

# Senza Sordino

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## Justice for Extras

In the symphonic world, there is a group of our colleagues that has not received the attention it deserves. Extra musicians (substitutes and non-contracted players) are indispensable to the operation of our orchestras.

Two surveys, one by the Atlanta Symphony ICSOM delegate and the other by AFM Local 2-197 (St. Louis), were conducted in the past year to determine the treatment of extra musicians in ICSOM orchestras. While the majority of our orchestras appear to treat extra players fairly, there is still room for improvement.

Most managements are not willing to take on the financial burden of maintaining a Vienna- or Berlin-sized orchestra. Extras are an efficient way of adding players to the orchestra (or replacing players temporarily) only when needed.

During the time these musicians play on stage with us, they are part of our orchestra. They are under the direct control of the same conductor, personnel manager, and other supervisory personnel as we are. They take the same breaks and drink the same coffee we do. They often have very prominent parts to play under extreme pressure. They are heard by the same paying audience and reviewed by the same critics as we are.

Yet, a double standard exists. With very few exceptions, extras do not receive any life, health, instrument, or disability insurance. They get no pension, not even the AFM-EPW. They get no vacation pay, personal leave days, or sick days. In some orchestras, they make only a token salary. Doesn't the situation of these musicians seem like our own, say, 30 years ago? Did we like working under those conditions?

A strong local or sympathetic orchestra negotiating committee might help the extra players achieve some progress in salary and benefits. But if the local does not want to make waves, or if the negotiating committee views money spent by the management

on extras as coming from the orchestra's pocket, then extras are lucky to get miscellaneous local scale. With no job security, it is difficult for the extras themselves to influence their situation, for they risk never playing with the orchestra again, branded "ungrateful troublemakers."

And what about job security? Although most extras play with our orchestras on only an occasional basis, what happens if an extra has a bad day (or week)? What happens if an extra is ill or previously engaged and cannot play? What happens to an established extra when a new "hot player" moves to town? An extra who has bent over backward to play in the orchestra, even filling in at the last minute, could lose the chance to play with the orchestra in the future. "Oh, well, that's the free market," we say. Right. It's the same "free market" that existed in the old days for everyone. Many of these extras will eventually get permanent jobs in our orchestras. They deserve just treatment by their colleagues who are fortunate enough to have attained permanent jobs already.

The minimum compensation that an orchestra should provide for extra players would be the base orchestral salary per service, with electronic media payments paid separately. Extras engaged for an extended time should receive *pro-rata* vacation pay. And all extras should receive a percentage payable to the AFM-EPW or other pension. Providing other benefits in most situations may be impractical, but at least the concept of equal pay for equal work should be established.

We in ICSOM are quick to seek parity with other orchestras and pursue justice in our labor-management relations. Let's apply some of that parity and justice to our valuable extra players.

*Michael Moore*  
*Atlanta Symphony ICSOM Delegate*

## Oklahoma Symphony Dissolved

On June 28, 1988, 35 of the 66 members of the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra board of directors voted to suspend operations on June 30 and to dissolve the corporation. The board decided to disband the 51-year-old institution despite a cash surplus, ignoring repeated requests by the musicians to continue negotiations. The musicians sustained the longest strike (from October 7, 1987 to June 28, 1988) in AFM history.

Major economic disagreements during the work stoppage centered around the board's attempts to change the orchestra to a night-time, per-service ensemble; cut salaries up to 25% (from the 1986-87 base annual salary of \$14,400); cut the season from 32 weeks to 29; and fire 18 of the 55 full-time musicians. A final board proposal included a public-funding financial contingency clause with a 30-day cancellation provision. Non-economic issues included musicians' proposals for improved working conditions,

voting representation on the board of directors and in selection of future executive directors, and incorporation of regular part-time players into the contract. Major philosophical issues included musical quality, long-term commitment from the board and management, and strong anti-union sentiment on the part of the board.

Musicians expect to have a final meeting with board attorneys to discuss the board's decision to dissolve, the transfer of assets, and individual health insurance and investment-plan policies. Further details will be reported after that meeting.

The OSO musicians are grateful to ICSOM orchestras for the tremendous financial and moral support received during this crisis.

*Karen Schnackenberg*  
*Orchestra Committee Chairperson*

## Conductor Evaluations Evaluated

### Confidential Information

Relations with conductors have always been a concern of musicians in ICSOM orchestras. A committee was appointed at the September 1963 conference to draw up a code of ethics for conductors; such a code was approved at the 1967 conference, but the hope that it would become part of AFM bylaws was unrealized.

