NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MARIN ALSOP

SUBJECT: MARIN ALSOP, MUSIC DIRECTOR, BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, WILL ADDRESS A LUNCHEON ON NOVEMBER 17.

MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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SYLVIA SMITH: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. I'm Sylvia Smith. I'm the Washington editor of the Ft. Wayne *Journal Gazette* and president of the National Press Club.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching on C-Span or listening on XM Satellite Radio.

We're celebrating our 100th anniversary at the Club here this year, and we've rededicated ourselves to a commitment to the future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterward, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From you're right, Jerry Zremski, Washington Bureau Chief from *The Buffalo News* and former president of the Press Club; Garland Scott, head of external affairs at the Folger Shakespeare Library; Constance Ikokuru, Washington bureau chief of *This Day*, a newspaper of Nigeria; Paul Meecham, president and CEO of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and a guest of our speaker; Betsy Fischer, executive producer of *Meet The Press*; Robert Meyerhoff, guest of the speaker; Marilou Donahue, editor and producer of *Artistically Speaking* and Speakers Committee member who organized event. Thank you so much, Marilou.

And we'll skip over our speaker for just a moment. Rheda Becker, BSO education committee and guest of the speaker; Bob Madigan, WTOP's Man About Town; Linda Gasparello, co-host, *White House Chronicle*; Jim Allison, program director of classical WETA radio; and Marvin Kalb, host of *The Kalb Report*. Thank you so much for coming everyone. (Applause.)

It is tempting to introduce Marin Alsop as the first female conductor of a major U.S. orchestra, or as the recipient of a MacArthur Genius Grant, or as the protégé of the legendary conductor, Leonard Bernstein, or even as the subject of front page news when some members of the Baltimore Symphony threw a tantrum over her job candidacy. All of that is true.

And all of that is interesting and relevant biographical material, and perhaps we'll ask for a bit more details later. But what strikes me as the most compelling components of Alsop's professional story is what has happened to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in the two and a half years since she was named its music director.

In 2005, the Orchestra had a $10 million dollar deficit, and its, "somewhat fusty symphony," as *Newsday* called the BSO, rarely played to packed houses. And the end of Alsop's first full season earlier this year, attendance was up 11% and there were more sellouts and 2,000 plus filled seats than in the past half dozen years. The Orchestra is recording again after a decade-long hiatus, and it has a deal with XM Satellite Radio.

Foundations that hadn't made grants to the BSO in years are opening their checkbooks. This is surely welcome news for lovers of symphonic orchestras, which are in declining number in the U.S. To accomplish it, all Alsop had to do is make more people want to sit for two hours in a large orchestra hall, close their eyes, and listen to music.

She reached into her magic bag of tricks and came up with, talk to concert goers, initiate programs to reach out to children, play music people want to hear.

For instance, one of her selections for this holiday season is "Too Hot to Handel: The Gospel Messiah". Did she do these things because, as a woman in a male-dominated profession, she has a fundamentally different approach and can connect with audiences in a way that feels friendly rather than tutorial? Or did she watch *The Wire* and realize that demystifying classical music was essential to success in Baltimore? Or perhaps it has something to do with that Genius Grant.

Marin Alsop is here today to talk about the importance of arts education. For someone who began piano lessons at age 2 and transferred from Yale to Julliard, blending arts into the public school curriculum is obviously a fundamental value. And she walks the walk. Alsop invested $100,000 dollars of her Genius Grant money in the purchase of musical instruments for low income children. Please help me welcome to the National Press Club podium, the music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Marin Alsop. (Applause.)

MS. MARIN ALSOP: Thank you. Thank you very much. It's my great pleasure to be here today and have this opportunity to share some of my thoughts, ideas, and hopes with you. I didn't grow up with many of the advantages that typically define privilege. But I grew up with the greatest privilege of all. I grew up in a household that exuded possibility.

My parent s were both professional musicians. And because of that, my world was defined, colored, and transformed by music. And that's what I want to talk to you about today, the transformational power of music.

Many years ago when I was a nine year-old girl living in New York City, my father took me to a Young Peoples concert at the New York Philharmonic. That was a day I'll never forget because that was the day I fell under the spell of the amazing Leonard Bernstein. And my life was changed forever.

Thirty-five years later and over 2,000 miles away, a young man in Venezuela named Lenar Accosta(?) was handed a clarinet. He marveled that anyone would trust someone like him not to steal it, until he realized with astonishment that it was his to keep. Later he recounted that it felt completely different from holding a gun.

Today in the city of Baltimore, a young boy named Jonah is attending second grade at Harriet Tubman Elementary School. "So what," you say. "There must be hundreds of thousands of kids in second grade around the country." But what I said was, he is *attending* second grade. For the first time in his young life, he's coming to school regularly, learning, actually getting an education.

