

Break Through Classical Music  
**THE DISCOVERY O!RCHESTRA**

**Exploring the History, Principles, and Practices of The Discovery  
Orchestra Through an Intensive Focus on its Third Season, 2008-2009**

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# The Discovery Orchestra

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction: Discovering <i>Stars and Stripes Forever</i> .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Listening Guides: Gateways to Discovery .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Discovering Sousa: The Audience Responds .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Discovery Orchestra: Fundamental Principles and Goals .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Discovery Orchestra: History and Evolution .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Roots of “Discovery”: George Marriner Maull and Saul Feinberg .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The Discovery Process: Voices of Audience Members .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The Discovery Process: Voices of Staff Members and Musicians .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Refining the Goal, Redefining the Mission .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Conclusion: The Discovery Orchestra as Educational Force .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Post Script: Where We Are Now</b>	

## Introduction: Discovering *Stars and Stripes Forever*

It's a Sunday afternoon in November 2008. The small but state-of-the-art concert hall at SOPAC, the South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, New Jersey, is nearly full; the audience includes a wide variety of ages and concert attire choices. Elderly men in checked sports jackets and ladies with brooches on their sweaters mingle with casually dressed forty-somethings and their even more casually dressed children. A few minutes after 3 PM, the house lights dim as members of The Discovery Orchestra walk onstage and take their seats. As the instruments tune, it becomes apparent that the ensemble onstage today is not the full Discovery Orchestra but a concert band version of it, with no stringed instruments. This is not a surprise for the audience members who've already glanced at the program: it is entitled *Discover Sousa*.

The audience applauds as conductor George Marriner Maull enters, heading for the podium at a fast clip. He lifts his baton; the orchestra launches into John Phillip Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*. Their rendition of the three-and-a-half minute march is both polished and rousing, and a nodding head or tapping hand can be seen here and there in the audience.

Maestro Maull takes a deep bow and asks his ensemble to stand. "He *looks* like a conductor, doesn't he?" whispers an audience member to her companion. And he does have an old-fashioned, grand-style conductorial presence, with a shock of glossy black hair down to the collar of his tuxedo shirt, a mustache, and a trim beard. His deep voice is amplified by a lavalier microphone. "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen," he says. "That was of course *Stars and Stripes Forever*, by John Phillip Sousa. How many of you have heard it before?" All hands go up. "It's wonderful, isn't it?!" he continues. "Now here's another question: how many of you have ***listened*** to it?"

After a moment, some hands go halfway up. The maestro gestures to his musicians to sit down and then addresses the audience. "You know," he says, "we all frequently hear music that we're not listening to. We can't help it. That's our common experience of music these days. No matter where we go – to the mall or the ice cream store or the doctor – it's literally coming out of the walls, out of the ceiling. So when you

go to a concert, sometimes it's hard to know exactly how to listen to the music in a way that gives you real emotional satisfaction.

"That's our mission today. We're going to learn how to *really listen* to *Stars and Stripes Forever*."

He tells the audience to look at their Listening Guides, black-and-white brochures tucked inside their programs. "As you see, the first thing that happens is the Introduction – a grandiose musical gesture that kind of makes people sit up and take notice. I'm going to have the orchestra play just the intro for you. And I want you to listen closely and tell me how many measures it has."

The Listening Guide is a simple program-sized document, full of scraps of musical notation mingled with written words, graphic gestures, and pictures of instruments. The first page is structured in three blocks. In the uppermost block is written the composer's full name and dates of birth and death, and then the full name of the piece, *The Stars and Stripes Forever March*; beneath that is a note saying that it was composed on Christmas Day in 1896.

Next comes a line in bold print, as follows: **FORM: Intro-AA-BB-Trio-Bridge-Trio-Bridge-Trio.**

And under that, in even bigger bold print: **1. INTRODUCTION, OF MEASURES.**  
***ff*** All this comprises the first block of the Listening Guide.

As the audience members peruse their guides, the orchestra blasts through the introduction and stops abruptly. "Do you see the blank in that first sentence – introduction of *blank* measures? asks Maull. "How many measures did you detect?" A short silence, then a few people call out from various spots in the audience. "Four?"

"Four! Yes!" He applauds them. "You know, I wasn't really so interested in whether you got the number right. You could have said two, you could have said eight – and you would have been technically wrong, but that doesn't much matter; you were paying attention. You were listening! Of course it's even better that you were listening ***well***, and got the correct answer.

"And now we will plunge into Section A, which has the main melody –you will no doubt recognize it. As you listen, think about this question: what's funny about it? What makes it humorous?"

He turns back to the orchestra and launches them into the music's main theme. The audience has shifted its collective posture; a number of people are sitting up, leaning in a little towards the stage. Some are staring intently at their Listening Guides, and a few have their eyes closed as their heads bounce along with the beat.

Again the orchestra stops abruptly, this time at the end of the first "A" section. "So," says Maull "what's funny?"

"The melody?" suggests a woman near the front.

"Well, yes, the melody is so peppy that in itself it's kind of funny, isn't it?" He looks up to the mezzanine. "What else? What's funny?"

People call out answers.

"It's so fast!"

"It's bouncy!"

"The trombones?"

"Aha, the trombones," says Maull, "but why are they funny?"

"It's – you know, they're so loud all of a sudden – "

"You've got it!" Maull declares. "The **dynamics** are what's funny. Those chirpy woodwinds do their quiet little tune... dum, di dum, di da da da da....And then all of a sudden they are interrupted by the big, booming low brass: ba-da-ba-da-ba."

He points to the right side of the house. "You all are the woodwinds," he says. "You're singing, nice and light, soft but peppy: *dum, di dum, di da da da da dum*. Can I hear you try that?"

