

You Didn't Think This Curtis Thing Was Going To Blow Over, Did You?

Monday, November 4th, 2019 by [Drew McManus](#)

77
SHARES

 **45** Share on Facebook

 **31** Share on Twitter

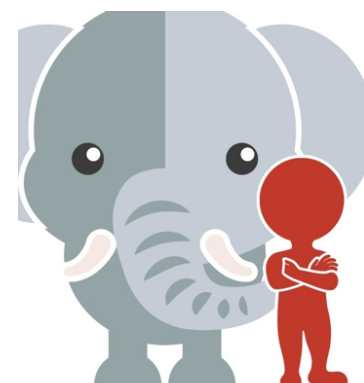
 **1** Share on LinkedIn

 Print

 Email

In the latest chapter of what comes across as a book on how not to go about crisis management, the Curtis Institute continues to dig up in response to allegations of sexual abuse and impropriety.

At the end of July, 2019, the Philadelphia Inquirer published an investigative [article](#) by Tricia L. Nadolny and Peter Dobrin that reports on alleged sexual assault at the Curtis Institute against a minor by a renowned violin teacher.



From a damage control perspective, things went downhill fast for Curtis thanks to a series of responses that spanned the range of attempting to bury the story to investigation theater.

The victim in this alleged incident who went public with her account is renowned violin soloist, Lara St. John, who recently posted a [message](#) on Facebook that included a copy of a letter she addressed to Roberto Diaz, Curtis Institute of Music's President.

According to St. John, Diaz did make contact with her via email at some point after the Inquirer article was published and offered to meet in Philadelphia, at her expense.

Here is my recent response to Roberto Diaz. After some emails back and forth in the past few weeks about possibly meeting, his latest indicates he would be happy to when he is back in [his] town from traveling. In the three months since the Inquirer article came out, practically nothing has been done or said by the Curtis Institute, yet I am expected to spend time and money to go meet with their director and CEO.

St. John also published a copy of the letter she addressed to Diaz. It makes no bones about what she describes as a series of cagy replies. It also spells out in plain English why she continues to be disappointed with the way his office and the school's board have handled the situation.

The letter concludes with a list of conditions needed before St. John would be willing to speak with Diaz on the telephone. Of particular interest is the condition that the school hire a law firm such as the one that investigated the allegations of sexual abuse and impropriety at the Cleveland Orchestra. The firm's [final report](#) ultimately contributed to the dismissal of two high profile musicians.

You would need to engage a law firm such as Debevoise & Plimpton, LLP in New York; the law firm which acted for The Cleveland Orchestra in its recent investigation of sexual misconduct within the orchestra's ranks; to conduct a full investigation free from interference from either you or the Curtis Board of Directors.

St. John also includes a requirement that the school commits to releasing the full report from such an investigation to the public.

Lastly, the one tangible action in response to the allegations Curtis made public was establishing an abuse hotline. St. John takes issue with this decision as well and while she supports establishing a hotline, she doesn't feel the organization Curtis selected to operate it is up to the task. Consequently, she provides her own recommendation.

You would speak to RAINN (Rape And Incest National Network) about establishing a hotline run by them, instead of the current service you have engaged which call center staff are inadequately trained in trauma and sexual abuse, victims are encouraged to be very brief about their abuse, and are advised that their anonymity will likely be compromised and cannot be guaranteed.

Should the institution meet these conditions, St. John affirms her commitment to meet with Diaz and the school's board "to discuss ways in which Curtis can better meet its responsibility to its students and stakeholders."

Following is the full Facebook [statement](#) and copy of St. John's letter.



Lara St John
about 4 months ago

Mr. Roberto Diaz
President
Curtis Institute of Music
1726 Locust Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

October 30, 2019

Dear Roberto:

While I appreciate your note, I have some fundamental issues with the way you and your Board of Directors have approached my letter to you, dated August 12, 2019, and your collective response to the subsequent revelations in the press of my past abuse.

When I first shared the information of my abuse and rape at the hands of a pedophile in the employ of Curtis with you and your Board of Directors, you pledged to diligently investigate. Both Elizabeth Warchauer and the Institute's attorney indicated that a report would be rendered following the investigation and that a copy would be shared with me.

