

No Cause for Alarm About New Strike Fund Tiers

By Peter de Boor, ICSOM Editor and Treasurer Emeritus

The AFM-Symphony Opera Strike Fund has been in operation for more than 55 years. During the first 30 of those years, the levels of dues and benefits were increased many times, most likely in an acknowledgement that previous benefit levels had become insufficient for the Fund's intended purpose. The last change to those benefit levels was implemented in 1999. At this point, an increase in benefit levels is overdue.

The current system provides four tiers of dues levels that are loosely tied to an orchestra's base weekly scale at the time of joining the Fund. I say "loosely" because an orchestra has the option of participating at a higher level than it would otherwise qualify for. These dues levels range from \$37.50 to \$75 annually, in increments of \$12.50. The benefits that are payable in the event of a strike, a lockout, or (as of 2023) a declaration of force majeure or similar action are based on a simple formula: No payment the first week, then weekly amounts that are double the annual dues for the next three weeks, quadruple the annual dues for the following six weeks, and six times the annual dues for the subsequent six weeks. While there are no provisions that explicitly grant benefits beyond these 15 weeks, the Fund trustees are empowered to extend the benefits, and have done so on several occasions (e.g., for the Minnesota Orchestra in 2012–13 and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 2010–11).

ICSOM's resolution to amend the bylaws proposes creating five additional tiers of dues/benefits, with annual dues levels from \$100 to \$200 in \$25 increments, and with the same benefit structure that currently exists relative to dues. It also proposes removing the already tenuous link between wage scales and dues.

As I have been in discussion about this proposal with various people across the Federation, I have heard only two concerns with it: What about locals that pay these dues on behalf of orchestra members and that may not be able to afford a dues increase? What will this change do to the fiscal stability of the Fund?

To assuage the first concern, the authors of this proposal made sure that the increases are entirely voluntary and must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the orchestra and, crucially, by the local executive board.

Potential Fund Ending Balances in 2026

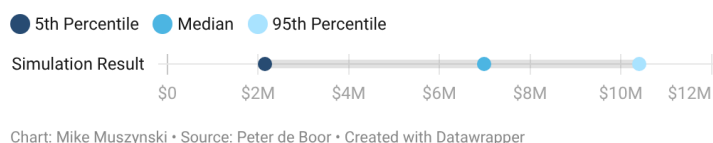


Figure 1

In terms of the fiscal aspect of this change, it is easy to conceive of scenarios that would prove problematic for the Fund (e.g., what if five large orchestras all increase their dues to the highest level, and then all go on strike for 16 weeks?). And while these scenarios are not inconceivable, they are also most unlikely and would be unprecedented.

What is needed is a model that can give us potential outcomes from likely scenarios, and here the technique of Monte Carlo simulations might be helpful. This technique involves assigning probabilities to various inputs, running a simulation in which those inputs are decided by chance (using a random number generator to determine them), recording the outcome, and then repeating a large number of times. The spread of outcomes gives some sense of what is likely to occur.

I created a program to do just that. I assigned each currently participating orchestra an annual strike probability based on its and the Fund's most recent 33-year history (as far back as I could obtain data). I also incorporated some idea of an economic cycle: Certain years would be considered "hot," where strikes were more likely and were likely to last longer; other years would be "calm," where strikes were less likely and tended to be shorter; and other years were "normal," where these probabilities were unaffected (the duration data were also drawn from the past 33 years). Starting with the Fund balance from 3/31/2008 and running this model forward 18 years produced the spread of hypothetical incomes in Figure 1.

The simulation also showed a 4.2% probability of dropping below the \$1M threshold (that would automatically have triggered a 50% dues increase) during the 18-year period. Given the current balance of the Fund (as of 12/31/25), this appears to be a reasonable model for Fund performance.

Running the simulation forward 20 years and starting with the Fund's current balance, I modeled the adoption of higher dues and benefits in four different ways: "Random," in which every orchestra had a 10% chance of opting for a higher tier; "Probabilistic," in which the base probability of opting in was increased in a way that was correlated with the strike probability, so orchestras with a relatively high strike probability

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Chairperson's Column

The Myth of the "New Model"

By Keith Carrick

For as long as most of us have been in this field, we have heard some version of the same complaints from management: classical music is dying, deficits are unsustainable, audiences are disappearing, and the old model no longer works.

While the language has changed, we've been hearing essentially the same argument for over a century that orchestras, as we know them, cannot survive unless musicians accept some fundamental change to the structure of our work.

I do not dismiss the financial pressures facing orchestras. Running an orchestra is difficult. It requires constant work to raise money, sell tickets, maintain a hall, build audiences, and engage the community. None of that is easy, and I have no doubt that many people in management find themselves under enormous pressure. Fundraising and marketing are specialized skills, and orchestras depend on people who are good at both.

But difficulty is not the same thing as catastrophe. And the fact that orchestras require ongoing support is not evidence that the model has failed.

Orchestras have never been simple, self-sustaining, for-profit organizations. They were not built that way, and they have never functioned that way. For centuries, orchestras depended on wealthy patrons, aristocrats, churches, royal courts, and, later, a combination of philanthropy, civic pride, public support, and ticket revenue. The notion that ticket sales alone should sustain a major orchestra is not only unrealistic but is also disconnected from how this art form developed.

This is not a new problem. In 1924, *Time* magazine reported that financial backers of 13 symphony orchestras were gathering to discuss their shared problem of deficits. Even then, in that article, Clarence Mackay (from the board of the New York Philharmonic) observed that "even with a full attendance at every concert," there would still be a deficit.

Forty-five years later, in 1969, *Time* published an article titled "American Orchestras: The Sound of Trouble," warning of "loud, unavoidable, cymbal-crashing financial trouble." The article quoted Manhattan fundraiser Carl Shaver, described as an expert in orchestral finances, predicting that "[b]etween 1971 and 1973...[the United States stands] a very good chance of losing at least one-third, if not half of our major symphony orchestras."

That, of course, did not happen.

It's true that some orchestras have struggled more than others. Orchestras have reorganized, gone bankrupt, reduced seasons, or struggled for years to recover from poor decisions,



Seth Jarvie



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The State of ICSOM

Compiled by Editor Mike Muszynski

Prior to each AFM Convention, the Governing Board asks each delegate of our member orchestras to give a sense of what their orchestras have faced in the last few years as well as the challenges they face going forward. Responses were collected between March and May and represent a snapshot of the conditions in our field during the last three years. Note that charter members of ICSOM are denoted with an asterisk ().*

Alabama Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1997

Joined ICSOM: 1998 (the predecessor Birmingham Symphony was a member of ICSOM 1975–1995)

AFM Local: 256-733

Delegate: Brad Whitfeld

The Alabama Symphony Orchestra continues to present high-level performances, despite the many challenges all of our orchestras face in this tumultuous political landscape. The musicians are in year two of a three-year contract that will need to be re-negotiated beginning in the 2026–27 performance season. The current contract addressed many concerns from the musicians, specifically regaining wages lost after the pandemic. However, given the rising cost of everything, these concerns are omnipresent.

The ASO has continued a successful endowment campaign, which has yielded the highest amount to date of endowment funds, and some recent, unexpected gifts have provided some relative financial stability. It is the hope of the musicians that a turning point is on the horizon for the organization to transform our narrative from continually treading water to sustainable growth.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1945

Joined ICSOM: 1971

AFM Local: 148-462

Delegate: Karl Fenner

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra is finishing its fourth season with Music Director Nathalie Stutzmann, who was recently renewed for three more seasons. Reviews have remained excellent, audiences have continued to average around 90% of capacity, and the orchestra is headed for a twelfth straight year of budget surplus. In the fall of 2025 the musicians began a three-year contract that will bring the base salary to \$115,000 in the third year. There are significant improvements to working conditions, an overhauling of audition and tenure language, and the addition of two string positions to the complement.

*Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1916

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 40-543

Delegate: Lisa Steltenpohl

This past September, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra ratified a progressive three-year agreement with our management and overhauled our audition process. We are currently in the midst of a capital campaign and recently announced a three-year extension for Music Director Jonathon Heyward. Additionally, our audiences have grown, particularly at Strathmore, our second location in North Bethesda, Maryland.

*Boston Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1881

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 9-535

Delegate: Carl Anderson (update by Kathryn Sievers)

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is currently in contract negotiations with management. This is happening amid a backdrop of turmoil since the announcement on March 6 that the Board of Trustees had terminated BSO Music Director Andris Nelsons's "evergreen" contract. Shortly prior to this controversial announcement, three other artistic leadership vacancies arose: vice president of artistic planning, director of artistic planning for the Boston Pops, and conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. The post of principal guest conductor also remains unfilled after many years. Of six artistic leadership positions, only conductor of Pops remains filled. Negotiations center around proposals prioritizing the musicians' stake in artistic decision-making.

*Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Founded: 1934

Joined ICSOM: 1963

AFM Local: 92

Delegate: Jonathan Borden

The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra will be undergoing some changes over the next few years. Executive Director Daniel Hart recently announced his retirement after over 20 years in the job, and the search process will begin shortly for his replacement. Musicians are currently working on ensuring representation in that process. Hart's successor will begin with negotiating a new contract under challenging financial conditions. Revenues have not kept up with expenses in the aftermath of the pandemic. Surpluses from COVID-era government loans have been spent. Subscription revenues are at levels similar to pre-pandemic years, but health insurance premiums have driven significant expense inflation and will surely be a flash point in the upcoming negotiations.

The musicians of the BPO have also undergone some internal organizational updates, including updating the players association bylaws for the first time in nearly 30 years.

Strike Fund continued from page 1

were quite likely to opt in; “Threshold,” in which orchestras whose strike probability met a certain threshold were the ones that opted in; and “All,” which is self-explanatory. Note that the “Probabilistic” and “Threshold” models directly address the potential adverse selection risk possibility that many have perceived with the resolution.

In addition to modeling whether or not orchestras opted for higher dues, I also needed to model the extent to which they would, i.e., what dues tier they would opt for. Here again there were different scenarios: “Nearest,” in which likelihoods were tilted to the lower of the new tiers, “Uniform,” in which all new tiers were equally likely; and “Farthest,” in which the probabilities were tilted to the high end of the new tiers.

There was a further consideration related to the future of the Fund. In 2023, the convention passed a bylaw amendment that permits benefits to be paid “in the event an employer declares force majeure, asserts impossibility of performance, repudiates the local collective bargaining agreement in its entirety, furloughs musicians, or takes similar action that has the effect of depriving the musicians of all wages guaranteed under their local agreement.” This clause has not yet been invoked, and there is obviously no historical data that can be used to infer probabilities. So, I increased all strike probabilities (which should really be called “benefit payout probabilities”) by 15%, which is a completely arbitrary number.

Lastly, the possibility exists that an orchestra choosing to increase its dues tier might, as a direct result of that choice, be more likely to go on strike, or more likely to stay out on strike for longer (because the increased benefit enables them to—the whole purpose of the Fund). In this simulation, I therefore both increased the strike probability and the likelihood of longer strikes for several years. The section “Unlimited Payout” in Figure 2 shows the results of the simulation.

The average numbers (the median is shown, but in each case, the mean is similar) look reasonable, but the lower tails of some are problematic, particularly the ones we are most concerned

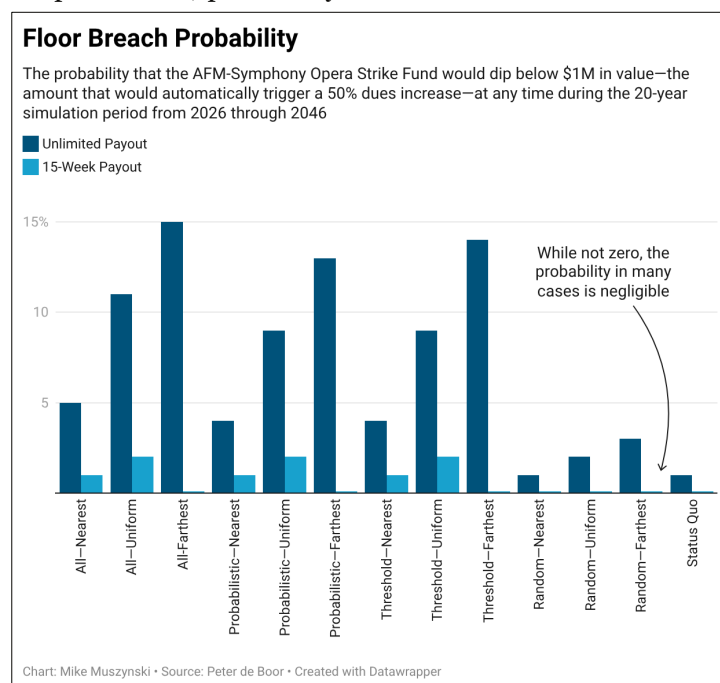


Figure 2

Potential Fund Ending Balances in 2046

Simulated ranges of ending balances in the AFM-Symphony Opera Strike Fund given several hypothetical scenarios for adoption of higher dues tiers starting in 2026 and running through 2046

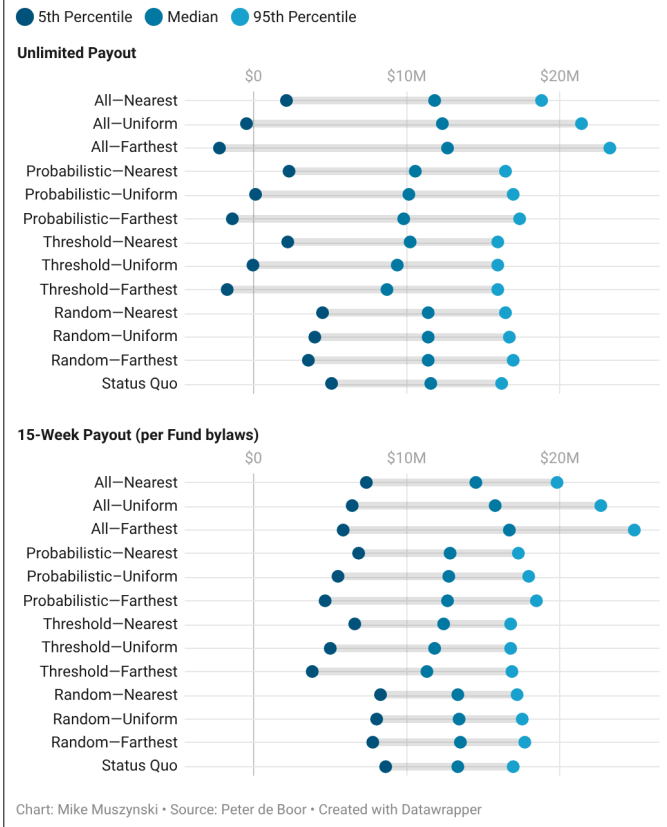


Figure 3

about, “Threshold” and “Probabilistic.” Also of concern, the average probability of breaching the \$1M floor during the 20 years was as high as 15%.

However, it is important to remember that the historical data about payout durations include some remarkably long payouts. I was not a trustee at the time that those extended payouts were approved, but I imagine that there was considerable discussion amongst the trustees about the effects on the Fund’s finances of approving the extensions.

