

Toledo Symphony Orchestra Rejoins ICSOM

By Laura Longman, Toledo Symphony Orchestra Delegate

The musicians of the Toledo Symphony Orchestra (TSO) are thrilled to rejoin ICSOM after over 30 years with the Regional Orchestra Players Association (ROPA). Our return to ICSOM is a milestone in an era of growth for the orchestra.

Led by Music Director Alain Trudel, the TSO presents regular Masterworks (mainstage classical), Pops, Family, and Chamber concert series, as well as various neighborhood and regional concerts around Toledo and throughout Northwest Ohio. The TSO's main performance venue is the Peristyle Theatre at the Toledo Museum of Art, a Grecian-inspired space that opened in 1933.



Robert Cummrow

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1943 as the Friends of Music, comprised of just twenty-two part-time musicians. The Toledo Orchestra Association was incorporated in 1951 to manage the TSO. Over time, the organization expanded to include music education with the Toledo Symphony School of Music and the Toledo Symphony Youth Orchestras. The TSO was a member of ICSOM from 1977 until 1987, when it joined the then-nascent ROPA. During this first period of membership, ICSOM supported the musicians in bargaining higher pay, expanded service guarantees, and protections against musician non-renewal.

Recent artistic endeavors of the TSO include a Carnegie Hall performance in 2011 and a complete cycle of Anton Bruckner's symphonies, completed in 2015. TSO musicians have performed in a series of chamber music marathons, including the complete Shostakovich String Quartets, a Bach Around the Clock 24-hour marathon, and most recently the complete Beethoven String Quartets performed over a single day. In 2024, the TSO celebrated the total solar eclipse that passed over Toledo with The Orchestra's Guide to the Galaxy, which paired Gustav Holst's *The Planets* with a commissioned work from the ADJ•ective Composers' Collective titled *...of the spheres...* This commission was supported by a National Endowment for the Arts grant and the University of Toledo Department of Physics and Astronomy, which consulted with the composers on scientific aspects of the planets to inspire their work.

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra maintains many local and regional community connections, including Young Peo-

ple's programming for the Toledo Public Schools and other local schools. The TSO has featured many Ohio-native artists, including Jan Dan, Girl Named Tom, and Oliver Hazard, and starting in 2012, the TSO has partnered with Bowling Green State University to hold annual readings of student compositions. Orchestral composers are invited to observe the reading and give masterclasses to the students—past guest composers include Chen Yi and Christopher Theofanidis.

In 2019, the TSO's managing organization, the Toledo Orchestra Association, merged with the Toledo Ballet to form a new multi-disciplinary arts organization called the Toledo Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA). TAPA administers the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, Toledo Symphony School of Music, Toledo Symphony Youth Orchestras, Toledo Ballet, and, starting in 2024, the Toledo Jazz Orchestra. This year marks the opening of the Toledo Center for Live Arts, a state-of-the-art building which brings TAPA's administrative and education operations under one roof. Also in 2025, TAPA rebranded with a new name, Live Arts Toledo.

Today, the TSO is an ensemble of 71 professional musicians, represented by the Toledo Federation of Musicians, AFM Local 15-286. Several current and retired musicians of the TSO serve as officers and board members of our Local. Rejoining ICSOM became a shared goal between musicians and management, with eligibility clinched in a historic five-year agreement signed in 2024, with wage increases totaling 40% and expansion of the core complement.

From the Friends of Music to an expansive organization in Live Arts Toledo, the Toledo Symphony Orchestra's story is one of growth, renewal, and transformation. Returning to ICSOM is powerfully symbolic of the TSO musicians' own growth as a body of working professionals. We are very grateful to ICSOM for the warm welcome back, and we know ICSOM will be an invaluable resource as we continue forward.

Special thanks to Third Horn Emeritus Alan Taplin, Principal Second Violin and Artistic Administrator Merwin Siu, and Marketing Manager Emily McCready for their assistance researching this article.

