

Preparing Musicians for Complex and Uncertain Future: A View into the New World Symphony's BLUE Program

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Abstract:

This qualitative case study examined the entrepreneurship training program BLUE (**B**uild, **L**earn, **U**nderstand, **E**xperiment) at the New World Symphony (NWS), an orchestral academy located in Miami Beach, Florida. The purpose of this study was to understand how the program impacted Fellows and contributed to their professional development by initially focusing on the following two research questions: 1. What individual and organizational characteristics best support sustainable culturally- and community-relevant entrepreneurial activity and innovation within the NWS BLUE Program? 2. What role might the NWS BLUE Program play in promoting artistic and civic innovation among their Fellows and their community partners in Miami? Data collection involved interviews, focus groups, and observations with Fellows, staff, and other mentors during the 2021-2022 season. Key findings revealed BLUE provided a unique creative space for NWS Fellows to develop and realize self-directed projects. The open, personalized structure enabled diverse outcomes from reinforcing traditional symphonic careers to catalyzing new entrepreneurial identities. Mentorship and modeling from staff and industry experts, and individualized support from program leaders were vital to instilling skills and mindsets for developing successful projects. Institutionally, BLUE projects have permeated the NWS' organizational culture and community programming resulting in new standing concert series and initiatives originally pilots as BLUE projects. While the experiences of the BLUE curriculum are not broadly unified or standardized from the perspective of each Fellow, the disposition of leadership in enabling risk-taking and possibility is central to the program's efficacy. This suggests that the NWS BLUE Program succeeds through facilitated customized experiential learning and personalized, growth-focused relationships with mentors, peers, faculty and staff over multiple years of the program and NWS Fellowship, rather than formal workshops and training sessions. Further research should examine long-term impacts of the BLUE experience on alumni, as well as comprehensively measuring the skills, mindsets and prior dispositions Fellows have developed prior to their experience with the New World Symphony to better track and evaluate the direct impact of the NWS Fellowship program, and to better differentiate and support Fellows diverse incoming mindsets, skills, and professional visions of success in their careers.

Introduction:

With declining public funding and changing audience expectations, arts organizations increasingly seek to equip musicians with entrepreneurial skills (Beckman, 2007). Arts entrepreneurship education aims to foster adaptable mindsets and capabilities, beyond artistic technique, that enable artists to build portfolio careers—a professional approach that strategically balances artistic practice against multiple, diverse, revenue-generating roles (Bridgstock, 2013). Yet how such training is designed and delivered remains underexplored through formal research, especially for young, highly skilled classical musicians on the cusp of professional lives such as those accepted into the Fellowship program at the New World Symphony.

Our research partner for this research study is the New World Symphony (NWS), a professional training academy preparing musicians for a profession that is increasingly uncertain. Since its founding in 1987, NWS has served as a laboratory and incubator space for classical music, with a reputation for innovation and experimentation in education, programming, community and audience engagement, and technology. The Fellows, collectively, are a group of up to 80 musicians who make up a standard symphony orchestra including conductor, a librarian, and audio engineer. Fellows receive a yearly stipend (US\$19,000 at time of this study), housing near the state-of-the-art NWS facility in Miami Beach, and release time from performances for audition taking. The NWS has a reputation for forward-thinking, technologically advanced practice through integration of state-of-the-art video and multimedia capabilities, and their first-of-its-kind WallCast system, enabling audiences to attend and participate in free to attend live concert broadcasts on the NWS lawn. As an orchestral training program, their program focuses on in-depth training in orchestral performance and audition taking (60%), community and audience engagement experiences (20%), and leadership and entrepreneurship training (20%) to support their ongoing artistic and professional development. NWS functions somewhere between a professional orchestra and a conservatory; bridging the gap between Fellows' educational and professional lives. Each season runs from early September through early May.

NWS fellowships are prestigious and highly competitive. Fellows seek out the program at a critical juncture in their lives, entering NWS at the end of a long pipeline of professionalization and socialization commonly starting around age 4, and continuing through undergraduate and graduate training in highly specialized programs of performance-based study. The tension between Fellows' steep investment in their professional training and an increasingly uncertain future for orchestral musicians doesn't appear in NWS's outward-facing materials, but it is implicitly understood by NWS leadership. The normative expectation is that this is a launching pad for winning a symphony orchestra position.

Fellows, meanwhile, grapple with the pressure, tensions, and uncertainty of their future careers in different ways: some immerse themselves in artistic practice, seeking to maximize their return on investment in their musical proficiency; others find space to expand their sense of what a

professional musician can be and do, including the pursuit of intrapreneurial activities that expand traditional definitions of orchestral performance, as well as taking on additional roles beyond primary employment as a performing musician to include related activities in administration, as educators or as entrepreneurs. NWS' entrepreneurship and leadership training program emerges, then, as a curricular experiential learning space where Fellows explore, test, and contest the tension; and where they exist, as musicians, in the professional world outside of traditional performance roles backstage, on stage, and outside the concert hall in the community, while still being in the relatively safe space between academic study and professional performance. The leadership staff of the BLUE Program is especially well attuned to the unique challenges and opportunities of this space, actively seeking to understand and meet Fellows where they are at in their personal and professional life journeys, without prescribing a particular vision of success, let alone the relatively narrow traditional conception of success as winning an orchestral position.

About this Study

This study inquired into the experiences of NWS Fellows, mentors, and staff as they navigated the NWS BLUE Program during the 2021-2022 season, which according to its official promotional materials combines leadership training and experiential, project-based learning to provide NWS Fellows comprehensive entrepreneurial skills that enhance and support their artistic training. Standing for **B**uild, **L**earn, **U**nderstand and **E**xperiment, the NWS BLUE Program facilitates a broad range of projects in and out of performance that are proposed and led by NWS Fellows under the guidance of a dedicated program director and a team of staff mentors. Formally launched in 2018, at the time of this study BLUE was currently in its fifth iteration of operation. In 2021, the program was extended to also include supporting projects proposed by NWS alumni.

This report shares our research process and findings examining how the curriculum and opportunity space of NWS BLUE shapes Fellows' mindsets, skill development, and perspectives during a critical career juncture when many are transitioning into full-time employment in the orchestral field. Our inquiry seeks to elucidate the challenges to and opportunities for best practices for arts entrepreneurship and leadership education, to identify areas where the NWS may work to improve the program, and to suggest models that might be implemented by other organizations sharing a similar goal with preparing young artists for sustainable professional lives.

This study begins addressing these gaps through an intensive case study of selected Fellows' experiences within the NWS BLUE Program. Occupying a flexible space between professional orchestra and educational institution, and carrying an institutional commitment to experimentation, NWS offers a productive vantage point to evaluate how best to prepare young artists for careers in an uncertain world. By closely following a sampling of Fellows through the

program using interviews, focus groups, and observations, we generate important insights into effective arts entrepreneurship and leadership education for aspiring professionals. Findings stand to inform best practices in the care for professional musicians across the lifespan, and to better chart the dispositions, mindsets, and enabling factors that promote the design and sustenance of sustainable careers in classical music.

Methods

This qualitative case study utilized an ethnographic approach to deeply understand selected Fellows' lived experiences within the NWS BLUE Program. Ethnography involves immersive field research to capture participants' emic (insider) perspectives and meanings through detailed observations, interviews, and analysis of their actual practices within a particular cultural context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This methodology aligns with the aims of illuminating how an intensive arts entrepreneurship program is experienced and given meaning by participants.

