

Welcome, Delegates, Officers, Members, Friends, and esteemed guests.

As we gather here today, I am filled with a sense of hope and determination. I am grateful for your trust in me and excited about what we can accomplish together.

Many thanks to Local 99 for graciously hosting this year's conference, and to our dedicated conference coordinators, Zach, Amanda, and Paul Gunther for all their tremendous hard work.

Portland is a vibrant and creative city, full of life and inspiration. While you explore everything it has to offer, I encourage you to stay aware of your surroundings and mindful of your interactions. Portland's unique charm sometimes gives rise to a certain reputation, and I'd hate for any of you to accidentally join a band during your stay here!

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the governing board for their hard work this year. This board exemplifies the best qualities among us: kindness, thoughtfulness, and dedication to improving the lives of our members. And, remarkably, despite some grumbling, none of them quit when I extended the length of our regular meetings!

A special shout-out goes to ICSOM President Paul Austin. Paul is a brilliant musician and leader, sharp dresser, martini enthusiast, and all-around good guy. During the seven years Paul has served as president, he's coordinated ICSOM's social media accounts, hosted ICSOM's 'Orchestras of Note' series, and developed the monthly series "Musician Profiles: Celebrating Racial Diversity." Additionally, he has spent much time on the road visiting with many of our orchestras. That's a lot of hotel breakfasts—a true sacrifice for our industry. I will miss working with him.

Typically, the Chairperson's address begins the conference. But this year, I asked to give my address later in the morning because I feel I need some extra time to explain what the Governing Board is trying to accomplish.

ICSOM orchestras are facing some very difficult challenges. Most notably, systemic racism, sexual violence, and inequality.

I'm also deeply concerned about the threat of authoritarianism, which endangers our fundamental freedoms and poses what could be the most severe threat to labor rights we've ever faced. As the upcoming election looms, the stakes could not be higher, and the uncertainty and fear among ICSOM members is palpable. I've heard the familiar jokes about moving to another country. But this is my country, and even if I can leave, I won't. I will stay and fight for all of us no matter what happens.

Remember that the AFM predates the National Labor Relations Act, and our rights are not derived from the law; the law is an imperfect reflection of our rights. Even if the law is weakened, our rights endure. We learned to fight the boss before we had the law on our side, and ICSOM will continue to represent and fight for our members, regardless of the challenges ahead. We're not going anywhere.

I may not know what's going to happen in the election, but I do know that we are weakened by divisions along racial and gender lines in our orchestras. And, if we do not take steps to heal and strengthen our solidarity, we will have a much more difficult time protecting ourselves and fighting back.

But to heal, we have to do the work, which requires a clear understanding of the system in which we work, our roles in that system, and the skills to change it.

Everyone here is part of a massive system that begins in early childhood, runs through music schools, influences our auditions, and spans our entire careers. By the time we've navigated this system, most of us have dedicated nearly our entire lives to music.

Given this perspective, it's unsurprising that our efforts to change this system have had limited impact on the challenges in our daily lives. Despite our best intentions, problems of fairness and safety persist.

Our current system prioritizes artistic excellence, status, and personal connections above all else. This system must change. It's not enough for musicians of color to join our orchestras; they must be fully accepted and valued as members. It's not enough for women to feel safe in our orchestras; they should also feel comfortable and respected. Having 'good jobs' is not enough; we should also find joy and fulfillment in our work. Character and conduct should be just as important as artistic excellence, and anyone whose character or conduct fails to meet the standard of excellence should have no place in our orchestras.

Considering more qualities than artistic excellence requires a significant shift in how we think about our jobs. To fix this, we must change, and change is inherently disruptive. If we aren't willing to be disruptive, we shouldn't expect to change anything anytime soon.

No one here created this system, and we should not pass judgment on those who have benefited from it. The system functions as designed. However, we will be guilty of perpetuating its deficiencies if we do not act to change them. This will require time and effort, and will only succeed when our colleagues understand why, what, and how to change.

