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Grand and Rapid Versus Small and Sluggish A GRS Negotiation Update

By Member-at-Large Paul Austin

The musicians of the Grand Rapids Symphony (all members of the AFM Local 56, Grand Rapids) have been negotiating for a new contract since April 27th with the Grand Rapids Symphony Society. The four-year agreement between the musicians and the Society expired August 31, 2015. Since September 1st, the musicians have been working without a successor contract in a “work and talk” situation.

While negotiation sessions over the summer had been productive in terms of many non-financial issues, there remains distance between both sides regarding the financial aspects of the proposals. The musicians want the GRS to grow along with the city that currently is experiencing a boom like never before, while the management wants to turn back the clock, decreasing pay and benefits to its musicians.

The summer of 2015 included three important visits to GRS Musicians from leaders in our industry: Bruce Ridge, Nathan Kahn, and Randy Whatley.

ICSOM Chair Bruce Ridge flew to Grand Rapids for a three-day site visit to ICSOM’s newest orchestra. During his time in our city, Bruce had meetings with the musicians and several committees, as well as board, management, and Local leader-

(continued on page 11)



Gail Christopoulos

GRS Negotiation Committee: Left to right: the Author (Co-Chair), Leslie Van Becker, Beth Colpean, Eric Vander Stel (AFM Local 56 President), Diane McElfish Helle (Co-Chair), and Nathan Kahn. Not pictured: Barbara Corbato, Jeremy Crosmer, Christopher Martin

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Growth Not Cuts

By Scott Jessup, FWSO Negotiating Committee Chair

After months of negotiations and 12 bargaining sessions, the musicians of the Fort Worth Symphony are facing essentially the same proposal from management that we received last summer. We took a 13.5% pay cut in 2010 and lost weeks, and now they want even more. Their current proposal is a cut from 46 full-time paid weeks to 39 full-time paid weeks plus a four-week “Summer Season”. With inflation factored in, this represents a total cut of 22.8% since 2010. We offered management a four-year proposal with yet another gesture of assistance to them: a freeze the first year. Even with this they are not budging.

Management is claiming record ticket sales and subscription growth, yet despite numerous requests for a formal plan to increase our budget or commence a capital campaign, we have received nothing. Notably, there is also a record turnover rate among the staff of the symphony.

Since 2008, Fort Worth has the fastest-growing economy in Texas and the sixth fastest-growing economy in the U.S. Our peer orchestras all over the country are raising millions of dollars and growing; however, since 2010 the budget of the FWSO has not only not grown, it has actually shrunk.

To demonstrate our solidarity and determination, the musicians have organized many actions. We presented a petition to our president calling for a plan that shows growth and increased fundraising. We gave a speech—received with a standing ovation!—to our audience outlining our situation before a symphonic subscription concert. We organized a “flash mob” performance of “Brazil” in downtown Fort Worth. The video of that performance, which can be seen on our Facebook page or on YouTube, has reached more than 25,000 people on Facebook as of this writing.

We will continue to fight for the future of our orchestra. Going backward is not the Fort Worth way. We are seeking a contract that includes growth, not cuts.



Stewart Williams

The FWS Negotiating Committee delivers the pre-concert speech: Ed Jones, Julie Vinsant, the Author, Shelley Jessup, Joni Baczewski



Chairperson's Report

By Bruce Ridge

In This Bleak Mid-Winter

As I write at my desk tonight, it is four days before Thanksgiving in the United States. We are about to enter the holiday season, a season that in many ways is defined by music and memories. The musicians of ICSOM will be performing music that is all too familiar to us, with countless *Nutcrackers*, *Messiahs*, and holiday arrangements we have performed hundreds if not thousands of times. While we might find that music to be fatiguing, it will bring joy to many who listen, and they will find that joy at a time when it is greatly needed for the world.



Michael Zinke

Every holiday season is at least partly about the holidays that went before. Christmas carols and other holiday music are as evocative as the decades-old Super 8 millimeter films I have of me and my brothers opening presents, as our forever young parents watch wearily and joyfully.

My favorite carol has always been "In the Bleak Mid-Winter", which I learned as a child from the Methodist hymnal, as a setting by Gustav Holst of a poem from

the 1870s. But Benjamin Britten and other composers have also set the poem to music, and as a result there are many versions of this carol. Some are very religious, and others more secular. My favorite recording might be by the American singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin.

The bleakness of the carol's title merely describes the winter months, when "earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone" and "Snow had fallen, snow on snow, in the bleak mid-winter, long, long ago."

This music is on my mind tonight, because as Thanksgiving approaches it is also ten days after the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, and just a few days after the attacks in Mali. From the other room I can hear the non-stop drone of television news reporting that Belgium is under the highest alert for terrorist attacks, and pundits and candidates, alternately well-meaning and self-serving, debating and arguing over what we all should be doing to respond. The violent, disheartening events of the world in this mid-winter are indeed bleak.

Our esteemed editor, Peter de Boor, sent me a blog post he had found that discussed how the world should respond. The post urged us all:

If you make music keep making it. Make more of it.

If you write, write more, publish more, speak more.

If you make or watch film, or theatre, or dance, or comedy, or any other form of performance, it's now more important than ever.

When our hearts are broken we have to keep our minds open.

After these latest attacks on humanity, the world again turned to music and musicians responded.

Orchestras across the world dedicated their performances to the victims in France. The Metropolitan Opera performed the French national anthem "La Marseillaise", as did the National



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Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, along with so many others. Making it easier to do so, the list-serve of the Major Orchestra Librarians Association (MOLA) sent out an immediate notice informing all their members how to access the score. And the Atlanta Symphony dedicated its performance of the Verdi *Requiem* to the victims in Paris.

The day after the attacks, a pianist arrived outside the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, the scene of so many deaths, and played John Lennon's "Imagine" for the gathered grieving crowd. As Brussels went on lock-down, a cellist appeared in front of armored vehicles to play Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah". To assist others in crisis, the Vienna Philharmonic launched a campaign to fund a house for asylum seekers that would give shelter to four families of refugees while providing language courses and music.