Tentatively, they try it. Maull gestures at the left half of the audience. "You are the low brass, and you're good and low, fortissimo, as loud as you can manage! **Ba-da- ba-da-ba!**"

They sing it back to him.

"Okay, now we're going to put it together, just the way Sousa did. You all" – he points to the right side – "start with your cheery woodwind *dum, di dum, di da da da da dum*. And then you all" – a gesture toward the left – "interrupt them – just pounce on the end of their line and bury it. **Ba-da-ba-da-ba!**"

He lifts his baton. "Woodwind people, are you ready? Here we go!"

“*Dum, di dum, di da da da da dum,*” they sing, some even in tune, and the “low brass people” activate their inner bullies and jump in immediately after the last “*dum:*” “***Ba-da-ba-da-ba! Ba-da-ba-da-ba!***” The simple, visceral feel of that collision makes people start to laugh.

Mauull looks like a kid watching his birthday cake arrive. “Oh, let’s do that again!” he says.

### **Listening Guides: Gateways to Discovery**

The Discovery Orchestra has used Listening Guides for **every** concert since its inception as a teaching orchestra. Mauull constructs the guides, and although they may seem at first glance to be rather spontaneously created, close observation shows that they all follow the same general structure – in fact they are meticulous about using the same principles and procedures for guiding listeners through pieces of music.

Every Listening Guide begins with the composer’s name, and underneath that, the year of his birth and death. Then it cites the name of the work that will be played, and beneath that the date of its composition; this is followed, when appropriate, by the section or movement of the work that will be the focus of “discovery.” On occasion, this information is followed by a general fact about what the piece is or how it is constructed. The Listening Guide for the fourth movement of Brahms’s *Quartet for Piano and Strings*, for example, includes the heading “*Modified Rondo – ABACAD ECBD*”A “*ECD*” (*Coda*).”

Each guide provides a way to engage the active participation of the listener at the very beginning of the piece. Often, as in the case of the Listening Guide for the Sousa march, this is done by a simple blank space wherein the listener is to provide information. For example, the Listening Guide for Richard Rodgers’ *Prologue to Carousel* begins with the sentence “INTRO in SLOW 3 is strangely DISSONANT,” which is followed by the first listening task for the audience: “MUTED TRUMPETS play an idea\_\_\_\_\_times.” Similarly, the Listening Guide for Johann Strauss’s *Blue Danube Waltz* begins with two descriptive statements (“Glistening TREMOLO

STRINGS. FRENCH HORNS give us a “taste”), and then asks the audience to fill in two blanks: “TEMPO becomes\_\_\_\_\_ and then\_\_\_\_\_.”

In other instances, Listening Guides begin not with a “fill in the blank” question, but with a descriptive sentence that is usually graphically illustrated in some way, which Maull will use to engage the audience. For example, the Listening Guide for Handel’s *For Unto Us A Child is Born* chorus from the *Messiah* begins with the sentences “ORCHESTRA begins. SOPRANOS enter, *piano* (soft).” Beneath those sentences is a musical staff showing the musical notation for the first phrase, with lyrics under the notes. In that concert, Maull began his “discovery” session by asking the audience to sing that phrase a number of times, at varying tempos and dynamic levels.

Similarly, the Listening Guide for Vivaldi’s *Spring* begins with the sentences “1. RITORNELLO – Spring has arrived! 2. The birds welcome spring in joyful song.” In the concert performance of this piece, Maull asked the audience to raise their hands when they heard the birds singing.

Although these are simple and basic strategies for audience participation, they function effectively to make sure that, from the outset, every audience member is involved in listening to the music in some active way.

This initial aspect of the Listening Guide format reflects a basic principle of Maull’s teaching method. “Listeners have to be actively engaged, they have to actually participate in some way, at the very beginning of the concert,” he says. “That is the best way to communicate, from the outset, that they are to listen to the piece: **actively**, as if they are part of the musical event. Because active listening is a necessary part of any meaningful musical event.” In the Sousa concert, an activity as trivial as counting the number of introductory measures has served the purpose of requiring the engaged participation of audience members.

Maull has followed up this initial step by requiring deeper engagement; he has asked audience members to sing. Adult non-musicians, in the United States at least, tend to feel acutely uncomfortable about singing in public. But Maull has brought them into it so briskly and forcefully that some have found themselves singing in spite of themselves and thus engaging physically, re-creating melodies and rhythms with their voices. This visceral experience has been immediately followed by laughter, which also

seems to be a fundamental part of Maull's pedagogy; audiences usually laugh a number of times during a typical *Discovery Concert*. Laughter is physical engagement of a different kind; it serves to relax audience members and to remind them that music listening is, at least partly, an exercise in joy and play.

After the initial audience-engaging opening, Listening Guides are usually structured in numbered sections corresponding to sections of music. Each numbered section has a descriptive sentence or two about what is going on in the music at that point; many sections offer more fill-in-the-blank questions. In addition, plentiful graphics adorn each Listening Guide. These graphics are frequently musical staves with notation; often, too, they include black-and-white drawings of instruments. The Guides also include numerous fanciful depictions of musical events. For example, a crescendo may be depicted by a large-scale crescendo mark (the long sideways "V") with hand-drawn musical notes inside it, very small at the beginning and growing in size to very large at the end. A sequence may be represented by a line drawing of a set of stairs going up or down. Sometimes a wavy glissando line or an extra-large fermata appears.

In general, a Listening Guide is designed to offer audiences an understanding of the structure and content of the musical work being presented. By clearly delineating the sections and describing each section in words, and then adding simple graphic depictions of instruments or musical events, the Guide makes the musical structure clear and accessible to non-musicians. The numerous fill-in-the-blank questions motivate audiences to listen actively and purposefully, and thus to engage with the work in a participatory way.

