

# Racial / Ethnic and Gender Diversity in the Orchestra Field

A report by the League of American Orchestras with research  
and data analysis by James Doeser, Ph.D.

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League  
of American  
Orchestras

# Introduction

This is a time of transformation, not only for communities across America but also for the cultural institutions that reflect and help to shape their identities. The work of orchestras is shifting and intensifying, as orchestras recognize and respond to sweeping cultural, social, political, economic, technological, and demographic change within the communities they serve.

For all cultural institutions, knowledge and information are becoming critical tools in the work of navigating a course through this new landscape. In particular, there is a recognized value in learning from the past in order to inform action for the future. By offering a new baseline, *Racial / Ethnic and Gender Diversity in the Orchestra Field* provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the demographic composition of orchestras: musicians, conductors, board members, and staff. Of course, each orchestra has its own unique story to tell. Nonetheless, the field-wide data in this report provides an essential foundation for analysis, understanding, debate, and action.

Our report looks back over nearly four decades of orchestra demographics data to present an analysis intended to promote learning and action among orchestra stakeholders, inform public dialogue, and serve as a stimulus for further research.

In this report, we present an analysis of the following data sets:

**Musicians:**

Race and Ethnicity (1980-2014);  
Gender (1978-2014)

**Conductors:**

Race and Ethnicity (2006-2016);  
Gender (2006-2016)

**Staff:**

Race and Ethnicity (2010-2014);  
Gender (2010-2014)

**Board Members:**

Race and Ethnicity (2010-2014);  
Gender (2010-2014)

Our analysis is shaped by available data, and the terms that we use to categorize people by race, ethnicity, and gender reflect those employed within our data sources. Please refer to the Technical Note on page 8 for details.

## Key Findings

- The years 1980 to 2014 saw a four-fold increase in the proportion of diverse musicians on stage, driven largely by an increase in musicians from Asian / Pacific Islander backgrounds.
- Nonetheless, the proportion of non-white musicians represented in the orchestra workforce – and of African American and Hispanic / Latino musicians in particular – remains extremely low.
- The wider orchestra field – conductors, executives, staff, and board members – also remains predominantly white. In some cases, such as among conductors, there are indications of positive change; in others, there is an absence of change.
- There are noticeable differences between larger orchestras and smaller orchestras. Specifically:
  - The percentage of musicians from African American and Hispanic / Latino backgrounds employed by smaller orchestras is double the percentage of those employed by larger orchestras.
  - Conversely, conductors from African American and Hispanic / Latino backgrounds are more likely to be employed by larger orchestras than by smaller orchestras.
- Women conductors are still rare, especially in the high-status position of music director.
- Elsewhere, the orchestra field appears to be becoming proportionally representative of the general population in terms of gender, both on and off the stage.