It is a troubled time for the world, but every generation has faced such a moment, and every generation has said "but this time it feels different." It is true that the attacks being perpetrated around the world, not just in European capitals but also in Beirut, Kenya, Nigeria, and in so many other places, represent a different type of assault on humanity and culture. These attacks are killing countless people, and they are also demolishing museums and artifacts, eradicating libraries, and destroying musical instruments.

Terrorism is designed to make us afraid, and designed to make us surrender our values in response. We must not accommodate the aims of terrorists. It is easy to see only the destructive people, but even while under assault there remains more kindness in this world than misanthropy. I remember an admonition from Mister Rogers I saw many years ago. When children would see television footage of such attacks, he would advise them to "look for the helpers. There are always people helping."

As humans and musicians, here is how we can best respond.

Seek out ways to show individual kindness to others, especially when it might not be seen or honored. This holiday season when many families are together there will be many people alone. Find ways to reach them. Volunteer to visit the elderly, who are all too often alone with the memories of the past holidays. Volunteer to serve at a soup kitchen over the holidays. Give a coat to the homeless.

The musicians of our orchestras can join together to make donations of non-perishable goods to the food banks in our cities, or to raise money among ourselves for a donation to a needed cause in our cities.

This is how to respond to terrorism.

Further this year, when it is the tenth performance of the *Nutcracker* and we are exhausted with the repetition, look into the audience, mindful that they are arriving after seeing terrible carnage on TV. Make it our mission to demonstrate something beautiful to them at a time when they are wondering where beauty is to be found.

Share your thoughts and experiences with your orchestra's board members to make sure they understand their support for their orchestra is meaningful in their city, and meaningful in this world, perhaps now more than ever.

We will not be isolated, we will not be fearful, and we will not be apathetic.

When I was studying in Boston, my great teacher Lawrence

Wolfe would often write messages to me on my sheet music, which would usually say "Know no fear." As we move through this holiday season, and as we look for ways to respond to the world events, I urge us all to know no fear. We can respond with individual acts of kindness, we can respond by seeking out moments of joy and peace to share with everyone we meet, and our orchestras will respond as families, performing and welcoming the audiences who have arrived to share a moment of peace with us.

People of all religions and ideologies will be celebrating this month, and this year we must celebrate inclusiveness and acceptance together. While it can be easy to feel a sense of futility in the face of terrorism, musicians can join together inclusively and lead the way with our dedication and music, as music will always remain a force for good in our weary world.

*What can I give you,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can, I give you -
I will give my heart.
In the bleak mid-winter
Long, long ago.*

Note: the blog post referenced in this report can be found at <http://sureweapons.com/2015/11/15/how-to-terrify-terrorists/>

President's Report

By George Brown

Keep Going

Since assuming my new position on the Governing Board, I have been perusing past issues of *Senza Sordino* from the online archives. The history of ICSOM is a rich one, and much of it is chronicled in *Senza's* many articles. One item that fairly jumped out at me was a message that our Chairman, Bruce Ridge, has been touching on for years, going back to his early days on the Governing Board. It's a powerful message—one that bears repeating—that speaks to our relationships with our neighborhoods and communities.



Brian Root

As ICSOM's member orchestras have matured over many years from community organizations to major professional ensembles, so have our ranks evolved: orchestras that once were predominantly local players are now made up mostly of musicians from around the country and even from around the planet. (To a large extent, this change is reflected in many of our orchestra managements, as well.)

This can sometimes become problematic if many of us, new to a particular city, don't move a bit beyond our initial social circle of musicians to integrate with others over time. Without this process, the extent of our relationships within the com-

munity can become restricted to simply performing for folks on weekends at our concert halls, and at that point we're not so much communicating with people as at them.

This is precisely what Bruce has been addressing in so many ways over the years. It is what he meant almost a decade ago when he borrowed and re-tooled the phrase, "Breaking the Fourth Wall," from the theatre industry. The Fourth Wall refers to the imaginary wall that separates the performers from the audience, with the shell of the stage forming the other three walls. In theatre, the fourth wall is broken when a character, suddenly aware of his 'fictional state', begins sharing insights directly with the audience. (Kevin Spacey's character in the current *House of Cards* series provides a wonderful TV example of this.)

Bruce applies this directly to our own industry, imploring symphony musicians to break the wall by reaching out in various ways to our audience members, and beyond them to the community at large, so that our stages don't morph into bubbles. Of course, this is exactly what many musicians have already done, and it is reflected in the extensive teaching, outside performing, and volunteer efforts by many of us nationwide.

All of this ties in to an interesting question I've been fielding recently—beginning with our most recent ICSOM Conference—coming from delegates and from folks involved with their musicians' PR efforts back home. They represent orchestras that have successfully hammered out new contracts in the past couple of years, and they ask about the importance of keeping the outreach (online and otherwise) going after ratifying their CBAs.

It's a crucial question because many orchestras began their outreach efforts during contentious contract talks; the musicians realized they needed to move quickly to get their own message out to the public and counter what their managements were saying about them. They did so by launching e-newsletters, as well as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube sites, and in the process, they created a media infrastructure with a local, regional, and even an international reach. Then with negotiations suddenly behind them, musicians in some orchestras expressed confusion regarding how—or even whether—to continue with all these efforts.


In the past, the traditional practice has been to re-focus all our energies on our music-making for a couple of years after a new CBA is in place, and then gear up for negotiations once again in the last year of the agreement. But that was before we began directly engaging with our fans and our communities. As experts in the entertainment industry have often said, fans can be fickle and, over time, we run a risk of being perceived by the public as selfish and disingenuous if we reach out to our fans only when we need them. It is essential to continue making use of the PR infrastructure we have built to inform, entertain, and engage people (beyond simply making music at our halls), regardless of negotiations.

It's easy to understand why there may be resistance to this notion from within our ranks. Whether it involves organizing outreach performances in hospitals, or simply keeping online content current, it takes work and a long-term commitment to keep this engagement moving forward. When a group is successful at maintaining these efforts over a number of years, it represents nothing short of a cultural shift for those orchestra

musicians, since this kind of activity is work for which none of us had been trained at Conservatory or ever envisioned choosing to do as essential parts of our jobs.

