

Everybody In, Nobody Out

Inspiring Community at Michigan's
University Musical Society

KEN FISCHER WITH ROBIN LEA PYLE

FOREWORD BY WYNTON MARSALIS

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Ann Arbor

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To my family for their enduring love and support . . .
In memory of Mom, Dad, and Jerry
With great appreciation to Norm and Martha
And immense gratitude to Penny, Matt, Renee, Alex, and Reid

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Preface

During my years as president of the University Musical Society (UMS) at the University of Michigan (U-M), I was fortunate to have many opportunities to speak to groups about my experiences presenting the artists who visited our community. The groups especially liked the “backstage” stories, those that brought out the humanity of the musicians, actors, dancers, composers, and conductors. I spoke at service clubs and lifelong learning groups throughout the state; at University of Michigan alumni clubs in nearly every region of the country, including Camp Michigania in Northern Michigan and in the Adirondacks; and at U-M alumni travel programs that I hosted with my wife, Penny, throughout the world. I’ve continued to do these presentations since I retired from UMS on June 30, 2017.

After these presentations, people commented, “Get that story in print” or “You should write a book.” I thanked them for their comments and thought to myself, “Yeah, someday.” As retirement approached, and colleagues and friends asked about my plans, I found myself saying, “Maybe I’ll write that book people have suggested.”

Around the same time, I was visiting with prospective donors to the Victors for Michigan campaign, U-M’s major fundraising initiative that had a goal of \$4 billion (and when the campaign ended on December 31, 2018, U-M had raised \$5.28 billion). Among the individuals I met with in the spring of 2016 were Tom and Debby McMullen, who had been supporting UMS concerts each year for the past two decades as corporate sponsors. Their love for the arts had deep roots: Tom was still playing his cornet, an instrument he’d studied in his youth with Roger Jacobi, an Ann Arbor Public School music educator and later Interlochen Center for the Arts president. He was looking forward to retirement.

I mentioned to Tom and Debby that, with Tom retiring, it might be a good time to take steps to assure that there would be an annual McMullen-

sponsored performance each UMS season into the future. I also brought up my own impending retirement and that I was considering writing a book about my years at UMS. Tom and Debby were delighted to learn this and told me how much they'd enjoyed hearing me tell stories about the visiting artists over the years. One of my favorite stories actually involved Tom and local restaurateur Dennis Serras, who'd both played 18 holes of golf with Mikhail Baryshnikov when the dancer and actor was in Ann Arbor for a week doing a play for UMS in October 2004.

On May 13, Tom and Debby sent me a letter proposing a gift to UMS that would accomplish two objectives: first, to assure funding for a McMullen-sponsored concert each year for the next five years through the 2020–21 season; and second, to support my book project—to provide, in Tom's words, incentive for me to start it and finish it. The gift could be applied toward the purchase of books from the publisher, for editorial and promotional support, and for anything else that would help get the book completed. What a creative gift! And certainly one that any publisher would welcome. I had always intended that, if I did write a book about UMS, all proceeds would go directly to UMS to support its programs. The McMullens' gift would help guarantee healthy sales to propel that goal. It also meant to me that the book had better be good. The pressure was on!

One of my first challenges was to determine what the book would and would not be. It was easier to think about the latter. I didn't want to write a detailed history of UMS, or even just of the 30 seasons when I was at the helm. Comprehensively documenting the organization's history might be an interesting and valuable project for someone someday, but not for me. Nor did I want the book to be a "how-to" text on performing arts management. Having now taught several U-M courses in Arts Leadership, I know my experiences at UMS hold helpful illustrations of certain leadership and management principles and practices. And I did hope the book could offer something of value to both experienced executives and emerging professionals that they might apply to their work. At the same time, I was reluctant to force every story in the book to teach a lesson about leadership or management. Some stories are just good stories.

So what would the book be?

