Mozart and Bach." So, on his way out to California to guest conduct in San Francisco, Abravanel stopped off in Salt Lake City, to meet with members of the Utah Symphony Orchestra. He describes how Ruth Cowan took him to Temple Square, where he was introduced to a number of people, including Tracy Cannon, who was in charge of music for the church. Cannon's impression on Abravanel was so profound, that combined with his positive experiences during the visit and after meeting the USO board, that he was offered the position and intended to take it. He went on to California, and after conducting in San Francisco he traveled to Los Angeles, where he was offered a movie contract for a new...
movie coming out that would feature music by Grieg. Abravanel again refused the offer, as he was determined to accept the position in Salt Lake City.

Moving to Salt Lake City would require a sacrifice in temporal wealth, but would provide the opportunity to experience the great works that Abravanel was interested in performing. For example, Abravanel recounts how the Utah Symphony Orchestra had not even financed his trip or accommodations. He recalls, “I had to sit there all night at the Union Pacific and so on and so forth because nobody made a reservation for me, nobody. I can remember standing at the Union Pacific Depot and thinking, ‘Well, this is poetic justice. You conduct on Broadway, you have all those luxuries. If you want to conduct Beethoven and Mozart, that has a price, so it’s perfectly okay.’”

The people and community of Salt Lake City must have had some swaying power, however, because Abravanel’s offers were not limited to radio and movie contracts. The final offer came from the Houston Symphony, which Abravanel turned down as he had now made up his mind to go with Utah. What did all this amount to? In order to come to the Utah Symphony Orchestra, Abravanel had rejected offers that paid two (Houston) and three (Radio City Music Hall) times the amount that Utah was offering him, and considerable potential prestige. What was it for? What would await Abravanel in Utah? What new challenges would confront him?

By piecing together information from the transcripts of Abravanel’s many interviews, augmented and edited where necessary by other sources, it is possible to reconstruct much of the history of Abravanel’s years with the USO. As has been demonstrated earlier, this was a period of continuing growth in symphony orchestras throughout the country, and while Abravanel’s experiences in pushing the symphony

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92 Ibid., box 4, fd. 12, p. 15.
through its early years are probably fairly typical, the eventual result was certainly unique in terms of the degree of success brought about. Abravanel's words provide a rare insight into the story from the music director's vantage point.

According to Abravanel, the Utah Symphony Orchestra began in 1946, not 1940. It was the 1946–7 season that marked the beginning of a permanent orchestra with regularly scheduled concerts from year to year. Challenges abounded when Abravanel arrived in Salt Lake City to take his post, but in at least one area they did not come. Abravanel's talent and ability, both as a conductor and a music director, were never questioned. In a typically modest statement, Abravanel indicated that there was little reason that the board, musicians, and community would not be pleased with him, as virtually anyone would be an improvement over his predecessors. "That made life for me so easy, because those who had come before were, I understand, so awful that any, even a little bit less worse conducting would have been thought very good. So therefore, I was very successful, because I was not quite as bad as what you had before." 93

Abravanel's motivations for taking the job were not only to perform the music that he felt to be important but also to expose the community to the same. Even before accepting the position he had gone to the symphony's office and made notes, from programs, of all the pieces that had been performed. He discovered that many of the influential and monumental works had never been performed by the symphony, and perhaps never in the state of Utah. Among these were Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Brahms' Symphony No. 2, Stravinsky's Firebird Suite, and Schubert's Symphony No. 9

93 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 9 August 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 4, p. 3.
in C Major. "So naturally, I tried to perform those fantastically beautiful pieces as soon as possible."94

In addition to old workhorses, Abravanel was always concerned with providing a venue for new composition, "and so I performed some Copland, Barber, William Schuman right away, also Stravinsky, Hindemith, Darius Milhaud, etc. In other words, I knew that the audience wouldn’t accept thirty new names, but it might accept half a dozen."95 Unfortunately, programming contemporary music is not always popular, which Abravanel quickly learned.

In one of his first concerts with the symphony, Abravanel programmed, in the second half of the concert, three modern compositions. The concert did not meet with the approval of all present, including an influential symphony board member and the head of an important sponsor, Utah Power & Light, George Gadsby. The pieces performed were described as “awful and disgraceful” and Gadsby told Abravanel that neither he nor Salt Lake City cared for the music. Further, the symphony would not get a penny from Utah Power & Light if they continued to perform music of that sort. In response, Abravanel called and confronted Gadsby, asking if that wasn’t economic boycott? The next day, as a peace offering, Gadsby went to the symphony manager with a personal donation. In credit to Abravanel’s musicianship, the three new pieces became some of the staples in orchestral literature: William Schuman’s Sideshow for Orchestra, Samuel Barber’s Adagio for Strings, and Aaron Copland’s brand new ballet score Appalachian Spring.96

94 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 23 August 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 6, p. 18.

95 Ibid.

96 Abravanel’s memory of the concert program is probably in error. The Abravanel collection at the University of Utah contains concert programs from November 1947 through the end of Abravanel’s tenure with the Symphony. Unless the program for the concert he alludes to is missing, there was no such
The collection of concert programs in the Abravanel papers at the University of Utah validate Abravanel’s claim that he tried to expose the community to compositions. Virtually all of the concerts during his first couple years featured at least one contemporary work.

Acceptance of the fledgling orchestra and new conductor was slow to come in many aspects of the community, but nowhere was the relationship so ambiguous as it was with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In many ways the church was supportive of the symphony, and Abravanel’s efforts. The lay membership provided an increasingly positive audience base, and the highest levels of church leaderships were supportive. One tremendous method of support was allowing the symphony the use of the tabernacle for their concerts, for over twenty years, before the symphony moved to Kingsbury Hall, at the University of Utah.