There is nothing esoteric about Listening Guides; their features are similar to methodologies used in many a general music or music appreciation class. What is unusual about them is this new context: they are intended for, and used by, adult audiences who have paid to see and hear a concert. "It's just sort of a road map for understanding," says staff member Diane Lester, "with little snippets of the music. And you learn. I learn! Things I've never heard of before."

Discovery Orchestra members generally admire the Listening Guides. "The program guides are ingenious," says principal violinist Mia Wu. "We [the musicians] always tend to grab a program and check out the notes before we go on. And we all



marvel, at every concert, with what George comes up with to explain music to non-musicians!”

“The Listening Guides are really well done,” says trombonist Bruce Bonvissuto. “They are clearly well prepared in advance. He really does his homework – it’s not just done on the fly.”

The experiences offered by the Listening Guide – counting the iterations of a theme, noticing timbre and orchestration, perceiving dynamic changes and other expressive elements, catching a composer’s joke – are all intended to bring the audience into active, participatory listening. By the time the orchestra is a few minutes into a piece of music, audience members are primed to pay attention.

### **Discovering Sousa: The Audience Responds**

As they pull on coats and scarves and head out into the lobby, the excitement clearly lingers among many audience members. “I’ve heard Sousa’s music all my life,” says Richard L., a man in his seventies with what he calls “extensive” musical experience. “And I was in concert bands for most of my youth. But I think I learned something new in that concert. He went through the form of marches, which I had never understood before.”

Mitchel, a man in his fifties with limited musical experience, has a similar reaction. “Instead of just listening to Sousa and saying, ‘Yeah, okay, I like marches’ – my ears pricked up from the very beginning, when we counted the measures of the Introduction. After that I tried to find the repeating themes. It was great the way the themes kept reappearing.”

Ken, who is in his forties and has had some musical experience, also remarks on the pleasure of understanding form and thematic development. “I learned something about musical structure, which I never knew much about before,” he says. “For a layman, it’s fascinating to know how the composer constructed a piece around some lovely melody by employing his composer’s craft to develop it.”

He adds that it’s satisfying to perceive musical details that have always gone unnoticed. “When the conductor asks all the piccolos to stand up and play their part

alone, it highlights a detail within the music that you're familiar with. But it makes it memorable. That piccolo line – I'll be noticing that for the rest of my life."

### **The Discovery Orchestra: Fundamental Principles and Goals**

"Counting the measures of an introduction," says George Marriner Maull, "is not, obviously, what we're really about. It's just a way to start noticing detail. And it really doesn't matter what detail you choose to focus on. Whether you choose to isolate this crescendo, that stretto, this chord change...it really doesn't matter which things you pick, as long as you pick something for people to notice. Ideally, of course, it should be something you're interested in yourself!

"What we're really about is helping people acquire the listening skills that will open them to the possibility of an authentic emotional response to classical music. But you have to be aware of details – you have to be able to *really listen* to details – if you're going to get anywhere near that goal."

In describing the Discovery method, Maull often speaks about the "aha" moment in music listening – the moment when one's full attention to the music is rewarded by greater acuity in noticing musical detail, and proportionally greater pleasure. He structures his presentations to maximize the likelihood that people will have "aha" moments at various points along the way. The ultimate objective of every *Discovery Concert*, he says, is to help listeners intensify their attention to musical detail, in the belief that such intense attention can and will lead to a powerful emotional connection to the music.

"Really, you can boil down my work to two goals," he says, "two things I want to have happen for every audience member in every concert. First, I want for all those who haven't had it already, to have an "Aha" moment about the necessity to really listen. Often, people just don't know that they've never been listening. They need to realize this: 'Oh my gosh, I really do have to just be there with the music. And if I do, it will fill me enough that it won't even occur to me to be thinking about other things or doing other things. I will be simply filled with the music, and I will allow myself to be present to it.'

“And the second thing is noticing details. Because once people start noticing details, they’ll just keep noticing more details. And that is what will inevitably lead, sooner or later, to an emotional connection with the music. And that’s the whole point of the exercise.”

Mauil’s makes the point that while some historical context for a musical work is usually included in a *Discovery Concert*, the focus is kept on the music itself. “If an individual can be persuaded to give classical music their undivided attention with an open mind,” Mauil writes, “the emotional pleasure in the music begins to reveal itself.” He describes The Discovery Orchestra’s goal as follows: “Our intention is to elicit in the audience, in an engaging and entertaining manner, the kind of mentally aware state that enlivens the music listening process and eventually transforms it into an immensely emotionally rewarding one.”

These fundamental premises of The Discovery Orchestra are rooted in Mauil’s convictions about aesthetic response, developed over a lifetime of playing, conducting, and listening to music. “I believe that there’s a kind of ‘feelingful’ continuum that goes on inside all of us,” he says, “that transcends specific emotions like anger or fear, but involves a deep emotional reality. And music gives us access to this inner realm. It’s like a portal has suddenly been opened to this unbelievably rich emotional continuum.

“The other day,” he recounts, “I was driving in the car and turned on the radio, and Chopin’s *Scherzo No. 2* happened to be about halfway through, and I was just completely moved by the end. I was crying...but what was I feeling? I don’t know, except for the fact that it was overwhelming touching – and very real. There was a veracity to it that was unquestionable. Not sad...just an expression of something that’s very important, very real, lurking beneath the surface until I listen to the Chopin *Scherzo No. 2*. “So that’s what I want to offer my audience – access to that.”

“But noticing is key,” he concludes. “You can’t expect to receive an emotional experience in the concert hall, if you didn’t notice what happened in the concert hall. When people begin to notice...that’s when they begin to feel.”

## The Discovery Orchestra: History and Evolution

The Discovery Orchestra was officially launched in 2006. But the first *Discovery Concert* - a term the organization has registered as a trademark - happened ten years earlier, in 1996. At that time, Maull was the music director of the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey, a professional orchestra founded in 1987 with the goal of serving western central New Jersey.

