

Bruce Ridge, ICSOM Chairperson opening address: August 22,  
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ICSOM Conference, 2012: *The First Fifty Years*

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On May 12, 1962, musicians from twelve Symphony Orchestras gathered here in Chicago for what would become one of the most important events in the history of the arts in North America. Today, just over fifty years later, we have gathered once again to honor the great leaders who began this historic movement. But, we have not come back to Chicago merely to celebrate the past—we have arrived to build a foundation for an even greater future. There could be no more appropriate honor for the founders of this organization than for us to leave here at the end of this conference with a renewed dedication and a re-energized sense of purpose. We are not here only to honor the first fifty years of ICSOM...we are here this week to ensure that musicians will gather here again in 2062 to celebrate the accomplishments of the next fifty years as well.

The need to create ICSOM was great in the early sixties, as at that time few musicians were able to earn a living wage, and they were often subject to immediate and arbitrary dismissal. Orchestral musicians had virtually no say in the negotiation of their contracts or in the governance of their own workplace.

ICSOM was founded by a group of extraordinary and fearless musicians who came together in a most remarkable way. The founding musicians of ICSOM and the leaders who followed bravely won recognition from their union, and played an instrumental role in the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts, as they elevated the profile of symphonic musicians in North America. They were advocates for the future, and that advocacy is as strong today as it was at the moment of the organization's birth.

At the time of ICSOM's founding, symphonic musicians, despite their artistic renown, were treated terribly. A famous quote from around that time came from Dr. Wilfred Bain, the dean of the Indiana University School of Music, who said:

*"Snaring top flight musicians is easy, because people who push brooms are treated better than symphony players."*

In the 1960's, *Senza Sordino*, reported that:

*"...most musicians in major symphony orchestras were employed little more than six months annually, at a yearly salary that was barely a living wage."*

It was a time when the field either had to move forward, or dissolve into irrelevancy. Through the leadership of the musicians of ICSOM, the field did indeed move forward.

Today, musicians face new challenges from many sources. Some of the challenges are reminiscent of those that the founders of ICSOM confronted, and some of our challenges are unique to the time in which we are living. But just as the first generation of ICSOM musicians are remembered for leading the field to new heights, so will this generation of orchestral musicians be remembered. For while there are negative voices that would have us believe that the sun is setting for America's orchestras, those of us in this room, along with our friends and colleagues across the country and the world, are here to proclaim that a new morning is upon us, and this new morning dawns today as we begin our second half-century.

The founders of ICSOM faced persecution from their managements, scrutiny from their union, and doubts from their colleagues. The creation of ICSOM was an ultimately democratic action, reflective of the words contained in the Norris-LaGuardia Act, which proclaimed that "The individual unorganized worker is commonly helpless to exercise actual liberty. To be genuinely free, the individual worker must be able to organize collectively."

Since the founding of ICSOM, orchestral musicians have been able to build successful artistic lives, with job security, the freedom to take artistic chances, and with benefits that allow them to care for their own children even as they dedicate their lives to advancing the education of the children of their communities.

As I have prepared for our 50th anniversary conference, I have studied the work of the founders and I've been amazed at their bravery and ingenuity. A recent, modern event reminded me of the difficult task the ICSOM founders encountered

This year, when the management of the Louisville Orchestra put out the despicable call for replacement musicians, I wrote a notice to musicians everywhere urging them not to accept work from the Louisville Orchestra Incorporated while the true musicians of that orchestra were unjustly out of work. The message I wrote went around the world in just 24 hours. It was re-posted on Facebook 1400 times, and I received messages of support from as far away as Egypt.

But, the modern age of the Internet and social networking allowed me to accomplish this while sitting at my desk at home. I merely hit "send" and the message spread across the world.

This incident made me all the more aware of the Herculean accomplishments of ICSOM's founders. The revolutionary ideas they brought to the arts scene of North America were advanced in those early years without even the convenience of a Xerox machine. Their idealism, bravery and unwavering commitment all are still at work as we gather here today as a united network of friends.

Now, our field faces another time of challenges, and we must once again come together in the spirit of friendship and innovation that orchestral musicians found 50 years ago. We must re-dedicate ourselves, and we must not allow ourselves to feel discouraged. We must not give in to negativity and we must not allow the misguided, visionless statements about the future that emanate from some managerial organizations to dampen our spirit. There is a positive message that our audiences are eager to hear, and it is a message that stands in contrast to the negativity too often quoted in newspapers.