Research Participants

The research sample consisted of multiple Fellows, staff, and external mentors at the New World Symphony during the 2021-2022 season. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich cases for in-depth focus. Individual interviews were conducted with an initial sample of 12 Fellows, five of which were selected for portraits to share later in this report, each of which led substantial BLUE projects in the 2021-2022 season. Two were string players, two brass, and one was a percussionist. While over 30 Fellows were interviewed individually or in focus groups, the Fellows profiled in the portraits below were selected for their potential to highlight different perspectives in gender, race/ethnicity, and prior educational and experience backgrounds prior to joining the New World Symphony.

Five staff members closely involved with BLUE were also included in the in-depth interviews for our study, including the academic dean and several program mentors. This approach enabled data collection and perspectives from both Fellows, their mentors, and administrative staff responsible for program direction. In total, we interacted with more than 50 unique Fellows, mentors, and staff during fieldwork, with six in-depth sets of Fellow interviews, and a similar set of in-depth interviews with NWS BLUE administrative staff. This relatively small sample allowed intensely holistic, prolonged data gathering. These data will inform the creation of a set of baseline and follow-up surveys to map Fellows' experiences more deeply and accurately in future seasons, enabling measuring change across the Fellowship activities.

Data Collection

Data collection involved four week-long site visits by the three-member research team throughout the 2021-2022 NWS season in October, December, February, and May. During each visit, the researchers conducted:

- 10-12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Fellows and staff members, lasting 60-90 minutes each.
- Three focus groups with 5-6 Fellows, lasting approximately 90 minutes each.
- Ethnographic observations of rehearsals, meetings, classes, and informal interactions and conversations.
- Document analysis of items including BLUE project proposals, marketing materials, and curricula.

Interviews and focus groups were conversational, using open-ended questions to capture participants' perspectives and experiences in their own words. Observations provided additional context about the setting, behaviors, and organizational culture. In total, the data corpus encompassed over 50 hours of interviews, 8 hours of focus groups, 100+ pages of fieldnotes, and assorted documents. Data gathering focused on understanding Fellows' program experiences, skill development, identities, educational interactions with staff and mentors, career visions, and challenges faced as they navigated the curriculum and project design and implementation.

Data Analysis

Interview and focus groups audio recordings were professionally transcribed. Detailed collaborative analysis was undertaken by the research team using an inductive, iterative process to identify salient themes and patterns. This involved close reading of transcripts and texts to code and categorize content related to the research aims. Key themes were refined over multiple passes to arrive at a comprehensive set of findings. Data analysis aimed to foreground participants' emic meanings and perspectives rather than imposing external frameworks. The extensive time researchers spent immersed in the setting also informed analysis through experiential insights.

Methodological Integrity

Several strategies were used to strengthen methodological integrity: 1) prolonged engagement through four, weeklong visits across the program timeline, regular debriefing calls with NWS program staff enabling deep cultural understanding; 2) triangulation of findings across different data sources and participant perspectives; 3) collaborative analysis to reach intersubjective consensus; 4) participant member-checking to verify interpretations; 5) thick description with narrative excerpts to vividly convey findings; and 6) clarifying researcher positionality and reflexivity to examine subjective biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Together these practices bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

BLUE Projects and Program in the 2021-2022 Season

In the 2021-22 season, the New World Symphony's BLUE Program facilitated a diverse range of artistic projects, reflecting the institution's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and leadership among its Fellows and alumni. The program encompassed 25 fellow-led projects and four alumni projects, involving 43 partners and 32 faculty members.

Adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the BLUE Program incorporated both remote and in-person experiences. Programs were livestreamed or pre-recorded in addition to serving in-person audiences, with some projects utilizing digital platforms and social media. Fellows connected at the New World Center, via Zoom, and around Miami for workshops and project implementation.

Innovative Concert Formats and Community Engagement

Many BLUE projects experimented with innovative concert formats, which were integrated into NWS' yearly calendar. The Inside the Music, Solo Spotlight, and Musicians' Forum series, free chamber music events open to the community, served as platforms for these projects. Additional projects featured collaborations with tango experts, beer and brass pairings, and immersive digital artwork in partnership with community organizations.

The Inside the Music concerts explored diverse themes, including "Music Mirroring Identities," "Eurasian Folk Traditions," "Echoes of the Harlem Renaissance," "What the Heck!" (introducing the rare heckelphone musical instrument), and "Solstice," a multimedia work featuring horn, electronics, videography, and poetry.

Solo Spotlight recitals showcased a range of repertoire, including "Pathways through Paris" (chamber works by composers who lived in Paris), "Natural Element" (a sensory journey through the elements featuring bassoon and projected visuals), "A Labyrinth of Myths and Legends" (contemporary harp music), "New Works for Percussion and Piano" (premieres by living composers), and "Creative Dialogues" (solo piano works by young composers).

The Musicians' Forums came alive through musical inspiration and unique artistic partnerships curated and produced by the Fellows themselves.

Venue-Based and Season-Long Projects

Venue-based projects included "Carol of the Basses" (holiday repertoire at Vizcaya Museum and Gardens), "Buenos Aires Tango" (showcasing tango, waltz, and milonga with guest artists and dancers), "Blue Waves" (a multimedia program exploring the human experience through music and visual art), "Beer and Brass" (pairing brass repertoire with local craft beers), and the "College-Track Mentorship Program" (coaching underserved high school musicians).

Season-long projects encompassed "Playing for a Cure" (uplifting music for cancer patients) and "Yoga for Musicians" (specialized yoga for Fellows and the music community).

Digital Projects and Audience Engagement

The BLUE Program also facilitated digital projects aimed at providing skills and resources for musicians and audiences. "AudienSync" created an interactive concert playbook with audience participation activities, while "Clearing the Stage" featured meditative commissions using dissonance. "Digital Horn Media Education" produced educational content for young hornists, and "@FellowsOfNWS" curated an Instagram account. "Flu Pan Dalin" explored electronic backing tracks combining classical and pop, and "The Marlea Note" was an inclusive video blog. "Sound Mind: Virtual Mental Wellness Summit" addressed musician wellness.

Program Structure and Objectives

The NWS BLUE Program was designed to allow Fellows and alumni to develop as leaders and entrepreneurs, providing training beyond their artistic development and professional skills training through passion projects that engage the Fellows beyond their role as instrumentalists. Mentorship, hands-on experience, and collaboration foster essential skills. Projects incorporate technology, community partnerships, and innovative programming while serving NWS's mission.

There were two types of BLUE projects funded for the 2020-2021 season:

1. NWS BLUE projects tied to existing NWS performance series and venues, including New Audience Fellow Initiative (NAFI) concerts, Inside the Music lecture-recitals, Musicians' Forums, Solo Spotlight recitals, and a mentorship program. Support from NWS marketing, artistic, and production staff was provided.
2. NWS BLUE projects developed for a life outside NWS, including digital or non-performance projects. Typical funding ranged from \$1,500 to \$10,000, with NWS staff providing guidance on external resources, but venue availability was not guaranteed.

The NWS BLUE curriculum employed a multifaceted approach to provide young musician Fellows with comprehensive entrepreneurial and leadership development alongside their elite artistic training:

- *Workshops:* Required first-year workshops build critical basic capacities in areas like production, public speaking, fundraising, teamwork, negotiations, and union matters. Optional workshops offer continued development in skills like audio/video, branding, financial literacy, improvisation, and more. Ongoing sectional work focuses on peer communication, expectations, problem-solving, and support.

