

Senza Sordino

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2007 AFM Convention

by Laura Ross, ICSOM Secretary

For the first time in 12 years, I had to miss the final day of the AFM Convention, when most of the real action occurs. This year, the Nashville Symphony hosted the American Symphony Orchestra League's convention. It overlapped with the AFM Convention on Wednesday, so I was on the red-eye early Wednesday morning to play the final rehearsals for our concert at the League convention. Having attended both conventions, I'd like to pass on a few of my own observations. *[Editor's Note: The American Symphony Orchestra League changed its name at its convention. It is now the League of American Orchestras.]*

First, some history: When I began attending AFM Conventions in 1995 as ROPA's secretary, there were significantly more attendees than today. Dissatisfaction with the AFM back then continued five years after the Roehl Report recommended, and the Blue Ribbon Committee made permanent, the formal establishment of the Symphonic Services Division and the Electronic Media Division. Player Conference delegates had a voice on the floor of the Convention by that time, but they were mostly relegated to some round tables off to the side of the voting delegates, near the AFM staff tables. I became a voting delegate for Local 257 (Nashville) in 2001 and moved over to one of about 15 long tables in front of the dais, where the AFM officers, division heads, emeritus officers, and general counsel sit.

Over the years I've watched as well meaning and thoughtful resolutions from the Restructure Committee, the Investigative Task Force, and the Futures Committee were discarded because many delegates feared change. The AFM has many problems that require thoughtful, purposeful changes, but fear of losing control is a strong motivator to continue to do nothing (regarding, for example, establishing regional centers to assist locals that some see as a threat to small locals). Of course, politics play into these decisions as well.

Well-meaning people continue to submit resolutions, and every once in a while something changes. A few changes occurred this year, the biggest being the move to a three-year convention cycle. Most saw

this move as essential to saving the AFM financially. (Removing the AFM's obligation to pay per diem and hotel expenses for one delegate from every local and Player Conference would probably save the AFM more. This year there were 317 delegates, and more than 200 received reimbursement.) A couple of resolutions designed to make the business of the AFM more transparent by ensuring better access to information easily passed this time, even though they went down in flames in 2005. A substitute resolution similar to the Orchestra Services "Lite" Program we approved at the ICSOM Conference last summer also passed. Delegates also adopted a two-year-old IEB policy regarding the appointment of Player Conference representatives to AFM committees.

One change that seems to have been lost in the shuffle of final day events redefined what a "rank-and-file" member is when one is chosen as an AFM-EPF trustee. The resolution dealt with a situation that, in part, caused a major rift that began initially between the AFM and RMA. It addresses the notification and consultation process between Player Conference representatives and the AFM president in choosing rank-and-file pension trustees. I hope this will finally repair the misunderstandings that have dogged this process in the past.

There were the usual time-wasting resolutions, which have more to do with opinion than with changing our AFM. However, they paled in comparison to two other matters that received discussions of over two hours' duration each at this Convention.

The first was an emergency motion from the Canadian Conference to waive the requirement that Montreal's dues be paid in full prior to the AFM Convention. According to Article 5, Section 47(e) of the AFM bylaws, a local in arrears one quarterly payment of per capita dues or in arrears three months in reporting and/or forwarding work dues shall not be allowed representation at the Convention. The Montreal local was in arrears by nearly \$100,000. The motion was presented before any Convention action occurred and required a two-thirds vote of approval just to be discussed. Numerous people spoke passionately about how Montreal's financial situation was caused by a previous administration that had been removed from office. They said that the new officers were making good-faith efforts and promises to pay back what was owed. However, the IEB established a policy many years ago that discontinued loans to locals. So without action by the Convention delegates, Montreal would have been prohibited from attending.

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Chairperson's Report by Bruce Ridge

My visits to Las Vegas never fail to leave me numbed by the 24-hour sensory overload that assaults you the instant you emerge from the Jetway. The din of bells and coins hitting metal trays mix in with the over-sized visual assaults, promoting magicians I've never heard of who are somehow famous enough to have enticed Pamela Anderson to be their assistant. In the midst of a beautiful desert, Las Vegas is a deceptive mirage.