There were, however, two areas in which little support seemed forthcoming—the Tabernacle Choir and financial support from church-owned businesses. The story of the Choir’s relationship with the symphony is a well-documented one, particularly in Lowell Durham’s biography. Extensive as Durham’s account is, it fails to give Abravanel’s complete understanding of the causes behind the conflict.97

Soon after accepting the job with the USO Abravanel went to Spencer Cornwall, conductor of the Tabernacle Choir, to propose combining the two ensembles for a concert in November 1947. Barber’s Adagio was performed during this month, and it is likely that he is adding that piece to a concert given later in the season, on 31 January 1948. This January 1948 concert featured an entire program of Utah premiers. The first half of the program included the world premier of Walter Kaufmann’s Dirge along with Beethoven’s Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra. The second half of the concert was very similar to Abravanel’s memory: Charles Griffes’ White Peacock, Aaron Copland’s Appalachian Spring, and William Schuman’s Side Show. These two programs are found in the Abravanel Papers, box 31, fds. 1 & 4.

97 Durham, pp. 69, 126–127, 198–199.
performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. After refusing the offer with a weak excuse about concern for the well-being of the singer's voices, Cornwall finally came out and said, according to Abravanel, "'Look, I might just as well tell you we are the church, you are the state, the two don't mix.'"98 It would be another twenty-eight years before the Utah Symphony and Mormon Tabernacle Choir would perform together, in Zion's National Park, in May of 1976, only a few years before Abravanel retired.99

In the early years, even the use of the tabernacle was sometimes problematic. To illustrate the extent of the ambiguity in church support of the symphony, Abravanel recalled that when Spencer Condie was in town, and Spencer Cornwall was not, Condie would call up Abravanel and tell him that while Cornwall was away the symphony was welcome to use the tabernacle.100 Eventually David O. McKay, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, called and told Cornwall, according to Abravanel's account to stop this "ridiculous," "dog in the manger" behavior, after which the symphony was allowed to use the tabernacle for many years, until another hall became available.101

Funding proved to be the real difficulty with some members of the church, a problem that remained largely unresolved until Wendell Ashton joined the symphony board.102 Most of the active members of the symphony board during the early years were

98 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 24 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 12, p. 20.
99 Durham, Abravanel!, 173.
100 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 24 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 12, p. 43.
101 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 14 October 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 15, p. 11.
102 Wendell Ashton had been a prominent member of the Salt Lake City business community while working for Gillham Advertising Agency. In 1972 he left this company to devote himself more fully
prominent Salt Lake citizens, and largely non-members of the church (The slight majority of board members were governor-appointed people who lived in other parts of the state and rarely became involved in symphony business). The board, according to Abravanel, wished to maintain the operation without relying on the aid of the church.

Whether it was the cause of poor relations or simply added to them, one episode occurred when Fred Smith, a close friend of Abravanel and president of the symphony from 1940 to 1948, made an unfortunate statement. The symphony was under extreme financial stress because of a very expensive first season (with numerous imported musicians to augment the local ones), when, at a board meeting, Smith said, “we ought to go to the church, they are suckers for culture.” According to Abravanel the statement was entirely innocent, and meant as a compliment, but it eventually made its way to Mormon apostle J. Reuben Clark, first counselor in the first presidency of the church, who did not care for the phrase “sucker for culture,” and who Abravanel says was never converted to the cause of the orchestra.

Whatever the reasons, potentially significant funds from the large church-owned companies, such as Beneficial Life and Utah-Idaho Sugar, never came. Financial problems came from the state government as well. For instance, When J. Bracken Lee was running for governor, both he and his opponent had, as part of their platform, promised $25,000 to the symphony. After being elected, Lee succumbed to pressures from some of his constituency and reneged on his commitment, leaving the symphony in a very dire situation. The events which followed ended up being one of the largest and

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most threatening in the early history of the orchestra, and would have surely caused its
death if not for Abravanel’s resolve, dedication to the institution, and personal efforts.

Abravanel’s account of the story is as follows: He was called on the third Friday
in January 1949, the day before a regularly scheduled concert. Abravanel was informed
that the next morning Mrs. Glenn Wallace (the president of the orchestra) would come
and announce to the performers that the orchestra had no money and would fold.

Abravanel told her not to come, that the musicians had been given a contract that they
would have an orchestra to play in, and that the contract must be honored, funding or no.

Abravanel went to Ben Bullough, the secretary of the local musicians’ union, and told
him the situation, and that the musicians would be playing for free. Bullough
courageously ignored his duty (which would have been to stop the operation of the
orchestra) and responded, “I’m going to look the wrong—the other way. We have tried
to have an orchestra here for one hundred years, and we would have a few concerts a
season of maybe four or five concert, and then it would stop. Now is the first time we
feel it might stick. . . . If they cannot raise the money while we continue to play
concerts—obviously they could not raise it if we don’t play concerts.”

