

Senza Sordino

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Don't Add This Fiber to Your Diet

Asbestos is second only to tobacco in the number of cancer-related deaths caused by a known carcinogen. Because of the requirements of performing arts auditoriums for fire safety and insulation from intensely hot equipment, musicians will assuredly find asbestos somewhere in their workplaces. Use of asbestos remains common, even after hundreds of thousands of deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars spent in litigation, awards, repair, and eradication. Due to the billions of dollars at stake in the industry, companies have been reluctant to disclose the dangers of asbestos.

While not wishing to be alarmist, this writer would like to make musicians aware of the potential dangers of asbestos in our theaters. It is important to inform ourselves about asbestos and its industry, its properties and how it is used, how and why it can be hazardous, how to recognize potential places it may be, and what should be done about it. Keep in mind that this article is written by a lay person; a real expert (one whom you pay to represent your interests!) should evaluate the safety of your workplace.

What is Asbestos?

The name asbestos is given to a group of 30 or more minerals of fibrous crystalline structures, only six of which are used in industrial applications. These are, listed in order of importance: chrysotile (95% of all asbestos, called white asbestos), crocidolite (blue asbestos), amosite (brown asbestos), anthophyllite, tremolite, and actinolite.

Since World War II, about 800,000 tons of asbestos have been used yearly, with roughly 300,000 tons going into the construction of schools, public buildings, homes, factories, ships, and other structures. A survey from 1984 showed that at least 714,000 public buildings in the U.S. (federal, office, schools, and apartment buildings) contained crumbling asbestos that was emitting loose fibers.

Diseases Caused by Asbestos

Asbestos fibers can cause two diseases- asbestosis and cancer. Asbestosis is a permanent, progressive disease that may take from five to twenty years to develop. To date, there is no known cure. Symptoms include shortness of breath, pain in the upper chest or back, and rales (a dry, abnormal sound accompanying the normal respiratory murmur). "Clubbing" of the victim's fingers and toes (rounded tips with flattened nails) also occurs and is a result of the difficulty in breathing. Various forms of cancer have been linked to asbestos exposure. Most common is lung cancer, followed by gastrointestinal cancer, cancer of the liver and mesothelioma— an invariably fatal tumor of the pleura (the membrane that encases the lung), or of the peritoneum (a similar membrane that lines the abdominal cavity). Metastasis (transfer of disease or disease producing cells from one part of the body to another) is common with these cancerous malignancies.

Brief History of Asbestos

Asbestos (a Greek adjective meaning inextinguishable) was observed and initially recorded in the first century by the Greek geographer Strabo and by the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, who both mention a lung ailment in slaves who wove asbestos into cloth. Marco Polo also became familiar with asbestos while traversing a part of Siberia known as the Great Empire of Tartary. After another long period of eclipse, it was rediscovered in the Western world, and by the late 1800s, the mineral began to be used extensively to insulate boilers, steam pipes, turbines, kilns, and other high temperature equipment. As a result, the long-forgotten knowledge of Stabo and Pliny that asbestos could produce lung disease soon became apparent.

The first autopsy to show asbestosis was in 1900 in London. Thirty years later, establishment by autopsy of asbestosis also occurred in the U.S. More reports and studies about asbestos and asbestosis came forth from the asbestos industry itself until about 1930. The debilitating effects from inhaling asbestos were finally becoming known by the corporate heads. By this time, the asbestos industry was booming. Asbestos companies began to cover up the health perils caused by their product—some companies even denied permission for medical staff to perform mortality studies.

"Asbestos I can tell, asbestos is still with us in our symphony, opera, and ballet halls." Brian McCarty

Government standards were eventually set for an allowable amount of asbestos fiber to be in the air, but the standards were high and not enforced. As a result, thousands of insulation, mining, and processing workers were dying. Mass litigation against mining companies, suppliers, and contractors was also beginning. Finally, in October 1964, a study by Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, was delivered at the International Conference on the Biological Effects of Asbestos. Dr. Selikoff reported on the health problems of asbestos-insulation workers from the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers in New York (Local 12) and New Jersey (Local 32). Concurrent with his pioneering study, there were some changes in the interpretation of the law. These developments provided the basis for a landmark decision of liability (*Tomplait vs. Fibreboard* and subsequently *Boral vs. Fibreboard*), and led to a flood of lawsuits against the asbestos industry. This was the beginning of the industry's demise.