But on my most recent trip to Vegas, the 24-hour activity of the ICSOM team had nothing to do with casinos, shows, street spectacles, or buffets. Rather, the 97th Convention of the American Federation of Musicians (June 18-20) was a show unto itself.

The ICSOM team arrived bolstered by the overwhelming support of our orchestras in our *Call to Action* campaign that protested a proposed increase in symphonic work dues. During this Convention, local presidents would seek us out at our table to tell us that they had indeed received petitions from their orchestras, and that they had heard the unified message of ICSOM. Our locals were receptive to our message, and we can report that the *Call to Action* campaign was a success and that the revenue package passed by the Convention does not include an increase in symphonic work dues.

This success is a result of the actions of the musicians of ICSOM, and we have effectively demonstrated the strength we have when we all respond to a collective call for action. Our positive message has been heard, and we can build on this effort for future causes as we continue to advocate for our musicians and the arts.

We had many allies in this effort. Our friends and colleagues from the other Player Conferences of the AFM must be thanked, as well as the many local officers who heard our message. But the main credit must go to our ICSOM delegates, our player associations, and to every musician who signed a petition or spoke to a Convention delegate. The success of this grass-roots effort should encourage every orchestral

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Photo by Charles Venard

ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge addresses delegates at the 2007 AFM Convention in Las Vegas.

International Conference of Symphony & Opera Musicians

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Orchestras

Alabama Symphony Orchestra
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
Boston Symphony Orchestra
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
The Cleveland Orchestra
Colorado Symphony Orchestra
Columbus Symphony Orchestra
Dallas Symphony Orchestra
Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Florida Orchestra
Florida Philharmonic Orchestra
Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra
Grant Park Symphony Orchestra
Honolulu Symphony Orchestra
Houston Symphony Orchestra
Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra
Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra
Kansas City Symphony
Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra
Los Angeles Philharmonic
Louisville Orchestra
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra
Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
Minnesota Orchestra
Nashville Symphony Orchestra
National Symphony Orchestra
New Jersey Symphony Orchestra
New York City Ballet Orchestra
New York City Opera Orchestra
New York Philharmonic
North Carolina Symphony
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President's Report by Brian Rood



Perspectives on the AFM Convention

An AFM Convention typically packs a great deal of business and politics into a whirlwind three-day session. Committees made up of local delegates appointed by the AFM president listen to many hours of testimony given by proponents and opponents of the many resolutions and recommendations submitted prior to the Convention. The committees include: Measures and Benefits, Law, Finance, Joint Law and Finance, Good and Welfare, and Organization and Legislation. These committees often arrive before the Convention begins to pore over and discuss financial packages, bylaw amendments, and other proposals, as well as additional matters affecting the Federation. After hearing testimony and discussing the merits of a proposal, a committee has the option to give a favorable or unfavorable recommendation, or to refer the proposal to another committee or to the IEB. A committee's recommendation is significant because it often carries great weight with the delegates on the Convention floor. There are times when delegates will vote against a committee's recommendation, but those instances are few and far between.

Regarding the election of AFM leadership, it is interesting to note that candidates do not have an opportunity for campaign speeches or debate in a public forum. It was strange indeed to go the entire Convention without once hearing from one of the two candidates for AFM President (even though he was seated at the head table near the podium). IEB members were elected who never spoke on the floor prior to the elections. It is easy to take for granted a key feature of ICSOM Conferences that offers delegates the opportunity to hear candidates' ideas and strategies to strengthen ICSOM.

