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Orchestra London revamps image

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LONDON. Ont. - Orchestra London is breaking with tradition in the hope of improving its financial fortunes. Next season it plans to attract larger and younger audiences by introducing a new concert format.

John St. Croix says it's not about changing the notes, it's about changing the presentation. St. Croix is on the orchestra's advisory board.

He knows there are orchestral purists who would consider any change in presentation heresy, but he also knows the orchestra must consider any and all ways of improving attendance if it is to survive.

Next season St. Croix says the orchestra is going to take a bold step and experiment with its Sinfonia series of concerts. The concert hall will be lit with candles, the musicians will perform in the round and the audience will sit in couches while being served wine and hors d'oeuvres. St. Croix says it's definitely a risk:

"We have an opportunity here in London, Ontario to be innovative in the area of orchestras across Canada and maybe across North America. So either we're going to get just hammered [laughter] or we're going to have a lot of fun with it and attract patrons into classical music that maybe would never get the opportunity to do it."

St. Croix says the changes are aimed at attracting a younger audience to the concert hall. He says he has the blessing of the musicians and other members of the board. And just to be sure that the break with tradition is complete the orchestra is holding a contest to rename the Sinfonia series, one that reflects a new packaging of an old art form.