More In This Issue

Chairperson's Column	
<i>Finding Our Place in a Changing World</i>	2
Re: The Library	3
The Art of Organizing	4

Chairperson's Column

Finding Our Place in a Changing World

By Keith Carrick

The world today feels more confusing and chaotic than ever. We worry about the future of our jobs when management talks about changes in philanthropy, shifting ticket-buying habits, and, once again, the need for a “new model.” More broadly, we wonder what place symphony orchestras will occupy in a rapidly changing world.

In a landscape increasingly dominated by digital platforms and AI-driven media, I am, perhaps counterintuitively, optimistic. As more of our lives move online, and as it becomes harder to distinguish what is real from what is artificial, our communities will crave authentic, unplugged spaces, places of genuine human connection and shared experience. If we make some smart decisions now, orchestras can play an ever more relevant role in the new world. This moment offers us an opportunity not only to remain relevant but to strengthen our institutions and protect our jobs in the decades ahead.



Seth Jarvie

One of the most important keys to surviving and thriving in the modern world is clarity about who we are and what we do best. Orchestras serve a specific and essential purpose, and it would be a serious mistake to lose sight of that by trying to compete directly with the for-profit entertainment industry. Taking on excessive financial risk in the media space, or dramatically increasing pops and non-classical programming in an effort to keep up, risks blurring our mission beyond recognition.

At the root of everything we do must be symphonic art. Yes, we must balance budgets and generate revenue, but the foundation of our work is artistic contribution, not entertainment for entertainment's sake. Art and entertainment can and do coexist, and the line between them may blur at times. But our competitive advantage lies in what only we can offer: beautiful, live, symphonic music performed by human beings, in shared physical space. That is the market we are strongest in, and the one in which we are best positioned to compete.

Many of us hear repeatedly from management about the changing philanthropic habits of Millennials and Gen Z. This concern is real and supported by research. Younger donors are generally less inclined to give out of habit or tradition, and more motivated by authenticity, transparency, and visible community impact. They want to know that their support is making a real difference.

Meeting this moment requires more than new messaging; it requires real action. Orchestras that hope to attract and retain younger donors must actually be doing meaningful work in their communities. If our engagement is superficial or performative, it will not succeed. Donors are perceptive, and they can

Finding Our Place continues on page 5



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS

A Player Conference of the
American Federation of Musicians of the
United States and Canada, AFL-CIO

www.icsom.org

Orchestras

Alabama Symphony Orchestra
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
Boston Symphony Orchestra
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
The Cleveland Orchestra
Colorado Symphony Orchestra
Columbus Symphony Orchestra
Dallas Symphony Orchestra
Detroit Symphony Orchestra
The Florida Orchestra
Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra
Grand Rapids Symphony
Grant Park Orchestra
Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra
Houston Symphony
Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra
Jacksonville Symphony
Kansas City Symphony
Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra
Los Angeles Philharmonic
Louisville Orchestra
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra
Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
Minnesota Orchestra
Nashville Symphony
National Symphony Orchestra
New Jersey Symphony
New York City Ballet Orchestra
New York Philharmonic
North Carolina Symphony
Oregon Symphony
Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico
Pacific Symphony
The Philadelphia Orchestra
Phoenix Symphony
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra
St. Louis Symphony
The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra
San Diego Symphony Orchestra
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra
San Francisco Opera Orchestra
San Francisco Symphony
The Syracuse Orchestra
Utah Symphony
Virginia Symphony Orchestra

Governing Board

Keith Carrick, Chairperson
Utah Symphony
1529 E Parkway Avenue
Salt Lake City, UT 84106
301-639-6614
keith.carrick@gmail.com

Nicole Jordan, President
The Philadelphia Orchestra
1401 Spruce Street, Apt. 1711
Philadelphia, PA 19102
470-891-1386
njordanigb@gmail.com

Laura Ross, Secretary
Nashville Symphony
1609 Tammam Drive
Nashville, TN 37206
615-227-2379
lar2vln@comcast.net

Rob Schumitzky, Treasurer
Pacific Symphony
3 Coral Reef
Newport Coast, CA 92657
714-906-4024
rschumitzky@aol.com

