

Reframing the Academic Retreat:

A Colloquy on Conducting and Leadership

In May 2025, Dr. Mark Powell, Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Rochester's Arthur Satz Department of Music, convened a unique colloquy that brought together four distinguished conductors: Maurice Cohn, Tanya Chanphanitpornkit, Brad Lubman, and Peter J. Folliard. Funded with a modest budget of \$7,800 covering travel, accommodations, meals, and stipends, this gathering was less about formal presentations and more about intentional, unstructured dialogue.

Structure and Experience

Over four days, we engaged in daily sessions from 12:00 to 5:00 PM, contemplating four thoughtfully curated questions each day. Evenings were reserved for shared meals and discussions that fostered deeper connections. A visit to a nationally renowned museum and ample personal time allowed for reflection and individual work. The environment was deliberately low-pressure, granting participants the freedom to come and go as needed.

Personal Takeaways

- **Cultivating Patience:** The unhurried pace of the colloquy emphasized the importance of patience in leadership. Allowing ideas to mature without immediate pressure led to deeper insights and more thoughtful discussions centering on process, healthier and more connected outcomes, and the awareness necessary to cultivate this strategy.
- **Clarifying Expectations:** Our dialogues underscored the necessity of clearly articulating expectations - not only for those we lead but for ourselves as well. First and foremost, this mutual clarity fosters trust. A further benefit is the alignment within teams that allows for the continued refinement of ideas and goals.
- **Reflecting on Influences:** Engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds prompted introspection about the mentors and experiences that have shaped our own leadership styles. Recognizing these influences, and the advantages and shortcomings they contain, is crucial for continued growth as an artist.
- **Enhancing Problem Solving Skills:** Collaborative discussions revealed various approaches to tackling challenges and highlighted the immense value of diverse perspectives in effective problem-solving at both the macro and micro levels.
- **Embracing Vulnerability:** Sharing personal experiences and uncertainties in a supportive environment reinforced the strength found in vulnerability. This openness is essential not only for genuine connections but for organic and trustworthy leadership development.

- **Pursuing Excellence:** The colloquy reignited a commitment to the elements of excellence that are often talked about, but not acted upon. This helps to define excellence not as a destination, but as a continuous process of improvement and the learning that results from that approach.

Sample Guiding Questions

Final Day:

What, today, do you not do well that you would like to?

What would you have found most helpful earlier in your career (teaching, exposure, environment)?

What are your current teaching strengths and why do think you possess them?

Conclusion

This colloquy transcended traditional academic retreats. It served as a mental and emotional reset - a "comb through the brain" as one participant described it - offering clarity and emphasizing renewed purpose. Despite initial unfamiliarity among the participants, the shared experience cultivated a sense of both community and mutual respect.

Via an unconventional approach, this colloquy exemplified the profound value of creating space for open ended exploration among professionals. It highlighted the importance of stepping away from routine to engage in meaningful discourse, ultimately serving to enrich our perspectives and practices in the field of music leadership.

Colloquy Members



Mark E. M. L. Powell, DMA

- Current Roles: Senior Lecturer in Music and Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Rochester's Arthur Satz Department of Music; Lead Conductor of the New Conductors Orchestra in Manhattan.

- Background: Dr. Powell conducts the University of Rochester's Symphony, Chamber, and Studio Orchestras as well as the directs the *Happy New Ears* contemporary music series. In addition, he teaches courses in conducting and ensemble literature. He is a Ford Foundation American Conductors Prize winner and has held faculty positions at the Eastman School of Music and the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, CUNY.



Maurice Cohn, MM

• Current Roles: 11th Music Director of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra; Artistic Partner and Conductor of Camerata Notturna.

• Background: Maurice Cohn is a two-time recipient of the Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award. He previously served as Assistant Conductor for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra for three seasons and the Aspen Music Festival. His recent engagements include debuts with the Filharmonie Bohuslava Martinů and the Omaha Symphony.



Tanatchaya (Tanya) Chanphanitpornkit, MM

• Current Roles: Assistant Director of Orchestras at La Guardia High School for the Arts, New York; Lecturer in Music Education at Brooklyn College; Music Director of the Crescendo Orchestra of the New York Youth Symphony

• Background: A double bassist and conductor from Trat, Thailand, Tanya is an alumna of the Eastman School of Music and holds advanced degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University, focusing on social justice in orchestral pedagogy. She is also a founding member of *Girls Who Conduct*.



Brad Lubman, MM

• Current Roles: Professor of Conducting & Ensembles and Director of Musica Nova at the Eastman School of Music; Founding Co-Artistic Director and Conductor of Ensemble Signal.

• Background: Brad Lubman is renowned for his work in contemporary music, having conducted major orchestras including the Bavarian Radio Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras. He received the 2019 Ditson Award for his contributions to American music and chairs the conducting department at Eastman.



Peter J. Folliard, DMA

• Current Roles: Founding Dean of the Augustana University School of Music; Vice President of Innovation; Clinician; Producer.

• Background: Dr. Peter J. Folliard is on the forefront of music production in higher education, and is working to promote a technology-rich program supported by partnerships with Avid Technology and the Yamaha Corporation. He's held conducting positions with the The United States Air Force Band and Symphony Orchestra, and taught at the Juilliard School and the Eastman School of Music.