When asked about the origin of the *Discovery Concert* idea, Maull says, “We began to be contacted, via phone and mail, by people who were regular attendees of Philharmonic concerts,” says Maull. “And these inquiries were really interesting. People were saying, ‘I know there’s something to the classical music thing, but I feel like I just don’t get it. Can you recommend something I could read?’ Or they’d say, ‘I took a music appreciation course once, but I don’t remember anything, and I don’t understand classical music. Is there some kind of refresher course I could take?’”

Ginny Johnston, the Executive Director of The Discovery Orchestra, is sure that George’s friendliness and sociability accounts for the frequency of such audience communications. “Audience members tend to find George more approachable than conductors usually are,” she says, “and so people felt comfortable going up to him and sharing their interests with him. Always, what they said was some version of ‘We want to know more about how to enjoy classical music.’”

Maull’s background was as a violist and conductor. He had played viola in the Louisville Orchestra while still an undergraduate at the University of Louisville School of Music, and served as conductor for The Louisville Ballet during his years in graduate school there. Arriving in New York as a freelance violist in the mid-seventies, he became assistant conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and then music director of the New Jersey Youth Symphony, a post he held for eighteen years, prior to co-founding the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey.

During his tenure with the New Jersey Youth Symphony, he had developed a lively interest in teaching those young musicians how to listen to music from an aesthetic, as opposed to performing, viewpoint. “In a way,” he says, “what audience members were asking for was exactly what I had been teaching the youth symphony

kids. I always felt that it was important for them to have this understanding of music listening.”

In response to his audience’s requests, he began in 1992 to offer a Philharmonic-sponsored six-week course in music listening called *Fall in Love with Music*. “The first time we did the course, it was so successful that we began offering it every year,” says Maull. “And every year it attracted more people.” He taught the course using recorded musical excerpts and a piano – at first a general course and later, specialized courses focused on just one large work from the standard orchestral repertoire. “I began to offer, for example, a five-session course on the Brahms *Symphony No. 1* or Rachmaninoff’s *Piano Concerto No. 2*,” he says.

“In 1996, at a Philharmonic Board meeting, some board members who had taken these courses said to me, ‘George, could you do in the concert hall what you are doing in the classroom? Because, really, you should do that with the entire orchestra.’ And I thought – well, why not? I knew it would be logistically challenging in many ways than the listening courses. But on the plus side, I’d have the orchestra with me, which would be a lot more fun – because I could ask the violins or clarinets to play their part separately, which I couldn’t ask the stereo to do. And also, there would be the joyous interaction of having a lot more people to teach.”

In November 1996, at Richardson Auditorium on the Princeton University campus, the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey performed its first *Discovery Concert*, called *Bach to the Future* – which in 2002 would be recorded for public television - featuring the third movement of the *Brandenburg Concerto No. 4*. Over the next several years, the Philharmonic devoted one concert per season to this kind of “Discovery” performance or *Discovery Concert*, focusing on a different piece each time. These concerts served as a series of laboratories where Maull developed and honed his pedagogical methods and style.

In 2002 Maull and his staff began to conduct regular surveys of the audiences attending *Discovery Concerts*. Surveys were in the form of a one-page questionnaire folded and tucked inside programs, and at the end of each concert Maull would ask the audience to take a moment to fill them out and hand them to ushers on the way out. Response rates to the surveys were high, averaging around 40%.

Asked about the extent to which the educational presentation had enhanced their enjoyment of the music, 80% or more of the respondents typically chose “very much” over the two other choices, “not at all” or “somewhat.” Most of the written-in comments were highly favorable. “One of our best responses,” says Maull, “was from a man who wrote, ‘This is the first time in my life that the men in the men’s room during intermission were talking about how wonderful a concert was.’” In general, he adds, survey responders invariably state that when the piece is performed straight through after the “Discovery” process, it always sounds different, more exciting and more moving.

Those few who objected, Maull adds, tended to be “people who believe with all their hearts that they already know everything there is to know about classical music.” Others, he added, who simply liked to listen to music without any talk about it. But the majority of respondents loved the new format and wanted more of it.”

“From that first *Discovery Concert*,” says Johnston, “through the next ten years, it was a gradual process of our eyes being opened to the fact that this was really helping people, was meeting a real need.”

In 2002, the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey hired a consulting firm to help them formulate a new strategic plan. In addition to speaking with staff, donors, and audience members, the consultants polled all the members of the Board of Directors, asking them to prioritize the activities of the orchestra. A solid majority of board members replied that the most important thing the orchestra did was *Discovery Concerts* – even though these concerts occurred only once a year. “I realized,” says Maull, “that in fact there might not be anything more valuable I could do with my time and energy than this.”

The process of prioritizing the “Discovery” mission gained added momentum when the board made the decision to produce a televised concert. “The consultant we were working with asked the board members to come up with their wildest dreams of what we could be doing,” says Maull. “And one of the things – they were all taped up on the wall – was to make a television show of a *Discovery Concert*. And then they were asked to prioritize all the dreams that were on the wall, and a televised *Discovery Concert* came up number one.”

“To put one of our *Discovery Concerts* on TV – that was a wild goal,” says Ginny Johnston. “We couldn’t imagine ourselves doing that.”

“Of course,” adds Maull, “everyone’s next reaction was -- how could we ever raise enough money to make a television show? But they were all excited by the idea. So I just ran with it; we found the money, and we taped *Bach to the Future*.” The show was recorded on March 24, 2002 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center; it was aired first by Philadelphia’s public television station WHYY, and in the course of the following year was distributed to more than eighty public television stations across the country, eventually going international as well.