Mike Muszynski, Senza Sordino Editor
Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra
450 E Ohio Street, Apt. 114
Indianapolis, IN 46204
224-558-0342
editor@icsom.org

Thomas Burge, Member at Large
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
2433 Kingsbury Drive
Charlotte, NC 28205
704-516-4546
thomasburge2004@gmail.com

Jack Latta, Member at Large
Grand Rapids Symphony
1426 Valley Avenue NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
308-340-5483
jacklattapercussion@gmail.com

Rebecca Matayoshi, Member at Large
Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra
2273 Julian Avenue
San Diego, CA 92113
773-899-3748
rebecca.matayoshi@gmail.com

Sharon Yamada, Member at Large
New York Philharmonic
137 Tappan Road
Norwood, NJ 07648
201-750-1231
yamada@optonline.net

Kevin Case, ICSOM General Counsel
Case Arts Law LLC
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 209
Chicago, IL 60604
312-234-9926 • Fax 312-962-4908
kcase@caseartslaw.com

Subscriptions: \$10 per year, payable to ICSOM Inc.,
c/o Rob Schumitzky, Treasurer, 3 Coral Reef, Newport Coast, CA 92657.

Report delivery-related problems to Mike Muszynski, Editor, 450 E Ohio Street, Apt. 114, Indianapolis, IN 46204.

Senza Sordino, the official publication of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, Inc., is published four to six times a year. Copyright © 2025. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction prohibited.

DMCA and DCA Notices may be found at <http://www.icsom.org/notices.php>

Re: The Library

by Nicole Jordan

When people think about an orchestra, they tend to think in terms of artistry: the musicians onstage, the conductor on the podium, the sound in the hall.

10/10. No notes.

But what's often missed is that artistry doesn't begin at the downbeat. It is shaped by an often overlooked infrastructure long before anyone walks onstage—through preparation, coordination, sourced and shared materials, and thousands of small decisions that determine whether the music-making is coherent or chaotic.

The library of any ensemble lives where those two things meet.

It is both infrastructure and artistry—a system that supports the mechanics of our organizations while directly influencing how music is made. This is not a metaphor. It is a practical, musical reality.

Now—when I say the words “the library,” what do you picture?

Pause.

If my experience is any indication, the answer I usually get goes something like “Oh! I didn't know that was a job. I just thought musicians sat there and played the sheets in the folder.” To which I usually respond (with a wink and a smile) “Who do you think puts the sheets in there?”

Sometimes this is accompanied by a light laugh. Sometimes genuine surprise. Occasionally a look of horror, once the realization lands that yes, this is a real job—and no, putting the sheets in the folder is just one iota of a much larger job (and rarely the part causing the problems).

When I ask my playing colleagues, the answer is usually different. They tend to think I'm doing one or two things:

Bowings (because apparently the question of down versus up is never quite settled. Or maybe it is. Until it isn't...), or beating up a photocopier. Which, I am—because really, why is it taking fifteen minutes to spit out a single page turn fix for someone who asked me for one minute before rehearsal started on Tony “Two Chins” Canoni™, my Audi Q5-sized photocopier?!)

...awkward pause

I don't share this to shame anyone—including anyone who has ever uttered the words “we have some small bowing changes”—or Tony “Two Chins,” who chooses violence at the worst possible times. I share it because it's revealing. Because what the library actually does sits much closer to the music making than most people realize.

This is the part I spend a lot of time communicating to different groups—and once people see it and understand it, it's hard to unsee it or misunderstand it.



Photo Caption

What Librarians Actually Do

Librarians do not simply “hand out music,” a common misconception. In reality, performance librarians, as we are properly titled, manage one of the most complex, high stakes workflows in any performing arts organization.

Across orchestras, opera companies, ballet companies, chamber ensembles, academic institutions, and bands, performance librarians operate at the intersection of artistic planning, labor agreements, licensing, budgets, and time. Performance librarians:

- Secure, prepare, and maintain performance materials that comply with contractual, legal, and artistic requirements;
- Track versions, cuts, edits, errata, and revisions across multiple works;
- Coordinate with conductors, directors, choreographers, soloists, guest artists, publishers, and composers;
- Ensure that all playing musicians are working from identical, accurate materials;
- Protect the organization from penalties, fines, and reputational risk; and
- Do this work under immovable and often compressed deadlines, frequently with incomplete or shifting information all while being short-staffed.

