

# Senza Sordino

Official Publication of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians

VOLUME 52 NO. 2

Online Edition

August 2014

## An Editor's Parting Thoughts

by Richard Levine, Editor

As I end 12 years on the ICSOM Governing Board and 10 years as the *Senza Sordino* editor, some thoughts occur to me that are inspired by the changing landscape we face as orchestra musicians. I take sole responsibility for all the views expressed here, though many are not original. They are the product of countless interactions with many individuals during my 35-year association with ICSOM, its officers and delegates, AFM officers and staff, local officers, negotiators, various legal counsel, board members, management, fellow musicians, and audience members.

I offer this only as food for thought, neither as solutions nor as a "correct" point of view. In no way do I mean to suggest what should be or should have been done in particular orchestra situations, even if I do mention a few. So much for the disclaimers.

I sometimes struggle with where and how we and our orchestras fit into today's world with all its problems: famine, poverty, war, persecution, and disease, as well as natural and man-made disasters. Humans certainly seem to have a great capacity to ignore the suffering of others. In the midst of it all, here we are offering a drug-like distraction—reveling in some of the finest creative works of mankind. Perhaps it's just personal bias or wishful thinking that allows me to think our music has the capacity to lift spirits, elevate consciousness, and bring people together; but judging from audience applause and the long history of public and private funding of orchestras, I'm not alone.

In any case, the distraction is incomplete, and social welfare remains an enormous concern to everyone. Over the years some donors have decided to shift part of their support from the arts to social issues, raising concerns in some circles about the relevancy of our orchestras. I am reminded of one negotiation where I made an emphatic case for something the musicians considered vital. A doctor on the board's negotiating team took issue with the importance I had placed on the issue and made clear that his patients dealt with

disease and death. He questioned how we could seriously suggest our issue was so important. It's hard to argue in that context, but what struck me most was that this same individual was a tireless symphony supporter who devoted countless hours to fundraising for the symphony. In other words, his own actions demonstrated how extraordinarily important the orchestra was to him, even given his daily confrontations with life and death situations.

The belief—the fact—that our art is worthy of support does not imply any challenge to the worthiness of other causes. Within our organizations, there is no room for skepticism about the importance of our art. We need to insist that everyone throughout our organizations are as fervent in their support as we are. Sadly, we too often read laments attributed to orchestra management or board members about the unsustainability of orchestras, dwindling audiences, how our music belongs in a museum, or worse. Although in the right forum these might be legitimate topics for discussion, we see them being fed to the press as excuses for failure by those most responsible for creating successes for our organizations. The crime is that such whining itself diminishes the support for our orchestras that we need to be building and preserving.

But it doesn't stop there. Increasingly we are seeing managements and boards planning lockouts as a tactic for implementing drastic changes to negotiated contracts, changes unproven as solutions to any problems. They are willing to use sledgehammers to change provisions that they themselves had agreed to just one contract earlier. Flagrant examples abound, with Detroit and Minnesota all too current, and looming threats at the Metropolitan Opera and several other orchestras as *Senza Sordino* goes to press.

What is a proper response? How can we effectively deal with such situations? What types of influence can we exercise, and through what points of contact? What are the best available ways for musicians and our organizations to assert themselves to right situations that have gone wrong?

In earlier days musicians who wanted something sooner rather than later were willing to strike in order to achieve their goals. There is a fundamental difference, though, to what we are witnessing in the 21st century. In the past, by and large, strikes were reserved for inequitable or unjustifiable conditions that, when improved, benefited in a very real sense not only the musicians but also the quality of the orchestra. As a direct result, no one can seriously question the high performance standards of today's orchestras—it is acknowledged

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## Chairperson's Report by Bruce Ridge



### Sowing the Wind

We have often marveled (and occasionally despaired) at the fact that we work in a field where all too often organizational failure is accepted, and all too often such failure is even expected. This has never been more strikingly illustrated than in the recent announcement from the management of the Green Bay Symphony that it would close following the 2014–2015 season despite several recent profitable years.

The executive director publicly labeled the profitable years “a fluke.” What other business would do that? Well—no other business. It is just too bizarre. Successful businesses would highlight the profits, knowing that success breeds success. No business would dismiss profits as a fluke, thereby suggesting that their successes had nothing to do with the quality of the product, the excellence of the employees, or the importance of the service to the community.

