

ANDREW SHAW (MBA '77) PRESIDENT AND CEO, TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

As told to Karen Christensen

Describe your role

It's not that different from being CEO of any \$18-million corporation, with the added challenge of being hugely visible. The press is on you all the time, and there are literally hundreds of stakeholder relationships to manage. In addition to the regular ones, we've got a governors council, plus several committees, plus our volunteers, plus all the government agencies, the City of Toronto, and our donors. We've also got 27,000 subscribers — 400,000 people coming through our doors every year. The classic CEO role is to work at the boundary of the organization. There might be a few organizations where the boundary is more intense and complicated than ours, but not many. So take the classic CEO's role, and add on 20 layers. It's very challenging.

Do you have much contact with the orchestra?

My office is right beside the orchestra area, which I love. It allows me to stop in during rehearsals and say hello to everyone. I'm here at every concert, before, during intermission, and after. The musicians see me in the audience all the time, so there's a connection there. And that's very important, because they are our product offering. In the past, there was a huge disconnect between the orchestra and the administration. I'm trying to change that.

What is your biggest challenge?

On a personal level, it's managing my own physical limitations. I have to maintain a positive attitude throughout the day, then go to the sponsor reception, then to the concert, then to the reception afterwards. Physically, it's quite challenging. On a practical level, financing is the most challenging part. We are constantly raising capital — one third of our budget each year must be raised. It's really like running two businesses at once. Even if we sell out the house, that only gives us 50 per cent of what we need to run this place. There's no leverage here. You're just burning through the dollars.

What keeps you going?

I'm fascinated by the challenge. When I took this job, the TSO was in a desperate situation. My objective is to get it to a point where I can actually balance it. I still love the music, but you can't get all 'dewy eyed' about it — this is a business, and I run it as such. I have music in my background [a former cellist, he holds a Masters in Music from the University of Western Ontario], and there's no way you could justify this kind of effort if you didn't fully believe in the importance of this kind of activity for society. When I was considering this offer, the chair, Bob Rae, restructured



things quite a bit. While some things still seemed impossible, he changed a few key things, so that suddenly, it didn't look quite as impossible — at least it became interesting.

What TSO initiative are you most excited about right now?

Getting our new music director **Peter Oundjian** in place was very exciting. When I arrived, this place was virtually out of business. I had to get it up and running, and that is not the best time to be looking for a new director. The key thing now is preparing to launch him next September. He was here last week as a guest conductor, and the audience went crazy. In the meantime, this year's program is very 'meat and potatoes' — accessible stuff. Our focus is on launching Peter: So I've got a year to get the wheels firmly in place on a car that I'm driving at full speed — and repairing at the same time!

What are you most proud of?

I take satisfaction from my role in creating things of high quality — in terms of absolute qualitative universal standards. There's something special happening here in terms of the quality of the music, and it's adding meaning to many peoples' lives. That's an important aspect of what makes a society great.

What do you do for fun?

I enjoy sailing, canoeing, and cycling. I've been renting a cottage in the Thousand Islands for years now, and I love just sitting there on the dock, reading a book, watching the river go by.

Any words of advice for other MBAs interested in the non-profit sector?

If, throughout the MBA experience, you can maintain values pertaining to the not-for-profit sector, when you're surrounded by talk of huge, billion-dollar corporations — then you've already qualified yourself as determined and committed. My EMBA experience was a positive, life-shaping and defining experience. I think all my classmates would agree. A bunch of us gets together every couple of months for dinner, to yammer about stuff — I had a group of 20 here for dinner and a concert last November — (Professor Emeritus) Bill Waters came too.

Do you ever have dreams about playing the cello?

No — my dreams are all about fundraising.