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Speech at the ICSOM Conference (Houston TX)
19 August 2010

To the ICSOM Governing Board, ICSOM Delegates, distinguished and honored guests, it is an honor to address you this afternoon in Houston as we embrace the future of our industry. I extend warm greetings to you from ROPA, especially since you are in the most air-conditioned city in the United States. I had also planned to extend blankets and sweaters to all of you, too, since I have grown to know and love Houston recently.

You see, Houston has become the unofficial home base of ROPA. This is my fourth visit to Houston in the past two years. ROPA held its 2008 annual conference here, and the southern hospitality was enjoyed so much by ROPA's Executive Board that we decided to hold our mid-year meetings here in 2009 and 2010.

In addition, we are very proud to have two full member orchestras here, Houston Ballet Orchestra and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra.

Two weeks ago, ROPA had a very successful annual conference in Omaha. Our theme was "looking to our future." I believe that in order to look to our future, sometimes it requires a peek into the past. A few months ago, I vacationed in Italy and wrote an article for ROPA's newsletter, "The Leading Tone", about my trip. I placed a copy of that issue in your mailbox yesterday while wondering if you will be as surprised as I was to discover exactly what can happen to a city such as Venice when its forefathers did not maintain or advance the wages of its musicians.

What is that old saying? Ah, yes. History repeats itself. Orchestras in both ROPA and ICSOM have experienced severe financial cuts in recent times. One example is the Shreveport Symphony. Two years ago, they faced a 75% pay cut, which would move its full time core musicians from barely a living wage in the first place to an amount that is less than a graduate assistantship at a college or university. The Shreveport musicians were on strike for the two years after this offer was implemented, and just last month settled with a 45% pay cut.

Today we see an even worse situation unfolding in Charleston, South Carolina, where management cancelled the remainder of the 2009-2010 season last April after the musicians failed to accept the terms of a proposal given during a contract reopener. Originally, their contract was to expire in 2012. Now we see an illegal lockout occurring in Charleston. The offer that the musicians rejected last spring included an 84% pay cut, which would have taken the base wage of their full time section players from \$22,000 a year to \$3600 a year. As a further insult, the musician's health insurance was cancelled at the end of April.

It blows my mind to know that the mayor of Charleston was recognized with the National Medal of Arts at the White House within a month of the musicians receiving this appalling offer. In fact, the President congratulated him by saying, quote, "my great friend Joe Riley and the extraordinary work he's done in Charleston." Others awarded at this time included soprano Jessye Norman, conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, and composer John Williams.

But wait, there is more. Do you know how much money was raised to renovate Gaillard Auditorium, home of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra? One hundred and forty-two million dollars. Yet they cannot pay their full time core musicians more than \$3600 a year? That is beyond insulting to those fine musicians.

This coming year is the 75th season of the Charleston Symphony, which should be a celebration. Perhaps some of you played in this orchestra at some point of your career. Or perhaps some of you know someone who plays there today. I can assure you that this has nothing to do with the quality of their performance, and it has everything to do with severe mismanagement.

Shreveport, Louisiana. Charleston, South Carolina. What an absolute injustice to our industry. What an absolute injustice to their communities. It is absolutely degrading for professional musicians to be handed a financial package that puts their salary levels well below the poverty line.

Mind you, Charleston is not a depressed part of the United State, by any means. Far from it. Three days ago, according to a national publication that provides site-selection information to companies scouting new locations, South Carolina ranked number one for economic growth potential. In addition, South Carolina ranked at the top of its list for "Economic Growth Potential", thanks mostly in part to Boeing's decision to build a jet assembly line at Charleston International Airport. With a talented and creative management team and an active board, this orchestra should be flourishing.

A report two months ago stated that the average Executive Director of a ROPA orchestra earns about \$105,000 a year, just over six figures. Yet, the average ROPA musician earns about \$13,000 a year, just over five figures. While we find this to be disturbing, the frustration really grows when musicians hear that they must accept the same percentage of pay cuts that the staff and management have just accepted.

When ROPA managers or conductors accept a 5%-10% pay cut, it means that they can still have dinner in restaurants with their families, perhaps not as nice or upscale of a restaurant as before; however, when ROPA musicians take the same 5%-10% pay cut, it means that someone may go to bed hungry. The "equity of sacrifice" argument cannot apply to our orchestras.

Serving as ROPA Vice President for the past two years, I have observed and

encountered a number of situations that lead me to say that the managers of ROPA orchestras do not have the same level of training and experience that the musicians of ROPA orchestras have, nor have they endured the grueling audition process on a national level that we must face in order to earn a seat in a ROPA orchestra.