Taking that into account, Figure 3 also shows results if the simulation were to limit the payouts to the 15 weeks outlined in the bylaws, in the section “15-Week Payout.”

These results are far more reassuring, as are the results for the probability of breaching the \$1M floor.

Subsequent to creating this simulation, I polled the ICSOM orchestras about their likely intentions if the resolution were to pass. Based on that admittedly unscientific sample (the 15 ROPA and OCSM orchestras were not surveyed, and only 21 of the 48 participating ICSOM orchestras responded), the “Random—Uniform” seemed to be the most likely scenario, though the probability of opting in seemed closer to 30% than the 10% figure I had used. Running this particular scenario again, with a 28% probability of opting in to higher tiers, produced an outcome closest to “Random—Farthest.”

While it is impossible to predict the future, I think there is little likelihood that passage of the resolution will lead to fiscal instability of the Fund, particularly if there continue to be trustees who carefully weigh the Fund’s fiscal health in their deliberations.

The Myth continued from page 2

weak fundraising, or broader economic forces. We should be honest about that. But the repeated prediction that the entire field is on the brink of collapse has been wrong for more than a century.

The more useful conclusion is not that orchestras are doomed. It is that orchestras are hard to operate, have always been hard to operate, and require constant renewal, discipline, imagination, and investment.

There is often a temptation to compare the American model unfavorably with the European model, where many orchestras receive more direct public subsidy. There is something appealing about that stability, especially when our own institutions seem to constantly see-saw from stable to cash-strapped. But that model came from a very different history. Many European orchestras grew out of court, church, and state traditions in which the arts were supported by ruling powers and later by governments. The public was accustomed to the king funding the arts; when democratic governments replaced monarchies, the expectation of public support often persisted.

The American model developed differently. Wealthy patrons and civic leaders wanted their cities to have the same cultural institutions as those in Europe, but lacked the same public funding structures. So they built and supported orchestras themselves, eventually joined by foundations, corporations, subscribers, individual donors, and some public funding.

Neither model is perfect. Public funding can offer stability, but it can also leave orchestras vulnerable to political shifts, austerity measures, and ideological attacks on the arts. In recent years, major European orchestras have faced serious threats from funding cuts. Imagine if every few years our orchestras had to negotiate the core of their funding directly with elected officials here in the States...yikes.

From that perspective, I am not so quick to trade the American model for another one. Our model has problems, but it also has strengths. It requires orchestras to build relationships with their communities, donors, audiences, and civic leaders. It requires constant advocacy. It requires us to make the case for why we matter. That work can be exhausting, but it is also powerful and lasting if we get it right.

What concerns me is that when some managements talk about a “new model,” they often seem less interested in taking on the real difficulties of running an orchestra than in shifting the pressure away from themselves. Too often, the phrase becomes a way to justify accepting increased workload, reduced compensation, smaller orchestras, weaker benefits, diminished job security, or a diluted artistic mission. That is not a new model; that is just cutting.

A serious new model would begin by asking what orchestras actually need to thrive. It would ask how to deepen community relationships, how to communicate more effectively with younger donors, how to make concerts feel essential, how to strengthen education and civic engagement, how to use media strategically without undermining live performance, and how to preserve the artistic excellence that makes an orchestra worth supporting in the first place.

It would also ask whether our institutions are investing in the right people. If fundraising and marketing are among the most urgent needs facing orchestras, why are so many organizations structured as though the chief executive is the only indispensable member of management? Why are CEOs so often the highest-paid administrators—by far? Why not the Chief Development Officer? Shouldn't we invest more aggressively in the people who actually raise money, sell tickets, build community partnerships, and communicate the value of the institution?

If an orchestra needs more contributed revenue, then it needs to invest in excellent development staff. If it needs broader audiences, then it needs to invest in excellent marketing and community engagement staff. If it needs deeper civic relevance, then it needs to invest in people who know how to build relationships beyond the concert hall. Those roles should be valued, supported, and compensated accordingly.

The recent turmoil at the Boston Symphony Orchestra is a useful example of how vague invocations of “vision” can become a substitute for accountability. The BSO announced that it would not renew Music Director Andris Nelsons's contract because of a lack of alignment over “future vision,” a decision that produced significant backlash from musicians and patrons. The *Boston Globe* editorial board has reported that fundraising has fallen since the announcement and argued that the board's own actions are alienating patrons.

I do not know every internal detail of what happened in Boston, and I do not need to. The larger lesson is clear enough: Blaming the “model,” the music director, the musicians, or the audience does not constitute leadership. If an institution is struggling with fundraising, maintenance, attendance, communication, donor confidence, or strategic direction, those are management and governance problems that require management and governance solutions.

The truth is that orchestras will probably always stand on somewhat unsteady financial ground. That does not mean they are failing. It means they are nonprofit arts institutions doing expensive, labor-intensive, deeply human work in a world that rarely makes such work easy. Unsteady does not mean doomed. A deficit does not mean collapse. A changing audience does not mean irrelevance. And a difficult fundraising environment does not justify panic.

There may indeed be room for new models. But let them be real ones. We should forcefully reject the idea that every challenge facing orchestras can be solved by diminishing the art, shrinking the work, weakening the contract, or asking musicians to absorb the consequences of poor leadership.

The orchestra “crisis” is not new. In many ways, it is the same conversation we have been having for generations. The myth is that the crisis proves the model is broken. The reality is that orchestras have endured because generations of musicians, donors, staff, board members, audiences, and communities have continued to believe they are worth the work, and they still are.



State of ICSOM continued from page 3

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1932

Joined ICSOM: 1999

AFM Local: 342

Delegate: Thomas Burge

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra is currently completing our second season with new Music Director Maestro Kwamé Ryan. The audience and musicians are enjoying the perspective he brings to the podium and the undeniable energy in our performances. News of Ryan's recent Grammy for Best Opera Recording has flooded the press and concert halls and has been warmly received by the public. The artistic trajectory, particularly of our Classical Series, is also moving in a very positive direction.

Under the guidance of CSO President and CEO David Fisk, along with numerous city leaders, we recently completed a three-year Comprehensive Campaign, the largest fundraising event in the orchestra's 93-year history. The campaign surpassed its \$50 million goal and will secure new endowment funds and operating support.

The next two years are crucial, while pledged funds continue to be realised, and will be key to strengthening the future of the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra.

Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra

Founded: 1954

Joined ICSOM: 1969

AFM Local: 10-208

Delegate: Amy Hess

Over the past several years, the Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra has been encouraged by growth in programming coming out of the pandemic. With new General Director John Mangum at the helm, the company has not only increased opera performances but has also branched out more into movies, concerts, and collaborations—including with Chicago's own (and new Lyric board member) Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins. The orchestra still has a ways to go, however, to grow our ranks back to pre-pandemic levels, and will continue to advocate for grand opera's place in Chicago's artistic landscape and beyond.

***Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

Founded: 1891

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 10-208

Delegate: Miles Maner

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is thundering forward with all eyes fixed on the fall of 2027, when Klaus Mäkelä begins his official tenure as music director. As designate, Mäkelä has already steered the orchestra in a fresh direction with eclectic programming, signaled a motivated interest in recording, and led the orchestra on a successful tour of the East Coast this past February. Musicians are generally optimistic about this leadership transition and hope the powerful collaboration between the orchestra and Mäkelä will drive strong attendance in the seasons ahead.

A recent season highlight was the invitation to play Mahler's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies at the Mahler Festival in Amsterdam in the spring of 2025. The CSO Association worked with the Musicians Committee and Jaap van Zweden to build a two-week European tour around the Netherlands concerts.