As you have read by now, our *Call to Action* campaign was tremendously effective. With the support of our orchestras, ICSOM was effective in warding off increased work dues for symphonic players. An added benefit was that ICSOM's collective voice was heard firmly. Several proposals that made good sense for symphonic players as well as the AFM were adopted, and others that may have undermined our collective abilities were defeated. A personal highlight was to observe Chairperson Ridge as he spoke eloquently of unity on the Convention floor and in committee meetings. An equally poignant highlight was the effective camaraderie of present and former Governing Board members and other Player Conference officers as we interacted

with the various committees and on the floor to further not only ICSOM's interests but those of the whole AFM.

An unsettling aspect of the 2007 AFM Convention was the hostility clearly aimed at members of RMA. That there is tension between the the AFM's and RMA's leadership is not recent news. However, it became painfully apparent during this Convention that this rift, if not corrected soon, may well spell the end the AFM as we now know it. Appeals for unity and healing were made on the Convention floor by delegates, IEB members, and our own ICSOM chairperson. It is sincerely hoped that all leaderships will roll up their sleeves and rededicate themselves to healing the rifts and to building a stronger, more relevant AFM. Our collective future depends on it.

The hostility directed towards specific working musicians of the AFM that permeated this Convention was that much more remarkable given the relative ease with which delegates made adjustments to allow specific delegates to be seated. Legal considerations aside for the moment, it was commendable for there to be "unity" from the floor on the issue of seating these delegates. One can only wonder why this same compassion and dedication could not be applied to all AFM members, including the RMA and other working musicians.

When in its infancy, ICSOM endured and overcame obstacles with the Federation. We did so by creating change from within. Previous Governing Boards have stressed the need for ICSOM musicians to become more involved with their own locals and to become AFM delegates. I can count at least six recent past and present Governing Board members who are AFM delegates and integrally involved with their locals. As Chairperson Ridge states in his column, more ICSOM musicians must become AFM delegates in order to create the changes needed to strengthen the AFM. Are we up to this task? Are we ready? With the 2007 ICSOM Conference just a few days away, the Governing Board eagerly looks forward to meeting with the delegates to discuss how to strengthen ICSOM and the AFM.

In closing I would like to recognize Member-at-Large Stephen Lester as he leaves the Governing Board. Steve has provided invaluable advice and assistance during his tenure on the Governing Board and the ICSOM Media Committee. It has been a great personal pleasure to get to know and work with such a committed, passionate, and talented leader. Steve's presence helped ground us during times of discussion while urging us to look optimistically to ICSOM's future amongst the seemingly never-ending negative rhetoric coming from all sides. Steve, thank you!



First page of an Atlanta Symphony petition signed by all its musicians—one of many from ICSOM orchestras to their locals.

A Different View of How To Fix What Ails American Orchestras

A Food-for-Thought Perspective

by Lucinda Lewis

Establishing economic stability and community relevance have proven to be constant challenges for American orchestras, and of course, musicians have paid the highest price throughout this battle for survival. Cuts in weeks and wages have become the traditional response to orchestras' economic troubles but have never succeeded as a legitimate bridge to a long-term fix. So it's not all that surprising these days to find orchestras stagnating on the brink of financial insolvency, as musicians bargain themselves further into managerial and governance roles to join the pursuit of the elusive permanent solution. Our growing involvement in institutional decision making reflects not only how musicians have come to react to the economic malaise that has haunted American orchestras, but demonstrates how we are now complicating this problem.

In years past, if our managements were unable to keep things afloat, we accused them of inadequacy. Now that many of us have become part of our organizations' problem-solving machinery and have proven ourselves equally incapable of offering up long-term solutions, we have begun to parrot some of the age-old excuses we used to dismiss. That saying—*not being able to see the forest for the trees*—provides a fitting analogy.

Musicians are so close to the problem that, like our managements, we tend to see only the *micro* reasons that contribute to our institutions' failures and respond with *micro* solutions. Community outreach programs and musician involvement in fundraising and public relations are among a whole host of micro solutions which have not gotten the traction they need to be effective largely because the symphonic industry as a whole has never collectively addressed the *macro* problem. The macro problem begins with the way the industry has historically done business and the fact that orchestras are more comfortable with tradition than they are fond of change. Nothing bears this out more than an article from the 1930s and a study from the 1970s.