After several more seasons, “we realized we didn’t want to give regular performances at all any more,” says Maull. “We only wanted to give *Discovery Concerts*. Our feeling was that there were lots of orchestras giving conventional concerts, beautifully played – albeit sometimes to half-empty halls. But we had something really distinctive and valuable to offer. And therefore, that’s what we should do. Since there was now consensus among my staff and board about this, there was no reason not to go forward.” Within a single season, 2005-2006, the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey changed its mission, its entire mode of operation, and its name to The Discovery Orchestra.

Working along with Maull to accomplish this change were the three additional staff members of the Philharmonic at that time: Executive Director Ginny Johnston, Administrative Director Diane Lester, and Events Director Jeanne Maass. All three were enthusiastic participants in the change process, and have remained members of the orchestra’s staff, now grown to include six positions at the present time. “We are all involved in everything that goes on,” says Maass. “We’re very close, and we throw ideas and thoughts at each other on a regular basis. So we were talking about this change all the time.”

Says former Board member Doug Munch, “I’ve known George since 1990, when my daughter was playing violin with the New Jersey Youth Symphony. I was a board member and treasurer of the Philharmonic for eight years.” Munch says that he never doubted the organization was moving in the right direction. “I believe that culture drives everything. And the culture of this organization was really driven by George and the

staff – by what excited and felt valuable to them. It became clear that within this culture, the overwhelming favorite subject was the teaching mission. And when something is that dominant, you have to pay attention to it. As a consequence of that strategic planning process, we changed the mission. We developed new vision and mission statements, which put the teaching priority front and center.”

Perhaps the most important element in the development of The Discovery Orchestra’s new mission and identity was, of course, the audience. Among audience members interviewed for this essay, only two had been patrons of the Philharmonic Orchestra of New Jersey and experienced the change of identity and emergence of The Discovery Orchestra. These two were vocal in their support for and excitement about the change. “I was so excited when they became The Discovery Orchestra,” says Fran, an experienced concertgoer in her 70s. “It took a lot of guts and a lot of determination on their part. But I thought it was just great. I love the whole thing!”

“I thought it was brilliant,” says Ken, who was in his forties and described himself as a frequent concertgoer. “It lifted the group out of suburban music groups with similar names and little followings that I got flyers for that I tossed aside. And it became something with a strong identity. Even by the name, you knew it was something special, worth paying attention to.”

### **The Roots of “Discovery”: George Marriner Maull and Saul Feinberg**

“I went to a choir school for boys in Philadelphia during my elementary years,” says George Marriner Maull. “It was a really intense beginning of my musical education. But then I went to a big public high school – five thousand students, after I’d been in a school in which the entire student body consisted of just forty kids. It was a traumatic change.”

Maull recounts how he was drafted into the high school chorus and therefore “placed out” of the general music class that was a twice-a-week requirement for all the other kids who did not participate in music performance ensembles – 90% of the student body. One day during a lunch period, however, he heard the strains of Dvořák’s *New World Symphony* coming from down a hallway. He followed the sound and



stopped outside the classroom door, where the general music teacher was conducting a session in music listening.

“What surprised me the most was that no one in the room was talking. They were just listening. I immediately perceived this to be very atypical behavior for kids in General Music class; I had heard stories about those classes with other instructors, where basically, kids were pulling the shades up and down, throwing erasers at each other...pandemonium - especially if the teacher dared to begin to play a little bit of recorded classical music.

“But here in this room, it was happening. People were just sitting and listening.” Maull began to spend every lunch period sitting on the floor next to the open door of the general music classroom, until after several weeks the teacher came to the door and said, “Wouldn’t you be more comfortable coming in and sitting in a chair?”

That teacher was Dr. Saul Feinberg, and he was, says Maull, “on a mission to increase the music listening capabilities of the entire student body of Abraham Lincoln High School.” He became a mentor and piano teacher as well as general music teacher for Maull as a teenager, who was “a sponge,” he says. “I wanted to have as many aesthetic experiences listening to music as I could possibly cram into any given 24-hour period.” Maull spent his teenage years in this relentless pursuit, using up all allowance money in the LP record sections of department stores. At the relatively late age of sixteen, he took up the viola and decided that he wanted to be an orchestral violist; he attended the University of Louisville School of Music and achieved his ambition while still an undergraduate.

Maull credits Feinberg’s approach with every major aspect of The Discovery Orchestra’s principles and methods. “Our Listening Guides are absolutely based on his *Blueprints for Musical Understanding*,” he says. “They present the listener with specific problems to solve, usually information gaps to fill in. ‘How many times is this theme repeated?’ ‘What happens to the tempo in this section?’ ‘Which thematic idea returns here? How has it changed from when you heard it before?’ The listener has to focus *on the music itself* in order to answer these questions.

“We’re not saying that answering such questions is *all* that there is to an aesthetic experience. But we believe that being presented with such questions is a good way to prepare people to have aesthetic experiences. The Discovery Orchestra’s basic pedagogical procedure is the asking of questions “that can only be answered by listening carefully to the musical excerpts next performed by the orchestra.” This method of proceeding Maull clearly credits to Feinberg. “We firmly believe Dr. Feinberg’s maxim: ‘The more we perceive, the more we receive.’ Based on the pioneering research of Saul Feinberg,” says Maull, “we believe that a high percentage of individuals in any culture can learn to listen to and be profoundly moved by the greatest musical expressions of that culture...provided that they are sensitized to the listening process.”

“It’s not possible to be moved to the maximal degree inherent in a piece of music unless you are able to really listen to it - really focus your listening. So learning to notice musical detail is the necessary precondition for having a rich, *feelingful* aesthetic experience of music.”

“And that,” concludes Maull, “is what I learned from my great teacher, Saul Feinberg.”