Financially, the CSO Association recently surpassed its "Sempre Always" fundraising goal originally set in 2018. Aimed at increasing the endowment and reducing the significant debt from the Symphony Center renovation 30 years ago, the original \$175 million goal was exceeded this past December when, with just \$10 million dollars left to raise, Helen Zell of the Zell Family Foundation donated \$50 million.

Looking forward, negotiations will soon be underway as our current contract expires this September. The working relationship between board, management, and the Musicians Committee remains strong. Following mid-season talks that secured a mutual plan to shelve negotiations regarding health care, the committee is cautiously optimistic that this round of bargaining will be relatively smooth. No doubt, end-of-season budget deficits for the past three seasons and a need to address deferred maintenance of Symphony Center will be on management's mind as the musicians push to secure growth in the contract.

***Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra**

Founded: 1895

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 1

Delegate: Dwight Parry

Our orchestra is on an upward trajectory with the hiring of a new music director, the signing of a progressive, five-year contract, and the restoration of our full complement of musicians. We maintain our focus of relevance and community service while expanding our reach through broadcasts, recordings, and a planned tour. That tour will be the first since our canceled European venture in 2020 and marks a commitment to return to regular international touring.

On a personal note, the Cincinnati Symphony is an exceptional place to work. A culture of collaborative excellence combined with key new hires has engendered an environment with the right blend of motivated edge and comfortable security in which one can take risks and pursue artistic heights as a team.

***The Cleveland Orchestra**

Founded: 1918

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 4

Delegate: Yun-Ting Lee

The Cleveland Orchestra has balanced the budget for another year, but our contract is set to expire in fall of 2026, and we expect to start negotiations soon. 2026–27 is also the last year with our music director, Franz Welser-Möst. We will have our last major European tour with him

in October 2026. A music director search is ongoing and we continue to evaluate many candidates.

The Miami Residency is also continuing, with possible expansion and more community engagement in the city, such as working with New World Symphony and Bethune-Cookman University. We have filled some important vacancies since the last update, but we will need to find a music director before hiring more musicians.

Colorado Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1989

Joined ICSOM: 1968 (joined as the Denver Symphony, then re-formed as the CSO after bankruptcy proceedings in 1989)

AFM Local: 20-623

Delegate: Jason Shafer

The Colorado Symphony is grateful to continue to stand on strong financial and artistic footing. Our negotiations have resulted in CBAs with substantial yearly pay raises and have allowed us to retain excellent working conditions. Artistically, we were thrilled to recently go on tour to New York for the first time in 50 years, performing sold-out shows in Carnegie Hall and Radio City Music Hall. We are also glad to have Peter Oundjian officially announced as our Music Director, with his initial contract extended through the 2028–29 season.

Under the guidance of our new CEO (Daniel Wachter), we are planning major renovations to our main performing space, Boettcher Concert Hall. These renovations are badly needed and are expected to occur within five years. The work will address major acoustical and structural concerns and also improve the patron experience in various ways.

The main challenge for us continues to be securing more consistent annual giving and contributions. Our proportion of contributed income vs. ticket sales has always been extremely weighted toward ticket sales.

Columbus Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1951

Joined ICSOM: 1990

AFM Local: 103

Delegate: Betsy Sturdevant

The Columbus Symphony is currently in the process of laying the groundwork for building a new concert hall. Our current hall, the Ohio Theatre, is becoming increasingly unavailable to the orchestra as Broadway shows take precedence. The orchestra has a new CEO and is hiring other top administrative positions. We will celebrate our 75th anniversary in 2026–27 which will include a world premiere by Gregory Spears performed in Carnegie Hall. We are also in the first year of a three-year agreement which adds weeks to the season, increasing from 31 to 33.

Dallas Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1900

Joined ICSOM: 1968

AFM Local: 72-147

Delegate: Matt Good

The musicians of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra ratified a new three-year agreement in early March 2024, with changes in almost purely economic terms and including yearly raises between 4% and 4.5% of base scale.

In May and September through October 2024, the DSO performed a concert version of Wagner's *Ring* with a complete run of the complete cycle in October. These performances were recorded and will be available on a physical and digital release on May 22, 2026.

The DSO had a successful two-week European tour in June 2024 despite many confirmed cases of COVID during the tour. Despite the absences, all the concerts went on as planned. Many of our colleagues heroically stepped up and covered parts for those who had fallen ill on little notice.

During the past two seasons, the Dallas Symphony Association has been making progress on deficit reduction as well as securing a \$25M matching gift for a recent endowment campaign from the O'Donnell Foundation.

***Detroit Symphony Orchestra**

Founded: 1887

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 5

Delegate: Scott Strong

The past few years have been very eventful for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. There have been several recording projects, including Wynton Marsalis's *Blues Symphony* and Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. We completed a tour of Florida in spring of 2024, the first with Music Director Jader Bignamini, and we have had 17 new musicians hired since 2022. Audience numbers have grown steadily, but are still under what could be expected. We expect to start negotiating a new contract in the fall of 2026, as our current contract expires at the end of the 2026–27 season.

The Florida Orchestra

Founded: 1968

Joined ICSOM: 1987

AFM Local: 427-721

Delegate: Warren Powell

In spring 2025, The Florida Orchestra musicians ratified their second consecutive progressive CBA, five months before the predecessor contract expired. The agreement provides for 23% increases over four years. This was the result of an excellent atmosphere of cooperation and desire on the part of the musicians, board, and management to forge positive growth for the future.

TFO continues to have serious challenges regarding our main venues for rehearsals and performances. There



does seem to be renewed effort from the board and management to resolve the problem of a permanent home for the orchestra.

Recent successes included two sold-out concerts with Cynthia Erivo and a successful gala performance with Audra McDonald.

Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1957

Joined ICSOM: 2001

AFM Local: 72-147

Delegate: Debbie Brooks

The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra continues its momentum under Music Director Robert Spano, who remains a driving creative force for the orchestra. This season, we have presented more than 120 performance, education, and outreach concerts, reaching an audience of over 100,000 across Fort Worth, both on the stage of the acoustically superb Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall and out in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Creative partnerships and our trademark “Theatre of a Concert” remain central to who we are. We collaborate with a remarkable network of local arts and cultural institutions, including the Kimbell Art Museum, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, the Sid Richardson Museum, the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Casa Mañana, Bruce Wood Dance, Texas Ballet Theater, Fort Worth Opera, The Cliburn, and PianoTexas. By weaving in multimedia and theatrical elements, we continue to offer audiences multisensory concert experiences that broaden what an orchestral performance can be. Residencies, commissions, and collaborations with living composers round out the season, and our catalog of recordings, including several world-premiere releases, continues to draw international acclaim.

As we look ahead to next season, we are deeply grateful to our management, board, audiences, and community partners for their continued support, and are proud of the role our musicians play in keeping exceptional musical experiences at the heart of Fort Worth.

Grand Rapids Symphony

Founded: 1930

Joined ICSOM: 2013

AFM Local: 56

Delegate: Mark Buchner (update by Jack Latta)

A new 12,000-plus seat amphitheater has opened in downtown Grand Rapids, and the Grand Rapids Symphony will play our first Independence Day concert in many years there this summer. We will play one other concert there this summer and look forward to nurturing our relationship with the venue into the future.

As the GRS prepares for its 100th anniversary in 2029-2030, we are nearing the end of a search for a new president/CEO. The 2025–26 season started with some surprise financial struggles and the departure of both the president/CEO and the general manager. CEO Mary Tuuk Kuras, who retired at the end of 2022, returned on an interim basis in order to help stabilize

the organization’s finances with cooperation from management, board, foundation, and donors. At the same time we are preparing for negotiations in the coming season and hope to continue our trend of securing salaried contracts for our remaining 25 per-service musicians.