Asbestos in Theaters

Most theaters in operation today probably contain asbestos in their construction, insulation, paint, electrical, and/or fire protection systems. While the uses of asbestos may vary in theaters

throughout the U.S. and Canada, some general practices are common.

Asbestos has two main functions: fire protection and insulation. Places to look for fire protection asbestos include boiler rooms, electrical power rooms, transformer rooms, or any place where extreme heat can be generated in normal or abnormal circumstances (i.e., when a main circuit-breaker blows). Asbestos fibers are sometimes used in floor and ceiling tiles, roofing, wallboard, paint, countertops, concrete, fire curtains, and fire doors. Other uses for fire insulation include high power wiring, boilers and related equipment, and high temperature lighting in order to protect the internal wiring. Uses for insulation include steam pipes, heating ducts, salt water or corrosive chemical insulation, and other general insulation.

As mentioned above, asbestos sometimes was used to wrap steam pipes. Steam pipes may be among the most likely distributing mediums of airborne asbestos fibers, as these pipes tend to be dispensed throughout the building, and many are exposed in backstage areas. The asbestos around steam pipes is usually mixed with a plaster-like substance such as magnesia (magnesium oxide), which can be rather soft and powdery much like sheetrock, and then wrapped with a cloth covering (the asbestos content was usually 15% in such instances). The constant expanding and contracting of the pipes can produce cracking, causing the chalky powder of the asbestos-carrying material to drop out onto the floor, to be swept into the air as traffic passes. A much more serious hazard for pipe insulation occurs when a long scrape or a blow rips the outer lining open and allows the contents out into circulation. Cleanup and tape repairs should be done immediately until a more permanent abatement can be accomplished.

Fire curtains pose a threat for exposure as well, especially from the use of a fire curtain or door as a barrier between the stage and the audience sections of a theater. Ballet and opera companies are the prime offenders in this regard, as they simultaneously rehearse staging or lighting while the orchestra is in the pit. The curtain or door is increasingly subject to damage while down. Moving the curtain or door up and down will also disturb the loose surface asbestos, especially if the curtain is rubbing against other curtains or sound and fire insulation that provides a good seal when the door is in place.

Testing the Air

The real litmus test for airborne asbestos in the work environment is an air quality test. An air quality tester walks around the workplace for a few hours carrying a device (almost like a culture plate) that collects air, along with any airborne impurities, into a chamber with a special collecting membrane. Impurities in the air stick to the membrane, which is subsequently analyzed for concentrations of hazardous materials. A safety evaluation of the workplace is then determined. Keep in mind that this determination of safety is based on the day that the test is made and can be affected by a number of factors, including the amount of traffic, construction, loading in and out of sets, use of curtains and lights, and accumulation of dust.

Public agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or the state equivalent can be of help. However, different agencies have different standards of hazardous waste and of what level and/or period of exposure constitutes a hazard. Federal law permits states to enforce occupational safety

and health standards in private sector employment pursuant to a federally approved state plan. (In California, state standards are more extensive than the OSHA guidelines: for instance, Cal-OSHA regulates 170 toxic substances not controlled by OSHA and is substantially more stringent regarding exposure for 65 additional toxins than OSHA.

So That You Can Breathe More Freely...

Calling in a private expert on asbestos for advice on repair or eradication is in your best interest. (See asbestos removal in your local yellow pages.) A third party can offer informational tools for determining an effective procedure for repair or eradication. Too often, cost, time, and politics keep correctional measures to a minimum when more extensive repair or eradication is needed. Having the orchestra or local union pay an outside expert is probably a wise way to protect your interests in negotiating and pursuing a plan of action with your management and the owners of your workplace.

*Brian McCarty
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra ICSOM Delegate*

Letter to the Editor

Like many of my colleagues across Canada, I have reacted with shock and concern to the Seattle Symphony Orchestra's decision to decertify the AFM. It was to be hoped that reason and compromise would govern the discontent. We Canadians have noted the conciliatory efforts of AFM President J. Martin Emerson and symphony department head Lew Waldeck.

The SSO's decision to rescind the AFM recording agreement is particularly troublesome, as this conclusion represents disregard for the negotiating efforts of so many musicians over time.

At the recent OCSM conference, delegates concluded that the interest of Canadian symphony musicians is best served within the structure of the AFM and that any changes should be made from within.

The Seattle Symphony has often demonstrated solidarity and generosity across the border to its colleagues in Vancouver. We hope the spirit of understanding and goodwill can endure the ramifications of the SSO's actions.