But there is another layer of the work that is often invisible and deeply musical.

Performance librarians must possess enough instrumental and theoretical knowledge to effectively “play” every instrument in the ensemble on paper. Not to perform it, but to understand what is physically, technically, and musically possible (and what is not). This means recognizing range issues, transposition errors, awkward or non-existent page turns, impossible doublings, missing cues, impractical layout, and notation choices that may look fine on a full score but fall apart at the stand. Sometimes it means catching problems early and quietly fixing them. Other times, it means calling a publisher or a composer and asking hard questions. And every so often, it means gently explaining: that an oboe cannot play a low A, and a bass clarinet does not read alto clef.

rubs temples

This work directly affects whether the music onstage is playable and can be rehearsed by the playing musicians performing it. That is not clerical labor. That is musical judgment and expertise—obtained through music degrees (usually performance degrees, as there is no school or program that teaches this specialized work)—exercised in service of the ensemble. I make these decisions every day, with real people waiting on the other side for answers (and their music) and there are real serious consequences if I choose wrong.

In a system where time is money, this matters.

Most professional ensembles rehearse a program on a truncated timeline as a unit. From a symphony orchestra perspective, it's often two to five rehearsals totaling around eight hours. That is not a lot of time to perfect core repertoire or newly commissioned works. Every minute spent correcting wrong notes, missing cues, mismatched parts, or unplayable

The Art of Organizing

by Brian O. Shepherd

Editor's note: Sometime last year my friend Campbell MacDonald and I were discussing our experience serving in our union—what we have learned over the years, what has worked for us (and what hasn't), where we go for inspiration, etc.

Eventually, Campbell pointed me towards an article by Brian O. Shepherd, originally [published on Substack in Labor Politics](#) and later [reprinted in Labor Notes](#). Brian was the lead organizer for United Auto Workers in their attempt to secure representation for Mercedes-Benz workers in Vance, Alabama, and in the article he describes some of the techniques for effective organizing that he has learned through his experience.

Brian's article made an impression on me at that moment, and I find myself coming back to it when I feel like I need a pep talk—so much so that I asked the editors at Labor Notes (and Brian) if I could reprint the article in Senza Sordino. Hopefully, the techniques described will resonate with you as they have with me.

The following article was originally published in the Substack Labor Politics and is presented here with permission.

Organizing isn't just a science, it's also an art. Normally the latter is passed on through phone calls, debriefs, meetings, and late-night shit talk. This is an attempt to share with the next generation of union organizers some of those lessons learned along the way, some in victory, some in defeat. None of this is new. None of this is mine.

I certainly don't have the answers, I just know it's something that I've given my life to over the past quarter of a century. The art requires staying close to the ground where people are—and that's messy. It requires us to relate to others, take chances, innovate, all while asking the hard questions of others and ourselves.

All of it is simple. None of it is easy.

—Brian O. Shepherd, *United Auto Workers organizing director and lead organizer supporting Mercedes workers in Vance, Alabama. June 3, 2025.*

The Art of Organizing

1) Be Quiet

After you have asked a question, be quiet and just listen.

2) Stop Being Weird

It's not what you are saying, it's how you are doing it. Stop being weird.

Organizers can easily get lost thinking about what's the right question to ask or what is the right combination of words that will push this worker to make a decision. Not that it doesn't matter, but most of the time it's the non-verbal cues or delivery that people are reacting to more than what you're actually saying.

If you're talking really fast, and trying to bombard people with information, you've already set yourself up for the other person to put up some unnecessary barriers. Slow things down, be confident and speak calmly and you will notice that people will respond differently.

3) Trust Workers

Sounds simple, right? But how often do we go into conversations, meetings or campaigns with a predetermined plan and outcome?

