

Senza Sordino

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MUSICIANS MEET AT MEANY AFM Labor Activists Get An Education

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Just like my colleagues in orchestras around the country, when I receive my issue of *Senza Sordino*, what do I see but yet another front-page article discussing the problems of the American Federation of Musicians? How does this affect me? Why should I care? Does it matter if the national union is having financial problems? My local reduced our work dues a few years ago, pays for our lawyer when we negotiate our collective bargaining agreement, and is always supportive. Isn't that the way it is for everyone out there?

Definitely not. Loyal readers of *Senza* have only to review the past year's issues to read of the problems faced by the Louisville Orchestra when its local didn't behave in the best interests of its working musicians.

For five days in January, 15 members of the American Federation of Musicians, representing a diverse range of backgrounds and current employment status, took part in a first-of-its-kind training program at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies. While workshops on a variety of topics are given at The Meany Center year-round, there had never been one designed specifically for members of the AFM. Hopefully, based on the reaction of those of us who participated, this will not be the last.

The AFL-CIO operates the George Meany Center for Labor Studies on a 47-acre campus of green lawns, large trees, and brick buildings just outside Washington, D.C. in Silver Spring, a Maryland suburb. The campus contains a library, dormitories, cafeteria, meeting and classroom spaces, and an area for informal mixing at night. A portion of our union dues helps pay for the staff and facilities at the Meany Center, which is "the only union conference center in the United States exclusively available to all AFL-CIO affiliates and their locals. Because of that unique quality, labor leaders from many unions can expect to interact and exchange ideas in a warm and stimulating atmosphere of trade union solidarity." The week I was in attendance, other groups which were meeting included the Communications Workers of America, the Sheet Metal Workers, and the Transport Workers Union. There was also a gathering of building trades organizers, and there were seminars pertaining to arbitration. The Center sets a schedule of classes which are open to anyone belonging to an AFL-CIO affiliate.

Attendees of the Meany Center seminars were James Clute (Minnesota Orchestra and ICSOM Governing Board Member-at-Large); Dr. Art Davis (Executive Board, Local 47, Los Angeles); Mary Landolfi (Vice President, Local 802, New York City); Frank Donaruma (Chair, American Ballet Theatre Orchestra Committee, New York City); Dennis Mackrel (Jazz Advisory Committee, New York City); Jimmy Owens (Chair, Jazz Advisory Committee, New York City); Mary Plaine (Chair, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Players' Committee and ICSOM Governing Board Member-at-Large); Dick Simon (New York Philharmonic); James Sims (President, Dallas Theatre Musicians Association); Blair Tindall (Chair, Broadway Theater Musicians Committee); Dave Titcomb (Chair, New York City Opera Orchestra Committee); Peter Vriesenga (President, Local 20-623, Denver); and Sharon Yamada, New York Philharmonic Orchestra Committee).

Those in attendance at our meetings were local organizers, local officers, ICSOM orchestra musicians, theatre musicians, free-lance musicians, and jazz musicians—all AFM members. Local 802 (New York City) was the impetus behind the week's activities taking place. Invitations were extended to members of Local 802 and ICSOM leadership, and through them to other ICSOM members and local officers and their boards. Although many of the musicians contacted were excited about the workshops and wanted to attend, only a few could create the time in their busy schedules on admittedly short notice.

The five days began on Sunday afternoon and continued with morning and afternoon sessions through Thursday. The evenings

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were left free for unstructured group discussions, “homework,” practicing, or just relaxing. We were welcomed by the Center’s Executive Director Susan Schurman and the Director for Noncredit Programs, Don Spatz, who laid down three laws to live by during our stay: The Center is a safe haven for all union brothers and sisters, so it is not the place to make any “unkind or unwelcome comments about their union or their person;” harassment of any kind will not be tolerated; and during classroom time there is to be no trashing of the International or other leaders of one’s union.