I wanted to write something for the UMS family, including our audiences, staff, volunteers, partners, and regional community. It needed to help them recall special performances and other events, to provide a sense of the inner workings of their organization, and to heighten their appre-

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ciation for the amazing team of dedicated professionals required to bring them the outstanding programs UMS presents year in and year out. I also wanted the book to offer something to the University of Michigan family of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends who might become more familiar not only with the oldest university arts presenter in the U.S. but also with a unit of their university that contributes significantly to our shared mission of teaching, research, and public engagement.

I decided the best way to achieve these aims was a chronological walk-through of my time with UMS, highlighting some of the memorable events, decisions, initiatives, and people experienced along the way. I would have to pick and choose the stories and necessarily leave some good ones on the cutting-room floor. The early part of the book would cover the 42 years of my life up to the point when I started the job at UMS on June 1, 1987, with a focus on the experiences that contributed to my eventual work in the arts. Throughout, I wanted to show how the path I took was guided by a philosophy that ultimately became this book's title. EINO—"Everybody In, Nobody Out"—was the inclusion policy of Washington, DC, impresario Patrick Hayes, founder of the Patrick Hayes Concert Bureau in 1947 and the nonprofit Washington Performing Arts Society in 1966. He was committed to desegregating the theaters of Washington and to assuring that the arts would be welcoming to all. During my years living in the DC area, Patrick became my good friend and mentor. Inspired by what "Everybody In, Nobody Out" accomplished in Washington, I brought EINO to UMS with Patrick's blessing, and it became our guiding light for my 30 years at UMS.

Even after determining the book's focus, I can't say writing was always easy. There were retirees who'd advised me, "Fisch, people will want you to do stuff, to take on leadership roles, join boards, after you retire. Say no to everything for a year." I didn't heed their advice and said yes to two invitations from people I couldn't say no to: Community leader Ismael Ahmed invited me to chair the new advisory board of Detroit's Concert of Colors diversity music festival, which he had founded 26 years before; and the King's Singers invited me to become president of their new King's Singers Global Foundation, an initiative the renowned British men's vocal ensemble created during their 50th anniversary year to support their commissioning, special projects, and charitable activities. I also taught my first collegiate-level course during the fall of 2017 for the School of Music, Theatre & Dance. Although only a one-credit, mini-course, it might as well

have been a four-credit mega-course given the amount of time I spent developing and executing it. Those opportunities took time away from the book but brought great satisfaction.

When I did find time to write, I had assistance from two talented individuals. First, Robin Lea Pyle, who not only helped me organize, draft, and edit the manuscript in its early stages, but also provided constant encouragement along the way. Later Robin would read the final draft of the manuscript and offer valuable editorial suggestions. Second, Eric Engles, a developmental editor who helped me improve the structure and focus of the book. Eric was direct, confident, and persuasive, but always kind and understanding, taking the time to explain the recommendations he offered. He asked me many questions that demonstrated his deep investment in helping me make this a worthy book.

I'm told fact-checking is rarely an author's favorite part of writing a book. I loved it. The process of confirming numerous dates and details put me back in touch with artists, managers, teachers, administrators, camp counselors, close colleagues and friends, as well as UMS staff, board, and volunteer colleagues—all whom I had built relationships with over many decades. Renewing these relationships was a joyful experience for me, and I hope this comes through as you read the book.

A central role, both in completing this book and helping me through the events described within it, was played by my wife, Penny. She's been there the whole time providing encouragement. In fact, with my having met her at age 16 in the orchestra at Interlochen Arts Camp, Penny has known me 80% of my life. I couldn't have done this without Penny's constant love and support—and for her being the best possible first-line fact-checker with her great memory for detail. Thank you, Penny.

Foreword

by Wynton Marsalis

There have been many stories about the stresses and strains of touring. Long travel, bad food, missing family, the list goes on and on. Those things are unquestionably true, but there is another truth. Every performance, wherever you may be, is also a homecoming. And while the artist or star is the subject of commentary, criticism, and celebration, there are a handful of very basic, yet critical touch points to every concert that hold the keys to activating millions of connections.

