

ROPA Conference 2020  
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We are in a very tight spot. I doubt there has ever been a time when our orchestras, and our nation, have been in a more precarious----potentially catastrophic---situation. The coronavirus pandemic has stripped away our livelihoods and our way of life. It has taken the lives of 10s of thousands of Americans and it has devastated our economy. We are hanging by our fingernails while our Federal Government is disintegrating into an autocracy.

It is hard to imagine that just 4 months ago we were performing concerts in our halls and practicing repertoire for the next series. Now we find ourselves exiled and isolated, locked out of our halls—trying to find ways to connect with our friends, our colleagues, our audiences and our music.

But the coronavirus has also, in its sudden and brutal devastation, shone a harsh light on the many social and economic disparities that exist in our country. The pandemic has forced us to stop. To stop our busy and distracted rat race and really look at what we are doing, to clearly see the society we have created. The disproportionate deaths of people of color has revealed the economic disparity, the environmental racism, the exclusion and oppression that our corporate capitalist society has created and that our Black & Brown citizens suffer under every day.

We are experiencing an historic moment, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets to demonstrate against that oppression. We are also experiencing a long overdue reckoning of our nation's history, begotten in genocide and slavery. The continuing legacy of that violence, of racial inequality and social injustice, is dramatically on display in our streets today.

The pandemic has revealed the terrible failure of our health care system, the failure of our government to govern--- to care for our democracy and its citizens. Our hyper-individualist, rapacious capitalist ideology has lead us to trample our fellow human beings and to poison our planet. The curtain is torn away by the apocalypse of this pandemic and we have a singular opportunity to truly see where we are headed.

I'm going to hazard a guess that more than a handful of you follow Rachel Maddow, so this book, *ON TYRANNY Twenty Lessons from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, by Yale Professor of History Timothy Synder, will not be unfamiliar to you.

**Lesson #2: Defend Institutions:** "Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall, one after another, unless each is defended from the beginning. So chose an institution you care about---a court, a newspaper, a law, a labor union---and take its side."

Your orchestra is your institution and the American Federation of Musicians is your labor union. We need every man, woman

and musician to take action now—speak up, speak out, connect with your donors and audience. Help out in your community—I know many of your orchestras already have a musician FaceBook page. Use it to start a food drive in your neighborhood. Use it to organize porch concerts. Be visible, do good.

I love **Lesson #13: Practice Corporeal Politics:**

“POWER wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them.”

For the time being, virtually or socially distanced. But none of us can afford to stand on the sidelines. We must act now!

Educate yourself---to abandon facts is to abandon freedom. Contribute to a good cause, stand up and stand out--set a visible example of the best of American democracy in order that we may preserve it for future generations.

We will survive this crisis—our orchestras will survive if we actively defend them. We must speak up, stay connected to each other and reach out into our communities.

We will survive because we have dedicated our entire lives to our music. We connect humans with their humanity. We ignite hearts. We unite spirits. And we know in every fiber of our being what is just and fair because we seek it every day in our art.

Every person in this virtual room has given their lives to improving the lives of others; to our students, our colleagues, our audiences, our orchestras and our union. You are doing it right now by participating in this conference. We will stand together and we will have each other's backs. We will find the path together, with our orchestras and with our communities--- the path that heals our nation and restores our orchestras and the music we create.

Thank you for having me and I wish you a successful conference.