

Senza Sordino

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I Went to the State Fair—for ICSOM

Paul Gunther, ICSOM Member at Large, Minnesota Orchestra

The Minnesota State Fair was the scene of my most recent pro-ICSOM, pro-union experience. My experience also echoes ICSOM Secretary Laura Ross' excellent *Senza Sordino* article from last December, entitled "Why be an AFM Convention Delegate?" Here's the story:

The first Minnesota State Fair was held in 1859. It moved to its present site at the State Fairgrounds in Falcon Heights in 1885. Common wisdom holds that it is the largest in the U.S. in terms of daily attendance but second largest in terms of overall attendance, only because the Texas State Fair runs twice as long. It was just a decade later, in 1896, that the American Federation of Musicians was established, to represent the collective and individual interests of professional musicians.

The current AFM mission statement, from the Federation website, begins with these words: "We are the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, professional musicians united through our Locals." It goes on to list fifteen objectives, commitments and actions. These three are particularly relevant:

- We will have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect us.
- Our collective voice and power will be realized in a democratic and progressive union.
- We must commit to actively participating in the democratic institutions of our union.

To paraphrase these words from the AFM: in order to have a voice in the way our union is governed, we must participate meaningfully, using the democratic process.

Many who attended the recent ICSOM Conference in Norfolk, Virginia, were aware already of disconnectedness, sometimes quite grievous, between the current AFM leadership and its symphonic constituents. The Conference, hosted by Local 125 and the

musicians of the Virginia Symphony, was outstandingly successful due in great part to the unity shared by those in attendance. This remarkable unity is a far cry from the feeling of disharmony I remember well from the 2007 AFM Convention.

The symphonic player conferences of the AFM, through their individual work dues, contribute over half of the Federation's overall work dues. Yet how does the Federation respond? By consigning to its Symphonic Services Division (SSD) a mere 10% of its budget, and leaving the post of SSD Director unfilled for the better part of a year.

Please understand. I'm a lifelong believer in taxing those who can afford to pay in order to assist those who can't, even if it is I who pay more taxes than many. I'm fine with that. While I do not expect that for every dollar I send to our government in taxes I will realize a dollar's worth of benefits, I do expect that, for my taxes, I also will enjoy a certain level of governmental benefit and protection. Specifically, one thing I expect is to be assured enough benefits that I can maintain solvency, continue supporting the government, and keep paying taxes. Indeed, would it make any sense at all for the government to take my taxes and then leave me high and dry if I begin to run into trouble? (Disclaimer: I have no wish to become enmeshed in debating current government policy, simply to offer this as a metaphor for the current situation at the national level in our union.)

Why would the Federation—specifically current AFM President Tom Lee—seemingly ignore symphonic musicians during their worst crisis since the inception of ICSOM? Numbers are telling: the health of the AFM depends on the health of its symphonic members. What sense does it make to ignore their distress during a time of acute economic crisis? Why leave the post of SSD Director unfilled during the worst months of the economic crisis?

The ICSOM Governing Board posed these questions directly to President Lee. So far no meaningful response has been forthcoming. Could this be an indication that the time is approaching for bylaw change and insistence on leadership that represents us properly?

For those who may be unaware of the process, elections at the national level take place only at the national AFM Convention. The next Convention will take place in June 2010, only seven months from now. Voting rights are held *not* by individual union members like you and me, but rather by a small number of elected delegates

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Chairperson's Report by Bruce Ridge



The 2009 ICSOM Conference in Norfolk, Virginia, was one of the most unifying and uplifting events that I have ever experienced in my 30-year career as an orchestral instrumentalist. But as the late Richard Totusek would say, time only moves in one direction. In the three months since our gathering, much has happened. We all must be engaged with these events in order to positively influence the future of our field.

When I first began to practice my instrument seriously as a teenager, I had one of those trite drug-store bought inspirational post cards that I kept on my music stand that said, "My future depends on me." I suppose I have both lived up to that charge and also at times let myself down. But as we build upon the remarkable unity of ICSOM that was demonstrated at our Conference, we all must feel that the future depends on all of us. We must react and build upon the advocacy for our field. With that in mind, I'd like to offer a few desultory thoughts on recent events.

1. In a time when many of our orchestras have faced concessions, several have continued to thrive even in this difficult economy. Strong musician leadership, talented managers, engaged boards, and innovative programming have demonstrated the relevancy and sustainability of symphonic music in America. Still, the field will continue to initiate self-study, searching for reasons why some orchestras are not succeeding. These studies will inevitably conclude that we are in a "new economic reality," and that a new model must be developed. Many musicians would be more supportive of that if they had actually seen the current model implemented well. What these studies can never adequately measure is the skill and engagement of those currently running our organizations.

Some orchestras have responded to the economic downturn by offering a lackluster season to their audiences. When the response of an audience is to not show up, it can't be much of a mystery why. I read a recent, scathing review of one orchestra's programming that lamented the evening's offerings of "nugatory trifles" while reporting that the pieces were "greeted by feeble applause, as they deserved." The programming required no extra musicians, though. No doubling either. It was cheap to produce, and that fact was apparent to an audience that had left their homes to support their symphony. As the reviewer wrote, "These (pieces) might be pleasant for drive-time, but to actually buy a ticket to listen to these nothings seems over the top."