These relationships are all conceived, facilitated, and executed by your presenter and their team. Acting as host, master of ceremonies, and conduit to the community, that team has labored over thousands of details—significant and trivial—to make a single concert a reality, and they do this again and again. It's God's work requiring the care of a first-time mother and the patience of a doting great-grandfather.

I have performed around the world for 40 continuous years and there is no finer team than the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan and no more dedicated a servant of the Arts and Culture than Ken Fischer. For me, he is the model, manifestation, and very definition of a great presenter.

Guided by a love of community, Ken's countless presentations have demonstrated not only respect for what his audiences wanted but a deeper commitment to what they needed. He possessed a belief in his own good taste and a very strong constitution to withstand democratic dialogue. Ken was and remains the definition of an arts rebel, fighting a guerrilla war from inside the establishment. He is, by necessity and by trade, a psychologist, chauffeur, salesman, gofer, psychiatrist, diplomat, educator, boss, cheerleader, businessman, lawyer, confidant, mentor, friend, disciplinar-

ian, follower, financier, politician, raconteur, pollster, nurse, servant, and social worker. With a steady hand, he expertly navigates all of these roles and deftly fields the countless number of things that can and do go wrong. On top of it all, he has nerves of steel because . . . the show must go on.

I am so proud to be his most presented artist: 19 times in 30 years. I only wish there were more. I first got to know Ken in 1996, when UMS presented the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra Octet for the first time at the Michigan Theater. A year later, we came back with my oratorio, *Blood on the Fields*, in Hill Auditorium, and a year after that with a program that combined Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat* with the world premiere of my own composition, *A Fiddler's Tale*, in Rackham Auditorium. A couple of years later, we performed a Swing Dance party at the Eastern Michigan University Convocation Center.

In a period of five years, Ken presented our group five times in four different venues and in very different contexts. Though we have played in many venues, I will focus on Hill Auditorium, where most of our concerts took place.

It's a large house and not always easy to fill. But time and time again, Ken kept it packed with the most diverse listening community that exists anywhere in these United States. With UMS, you would see a college arts series with actual students in attendance. In almost all colleges, Arts were for alumni and teachers, and entertainment and spectacle were for students. Here . . . students overflowed because Ken was out there recruiting them to the cause.

UMS audiences have experienced a startling array of musical styles, artists, and world-class ensembles, new commissions, and innovative presentations. They feel at home and free to be themselves, expressive and unbridled in their response to sublime moments. When you sound great, they are with you; when you struggle, they carry you. If you are lucky enough to play for them, "you feel them." And Ken was out there cheering with the best of 'em.

Let me take you through a composite day at Hill with Ken, one that has become 'second nature' across these decades.

It all begins with a 'journey'—be it by plane, car, boat, or all of the above. The organization and particulars of this trip is the first indication of the class, clarity, and concern of your presenting hosts. When you arrive, Ken is there to welcome you.

Your travel takes you to a 'home,' Hill Auditorium. Upon arrival, you

get an immediate and visceral feeling. There is a presence and an energy permeating the rooms and corridors. A living history speaks from the photos and posters on the walls, to the creaks and cracks of the stage floor and out past the proscenium into the resonant body of the room. Ken is there watching you figure things out.

Your formal introduction is called a 'soundcheck.' Here you meet the stage crew and assess their disposition, as well as the ambience and guts of the room. The crew can, many times, be at odds with the management. Here, all is aglow and you're happy. After the soundcheck, in the silence and loneliness of an empty hall, you can hear the whispering ghosts of past performances. If you are quiet enough, you can channel the nervous anticipation of past performers and hear the cheers of triumphant nights forever gone, the murmurs of tepid receptions and the deafening silence of abject failures.

After the soundcheck you are served a '*meal*' that teaches you about more than just the popular chicken dish of the region. How and where it is laid out and by whose hands, let alone the quality, reveals and reiterates the care and concern of your presenting hosts. Ken is in there with you eating and joking and clowning, and you are "at home" on the road.

