

2015 ICSOM President's Address – Brian Rood

Good morning, delegates, governing board members, Counsel, AFM officers and staff, and honored guests.

A great deal of work goes in to putting on an ICSOM conference. Special thanks go to Local 77 President Joe Parente, the Local 77 Executive Board and our colleagues of the Philadelphia Orchestra-especially Jon Beiler, Gloria de Pasquale, and John Koen for inviting us to this wonderful city and for their incredible hospitality.

As you know, tonight we will have the opportunity to tour the Kimmel Center and to enjoy ourselves at the Doubletree. As you heard there will be some home-brew to sample in the players' lounge, courtesy of librarian and former delegate Robert Grossman. I know from first-hand experience-as do those in Ottawa for the 2002 Unity Conference-that Robert knows a thing or two about brewing beer. The rest of the story, as Paul Harvey used to say, is that an ICSOM resolution was adopted unanimously thanking Robert for his tireless efforts to quench our thirst. That resolution also bestowed upon Robert the title of ICSOM Braumestier.

While this conference marks the departure of two officers from the governing board it also provides us an opportunity to reflect on where ICSOM was in 2002 and the transition to today.

I joined the governing board at the 2002 Unity Conference in Ottawa. As I look around this room today there are several people I would like to recognize because each has played an important role in ICSOM's history, and each has had a profound effect on me. Jay Blumenthal, Mary Plaine, and Michael Moore were members-at-large then. Delegates in attendance to who were in Ottawa include Penny Brill, Warren Powell, Helen Riech, Bob Wagner, John Koen, and this gentleman to my right, Bruce Ridge. Laura Ross was also there as a guest.

Until after the 2002 Conference the ICSOM governing board had a different governance structure than in place today. There used to be an executive committee that included five officers; the chair, president, secretary, treasurer and editor. The four members-at-large were on the governing board but not the executive committee. The delegates of the 2002 conference approved a series of resolutions that amended ICSOM Bylaws by removing all references to an "executive committee" and, instead, delegated authority and accountability equally to all nine members of the governing board including the four members-at-large.

This is important to remember for two main reasons. One is that members-at-large remain the lifeline of communication between you, the delegates, and the governing board. No one has more interaction with each orchestra's delegate or knows more about an orchestra's issues than their member-at-large. The second reason is history will show that members-at-large played even more important roles within the governing board and ICSOM as a result of expanding the governance structure.

Those of us in Ottawa that August found an ICSOM leadership at a crossroad. Communication had faltered, and working relationships were strained. Within a few short months six of the nine governing board positions turned over. Only Michael, Jay and Mary remained to work with the rookies that included Laura and me. ICSOM historian, past conference coordinator and former CSO violinist Tom Hall agreed to re-join the Board as Editor, which provided continuity. Tom is one of ICSOM's true statesmen and one of the finest individuals one could hope to meet. Tom helped ICSOM many ways following the 2002 Conference as he always has. I will forever be in his debt, as will future generations of ICSOM musicians.

ICSOM was also at a crossroad regarding electronic media, whether it should be governed locally or nationally and whether national standards including wage scales were appropriate for different budget sized orchestras. Lively debates were held at the San Diego conference in 2001 and again in Ottawa in 2002. A special edition of Senza Sordino was published in March 2002 titled, “The Great Electronic Media Debate.”

In the fall of 2002 the new governing board set out to heal an organization fractured by volatile but important issues. Member orchestras were re-engaged by the governing board as delegates and committee chairs were personally telephoned for their input on the issues of the day, especially electronic media. An electronic media summit was held in January 2003. Three different meetings took place over two days in Chicago. The first was a President’s Council meeting involving founding ICSOM member orchestras. The next morning an ICSOM-wide meeting was held. In the afternoon the AFM and General Counsel George Cohen joined ICSOM leadership and musician representatives for an extended open forum.

The governing board then solicited as many distinct views on electronic media as possible by appointing a larger electronic media committee than before, creating media-l, and continuing to field calls and emails from concerned musicians across the country.

The governing board also took other steps to re-engage ICSOM musicians over the next few months and years.

By 2005 interest in ICSOM had grown considerably from what we saw in 2002. Attendance was higher at annual conferences, and more orchestra committee members and chairs became involved. Interaction between the governing board and delegates became more productive and consistent. Negotiating orchestra conference calls, annual negotiating orchestra caucuses and new delegate breakfasts became the new norm.

At the 2005 Conference in San Diego four members of the governing board who comprised the Vision Committee gave their report. From that day forward ICSOM refocused on a central theme throughout our history-advocacy. We discussed how badly orchestras were treated in the press. At that time no media outlet wanted to report on the successes of the day-instead they churned out the same old “gloom and doom” spewed by so called industry experts and pundits alike. We realized that if ICSOM did not lead our advocacy efforts no one else would. No other organization appeared ready, willing or able to advocate on our behalf.