We were led through a brief history of unionism. There was a lecture on trends in economics, and how unions, and the lack of unions, affect the economy. We heard about the AFL-CIO’s goals and initiatives. One of the goals is for unions to commit 30% of their dues to organizing new members. We talked about bargaining power. We were anxious to discuss our union, but first the instructors wanted to give us a background in trade unionism and what it is that makes a union work well.

One of the points that was made to us was that in order for a union to work well, it must have what the AFL-CIO has termed the “Five Core Competencies of Effective Labor Organizations.” These are 1) organizing the relevant labor market(s) by industry, craft/occupation, and spatial/geography; 2) representing workers’ interests in the economy/workplace; 3) representing workers’ interests in the political/legislative arena; 4) building strong coalition rela-

tionships with allies and potential allies; and 5) governing and administering the union, requiring both political and management skills.

When we finally did begin to explore the topic of musicians as workers, the trainer led us through some “ice-breaking” exercises, at which we as a group of students in a classroom failed rather miserably, especially considering that as performers we are such creative people. Then we got down to business, discussing how musicians are similar to other workers and how we are different, what our shared values as musicians are, and why the AFM is important to its members.

We explored the structures and operations of unions and examined that of our own. Meany staff members talked to us about “building a culture of organizing” through educating members and generating commitment and resources.

On Wednesday evening there was a “chautauqua” where Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute told us all we needed to know about the economy in 20 minutes. Following his enjoyable talk was “Labor’s Troubadour,” singer Joe Glazer.

On Thursday before the workshops ended we discussed community labor councils and building coalitions. The AFL-CIO is now promoting actions it terms “Street Heat,” where all union members are encouraged to gather and support fellow workers at a designated location and time. Here in Baltimore, for instance, there is a service station where union members are encouraged to picket once a month at a set time to protest the company’s treatment of its employees at its refineries.

On a personal level, I found the time I spent at the Meany Center to be very valuable and wish I had had the opportunity to have such a week of training years earlier. It was an “attitude-adjusting” experience to work not only with symphonic colleagues but also with jazz musicians, free-lancers, local officers and organizers. It became painfully clear that our union, like others, has been subject at times to the “-isms” of race, sex and class.

Just as in the symphonic industry we may be watching our audiences slowly diminish, due in part to a lack of music education in our schools, there is a similar problem in many unions, including ours. Trade unionism in the current AFM structure is not being actively promoted. Many AFM members view their membership as if they were a member of a guild: the AFM is a closed shop, a protection agency with the payoff of the all-important death benefit. If those of us who work under collective bargaining agreements cut ourselves off from other musicians who are not so well-off as we, we will wake up someday to the sad fact that there are plenty of non-organized workers out there who can replace us. Just as the next generation concert audience is not being groomed, workers who believe that belonging to a union and fighting collectively on issues is better than having every individual fight for him/herself are not being trained.

We symphonic players must take an interest in the future of the AFM if we are to maintain and improve upon our past 35 years’ gains in benefits and working conditions. We must work collectively to see that all our colleagues are earning living wages, working in safe environments, have access to affordable health care—and that

Before departing the Meany Center on Thursday afternoon, the participants spent a great deal of time creating a document which seemed to sum up the consensus of the class. The following ideas are intended to promote a constructive dialogue concerning the future of our union and all working musicians:

1. That there should be one international union that includes all professional musicians regardless of style, genre, or location of employment. We must organize in order to bring the benefits of union membership and representation to encompass areas under-represented in the past: for example, Jazz, Rock, Latin, Country-Western, and others.
2. That our union should be structured according to the democratic principle “one musician, one vote.”
3. That both the international body and its subdivisions must be restructured effectively. The union must allocate sufficient resources to organize musicians in their varied workplaces and to represent their interests with employers. We must also build strong coalitions with organized labor, educational institutions, and in the political arena.

We firmly believe that only by committing our resources to the above ideals will the AFM be able to effectively organize and represent musicians in the 21st century.

We encourage our colleagues and leadership to avail themselves of the educational resources of the AFL-CIO. We invite the active participation of all our friends and allies in achieving the goal of a stronger AFM.

our union is capable of spearheading those fights for us. If we don't get actively involved in this restructuring process, it will be done for us, possibly TO us, and, most likely, we will not like the results.