However, a conductor evaluation program was formulated and approved at that same conference. At first, results were hand-tabulated by member orchestras and conveyed to a Rapid Communication Center for dissemination. Forms were periodically reviewed and revised. Conductor evaluations were computerized in 1982, with much time devoted to this project by Catherine Compton (Detroit Symphony). Even now, a committee is reviewing the current form for possible improvements. The program currently provides over 1100 sets of evaluations on over 250 conductors.

The primary purpose of providing forms was and is for musicians to have a way to provide their collective subjective opinions and objective appraisals of conductors to help managements reach decisions in engaging guest conductors or music directors for member orchestras. As with other ICSOM programs, participation in the conductor evaluation program is not mandatory, but obviously the more orchestras that regularly and conscientiously fill out the forms, the more valid and significant the results.

A reason often given by orchestra members for not filling out the forms is that results are not posted or made available to the orchestra at large. There is good reason for this: orchestras must be protected from legal action by conductors charging defamation. The question of whether the compilation and distribution of conductor evaluations might make the union or its members answerable in any suit for libel arose when the program was adopted. The issues today remain much as they were outlined by ICSOM legal counsel in 1968: proper and limited use of the evaluations should leave ICSOM and its members free from any liability.

In clarifying what was proper and limited, counsel recommended that statements about conductors be neither recklessly nor maliciously made, that opinions about conductors be distributed only to persons having a common interest in those opinions, and that requests by management for evaluation information be made in writing with an assurance of indemnification.

For these reasons, warning sheets are distributed to delegates, appear in the ICSOM Delegate Manual section on conductor evaluations, and cover each set of evaluations returned to delegates from the Wayne State University computer services center, where results are tabulated. A model letter for management request for information is also included in the delegate manual.

Leaks to the press are of major concern. The publication of evaluation information in any periodical or paper with a circulation outside the limited professional sphere might be protected under the right of the press to make "fair comment" on public figures, as long as such comment has relevance to the person's public character or performance, but there are many differing views as to how far the press can go in this regard.

The best advice to ICSOM orchestras is to continue to take special care with evaluation results. While this information is appropriately shared with an orchestra's artistic advisory personnel,

general dissemination of this information is to risk its being carelessly or deliberately abused.

*Tom Hall, ICSOM governing board member, with ICSOM attorney Leonard Leibowitz and ICSOM conductor evaluation program administrator Brad Buckley.*

### Looking Back

ICSOM musicians are routinely asked to evaluate the conductors who perform with our orchestras. Musicians vary in their enthusiasm for this process. When the conductor evaluation program was launched in the 1960's, the following reactions of musicians, critics, and conductors appeared in the pages of *Senza Sordino*.

"The orchestral musicians believe its value to be monumental.... [Boards of trustees] may all love good music, but they are completely in the dark when it comes to professionally evaluating a conductor to direct their group. Now they will be able to have the considered opinions of professional orchestral musicians from coast to coast to aid them in their deliberations...."

"Symphonic and operatic maestros, long known for their autocratic attitudes toward the musicians they direct, will now have to be on their best behavior. They will never know when... musicians may be filling in a questionnaire whose results may be considered in deciding [conductors'] futures." (April 1967)

*Sam Denov, former Chicago Symphony member, Senza Sordino editor, ICSOM vice-chairman, and chairman*

"The trouble is that the orchestra players frequently have private axes to grind, and their judgements must be modified by awareness of these extra-esthetic considerations. Every orchestra of consequence, regardless who its leader may be, has complaints...."

"When the members of ICSOM reach the point where they would recommend the appointment of a conductor known to be a strict disciplinarian because of their respect for his musicianship, they will reflect another and more important aspect of artistic maturity." (April 1967)

*Robert Marsh, Chicago Sun-Times*

"Musicians have always evaluated conductors. In Europe, they do it constantly. The only question to ask is: To what purpose? It doesn't worry me, but it should certainly worry some people who administer orchestras. Such a poll may tell them some things they don't want to know." (Summer 1968)

*Erich Leinsdorf*

"If it would change the situation, if the conductor would learn something from it—make him stick to the beat, for instance—it might be healthy. The conductor is supposed to know everything better than the musicians, but on the fingers of one hand you can count the real conductors. Before the first downbeat, the musicians know. [Some conductors oppose written evaluation because] they believe their swindle might be discovered. Conducting an orchestra is a grazing ground for lack of talent." (Summer 1968)

*William Steinberg*

## ICSOM Orchestras Contribute Over \$69,000 to Colleagues in Need

During the last few years, a number of ICSOM orchestras have requested financial aid from other orchestras to help them through times of crisis and hardship. Encouragement to give generously is often provided, but specific amounts for donations are customarily not suggested. During this season, delegates from several member orchestras have asked ICSOM officers for guidance in making donations compatible with those by other orchestras. With the assurance to orchestras that such information would remain confidential, ICSOM governing board members-at-large surveyed member orchestras to find the amounts that they donated to Detroit, Oklahoma, San Antonio, San Diego, Honolulu, and Oakland. These orchestras faced crises from extended work stoppages to cancellations of seasons to bankruptcy and liquidation.