- *Mentor-Delivered Curriculum:* Mentors guide Fellows in key entrepreneurial competencies like design thinking, event production, budgeting, marketing, audience growth, professional materials, public speaking, and leadership.
 - *Project Timeline:* A staged series of application cycles, project team formation, workshops, and performance projects provide a structured implementation process. Aligning most projects with existing NWS series allows focus on creative development.
 - *Budgeting:* Fellows receive funding of up to \$10,000 to incubate ambitious projects, plus extensive in-kind support.
- Through this comprehensive approach, the New World Symphony equips its Fellows with the skills and resources necessary to thrive as artistic entrepreneurs, fostering a new generation of leaders in the classical music industry.

NWS BLUE Program Goals

The New World Symphony placed a strong emphasis on fostering leadership and entrepreneurial skills among its Fellows through the BLUE Projects initiative. Approximately 20% of the Fellows' stipended time was dedicated to these projects, which provided a platform for exploring passions beyond music performance, developing professional skills, and creating meaningful programming that engages the local community and reaches new audiences.

All NWS Fellows participated in BLUE Projects across a continuum of engagement. While some Fellows simply served as performing musicians on projects conceived and led by their peers, others took on leadership roles by developing and leading their own original projects.

The overarching goals of the BLUE Projects initiative are multifaceted:

1. Enabling NWS Fellows and alumni to explore interests and passions outside of traditional music performance.
2. Fostering the development of leadership and professional skills essential for a successful career in the arts.
3. Providing meaningful programming that gives back to the local community and deepens engagement with existing audiences.
4. Reaching new audiences and expanding the reach of the NWS as a cutting-edge orchestral training institution.

BLUE Projects begin with a musician's vision and creative interests, driven by their original ideas. From concept to execution, the project leaders receive mentorship and guidance from NWS staff members or external professionals. The team leaders develop initial project concepts and budgets, which undergo an approval process by the NWS administration. Throughout the season, mentors provide coaching and support, while NWS staff members offer additional assistance to ensure the successful realization of the projects.

The application process for BLUE Projects is facilitated through an online form. Projects were selected based on criteria such as artistic content, impact and innovation, feasibility, sustainability, adherence to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) principles, and alignment with the NWS's mission and service to the community. Selected projects were eligible for up to \$10,000 in funding, along with significant in-kind access to professional production services from NWS staff.

Selected Fellow Experience Portraits

What follows are five portraits of Fellows¹ who led projects during the 2021-2022 season and selected from the pool of Fellows the research team followed and interviewed in depth over the course of the year. These portraits are an illustrative sampling of perspectives presented to provide a flavor of the nature of the BLUE experience, and to show how each of these Fellow navigated the NWS BLUE curriculum and experience, while also summarizing the key learnings and insights gained along the way. After the presentation of each portrait, a brief analysis of the themes and insights for the NWS BLUE Program gained across the portraits.

When we began our initial data collection, it became clear that each of the Fellows in this cohort came to the NWS with a broad range prior experiences and levels of comfort with themselves as musicians, as humans, and as program leaders. Most Fellows arrive at the NWS after many years of highly specialized conservatory training preparing them for a career as full-time orchestral musicians. For some Fellows, the NWS BLUE Projects and curriculum sat in tension with the Fellow's primary goal of and work effort toward winning auditions. For others, the NWS BLUE Projects provided a welcome space and resources to explore new ideas, or to further an existing project—sometimes awakening to career goals outside of orchestral music performance. It became clear to us as researchers that a simple evaluation of BLUE Program learning outcomes was not going to be possible.

Further complicating the picture is the range of extra-musical skills, experiences, and knowledge Fellows brought to NWS. Some Fellows arrived at the NWS with prior leadership experiences, and deep interest and comfort level in program innovation and development. These Fellows, already primed for this kind of work, excelled at developing entrepreneurial project ideas, organizing teams, and exerting strong leadership. Other Fellows found, in BLUE, their first exposure to thinking about their musical development beyond artistic practice.

As a research team, we decided to shift gears in how we viewed the evaluation process from an initial approach that focused on evaluating the program outcomes stated by the BLUE Program guidelines, to focus instead on asking for each Fellow: “How are you taking advantage of the

¹ The names of Fellows in this report are replaced with pseudonyms per human subjects' research protocols.

resources, creative space, and opportunities provided by the BLUE Program to create a project that is meaningful and valuable to you, the NWS, and your partners?” We felt this perspective would better enable us to use our presence and process as researchers to capture and illuminate the unique ways NWS Fellows took advantage of the BLUE Projects to create value. The portraits that follow are a selection of portraits that provide a sample of the diversity of Fellow’s prior experiences before coming to the NWS, of how they experienced and took advantage of the BLUE Program curriculum, experience, and funding, and how their career plans are diverging in interesting and meaningful ways as of the end of their Fellowship period.

Xander

Xander was a string player in the second year of his NWS fellowship. After several years of narrowly focused training in classical music and orchestral performance, he felt drawn to use the NWS BLUE Program to cultivate his interests outside of classical music. The pandemic offered him a break from his standard routines of practice, preparation, and performance: time that allowed him to notice common threads between his interests in mindfulness, nature, and wellness, and to begin crafting a project that could use the support structures offered by BLUE and NWS.

Xander developed a project combining guided meditation with contemporary music and spoken word. Noting how much music for meditation used static harmonies and rhythms, he embraced musical tension and distance to support and challenge participants in building emotional resilience and self-regulation.

His project developed various outputs. He began with a podcast, setting up a barebones website and commissioning musicians and meditation guides from around the world to create content for three episodes. Over the first year of his project, he finished a body of 20-25 episodes, currently at 8 and releasing 10 more shortly after. He piloted a new concert structure combining guided meditation with challenging and engaging works featuring musical tension and improvisation. Feedback from participants showed him he was onto something: Xander reported audience members telling him that his presentation format allowed them to hear in ways they’ve never experienced before, allowing them to notice with greater clarity what came up for them emotionally.

This enthusiastic feedback encouraged Xander to build a strategy to transition from orchestral performance into a self-directed career as a content creator, meditation guide, and facilitator of concerts and mindfulness events. New World partially funded his meditation guide certification and collaborations with a Grammy award-winning musician and senior Buddhist teacher. He used NWS funds intended for professional development—funds Fellows normally spend on coaching and private lessons—to gain vocal coaching to deepen his on-mic presence. Through NWS mentorship, he gained skills in podcast production. He also developed literacy in contracts

and licensing; sales and closing techniques; and developed an awareness of potential professional roles and markets for his services. He honed his skill at maximizing NWS resources, imagining how he might chart a new career pathway after the Fellowship.

Through his work on the BLUE project, Xander realized that when he identified as an orchestral musician, he was in a passive position: waiting for opportunities and income to come his way, unaware of what value his work might offer to others. By building his own platform grounded in his values, he learned that he could leverage resources, time, and energy to provide experiences that generate value for others. He now feels confident in who he wants to be and who he can best serve through his work.

Xander now plans to build his project into a production company facilitating events and retreats globally and has developed goals for ten years of growth. Key lessons were realizing the importance of accountability, giving first before receiving, expanding his network of service, and learning to communicate the offering clearly. It has also been an ongoing process of self-discovery figuring out how to unify his diverse experiences, skills, and interests.