# Detailed Findings

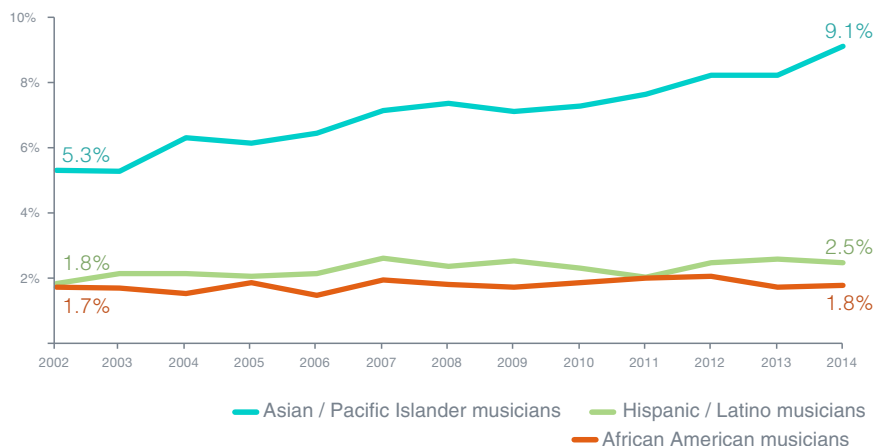
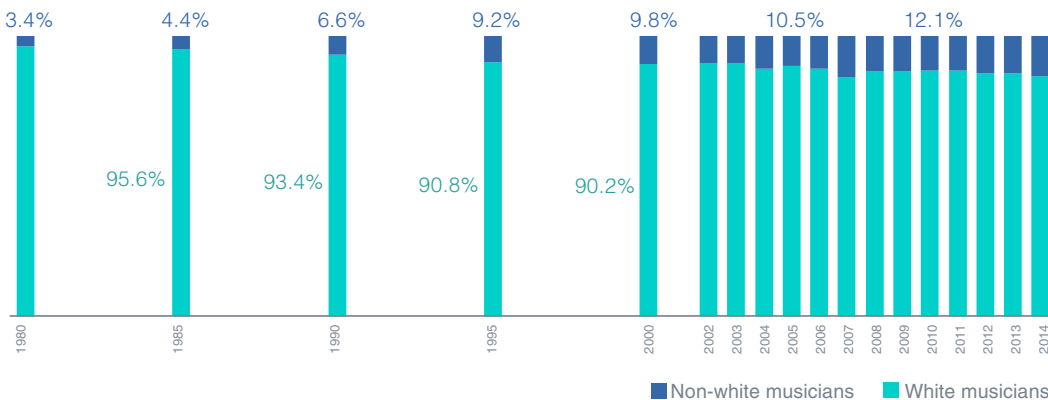
## Racial / Ethnic Diversity: Musicians

Over a span of 34 years, the proportion of musicians from African American, Hispanic / Latino, Asian / Pacific Islander, American Indian / Alaskan Native, and other non-white backgrounds increased four-fold, from 3.4% of all musicians in 1980 to 14.2% in 2014. Nonetheless, by 2014 these musicians still constitute less than 15% of the orchestra musician population.

This chart is based on data submitted by over 500 distinct orchestras that participated in the League of American Orchestras' Orchestra Statistical Report (OSR) survey at least once between 1980 and 2014.

When the data is more closely examined, it is clear that **the modest shifts towards diversity that we observe have been largely driven by Asian / Pacific Islander musicians.** Since the League first reported detailed racial / ethnic categories in 2002, the proportion of Asian / Pacific Islander orchestra musicians has increased by 70%, from 5.3% in 2002 to just over 9% in 2014.

Comparatively, **the growth in representation of other racial / ethnic groups has been much more modest.** Specifically, the proportion of Hispanic / Latino musicians started at 1.8% in 2002 and grew to just 2.5% in 2014. Meanwhile, the proportion of African American musicians hovered at around 1.8% throughout the 12-year period.



## Differences between small and large orchestras

We examined whether the percentages of African American and Hispanic / Latino musicians changed when we compared orchestras with larger annual operating budgets (League of American Orchestras' Budget Groups 1 to 3) and smaller ones (Groups 4 to 8).

We found that smaller orchestras are somewhat more diverse than larger ones. Interestingly, this trend is more apparent when we focus on African American and Hispanic / Latino musicians. Based on the FY2014 OSR survey, the percentage of African American and Hispanic / Latino musicians employed by smaller orchestras is double the percentage of those employed by larger orchestras. Specifically, African American musicians make up 1.2% of musicians at Groups 1 to 3 orchestras and 2.5% of musicians at Groups 4 to 8. A similar pattern is observed with Hispanic / Latino musicians, who make up 1.6% of musicians at Groups 1 to 3 and 3.7% at Groups 4 to 8. In all cases, however, the actual percentages of African American and Hispanic / Latino musicians remain extremely low.