In his recent book, *The Art of the Turnaround: Creating and Maintaining Healthy Arts Organizations*, Michael Kaiser writes:

I realized that most organizations in trouble get that way because they react to an initial financial problem inappropriately. When any financial problem emerges, the first reaction of most boards and staff is to reduce expenditures. The easiest expenses to cut are the most discretionary areas of spending: artistic ventures and marketing.... However, when arts organizations

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SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS

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Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
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Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra
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Colorado Symphony Orchestra
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Dallas Symphony Orchestra
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Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
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Secretary's Report

by Laura Ross



This has been a very difficult year for our orchestras. We are barely into the new season, and I have produced more than 15 settlement bulletins, 7 of which are for revised or amended agreements (and at least one, Honolulu, is already out of date). Out of last season's 29 bulletins, 13 were for revised or amended agreements (many came in as we approached last summer's ICSOM Conference). Sadly, some of those amended bulletins have already come up for another pass.

After Michael Kaiser's wonderful presentation at the ICSOM Conference last August, I continue to marvel at the state of our organizations and how they are run. And I have to ask why our managers and boards can't do better. I'm not saying there aren't dire issues our orchestras are facing, but there has to be some accountability for the treatment of musicians in some of these situations. And, yes—I am saying that in some cases managers and boards have failed to be prudent caretakers of their organizations and are now trying to take advantage of their musicians as a remedy.

Colleagues ask me, "Does the management realize they don't have a job without us?" Sometimes I, too, begin to wonder if they get it. Managers and boards need to treat their musicians with more care.

Let me digress for a moment. This summer in Dayton, I attended ROPA's 25th-anniversary conference—an event that was honored by a resolution we passed at the ICSOM Conference. (As it happens, I joined the Nashville Symphony the very same year that ROPA was formed.) While preparing our resolution honoring ROPA's 25th year, I was amazed that so many of ROPA's founding orchestras had been able to achieve what we all seek: better wages, benefits, and working conditions. Some ROPA orchestras saw so much improvement that they applied for membership in ICSOM.

These are the charter members of ROPA: Austin Symphony Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, Columbus Symphony Orchestra, Florida Orchestra, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Fort Worth Symphony, Grand Rapids Symphony, Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, Omaha Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonic Orchestra of Florida (Florida Philharmonic), Richmond Symphony, Sacramento Symphony, San Jose Symphony, Spokane Symphony, Tulsa Philharmonic, Virginia Symphony, and Wichita Symphony Orchestra. From this list, the following eight orchestras have joined ICSOM during the past 25 years: Charlotte, Columbus, Florida, Fort Worth, Jacksonville, Nashville, Florida Philharmonic, and Virginia. While more may join ICSOM in the future, there will also always be new orchestras that wish to join ROPA because of the rich communication it offers its member orchestras. ROPA has expanded its ranks to now represent 79 orchestras. ICSOM, ROPA, and OCSM have a shared communication network through the distribution of settlement

bulletins and rosters, and our top officers share wonderful working relationships based on mutual respect and genuine friendship.

As I consider the vast differences among our orchestras, from the most highly paid ICSOM orchestras to the smallest per-service ROPA orchestras, I have to marvel that every one of our orchestras emanates from humble backgrounds, when not a single orchestra season offered year-long employment. Every orchestra strives to improve its situation, and because of the unity and shared knowledge our player conferences offer, this continues to occur with every contract negotiated. The success of one orchestra is celebrated by all orchestras; but the abuse to any of our colleagues is something we all take to heart. It evokes our sympathy and desire to reach out because we all have been in dire situations once upon a time ourselves. And let us not forget that, for all the successes in ICSOM and ROPA and OCSM, there are those who would try to tear down those successes—look at some of the ICSOM settlement bulletins I have prepared in the past few months; look at New Mexico, and Grand Rapids.

My heart breaks when I see these proud orchestras treated with such disregard by their managers, boards, and others. One ICSOM orchestra continued to work despite two years of late payrolls (sometimes months late), but to receive payment for work already completed, they had to agree to cut their annual wages going forward. And now that same orchestra may face bankruptcy due to the lack of vision by their board and management who did not have the wherewithal to raise the capital necessary to sustain this orchestra that has withstood far more difficult times than these. At least two other orchestras have faced draconian budget cuts that have changed the face of their orchestras. Another orchestra's musicians took it upon themselves to voluntarily take concessions before management asked, while others have agreed to major cuts or wage freezes; all of which were considered by the musicians to be donations and tokens of their dedication to their organizations. Where is that same dedication on the part of the managers and boards?

Despite all these positive actions by musicians, some boards and managers have responded with threats of bankruptcy to intimidate musicians to comply with demands for even further givebacks. In other cases there are examples of incredible lack of vision, lack of commitment, lack of community building, lack of faith in the organization and the community to support it, lack of imagination, and sometimes flat-out laziness. I guess what makes me so angry is that no one is more concerned about the future and the health of their orchestras than the musicians. When those who are the caretakers of these orchestras behave in such an irresponsible manner, it makes me furious! We need managers and boards that inspire and are inspired to support their musicians!