The Green Bay Symphony website's home page currently trumpets “GBSO's Farewell Season!” That's right—*there really is an exclamation point*. The text audaciously goes on to say, “Join us as we celebrate the tradition of great music!” The management seems pretty excited about giving up on a 100-year legacy where the citizens of the community and the great musicians of the orchestra clearly deserve better. The website also asks, “Why should a community support an orchestra that's in its final season?” Actually, that is a pretty good question.

I want to go a little easy on my criticism, though, as it seems apparent that this orchestra can be saved, and hopefully people with wisdom can be found in the community to recover from this fell proclamation, and the orchestra can be led with vision into its next century. I do not desire that my comments poison that well.

But in a field where failure it too often accepted, even expected, it seems amazing that so many orchestras can overcome such suppositions and perform so well, especially in these economic times. Such successes are being experienced in places with positive expectations, and in life what you expect is often what you will get. If you find failure to be a reasonable result, and you spread such a message, then negative results are often what your vision will deliver.

For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

As we review the orchestral season, it is clear that difficulties remain, and clearer still that there are a few storms ahead. But what is even more apparent is that, if success is a fluke, there certainly have been a lot of “flukey” things going on for orchestras and the arts.

- The Chicago Symphony received the two largest gifts in its history, totaling \$32 million.

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**Subscriptions:** \$10 per year, payable to *Senza Sordino*, c/o Michael Moore, Treasurer, 953 Rosedale Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30306. Report delivery-related problems to Richard Levine, Editor, 2045 Oriole St., San Diego, CA 92114.

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## Chairperson's Report

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- The Indianapolis Symphony saw a 19% surge in ticket sales with an increase of 30% in subscription sales.
- The Cleveland Orchestra announced a balanced budget, growing audiences, increased endowment, and a record number of student attendees.
- The Houston Grand Opera received a \$750,000 grant to assist in producing new works, while also achieving record attendance and fundraising.
- The Arizona Opera erased its debt.
- The Lyric Opera of Chicago, which has operated in the black for 26 of the past 27 seasons, saw significant increases in revenue and fundraising, and an increase of 8% in ticket sales.
- New York City increased funding for arts in the public schools by \$23 million and is expected to hire 120 additional arts teachers.
- As Symphoria works heroically to establish a permanent orchestral presence in Syracuse in the wake of the unnecessary Syracuse Symphony bankruptcy, the new orchestra is now receiving grants, including funding for its educational mission.
- The San Antonio Symphony celebrated its 75th anniversary as it prepares to move into its new home, the Tobin Center.
- The Florida Orchestra saw an increase in attendance of 30%.
- The Houston Symphony's gala raised over \$2.5 million in one evening for education programs.
- The New York City Ballet's Spring Gala celebrated 50 years at Lincoln Center and raised \$3.15 million.
- The Milwaukee Symphony reached a goal of \$5 million from new donors.
- The Cincinnati Symphony's endowment has grown by 43%, and the number of gifts has increased by 94%, leading to a double-digit increase in attendance.
- The Grand Rapids Symphony launched a \$40 million endowment drive with a \$20 million gift.
- The Detroit Symphony's holiday concerts set a new box office record.
- The Buffalo Philharmonic saw an increase in concert revenue of 5.5%, an 11.9% surge in contributions, endowment growth of 7.7%, and an increase in ticket sales with records set for subscriptions.

I have been traveling the world over the past decade spreading the message that for every story of failure there are ten stories of success for the arts, all the while hoping that we could sow the seeds of positive advocacy that could lead to a new era of artistic relevance

for the modern world. I was recently inspired by a quote from Gustav Mahler, who said, "I am hitting my head against the walls, but the walls are giving way."

Yes, there were some bad stories this year, too, and there will be others. That's how life is. There is good and there is bad. It is true for orchestras just as it is true for every other type of business. It has been reported that 90% of restaurants in America fail in their first year of business, yet no one would argue that Americans no longer like to eat.

Results aren't always a fluke. Sometimes success is the result of hard work, cooperative and visionary thinking, mutual respect, and positive expectations. I do not doubt, even for one second, the importance of our orchestras or our ability to succeed as we continue on as a beacon for a world that longs for light and inspiration. There is nothing negative about what we do. We teach the next generation. We serve our communities. We constantly aspire for something greater than ourselves.

We play music.

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## Using Our Owned Media

by George Brown, Utah Symphony Orchestra

It has been reported that roughly 75% of traditional print and broadcast media journalists check people's and groups' websites or blogs before deciding whether to do a story on them. That point was driven home to me the other day when I received a text from fellow percussionist Eric Hopkins that read, "Just got a call from NPR in D.C. about doing an interview tomorrow as a follow up to my triangle article."

