

# Senza Sordino

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## THE BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA A Touch of Class

By FRED ZENONE, *National Symphony Orchestra*

In any discussion of orchestras of the world, the bits and pieces of information we have all heard about the Berlin Philharmonic, come to the surface. Those of us who work in a hall they visit have marveled at the efficiency of their organization; the ever present unending personnel list, and the aligned rows of unblemished trunks that stand as the marching band adjunct to that great orchestra.

In November, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra made a brief tour of Washington, Chicago, and New York. It seemed to be a good time to get the answers to many questions. Does an orchestra with that kind of organization really live in a barrack? Do they have uniform inspection before breakfast every morning? Do they use regulation polish for the tuba?

Hellmut Stern, an assistant concertmaster, whose past orchestra activities are analogous to an American orchestra committee chairman, was most anxious to answer my questions. Mr. Stern is a German citizen who speaks English fluently and who is familiar with American orchestras. He played in the Rochester and St. Louis orchestras while living in this country. The dialogue was easy. He knew what would interest me because he had read all the latest *Senzas*. He spoke with so much fervor about his organizational activities that I asked him if he could identify the time when he became a "revolutionary." "I was born one," he replied.

The view of *revolutionary* as congenital pathology is not new to us in United States orchestras. We usually hear it from the other side of the bargaining table. In view of such candor, I knew it would be a learning day for me. What follows is a summary of much of the information given to me by Mr. Stern.

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra musicians have civil service status. Their basic wage is generally equivalent to a government assistant cabinet minister. That means a basic salary of \$27,600 per year including dependent and housing allowance. All first chair players are 16% above that except the three concertmasters and two first cellists who are 32% above scale. There is no deviation from that schedule. Fringe benefits such as health insurance, sick leave, etc. are by government service standards. There are eight weeks of paid vacation. Full pension at age 65 is 80% of the musician's highest salary.

The number of services each musician performs was discussed at length. Berlin has 125 musicians and an *extensive rotation system*. There is no minimum or maximum number of services required. Each player simply accumulates credits for each service performed and the work is distributed equally. My skepticism must have been obvious immediately. By way of explanation we consulted Mr. Stern's appointment book for two random months in 1976. It showed for each month, 26 services played, eight free days for the whole orchestra, and twelve services off on rotation. My skepticism turned to enthusiasm. At home, the Berlin orchestra plays with a smaller contingent than American orchestras are

used to. That fact, along with 125 permanent members, accounts for a generous rotation system throughout the orchestra. When the orchestra decided to play with a larger than normal group on the American tour, they didn't schedule each player for more services. They hired additional players and brought the whole group on tour.

The rotation system manifests in what seems at first glance to be a curious seating system. There are two rotating first players in each section. In the string section the first stands have permanent seats; in the rest of the orchestra only the first players have permanent seats. All other players throughout the orchestra revolve. Because there are different players for each program, tutti players merely sit where they want for each program. How adult! The winds and brass revolve to cover the remaining parts. *There are no assistants*. If a part is to be doubled, the alternate assists. I asked Mr. Stern about the musical effects of such a system. He was emphatically positive. Further, he pointed out that the tutti seating does not settle into permanent stand partners. "The sociological effects are not to be minimized either," he said. "No empires, no castes, and a good feeling of egalitarianism."

A fringe benefit of no small consequences to many players is a policy whereby all instruments repairs are paid for by the orchestra Association. Additionally, there are interest-free loans available for purchasing instruments.

The Berlin orchestra is essentially a stay at home orchestra. In a year they will tour Germany for about eight days, have about 10 days of random touring, and have a series of mini-festivals in Salzburg totaling approximately three weeks. Their per diem is government controlled and is a rate comparable to an assistant state department director. The hotel is paid for and provides for single rooms at the best hotels. Food allowance varies from \$28 to \$30 per day.