There's never a shortage of content out there that we can share with our communities as well, whether the news is about us, about our orchestra, or about our industry nationally. Our fans love it when we pull the curtain back to show glimpses of our lives and profession, sharing insights into what it's like being an orchestra musician, insights that they often would never otherwise have imagined. Sometimes this content needs to be carefully written, but at other times it's as simple and quick as re-sharing news from another orchestra's Facebook page or re-Tweeting a link from the ICSOM Twitter feed.

It all serves to convey the players' message to the public, though that message and tone can vary widely over time as people and situations come and go in an orchestra. Perhaps the most fundamental impact of musicians using their own media platforms is that they define themselves directly to the public, independent of how anyone else, with whatever motive, attempts to paint them. How we maintain and exercise our control over our message to the community in these days of instant news and opinion via iPhones and social media is more crucial than ever. For that reason, it's important we continually stay on top of our messaging.

More than a few times over the years I have read an article in *Senza* and felt strongly that our patrons and ticket holders would enjoy—and learn from—reading it as well. Those orchestra musicians who take and keep control of their own public messaging essentially create a kind of *Senza Sordino*, customized to their own fans and communities. A splendid and needed concept, in my opinion. 

Repaying My Debt to the Cincinnati Symphony

By Member-at-Large Paul Austin

As ICSOM's newest Member-at-Large, I represent 13 orchestras to the Governing Board. My group includes the Cincinnati Symphony, an orchestra of which I have many fond memories.

I lived in Cincinnati from 1982 to 1993, obtaining two graduate performance degrees from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, as well as free-lancing and teaching privately in the area during that time. I listened to Cincinnati Symphony concerts as part of my education. Many of those performances remain with me today as a lasting memory of that fine orchestra and its outstanding musicians.

However, being a poor college student before the era of discounted student tickets, I had discovered a way to sneak in to those concerts through a back door. Eventually, when I had the disposable income to purchase concert tickets, I attended CSO concerts without the fear of being discovered by an usher.

The guilt I felt about those involuntarily-comped concerts became acute upon my election as MAL, with the CSO assigned to my group. The catalyst for my decision to repay my debt to the Cincinnati Symphony was the discovery that one of my private horn students from that time, Amy Catanzaro, today

serves as the CSO's Director of Sales.

Being Amy's teacher for six years, from seventh through twelfth grade, and seeing her progress from Dayton's music magnet schools to a leading position in the arts, encouraged me to come forward and confess.


A quick road trip to Cincinnati last month allowed me to meet with Amy and deliver a check for those times I helped myself to an empty seat at Music Hall. It also provided an opportunity to see that magnificent historical venue and tour the neighborhood. Much shop-talk occurred between us during our visit, and I am quite proud to see that my bright protégée from twenty-five years ago has become a respected part of the CSO.

After our visit, I was also pleased to meet with Paul Frankfeld, President of AFM Local 1 and CSO's long-time but now former ICSOM Delegate. Anyone who knows Paul will not be surprised to know that we were able to reminisce about those



The Author with Amy Catanzaro

specific concerts that I recall so clearly. We discussed the recent developments with the orchestra and it was encouraging to hear good news about the Cincinnati Symphony.

With that behind me, I feel that I can represent the Cincinnati Symphony to ICSOM's Governing Board with a clean conscience. I also hope to visit the other 12 orchestras in my group, but without the baggage of any youthful indiscretions. 

ICSOM bylaws provide that dues are late after December 31. If your orchestra has not yet sent in your dues payment, please do so as soon as possible. Thanks for your support!

Michael Moore, ICSOM Treasurer

In the Eye of the Storm

By José Martín, OSPR ICSOM Delegate

There is currently a financial crisis in Puerto Rico. The government's debt is more than \$72 billion and it missed a payment for the first time in August. The local economy has been in recession for ten consecutive years. Some of our ICSOM colleagues have had to deal with the effects



Foto: Ashlin

of economic crises, but the structure of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (OSPR) makes the difficulties of our situation unique. (I highly recommend the book *Las Mieles del Alba*, written by the Puerto Rican composer Aponte Ledee, which is a must for understanding the political/cultural/historical intricacies that make up our "DNA" as classical musicians in Puerto Rico.)

Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States since 1898, but only in 1948 did it get its first elected Governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. Muñoz Marín had a friendship with the self-exiled Spaniard, Maestro Pablo Casals, whose mother was Puerto Rican. At that time Casals, already a renowned cellist, opposed the dictatorship of Franco in Spain and made his home in Puerto Rico.

These two personalities, one from the world of politics and one from the world of classical music, united to create the OSPR in 1956. Two years later they founded the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music. Initially the two institutions operated under the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Authority, and musicians were offered a position both in the conservatory and the orchestra.

The OSPR was thus created not through the wishes of private citizens who desired an orchestra. It arose from an idea shared by a politician and a musician: the musician sought to promote what he believed to be the best music for the people, and the politician sought to portray himself as the creator of this "victorious" idea—an idea that would help lure investors to Puerto Rico. It worked, and Puerto Rico's industrial economy flourished at the time.

From its inception, the OSPR was linked to the AFM. The first musicians were brought in from the states and all were members of the AFM. The AFM rapidly obtained contracts for virtually all musical activity in Puerto Rico at the time: hotels, radio and TV stations, recordings, and the OSPR.

The government of Puerto Rico created the OSPR as a government-owned corporation. Labor relations are governed by Puerto Rico Labor Laws, which are analogous to federal labor law in the states. But there is one key distinction between the OSPR and most orchestras in the states: as a government-owned corporation, the members of the Board of Directors are named by the Governor.

In practice, this means Board members respond to the needs of the present government—not the needs of the corporation. It also means that every four years, with the change of the gubernatorial administration, the Board and the management are entirely replaced—they start *da capo*. And in contrast with

many of our fellow ICSOM orchestras, our musicians are legally prohibited from serving on the Board.


