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A Union That Marches To Its Members' Tune The Musicians' Association of Hawaii, Local 677

by Marsha Schweitzer, Senza Sordino Assistant Editor

Why should we be union members? What does the union do for us to justify the work dues we pay? For many years the Honolulu Symphony musicians, members of AFM Local 677, asked these questions with as much anger and bitterness as any union members anywhere. Our union was in the grip of a stagnant, unresponsive administration that during its thirty-nine-year tenure had been corrupted by cronyism, nepotism, and a general lack of regard for the needs of its members. The full-time working musicians, who, as in most cities, were a minority of the union membership, had given up trying to change things.

But then, a free-lance trumpet and bass player, Milton Carter, came home to Hawaii after many years of performing in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and was hired as field representative for Local 677. Also joining the Local 677 staff at about the same time was a radio and television producer, Michael Largenticha, who had heard about the union's plight and wanted to do something about it. After several years of working inside Local 677, Milton and Michael began to see a way to topple the old entrenched regime and set the union on a new course. Although Milton had no ambition to become union president, it was agreed that, with his strong grassroots connections to Hawaii and its professional musicians, he stood the best chance of unseating the established incumbent in an election.

In 1984 Milton Carter was elected President of Local 677. He immediately set to work creating a new environment for musicians in the union, throwing open the doors, listening to the gripes and needs expressed by union members, and making changes. Administrative assistant Michael Largenticha and office manager Carol Cavalho worked with Milton to make the union a place where musicians could feel welcome and where their professional needs would be addressed.

With the help of his staff, Milton Carter revolutionized Local 677 by the sheer force of his vision of what a good union should be. His jovial charm, impeccable character, and personal warmth have moved mountains and dissolved bitterness with incredible speed. What follows is a description of how he did it.

He gave all members of the Local the pride of ownership

Milton does not run Local 677, its members do. Not only symphony musicians, but all members of Local 677 are welcome in the President's office at any time. No subject is off limits for discussion, and informal bull sessions are common.

Members have virtually unlimited use of union facilities,

including rehearsal studios, xerox machine, computers, audio and video equipment, the services of the union lawyer, union payroll service, and long distance telephone and FAX. Area standard wage scales and conditions are established by the members themselves, working in committees comprised of musicians who work regularly in the fields involved. As Michael says, "We have a market-oriented approach to providing services to the musicians. We want to address the business needs of serious professional musicians, and if the traditional ways of relating to our members don't work in today's market, we work with the members to change things and make the union more responsive and effective."

He took a personal interest in our work

Milton was a full-time professional musician for many years, both in Hawaii and on the mainland, and still plays a gig now and then. (Anyone who walks into the President's office with an instrument can usually coax Milton to get out his trumpet and jam a little.) He attends symphony concerts, as well as many other performances by union members. If a group of musicians is rehearsing at the union hall, he might stop in and listen for a while. One day he even brought the coffee pot along and served us while we rehearsed.

He tries to know every member of the union on a personal level. Milton leads many of the union's new member orientation sessions himself. Clarinetist Scott Anderson remembers, "Milton was there to meet everybody and discuss things personally. He explained very candidly about the high work dues and other assessments. He already knew at least half of us at the meeting and had learned something about us. It really made a difference to me to see him there."

He puts his total emotional energy to work for us

Milton has a great capacity for all kinds of emotion. He angers quickly when provoked. His bouts of righteous indignation, usually capped with a choice four-letter word, are a trademark. But he also forgives quickly, and his irrepressible friendliness always wins in the end. Most of all, he has a boundless capacity for love. He fights for us because he loves music, musicians, fairness, goodness, truth, and beauty. His compassionate sensitivity comes out not only in his actions as union president, but also in his music, his jokes, and his cooking, as evidenced in the weekly dinners he fixed for us during our 1986 strike.

Continued on next page

Milton feels every affront to a musician as if it were a personal injury. His sacrifices of time, money, and heart during times of negotiation and strike were as great as ours. He has gone the last mile with us. He is not just our president; he is our friend, our champion, our comrade-in-arms.

He is a consummate statesman

He understands how business is done in Hawaii and how people think. From disgruntled musician to symphony manager to state legislator, he knows how to find and nurture the good in people. He is also the court jester, with a sharp wit that disarms the most clever antagonist. But do not be fooled — his jovial demeanor masks a shrewd and intelligent mind that unerringly finds the heart of an issue and the common-sense solution to a problem. And he does crossword puzzles in INK!