Now, why the change? Because of a new program instituted in his school, which has turned him onto music and has begun to teach him how to play an

instrument. Yes, Lenar Accosta, young Jonah and I, we all have one thing in common – music has transformed our lives. Because I believe so passionately that everyone should have this access and this same opportunity, especially children, I would like to make a bold proposal to you today. I would suggest that enabling every first grader to learn how to play a musical instrument, and continuing these studies through elementary school would achieve that transformation. It would improve test scores, increase academic achievement, and have a more dramatic, more consistent, and more long-lasting impact on children's lives than any of the drills and measuring we're currently engaged in.

Listen – as a child, I really didn't have much choice about being transformed since both my parents were professional musicians. You know, I can picture them sitting in the-- We had a little kitchen table in our two-room basement apartment on 107th and Amsterdam. And I can see them sitting there saying, "You know, wouldn't it be great to have a trio? All we need is a pianist. Oh, let's make one." (Laughter.)

So that's how I was born and that's also why I was born. I was definitely born with a job and I did begin playing the piano when I was two years-old. And as I tell everyone, there's the perfect instrument for every child and piano was decidedly not the perfect instrument for me. I retired from the piano when I was six, but my parents refused to give up their dream of having me share their joy in the magnificent sound of music.

So over the next few months, they managed, through a rather elaborate combination of trickery and bribery, to get me to play the violin. But, you know, it turned out pretty amazingly that I loved the violin. You know? It fit perfectly under my chin. It spoke to me as nothing ever had. And the best part was that I got to sit in the orchestra when I played the violin.

And sitting inside that sound was like escaping for me to a magical planet. Learning the violin transformed my life. It set me apart. It made me special. It taught me persistence. It made me perspire a lot, too. But gradually I learned to motivate myself. I learned to budget my time, assess my progress, and I learned how to make good choices.

I was probably born with a good dose of it, thanks to my parents. But I think playing the violin also gave me real courage. I mean, some people might call it *chutzpah*. On one occasion-- I'm afraid it's one of many-- I was called in by the director of the orchestra that I was playing in. And he said, "You know, we've been getting a lot of complaints from people that someone in the back of the second violins is trying to lead the whole orchestra." That was me.

You know, I was upset, but somehow that fueled my fire. And fortunately, shortly thereafter, my father took me to that amazing concert with the New York Philharmonic where I got to see Leonard Bernstein conduct. He was magnetic. He was frenetic. He was, you know, having a blast. And I noticed that no one was yelling at this guy. No one even seemed remotely bothered by his wild gyrations and infectious joy. I thought, you know, "I could do that." I thought, "I will do that. I am going to do that."

And that day, I decided I would be a conductor. And I never changed my mind, not for one day of my life. Of course not everybody agreed with my choice. When I went back and delivered the big news to my violin teacher, she said, "Well, you know honey, you're too young. And girls don't do that." I thought, "Okay, one of those will change. But I'm going to have a problem here, I think."

You know, I was really devastated and also confused. But I was buoyed up by my parents' belief in me. My mother was furious. She wanted to sue the school and sue the teacher. She's all into suing. She's never sued anyone in her life, by the way, I should mention. But my father, who is-- He's quieter probably because he's around my mother, and you can't get a word in edgewise. But he went out, and when I came down for breakfast the next morning, there was a long wooden box. And I opened it up and it was filled with batons.

And I still have that box. And I'm very pleased to say that my father also makes all of my batons today. That was the beginning of a long journey for me. And it's the kind of beginning that I believe every young person should have the chance to experience. Yet we are so shortsighted in America every time we cut back on arts education. And of course the arts are usually the first thing to get cut when finances are tight. We sell our children short on every level, and work against what we stand for as a country — individually, creativity, entrepreneurial, outside the box thinking. That's what America's all about.

With No Child Left Behind, we have seen a 30% decrease in arts in our schools. Though 81% of American corporate leaders say they consider creativity an essential skill for the 21st Century workforce, only 20% report excellence in this area among recent college graduates seeking employment with their companies. The survey found equally disturbing skill deficits in other key areas, including teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication.

Let's look at the flipside and see what music programs can do for kids. Schools with music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than those without, 90.2% versus 72.9%. That's a big difference. Dr. James Catterall of UCLA reports that his ten-year tracking of 25,000 students shows that music-making improves test scores, regardless of socioeconomic background.

And let's take special note of what the National Governor's Association reported in their 2002 assessment on the impact of arts education. The arts can provide effective learning opportunities to the general student population, yielding increased academic performance, reduced absenteeism, and better skill-building. An even more compelling advantage is the striking success of arts-based educational programs among disadvantaged populations, especially at-risk and incarcerated youth.

These, of course, are just statistics. And while they support what I'm supporting, this cause for me is more about the health of our souls and our psyches. We're in crisis, not just financial, political (maybe not so much anymore) social crisis. But I believe the crisis is more fundamental. I really believe it's a crisis of essence.

As Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind* states, "It is now the abilities characteristic of the right hemisphere of the brain — artistry, inventiveness, big picture thinking. These are now the abilities that matter most in any kind of profession, in any kind of industry." Clearly, the key to our future lies with our children and the kind of world they perceive, the kind of world they experience. Is it a world of possibility? Or is it a world of despair? And what kind of citizens of that world will our children become?

