

2017 ICSOM Chairperson Address – Meredith Snow, Los Angeles Philharmonic

Good morning! I bring greetings from Bruce Ridge who sends his best for a successful conference. He said to tell you he is enjoying his free time, sitting on the porch with a Jack & ginger in hand, NOT thinking about orchestras....after his 10 years of extraordinary service to ICSOM, it is a well-deserved break I think. And I hope that the message he had worked so hard to deliver, that our orchestras are NOT irrelevant and elite and unsustainable, that our audiences and donors are NOT dying out, is finally getting through.

In 2013, the National Endowment for the Arts and the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis developed an “Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account” in order to calculate the economic contribution of the nonprofits arts industry to the US gross domestic product. Their findings for that year, determined that the nonprofit arts industry contributed slightly over \$704 billion dollars to the US economy and supported over 4 million jobs in the arts and related industries.

This year, the League of American Orchestras released a study entitled “ORCHESTRA FACTS 2010-2014” which found that the more than 1200 US orchestras of all budget sizes, this includes community and youth orchestras, contributed \$1.8 billion dollars to our economy in direct payments for goods and services, in addition to indirectly fueling the economy through related services.

This is good, substantive proof of what we in this room already know---that our orchestras are a vital and a viable part of our communities. I hope we are seeing this confidence reflected by our boards and managers. With the exception of the strikes in Fort Worth and Pittsburgh last September, ICSOM has seen modestly progressive and early settlements in a number of our orchestras. The Fort Worth settlement was not concessionary, thank you Ray Hair & Todd Jelen for your work there. And Pittsburgh will regain their give backs by the end of the contract, thank you Kevin Case. For those of you who were at our negotiating session last night, I would hope to offer a more favorable vision---that perhaps because of these positive economic indicators, our managers will finally decide to stop shooting themselves in the foot, and that our boards are coming to recognize that a vibrant orchestra, visible to its community and recognized as a cultural and economic asset, is a good investment.

In a swift and steep departure from past practice, 4 members of the Governing Board, myself, Paul Austin, Laura Ross and Dan Sweeley, in addition to Kevin Case and Rochelle Skolnick, all attended the League of American Orchestras conference in Detroit, largely because their focus was on diversity.

There is much room for improvement in diversity both on stage and in our staff and board rooms. I think this is an invigorating and overdue discussion for us to be having. We have an opportunity here to work together with our managements and our union to demonstrate social justice in action. There may eventually be as many solutions as there are orchestras to create them. I’m grateful that we have this chance to explore ideas and avenues of engagement and I’m looking forward to the discussion.

Finally, I would like to address an issue that cuts fairly close to the bone but I think is important for us to examine.

Several months ago, it came to light that an undisclosed number of ICSOM musicians played the nonunion dates that scored the 2016 MGM release of “Ben Hur”. Arguably some of our most privileged union musicians, with guaranteed minimums, tenure and benefits, chose to undercut their colleagues and undermine the AFM sound recording agreement to which MGM is a signatory. I think it behooves us to take a step back from the scene of the crime and examine how this could have happened. Some of it, I think, starts here in this room.

Since the inception of ICSOM our orchestra committees have become increasingly capable and powerful. ICSOM has been a driving force behind our orchestras’ ability to communicate and share strategies---all to the good. But in creating our own orchestral identity, I think we have lost some of the meaning of what it means to BE a Union. In some places we have come to view the American Federation of Musicians as

an entirely separate from our committees. The AFM is not a top down bureaucracy, it is not a third-party interloper into our negotiations ---it is US. I AM the Union. It is my commitment to you, to uphold the value of your labor that is the basis of our Federation. The strength of that union is entirely dependent on our commitment to each other.

The most powerful political tool in your possession is your wallet. Where you spend your money and how you choose to earn it, determines the course of the free market. If I commit to buying organic, non-GMO produce, there will be more on the grocery shelves. If we all work union, there will be more union work.

I think as leaders within our orchestras, it is incumbent upon us to help our colleagues understand that the AFM is US and the success of our Union is entirely dependent on our actions as individuals. The objectification of the AFM as a separate entity, a bureaucracy to which I pay dues, a club that I belong to, allows for a disassociation into “us” and “them”. That disconnect comes at great peril. We must reinforce our commitment to one another, to ALL members of our Federation, in order to strengthen our Union. Our purpose here, the purpose of ICSOM, is to help our orchestras and our industry thrive. Our Union, the American Federation of Musicians, is the means to that end.

Thank you for your attention this morning and I am looking forward to an energizing and informative exchange throughout this conference.