The electronic media arrangements are extensive and well paying. Recording brings an average of \$18,000 a year additional pay to each member of the orchestra. They do no recording for the parent orchestra association. Instead, the members have formed their own association which contracts for recording and pays the players. That association collects and distributes royalties at 2½% per record sold for orchestra repertoire and 1½% for accompaniments. The group has a contract with Deutsche Grammophon to produce at least twenty-two recordings a year. *The members are paid a lower session rate than American orchestras but participate handsomely in the royalty schedule*. Mr. Stern characterizes that arrangement as "risky and involving constant vigilance." They play about twelve sessions a month almost always during the weeks when Karajan is there and when concert rehearsals are at a minimum. They are paid a 4% royalty on television films and they have a guarantee from their parent manage-

ment for \$150 per month for radio broadcasts. Recordings follow the same personnel rotation policies as concerts.

The orchestra is completely autonomous in matter of hiring, tenure, and termination. When an audition is held, an orchestra meeting is called. All members attending are credited with a service played (as for all orchestra meetings.) The instrumental group for whom the audition is held is permitted to make a recommendation to the orchestra. Each member has one vote by secret ballot. If a player is hired there is a one year probation period. Because of the revolving seating process, the new player will sit with each permanent member for a great deal of time through the year. At the end of the probation year another meeting is called (another service!) and the same discussion process is used as for the audition. A player given tenure is subject to possible termination for another four years.

"I have never known that provision to be used," said Mr. Stern. "With everyone spending so much time with a new member we don't make many mistakes." Termination of members of long service is handled entirely within the orchestra by moving players away from exposure or to non-playing positions in the organization. *The conductor has no voice.*

Contract negotiations follow a little different procedure from what we know at home. On one side of the table sits the national union (which represents only orchestra musicians), two representatives from the orchestra, and one representative from the personnel council (representing all people who work in the concert hall; stage managers, etc.). On the other side sits a representative from each of the following governmental agencies: 1) the Senator for culture, 2) the Department of Interior, 3) the Department of Finance. The orchestra manager sits formally as an intermediary between the two sides *but most often finds himself on the side of the orchestra.*

The anxiety for funding the Berlin orchestra's 6 million dollar annual budget is minimized by approximately 4 million dollar annual subsidy by the government. Approximately 50% of the budget is paid to the musicians.

The orchestra's personnel has become quite international in the past few years, a fact that they feel very comfortable about. I noticed, however, that all our discussions used the masculine pronoun and hoped that that was a failing of our language rather than of their personnel practices. Not so: *No women.* At last something an American could seize on. As it turned out, this is a source of great embarrassment for them and Helmut assured me that this policy is soon to change. I felt I could be useful by suggesting that talented women musicians would beat a path to the Berlin Philharmonic door were they given a chance to compete. He questioned my usefulness.

It is important for us in trying to understand the Berlin Philharmonic utopia that we understand something of the sociology of West German labor. As far back as 1952 workers have, in many industries, participated in the executive process. In 1976 the West German legislature passed a law that will make it mandatory for supervisory boards (Board of Trustees) of all enterprises of more than 2000 employes to be composed of one half of labor spokesmen. Obviously that does not prevail for symphony orchestras but it surely makes manifest a cultural bias that recognizes labor as a capital asset and a necessary voice in shaping corporate policy.

The Berlin Philharmonic is a superb orchestra and organization; one whose members have worked hard to obtain the conditions to make it so. It is not alone the availability of six million dollars yearly, but the existence of an esprit de corps and attention to artistic excellence without sacrificing the musician's individual welfare which impresses one. There are lessons to be learned here and for American orchestras, goals for which to strive, despite the basic differences in our organizations. I suggest that we can make use of good ideas from other orchestras and translate them so that they work in our own situations.

## 1976-77 SYMPHONY WAGE CHART

Most orchestras that guarantee income for recordings or other electronic media services, pay such income in weekly increments. To facilitate comparison, the weekly salary in such orchestras are broken down into two figures.

Hopefully, the statistics below will be of some aid pending distribution of the 1976-77 ICOSM-AFM chart which compares symphony wage scales and conditions. Orchestra delegates who have as yet not sent chart information to Ted Dreher are urged to do so *IMMEDIATELY*. Address to AFM Symphony Dep't., 1500 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036.

