

ICSOM President's Report
2012 ICSOM Conference
Chicago Westin Michigan Avenue
August 22, 2012

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Good morning delegates, fellow GB members and Counsel, Federation and Local officers and staff, and our many honored guests.

Welcome to Chicago, where ICSOM was created during those historic meetings in May of 1962. We are thrilled that so many founding members will join us this week. We are also thrilled that this conference will have the most attendees of any ICSOM conference by a long shot. Just last month we realized that we were going to exceed our original hotel room block. Our estimate had been based on the San Francisco Conference, which was the best attended in recent history. In July we increased the room block here at the Westin by 40%. Ladies and gentlemen, we will have over 150 delegates, officers, guests and other dignitaries with us this week staying in more than 530 total rooms.

There is plenty to celebrate from ICSOM's first 50 years. If you have not seen it everyone should read Tom Hall's book *ICSOM "Forty Years."* First released in 2002 the governing board distributed copies during the 2003 and 2004 ICSOM Conferences. Tom has done an incredible job of assembling and analyzing conference minutes, issues of *Senza Sordino*, and many other materials. What was clearly a labor of love culminated in an 80 page history of ICSOM complete with lists of all delegates, officers, and conference sites. Issues facing ICSOM from the beginning along with those addressed by ICSOM these past 50 years are meticulously covered. There is even a year by year synopsis of ICSOM's first forty years.

When I joined the governing board in 2002 I found Tom's book to be one resource that I used on an almost daily basis. Tom's book should be required reading by every ICSOM musician. When you have a moment please thank Tom Hall for this wonderful resource!

Over the past 50 years ICSOM musicians courageously fought to achieve better wages and benefits, improved working conditions, job security provisions including tenure, contract ratification, meaningful musician input during negotiations, longer seasons and fuller orchestra complements. ICSOM's Emergency Relief Fund, the AFM Strike Fund, official conference status within the AFM, a full time Symphony Department, now SSD, annual Directories, the Conductor Evaluation Program, and many more services are tangible proof of ICSOM's extraordinary impact on our livelihoods, our orchestras, and our union.

Now, in 2012, much of what was gained is at risk. Proposals from several managements and boards seek to set their orchestras back by 10 years, 20 years, or even longer. This is an attack not only on the orchestras but on the fair and reasonable

compensation and working conditions secured by ICSOM musicians these past 50 years.

Look around the country and we find that not only orchestras but organized labor itself are under attack. We have witnessed the shenanigans taking place in other Midwestern states; Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan and Indiana, states where workers and their unions have been attacked by corporate and government officials. Union membership in 2010 was at a seventy-year low; 11.9% of the work force or 14.7 million workers. Attacks on public unions increased dramatically during the past couple of years. All too often the pundits blame government shortfalls on retirement and healthcare benefits that were negotiated in good faith rather than the decreased tax revenues from corporations and wealthier individuals. Corporations and the 1% are currently taxed at some of the lowest levels in modern history. While labor has always been under attack from the “right” have we ever seen such a full scale war against American workers and the middle class?

President Kennedy once said, “we cannot negotiate with those who say, what’s mine is mine and what’s your is negotiable.” Yet this is the very dogmatic stance used by some managers and boards across the table and by elected leaders against organized labor.

Two weeks ago I was in NYC for the AFM-EPF trustee meetings. As I returned to my room for the night, I surfed the channels and landed on C-Span. The DNC Platform Drafting Committee was holding a hearing prior to the formation of the 2012 Democratic Party Platform. Chairman Ted Strickland-former governor of Ohio, introduced a young man from Minneapolis.

This labor leader, Adam Robinson, is a community organizer for the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation AFL-CIO and a member of the Teamsters, Local 120.

The program was recorded on July 28 and is available on C-Span’s archives. Adam began by requesting that the Democratic Party keep its long and foundational support for the freedom to form unions and collectively bargain as planks of the Democratic Party Platform this fall.

Adam quoted the 2008 Democratic Party Platform by saying:

“We believe that every American, whatever their background or station in life, should have the chance to get a good education, to work at a good job with good wages, to raise and provide for a family, to live in safe surroundings, and to retire with dignity and security.”

