

Senza Sordino

Official Publication of the International Conference of Symphony & Opera Musicians

VOLUME XXIV, NO. 6

©370

AUGUST, 1986

THE DETROIT SYMPHONY AND LOCAL 5

The following article, adapted from remarks by Detroit Symphony member Doug Cornelsen at the May AFM symposium held in Chicago (reported in the last issue of Senza Sordino), documents the relationship between that ICSOM orchestra and its local union and provides a comparison with earlier reports from Seattle and Minnesota.

Orchestras and their local unions must more fully realize, and work toward, their common economic and political goals. There remains much progress to be made along these lines. In many ways, we in Detroit have a history typical of problematic local-symphony relations in the last two decades. In other ways, we have taken significant steps toward a realistic and healthy relationship.

Detroit's local-symphony history may sound familiar: disputes over money and authority. In the 1960's, the symphony musicians were granted the ability to negotiate and ratify their own contract. In 1969, the symphony musicians attempted to place a cap on the amount of work dues a musician would annually pay to the local, evidence even then of the feeling of economic imbalance in supporting the local between the full-time symphony musicians (a small percentage of the local) and the part-time jobbing musicians (the greatest part of the local's membership). This attempt was unsuccessful, and work dues remained uncapped.

In the 70's, the symphony's wage scale increased substantially, greatly exceeding the wages of most of the other musicians in Local #5. The dawning of the 80's found the 100 musicians of the symphony paying nearly half of the total work dues revenue of the local. On January 1st, 1981, union work dues were increased another one percent, a unilateral decision of the union which left Detroit Symphony musicians with a 4% work dues rate, the highest of any orchestra in the AFM. Concurrent with, and mostly as a result of, this move by the union, the symphony musicians were successful in establishing a new office at the local, the office of Second Vice-President in charge of Symphony Affairs. This officer received a token salary, was listed in the local's by-laws, sat on the executive board of the local, and was required to be an active musician with the Detroit Symphony. The symphony musicians believed that, because they were paying nearly half of the work dues revenue of the local, they were entitled to this permanent representation. However, this position was terminated last year because the national Federation ruled that this position was illegal because candidacy was restricted to a limited group within the local's general membership. (Of course, no symphony musician is restricted from running for any office of the local; however, no Detroit Symphony musician currently holds any elected position of the local.)

The musicians of the Detroit Symphony presently pay the highest work dues rate of major American orchestras, which last year amounted to \$178,000, or 61% of the work dues revenue of Local #5. We have been denied a cap on that amount, and we have been denied a direct representative voice at the local. Where in this situation can be found any good news for symphony musicians?

The good news is this: the Detroit Federation of Musicians is more supportive of its symphony orchestra than any other local we know. Our local is a stalwart ally and fighter for the symphony musicians in any dealings with management. The local pays virtually all the expenses symphony musicians normally incur in furthering their collective interests: attorneys' fees (both local and negotiating counsels), ICSOM dues, strike fund dues, arbitration costs—all items for which some symphony orchestras must still assess themselves. In recent history there have been four arbitrations; the union paid for all four, and we won all of them. All of this funding began in 1981, when the orchestra committee and the negotiating committee convinced the executive board of the local that the local is funding and supporting *its own best interests* when it pays for and supports the union activities of symphony musicians. The quality of the local's commitment to the symphony is demonstrated by the fact that the local has continued and even increased its monetary support of the symphony during years when the local itself was experiencing heavy deficits. The local's support of the symphony has generated a contract which brings over \$170,000 to the local; the local's economic support of the symphony has resulted, very directly, in increased revenue to the local.

More good news from Detroit is the moral and administrative support which the orchestra and the orchestra committee have received from the local. President Carl Austin has taken an inspiring interest in the orchestra committee and our often difficult dealings with management and is always on hand to lend whatever assistance he can, which is often considerable. Fred Netting is a highly competent and dedicated secretary-treasurer whose thoroughness and attention to detail have been much appreciated by our committee.

Although symphony players in Detroit pay the highest percentage of their pay check into work dues of any symphony musicians in this country, this situation is, for the time being, tolerable for us because our local is so clearly supportive of the symphony. Other reasons why the symphony is forbearing towards the local are recognition that the local is experiencing financial problems, knowledge that the local is making valiant and successful efforts to turn their red ink into black, and our trust in the good intentions of the local. When it is on solid economic footing again we believe we can sit down with our local and work out some milder taxation.