Discussion also centered on the phrase “how to counter the negative rhetoric” a term that then member-at-large Ridge so eloquently coined. What we saw in San Diego was ICSOM’s reinvigorated pledge to create effective advocacy as vital to our long-term success. Governing board initiatives since 2005 focused on advocacy from the creation of a separate 501c(3) to the Americans for the Arts partnership; from new relationships being built within and outside of the orchestra industry to testimony given on the Hill by Chairman Ridge-just to name a few. Surely, ICSOM has always been about advocacy. Yet, we needed to continue to develop new tools for the 21st century to face whatever the world had in store for us-no matter what that might be.

Let us focus on our member orchestras for a moment. It is heartbreaking to lose just one orchestra, as was the case with the Florida Philharmonic some ten years ago. No one could have predicted, however, the recent unprecedented attacks on our orchestras due, in part, to the Great Recession. Atlanta, Columbus, Detroit, Indianapolis, Minnesota, St. Paul and others all endured painful attacks from their managements and boards. In an orchestra very close to us now (that shall remain

nameless) a certain board chair wrote in the local paper that the “current collective bargaining agreement is a roadmap to extinction.” It is hard to believe that was just ten years ago.

Arguably, and perhaps most despicable of all, were the Craigslist ads placed by the Louisville Orchestra management to replace tenured contract musicians, our colleagues who had spent their careers building one of America’s great orchestras.

In each case, though, our colleagues stood together and fought valiantly. While not every situation turned out as we may have hoped, managements and boards across the country were forced to deal with musicians and musician leadership far more organized, determined, and better equipped than they possibly could have imagined. From self-produced concerts to sold-out audiences; from the engagement of public relations experts like Randy Whatley to AFM and local support including unprecedented support from the AFM Strike Fund, our managers and boards ultimately were forced to face the errors of their ways. Starving out your musicians and cutting off their health insurance in order to extract a pound of flesh because a bean-counter says to do so is not the way to bring people together to solve an organization’s problems.

Remember Michael Kaiser and how he broke away from the pack by advising managers and boards that financial problems are not solved by cutting either the artistic product or marketing? Everyone here is likely familiar with his book, the “Art of the Turnaround.” What may surprise you is that it was written in 2008. We have been dealing in crisis mode for all too long.

Yet, you know that there are success stories to be told. And now, in sharp contrast to ten years ago, they are being told. ICSOM’s advocacy efforts are paying off. Just this year alone the press reported success stories from Atlanta and Rochester in June, Cincinnati and Houston in May, and Buffalo and Los Angeles earlier this year.

We also must recognize that two orchestras recently reinvented themselves, the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra and Symphoria through the hard work and determination of our colleagues there.

As horrible as the attacks on particularly Atlanta, Detroit and Minnesota were the silver lining is that the resiliency of ICSOM musicians should never be underestimated again. Over two million dollars were raised through ICSOM *Calls To Action* to help musicians locked out, on strike or facing the threat of bankruptcy. The AFM Strike Fund paid out three million dollars in benefits over four years. Now, almost every ICSOM orchestra has a Facebook page, a Twitter account and is using social media to advocate in ways their managements do not.

Advocacy is what ICSOM is about. The sharing of ideas among orchestras is what ICSOM is about. Helping each other find ways to succeed in the troubled world we live is what ICSOM is about.

We remember how painful it was to lose an orchestra as happened to the Florida Philharmonic. Yet, we may well lose another despite our best efforts and intentions. The situation in Denver for the Colorado Symphony Orchestra is fragile at best. Chairman Ridge and I traveled to Denver twice this spring—once in May and again in June to meet with the musicians to hear their concerns and offer our assistance. While we will discuss this more in-depth I would like to encourage us all to be as supportive as we can. It is our responsibility to positively demonstrate what ICSOM and the AFM can do to help our Colorado Symphony Orchestra colleagues as they contemplate their future within the AFM and ICSOM.

As I leave the governing board I want you to know how much I have enjoyed working with each member and those who served on previous boards. Together, we accomplished much these past thirteen years during difficult political and financial times. But, ICSOM is a stronger organization not

because of its leadership but because you and your colleagues made it so. You brought home to your orchestras the message of hope and how strong we are when we act together. When Calls to Action were issued you and your colleagues gave quickly and generously. When asked for support leading up to AFM Conventions you signed petitions and met with local presidents. That support in particularly the 2010 and 2013 AFM Conventions made the difference in many important decisions from electing new leaders to rejecting proposals not in our best interests.

The door is now open for future ICSOM leaders to emerge. They will have a terrific governing board to work with. I continue to be inspired by their dedication, determination and hard work. To a person-they are simply terrific people.

In 2002 people questioned ICSOM's relevance. If we did one thing together these past several years it was to answer that question unequivocally. ICSOM is and will continue to be relevant to our orchestras, the AFM, and to each of us here today.

We are going to have a great week here in Philadelphia. I look forward to catching up with as many of you as possible in our time together.

Thank you for friendship, and thank you for placing your trust in me to serve as president.