Adam continued with more from the 2008 DNC Platform; “Democrats are committed to an economic policy that produces good jobs with good pay and benefits. That is why we support the right to organize. We know that when unions are allowed to do their job of making sure that workers get their fair share, they pull people out of poverty and create a stronger middle class. We will strengthen the ability of workers to organize unions and fight to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. We will continue to vigorously oppose “Right-to-Work” Laws and “paycheck protection” efforts whenever they are proposed.”

Many ICSOM orchestras are in “right to work” states. To those bargaining units’ credit and their locals most remain firmly unionized.

In February of this year, Indiana became the 23rd state to enact a right-to-work law, the only right-to-work (RTW) law passed in the last decade. It is no secret that Republicans typically favor RTW laws while unions and Democrats do not. RTW laws tend to reduce union power and influence. Data shows that workers in “right-to-work” states wind up with lower compensation for both union and nonunion workers.

An economist at the University of Oregon’s Labor Education and Research Center wrote that “there is no supporting evidence that RTW laws positively impact employment or bring back manufacturing jobs.”

Yet, last year, Senator Jim DeMint (R. SC) introduced the [National Right-to-Work Act \(S-504\)](#), a bill *to preserve and protect the free choice of individual employees to form, join, or assist labor organizations, or to refrain from such activities*. S-504 has a snowball’s chance in hell of passing in the Senate and even if it did, President Obama would hopefully use his veto power. However, if the Republicans take both the White House and Senate, while holding onto the House, chances are that a national “right to work” act would be high on the Republicans’ to do list.

I raise these issues today, even as we celebrate ICSOM’s first 50 years, because the immediate challenges affecting orchestras are not just orchestral. They are political. And we must summon the will to fight the good fight not only across the table with our managements but at the polls in November.

At stake besides the White House, control of the Senate and all House seats, is a fundamental question for us and all organized labor. Are unions relevant or even necessary in the 21st century? Depending on the election’s outcome we will either have a fighting chance to improve our lot as unionized orchestral musicians or face an onslaught of union busting legislation and strong arm tactics.

Last week Mitt Romney told Fortune Magazine that he would not just cut funding for PBS and the NEA but actually eliminate their funding completely. It would be an understatement to say how truly difficult things would be for our orchestras and organized labor in general should the Republicans gain control of the White House and Senate.

Yet, the tools to take a stand politically are the same used to defend and promote our orchestras.

ICSOM continues to be about advocacy and activism. This morning let us add awareness.

1. Awareness. We must educate our members and the public so that they become more aware of the issues facing our orchestras, the industry and organized labor. Our player associations are doing a great job by increasingly using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to deliver their message to more people than ever before. Perhaps it is time to also defend our right to organize. Perhaps it is time to strategically take pro-labor stands while observing DOL regulations.
2. Advocacy. We must build upon on our already terrific advocacy efforts. And, with ASAP (American Symphonic Advocacy Project) we are about to take a giant step forward. There is no other organization in this country whose sole purpose is to

educate the public regarding the integral and meaningful role the symphonic arts and ICSOM orchestras play in our community, culture and economy.

An important component of ASAP will be its tax status. Unlike a labor organization ASAP will be a 501(c)(3), which means that the public can support our mission and goals through contributions.

3. Activism. To be successful we must all become even greater activists for our orchestras and union.

ICSOM musician have become increasingly more active within their locals. There are now more ICSOM musicians who are local officers and board members than ever before. We have seen the positive results of this activism in our union over the past several years. Perhaps it is time to cast a wider net. With less than three months before the fall elections we must join with other labor leaders and members to ensure that our voice is heard. At home we must do everything we can, helping people to the polls, making telephone calls and distributing flyers for those candidates that support labor, writing letters to the editor and using social media to advance our cause. Let us make sure that ICSOM's voice, the voice of four thousand symphonic musicians, is heard loudly and clearly.

This week let us celebrate our founders, delegates and all who created ICSOM and then nurtured it these past 50 years. But, let us also lay the groundwork for ICSOM's next 50 years. Let us pledge to put our hearts and minds together, to learn with and from one another, and to renew our mission of advocacy and activism.

Thank you for being here and let's have a great conference.