Many conversations I have about DEI focus on "Diversity" and "Equity," but I would argue that "Inclusion" might be the most crucial part. Inclusion will play an essential role in this process of change. Inclusion of all races and genders, and, inclusion of all backgrounds, ages, experiences, and perspectives. For instance, sometimes we think that by tweaking our auditions to be "fair," musicians from historically underrepresented backgrounds will come knocking on our door, without even considering if our orchestras would accept them if they were to win. That's inclusion. We also confuse "fairness" and "equity," which is a conversation we

desperately need to have. On Friday, you'll hear more about this from our valued partner, Jessica Schmidt.

Inclusion requires us to have civil, meaningful conversations about the values of our orchestras. If we continue to allow some members to dominate conversations and berate each other to settle debates, how will we ever achieve any measure of inclusivity? Meetings do not need to be hostile, committee members do not need to be attacked, and all members should feel comfortable speaking. All genders and racial backgrounds must be welcome in these conversations, including the significant component of Asian musicians in our orchestras, who also suffer as a result of systemic racism.

If we only hear from one side of an issue, we'll only get one-sided solutions, which are bound to be ineffective in producing real change. An improved and inclusive culture will allow us to discuss what fairness and equity mean in the context of our orchestras, leading to changes that reflect what we actually want our orchestras to be like. But we have to do the work. Happiness and safety are not mandates; they are outcomes.

As an industry, we must also broaden our efforts beyond the barriers to entry, to include the path musicians take to our orchestras.

Consider for a moment: where do music schools recruit? Are they looking for talent everywhere? And how are they testing for that talent? By what the student might be wearing, who they study with, or the quality of their instrument? Many of us, myself included, would like to think we're smart enough to see through these barriers, but that's what implicit bias would like us to think.

Many of our musicians are on the faculty at these music schools. We hold positions of authority over these young, aspiring musicians. We recruit, audition, distribute scholarship money, and teach, which means we have a sizable role to play in the path to our orchestras. It's a complex and messy part of the larger system, and we cannot sidestep our role in it.

If those who teach have a clear understanding of our values, they can set a good example for their students and teach them that to be in our orchestras, they must play well and respect our values. These same teachers can ensure that music schools protect all students, and recruit and support disadvantaged students. In this way, changing our culture, our contracts, and the pathway is possible.

The same system that allows us to dodge responsibility for the path to our orchestras, and that prioritizes artistic excellence at the expense of all other qualities, is the same system that allows sexual predators to go unpunished in our industry, is the same system that incentivizes financial settlements rather than justice, is the same system that places the responsibility of finding solutions on the victims, rather than the perpetrators. This system must change.

Our members, our Union, and our management must understand our roles in workplace safety and hold each other accountable. Our management must investigate properly, our Union must actively monitor workplace safety and defend its members, and our members must take collective action to change our toxic workplace culture.

It's easy to think that more robust DEI and sexual misconduct policies and training can solve these issues. This is a mistake. If policies and training could solve this problem, they already would have. We cannot absolve ourselves of the work needed to change our workplace culture. Our policies, training, and culture must all be aligned, or we will fail in our efforts. No amount of training, and no policy, can compensate for a toxic culture. There are no shortcuts to fixing this problem.

I would guess that everyone here today is sympathetic to the struggles of musicians of color and female-identifying musicians. You support equal pay for equal work, a level playing field, and equal opportunity for everyone to get ahead. You stand against bias, racism, and sexism, and want these principles to extend to our workplaces and our contracts.

So, why do we continue to tolerate the practice of individually negotiated agreements for principals and others? Do these not invite bias and favoritism into our orchestras? How can we claim to support equality while allowing this practice to persist?

Inequality anywhere is inequality everywhere. We must stamp out inequality and bias wherever we find them—in the pathway to our orchestras, auditions, tenure, the workplace, and individual agreements. We must end the practice of individually negotiated agreements once and for all. We can continue to have overscale for principal and other positions – in the CBA, where it belongs. Anything less betrays the principles we profess to uphold. Kevin Case will discuss this in more depth in his presentation tomorrow.