These limitations, seen from afar, may seem minor. But the consequences are significant. Legally, the OSPR management has the capacity to raise funds for the orchestra and to meet the needs of the corporation, for the benefit of the orchestra. But customarily they have depended totally on the funds the government gives them.

As I write this article the Government of Puerto Rico has declared itself in a fiscal crisis. There are talks of partially closing the government, downsizing the government workforce, and cutting part of the paid work-week.

We expect that the management's reaction to this will be to say that they cannot operate with a smaller budget, while they continue operating a smaller classical program of some sort. The Casals Festival will most likely be saved, and foreign orchestras or chamber ensembles will be used so that the marketing has more impact with the regular classical audience. In February, 2006, management refused to sign a three-year CBA with a total cost of three million dollars, stating that they did not have the budget; they then turned around and spent over five million dollars on the Casals Festival—in only four weeks.

Since October, 2015, the OSPR has produced six concerts of the music of the different *Star Wars* movies. It started with one concert programmed in the season, and because of requests from the public, five more (and counting!) have been played. The musicians have had to “fight” with management to allow them to take place—sacrificing overtime and playing on free days. These concerts have sold out, most of them in less than four hours, but the only publicity for the concerts was done through the OSPR's Facebook page.

The musicians of the OSPR have not had a salary increase or improvements in benefits for more than ten years. As a result of the current crisis, we anticipate losing some of those benefits from our CBA—including our Christmas bonus and some health insurance payments—by government decree. We also understand that some Board members may be privately funding another orchestra to do run-out concerts outside the metro area, because management says that we only play in San Juan. This cannot be farther from the truth: we are willing to play wherever management takes us and we have played outside the metro area countless times.

Under these conditions we are preparing to negotiate a successor to the CBA that expires in June 2017. We hope we will make it to that point, with the support that we know we have from the AFM and ICSOM. 

The new online version of *Senza Sordino* is available at www.icsom.org/senzasordino/ Active and Emeritus members wishing to opt out of receiving a paper copy may do so by sending an email to the Editor at pdeboor@gmail.com. The decision to opt out may be made or reversed at any time.

Fighting the Flatline

By Kevin Case, ICSOM Counsel

Recently, the United Auto Workers (UAW) reached contract agreements with Ford, General Motors, and Fiat Chrysler. The essential details of these largely similar deals have been reported in the press. The UAW obtained wage increases of 3% to 4% annually through a combination of raises and bonuses, and there is now a pathway to elimination of the two-tier system in which employees



Mira Kamenka

hired after 2007 were paid a lower scale than their veteran colleagues. Health benefits are undiminished; in fact, some autoworkers will actually see improvements to their health care.

During the Great Recession, the autoworkers had agreed to major concessions to help their employers stay in business. Now automakers are again profitable. The new UAW contracts reflect an understanding

that it is fair and right for employees to share in the recovery; that in light of the sacrifices those employees made during the crisis, it is appropriate for them to begin to recover some of what they gave up.

Symphony orchestra musicians experienced much of what the autoworkers went through during the economic crisis. Many musicians took big hits to their wages and benefits: salaries were slashed or frozen for years; musician complements were reduced; health care was gutted; pensions came under attack. Like the autoworkers, union musicians agreed to those give-backs in order to ensure their employers' survival.

The crisis has passed. The economy is much improved and unemployment is low. In particular, the wealthy, who make up a large proportion of our audiences and donors, have done very, very well. (Any orchestra manager who now points to “the economy” as an excuse for poor financial performance should be laughed out of the room.) Many, if not most, ICSOM orchestras not only weathered the Great Recession, they are thriving.

Unlike the Big Three automakers, however, most symphony managements have not embraced the notion that their musicians should share in the recovery. Only a handful of recent contract settlements have featured genuinely healthy wage increases—and many of those contained offsetting benefit and work-rule cuts. Many musicians are still seeing only token increases in take-home compensation, or none at all. Musicians have to fight tooth and nail (often unsuccessfully) to restore positions that were lost in earlier rounds of complement cuts. Symphony managements and boards appear reluctant to acknowledge the basic fairness of reversing the draconian cuts that many musicians agreed to in the depths of the crisis. The concessions now seem to be viewed as permanent.

The most disturbing trend I see is “flatlining”: contract proposals where management demands that any raises must be paid for with cuts elsewhere (particularly to health care) and with work rule changes. (In a variation, management says, “here's the money we have; you can put it wherever you

like, but that's all we can give you.") That's a great deal for the employer—labor expenses stay essentially frozen—but a lousy one for the musicians. Yes, inflation is generally low right now, but it sure doesn't seem that way to a musician trying to pay for college tuition or buy a home in a hot market. The old adage is true: a freeze is a cut.

For the most part, these flatlining demands are unnecessary. Charitable giving in the arts has increased significantly. Many orchestras have found innovative ways to increase ticket sales. Health care costs—often the primary target of flatline demands—are not spiraling out of control. I have recently seen several health insurance renewals come in with no increases at all (and even some decreases).

I see flatlining as simply a new twist on an old story. For years we have heard, *ad nauseam*, about “structural deficits” and the “broken business model”. It is no secret that many managers and board members believe symphony musicians have been overpaid for decades. They would like nothing more than to ratchet down labor costs to a “sustainable” level—meaning, in their view, the point at which they know for certain they can raise enough money and sell enough tickets to cover expenses each and every year.

We saw this view put into action in Minnesota, Detroit, and Atlanta (among others). But the resulting labor strife was damaging, which may have led some managers and boards to rethink the ripping-off-the-Band-Aid approach of seeking massive cuts in one fell swoop. Make no mistake, they still want the cuts—they may just be taking the long view. Why go through the drama and damage of a nasty labor battle when the same result can be accomplished by simply keeping things flat for a period of several years? If revenues grow while expenses remain flat, that “structural deficit” will be gone in no time. The flatlining approach may also be easier to implement: musicians have a harder time building support for a work stoppage when salaries aren't actually getting cut.

In medical jargon, of course, “flatlining” means the patient is dead. The results of a flatlining approach in symphony orchestras may not be so severe, but the consequences are nonetheless negative. Flatlining reflects a mentality that rejects the very notions of growth and ambition. It aspires to nothing but the status quo. Which begs the question: how can any organization possibly thrive, if the goal is to stand still?

