

President's Address
ICSOM Conference
August 21, 2013

Delegates, fellow governing board members, esteemed ICSOM Counsel, friends and honored guests, let me begin by also welcoming you to Kansas City. I would like to recognize a few people who helped turn the dream of hosting an ICSOM Conference into reality.

You have met Steve and Leslie Multer, our amazing co conference coordinator team. Along with Tom Reel they have done an incredible job these past 12 months. They have taken care every of detail imaginable from the trolley rides this afternoon to working with the Mayor's office. An added plus for us, is that no one is more ideally suited to host the hospitality suite than Steve!

Tonight's tour of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts and especially the concert in Helzberg Hall was Steve's idea with terrific assistance from our Symphony staff. Steve attended the ICSOM Conference in Detroit and wanted everyone here to experience the beautiful aesthetics of Helzberg Hall along with its marvelous acoustics. Thank you, Steve, and a special thank you to our Symphony Musicians and guests who will donate their time and talents tonight. I would like to recognize our Symphony colleagues who spent hours yesterday helping to set up the mailboxes, tape down power cords, and other tasks.

I have not met an executive director who enjoys classical music more or works harder for his orchestra than our Frank Byrne. Frank has been with us for 12 years, and his leadership contributes greatly to the Symphony's success. Frank has been a terrific partner from the get-go in helping us host this conference. He and the staff have gone above and beyond the call of duty by donating the swag bags, books, and CDs in your welcome packets along with making arrangements for our tour and concert tonight. Please thank Frank when you have a moment and also our terrific staff that will be on hand to lead the tours.

Our Secretary-Treasurer Dick Albrecht and our Local 34-627 Board, including KCS delegate Marvin Gruenbaum, have been with us from the very beginning-when we first signed cards certifying the AFM as our bargaining agent, through the many successive negotiations and contract administration issues, to now hosting this conference. Thank you Dick and Marvin.

I would also like to thank the Kansas City Symphony Musicians' Association for their generous donation towards tonight's mixer. You will see many of them at the concert and mixer. Dorris Dai Janssen, who attended the 2005 ICSOM Conference in San Diego, will be on hand to represent the Musicians and the Musicians' Committee.

Last, but not least, I would like to recognize former delegate and Local 34-627 Executive Board member Tim Jepson. Tim served on the original negotiating committee in 1997, has been on various committees since, and was the one to originally pitch the idea of hosting this conference to the Local and orchestra.

Today truly is a dream come true.

Little did we know when Dave Everson and I attended the 1998 ICSOM Conference as observers, that we would host a conference in Kansas City just 15 years later.

Much has changed in our world since that time.

In 1998 Bill Clinton was in the White House and gas was \$1.15 a gallon. Nelson Mandela was the president of South Africa. The original three tenors; Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti, performed during the World Cup Finals in France to over 3 billions viewers world-wide. The United States had its first budget surplus in 30 years.

In 1998 the Kansas City Symphony was a young 17-year-old organization created after the demise of the Philharmonic in 1982 after years of wavering community support, large deficits and all too frequent work stoppages.

Our turning point came in 1995 when new leadership emerged. Mrs. Barnett C. Helzberg, Shirley-our “Angel”-became the new Board Chair. A new executive director and personnel manager also began their tenures. Under Shirley’s leadership the Symphony ushered in a new era of artistic and fiscal growth along with collaborative governance and musician empowerment.

Shirley wanted very much to be here this week to greet you. She is out East on a trip that had been planned many months in advance of the conference. Shirley sends her warmest greetings and best wishes for a terrific conference.

I believe that an orchestra’s success or failure is largely dependent on the board’s level of commitment and service. I am proud to say that we have one of the finest boards around. Continuity of leadership is important in every business, perhaps even more so in orchestras. Not only was Shirley our chair these past 15 years but three other members of our executive committee began with Shirley and still serve. Two others, including our new chair, Bill Lyons, have many years of dedicated service between them.

By the 1998 ICSOM Conference the Symphony’s first collective bargaining agreement was in place. Our 78-member orchestra had just negotiated the largest yearly raises in the Symphony’s history and began to convert three tiers of employment to full-time status. Working conditions and benefits were vastly improved, and participation in the AFM-EPF began for the first time.

While many of you may heard of our 1998 evergreen agreement you may not know that one of the primary goals of that multi-year agreement was to provide a roadmap that would help guide the Symphony into its new home.

Preliminary plans were underway for a new performing arts center to be built that would be the first real home for the Symphony. Led by Ms. Julia Irene Kauffman a team that eventually included our own Shirley Helzberg became the steering committee for the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

Through the economic turmoil of the last decade Julia, Shirley and others responsible for building the Kauffman Center could have simply given up. Had they not been as determined and committed as they were the Kauffman Center might not have been built.

To be sure there were challenges. But, it was a journey that we all took together-civic leaders, board members, staff, musicians, and our community. We all kept our eye on the ball moving into the Kauffman Center together in 2011.

