

A Modest Proposal to Bring the Zing Back to the Strings

Richard J. Salvucci

I've often heard it asked in the wake of the Spurs championship season, "How Could San Antonio Get Any Better?" Well, human nature being what it is, you can always think of something you'd like to have and don't. This proposal is written in just that spirit. I beg the Movers and Shakers to read it even though I doubt they're going to like it very much.. Something, I figure, is better than nothing.

And as far as a symphony goes, nothing is what we're looking at. Rather than add to the endless analyses of what's wrong with this organization, I want to suggest some creative solutions to its apparent demise. Solutions there are, particularly that take advantage of San Antonio's unique binational heritage. I guarantee you. This fits right into the philosophy of *como San Antonio no hay dos*. And that's the beauty part of it. Oh, yes, it's a solution that imbibes the spirit of NAFTA, which as we all know, is the key to our collective destinies here. You see, if we can just get Mexico to cooperate, we can Save the Symphony. And we can do it by spending very little money. Maybe even none. All of us get music out of the deal. Mexico gets lots of good publicity, which, God knows, Mexico always needs. And San Antonio gets to keep the Symphony, albeit in slightly altered form. But, what the heck, if we can have "Los Dos Laredos", why not "Una Sinfonia: Dos Paises"? Hey, it can work.

Actually, the whole idea was inspired by the move made by a friend who plays in the Symphony to Floresville in response to recent events. Go South, young (well, sort of young) man, he thought. The cost of living is lower there, the grass is greener, Toyota's coming, you know the drill. In any event, it suddenly hit me that this guy's migration was in the right direction, *but not far enough..* Yes. The solution to the Symphony's going south is to Go South. But all the way. To Mexico. Where in Mexico? Well, it could be almost anywhere (maybe not Chiapas), but somewhere in the North would be most practical, obviously. Maybe we can call the place Aztlán, with the understanding that it's in the environs of Monterrey or thereabouts. Well why not? It works for the HEB and Stride Rite. It can work for the Symphony, too.

Why Mexico? Well, it's right next door, right? You might say Mexico's a poor country with a lot of poor people, but then, San Antonio isn't exactly Fat City either. And Mexico's got lots of millionaires, billionaires, heck, gazillionaires. San Antonio's got only a measly five or six, or whatever, and they've

made it pretty clear they ain't the least bit interested in helping. The odds are much better that we can interest a Mexican with money in doing this. Entrepreneurs in Northern Mexico are always on the prowl for good acquisitions in the United States and the Symphony would do nicely for some of those upscale garden parties that the monied men throw on their haciendas and ranchos. I think our brass players could master mariachi. We could arrange for joint appearances of Vicente Fernández and the Symphony, or, in a pinch, Los Traileros del Norte would do. You know, music is music. The Symphony could open for the Traileros, or, even cooler, back them up. You can't imagine what Selena with Strings would've sounded like? Shame on you. No imagination. Haven't you ever heard the Boston Pops?

Besides, in a pinch, the Symphony could play, ugh, "classical" music. When my wife and I lived in Mexico, we got the impression that Mexicans from many classes listened to a good deal of the stuff. The National University radio station broadcast it all over the country, and, as far as I know, still does. We used to go hear the Orchestra of the State of Mexico, and it played "Pictures at an Exhibition," things like that. Nobody ever suggested that the people there were genetically allergic to the music, or called it "broccoli." The halls were usually sold out. The musicians were terrific. There were even Mexican composers, Enrique Revueltas, for one, who wrote for symphony orchestras. Besides, a little broccoli never hurt anyone. But I digress.

See, the other point is, the musicians could actually live on the contract the Symphony's offered them here. It's just that they'd have to live there. Of course, I'm assuming right now that the musicians aren't real particular about where they live, as long as they can make a living. From what I hear, they're going Anywhere. Imagine that. So why not Mexico? It might not be San Antonio, but if you can live for less in Floresville, imagine what you could do South of the Border.

Now where exactly do we fit it? Well, as I see it, there are a couple of possibilities. I'm assuming that a Mexican purchaser or backer or whatever would immediately see the publicity value of saving the San Antonio Symphony from San Antonio. Oh, I meant *for* San Antonio, but small matter. The Symphony could tour in San Antonio and not have to be restricted to the Majestic Theatre. It could play all kinds of commercial venues, maybe even open a road or a supermarket or a radio station or two, do Sea World, all unapologetically, for there would be no silly questions of commerce versus culture here, no sir. I bet we might even get the Mexican government to kick in a few bucks, or, at least, give the musicians eligibility in

the state medical system. It'd be more than they have now. The Symphony could even do a series of concerts at UNAM, San Antonio, which, from what I can see, has plenty of experience in bringing high culture to all sorts of diverse audiences. They could sell T-shirts, raspas, CDs, the works. And anytime anyone in the United States were to say anything negative about Mexico or Mexicans (a rare happening, I admit), the Mexicans could say "But the San Antonio Symphony, which does so much good, is actually owned and sponsored by a Mexican." It might make up for Mexico's nonreaction to 9-11, believe me. Señor Fox, are you listening?

What's more, we could always rent-a-symphony for less than we could have-a-symphony. You know, I bet \$400,000 could sponsor a nice little chunk of time up here, and I bet even the Symphony could draw better than the Cowboys have. So you get a little more bang for your buck. Or your peso.

Now, you might ask, why even keep the name San Antonio Symphony if it were to operate out of Mexico, the musicians take up residence there, and the owner or sponsor be Mexican. Well, come on? Who would figure on a world class collection of musicians settling down somewhere in Mexico? You'd want a name that would provide credibility. A city that was, well, for real, and which everyone would expect would have a first class-symphony as part of its cultural life. A city like...San Antonio! Even if we're exaggerating a little bit. It could be our secret. Who would know, aside from City Council and a few obvious elitists?

You don't think it could work?

But what's lost in trying? As it is, we have nothing now. How could nothing, or something for nothing, be worse? You tell me. And tell the musicians at the Symphony as well. They're waiting. But they can't wait much longer. Ándale, pues.

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