About two-thirds of our member orchestras responded to the informal survey. Orchestras which did not respond may still have made contributions. Individual musicians may have donated money personally rather than through their orchestra. Some orchestras may have given money since the survey was made in early 1988. Still, the poll provides some insight into giving patterns.

The 34 responding orchestras gave over \$69,000 in over 90 separate donations to the six orchestras cited. Seven orchestras gave to only one orchestra; five orchestras gave to all six. Differences in donations by the same orchestra ranged from no money to \$2,500. The smallest gift by any one orchestra was \$50, the largest \$3,500. Eleven orchestras gave gifts in the \$1,000 range; fifteen gave gifts of \$500 or less. The average donation was about \$800 per orchestra. The more affluent orchestras were usually, but not always, the most generous. Although 28 orchestras gave to some but not other orchestras, only 2 or 3 orchestras were notably inconsistent in the size of donations when donations were made. To their credit, several of the orchestras which requested aid were among those who sent donations to other orchestras.

Information on how money was raised for donations was also solicited. Some orchestras use a payroll deduction, while others use a mandatory special assessment or personal voluntary donations through the ICSOM delegate. It's difficult to know when orchestras are going to need financial aid from other orchestras, and it's sometimes awkward to go back to orchestra members for another donation when the hat has recently been passed; later collections are generally less productive. Some plan for collection would seem advisable.

One orchestra provides a commendable model: the Seattle Symphony automatically sends \$500 to any orchestra enduring a work stoppage or other severe hardship during the second week of that crisis; an additional \$250 is automatically sent if the crisis is extended. Money is collected by payroll deduction. Seattle sent more money than some orchestras with considerably better wages, and sent money with a consistency matched by few orchestras. Congratulations and thanks to the Seattle musicians for their generosity, organization, and commitment.

*Tom Hall, with assistance from Michael Nutt, Richard Decker, and James Clute, all members-at-large, ICSOM Governing Board*

## After Retirement--What??

When your orchestra negotiates a new master agreement, the pension plan is usually a high priority. The committee is concerned with many aspects of the pension, including the benefit amount, the years of service or age needed in order to receive the benefit, early retirement provisions, and funding requirements. When the negotiation is over, the orchestra and management go about their business. The people who retire receive money from the pension plan, and that's the end of that.

I would suggest to you that we need to start thinking about a number of other retirement issues.

- **Insurance:** We all know how fast health care costs are increasing. We need to investigate supplemental medical insurance and affordable ways of providing it to retirees.
- **Retirement Counseling:** A musician who retires after decades of intense daily performance is facing a major change in life-style. Counseling must be made available to those who need help dealing with this change.
- **Recognition Events:** We should recognize and honor our retired people in some public manner to let them know their years of service are appreciated.
- **Experience Utilization:** Our retirees represent a pool of wisdom and experience that we could utilize in many ways to the betterment of all orchestra musicians. Union liaison, public relations for the orchestra, and counseling or helping young musicians are just a few ideas.

Make no mistake—I am not suggesting that a free lunch and a pat on the back address the very real economic needs of people facing retirement. However, we and the personnel who administer our orchestras need to do more than just hand orchestra retirees some money and say goodbye.

*Brad Buckley  
St. Louis Symphony*

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## Saving the Ozone

Musicians of the San Francisco Symphony recently committed themselves to several activities to protect the environment. In response to findings that the manufacture of styrofoam uses chlorofluorocarbons, which are harmful to the ozone layer, the musicians have decided not to use any styrofoam cups at work. Either paper cups or mugs will be used, with the stagehands building a rack for mugs if needed.

Musicians are currently recycling all memos, and the management has committed to conserving on use of paper. Aluminum cans are being collected at the hall for recycling.

The smoking area has been moved to a remote part of the hall, away from where the musicians congregate.