"Symphony Finance" was a lengthy exposé published in *Fortune Magazine* in 1937, which delved into the New York Philharmonic Symphony Society's financial difficulties in particular and those of other orchestras in general. In 1970, the Midwest Research Institute of Kansas City issued its comprehensive report, *25 Symphonies Doomed to Die*, which concluded that a combination of bad business practices in American orchestras and over-extended local philanthropies presented the greatest peril to the symphonic industry. What made these two studies particularly interesting was the degree to which they documented the mistakes made and the solutions sought by orchestras during two very different periods in American music. Remarkably, from 1898 to this day, the reasons orchestras have gotten themselves into trouble, and the ways they have attempted to get out of it are all but identical. In spite of that, American orchestras have never responded collectively to their redundant, individual financial calamities by making a wholesale adjustment in the way the entire industry does business.

Fortune Magazine launched its investigation in 1937 because orchestras were perpetually in debt and always close to being shut down by their boards. Unfortunately, what the magazine found back then—and continues to be the case today—was that not even a sudden infusion of large sums of money spelled permanent relief for an orchestra's financial woes.

Typically, when orchestras have had money, they expand their seasons, increase their touring and media, and generally inflate expenditures until the ledger bleeds red. The ensuing structural improvements and financial economies usually survive long enough until there is enough money in the bank to start the cycle all over again. This has happened with such regularity, it has fostered a rather naïve belief in the industry that fundraising shortfalls and structural deficits are economy-driven, industry-wide phenomena that affect every orchestra the same that we just have to live with. And live with it we have.

Our pursuit of the same, tired solutions hasn't exactly paid dividends either. A prime example is media. In spite of the multitude of recordings in the public domain and poor sales to boot, orchestras have always viewed technology and electronic media as the Holy Grail of bottom-line relief. Well, not exactly. As *Fortune Magazine* presciently observed back in 1937, "...science had twice been seen coming to the financial rescue of orchestras—once with phonographs and again with radio broadcasts—and twice she has produced flops." To this day, while orchestras rush to turn their archival recordings into CD box sets and find sponsors to underwrite their radio broadcasts, few have given a thought to the fact that not many Americans are actually listening to their broadcasts or buying their recordings. Therein lies the core of the *macro* problem.

Why do orchestras crave to produce recordings, do radio broadcasts and international touring, expand community outreach and educational programs, and try to turn their musicians into marketers? Simply put, these are all forms of *promotion*. We are still trying to find ways of selling ourselves, increasing our value, and expanding our local, national, and international audiences. The problem is, the aggregate impact of all of these micro strategies is short lived. Nevertheless, they have become central components of every orchestra's marketing arsenal.

In a nutshell, the macro problem boils down to the fact that classical music is not a vital part of the *national entertainment industry* or even on the radar of the majority of entertainment consumers. It's not difficult to see why. Our institutional business practices have historically been designed around basic survival at the local level and have not been innovative or collectively effective in selling symphonic music nationally to a society that loves music. Our industry has never explored the kinds of evolving national strategies necessary to generate and maintain public interest in what we have to offer. As a result, classical music has been relegated to the fringes

of society's rich entertainment menu. One would think that solving this problem would dictate involving the most progressive and creative marketing and public relations experts. Instead, many orchestras are courting a group of amateur advisors—their musicians.

Aside from the legal questions raised by musicians serving on symphony boards and playing at managerial activities, if orchestras legitimately want to find solutions to their longstanding economic and administrative problems, what value is there in turning to employees with no business training or expertise? The current trend to make management and labor more compatible may have added a layer of wishful thinking, but it has obfuscated the forest and prevented us from recognizing the underlying macro cause of our current industry-wide dilemma.