What about the nonsense in New Mexico? Talk about bad-faith bargaining! The orchestra was still in talks—but "to save money," management unilaterally cut the musicians' health insurance and then waited ten days to tell them about it. In

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The Roehl Report Revisited

by *Laura Ross, ICSOM Secretary*

Two years ago we began sending *Senza Sordino* to every AFM local in the U.S. and Canada. We did this hoping that locals, regardless of whether they are home to any ICSOM, ROPA, or OCSM orchestras, would find our newsletter interesting and appreciate hearing about some of our issues, including the need for strong committees, support from our locals, and AFM support to keep us informed and help us face the constant challenges in our industry. In the last issue you read that our orchestras did not have all the help from the AFM that was due when we needed it most. As a group that pays considerable work dues to our locals and the Federation, we expect a certain level of services in return, just as we do as taxpayers.

As I contemplated this article, I found myself drawn to ICSOM's history. Many of the changes that have affected our orchestras occurred just as I was beginning my professional orchestra career. At that time I had little understanding of the union and the role it would have in my future. As I became more involved in my orchestra, I found I wanted to be an advocate for it because there were so many forces working against us.

I joined the Nashville Symphony 25 years ago. At that time, my move from the Toledo Symphony was a lateral one, but there were promises being made to take Nashville to a higher level. Kenneth Schermerhorn, the former music director of the New Jersey Symphony and of the Milwaukee Symphony, had been hired as our new music director, and the former music director of the Birmingham (later Alabama) Symphony, Amerigo Marino, was our assistant conductor. However, not three years later, the stock market was in freefall, the economy was tanking, and my orchestra shut down and later filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

The year was 1988. While we were in bankruptcy, the Nashville Symphony hosted that year's ROPA conference. It was the first ROPA conference I ever attended. I met many members of the AFM International Executive Board and the AFM president, Marty Emerson. I met officers from ICSOM and OCSM, and I heard a lot of sad stories about what was going on in the orchestra industry. 1988 was a bad year for orchestras. Vancouver, New Orleans, and Nashville—all three shut down that year. Oklahoma City had been out of work for more than a year. And to top it off, the Seattle Symphony, then an ICSOM orchestra, was about to leave the Federation.

Just one year later, as a ROPA delegate, I began to hear about trade divisions devoted to specific industries within a union. It was this discussion that led to the Roehl Report in 1990.

There are a number of people who have written about or wondered why the Players Conferences are so consumed with the Roehl Report, but I'm not sure if everyone remembers what led up to that time. Does anyone remember why ICSOM was formed in 1962? One is directly related to the other.

ICSOM was formed a little less than 50 years ago because orchestras did not have control over, or even input into, their own wages, benefits, and working conditions. Most local officers at the

time had little or no knowledge of our industry, and many paid little attention to the concerns of the musicians they were supposed to represent. Even fewer allowed those musicians to participate in contract negotiations (and I use that term loosely).

There was already a network that allowed for communication among managers, largely due to their participation in the American Symphony Orchestra League (or ASOL, as the League of American Orchestras used to be called). Once ICSOM was formed, similar networking and communication was soon put to good use by musicians. As orchestra musicians were able to negotiate for the things they felt were important using skillful negotiators, they began to see better wages, benefits, and improved working conditions. Standards were set in the industry. A strike fund was established in 1970 to support orchestras during job actions. (Currently 69 orchestras contribute to the strike fund, which has paid more than \$7.3 million in benefits to 50 orchestras.)

Sadly, it took ICSOM 20 years to gain the appointment of a full-time, dedicated symphony department staff member (Lew Waldeck, appointed in 1982). The guarantee of musician ratification of their agreements finally became an AFM bylaw in 1983. These gains were achieved through hard work, advocacy, and cooperation. Though sometimes slow to come, these changes were a direct result of democracy in action. Orchestra musicians became proactive and demanded that they be heard—not only by their locals, but by the Federation as well. (As an aside, I consider our AFM bylaws, which are always a work in progress, to be similar in at least one way to collective bargaining agreements. While not the primary purpose of either, both document previous abuses and show how those problems were dealt with.)

Over time, the AFM's symphony department expanded, but the impetus for the greatest expansion to date was Seattle. Just one word, but it still has meaning for musicians in the orchestra world. The Seattle Symphony was an orchestra crying out for help. Its musicians were having a massive battle with their local and were getting no attention or resolution from the Federation. In the end, their only remedy was to leave. Seattle decertified the AFM and has never returned.

There were fixes after the fact. One was an AFM bylaw adopted in 1988 and expanded in 1989. It outlines obligations locals have to orchestras—including providing competent representation during negotiations, paying the reasonable expenses for contract administration, negotiations, grievances, and arbitrations, and paying to send one delegate to the annual conference of the appropriate Player Conference. Another was the Orchestra Services Program (OSP), which allows an orchestra to receive services directly from the Federation. This was created by IEB policy immediately after Seattle left and was later codified in the AFM bylaws. While some may consider the OSP as punitive to an affected local, it may be viewed as a last-ditch effort to keep an orchestra in the AFM when its musicians are having devastating problems with their local. Just recently, the OSP bylaw was tweaked, hopefully for the better.