Eric is not only a wonderful musician; he's also a very fine writer who contributes regularly to our musicians' website and our quarterly E-newsletter. In May he approached me with the idea of a blog article with the intriguingly compelling title, "How to Become a Professional Triangle Player." He'd recalled being quite annoyed by the following quote from the 2013 San Francisco Symphony strike: "If the Symphony needs a scab player for the triangle or tambourine to help break the strike, then I volunteer to perform for free. I've had no musical education at all but those instruments don't look that difficult."

Eric felt this uninformed remark simply *screamed* for an intelligent response, which had never been delivered. I agreed and loved his idea

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## Orchestra Newslets

As of late, ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge has been on the road quite a bit representing ICSOM and visiting numerous ICSOM orchestras. Of course, that's not unusual for Ridge. When one realizes that his own orchestra, the **North Carolina Symphony**, has one of the busiest travel schedules in the country, one further appreciates the (literal) distance he goes for ICSOM. Just some of his travel during the last year on ICSOM's behalf includes a trip to Buffalo to visit with musicians of the **Buffalo Philharmonic**, attending the FIM International Orchestra Conference in Oslo, Norway, an ICSOM Governing Board meeting in Chicago, a trip to Miami to meet with the New World Symphony, going to Tampa Bay to visit with musicians of the **The Florida Orchestra**, meetings with the ICSOM Media Committee, going to Reno, Nevada to meet with the AFM International Executive Board (IEB) at the AFM Players' Conferences Council (PCC), a trip to Minneapolis to visit with the **Minnesota Orchestra**, a visit with musicians from the **Virginia Symphony**, an excursion to see musicians of the **Philadelphia Orchestra**, as well as recent trips to Pasadena, California, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Fort Worth, Texas for the conferences of the Regional Orchestra Players Association (ROPA), the Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians (OCSM/OMOSC), and the Theatre Musicians Association (TMA), respectively.



ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge visits with musicians of the Virginia Symphony backstage at the Sandler Center in Virginia Beach on April 7. Ridge returned in May to meet with the full orchestra in Norfolk.



During an April trip to Philadelphia, ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge (*right*) meets with Philadelphia Orchestra musicians backstage at Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Also pictured are (*left to right*): ICSOM delegate John Koen, musicians' chair Gloria dePasquale, and Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Ridge also met with Local 77 President Joe Parente and members of the orchestra's management.



ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge (*left*) and Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä. In June, Ridge travelled to Minneapolis where he also met with the full Minnesota Orchestra, Local 30-73 President Brad Eggen, the new Minnesota Orchestra board chair, and many supporters within the community.



The **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** announced that it had received two of the largest donations in its history: a \$17 million gift to endow the Music Director position, and a \$15 million gift to create and sustain connections to music for individuals and communities. Both gifts were acknowledged publicly on the same day and included funds for both the CSO's endowment and its general operations. The \$17 million donation is a gift of the Zell Family Foundation, funded by CSO Trustee Helen Zell and her husband, Sam. The \$15 million donation is from the Chicago-based Negaunee Foundation. To honor the Negaunee Foundation's support for the CSO's Institute for Learning, Access and Training, it will be renamed as the Negaunee Music Institute at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. These two major gifts cap President Deborah Rutter's tenure with the CSO. In September she will move on to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as its president.



The Chicago Symphony Orchestra will also see the departure of its vice president for artistic planning and audience development, Martha Gilmer. Gilmer will head to the **San Diego Symphony** on September 24 to start a three-year appointment as its new CEO, succeeding Edward "Ward" Gill.

The **Lyric Opera of Chicago** recently announced encouraging news about the state of opera in Chicago. Ticket sales for 2013–2014 increased 8%, pushing the Lyric Opera into the black for the 26th time in the past 27 seasons. Ticket revenues soared to \$28.8 million from the 284,440 tickets that were sold. Perhaps even more impressive, though, is that nearly one-fourth of those tickets were purchased by first-time Lyric Opera buyers. Equally impressive was the turnout for the Lyric Opera’s production of *The Sound of Music*, which made it the top-selling production in Lyric history. That production alone was responsible for about two-thirds of the season’s first-time attendees and 25% of the season’s tickets. During its more traditional offerings consisting of 67 performances of eight operas, the Lyric Opera drew audiences at an impressive 85% of capacity. According to General Director Anthony Freud, another strong point of the season was creative consultant Renée Fleming’s taking on an expanded role as advisor for the Ryan Opera Center. Fleming will also spearhead Lyric’s collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools to restore the arts as part of the core curriculum (in collaboration with Yo-Yo Ma and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra).