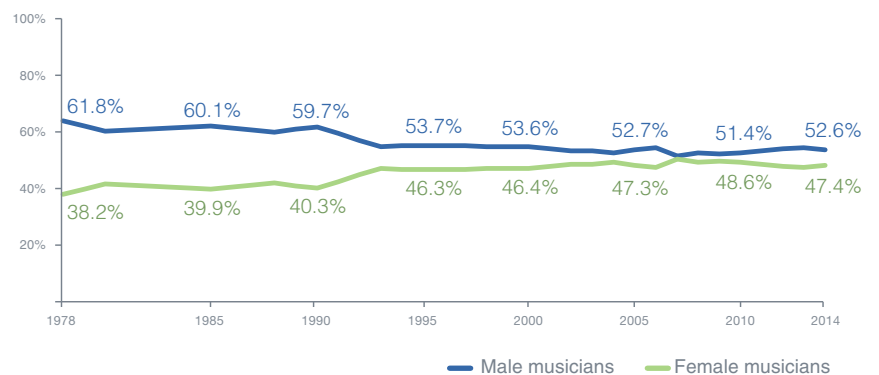
Musicians	Groups 1 to 3	Groups 4 to 8
% African American	1.2%	2.5%
% Hispanic/ Latino	1.6%	3.7%
% Asian / Pacific Islander	9.3%	8.8%
% American Indian / Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.1%
% Other Non-white	0.8%	0.8%
% Total Non-white	13.1%	15.9%

Source: FY2014 OSR

## Gender Diversity: Musicians

The gender mix of musicians has noticeably changed since 1978, the earliest year of digitized data that the League currently holds. The most significant finding here is that **the gender gap narrowed in the early 1990s, with women musicians making up between 46% and 49% of the total musician pool in the two decades since.**

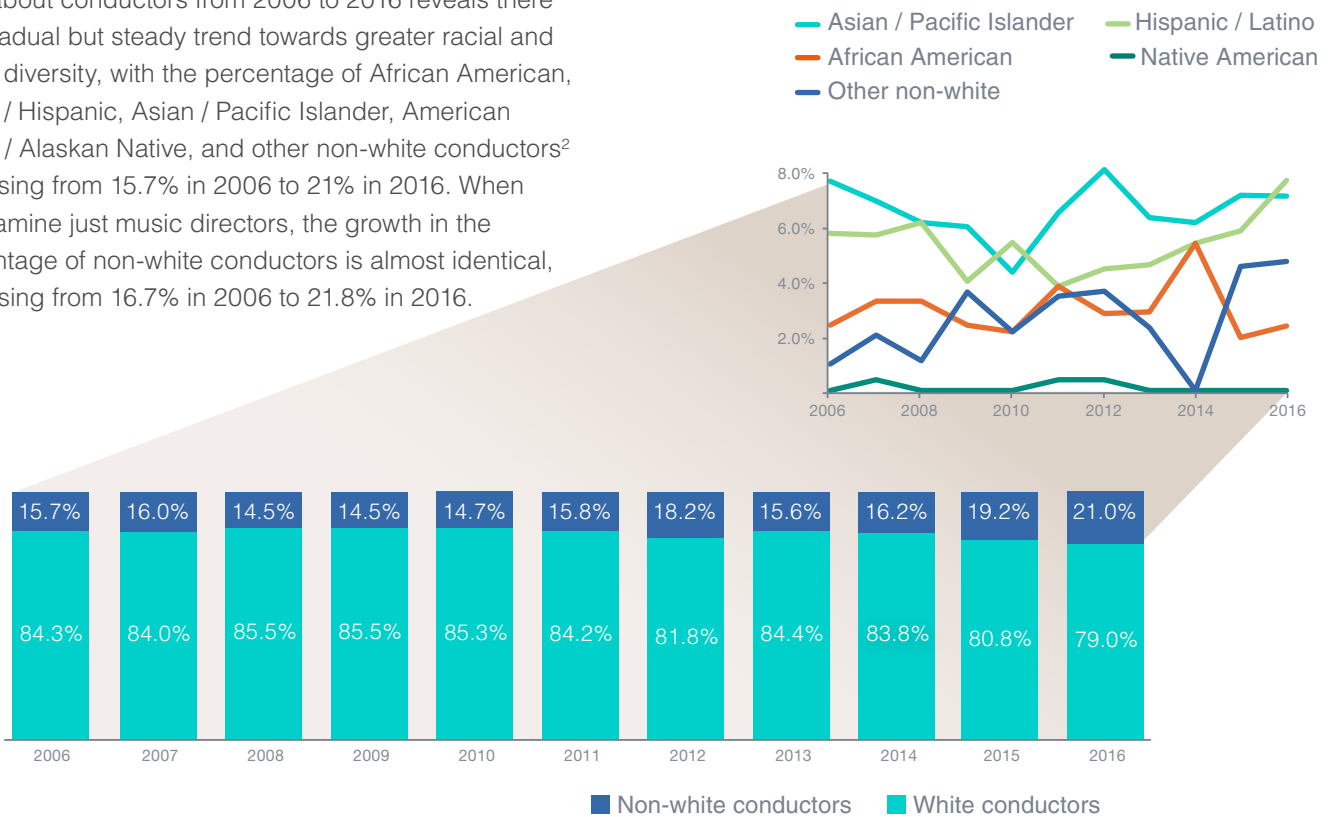
The widespread adoption of blind auditions in US orchestras, during the 1970s and 80s, has been widely credited for its impact on musician gender diversity.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, "Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians," *The American Economic Review* 90, no. 4 (September 1, 2000): 716.

