

If you were one of the founders of ICSOM back in the early 1960s and you had a dream of what ICSOM would be twenty years later – how it had grown and how much it had achieved for orchestra musicians in North America – and you wondered where the leader for that time would come from, where was the person now who would lead ICSOM into full maturity in the 1980s, would you have even thought to look for that person in a public school in Levittown, PA and put your finger on the grade school music teacher?

I can't say for sure that Fred Zenone is unique in the world of symphony musicians. There may be others who chose their instrument when they were nearly 20 and almost through college and managed to end up in a job in a major American orchestra, but I don't personally know of another. Fred grew up in a steel worker's family in Latrobe, Pennsylvania and started to play the trumpet in fourth grade. In gratitude to his mother and father he once said, **"When my parents thought they saw a little aptitude for music, they fanned the flames because they sensed it would be my ticket out of the steel town."** They were right, but that ticket was not for a direct flight to his final destination.

His parents made the hour's drive to Pittsburgh for lessons with a trumpet player in the Symphony, and by the time he was in high school he was playing dance band jobs on weekends. He went to college at Indiana State Teachers College in Indiana, PA, studying to be a school music teacher. He graduated; got married, got a teaching job in Levittown, PA, and later in Princeton, and had three sons. But before he graduated, he had taken a string methods class and somehow decided that he was going to be a cellist. During the next eight years, along with his teaching job and raising his family, he immersed himself in the impossible dream of becoming a professional cellist.

If there is one word I would choose to describe Fred, it is "persuasive." I still can't understand how he persuaded Orlando Cole who taught at Curtis and, later, David Soyer, cellist of the Guarneri Quartet, to take him as a student. And, to boot, in his "spare time" he took a leadership role in the teachers union in Princeton. Maybe his biggest feat of persuasion was convincing **himself** that he could succeed. Of course, it is obvious that he could not have attempted this without the full support of and great sacrifice of Pat, and that is something for which he was forever grateful.

During that time he started getting freelance jobs in and around Trenton. Then, in 1968, he auditioned for the Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia – a brilliant ensemble that had a short, but distinguished existence in the mid through late 1960s. He was hired – his first real professional job. Then the next year the orchestra was about to fold – now what? A friend in the National Symphony in Washington told him there were two cello openings. He took an audition. He got a job.

In the National Symphony, his labor experience and his brilliant mind were quickly recognized and he was, before long, Orchestra Committee Chair. And, most importantly for this occasion, ICSOM rep. Again, at ICSOM, those same qualities were identified and latched onto and he was on his way to eventually becoming Chairman of ICSOM by 1980.

But back up just a bit: Fred lands a good job with the NSO. Dream fulfilled? Hardly. His first rehearsal was delayed by a 9-week strike, and then, once he started, he learned quickly that orchestra musicians had little control of their musical life and were treated in many respects more like assembly line workers than professionals and artists. So he devoted the rest of his career to remedying this. When he joined the NSO here's how bad things were: The orchestra manager had instructed Board members they were not to speak with individual musicians – and the Board members obeyed. A decade after that, after Fred had worked to change all this, NSO Board Chairs were meeting privately with Fred and hearing directly from the musicians' elected leadership about the musicians' needs and concerns. (He may have gotten their attention when he used his persuasiveness to get Rostropovich to join the orchestra on the picket line in 1978.) Some key Board members from the 1980s remember those "kitchen cabinet" meetings. Under Fred's leadership the whole organization went from dysfunction to one of the most harmonious and productive board/management/musician relationships in the country.

Back to 1980 and Fred's becoming ICSOM Chair – the fifth out of ten. Fred really was a bridge between ICSOM's growth years and its maturity. Just look in your delegate's handbook in the "History" section and you can read what had been accomplished by 1982 by ICSOM orchestras – thanks to the sense of solidarity and unity of purpose that ICSOM brought to symphony musicians, in dealing not only with their employers but with their locals and the AFM, as well. Most significantly, as chair, Fred saw the AFM adopt a Bylaw that provided that orchestra musicians have the right to ratify the terms of the contracts that govern their work, a right that no orchestra had when ICSOM was formed.