In actuality, the symphony declared bankruptcy in 1949, during their second
season. It was probably entirely due to Abravanel’s resolve that the symphony continued
performing, without pay for a number of weeks, until sufficient funds could be raised to
begin, once more, operation of the organization. Acquiring funds for the orchestra
became even more difficult, because now that the symphony had declared bankruptcy
once, donors were more wary of making an investment in the symphony. The situation

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104 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 6 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 8, pp. 13–14,
and Maurice Abravanel Interview, 24 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 12, pp. 31–33.
was not improved by the number of magazines and newspapers throughout the nation that carried the story of the symphony's folding. Of course, when the symphony began operation again, that was not news, so many people were unaware that the Utah Symphony Orchestra had been started again.¹⁰⁵

Financial considerations were a constant concern, as Abravanel describes in the following account: “Each year when Huck [Herald “Huck” Gregory, the symphony manager] would present the financial statement the reaction [of the board] was, ‘Oh, look, [the deficit is] bigger again than last year. That’s terrible. When will it stop?’ And I would point out, yes, it was much bigger on the same amount of contribution.”¹⁰⁶

While contributions ranged from $35,000 to $50,000 per year, the budget had increased from $100,000 to $500,000. Though the reasons for this were profitable—a longer concert season, school concerts, and programs in distant towns to build prestige throughout the state—the result was a worry to the board.

Occasionally the board was even the cause of the problem. In one case Abravanel missed a board meeting (he went to virtually all of them) because he was at a rehearsal with a University of Utah choir. The next day he read in the paper that “thanks to efficient management” the symphony was reducing the contribution goal from $50,000 to $35,000. Abravanel was furious. He went directly to the board and reminded them of the paltry amounts that the musicians were being paid, and that a notice to reduce the amount of desired funds would convince the community that the symphony did not need more financial backing. He told the board that if this was their policy then he was leaving, and showed them offers that he had recently been asked to sign with the

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Abravanel Interview, 30 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 13, pp. 35–36.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10.
Vancouver, Portland, and Seattle symphonies. Abravanel threatened to leave until they committed to raise an additional 23,000 ($1,000 per member present). Of course, he stayed, having received a telegram from Governor Bracken Lee reminding him of his commitment to Utah!  

Even though Abravanel’s dealings with the board were by no means always favorable, the amount of interaction and influence that he enjoyed were by no means typical. Of course, times change and every organization is different, but Sheldon Morgenstern’s No Vivaldi in the Garage offers us a comparison. Morgenstern’s book contains, as an appendix, a questionnaire sent out by the author to all of the major U.S. symphonies. This report states that between 14% and 78% of music directors attend board meetings, 14% being the largest orchestras and 78% being the smallest orchestras. The report also shows that many music directors are not solely responsible for programming.

Many of the people with whom Abravanel worked closely were of great help and assistance, and it is a tribute to his discernment of character that Abravanel chose some of these to work with him. “Huck” Gregory, eventually the symphony’s manager, was one of these. When Gregory was first hired he apparently had very little experience with the operation of a symphony, but through his own diligence he learned quickly, and Abravanel could not have hoped for a better person in the position. Abravanel had


108 Morgenstern sent his questionnaire to all class AA, A, and some B symphonies. The classifications are as follows: AA=annual budget of $10 million or more; A=$3.6 million to $10 million; B=$1,050,000 to $3.6 million. The questionnaire was mailed out in 1998 to presidents, directors, or staff members. 44% filled out and returned his questionnaire, but unfortunately, he does not volunteer which, or what reports come from what organizations.
nothing but the finest praise for Gregory, chiefly because of Gregory's exceptional honesty and candor.

To illustrate Gregory's character, and what a large asset this was, Abravanel tells the story of when an auditor from New York came to review the symphony's books. Usually these men would come and work for a considerable time, digging through records, to see if the managers had found some way of stealing funds and not reporting them. Abravanel says that when one such agent came, "he took one look at Huck, after two minutes he put on his coat, back he left. He said to me, 'You know, I have never seen a manager like that.'" In addition to a wonderful manager, Abravanel recommended other people to the board for positions, but none as influential as Wendell Ashton.

The only way to truly appreciate Wendell Ashton's significance in the history of the USO is with the following quote from Abravanel: "Wendell Ashton has been a miracle worker. I put the symphony on the map artistically, no question about that. With the help of fine people I picked fine musicians and fine town people who were devoted on their goals, no question. Wendell put it [the symphony] on the map financially, no question about that either." Ashton was largely responsible for the permanent financial stability of the symphony, and the story of his coming to the rescue of the organization must be told.

Before Ashton arrived on the scene the symphony treasurer was Walter Roche, by all accounts a fine man, but a bane to the symphony. Abravanel complained that Roche was so unsuccessful as a treasurer because he refused to ask people for money. Roche's

109 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 7 October 1981, Abravanel papers, box 4, fd. 14, p. 42.
110 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 30 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 13, pp. 33-34.
answer to please the benefactors of the orchestra was to ask them for no more money than they were already giving. Roche also failed to court new potential contributors, which certainly did not relieve any of the symphony’s financial concerns. Abravanel was continually in opposition to Roche, and even prevented him from becoming president of the symphony by going behind Roche’s back and getting all of the governor-appointed, uninterested board members to come to the meeting and vote against Roche (which made a slight majority against Roche).\footnote{Ibid.}

Abravanel’s selection of Wendell Ashton was interesting because Ashton was a relatively unknown person, who had no interest in music or the Utah Symphony Orchestra. Abravanel, upon meeting Ashton, had been very favorably impressed with him. Ashton was an active member of the church, and had decided to devote his time and energies to his family and church responsibilities, for which reason he turned down Abravanel’s first offer to join the symphony board. Ashton went home and told his wife about the offer, and she (an amateur performer and devotee of the symphony) told him to take the job. Ashton returned to Abravanel and accepted the position as treasurer, while still retaining his position with the public communications department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.\footnote{See footnote 102.}

Ashton quickly became incredibly active in work for the symphony, and started to acquire funds for the symphony through previously untapped resources. According to Abravanel, the two areas in which Ashton was most successful were in seeking out a younger generation of successful businessmen to contribute and in opening the door to assistance from the church. This last was extremely important, because until now the
church-operated businesses had been quite reticent to support the symphony, and the board had shown little interest in requesting aid. Ashton had many influential friends in the church from whom he solicited help. In Abravanel’s words, “Wendell, as I put it, with a very wonderfully felt smile that comes from the bottom of my heart convinced the brethren [church leaders] that it would be pleasing to the Lord to give money to the Utah Symphony. That’s what he did.”