His honesty, decency, and integrity are beyond question

He doesn't deceive or manipulate people. His simple humility ("I pray that God will help me do the right thing") is inspirational. Milton is a charismatic leader. He embodies a dignity and nobility in the face of powerful foes that reflects the highest principles of unionism. Following Milton into battle is easy, because there is honor and righteousness in his leadership.

The musicians' friendship with Milton is not calculated by their desire to get more service from the union, but rather is the inevitable result of respect and trust and Milton's willingness to be a servant of those who elected him. Paradoxically, by relinquishing power and control to the membership, Milton has achieved a level of esteem far beyond what would have been possible had he coveted the power of his office.

Lew Waldeck, head of AFM Symphonic Services Division, describes Local 677 as a perfect example of social unionism. "The union is not just an organization; it is people, a coalition, working to address the whole need of working people. If addressing that need means political action, or public education, or any other service, that's what is done." But the heart of Local 677 goes even deeper. Members find not only help in their professional lives at Local 677, but also love and human compassion. Lew recalled, "When a member of the symphony lost his wife last year, where did he turn for solace and consolation? To his union!"

The blend of intelligence, diligence, compassion, and devotion found among the members and staff of Local 677 is electric. The dynamic convergence of a great union, a talented and

hard-working orchestra committee, and a resolute and enlightened orchestra has enabled us to slay Hawaii's most fearsome anti-union dragons and produce some of the greatest economic gains in Honolulu Symphony history during the last six years.

Our local, like most others, suffers with the problems of declining membership and loss of jobs in the music industry. Local 677 also has special problems related to high operating costs in Hawaii, where the cost of living is the highest in the nation. Our work dues obligation is 4.5%, also among the highest in the nation, but there is no question that the Honolulu Sym-



Milton Carter poses with three of his office essentials: computer, telephone, and trumpet.

phony musicians get their work dues back many times over in service from Local 677.

If you feel as if you have been reading a fairy tale, let me assure you that Milton and the success of Local 677 are very real, as is the opportunity for all symphony musicians to have a rewarding, productive relationship with their locals. In our case, it was necessary to replace some of the union's officers to achieve reform, but many other locals may be reformable without the removal of the current leadership. What is required is open communication, agreement on common goals of service to the musicians, and the genuine desire of both orchestra and union to pursue those goals as a team. If the new glorious Local 677 could rise from the ashes of the old decaying one, it could happen anywhere.

*Marsha Schweitzer, Treasurer
Honolulu Symphony Musicians*

Resolutions

As of the 1989 AFM convention, the player conferences can submit legislation at AFM conventions. The following resolutions will be submitted by the Player Conferences Council (ICSOM, OCSM, ROPA, and RMA) during the 1991 AFM convention:

Pension Fund

Whereas, It is in the best interest of the AFM to include rank and file input in the governance and policy decisions of the Union and,

Whereas, The Pension Funds administered by the AFM in the United States and Canada are among the most important programs in which the Federation is involved; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That a new section be added to Article 27 of the Bylaws to read as follows:

As a matter of policy, the Federation shall include rank and file musician representation among the Trustees it appoints to the Board of the AFM-EP Fund in the United States and the AFM-EPW Fund in Canada.

"Symphony Orchestra" Definition

Whereas, The current AFM Bylaw defining "symphony orchestras" is not reflective of the different types and sizes of these orchestras, and

Whereas, A clear, concise Bylaw that defines symphony orchestras is needed by the AFM; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That article 21, section 1, of the Bylaws be amended as follows:

The term "symphony orchestra" as used in this article (~~means and includes any orchestra organized as a philanthropic community project and maintained in substantial part by public subscriptions and contributions and being a full orchestra with a substantially permanent conductor and not less than sixty (60) players under personal service contracts for the season, and with a scheduled annual season of not less than fifteen (15) concerts of the character performed by the symphony orchestras.~~) shall mean a non-profit symphony, opera, ballet or chamber orchestra performing varied repertoire during recurring annual seasons under a local collective bargaining agreement with musicians who have personal service contracts or are otherwise engaged on a consistent and continuing basis.