The key themes and insights about entrepreneurship and leadership training from Xander's experience with NWS BLUE Program include:

- *Combining passions*: Xander built a project that combined his passions for music and mindfulness/mental wellness, demonstrating the importance of pursuing unique ideas that align with personal interests.
- *Continuous learning*: Xander realized he doesn't know everything and embraced the opportunity to develop new ideas and skills to advance and enhance his career.
- *Maximizing resources*: Over time, Xander developed the skill of imagining uses for BLUE funding that went well beyond standard practices, leveraging NWS funds to get private coaching, audio engineering, voice coaching, and mediation instruction. He became comfortable making repeated request for additional resources beyond those in the program guidelines. He showed a willingness to go out on a limb to explore a project that was not centered on musical performance.
- *Risk-taking*: Xander took a risk by diverging from the dominant narrative about the purpose of the NWS fellowship. He dared to design and execute a wholly original project entirely by himself, asking for more money than he could have imagined, and succeeding in his requests. He cites one of the greatest rewards of his BLUE project as discovering that he didn't want the path of a traditional orchestral musician. This highlights the importance of being open about non-traditional career paths.
- *Professional presentation*: Xander learned to present his ideas professionally and treat his endeavors like a business, which is crucial for entrepreneurship.

- *Managing expectations and pivoting:* Xander learned to manage expectations, be open-minded, and adapt his plans when needed, which is essential for successful entrepreneurship.
- *Learning to think at scale:* Xander developed the capacity to imagine his work in a global scale, and the confidence to imagine profitability at levels that outstrip the largely unspoken expectations of his peers in the Fellowship.
- *Building confidence:* Through the NWS BLUE Program, Xander gained confidence in building a career around a personalized idea that combines diverse interests.

These insights emphasize the importance of personal growth, risk-taking, professional presentation, adaptability, and confidence in entrepreneurship and leadership training.

Sarah

Sarah was a cellist with an undergraduate music performance degree from a conservatory in a liberal arts college, and a master's degree from a major US conservatory. A fourth year Fellow, her NWS BLUE Project was a recital-length performance focused on exploring the intersections of music and identity presented as part of NWS' Inside the Music lecture-recital series at the New World Center.

Sarah's project advanced a performance model that explicitly and politically addressed complex formulations of racial and cultural identities by blending a program of works by Black and Jewish composers with her own personal storytelling and space for audience reflection and discussion. She'd experimented with lecture-recital format in previous BLUE projects, but "Music Mirroring Identity" represented a significant departure. By foregrounding her personal history and identity, she offered her audience unusually intimate access to her complicated identity as a person and artist who walks in a white-centered world as a Ghanaian and Jewish American woman.

This project was shaped by its social context. In the summer of 2020, in a time she referred to the "post George Floyd era of music." Sarah, like most of her peers, was awakening to the importance of programming Black composers. But as a Black musician, she experienced this surge of interest in Black composers with a greater degree of complexity. As the daughter of a African father and an Jewish mother, she has struggled to reconcile her blackness with a Black American identity that doesn't often mirror her African or Jewish experience. In August 2021, when a friend invited her to develop a recital for a concert series in Tacoma, she jokingly suggested "Black and Jewish" as its theme. But the result confirmed for her the power of creating a musical platform that allowed her to bring *all* of herself, and not simply her skills as a cellist, to the project of meaning-making in and through musical experience.

NWS BLUE offered Sarah the platform to further develop her program, focusing more deeply on her personal storytelling. She appreciated the opportunity to perform in a modern performance venue with cutting edge media equipment, full production staff, and access to mentorship in public speaking and messaging. This support made it possible for her to enter an intensely vulnerable and psychologically risky enterprise. In what's already a demanding performance practice, Sarah was breaking classical music's "fourth wall". She was speaking for herself in and through music, rather than letting her music speak for itself. Furthermore, she was revealing narratives that were at once deeply personal and deeply politicized, in front of an audience, most of whom won't share her lived experience.

After her recital, Sarah reported feeling excited that some non-white audience members were in attendance, including a Black man who engaged with her about the topics afterwards. Many audience members were unfamiliar with composer George Walker, which reinforced Sarah's goal of introducing underrepresented composers. Overall, the confirmed in Sarah that programming recitals to reflect and shape personal narratives is a model that has tremendous value; that she has the musical skills to program repertoire to bridge her multiple identities; that her skills have value beyond her role as a cellist; and that there are audiences ready and willing to be engaged by personal storytelling.

Overall, the project allowed Sarah to further her skills in programming concerts around ideas, speaking publicly, and performing repertoire by lesser-known composers related to her identity. It provided valuable experience in presenting thoughtful concert experiences that engage audiences through multiple channels. Although she used very little funding—a modest honorarium to the collaborative pianist—her post-performance reflections with mentors and researchers opened a window to the possibility that her project could be the seed of fully-funded initiative; that she could be paid to perform in a way that's most meaningful to her.

Here are some key insights about entrepreneurship training that can be learned from Sarah's experience:

- *Identifying opportunities:* In a climate newly focused on promoting diversity in classical music, Sarah saw an opportunity to enlarge the conversation by creating a concert that articulated complex formulations of race, ethnicity, and identity.
- *Building networks:* Sarah collaborated with Fellow pianist William on the performance, combining her cello repertoire with his piano skills. She also worked with staff mentor Tom, who helped advise her on community outreach and speaking skills.
- *Creating value propositions:* Sarah introduced audiences to underrepresented composers and perspectives, enriching her performance with personal narratives and offering audience members more windows into their own personal relationships to the music.

- *Resourcefulness and problem-solving*: Sarah had significant experience in the lecture-recital format and had presented this program earlier in the year. Comfortable with the repertoire and format, she focused on improving her public speaking skills.
- *Risk-taking*: Sarah's identity-focused recital required not just a tolerance for vulnerability, but a capacity to take calculated risks in connecting musical performance to her multiply marginalized identities.
- *Pitching and presentation skills*: Sarah had to craft her speaking parts for the performance and practice presenting them smoothly alongside the music. This helped develop her skills in effectively pitching ideas related to musical performance.

Overall, Sarah's experience highlights skills in opportunity identification, network building, creating unique value, overcoming challenges, and polished presentation when sharing an idea - all important aspects of entrepreneurial training. Performing an identity-focused recital strengthened her ability to create engaging concert experiences.

Dave

Dave was a first-year horn fellow who proposed a collaborative concert-based BLUE project to fund working together with his composer friend to create and perform original compositions for horn and electronics. The project was inspired by Dave's experience as Sam's roommate freshman year of college, when he was exposed to many genres of music he hadn't heard before. The goal of the project was to premiere Sam's music and explore the possibilities of merging orchestral instruments with electronics. Dave also wanted to showcase his own multi-track recording skills. In preparation, Dave and Sam had several conversations to discuss his creative vision, such as incorporating spoken word and visual elements. Dave utilized the program funding to have Sam come to New World Symphony to workshop the pieces on site before the performance.

Dave viewed the BLUE project as supplementary to his main orchestral training, which meant that in practice he allocated minimal time to it compared to the time and effort he spent focused on orchestra rehearsals and auditions. He aimed to develop what initially seemed to be a smaller scale collaborative project that would be artistically fulfilling while allowing him to focus on professional development, even though, in the end, he ended up investing significant time and effort on the project as the concert date approached.

Dave's project hit some roadblocks with performers dropping out after accepting roles. Dave realized he needed to bring together collaborators that were open to experimental music, not just participating to fulfill a requirement. He felt that the BLUE project workshops and trainings could have been more effective if Fellows understood the purpose in advance. As a first-year fellow, Dave did not have the benefit of having participated in other BLUE projects in prior years, which could account for this perspective. Overall, Dave used the BLUE opportunity to

expand his conception of what was possible for a horn player by merging orchestral instruments and electronics. The collaborative process with Sam opened his mind to new possibilities in repertoire development.