Jane Chu is the new head of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA chairmanship had been vacant since Rocco Landesman left in December 2012. At the 2013 ICSOM Conference, delegates passed a resolution urging President Obama to appoint a new NEA chair immediately. Chu was nominated in February, confirmed by the Senate on June 12, and assumed her duties on June 30. Before moving to the NEA, Chu was president and CEO of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, home to the **Kansas City Symphony**.



Photo by Paul Austin

ICSOM President Brian Rood (right) poses with Grand Rapids Symphony violinist Sunny Girlin following a rehearsal on July 30 at Cannonsburg, Michigan, the summer home of the Grand Rapids Symphony.

## Owned Media

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to compose one for our website. The end result was a wonderful article, which can be found on our site, [musiciansutahsymphony.com](http://musiciansutahsymphony.com), at [musiciansutahsymphony.com/blog](http://musiciansutahsymphony.com/blog). (For purposes of shameless self-promotion, one can also subscribe to the musicians’ free e-newsletter on the same page.)

About a month after Eric’s blog post appeared on the site, I received an e-mail from our PR counterparts from the MET Orchestra musicians, who were so impressed with Eric’s article that they wished to include it as a guest post in the “Features” section of their own website ([www.metorchestramusicians.org](http://www.metorchestramusicians.org)). I thought that was a splendid idea and implored them to go for it!

That’s where things started getting really interesting! It seems that a rising young journalist from NPR named Tamara Keith had recently been perusing the MET Orchestra musicians’ website looking for ideas for a story when she stumbled upon Eric’s article. Having been a high school percussionist herself, Tamara was immediately drawn to the article and set about finding Eric. The end result was a delightful July 4 interview on NPR’s *Weekend Edition*. Our website page with Eric’s article includes a link to the *Weekend Edition* interview as well as a short written article by Ms. Keith. (By the way, the reader responses at the bottom of that article are a hoot!)

So, as ICSOM orchestra members, what are some useful takeaways from all this?

The Internet, with its websites, e-newsletters and social media platforms—including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube—together represent some of the most important, evolutionary changes to our industry in our lifetimes. And the opportunities they create for orchestra musicians to get our messages far beyond our own little echo chambers and out to the public, at minimal expense, are absolutely mind blowing! Those Internet channels that we control (which are called “owned media” whether or not we actually own them) allow us to create and distribute our own content—telling *our* stories the way *we* want them told—reaching fans, donors, board members, politicians, the media, other union locals, and simply the man or woman in the street. When we use owned media effectively, our reach expands, and we continue to build support over time—locally, regionally, nationally, and even internationally.

Finally, it is no longer sufficient to create our owned media only when our musicians are already staring down the barrel of a possible labor dispute. To be truly effective, we need to begin our community outreach efforts and committees, online and otherwise, much sooner—whether it’s three months, or even three years before the start of our contract negotiations. Just as importantly, all these efforts must be ongoing—continually building upon our fan and support base as long as our orchestras exist.

It never ends.

## Parting Thoughts

*(continued from page 1)*

all over the world. Could the same have been achieved without job security or full-time employment? No. But can the same be said for a lockout designed to slash salaries and benefits and to gut long-established workplace practices?

Sometimes, even today, there is no alternative to a labor dispute; but are musicians now less willing to go to that extreme? Why does a strike seem less desirable and less effective in today's world? One source of influence reliably available to musicians has been public opinion; have some gone too far in wanting to keep a dispute out of public view?

Certainly, the methods of resolving disputes, whether labor disputes, armed struggles, or simple disagreements, haven't changed for eons. People continue to fight with whatever energy they muster until the power relationships change and one or both parties considers compromise preferable. But it does seem that something has changed and that there is less appetite for strikes by labor and more desire for lockouts by management.

So what is it that has changed, and how should we handle that change? The public seems to understand and thus support unions less than in the past. Hard-won benefits of union workers, such as healthcare and pensions, are now derided on radio talk shows, even by workers, as excessive and too costly. There seems to be some driving force encouraging the public, rather than striving to make everyone better off, to support reducing the benefits of those who have it better than the norm.

Those benefits were won at great cost when workers, including musicians, grew tired of putting up with unjust conditions and applied concerted, united action. One thing that has long complicated musicians' messaging is that we are a niche field, the norms of which are not readily accessible to the public. For example, in order to support what we do, we must have access to highly specialized medical care when the need arises. In that regard, our performance is closer to that of sports figures than to clerical or executive staff. It is not easy to make even those in management or our boards understand the issues.