*Lee Ann Crocker  
San Francisco Symphony ICSOM Delegate*

## Orchestra Finances

### Planned Budgeting, Collecting, and Accounting

In following up non-payment of ICSOM dues by a member orchestra, it was discovered that, although the members of the orchestra had been paying individual assessments to their treasurer to cover ICSOM dues, payments had not been forwarded to ICSOM for several years. In other cases, orchestras remitted only partial payment of ICSOM dues, jeopardizing the orchestra's continuing membership in ICSOM. These situations point up the desirability of each member orchestra understanding the ICSOM dues structure and having some system of financial accounting to its members.

ICSOM dues are payable annually by each member orchestra in an amount determined by a formula based on orchestra size and the amount of minimum scale. Misreading of this formula, which is set forth in the ICSOM bylaws, has sometimes led to a misperception that ICSOM dues are payable by individual musicians. Some orchestras have remitted only partial payment, citing failure of individuals to "pay their ICSOM dues." A resolution to be presented at this year's conference will address this practice and affirm that non-payment of dues in full is grounds for loss of membership in ICSOM.

Orchestras should have some internal financial organization which allows members to determine the amount of money needed to meet collective obligations and needs, to agree upon a method of collection, and to review the use of funds.

Ideally, a budget should be prepared by the orchestra committee or treasurer each year and presented for approval by orchestra membership. Budgets usually include provisions for committee expenses, payment of ICSOM and AFM strike fund dues, donations to orchestras in need [see article on page 3], and social activities for retirees and visiting orchestras. There may be additional fees if local unions do not provide legal counsel and other services.

The orchestra should have some mode of collection, ideally with all members sharing the burden equitably. Some orchestras have negotiated contract provisions whereby members must pay union, ICSOM, and committee dues as a requirement of membership. The legality of such a "fair share" provision in the St. Louis Symphony contract was tested in the courts and upheld; such clauses are now often known as "St. Louis clauses." Some orchestras have members' payments collected through payroll deduction. Some even have their internal strike fund "war chest" payments handled by payroll deduction!

Finally, to avoid unpleasant revelations that money is not being spent in the manner prescribed or for the uses approved, there should be an annual financial statement to all orchestra members showing income, expenditures, and balance in account. An accounting form showing all credits, debits, and monthly balances is best.

*Florence Nelson, ICSOM Treasurer*

*Tom Hall, ICSOM Governing Board Member-at-Large*

### Medical Alert

Dr. Michael Charness of the University of California Health Program for Performing Artists advises musicians that high doses of pyridoxine (vitamin B<sub>6</sub>) may cause serious nerve deterioration. The resulting loss of sensation or coordination may be irreversible. Pyridoxine is sometimes prescribed by physicians to treat premenstrual syndrome and certain psychiatric disorders.

Dr. Charness has noticed in his practice that many musicians take large doses of vitamins. A dose of 250 milligrams or greater constitutes a dangerous level of pyridoxine.

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### ICSOM Orchestras

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| Alabama Symphony Orchestra<br>Atlanta Symphony Orchestra<br>Baltimore Symphony Orchestra<br>Boston Symphony Orchestra<br>Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra<br>Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra<br>Chicago Symphony Orchestra<br>Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra<br>Cleveland Orchestra<br>Dallas Symphony Orchestra<br>Denver Symphony Orchestra<br>Detroit Symphony Orchestra | Florida Orchestra<br>Florida Symphony Orchestra<br>Grant Park Symphony Orchestra<br>Honolulu Symphony Orchestra<br>Houston Symphony Orchestra<br>Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra<br>Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra<br>Los Angeles Philharmonic<br>Louisville Orchestra<br>Metropolitan Opera Orchestra<br>Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra<br>Minnesota Orchestra | National Symphony Orchestra<br>New Jersey Symphony Orchestra<br>New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra<br>New York City Ballet Orchestra<br>New York City Opera Orchestra<br>New York Philharmonic<br>North Carolina Symphony Orchestra<br>Oakland Symphony Orchestra<br>Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra<br>Oregon Symphony Orchestra<br>Philadelphia Orchestra<br>Phoenix Symphony Orchestra | Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra<br>Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra<br>St. Louis Symphony Orchestra<br>St. Paul Chamber Orchestra<br>San Antonio Symphony Orchestra<br>San Diego Symphony Orchestra<br>San Francisco Ballet Orchestra<br>San Francisco Opera Orchestra<br>San Francisco Symphony<br>Seattle Symphony Orchestra<br>Syracuse Symphony Orchestra<br>Utah Symphony Orchestra |
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