

Winter  
2019

# The Leading Tone

# ROPA

Regional  
Orchestra  
Players'  
Association

A conference of the American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO

## Message from the President

*By John Michael Smith, ROPA President*

An opportunity I've always looked forward to as ROPA President is to visit with our orchestras in their home concert halls and performance venues, and not during a work stoppage! That happened twice this fall, and I had the pleasure of hearing two of our orchestras perform.

While on a family trip in October I was in Toledo, Ohio and attended a Toledo Symphony concert at the Paristyle, a wonderful Greco-Roman style concert hall that is part of the Toledo Museum of Art. It was a terrific concert, led by their new Music Director, Alain Trudel.

I was particularly impressed with the live video enhancement during the concert. Video screens were mounted on each side of the stage. A camera crew, which rehearsed with the orchestra during the week, was shooting the orchestra performance from two or three cameras, very unobtrusively from the back-stage areas and was capturing orchestra solos and important section passages as they happened during the performance. This video was particularly helpful in the Paristyle, as the orchestra is seated mostly flat on the stage, with only a few risers. The audience seating is also very low in this hall, not really allowing for those seated in the orchestra level or for that matter most of the audience to see the middle and back rows of orchestra musicians. I wondered if this video addition was welcomed by or was distracting for the audience. I was told by audience members that it had been stopped for a while after it was initially tried, however many patrons responded that they found it pleasing and helpful to the experience and they have returned to providing it for most concerts at the Paristyle.



ROPA President  
John Michael Smith

They also utilized the video screens at intermission to announce the upcoming concerts and events of the Toledo Symphony. At intermission I had the pleasure of speaking for a few moments with ROPA Delegate Katherine Cosgrove and Orchestra Committee Chair Garth Simmons.

The concert was very well attended. The program featured Rimsky-Korsakov's "Tsar Sultan Suite", the orchestra's principal tubist David Saltzman performing the world premiere of the Tuba Concerto by Samuel Adler, Borodin's "Polovtsian Dances" and silk painting artist Holly Carr painting reflections of the story of the Firebird on silk screens placed on stage behind the orchestra during the performance of Stravinsky's "The Firebird". A very interesting and innovative concert! The musicians were energized, and it was a wonderfully eclectic mix of concertgoers. Bravi, Toledo!

I also attended the Boston Ballet Orchestra performing "The Nutcracker" in Boston's Opera Hall. I was in Boston doing a site visit for the ROPA Conference hotel, and was free that evening. Boston Ballet performs Nutcracker over 40 times a season. That's a lot of Nutcrackers! It was a beautiful performance, led by new Music Director Mischa Santora. Opera Hall is a wonderful old vaudeville theater, with lots of red fabrics and white marble, painted ceilings, gold leaf, chandeliers; a classic! Boston Ballet will be one of our host orchestras for the 2019 conference. I had dinner with ROPA Delegate Bob Marlett, and the opportunity to briefly greet and speak with orchestra committee chair Hans Bohn and a group of the Boston Ballet Orchestra musicians during intermission. The hall was filled to near capacity, and I got the impression that these performances were indeed a holiday tradition for many families and those in attendance.

I had a very positive experience attending these two performances, with new music directors, new innovations and enhancements in one concert, tried-and-true traditions in another, with full houses and appreciative audiences. I was not seeing or feeling any of the doom and gloom about the demise of classical music and our arts organizations at either of these performances that some would have us believe we are facing. Quite the opposite!

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## The Leading Tone

### Volume 34, Issue 2

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## ROPA

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#### INFORMATION CENTER

- This newsletter will be posted online at <http://www.ropaweb.org>
- To subscribe to the ROPA Internet Mailing List, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/ropa-discussion>
- The list is open to musicians in ROPA member orchestras and AFM Local officers for those orchestras.

## The 360 Workgroup

by John Michael Smith, ROPA President

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Ryan Taylor, President and General Director of Minnesota Opera about the formation of a new independent task force called the 360 Workgroup. The purpose of the group, of which all members are opera companies, is to work together to study and address diversity, equity and inclusiveness in their boards, staff and performers. The task force is comprised of Minnesota Opera, San Diego Opera, Austin Opera, Memphis Opera and Chicago Opera Theater.

Each company is studying its own civic impact, and will send a cohort made up of four to five board and staff members to Minnesota for an annual meeting in each of the next three years. The 360 Workgroup will hold its first gathering in Minneapolis for two days in March 2019 during Minnesota Opera's world premier of "The Fix", a new opera by Joel Puckett. This meeting will be an opportunity for the workgroup to discuss how each of their companies is working toward implementing greater diversity and inclusiveness throughout the company by sharing their experiences in hiring practices, programming, staffing and artists presented.

The group has an Innovation Grant through Opera America from the Getty Foundation to support the costs of hosting the 360 Workshop meetings during Minnesota Opera productions

of "The Fix" in 2019; "Edward Tulane" in 2020; and another piece from Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative in 2021. Ryan was careful to point out that this workgroup is not about chasing dollars by receiving grants for this work, but as something necessary for the companies to more accurately reflect their communities and who they are, as well as presenting operas, both old and new, that provide enrichment to their community.