The Meany Center does not exist to provide its members with answers, easy or otherwise, to problems a union may be experiencing. But through education, training, and research, the Center hopes to provide union members with knowledge and leadership to find solutions to issues that all unions face, ours included.

I hope that ICSOM and the other Player Conferences will have a meaningful Unity Conference in August and that we all will be able to debate the pros and cons of our current Federation structure and what our ideal would be. I would encourage all the readers of *Senza* to review and consider the Big Questions listed in the box to the right and if possible, to avail themselves of training at the Meany Center. For more information about the George Meany Center for Labor Studies, please write to

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Toward UNITY 1998:

Investigative Task Force Progress Report

The Investigative Task Force (ITF), the group formed by resolution of ICSOM, OCSM, ROPA and RMA at last summer's conferences to study AFM restructure, met in February in Milwaukee. The ITF, which is evenly composed of players' conference representatives and AFM local officers, spent two and a half days discussing the basic principles on which the AFM should be run.

Present were Andrew Brandt (President, ROPA), Dennis Dreith (President, RMA), James Ewen (2nd Vice-President, OCSM), Robert Levine (Chairperson, ICSOM), Art Linsner (Vice-President, TMA), Bill Moriarity (President, Local 802), Jimmy Nixon (President, Local 105), Paul Sharpe (President, Local 279), Richard Totusek (Treasurer, Local 47), Denise Westby (President, Local 99). The group was assisted by Leonard Leibowitz, ICSOM Counsel, and Don Spatz of the George Meany Center.

The group came to formal agreement on a few general principles, most notably on the trade union purpose of the AFM, the need to more equitably distribute the burden of funding the AFM, and the negative effect of employers serving as local officers. It was agreed to ask Ron Bauers to help identify existing administrative inefficiencies that impact the union's cost of doing business.

Also agreed was that the Unity Conference (Las Vegas, August 19-23, 1998) was the target date for presenting a first draft restructure proposal, and that AFM President Steve Young would be invited to the next ITF meeting, which is scheduled for Shreveport in early April. Members of the ITF will also interview AFM staff in New York during the March meeting of the IEB.

One of the many handouts we received in our classes was entitled "Big Questions: Taking a Hard Look at Our Union." These questions were not created specifically for AFM members but pertain to it as well as every other trade union.

The Big Questions are:

1. What kind of Union do we want to be?
 What should the role of the Union be at work?
 What should the role of the Union be in our industry?
 What should the role of the Union be in the economy, in politics and in the community?
 What should the relationship(s) be between the Union (officers and staff) and the members?
 Can we write up "Statement of Principles" or "Vision Statement" that expresses what our Union aspires to be and to achieve?
2. How does our union measure up to our "Vision" or "Principles?"
3. What are the greatest external threat(s) to our union?
4. What are the greatest internal threat(s) to our Union?
5. Are we as strong and powerful at work as we would like to be?
 Are we as strong in our industry as we would like to be?
 Are we as strong and influential in the economy, in politics and in the community as we would like to be?
 If not, why not? What are the current and the potential consequences?
6. Do our members appreciate the union or participate in the union as much as we would like them to?
 If not, why not? What are the current and the potential consequences?
7. Is it important for us to organize the unorganized?
8. Why is it so hard for us to organize the unorganized?
9. How can our Union become more powerful at work? In the industry? In the economy? In politics? In the community?
10. How can we be a more democratic union?
11. What specific things could we accomplish if we were bigger and stronger and/or more influential in the community?
12. What are the internal obstacles we face in trying to become bigger, stronger and more influential? What are the external obstacles?
13. What are the internal obstacles to members appreciating the Union more and participating more in the Union?
 What are the external obstacles?
14. How can we overcome these obstacles?
15. Is it worth trying? What are the risks of making changes?
 What are the risks of not making changes?