There are three characteristics that organizers need to keep front and center when helping workers build organization:

- Workers have the power to decide WHAT the problem is.
- Workers must have the power to decide HOW to solve those problems.
- Workers have the power to ACT on implementing the solutions to those problems.

There are systemic structures that prevent working people from acting on any of those three things. A large part of our role as organizers is to help people identify and break through the barriers our system has set up. When we get workers to “buy in” to a plan, it sets us up as yet another way to take agency away from people.

4) Workers Want Recognition

Workers need bread, but they need roses too. Labor unions generally focus on negotiating wages, benefits, fair work rules, and safety. That's all very essential. But one thing we often fail to do is acknowledge workers' need for recognition. People have dreams and values, along with a desire to be respected and to connect to others. This is why technical organizing will only get you so far—building something sustainable requires deep relationships.

5) Organizers Are Scouts

In any workplace, there are going to be a small number of people that support the union no matter what. Getting those people on board is not organizing, that's mobilizing.

The fundamental responsibility of an organizer is to identify, recruit, and develop leaders—people who can bring along and persuade others. That's who you need to win hard fights and to sustain shop-floor power.

An organizer does not provide services. Effective organizers wake up each morning and go to sleep each night thinking about finding, engaging, training, supporting, and agitating leaders. All that really means is that you're challenging a person to act on behalf of themselves and their coworkers.

6) Get Over Your Ego

Recognizing the dilemma you are facing is one of the most important mental aspects of improving at union organizing. Most people's egos won't allow them to be humble enough to recognize the problem in front of them. If you think you always have all the answers you tend to stick with formulas that worked before but might not work today.

7) Be Curious and Listen

As organizers we lead with empathy and curiosity to learn as much information as possible about what the other person's experience has been. It sounds really easy to do but is also the place where organizers stumble the most.

If we lead with the solution—that if they organize they will have more power and more rights—we lose people because we are going outside of their experience. Organizers listen, then propose that to fix the raised issues, they have a choice to act or not.

8) Organizing is Relationships

Relationships lead to organizing. Issues alone lead to tasks.

9) Look For Opportunities

Seeing opportunities while most people are simply not paying attention to details, or are just plain unaware, is what separates a good union organizer from everyone else.

10) Fear is the Obstacle

A big part of what organizers do is help teach worker leaders to overcome the fear of standing up to the boss. And even more than that, most fear actually comes from the fear of rejection—doing a leaflet at shift change, talking to a coworker about signing a card, facilitating a meeting of coworkers, etc. So we have to get people more angry than afraid.

11) Don't Talk From a Script

A good organizing conversation isn't you being a little robot reading a script. The following framework, developed from the United Farm Workers, is more helpful:

- A: Anger, turn fear into courage
- H: Hope, turn despair into possibility
- U: Urgency, it's waited long enough
- Y: You, can make a difference

At the same time, organizing conversations are intentional and not just a complaint session or therapy. They have to be about specific goals:

- Identify what issue this person cares about
- Identify if they have leadership potential
- Connect them with a plan of action
- Get them to commit

12) Cards Are Unreliable

Union authorization cards are a very unreliable indicator of where your support is at during an organizing drive. They are one measure of support at a particular moment in time. What matters significantly more is the deep relational organizing that comes through identifying recruiting and training leaders—and then being public about that support in the face of opposition from the employer.

13) Don't Be Afraid to Lose

The labor movement has lost our organizing muscle; failing is a part of the process to get it back. Most unions aren't even trying because they are so afraid of losing.

14) Take A Breath

Organizers tend to run from one task to another. Take a second to stop and take a breath. Make a plan to have a few extra moments to just be. Take that call and do a lap in the parking lot. Look for opportunities to meet with your teammates outside and take in the local scene.

Twenty years ago a veteran organizer told me “if you are constantly working yourself without taking even a moment to reflect and refresh, you aren't able to be truly present in the work.”

It's not a new age or selfish self-care thing. It's about giving yourself a chance to recover so that you can be more present and effective at your work.