Board members of symphony orchestras should be well acquainted with the necessity of growth. They are, for the most part, people with a record of success in business and finance. In that world, it would be unthinkable to accept a business model in which growth has no place. It would be equally ludicrous for a for-profit employer to assume that it can keep labor costs flat, year after year after year.

Growth needs to be built into an orchestra's business model. That doesn't mean musicians should expect huge salary increases every year. For those who made big concessions during the recession, restoration will take time. (For example, in the UAW contracts, the equalization of Tier 1 and Tier 2 workers is expected to take eight years.) Musicians know this. But flatlining cannot be the answer. It is bad for musicians, bad for the orchestras they serve, and an insult to those who sacrificed much to help those orchestras survive.

Of course, musicians sometimes have little choice but to ac-

cept bad contract proposals, at least in part. Every bargaining unit has to do what is best for itself, and no outsider (myself included) should ever second-guess those decisions. But if flatlining is indeed a growing trend, then we need to be prepared to oppose it.

This is my first column for *Senza Sordino* in my new role as ICSOM Counsel. I chose this topic because among the many concerns—legal and non-legal—of ICSOM musicians, so much depends on collective bargaining. Nearly every term and condition of your employment is the result of that process. You face a constant struggle to obtain contracts that enable you to make a decent living; none of you is paid as much as you deserve for your talents and skills. I look forward to fighting alongside you.



Secretary's Report

By Laura Ross

Working together to achieve a common goal is the heart of unionism. And an important part of working together, of collaboration, is the communication that makes it all possible. In a union as large as the AFM, it's important that musicians understand what everyone else is doing.



Robby Klein

In these next few issues of *Senza Sordino* I'd like to open up the dialog about issues that should concern us, so we can offer our support to our musical colleagues who don't have a built-in support system like we do. It's my hope that we can showcase and discuss some of the issues and activities of the AFM and other areas of our

music industry—to understand the impact on the symphonic industry and to support their efforts.

One of the issues you may have heard mentioned is the Fair Play, Fair Pay Act of 2015 (aka Fair Play, Fair Pay), a bill that would expand payment requirements for music played on the radio. For many years the AFM and other artists' representative bodies have lobbied Congress for payment of radio broadcasts. Since the earliest days of broadcasting—in the analog age—songwriters, publishers, and record labels have received royalty payment from broadcasters for playing their music on the radio. But the artists and backup musicians, whose talents were on full display, never received a dime.

In October, 1998, Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). This law allowed implementation of two 1996 World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) treaties that were intended to shore up copyright protections. The law heightened penalties for copyright infringement on the Internet, and it provided an exemption from direct and indirect liability for Internet service providers and other intermediaries.

You could be thinking, so what? How does this impact me? Another provision of the DMCA clarified that the digital performance right created in 1995 did apply to the payment of radio broadcast/streaming royalties to both featured and non-featured artists, in addition to copyright holders. Some of our orchestras with long histories of recording have begun to see the benefit of this provision in the past few years. Following

passage of this law, an organization called SoundExchange was established as an independent nonprofit collection agency that distributes digital performance royalties to featured artists and copyright holders. SoundExchange also collects royalties for non-featured artists, but another entity distributes those funds—the AFM & SAG-AFTRA Intellectual Property Rights Distribution Fund. The AFM & SAG-AFTRA Fund is administered by Dennis Dreith and is overseen by a board of trustees from the AFM and SAG-AFTRA.

SoundExchange sets the rates that Internet broadcasters and streamers must pay, and that money is then split: 50% is paid to the copyright holder; 45% is paid to the featured artist; and 5% is paid to the non-featured artists, which is split further with 2.5% to AFM musicians (the rhythm sections and orchestras accompanying the artist) and 2.5% to SAG-AFTRA members (in most cases this would be the backup singers). The AFM & SAG-AFTRA Fund collects and distributes the royalties for these non-featured artists, but it has also been designated to distribute featured-artist royalties to symphony orchestras, because the amount of research required is enormous. For example, non-featured artists on a single Taylor Swift track are fairly easy to identify but when notice is sent to the AFM & SAG-AFTRA Fund for an orchestral recording, the Fund might only receive the following information: Beethoven Symphony #5 by the New York Philharmonic on Sony. Rosters must be researched, along with addresses and surviving beneficiaries, to assure the appropriate musicians receive payments. It's a monumental task for Shari Hoffman, Jennie Hansen and Fund administration.


This is what is now in place for digital radio streaming royalties and we know that more and more people are getting their music from these services and moving away from traditional analog or terrestrial radio. But the older forms of radio haven't completely disappeared, and there are a host of other issues that still need addressing. This is why Fair Play, Fair Pay is so important.

In April, 2015, the MusicFirst coalition of recording artists, labels, managers, and other industry representatives signed on to support this bill that would require all forms of terrestrial and digital radio to pay royalties to musicians for the use of their recordings. Michael Huppe, who serves as President & CEO of SoundExchange, was quoted in the *LA Times*, "For decades, music services have gotten away with building their business on the back of hardworking musicians, paying unfair rates—and in the case of the \$17.5 billion [terrestrial] radio industry, pay nothing at all, for the music they use. It is time that we properly pay the artists who put so much hard work into creating the music at the core of these services. If it weren't for them, these stations would be broadcasting little more than static."

Two major issues are at the heart of this bill: to reconcile the collection and distribution of royalty payments for all broadcast materials, both domestic and foreign, and to cover material that was previously excluded if it was recorded prior to 1972. The second would have a huge impact on many of our orchestras because recordings being broadcast are from archive recordings, some of which may date back to the 1950s and '60s. The first, allowing for the collection and distribution of royalty payments, would have a worldwide impact.