I've personally become a parent late in life. I have a five year-old son. And I've been overwhelmed by witnessing firsthand my son Auden's unlimited potential, his appetite for knowledge, his intense curiosity about the world. I'm now convinced that every child is born a genius, without a doubt. But I also believe that gradually that capacity for artistry, inventiveness, and big picture thinking that Pink is talking about is slowly drained from them by a combination of circumstances that add up to a lack of nourishment.

Like young flowers, they need individualized attention and care to grow, and especially to thrive. But too often, it's this personal attention, this care, this nourishment that's lacking in their lives. Well, I realize that trying to cope with not having parents who are involved in your life, or not having enough food to eat can be all-consuming. The ability to transcend those hardships through a sense of possibility, hope, and dreams is within the reach of every child.

So what can we do to help? I suggest that an answer, probably not the answer, but a very good one lies in my proposal to teach children music. Consider for a moment the qualities that the corporate leaders noted as lacking in so many recruits today — creativity, teamwork, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication. Those are the very qualities upon which an orchestra is built.

Who could possibly listen to an orchestra performing a Beethoven symphony and not realize that all of these skills have been brought to bear in the service of genius? Who could observe someone trying to learn how to play an instrument (my son is learning the violin) and not appreciate the hard work, dedication, motivation, listening skills, creative understanding that are required? And as so often happens, a skill learned in one area is transferable to another. All of those abilities which are needed to make music are the same skills needed for success in school, in work, and in life.

For validation, I turn surprisingly to Venezuela and the program that transformed the life of the young man I mentioned at the beginning of this talk. The program is called, rather unromantic title, *El Sistema*, "The System". And it was founded in 1975 by economist José Antonio Abreu, to save the children in the Caracas barrios from a broken existence.

For the past 35 years, it has been Abreu's mission to change the lives of these children by offering them the opportunity to play musical instruments and be members of the orchestra. Dr. Abreu, one of my heroes, has performed a miracle from the ground up. Over a quarter of a million Venezuelan children and young adults are now playing instruments. And most of them have found families in the hundreds of orchestras spawned by this project throughout Venezuela.

And the program's still growing; by the year 2010, the numbers will double, all this the result of one man's determination to put the right musical instrument in the hands of every needy child, all this the result of one man's belief that music can animate the soul.

Listen for a moment to some of the words of these young people whose lives have been transformed by music. Edicson Ruiz says, "They gave me a viola and sat me in the middle of the orchestra. I heard the sound of the double basses and I thought, 'Yes. That's the instrument for me'." Before the age of 18, Edicson left the barrio to become the youngest double bass player in the Berlin Philharmonic.

Lenar Accosta, who I mentioned, says, "At first I thought they were joking. I thought nobody would trust a kid like me not to steal an instrument like that. But then I realized, they weren't lending it to me. They were giving it to me. And it felt much better in my hand than a gun." Lenar now tutors burgeoning young musicians like himself at the Simon Bolivar Conservatory.

Gustavo Dudamel says, "The music saved me. I'm sure of this. The music gave me a way to be far away from the bad things." Gustavo, who's 26 years-old

now, has just been appointed the next music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. It's pretty impressive.

These are only a few examples of musical achievements, though. What about all the graduates from *El Sistema* who went on to become doctors, teachers, civic leaders? Maybe that's even more impressive. If something like this can take root and bloom in Venezuela, then it can also grow wildly and wonderfully here in America. And we're beginning with our own garden in Baltimore.

When I was first appointed music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, I was-- what's the word?-- shocked maybe by the musicians' level of restlessness. I suppose many factors contributed to their frame of mind, but it got me thinking so much about music, and especially about passion.

I also had the opportunity around that time to attend the World Economic Forum at Davos, where, for some unknown reason, I was put on a panel with top CEOs to discuss non-financial incentives for employees. They must have just gotten the cards mixed up. I couldn't figure it out. What am I doing here?

But there I was. You know? And it was one of the most fantastic experiences I ever had, because it got me thinking about the Baltimore Symphony musicians, how they, like me, they went into music for one reason and one reason only, I'm sure of it — passion. They couldn't escape it. And I began to wonder whether we could possibly find a way to rekindle, reignite and share that passion.

That question led me to make a rather audacious proposal to my musicians. I figured I didn't have much to lose at that point anyway. "Let's join together," I said, "…all 93 of us, to mentor 93 children in the inner city near our concert hall. I know we have the passion. We have the rhythm. We have the music within us. Let's share it."

Well, as you can imagine, that sparked some lively and engaged discussions. I learned about my musicians' fears, their worries, their hopes, and their dreams for themselves and their orchestra. "Oh, are we too trained to make any sense to these kids? We don't know how to teach little ones," they wondered. "Will this program start strong like so many other programs and just fall by the wayside?" You know, their concerns were genuine, heartfelt, and helped us to focus on the real world concerns we would have to address.