The Minnesota Opera, as part of the Minnesota Arts Partnership, has been sponsoring concerts of The Sphinx Organization, which has been involved for several years in creating opportunities for Black and Latinx artists in symphonic music. The Sphinx Organization has recently launched a vocal component to their efforts.

Minnesota Opera's own internal group is called the Diversity Council. It is made up of board and staff, with the head of the Diversity Council designated to be a non-leadership staff person. There is also a diversity/inclusiveness component in the Minnesota Arts Partnership, which includes The Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota Opera and the Schubert Club. Minnesota Opera is one of the first companies to create a diversity and inclusiveness charter with guiding principles. This statement can be found on the Minnesota Opera website at the link: [mnopera.org/edi](http://mnopera.org/edi).



**ropaweb.org**

Regional Orchestra Players' Association

## Union Solidarity at Houston Ballet

by Amanda Swain, ROPA Vice President

This Nutcracker season, the Houston Ballet Orchestra Committee decided to throw a holiday party – but not just any holiday party. We wanted it to be big, and we wanted to extend the invitation to every union member who worked at the Houston Ballet – dancers, dressers, wigmakers, stagehands, carpenters, musicians and more. We wanted people from the AFM, from AGMA (American Guild of Musical Artists) and from IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees). We wanted to let the other unions know that we can all stand in solidarity together to support one another in our professional endeavors, our contract negotiations and socially. We wanted a lot. And we got it!

On December 21st, the musicians of the Houston Ballet Orchestra hosted the first ever union holiday party at the Houston Ballet. We turned our musicians' lounge at the Wortham Theater into a winter wonderland, with lights strung across the ceiling, two Christmas trees with ornaments, a new rug, gift-wrapped doors and a disco ball to tie it all together.

Everyone donated something to transform our bare-bones lounge into a cozy place to relax and socialize. We posted invites around the theater. The musicians brought all manner of sweets, drinks and snacks to share. Our very own former ROPA Vice President, Nancy Nelson, brought in her Christmas music playlist and was a great DJ for the event.



Right to left: Jared Matthews, Principal Dancer and AGMA rep; Amanda Swain, ROPA Vice President and Houston Ballet Orchestra Committee Chair; and Barry Thomas, President of IATSE Local 51. Photo courtesy of Natalie Gaynor

The party was a success! We were able to bring together union members from across the company. Everyone made new connections, and new friends. Small groups were having drinks together and sharing their experiences. I had the privilege of giving a small toast to solidarity and to our new-found relationship between the unions at the Houston Ballet.

If you have multiple unions within your companies, please consider hosting a party to get to know

some of your brothers and sisters in AGMA and IATSE. We all have so much more in common than we might imagine, and we are stronger together!

(Message, continued from page 1)

For the past year I have been participating with the AFM negotiating team in the negotiations for a new Integrated Media Agreement with the Symphony, Opera and Ballet Employers Electronic Media Association (EMA). ROPA's Electronic Media Committee members also include Naomi Bendorf Frisch and Taylor Brown. This has been one of the slower and more tedious negotiations that I've experienced in all my years of negotiating. We have an excellent team, represented by AFM officers, Symphonic Services Division staff and members of both ICSOM and ROPA orchestras. Perseverance seems to be the key here!

My site visit to Boston was a success, and the 2019 ROPA Annual Conference will be held July 28th–July 30th at the Hilton Boston Logan Airport Hotel. The hotel is located just across the harbor from downtown Boston, with easy access by cab, subway, and water taxi to the downtown areas and tourist attractions. Please note the date change from the previous announcement; we had to move the dates up a few days in order to book the conference in this hotel. I look forward to seeing all our delegates, friends, presenters, and all who will be attending our annual conference in Boston!

Please note: members of ROPA orchestras cannot serve as delegates, alternate delegates or executive board members if they hold managerial positions in their orchestras.

**Minutes: ROPA Executive Board  
Mid-Year Meeting, Chicago IL  
January 5, 2019 — January 6, 2019  
By Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary**

**Attendees:**

M. Smith, A. Swain, K. Sandene, S. Diller, C. Green, M. Stone, L. Davis, K. Shields, K. Hawley, C. Tiffin, C. Bozell, S. Wade, N. Bensdorf Frisch

*Proceedings: January 5, 2019*

**Called to Order at 3:00 pm CST****Treasurer Sean Diller**

Sean discussed the breakdown of per diem checks. Mike also discussed other expenses associated with the meeting.

**MAL Report: Casey Bozell**

Casey reported on trends that are seen throughout her orchestras. Reduced instrumentation was seen in several of them. One orchestra that is in a grievance will soon be entering into arbitration. Samples of diversity broadening initiatives were shared. Comments were made on the state of the AFM website. The board made comments about the ease or lack thereof of navigating on the site. It was suggested that further redesigning of site is needed. There was also discussion on managements' use of consulting groups to help the organizations chart future courses. It was also suggested that delegate response to MALs can be improved with phone calls.

