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Opening Address

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ICSOM Conference, 2013: *Music Cannot be Silenced*

On January 20, 2009, I stood backstage in Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis with the musicians of the great Minnesota Orchestra, and together we watched the historic inauguration of President Barack Obama. The timing of the rehearsal that morning was such that the musicians and I were able to watch as Yo Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Gabriela Montero, and Anthony McGill performed a piece composed especially for the ceremony. I was filled with excitement, as I could not recall in my lifetime a moment where classical artists had been given such prominent placement in a national and international event. I was aware that the whole world was watching, and that millions of people were hearing some of the greatest instrumentalists we have ever known. It reminded me of pictures I had seen from the Camelot days of the Kennedy administration, where Pablo Casals would perform major recitals at the White House, and the role of the artist in society was elevated and treasured.

I felt even more excited, and honored, that the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra, at that moment hailed as one of the greatest orchestras in the world, were allowing me to share this profound occasion with them in their backstage lounge. I had spent the morning visiting with the musicians, playing on their beautiful collection of basses, and listening to them rehearse Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* with their Music Director, Osmo Vanska.

It was, to say the least, an inspiring and beautiful day.

It seems almost inconceivable that the promise of that morning could be lost, but just over four years later the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra have been locked out for eleven months, and in Washington, the National Endowment for the Arts has been without an appointed Chairperson for over eight months.

When Congress returns to work this fall, the NEA will face the recommendation by the House Appropriations Committee to cut its funding in half. If enacted, this

will be the largest cut to the NEA in history. This assault on the arts in America comes at a time when the National Endowment for the Humanities has also been without a permanent Director since May.

This is unacceptable. Even if the President makes these appointments on this very day, and we must hope that he does, our nation, and our nation's children, have lost the opportunity to make the case for the value of the arts in our society for the better part of a year. It is a case easily made, though unfortunately, it is a case less easily heard.

The non-profit arts and culture industry employs over 4 million Americans, and the value of music to education and to the health of our citizens is undisputed.

ICSOM played a role in the creation of the NEA, and we must not stand idly by while it is dismantled. ICSOM has always been about activism, and this conference here in Kansas City will serve as a renewal of that call. At a time when there are some who doubt our orchestras we will not doubt ourselves. Music has never been more relevant to the lives of people living at a fragile time in a fragile world.

Today we call upon President Obama to appoint a Chairperson for the National Endowment for the Arts, and to appoint a charismatic and effective leader who can help fulfill the vision articulated by President Kennedy fifty years ago when he said "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist."

Further, we call upon musicians and artists everywhere to once again raise their voices in support of the value of music and the arts. We have never been more united than we are at this time of difficulty, as challenges always bring a constituency of shared idealism closer when confronted with an assault on what we hold true.

And further, musicians across the world today call upon the Board of the Minnesota Orchestra to end the senseless and egregious lockout of the ensemble that Alex Ross once called "the greatest in the world."

In contemplating the spate of lockouts this year, I found a quote from Victor Hugo who wrote "Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot be silenced." That is where we found the theme for this year's conference.

Music Cannot be Silenced. In this year where we all have watched with dismay as the Atlanta Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Minnesota Orchestra have endured these deplorable lockouts, we have all faced dark nights filled with worry about the future. But we continue to be strengthened by our friendships, and we are further strengthened by the fact that we have gathered together again.

Earlier this summer, while visiting with the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood, I made a pilgrimage to the Aaron Copland memorial in the Tanglewood garden where the great composer's ashes are scattered. I was reminded that Copland once said that "To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable."

Fifty years ago, ICSOM was founded to create a more rewarding livelihood for orchestral performers, and the success of the effort is apparent in concert halls across North America. ICSOM orchestras are now among the very best in the world, and our musicians have earned protections that allow them to care for their families and build upon their artistry as they serve the greater community that surrounds all of our cities. But in a climate of negativity, it could appear that the progress of the past five decades is now at risk.

If one was to believe the negative messages found in the media about orchestras, or the unsupportable claims of imminent disaster that are spewed by some managements and managerial organizations, you might feel a soul-crushing darkness that could lead you to question the validity of hope.

But the good news I bring you today is that the bad news that permeates so many discussions of the future is largely false. Unfortunately though, those false messages can be self-fulfilling, and we must not allow our resolve to be repelled by an assault of damaging words.

