

# Balancing Art and Commerce

*New Course Examines Cultural Institutions* BY JOHN CRAWFORD

**S**tanding before a class in Olin Hall, Keith Lockhart made a confession. “I never thought I would be speaking to a business school audience,” says the conductor, who is in his 15th season with the Boston Pops Orchestra.

Not that Lockhart is unfamiliar with business concerns. Quite the contrary. “Art doesn’t exist in a vacuum,” he says. “Art exists with financial support behind it.”

Lockhart was visiting Arts and Entertainment Management, the first Babson course devoted to the operation of symphonies, museums, and other cultural organizations. The conductor believes that such

classes, which foster a future generation of arts leaders, are essential, especially in light of the current economic downturn. In the sometimes harsh reality of the arts world, these organizations typically feel the impact of trying economic times first—and, conversely, recover last. “As the business climate for nonprofits has become more challenging, you need people with business skills,” he says.

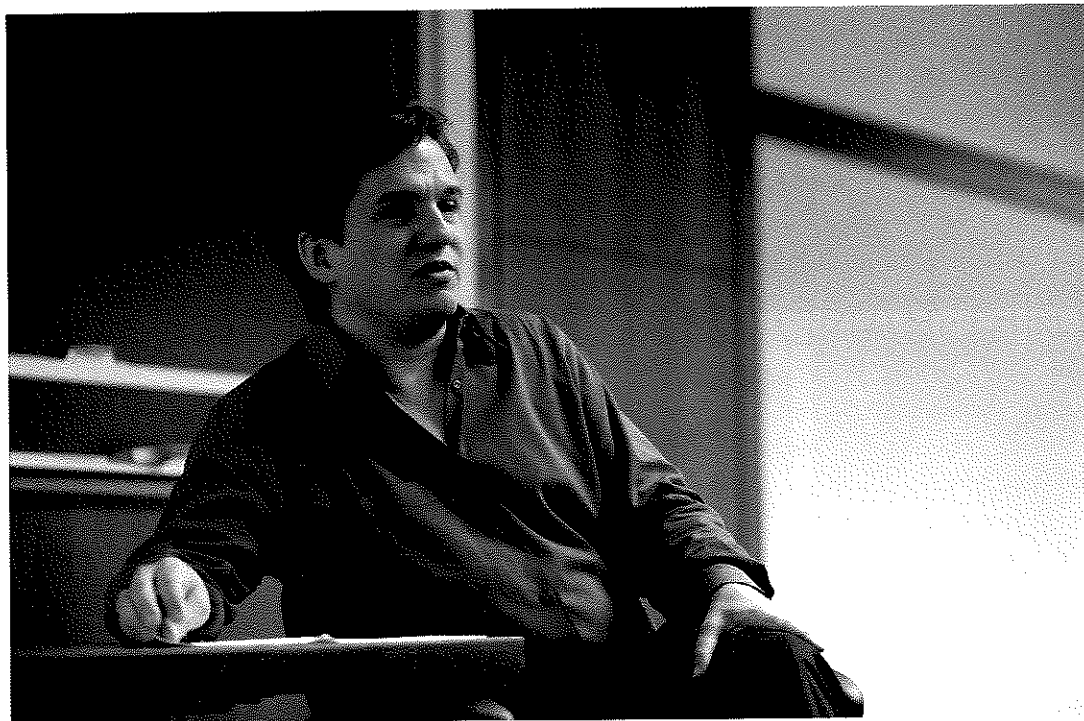
Bruce Thibodeau, MBA ’90, CAM ’03, an adjunct lecturer and executive in residence at Babson, teaches the undergraduate class, which requires a host of skills from students. They tackle finance, management, board governance, legal issues, audience development, fundraising, marketing, performance measures, and the social and educational impact of artistic programs.

Such is the complicated nature of arts organizations, so the class deals with myriad concerns. The leaders of these institutions, for instance, answer to a wide range of stakeholders. Beyond the staff, agents, donors,

## Keith Lockhart

conductor, Boston Pops Orchestra

“Decisions made in arts organizations are not just about money, but if you don’t think about money, you won’t be in business very long.”



unions, and artistic directors, leaders must remember the community the organization serves, the corporations that provide needed sponsorship, and the politicians whose support can make or break future plans. "How do you serve the needs of all of them?" Thibodeau poses to his students.

Thibodeau also teaches that above all leaders must negotiate the delicate balance between art and commerce, between making sure that the organization is secure financially and fostering an environment where creative people are free to do what they do best: create. "It's a balance between the left brain and the right brain," he says.

During Lockhart's April visit, he spoke of real-life examples of these issues in action. He began by talking about the 2002 merger of the Utah Symphony and the Utah Opera. Lockhart was the symphony's music director at the time, and while the merger made sense for the two organizations, their loyal respective audiences weren't so enthusiastic about the move. "You're dealing with people's emotional investment," Lockhart says.

The merger was typical of other case studies that students examine during the semester. Unlike product-oriented cases,



which students usually encounter in other classes, the arts management cases deal with community, artistic impact, and corporate sponsorship, explains Thibodeau.

After discussing the merger, Lockhart turned to the challenges that orchestras face today. Music education cuts in schools, for example, may translate into young people taking less interest in attending live symphonic performances. Add to that a growing trend of insularity in a society obsessed with smart phones, iPods, and video games. Shared cultural experiences seem to be marginalized. "There

has been a cultural paradigm shift," Lockhart says.

At the same time, attracting a new audience isn't easy when any changes to the traditional—say collaborations with modern artists or increased use of lighting and visuals—may annoy those who just want to hear Beethoven. "How do you refresh things without displeasing people who like things the way they are?" Lockhart questions.

Challenges abound, he notes, but so do rewards. Cultural institutions can create a positive community impact. "Your charge as a nonprofit organization," he says, "is to do great things."

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## Bruce Thibodeau

MBA '90, CAM '03

### Residences

Boston and  
Los Angeles

### Career

Adjunct lecturer and executive in residence at Babson, and the president of the Los Angeles-based Arts Consulting Group ([artsconsulting.com](http://artsconsulting.com)), which offers services to cultural institutions. DBA candidate at Grenoble Ecole de Management in Grenoble, France.

### A Favorite Book

*First Things First* by Stephen Covey and Roger and Rebecca Merrill. It helped him focus on priorities in his life.

### Personal Philosophy

Through the Arts Consulting Group, he hopes to "help people and organizations achieve higher levels of who they are and who they want to become."