*Stephen Wilkes
Vancouver Symphony OCSM Delegate*

Dues Are Due

ICSOM treasurer Florence Nelson reminds orchestras to pay ICSOM dues no later than December 25, 1988. Each orchestra's bill is based on the number of players and the orchestra's guaranteed minimum annual salary. Any orchestra which does not submit payment for all members risks jeopardizing its membership in ICSOM.

Settlement Summaries

Houston: ratified a 3-year agreement on July 28, retroactive to May 29, 1988. Wages (were \$670 + \$40 EMG) go to \$720—745/770—795/820, all + \$40 EMG. Pension increased from \$13,500 to \$15,000; "rule of 85" added. Dependent health insurance premiums are now 25% paid by Society. Changes in audition committee give increased power to music director. Rate for extra and outside services based on 1/8 orchestra weekly scale rate per service.

Rochester: ratified a 2-year agreement on September 8. Length of season (had been 52 weeks cut to 47 by five-week work stoppage in 1987-88) will be 48 weeks, 49 weeks. Wages (cut from \$31,200 to \$28,200 in 1987-88) will be \$30,528—\$33,350. Instrument insurance now provided. Medical, dental, life, and long-term disability insurance will be covered to the extent previously funded, but through cafeteria-style program which lets musicians select various levels of coverage. New benefits for contracted extra musicians include \$10/year of service lump sum seniority bonus to be paid annually after 10 years of service, and 25% of health insurance premium to be paid by management.

Utah: ratified a 3-year agreement on September 28 after a strike of several weeks. Wages (were \$550) will be \$550—566.50—566.50/650. Seniority pay instituted at \$5/week/5 years of service with a cap of 25 years. Pension remains 8% management contribution to AFM/EPW fund. Significant change in recording eliminates service conversion and specifies that musicians will receive nationally negotiated rates for any recordings. New tenure provision grants tenure after one full year of service. Improvements in health insurance, non-renewal, and scheduling. Two musicians who vote on Board of Directors also to be non-voting members of Board's executive committee; two board members to be non-voting members of orchestra committee.

Phoenix: amendments to current agreement ratified in September 1988. Length of season reduced this year from 39 to 36 weeks; will be 40 weeks next year. Cancellation clause, which

allowed contract to be terminated if deficit exceeded 25% of fiscal year expenses, replaced with reopener agreement, which provides for negotiations to occur pending projected budget surplus of 10% or deficit of 5%. The budget projections apply only to current, not accumulated, surplus or deficit. If no agreement can be reached on reopener, terms of original contract will be followed. Musicians and local union president to have votes on board. Reduction in services; improvements in scheduling, vacation, personal leave, grievance.

Florida Orchestra (Tampa): reopens to final year of 4-year contract ratified September 26. Wages (were \$450) will be \$473. Number of full-time contracted players (was 60) now 66. Improvements in Sarasota Opera residency conditions. Pension instituted; management will make weekly contribution of 1% of players' weekly salary, beginning no later than 4/1/89.

Chicago: ratified a 3-year agreement October 1. Wages (were \$1,000) go to \$1040—1090—1140. Seniority doubles in third year, with cap of \$70/week for 25 years' (or more) service. Pension goes from \$22,500 to \$28,000 in third year; "rule of 85" adopted; retirees' pensions will be bargained at future negotiations. Improvements in instrument insurance, vacation pay, audition committee pay, per diem. Scheduling improvements. Flexible spending account for medical, child care, and other expenses with \$200 contributed by management and opportunity for musician to contribute additional funds on a tax-sheltered basis. Some improvements and some concessions in health and welfare benefits.

New York Philharmonic: ratified a 3-year agreement November 1. Wages (were \$980) will be \$1020—1070—1120. Increases in overtime, extra rehearsal. Seniority pay now begins in the fifth year of service and doubles by the third year with a cap of \$70 for those with 25 and more years of service. Pension (was \$800/year of service, 30 years maximum) now \$933—933—1,000. Provision for everyone in orchestra to receive at least \$20 over scale for recording. Numerous and sweeping improvements in working conditions. Small increase in health insurance deductible.