We recognized that we couldn't go it alone. So we started talking to everyone — Peabody Conservatory, Johns Hopkins, the Mayor's office, Family League, the Baltimore City Public Schools, Arts Everyday, Baltimore School for the Arts. I even talked to the police department. With support from school and community leaders such as Dr. Alonso, CEO of the Baltimore City Schools, with

cooperation of Kim Sollers, principal of the Harriet Tubman Elementary School, and with firm commitments from benefactors like Robert Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker, who have led the way with their generous gift for the pilot year of this program, it started to come into focus.

We decided to work with one school in West Baltimore — Harriet Tubman Elementary School — named after the slave abolitionist who helped other slaves to freedom. As in other big cities, Baltimore's children are in desperate need. The 2004 U.S. Census Bureau offers some sobering statistics. Twenty-four percent of persons living in Baltimore City, compared to 8% in Maryland, as a whole, *24%* live below the poverty line. Thirty-three percent of Baltimore residents have no high school diploma. *The Baltimore Sun* recently revealed that 1,800 juveniles have been identified as gang members.

These are facts that should outrage us and challenge us to do something, do something important for our children. I'm brimming with hope. One candle can spread a fire. One seed can sow a garden. Our program in Harriet Tubman is called OrchKids, out of a desire the BSO has to offer individualized nourishment to each of our kids.

So here's the plan. For three afternoons a week from 3:00 to 5:30, we meet with the kindergarten turned first graders at Tubman. During the first semester, we're turning kids onto music and musicianship. In the second semester, they're going to explore the different instrument families. And they'll each choose the instrument that fits them. It's theirs to have, to hold, in sickness, in health. And then they'll learn how to play it through individual and group lessons, combined with Saturday fieldtrips to the Baltimore Symphony's musical adventure series, to the Baltimore museums, and even to the Baltimore Orioles.

This core group of kids will grow as musicians who play well with others, and as civic-minded people buoyed up by a program that allows them to believe in themselves, to experience an array of cultural events that never seemed within their reach, and which then challenges them to give back, to mentor new recruits and change society with the sound of their music and their newly empowered voices. We owe enormous thanks to Peabody Conservatory, which helped us find 30 year-old Dan Trahey. He's with us today. And I have to tell you, he's our program director and he's one of my new heroes.

Dan shares my unwavering belief that music can transform all our lives. And he's already started to take our first set of children to the next level. And he's eager to induct a new group of first graders into the OrchKids family. Eventually the older kids will become mentors to the younger one, transferring their seeds of knowledge to the next generation of OrchKids.

Fifteen or so years from now I know one of the children from our program may be standing here before you, a legal scholar, a leader in the community, or, I'm hoping for another maestra. And maybe I'll be sitting out there waving from my chair. I hope I'll be here. But I hope she'll be saying that, thanks to programs like OrchKids, her world and the world has changed for the better.

So what am I asking? I'm asking that anyone and everyone out there become part of the BSO's mission. Follow the example of Bob and Rheda, and so many of our wonderful supporters, and offer what you can, from whatever resources you have — time, money, talent — to give Baltimore's children an experience that transformed the lives of one-third of a million youngsters in Venezuela.

If you're outside Charm City or our beautiful second home at Strathmore, cultivate something similar on your own soil. People often speak about conductors' legacies, the sound of the orchestra under this or that maestro, the programming, the recordings. You know, for me, I'd really like my legacy to be about access and inclusion. By the time I leave, my dream is for everyone to feel ownership, to feel welcomed, embraced, and totally engaged with their orchestra, from the musicians to every single member of the public, a large extended family. Think about it. From a box of batons and an inspirational experience at a concert in New York that transformed the life of a little girl, to inspired program in the poverty stricken barrios of South America that's transforming lives as we speak, to the opportunity to do the same for the children of Baltimore, we can do this. We can and we must challenge ourselves to change the lives of children here in The United States.

So nowadays, to anyone who will listen (and that's you today) I reiterate my bold proposal, that we make it our goal to enable every first grader to learn how to play a musical instrument, that we enable them to continue these studies through elementary school, and that through music, we enable them to achieve that same kind of transformation that I experienced when I was nine years-old, that Lenar Accosta did when he traded a gun for a clarinet, and that little Jonah is starting to experience as he attends second grade.

As Dr. Abreu said, "Kids are kids. It doesn't matter the culture. It doesn't matter the race. It's music. Everybody loves music." That's my proposal. That's my challenge. That's my dream. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Thank you very much. You suggested almost franchising OrchKids. Do you realistically think this kind of program needs to be done outside the school curriculum, that is to say, because of the pressures that school boards are facing with, both financial pinches as well as curriculum pinches in that the No Child Left Behind act requires national testing? So do you think it has

to be brought in as a program? Or is this something that realistically we could expect schools to organize and embrace?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I think if we make this kind of commitment at a fundamental level, ideally, this would be part of the curriculum. And it would be a curriculum perhaps generated from the arts and through the arts, in my wildest dream. But I think the reality of the situation right now is that we can come in and offer a program that also helps deal with kids during the 3:00 to 6:00 PM period where most kids get into serious trouble. We offer childcare for that time, which helps out the parent. So this is sort of a win/win. But I think ideally, having music and the arts as part of the curriculum is the way that we would love to head.