While the odds may at times seem stacked against us, we have the decided advantage of being right.

At the time of ICSOM's founding, the arts and culture industry in America was a \$3 billion dollar marketplace. Today, as revealed in studies conducted since the recession, the arts represent over \$135 billion dollars in annual economic activity. And, at a time when America is concerned with unemployment, the arts support over four million full-time jobs. Here in Chicago, the city of our founding, the arts generate over \$2.1 billion, and ICSOM musicians are vital to the economy of the region as they perform for over a million people each year.

Some managers profess with great commitment that the current climate for fundraising represents an insurmountable obstacle. But recent studies have shown that Arts contributions are recovering from the depths of the 2008 recession almost twice as fast as other categories of charitable giving, and attendance for symphonic concerts is also recovering at a remarkable rate.

While putting a monetary value on priceless music seems counterintuitive, we find ourselves in a place where we must dispute the claims of some managers that our orchestras cannot be supported. They emphasize the negative while seemingly blind to the positive, and seemingly unaware that negativity breeds only negativity.

I read a book this year about President James Garfield, who once followed an over-the-top performance by one of his political opponents by saying that while he too could often be mesmerized by the tumultuous churning of the sea, he realized that the true depth of the sea is measured in the calm.

If we can set aside the destructive, hyperbolic rhetoric of some managers and pundits during this time of economic difficulty, in the calm we can see:

- That the Buffalo Philharmonic generates over \$25 million annually for the city of Buffalo and currently has a surplus.
- The Boston Symphony generates over \$166 million for Massachusetts, and just received a \$7.5 million gift.
- The St. Louis Symphony saw tickets sales, gifts, and the endowment grow in 2011
- The Oregon Symphony has seen ticket sales and attendance rise.
- The North Carolina Symphony has met an \$8 million challenge grant two years in a row.

- The New York Philharmonic has raised \$90 million, nearly double its goal.
- The New Jersey Symphony raised \$35 million, surpassing its goal
- The Houston Symphony broke its own records for fundraising for its annual fund for the second straight year
- The Cincinnati Symphony saw increases in ticket sales and gifts

And, despite the negativity of destructive editorials written in the *Denver Post* by an officer of the board of the League of American Orchestras, the Colorado Symphony, which some wanted to shut down in November, finished this season in the black.

As we face the challenges before us...and there will certainly be challenges ahead...we must not be discouraged.

As ICSOM led at its founding, we all must lead again into a new era of positive advocacy. I call on musicians everywhere to join in the positive message of advocacy. It surely must be clear to us by now that no one is going to do this for us. This is our mission, and we must join together as never before, because something precious is at stake.

We know that our friends and colleagues in numerous places might soon face lock-outs or strikes as they fight to articulate their positive vision for the future service their orchestras can provide their communities. Our colleagues will need the support of everyone in our network of friends, and I have no doubt we all will once again answer the Calls to Action. The unity in ICSOM and throughout the industry must surely be a source of inspiration, not only for musicians but for all of society that sees that musicians truly live the Golden Rule, and that wherever one musician is in need every musician will respond. Indeed, the musicians of ICSOM and our friends throughout the AFM have donated over \$830,000 to the orchestral musicians in need in these past few years.

But the Governing Board of ICSOM has realized that we must do more. While we will (unfortunately) surely need to issue additional Calls to Action to raise *immediate* money to assist our colleagues in *immediate* need, we also must create more funds to serve a more profound purpose.

ICSOM is organized as a Labor Organization, a 501(c)(5), which limits our ability to raise funds from outside sources. For example, acting as ICSOM, we cannot accept gifts from employers, nor can we offer tax deductions as incentives to potential donors. We know there are donors out there who are mystified by the negative messages of some managements, but we have no vehicle for them to participate.

We live in a time when money means access, and messaging is expensive. The musicians of America's orchestra's currently lack funding for our positive message.

For years we have imagined an advocacy campaign that could change the negative view of the future of orchestras, and could spread the message of the value of ICSOM orchestras, and live music everywhere, to every community in this country and beyond.

We simply must engage in this advocacy. The amount of the federal budget invested in the arts is only .066%, yet we currently have politicians who are disingenuously

suggesting they could address the federal deficit by eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts in its entirety.

But, to successfully engage in the type of advocacy that could truly elevate the status of our orchestras in the mind of the public, funds are needed. We need the ability to reach out to all funding sources, and to build a new network of friends who believe in the value of this music and in the education of the next generation of Americans.