Recruiting and Organizing

Whereas, The AFM has suffered a 50% loss of membership since 1979, and

Whereas, The AFM cannot be effective in the future with a stagnating or declining membership, and

Whereas, To survive, the AFM must demonstrate an ability to organize musicians in the changing music industry, and

Whereas, The AFM does not have a developed program to effectively organize and recruit musicians; Therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That a new section be added to Article 27 to read as follows:

The American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO-CLC [Canadian Labor Council] shall dedicate itself to the vital task of recruiting and organizing. To that end a program will be developed to evaluate our recruiting and organizing efforts, with the aim of creating more effective methods of recruiting and organizing, pursuing this mission both on the Federation level and through the cooperation and active participation of its locals.

Governing Board Meeting

The ICSOM Governing Board met all day on April 8 at O'Hare Airport. The morning was devoted to conference planning. Delegates from our 47 member orchestras will gather at Vail, Colorado, from August 21-25 for the 1991 ICSOM Conference. Speakers, panels, and workshops are being finalized and more information will be available in the June issue of *Senza Sordino*. A major topic of discussion will concern what happens at the AFM convention in June, particularly regarding the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations.

Other items of business addressed included proposed changes in immigration law, potential problems with conductor evaluations, use of computers in ICSOM, persons to serve on the nominating committee, and assignment of personnel to attend the AFM convention in June.

Editorial

The dramatic early gains in our profession began primarily in the large-budget orchestras. Wage increases, job security, the right to have orchestra committees, and the right to ratify and to negotiate our contracts emanated from Boston, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and other orchestras of high prestige. Their legacy is the increased viability of our profession and the improved conditions of the symphony workplace. However, not all the gains in our profession have come from the top down.

Today, more than ever, orchestras have much to gain from uniting behind our common concerns. Yet individuals in some of our most successful orchestras have become restless, and feel they have outgrown ICSOM. They think their concerns and problems are completely separate from those of smaller-budget orchestras.

The point is not to pit large-budget against small-budget orchestras, but to remember that all are part of a larger picture -- an ecosystem in which the organisms need each other. Improvements at the symphony workplace have not occurred in a vacuum. Large-budget orchestras pulling from above AND small-budget orchestras pushing from below have exerted the economic pressure to achieve better wages and working conditions.

Debbie Torch
Editor, Senza Sordino

Noteworthy

- The audio-visual agreement was overwhelmingly ratified.
- ICSOM incurs considerable expense as a result of returned mail. ICSOM Emeritus musicians are requested to notify Abe Torchinsky of address changes. His address is 654 Greenhills Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48105.
- ICSOM will send five people to the AFM convention. They will be Brad Buckley, Chairperson; Dave Angus, President; Carolyn Parks, Treasurer; and Jim Clute and Michael Moore, Members-at-Large.
- ICSOM has engaged three consultants over the past year and a half: Bill Roehl, to investigate trade division and union structure; Anthony Pino, to advise orchestras about health insurance; and Charles Raymaker, to coordinate security for orchestras on tour.

Clams . . .

The February *Senza Sordino* mistakenly identified Sam Denov as a violinist. Our apologies to Mr. Denov, who played percussion, not violin, with the Chicago Symphony.



Music Medicine News

Aspen Music Medicine Conference

The ninth annual symposium on Medical Problems of Musicians and Dancers takes place at Aspen August 1-4. This conference addresses problems of dancers and singers as well as instrumentalists. Special topics of interest to instrumentalists this year will include hearing loss, injuries, physical therapy, and new diagnostic approaches. For further information, contact The Cleveland Clinic, One Clinic Center, 9500 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44195-5241. Phone (216) 444-5696 or 1-800-762-8173

Music, Growth, and Aging: A Conference on Music and Human Vitality

The Biology of Music Making, Inc., presents its third international conference in association with the Eastman School of Music and the School of Medicine at the University of Rochester, July 14-20. For complete information and a conference brochure, contact Conference Manager, Contemporary Forums, 530 La Gonda Way, Suite E-4, Danville, CA 94526. Phone (415) 820-2800, FAX (415) 820-1675.

Music Medicine Textbook Published

The Textbook of Performing Arts Medicine addresses the causes, symptoms, and treatment of occupational injuries affecting performers. Editors are Drs. Robert Sataloff, Alice Brandfonbrener, and Richard Lederman. Contact Raven Press, Dept. 5B, 1185 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. Phone (212) 302-8507.

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