MS. SMITH: If a community, if somebody in a community wanted to create their own, what kind of resources, financial and otherwise, do you think they would have to have for one of these after school programs?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I think the thing that we learned immediately was that collaborating with your own resources is critical. And find out what else is going on. The great thing about Baltimore is that we have a system in place that, once we get the kids up through, you know, learning the instrument, through kindergarten, through first grade, second grade, we have a program called TWIGS. Then we have the Baltimore School for the Arts. Then we have Peabody Conservatory. So we have a system that's in place. But we haven't reached out to the minority communities to really get them engaged at a young-- I mean, to play an instrument, you have to start learning very, very early.

But, you know, when Dr. Abreu started the program, he had eleven children. And, I mean, from that, grew this amazing situation in Venezuela. So I believe you can start with very, very few resources, depending on what you have. But I would say that you have more than you think. And that's always the case, isn't it?

MS. SMITH: So if a school had, say, two first grade classes and maybe 50 kids, what would be the financial resources that a community would have to come up with to start a program like this?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I can only judge from our assessment. I think it probably differs depending on the community. But to do this pilot program-- and I think we're pretty conservative in the way we're spending money-- I think it's probably about $250,000 dollars for the first year. But obviously as the program grows, the budget will grow as well. But we're fortunate. And I did mention Dan Trahey. And I'd love Dan to stand up. This is Dan Trahey. He's incredible (Applause.) because, you know, the program's a lot more than just teaching kids

music, I mean, as you can probably deduce. It's about having life experiences that they never expected.

When I saw our little OrchKids come into the concert hall-- They came over, you know, to meet with Evelyn Glennie, percussionist, and just get to see her close-up. And, I mean, you can't imagine the look in their eyes when they walked into the Meyerhoff Concert Hall. You know, they'd never been anyplace like this. And it's about eight blocks, you know, from where they live.

So I think with a small amount of resource, you can change people's lives. And it's just a matter of continuing to build gradually, and never-- You know, like everything in life, just don't give up and you'll eventually succeed. That's my motto.

MS. SMITH: You mentioned all the people and agencies you needed to reach out to for the OrchKids program. And you've obviously spent time on fundraising needs of the BSO. None of that is, per se, music. How do you keep connected to what's obviously your bedrock passion?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I mean, luckily I didn't have to do all the legwork myself. I mean, I think one of the keys to the great success I've already experienced in Baltimore is that I have a team of people that are phenomenal, led by Paul Meecham, our CEO. And, you know, he's built a team of people that are passionate, that care, that are deeply engaged. And I think-- You know, our motto at the BSO is, maximize every opportunity. And, you know, for me, that's all about music. It's trying to bring the music to people. I mean, when I'm talking about the Tchaikovsky symphony like I will do on Saturday night, you know, that's it for me, to be able to talk and play and perform. That's what life is about. And that's my passion.

But, you know, for me to just sit quietly in my room working on the scores, I mean, it gives me great joy. But I feel an obligation and a happy obligation to share my passion about music with as many people as are willing to listen.

MS. SMITH: Could the National Endowment for Humanities or the National Endowment for the Arts be more effective? The President, incoming President, will appoint chairs of each. What qualities do you think that person should have, or those people really?

MS. ALSOP: Well, you know, I have the incredible vantage point of working a lot in Europe and in the U.K., as well as here in The United States. And so I'm able to watch systems where the government supports the arts, as opposed to in America, where most of the arts are individually and through foundations

and corporations, funded that way. But I believe that the government and the leadership, more importantly, the leadership of a country has to set an example. And that's the most important thing to me, that our incoming President sets an example and a tone that we can all fall behind and support.

You know, just saying, "The arts is important," and putting even a small dedicated person, a small amount of the budget toward that, sends a huge message. And I think that-- I'm planning on that. I hope everyone else is as well. So I hope he is, too. Boy, I better check that with him, yeah.

MS. SMITH: Well, the questioner wants to know, should the President-Elect consider appointing an arts czar?

MS. ALSOP: I'm not sure of the use of the term 'czar' but-- Doesn't seem to fit with his general philosophy. But I don't know. I mean, look, I'm not a political person. I only want to change lives. I don't want to be a politician. I thought that would get a laugh. Wow. Okay. (Laughter.) But, you know, I do think it would be wonderful to have someone out front talking about the arts, and trying to promote the agenda for our children. I mean, it's all about-- I guess everything's a form of lobbying in some way, that we have to have people out there really pushing for these things. So I think in that way, it would be very, very helpful to have someone as the front person for this, I think very worthwhile cause.