In the past, we spoke with one voice to address perceived inequities and to make gains. The past was rife with inequities to be righted, and we have been largely successful. Of course, what is inequitable differs from place to place and from time to time. If an orchestra is struggling despite the heroic efforts of management and board, musicians aren't likely to strike over tour conditions. It's a different matter when an orchestra finds itself on repeated tours where conductors, soloists, and board members are accommodated lavishly on the backs of its musicians. As many of the inequities in our field have been addressed over the years, musicians now have less energy to fight about smaller problems.

It was usually the "Big Five" orchestras that successfully pushed for improvements in such areas as compensation, work relief, benefits, job security, media work, and tour conditions. Those

advances were important for the entire field, though, for once something is attained, it is hard for others to argue its impossibility. Still, it took courageous and visionary musicians who were willing to be leaders, to take a stand, and to demand what was their due. Where would we be today had they not risked their livelihoods for a better future? Further, despite arguments to the contrary, the improvements we attained were never so outrageous as to diminish an orchestra's quality or so unmanageable as to cause the demise of any orchestra.

With today's more hostile environment toward labor, it's no surprise that musicians are also affected. We should keep that in mind whenever we have a message for public consumption. More so than in the past, messages must be well thought out and effectively articulated. We want and need the public on our side. Even with a more hostile environment, we should have an advantage for lining up public support; after all, it is us they come to hear.

Why, then, are some managements and boards opportunistically targeting our employment and our employment contracts? Why do they believe that their message will resonate with the public (sometimes with more success than we would like)?

This isn't a particularly easy topic to analyze or to discuss, in part because situations differ by orchestra and in part because the dynamics are complex. Some orchestras have long histories of financial successes, some of financial struggles, while others may be transitioning. Some board members have grown weary of constant fundraising that never reaches the mark, while others may have more capacity and are successful, being tremendously inspired by their association with great music making. Some boards seem to care more about a business model than about its product, while others delight in their contributions to the product through the community support they bring the organization. Some managers want to limit expenses to be able to reduce fundraising efforts, while others find new ways of motivating donors to support interesting and worthwhile projects. (I'm sure you can add to this list, so I'll stop there.)

Beyond those complexities, it should be no surprise that some of the calls for a "new model" stem from the hostile environment, with some board members wanting to capitalize on the current economy as they have in other sectors. This is not imaginary, as I've heard it expressed by people in management who have tried to move things in a different direction. With such a mentality permeating a boardroom, though, what would have happened had management either not resisted or had stoked the flames (as has obviously happened around the country)?

Even though these attitudes are at play, surely it's not the big picture. Even more important is the degree to which some boards and managements have wanted to run—and judge—our organizations as if they are for-profit corporations. Without understanding all of the intricacies of our business and whether for-profit models are applicable, they have convinced themselves that drastic change is for the good of their organizations, and perhaps even for the good of music.

Board members who truly take their oversight role seriously would spend time and energy learning about and from the many successful organizations that do exist and would work to implement what they learn at the board and management levels. Far too often, though, we hear about the need for a new business model from boards and managements that are not themselves successful by any measure. The changes that are proposed often serve more to lower the bar for board and management rather than to strengthen the core of the organization (which, at heart, is artistic).

I've written before of this issue, which stems in part from the board of a non-profit having a dual role, both in overseeing corporate performance and contributing to it. The board hires and oversees a professional chief executive who is tasked with assuring that all parts of the organization run well. If that person pushes board members too hard, though, the board might opt to seek a less demanding manager.

In some ways, but not all, we and our organizations might fare better if we demanded accountability using measurement tools and management techniques from the for-profit sector. Is our fundraising on par with that of competitors, and how is that being measured on an ongoing basis? Can the marketing department justify how money was spent and quantify the results? Are we connecting enough with our audiences in ways that measure how satisfied they are with our programming and the service of our staffs? How are goals set, and who is accountable if goals are not met? What metrics are in place, and how is management using predictive analytics to advantage?

I'm not trying to make the case that such for-profit practices are always needed or even appropriate (even if sometimes they are). If something can strengthen our organizations, no one would argue that it's a bad thing just because it comes from the for-profit sector. What is frightening is that what is taken instead are extreme anti-labor tactics. They are being used against orchestra musicians to support an ideology that is at odds with great music making, by people with little understanding of what our orchestras are, what they represent, and how fundamentally different they are from for-profit businesses. The tactics themselves underscore this, as it is the talent, commitment, and artistry of the targets of those attacks (i.e., the musicians) upon which the true value of our organizations must be built.

