

# Senza Sordino

Official Publication of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians

VOLUME 37, NO. 3

Online Edition

June 1999

## The 1999 AFM Convention: A Chance for Salvage, or for Sinking Deeper?

For the last 20 years, the American Federation of Musicians has been in steep decline—many jobs in the music business have been lost, more and more of the work that remains has become non-union, and membership has dropped precipitously. There is a widespread belief, both within the Federation and without, that if the AFM is to survive and succeed, it must radically change the way it operates, both internally—structurally, how it relates to its members—and externally—functionally, how it relates to employers, other unions, and the music industry in general.

At the 1997 AFM Convention it became clear that the current system of AFM governance and legislative representation at the Convention did not provide an effective framework in which to either correctly assess the nature and scope of the AFM's difficulties or enact measures to address them. The Federation's own attempt at restructure failed, and no new vision or plan of action emerged as an alternative course to follow.

In response to this alarming organizational paralysis, the leaders of the AFM player conferences, representing the majority of working musicians in the Federation, formed an Investigative Task Force (ITF) to study the AFM's problems and propose solutions. The results of that study were presented last summer at the Unity Conference, where ICSOM and the other AFM player conferences passed Resolutions, based on the recommendations of the ITF, to be presented to the 1999 AFM Convention.

The following are brief descriptions of the 1999 AFM Convention Resolutions submitted by ICSOM as a result of the ITF's two years of deliberations and the actions of the Unity Conference. (For a complete list of the recommendations and resolutions to be presented at the AFM Convention, see the May 1999 issue of the *International Musician*.)

### Resolution No. 1

(amends AFM Bylaws, Article 2)

Establishes that "The primary function of the AFM and its Locals shall be to organize musicians for collective action, . . ."

### Resolution No. 10

(amends Article 3)

Creates the Conference Representatives Board, made up of "one Representative elected from and by each official Player Conference and an equal number of District Representatives from the Regional Conferences Convention," to share AFM governance with the IEB.

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### Why ITF Matters

Robert Levine, ICSOM Chair

Two summers ago, in the wake of the now-infamous "Titanic" AFM Convention of 1997, the four Player Conferences embarked on two major projects: the Unity Conference and the Investigative Task Force (ITF). Some observers predicted that the ITF would simply float into the same old port, calling once again for increased funding for the Symphonic Services and Electronic Media Services Divisions, or perhaps even the establishment of real trade divisions.

But the ITF was a voyage of discovery, not a ferry trip. It was a unique event in the history of the AFM—representatives of the AFM's members who work under collective bargaining agreements, reaching out to local officers, without the blessing of the AFM's power structure, to form a partnership to ask the most fundamental questions a labor union could ask itself: what it ought to do, who it ought to be, and how it ought to be governed.

The most surprising conclusion the ITF came to—surprising even to its own members—was that reform was even more important to the AFM's future than was structural change. The ITF's answers to the questions it asked have the potential to change fundamentally the Federation's culture. And without a change in the way that the AFM thinks about itself and its mission, structural redesign really is the equivalent of shuffling the deck chairs on that most famous of ocean liners.

While the ITF Report made eleven recommendations, the core of the Report were two: the establishment of a new body of governance, the Conference Representatives Board; and a ban on employers of musicians serving as union officers.

The **Conference Representatives Board (CRB)**, as proposed, would be a board of ten representatives: five from the AFM's player conferences and five from the various geographic regions. It would have formal oversight over, and approval of, the AFM's budget and any expenses in excess of that budget.

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(WHY ITF MATTERS: continued from page 1)

The CRB has been characterized by some as an “elitist power grab” by the player conferences. In reality, it is an attempt to bring badly needed perspectives to the governance of the AFM. But why are those perspectives needed? Or, to put it another way, why are those perspectives not already present?

Currently, the day-to-day affairs of the AFM are in the hands of the International Executive Board—four executive officers and five members-at-large. The system looks good on paper, but in practice the IEB does not appear to do much real governing. Given the nature of the electoral system in the AFM, this is hardly surprising. Candidates for office at AFM Conventions rarely take public positions on issues, and thus any real ideological differences amongst candidates are blurred or buried. AFM elections are almost invariably fought on the basis of candidates’ personal popularity with the Convention delegates.