Here are some key insights about entrepreneurship training that were illustrated by Dave's experience:

- *Practical experience is the most effective teacher.* Dave felt he learned leadership and ensemble skills primarily through real-world orchestral playing and this hands-on project, not formal classroom workshops. Hands-on mentorship and time invested in collaboration informed was perceived as more valuable to him than formal lessons.
- *Passion drives initiative.* Dave was intrinsically motivated to collaborate with his friend Sam because of their positive creative history and mutual artistic interests. This personal connection makes the project meaningful.
- *Balance priorities carefully.* Dave was strategic in allocating minimal time for his BLUE project compared to professional auditions and orchestra obligations. He recognized it as supplementary, though in the end dedicated a significant amount of time to the project.
- *Seek kindred collaborators.* Dave wanted partners as open to experimentation as he and Sam were. He looked for musicians who treated themselves as artists willing to experiment, not just instrumentalists performing the music on the page before them.
- *Maximize institutional resources.* Dave leveraged New World Symphony's production support for lighting, audio, and video. He also utilized the built-in institutional promotion channels for the Inside the Music concert series.
- *Customize to your skills.* Dave designed a new concert project matching his strengths (i.e. recording, technology, performing in part on a secondary instrument—piano) and avoiding less developed skills like large ensemble leadership and coordination.
- *Document the process.* Dave saw archiving the creative process itself as a project outcome, not just the final performance. This reflects his exploratory mindset.

In summary, Dave experience illustrates using entrepreneurial projects as targeted opportunities for artistic growth. While originally his project was viewed as supplemental to his primary goal of working to become an orchestral musician, by the end he was struck by a widened conception of the kinds of performances his future career might entail. His strategic approach maximized personal fulfillment within institutional constraints.

Terry

Terry was a third-year horn fellow who started his undergraduate training in music education. After a short time working as a band director, he enrolled in master's degree in performance from a music conservatory. He auditioned for and was offered a spot in New World Symphony while working on his doctorate, so he left the program early to join the orchestra. Terry's BLUE project focused on using social media and the internet to build his artistic brand and share his

playing more widely. More materially, it became a platform for supporting private teaching, and helping recruit invitations to perform masterclasses and to provide clinician work. Through the project he took advantage of the enhanced technological and media production capabilities of the New World Center, working with multiple mentors to learn video and audio editing techniques, multimedia lighting effects, marketing, storytelling, and entrepreneurial skills through his projects. He also reported gaining confidence in his playing through the constant performing in both BLUE and mainstage programming at NWS.

Terry feels the BLUE Program structure encouraged experimentation, supported his interests, and provided tailored mentoring and technological skill development even if the formal courses weren't initially seen as helpful at the time of the workshops. The open-ended nature of the projects allowed him to explore creating artistic content online in a way that wasn't common yet in classical music and has provided a model and platform for his continued engagement online after the Fellowship.

Through his social media presence, Terry was able to build a following, get more teaching opportunities, and transition to a full-time orchestral performance career without winning major competitions. His story illustrates that the NWS is attracting and helping develop professionally adaptable Fellows willing to take risks outside the formal preparation for orchestral performance and auditions.

Terry also gained valuable perspective on how orchestras function through both his BLUE project and orchestra committee work. This behind-the-scenes view gave him knowledge he thinks will help him engage professionally as an orchestral musician beyond just ensemble playing. Overall, Terry felt the BLUE Program gave him the space and support to explore skills like entrepreneurship, content creation, and marketing that are not typically part of orchestral training. This allowed him to shape a more independent musical career grounded in both performing and teaching.

Terry's portrait illustrates several key insights about leadership and entrepreneurship training that can be gleaned from his experience:

- *Embrace autonomy:* Terry's father's strategy of "just getting out of the way" when Terry showed interest in music is a powerful leadership lesson. Leaders should provide their team members with the autonomy to pursue their interests and passions, which can lead to greater engagement and productivity.
- *Persistence:* Terry's persistence in taking auditions and building his career, despite the challenges, is a testament to the importance of resilience in leadership. Leaders should be persistent in pursuing their goals and not be deterred by setbacks.
- *Identify and leverage unique skills:* Terry's background as a trained music educator developed skills he transferred to his storytelling, video production, and audience

engagement on his social media channels. He also harnessed this familiarity through developing video content aimed specifically at young horn performers.

- *Create value:* Terry's work on the BLUE projects, where he built a platform for his art to exist online, shows the importance of creating value. Entrepreneurs should focus on creating products or services that provide value to their customers.
- *Continuous learning:* Terry's mentored skills in marketing, audio engineering, and video engineering highlight the importance of continuous learning in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs should be open to learning new skills that can help them grow their business.
- *Community engagement:* Terry's involvement with multiple prior educational and community BLUE projects in prior Fellowship years, and his work on developing curriculum for teaching artists show the importance of community engagement in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs should engage with their community and contribute to its development.
- *Building a personal brand:* Terry's use of social media to build a professional artistic profile is a key insight for entrepreneurs. Building a personal brand can help entrepreneurs establish credibility and attract an audience with the potential for monetization.

In conclusion, Terry's experience provides valuable insights into leadership and entrepreneurship, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, persistence, leveraging unique skills, creating value, continuous learning, community engagement, and personal branding.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a violist and triathlete with a bachelor's and master's degree in performance from a major metropolitan music conservatory. Her BLUE project which focus at the intersection of music and health, had two goals: using music to bring comfort to cancer patients, and to raise funds for research on a rare cancer that she survived in early childhood.

Jennifer first developed the idea for this project while still in high school, and an early experience in NPR's From the Top (FTT), a fellowship program that empowers pre-collegiate classical musicians to use their music and personal stories to engage and inspire audiences. She credits the inspiration of FTT as providing her with the opportunity to produce a benefit concert with fellow Chicago-area musicians, raising funds for a cancer advocacy organization.

Arriving at NWS, Jennifer saw BLUE as an ideal platform to further express and develop her commitment to advocacy, outreach, and fundraising. She was able to take advantage of NWS' existing relationships with local hospitals, and her developing relationships with other Fellows, to produce monthly concerts in hospitals and a fundraising event. She gained skills in event planning, fundraising, public speaking, and building partnerships.

The project provided meaningful experiences for Jennifer to connect with patients through music. It reminded her of the impact music can have and the importance of service over ego. She also valued the learning experiences around producing events and engaging communities. While busy schedules and the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges, Jennifer demonstrated commitment and leadership in developing her vision, creating meaningful musical experiences and professional growth opportunities over her years at NWS.

Jennifer's project created opportunities for her to harness and further develop personal meaning, community impact, and professional growth through her dedication to using music to serve others. Her experience highlights the value of developing leadership skills in a context deeply tied to personal values. Her project exemplified learning by doing, centering audiences, nurturing relationships, and imagining larger possibilities for impact.

Jennifer also learned that the considerable work of producing community performances and fundraising events was a distraction from her primary goal of winning orchestral auditions. While her project represented personally meaningful work, it would not supplant the need (and her strong desire) to win a full-time orchestra gig. For now, her primary identity was that of an orchestral string player.