Currently the US does not collect and distribute royalties

to its own citizens, nor does it distribute royalties for the portion of foreign material broadcast in this country. Most of the rest of the world—except China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Rwanda—does. In the absence of a reciprocal agreement in place to pay their musicians for material broadcast in the US, other countries may have collected royalties payable to our musicians for music broadcast in their countries, but they were not required to distribute the money to US musicians. To remedy this situation, the AFM and major recording Locals attending the 2012 WIPO conference in Beijing successfully added "no collection without distribution" to the treaty, which has already garnered in excess of \$10 million from foreign collectives. But millions of dollars have been withheld from our musicians because our government has not yet passed legislation that treats us fairly for the music we produce.

Radio and Internet broadcasters have always been a powerful lobby and have been actively fighting this proposed legislation with claims that it is too expensive and will destroy businesses. Terrestrial broadcasters have taken gross advantage of musicians for decades and it is time to right this injustice. A significant influx of additional money to this country and its musicians will improve the circumstances for tens of thousands of performers, and will have a positive impact on our communities and our country. The ICSOM Governing Board fully supports Fair Play, Fair Pay. I urge you to speak with, or write to, your legislators in support of this legislation. 

Orchestra Newslets

The Kansas City Symphony Enjoys a Taste of New York

As Major League Baseball finalized its World Series matchup, on October 23rd during a Kansas City Symphony concert, KCS Music Director Michael Stern proposed a friendly wager to New York Philharmonic Music Director Alan Gilbert: if the New York Mets won the World Series the KCS would send Kansas



George Brett enjoying his bagel and lox with a little bit of KC barbecue sauce

Courtesy of the Kansas City Symphony

City's best BBQ, and when the Kansas City Royals won the Philharmonic would send New York's finest lox and bagels. In addition to the food wager, the losing orchestra would have to perform, as an encore, a piece of music that features the winning city, and the losing Music Director would have to conduct the piece while wearing the winning team's jersey. In a video message released

on the Philharmonic's Facebook page, Gilbert accepted the challenge. Because the Kansas City Royals finished off the New York Mets in Game 5 of the World Series, on November 12th the Philharmonic honored the first part of the challenge

by sending Russ and Daughters' lox, bagels, and schmear. The KCS musicians invited Kansas City Royals Hall of Famer George Brett to enjoy the prized meal, and they look forward to seeing the performance of "Everything's Up to Date in Kansas City", currently scheduled for December 29th with Kansas-born singer Joyce DiDonato.

The MET Orchestra Pitches In

While the wager with Kansas City may have motivated the members of the New York Philharmonic to play a pep rally on the Lincoln Center plaza before Game Three of the Series, members of the MET Orchestra needed no such inducement to create one on the morning of Game One. Playing an arrangement of "Meet the Mets" by MET Orchestra trumpeter Peter Bond (which also included quotes from *Carmen*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Walküre*, and *Siegfried*), MET Orchestra musicians were joined by Chorus members, stagehands, electricians, props personnel, security personnel, and other employees. The guest of honor was the team mascot, Mr. Met, who conducted the performance.



Mr. Met poses with Pedro Diaz and Vincent Lioni

Note: A video of the performance, as well as more information, can be seen at <http://www.meteorchestramusicians.org/blog/2015/10/29/mr-met-pays-a-visit-to-the-met>

Chicago Lyric Opera Reaches Agreement

On September 22, 2015, the musicians of the Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra ratified a three-year agreement that runs from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2018. As the Chicago Lyric musicians prepared to negotiate this agreement, they worked extensively with Randy Whatley of Cypress Media, which led to a significant presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition, the musicians created a Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra website, an active email newsletter, a member blog, and an appealing graphic design for merchandising. Throughout this process the musicians discovered and cultivated new talents within themselves in the fields of writing, editing, communications, media relations, blogging, labor organizing, and managing social media accounts.

The silver lining of this very difficult and protracted negotiation was the solidarity and communal effort produced by the orchestra musicians. Their work to introduce the public face of the orchestra to the world vastly strengthened the position of the Orchestra Committee in the negotiation room by reminding the public, and Lyric Opera, of the world-class skill level, extensive training and experience, and passion and commitment these musicians bring to their jobs every day. This solidarity extended to the actual bargaining process, which began with a vote to authorize the Committee to return with only proposals

it could recommend for ratification.

Throughout many months of negotiating, Lyric Opera made little movement on its demands for increased work hours on top of drastic reductions in wages and benefits for musicians as well as substitutes, extras, and stage band musicians. As the season began, the orchestra took a unanimous vote to authorize the Committee and the Union to call a strike if and when they felt that would be necessary. Finally, after several weeks of work with FMCS mediator Javier Ramirez and a short play-and-talk period, an imminent strike was avoided when Lyric Opera improved its offer to the point that the Committee and the Union were able to recommend it for ratification. The season began without a hitch and the reviews, especially for the recent production of *Wozzeck*, have been terrific. After an unusual delay of many months, Lyric Opera recently released its audited financial report for 2015 showing that the company finished last season in the black for the 27th of the last 28 years.

New Jersey's New Music Director

On November 15, the NJSO held its usual annual dinner for 140 of its top donors.

What was unusual about this event was the guest of honor, the orchestra's new Music Director—Xian Zhang. Xian is the 13th Music Director of the NJSO. She is the first woman and the first Asian to be named to the position. Hiring Xian was the result of a very musician-influenced process, elected musicians having comprised one-third of the search committee.

After the announcement and introduction of Xian, and her enthusiastic short speech (which included some very kind words about the NJSO musicians she was "looking forward to making music with"), she went to every table, met every donor in the room and made a personal first impression on all in attendance. Talk about working a room.

Xian was previously the Associate Conductor of the New York Philharmonic. She will continue as music director of the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, and has also recently accepted the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. She was the first woman music director of any Italian symphony orchestra and will be the first female titled conductor of any BBC orchestra.

Record Gala in Houston

The Houston Symphony had a record-setting Opening Night Concert and Gala for the 2015-16 Season, generating almost \$1 million in earned and contributed revenue for the orchestra. The evening started with a concert featuring music director Andrés Orozco-Estrada and violin soloist Joshua Bell. The orchestra performed Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite and an arrangement of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* written for Mr. Bell. The gala honored Margaret Alkek Williams (celebrating her 80th birthday on the same evening), who recently donated \$5 million to the Houston Symphony, which was the largest single contribution from an individual in recent history. Also, for the first time, a group made up of donors and board members donated enough money so that every member of the orchestra and a guest was invited to the Gala.

