

I bring greetings from my 1100 colleagues in Canada, and I thank you for once again inviting me to your conference.

Our news from Canada is basically okay. Our orchestras are perennially underpaid, with too many having base salaries that are close to the poverty level. Half of the 20 OCSM orchestras have taken pay cuts in the past year or two, but these have been relatively minor compared to what some of the US orchestras have suffered. The main reason for this is that Canadian orchestras are more heavily dependent on federal and provincial funding than the US ones are. We don't have large endowments to begin with, so we were not as affected by the downturn in the economy as were our counterparts south of the border. However, fund-raising is definitely more difficult than it was, and three of our orchestras have lost funding that traditionally came from gaming enterprises because of changes in local or provincial policies. Others have reported cuts of up to 50% in their provincial arts funding. The few orchestras that have always done poorly are continuing in that tradition. Touring is either way down or non-existent in many of our orchestras. An analysis of our wage charts showed that, over the past ten years, OCSM orchestra salaries have increased by 14.35%; however, the Consumer Price Index has risen by 19.2% over that same period.

Another thing that has affected eleven of our orchestras has been the implementation of a harmonized sales tax, or HST, in Ontario and British Columbia. Instead of paying just a 5% Goods and Services Tax on tickets in those provinces, the organizations now have to charge provincial tax as well, for a total of 13%. That means that every ticket has gone up an automatic 8%, which doesn't leave any room for an orchestra to raise ticket prices simply because it might be necessary. In addition, every orchestral musician who earns more than \$30,000 annually has to be paid 13% tax on top of his or her basic salary. That money doesn't benefit the individual musician, since it gets turned back to the government, but the orchestra still has to come up with the money. The HST came into effect this spring, so many orchestras saw their subscription sales rise initially from beat-the-HST campaigns, but we are all concerned about the effect that this tax increase will have on our orchestras and theatres. There were, of course, many groups lobbying to have arts groups exempt from the HST, but to no avail.

However, it's not all bad news. The best thing about an orchestra conference is hearing about the exciting things that some orchestras are doing. The Winnipeg Symphony has instituted an aboriginal festival, one concert of which used an indigenous rock band. This generated so many letters of support from a community that had traditionally been excluded from our orchestra world that the provincial Minister of Culture actually contacted the Symphony to see what he could do to help. The result was additional funding. For twenty years, the Winnipeg Symphony has enjoyed unprecedented success with its new music festival, which is attended by some 14,000 people each year. People actually schedule their escapes from the harsh Manitoba winters to make sure that they're in town for the festival.

The Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra has a clause stipulating that at least 50% of the people on the nominating committee for their governing board must be musicians. They have the right to veto any union-unfriendly nominees.

I reported last year that the Canadian Broadcasting Company had changed direction and was no longer essentially a classical music station. Despite this, we were surprised to learn from the delegates that the CBC was doing nearly as many orchestra remotes as in the good ol' days.

At the conference, we heard about an exciting project that will be produced by Rhombus Media. This originated with an idea from Kent Nagano, music director of the Montreal Symphony. It will be a 21st-century version of the movie Fantasia, centering around the number 7: 7 contemporary composers will write music, to be performed by the Montreal Symphony, for the work of 7 different cartoonists, based on things associated with the number 7 -- days of the week, deadly sins, colours, etc. The project will take several years to complete, and it will include a TV program and a DVD with 7 layers (the movie itself, a concert version, documentaries, and so forth). There will be a video game with 7 layers based on 7 worlds. Since I've never played a video game, I don't know what that means, but I assume that others do.

After trying for at least four AFM Conventions, and with the support of ICSOM, we finally succeeded in getting rid of the Canadian exemption to the prohibition of having theatre contractors on boards. This was an important issue for the Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians because many of our musicians do theatre work, because there was no TMA chapter in Canada to fight the cause, and because it was simply the right thing for unionists to do. Nobody should have to fear going to their Local board to complain about a contractor who just might be sitting on that board. Also, AFM Canada will now be called the Canadian Federation of Musicians, or the CFM. We are still members of the AFM, but with a different name for doing business within Canada. This should lower the eyebrows of funders or government organizations who have been wondering why a group with "American" at the beginning of its name is coming to it for help.

We send you wishes for a fruitful conference, and I would like to extend my personal congratulations to the ICSOM board for the vigorous way they represent the needs of everyone in this room. Thanks go especially to Brian for his contributions to the OCSM conference, and to Bruce for his steadfast support.