

Opinion

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Symphony is cultural window on suburbia

THE OBOE sounds A, the concertmaster and violin section tune their instruments to it, and off we go for a new season of the Oakway Symphony Orchestra.

We welcome the announcement of the next concert, at 3 p.m. on Oct. 30 in Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward, conducted by Francesco DiBlasi. Soloist will be Canadian cellist Ofra Harony.

These concerts are a delight in themselves, for the sheer fun and relaxation of hearing good music. But when you think of it, the Oakway Symphony Orchestra is a cultural enrichment, a teaching institution and a window to a gigantic new world.

COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA concerts are an excellent place to introduce children to good music. Many might otherwise be restricted to the hammering bray of radio rock.

In our electronic world, youngsters rarely hear live performances. (We recall, in particular, the

rock concert where the performers played records and "mouthed" the words, entirely fooling a live audience.) It's a whole new experience for kids to see an ensemble of 90 or more musicians in a harmonious, cooperative effort, using acoustical rather than amplified instruments.

Local orchestra ticket prices are low enough so that an entire family can attend reasonably — especially compared to the price of a metropolitan, world class symphony orchestra. Senior citizens on fixed incomes find a community orchestra affordable and satisfying.

And you can't beat the price of parking in a school lot compared to the downtown rates.

A COMMUNITY orchestra is an interesting mixture of musicians.

Many orchestras hire professionals for first-chair positions. These professionals may be from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, university facul-

ties or the ranks of teachers.

The sections are fleshed out with dedicated amateurs — talented local folks who may have played well in school orchestras in their youth, but for whatever reason chose not to become professional musicians.

Top-notch high school and college students often are invited by the conductor to fill some chairs. It's a heady experience for them to perform with professionals and quality adult players before a non-school audience. And the older players enjoy the opportunity to help the youngsters along.

Oakway sponsors young artists competitions. Everyone gets the experience of competing. And winners not only get nice cash prizes but a chance to perform as soloists with the orchestra.

And so it's demonstrably clear the community orchestra performs many functions beyond giving us a few hours of entertainment several times a year.

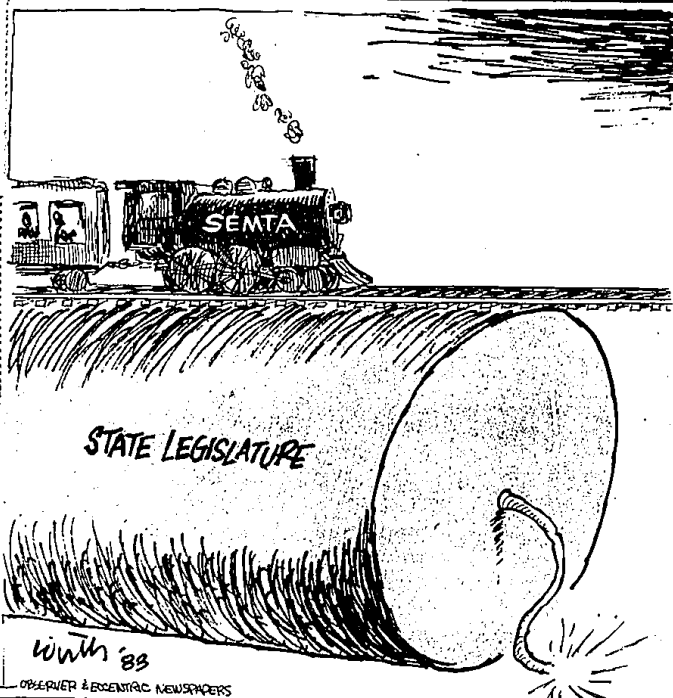
THERE'S AMPLE room for those who want to give additional help beyond buying a ticket.

The board of directors knocks on the doors of potential major contributors, buskets tickets, arranges for program printing and does the humble work of ushering on concert day.

Other volunteers provide refreshments for the musicians on those long rehearsal evenings and raise money with bake sales, cook book sales and other fund-raisers.

A key figure in all of this — a genuine community leader — is conductor DiBlasi, who rehearses the musicians, recruits new members, auditions them, wheels and deals to get quality soloists, tracks down sheet music, inspires the board of directors and prays a lot.