Of course, the call to run things like a business is hardly new to troubled orchestras. What is most alarming is how this mentality has crept into those charged with preserving our most prestigious and cherished orchestras. Clearly we cannot blame ourselves for those attitudes in board and managements. Nonetheless, I fear that our lack of interaction with boards and a reluctance to stand up for what we need as musicians and as employees actually fosters conditions that favor those attitudes. Have we become isolated to a degree that the conversations occurring between management and board members is not influenced by the artistic and human needs of musicians? We all understand that love of music is not the only

reason (or, indeed, the only good reason) that community members join a symphony board. But is the commitment of board members and managers to the intrinsic value of an orchestra being stressed enough when there are difficulties?

In a well-run, successful organization, the board and management would themselves be at the forefront of ensuring this. Their commitment to quality and their ability and willingness to bring it about would be driving forces throughout the organizations. It appears, though, that we can no longer rely on others to start the conversation about board or management commitment and performance, or to ask the difficult questions. It's understandable that musicians would like to limit their attention to performing to the best of their ability. As much as I wish we could afford such complacency, we can't. It will take hard and dedicated work not only to articulate a case, but also to analyze where we might have success in changing attitudes.

It has always been a minority of musicians who take on leadership roles in an orchestra to fight for a better future. But gains have always been made when the vast majority of musicians agree on what a better future looks like and the importance of attaining it. Gains have been made when musicians stand united and speak with a single voice. It is up to us to educate newer members as they join our orchestras. Many musicians have never known the labor battles that brought about the decent jobs they have landed and may be unaware of their orchestra's labor history. They may also not realize the importance of unity, a principle that cannot be emphasized too much or too often.

But times have changed, and our methods must also change. A strike fifty years ago did not have the same potential benefits and risks as a strike today, and those calculations must always be considered. In this information age, the tools at our disposal have increased greatly. That places further burdens on musicians who mount campaigns designed to bring about desired change to their orchestras.

It is easy for musicians to feel overwhelmed at the prospect of doing more than perform as instrumentalists. We take pride in our proven abilities and see our concerts as accomplishments. When we move away from that, we are taking time away from what we care about  
*(continued on page 8—see PARTING THOUGHTS)*

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## Parting Thoughts

*(continued from page 7)*

most. Still, there are musicians who do enjoy other pursuits and who are extremely talented in many different ways, and we must capitalize on those resources.

This is different from managements wanting to supplement their non-artistic staffs with musicians. Our organizations depend on and deserve staff who are in their positions because they are good at what they do and are evaluated on that basis. Management should understand that, as well as how much energy can be sapped from creative employees by forcing them to do what they never signed up for.

The same holds for finding musicians to do the work necessary to negotiate contracts and to interact with our unions, managements, legislators, and the public. It's wrong that only a few individuals do all the work, as they will eventually suffer exhaustion and burnout. We must find musicians within our orchestras who are both good and willing to do specific tasks that combine to support our futures.

I remember one ICSOM Conference where Brad Buckley surprised me during his chair report. Rather than appealing to the delegates that they should do more and be more conscientious in their efforts, his message instead was that it was okay if they didn't have the energy to perform their duties as delegates—they should let someone else do the job and not feel guilty about it. At that time, ICSOM delegates were not necessarily the most influential people in their orchestras. Since then, I think ICSOM has made great strides in connecting with orchestras. There is still a lesson to learn from Brad's approach, though. We need to organize ourselves with the recognition that supporting one another as best we can implies that some people will do more than others, but everyone must consider how they might help—and then pitch in to the best of their abilities.

There was a time when we could afford to have an orchestra committee or negotiating committee that took care of everything, with our ICSOM delegate being a liaison to other orchestras. Those days are over. In the past committees called upon the entire membership of their orchestras to participate mainly in advance of possible labor disputes; now we must do so on an ongoing basis—and there is plenty of work to go around. In order to be prepared for the next problem, whether that is a financial crisis, a need for legislative action, or a labor negotiation, there is a lot to have in place.

More and more, musicians find value in having a website that continually attracts audience members with new content. Beyond that, social media has proved to be an invaluable tool. We must maintain media contacts as well as labor, board, and political ties. We need press releases, website content, and PR pieces. We can also find many good uses for interesting photographs, both of musicians at work and in our communities.