By bridging the gap between the USO and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ashton brought the symphony onto a much more secure financial footing. Shortly after Ashton’s appointment the symphony went on its first European tour. Ashton worked to show members of the church that the Utah Symphony Orchestra would represent Mormonism in the eyes of people in other countries, as they would know that the symphony came from Utah—from Salt Lake City. By demonstrating this connection Ashton was able to convince people that the symphony need not be a separate, and secular, entity, but that it was an important part of their community, and worthy of support. Ashton’s beneficial and dedicated efforts continued throughout his long association with the symphony, which he presided over, as president, for many years.

As the symphony began to mature and grow, Abravanel was able to implement the programs that would define the years of his direction and build the symphony into the impressive, internationally recognized organization that it is today. These programs were based upon Abravanel’s life-long philosophies about music. They were (1) programming, especially the important role of contemporary music; (2) educating the community through school, local, and youth concerts; and (3) the use of recordings to

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113 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 30 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 13, 30–32.
promote the symphony. While Abravanel’s belief in the effectiveness of these programs was not novel, his intense dedication to them was surely exceptional—these were the themes that would shape his years with the orchestra.
CHAPTER 3
THE UTAH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

“If I could choose how and where to die, I would like it to happen while conducting my orchestra in a place like Dillon, Montana.”114 The story behind Maurice Abravanel’s curious statement to Time Magazine correspondent Leo Janos demonstrates the Maestro’s unparalleled devotion to the cause of classical music. In the last decade of Abravanel’s time with the Utah Symphony Orchestra he received a call from residents of Dillon, Montana, inviting him to bring the orchestra there to play any music he chose for “a bunch of cowboys.” Not only did Abravanel comply with the request by taking the symphony to Dillon, but he told the residents, “I think you deserve the best,” after which the orchestra performed Beethoven’s monumental *Eroica* Symphony. The audience was extremely enthused, which they showed by raucous applause and ovation (even between movements).115

Why would the symphony travel to such remote communities to perform for small audiences? In Abravanel’s words: “our reward for this hard traveling is the reaction of a


115 Ibid., 53. Actually, our rigid rule against clapping between movements of a work is a fairly recent one. Audiences have long recognized when it was inappropriate to clap between musically connected movements, but clapping after dramatic musical cadences has been, until recently, an acceptable and even expected practice. At the premier of Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 3, Richard Strauss even “strode the entire length of the hall to shout his approval near the podium, a move which redoubled the audience’s enthusiasm.” Henry-Louis de la Grange, *Gustav Mahler Vol. 2: Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897–1904)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 528.
small-town audience when it hears a symphony orchestra for the first time." By examining stories and statements about Abravanel’s philosophies toward contemporary music programming, community and school concerts, and recording, we will be able to understand how Abravanel’s programs not only furthered classical music education in Utah, but resulted in the unprecedented growth and success of the Utah Symphony Orchestra.

Abravanel was always concerned with the lack of awareness among Americans in general and Utahans in particular of contemporary composers and their works. He believed that one of the primary roles of the symphony was to provide an opportunity for new works to be performed. We have seen that many musicians and musicologists have shared this sentiment, and expressed concern that the paucity of this music was related to the perceived downfall of the art. Abravanel was always conscious of the need to program these new pieces, whether they were well received or not.

The minutes of the symphony’s board meetings show that in addition to programming modern works in regular subscription concerts, the symphony also began adding at least two “contemporary concerts” to their season each year. These were held on the University of Utah campus, and were originally funded (in the amount of $1500) by the university. The university eventually decided that these concerts were not profitable, because they were not popular, and would therefore no longer pay the symphony. In recompense, the university offered that the symphony might keep half of the money from ticket sales if they wished to continue holding the concerts. The first

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116 Janos, 53.
season that this went into effect (1962–63) the symphony made six thousand dollars (for
the two concerts), double what the university had been paying them.\textsuperscript{117}

When Abravanel had begun his work with the symphony, the board only wanted
ten regular concerts in a season, because of funding limitations. As a result, Abravanel
was forced to choose what pieces the symphony would perform. “So I started playing
pieces that were not on the top shelf but interesting, so that the audience should have an
opportunity to hear them. So this was the rationale. Because we had only ten concerts
each year programming was a process of elimination. I would have so many works I
wanted to play and could not play them all. So, I would reluctantly have to eliminate this
and that.” Later, when the symphony was performing more regularly, “it was possible to
be more adventurous.”\textsuperscript{118}

Abravanel’s dedication to performing contemporary music, while certainly not
unique, was admittedly stronger than that of most of his colleagues. By examining
statistics from the Bulletin of the National Music Council over some of the years during
which Abravanel was conducting the USO, it becomes clear that his interest in
contemporary American music was significant. Available copies of the bulletin begin
with the 1953–54 season, six years after he began conducting in Utah. Information for
the earlier years, if available, would likely have demonstrated an even higher percentage
of works in this category, as there were considerably fewer concerts at the time and we
have proof through concert programs of the prevalence of modern compositions.