Then the 'concert' itself. After Ken delivers some gracious, inspiring, and welcoming words, the audience is warmed up; you are up over wires onto a battleground to play away the blues of everyday life for a group of strangers, who are soon to become 'one' in pursuit of an elusive, but palpable mutual happiness. It is the ritual recreation of an event as ancient as storytelling. That concert remembers *and* foretells for artist and audience alike, what has meaning *to* us and what it means *to be* us. How that audience looks and feels, how it listens and responds, and how it discerns and assesses, is the heart of the matter. And, *that* tells you all you really need to know about the substance of your presenter's aspirations.

The '*post-concert reception*' immediately follows. It's for sponsors and supporters, and here you meet the intricate network of sophisticated citizens who bring noncommercial art to this community. This gathering tops off the evening and must be handled gracefully and graciously and timed just right. The aspirations and dreams in this room will most likely become future cultural achievements for us all. Ken and Penny are there. And, he is the master of hosting, cajoling, reminding, leading, and following, very much on duty, piloting the room to ensure everyone had a good time, everything was right, and that future calls to duty would be eagerly affirmed.

After some photos, anecdotal exchanges, and critical 'fare-thee-wells,' we are off to a '*meet-and-greet*' with dedicated fans, students, and friends who have patiently yet still eagerly waited on what can feel like the end of a very long receiving line. Before you are a class of kids, old friends, and cousins (you didn't know you had). You see fans of all ages and persuasions and, as the night goes on, you notice that Ken is still amongst them, still hanging in. You sign and talk to people and listen to kids play and happily receive some homemade oatmeal cookies and maybe a pound cake. This has been a long day. Whew . . .

And you realize at this point in the night, that over the years, Ken is there. And he is a man whose presence *is* friendship. And his achievement can't be assessed in grand terms over the broad canvas of years. Because for him, every night, every performance was the most important thing that has ever happened. That is why he was always there.

Ken understood that for the concertgoer: it is your first night out with your 8-year-old daughter or son to see some piece they may fall asleep on, but refer to as a touchstone forever; it is your 89-year-old grandmother's favorite artist and you've gotten the same seats she sat in with your grandfather for 65 years on her first night out after he has passed away; it is your 19-year-old's hope to initiate a group of underprivileged and deprived middle-school kids in the wonders of a long form composition; it is the only chance you will ever have to see something you have waited your entire life to see, and it is right before you, be it from Russia or Pakistan or Louisville, Los Angeles or London. And when you leave that concert . . . your life is never the same, because something that was only a distant dream has come to you, in Ann Arbor.

It is the expansion of consciousness and it is the great coming together around something of substance and meaning. Ultimately, it is the essence of what we can give to one another, an enriching human experience that becomes an indelible landmark on the panorama of our lives.

And for Ken, each night has been the culmination of years and years of asking: asking managers if their artists are available, negotiating fees, asking for breaks on travel and hotels and asking for catering, asking for time and space in the hall, asking teachers and students to attend something they may not be familiar with, asking donors and alumni and sponsors to support performances at different levels, asking stage crews to wait a little longer to close the hall, asking drivers for a little more time, asking artists to talk to supporters and fans and students, and asking Penny and

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Matt and family to be with him and to wait and wait and wait. And, asking them to be with you, to come with you and be hospitable, to be kind and be giving of time and energy, night after night, deep into the night. Asking and more asking.

And at the very end of a long day and night, many times across 30 years, he's looking at me trying to see if I want to go, and I'm saying "no man I'll talk to everyone," and he's saying "we have to close the hall," and I'm waving him off, and he's trying to make sure everything is cool, saying to everyone, "It's been a long day folks," and I'm talking to the last of the students and listening to them play, and it's now well past the hour he should be home and the hall should be closed . . . but here we are. Me and him. And it's past midnight when we get into the car and he says, "How are you doing? You want to go get something to eat and talk about things?" And I laugh and look at him and we both start laughing.

It's now 3 a.m. and the band is back on the road and I'm saying to myself, "Ain't but one thing makes somebody do all of the things he did night in and night out." Belief. And it's all up in this book.