Perhaps the system of at-large elections actually guarantees issue-free campaigns. Because no candidate is assured of support by any kind of voting bloc, candidates are anxious not to offend any possible constituency by taking positions on anything controversial, or indeed anything of real substance. In the process of trying to appeal to all possible voters, the successful candidates end up with no real constituency and no mandate to do anything but continue to be popular.

The CRB will bring to the national governance table, for the first time, points of view from real constituencies based both on workplace and geography. It will bring the concerns of working musicians into the room in a way that cannot be ignored. It will make the AFM far more democratic and far more responsive to the concerns of its members.

But even more controversial than the CRB has been the proposal to **ban union officials from acting as employers**. This is likely to seem an abstract issue to many orchestra musicians—after all, *their* employers aren't serving on the local union board.

But imagine, for a moment, what kind of a union it would be if your orchestra manager was also the president of your local. (Given that a number of ICSOM orchestra managers are, in fact, members of the AFM, such a scenario is technically possible in many locals.) With management on both sides of the table, it would give new meaning to the phrase “negotiating against ourselves.” Getting the union to pay for arbitrations against your orchestra management would be virtually impossible. You wouldn't much like the union's take on job security issues. And the union's interest in organizing other employers would be modest at best.

But, for many members of the AFM, that's exactly the kind of union they have, because the boards of far too many AFM locals are dominated by musicians who make most of their musical income *by employing other musicians*. Because of this domination, their union is not very interested in raising scales, especially in ways that might burden employers (such as adding pension contributions.) It's certainly not interested in organizing musicians for collective action against their employers. And it's not likely to take the employees' side in a dispute with the employer. In short, what many members of the AFM have is an employer-dominated union. Is it any wonder that so many of them have left?

It's also not surprising that many local officers don't want to change this system. There are many locals that would have a hard time finding musicians who weren't active contractors to serve on local boards. And, to be fair, some contractors who serve on local boards are good local officers and try to do well by their members. (No doubt, some orchestra managers would also do well by their members as local officers.) But the fact remains that acting as an employer of musicians and serving as an officer of a union that represents musicians are two fundamentally incompatible roles. A labor union that doesn't understand this—or doesn't act to fix it—is a labor union in name only.

Barring employers from serving as union officers and bringing geographic and workplace representation to the national governance table will not, by themselves, be sufficient to make the AFM an effective labor union. But they are absolutely necessary conditions to that end. A union that is run by employers and not by people who are truly representative of the membership will always be a lousy union, regardless of its size or wealth. It's time for the AFM to do better.



(AFM CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS: continued from page 1)

**Resolution No. 12**  
(amends Article 5)

Extends to RMA and TMA Delegates, as well as ICSOM, OCSM, and ROPA Delegates, the requirement that the Local “pay the reasonable and necessary expenses of sending one Delegate from each such symphonic orchestra and/or local chapter to the annual meeting of the national or international Conference with which the orchestra or chapter is affiliated.”

**Resolution No. 15**  
(amends Article 5)

“No Local Officer shall (1) serve in the position of a Personnel Manager or a Contractor for an employer in the Local's jurisdiction; (2) work in any position where s/he receives any remuneration from contracting or booking musical units (other than a regularly organized one of which s/he is a leader or member) in the Local's jurisdiction.”

**Resolution No. 16**  
(amends Article 5)

Provides for Local Officer training.

**Resolution No. 20**  
(amends Article 8)

Establishes an Inactive Life Membership category.

**Resolution No. 29**  
(amends Article 12)

Reverses the 1997 Convention action of charging members for the cost of collecting claims on their behalf.

**Resolution No. 44**  
(amends Article 26)

Defines and manages potential conflicts of interest of Local officers and agents who “only sporadically or minimally engage, book or contract for Local members.”