15) Learn From the Past

Examine the past and learn from it. “The only right way of learning the science of war is to read and reread the campaigns of the great captains.” — Napoleon

16) Don't Fear Making Mistakes

Organizers often freeze because they are more worried about making a mistake than taking action. Organizers can only be forged through experience on the ground and intense self-reflection. Yes, you will not be good when you start, you will constantly make mistakes. Instead of letting insecurities take over, you learn from doing and reflection.

It's easy to celebrate wins, good organizers never forget their losses. The key is to ask yourself the difficult questions, analyze what went wrong, then start looking for solutions so that you don't find yourself stuck in the same situation the next time. This is true for a single phone call, a meeting with workers or an election campaign overall. It's important to not get stuck in the analysis phase—learn your lesson and move to improved action as quickly as possible.

17) Keep Showing Up

No one ever really masters organizing, but that's not necessary. As an organizer you must constantly be developing your skills, increasing your abilities to be able to face the situation in front of you. It requires that you show up daily.

And there are going to be days (maybe weeks) where you're not going to want to. Show up anyway.

18) Don't Lose Hope

Organizers must recognize that hope can emerge out of difficult situations. Oftentimes it's not even the opposition that gets to us. It's that nagging internal voice where we put pressure on ourselves to do more or feel that we aren't good enough or that we're not making a difference. It can stop an organizer dead in their tracks, because it all seems so overwhelming. No matter what disappointments we might have, we must refuse to lose hope. 

Finding Our Place continued from page 2

tell the difference between genuine commitment and box-checking. Authenticity is not a branding exercise; it has to be earned.

So what does this mean for us as musicians, and for the union? How do we help shape a future that is both artistically meaningful and economically sustainable?

First, it means developing and maintaining open, regular lines of communication with our management and boards. When musicians are completely siloed from strategic discussions, we risk learning about major initiatives only after decisions have already been made. Staying engaged allows us to advocate for a vision of the orchestra that prioritizes community impact and artistic integrity, ensuring that perspective is considered before plans are finalized.

Second, it means being willing to collaborate in specific ways. Musicians can and should be partners in education initiatives, community engagement efforts, and development events. Volunteering time and presence at community or donor events can strengthen relationships and reinforce the

Finding Our Place continues on page 7

The Library continued from page 3

passages is a minute not spent shaping sound, listening across the ensemble, and deepening the interpretation.

This is why materials need to be as close to perfect as possible, week in and week out. When the library's work is done well, playing musicians aren't fixing the music. They're making it instead. Less time spent stopping to correct what's on the stand means more time spent doing what we all came here to do: diving into the art form we love.

None of this is abstract. It is measurable in rehearsal efficiency, ensemble clarity, overtime avoidance, and trust.

The library is not an accessory to the artistic process. It is a load-bearing system within it.

Why “Othering” Librarians Hurts Everyone

In many organizations, librarians are treated as adjacent to (rather than part of) the bargaining unit's core musical operations. This “othering” often shows up subtly, and sometimes not so subtly:

- Referring to the bargaining unit as musicians and librarians, rather than recognizing that librarians are musicians too, performing specialized musical labor in a different form
- Treating the library not as a section within the ensemble (as with percussion or keyboards), but as a separate “unit” expected to operate under different rules, standards, and protections
- Deliberately classifying librarian positions as administrative and keeping them outside the bargaining unit, denying parity in compensation, benefits, protections, and workplace standards despite the musical and contractual nature of the work
- Making decisions without library input, even when those decisions directly affect onstage work
- Receiving late or partial information, compressing timelines and shifting unnecessary risk onto the library and its work flow
- Imposing working conditions that are unreasonable or unsafe in order to favor convenience rather than necessity
- Chronic understaffing, or the use of underpaid and/or non-bargaining-unit labor to perform work equivalent to that of bargaining unit members
- An assumption of no overtime pay, even when workload, deadlines, and last-minute changes make additional hours unavoidable
- Framing library concerns as preferences, rather than as requirements rooted in musical, contractual, and practical reality
- Speaking to librarians about what the library's responsibilities are, rather than engaging the library as musical colleagues with expertise in that work
- Expecting the library to operate as a constant access service: responsive at all hours on all days, regardless of staffing, scope, or sustainability

This framing is severely damaging—not only to librarians, but to the entire bargaining unit.

