

ICSOM President George Brown 2016 ICSOM Conference Address

Good morning delegates, fellow GB members and Counsel, Federation and Local officers and staff, and our many honored guests. And welcome to Washington DC.

When Bruce Ridge assumed the Chairmanship of ICSOM in 2006, George W. Bush was President, Facebook switched to an open registration policy and America's heady real estate and Wall Street bull markets were beginning to feel increasingly choppy.

Bruce Ridge's ten year run as ICSOM Chair is not only record setting for its length, it could well be argued that this was ALSO one of the most challenging decades for Orchestras and Orchestra Musicians in ICSOM's history.

It was downright prophetic on Bruce's part to roll out ICSOM's Calls to Action in late 2007, for those Calls started coming in quicker than many of us had imagined. Thus far, ICSOM musicians have assisted ten orchestras with contributions totaling over 1.5 million dollars of greatly needed support for their colleagues during some surrealistically tough labor disputes.

The March 2008 release of the Flanagan Report on the Health of the American Symphony Orchestra, followed by the long economic downturn that began in September of that year, combined to throw ICSOM and our member orchestras into turbulent, uncharted waters. As an example, in his opening address to our 2010 Conference in Houston, former President Brian Rood stated that in the first eighteen months of the recession, more than 30 ICSOM orchestras revised or re-negotiated not only wages, but benefits and working conditions as well.

Instead of treating this recession as a cyclic event (as are all recessions), during these years the managements and boards of many ICSOM orchestras, armed with fresh, yet highly questionable, statistics from the Flanagan Report, repeatedly spun our Orchestras' fiscal challenges to the press as our industry's new permanent reality. And with that, the management side of our field, as reflected in certain statements and actions of the League of American Orchestras, began a scramble to try and re-invent itself, its mission, its orchestras and our jobs, all meant to circumvent some never fully articulated 'sky is falling' scenario.

During this time a series of buzzwords were reported were reported being heard simultaneously at negotiating tables around the country as well as – not coincidentally -- at League Conferences. We were *just* starting to *almost* get used the phrase "Structural Deficit" when they started flinging other new terms at us, like:

- New Business Model
- Donor Fatigue
- Relevancy
- Sustainability
- (and finally:) Restructuring

"Restructuring!" With this, Managements had an elegant, sanitary term for simple contract gutting. And in just a few years, Managements' draconian attempts at slashing player contracts around the country ran the gamut, starting with smaller budgeted orchestras and marching right up to the doors of ICSOM's very largest. *No one was immune!*

During this amazingly stressful time for our colleagues, Bruce's leadership extended far beyond the Calls to Action that he initiated. His site visits to orchestras in distress will always be remembered by those he visited as inspirational and even healing as they endured or stared down the barrel of a labor dispute. His outreach efforts to orchestra musicians boosted the morale, the understanding and the resolve of hundreds of our colleagues and at times when they sorely needed it.

It looked for a while that orchestras struggling through the recession with seemingly no end in sight, plus trying to counter the unfairly negative press on orchestras spewing from the media, might be the only dominant industry themes during Bruce's decade as Chair. That was until ICSOM and some of our member orchestras began getting training in crafting and broadcasting our own message to our various communities using the Web, Social Media and other tools. The Atlanta Symphony, through Michael Moore, brought PR specialist Randy Whatley to ICSOM's attention, and Bruce had the vision to welcome him into his, and into our universe. Bruce recognized Randy's abilities to tap into and direct orchestra musicians' creative talents towards fashioning -- and most importantly: assuming accountability for -- their own PR campaigns. (That last part being a huge contextual shift that has the power and the potential to change everything.)

Since that time, these internally organized PR campaigns have repeatedly proven to be a crucial component in most of the successful contract settlements achieved by ICSOM Orchestras over the past several years. They have also gone a long way towards countering a large swath of the negativity heaped upon our industry by our industry's own leadership.

Though we now, for the most part, see this recession through the rear view mirror, "Restructure Fever" has yet to work itself **completely** through the system, and with some CEOs and Board Chairs out there, the fever may never completely break. In the process, know that Managements throughout the League will be watching to see if our musicians keep up with all their PR and community outreach once their CBAs are ratified.

