



## **WSO Artistic Vision Statement**

10/10/13

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Orchestras grew tremendously in terms of budgets, the size of staff and the number of performances, while the actual experience of the performance (what actually happens in the concert) remained basically unchanged, and over time hardened into ritual. This deficit of artistic evolution and adaptability in performance has slowly undermined the cultural relevance of orchestras, big and small. It has resulted in classical orchestral music becoming disconnected from popular culture and further removed from our cultural radar screens. Yet classical orchestral music thrives on Amazon and iTunes and occupies a sizeable hunk of memory on millions of iPods, so the music is not the problem. What then?

The WSO believes the routinized monotony and ritual of the typical orchestral concert is a major cause of its decline in cultural relevance. Over the next several seasons we will present concerts in new, stimulating ways, to try and enrich and diversify the concert experience. Our goal is creating the expectation in our audiences that when they attend a WSO event, they will experience something different. This is the embodiment of our tag line "Moving Music Forward." We will create content with scripts, lighting schemes and other visual elements, with the goal of heightening the emotional content of the music. We will 'compose' concerts, in which the arrangement of musical selections takes on a sculptural aspect, treating each composition like a piece of mosaic which, when assembled with the rest of the program, creates a new, distinctive aural picture. Here are some examples of what we have done and how we would like to carry these concepts forward in future seasons.

### **OUR VISION**

#### **One size doesn't fit all.**

Each concert should have a different look and feel. We do this already from concert to concert, from a 21-piece sting orchestra in our "Eight Seasons" concert to a 90-piece orchestra performance of a Mahler Symphony. What we want to further explore is going from a solo flute to four percussionists to eight cellos to a full symphony orchestra within one concert.

- "Bolero" (November 2012,) was a 70-minute seamless (no applause) juxtaposition of highly contrasting but complementary repertoire culminating in a performance of Ravel's *Bolero*. Our upcoming "The Devil and the Double Violin" (November 2013) is another example of this approach.

#### **Don't just sit there.**

Music is fluid; it dances, it breathes; the way it is presented should too. Music shouldn't always be viewed from the other side of a proscenium arch. The orchestra (and sometimes the audience) needs to stand up

and move around, maybe dance the minuet, sing a sea chantey or utilize digital communication technology.

- “Forbidden Love” (February 2012,) a sequential telling of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* employed actors from Waterbury’s Shakesperience Productions, who performed pivotal scenes from the play in different parts of the theater.
- In our next Shakesperience collaboration, *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Spring 2015,) we will invite musicians from the WSO to also act and move on stage along with the actors.

### **Smaller can be better.**

Experiencing music performance up close excites all the senses. Soloists and small ensembles, performing in intimate settings break down the barrier between audience and performer, as well as help the WSO better serve towns in Northwest Connecticut that don’t have large performance venues.

- “Sense-ations” wine tasting at Mill House explored how soloists and small ensembles could be presented in a fluid, al fresco setting.

### **Expect the unexpected.**

Newness becomes part of our brand. Audience members come with the expectation of a new experience. Emerging artists, new repertoire, and a kaleidoscopic concert presentation are the key ingredients in making the experience ‘new.’

- “Fantastic Planet” (April 2011); “Eight Seasons” (November 2011) and our upcoming “Canyon & Stars” (March 2014,) feature traditional repertoire enhanced with rich video elements.
- “Titan” (May 2013) & the upcoming “Symphonie Fantastique” (May 2014,) feature imaginative storytelling through actor portrayals, video, narration and musical excerpts, all culminating in traditional performances of great masterworks. The goal is to create a deeper emotional connection between the audience and a symphonic masterpiece: they accompany the composer on his/he journey to genius.

### **“Don’t be embarrassed Mr. Gershwin, music is music.”**

So said Alban Berg, perhaps the greatest of the 12 tone composers, to George Gershwin. The barriers/rules of etiquette that classical music has created for itself are slowly draining its vitality. George Gershwin was a great synthesizer; He melded jazz and symphonic music and created a string of masterpieces. He wasn’t a snob or an elitist. The same is true with Mozart; he found music all around him. The only criteria the WSO has for music is its ability to excite and inspire, regardless of what genre it represents. If Gershwin or Mozart were composing today, I’m certain hip-hop, rap or techno would find their way into the fabric of their music.

- “Metamorphosis” (May 2012) featured Hindemith’s masterpiece *Symphonic Metamorphosis* paired with an intermission performance of *iAlchemy* – a commissioned work for 17 acoustic instruments and 8 student iPad performers drawing influence from video game soundtracks. The audience was enchanted, fascinated, surprised and probably a little bit puzzled!

### **Small steps can make big results.**

These big ideas will be implemented in small steps, so we have time to fully understand how each element defines the next, and adds to the overall concert experience – while we maintain and respect over 250 years of classical orchestral music tradition.