MS. SMITH: What are you expecting regarding Federal arts funding under an Obama Administration and the new Congress?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I'm expecting a lot. But realistically I think that-- I'm proceeding cautiously. I'm not making great plans for a huge increase in funding, especially with the economic situation. But again, I think it can't be about money. Look — life can't be about money. The state of our children, the state of their souls, it can't be about money. When you go to Venezuela and you experience-- I mean, I lived vicariously through Dan, who went to Venezuela and worked with an orchestra, several orchestras in *El Sistema*.

You know, the instruments they play on are in complete disrepair. They're working under-- You know, they're playing in basements with poles everywhere. They can't even see the conductor, you know? It's really primitive conditions. It's not about the money. It's about the experience. And to me, money is really-- it's secondary to everything. I think we have to do things because it's the right thing to do. I always believe the money will follow if your motivation is right. And we have to let passion and caring and quality of life experience lead the way.

MS. SMITH: Well, taking two comments that you made in the last two answers, you said that the President should set the tone, and it's not about the money. What could the President and the First Lady do that would set a tone to focus on the arts in a way that hasn't been done, that wouldn't cost money? What would you like to see?

MS. ALSOP: Well, the first thing I'd like to see is a youth orchestra playing at the Inauguration. I mean, wouldn't that be fabulous? I mean, just doing something like that would send a statement. So, I mean, that's my small suggestion. So will you let him know? I tried to get in on the Convention. I couldn't even get in there, so.

MS. SMITH: No doubt he's watching. Questioner says, if you attend the National Symphony performances at the Kennedy Center and look around the audience, it looks like a group picture from the 1940-something high school reunion. Does the BSO audience look the same? And what can be done to build a younger audience with an interest in classical music?

MS. ALSOP: Oh, this is a dangerous, dangerous question. I feel it. It's just quicksand around my feet. But I think what's interesting is that, in 1938, the biggest concern was that the audience was going to die off. And they did. And here we are. Because the amazing thing is that, we all mature. And there are more mature people coming up than ever before in our history. And the reason I talk about maturity is that I think classical music-- I might be in a minority, but I really think that spending a lot of energy trying to get a kid who's 18 to about 28 years-old in to hear a classical concert if they haven't been exposed to it, is really rough work.

But if you expose kids to classical music when they're young, they come back to it later in life. You know, I remember back to college. I tried to think of an analogy with wine. You know, when I was in college, I did not spend a lot on wine. I don't know about you. But, you know, it was not really the taste experience I was going for. But later in life, you know, it's that maturity, the sophistication, the knowledge, the quality of life experience. So I think the key really is exposing more young kids to classical music, and giving them-- Because they're-- completely embrace it. And they're open to it. And as I've said, you know, this afternoon, it changes the way their minds work. And I think they'll come back to it later. But that said, you know-- I don't know, our audiences in Baltimore seem very hip to me, so.

MS. SMITH: Questioner says, former Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee, has been among the few Republicans who've talked about the importance of arts and music education. Have you had an opportunity to discuss

this with him? And might he be able to be a help in building GOP support for music education?

MS. ALSOP: I look forward to speaking to anyone that is supportive of the arts in the schools, so. You know, you set it up, and I'll be there. That's how I feel about it.

MS. SMITH: We had quite a number of questions on this very same topic. In the midst of the financial crisis, how worried are you about institutional support for classical music and arts education? And sort of as a corollary to that, how has the economic downturn affected your ability to continue with innovative programming?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I think, you know, it's yet to be seen how everything will shake out, because I think-- I think it's going to be a difficult time for everyone. And the arts are certainly going to suffer. It's going to be a hard time. But this is not a new development for the arts, that we're going to have to suffer. I mean, that's sort of a given. And I think the amazing thing about difficult times is that, it offers opportunities that didn't exist before.

I find that when people are struggling, they're much more willing to entertain alternative ideas than they are when they're not struggling. So I try to look at everything-- I mean, maybe this was the only way I could ever succeed, and trying to, you know, crawl my way up the ladder to be a conductor as a woman. Maybe this was the only outlook that seemed feasible for me. But I look at this as an opportunity, not as a problem.

And so I think it's a challenge. It'll be a challenge for us, because, you know, we, like everyone else, will suffer. And people won't be as willing to donate money because they won't have as much money. And we have to look at them. We have to be responsible. But at the same time, I think it's the moment to be bold and to make statements and to really put yourself out there. Because if our schools cut back on the arts any further, they almost won't even exist for our kids. So now's the moment that we have to step ahead and set an example and be bold.

MS. SMITH: Aside from OrchKids, what is some of the bold action that we should expect to see from the BSO?

MS. ALSOP: Oh, well, listen, I mentioned the programming, the sound of the orchestra, the recording profile. No. I think that-- You know, the things that we're trying to do at the BSO, I mean, the most important thing is that we're trying to make great music. I had the great joy yesterday to listening to half of the concert. You know, I never get to listen because I'm busy, you know, organizing things from the podium. But I sat in the concert hall yesterday and I thought,

"Wow, this is a fantastic orchestra. And the conductor was very good, too," a young Spanish man, excellent. And, you know, I thought, it just doesn't get much better than this. I am so fortunate. And for me, it's about the music. It's about creating programming that interests you, and maybe that you don't like. But, you know, trying to give you contrast and give you a menu that's varied, and change things up, and make it accessible, and talk to you a little bit about the music, so that you can gain some insight.