	Weeks	Weekly Salary & E.M.G.	Annual Guaranteed Salary
ATLANTA	48	\$275.+5.	\$13,440.*
BALTIMORE	45	280.	12,600.
BOSTON	52	400.+20.	21,840.*
BUFFALO	46	305.	14,030.
CHICAGO	52	420.	21,840.
CINCINNATI	52	305.+20.	16,900.*
CLEVELAND	52	350.	18,200.
DALLAS	49	316.50	15,508.*
DENVER	46	300.	13,800.
DETROIT	52	345.	17,940.
FLORIDA	25	200.	5,000.
HONOLULU	33	245.	8,085.
HOUSTON	52	295.} 310.}	15,730.
INDIANAPOLIS	43	300.	12,900.
KANSAS CITY	35	240.	8,400.
LOS ANGELES	52	380.+30.	21,320.*
MILWAUKEE	49	302.50	11,822.
MINNESOTA	50	340.} 350.}	17,250.
NASHVILLE	95 serv.		2,394.
NATIONAL	52	350.	18,200.
NEW HAVEN	70 serv.		2,000. cst.
NEW JERSEY	27	270.	7,290.
NEW ORLEANS	38	309.	11,742.
NEW YORK	52	420.+20.	22,840.*
NO. CAROLINA	40	265.	10,600.
OAKLAND	72 serv.	341. per set	3,061.
OREGON	35	189.35	6,627.
PHILADELPHIA	52	400.+40.	22,880.*
PHOENIX	30	145.	4,350.
PITTSBURGH	52	350.+15.	18,980.*
ROCHESTER	42	310.	13,020.
ST. LOUIS	52	315.+20.	17,420.*
SAN ANTONIO	33	230.	7,590.
SAN DIEGO	150 serv.		5,400.
SAN FRANCISCO	52	375.+10.	20,020.
SEATTLE	40	295.	11,800.
SYRACUSE	37	200.	7,400.
UTAH	42	330. A cont.	13,860.
MET OPERA	44 <sup>1</sup>	428. <sup>2</sup>	18,832. <sup>3</sup>
N.Y.C. OPERA	28 <sup>4</sup>	370. <sup>5</sup>	10,360. <sup>6</sup>
N.Y.C. BALLET	25	360. <sup>7</sup>	9,000. <sup>8</sup>
CHICAGO LYRIC	15	390.	5,850.

\*Annual Guaranteed Salary includes Electronic Media Guarantee or Recording Guarantee.

Utah—42 weeks include 7 weeks for E.M.G., tours.  
B contract, \$30 per service.

Met Opera—<sup>1</sup>) Plus 7 week supplemental unemployment benefit.  
<sup>2</sup>) not including rehearsals. <sup>3</sup>) not including rehearsals.

N.Y.C. Opera—<sup>4</sup>) plus tours. <sup>5</sup>) not including rehearsals. <sup>6</sup>) not including tours or rehearsals.

N.Y.C. Ballet—<sup>7</sup>) not including rehearsals <sup>8</sup>) not including rehearsals

## LILLY ENDOWMENT OFFERS SPECIAL CHALLENGE GRANT TO INDIANAPOLIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

On November 23, 1976 the Indiana State Symphony Society announced a unique challenge grant awarded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., designed to enable the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, with support from the community, to achieve the financial stability necessary for it to continue to thrive as one of the 31 major symphony orchestras in the country.

The grant is designed as follows: For every \$1.00 contributed by the community to the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra's annual Operating Fund Drive, Lilly Endowment, Inc., will match it with \$2.00, not to exceed a maximum gift of \$1,000,000 per year. The grant covers a three year period, with an even stronger challenge to the community in the third and final year. The receipt of the potential \$1,000,000 award in the third year is contingent upon the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra raising a separate \$5,000,000 in community contributions to its Endowment Fund by Dec. 31, 1979.

In addressing himself to the impact of this special grant, William B. Weisell stated, "Speaking for the Board of Directors, the members of the Indiana State Symphony Society, the musicians in our symphony orchestra and the community, I want to express our sincere gratitude to the Lilly Endowment for this generous grant. This is an inspiring and challenging opportunity for the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra to secure a strong economic foundation at a time when all arts organizations are encountering financial difficulties. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra would be facing a significant deficit by the end of the 1978-79 season. It is now possible for the ISO to project the attainment of a balanced budget for the next three years, while, at the same time, building a substantial Endowment Fund."