None of this solved the whole problem, though, probably because many grievances stemmed from the implementation of a 1981 AFM bylaw that imposed a mandatory 1% work dues requirement on all local work, with a 0.5% work dues payment out of that directed to the Federation. The rationale for this was that per capita dues were no longer enough to sustain the Federation. But it created a situation where just 1.3% of AFM membership was paying a staggering 37% of the work dues supporting the Federation. That percentage has only increased over time. A new democratic remedy had to be identified. Enter Bill Roehl.

Reflecting upon the Roehl Report is important not only in light of ill-advised hints from some quarters that what has been in place for 15 years ought be destroyed, but also because we need to be reminded of the continuing strength of its recommendations. Consider these words from the Roehl Report:

Unions do not operate in a vacuum. All unions have been and will continue to be influenced by political forces, socioeconomic conditions, changes in the work force, and management's opposition to organizing.

The hallmark of a great union is its willingness to communicate, to change, to address the genuine needs of its members and prepare for the next generation. I understand President Emerson and members of the International executive board have endorsed the concept of restructuring the player conferences in order for [the] AFM to be even more effective in representing the membership in general and symphony and recording musicians in particular.

Still you might ask, why do we need this extra level of representation?

Intermediate bodies are formed as reasonable and rational groupings to correct problems in the relationships between local unions or between locals and their international union. In most instances these bodies are utilized to achieve a common objective in collective bargaining.

An AFM Players Conference is something like the Department of Professional Employees (DPE) in the AFL-CIO. (Incidentally, the current DPE general board chairman is AFM President Tom Lee.)

Some intermediate bodies are developed to pool staff resources to enforce contracts and negotiate, thereby helping local unions that can not meet the demands put upon them because of their meager resources. The structure of intermediate bodies in any international or national union inherently offers a means for mediating internal grievances. This mechanism provides a positive function that lessens the possibility of a secession movement.

What the Roehl Report and the AFM did by codifying a new structure in the AFM bylaws was to allow for a more democratic

representation that could present a united voice. It strengthened the voices of symphonic musicians interacting with their locals and confirmed the need for musicians to have both a voice and a vote.

By 1989, certain objectives had already been embraced:

- Players Conferences should have non-voting representation at AFM Conventions, including the right to appear before committees to defend legislation.
- Each Players Conference should have three delegates' expenses paid according to AFM bylaws.
- Players Conferences should have the right to introduce legislation.
- Locals should be obligated to provide a minimum level of required services.
- There should be a mechanism for an orchestra to be placed in the OSP even if their local objects (the musicians, too, will have a voice).

The Roehl Report built upon previous accomplishments and went a little bit further:

- The names of the symphony and the recording departments were changed to Symphonic Services Division (SSD) and Electronic Media Division (EMSD).
- The administrator of each department was designated as a director and as an assistant to the AFM president. Both positions are appointed by the AFM President.
- Steering committees for each division were established to serve as advisors to each division. The heads of ICSOM, OCSM, and ROPA advise SSD. A small group of RMA officers (as determined by their conference) plus one symphonic representative advise EMSD.
- The Player Conferences Council (PCC) was established. The PCC would meet with the IEB at mutually established times "to exchange information and ideas on appropriate subjects regarding the good and welfare of the American Federation of Musicians."
- The Structure Committee (that started this discussion) would continue to research structural and operational improvements within the AFM.

Since these changes were incorporated into the AFM bylaws, they have been improved upon to try to ensure that everyone works together for the good and welfare of the AFM. PCC members have served on AFM committees since that time and have been

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Louise Dieterle Nippert Creates \$85 Million Musical Arts Fund by Paul Frankenfeld, Delegate, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

As musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra arrived for the dress rehearsal of a Holiday Pops concert on December 10, they were surprised to see members of the management and the trustee boards of the Cincinnati Symphony, the Cincinnati Opera, the Cincinnati Ballet, and the May Festival, all milling around onstage. At the moment the rehearsal was scheduled to commence, Cincinnati Symphony President Trey Devey came to the podium accompanied by Louise Dieterle Nippert, a long-time arts patron, to explain that a special announcement would take place. Speaking for Mrs. Nippert was Carter Randolph, administrator of the Greenacres Foundation, a local educational trust created by Mrs. Nippert and her late husband, Louis Nippert. Mr. Randolph explained that Mrs. Nippert had decided to create a Musical Arts Fund of \$85 million that would benefit the Cincinnati Symphony by providing future income to ensure that the musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony would have a full-complement orchestra and continue with 52-week employment. In the case of the Cincinnati Opera, the allotment from the Fund will be used to utilize the symphony musicians in the pit. The Fund also provides support to the Cincinnati Ballet to bring its productions back to Music Hall from the Aronoff Centre, and to re-establish a collaboration that existed in the early years of the Ballet with the Cincinnati Symphony as its orchestra.

This stunning announcement represents one more example of the overwhelming generosity that 98-year-old Louise Dieterle Nippert has demonstrated all her life. Along with her husband, Louis Nippert, they have given, often anonymously, to charitable foundations throughout the Cincinnati region. As a former majority stakeholder in the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, the soft-spoken Mrs. Nippert has had a long-standing belief in the importance of local stewardship. The Nipperts' support for the Cincinnati Symphony extends back decades, including the endowment of the Principal Viola position, as well as the Music Director and Pops Conductor positions. A Swiss boarding school graduate fluent in German and French, Mrs. Nippert has a keen interest in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and was classically trained as a soprano. Despite health challenges of the past decade, Louise Nippert has continued to attend concerts and operas at Music Hall and the College Conservatory of Music.