And for those of you who hate it when I talk, you know, you come to the concerts where I don't speak. I mean, it's about trying to-- I don't talk all the time, believe me, although some people would argue with you. And, you know, we're interested in being part of the world we live in, not being a dinosaur or, you know, some sort of relic on a shelf. We want to be part of the digital revolution. We have an awesome, as my son says, website. I mean, it's really cutting edge. We're(?) doing downloads on iTunes. Check it out. Our *Rite of Spring*, when we collaborated with Peabody, was number one on iTunes. It even surpassed the most relaxing music in the spheres, or something like that, so.

We want to be on the cutting edge of what's happening. We want to be part of the world. And we want to be relevant. So whatever it takes to do that, that's what we're going to do.

MS. SMITH: You mentioned crawling your way up to the top as a woman. Please talk about the things you think about when you consider gender and conducting. Do you consciously try to be not to feminine? What does your body language say? Do you hold the baton differently than a male conductor might? Do you have to teach yourself to have that stereotypical, more direct male style than the stereotypical indirect female style? (Laughter.) Just to ask a few….

MS. ALSOP: God, you know, there should be a test, like, of me trying to guess who asked these questions at the end. I don't want to ride in the car with him or her. Okay. But it is very interesting question because people ask me often, "So why aren't there more women conductors?" I mean, this is sort of the big question. I really don't know the answer of course. But I think it's all about perception and the perception of authority, the perception of power, what people are comfortable with.

But there is an inherent, uh, issue. Because when I-- Conducting's all about body language. And when a woman makes a gesture, it's interpreted differently from when a man makes the same gesture. Do you know what I'm saying? So that if I come after you and I give you one of those, you know, really strong handshakes, if a guy does that, everybody's like, "Oh, wow, he's really…" If a woman does that, they're, "Oh, wow, she's scary." You know? There's sort of this different response.

And it's the same with conducting. You know, there's a balance that has to be struck. And I have to say that for me, when I practice gesture-- which is important because that's my instrument-- I try to almost get rid of any kind of gender association with it. Because, you know-- I'm willing to tell students, you know, "That looks too-- That's too girly." You know, if a woman makes a gesture that's, you know, sort of delicate, it's too girly. If a man does it, it's sensitive. And you have to be aware of these things. I don't think I'm trying to be, you know, cheeky about it. I'm really-- It's really just the reality. And so I think it's important that your gesture serves the music. And so it's important to understand how people are interpreting your gesture.

And I think about it a lot and talk about it quite a bit. You know, I mean, I think one of the great compliments I got was when one of the big brass guys came up to me and said, "You know, you were really good. I never noticed you were a girl." (Laughter.) You know? Don't think about it too much. I thought about it a little bit later. I was, like, whoa.

MS. SMITH: As a Bernstein protégé, would you consider hosting your own Young Peoples Concert for PBS or cable TV?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I'd certainly think about it. I'm not sure-- It'd probably be on one of those cable stations, you know, that you only get at 3:30 in the morning, and you wonder, "Wow, who gave them a camera?" Because, you know, when Bernstein hosted the Young Peoples Concerts, you know what channel it was on? CBS. Sunday afternoon.

MS. SMITH: Do they have cable?

MS. ALSOP: Listen-- But, you know, I mean, listen, I like football, but how many football games can you watch on one afternoon? I mean, you know what I'm saying? I like all the sports. I do. But, I mean, can you imagine turning on your television and seeing an orchestra on a major broadcasting station? That would be shocking. Maybe that should be my next goal. I don't know.

MS. SMITH: You mentioned that you were invited to the World Economic Forum in Davos. What did they want from you? What did they want to know?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I know what they didn't want from me, but-- You know, it was an incredible experience because-- It was in 2006 and the focus was on leadership and the arts. And there was a lot of discussion about how an arts background creates great business leaders. And that was really fascinating. And there was an emphasis also on women's issues and women in leadership roles. So

this is what I really-- I think one of the reasons I was invited there. And it was fascinating. And I think the thing that I'd like to share with you is that, it was inspiring. Because I saw people, people of great power, people of enormous wealth, determining the future of the world. And the way they were determining it was, how could they make the greatest difference and the greatest impact?

And I saw, you know, individuals teaming up with governments and with non-governmental organizations in a way that has never happened before, to affect dramatic change in the world, and to make the world a better place. You know, I certainly didn't think that's what I was going to come away from this with at all. And I was inspired. And that's what actually gave me the idea of taking one of the installments, my last installment, from the MacArthur Award, and using it in a way to challenge people to step up in a way they hadn't thought about doing before. And it was an inspiration, really, from being around these people at Davos.

MS. SMITH: Do you find that income level and music appreciation have any relationship?