We suggest that the situation in Detroit may serve as an example for other orchestras and locals. Certainly all of us have much to lose if we cannot learn to work more closely together and much to gain if we can.

SETTLEMENT SUMMARIES

Settlements are reported in depth in ICSOM bulletins which are sent immediately to member orchestras; summaries of basic and interesting new provisions are noted in Senza Sordino. Orchestras are encouraged to file and consult bulletins for more detailed information.

Musicians of the **Houston Symphony Orchestra** agreed to mid-contract negotiations and voted in May to accept a 15 percent wage reduction effective June 1, a delay of the wage increase scheduled for late June, and a delay of seniority pay increases due June 1. Additionally, four current vacancies will remain unfilled, reducing orchestra size to 93.

These measures were deemed necessary because of economic conditions in Houston and the need to reduce the annual budget from \$9.5 million to \$8.5 million.

In compensation for the wage cut, an orchestra member approved by the musicians will be appointed as a voting member of the executive committee of the symphony board. Staff wages will also be cut 10-15 percent and staff size reduced.

New York City Opera Orchestra musicians ratified a new 3-year agreement June 7, the first time since 1962 a settlement has been achieved without a strike or lockout. Wages (were \$646.25) increase to \$681.79 — \$719.29 — \$755.25 for 5.5 performances per week; rehearsal pay (was \$19.33/hour) increases to \$20.39 — \$21.51 — \$22.59.

Season length remains at 23 weeks of grand opera and 3 weeks of vacation. Additionally, from an individual bank account containing the equivalent of 6 weeks of a musician's salary, management will pay him/her for work outside the grand opera season; 50 percent of any money in account at end of season will be paid to the musician as the supplemental unemployment benefit (SUB).

Seniority pay doubles in the third year to \$2/week per year of service, payable in 5-year increments. Pay for subs becomes closer to that for contracted players. Retirement bonus increases in the second and third years from \$2,500 to \$3,500 and \$5,000.

New provisions: disability plan and \$10,000 life insurance coverage; before-tax money to be set aside from salary to cover expenses for disabled dependents or early child care; shop steward position in contract; orchestra to approve any new personnel manager appointments.

North Carolina Symphony Orchestra musicians ratified a new 3-year contract May 16, months before the expiration of their current agreement. Weekly scale (was \$513) increases to \$538 — \$563 — \$591; principal and assistant principal percentages above scale also increase each year. A new category of seniority pay (\$20/week for those with 16 or more years of service) has been added. Length of season (was 38 weeks) increases to 39 weeks for 1986-87 and to 40 weeks the following years; Additional summer optional season increases to 5 — 6 — 7 weeks. Life insurance increases to \$20,000 — \$25,000 — \$30,000.

Ellen McGlone, ICSOM Member at Large, has left the San Antonio Symphony to join the AFM Symphony Department. There will be an election at the upcoming ICSOM Conference in Atlanta to fill the one year remaining in Ellen's term as Member at Large.

KENNEDY CENTER AND NATIONAL SYMPHONY TO AFFILIATE

On June 20 the National Symphony's board of directors and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts jointly announced that they were signing a letter of intent that the two organizations affiliate. According to NSO executive director Steven Klein, financial and support activities of the orchestra and the national cultural center would be combined, with a merger of staff and elimination of redundant public relations, development, and accounting departments.

The NSO, which has been a rent-paying tenant of the Kennedy Center for the past 15 years, has been told that it will benefit from new recording, national touring, and educational projects under KenCen auspices. The NSO's board of directors will remain intact and will continue to be responsible for raising funds and for hiring music directors and orchestra managers. The NSO's \$15 million endowment and \$4+ million accrued deficit would transfer to the Kennedy Center. No merger of the National Symphony with the Kennedy Center Opera Orchestra is contemplated.

Final details are being formulated by a joint NSO management-KenCen task force. If ratified by the Center's board in August, the affiliation would take place at the beginning of both organizations' fiscal year, October 1.

