

ICSOM President's Report

2010 ICSOM Conference

Houston, TX

August 18, 2010

Good morning delegates, fellow GB members, Federation officers, staff and honored guests. I would also like to thank President Lovie Smith-Wright, Secretary-Treasurer Bob McGrew, Conference coordinator Burke Shaw and the musicians of the Houston Symphony for hosting this conference.

To say that we live that in interesting times would be an understatement. Many of our orchestras face unprecedented attacks on our CBA's. I mention the CBA because much more is at stake than just compensation. Recent proposals from management include abolishing tenure, ending pension contributions, refusing to pay for electronic media services, severely reducing health insurance benefits and re-defining our jobs as orchestral musicians. Managers increasingly tout service-conversion as the next best thing since sliced bread, a cure all for orchestras' problems.

Laura and I were in Ann Arbor, MI, earlier this year for the American Orchestra Summit. From the opening session, Joe Horowitz, former Brooklyn Philharmonic ED and co-creator of the Summit, proclaimed that orchestras produce more concerts than their communities can accommodate, have unsustainable fixed costs, (code word for musician salaries) and that the solution is service-conversion. A later panel included presentations by the EDs in Louisville, Memphis and Pittsburgh. This was my first, but far from last, exposure to the Memphis-model. In order to preserve ones salary, according to their ED, a musician in Memphis must agree to participate in "approved partnership activities." These activities include teaching general music classes in public school and taking on traditional staff roles, such as concert planning, development,

marketing and presenting. While I appreciated the concerns expressed by attendees about challenges facing orchestras, I was frustrated by the lack of accurate information most attendees had regarding life in today's orchestras. Many attendees appeared unwilling to acknowledge other orchestras' successes. Fewer yet appeared open to alternative solutions that did not involve service conversion or slash and burn measures.

During my address, I held up Michael Kaiser's book, "The Art of the Turnaround". I read a couple quotes regarding the problems facing arts organizations. First, "the usual culprit is the absence of a dynamic marketing campaign that conveys the excitement of a thriving artistic program." Second, "good art must be marketed well."

ICSOM musicians remain convinced that the current orchestra economic model still works when an organization fires on all cylinders. Orchestras can thrive, even during economic downturns-but only when creative programming is coupled with dynamic marketing, and when board and managements work with, and not against, their musicians. When one of these ingredients is missing, an organization usually flounders and rarely achieves artistic success or financial stability.

All too often managers and boards are incapable or unwilling to effectively lead our orchestras. Instead of promoting orchestras they would rather apologize for their existence. It should be clear to us by now that we, the musicians, must continue our advocacy efforts.

Last week I was in Montreal to attend the OCSM Conference as ICSOM's representative. I appreciated the warm hospitality extended by President Francine Shutzman, her OCSM board and the delegates.

Randy Cohen from the AFTA delivered another inspiring and highly informative presentation. If we could bottle up his enthusiasm and give a small dose to every manager and board chair our orchestras would see immediate improvement!

During Randy's presentation I felt especially proud to be a member of the ICSOM GB. Due to Bruce's reaching out to the AFTA more than three years, Randy has been to ICSOM, ROPA and now OCSM. More than 10,000 symphonic musicians across North America have access to a wide array of valuable AFTA resources.

Yes, we live in interesting times. Much has changed within our union since we were last together in Norfolk.

The delegates at the 2010 AFM Convention decided that our union needed to change. We congratulate AFM President Ray Hair, US Vice-President Bruce Fife, Vice-President from Canada Bill Skolnik, Sec-Treasurer Sam Folio and IEB members Tino Gagliardi, Tina Morrison, Joe Parente, Dave Pomeroy, and Vince Tombetta. Just as Bruce said earlier, ICSOM is eager to work with the new IEB on behalf of all AFM members.

During my speech last summer I asked whether ICSOM and the other player conferences would be treated as friends or foes throughout the Federation.

I am pleased to report that, during this AFM Convention, we were warmly received by local officers and delegates. Player conference tables are placed along the far side wall of the Convention hall. In past years we sometime felt like outsiders. This year was different. Convention delegates came over to talk with us and several even sat with us at our tables. We appreciated the open communication and dialogue we had with members of the various Convention committees, including Law and Finance.

None of the changes within the AFM would have been possible without the commitment and hard work of ICSOM delegates. When the GB issued the Call to Action on May 15, just five weeks before the Convention, over 86% of our member orchestras responded by signing petitions and meeting with AFM Convention delegates and local officers. This unprecedented commitment played a huge role. Local presidents repeatedly told us how much it meant to them to hear from so many of you and our thousands of colleagues. Recommendations #2 and 24, sponsored by the previous IEB, never made it out of committee. Following testimony by ICSOM and other PC leaders as well as deliberations by the Law and Finance Committees, the IEB withdrew both Recommendations. Likewise, AFM Convention delegates understood that the issue of raising symphonic work dues was a non-starter.

We cannot thank you enough for the tremendous difference you and your colleagues made at this year's Convention. What we did together demonstrated unionism at its very best. When we stand together the impossible is indeed possible.

There is great concern about the AFM-EPF, its critical funding status and the \$1 multiplier. Like other pension plans, there are challenges ahead for participants that depend on the Fund for their retirement.

I am quite certain that now I feel those challenges more acutely now than I did just a few days ago. I am honored and humbled to have been appointed as a new pension fund trustee by President Hair. Like you I hope that the Fund will return to the green zone as soon as possible, and that benefits may be fully restored. The only thing I can promise, though, is that I will work as hard as I can on behalf of all the Fund's participants.

More than 30 ICSOM orchestras revised or re-negotiated wages, benefits and working conditions during the past 18 months. Several are back at again this year. Last night we held another

negotiating orchestra caucus. While situations are critical such as in Detroit and Honolulu ICSOM's commitment remains solid. What happens to one orchestra affects us all.

The GB came up with the conference title, "Let's embrace the future" partially in response to the League's June Conference in Atlanta, title; "it's time to take on the future." We believe it is time to embrace the future. We believe it is time to believe in and promote our orchestras and the value they provide to our communities rather than allow managers and boards to apologize for our very existence. Let us embrace the opportunity this week to learn from one another and our many guests. Together, we will explore solutions to ensure that our orchestras and the union survive and grow in the years to come.

Thank you for being here and let's have a great conference.