\textsuperscript{117} Minutes of Utah Symphony Orchestra board meeting, 1 April 1963, Abravanel Papers, box 24,
fd. 5, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{118} Maurice Abravanel Interview, 23 August 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 6, p. 20.
The first fact that jumps out in the bulletin for 1953–54 is that the Utah Symphony Orchestra was now performing sixty subscription concerts each year (as opposed to ten when he was hired half a decade previous)! As an item of interest, the symphony did not always perform so many concerts. During the next eleven years the number of concerts gradually reduced to roughly half that many (a low of thirty in the 1959–60 season), and was then built back up to around sixty concerts. Over time, the position of the USO fluctuated in the ranking of the top thirty major symphonies, in relation to percentage of works performed by American-born composers. The symphony was usually in the top five orchestras, rarely out of the top ten, and frequently third or fourth. During the highest years, between twenty-three and thirty percent of the works performed by the orchestra were composed by American-born, naturalized, or foreign-born composers living in the United States.119

In addition to promoting the creative works of modern composers, Abravanel was committed to the principle of supporting local, young, and rising talents among composers and performers. Concert programs regularly featured works by Utah natives, such as Leroy Robertson. Annual youth concerts provided another opportunity for young and able musicians to perform with the Utah Symphony.

Of course, just as programming in an orchestra must contain enough crowd-pleasing works to meet ticket sale requirements, so also they must feature big-name “stars” to bring prestige (and large audiences) to the organization. Because of Abravanel’s considerable experience and status in musical circles, the USO was able to bring many notable guest conductors and musicians to Utah to perform with the orchestra. The impressive list of guest artists to conduct the Utah Symphony Orchestra

during Abravanel’s years includes Pierre Monteux, Henry Mancini, Arthur Fiedler (Keith Lockhart was not the first Boston Pops conductor to grace the USO with his baton), and two life-long friends of Abravanel, Danny Kaye and Aaron Copland. The list of prominent musicians to perform with the symphony is no less impressive: Claudio Arrau, Arthur Rubinstein, Gina Bachauer, Itzhak Perlman, Mstislav Rostropovich, Beverly Sills, Isaac Stern, Jack Benny, Leontyne Price, and Jean-Pierre Rampal, to name only a few. Performances by such respected and talented guests increased the prominence and recognition of the Utah Symphony Orchestra.\(^{120}\)

Abravanel repeatedly demonstrated his loyalty to the furthering of music over the immediate financial good of the symphony, and the promotion of the symphony over the opportunity for personal economic success. In both personal and symphony business he would turn down opportunities to make more money in favor of what he felt were more worthy causes. In the manner of a true leader, he was at times able to share his passions and priorities with those with whom he worked. His determination to educate the community and the youth provides numerous examples of these attributes.

Abravanel recalled that when he was first given the position of music director with the USO that the board had told him that there would be no pops concerts or school and children’s concerts (as there was no money in the latter).\(^{121}\) The first, he agreed with, because of his desire to perform legitimate classical music. The second he refused to adhere to because he felt that performing in schools and small communities was essential to cultural education. During his years with them, the symphony became known for

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\(^{120}\) For a more complete list of guest artists who performed with the Utah Symphony Orchestra during Abravanel’s tenure see Harrison.

\(^{121}\) Maurice Abravanel Interview, 7 October 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 14, p. 3.
traveling throughout the state, and from school to school, performing anywhere that an interested audience could be found. These performances were often costly to the symphony and to the individual musicians. Before contemplating the reasons for these sacrifices, it is necessary to bring the discussion of government relations up to date.

Some funding for the symphony came from state appropriations to the Institute of Fine Arts, of which the Utah Symphony Orchestra was a part. The symphony had played the major role in reviving the institute. The symphony enjoyed much better relations with the government after J. Bracken Lee left office. The next two governors, George D. Clyde and Calvin L. Rampton, were both far more willing to help the symphony. Clyde was willing to give the symphony any amount that Abravanel told him was needed, and Rampton was second only to Brigham Young, as a governor, according to Abravanel (no doubt due to his favorable attitude toward the arts).

Partially because of assistance from the state, Abravanel felt it was the responsibility of the symphony to provide concerts for as many of the citizens of the state as possible. At the board meeting of 1 February 1960 the wisdom of conducting such distant concerts was brought into question. Abravanel had come to the meeting with a statement from the orchestra committee asking for relief from the hectic schedule they were under. As an example, the committee reported that two days hence, on the third, they would have a one and one half hour rehearsal, followed immediately by a youth concert, after which they would drive to Vernal, Utah, for a concert that night. Such a routine was not unique, and Abravanel stated that the problem could be relieved by a bigger budget, which would allow for a longer season, and therefore the schedule could
be spread out. The response of the board was to question the propriety of distant concerts.

Abravanel stated that as some (even though it was a small amount—$13,000) of the symphony’s funds came from the state there was an obligation to allow all parts of the state the opportunity to hear the orchestra. At least some of the board members agreed with Abravanel. Two of them were said to comment at this same meeting on the necessity of performing in the smaller communities, not only for political reasons but because this was likely one of the only forms of cultural education that would be accessible to the residents of such towns and villages. Abravanel repeatedly dismissed the idea of having a second orchestra in the state, citing examples of much larger communities that supported only one orchestra. He felt that such competition would be disastrous to the musicians, who relied on the symphony for at least part of their support.

A greater financial sacrifice came to the symphony musicians in regards to public school concerts. At first, the symphony went and performed at schools free of charge, just to provide an experience for the students to hear the orchestra. Schools in the Salt Lake City area soon learned that these concerts were being held at the expense of the symphony, and many schools requested to have the symphony come. Abravanel quickly adopted the policy that the symphony would come if the school would only cover the costs of instrument transportation (which was usually around ninety dollars). This arrangement continued for some time, until enough schools were requesting the

122 Minutes of Utah Symphony Orchestra board meeting, 1 February 1960, Abravanel Papers, box 24, fd. 3, p. 2.

123 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 7 October 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 14, p. 31.
symphony that too much time and money was being expended. The symphony's decision
to make the schools pay (an amount around $750) was still an altruistic one, as this did
not represent the entire cost required to perform the concert. Even under the new
arrangement a number of concerts were given, always under Abravanel's baton, some
funded by Deseret Book and other companies.  