With great excitement, at this moment of ICSOM's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we can announce that we are creating the American Symphonic Advocacy Project, an organization that will have the ability to raise such funds from multiple sources. The American Symphonic Advocacy Project, or ASAP, will have a board separate from ICSOM's, though with shared membership, and is awaiting designation as a 501(c)(3) organization. ASAP is already incorporated, and we have been working diligently to create this new organization for some time now. While funds for ICSOM will still be needed for the purpose of serving the collective bargaining needs of our members, for the first time we will have a source to turn to that can actively work to spread a positive charitable message...a message that can serve the future of orchestras, enhance the culture, serve the business community, and educate the next generation of Americans.

We have no delusions about the difficulty of the task before us, but neither do we lack hope or faith. For while we cannot guarantee success, we can guarantee failure should we fail to make such an effort at this critical moment for the future. The best way to predict the future is to create it, and we should not hesitate to dream great dreams simply because they are hard to achieve, and further...at a time when there are some who doubt America's orchestras, we will not doubt ourselves.

This effort will be important for America's future, just as the initial effort that created ICSOM positively affected our nation's culture. There was a study recently conducted in the Chicago public schools, where three pilot schools of very different socio-economic populations were immersed in an intense arts program. The standardized testing results for those schools improved by 12%. I believe that Frederick Douglass said that "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." No one would protest that music is good for education, but the message is too often lost in negativity.

The American Symphonic Advocacy Project will offer an opportunity for the supporters of symphonic music to play a role in combating the negative rhetoric that undermines America's cultural future.

When Gore Vidal passed away recently, I was reminded that he once said that "whatever is wrong with human society can be put right by human action."

The American Symphonic Advocacy Project will be just such a positive human action. We look forward to joining with new friends, and much more information on this groundbreaking effort will be discussed with you all this week.

Just as the founding of ICSOM in 1962 led to a new era for orchestral music in North America, this conference can lead to another meaningful beginning. But, this dream will only be realized if we emerge from this conference even more united, even more hopeful, even more dedicated, and only if we all spread the messages heard here to our colleagues and supporters. For while we will be initiating long-term efforts, we will also be facing short term needs.

In numerous cities our members are facing managements who have made insidious mistakes, and those managements now expect the musicians to pay for their errors in judgment. Collectively, the performance level of the musicians of ICSOM orchestras has never been higher. The quality of our musicians is unquestioned, but we have a right, and our communities have a right, to expect that our skills will be matched by those managers entrusted with preserving a precious community asset.

This week we will hear the names of ICSOM's founders--legendary names of musicians who bravely stood up in the face of great adversity, and who not only found inspiration from deep within their souls to believe that they could achieve something greater than themselves, but also found the inspiration to lead others who may have held greater doubts. Zazofsky, Denov, Mendelsohn, Segal, Zenone, Burrell, Buckley, Levine, and Gippo, along with others like Nashan, Golan, Coleman, Raffaelli, Shaw, Barrington, Lottridge, every member of the Chicago Musicians for Union Democracy, and far too many others to mention here...Angus, Rood, Ross. Any such list inevitably omits some legend that stood up at a time when it would have been far easier to stay silent.

We owe these musicians so much. We owe them our thanks

- every time we vote to ratify a contract
- every time we receive a payment from the Strike Fund
- every time an orchestra receives a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts
- every time we contact the Symphonic Services division
- every time we take an audition held in accordance with a code of ethics

But we owe them so much more. Our mere thanks and honors would surely ring hollow without our continued and renewed activism.

As Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago stated in his proclamation that declared to the citizens of Chicago that today, August 22, shall be recognized as International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians Day, the actions of our founders "undoubtedly had a resounding impact within culture and upon the overall performance of music and music quality throughout the United States."

1962, and the founding of ICSOM, marked a new morning for music in North America. This week we will honor those visionaries who founded ICSOM by renewing our commitment, and by once again looking deep within ourselves to find not only the inspiration to *believe*, but the inspiration to *lead*. This week we will share our problems and our solutions. We will welcome a gathering of influential attorneys that is

unprecedented in the history of the field, and we will strengthen the friendships that are crucial to the successes we hope to lead.

With the continued work of ICSOM, and the creation of the American Symphonic Advocacy Project, those of us gathered here this week will set an ambitious agenda for the next fifty years.

I look forward to learning from you, and to being inspired by you all. And, as always, I thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as chair of this historic organization.