**Resolution No. 48**  
(amends Article 27)

“As a matter of policy, at least one rank-and-file musician, selected in consultation with the Players Conferences Council, shall be included among the Trustees appointed by the Federation to the board of the American Federation of Musicians' and Employers' Pension Fund . . . .”



# ICSOM Conference 1999

At The Antlers, Vail, Colorado  
August 25 - 28, 1999

## AGENDA

**Music Medicine Panel**  
**Interest-Based Bargaining Panel**  
**Report on the 1999 AFM Convention**  
**Election of Governing Board Members-at-Large**

*ICSOM Delegates:* Please contact our official travel agents **Susan Levine** or **Carl King** at Travel Gems for help with conference travel and accommodations. Susan and Carl can be reached in New York from 9:30AM to 7:00PM daily at 1-800-569-4495 x115, 212-889-3131 x115, Fax 212-889-8688, or [suetravel@aol.com](mailto:suetravel@aol.com).

There will be Conference discounts available with United Airlines into Denver or Eagle (about 31 miles from Vail) for all participants and their guests. The earlier you call, fax, or email, the lower the price. There are also discounted rates for van service through Colorado Mountain Express, or car rentals from either airport.



### *Panel Preview:* **Music Medicine**

Panelists Dr. Richard Norris (author of ICSOM's publication *The Musicians Survival Manual*) and Dr. Simon McGrail will discuss the performance-related injuries and physical disorders which affect musicians, as well as injury prevention. Psychologist David Sternbach will focus on stress and its links to increased risk for overuse injury. ICSOM counsel Leonard Leibowitz will be discussing disability insurance, worker's compensation, and what players should do legally to protect their jobs when their playing is compromised by injury. Information will be available on the disability benefits available through the AFM-EP Fund.

Optional evening sessions will also be offered by David Sternbach on performance anxiety, and by Richard Norris on ergonomics and injury prevention.

*Lucinda-Lewis,*  
*ICSOM Secretary*  
*Music Medicine Panel Moderator*

### *Panel Preview:* **Interest-Based Bargaining**

Interest-Based Bargaining. Mutual-Gains Bargaining. Win-Win Bargaining. Sound familiar? What do these terms mean? How is IBB different from "traditional," adversarial bargaining? Is it good for an orchestra, and/or the union? Is it bad? Or is it neutral, just one more tool we should have at our disposal when negotiating a contract?

ICSOM will devote a day of this August's conference to examining these issues. We plan to have a representative from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service spend the morning session explaining the model of IBB, how it developed and why, and how its participants are trained. In the afternoon ICSOM Legal Counsel Leonard Leibowitz and SSD Director Florence Nelson, along with some symphonic musicians who have participated in IBB, will interact with the mediator, examine the pros and cons of IBB, and take questions from the floor.

*Mary Plaine*  
*ICSOM Governing Board Member-at-Large*  
*IBB Panel Moderator*

## Newslets

“As we approach the 21st century there is a very real danger that the strength of the worker that was generated by solidarity will be eroded to the very point at which the need for unity was recognized more than 100 years ago. Perhaps, at that time, history will repeat itself and workers will begin, all over again, the struggle to have a say in their own destiny. . . .

“The union is not the elected officers and staff who comprise the administration, nor is it the physical location of the offices. The Union is the membership, the workers, the people. All the Union can ever hope to be is represented by the resolve of these individuals to unite for the purpose of exhibiting strength in their numbers.”

*Frank Amoss, President Local 7 AFM (Orange County, CA), in the Score, Local 7's newsletter*



On May 28, the **Honolulu Symphony musicians voted to adopt a resolution** instructing their local's delegates to the AFM Convention to support IEB Recommendation No. 15 concerning changes to the AFM Strike Fund. Then a member of the local's AFM Convention delegation announced to the orchestra that the local's delegation intended to vote in favor of the resolutions and recommendations supported by ICSOM. The musicians' questions and suggestions were invited.