## Racial / Ethnic Diversity: Conductors and Music Directors

Data about conductors from 2006 to 2016 reveals there is a gradual but steady trend towards greater racial and ethnic diversity, with the percentage of African American, Latino / Hispanic, Asian / Pacific Islander, American Indian / Alaskan Native, and other non-white conductors<sup>2</sup> increasing from 15.7% in 2006 to 21% in 2016. When we examine just music directors, the growth in the percentage of non-white conductors is almost identical, increasing from 16.7% in 2006 to 21.8% in 2016.



## Differences between small and large orchestras

The fluctuations we see in the percentages of African American, Asian / Pacific Islander, Hispanic / Latino, and other non-white conductors and music directors could partly be explained by the small scale of the conductor data set, combined with irregular survey participation from some orchestras.

We also examined the 2016 data for any differences between the percentages of African American, Latino / Hispanic, Asian / Pacific Islander, American Indian / Alaskan Native, and other non-white conductors and music directors working at orchestras with larger annual budgets (Groups 1 to 3) and at smaller ones (Groups 4 to 8).

Conductors	Budget Groups 1 to 3	Budget Groups 4 to 8
% African American	5.0%	3.6%
% Asian / Pacific Islander	9.2%	6.0%
% Hispanic / Latino	8.3%	5.4%
% American Indian / Alaskan Native	0.0%	0.0%
% Other Non-white	1.7%	5.4%
<b>% Total Non-white</b>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>20.4%</b>

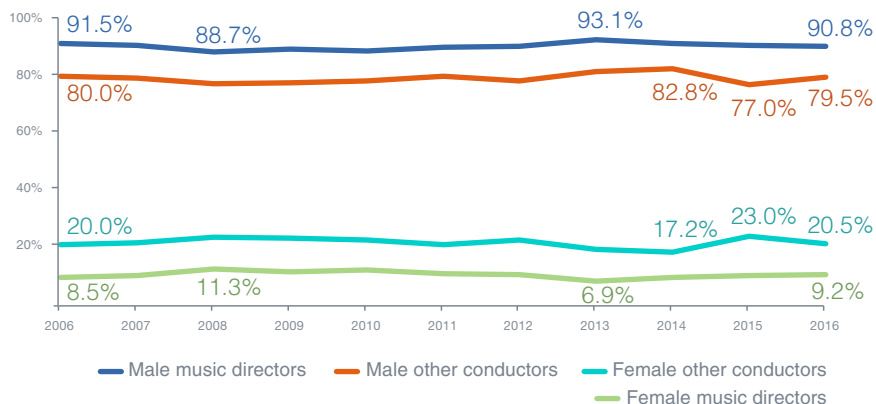
Source: FY2016 Salary Survey

<sup>2</sup> The conducting positions represented here include music director, associate, assistant, resident, youth orchestra, pops, and chorus conductors.

Based on the League's FY2016 Salary Survey, non-white conductors are currently more likely to be working for larger budget orchestras than for smaller budget orchestras. This finding is contrary to that produced by our identical analysis of musician data (see page 4).