Managements and boards are already set up to capitalize on these types of resources. If we are not, we are disadvantaged. The good

news is that, given enough lead time and effort, we can and will find musicians who are both good at and willing to perform these tasks. Some musicians hate social media sites, others live on them. Some musicians are deeply involved in political causes. Some musicians know how to run websites, while others might be great photographers or proficient writers. The list goes on, but unless there is a commitment by an orchestra to put such an infrastructure in place, it won't happen.

Let me give one example. I have been working with AFM lobbyist Alfonso Pollard and others in our field on efforts to ease or eliminate restrictions on travel with instruments and bows containing ivory. Think of how powerful it would be if we could easily coordinate local and national pressure on all the legislators who represent the musicians in each of our orchestras. If your orchestra received an email tomorrow asking for your immediate assistance on this, could your orchestra respond appropriately? The time has come that orchestras must be able to answer affirmatively.

And there are even bigger questions. There is already much duplication of effort being expended by musicians in different orchestras. If every orchestra follows through on establishing the infrastructure I am suggesting, there will be even more unnecessary duplication that will need to be eliminated. Both ICSOM and the AFM SSD have already taken steps to reduce that, but much more thought and staffing is required to make it happen.

Similarly, how much extra cost and duplication of effort are expended by orchestras in negotiation, in crisis, or simply wanting to penetrate their local media to get positive PR? This is something that should be discussed. Solutions should be found. It's a bigger question than it might seem at first glance, though.

We must not be afraid to ask the big questions, no matter where the answers might lead (and I am not suggesting where that might be). Recently in the Twin Cities, we saw how multiple labor disputes can significantly impact a local's financial health. Should we be considering union structures that are more robust and cost-effective? Would it make more sense to have a fewer number of geographic (regional) orchestra-only locals, or perhaps to assign orchestras to orchestra-only locals according to budget size? What impact would removing orchestras from our current locals have nationally? Would a restructuring with that in mind strengthen or weaken the AFM?

Orchestra musicians pay a lot of dues to both our locals and to the national AFM, and it's not heretical to think that our needs should be met for that. Especially when similar services are needed throughout the country, it's reasonable to think that the national union, or at least something larger than our locals, should handle that need.

Many things come to mind. For instance, what economies of scale could be seen if we had (in sufficient numbers and highly skilled) labor lawyers, public relations experts, negotiators, and webmasters—all on staff or retainer, available to all orchestras and to all locals,

whenever needed? Shouldn't there be paid staff collecting information for the wage chart and other data necessary for negotiations? Who facilitates providing the work product of one orchestra's negotiation to another when appropriate? Who maintains current press lists? If we had a sufficiently large staff of excellent and experienced negotiators, would locals and orchestras need to hire costly counsel to represent them for each contract negotiation? Might we get even better results with a different arrangement? Might the cost and effort of negotiating little used national media agreements someday be better addressed through local negotiations if there were sufficient expert help available from union staff who know and understand the many intricacies and potential pitfalls of media work?

Don't get me wrong. I've seen tremendous improvement in the service both locals and the SSD provide over the years. And the AFM has had to deal with tremendous financial constraints. However, are we getting our needs met in a robust and cost-effective manner, or are there better ways to explore?

This takes us full circle to the question of how to assert the influence we have effectively. Whether it's to develop better union resources or to attain a better contract, we need to be organized and united, and we must speak with one voice. First, though, we need to develop a consensus about where we are headed. The fundamental principles are always the same, even when discussing organizational change that cannot come directly through contract negotiations (such as changes in board attitude or commitment, or changes of music director or CEO). We must organize, analyze, involve as many as possible, make strategic plans, and execute them. Managements and boards seem to be getting better at this, even if for dubious purposes. Are we prepared?

Finally, although I firmly believe that we must have musician leadership that is resolute and adamant in the need to protect musicians and to hold managements and boards accountable for living up to their agreements, when management and board do display a true commitment to our orchestras, it's important that we appreciate that. If possible, we should find ways to support board and management efforts without being unduly compromising or sacrificing our needs. I am not referring only to contract negotiations and waiver requests. Perhaps equally important is the building of human connections that are not based upon work issues, for if trust and understanding are developed among people when times are good, that will help overcome disagreements during stressful times.

To that end, has your orchestra considered sending greeting cards to board members for no reason other than to let them know that their service is appreciated? If musicians interact with board members on subcommittees, is an effort made to get to know them?