To most consumers, the words *symphony orchestra*, *opera*, and *ballet* evoke images of high brow, boring, passé entertainment for the rich. If so many people have the wrong image of our product, how can we ever expect them to patronize us? The lack of consumer interest in classic music is the primary reason American orchestras have had to devote such large portions of their annual budgets in constant fundraising and promotional campaigns.

You're probably thinking: *If we haven't been able to correct this problem in over a hundred years, how can we do it now?* Perhaps we need something along the lines of a corporate identity for classical music.

Corporate identity is an image-building technique for which for-profit and nonprofit corporations spend large sums of money to have created. This involved process develops an identity brand that makes a company or a charity unique and distinguishable, gives it instant recognition, and expands its ability to appeal easily to a target audience or customer base, as well as giving the public a greater sense of ownership in that company. Consider a few corporate identities: *The Muppets*, *Harley-Davidson*, *McDonalds*, *Ronald McDonald House*, *The Red Cross*. Each of these evokes a specific reaction in consumers that is the product of a well-developed branding strategy.

Obviously, orchestras cannot become one national brand because they are local entities. On the other hand, classical music is our common product; however, as long as that product is undervalued and under consumed by Americans, most orchestras will never be able to attract the top level of corporate and philanthropic gifts.

Big or small, corporations tend to use philanthropy more as an extension of their advertising and promotional campaigns than a support for worthy causes. It's, therefore, not surprising that companies reserve their largest gifts for organizations with national reputations that produce the most positive reaction in the public. Clearly, the lack of a broader public appetite for classical music undercuts every orchestra's fundraising capabilities, even in the oldest and bestknown American orchestras.

Unfortunately, maintaining audience interest and subscriber levels has become increasingly more difficult. Community outreach, youth concerts, media, tours, and pops concerts have not enticed new

subscribers in large numbers. After more than one hundred years of failing to identify strategies that keep them financially solvent and publicly inviting, one would think American orchestras would see the need for a new approach. Even so, orchestras do not like to stray far from the tradition of their familiar business practices. Instead of bringing outside innovation to the industry, American orchestras have consistently looked inward to themselves, apparently not noticing that innovation from within is hard to come by. They have been recycling old ideas—old solutions—and calling them new.

The macro predicament facing the symphonic industry will not be solved by local musician/management collaborations but by a broad, joint effort undertaken by the union, orchestras, and the major societal proponents of classical music. It is time for us to investigate the benefits of a long-term, national marketing campaign. While our cloistered view of institutional marketing may not allow us to envision what form such a strategy might take, there is a large marketing industry out there which knows how to peak interest and sell anything to the public, although it will not come cheap.

Admittedly, organizing industry-wide discussions around this idea may prove to be somewhat like herding cats, but musicians can provide the first level of leadership by instigating the dialogue within the player conferences and the union and eventually with other organizational and philanthropic supporters of classical music.

It goes without saying; musicians are big stakeholders in all of this. Our wage givebacks have not underwritten change, but subsidized years of the same failed policies and practices that have kept orchestras stuck in a perpetual state of economic uncertainty. The proliferation of feel-good management/labor collaborations at the local level may produce a few new micro strategies, but we don't need more micro strategies. We need a new national paradigm.

In the words of the great artist Marcel Duchamp, "*If there is no solution, there can be no problem.*" The time to act is long overdue. American orchestras will never change course unless their musicians put boot to butt. No one else is stepping forward to help us. The health and survival of classical music in the United States rests squarely upon our shoulders. The next step is ours to take.

Lucinda Lewis has been New Jersey Symphony's principal horn since 1977. She is the author of Broken Embouchures and Embouchure Rehabilitation, which deal with embouchure overuse and performance-related injuries of brass players. She was the secretary of ICSOM from 1990–2002.

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Call to Action Success

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musician to believe in the power they have to effect positive change. When we engage in debate with an elevated tone, effectively stating and supporting our positions, then the strength of our message cannot be denied whether we are working with our union, our managements, or spreading a message of hope to our communities.