1997-98 Wage Chart of ICSOM Orchestras — *compiled by ICSOM Treasurer Stephanie Tretick*

Orchestra	Weeks 97-98	Annual Minimum Salary	Seniority: 40-yr Cap if no max	EMG	Pension: 40-yr Cap if no max	Pension Type	Pension Based on Min/Prsnl Scale	Vacation Weeks	Relief Weeks	Notes	Orchestra
Atlanta	52	56,056	58,136	2,860	3.75%	AFM-EP	m	8	2 services	1 personal leave day.	Atlanta
Baltimore	53	58,300	62,540	0	19,500			8	16 services		Baltimore
Boston	52	80,340	85,964	0	43,500			10	1 of the 10 vacation weeks	At least 22 wks = 5 day weeks	Boston
Buffalo	35	26,800	28,025	1,550	3.5%	AFM-EP	m+EMG	none	none		Buffalo
Chicago Lyric	24	36,960	38,438	0	9%	AFM-EP	p	15%/gross	1 opera relief, prin & asst.prin	Overtime not included in salary.	Chicago Lyric
Chicago Sym	52	81,900	89,674	0	48,000			8	2, plus 1 subscription & 2 summer programs		Chicago Sym
Cincinnati	52	69,030	70,590	2,860	22,000+4%	AFM-EP	m	9	16 services for strings		Cincinnati
Cleveland	52	79,060	87,380	0	36,000			10	none		Cleveland
Colorado	41	25,625	27,265	4,100	7%	AFM-EP/DCP	p	4	7 personal svcs		Colorado
Columbus	46	42,504	43,424	0	7.5%	DCP	p	4	6 services personal leave		Columbus
Dallas	52	58,890	60,970	6,760	23,040			9	12 string services		Dallas
Detroit	53	76,850	78,970	1,534	30,000			9	8 services for strings & 2nd winds		Detroit
Florida Orch	34	23,800	24,820	170	4%	AFM-EP	p	3	4 svc, strings		Florida Orch
Florida Phil	43	35,000	36,075	0	8%	AFM-EP	m	4	12 svcs strings, prin & 2nd wwnds & 2nd brass	Annual "in residence adjustment" of \$800 in addition to salary.	Florida Phil
Grant Park	10	10,091	10,091	0	10%	AFM-EP	p	none	none	Salary includes special services & health & welfare.	Grant Park
Honolulu	28	20,800	22,060	0	5%	AFM-EP	p	none	none		Honolulu
Houston	N/A										Houston
Indianapolis	52	54,600	57,720	0	28,800			8.5	8 svc stg/1&2ww/prin brss/2nd hn,pt/timp		Indianapolis
Jacksonville	38	26,679	28,407	0	2.5%	AFM-EP	p	2	6 svc	Seniority is approx, using formula: \$.15 X yrly svcs X yrs svc	Jacksonville
Kennedy Center	26	14,850	17,450	0	7%	AFM-EP	p	4% of personal scale	none	Season under 2 contracts:opera and ballet/musical.	Kennedy Center
Los Angeles	53	81,900	86,140	2,000	6%	AFM-EP	m	10	+ 1 week strings, 2nd winds	Pension = 10% for those retiring before 9/19/99.	Los Angeles
Louisville	40	23,056	23,676	1,755	500/yr	AFM-EP	m	4	none		Louisville
Met Opera	52	85,353	85,353	0	60%		p	10	1 of the 10 vacation weeks	Salary incl avg reh pay. Addl Radio agrmnt: 21 brdcsts @ \$239.48.	Met Opera
Milwaukee	44	48,092	49,484	0	5%	AFM-EP	p	6	8 services		Milwaukee
Minnesota	52	70,850	72,410	3,250	30,000			8.5	6 maximum (on seniority) + 7 strings		Minnesota
National	52	74,360	86,060	0	35,000			8	1 week + 1 week for strings		National
New Jersey	33	28,875	29,741	825	9%	AFM-EP	m	2	none	2 addl wks work w community outreach.	New Jersey
North Carolina	40.5	32,400	33,413	0	8.5%	403(b)	m	4	4 services personal leave	Salary + 4 optional summer weeks = \$35,600.	North Carolina
New York Phil	52	81,120	86,744	0	43,500			9	1 of the 9 vacation weeks	All players receive add'l min. \$20/wk overscale.	New York Phil
NYC Ballet	30	41,800	44,425	0	12%/gross	AFM-EP	p	4	none		NYC Ballet
NYC Opera	29	32,242	34,272	0	10%	AFM-EP	p	4	none	Base does not include rehearsal pay.	NYC Opera
Oregon	43	33,928	33,928	506	8.5%	AFM-EP	p	2.5	none		Oregon
Philadelphia	52	80,600	86,580	0	46,000			10	1 of the 10 vac wks + 4 pers days & 2 days at Saratoga		Philadelphia
Phoenix	36	23,760	25,020	0	3%	403(b)	m	2	none		Phoenix
Pittsburgh	52	75,510	78,630	0	35,000			10	11th deferred service week possible		Pittsburgh
Rochester	40	30,600	31,530	0	2.5%	DCP	m	3	none		Rochester
Saint Louis	52	66,300	71,500	0	28,000			9	1 of the 9 vacation weeks	2 extra wks vac poss w volunteer work in Comm Partnrsh Prg.	Saint Louis
Saint Paul Chamber	38	52,592	54,192	1,200	9%	403(b)	p	4	1 of 4 = relief week for all		Saint Paul Chamber
San Antonio	39	28,548	30,108	0	6%	AFM-EP	p	4	none	5th vacation week possible with community svc program.	San Antonio
San Diego	N/A										San Diego
SF Ballet	21	28,398	29,686	1,112	10%	AFM-EP	p	13% of base	none	Sal incl vac pay. Yrly contract guar = 105 perms.+102 reh.	SF Ballet
SF Opera	29	52,085	53,085	1,815	9%	AFM-EP	p	4	1 opera every other season for stgs	Vacation is in addition to 25 season weeks	SF Opera
SF Symphony	52	80,340	85,020	1,560	37,000	0	0	10	3 of the 10 = floating, 1 extra (11th) wk for 2nd wnds		SF Symphony
Syracuse	38	23,878	24,478	0	.0046	private	p	4	none		Syracuse
Utah	52	38,532	40,092	0	8%	EP/403(b)	m	9	none		Utah