This is an area where smart managers would do well to facilitate social interactions. Managers should guard against the instinct to isolate their board from musicians in an attempt to limit their influence. If a manager is up to the task of running an orchestra, that's a very short-sighted viewpoint. Board members who get something

personally out of their association with an organization will be much better ambassadors for and supporters of the organization. Since board members are more willing to go to a social event when asked by a peer, managers should consider facilitating social events that invite both the full orchestra and the full board—without any motive to engage in shoptalk. (Of course, musicians need little encouragement to voice their opinions, so orchestra committees would do well to remind their musicians in advance of the need to speak with a single voice on contract matters and to either avoid such discussions or to refer them to the elected musician representatives.)

This same openness might even go a long way to foster community involvement and support. As you probably know, my orchestra, the San Diego Symphony, had a long history of past financial troubles. In the midst of that, largely at the instigation of musicians, the San Diego Symphony opened up our hall for what was known as "Symphony Sunday." It was a free opportunity for the community to visit and tour the hall, to meet musicians, and to interact with the orchestra. The music director played ping pong; a violinist who was a chess master played multiple chess games at once; there were refreshments; and musicians volunteered at various times throughout the day to connect with the public. The event only occurred once a year for a few years, but it was amazing how much positive feedback it continued to generate long afterward. Something as simple as being onstage at a performance facility gave our guests a special feeling they couldn't get anywhere else.

When board members, musicians, and managers really do share a common goal, there is truly no limit to the successes we can still achieve.

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## A World with Fences

by Jory Herman, San Diego Symphony

On Sunday, July 6, 2014, members of the San Diego Symphony performed an unprecedented event at Friendship Park, in the very southwest corner of the United States, when they gave a concert while collaborating across the U.S.-Mexico border with musicians of Orquesta de Baja California (OBC). This location is one of few along the border where individuals can converse with foreign nationals while remaining on their respective sides of the border. The holes in the 20-foot tall metal border fence allowed the split ensemble to communicate during the performance, attended by hundreds of people in both countries. Although half the ensemble was visually obscured, the music remained harmonious and synchronized. San Diego Symphony musicians Igor Pandurski, A.J. Nilles, Marcia Bookstein, and Jory Herman were joined on the U.S. side of the border by the former concertmaster of Orquesta de Baja California, Jorge Soto, with OBC musicians Alejandro Garcia, Apolo Pachinski, Augusto Miron, and Oscar Miramontes Yllan on the Mexico side.

This performance came at a time of much turmoil in the national media about immigration reform. As a result, national news organizations ABC, NBC, and CBS covered the event in addition to our local media. However, the performance was not directed at the political debate. It was in promotion of a San Diego Symphony project called “Your Song, Your Story,” which was presented in a series of July concerts. Those performances, funded by a James Irvine Foundation grant [*as reported in the November 2012 issue of*

*Senza Sordino*], brought together the music of composer Bill Conti, 18 community performing groups, the entire San Diego Symphony, and a dozen user-submitted videos (from over 300 submissions, which can be viewed online at [YourSongYourStory.org](http://YourSongYourStory.org)) throughout the entirety of the 30-minute multimedia work. In total, the concerts reached a diverse audience of 6,100, with 59% of the audience being non-Caucasian, and 33% having never previously attended a San Diego Symphony concert.

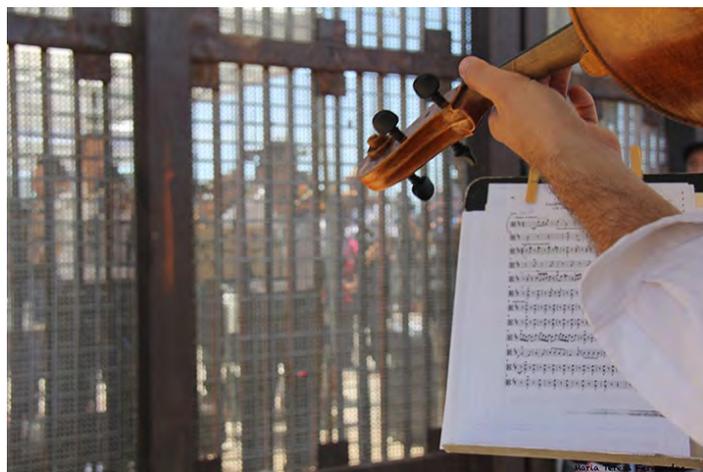


Photo by Maria Teresa Fernandez  
Musicians from the San Diego Symphony and Orquesta de Baja California perform on both sides of the border fence in Friendship Park on July 6.