When Librarians Are Kept Out of the Bargaining Unit

Including librarians in the bargaining unit is not about special treatment. It is about equitable treatment: access to the same

structural protections that define expectations and authority, the same financial parity that reflects the scope and risk of the work, and the same moral support that affirms setting boundaries as professionalism rather than defiance. When librarians receive that support, the entire bargaining unit is stronger. When librarians are excluded from the bargaining unit, they are not simply treated differently—they are structurally disadvantaged. They are asked to shoulder the same musical responsibility, pressure, and risk, without the same protections, parity, or voice.

ICSOM recognized this clearly in conference resolutions in 1997 and 2018 supporting the inclusion of orchestra librarians in the bargaining unit (see [1997 ICSOM Conference Resolutions, Senza Sordino Volume 35, October 1997](#) and [Adopted Resolutions of the 2018 Conference, Senza Sordino Volume 56, Issue 3, October 2018](#), specifically, Librarians in the Bargaining Unit). That resolution was not a symbolic one. It was an acknowledgment that library work is musical labor, and that excluding librarians from collective protections undermines fairness, sustainability, and unit cohesion.

I say this not theoretically, but from experience. I've done this work both inside and outside of a CBA and I can say, without any hesitation, that it is, hands-down, worse to do this work without being part of one. Without a CBA, boundaries blur. Expectations expand. Overtime becomes assumed. Protections become negotiable. A librarian's work becomes at-will (and so does the librarian). The work does not get smaller. Rather, it gets heavier, lonelier, and more precarious. And when you try to stand up for yourself or for your section (particularly if you are the principal librarian) that advocacy is often reframed as a personal flaw that “doesn't reflect the values of the institution.”

You become:

“Difficult.”

“Hard to manage.”

“Not a team player.”

That reputation does not stay contained either. It is often deliberately circulated among multiple stakeholders in the organization—including staff, artistic leadership, the board, and playing musicians—causing reputational harm while quietly undermining credibility and isolating the very people trying to protect and support the work happening onstage.

This isn't by accident. It is a very predictable outcome in a system where authority is unclear, protections are thin, and boundary-setting is treated as disruption rather than professionalism.

Including librarians in the bargaining unit does not eliminate disagreement. What it does is prevent accountability from being mischaracterized as insubordination. And it prevents some of the strongest advocates in the organization from burning out at best, and losing their jobs at worst.

Why This Also Matters for Substitute, Probationary, and Marginalized Musicians

There are broader consequences to this kind of exclusion that extend far beyond the library.

These same carve outs—treating certain workers as exceptions, governed by different rules and expectations, or

protected only by proxy—are what allow substitute musicians, probationary members, and underrepresented or marginalized colleagues to be treated poorly, even though they are nominally covered by the collective bargaining agreement.

Substitute and probationary musicians work under a CBA they did not negotiate, did not vote on, and often have no meaningful voice in shaping. Probationary members, in particular, are members of the bargaining unit while still experiencing reduced security, heightened scrutiny, and pressure to not push back for fear of jeopardizing their tenure chances. For colleagues who are underrepresented or marginalized, these dynamics are often intensified.

The risk of being labeled “difficult,” “ungrateful,” or “not a good fit” carries additional weight when you are already navigating bias, isolation, or heightened visibility. In those early years and in those positions, silence is often celebrated as professionalism by those insulated from risk rather than recognized for what it more accurately is: a response to vulnerability. That dynamic should concern us. I recognize how this risk gets learned because I was one of those people and I’ve watched countless others learn, very quickly, where the risk actually lives.

When sections of the ensemble are normalized as “other” (expected to absorb risk, accept last-minute changes, waive protections, or tolerate unreasonable conditions) that practice does not stay contained to just that section. It becomes precedent. What is first justified as an exception for one section quietly becomes a model for how others can, and should, be handled. Protecting librarians within the bargaining unit is not just about librarians. It is about resisting a framework where exclusion becomes normalized, and where “temporary,” “adjacent,” or “special” roles are treated as expendable.