But, we must not be content with this success. Let this be the start of a renewed era of activism. More calls for action will follow. We must be ready to activate our network of communication to send letters when musicians face troubles locally. We must advocate for causes that support the message of community service that our musicians embody. We must watch the news and demonstrate our unified sense of purpose through reasoned debate and activism.

No cause will be more important over these next few years than electing delegates to the AFM Convention from within our orchestras. The 2007 Convention voted to move to a triennial meeting, so we have three years to build upon our recent success. During that time, we must become more involved in our locals. We must start attending meetings at our union halls and representing the concerns of our orchestras. We must not be content with backstage mutterings about things that are wrong. It is time for us all to rise up and become involved. Be a leader in your orchestra, a leader in your local, a leader in the Federation, and a leader in your communities!

In every issue that is before us now, apathy is our biggest enemy. I understand the pressures of life, the constraints on time, and the obligations that exhaust us all. During my frequent 20-hour days I grow weary of the task before us now. But, the response of our musicians to the *Call to Action* campaign has invigorated me more than I can express. More than ever, I am filled with hope for what we can accomplish together. The success of our recent efforts should fill you with hope as well, and we need you to help us spread that message. It is a right of the people that they not be deprived of hope.

The other night I was reading *Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians*, by George Seltzer. The final chapter, "What the Future Holds," begins with this thought:

Throughout its long history, the American Federation of Musicians has been beset by a series of continuing problems. The wonder is not that these difficulties occurred, but rather that the Federation survived at all. The end of these distressful conditions is not yet in sight.

I leafed back to the front of the book to find that these words had been written in 1989, nearly two decades ago. And yet they seemed truer to me when I left Las Vegas than when I arrived.

Orchestral musicians can best prepare for the future by dedicating themselves to a renewed activism and a renewed commitment to their communities. Renew your commitment to your colleagues within your orchestra, to the community that supports your orchestra, and to the community of friends that perform nightly in every orchestra in North America. As they hear our music, let them also hear our voices. We have demonstrated that when we all speak as one, our message of hope cannot be ignored.

The subtitle of Julie Ayers' great history of ICSOM is "How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History." There is no doubt that those who went before us did indeed make history. And now, we just might have to do it again.

There can be no disputing that there is a long road ahead of us. Our positive message must be spread to our managements, staffs, boards, communities and locals. In my AFM Convention address, I said:

The unity within ICSOM strengthens our resolve to express our concerns and needs in a manner that avoids any vitriolic dialog. But, we do resolve to be heard. There can be no doubt that through such an overwhelming financial contribution to the well-being of the union, we have earned our place at these microphones. And with the united voice of ICSOM's 4,000 members, we call for a new day of positive communication. The musicians of ICSOM eagerly await the opportunity to share our ideas for this road that lies ahead.

The success of the *Call to Action* campaign belongs to every musician in ICSOM. I encourage you to take a moment to enjoy it—but then we have many more issues to discuss.

I left Las Vegas on the red-eye, flying directly to my favorite city (non-Carolinian, that is) of Nashville and to the annual conference of the American Symphony Orchestra League. The League has announced a name change, which they humorously attribute to an effort to avoid the famously unfortunate acronym, and they will now be known as the League of American Orchestras.

At the League's conference, I met with many managers, both in public forums and in private meetings requested in advance. I was joined by ICSOM Secretary Laura Ross as we met with the musicians who were attending the conference, as well as the Group 2 managers. It was my privilege to participate in a forum titled "Creating a Positive Environment in the Workplace," with SSD Director Laura Brownell, ROPA President Tom Fetherston, and Carla Johnson, executive director of the Virginia Symphony.

In addressing the League's conference, I couldn't help but take a moment to ponder just how few people have ever had the opportunity to address both the national gatherings of the League and the AFM within 48 hours! Here are a few excerpts from those remarks:

Everywhere I go, I see opportunity. Everywhere I go, I find inspiration for what our organizations can accomplish in their communities. We are fortunate people to be in a field that provides us the chance, on a daily basis, to educate the children of our communities, to elevate the profile of our cities, to enhance the financial well-being of our business communities, and to elevate the human spirit.