Here are a few key insights that can be taken from Jennifer's BLUE Project portrait:

- *Personal growth.* Jennifer provided meaningful experiences connecting with patients through music, reinforcing her awareness of music's power in service of human need, and the importance of service over ego.
- *Real-world skill development.* She gained valuable skills in event planning, fundraising, public speaking, and building partnerships (planning benefit concerts, giving speeches, maintaining relationships with community organizations). This allowed her to share her personal cancer survivor story and raise awareness for a rare disease, while sharing her passion for using music to help others.
- *Community impact.* Her project engaged around 20 NWS Fellows in hospital visits and benefit concerts over a time span of 3-4 years. Through this she maintained ongoing relationships and delivered inspiration through monthly musical performances at local hospitals
- *Storytelling and fundraising.* Through this project, Jennifer was able to hone her storytelling and fundraising skills through focused mentoring from NWS staff. She both raised awareness and funds for cancer research through these benefit concerts and developed her skills and confidence as a public speaker.
- *Professional development.* Though she maintained her desire to pursue a traditional orchestral performance career, she demonstrated commitment and leadership in developing her vision and overcoming challenges, exemplified using one's skills to serve,

learning by doing, and imagining larger possibilities for impact. Through these projects, she took advantage of this opportunity to learn event production, audience engagement, project management, and community engagement skills.

Summary across Portraits

These portraits provide a window into a sampling of BLUE Program projects from the 2021-2022 season. Together they help illustrate how entrepreneurial leadership can emerge when meaningful and well-resourced spaces are created, and when program staff provides a highly tailored mentoring experience. In this context, NWS Fellows developed projects that stretched them to develop new, project-relevant skills, enabled and promoted risk-taking, and were driven by purpose and experimentation. Leadership skills developed when intrinsic motivation and interests combined with community needs and opportunities for broader impact. Confidence and capabilities were expanded through embracing uncertainty and working creatively to overcome challenges with NWS program and mentor support. Each fellow profiled above is a rising talent, emerging from the NWS Fellowship better prepared for a changing orchestral performance industry.

Emerging Themes

Several salient themes emerge across these Fellows' experiences:

- A sense of purpose and alignment with passions fuels internal drive and perseverance. When aspirations harmonize with community needs, the energy for persistence ignites. Xander, Sarah, and Jennifer pursued projects resonating with their values, talents, and identities. Fulfilling a worthy mission engenders leadership.
- An entrepreneurial growth mentality strengthens capabilities through hands-on application. Core skills like assessing opportunities, communication, production, problem-solving and teamwork are honed experientially. Taking creative risks and initiative forges innovation and resilience.
- Maintaining focus to transform vision into reality is imperative. Prioritizing goals, balancing obligations, and defining scope enables progress. Dave's experience exemplified strategic project prioritization aligned with professional development aims. Staying grounded in primary objectives keeps impact achievable.
- Creative risk-taking enables breaking new ground. Trying unproven formats, sharing personal stories, driving original fusions—boldness opens the door for innovation. Xander integrated meditation and classical music, unveiling novel possibilities. Sarah dared to admit the parts of her experience she'd previously kept silent.
- Confidence accumulates through exercising leadership. Successfully manifesting ambitious visions breeds self-assurance and empowerment. Sarah strengthened her self-

esteem by testing her program development and public speaking skills. Growth occurs by transcending limits.

- Resilience and adaptability are enhanced by overcoming challenges. Roadblocks breed ingenuity; setbacks provide feedback to improve. Jennifer demonstrated grit by persisting through pandemic obstacles. Agility compounds through practice.
- Visibility and community focus drive impact. Ensuring awareness and cultivating partnerships maximize reach and engagement. Marketing and relationship building amplify influence.

When knowledge, courage, and compassion align, the potential for impact is profound. By finding and amplifying their distinctive voices, these emerging leaders gained the self-knowledge to serve with authenticity and heart. Their stories illuminate how leadership might be cultivated by marrying capabilities, mentoring, and meaning.

Discussion and Implications

The NWS BLUE Program was intentionally designed to be open-ended and personalized in nature. This enables individualized development trajectories and organic growth based on Fellows' unique needs, experience, and interests/ Key elements that seemed to enable its success included:

- The flexible structure which accommodated diverse engagement levels and outcomes
- The program leaders' leadership styles, which prized collective empowerment over hierarchical power.
- The critical role personalized mentorship plays in unlocking potential.
- Institutional permeation and buy-in.
- How Fellows' past experiences shape their utilization of resources.
- Identity reinforcement enabled through exploring non-traditional roles.

While concrete entrepreneurial skills were built through executing self-directed projects, the program seems to succeed more through facilitated hands-on learning and growth-oriented relationships, than through formal curricular workshop, though NWS' internal survey data shows that the workshops were found to increase skill levels and confidence among Fellows. Below is a deeper discussion of each enabling element, key takeaways, potential areas for improvement, and applicable best practices for other institutions.

Flexible Structure Enables Diverse Outcomes

A major factor in the NWS BLUE Program's impact is its flexible, unstructured nature which enables highly customized engagement and development. Although all Fellows are required to participate, their involvement ranges widely based on interests and needs:

- Some join peers' existing projects, allowing easy exploration of collaborative undertakings.
- Others initiate entirely new solo endeavors based on their passions and strengths.
- A few ultimately direct large-scale undertakings requiring coordination of multiple teams and stakeholder groups.

Rather than lockstep progression through a set curriculum, this flexibility accommodates different skill levels and goals. Fellows shape their own paths fluidly over time as their skills, confidence, goals, and plans evolve. The flexible structure supports highly individualized growth trajectories.

According to the Fellows interviewed and observed, the overall curriculum of NWS BLUE favors experiential learning over theoretical classroom training or skills workshops alone. Fellows learn by both participating in and leading self-directed projects, which develops critical entrepreneurial muscles like opportunity identification, initiative taking, creative problem solving, managing uncertainty, strategic planning, and mobilizing resources. The culture of NWS BLUE allows ideas to organically bubble up and empowers Fellows' intrinsic motivations. Fellows are encouraged to take calculated risks and then nimbly pivot plans when challenges inevitably arise. Adaptability is stressed over rigid adherence to initial plans. This promotes resilience along with design thinking skills to constantly optimize and improve. By confronting real-world constraints hands-on, Fellows build capabilities not easily developed through instruction alone.

launching unique projects enables Fellows to shape their own career visions tailored to individual passions. Many discover newfound confidence in artistic directions that resonate with their strengths and interests, even if non-traditional. This boosts leadership capacity and personal agency in shaping one's path. Community engagement is heavily emphasized through projects focused on delivering impactful musical experiences to various public groups, not just inward facing performance skills. This orientation expands institutional relevance beyond its own walls. Fellows act as conduits between NWS and the community, learning valuable skills around outreach, education, presentation, and audience development and engagement in the process. Presentation and public speaking abilities are strengthened alongside pure musical skills given the external visibility of many projects. Communication, storytelling, and explaining the broader relevance of one's work all contribute to project success.

While hands-on work develops concrete marketing, budgeting, team management and event production competencies, the adaptive nature also keeps the focus on deeper leadership growth and identity exploration.

Key takeaways enabled by the flexible structure include:

- Exposure to diverse types of entrepreneurial projects combining passions, interests, and NWS resources.
- Confidence in shaping one's career around strengths, not just traditional orchestra jobs.
- Emphasis on community engagement and service.
- Strengthened presentation abilities and communication skills.
- Promoting resourcefulness and creative problem solving.
- Leadership development through hands-on coordination and team experiences.
- Learning by doing through real-world experiences versus classroom training alone.
- Requiring adaptability, initiative taking, and calculated risk-taking.
- Need for balancing project work and core musical development like orchestra rehearsals.
- Drive to increase visibility and impact beyond NWS walls.