Equity, safety, and equality are very real problems, and, frankly, I'm not sure which interventions will help. But I do know that it starts with our culture. We must begin having honest conversations to define our core values. What do we want our orchestras to be like? What should it mean to be a member of our orchestras? Top-down solutions, where we simply insert pre-determined language into our contracts, will never be as effective as bottom-up solutions brought forth by the rank and file. We can ratify new policies, but those policies will never be effective until they are also ratified in the hearts and minds of our members.

We've arrived at a crossroads. The path we are currently on leads to toxic, dangerous, and deeply unsatisfying workplaces, and is the path of least resistance. The other path is a path of change, that leads to a future of diverse musicians in our orchestras and voices in our Union, and to safety and security for all gender identities.

The path of change will require sacrifices from all of us, whether it's our time, advantages, or power. This will be hard work. But it's not just about working hard; it's about working together. We must place our orchestras' collective happiness, safety, and success above ourselves. We have to

make a choice, and we have to make it now. Will we choose the path of least resistance or the path of lasting change?

I believe that tomorrow can be better. I have hope. As Mark Twain says, "Loyalty to a petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul." And so, I choose the path of change, the path that leads to a brighter future for all musicians.

We often speak of solidarity and its importance when confronting difficult issues. But isn't solidarity just another form of inclusion? I ask, what are the boundaries of solidarity? Should solidarity extend only to musicians of your gender or race? Should it be limited to musicians in your orchestra or only those in ICSOM orchestras? What about solidarity with the musicians who built your orchestra into what it is today? Or with musicians who will someday play in your orchestra long after you leave?

If we're all in this together, that means all of us, right? If we accept the premise that what helps you also helps me, we must also accept that what harms you also harms me, and what excludes you also excludes me, whether done intentionally or not. Solidarity calls on us to work together, change together, and heal together.

So, how do we move from where we are to where we want to be? We address these challenges like any other labor issue: by organizing. This begins with learning some fundamental internal organizing skills. We're offering you training in some of these skills at this conference, with more to follow. Organizing is essential because solidarity is useless to those who do not know how to employ it.

The Governing Board cannot do this alone; you must step up and start organizing your orchestra. If you won't do it, who will? This path will require a new level of commitment from ICSOM Delegates. Regular duties such as representing your orchestra, submitting the wage chart and directory information, and paying dues will continue, but the expectations of being an

ICSOM Delegate will grow to include leading your orchestras to a better place.

It doesn't matter if you're an introvert or an extrovert, or how long you've been a delegate. What matters is your desire to make a change and your willingness to put in the time; everything else can be learned. The governing board will provide you with the resources and support you need to be successful, and we will help you follow through.

This journey starts at the intersection of DEI, assault, bullying, and inequality: our toxic workplace culture. We move on to our policies and procedures only when our orchestras can have meaningful conversations about these issues, understand them, and want to make a change. If we skip this step and move directly to interventions, we are doomed to continue our cycle of frustration. Every ICSOM orchestra needs help with culture. No orchestra is immune; every orchestra must do the work.

I'm asking all of you to take a leap of faith with us into an unknown future. We may not know where this path will lead, but the bravest and most important thing you can do right now is show up.

I know this is a lot to take in. The world is throwing challenges at us left and right, and I'm asking all of us to do more, to take responsibility for realizing the change we seek. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to change, and more people will be hurt.

I will support anyone who wants to change, work with anyone who is unsure, and oppose anyone who resists, and I am willing to put my position as your chairperson on the line to make these changes happen. I call upon all ICSOM members of good conscience to join me and the governing board in these efforts.

To build a new and better system, we must work together collectively and in solidarity with our past, present, and future members. In the words of



Woodrow Wilson: "We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We stand together until the end."