We have come together to find solutions for the problems that musicians face, and that we will continue to face, but we have also come here to Kansas City to celebrate. This evening we all will tour the beautiful Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, and Helzberg Hall, the home of the Kansas City Symphony. I was privileged to be here for the opening concerts at this iconic building which

stands as a symbol of the success of the arts in Kansas City, and a monument to what is possible for all of our communities.

In Kansas City, the non-profit arts and culture industry results in over \$275 million in annual economic activity, including over \$23 million spent through cultural tourism. The arts in Kansas City lead to over 8300 jobs, employing more people than Sprint/Nextel.

In 2012, the Kansas City Symphony saw an increase in ticket revenues of over 46%, along with record attendance. This period of growth began over 15 years ago, when the musicians of the orchestra successfully negotiated a union recognition clause into their collective bargaining agreement. Today, we arrive here following the announcement of a progressive new contract agreement, settled amicably and one year in advance.

The success of any organization is largely dependent on the people involved, and much credit here must go to the management, the community leaders, and the great board leadership of Shirley Helzberg.

Also crucial to this success has been the leadership of our esteemed ICSOM President, Brian Rood. This success has not been easily achieved. Brian and the musicians faced a great deal of criticism all those years ago, when a long-term contract was agreed to in order to achieve the union recognition clause. But Brian had the vision to know that the right decision had been made, and I often wonder what Kansas City would be like had Brian Rood never come here. In a George Bailey type of scenario, I imagine that the Kansas City Symphony would probably be very different, and we might not be here celebrating this success. The entire field benefits from Brian's leadership and vision, and like George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, when it comes to friends and people that he has helped, Brian Rood is the richest man I know.

But success is not limited to Kansas City. Orchestras have again proved to be remarkably resilient, and the true story to be told is how well orchestras have emerged from the recession. The truth is that philanthropic giving to the arts reached an all-time high last year of over \$14 billion, and the truth is that the number of businesses contributing to the arts has risen 18% in the past three years.

But these facts are too often dismissed and unheard; and instead they say that orchestras are dying, attendance is declining, and audiences are aging.

Yes, they say that orchestras are dying, but the Houston Symphony approaches its centennial with the momentum of record breaking fundraising, and the San Diego Symphony has seen a decade of balanced finances even as it more than doubled its budget.

Yes, they say that attendance is declining, but the Buffalo Philharmonic sold more subscriptions this year than at any point in its 75-year history, and the Chicago Lyric Opera increased its attendance by 15%.

Yes, they say that audiences are aging, but the Cleveland Orchestra doubled the number of students attending its concerts this year, and is on track to set records for Severance Hall. To even claim that aging audiences are a problem, one must ignore the indisputable fact that life expectancy has increased in this past century at a rate previously unseen in the history of mankind. In 1940, life expectancy was 62 years. Today, it is 79 years. If we generally accept that people tend to turn towards attending symphonic concerts after they have reached a point of success and greater leisure time in their lives, then the fact that we have our target audience for an additional 17 years of life span is not a problem, it is an opportunity.

Still, we have no claim to condemn the negative messages about our orchestras if we are not doing everything we can to disclaim them. We have no right to refute these messages if we are not doing everything we can to articulate the message of hope that our orchestras provide in the cities where our children learn, our companies do business, and our citizens seek the dignity of building a society based on the principles of humanity.

There is no doubt that times are changing, and we all must be ready to change as well. After all, when I look at my iPhone I know I am holding more technology in my hand than was on the Apollo space crafts that sailed to the moon. Such an astonishing realization creates both opportunities and challenges.

The artist Ai Wei Wei said “The world is changing. This is a fact. Artists work hard hoping to change it according to their own aspirations.” He also said “For artists today, what’s most needed is to be clear about social responsibility.”

The next generation of musicians will build careers that are different from the careers of their teachers. This next generation must be the most ardent advocates that music has ever known, and we must provide the example for them to build upon just as those who went before built the foundation of unionism for us.

Every means available should be utilized; every opportunity of technology should be explored. The delegates to this conference should become a sodality of Tweeters, and ICSOM should have thousands of followers on Facebook. We must become skilled in any area of social media that can relay the positive and truthful messages that will enhance our chance of success while negating the messages of those who seek to approach the future by turning back the clock.

Last year, Kickstarter funded more arts projects than the National Endowment for the Arts. I have seen a tendency among our orchestras to be dismissive of cultural influences, but we ignore them at our own peril. As the Pew Charitable Trust has said “The internet and social media are integral to the arts in America.”