Campaigning From The Bass Line

ICSOM Treasurer Stephanie Tretick was recently published in "Behind the Scenes," a regular column in The Strad magazine. This article appeared in the November 1997 issue and is reprinted here with permission. (The British spellings have been retained to enhance the flavour. – ed.)

ICSOM is the acronym for the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, a volunteer organisation within the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), established in 1962 by delegates from U.S. and Canadian orchestras. In addition to my duties since 1980 as a violist in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, I have served as the PSO's ICSOM delegate for ten years, and have held positions on ICSOM's governing board for the last seven years.

ICSOM's charter states that the organisation was formed for "the promotion of a better and more rewarding livelihood for the skilled orchestral performer and the enrichment of the cultural life of our society." At the time of ICSOM's formation, the AFM often did not grant orchestral musicians the right to ratify their own contracts even though this had been long observed by almost all other trade unions. Typically, the local musicians' union would privately negotiate a contract with the orchestra manager and present it to the orchestra members as a *fait accompli*. In those days, if an orchestra objected to this lack of direct representation at the bargaining table, the union rarely supported complaining musicians.

When they attempted to enter into the negotiations, players were threatened with fines or even expulsion from the union, with some of the situations escalating into litigation. Through the efforts of ICSOM the situation improved. Although ICSOM has nonvoting representation at the AFM convention, it was instrumental in creating a collaboration with the Federation, and the improved climate fostered more effective negotiations, reshaping the entire symphonic industry of North America. Orchestral jobs evolved into full-time work, with competitive wages, health insurance and pensions.