By accommodating diverse engagement levels and outcomes, the NWS BLUE Program opens creative spaces for Fellows to gain transferable entrepreneurial skills grounded in their unique passions, interests, and community contexts. This represents a departure from rigid, uniform training approaches. This flexibility reinforces intrinsic motivations and identity exploration in ways closed systems cannot replicate.

Mentorship is Critical for Unlocking Potential

Personalized mentorship plays a vital role in NWS BLUE's impacts. All Fellow project teams are paired with individual staff or external mentors who provide coaching tailored to their projects, strengths, and development needs. These mentoring relationships provide accountability structures, expert advice, leadership development, connections to insider networks not otherwise accessible, and resources for overcoming obstacles. By regularly reviewing goals and vision, mentors maintain focus and drive progress—essential educational scaffolding. Their institutional and industrial knowledge helps Fellows navigate constraints. Mentors model supportive leadership dispositions and environments for others' success.

At the outset of each year, after an open call for volunteer mentors, NWS hosts a training session to align all mentors on optimal frameworks for advising BLUE projects. This ensures consistent messaging and coordination. *Ad hoc* mentors who miss the training receive; individual preparation is conducted. Once projects are underway, the program director monitors mentor-Fellow relationships and project advancement through monthly check-ins. Informal oversight is conducted if progress benchmarks are not met, with the program director following up directly with mentors and Fellows as needed. While structured, this feedback loop maintains accountability without overbearing rigidity.

Mentors provide expertise in critical areas like budgeting, marketing, strategic planning, resource mobilization, partnership development, and community engagement, filling critical gaps in

Fellows' training, and making the content from skills-based workshop newly relevant in a real-world application. Their experience and expansive networks prevent amateur mistakes and accelerate outcomes. Mentors keep projects tethered to realistic scope, resources, and timelines by reviewing goals regularly. Leadership coaching on soft skills like team management, time allocation, and constructive communication allows Fellows to execute practical elements smoothly. By candidly identifying areas for improvement, mentors enable real-time optimization and increased chances of impact.

Key elements enabled through effective mentoring include:

- Individualized coaching and scaffolding to unlock potential beyond current capacities.
- Accountability structures and regular progress reviews to maintain focus.
- Transfer of specialized expertise outside Fellows' knowledge domains and beyond the scope of formally offered workshops within the curriculum.
- Facilitating clarity of vision, purpose, and realistic goal setting.
- Targeted leadership coaching and modeling effective environments for others.
- Access to insider networks and partners critical for project success.
- Problem-solving assistance when roadblocks arise by brainstorming options.
- Customized guidance aligned with each Fellow's strengths and development needs.
- Constructive feedback for continuous improvement and impact optimization.
- Institutional knowledge to effectively navigate constraints and utilize resources.

A well-matched mentor-Fellow pairing is crucial, based on personality fit, work styles, expertise, experience, and specific project needs. When synergistic relationships form, mentors describe the personal fulfillment of contributing to talented individuals' evolution. The mentor role is thus almost as demanding as the Fellow role, requiring deep commitment. While all mentors provide key functions, areas of relative unevenness include sufficiently emphasizing artistic development and audience impact goals. Some Fellows noted mentors biased towards concrete skills building versus meaning, emotional resonance, and public activation. While understandable given diverse expertise, this points to the need for balanced guidance inclusive of the Fellows' and the Program's artistic priorities.

Personalized hands-on mentorship is invaluable for providing the tailored scaffolding, leadership development and insiders' perspective critical to bringing entrepreneurial visions to fruition. The blend of structure and flexibility keeps projects accountable while enabling customization. As multi-year relationships form, mentors describe the privilege of contributing to talented individuals' journey of impact.

Institutional Alignment and Permeation

Given the experimental nature of BLUE, gradual buy-in from NWS stakeholders was required to legitimize divergence from orthodox training approaches. Internally promoting the value of

controlled risk-taking and non-traditional capacity building helped expand perceived validity. Over time the message permeated programming, with community members increasingly viewing NWS's role through an entrepreneurial lens. Concretely, the percentage of NWS public programming originating from and led by Fellows now approaches 20%, a significant culture shift. What was once viewed as ancillary or extracurricular is now seen as part of the core educational model. Acceptance of beneficially disruptive pedagogies took root.

Externally this expanded engagement increased NWS's relevance to the Miami community beyond pure performance showcases. It provided platforms for Fellows to activate social priorities and engage diverse groups. Fellows act as conduits between NWS and the public. The permeation heightened the institution's accessibility. This identity expansion was not without friction, as successful adoption of institutional innovations rarely is. Navigating stakeholder misgivings while demonstrating value of unfamiliar approaches required dexterity and commitment. Peak exposure to potential failure ideally coincides with peak learning, and calculated risk-taking by leadership was rewarded over time as positive impacts emerged.

Remaining areas of tension center around managing project commitments with elite-level musical and professional; development. Rehearsals, practicing, lessons, and professional audition preparation represent significant obligations. Fellows reported concerns about overextending themselves to the detriment of musical growth. While learning to balance commitments is part of professional maturation, survey data reveals Fellows join BLUE without fully considering the workload realities. This points to managing expectations proactively while still reinforcing grit and accountability.

In summary, permeation of the BLUE ethos throughout NWS programming validated institutional openness to experimentation, failure risk, and elevating student agency in shaping experiences. This helped Fellow's view NWS as an empowering launch pad versus a contained vocational school. Gradually increased community engagement also positively expanded external perceptions of NWS's role in Miami.

Fellows' Prior Experiences Shape their Approach

As in any sufficiently complex educational ecosystem, Fellows enter the NWS BLUE Program with diverse levels of exposure to entrepreneurial experiences. This shaped their capacity to take advantage of the program and chart impactful journeys. While BLUE is structured as an introductory-level program, backgrounds informed uptake. Many Fellows had existing passions, interests, and ideas they wanted to deeply explore based on previous exposure. For example, Xander's pre-existing interests in yoga, meditation, and mindfulness practices, or Sarah's prior socially conscious recitals exploring intersectional identities. Others like Jennifer entered having led major community initiatives before, including fundraising, event planning, and outreach coordination. Her grasp of operational nuts and bolts was more solidified.

Longer-tenured Fellows were naturally more familiar with NWS's full palette of institutional resources and partnerships available to leverage for their BLUE projects. Recent arrivals took longer orienting. Capacity to strategically utilize insider opportunities increased with time at NWS.

Basic musical skills were a shared starting point given Fellows' advanced training and acceptance competitiveness. However concrete project management, budget oversight, partnership leveraging, and marketing abilities were less evenly developed. These operational areas represented growth opportunities. While all lacked hands-on project leadership experience, a few Fellows were better primed having helped coordinate previous conservatory initiatives or led teaching-based efforts. Comfort mobilizing teams and delegating tasks appeared tied to such exposure. Similarly, prior experience planning recitals provided scaffolding. The intentionally open nature of BLUE meant those eager for structured direction entered with some frustration, wishing more defined templates or formulas existed. Others appreciated the flexibility this afforded. Comfort with uncertainty seemed linked to prior gap years spent clarifying passions outside academia. Staff may have been able to provide more customized calibration and scaffolding if they had been resourced with the capacity to provide such customizations.

Fellows came into the BLUE experience with a range of exposures, capabilities and motivations that informed their individual levels of BLUE Program utilization. While a shared baseline of musical skills existed, entrepreneurial and leadership competencies diverged more widely. Greater orientation or skills assessment at the outset may have allowed more customized calibration and scaffolding.

