

Address at the ICSOM Conference Chicago, 2012

Hello! I first want to thank Bruce Ridge and the ICSOM Executive Board for inviting me here to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians.

We've come a long way Baby!

I, too, want to give recognition to the people that helped me when I was chairman. Each individual that worked with me was important, however, I must give credit to one person that was the best appointment I made because he was the greatest influence to ICSOM and made my job much easier. That was Tom Hall of the Chicago Orchestra. As editor of Senza Sordino he kept all of us in the symphonic world connected, informed and up-to-date, with excellent writing and editing and an insistence to keep to strict deadlines. Senza became the best rank & file newsletter of all the unions in America and Canada.

And most importantly, how many of you have heard him play? He is an outstanding musician, symphony player and chamber musician, and isn't that why we are all here? I also appointed Bruce Ridge, who later ran for President of ICSOM when Brian Rood resigned, and as you can see, that appointment was one of my best. After the hostility within ICSOM had left and we started to work together again, the Board, with the many appointments we made, especially Michael Moore as Treasurer, became an efficient, grass roots, egalitarian governing body, which listened to the delegates and started working on all the problems of the new era.

I am delighted to see, once again, the family of George Zazofsky. We went to Boston and dedicated a plaque to him for his foresight and tremendous courage to organize a conference within the AFM Union structure, to focus on the symphonic problems, and give us the right of self-governance, with our right to negotiate our own contracts. We now take these rights as self evident, to quote a famous declaration. Isn't that why the Europeans came to America? For freedom and respect? It took courage. We thank them everyday that we are able to set our own standards and make our own destinies'. The plaque is mounted in the musician's lounge of the Boston Symphony. We should never forget!

We must also recognize Leonard Liebowitz. I am very angry with Lenny. He lied to me. However, if it weren't for Lenny and his tremendous gift of law and his deep love of the symphonic brotherhood, we would not have some of the great contracts our colleagues have now. When the next 40-year history is written about ICSOM, Lenny will be in every chapter.

I read a posting on Orchestra-L, from someone in Indianapolis, I believe, that said, "I thought we won that battle." That was one of the first comments I made as a rookie when I joined the Saint Louis Symphony in 1972.

I read with great delight the address that Bruce gave in Ann Arbor. I made a copy for myself: heavy paper, and spiral bound. I believe that everyone should have a copy of this speech and when managements start complaining and ringing the death kneel bell, we should start to quote from Bruce's writings.

ICSOM is VERY important!

At the end of the day the AFM is helping us with our cause, but it is the musicians of the major Orchestras and the Ropa Orchestras that will keep the symphonic flame burning white hot with the greatest music of the past and the new music of today. At one of the Mellon seminars, I got into a fiery discussion with Tom Morris, then the General Manager of The Cleveland Orchestra. We were talking about "who owned stake in the symphonic orchestra." I said, "...that when all is said here and across the table at our home, and each member of the Board and Management has gone on to something else, it is the musician which holds the institutional memory and it is only the musician which holds stake in the performance and the symphony.

I still believe that, and each succeeding management and board has proven me right, to my dismay!

The Union is under attack. We must not only acknowledge that fact but we must look at ourselves and take responsibility for what we have done that contributed to the misunderstanding of "*to unionize.*" We must correct that misunderstanding and change our ways and rhetoric. When the average person thinks of the union, they can only remember the Jimmy Hoffas, the corruption, the embezzlements and dirty tactics of some of the other unions.

Mostly **managements** of the unions, not the rank and file.

We, the AFM, have never had that history, and we must be positive about why we are a brotherhood and explain over and over again until the public starts to understand what a musician is and why art and music must be kept alive and growing for all mankind.

The world has changed and we must not become stuck in the past, but rather ICSOM must blaze new paths and continue to do what we do best: present the greatest art form devised by women and men.

Music is the non-verbal communication of emotion and every human needs that form of art to make sense of the barbaric treatment we humans perpetrate on each other.

We, the members of the Union, however, must understand that the right of collective bargaining, the inalienable right, as George Cohen taught us, of collective bargaining. We must preserve this right, fight for this right, as the coal miners, railroad workers, steel workers and symphony musicians of the past had to fight.

Why, do you ask, do we have to fight so hard? Because managements haven't shown in the 50 years we have been trying to work with them, that they have changed and that they understand artists any more now than they did then.

Bankruptcy in Philly? Columbus loosing more weeks: Honolulu shutting the doors! Unbelievable with the kind of wealth being generated in this country!

In the tradition of Bruce Ridge, however, let's acknowledge our successes. Look at the salaries of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco, Chicago, New York and Boston. Those contracts are what they should be. It started in Boston with George Zazofsky and the founding of ICSOM. It took real, possibly life-changing courage. The pressures are just as heavy now as they were then. We could loose our jobs! And some of our musicians already have. That didn't stop the founders, why should it stop us?

Then we look at the Virginia Symphony, Fort Worth and now St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. No musician should have to struggle like that just to give art a chance to be heard. We all need to raise our voices, not after the fact, but hit hard before the threat. There are always behind the scenes talks. We'll let the ICSOM Board handle those. ICSOM, each of you, the delegates, must motivate your orchestra to help our colleagues. We must make a lot of noise, public noise. We let our guard down and managements think they see weakness.

I end with the telling of an incident that happened in the Saint Louis Symphony during a contract negotiation in the 1970's. A Polish cellist spoke at a meeting.

"We are not great orchestra! Great Orchestra is unified, every member, principal and section player. We fight as one. Then we are **Great Orchestra!**"

We've come a long way, but we need to continue the fight. ICSOM started it and now more than ever ICSOM must lead the charge to excellence.

ICSOM IS VERY, VERY IMPORTANT.

SEE YOU HERE IN THE NEXT 50 YEARS.