### **The Discovery Process: Voices of Audience Members**

“The *Messiah* concert was amazing,” says Mitchel, a concertgoer in his fifties who plays the mandolin. “I never knew what a melisma was. But by the end of that concert I loved melismas. And having the performers right there...you got to see them perform those fantastically difficult parts, over and over again. That was remarkable.”

“I could finally hear what was going on inside the music,” says Grantley, a science teacher who recently began to take guitar lessons as something to fill the time when he took his grandchildren to their community music school for piano lessons. “I always liked the *Messiah* but it always just kind of washed over me, I never understood anything that was going on.”

Jane, in her 40s, says something similar; she says she's always understood that the words of the *Messiah* tell a story, but she never knew that the music also tells the story. Asked how this changed her experience of listening to the piece, she says, "It made it much more powerful and much more emotional. Those are the two words that come to mind." She adds, "It made the story more meaningful – or meaningful at a deeper level. At the level of feeling."

Ken, a concertgoer also in his 40s, has been a regular at *Discovery Concerts*, but this time he brought his wife and 10-year-old son. "My son said afterwards, 'Is that the whole *Messiah*?' My wife said, 'No, actually the whole thing lasts three hours.' And my son said, 'Next time can we hear the whole thing?'"

"The architecture," says Richard S, when asked what he had learned from the concert. "For the first time I heard how the choruses are actually built. Like an architectural work. That's something I never even thought about before."

Susan, in her 30s, attended the *Messiah Discovery Concert* with her husband because a friend who had won two tickets at another organization's charity raffle gave them the tickets. Neither had ever heard of The Discovery Orchestra before, and neither had had musical training of any kind. "I was so pleasantly surprised to find I could actually learn something!" she says. ***"I've never enjoyed music as much as I enjoyed that concert."***

The last two comments are indicative of a theme stressed by a number of concertgoers about their experience with *Discovery Concerts*: they went into a concert thinking their lack of musical experience would make it impossible for them to really learn something about classical music, and they came out thrilled that in fact they had learned new things.

"I always thought I was just nowhere in terms of classical music," says Peter, who is in his thirties and was brought to his first *Discovery Concert*, the Sousa concert, by a friend. "And I didn't expect that to ever change. But in that concert I started to hear the different things going on at once. I was surprised I could actually do that."

"I definitely hear things at these concerts I've never heard before," says Mitchel. "The way composers build interest and tension...I never even thought about that."

There are several other themes that constitute common threads in many remarks of many of those interviewed. Perhaps most prevalent is the idea that simply focusing on music listening is possible, and further, is valuable. It has been noted that in every *Discovery Concert*, Maull expounds deliberately upon this theme; its frequent emergence in post-concert interviews is testimony to the effectiveness of his efforts.

Sometimes the message is expressed in very simple form. "I loved how he got us to actually listen to the music," says Susan. "He gives people the distinction between passively hearing and really listening," says Fran. According to Grantley, ***"My music listening at home has totally changed. Now it's not something in the background, to block out noise. Now I actually pay attention."*** Richard gets that Maull has, in a way, charmed him into engaged listening. "George gets us so involved in figuring things out," he says, "that we can't help but listen!"

When people are fully listening in Discovery Orchestra concerts, what are they detecting? According to many interviewed, they are noticing what's going on "inside" the music. Says Richard S, "You can hear the complexity of the music, and how much is going on at the same time and yet how it all comes together. I mean, who wouldn't be fascinated by that? Most concertgoers assume that you're not capable of hearing this, if you can't read music. But now I realize you don't need to read it! You can do it by listening!"

"You learn to listen for specific musical elements," says Richard L. "I like the structural component of what we learn at a *Discovery Concert*," says Jane, who had also spoken about hearing the story within the music of the *Messiah*. "I learn about musical structure, which I never knew much about before," says Ken. "And also, those repeating themes that fly past and are hard to catch...you start to really hear those."

Beth describes her revelation in almost mathematical terms. "For me, the overriding thing is the understanding that there's no coincidence. Every part of an artistic work has a meaning and a function." "He opens up and separates out the musical elements," says Fran, "so you know what you're listening for." Grantley: "I am finally learning what is happening inside the music."

The Discovery Orchestra consistently articulates its public mission, in printed material, in email communications, and on its website, as follows: “We teach the listening skills that help you emotionally connect with classical music.”

Asked whether understanding the music better makes for a more enjoyable and emotional listening experience, most concertgoers say that it does. Like Susan, the raffle ticket winner who found the *Discovery Concert* experience more enjoyable than any other musical experience she has had, the majority of those interviewed said that the more one knows and understands about a piece of music, the more enjoyable it will be. “You’re only going to get increased pleasure and increased appreciation,” says Ken. Says Mitchel: “Knowing more about the music helps me enjoy it more. I can listen to the same piece again and again and get more out of it – it seems fresher.”

Some concertgoers go further, saying that a *Discovery Concert* brought them not only greater enjoyment but a deeper emotional experience. “There’s no doubt about it,” says Richard S. “The more one understands about how the music is put together and what is actually going on in it, the more one’s emotional involvement can be increased.”

Mitchel says that he now associates the different treatment of musical themes with different emotions. “When a theme at one moment seems happy and buoyant, and the next moment introspective – I just love that.”

“Learning about how the *Messiah* is structured,” says Jane, “gave the music much more meaning. And more power! More emotion! The crescendo of the chorus at the end gave me chills.”

“I weep,” says Fran.

There are a few concertgoers, however, who stop short of saying that greater musical understanding led to a more satisfying emotional experience. “Yes, I enjoy it more,” says Richard L, “but does it change my feeling? I’m not sure about that. Feeling about music is such an intangible thing.” “I would say that the explanations made the whole concert a lot pleasanter,” says Esteban. “I don’t know about intense feeling. Maybe I would have that someday if I kept coming to these concerts.”