## NCS ROTATION SYSTEM UNIQUE

The North Carolina Symphony has just this season instituted a system of complete rotation among the string players. The only players who are excepted are the first stands of first violins, second violins, violas, and cellos, and the acting principal bass. The unique feature to this particular system is that there is complete rotation among the violins, *with no distinction between first and second violins*. The personnel manager and the artistic advisory committee have worked together to devise a system which is equitable and which coordinates each change of seating with a change in repertoire.

In a recent survey which was taken among the rotating players, the response was overwhelmingly favorable. Listed as important advantages to this system were; variety of stand partners, improvement in morale and overall sound of the sections, and the opportunity to switch parts on a regular basis. The experience of viewing the conductor from different vantage points, helping solve ego problems, and more universal attentiveness were also mentioned as positive aspects.

On the negative side, there has been some confusion with regard to sharing parts (checking the list to see whom you share which stand with for which pieces).

Any new experiment can expect to be met with some opposition, and inevitably there will be some confusion. With the cooperation of the section players and the personnel manager, and the supportive attitude of the conducting staff and the section leaders, this particular experiment with the North Carolina Symphony seems to be remarkably successful.

Jan Gayer, ICSOM Delegate  
North Carolina Symphony

## HIBERNATION OF AN ORCHESTRA

About a year ago the outgoing chairman of the Orchestra Committee of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra wrote an article entitled *Death of an Orchestra* which was published in *Senza Sordino*. He and a fellow committee member are gone now, victims of a successful management purge. The orchestra is not dead. We go to rehearsals. We play concerts. We even have a new musical director, Max Rudolf, who has replaced Mr. Henry Lewis. However, we are not a healthy organization. After our recent contract negotiation, we feel like the patient who was frozen after death to await the discovery of a cure for his particular disease. Thus, the title of this report should be *The Hibernation of an Orchestra*.

Meaningful negotiations for a new master agreement were to begin February 1, 1976. Management waited until mid August, 1976 to place any economic proposals on the bargaining table. On October 4th, the musicians of the New Jersey Symphony unanimously rejected what was termed by management as "their final offer" for a new master agreement between Local #16 of the American Federation of Musicians and the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Symphony. For the second time in two years, New Jersey's only major symphony orchestra was facing the postponement of its opening concerts!

About a week later, 24 hours before the season's first rehearsal, the orchestra members, by majority vote, rejected the unanimous recommendation of their committee, and accepted management's two year package.

There are many reasons for this radical about face of NJSO members — a) scars of a losing strike one year ago, b) failure of the former committee to enroll the NJSO in the ICSOM strike fund, c) management's threats of an immediate cancelled season, d) a block of musicians so financially strapped, a strike of any length was impossible, e) a large group of rookie players, unaware of the struggles of the past, who were unwilling to begin their careers with a strike, f) members of the orchestra (housewives, teachers, business people, etc.) to who's advantage a strike for \$15.00 or \$20.00 more a week and a longer season, would be negligible at best, g) all of the above!

In 1975-76 the NJSO played a 24 week winter season at \$250 weekly salary (\$6000 yearly). No summer weeks and no paid vacation. Our new contract calls for a 24 week season at \$270 weekly (\$6480 yearly), three optional weeks in the summer and no paid vacation in the 1976-77 season. In the 1977-78 season we are contracted for 25 weeks at \$285 weekly (\$7125 yearly), three weeks optional in the summer and no paid vacation. Summer work is non-mandatory and non-consecutive.

By accepting these meager wage increases (which barely keep pace with the cost of living increases), the NJSO members also lost the opportunity for two more years of improving work conditions and increasing medical, dental and pensions benefits as every major proposal in these areas was turned down by management.

As in all American cultural institutions, the basic problem facing the NJSO is a financial one. But why, financially speaking, should the NJSO, perennially exist in the twilight zone of the American cultural spectrum. An ICSOM comparison study of other American orchestras with budgets similar to the NJSO — New Orleans, North Carolina and Utah — shows that they enjoy much longer seasons and have annual wage guarantees far in excess of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra.

