

Chairperson's Address to the 58th Annual ICSOM Conference

Meredith Snow, ICSOM Chairperson

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

We are in a very tight spot, both as a nation and as an industry. I doubt there has ever been a time, since ICSOM was founded 58 years ago, that our orchestras have experienced a more precarious and harrowing situation than this. The coronavirus pandemic has stripped away our livelihoods and our way of life. We are hanging by our fingernails financially. It has devastated our economy and taken the lives of over 580,000 people—and counting—worldwide.

It's hard to imagine that just four months ago we were performing concerts in our halls and practicing repertoire for the next week. Now we are exiled and isolated, trying to find ways to connect with our friends, our colleagues, our audiences, and our music.

But the virus has also, in its brutal devastation, shone a harsh but compelling light on the many social and economic inequities that exist in our country. It has made manifest the disadvantage, oppression, and violence that our predominantly Black and Brown citizens face every day.

We are witnessing an historic moment, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets to demonstrate against that oppression. We are also experiencing a long overdue reckoning of our nation's history, begotten in genocide and slavery and, continuing through these centuries, that legacy of violence, of racial inequality and social injustice is dramatically on display in our streets today.

We are still grappling with the aftermath of that history. It remains largely unrecognized and tacitly accepted as elements of bias and racism within our society. It plays out in the social and economic oppression and exclusion of our Black and Brown citizens. There is a critical need in our nation for truth and reconciliation, for truth and justice, for truth and equality. But there can be none of these without the truth first.

In this centuries-long reign of capitalist acquisition, the rush and insatiable desire to amass the most, humanity has lost its way. That greed has myopically led us to trample our fellow humans, to obliterate thousands of species, and to poison our planet.

We are unwittingly coming closer every day to the precipice of our apocalyptic ideology. This is a moment for humanity to rethink its destiny. The curtain is torn away by the crisis of this pandemic and we have an opportunity to see where we are headed.

This is a moment for our nation to do better. It is a moment for us to do better.

Our orchestras will survive this crisis. We will survive because we have dedicated our entire lives to our music. We connect humans with their humanity. We ignite hearts, we unite spirits, we speak truth and beauty. We know in every fiber of our being what is right and just and fair because we seek it every day in our art.

We will survive because we, here in this virtual room, have dedicated our lives to improving the lives of others: our students, our colleagues, our audiences, our communities, and our union brethren. This Governing Board, our Delegates who are the lifeline to our musicians, our Locals, Symphonic Services and our International Union, will stand together and we will have each other's

backs. We will find the path together—the path that heals our nation and our communities, and restores our orchestras and the music we create.

We have much to do and many miles to go before this crisis is behind us. But we will see the other side and we will come out stronger and better because we will never give up and because our music is our mission.