Larry Bocaner

National Symphony Orchestra ICSOM Delegate

CONDUCTOR EVALUATION FORMS CAN BE USED FOR OPTIONAL QUESTIONS

The current ICSOM conductor evaluation form provides a means for ICSOM orchestras to customize this form to their particular requirements or to survey orchestra membership on up to five questions for computerized tabulation.

Items 4-8, contained in the box at the bottom of the form, provide answer blanks for optional questions. These questions should not be written on the form but should be announced to the orchestra, along with any special instructions for marking answers.

Very few orchestras have taken advantage of this resource for tabulating orchestra opinion on many issues.

ICSOM COMPUTER COMMITTEE PLANS QUESTIONNAIRE

PC or not PC? That is the question to be explored in a forthcoming questionnaire to determine how widely personal computers are being used by orchestra musicians to carry on orchestra business and how much wider that use could be in the future.

Interest in pursuing this question began in the ICSOM President's Council, and a committee was appointed at the 1985 annual conference. Serving with me are Richard Decker (Syracuse Symphony), *Senza Sordino* editor Tom Hall (Chicago Symphony), AFM Symphony Department head Lew Waldeck, and Robert Walp (Houston Symphony).

Personal computers are now widely used by musicians in our member orchestras for writing correspondence, tabulating surveys, printing announcements, keeping records on rotation and revolving seating, and communicating with the new Symphony Department bulletin board (reported in the last issue of *Senza Sordino*.)

The questionnaire will tell us how many of our musicians have computers and how they are using them, especially in helping their orchestras. This information will serve as a basis for recommending how ICSOM can best use computers as a resource.

*Paul Ganson, Detroit Symphony Orchestra
ICSOM Computer Committee Chairman*

CON SORDINO

by Fred Spector

Violinist, Chicago Symphony Orchestra

My fascination with string mutes and their history began fifty-three years ago when my uncle, once a violinist in the czar's imperial orchestra, gave me three beautiful Russian mutes. This gift came after I had graduated to a three-quarter size violin and my neighbors had complained of the increased volume of sound emanating from the apartment.

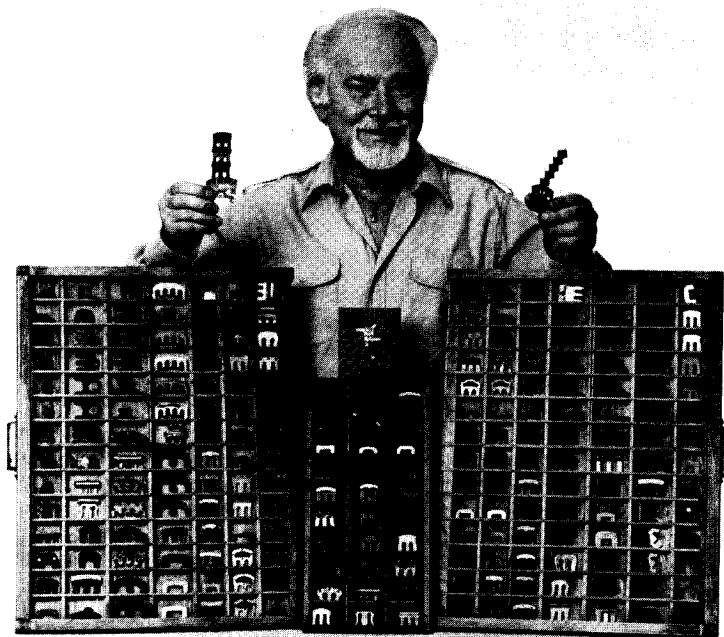
From this practical beginning my collection has grown to a total of five thousand mutes, comprising at least one thousand different styles and variations, not only for the violin but for the entire family of string instruments. To my knowledge this is the largest collection of mutes in the world.

In the search for the perfect mute a variety of materials have been used, including gold, silver, copper, brass, aluminum, lead, steel, bone, ivory, tortoise shell, leather, Bakelite, Lucite, plastic, rubber and gutta-percha. The most commonly used wood is ebony, although creative artisans have employed mahogany, oak, walnut, pine, boxwood, rosewood, ironwood and such diverse materials as rubber bands, ribbons, felt, springs, and magnets.