If it is true that what is most needed is to be clear about social responsibility, then we must lead by example in a tireless way that will inspire our colleagues and our communities. The musicians of the world look to those of us in this room for leadership, and we will answer that call. Boards that would seek to silence music through lockouts are displaying a shocking lack of social responsibility, but we will answer any such negative and false message with a positive and true message of hope. Virtue and vice must not receive the same reward, and our true opponent is frustration, and our true enemy is apathy. It is more than hope that we are offering; indeed it must be action that we are promising.

This week we will discuss utilizing every opportunity available to change the self-fulfilling negative messages through equally self-fulfilling positive messages. We will receive updates on the efforts to build the American Symphonic Advocacy Project, and we will hear reports from our colleagues who have suffered through the unprecedented wave of lockouts. Perhaps most importantly though, we will have the opportunity to build upon our friendships, and we have tried to structure an agenda that allows for more flexibility. The united network of friends that comprises ICSOM has again been on display this year through continued donations to the various Calls to Action, and hundreds of thousands of dollars has been

donated to musicians in need. We have been joined by all of our friends across the AFM, and at last month's AFM Convention in Las Vegas, over \$70,000 was raised to support the Twin Cities AFM Local 30-73 in one of the most remarkable displays of unity ever seen at an AFM Convention.

I am constantly moved by the generosity and kindness of our musicians. This year, when the Indianapolis lock out ended shortly after we issued a Call to Action, the musicians of that orchestra actually returned the money they had received.

I am also constantly moved and amazed at the dedication of my dear friends on the ICSOM Governing Board. No amount of praise for their dedication would be adequate, but this year they have all shown and even deeper level of commitment during what has been perhaps the toughest season ICSOM orchestras have ever experienced. It has not been easy for the Board; each individual has persevered through professional and personal hardships to serve this cause in which we believe so deeply. Two members of the board have been locked out, one was on strike, and others have experienced extraordinarily tough negotiations and family losses. Yet their commitment has never wavered, and their resolve has never waned. This board has been together a long time, and this year Member-at-Large Cathy Payne will be stepping away. Cathy is one of the most extraordinarily passionate musicians to ever serve ICSOM, and we are all in her debt for her remarkable service.

As musicians, we will not allow destructive messages to undermine our idealism and hope, and we will not validate the words of those we do not respect. Those who question the value of our music cannot make us question our heart. The comfort we can take in a time of difficulty comes from the indisputable truth that the positive message offered by musicians will far outlast the negativity of those that seek to silence us.

I have delivered some version of these remarks several times this summer, and after one presentation I was asked if I was seeking to inspire myself as well as seeking to inspire others. I think that is true. There is no denying that the responsibilities of this position take a great toll. In moments of doubt, I am inspired by every musician I have ever met and every orchestra I have ever heard. I am strengthened by my visits with our member orchestras, and I am humbled to be so

welcomed by you and your colleagues in your concert halls. I am eternally honored to be allowed to serve as chair of this historic institution, and this week I will again turn to you all, and I will count on you all, for my personal inspiration.

Recently, I have also been inspired by the story of the creation of the Israel Philharmonic, originally called the Palestine Symphony, which was the vision of the great violinist Bronislaw Huberman. The creation of the Palestine Symphony was a brave effort to save the lives of the greatest Jewish musicians of Europe from the terror of the Holocaust, while also preserving the best of an entire culture. Huberman overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles, including the dehumanization of an entire people, to achieve a dream by believing in humanity. Musicians such as Toscanini and Koussevitzky stood with Huberman in a testament that music represents the best that humans have to offer, even in the face of humanity's worst moment. I was reminded of the assistance to Huberman while paying my respects at Koussevitzky's grave at Tanglewood, where a stone marker presented by the Israel Philharmonic thanks him as a loved and honored friend.

Huberman said "The true artist does not create art as an end in itself. He creates art for human beings. Humanity is the goal."

I believe that is why we are all here together. In a world that occasionally slumps with the weight of its burdens, I believe that music represents the best of humanity, and I know that we all believe in each other.

In times of negativity, we must not be dissuaded from what we hold true. We must rage against the dying of the light. We must be our own advocates, strengthened with the knowledge that the best of humanity is on our side.

Music cannot be silenced, and music will not be silenced. As Aaron Copland said, to do so would be inconceivable. We will stand together, as always, in solidarity. And if we do, there can be no doubt that we will all gather together again in unity to celebrate many future successes.