The real sacrifice in these concerts came not to the symphony as a whole, but to
the individual performers. Most members of the orchestra were teachers (usually music
teachers) at these same local schools. Since the concerts were held during the day, the
musicians were docked their pay, for time missed, even when the concerts were at their
own schools (while getting paid their standard $6.25 per service). In Abravanel's words,
"you had the spectacle of those people [the musicians] time after time losing $25 to $30,
$35 for the privilege of playing for children."  

This program clearly was not working, so Abravanel went to Governor Rampton
for help. Rampton advised Abravanel that funding through the art institute was not the
way to go, but rather to push for funding through the education program. Rampton
confided in Abravanel that this would not be an easy battle the first time, but that once
won, it should be fairly easy to maintain. So Abravanel went to "the hill" and spoke in
favor of funding to be supplied through the education program. He was summarily
informed by the legislature that they had virtually all been appointed on a low-taxes
platform and that they could not increase taxes for this purpose. They further told him
that the propriety of this was not his business, but theirs. Abravanel, furious with the lack
of consideration, told the legislative assembly, in so many words, that they were being

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124 Maurice Abravanel Interview, 30 September 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 13, pp. 49–52.
125 Ibid., 51.
bullied by the people from Kennecott Corporation who were always present, “breathing
down their necks.” Abravanel’s scandalous statement apparently made its point, because
the next day appropriations for the program in the education budget were approved.  

In much the way that school programs, while not lucrative, improved the image of
the symphony in the local community, Abravanel viewed recording as a means for
massive influence and recognition throughout the world. It was through this extensive
program that the most dramatic examples of growth in the USO become evident. For the
first six years (at least, and probably much longer), recording did not prove to be an
economically sound investment.

At first, the symphony worked with the Westminster recording company. This
was a fairly small company at the time, and was not financially responsible (they failed to
pay the symphony, on occasion, the royalties owed), but produced good quality
recordings. After having little luck getting Westminster to pay off debts, the symphony
board left the decision with Abravanel to drop Westminster and go with Vanguard, which
he did. The symphony’s 6 June 1963 report on recordings shows that in the first five
years of recording (beginning in December 1957) the Utah Symphony Orchestra had
spent $52,879.87 on making recordings and received $23,490.75—less than half of their
investment! These figures, taken alone, are a little misleading, as some of the recordings
were very recent, and did not reflect all the money that would eventually be received
from the royalties, yet the prospects were financially bleak.  

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126 Ibid., 53–54.

More interesting than the amount spent or received during these five years is the number of recordings produced: twelve Vanguard albums and thirty-six Westminster albums! This rapid entrance into the world of recording symphonies was not only significant in terms of the number of recordings this fifteen-year old orchestra had made, but in the high quality of these recordings. Reviews of the USO’s recordings were always full of praise, as one award after another increased the symphony’s fame. One of the earliest commendations came from one of the symphony’s first recordings, Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*,\(^{128}\) which *Consumer’s Guide* listed as the best recording (of twenty-seven) of this piece.\(^{129}\)

Quality recording projects by the symphony helped not only further to increase awareness of the Utah Symphony outside of the state, but also served to promote the symphony among potential sponsors in the Salt Lake City community. One representative tract was published by the symphony sometime around 1958. This pamphlet, entitled, “Questions and Answers about the Utah Symphony Orchestra,” informed readers that while recordings were costly to produce (and might not even pay for themselves) they promoted the cultural interests of the state throughout the country and helped Utahans to appreciate the quality of their local symphony.\(^{130}\)

In an effort to encourage more corporate sponsorship of the symphony, “Questions and Answers,” describes how the symphony, at approximately ten years into Abravanel’s reign, received its funding. The pamphlet states that only three percent of

\(^{128}\) George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, conducted by Maurice Abravanel, Utah Symphony Orchestra, Westminster, 14002, 1957, LP.

\(^{129}\) Minutes of Utah Symphony Orchestra board meeting, 23 June 1959, Abravanel Papers, box 24, fd. 2.

\(^{130}\) Utah Symphony Orchestra, “Questions and Answers about the Utah Symphony Orchestra” (Salt Lake City: Utah Symphony Orchestra, [ca. 1958]).
the symphony's $192,000 budget came from state appropriations. Individual and corporate contributions amounted $60,000, or less than one third of the total budget. This amount, the pamphlet points out, was smaller than many orchestras received that resided in communities with smaller populations than Salt Lake City.131 These statistics demonstrate that the symphony, ten years after Abravanel joined them, was already receiving seventy percent or more of its total income from ticket sales—an amount significantly higher than the national average.