Grant Park Orchestra

Founded: 1944

Joined ICSOM: 1977

AFM Local: 10-208

Delegate: Amy Hess

The Grant Park Orchestra is entering its second season with Artistic Director Giancarlo Guerrero. Highlights of recent seasons have included participation in the 20th anniversary celebration concert for the orchestra’s home, Millennium Park, involving appearances by Chicago natives Common and Jennifer Hudson.

The orchestra looks forward to continuing to provide free outdoor concerts with an impressive lineup of international soloists to hundreds of thousands of audience members every summer in the heart of Chicago in the Frank Gehry–designed Pritzker Pavilion and advocating for classical music amidst the wide variety of summer offerings in the city.

Hawai‘i Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 2011

Joined ICSOM: 1967 (as the Honolulu Symphony)

AFM Local: 677

Delegate: Rebecca Matayoshi

The Hawai‘i Symphony is currently in negotiations, with our current contract expiring on August 31, 2026. On July 1, 2024 the orchestra welcomed new Executive Director and President Amy Iwano, and in November 2025, it was publicly announced that Music Director Dane Lam would be extended through June 2031. We are back in our performance space, the Neal S. Blaisdell Concert Hall, but the City of Honolulu recently announced there would be another round of renovations to begin within the next two years, which will again cause us to lose access to our hall.

With Lam settled in his position, we have finally been able to hold auditions to fill many vacancies we had from before the pandemic. Newly filled positions include Principal Oboe, Associate Principal Oboe, Third Oboe/English Horn, Principal Trumpet, Principal Harp, Principal Bass, Associate Concertmaster, Section Violin, Section Viola, Section Cello, and Section Horn.

Houston Symphony

Founded: 1930

Joined ICSOM: 1965

AFM Local: 65-699

Delegate: Brian Del Signore

The Houston Symphony has completed updates and renovations to its concert hall, Jones Hall. Acoustical

improvements are quite audible with a new shell and proscenium. New locker rooms are also planned.

Music Director Juraj Valcuha has renewed his contract through the 2027–28 season. Livestream broadcasts each Saturday night of our classical and pops series continue to be well received, and we have an excellent crew of audio and video technicians creating a high quality product. I encourage everyone to see what we are doing by checking out a livestream or two. The paywall is \$20 and each concert remains available to view on YouTube for anywhere from one to five days, depending on rights and permissions. Education and community engagement initiatives continue with a Community Embedded Musicians program including teaching residencies at area public schools and fellowships at Rice University and the University of Houston.

No tours have been scheduled since the last European tour of 2018. Since the pandemic, a return to touring has not happened and the current economic and political climate makes our board and management conservative in this outlook. In our case, the music director is also instrumental in making it happen, and Valcuha has not pushed for it.

Other challenges going forward are subscription sales. Single ticket sales are very good, but season ticket subscriptions are not at pre-pandemic levels. The budget remains strong although there was a small deficit this past year. We expect negotiations to start soon, as our CBA is up for renewal at the beginning of October, 2026

***Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra**

Founded: 1930

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 3

Delegate: Melissa Deal

The Indianapolis Symphony has seen some pivotal changes in the past few years. Artistic Advisor Jun Märkl was named Music Director beginning in the 2024–25 season and since becoming Artistic Advisor in 2022 has hired 22 musicians. Management has published a strategic plan ahead of 2030—the orchestra's 100th anniversary—with goals of modernizing facilities, heightening the impact of community engagement, and building our endowment. We have increased our collaboration with local organizations, performing four complete ballets with the Indianapolis Ballet, organizing a free chamber music series at two local universities, and strengthening our presence at Indiana University.

While we have seen our audiences grow in the past few seasons, we have not reached pre-pandemic attendance numbers. Our Pops series specifically is undergoing some changes as we have welcomed Principal Guest Pops Conductor Enrico Lopez-Yañez in the 2024–25 season (Jack Everly remains principal pops conductor) and we are eager to see how Enrico's programming resonates with our audiences. CEO James Johnson will depart in June 2026, with Jonathan Martin stepping in as interim COO during the transition period. We hope to emerge in a stronger position both to provide for the future of the organization and to serve our community.

Jacksonville Symphony

Founded: 1949

Joined ICSOM: 1997

AFM Local: 444

Delegate: Brian Magnus

The Jacksonville Symphony is wrapping up its 76th season and is entering the third year of a four-year contract. Music Director Courtney Lewis, who began his tenure in 2015, has been renewed to 2032. An interesting project is underway for the 2026–27 season: the Jacksonville Symphony has commissioned six leading composers to collaboratively compose a score for the silent film, *The Flying Ace*, which was filmed in Jacksonville in 1926 and features an all-African-American cast. The new score will be premiered by the Jacksonville Symphony with the film in November 2026.

Kansas City Symphony

Founded: 1982

Joined ICSOM: 1998 (the predecessor Kansas City Philharmonic was a member of ICSOM 1966–1983)

AFM Local: 34-627

Delegate: TK DeWitt

Although the Kansas City Symphony has seen a huge amount of growth in the past decade, the orchestra has struggled with deficits since the pandemic. As a way to solve this, the organization has decided to try to emulate the success of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and others who have additional venues beyond their main hall by building a new venue. It will be purpose-built for amplified music, with a much larger capacity than our home in Herzberg Hall (4,600 compared to 1,600). The orchestra will play films with live music as well as some of our larger pops shows, but it will mostly be used to attract touring acts, as there is not a venue of this size in Kansas City.

The initial reception from the community for this plan has been positive, although there has been significant blowback from some of our major donors—especially regarding the poor rollout of the messaging and overall confusion regarding our status at the Kauffman Center. Planning has begun, but it remains to be seen if we can actually have the venue built on budget and on time, and if it will attract the kinds of acts that will generate the revenue we need.

Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra

Founded: 1978

Joined ICSOM: 1978

AFM Local: 161-710

Delegate: Peter de Boor (update by Uri Wassertzug)

These are by far the most unsettling times ever for members of the Kennedy Center Opera House/Washington National Opera Orchestra. As you may know, our orchestra is unique in that it is one orchestra with two



employers: the Washington National Opera, for whom we perform opera; and the Kennedy Center, for whom we perform ballet, musical theater, and other genres. Combined, these two contracts allow us to earn enough to live in an expensive part of the country and attract high-level colleagues to our auditions.

A year ago the Kennedy Center abruptly got new leadership, and under this leadership, there has been a boycott of the Center, both by audience members and by guest artists. This has led to financial issues and a lack of programming. All the while, the Center has been shedding its administrative staff. Our orchestra, which had three full-time managers, now has none. The dance programming department staff has been reduced from three to one. Marketing and fund-raising staff has also been slashed.

In response, the Washington National Opera decided in January to opt for a tenuous future on the road rather than a certain demise at the Kennedy Center. Our next two operas will be performed at Lisner Auditorium (on the campus of George Washington University), and *West Side Story* will take place both at the Lyric Baltimore and (in a semi-staged version) at Strathmore Music Center in Bethesda, MD. Planning is underway for a 2026–27 season at a variety of venues. The Opera has assured us that it will fulfill its union agreements, including our CBA.

However, 40% of our income still comes from our Kennedy Center work. It was announced in February that the Kennedy Center will shut down in early July for a two-year renovation. Since we have no managers, we have not heard this officially from the Center, but if it is true, we hope and expect our CBA to be upheld and that the Kennedy Center will find suitable venues for us to perform, in keeping with the Cultural Center Act that established the Kennedy Center.

We remain vigilant in defending our jobs and standing in solidarity with our colleagues at the National Symphony, who navigate this same uncharted territory.