This community is all the richer for having the Oakway Symphony Orchestra. We are glad to see a new season starting.



Legislature hamstrings SEMTA, hurts riders

IT'S A WONDER the board of directors of SEMTA decided to take the abuse.

There was abuse at last week's public hearing from low-income people who don't wish to see their bus rides cut off.

There was abuse from senior citizens who rely on public transportation to get to the doctor.

There was abuse from patrons of the Pontiac-Bloomfield Hills-Birmingham-Royal Oak-Detroit commuter train who will see that service entirely closed down.

There was abuse from the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, a level of government which never, in Michigan history, has offered public transportation (it traditionally has been a function of cities), full of second-guessing and interminable demands for more information.

WHILE ONE can understand and sympathize with those who are seeing public transportation rapidly cut to the knees, the facts of life are these:

You can't spend money you don't have, and the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority is short \$16.6 million for the current fiscal year. It cut operating costs 20 percent early in 1982 and is about to cut them again 30 percent.

The federal government is willing to pay for capital costs such as a light rail line and a downtown people mover, but it is unwilling, for a variety of reasons, to underwrite operating costs. Any operating subsidy of farebox revenue must come from the state, which created the seven-county SEMTA, or from voters in the region.

To get such an operating tax, the SEMTA board must get the approval of the Michigan Legislature. Unlike a school board or city council, SEMTA cannot pass a tax on its own, or even put the question on the ballot by itself.

The Legislature is unwilling even to place the question on the ballot.



Tim Richard

IF A FINGER of blame is to be pointed anywhere, it should be at the parents of this starved child.

The voters of this region may well reject a public transportation subsidy. The betting odds, among those who study such matters, are that such a tax — probably a cent of the sales tax but perhaps an income or property tax — would be defeated.

If so, that should be the voters' decision, not the Legislature's.

THE SPECTRE of "recall" hangs heavily over the heads of the 148 legislators.

Indeed, one recall petition aimed at a metropolitan senator even cited his vote in favor of allowing an outstate transit authority to conduct a tax election as a reason for recalling him. So rabid have the recall people become that they are willing to punish a lawmaker for even allowing somebody else to vote on a tax increase.

It's pretty sad when Michigan, one of the nation's pioneers in the local "home rule" movement, so hamstringing an agency like SEMTA that it must inflict a 30 percent cut on people who rely on it to get to work, to the doctor, to be mobile.

Public transportation in Michigan was practically dead when the Legislature created SEMTA in 1967 to consolidate the patchwork of public and private bus companies into an integrated, regional system. It was an act of foresight.

One can only hope the Legislature can rise to the occasion a second time.

Booster clubs keep school sports alive

"A SANE MIND in a sound body."

To many, someone with a healthy, fit body thinks better. It is the part of the philosophy behind the craze in physical fitness.

Fitness is not only for adults, but for youngsters. That's why many private schools such as Detroit Country Day in Beverly Hills require that students participate on athletic teams.

Parents today are as interested in their children's athletic programs as their academic curriculum. They realize that school sports are no longer confined to the traditional boys' football, basketball and baseball. Now there's a proliferation of so-called "minor sports" — swimming, tennis, track, golf and soccer.

There also has been an explosion of girls' sports — field hockey, basketball, softball, basketball, soccer, track, swimming, tennis and golf.

SCHOOL ATHLETIC departments no longer have the resources to serve all the students. So they have turned to parents for help. Many suburban schools — both elementary and high school — now have a "parents' group" directly involved in running of sports programs.

In some places, they're called Boosters. In others, they're called Moms' or Dads' Clubs.

They can work directly on such sports projects as taking tickets, selling programs or working in the concession stands during athletic events. Sometimes they sponsor activities to raise money for teams such as pancake breakfasts, fashion shows, bingo and paper drives.

The bottom line is that many sports programs could not exist without these adult groups. They are the equivalent of the Parent Teacher Organization on the academic side of school.



Nick Sharkey

"We wouldn't have much of a sports program if we didn't have the Boosters," said Dick Rosenthal, athletic director of Birmingham Seaholm High School.