### Gender Diversity: Conductors and Music Directors

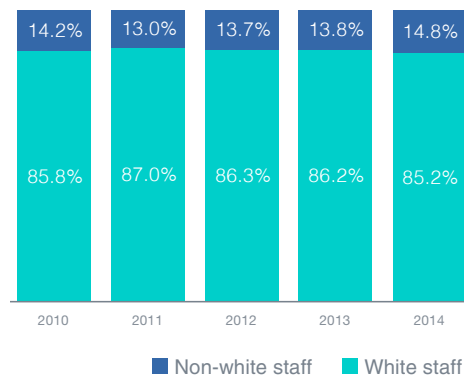
The gender mix of conductors appears to have **remained unchanged from 2006 to 2016**. Based on responses to the League's annual Salary Survey, the ratio of male to female music directors and all other conductors<sup>3</sup> has remained constant at around 10:1 and 4:1 respectively. It is notable that **women conductors are twice as likely to be found in other conductor positions (20.5%) than in music director roles (9.2%)**.



### Racial / Ethnic Diversity: Orchestra Staff

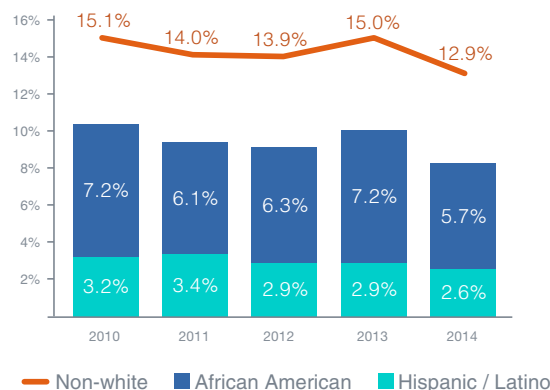
The League of American Orchestras began collecting race / ethnicity data on orchestra administrative staff in 2010. **Since then, the percentage of non-white staff has hovered at around 14%**, including 5-7% African American and 3-5% Hispanic / Latino employees.

As staff demographics may be significantly influenced by the overall population demographics of a city or town, we identified a constant sample of 41 orchestras that had participated in the League's OSR survey annually from 2010 to 2014.



An analysis of this constant sample suggests a **slight decline in the representation of African American and Latino / Hispanic staff** during this time.

It also demonstrates that the racial / ethnic profile of top executives (e.g., executive director, CEO, president) is overwhelmingly white. Since 2006, the percentage of top executives from African American, Latino / Hispanic, Asian / Pacific Islander, American Indian / Alaskan Native and other non-white backgrounds has fluctuated between just 1.6% and 5.2%.

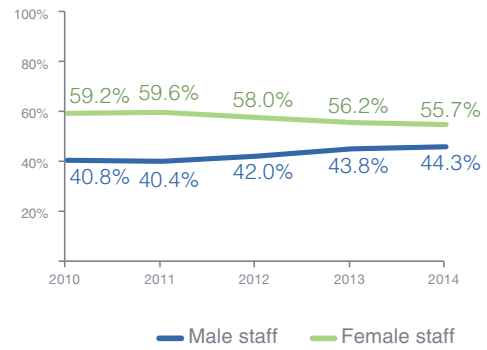


<sup>3</sup> The non-music director conductor positions listed in the survey are associate, assistant, resident, youth orchestra, pops, and chorus conductors.

### Gender Diversity: Orchestra Staff

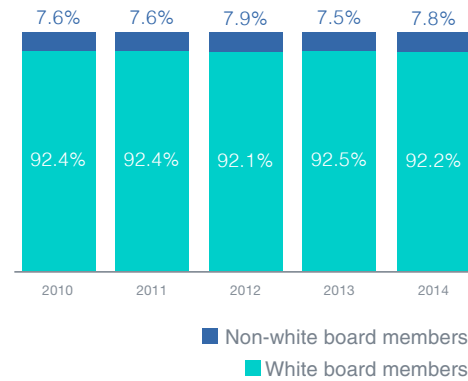
The proportion of women on staff in orchestras has decreased slightly since the League began collecting staff diversity data in 2010: the following chart shows a slow but steady narrowing of the gap between men and women.