The reasons for the pernicious dilemma of the NJSO are many; general mismanagement of the past and ultra conservative financial administration by companies such as the Prudential Life Insurance Company are but a few. One thing is certain however. Until our Board of Directors embark on a positive, meaningful

program of growth, the people of the New Jersey community will be denied a bigger piece of the cultural rock which they need and deserve, and the NJSO will remain an orchestra in hibernation.

The New Jersey Orchestra Committee,  
William Brown, Chairman.

### FOSTER PARENTS—MINNESOTA STYLE

In 1973 the Minnesota Orchestra began a program of "adopting" a junior or senior high school in the Twin Cities area for a season. This was the idea of Henry Charles Smith, the orchestra's Associate Conductor. He estimates that he spends about 200 hours a year working with this project. At the beginning of the school year the entire student body of the chosen school comes to Orchestra Hall for a special concert. Smith meets with the faculty and they exchange ideas on what might be done throughout the year.

The orchestra's small ensembles have been used in a variety of ways. Some have played for the music students of the school and its satellite elementary and junior highs. The ensembles and individual players have conducted numerous clinics. One group performed for an art class which sketched during the playing . . . another played for a journalism class which wrote reviews . . . Possibilities are limitless.

There have been classroom lectures and demonstrations — *The Math and Physics of Music and Instruments* for math class, *Spanish Music—Its Rhythms and Influence on Composers of Other Countries* to a Spanish class, *The Development of the Symphony* to a German class . . . to name three.

Each year the adopted school's Girls' Chorus sings with the Minnesota Orchestra in its Christmas Nutcracker production. One group of students accompanied the orchestra on a runout. Others have worked with the State Manager in a limited way. The orchestra's librarian knew a good thing when he saw it, and on one occasion put some of his student visitors to work marking bowings! Up to 100 tickets are made available to the school for selected concerts.

Original funding was a Federal grant administered by the Urban Arts Office of the Minneapolis Public Schools. So successfully has the program developed, that additional funding has been obtained from the Scrdna Foundation. This year the Minnesota Orchestra is adopting two schools; one in Minneapolis and the other in St. Paul.

Kirke Walker  
Minnesota Symphony Orchestra

### A FERRY TALE—SEATTLE STYLE

Symphony travel around Puget Sound in Washington State sometimes gets involved. When the Seattle Symphony traveled to Orcas Island for a concert in the spring, the driver of the semi-trailer carrying the property and large instruments drove onto the ferry at Anacortes and found out the hard way that his rig was four inches higher than the upper deck clearance. He had all vehicle wheels on the ferry, but about eight inches of the leading edge of the trailer top was peeled back and that much of the rig was tightly wedged between the car deck and the passenger deck above. On the one hour passage to the island the driver alternately tried reverse gear, cursed, let some air out of the tires, cursed, tried reverse gear, cursed, etc., until finally the trailer sprang free. Now the only problem left was getting the truck off the ferry on arrival.

Vehicles normally drive through the ferry and then unload by driving ahead and off the opposite end at their destination. Obviously the semi couldn't do that. So what happened? The ferry unloaded the passenger cars along with the symphony busses in the normal manner and took on the cars and trucks departing the island. Then the 400 ft. ferry backed away from the slip into mid channel, turned end for end and went back into the slip again. The truck driver gave an exhibition of trick and fancy driving as he backed the trailer off the boat and up the long single-lane loading ramp to the highway. The ferry Captain tooted the whistle, left the slip and the driver tore for the auditorium. That's what it took to start the concert on time.

As a sequel to this, bassist Mori Simon (while still on the ferry) watched the driver pick up a six inch piece of aluminum extrusion which had been knocked off the truck, and throw it disgustedly into a trash can. Mori, retrieving it, surreptitiously gave it to Dave Postetter (also of the bass section) who mounted it on a suitable wooden plaque. The next week the rest of the bass section organized an impromptu presentation. Before the start of the family concert, six bass players encircled the puzzled driver. In stentorian tones the award speech was given, the wrapping of the plaque was torn away and the aluminum extrusion received a new home with Jim Devine our "come-hell-or-high-water" truck driver.

Submitted by  
David Postetter and Davey Griffin  
for the Seattle Symphony Bass Section

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