

ICSOM President's Report
2011 ICSOM Conference
Detroit, MI
August 17, 2011

Good morning delegates, fellow GB members, Federation and Local officers and staff, and honored guests.

I hope you will indulge me a moment to reflect on being here, in Detroit, in 2011.

Thirty years ago, in 1981, I was a junior at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Right after Labor Day I was fortunate to land a position with the Flint Symphony Orchestra that would change my life forever. One of my first responsibilities was to join the union. I knew very little of the Federation, what a CBA was, and what belonging to a union involved. Luckily, I found myself sitting next to someone who helped show me the ropes. I learned a great deal from my long-time friend and current DSO delegate Dave Everson including always striving to be your best both on the stage and off. Those early years as a musician, union rep and committee chair offered me valuable opportunities to learn why our union and the power of collective solidarity are essential to life in an American orchestra.

I also joined Local 625 in Ann Arbor and Local 5. I was fortunate to sub regularly with the DSO. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra has been one of America's great orchestras and many would say-greatly underrated. From time to time communities and boards take their orchestras for granted, but perhaps none more than Detroit these past twelve months.

In the Motor City, I have to say this once; let me shift gears for a moment.

If you have time to visit the Henry Ford Museum it may well be worth the effort. Presidential limos used by JFK, Ronald Reagan, and planes, trains and automobiles from yesteryear are there. The Ford Museum has many terrific exhibits including a musical instrument showcase of over 600 instruments from Mr. Ford's private collection, including a Stradivarius and a Guarneri. There are several American history exhibits including an extensive section on the civil rights movement. While here on vacation a couple of weeks ago, my family had the opportunity to sit in the same bus Rosa Parks rode that auspicious day, December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. A speaker inside the bus recounts the significant event and ends the audio-tour with an overhead light directed on the actual seat used by Mrs. Parks. The mother of the freedom movement and the first lady of civil rights, Mrs. Parks later moved to Detroit where she was a secretary and receptionist for a particular United States Representative named John Conyers, Jr.

Next to the Rosa Parks' exhibit is one dedicated to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As I prepared for the conference I discovered another of Dr. King's quotations and found it to be of particular interest and inspiration.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." --Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The theme for this summer's conference is "Now more than ever." Let us take a moment to think about what that may mean.

Our orchestras are not the only labor groups under attack. The right to collectively bargain for many public unions has been stripped by the stroke of a pen. Private unions are under attack from those who

would rather further their own agendas than allow the middle class to achieve the American dream. Even the Hyatt hotel chain literally turned up the heat on its own workers when demonstrated over unacceptable working conditions. Despite our relatively new relationship with the Hyatt chain this GB will not consider future partnerships with Hyatt until they resolve the dispute with their workers.

Several orchestras encountered draconian proposals and ultimatums the likes we thought we would never see. Bankruptcies were filed in New Mexico, Syracuse, Louisville and Philadelphia. We also had the longest strike in recent memory here in Detroit. Our Detroit colleagues fought valiantly to preserve their orchestra, its historical place among the top ten, and the exemplary service they provide to the citizens of Michigan.

With the Chapter 11 filing by the Board and Management of the Philadelphia Orchestra today's reality is that no orchestra is immune from mismanagement, attempts to balance a budget on the backs of musicians and a lack of commitment to retain those musicians who dedicated themselves to their orchestras.

Now, more than ever, it means that we must be even more vigilant in supporting our orchestras and each other. When an orchestra is under attack such as happened here in Detroit, and Louisville, Syracuse, now Philadelphia and across the AFM, we must support them.

ICSOM musicians and our brothers and sisters throughout the AFM are to be commended for their overwhelming response to ICSOM's Call to Action for Detroit. But, we must continue to support of *all* orchestras in crisis.

Additional Strike Fund benefits were extended to our colleagues in Detroit due to the potential ramifications on all orchestras had the DSO Board and Management been allowed to impose insidious work rules, elimination of tenure, two-tier wage structure, removal of librarians from the bargaining unit, and other equally disturbing proposals. We must remember that what affects one orchestra affects us all. Consideration should be given to deploying Strike Fund assets to assist musicians as they seek to create new orchestras, and thereby provide jobs for ICSOM musicians unemployed due to bankruptcy. Is it also time to consider raising Strike Fund dues to bolster our ability to collectively "fight the good fight" with boards and managements intent on unilaterally imposing *their* vision of a new business model upon us?

We must continue to reach out and identify those organizations who agree that orchestras are essential to the quality of life in our communities. Every ICSOM musician should be a member of the Americans for the Arts Action Fund. Membership is free. Go online to artsusa.org for more information or ask any member of the governing board.

Within the orchestra field there are many executive directors and board members who are passionate about the arts and committed to their orchestras. We must continue to reach out and connect with these allies. There are, however, some within this field that do not support what we do. They seek to undermine our contracts and working conditions with little or no regard to the artistic consequences. Musician leaders here in Detroit and elsewhere warned their managements and boards but were ignored. As a result musicians are leaving troubled orchestras in record numbers. We must get this story to the public carefully and strategically.

I would like to close with words by Chairman Emeritus Fred Zenone, for whom this conference is dedicated. In the ICSOM delegate manual and on ICSOM's website is an article Fred wrote titled "How delegates make ICSOM work."

Fred addressed the need for delegates to share the lessons learned here at the Conference with our colleagues back home. Our work is not over on Saturday afternoon. Our work really has just begun.

Fred writes, "Too often delegates return to their orchestras with the message, "I have been to the annual ICSOM conference and I am convinced." This is not a position that will enlighten or persuade an orchestra. Few people at the conference or at home will act as a result of such a statement. Because we are a rank-and-file organization, and because we do not make agreement a condition of membership, our single most effective tool is persuasion. We must have the power to persuade and the willingness to be persuaded.

We have been designated by our orchestras as leaders and activists. ICSOM asks us to affirm and reaffirm that position throughout the year. We are the voice in our orchestras of American orchestra musicians united on a national level. We are the persons who must constantly examine the effect our orchestra's action will have on other orchestras. Each of us must be a leader, an organizer, a conduit of information, the conscience of a movement of caring and involved and active musicians who insist on improving the institutions through which we produce our art.

Our role this week is to put our hearts and minds together, to learn from and with one another, and to renew our mission of advocacy and activism.

Thank you for being here and let's have a great conference.