The oldest mute in my collection dates from the early 1700's and is hand carved from boxwood. It was most likely made about one hundred years after string players began using mutes. Professor Fredrick Niecks stated in the June 1, 1911, edition of the *Monthly Musical Record*, "It is impossible to say when the mute of bow instruments was invented. We shall do well to begin the history of the mute in the second half of the seventeenth century when documents enable us to speak authoritatively, although of course the origin must date back further." Through my own research I have found documents about mutes which date from the first half of the seventeenth century. In 1635 Marin Mersenne in *Harmonie Universelle* wrote comments and descriptions of string mutes; these are the first printed remarks I have been able to find. Mersenne's comments predate any mention of mutes in scores by almost forty-five years.

For centuries, craftsmen and musicians have attempted to create mutes which would produce the sound they desired and which could be conveniently handled. One example is a leather mute with a magnet which sticks to a metal music stand when not in use. The Menuhin mute is attached to the middle strings behind the bridge and flips on and off. The Roth-Sihon mutes which slide quickly and quietly are very practical for today's sound-sensitive recording techniques. I have designed a sliding mute which is used by a number of musicians, including some of my colleagues in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Mutes can be intricate works of craftsmanship and even elaborate and captivating works of art. My collection includes a mute made of ivory in which two carved elephants sit upon the top of the device, a novelty mute made of thin spring steel with a heavy ball on top which vibrates for added musical effect, a brass stacking mute which builds up like a staircase and becomes heavier as more mutes are stacked upon the bridge, and a wooden stacking mute which builds to three inches in height. The most unique mute I own was invented by Hans Muenzer, a professor of music and symphony violinist. Shaped like a human stick figure, the metal mute is about five inches long with two legs which clamp the bridge from the side. It is activated by pressing upon the head of the stick figure. Some of these mutes are less than practical, but they are all sincere attempts to improve on the basic three-hundred-year-old design of a split prong which grips the bridge of the instrument.



Fred Spector displays some of the mutes in his large collection.

RETROSPECTIVE

These last four years as your editor have been a time of increased learning and broadened perspective for me. In my last issue I wish to share with you some observations about the workings of our national organization.

ICSOM has made great strides during these four years. Formal liaison has been established with the major managers, an important result of which was the formulation of a code of ethical audition practices; more benefits should arise from this collaboration. Several early settlements have provided model alternatives to reflex negativism and militance in approaching management-labor problems. Music medicine has developed dramatically, with ICSOM presently undertaking a benchmark medical survey. We are more frequently addressing quality-of-life issues, realizing that the welfare of the orchestral musician is not measured exclusively in dollars-and-cents wages and weeks-and-hours working conditions.

All this justifies our uniting on a national level to achieve through collective action what can't be accomplished individually. However, in order to make collective action work, individual members must be willing to sacrifice complete for partial satisfaction; rarely is what is good for the membership-at-large ideal for any one member. Also, the time and money expended on potentially far-reaching explorations and actions on the national level do not translate quickly into perceptible movement. Furthermore, there will likely be no direct dollar-for-dollar return for one's dues; members must contribute with the faith that work for the general welfare ultimately translates in some fashion into the welfare of the individual.

For any national organization to function effectively it needs the support of its grass-roots constituency. Perhaps ICSOM appears to function very well without much input or help from the membership. After all, four full pages of *Senza Sordino* continue to appear every two months. It's easy to assume that this magical occurrence will always take place, but

(Continued on next Page)

(Continued from Page 3)

many were the times your editor was not so sure that the next issue wouldn't contain some blank pages. Former editor Henry Shaw summed up the problem well:

Senza Sordino functions best when its editor edits, selecting articles and material not only from the musical world around us but primarily from the members of ICSOM. Every *Senza Sordino* editor has pointed to the apparent deficiency in the production of a truly representative newsletter. We need more musician input. Organizational dogma is a poor substitute for grass-root opinion, and paraphrased newspaper articles can't match news from the orchestra itself.

Each year at the ICSOM conference your delegate is reminded to provide material. A full page of suggestions is made available to him. In too many cases that last *adieu* before he leaves the conference is the last contact your editor has with him until the next yearly meeting.