I made this point quite clearly at the Orchestra Summit in Ann Arbor last January, to a room full of managers. And I also promoted Michael Kaiser and the Orchestra Management Fellowship program that he runs at the Kennedy Center, as an answer to this problem of untrained and ineffective managers in ROPA orchestras.

Well, last spring, you can imagine my surprise when I read in my local newspaper that a philanthropist from the DeVos family in Grand Rapids, which is where I live, had just funded Michael Kaiser's fellowship program to the tune of 20 million dollars. And just last week I received notification of their management training seminars that will begin this fall in Grand Rapids and Detroit. It is my sincere hope that help is indeed on the way in the area of trained, educated, versatile, and motivated orchestra managers, as we seek to embrace our future.

There is the tale of another ROPA orchestra whose musicians accepted a 20% pay cut last season. This summer their management came back to the table to ask for an additional 3% cut in wages. The interesting part? The amount that would be saved, by this proposed 3% pay cut, equates to the cost that the orchestra pays in dues for their membership in the League of American Orchestras.

You may have begun to notice that my speech today is filled with a number of questions. Here comes another one. Is it right for the musicians in this orchestra to basically subsidize their management's membership to the League? Can't they take a year off of their League membership dues because of financial straits and keep the salaries of their musicians in place, especially since the musicians just took a 20% pay cut last season?

I have attended the last two conferences of the League of American Orchestras, and both times I have been singled out from the audience as being a problem. In Chicago in 2009, the Executive Director from my orchestra, the Grand Rapids Symphony, served as a panelist and told the audience, during his introductory remarks, that I was sitting in the front row, which indicated that he would not be able to speak freely. And in Atlanta in 2010, I was actually pointed out as being "the elephant in the room" when asked for a show of hands if there were any musicians present.

Well, when I was called an elephant, it took a lot for me to not give the smart-aleck answer that popped into my mind, something like, gee, that explains why ROPA musicians work for peanuts. Instead, I waited until the session was

over, sought out the person who referred to musicians in such a way, and clearly asked the question: "how can you call me the elephant in the room, when the musicians are the product?"

I had a few minutes to speak with this gentleman, who actually is a staff member of an ICSOM orchestra. I mentioned many things of which I was aware that the musicians of his orchestra had done to prove that they were not a problem but indeed a resource. At the end we shook hands and exchanged cards, but I do not feel that he regretted his "elephant" comment. Instead, I feel that he may have regretted that there was a musician present who witnessed his unfortunate comment.

On an uplifting note, I am proud to announce that ROPA has a record enrollment: today we are 83 orchestras strong, with 75 full member and 8 associate member orchestras. Actually, the membership in ROPA has grown significantly since the financial downfall of October 2008, which indicates to me the importance of solidarity during tough times. Over the past two years, we have added eight new orchestras to ROPA, and two of our associate members upgraded to full member status. In addition, there are even more orchestras on the cusp of joining ROPA this season.

I feel that ICSOM and ROPA have become more unified during the past two years as well. We have responded to each others requests for support, including calls to action for Jacksonville, Columbus and Honolulu symphonies, and the upcoming action in Detroit. We thank ICSOM President Brian Rood for his appearance in Albuquerque last fall to support the musicians of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra during their three-and-a-half month lock out. I traveled there too and assisted the musicians in picketing a pops concert that the symphony's management was producing without the orchestra. The following day I performed at one of the extremely successful benefit concerts that their players' association sponsored. Those concerts raised over \$25,000 in funds for the musicians and their newly-formed audience association, which recently received their own 501(c)3 status. Unfortunately, I have to say that the NMSO is not out of the woods. They have been plagued with chronic late payrolls, and some musicians are still owed money from last season. Lack of leadership and vision continue to haunt the NMSO, which is the official orchestra of the state of New Mexico.

I also extend sincere thanks to ICSOM Chair Bruce Ridge for his support of my orchestra, the Grand Rapids Symphony, during our difficult negotiations last summer. Actually, I never realized that the Grand Rapids Symphony, the Sarasota Orchestra in Florida, and the Long Beach Symphony in California had so much in common until we all received nearly identical proposals from our managements within a few months, and I am certain that some of you received similar offers with the same immoveable stance from management, as well as the shell-game approach found in their financial counter-offers.

This leads me to ask yet another question. Exactly where is this style of management being promoted? To paraphrase a line from "Madame Bovary," I demand the right to see my executioner.

Exactly who is giving this poor advice to the managers of our orchestras right now?