*BALTIMORE, November 1988
Musicians from the Kennedy Center and the National Symphony picket with members of the Baltimore Symphony. The BSO has been on strike since September 23 and needs financial assistance. Please send donations to:
BSO Players Committee
c/o ICSOM Delegate Charles Underwood
21 E. Eager St.
Baltimore, MD 21202*

Photo by BSO musician Edward Hoffman

Strike Up the Fund

The trustees of the AFM symphony strike fund met in New York on October 31, 1988. The five trustees are J. Martin Emerson, Kelly Castleberry, Lew Waldeck, Brad Buckley, and Melanie Burrell. Several items of interest to ICSOM orchestras were discussed at that meeting:

- Clarification and updating of the administrative rules of the fund
- The need to continue close communication among the trustees
- The requirement for orchestras and locals to understand how the fund works and when payments are due to the fund
- How the trustees should respond to fund orchestras facing situations such as cancellation and bankruptcy, which fall outside the "normal" strike/lockout

In light of recent events in the industry, the trustees spent a great deal of time and thought on this last topic. The strike fund is not structured as an unemployment fund. However, the union wants to support orchestra musicians confronted with the problems of sub-standard management and inadequate board governance. It was decided to review situations like these on a case-by-case basis, with careful consideration and communication among the trustees.

Copies of the administrative rules and how the fund works will be made available to the orchestras and locals, and the trustees will take rigorous steps to ensure that payments to and from the fund are made in a timely fashion.

Since its inception in 1970, the strike fund has collected \$2,927,830, and has paid out \$2,365,410. These figures speak for themselves about the importance of the fund. Orchestras which have received benefits from the fund this season have been Utah, Denver, Baltimore, and New Orleans. Orchestra members who wish to see more details about the fund should consult the strike fund section in the ICSOM Delegate Manual.

Brad Buckley, ICSOM Chairperson
Melanie Burrell, ICSOM President

Help Wanted

Administrative Assistant(s) AFM Symphony Department (New York/Los Angeles)

Ideal applicants should have background as symphonic musicians, local officers, and/or union activists, and/or should possess some type of labor relations/legal background. Initially, duties will include counseling symphony musicians and local officials with respect to grievance, arbitration, contract negotiations, work stoppages, and miscellaneous symphony problems. Applicants should have a willingness to travel, as positions will evolve to include the presentation of organizing seminars and the on-site negotiation of collective bargaining agreements.

Applicants should send resume and cover letter indicating why these positions are of interest.

American Federation of Musicians
President's Office
1501 Broadway, Suite 600
New York, NY 10036

Changes on Governing Board

After many years of dedicated service, former ICSOM secretary Nancy Griffin can no longer continue in her post, having decided to withdraw from the AFM. Her past contributions to ICSOM are greatly appreciated. Syracuse Symphony ICSOM delegate Richard Decker will assume the duties of ICSOM secretary until the 1989 conference, when election for the remaining year of the secretary's term will be held. Filling Decker's position as member-at-large until the 1989 conference will be Rochester Philharmonic ICSOM delegate David Angus.

Happy Holidays

ICSOM Governing Board

Chairperson
Bradford D. Buckley
St. Louis Symphony
6607 Waterman
St. Louis, MO 63130
Phone: (314) 863-0633

President
Melanie Burrell
Denver Symphony
415 Garfield Street
Denver, CO 80206
Phone: (303) 331-9263

Secretary
Richard Decker
Syracuse Symphony
418 Seneca Drive
Syracuse, NY 13205
Phone: (315) 469-6854

Treasurer
Florence Nelson
New York City Opera Orchestra
104 Executive Drive
Manhasset Hills, NY 11040
Phone: (516) 627-0197

Editor, Senza Sordino
Deborah Torch
San Antonio Symphony
2922 Abercorn
San Antonio, TX 78247
Phone: (512) 496-2605

Member-at-Large
David Angus
Rochester Philharmonic
284 Castlebar Rd.
Rochester, NY 14610
Phone: (716) 271-1730

Member-at-Large
James Clute
Minnesota Orchestra
447 Newton Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55405
Phone: (612) 374-9373

Member-at-Large
Michael Nutt
Los Angeles Philharmonic
1075 W. Kensington Road
Los Angeles, CA 90026
Phone: (213) 977-0222

Member-at-Large
Carolyn Parks
Kennedy Center Orchestra
3730 Brandywine St. NW
Washington, DC 20016
Phone: (202) 966-1874

Counsel
Leibowitz and DuBrul
400 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10017
Phone: (212) 593-3310

ICSOM Emeritus Program
Abe Torchinsky
654 Greenhills Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
Phone: (313) 662-8114

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Deborah Torch, Editor
2922 Abercorn Drive
San Antonio, TX 78247

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