While we now know that a report was written, when Stephen Judson asked you to share it with me, you at first denied knowledge of a report and after a number of subsequent written requests, acknowledged the existence of a report which you declined to share with me. I now know why you declined to share the report, having read it in the Philadelphia Inquirer in July 2019, and the Board's commissioned investigation was designed not to arrive at the truth nor to safeguard the children and other students currently attending Curtis, but rather, to understand what liability existed for the school as a result of the criminal activity there which was both condoned and facilitated by members of your staff.

This was disappointing to me.

Since the day the public revelations of these crimes were revealed in the media, no one from your office or Board has:

1. articulated any regret for how I was victimized,
2. investigated the events of 1991 and 1996,
3. contacted witnesses to Robert Fitzgerald's meeting with me in which he refused to protect me from Curtis' employees, a pedophile, or
4. explored the numerous other cases of rape, sexual abuse and sexual coercion, which occurred with the knowledge of employees of Curtis.

You and the Board have failed both this venerable institution and the Curtis community.

Serious crimes were committed and we now know that dozens of other children and women were affected by the pattern of abuse, neglect and negligence by senior Curtis staff.

So, to address your initial question, several things would need to occur before I meet or speak with you on the telephone:

1. You and your Board of Directors would need to publicly acknowledge Curtis' failure to protect me as a minor from a pedophile,
2. You would need to engage a law firm such as Debevoise & Plimpton, LLP in New York, the law firm which acted for The Cleveland Orchestra in its recent investigation of sexual misconduct within the orchestra's ranks, to conduct a full investigation free from interference from either you or the Curtis Board of Directors,
3. You would release the report publicly making it available to all Curtis Alumni, Board of Directors, staff, students, and the public,
4. You would speak to RAINN (Rape And Incest National Network) about establishing a hotline run by them, instead of the current service you have engaged which call center staff are inadequately trained in trauma and sexual abuse, victims are encouraged to be very brief about their abuse, and are advised that their anonymity will likely be compromised and cannot be guaranteed.

Once you have met these conditions, I will be pleased to speak with you and members of your Board to discuss ways in which Curtis can better meet its responsibility to its students and stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Lara St John

Here is my recent response to Roberto Diaz. After some emails back and forth in the past few weeks about possibly meeting, his latest indicates he would be happy to when he is back in [his] town from traveling. In the three months since the Inquirer article came out, practically nothing has been done or said by the Curtis Institute, yet I am expected to spend time and money to go meet with their director and CEO. Fine, but the following is what it will take for me to do so.

279 105 31

About Drew McManus



"I hear that every time you show up to work with an orchestra, people get fired."

Those were the first words out of an executive's mouth after her board chair introduced us. That executive is now a dear colleague and friend but the day that consulting contract began with her orchestra, she was convinced I was a hatchet-man brought in by the board to clean house.

I understand where the trepidation comes from as a great deal of my [consulting](#) and [technology provider](#) work for arts organizations involves due diligence, separating fact

from fiction, interpreting spin, as well as performance review and oversight. So yes, sometimes that work results in one or two individuals "aggressively embracing career change" but far more often than not, it reinforces and clarifies exactly what works and why.

In short, it doesn't matter if you know where all the bodies are buried if you can't keep your own clients out of the ground, and I'm fortunate enough to say that for more than 15 years, I've done exactly that for groups of all budget size from Qatar to Kathmandu.

For fun, I write a daily [blog](#) about the orchestra business, provide a [platform](#) for arts insiders to speak their mind, keep [track](#) of what people in this business get paid, help write a satirical [cartoon](#) about orchestra life, [hack](#) the arts, and love a good coffee drink.

[View all posts by Drew McManus](#) | [Website](#)

Related Posts

The Latest #MeToo Accusation Turns Into A Lesson On How Not To #PR

The 7/25/2019 edition of the Philadelphia Inquirer published an investigative article by Tricia L. Nadolny and Peter Dobrin that reports on alleged sexual assault...



Commentary: It's Time To Begin Clawing Back Compensation

The 2/13/18 edition of the Indianapolis Business Journal has an article by Lindsey Erdody following up on an issue at the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra...



[Read More](#)

The Latest #MeToo Installment

What more is there to say about #MeToo revelations other than cautioning against becoming numb. To that end, the 8/13/2019 edition of the Associated...



[Read More](#)

>>>