We are the stewards of a precious community. We must look to the future with similar goals. We must debate our differences in the most elevated of manners, and we must change a culture that promotes any negatives in the face of such an overwhelmingly positive opportunity to serve and enhance the lives of all those we seek to touch. This we assert without hesitation: symphonic music will thrive in America as we seek to serve our communities profoundly. As the *New York Times* reported in large and bold print just twelve months ago, this can indeed be the "Golden Age for Classical Music."

I must take a moment to express my personal gratitude to ICSOM Member-at-Large Steve Lester (Chicago Symphony), who will be stepping down from the ICSOM Governing Board this August. Steve is a great leader, and his dedication to the field should be emulated by us all. It has been an honor to work with him, and I am grateful for his guidance and friendship. We will miss him on the Governing Board, but we've no doubt that he will continue to enlighten us with his thoughts and ideas.

AFM Convention

(continued from page 1)

When I spoke against this measure, I explained that my local had its own financial problems a few years back and that no such offer was ever extended to us. Thankfully, we were able to pay our obligations prior to the Convention. Some argued that it wouldn't be right to disenfranchise such a significant number of members—nearly one-quarter of the entire Canadian membership. Puerto Rico was one of the few other locals prevented from attending by dues-payment problems. For more than a year, the Puerto Rico local has incurred substantial legal fees representing its symphony musicians, whose very right to collective bargaining was being challenged. In their case, they had requested dues relief from the AFM instead of a loan.

There were also issues never fully revealed about Montreal's situation during the two-hour discussion. I was told weeks later that Montreal's new officers discovered the financial problem only one month before the Convention began. Remember that strike the Montreal Symphony had a few years ago? According to another person, those "terrible" officers that had been removed had done the unthinkable: they matched strike funds with local funds while their musicians were out of work. Frankly, they put their members first—not a bad thing in my book.

Some believe the entire discussion was about politics, but some of us felt it was more about process. I believe that, because the resolution passed, it has set a new precedent for the future when seating locals with outstanding financial obligations.

The second discussion, on day two, was about African-American delegates. By way of background, locals with hyphenated local numbers, like Local 10-208 (Chicago), are the result of the merging of two locals—one white and one African-American. The mergers occurred starting in 1953 (in Los Angeles) and continued into the 1970s. *[Editor's note: See More Than Meets the Ear by Julie Ayer for a detailed account of the history of segregated locals.]* To counter the loss of African-American officers, these "hyphenated" locals were entitled to one additional African-American delegate. This continued for many years until, in 1989, the Department of Labor

(DOL) informed the AFM that it was illegal to have a delegate position that was open only to African-Americans. These delegates could still attend, but they could not vote in the election of officers. The AFM decided to honor the DOL ruling in 1989, but in 1991 it went back to "business as usual."

We're all aware of the attention that has been directed at labor unions in the past few years by the current administration in Washington. Further, due to a challenge about the elections by an AFM member, the DOL was looking hard at the AFM's election process in particular. Jeff Freund, AFM General Counsel, stood before the delegates for more than two hours and explained patiently and repeatedly that simply having the entire membership vote for the African-American delegates would not address the problem. What few seemed to understand was that the DOL required the delegate position be open to people of every race; delegates could still represent African-American concerns, but the position could not be restricted by race. More than once people stood up and suggested the bylaw be changed or recommended ignoring the DOL (saying that no one would challenge the election while disregarding entirely the fellow walking back and forth in the back of the room during the entire Convention who, I'm told, started the whole process to begin with). I understand that some members of the Diversity Committee had been aware of this problem for some time and had recommended addressing this issue to no avail. The entire discussion was an exercise in futility because too many people just didn't (or wouldn't) understand. It is my hope that the AFM finds a way to address this issue with a recommendation or a resolution that will finally put this matter to rest.