On a more positive note, it has been such a pleasure to work closely with ICSOM representatives during the past two years. This includes my work with Bruce Ridge (and Francine Schutzman of OCSM) on the SSD Director search committee, the national media negotiations with Bill Foster, Cathy Payne, Laura Ross, Peter Rofe, and Matt Comerford as we worked to develop the Integrated Media Agreement, the wage chart improvements with Brian Rood and David Herring, and the Orchestra Summit in Ann Arbor with Brian Rood and Laura Ross. Please know that you are extremely well represented by each and every one of them, and it has been an honor to get to know them professionally and personally.

Speaking of the Orchestra Summit in Ann Arbor, service conversion seems to be the buzz now in the world of orchestra management. In a nutshell, service conversion is the practice of exchanging orchestral services for non-orchestral work, which could include working in the symphony's office.

I remember the actual date, September 25th, 1987, when I could finally quit my day job at the Cincinnati airport, since I had enough work in the music profession without having to work in an office anymore. For me, the last thing that I would want to do today is to swap the opportunity to play a Brahms Symphony for answering the phone or filing music in my Employer's offices.

However, I want to be perfectly clear on this next comment. ROPA does not refer to the practice of service conversion as "the Memphis Model".

At the Ann Arbor summit, I served on a panel with Brian Rood and was proud to recognize the Memphis Symphony as a ROPA orchestra. After the presentation, I sought out and spoke to the Memphis Symphony's Executive Director about their situation. I told him that, while I understood that he was able to work together with the musicians of the Memphis Symphony to find a plan that works for their situation and for their community, that it is a plan that would not necessarily work in other ROPA orchestras.

What can be gained by the situation in Memphis is that management, musicians, and the Local can come together to find a plan that fits their needs. Unfortunately, what has resulted from the situation in Memphis is that the managers in other orchestras now accept the practice of service conversion as a reality for all orchestras to embrace.

Instead of working together on a plan as they did in Memphis, managers in other orchestras wish to enforce the practice of service conversion as a "take it or leave it" approach to negotiations. This is absolutely wrong and, as a result, is creating incredibly difficult situations in orchestras, not just in ROPA, but in ICSOM as well.

And, may I add, I will not stand by and let the musicians of the Memphis Symphony feel alienated from ROPA. Our brothers and sisters in Memphis deserve our respect and support, and we will not treat them as outcasts. Truthfully, I wish that the title "the Memphis Model" had not been placed upon this situation, as it opens the possibility of causing conflict within ROPA, and possibly between ROPA and ICSOM.

Everyone, please take note that the title "the Memphis Model" certainly was not dubbed by ROPA or ICSOM. So now I have to ask another question. Exactly from where does the label "the Memphis model" originate? According to the musicians of the Memphis Symphony, it does not come from Memphis. They too would like an answer to this question.

We continue to watch events as they unfold in the Richardson Symphony, which is a full member orchestra of ROPA and located in the Dallas area. Many of you watched the YouTube video of their Music Director ranting at the musicians from the podium last spring. At this point, the musicians had not been paid for services from the prior concert cycle. Note: the salary of this music director is \$75,000 a year, yet the musicians in the Richardson Symphony earn an average of \$3000 a year.

Anyway, the conductor singled out their Principal Trumpeter, who was also Chair of the Negotiation Committee, and announced to the entire orchestra what this musician's overscale amount is, in an attempt to divide the musicians. In June, their management has announced that they do not wish to continue to have an AFM agreement, which placed them on the AFM's International Unfair list. And in July, their management turned down an offer for mediation. Now I understand that their management has announced auditions for their new non-union orchestra to be held in a few weeks at a local church. Thank you, ICSOM, for your support of our brothers and sisters in this orchestra, and thank goodness for AFM President Ray Hair who has been instrumental in the fight there for the musicians of the Richardson Symphony, since he's President of the Dallas Local.

I believe that the bond between ROPA and ICSOM has never been greater. It has been wonderful to see letters of support to ROPA musicians from ICSOM musicians. In some cases, those letters came from ICSOM musicians who used to perform in that ROPA orchestra. It is apparent that the authors of those letters still take pride in their former orchestras, and their offer of support and assistance is noticed by the community, board, and musicians.

There is strength in numbers, and with 83 member orchestras and nearly 6000 musician members, ROPA is recognized as a force in today's industry. Two weeks ago, Carla Lehmeier-Tatum was re-elected to another two-year term as ROPA President. Her tenacity, strength, and wisdom continue to impress all of us, and Carla and I speak daily about issues in ROPA orchestras and the industry. She sends warm greetings to you as well.

In conclusion, we are here to help one another during challenging times, be it east coast, west coast, and anywhere in-between. I look forward to serving as ROPA's Vice President in the coming year and firmly believe that the player conferences are making a difference in the orchestral industry.

Now for my final question. It's time to embrace the future. Right now? You bet.

Thank you.

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