Though the symphony was doing well in ticket sales, there was always a need for greater contributions from the private sector. Promoters of the USO, like those of the rest of the American symphonic world, continually harped on the precarious nature of the symphony's finances. One such tract, by Harold Lundstrom and published by Deseret News, was entitled, "Will Utahns Face the Financial Music?" This article was in response to a very real financial quandary that would face the symphony in the 1962–63 season.132

The cause of the problem was this: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was going to renovate the tabernacle during this year, which had served so long as the home of the symphony. The symphony decided on the Highland High School auditorium for its temporary home, but this brought all sorts of new problems. The auditorium was not even large enough to accommodate all of the regular season ticket holders (approximately four thousand), let alone individual ticket buyers. As a result, two performances of each concert would have to be given to allow more people to attend

131 Ibid.

the concert. This meant not only paying rental fees for the hall, but also paying them for twice as many concerts. Additionally, guest soloists would have to be paid for twice as many performances, and the total number of concerts would preclude as many lucrative concerts in remote parts of the state. Estimated funds needed to cover the additional expenses during this period came to forty thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{133}

At this point it is easy to see not only how beneficial, but how necessary the church’s support in providing a concert hall had been to the success of the symphony. Lundstrom began by reminding readers that the Utah Symphony Orchestra received roughly $189,000 of its now $285,000 budget from ticket sales (notice that the symphony’s budget had increased almost $100,000 in four years). Lundstrom argued that this percentage was possibly the highest in the nation, and compared the USO to the Denver Symphony, which received only about $40,000 each year in ticket sales (to make the comparison complete, in the 1975–76 season the Denver Symphony was operating on total contributions of more than four times those of Utah).\textsuperscript{134}

The only answer to the orchestra’s financial dilemma, Lundstrom argued, was an increase in the amount of gifts and donations. The policy of the symphony at this time was to court a broader base of corporate aid. Lundstrom, like the “Questions and Answers” pamphlet four years earlier, saw large corporate donations as the key to the financial stability of the orchestra. The idea was to get more companies to contribute, rather than continuing to rely on the same consistent donations from companies like Kennecott Copper, which had given $10,000 annually for the last ten years (apparently Abravanel’s castigation of Kennecott before the state legislature, along with successful

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
efforts of board fund-raising, had made an impression with Kennecott as well as the legislature). While Federal assistance loomed on the horizon as an answer to the symphony’s financial difficulties, Abravanel, like others, was concerned that such assistance would include too much government control on the freedom of expression in the arts.

By the early 1960s the symphony, while still operating within a twenty-one-week concert season, was performing fifty-eight concerts, with a total concert attendance of over 205,000 persons, or approximately one fourth of the state’s population. Corporate sponsorship with the Utah Symphony remained around 25% of the symphony’s total budget, compared with orchestras in Denver (60%), Atlanta (50%), Cincinnati (33%), and Houston (60%). Abravanel’s emphasis during this period continued to be with promotion of the symphony through recording projects, touring, and school concerts and growth continued rapidly.

After nineteen years of nurturing the symphony—extending its influence through recordings and tours throughout the country—Abravanel sought to further recognition of the orchestra by taking it on a month-long European tour. The tour is worth examining because it represents a milestone in the growth of the organization and exhibits the effectiveness of the programs that Abravanel had instigated in the symphony.

The auspicious opening concert of the tour took place in Carnegie Hall, New York, when the symphony was on its way to Europe. The 9 September 1966 concert was significant not only because it was the first time the orchestra had performed in New

\[135\text{ Ibid., 3.}\]
\[136\text{ Ibid., 4–5.}\]
\[137\text{ Ibid., 10.}\]
York, but also because this concert opened the seventy-fifth anniversary season of Carnegie Hall. This concert, which thrust the symphony into the national limelight, was extremely well received.

Glowing reviews in the New York Times, the New Yorker, the New York Post, Billboard, and by the Associated Press all focused on the very musical approach to the difficult repertory of Vaughan Williams, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Bernstein. The audience marveled at the superior performance by an organization from a relatively small community. The papers lauded Grant Johannesen’s piano performance, dubbing him one of the greatest artists in the nation on the piano. Most reviews of the concert applauded the musicians, who made up for any lack of virtuosity through accurate, vigorous, and passionate playing.

While all of the articles attributed the symphony’s musicianship and professionalism to Maurice Abravanel, Winthrop Sargeant of the New Yorker most eloquently stated the sentiment. He writes: “I should not describe this [orchestra] as a collection of virtuosos. It is, rather, the kind of orchestra that has been built to achieve a high standard of performance entirely through the methodical efforts of a great conductor ... [Maurice Abravanel] has drilled his orchestra to the point where it sometimes sounds almost like one of the top symphonic organizations of the country. Its personality is responsive, accurate, and wonderfully disciplined.”

138 Sargeant goes on to compare the unified sound of the symphony, free of soloistic spectacle, with that of Central European orchestras.

138 Winthrop Sargeant, review in The New Yorker, 17 September 1966. Newspaper reviews and other information regarding the Utah Symphony Orchestra’s September–October 1966 European Tour is found in the Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections, in a folder entitled “Utah Symphony Tour, September 9, to October 2,” BX 8688 .Ala no. 61.
From New York the symphony traveled to Athens, where it made its first three performances in Europe, before an audience of roughly 14,000. From Athens the symphony moved northward to perform in Salonika, Greece, the town of Abravanel’s birth. The tour continued through Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, and London, before returning to the United States for a final concert in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Pleased audiences in Belgrade, Vienna, Stuttgart, Berlin, and all of the cities where the symphony performed remarked at the wonderful sound of the orchestra from Utah.