***Los Angeles Philharmonic**

Founded: 1919

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 47

Delegate: Ted Botsford

The Los Angeles Philharmonic is celebrating Gustavo Dudamel's last season with us and also looking to the future of the organization. Under the leadership of new CEO Kim Noltemy we recently named Esa-Pekka Salonen Creative Director and Anna Handler Conductor-in-Residence while we continue the search for a Music Director. We recently ratified a new contract that takes us through 2029, and are looking forward to the Olympics happening in LA in 2028.

Louisville Orchestra

Founded: 1937

Joined ICSOM: 1980

AFM Local: 11-637

Delegate: Lillian Pettitt

The Louisville Orchestra has had great momentum these last few seasons. We continue to tour throughout the Common-

wealth of Kentucky with generous funding from the state and are now a Grammy-winning orchestra, as in 2024 we won our first Grammy for Best Classical Instrumental Solo for the album *The American Project* conducted and composed by Teddy Abrams with soloist Yuja Wang.

We are currently searching for our next executive director and are hopeful that we will hire someone before the 2026–27 season. Our next negotiation will start at the beginning of 2027 and we are hopeful for another contract that will help propel our orchestra even farther.

***Metropolitan Opera Orchestra**

Founded: 1880

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 802

Delegate: Jeremías Sergiani-Velázquez

At the Met Orchestra, our committee is currently engaged in negotiations with management for our next contract ahead of its expiration at the end of the summer. We are looking forward to touring this summer, with performances in London, Lucerne, and Paris. This season, we were pleased to welcome several new colleagues to the orchestra: bassist Alex Bickard, Principal Oboist Peter Davies, trumpeter Nathan McKinstry, and Principal Tubist Hiroshi Nakachi.

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1959

Joined ICSOM: 1970

AFM Local: 8

Delegate: Robyn Black

Did not respond in time for publication.

***Minnesota Orchestra**

Founded: 1903

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 30-73

Delegate: Michael Sutton

The Minnesota Orchestra has a paid attendance averaging 82%, with record numbers of new subscribers. Also remarkable is that at any given concert, 24% of the audience is at Orchestra Hall for the first time. We also have continued our local public radio Friday night broadcasts reaching 12,000 listeners, as well as four local PBS broadcast concerts per season that average 22,000 views.

With 15,000 YouTube subscribers, 58,000 Instagram followers, and 76,000 Facebook followers, our social media department continues to set the bar.

We recently signed on with Pentatone records, starting with live recordings of Thomas Adè's pieces including the violin concerto with Leila Josefowicz, with more projects to come.

Last month we announced a new partnership with Principal Guest Conductor and soloist Leonidas Kavakos, and our programming continues to be committed to new works and DEI, as well as concerts for Lunar New Year, Juneteenth, and Pride celebrations.

We will be breaking ground this spring on an 8,000-seat outdoor venue, which we co-own with local rock promoter First Avenue. This will bring in a strong revenue stream to help offset recent deficits.

Nashville Symphony

Founded: 1946

Joined ICSOM: 2000 (the orchestra was also an ICSOM member 1975–1977)

AFM Local: 257

Delegate: Evan Bish

The Nashville Symphony has named Leonard Slatkin as music director for the next three seasons while continuing its search for a permanent successor. The orchestra is continuing its efforts to record new works by notable composers. In an exciting new collaboration, the Symphony has worked closely with Dolly Parton to create *Threads: My Songs in Symphony*, a multimedia production featuring her storytelling and music, which will return for an eight-week summer run at Schermerhorn Symphony Center.

***National Symphony Orchestra**

Founded: 1931

Joined ICSOM: 1963

AFM Local: 161-710

Delegate: Alex Jacobsen (update by Jenny Mondie)

The National Symphony Orchestra has been enjoying a period of wonderful artistry under Music Director Gianandrea Noseda. While we had a couple of tours fall apart during the pandemic, we returned to Europe last year, have enjoyed yearly visits to Carnegie Hall, and have a date in the Hollywood Bowl this summer, followed by a domestic tour next year and international tours to follow. We have been recording regularly, including a Beethoven cycle, Copland's *Billy the Kid*, and many other recordings in the last few years.

We are currently bargaining a successor agreement and making plans to be displaced from our home at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall for perhaps the next two years. We expect to have a robust schedule next season despite this challenge, with many unique opportunities for a wide variety of local venues and innovative programming.

New Jersey Symphony

Founded: 1922

Joined ICSOM: 1973

AFM Local: 16-248

Delegate: Martin Andersen

The New Jersey Symphony is searching for a new music director as Xian Zhang's 12-year tenure comes to a close. Also, Joshua Bell has been named the NJS's principal guest conductor. The prospect of moving the Orchestra to a new home base in Jersey City is one step closer to being actualized, following a recent \$29M CAFE grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. NJS musicians have commenced gearing up for next year's contract negotiations, with our five-year CBA expiring in August 2027.

New York City Ballet Orchestra

Founded: 1948

Joined ICSOM: 1968

AFM Local: 802

Delegate: Derek Ratzenboeck

The NYC Ballet Orchestra has welcomed eight new musicians in less than two years. Recently, we also have been working with several young and talented guest conductors as they compete for the role of associate music director under Music Director Andrew Litton.

In the winter season, the company premiered two new ballets: *Le Roi Nu* (The Naked King)—an allegorical tale based on *The Emperor's New Clothes*—with choreography by Artist in Residence Alexei Ratmanský and set to a score by Jean Françaix; and *The Wind-Up* with choreography by Resident Choreographer Justin Peck set to the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. The orchestra's three year contract expires on August 31 of this year. We expect to begin negotiations in spring/summer.

***New York Philharmonic**

Founded: 1842

Joined ICSOM: 1962

AFM Local: 802

Delegate: Alina Kobialka

The New York Philharmonic is entering a transformative new chapter. Our recent contract negotiations secured a base salary increase of over 30%, restoring our compensation to levels comparable to those of peer orchestras.

In the upcoming fall season, Gustavo Dudamel begins as the 27th music director, which will bring a new vigor and excitement to the orchestra's presence both in New York City and beyond. We will kick off his arrival with a two-and-a-half-week European tour, marking our first trip to the continent since 2017.

North Carolina Symphony

Founded: 1932

Joined ICSOM: 1972

AFM Local: 500

Delegate: Kurt Tseng

Things here at North Carolina Symphony have been fairly steady the past few years. Although we have had a wave of recent retirements, we have also managed to hold auditions and welcome many new members to the group, including finishing up our first season with our newly appointed concertmaster, Justin Bruns. We are also very excited that this season (2025–26) we were able to expand the size of our orchestra by adding a section second violin position.



Oregon Symphony**Founded:** 1896**Joined ICSOM:** 1971**AFM Local:** 99**Delegate:** Amanda Grimm

The Oregon Symphony players have recently ratified a new four-year contract, having hired the assistance of Kevin Case; this is the first time we have had a lawyer at the table with us and it has been extraordinarily helpful.

Our administration has gone through major personnel shifts over the last three years. The board appointed Paul Snyder as our new CEO in January (our third CEO in the last four years) and major VP positions are currently open or have been filled with new appointments.

The biggest change the organization has made in the last year is our elimination of Monday night concerts. We've had a dedicated Monday night audience for years but in an attempt to condense ticket sales and have a schedule that aligns more with our fellow orchestras, we are experimenting with Thursday and Friday night concerts in lieu of Monday. We are also giving fewer performances of our classical series in order to allow for the scheduling of more specials and pops concerts.

Our biggest challenge at this point remains our relationship with the hall and the ever-increasing costs associated with our rental of it. Our management is also embarking on a large capital campaign in the hopes of creating more financial security for the future.

Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico**Founded:** 1958**Joined ICSOM:** 2003**AFM Local:** 555**Delegate:** Fermín Segarra

Did not respond in time for publication.

Pacific Symphony**Founded:** 1978**Joined ICSOM:** 2021**AFM Local:** 7**Delegate:** Andrew Chilcote

The fall of 2026 will mark the beginning of Alexander Shelley's tenure as artistic and music director, only the third in our 48-year history. As we approach the orchestra's 50th anniversary, ticket sales remain below 2018–19 levels, though management has launched a new monthly subscription program offering discounted tickets aimed at attracting new audiences.

In 2024 we moved to a new temporary outdoor venue provided by the City of Irvine to host our Summer Series, while details for a permanent city-owned outdoor venue remain in the planning stages. 2026–27 will be the final year of our three-year CBA, and we remain confident a successor agreement will restore wages to pre-inflationary levels and meet the cost of living in Southern California. We expect that health insurance coverage will be a particularly difficult issue as premiums have drastically risen since we switched to a new system this year.

The Philadelphia Orchestra**Founded:** 1900**Joined ICSOM:** 1962**AFM Local:** 77**Delegate:** Nicole Jordan

In the years since our last report, The Philadelphia Orchestra has continued to rebuild and stabilize following the disruptions of the pandemic period. The orchestra has steadily moved closer to full playing complement, with the goal of returning to full complement in the coming years, while maintaining an active performance, touring, and media presence.

Recent successes include two additional Grammy nominations, continued international touring and residencies, and ongoing recording and digital media initiatives. The organization has also undergone a leadership transition, with former Executive Director Ryan Fleur stepping into the role of president and CEO.

We continue to navigate several challenges that reflect broader trends across the field. These include balancing artistic priorities with increasing programming demands, including the continued growth of film and pops programming. There is also a focus on ensuring that the musician voice remains present in decision-making processes, and that collaboration continues to be prioritized as the institution evolves.

The orchestra has made progress in addressing inequities in substitute musician compensation and continues efforts to bring overall compensation into closer alignment with peer organizations. A priority of the membership is to expand protections while fostering an environment that upholds the rights of musicians, alongside a commitment to being responsible stewards of the broader Philadelphia musical ecosystem.

Phoenix Symphony**Founded:** 1947**Joined ICSOM:** 1974**AFM Local:** 586**Delegate:** Bridget Pasker

The Phoenix Symphony is very excited to have announced new Music Director Paolo Bortolameolli in March 2026. We are also pleased to announce Principal Pops Conductor Stuart Chafetz will start in the 2026–27 season.

The organization is currently in the middle of a \$60 million capital campaign, \$40 million of which will be allocated to the endowment. Despite a lot of positive momentum, the organization still experiences significant cash flow issues in daily operation, and has been operating on a series of one-year contracts since 2019. We anticipate these problems will continue in the near future, depending on the success of the campaign.

However, we are still attracting and hiring wonderful new musicians, all of whom are contributing to the culture and artistic quality of the organization as a whole.

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra*Founded:** 1895**Joined ICSOM:** 1962**AFM Local:** 60-471**Delegate:** Douglas Rosenthal

In 2024, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra ratified a three-year successor agreement that included a 12.4% increase in wages over a three-year term. This also achieved substantial improvements to audition and tenure procedures aimed at decreasing unintended bias. These negotiations were seen as a positive first step in resetting previously strained relations and for making up lost ground in wage growth over the past 15 years or so.

Also in 2024, the PSO toured to the major European festivals of Salzburg, Vienna, Hamburg, Cologne, Merano, and others. Preparations for a similar tour this summer are underway.

This past December, the PSO's sold-out performance at Carnegie Hall (New York) was met with critical acclaim, with *New York Times* critic David Allen titling his review, "The Pittsburgh Symphony Plays How an Orchestra Should Sound."

The PSO continues to release new recorded albums every year with Music Director Manfred Honeck, one of which—including Bruckner's Seventh Symphony and Mason Bates's *Resurrexit*—received a Grammy Award in 2025.

On the education front, the PSO's Paul J. Ross Fellowship Program, now in its 18th year, has expanded to provide for four fellows each season.

Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra*Founded:** 1922**Joined ICSOM:** 1962**AFM Local:** 66**Delegate:** Cory Palmer

The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra has continued and expanded its collaborations with local performing arts organizations including Rochester City Ballet, Garth Fagan Dance, Troupe Vertigo, and PUSH Physical Theater.

Voices of Today was launched in the 2024–25 season, a five-season commissioning, recording, and storytelling initiative that will include the release of five full-length albums. The first of these is scheduled to be released in the fall of 2026 and will feature works by Derrick Skye, James Lee III, and Roberto Sierra. The Voices of Today online hub includes podcasts and filmed performances.

The RPO has extended its successful Centennial Capital Campaign and has continued to see significant donor support as we continue to work towards pre-pandemic attendance levels.

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra*Founded:** 1880**Joined ICSOM:** 1962**AFM Local:** 2-197**Delegate:** Henry Skolnik

In May 2023, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra broke ground on a transformative expansion and renovation of its historic home, Powell Hall. Following two seasons of perform-

ing at alternative venues, the SLSO returned to the stage on September 20, 2025, launching its 146th season in the revitalized Jack C. Taylor Music Center.

This monumental project, completed on time and on budget, blends the historic grandeur of the 1925 building with modern innovation (for further detail, see "St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Powell Hall Transforms," *Senza Sordino* Issue 64, Volume 1).

Demonstrating incredible community support, the SLSO exceeded its fundraising target, raising over \$16 million above the original goal. These additional funds were directed to the endowment to ensure long-term care and maintenance of the facility.

Opening weekend performances in September 2025 garnered universally outstanding reviews, highlighting the enhanced sound and new amenities. Ticket sales have increased substantially, and the new center is successfully attracting large, new audiences. With a robust endowment, strong community support, and this renewed world-class home, the SLSO is exceptionally well-positioned for the decades to come.

Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra**Founded:** 1959**Joined ICSOM:** 1984**AFM Local:** 30-73**Delegate:** Alicia McQuerrey

Under the guidance of our new leadership, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra is developing a new strategic framework. We've had the privilege of working with facilitator Jessica Schmidt twice this spring, with a final session scheduled for May to bring our musicians, staff, and board together to prioritize our goals. We have also elected a negotiating committee to prepare for sessions beginning this fall.

While the current financial climate presents a challenge in finding the right balance, the music is fantastic and our halls are full. We remain fully committed to the collaborative effort required to keep the SPCO world-class.

San Diego Symphony Orchestra**Founded:** 1910**Joined ICSOM:** 1974**AFM Local:** 325**Delegate:** Kevin Gobetz

The San Diego Symphony Orchestra recently completed a \$125 million restoration of its 94-year-old hall, with 2025 marking its second full season of operation. This reopening represents the orchestra's second major infrastructure investment, following the completion of the Rady Shell at Jacobs Park in summer 2021, a year-round performance venue on San Diego Bay. Together, these projects have formed the cornerstone of the Symphony's strategic vision over the past decade.

With both venues now fully operational, the organization is focused on expanding its audience and deepening its connection to communities throughout the region.



Under the leadership of Music Director Rafael Payare, the SDSO also plans to release recordings in the coming years, further elevating its national profile. With the current CBA set to expire at the end of the 2027 season, musicians are optimistic and motivated to negotiate a new agreement that reflects the organization's recent achievements and the momentum they have created.

San Francisco Ballet Orchestra

Founded: 1975

Joined ICSOM: 1977

AFM Local: 6

Delegate: Craig Reiss

On May 29, 2025, the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra ratified a new three-year contract with gains in working conditions, cost of living raises, and the addition of a core player in the final year.