MS. ALSOP: Oh, income level and music appreciation? No, absolutely not. I think as Dr. Abreu says, you know, everybody loves music. Everybody appreciates music. But, you know, I look at our orchestras around the world, but, you know, especially in America. And the orchestras do not reflect the diversity of our communities. I mean, that's true. We have to start addressing that issue. And through programs like OrchKids, I hope that we can do that.

And the main problem is that the kids do no have access and they don't feel included at a young enough age. And so that's why I think it's really critical that we get to them early and we get started and we get them involved. And I'm hoping 20 years down the way, that when we look at an orchestra sitting on a stage, it will look like the community that we live in.

MS. SMITH: Do you notice any difference in audiences or attendance after a particularly good newspaper review or a drumming?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I never read the reviews, do I? So--

MS. SMITH: Right.

MS. ALSOP: Yeah. That's like Bernstein's, "Oh, I never read the reviews. But in 1963 when the…" You know, frankly I haven't really tracked that at all. I think it's really important to have music journalism and music writers and knowledgeable people writing on the subject, because people are very, very busy. And it's a way of getting information. But I think people make their own choices.

And the wonderful thing now about the Baltimore Symphony is that people are coming because they know that it's going to be a quality experience, no matter what one person thought of it. But so far, so good I think.

MS. SMITH: This questioner says, does someone in your position have a responsibility to challenge audiences by performing the works of lesser known composers from the 18th and 19th Centuries whose work was acclaimed at the time, but has been overshadowed by some of the accomplishments of better-known composers? There's some examples that he sent along — Cherubini, Franz Beck, Samuel Wesley.

MS. ALSOP: Well, I'm a big champion of all the underdogs always. I mean, that feels like my responsibility. And I think for every conductor, you know, you have to champion things that you believe in, because if it's not authentic, it doesn't ring true for your listeners and your audience. For me, there are some lesser known composers from the 18th and 19th Century. And, you know, there are a lot of living composers that are never performed. And maybe that's where my heart lies, in promoting people that I can touch and feel, and that are breathing, and can come and talk to you and be present.

And the thing to remember I think is that, you know, Beethoven was new music at one time as well. So everything is part of a cycle. And I think as conductor, it's my responsibility to promote what I believe in. And if I feel passionately, I definitely will bring that to you.

MS. SMITH: I'm sure your loyal audiences have their favorite pieces of music. Do they let you know what they want to hear? And do you listen to them?

MS. ALSOP: Huh. They probably let me know what they want to hear, but nobody's told me what they ...(inaudible). You know? They probably write in emails and say, "Why are you playing that new music?" or, "Can't you play more of that new music?" It probably depends on their point of view. After all my concerts, I do Q&A sessions. And I find that that's really helpful, because then I find out from the audience what they really were intrigued by, what they're looking forward to, what they're interested in. And that has, I think, in some way, really formed the basis of the seasons I'm planning ahead.

I mean, I don't think I'm just pandering to what people want to hear. But I'm trying to listen to my community. Because the symphony is a reflection of the community in which it exists. You can't live in a vacuum. I mean, but you also have to challenge people. You can't just give them what they want all the time, or they become-- we all become complacent. I mean, when I go to a museum, do I just want to see all my favorite paintings? No. I want to see something brand-new,

something that, you know, triggers a new synapse in my brain. Otherwise, life is-- I mean, it's, you know, Groundhog Day all the time.

MS. SMITH: You formed a jazz band more than two decades ago. Do you still play in String Fever?

MS. ALSOP: Well, I was going to try to play this week at the BSO. And I tried to practice and it sounded really good for one day. Then the second day, I thought, "Oh my god, this sounds awful." And, you know, my five year-old son is sounding better than I am these days. So I don't think I'm going to torture my audience with that. But I'd like to have a String Fever reunion. I mean, the last concert we played was about six years ago. So it's not that long ago. And that was another one of my crazy ideas years ago. But it's a ten piece string swing band. And it was a lot of fun, and we did some crazy things together. I'd love to do a reunion. So if I can practice hard enough, I'll get to it. It's on my list.

MS. SMITH: And the National Press Club would love to hear that some time. We're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, a couple important things I'd like to bring to our audience's attention. First, let me remind our members of future speakers. This week on November 19th, we have Steve Preston, who's the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. On December 16th, we have Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori who's the presiding bishop of the Episcopal church. And on January 13th, James Mulva, president and CEO of ConocoPhillips.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional Press Club mug. And my last question, what's on your iPod?

MS. ALSOP: What's on my iPod…? Yes. Well, let's see… Well, I have a lot of things on my iPod, but-- everything from John Adams to the Dixie Chicks, why don't we just say that?

MS. SMITH: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for coming today.

MS. ALSOP: My pleasure. Thank you for having me. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: We appreciate very much your being here. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Press Club Library for its research.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by our Broadcast Operations Center. Many of our events are aired on XM Satellite Radio and

available for free download on iTunes, as well as on our website. Non-members may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 202.662.7598 or going to archives@Press.org.

Thank you very much for coming, and we are adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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