ICSOM holds an annual conference in late August. All delegates and the governing board, along with observers from foreign orchestras, the musicians' unions and associated fields, assemble for five busy days. In addition to plenary sessions there is ample opportunity for delegates to network, strategise and socialise.

Serving as an ICSOM delegate is intriguing, but it also carries responsibility. As the delegate of the Pittsburgh Symphony I must report to other orchestras about what is happening in Pittsburgh, especially when contract negotiations are ongoing. Conversely, I bring home the latest news from other orchestras. During the past year the ICSOM orchestras were involved in developments concerning our colleagues of the Philadelphia, San Francisco and Atlanta symphony orchestras, who were in contract negotiations and were striking. In all three cases ICSOM-member orchestras responded with letters of support, petitions and monetary donations.

The amount of paperwork for a delegate is significant. ICSOM collects data from its member orchestras on a regular basis, including figures for the yearly Wage and Pension Chart, a roster of members and a conductor evaluation programme. Surveys on topics including what sorts of chairs players prefer, how we deal with noise levels on stage, whether we prefer playing on the flat or on risers, work-related health issues, hall renovations and what kind of lighting is most effective, keep us busy, too.

Because the conference period is so densely scheduled with meetings there is little time for much else, certainly not practicing, so most delegates leave their instruments at home. Because of this, it's only by tabulation at roll call that delegates get associated with the instruments they play for a living. Then it becomes oddly apparent that players of orchestral instruments of lower tessituras predominate in the ICSOM family. This year's conference boasted eight basses, seven violas, five bassoons, five cellos, four horns, three trombones and two tubas—about 70% of the total delegates! The delegates always enjoy making reference to this curious bass line tendency, and the subject invariably spawns a few new viola jokes!

Once a conference has finished, the ICSOM family continues to stay in touch during the year, energised by the conference and the connections made there. What a wonderful sense of community to look down a listing of the 45 ICSOM orchestras and realise that I have colleagues in every one.

*Stephanie Tretick
Pittsburgh Symphony ICSOM Delegate
ICSOM Treasurer*



(photo by Stephanie Tretick, of her work area at last summer's ICSOM conference)



A Message from the ICSOM Governing Board

The ICSOM Governing Board wishes to describe a serious situation unfolding in Milwaukee involving an ICSOM orchestra and a ROPA orchestra.

The managements of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (MSO) and the Milwaukee Ballet have announced that they are discussing having MSO musicians serve as the orchestra for the ballet, thereby displacing all 40 musicians of the Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra (MBO).

As is widely known, ICSOM Chair Robert Levine is also a member of the MSO and an officer of the Milwaukee Musicians' Association, AFM Local #8. In a letter to the ICSOM Governing Board on February 24, Robert withdrew from any participation in the Governing Board's consideration of this issue. He informed us that he did so in order that any actions which might be taken by the Governing Board in this situation would be perceived as driven by nothing other than ICSOM's obligation to the principles of trade unionism and to its member orchestras. We believe that in removing himself from any discussion of this matter by the Governing Board, Robert Levine has acted appropriately and ethically, and we support his decision.

Nevertheless, the ICSOM Governing Board is not restrained from action on this issue, and it strongly urges the musicians of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra to refuse to take over the work currently performed by their colleagues in the Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra.

In recent years, we have seen similar situations. We witnessed the musicians of the Boca Pops Orchestra of Florida willingly cross the picket line of the musicians of the Miami City Ballet, who were likewise being collectively fired by their management. This was, in our opinion, a total collapse of trade unionism and collegiality.

On the other hand, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra musicians refused to replace the musicians of the Minnesota Opera, and National Symphony musicians refused to act as a ballet pit orchestra replacing the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra. In both cases, the resolve of the symphony musicians and their commitment to trade unionism saved the jobs of the pit musicians.

We urge the musicians of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra to give careful consideration to these recent occurrences in making their position known to their management.