Another idea frequently expressed by concertgoers was that *Discovery Concerts* are effective for people with varying levels of musical experience. “I don’t play anything, and my husband plays accordion and piano, but he enjoyed the

concert just as much as I did,” says Susan. “It got him to listen in a different way. I just listened from a sheer beginner’s standpoint. But it worked for both of us.”

“My dad doesn’t know as much about classical music as I do,” says Beth, “but he loves the concerts too. He feels like they give him a step-by-step understanding of the music.” She goes on to note, as do several other concert-goers, that George is able to give clear explanations without ever talking down to the audience. “He gives some really solid, hardcore information in an easy-to-understand way,” she says, “without one iota of ‘talking down’.”

“It’s geared for adults, but it works for kids too,” says Mitchel. “We always take our kids, and at the last concert one of them gave George a ‘five out of five’ score. I think they enjoy it because HE enjoys it – they get a kick out of his enjoyment!” Several older concertgoers with grandchildren echo the words of Board Chairperson Betse Gump. “Our six-year-old grandson said, ‘That was really good, Granny! And that man sure talks a lot!’”

Almost all the concertgoers answered, “yes” to a question about whether The Discovery Orchestra experience could change someone’s experience of music listening permanently. “It has certainly changed my listening in my daily life,” says Richard S. “I listen in different ways and with a different outcome.” Susan says, “If you went to this kind of concert four times a year, then yes, absolutely, you would listen to music in a different way.” “I am aware in my daily life now,” says Fran, “that I can make a conscious choice to not only hear it but to really listen.”

Discovery Orchestra Executive Director Ginny Johnston says that she is confident The Discovery Orchestra experience can make a permanent difference in the way people listen to music. “Can even one experience change a listener? Yes, I think so,” she says. “People are so used to having music be something they relax to, take a nap to, and NOT think about – this can jar the passive relationship they’ve had with music for their whole lives.”

Only one concertgoer among the twelve interviewed had a negative reaction to the Discovery Orchestra method. The Sousa concert was the first and only *Discovery Concert* that Esther, in her 70s, ever attended. “I have to say,” says Esther, “I didn’t like all the talking. I didn’t come to hear explanations, you know? I came to hear music.”

Esther says she won't come to hear The Discovery Orchestra again. "I wish them well, but it's not for me." All the other concertgoers interviewed, however, say they look forward to coming back, and they plan to bring other family members or neighbors with them to share the experience.

In fact, the "Discovery" method seems to have been so successful in making audience members feel like pro-active participants in the music that several of them feel at liberty to make recommendations about future programming. "I wish they would do Bartok!" says Ken. "I've never been able to get Bartok, but I know there's something in there to get. This orchestra could help me find it." "I wish they would tackle jazz!" says Richard L. "I wish," says Mitchel, "that the Discovery Orchestra would do bluegrass!"

### **The Discovery Process: Voices of Orchestra Staff Members and Musicians**

Staff members speak of the way they've seen audiences react to Discovery Orchestra concerts. "I have a special perspective," says Jeanne Maass, "because I'm always onstage at some point, holding the posters. I love looking at the audience. At first they're being polite, but then George starts his interactive stuff, and then they're jumping out of their seats to participate...it's very cool. I get goose bumps even talking about it. People like to be a part of something. And you can see in their faces that they are really engaged...even the jaded ones, who come in and think they know everything about classical music. By intermission, they're animated. And by the end they're excited, and they can't wait to go home and listen to other pieces of music. It's fantastic."

Diane Lester says, "People leave with more than just 'appreciation.' It's a finer understanding, a focusing on one thing at a time. This is not the historical information you learn in schools. It's completely focused on listening skills. And really, how many people, especially our generation and younger, can sit and listen to a piece of music and not do anything else?"

Similarly, the musicians who have been regularly employed by the orchestra, whatever their initial impressions and understandings, are by now persuaded that the change is a good one. "We have seen that *Discovery Concerts* have been extremely

well received by audiences from the very beginning,” says violinist Mia Wu. “There is so much enthusiasm!” Says bassoonist Atsuko Sato, “Even though it can be frustrating for us as musicians not to play an entire piece, still, The Discovery Orchestra format is a lot of fun for us. It’s kind of amazing, but every musician enjoys doing it!”

Bruce Bonvissuto is equally positive. “These formats are really fun to do,” he says. “It’s an enjoyable and interesting way to play a concert. You get to be really inside the piece!” Mia Wu adds, “We are pretty much all of the same generation out of Juilliard. The majority of us have known each other for years, so there is a cohesiveness. And everybody loves George dearly.”

The mutual respect and comfort level between conductor and players is evident at the rehearsal. Maull’s tone is collaborative and collegial; he is consistent in using the “we” pronoun, implying that the orchestra members are his partners in the educational process. After they play through the second theme, he says, “Now we’ll ask them, ‘What does the music go back to at this point?’” He pretends to be audience members popping their hands in the air. “And then, in the Trio, we’re going to try to get them to hear that a new key is introduced. If they don’t get it, I may ask you to play the transition again.”

After they play through the bridge, Maull says: “Maybe we should make the ritard even more pronounced; what do you think?” Again, there is a sense that he is actively enrolling the musicians in the decision-making process.

In general, the musicians who play regularly with The Discovery Orchestra emphasize that they understand and agree with the orchestra’s new orientation and process. “I think the approach is very educationally sound,” says Bruce Bonvissuto. For Atsuko Sato, The Discovery Orchestra is onto “a unique view of explaining music.” She adds, “I hope the concerts can make a difference in how people listen to music. I hope that people will keep coming back, and eventually be able to find their own way of listening.”