It has been an incredible journey with its share of ups and downs. How we dealt with those differences and challenges, how we turned many into opportunities, and how kept our eye on the ball-helps to explain why earlier this summer we were able to negotiate a successor CBA one year early with modest raises in salary, seniority, pension, and other terms and conditions.

We know how fortunate we are to be in Kansas City right now. We have been lucky to have the right people in the right places and at the right times.

Across ICSOM land, though, this is proving to be the exception rather than the rule. Later today we will hear from our colleagues in four locked-out orchestras from this season. We also had short work stoppages in two of our highest budget orchestras. And, our colleagues in Minnesota face a second straight year of being locked out.

So, what happened?

First, we had the economic upheavals from the last decade. But, enough already with that!

Last Monday Michael Kaiser wrote an article for the Huffington Post that you may have read. Titled, "Time to Stop Blaming the Economy" Michael writes:

We cannot accept the conventional wisdom that "every not-for-profit arts organization is facing deficits" because that is simply not true and is dangerous. I know of hundreds of arts organizations that have done a superb job of navigating the new world in which we live.

It has been harder, for sure, to balance our budgets and has required arts managers and boards to be nimble in the face of the new environment in which we operate.

But blaming "the economy" is not the way to sustain ourselves.

You already know this.

So, what else has happened?

I believe that we are witnessing a generational shift throughout our boards that threatens orchestras of all budget sizes.

Our boards are changing and in many cases not for the better.

It used to be that board members felt a sense of civic obligation to support their orchestra. Board members were groomed to serve by other family members, business partners, and civic leaders invested in the community. Often times board positions were passed down from generation to generation.

But, that has and continues to change.

More and more—those from my generation (the plus 40 crowd—okay—maybe the plus 50 folks) do not feel the same civic duty to support an orchestra or other cultural asset. More entertainment options are available than ever before. Cities have more sports teams than ever before. NASCAR continues to gain popularity along with other outlets for one's discretionary time and money.

Couple that with the fact that more bankers and lawyers (present company excluded) are on symphony boards and in leadership positions. Look around your board. Then ask yourself if we are not losing the most committed and arts savvy board members at an almost epidemic pace.

Tactics used by boards and managements to extract concessions from us have become more ugly and destructive than before. Ten years ago, who would have thought the Minnesota Orchestra musicians would now face a second year of being locked out, or that an orchestra the size and stature of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association would declare bankruptcy with over 140 million dollars in assets, in part, to avoid making good on pension promises made to their musicians—many of whom spent their lives making a lifetime of musical memories for their audiences.

This is where we come in, why ICSOM is so important, and why the work we do this week is crucial to our orchestras and to the field.

Several years ago, former MAL and CSO members' committee chair Steve Lester told delegates that "the days of showing up to work and simply playing ones instrument were over."

This has never been truer than now.

We must raise our advocacy skills to another level. As we do so we must reach not only our boards and managements but our communities as well.

We must count on one another for the strength, courage and wisdom to get the job done!

Our challenge this week is not just to be engaged. Rather, our challenge is to return home and engage our members and then our managements, boards and communities. We must engage anyone and everyone that will listen to our message.

Delegates and guests, take advantage of every opportunity here to engage. The sessions we have planned this week are just the first part. Take advantage of every moment in between sessions and at breaks to talk with and learn from one another.

There is a wealth of incredible knowledge and experience within this room. You are the leaders of your orchestras. We have experts with us ranging from public relations to lobbying, and from organizing to labor law.

I would like to share one more Kansas City story.

It took longer than I would like to admit to realize that Crown Center, where we are now, was named so because it represents the corporate symbol for Hallmark Cards, which is headquartered here. Crown Center was designed by the Hall family over forty years ago to be a city within a city. Now it is a vibrant shopping and entertainment center with dozens of wonderful shops, restaurants, live and movie theaters, and other attractions.

Don Hall, chairman of the board of Hallmark Cards, was a founding trustee of the Kansas City Symphony. One of our vice-presidents on the Symphony's Board, Bob Kipp, was Don Hall's right hand man for many years. After Bob retired from Hallmark Don asked him to lead another important project.

Don, too, recognized that some within the next generation of civic and business leaders were not following in his generation's footsteps in giving back to the community. So, Bob's role was to mentor the next generation to understand, appreciate and support the arts and other important not-for-profits in Kansas City. Over the years Bob quietly but brilliantly mentored many current members of not-for-profits boards across Kansas City. I often wonder how many troubled orchestras would be less troubled had someone like Bob taken the initiative in their city to mentor productive and committed future board leaders.

One of the perks of being ICSOM president is to work with your governing board and Counsel. To a person they are some of the finest people I have had the pleasure to work with. It is hard to believe that we have been together for five years and several of us much longer. We are a family and a close one at that. As you know Cathy is stepping down this week. Leading by example Cathy has redefined the role of Member-at-Large. Our orchestras are stronger because of her commitment and service to them.

We can and we will change things for the better. This week is about recharging our collective batteries, hearing new perspectives, and discovering together how to deal with the challenges facing us in 2013.

Enjoy your stay in Kansas City, and let's have a great conference!