

Building stronger communities with the CSO



An interview with John W. Rogers, Jr., Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Ariel Capital Management, LLC

One of Ariel's core values is a deep commitment to our community. Beyond the firm's business performance, we want to help strengthen the neighborhoods and cities in which we live and work. An important part of this civic commitment is taking a real hands-on approach to corporate responsibility.

Over the years, I've been fortunate to be involved with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a variety of ways. Most consistently, I've chaired the CSO's investment and pension committees. I've also been a member of the nominating committee and worked with a great team of people to help attract new talent and ideas to the CSO. In addition to my involvement as a trustee, Ariel and our employees have enjoyed working with the CSO over the years.

Ariel has participated in Corporate Night, which is a great way for us to involve our clients and employees in a very special evening of music and mingle with others in Chicago's business community. We have also sponsored five Wynton Marsalis jazz concerts over the years, an event that is one of my personal favorites. Beyond these events, Ariel has also sponsored concerts featuring the Boys Choir of Harlem as well as a CSO performance at Carnegie Hall.

In addition to exposing the public to world class musical and cultural programs, I have been impressed with the CSO's push in diversity, which, in my view, has been sincere and effective. Chuck Lewis' leadership (*Chuck Lewis is a CSO Life Trustee*) in driving this particular initiative has been tremendous, and Ariel is very supportive and pleased to be working with the CSO in these efforts as well.

Another important part of Ariel's civic involvement is our sponsorship of the Ariel Community Academy, a small public school in Chicago's North Kenwood neighborhood that serves more than 400 Chicago students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The Academy is based on a student-family-school-community partnership. This means that family and community are crucial elements in the social, educational and emotional well-being of our students. In recent years, we've used the Wynton Marsalis concert as a bridge to join our employees, community leaders and other partners from the nonprofit world.

For example, we've had teachers and administrators from the Academy join us for a pre-concert dinner followed by the Marsalis performance. Many teachers bring their parents to the event. We've invited staff from the Rainbow PUSH Coalition to attend. Reverend Jackson even joined us on one occasion, and Wynton has stopped by. The venue and views are wonderful, the atmosphere is positive, and the music is great. Everyone loves it! Our sponsorship and involvement with this concert has been a terrific way for Ariel to reach out and include many corporate and nonprofit friends, especially those who don't often get a chance to go to Orchestra Hall. The CSO offers excellent opportunities to blend our institutional values with our civic interests and responsibilities.

This article first appeared in Inside 220, a publication of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.