**MUSIC WEB HUNTER** is a new online service offered by the Denver Musicians Association website. It is designed for searching music sites and promoting music sites across a broad spectrum of music lovers from casual fan to academic to working professional. Check it out at:

<http://www.dmamusic.org/musicwebhunter/index.html>

## Music Is A Casualty in Kosovo War

The scheduled appearance by the Boston Symphony in the People's Republic of China was cancelled by the Chinese government in the wake of the killing of three Chinese diplomats in a NATO bombing raid that mistakenly hit the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

The *Boston Globe* reports that the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Asian tour was cut short when Chinese officials cancelled two BSO performances in Beijing that were to have taken place in the presence of Chinese president Jiang Zemin. A letter from the China Performing Arts Agency stated, in part, “We believe the favorable atmosphere for the China tour at the moment is no longer there, and no longer is it appropriate for the tour to be conducted as originally scheduled.” Music director Seiji Ozawa, who was born in China, said in a statement that he was “terribly sad” about the cancellation: “I have decided to honor my commitment to give a master class in Beijing, but obviously it's not the same without the BSO. I prefer to think of this as a postponement, not a cancellation.”



## International Conference of Symphony & Opera Musicians (ICSOM)

Affiliated with the American Federation of Musicians - AFL-CIO

### ICSOM Governing Board

**Chairperson**  
Robert Levine  
Milwaukee Symphony  
7680 North Longview Drive  
Glendale WI 53209-1862  
(414) 352-3246 / FAX 352-6090  
rtl@icsom.org

**President**  
David R. Angus  
Rochester Philharmonic  
284 Castlebar Road  
Rochester NY 14610  
(716) 244-2514 (Voice/FAX)  
david.angus@icsom.org

**Secretary**  
Lucinda-Lewis  
New Jersey Symphony  
4 West 31st Street #921  
New York NY 10001  
(212) 594-1636 (Voice/FAX)  
lucinda-lewis@icsom.org

**Treasurer**  
Stephanie Tretick  
Pittsburgh Symphony  
3979 Boulevard Drive  
Pittsburgh PA 15217-2619  
(412) 422-7275 (Voice/FAX)  
stephanie.tretick@icsom.org

**Editor, Senza Sordino**  
Marsha Schweitzer  
Honolulu Symphony  
905 Spencer Street #404  
Honolulu HI 96822  
(808) 531-6617 (Voice/FAX)  
marsha.schweitzer@icsom.org

### MEMBERS AT LARGE

William Buchman  
Chicago Symphony  
4165 W Berteau Ave  
Chicago IL 60641-2240  
(773) 205-8624  
bill.buchman@icsom.org

Michael Moore  
Atlanta Symphony  
953 Rosedale Road NE  
Atlanta GA 30306  
(404) 875-TUBA (Voice/FAX)  
michael.moore@icsom.org

Mary Plaine  
Baltimore Symphony  
630 Deepdene Road  
Baltimore MD 21210  
(410) 433-6063  
mary.plaine@icsom.org

Charles Schlueter  
Boston Symphony  
60 Otis Street  
Newtonville MA 02460-1823  
(617) 964-4019 / FAX 630-8077  
charles.schlueter@icsom.org

### ICSOM Orchestras

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**The ICSOM Website**  
<http://www.icsom.org>



*Senza Sordino* is the official publication of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians and is published four to six times a year. ICSOM is affiliated as a conference of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO. Unauthorized reproduction of any part of *Senza Sordino* is strictly forbidden. Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved. ISSN 1074-7850

**ICSOM Counsel**  
Leonard Leibowitz  
400 Madison Avenue #600  
New York NY 10017  
(212) 832-8322 / FAX 605-0909

**ICSOM Emeritus Program**  
Abe Torchinsky  
777 W. Germantown Pike #1028  
Plymouth Meeting PA 19462  
Phone: (610) 277-3981  
AbeT825844@aol.com

**Orchestra-L and WebMaestro:** Robert Levine

**Subscriptions:** \$10 per year, payable to *Senza Sordino*, c/o Marsha Schweitzer, 905 Spencer Street #404, Honolulu HI 96822