However, since 2010 there have been consistently – albeit only slightly – more female top executives (e.g., executive directors, CEO, president) than male, with the percentage of female top executives ranging from 50.4% to 55.1%.



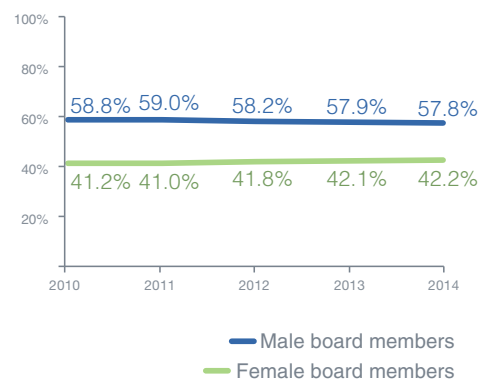
### Racial / Ethnic Diversity: Board Members

The League began collecting race / ethnicity data on orchestra board members in 2010. Since then, the percentage of African American, Latino / Hispanic, Asian / Pacific Islander, American Indian / Alaskan Native and other non-white board members has hovered at just under 8%, including 3-4% African American and 1-2% Hispanic / Latino representation. For comparison, a national survey by BoardSource<sup>4</sup> found that the representation of non-white people on nonprofit boards across the United States had increased from 16% in 2010 to 20% in 2014.



### Gender Diversity: Board Members

Orchestra boards are moving slowly but steadily toward gender parity. Currently, around 58% of orchestra board members are men, and around 42% are women.



<sup>4</sup> <http://leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/LWI-BLF-Report-Print-Layout1.pdf>



## Technical Note

This report draws upon data from approximately 800 League member orchestras, each of which participated in at least one of the two major League surveys, during the period 1978 to 2014.

The League began collecting operational and financial data from member orchestras in 1946. Here, we focus on the shorter time frame (1978 onward) for which digitized data is available. Of note, our reporting is limited by the relatively recent introduction (in 2002) of detailed race / ethnicity demographic data collection, and by various changes made to the way that this data was categorized.

The two specific data sources consulted for this report are the League's Administrative Staff Salary Survey – which holds all conductor data – and its Orchestra Statistical Report (OSR), which holds all data relating to musicians, staff, and board members.

Both surveys are voluntary and are open to all American orchestra members of the League, with larger orchestras being more likely to participate than smaller orchestras. Data is collated and submitted to these surveys annually by orchestra administrators and was verified, ordered, aggregated, and analyzed for the specific purposes of this report.

Throughout the report, the demographic categories we refer to reflect those employed by our two survey tools despite their inherent limitations. With respect to gender, we therefore refer only to male and female respondents, and not to respondents with non-binary gender identities. With respect to race / ethnicity, we refer to the following, undefined categories:

- African American
- American Indian / Alaskan Native
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Caucasian / White
- Hispanic / Latino
- Other / Non-white

The League is currently reviewing the processes, categories, and definitions it employs in collecting demographic data, in order to maximize clarity and comparability in future decades.

## Acknowledgements

The League of American Orchestras would like to thank the many orchestras who contribute on an annual basis to its Orchestra Statistical Report and Administrative Staff Salary Survey. Their participation is essential to the creation of analytic reports such as this.

We would also like to extend a heartfelt thanks to independent scholar James Doeser, Ph.D., whose commitment and rigor shaped this report and its findings.

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## About the League

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America's orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals across North America runs the gamut from world-renowned symphonies to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. The only national organization dedicated solely to the orchestral experience, the League is a nexus of knowledge and innovation, advocacy, and leadership advancement. Its conferences and events, award-winning *Symphony* magazine, website, and other publications inform people around the world about orchestral activity and developments. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League links a national network of thousands of instrumentalists, conductors, managers and administrators, board members, volunteers, and business partners. **Visit [americanorchestras.org](http://americanorchestras.org).**

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