Large Gift in Indianapolis

The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra recently announced that the Lilly Endowment Inc. would bestow a grant of \$10 million, one of the largest gifts in the orchestra's history. The intent of the gift, on the eve of the state's bicentennial, is to allow the orchestra "to sustain and build on [its] contributions to the cultural vitality of the city and state," said Ace Yakey, the Endowment's vice president for community development, in a press release.

In its own press release, the orchestra indicated that it would use the grant to support an investment in technology (to enable audio and video streaming of select ISO performances at Hilbert Circle Theatre), to fund its defined benefit pension plan for ISO musicians, and to support its endowment.


Recently, the ISO has been enjoying tremendous growth, with consecutive years of both balanced budgets and double-digit increases in ticket sales. The orchestra also reported an increase in student ticket sales of 50% over two years.

Sounds of the Motor City

On November 20 the Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiered a work by Tod Machover. The commission, enabled by a \$315,000 grant by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, was for a "collaborative symphony," meaning that the work was informed in part by "sound submissions and conceptual contributions from the public," according to a press release.

Symphony in D was not the first work of this kind by Machover, who is Professor of Music and Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He had already completed similar projects in Perth (Australia), Toronto, and Edinburgh; it was this last work, heard by the Knight Foundation's vice president for arts Dennis Scholl, that catalyzed the grant.

Over the course of a year Detroit residents were encouraged to submit sounds, and Machover visited schools and community centers to hold workshops and to lead discussions. The resulting work was informed by more than 15,000 sound samples making up over 100 hours of audio. Machover and his MIT Media Lab colleagues also created various technologies as part of the project, including an eponymous mobile app that enabled users to record sounds and then tag them with geographical data, creating a "sound map" of the city.

Attending the premiere, University of Michigan musicologist Mark Clague said, "The most remarkable achievement of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's performance of *Symphony in D* was a resonant social counterpoint that entwined ensemble with community. Tod Machover's final two movements, in particular, brought this civic polyphony to the fore, not simply through pre-recorded sounds or even the lyrics of local poets. DSO musicians performed alongside local students, techno musicians, a conga drummer, guitarist, and bassist, plus a gospel-tinged Chaldean choir that included both native Detroiters and recent immigrants to the city who had escaped war in Iraq and Syria to find a new home. At its best, music does not just represent our dreams, but shapes our lives. The DSO and *Symphony in D* did just that, casting the orchestra's audience as artistic collaborators, to forge a creative, engaged, and hopeful vision of their city." 

In Memoriam: Reinhardt Elster, 1914–2015

By Charles Harrington Elster

On October 5, 2015, ICSOM lost one of its cofounders, Reinhardt Elster. The distinguished harpist, who performed everything from jazz to opera with many of the greatest musicians of the 20th century, died peacefully at his home in western Massachusetts after complications from a fall. He was 101.

Mr. Elster was born in Hammond, Indiana, on July 23, 1914, the only child of German and Swedish immigrants. His father was a semiprofessional musician who helped found the local union. "Musicians' unions are in my blood," Mr. Elster would later say.

Mr. Elster began his musical life as a pianist and percussionist. His first paid job was playing the organ at a roller-skating



Courtesy of the Author

rink. He was a two-time national high school champion on marimba-xylophone. He didn't play the harp until he was 15, and only because his school bought one and offered him lessons.

His talent led him to the National Music Camp at Interlochen, where he twice won the student conducting contest; then to Curtis Institute, where he studied with Carlos Salzedo; then, during the Depression, to a stint as music director of radio station WHIP (nicknamed "We Hope It Pays"); and then, during World War II, to the Army Air Force Orchestra, which took him to New York City.

Mr. Elster freelanced in New York after the war, recording with the likes of Perry Como, Russ Case, Nat King Cole, and the NBC Symphony under Toscanini. He published his harp arrangements of "Donkey Serenade", "Perfidia", and "Frenesi".

But soon a friend from Curtis, the flutist Harold Bennett, began needling him to audition for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. With reluctance (he was already a successful freelancer) he agreed and was promptly offered the position. With even more reluctance (because of the demands of the operatic repertoire) he took it.

From 1948 to 1986, Mr. Elster was principal harpist of the Met, and from 1968 to 1978, he was also the harpist for the Casals Festival Orchestra in Puerto Rico. It was a career filled with many grand moments and plaudits. Leonard Bernstein called him "a wonderful harpist." James Levine marveled at his *Tannhäuser*. Pavarotti, Domingo, Sutherland, and Sills crooned to his lyre. And, accompanied only by Mr. Elster,

Marilyn Horne wowed a gala audience with “I Dream of Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair”.

Mr. Elster’s involvement with ICSOM stemmed from a 1960 contract dispute at the Met, when he did research for the negotiating committee. He later helped draft principles for the organization, and in 1963 became the second editor of *Senza Sordino*.

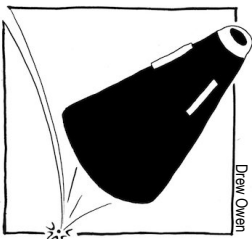
“I knew that we were all up against management that thought we were just a bunch of dumb musicians who didn’t deserve respect,” Mr. Elster wrote in 2012. “As editor of *Senza*, I wanted to help build our nascent organization and have it be treated seriously.”

Note: Further information about Mr. Elster can be found in the MET Orchestra’s blog post at <http://www.metorchestramusicians.org/blog/2015/2/26/reinhardt-elster-returns-for-a-visit>

Dropping the Mute

by Peter de Boor, Editor

Several years ago, Peter Schickele (well known for his “discovery” of P.D.Q. Bach) created a radio program for Public Radio International called “Schickele Mix”. The show’s motto was a quote from Duke Ellington: If it sounds good, it is good. Over more than 175 episodes, Schickele explored the connections between almost every genre of western music. For example, his first show contained music of Praetorius, Mozart, Chopin, Webern, Gershwin, Glass, Lennon and McCartney, Lennie Tristano, Elton John, Harlan Howard, Sonny Throckmorton, Brent Maher, and Harold Arlen.