The announcement of the establishment of the Fund brought tears to the eyes of many of the Cincinnati Symphony players, who were overwhelmed by the scope and size of this gift during such difficult economic times. That the Musical Arts Fund was created to directly benefit the musicians and is held in trust by the Greenacres Foundation, rather than being placed in the separate arts groups' endowments, is unique. The gratitude felt by the musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony to Louise Dieterle Nippert is not just for the security it provides for their careers, but for the promise that future generations shall continue to enjoy the 115-year-old orchestra.

On another front, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra recently returned from a seven-concert tour of Japan between October 22 and November 5. The orchestra performed four concerts in Tokyo, including two at Suntory Hall, one at the Bunka Kaikan, and one at the NHK Studio Hall that was broadcast live on radio and was

also videotaped for delayed television broadcast. Other concerts took place in Nagoya, Nishinomya, and Yokohama. The concerts, featuring music of Copland, Bernstein, Dvorak and Rachmaninoff, were led by Music Director Paavo Jarvi. Syako Shoji was soloist in the Sibelius Violin Concerto, and Krystian Zimmerman was piano soloist in Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Well-sold houses and enthusiastic audiences were gratifying for the musicians, and the entire tour was efficiently planned and directed by Japan Arts Concert Presenters. It was the Cincinnati Symphony's first return to Japan since a tour in 2003.

Roehl Report Revisited

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advocates for many issues, including the formation of the Locals' Conferences Council (LCC) and of an official Freelance Division. (It should be noted that no freelance work dues are paid to the Federation; only symphonic, recording, and travel and touring agreements are required to pay dues to the Federation.)

Considerable misinformation and even lies are being spread about ICSOM. Let us set the record straight: ICSOM is interested in enhancing the participation of working musicians in the governance of the union. That's how we work with our orchestras, and it should be the same with our union. More will be accomplished by an open and honest dialogue with a real interest toward understanding and dealing with problems than by the creation of constant roadblocks. Mr. Roehl closed his report by saying:

There is no "quick fix." Any long-term structural problems in the International in membership growth and perceived problems of the Player Conferences will not go away overnight.... These problems will change as a coherent program begins to develop.

I think my colleague, Tom Hall, said it best in his book, *ICSOM: 40 Years of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians*: "Despite some opinion within ICSOM's ranks that disaffiliation from the Federation would better serve the interests of orchestra musicians, the organization has, from its earliest meetings and in its statement of purpose formulated in September 1962, espoused the principle of working with and within the AFM to accomplish change."

Senza Sordino is the official voice of ICSOM and reflects ICSOM policy. However, there are many topics discussed in *Senza Sordino* on which ICSOM has no official policy; the opinions thus expressed in *Senza Sordino* are those of the author(s) and not necessarily of ICSOM, its officers, or members. Articles and letters expressing differing viewpoints are welcomed.

At the State Fair

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from the locals. The number of voting delegates, along with the number of votes assigned to each, is determined by the size of the local. Each local—no matter how small—is allocated at least one delegate with at least one vote.

Although structured with an eye toward fair representation, this can cause a lopsided voting system. Every small local—no matter how few members, and perhaps with no symphonic members at all—has a delegate with one or more votes. Yet larger locals may have only two or three delegates casting all their votes. For example, the Twin Cities Musicians Union (Local 30-73, Minneapolis and Saint Paul), with two ICSOM orchestras and one ROPA orchestra, and nearly 1400 members, elects only three voting delegates. Therefore a dozen small locals, each with 50–100 members, probably few to none of them symphonic, would aggregate four times as many voting delegates controlling all their votes.

It is a political fact that it is all too easy for the Federation leadership to woo those small locals, some without any fulltime musician members, away from concern over the well-being of their symphonic colleagues, who might seem to exist “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” Conversely, we symphonic musicians—especially those operating under good contracts, most especially those with full-year contracts that (at least until recently) have continued to grow and meet or exceed cost-of-living expenses—may be tempted to feel insulated, and isolated, and to grow complacent.

By now I assume it is clear why I am emphasizing the three objectives listed above: For any individual members, like symphonic musicians, to have that “meaningful voice” in our futures as unionized musicians, we must have a strong union. In order to keep that union strong, “democratic and progressive” in ways I fear the union has neglected, we must work at it. To effect any meaningful regime change, what is required is our “active participation.”

Specifically, what is required is voting power at the AFM Convention. We symphonic musicians must voice strongly to our local boards and local voting delegates that the need for responsible leadership at the executive level of the Federation has never been greater. We symphonic musicians must run for, and be elected to, local boards of directors, especially to positions that include the privilege of voting delegate at the national conference.

Just as we depend on our national union we depend on our locals: we must forge and maintain strong relationships with our local boards and our fellow non-symphonic members. And just as we depend on them, they depend on us—on our unity and on our support. It is no secret that in most cities with ICSOM orchestras, the percentage of financial support by symphonic players is even greater than nationally. In the Twin Cities local, according to the 2008–2009 ICSOM Wage Chart, ICSOM orchestra work dues contribute nearly 80% of the local’s annual budget.

Which brings us back to the final Monday of August, at the Minnesota State Fair.

Coincidentally, while in Norfolk for the ICSOM Conference I was contacted by Clare Zupetz, office manager for the Twin Cities Musicians Union. She asked if I might have time to volunteer at the Local 30-73 booth at the State Fair. Although it is likely that I would have done so anyway, all that has been happening in the Federation, and especially in ICSOM, in recent months, fueled my eagerness to be there.

Any Twin Cities trade union local that is part of the AFL-CIO, including our local, can have a booth at the AFL-CIO building on the State Fairgrounds. Two factoids about this building: (a) it is the first ‘green’ building at the State Fair, built just one year ago; (b) despite its prime location, one short block inside the main gate, it is the only building *not* on the State Fair map—evidently because it is the AFL-CIO that owns the property, and not the State Fair Corporation.

Like the other unions there, the Local 30-73 has a shaded cart, director’s chairs for those manning the booth, and hundreds of brochures and pamphlets to give to passers-by. Because of the prime location of the building, there are plenty of people who do stop. The local also has a cutout, where folks can stick their heads through for photo ops (a rock musician—next year we’ll try to get a symphonic one there, too), as well as a portable stage. This year’s paid live performances were mostly popular solos and duets, but there was even a small chorus. (Next year maybe some chamber music...)

Minnesota Orchestra ICSOM Delegate Norbert Nielubowski was also at the booth with me. Other musicians performed or stopped by, including David Frost, Columbus Symphony principal librarian, who grew up in Saint Paul and happened to be in town visiting relatives. Ms. Zupetz especially was the ever-gracious hostess, helpful and welcoming to everyone—an ideal voice for our local.

This proved to be an excellent opportunity to represent the local out in the community, at an event that embodies “Minnesota Nice.” Although there is no way to measure the overall effect of my presence there, I know that we who were there took this golden opportunity to discuss the local and national situations, and began to strategize ways to effect much-needed change—everything from altering or expanding the slate at the next local election, to working with those on the local board to motivate change at the national level, at next year’s Convention.

The timing could not have been more propitious for ICSOM that we were able to volunteer at the Twin Cities Musicians Union booth at the Minnesota State Fair. Moreover, it didn’t rain, and it wasn’t too hot. And, after I’d finished my four volunteer hours, I did enjoy that scoop of coconut gelato on a coconut half shell from the booth at the foot of the SkyRide.

In retrospect, my hopes and dreams for next year at the Minnesota State Fair: a symphonic photo cutout, chamber music demos and performances, dark-chocolate frozen key lime pie (on a stick), and an executive branch that values and is committed to work on behalf of every member of the American Federation of Musicians.

Chairperson's Report

(continued from page 2)

cancel artistic and marketing initiatives, they begin to lose the interest of their supporters, both donors and audience members. As a result, less revenue is received and further cut backs are made. This begins a vicious spiral that cripples arts organizations.

We are seeing orchestras make this mistake. I've recently had the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with musicians in two of our nation's great orchestras. I've listened to their ideas for reaching to the community and maintaining and elevating the profile of their city's orchestras while increasing community service. Our orchestras are filled with musicians with innovative ideas. Our managements should be eager to listen to them—and then our managements should be capable of inspiring our boards.

People contribute to things that inspire them to contribute. Inspiration leads believers to provide support for political campaigns and to causes that serve a need. Inspirational leaders build organizations that accomplish great things for the world, even in times of difficulty. Our field needs more inspirational leaders, and no amount of money invested in the same old studies of sustainability can ever make up for what is lost when an organization lacks a visionary, dynamic leader.

2. We have all been following the events in Albuquerque, where our friends and colleagues in the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra (a member orchestra of the Regional Orchestra Players' Association) were fighting for their orchestra and its great history. As this issue of *Senza Sordino* goes to print, we have learned that the musicians have accepted a settlement. While there were many issues involved there, perhaps the most notorious is the fact that the musicians' health insurance was cut off, and yet the management did not inform the musicians for approximately ten days. We have seen health insurance used as a negotiating tactic before, but perhaps never as egregiously as this. It would seem obvious that any organization that thinks it appropriate to place the health of its employees and their families at risk by cutting off health insurance—let alone without informing them—will have difficulty inspiring success and promoting growth.

ICSOM was pleased to be able to show our support for our New Mexico Symphony Orchestra colleagues at a rally in downtown Albuquerque on September 28. ICSOM President Brian Rood delivered a speech in support of the musicians. In his remarks President Rood made the following points:

The very future of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra is now at stake. Management and board leadership somehow suggest that the solution to their current financial issues is to make immediate and drastic cuts. These cuts would reverse the incredible artistic strides achieved through years of collaboration and would result in a vastly inferior product. If accepted, management's last offer to the musicians would result in an annual wage less than they received 18 years ago in 1991–1992 and would also be less than half of the current per capita income.

The full text of President Rood's remarks can be found on the Facebook page of the New Mexico Symphony Players Association, and we encourage you all to visit that page and join their growing list of supporters.

3. The American Federation of Musicians and Employers' Pension Fund (AFM-EPF) continues to suffer, and the multiplier was recently reduced to \$1, another 50% cut in benefits. Further, due to a new rule imposed by the trustees, it appears our orchestras have now lost the ability to reduce pension contributions during this time of economic cutbacks. This new rule seems to mandate that any contribution reduction by an orchestra would result in expulsion from the fund. But, really, much of this is not clear, and, as of early December, the AFM-EPF has yet to inform individual plan participants of changes by hard copy mailing, even though initial word came on October 16.

In that time, however, the president of the Federation somehow managed to respond to a mailing by the Recording Musicians Association (RMA) that was critical of his handling of a national media negotiation. The RMA, in its criticism, maintained that the duly elected leaders of that Player Conference had not been adequately involved in the negotiation of an agreement that they will be working under. The president's response to this criticism was nearly 1,300 words long and contained four attachments! At this time of crisis for our orchestras and for the AFM-EPF, is this really how we expect our leaders to be using their time, and our union's resources?

4. As I write this, news continues to break from Honolulu about the possibility of bankruptcy for that great orchestra, an orchestra that has persevered since 1900. The oldest symphony west of the Rocky Mountains—one that managed to survive both world wars, the Great Depression, and numerous recessions—has also inspired generations of Hawaiians. We will all stay in touch with this situation as it develops. I have had the honor of visiting with the musicians of the Honolulu Symphony on two occasions, most recently just two years ago. But in 1996, long before I was chair of ICSOM, I spent 10 days performing with the orchestra, and during that time I learned all I needed to know about commitment, service, artistry, and investment. I met a group of musicians completely dedicated to serving their community. One evening, they allowed me the courtesy of observing a meeting on-stage at the Blaisdell Center. What I heard and learned there convinced me of the importance of musicians investing in their community as we ask our communities to invest in us. ICSOM will be seeking ways to assist our friends and colleagues during this time.

I reminisced at the start of this article about a trite saying that inspired me as a kid. It may be trite, but it is also true. Change will come when you demand it, and when we demand it collectively. We must have managers who understand the field and can inspire a community, let alone their own office. And we must have a union that seeks to serve its dues paying members in their greatest time of need.

The future can be strong, but that future depends on us.

ICSOM Chair Pays a Site Visit to Baltimore

by Mary Plaine, Delegate, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

What do you do when your orchestra has voted to take two sets of cuts within a five-month period—the first “voluntary” and the other under the threat of bankruptcy—resulting in an ensemble full of frustrated and angry members? How do you convince volunteers to serve on an orchestra committee that may engage in conversations about further possible cuts? In the case of the few remaining musicians on the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Committee, you call in Bruce Ridge, chair of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, for a site visit.

The decision to have Bruce come to Baltimore was a good one. He flew into Baltimore on Sunday, September 27, 2009. After lots of listening, many questions, and a few suggestions, Bruce departed on Tuesday afternoon leaving behind a revitalized and more engaged collection of musicians. Maybe we musicians are no more united in how to meet the future demands of our board than we were before his visit, but after Bruce’s visit we were able to fill all seven positions on our orchestra committee, and those people have hit the ground running to get clear about our orchestra’s priorities for the future. Bruce brought together a diverse group of musicians who respectfully and passionately shared our sorrows over the possible loss of our collective dream of continued growth as a major orchestra.

Our new orchestra committee has decided to use co-chairs this season, Laurie Sokoloff and Robert Barney, both of whom had something to say about Bruce’s visit to Baltimore. Following Bruce’s visit, Bob wrote: “It is too early to say which direction we will be going in Baltimore, but I think Bruce may have helped to plant a seed that can grow into something big. The most heartening moment of his visit for me was when I came late to a well-attended orchestra meeting he was leading that was already two hours long and still going strong. I started feeling like we still have the spirit

we need in Baltimore, and for what it’s worth, this helped me decide to take the plunge back into committee work. Thanks, Bruce! Wish I had picked your brain more while you were here.”

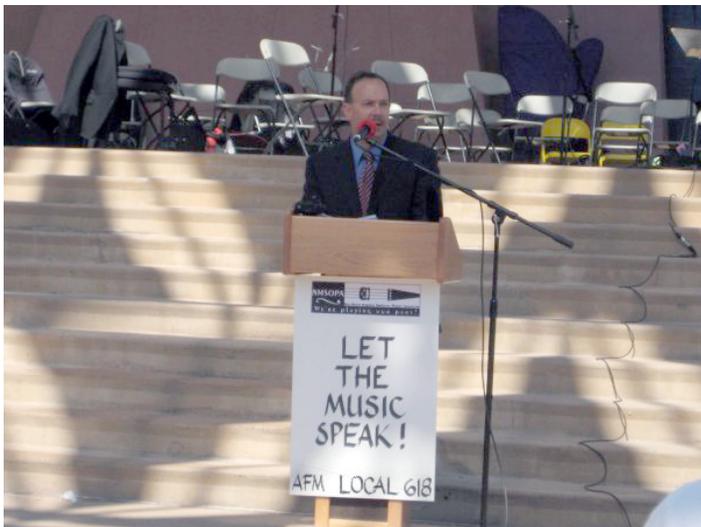
Laurie added: “It was an extreme pleasure to meet and get to know Bruce. As a co-chair with only one year’s previous committee experience, I appreciated the chance to learn from his experience and counsel. Bruce obviously enjoys his work, and it was heartening to see the orchestra respond so positively to his enthusiasm and spirit. I really enjoyed my time with him, and it was evident the orchestra did as well. Even after last summer’s demoralizing negotiations, Bruce was able to get us to see the opportunities that exist here. I applaud Bruce and ICSOM’s generous support in providing these services. Thank you!”

During his time in Baltimore, the ICSOM chair met with small groups of musicians at a player’s home, at a local watering-hole, and at a well-attended orchestra meeting. And in order for Bruce to have a better understanding of the Baltimore musicians’ situation, Bruce also met with our president/CEO and a member of our board of directors. Bruce also got to hear the orchestra in rehearsal, which, Bruce says, is a highlight of every site visit he makes.

For many musicians, it was the first real, live, and meaningful encounter with ICSOM beyond receiving *Senza Sordinos*, the annual directory, and annual post-conference reports. Before discussing Baltimore’s issues at the orchestra meeting, Bruce educated our membership about the problems ICSOM and the other AFM player conferences are having with our national union and its leadership. He invited all musicians to subscribe to Orchestra-L to stay knowledgeable about industry issues. And Bruce asked the Baltimore musicians to support Americans for the Arts, an organization that ICSOM believes does a superior job of advocacy for the arts and our profession.

One of the messages Bruce delivered to the Baltimore musicians was that we should commit not only to playing our best musically onstage, but also to delivering the most positive messages to our community about who we are and what we stand for while offstage. If our non-musician leadership is unable or unwilling to be advocates for the orchestra in our community, then we must. Ultimately, it is our jobs that are on the line.

The musicians of the Baltimore Symphony are grateful to the ICSOM Governing Board and to the ICSOM community for their continued support via telephone conference calls and to Bruce Ridge for taking the time to make this site visit.



ICSOM President Brian Rood traveled to Albuquerque to speak at a rally on behalf of New Mexico Symphony Orchestra musicians on September 28. [See page 8 for further details.]

Secretary's Report

(continued from page 3)

addition, management contacted the unemployment office in an effort to cut off the musicians' benefits. Now, the union is contesting the New Mexico Labor Force's decision to force the musicians to pay back the unemployment benefits they received for the time the season was "postponed." It's surprising that these musicians have any desire to work for their orchestra after such scandalous treatment.

What makes me sadder still is the recent efforts by New Mexico's board to cut musicians salaries by a much larger percentage than the staff (and let us not forget the staff have no real jobs without the orchestra). The same board audaciously stripped the musicians' proposal to set benchmarks for the board's fundraising efforts (similar to Utah's recent settlement that holds the board responsible for their stated goals) from the board's last, best, and final offer to the musicians. At the end of all this incredibly atrocious behavior by the management and the board, they did accept the musicians' benchmarks and accountability provisions. However, the musicians were forced to vote on a contract that reduced their salaries by the amount of income they received for performing the *Nutcracker* with the New Mexico Ballet. The musicians were told that if they did not accept the agreement, the board would vote on bankruptcy three days after the ratification vote.

While the contract was ratified, major healing must occur between the board and the orchestra. The board has much to answer for. They forced cuts on the musicians that were nearly two-and-one-half times that of staff members (and the staff was paid during the entire lockout)—this from a board that in previous difficult times would have worked with the musicians to formulate a plan that included equality of sacrifice and shown a willingness to involve all the constituents. The musicians, on the other hand, are working on the oversight and accountability mandated by the new agreement with their newly formed audience association.

Then there is Grand Rapids. The orchestra and the press made much of the fact that their new president/CEO is a former member of the

orchestra. Yet, when it really counted, when it was time to think outside the box, the management and the board retreated to small, regressive thinking and demanded deep cuts in salaries and pension. The musicians begged their management to embrace many of the ideas in Michael Kaiser's book. Instead, the ideas were pushed aside, and communication with the orchestra seems to be at an all-time low. While portions of Michigan are truly hurting economically, that is not the case in Grand Rapids. Ironically, one week after the Grand Rapids Symphony board approved a \$900,000 cut to the budget, the *Grand Rapids Press* reportedly featured such comments as "Fresh art ideas will keep funds flowing, expert says" and "He calls cutting budgets a recipe for disaster" (reporting on Michael Kaiser's visit to Grand Rapids). In the end, all the national attention caused the board to amend their final proposal, though the orchestra did not achieve restoration of previous contract terms. The board, with its eagerness to cut rather than look for other solutions, disappointed the musicians. Meanwhile, concert attendance is at record levels, and many goals are being met or exceeded.

In too many situations we have had to become our own public advocates because our managers and boards are so fearful, so unwilling to take chances. Instead, they retreat and do their organizations more harm than good—setting themselves up for years of playing catch-up and trying to reinvigorate and gain back their audiences and contributors. I find it disheartening that our leaders cannot think big or that they refuse to believe their communities will support all their good works, especially as the primary arts educators in our communities. (But that's another topic for another time!)

Of course, not all managements are guilty. Several are forward-looking and have maintained good relationships with musicians during difficult times. To those managers and boards who look to their musicians with respect and ask for help rather than demanding with threats—my hat is off to you. *All* our orchestras are aware that, no matter the size, what happens to one of us affects us all.