Despite efforts to inform through bulletins, newsletters, and delegate manuals, much of our membership seems unaware of the resources that ICSOM offers or what it is doing to address the problems that face the orchestra musician. Your present leadership has chosen to work quietly but effectively with and within other organizations, avoiding divisive contention when none was necessary. This approach has been successful in accomplishing much. ICSOM is recognized and respected as the collective voice of symphony, opera, and ballet musicians on the national level, a voice listened to by the AFM, the American Symphony Orchestra League, the Major Orchestra Managers Conference, and the national press.

Because ICSOM is not a regulatory agency, it does not interfere in local disputes or tell orchestras what they must do. It advises and informs and provides a forum for exchange and advocacy of ideas. It is a confederation of members who help themselves and each other through national organization. ICSOM is "us," not "them." Apathy and antipathy hurt all of us; concerned involvement benefits all of us.

Thanks to all who contributed and reviewed material for publication, to my fellow officers for their support, and to Bob Kowalski of M. Kallis and Co., printer of Senza Sordino, for his invaluable help in publishing the newsletter.

Tom Hall

INDEX TO VOLUME XXIV

The index below lists articles published in Volume XXIV (1985-1986) of Senza Sordino. In most cases the actual headline is used; where the actual headline is not sufficiently informative a more explanatory heading has been substituted or a bracketed explanation added. Some items of minimal length or import have been omitted. Listings are in order of appearance in the newsletter.

No. 1 (October 1985)

- ICSOM Convenes in San Francisco [Annual Conference Review]
- Minnesota Musicians, Union Agree on Representational Costs
- St. Paul Chamber Orchestra Project Promotes Organization Overview
- Seattle Musicians Achieve Work Dues Reduction, Union Benefits
- Settlement Summaries (Chicago, Oklahoma, Oregon)

No. 2 (December 1985)

- Atlanta Symphony Players Fund Salary Increases
- Music Assistance Fund Update
- New Music Medicine Journal and Clinics
- ICSOM-Major Managers Liaison Committee Meets
- Settlement Summaries (Baltimore, Detroit, Houston, Minnesota, Seattle, St. Louis)
- Milwaukee Symphony Music Medicine Seminars
- Committee Continuity

No. 3 (February 1986)

- Employers May Fail to Remit Deductions from Wages
- Diet and Drugs Implicated in Hearing Loss
- Music Medicine Publications Available to Musicians
- Letter to the Editor: Modern Music and Sound Levels
- 1985-1986 Wage Chart
- Cartoon: The Star
- Settlement Summaries (Milwaukee, Oakland)
- The Performing Arts Labor Relations Amendments

No. 4 (April 1986)

- Medical Survey Becomes a Reality
- North Carolina Musicians Start Summer Season
- Delegate Structure Vital to ICSOM Success
- ICSOM: A Review
- Minnesota Musicians Work with Joseph Gingold
- San Antonio Holds Health Fair
- Former *Senza Sordino* Editor Vance Beach Dies

No. 5 (June 1986)

- Fuentealba Convenes Symposium in Chicago
- 1986 ICSOM Conference in Atlanta [Preview]
- Symphony Department Goes On-line with Computer Bulletin Board
- Houston Musicians Play Challenger Memorial Concert
- Florence Nelson: First ICSOM Conference
- Instrument Transportation Committee Examines Airline Policies
- The Pittsburgh Symphony and ICSOM
- Settlement Summaries (Oklahoma)
- San Francisco Violinist [David Schneider] Retires after Fifty Years
- Robert Coleman: A Petition [Poetic Plea for Time Off]

No. 6 (August 1986)

- The Detroit Symphony and Local 5
- Settlement Summaries (Houston, North Carolina, New York City Opera)
- Kennedy Center and National Symphony to Affiliate
- Conductor Evaluation Forms Usable for Optional Questions
- ICSOM Computer Committee Plans Questionnaire
- Con Sordino [Fred Spector String Mute Collection]
- Retrospective [Editorial]
- Index

SENZA SORDINO is the official publication of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians and is published six times a year on a bi-monthly basis. ICSOM is affiliated as an official conference of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO.

Tom Hall, *Editor*—Mailing Address: 2800 Lake Shore Dr. #4001
Chicago, Ill. 60657.

Subscriptions: \$6.00 per year

Printed by M. Kallis and Co., Chicago, Ill.

©370