This wonderful program, and the ecumenical spirit it embodied, were on my mind when I recently encountered an internet meme. This meme features a photograph of a very narrow upright piano (with only three white keys and two black ones). The different variations of the meme all have a caption that reads “Special piano for composing hip-hop and rap”, or something similar. When I’ve seen this meme posted on Facebook, it’s typically accompanied by commentary which will more explicitly deride these (and other) forms of music, often denying them the very label of “music”.

I don’t tend to listen to hip-hop or rap any more than I do country music or teen pop. (Well, I do on occasion listen to teen pop, but I have teenagers who know how to work the media controls in my car.) I also don’t care for okra, though I recognize it is a vegetable, and I acknowledge that many people find it delectable. The desire to listen to music is a universal human characteristic, one that rekindles people’s belief in humanity. The impulse to denigrate the class of art that someone else enjoys, by contrast, plays to the basest elements of human nature.

Perhaps the food metaphor might be usefully extended: that fennel and celeriac salad with dill and white truffle oil you brought certainly looks delicious, and perhaps it is more sophisticated with a more complex and delicate flavor than my mashed potatoes, or my friend’s Cajun red beans and rice. But would you really consider asserting so, publicly? And who in the room would respect you if you did? Can’t we derive plea-

sure from all the food at the table, each in his or her own way?

I am not suggesting that symphony orchestras should abandon the canon and start programming only cross-over concerts with hip-hop artists—although in my neighborhood the National Symphony Orchestra recently had two very successful concerts with Nas and Kendrick Lamar. But we should always be seeking to bring our music to new audiences. And fairly or not, our music is widely perceived as elitist in the worst sense of that word. Ultimately a message of “your music is terrible, come listen to mine” is not very appealing.

The Governing Board has for several years been urging a strategy of advocacy—for our orchestras and for our art form. But it would be a grave mistake to speak for our art form at the expense of others, just as it would be wrong to laud one orchestra at the expense of another. As symphonic musicians, we are (or we should be) constantly striving to grow our audience, but it is a failing strategy to do so by denigrating other forms of music. Instead, we should be advocating for live music in all its forms. Ultimately, it is the paradigm of attending concerts that we should be nurturing. A culture in which live music in all its varieties is appreciated, supported, and valued is a culture that will maintain thriving orchestras.

Grand and Rapid Versus Small and Sluggish

(continued)

ship. He also attended a GRS concert in DeVos Performance Hall and discovered why Grand Rapids has recently been the third fastest growing economy in the country.

AFM Negotiator Nathan Kahn, who is our negotiator now for the fourth time, had the opportunity to address the musicians while in town for our bargaining sessions. His words of wisdom and support affirmed the solidarity that the musicians have had throughout this process. We will miss Nathan after he heads to retirement and know that we are quite fortunate to have had his advice over the years.

Randy Whatley of Cypress Media Group met with musicians



ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge meets with members of the Grand Rapids Symphony in July

and AFM Local 56 Officers, which resulted in his retention as our Public Relations Consultant. The involvement with Randy led to the creation of seven PR committees, which include current and former GRS musicians. In addition, thanks to Randy’s guidance, there have been the following important developments and events:


- Over the summer, the musicians changed the name of their organization from Professional Orchestra Musicians Association of Grand Rapids (POMA-GR) to Grand Rapids Symphony Musicians Association (GRSMA). A

new logo for GRSMA was created and featured on yard signs, T-shirts, and postcards. By Thanksgiving, GRSMA had created five e-newsletters, all available at www.GRSMusiciansAssociation.com. The updated online presence of the musicians also can be found on Facebook (GRSMusiciansAssoc) and Twitter (@GRSMusicians).

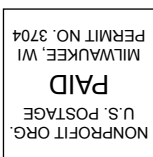
- In August, local supporters—patrons, subscribers, donors, and community members who cannot imagine west Michigan without the GRS musicians that are the region’s artistic ambassadors—created the Friends of the GR Symphony Musicians, a community-driven advocacy group. Its mission is to promote the Grand Rapids Symphony and to ensure the orchestra’s vitality and relevance as it advances to the 100th anniversary of its founding in 2030.
- On September 8th, the musicians produced and performed a free concert at the Grand Rapids Public Museum to a standing-room-only audience. The program, entitled “Ensemble”, traced the 80-year history of symphonic music in our city.
- During opening night concerts of the Grand Rapids Symphony in September, GRSMA greeted audience members in front of DeVos Performance Hall. They also distributed postcards that asked audience members to support the GRSMA by visiting the musicians’ site to sign up for e-newsletters, by picking up a free yard sign, or by purchasing a GRSMA T-shirt.
- October and November GRS concerts included the distribution of an updated GRSMA brochure and a leaflet pro-

viding an update on the negotiations, with both documents viewable on the GRSMA website. As a sign of solidarity the musicians wore GRSMA T-shirts to all dress rehearsals and blue ribbons for concerts.

- A letter writing campaign started in October, at first to the local newspaper and then directly to GRS Board leadership. The written support from our community was a true boost to the musicians (and especially to the negotiation committee that has been working tirelessly).
- A fifteen-minute radio interview with Bruce Ridge—about the current condition of arts philanthropy and the status of negotiations in American orchestras—aired in November on Michigan Public Radio, with the Grand Rapids and Detroit Symphonies serving as examples. Bruce asserted, “The truth about Grand Rapids is the city is growing. This is a time for tremendous investment...the greater the investment for these orchestras and for these musicians, the greater the return for the community.”

As of the writing of this article, we are scheduling dates in December to meet with management to continue discussions about the financial components of our proposals. The GRS Musicians thank our ICSOM family members who have reached out to us in a variety of ways, ranging from social media posts to letters of support. We hope to have a positive news story to share with you soon. 

Note: the MPR interview with Bruce Ridge can be found at <http://michiganradio.org/post/are-symphony-orchestras-really-trouble#stream/0>



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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS

