

The following information about the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Alumni Association is adapted from remarks made by Tom Hall at the 2008 ICSOM conference.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Alumni Association (CSOAA) began with an idea, put forth by some retired members of the orchestra, to bring together every living former member of the CSO during the orchestra's hundredth year as part of the centennial celebration. That idea was enthusiastically received by then-CSO executive director Henry Fogel, and a mailing to potential attendees met with an overwhelmingly favorable response. So it was that on September 21, 1991, many former members of the orchestra met in the ballroom of Orchestra Hall to reminisce about their years in the CSO. From that gathering arose what later officially became the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Alumni Association, an organization that continues to function today much as it did from the beginning.

The occasion was not without complication, as recounted in an article about the CSOAA by Phillip Kauffman, a former CSO violist and charter officer, in the March 1997 issue of *Senza Sordino*. Following the afternoon gathering of former members, the CSO was to give a concert in Grant Park to which retirees were invited as special guests, and there was to be a post-concert gathering of retirees back at Orchestra Hall to which current CSO musicians were also invited. Those lovely plans were jeopardized by the breakdown of contract negotiations then being held between the Union and the Orchestral Association. As feared, the orchestra went on strike immediately after the concert—which had been performed as a gesture of good will—and marched back to Orchestra Hall with picket signs. Needless to say, a reception in the Hall was out of the question. Chicago Federation of Musicians president Charles Guse came to the rescue, arranging for everyone to be bussed to a post-concert (and post-picketing) reception in the union hall, and it proved to be a grand success.

CSOAA bylaws, adopted in 1993, formally establish the organization, contain a statement of purpose, define membership eligibility and rights of members, establish a board of directors and how board members are elected, describe officers' duties, address payment of dues, and provide for amendments to the bylaws. Although the bylaws state that the CSOAA is a not-for-profit organization—and it functions as one—it has not formally established not-for-profit status, the membership feeling this unnecessary and to no particular advantage. Dues, originally \$15, have risen to \$30, primarily to subsidize the reunion, which is the organization's only significant expense.

The purpose of the CSOAA, as stated in the bylaws, is “to unite current and former members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, their respective spouses, and other musicians having substantially performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra into a single organization to 1) engage in social activities; 2) inform its members of the current location and activities of its membership; and 3) engage in any other lawful activities its members may deem appropriate.” Consistent with its purpose, the CSOAA is not an exclusive organization. It is not intended primarily as a private club only for former members with a minimum period of longevity, or for pensioners only. Its purpose is to connect and bring together musicians who have worked together and traveled together in the CSO, whether for decades or for just a year. As stated above, eligibility is extended to persons who have played and traveled with the orchestra even if they were not full-fledged and rostered members of the CSO. This is partly to be as inclusive as possible and partly to enrich the coffers.

The governing body is a board of directors with five officer positions—president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and editor—and a number of directors determined by the officers. There are currently nine members on the board of directors. Officer positions may be combined at the discretion of the board and with the approval of the membership.

The primary activities of the CSOAA are the dissemination of news of interest by e-mail and by newsletter, and the holding of reunions every 18 months. The newsletter is published quarterly, more or less, and e-mailings to a list group are sent in a timely manner to those who go online.

There have been 12 reunions over 17 years, the most recent being held in April 2008. The reunion has, in recent years, come to replace the annual party traditionally given by orchestra members in honor of

persons retiring or just retired. Recent retirees are now recognized and honored at the CSOAA reunion with plaques and checks. Beginning with this last reunion, former members attending the reunion concert had opportunity to be introduced collectively to the audience. Some 15 members represented over 450 years of collective service, a fact met with warm and enthusiastic applause.

It should be noted that the Chicago Symphony Orchestra *Alumni* Association is not officially part of the Chicago Symphony *Orchestra* Association (CSOA). Nowhere does the CSOAA appear on the CSOA organization chart. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra *Alumni* Association is able to use the name of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and CSO with the permission and blessing of the Chicago Symphony *Orchestra* Association. The CSOA does provide a place for the CSOAA board to meet, and it allows the CSOAA to copy and mail the newsletter at CSOA expense. The CSOA also provides a liaison, CSOA archivist Frank Villella, to facilitate interaction between the CSOA and the CSOAA. The placement of the liaison duty in the Rosenthal Archives is a good choice: information about former members is of historical interest, and maintaining contacts and keeping the database in the archives benefits both organizations. The CSOA also gives space to the CSOAA on its website, cso.org. The CSOAA member directory is online, accessible by password. Also posted online are the bylaws, a list of former officers, and a list of reunion dates and locations.

Since its inception the CSOAA has had the backing of the CSO Members Committee, and the support initially given by Henry Fogel is carried on by the current CSOA president, Deborah Rutter. As Phil Kauffman said in his article: "The CSOAA is a social organization, and we have decided that taking militant advocacy positions is not the way to go. We do not want an adversarial relationship with the Orchestral Association. In fact, we enjoy the warm embrace of a management which accepts us as the senior members of the CSO family."