Earlier I mentioned I had to leave the Convention early. I was truly sorry to miss the final discussion regarding the financial package that was adopted. Although I had real hopes for a true investigation into the finances of the AFM by what became known as the Revenue Committee, I'm not sure it ever happened. In the end, it seems they just looked for new ways to find money, without seriously considering how funds were being spent or could be used more effectively. I also believe that the oversight committees, known as the steering committees for symphonic services and electronic media, should be pressed into service to see if they, the governing boards, and the conferences they represent, can offer some substantial ideas and suggestions to improve the services we receive.

I cannot end without expressing my admiration of ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge. He has been the most eloquent advocate we could ever wish for. I think his honesty and real desire for a positive approach surprises some people. Some even seem to mistrust his very genuine opinions until they hear more and understand that he's the genuine article. He has made a great impression on so many people at the AFM and within the League. I had the opportunity to see him at work as he lobbied various AFM committees and delegates on the floor of the Convention, and to observe his participation on various panels at the League Convention and during meetings with musicians and representatives of Group 2 managers. I received many positive words about his work from local officers and managers throughout our week together. He was magnificent, and you all would have been very proud to have seen him represent you.

Impressions of an AFM Convention *by Paul Gunther, ICSOM Member-at-Large*

A question occurred to me as soon as I arrived at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas. It was reinforced at the Riviera Hotel (not Las Vegas's finest, by a long shot). "Why Las Vegas?"

Surely one could offer fifty other cities that would better dispose delegates and attendees to the business at hand. But as the days sped by, I understood that the city's overall tackiness, its heightened sleaze factor, and its pervasive lie, "Everyone's a Winner," were all appropriate metaphors for the tone of the Convention.

Having served over the years on various orchestra committees, having been involved with multiple contract negotiations, and having observed the politics of orchestra life from within and without, I assumed I knew how these things would array themselves at the Convention. Boy, was I ever wrong!

My overall impression is astonishment that anything gets done, that people come back for more, and that the Federation continues. I saw sincere folks treated badly just because someone could sway a crowd with emotions and loaded words. I watched well-meaning people serving on various standing committees sweat for hours to get through some obtuse documents, only to figure out later that they weren't worth working on in the first place. I observed earnest, wise representatives of a threatened way of life working round the clock in order to present what seemed to be obvious benefits for everyone, only to have their ideas battered about for hours before some portions were grudgingly passed. And I witnessed a large group of allegedly creative, intelligent progressives oblivious to the potential problems of two serious measures they seemed pleased to push through.

I guess that's politics for you. And in a strange sort of way, I loved every minute of it.

In truth, I was exceptionally proud to be part of the ICSOM team. Although present only in the capacity of observer, I was pleased I could assist in minor ways, by verifying what was going on and alerting others while they were occupied elsewhere. ICSOM officers Laura Ross and Michael Moore both attended as local delegates, and they also served as Federation committee representatives. Laura spoke from the floor, most courageously (and correctly in my opinion) from the unpopular viewpoint against seating the Montreal delegation. President Brian Rood's nuanced calmness and Counsel Len Leibowitz's vast knowledge were invaluable for backing up Chairperson Bruce Ridge as he formulated his excellent talks, and as he worked with the other Player Conference representatives. After Bruce, Len, and Brian had strategized over Bruce's talking points, Bruce gave valuable testimony three times to committees, and later spoke movingly both from the floor and from the Convention dais.

Our ICSOM representatives, frustrated though they may have felt at times, worked tirelessly and consistently to represent their constituents. The other symphonic players consistently looked to them for leadership, and that leadership proved highly effective in several crucial areas. It seemed to me that the strength and clarity of ICSOM's messages, while they may have seemed to some to pose a threat, actually offer great hope for the Federation.

Here's hoping.

International Conference of Symphony & Opera Musicians

Senza Sordino

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