This season, members of the SFBO have presented a series of sold-out chamber music performances in the Rodin Gallery at the Legion of Honor Museum in Golden Gate Park as well as a 50th anniversary fundraising dinner followed by a one-night-only, sold-out concert in Herbst Theater (adjacent to the War Memorial Opera House) including *Scheherazade* as well as music from Prokofiev's *Cinderella*, Bernard Hermann, and Bjork!

The San Francisco Ballet Association in partnership with the members of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra has announced a Legacy Orchestra Composition Competition as part of the orchestra's 50th anniversary. As part of our mission to develop new repertoire and support emerging composers, the competition seeks to create a 21st-century musical legacy that both engages and stimulates contemporary audiences and is as beloved and timeless as the music of our most esteemed historical ballet composers. On February 26, 2026, the SF Ballet Orchestra performed the finalist compositions and awarded a \$7,500 prize to Bobby Ge for his violin concerto.

This season marks the third year of the Denis de Coteau Fellowship (named after our long-term music director), a partnership between the Ballet and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music providing funding, instruction, and performance opportunities for two SFCM students.

San Francisco Opera Orchestra

Founded: 1980

Joined ICSOM: 1983

AFM Local: 6

Delegate: Leslie Ludena

The San Francisco Opera Orchestra has seen some progress since the disruption of the COVID pandemic, despite the ongoing challenge of almost yearly contract negotiations.

The company received a \$5-million-dollar-per-year pledge from the CEO of Nvidia, a generous gift for an unspecified number of seasons. In June 2025, the orchestra held the Company's first ever Pride Concert, which was by all accounts a success and will become an annual event going forward. Between this and multiple Beethoven symphony performances, the orches-

tra has enjoyed more visibility, emerging from the pit more regularly than ever.

We have also engaged in community outreach around the Bay Area, including chamber music concerts at retirement homes and in other spaces, and free orchestra performances at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The opera also recently announced three performances of Wagner's complete Ring Cycle to be performed in 2028, marking the first time the work will be conducted there by Music Director Eun Sun Kim.

***San Francisco Symphony**

Founded: 1911

Joined ICSOM: 1963

AFM Local: 6

Delegate: Barbara Bogatin

The San Francisco Symphony was finally able to achieve a new three-year Collective Bargaining Agreement in October 2025 (retroactive to November 2024), which maintained our status among our top-tier peer orchestras in terms of salary, pension, and working conditions. During this period of labor harmony, our contract mandates facilitated meetings with the musicians, administration, and board to encourage greater understanding and discussion of ways to move the organization forward in a positive direction.

Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen departed in June 2024 after only five years, citing a disagreement with the Board of Governors and their artistic direction. In April 2025 we performed an 80th Birthday Celebration Concert with our beloved Music Director Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas, in a heartfelt tribute to his long illustrious career. Exactly one year later on April 23, 2026, he passed away after a long battle with brain cancer, as the city of San Francisco was lit up in blue lights in his honor.

The 2026–27 season will include a roster of 23 guest conductors, a continuation of our innovative multimedia SoundBox series, and a tour to Southern California. We have added language in our new contract that allows the hiring of new musicians without a music director and in the past two years have added 13 new players to our orchestra, as we continue our search for a new music director.

The Syracuse Orchestra

Founded: 2012

Joined ICSOM: 1970 (as the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra)

AFM Local: 78

Delegate: Linda Carmona

The Syracuse Orchestra officially transitioned from the Symphoria name in February 2024, marking an important step in the organization's continued growth and identity within the community. Our current contract expires this year, but included a 3.85% base salary increase.

We have a 35-week season that includes two optional summer weeks.

As part of strengthening the organization's long-term financial position, The Syracuse Orchestra is working to reduce debt while shaping a sustainable 2026–27 season, streamlining from eight Masterworks programs to six and focusing primarily on the core orchestra.

We are hopeful to announce a new music directory in May, which will mark an exciting new chapter for the orchestra. At the same time, the organization has experienced increased stability in both the development and marketing departments this season—an encouraging step toward stronger audience growth and improved financial footing. Additionally, we have had success in recent auditions, which reflects both the continued strength of the ensemble and growing interest from high-quality musicians.

At present, we are in the midst of contract negotiations and remain focused on working collaboratively toward outcomes that support both the musicians and the long-term success of the organization.

Toledo Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1943

Joined ICSOM: 2025 (previous membership 1977–1987)

AFM Local: 15-286

Delegate: Laura Longman

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra celebrated our return to ICSOM at last year's conference. We are currently in the middle of a five-year CBA (signed in 2024), which brought the orchestra back to ICSOM membership eligibility with expansions to the core complement and historic wage increases.

The TSO's managing organization, Live Arts Toledo—recently rebranded from the Toledo Alliance for the Performing Arts—has seen steady growth in fundraising. This includes a major capital campaign centered around the Toledo Center for Live Arts, a former Masonic Temple renovated into a multi-disciplinary hub consolidating Live Arts Toledo's administrative and educational activities, which opened in 2025.

Looking forward, the TSO has embarked on a concertmaster search after the retirement of Kirk Toth, who held the position for 40 years.

Utah Symphony

Founded: 1940

Joined ICSOM: 1979

AFM Local: 104

Delegate: Erin David

In February 2026, the Utah Symphony celebrated the induction of our home, Abravanel Hall, to the National Register of Historic Places. This was, in a sense, the victory party following our campaign in 2024–25 to save the hall from demolition. Musicians Keith Carrick, Karen Wyatt, and Lori Wike were at the forefront of this endeavor.

2024–25 was also the first season for which Markus Poschner served as music director designate. He will begin as music director in 2027. As designate, so far he has hired a new violinist and a principal timpanist, who will start next season. Conversely, conductor David Robertson is finishing up his run as creative partner this season, with recordings of American composer Steve Mackey's guitar and saxophone concerti.

Virginia Symphony Orchestra

Founded: 1920

Joined ICSOM: 2000

AFM Local: 125

Delegate: Margaret Albrecht

Over the past few years, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra has had some successes and setbacks. Musically, the orchestra continues to thrive under the direction of Music Director Eric Jacobsen and Principal Guest Conductor Thomas Wilkins. Recent collaborations include recording projects, world premieres, and collaborations with renowned guest artists and composers such as Yo-Yo Ma, Kayhan Kalhor, Gil and Orli Shaham, Branford Marsalis, Yuja Wang, Curtis Stewart, Bela Fleck, and Laufey, among others.

The VSO has also seen an increase in ticket sales (both single ticket and subscription series), with a 69% increase in new or multi-year lapsed subscribers, all of which trend back toward our pre-pandemic numbers. The appointment of a new vice president of marketing and increased staffing in our Patron Services department are at least partially (if not wholly) responsible for this growth. Next season, one of our main venues in Norfolk will be closed for renovations. As a result, we are looking at more run-out style concerts and are curious to see how this might impact ticket sales/audience growth.

Financially, things have been a bit more tumultuous. We experienced a high turnover rate in our administration, especially our Finance and Orchestra Activities departments. We welcomed a new Board chair, new president/CEO, and have had several finance directors come and go. The VSO had a scare with a late audit in Fiscal Year 23–24 and an extension into our line of credit, but our newly appointed administrative members have worked hard to turn things around.

We have paid down the majority of our credit extension, and have come back with a clean audit for 2023–24 and for this season. Our development team has also been instrumental in securing some of the largest donor gifts in the VSO's history, allowing us to endow our music director position and grow our overall endowment. We are currently in the midst of a capital campaign and hoping for a continued positive outcome.





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