Identity Exploration Through New Roles

The flexibility of the NWS BLUE Program enables Fellows to leverage undertakings for identity reinforcement or expansion. The loosely defined space allows discovering new facets of oneself. Interests not traditionally cultivated through formal musical training gain legitimacy. Some Fellows utilize projects to bolster artistic aspects most closely aligned with future orchestra goals. For these individuals, BLUE represents opportunities for differentiation within classical music. Others view the program as a gateway for exploring entirely new identities beyond orchestral performance careers. Allowing alternate possibilities to organically emerge serves both groups.

The mentorship approach encourages examining potential non-musical strengths not previously tapped. In some cases, this catalytic impact on personal agency, initiative, and resilience is described as more transformational than concrete project outcomes. Fellows leaning into business roles discover new capabilities mobilizing teams, strategizing marketing, and coordinating logistics. Those engaging local communities experience rewards of teaching and

sharing musical gifts more broadly. For many this community orientation sticks, expanding definitions of artistic purpose.

The program flexibility provides space to discover and develop latent talents outside traditionally cultivated musical identities. Allowing Fellows to view themselves and potential careers through new lenses is empowering. Supporting shifts in self-perception enables fulfillment and impact.

Suggested Areas for Improvement

While highly successful in most dimensions, areas of suggested improvement include:

- **Increased financial and personnel support to program staff and Fellows in strategically balancing project work and core musical development like practicing and audition prep.** This overload concern should be addressed proactively by NWS leadership. Increased support would provide time and opportunities for a more robust Fellowship intake and mentoring processes throughout each season with regular check-ins on artistic and non-artistic growth and plans, goal setting, and accountability sessions through individual advising. Much of this is happening informally, or on-demand by some of the Fellows. Formalizing this aspect of program mentoring would significantly strengthen opportunities for growth and impact for all Fellows and their BLUE projects.
- **Create a formal plan to assess entrepreneurial, leadership, and risk-taking competencies when Fellows join the NWS to allow better customized scaffolding matching Fellows' baseline skills.** Establishing a formal intake survey that accurately captures Fellows' prior experiences before the Fellowship, as well as mindset, skill, and confidence survey around artistic and non-artistic skills developed through the Fellowship would provide a baseline for measuring growth and impact of the Fellowship and would provide background information that would better facilitate curricular tailoring for individual Fellows.
- **Ensure that artistic development and audience experience goals are emphasized equally by all mentors.** Creating opportunities and a culture and considered all New World Center staff as “mentors” would move toward a whole organization approach to mentoring Fellows in their success. Many Fellows reported learning from staff who were not formal mentors, as well as encountering some staff who did not see their roles as mentors.
- **Promote a contemporary, expansive view of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial action, and visioning of future careers to inspire BLUE project and personal development.** To best meet the program's learning outcomes, the NWS needs to fully commit to processes and a program that assesses and meets Fellows where they are in terms of skills, mindsets, and abilities. Currently, the formal program assumes many Fellows are at the same level and could be more individually tailored to individual needs. This assessment would also identify areas where Fellows could better serve as peer-

support mentors. Without this assessment, it is a challenge to determine which Fellows developed skills to successfully lead BLUE projects before coming to the NWS vs. through the BLUE Program activities. Tracking long-term career impacts on NWS BLUE alumni through post-Fellowship data collection mechanisms to better understand its benefits, as well.

- **Continue and expand convenings of NWS BLUE program alumni to share learnings and reflections**, especially those who are sustaining and applying BLUE projects professionally. As there are more alumni from BLUE projects leaving the NWS and joining orchestras and pursuing other music-related careers, create opportunities to bring them back to share how they are working to operationalize the skills they honed at NWS in their professional careers. Additionally, capture from these alumni data on how the BLUE program structure and skills can be more impactful. Consider allowing current NWS Blue Fellows to apprentice on alumni BLUE projects as that program expands.

While some of the above suggestions are underpinned by cultural and mindset shifts among program staff, increased funding allocation to the program (including new personnel lines for BLUE program support) is needed to expand institutional capacity to implement the above. Program staff was working at capacity, so further expansion of the program should also help scale program support, specifically in the provision of individualized mentoring.

Potential Best Practice Insights for Other Institutions

Aspects of the NWS BLUE Program offer informative examples for other advanced music training programs seeking to incorporate entrepreneurial development. These insights could be especially considered and adapted by musician training institutions at the secondary and tertiary levels such as youth orchestras, summer festivals, and fellowship programs, and undergraduate and masters-level music degree and conservatory programs:

- Create space in the curriculum for student-driven projects combining their unique artistic passions and interests. Allow room for organic exploration, and iteration over multiple program cycles.
- Emphasize values-based community engagement opportunities through music, developing presentation skills beyond performing abilities.
- Personalized mentorship builds leadership, communication, creative problem solving and resilience through real-world projects.
- Promote entrepreneurial mindsets like opportunity-identification, initiative taking, calculated risk-taking, and adaptability through workshops and community projects.
- Continue to allow Fellows to use private lesson money for novel purposes, such as coaching services, and opportunities to develop additional skills beyond artistic performance.
- Prioritize hands-on learning and growth-oriented mentoring over theoretical classroom/studio/stage training alone.

- Support students in shaping an individualized career vision tailored to their strengths beyond traditional orchestra jobs.
- Continue to increase students' visibility and impact via public-facing opportunities beyond institutional walls. Current practices include the evolution of BLUE projects into established NAFI and new concert models and showcases of Fellow projects before concerts via the video screens in the New World Center.

The key is facilitating participatory environments where students shape their own development through practical experiences grounded in intrinsic passions. Tailored mentorship and latitude enable personal evolution not possible through rigid programming. Outcomes demonstrate the power of agency and self-authorship in unlocking potential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the NWS BLUE Program succeeds in creating value for Fellows through its flexible structure that accommodates organic exploration, and growth-oriented mentorship enabling personalized development. The Fellow portraits shared in this report all took risks to lead, grow and develop new skills. Additionally, the Fellowship year profiled in this study happened during the COVID-19 outbreak, a time when the traditional Fellowship was significantly disrupted for the participants, staff, and the broader NWS staff community. As a result, the portraits and insights presented earlier do not necessarily capture the perspectives of Fellows who choose to participate rather than lead, but they do capture the learnings and experiences coming back to in-person Fellowship and concert experiences at NWS during 2021-2022.

The hands-on experiential approach to the NWS BLUE curriculum did further develop Fellows' entrepreneurial capabilities and mindsets. For many Fellows, they already came to the NWS with the existing dispositions and inclinations to develop them, and others developed these along the way. By allowing learner agency and choice to be central in shaping the project design and journey, the program promotes growth not achievable through classroom training alone. Personal impact stemmed from a significant investment in personalized mentoring by the program staff, aligning scaffolds, resources, networks, and project opportunities with individuals' motivations and strengths. While concrete skills are built through executing ambitious projects, the transformational emphasis remains on identity, purpose, and evolving conceptions of artistic potential for many of the Fellows. Key opportunities for improvement surround better supporting work/music balancing, front-loading skills assessment, expanding mentoring capacity, enhancing mentorship consistency, and tracking long-term impacts. The program as profiled provides an adaptable model of the developmental benefits possible when elevating student ownership and opening spaces for identity emergence, agency, and experimentation. Further research should trace the long-term impacts on alumni career development.

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