What becomes normal for one part of the ensemble eventually becomes normalized for the body as a whole.

Infrastructure Requires Authority, Not Just Goodwill

Libraries do not function on vibes. They function on:

- Clear processes
- Early and accurate information
- Enforceable boundaries
- Organizational authority to say “no” when necessary and reasonable

When librarians are asked to operate without that authority, or are undermined when they exercise it, the system degrades. Over time, preventable problems become normalized, and expertise is quietly discounted. This is not a personality issue. It is a governance issue that directly affects music-making.

Why This Matters for ICSOM Advocacy

ICSOM advocacy is, at its core, about protecting musicians’ work, time, and dignity. That mission succeeds best when structural, financial, and moral support exist not only for all members of the bargaining unit but also for those whose roles receive less support under the CBA (such as substitutes and extras), and for those whose work—and working conditions—belong within the bargaining unit but remain excluded or not addressed (i.e., the librarians). This means advocating for systems where librarians are included, informed, and empowered—not treated as a separate unit or an afterthought. It means recognizing that information flow, authority, and early involvement are not privileges, but necessities for the music to function.

Financially, it means defending parity: fair compensation, benefits, and overtime protections that reflect the reality of the work. Advocacy loses credibility when musical labor is celebrated rhetorically but discounted economically.

Morally, it means something just as important: backing each other publicly and privately. It means resisting narratives that frame boundary setting as being “difficult,” or professionalism as a lack of flexibility. It means not insisting that librarians accept less—or accepting mediocre terms on their behalf—to appease those advocating for unfair conditions and practices. It means understanding that when one part of the bargaining unit is isolated or discredited, everyone becomes more vulnerable. When work is invisible, it is also easy to misclassify—and misclassification has consequences for the library and beyond.

Libraries do not exist outside the music. Librarians do not exist outside the unit. Substitutes, probationary members, marginalized colleagues, and playing musicians do not exist outside the consequences.

Infrastructure is not separate from artistry. It is how artistry holds together.

Next in the Series, Article II: “Re: Precedent—When Flexibility Becomes Exposure” 

Finding Our Place continued from page 5

orchestra’s role as a part of the community. None of this is new, and many orchestras already do this work well. But if these efforts have stalled or never fully taken hold in your group, now is the time to recommit. The long-term health of our institutions may depend on it.

Third, musicians and committees should feel empowered to ask thoughtful, strategic questions, especially about projects that require significant investments of time and money. Does the orchestra need another costly recording project? Or would those resources have a greater impact if directed toward a community concert, an education program, or deeper local engagement? For every major initiative, it is reasonable to ask: What is the goal of this project? How does it advance our strategic plan? How does it position the orchestra for future success?

Most organizations already engage in strategic planning. Musicians deserve to understand that plan and to ask how proposed projects fit within it.

Finally, we must be clear about the limits of collaboration. Working together does not mean abandoning accountability. Musicians are not employed to do management’s jobs for them, and the complexity of the modern world is not an excuse for stagnation. We should expect good leadership, sound decision-making, and real progress, and we should not be asked to accept substandard wages, inadequate benefits, or diminished working conditions because “times are hard” or “the market is changing.”

The future of orchestras will not be secured by fear, retreat, or dilution of our mission. It will be secured by clarity of purpose, genuine community engagement, smart strategy, and musicians who are fully engaged in shaping that future. 



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS

Senza Sordino
VOLUME 63 NO. 4

Mike Muszynski, Editor
450 E Ohio Street, Apt 114
Indianapolis, IN 46204

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

MILWAUKEE, WI
PERMIT NO. 4048

Toledo Symphony Orchestra Then and Now



Toledo Symphony Orchestra

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra's sixth Music Director, Yuval Zaliouk, who led the orchestra from 1980 to 1989, conducts the orchestra in this archival photo from the 1985–86 season, during the TSO's previous ICSOM membership.



Robert Cummerow

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra performs under the direction of current Music Director Alain Trudel in the Peristyle Theater during the 2023–2024 season.