“I think it’s become clear to all orchestras that there is a cultivation of audiences that has to be done now,” says Bonvissuto. “And I think The Discovery Orchestra’s approach is very educationally sound. People come away with an awareness that



there's a lot more going on in the music than they ever thought possible. They have an opportunity to learn something about how to listen to music."

"And this is essential," he adds, "because, largely, people don't know how to listen to music! It's frightening!" Mia Wu says, "Our musicians are by and large committed to the mission. Many of us are teachers as well as performers, so we really get the importance of this." Asked if she thinks the orchestra provides a truly educational experience, she responds, "I say resoundingly yes. And I would say more: that sometimes it only takes one thing, something like this, to change a person's life."

### **Refining the Goal, Redefining the Mission**

A new 2009 document goes on to elaborate on The Discovery Orchestra's mission in clear and powerful terms: "To teach the listening skills that help people emotionally connect with classical music." It includes a quotation by the noted pianist and arts advocate Karl Paulnack: "Music allows us to move around those big invisible pieces of ourselves and rearrange our insides so that we can find expression for what we feel even when or perhaps *especially* when we can't talk about it." According to the document, this aspect of music explains why "the ability to listen to and be moved by the abstract musical compositions we call 'classical music' is so vitally important for human beings." The new language that emerges here that powerfully connects The Discovery Orchestra with the life of human emotion.

The Discovery Orchestra places "a strategic emphasis on broad-based education in music listening through the development of products and delivery methods that would reach target audiences beyond the concert hall and make active music listening widely available through popular, state-of-the-art technologies." One important component of the orchestra's new strategic plan is: "To capture and deliver musical discovery through audio and video means." This now includes not only making more content for public television but, more recently, a series of short (4-8 minute) *Discovery Orchestra Chats* uploaded to YouTube.

Board member Doug Munch says of the new orientation, "I think it's essential. We have to make our product available through the ways in which people receive music

today. It has to be available in every format: DVDs, MP3s, whatever platforms people are using now.” Administrative Director Diane Lester says, “I think it’s the right idea to go electronic. We’re trying to reach a younger audience in ways they’re used to being reached – why not? I agree with this future vision of the orchestra.”

Jeanne Maass, Events Coordinator, says, “If we’re true to this new mission, we’ll be on your iPad. You’ll be able to watch our concerts on DVD. I wouldn’t have said this a year ago, but I’ll say it now.” She adds, “We got a call from a woman in Chicago recently who saw our *Bach to the Future* on television last month! And she was all excited! This shows us we’re on target, we’re on the right track.” Executive Director Ginny Johnston agrees. “I think the electronic media will give us more and more opportunities for reaching people.”

### **Conclusion: The Discovery Orchestra as Educational Force**

“We don’t think of ourselves as a traditional orchestra anymore, in the standard sense,” says Maull, “but as an educational force.” Having recreated its identity in this way, The Discovery Orchestra has found itself during its first few seasons in a position familiar to many music educators: the position of having to defend the value of aesthetic education for its own sake.

“People say to me, ‘Can Discovery Orchestra learning principles be applied to geography learning? Can we teach math through music?’” says Maull. “And I always respond, ***‘This experience is valuable in and of itself.*** We don’t need to justify it in any other way.”

Maull recalls his mentor, Saul Feinberg, having to justify his high school music listening course to various administrators and other teachers along the way who questioned the practical value of the course. He also recalls that “Saul told me the story of one of his students who, when filling out an end-of-year questionnaire asking what he had gotten out of the course, wrote, ‘I didn’t get anything out of this course, ***except this may be the first time I’ve ever felt comfortable with myself.***’”

Maull laughs. “That’s all – nothing big! Just that he’s managed to explore his feelings to the extent that he feels okay in his own skin, for the first time in his life.

Often, years of psychotherapy can't yield that result. But one single course did. At Lincoln High School in Philadelphia, a kid learned how to listen to great music, and began to know himself."

### **Postscript, January 2021: Where We Are Now**

Over the course of the last decade or more, The Discovery Orchestra has been in a perennial process of self-re-creation as the relentless advancement of electronic media has ever more forcefully encroached upon the world of live concert-going. Also, during the last decade, I have become an active volunteer with the Orchestra, participating in strategic planning work and in supporting the resulting programmatic initiatives.

Our resources have been increasingly dedicated to exploring ways we can continue our work in the digital realm. We followed our first public television program, *Bach to the Future* (recorded in 2002), by making a succession of shows for American Public Television: *Discover Beethoven's Fifth* in 2010, *Discover Vivaldi's Four Seasons* in 2012, the eight-part series *Fall In Love With Music* in 2015, and *Discover The Firebird* in 2019 (in all, garnering three Emmy Nominations and ten Telly Awards). We also created a series of over 175 short-form video "Chats" that discuss a wealth of musical concepts in engaging and lively ways. We currently distribute a twice-monthly radio show "Inside Music" in partnership with New Jersey station WWFM The Classical Network, and we produce the video/audio podcast "Notes From Under the Piano" series. Select live programs, which sometimes have a media component as well, continue to have a place in fulfilling our mission. However, the focus is on smaller chamber music venues such as art spaces and home salons, rather than large concert halls.

An equally important long-term trend in our work is an emphasis on connecting with, supporting, and energizing the greater sphere of music education in the United States. We're constantly exploring ways to bring our music-listening methods to the learning that takes place in classrooms and in teacher training programs. For years, we've performed community outreach programs geared to marginalized students and families. And when we, along with the rest of the world, suspended live performances entirely during the COVID pandemic, we turned our energies toward creating a Virtual Learning Resource Library for music educators who need such resources desperately.

Whether our audience encounters us live or through electronic media, in full concert mode, or in the living room, our goal remains the same: to teach the skills of listening that help people connect emotionally and meaningfully with music. In a world where listening of all kinds is greatly needed, it's a more important goal than ever.