The last concert performed in Europe was in London, on 29 September, and did not begin until 11:00 p.m. In a problem typical of traveling orchestras, the symphony’s instruments were held at customs, having arrived from Holland without necessary documents. Finally, after the intervention of the U.S. Embassy, the British government released the instruments as a gesture of good will, whereupon they made their journey to the concert hall, where the audience had been patiently waiting for three hours. Abravanel immediately began the full-length concert, which, again, received wonderful praise from reviewers, all of whom stated that the concert was well worth the wait, and wished that the symphony had been able to stay even longer.\(^{139}\)

The 1975–76 season of the Utah Symphony, only three years before Abravanel’s retirement, demonstrated continual growth and development. Contributions from individuals, corporations, and projects (not including ticket sales or government support) were up to $242,000. The symphony held 205 total concerts (opposed to an average of 168 among major American symphonies), and was earning 71% of its total budget from ticket sales (over 20% above what most symphonies were doing). Perhaps more impressive, the symphony was now traveling up to 20,000 miles each year and

\(^{139}\) Ibid.
performing roughly sixty community concerts outside of Utah. Additionally, seventy-five school concerts were being held, reaching almost half the student population of Utah each year.\textsuperscript{140}

In 1976 \textit{Time Magazine} dubbed the Utah Symphony “America’s most mobile orchestra.” The article describes the success of the orchestra as resulting from Abravanel’s determination to promote classical music among all audiences, everywhere. By performing in country churches, school gyms, and movie theaters throughout the country the symphony is able to reach a vast and enthusiastic audience. One typical story comes from Great Falls, Montana, where a performance of Brahms’s Symphony No. 2 brought tumultuous applause from the residents filling the renovated movie theater. When applause began to die down, “a rancher in a sheepskin jacket shouted from the balcony: ‘Keep on clappin’ and they’ll keep on playin’!’” The rancher’s efforts were rewarded by an encore from Handel’s \textit{Water Music}.\textsuperscript{141}

Such efforts in taking classical music to people throughout the Rocky Mountains were a result of Abravanel’s undying commitment to the cause of promoting classical music. Abravanel’s devotion to classical music is best reflected in his own words: “I could go on and on and on and on. This is, after all, the world that has occupied me since childhood . . . and it’s an entire world! I hope that I can live in good health another seventy-five years, so that I can have a look, a quick look at one small part of the incredibly enormous, beautiful symphony repertoire there is.”\textsuperscript{142}


\textsuperscript{141} Janos, 48.

\textsuperscript{142} Maurice Abravanel Interview, 23 August 1981, Abravanel Papers, box 4, fd. 6, p. 12.
CONCLUSION

MUSICOLOGY AND CULTURAL HISTORY

It is difficult to speak to anyone for any length of time about the status of classical music in America today without hearing at least some degree of despair in the speaker's voice. This emotion stems from the common perception that nothing that can prevent the eventual death of the art. This study has shown that such fears have been expressed since virtually the advent of the symphonic institution in the United States. Amid constant predictions of imminent destruction, however, symphony orchestras have grown tremendously in quantity, quality of musicianship, and have attracted ever-increasing numbers of concertgoers. Such positive changes do not now, and have never, come about through the disheartening prophecies of the disillusioned. Rather, growth and progress are the results of the visionary efforts of motivated idealists. Maurice Abravanel was one of these.

Abravanel's love for classical music and his desire to share these beautiful compositions with everyone around him enabled him to carry the Utah Symphony Orchestra through times of extreme difficulty. This thesis has shown how Abravanel used ambitious recording projects to gain international recognition for the symphony; how he sought to build cultural awareness in the community through school and civic concerts; how he lobbied with politicians to encourage government patronage of the arts; and how he brought classical music, often at great expense to his person and the
organization, to the people. The far-reaching effects of Abravanel’s policies and programs are evident in the magnificent growth of the orchestra.

Because this thesis is specifically about Maurice Abravanel, I have undoubtedly erred on the side of crediting him with too much of the change in the symphony. After all, Abravanel was only one of many people associated with the orchestra. This thesis has also shown how beneficial Wendell Ashton’s public relations skills were and how helpful local musician’s union secretary Ben Bullough was by overlooking policies in behalf of the orchestra members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by donating the use of the tabernacle for so many years, removed an expense that very likely would have altered the fate of the orchestra. Most importantly, an orchestra is made up of individual musicians, and the dedication and sacrifice of these men and women, particularly in the pivotal early years of the symphony, was an essential factor in the growth and stability of the orchestra.

While the influence of so many people and organizations was necessary to develop the Utah Symphony Orchestra, without Maurice Abravanel the orchestra would simply not have achieved the heights that it did. It is always dangerous to speculate about “what might have been,” but I have tried to show in this thesis that only a leader of Abravanel’s caliber and vision could have effected such monumental change. Abravanel was willing to stay with the floundering symphony during a time when other symphonies were bombarding him with more lucrative offers. He worked with a board that was lacking in skill and turned them into an administrative body that would be able to carry the orchestra through future changes in music directors with smoothness and agility. Abravanel’s ability as a conductor was necessary to capture the respect of the musicians
with whom he worked. He made his devotion to the community apparent by focusing on education and school concerts. Through perseverance Abravanel succeeded in his ultimate goal of furthering classical music by enlightening Utahans with the great masterpieces of symphonic and choral literature, and by giving the state a symphony of which it could be proud.

Orchestras in the United States continue to move forward, and support for these organizations continually grows. Scholarly study of the methods used to contribute to this growth can only result in even greater development. By examining individual case studies of orchestras that have undergone extensive and rapid changes, such as the Utah Symphony Orchestra during Maurice Abravanel’s tenure, it will be possible to apply the principles used and replicate the results. I have written this thesis with the intention of furthering the growth of classical music institutions.

As the genre of cultural history becomes increasingly popular, the study of music history must eventually take on more significance than it now enjoys. Music is an undeniably powerful influence in any culture, and it mirrors the trends of the society in which it is produced. Rather than remaining content to allow the scholarly study of music history to reside in the domain of musicologists, cultural historians should employ the study of music, as they have the other creative arts, to enable a greater understanding of peoples and cultures.
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