MONEY RAISED by the Boosters has paid for a weight room, a trophy case and a new scoreboard for the swimming team.

"I can't say enough about what the Boosters mean to us," Rosenthal said. "They are constantly taking care of little matters which I don't have time to do."

Seaholm has 600 student-athletes and about 200 members in the Booster Club.

Detroit Catholic Central in Redford has Dads' and Moms' Clubs. They take care of parking, tickets, crowd control and concession stands at every home game.

Their largest fund-raiser is a program sold by the Dads before the annual Boys Bowl football game played between Catholic Central and Birmingham Brother Rice. About 200 pages of advertising are sold in the program. Proceeds are divided between Catholic Central and Brother Rice.

"We count on the mothers and fathers to handle all the small details of our program," said Tom Mack, football coach at Catholic Central.

AS YOU MAY have guessed, I am a member of a Booster Club at a suburban school. All the money for athletic programs must be generated by the Boosters. Limited school funds are spent for academics.

With a budget of \$13,000, Boosters sponsor 12 sports teams for boys and girls and four teams of cheerleaders. About 150 youngsters participate.

To most children, the discipline and teamwork required in sports complement what is learned in the classroom. For a few, success on the athletic field is the only positive experience of school life.

That's what keeps those adults selling pancakes, Christmas cookies, hot dogs and raffle tickets.

Why pick on smoke-filled back rooms?

AN ORGANIZATION called Michigan Citizens Supporting the Presidency is trying to drum up support of the presidential primary election in Michigan.

William McMaster, the organization's director, claims that eliminating the primary will mean that "Michigan Republican and Democratic parties will decide in smoke-filled rooms" the state's preferences for presidential candidates.

McMaster, who operates a public relations agency specializing in working for Republican candidates, claims there is unanimous grass roots support to keep the presidential primary in Michigan.

I can't agree. As a journalist, I am just as grass roots as anyone and do not think the presidential primary is a necessity. As a matter of fact, I miss the good old days when smoke-filled back rooms were the places where candidates were generally picked.

I THINK the smoke-filled back room has had as good a record as presidential primaries when it comes to choosing candidates.

In modern times, the smoke-filled room has produced candidates who became competent presidents — Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower. When presidential primaries played a part in elections, we got such presidents as Kennedy — who continues to be judged favorably by historians as time goes on — and Carter and candidates like George McGovern, whose presidential primary victories prepared him only to suffer the most ignominious loss in presidential election history.

Because George McGovern won a few primaries as far ago as even now, after losing the presidential election and a subsequent U.S. Senate re-election bid, is planning another presidential run.

McGovern, no doubt, thinks that his chances will be enhanced by winning a few presidential primaries.



Bob Wisler

IN FACT, the presidential primaries in Michigan have been costly and have played almost no part in the selection of a Republican or Democratic candidate for president.

In the last presidential primary in 1980, the state paid about \$5 million to put on a presidential primary and voters chose the candidates destined to be their party candidates in the fall — Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. There were no other serious candidates, as is usually the case in the state's presidential primaries.

The presidential primary affords ample opportunity for mischief which distorts the meaning of the totals. In 1966, for example, "guy" George Wallace, running as an American Independent Party candidate, got 332,000 votes in the state's presidential primary compared with Democrat Hubert Humphrey's 1,593,000 and Republican Richard Nixon's 1,370,000.

THERE is no doubt that many Republicans, knowing that Nixon was a shoe-in to be nominated as the Republican Party candidate, crossed over and voted for George Wallace in an effort to hurt Humphrey's chances.

The vote then became a questionable reflection of the "people's choice."

One reason that the presidential primary election plays little part in the selection of candidates is that usually a dozen or more primaries have been held in other states and whichever candidate is going to emerge as the people's favorite has already emerged.

The effect of the presidential primary in Michigan has been only to give kind of a party rubber stamp approval to a candidate who has already emerged as the person who will carry the party's banner in the November general election.

When it comes to rubber stamps, I figure the politicians who run the state parties can do that in a back room at no cost to the taxpayers.