Fred could see that ICSOM was at a new stage and needed a new structure in order to and exert itself as a fully mature organization in relation to the outside world. The job of ICSOM chair had grown too big for one person. So instead of a Chair and a Vice-Chair, there would be a Chair and a President: a Chair – to deal with outside organizations: the AFM, the League, the NEA, the Major Orchestra Managers Conference, etc.; and a President – to handle communications with, and services to, member orchestras. That change transformed ICSOM into an organization with a very active face to the outside world as evidenced by Fred's serving on the NEA's music committee, speaking at American Symphony Orchestra League Conferences, ongoing liaison with the AFM president Vic Fuenteabla, and, especially, regular meetings between ICSOM officers and a committee of major managers to discuss industry-wide issues. Liza Hirsch Medina, who was around in those days, says **that** was Fred's greatest accomplishment – having the vision – and then carrying it out – to reorganize and transform ICSOM so it could move ahead as the organization we know today.

Of course, he was in awe of what the founders and early leaders of ICSOM had done and the difficulties they overcame: George Zazofsky, Sam Denov (who is still very much with us), Ralph Mendelson, and Irving Segall. And he relied very heavily on the support of his fellow officers. His principal sidekick (partner in crime?) was Brad Buckley with whom he also worked on the ICSOM Media Committee before and after his chairmanship. The world of symphonic media agreements that we know today was established by Fred and Brad through their amazing work in the 1980s.

After Fred left the ICSOM Chair, he remained extremely active in the field, working together with a manager – usually Henry Fogel or Peter Pastereich – they were invited in, as what they called a "swat

team,” to mediate intractable disputes in one orchestra or another. Henry told me recently that one of their ground rules in such situations was that in speaking with one side or the other (musicians or management) they always went together. Management could not ask to speak alone with Henry nor could musicians speak alone with Fred. I know that these teams were highly successful in resolving what seemed to be impossible situations – Nashville and San Antonio are two examples that come to mind.

Fred’s contribution to the field was recognized not only by his peers in ICSOM and the AFM but by the American Symphony Orchestra League, who not only dedicated their conference this year to Fred Zenone, but even nineteen years ago in the summer of 1992, on their 50th anniversary, included him in a Symphony Magazine article which “sifted through the annals of orchestral life since the founding of the American Symphony Orchestra League, and identified those [50] who have endeavored and persevered, those whose talents and efforts have touched the lives of many orchestras.” I love looking at the last page of the article where in the top left corner is a picture of Toscanini, and on the top right is “Frederick Zenone, chairman of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians from 1979 to 1985 [typically, their numbers are off] and a cellist in the National Symphony Orchestra for more than 20 years, he has volunteered countless hours of work and travel, teaming up with managers to help orchestras in crisis.”

At some point in the 1990s, Nick Webster, long time Executive Director of the New York Philharmonic proposed to Fred that he take the number two position in the Philharmonic management. Nick had worked extensively with Fred through the major managers committee and on several media negotiations and was excited by Fred’s vision of transforming the workplace for musicians in symphony orchestras. Both knew they would take some heat from their respective colleagues for this, but ultimately Fred became comfortable that Nick was committed to finding new ways to develop the institution and that it could be a very interesting and exciting opportunity to transform the idea of orchestra management from the inside. They agreed to terms (including a significant increase above his musician’s salary) and Fred was ready to sign a commitment. Other than Pat, I was the only one he had told. But then, after a concert that week, before he had actually signed, he left the stage during a Brahms symphony. When I saw him later, he told me he had broken down and had to leave the stage. He realized that in his new position he would never again perform a Brahms symphony and he just couldn’t live with that. He was going to call Nick and withdraw his agreement to take the job.

I want to say just a few words about what I personally learned from Fred. It was not easy to disagree with Fred. You had to be able to support your view against a formidable intellectual onslaught. On the other hand, disagreeing with Fred taught me more than anything else did about negotiating and how to represent my colleagues effectively. The most important thing I learned from Fred is that those who strongly disagree with you help you think through a problem much more than those who agree with you. And a corollary: It is very helpful in a difficult confrontation to be able to argue your adversary’s point better than he or she can. I remember a number of times after long and sometimes angry discussion when I would finally be persuaded by Fred that he was right and I was wrong, only to have him begin to argue the point I had conceded and convince me I was right in the first place.

ICSOM has been very fortunate to have had dedicated and selfless leaders – and has had great fortune in finding the right leader for the time, again and again. Fred was certainly the right person for the '80s and his legacy permeates this great organization thirty years later.

Pat, we are all grateful to Fred for what he did for ICSOM and for orchestras all over this country. And we wouldn't have been the beneficiaries of all he did if you had not supported and encouraged him and made it possible for him to follow his crazy, impossible dream. Thank you.