The ICSOM Governing Board

Several other ICSOM musicians in addition to Mary Plaine attended the Meany Center program for musicians. The following are comments by two of them, as published in the March 1998 issue of Allegro, newsletter of AFM Local 802 (New York City):



I worry that the individual interest groups—like RMA, ICSOM, ROPA, etc.—may disintegrate into many separate satellites before we have a chance to restructure. The answer lies in these various interest groups, along with the large locals, because that's where the most active working musicians are involved right now. What's needed is a solid restructuring that can keep these groups consolidated and meet their needs at the same time. I think the Unity Conference this summer will be the perfect opportunity to really address the problems of working musicians.

*David Titcomb
Chair, NYC Opera Orchestra Committee*



One of the most stimulating things we did was to attack the grand notion that, as musicians, we are different from other workers in the labor force and therefore employers should treat us differently. After all, how can an artist possibly maintain his or her integrity and be involved in unionism? Aren't the two in total conflict?

This question, above all, brought home for many of us the personal struggle we endure in our artistic selves, resolving the conflict between that which we idealize and the brutality of our social and economic realities. For me, in a most personal way, it was the most liberating moment of the entire week. This recognition was something I had avoided confronting in myself for many years, and it was only with all of us finding such a common ground on this and other issues that I was able to honestly open myself to it. Thank you all!

The result of our brief education (which I hope to continue) was to turn upside-down many of my lifelong assumptions about musicians and the music industry, with respect to labor and unionism. Most important was the realization that many other industries have similar labor problems, and that in this respect we are not so different.

*Richard Simon
New York Philharmonic*

"Voicings" graphic design and concept by Michael Gorman and Norman Foster (bass and clarinet, respectively, of the Honolulu Symphony)

Newslets (Or, Life Is The Pits)

The Denver Musicians' Association, Local 20-623 AFM, reports that although a live orchestra was preserved for the **Colorado Ballet's** 1997 *Nutcracker* production, future use of tape to displace the ballet orchestra is still a threat. Ken Davies, webmaster of the Denver Musicians' Association website, has created a very detailed and entertaining webpage about the dance-to-tape issue, viewable at www.dmamusic.org/coloballet/coloballet.html, and asks "AFM members from all over the country to view the information and contribute opinions for posting on this matter." Ken adds, "Let's make everyone aware of this unaesthetic and unethical use of technology to degrade the contributions of professional musicians. Remember that this kind of thing could circle around to your town in more ways than ballet."

Ballet companies may displace musicians with a recording, or a synthesizer, or with other musicians. As reported by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the **Milwaukee Ballet Company** has proposed that the Milwaukee Symphony become its pit orchestra, claiming that "outsourcing musical services would enable the premier dance company and the premier musical organization in the state to collaborate. It would take the ballet company out of the business of running an orchestra . . . and it would lead to administrative efficiencies." It would also lead to putting the 40-member Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra out of work.

The "pitting" of one group of union musicians against another is not new. In 1996, during the Kennedy Center Orchestra's contract negotiations, the National Symphony was invited to take over a portion of the work of the Kennedy Center Orchestra. In 1994 the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra musicians faced threats of their own organization's bankruptcy unless they broke the strike of the Minnesota Opera musicians and took their work away. In both cases, union musicians supported each other and everyone kept his job. (See "A Message from the ICSOM Governing Board" on page 7.)

And even if entire pit orchestras aren't destroyed in one fell swoop, individual musicians can sometimes be picked off one by one. According to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "an *Aida* soldier created a lot of audience concern when his spear wound up down in the orchestra pit. 'One of the musicians was hit by it, but she's fine,' said Laura Silver, the PR woman for the **Minnesota Opera**." In another incident, a Houston Symphony player was hit and startled, but not harmed, by an errant prop during the **Houston Opera's** production of *Billy Budd*.

But not all pit mishaps are humorous or inconsequential. Objects falling into the pit have caused instrument damage and career-ending injuries. There are also continuing concerns about the health hazards of theatrical fog and pyrotechnics. From job insecurities and property damage to personal injury and illness, working in the pit can be a risky business.

ICSOM Governing Board

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