That's a bird's eye view of our industry over the better part of Bruce Ridge's amazing ten year run, and with a tip of the hat for some of the important ways he impacted this decade. As we soon transition into a new era, what lies ahead for ICSOM? Actually, it's a bit of a hot topic in some circles these days, and I'd like to bring up just two important issues related to it.

One current trend deserving of our attention, comes partly from the planet shrinking effect that the Web and Social Media have had upon our industry. With online tools like Facebook and Twitter, orchestra musicians are now globally inter-connected at a level to which most of us could barely even conceive a few years back.

One logical industry development arising from this shrinking planet is the continued development of, and our growing association with FIM, the Paris based International Federation of Musicians, and a truly international symphonic player conference. We are honored and privileged to have Benoit Machuel, the General Secretary of FIM here with us as a guest presenter on Saturday to talk to us about his organization, and to fill us in about the Fourth FIM International Orchestra Conference, to be held next May in Montreal.

I fully expect our symphonic Player Conferences will have a strong presence at the Montreal event, and over time I can see future collaborations increasing as we get to know one another better and learn more from each other's situations.

And to expand on this global spirit of information sharing, we're also privileged to have guest presenters from England, the Netherlands and from Australia, here to give us glimpses of the industry from their countries and from their unique points of view. I hope you'll all take the time to introduce yourselves to these folks and get to know them while they're here, as I'm sure they're just as eager to get to know and share their stories with us. Some stories we'll find quite unique. Others, I'm sure we'll find almost eerily similar.

And finally, a few Conferences back, Bruce began encouraging Delegates to run for our local union boards as a way to boost ICSOM orchestra representation within our Locals, in turn boosting our Locals' understanding of orchestra musicians' issues.

Over the past several Conferences, we've learned that many of us had, indeed, got onboard with our Locals and as a result ICSOM has made remarkable improvements with orchestral representation at the community level. This is a truly positive trend and going forward, we hope you and your Orchestra Committee colleagues will continue to run and serve, representing your Orchestra on your Local's Executive Board.

As we transition into this new phase, I would also like to take a similar step towards increasing the overall visibility of some of our ICSOM Reps at home and encourage any Delegate who is not already a member of their Orchestra Committee or Negotiating Committee to run for office. Many Delegates are already ex-officio members of their committee as directed through their bylaws – something the Governing Board does not and cannot mandate, yet we still *strongly* encourage -- and others run because they are simply drawn to this type of service.

Whatever the case, when we as Delegates are directly involved in internal governance, and in negotiations on behalf of our colleagues, then we become more efficient conduits of essential information between our Orchestra and ICSOM, and the information from our Conferences flows more directly to our Orchestra committees, often when they need it the most.

Even a resolution from the 1996, Vail ICSOM Conference takes on this issue with this statement:

“...be it Resolved, That ICSOM calls upon all of its constituent orchestras in which the ICSOM Delegate is not a member of the orchestra committee, to establish a policy whereby the ICSOM Delegate is encouraged to attend all meetings of the orchestra committee to transmit and to gather the valuable information which allows the full value of ICSOM membership to be enjoyed by the orchestra members...”

I would like to close with a short quote from former ICSOM Chair Fred Zenone, who addressed this issue with these words from his article, *How Delegates Make ICSOM Work*:

“...Because we are a rank-and-file organization, and because we do not make **agreement** a condition of **membership**, ICSOM's single most effective tool is persuasion. We must have the power to persuade and the willingness to be persuaded.

We have been designated by our orchestras as leaders and activists. ICSOM asks us to affirm and reaffirm that position throughout the year. We are the voice in our orchestras of American orchestra musicians united on a national level. **WE** are the persons who must constantly examine the effect our orchestra's actions will have on other orchestras. Each of us must be a leader, an organizer, a conduit of information, the conscience of a movement of caring and involved and active musicians who insist on improving the institutions through which we produce our art.

Thanks everyone, and have a wonderful conference in Washington.