**MAL Report: Christian Green**

Christian described questions that some of his delegates had about what constituted diversity initiatives. Suggestions for making the AFM website more useful were brainstormed. Losses of individual contracts were discussed. A successful solution to regaining live music to ballet company was highlighted. The board shared different methods of getting funds for paying ROPA dues from their members and Locals. The board also addressed concerns about the timing of announcements at services by management and/or union members.

**MAL Report: Cory Tiffin**

Cory reported on his orchestras. One orchestra has a formal sexual harassment policy that is sent out with employment emails. Some of his orchestras also deal with underemploying orchestra members at concerts. He discussed an orchestra that is having difficulties in contract negotiations.

**MAL Report: Katie Shields**

Katie reported on a successful resolution to a unilateral change to a workplace situation in one of her orchestras. The board

brainstormed proper channels for reporting interpersonal problems. Move-up policies in various orchestras were discussed.

**MAL Report: Kendra Hawley**

Kendra mentioned a dismissal in one of her orchestras. The board addressed safety issues on stage and in the pit. The board also discussed the benefits of regular meetings between the OC and Management. Additionally, there was discussion about the use of screens during auditions.

**MAL Report: Lisa Davis**

Lisa discussed increasing diversity via programming and venues. The board discussed the preferred way for MALs to report the results of their delegate contact attempts.

**MAL Report: Maya Stone**

In addition to a general overview of her orchestras, Maya described in detail many programs that the Akron Symphony has engaged in to encourage diversity.

**Day One Adjourned at 7:00 pm CST**

*Proceedings: January 6, 2019*

**Day Two Called to Order at 9:00 am CST****MAL Report: Steve Wade**

Steve reported on his orchestras. There was extended discussion about how to make time at conferences where delegates can discuss general topics more informally amongst the full group, perhaps in a town hall setting. The board touched on social media strategies for orchestras, referring to past conference presentations for ideas on handouts or speakers. Also discussed were various aspects to having musicians coming in from out of town to perform, such as scheduling, housing, per diems, etc.

**Approval of Minutes**

**The board approved the minutes of the 2018 Portland OR Conference, Motion by Sean Diller/seconded by Cory Tiffin. m/s/c.**

**Conference Call: Rochelle Skolnick**

1) **AFM Website** — The board shared its thoughts with Rochelle on ways to make the website more user-friendly and modern looking.

2) **Sexual Harassment** — Rochelle discussed what ROPA's

role is in assisting musicians when cases come up. She said she should be contacted when situations arise.

3) **AFM YouTube Videos** — The board shared thoughts on updating both the AFM and the SSD training videos.

4) **Onsite Training by Rochelle** — Rochelle stated that in most instances, her training can be done remotely, although site visits are sometimes warranted. She informed us on some upcoming visitations.

5) **IMA Negotiations** — She stated that significant progress has been made recently.

6) **Recent ROPA Contract Negotiations** — Rochelle described the general progress of current negotiations.

7) **Wage Chart Update** — Rochelle described some streamlining of language in the questionnaire to assist delegates with inputting information.

8) **Boston Symphony** — Rochelle was asked what should be the AFM's role in the overscale lawsuit; she stated the AFM's role is limited. She said that there is most likely gender inequity in compensation; master agreement negotiations strive to help all members of the bargaining unit, and there is no control over overscale negotiations.

9) **Sphinx Conference** — Rochelle and Alfonso Pollard will be attending on behalf of the AFM.

10) **Diversity** — The AFM Diversity Committee continues to meet. Rochelle is waiting to hear from the Players Conferences for guidance for further initiatives to pursue. She suggested having each Players Conference create its own Diversity Caucus.

11) **AFM Convention** — She hopes to see significant representation from the Players Conferences.

12) **ROPA Conference Topics** — Rochelle wants the board to be considering topics that we'd like SSD to cover in this year's presentations.

### Sharon Jones : Leading Tone

Sharon discussed items to be included in the next issue. The board compared the use of hard copies vs. digital. She is trying to determine the best way to use Twitter and Instagram for ROPA. She cited examples of how ICSOM and other orchestras are using the platforms. The board agreed to contact their delegates to get photos, articles and comments to share on Twitter, Instagram, etc. Hashtag/handle consistency was discussed. (note: following the Midyear meeting, Sharon finalized the

Twitter handle @ROPAorchestras, and ROPAorchestras as the name on Instagram.)

### Officer Reports

**President Mike Smith** — Conference update: The hotel selected is the Boston Logan Hilton. Conference dates were discussed.

**A Motion was made by Cory Tiffin/seconded by Kendra Hawley to assign the ROPA Vice President to the Conference Committee. m/s/c**

Mike highlighted his activities since the beginning of the season.

**Vice President Amanda Swain** — Amanda gave a verbal report on her activities. She spoke of working on implementing Google Drive for ROPA board purposes. She described her attendance at Local officer training at the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute in Silver Springs, MD in December. Naomi suggested having concurrent sessions at conferences dealing with organizing in right-to-work states versus union states.

**Secretary Karen Sandene** — Karen reminded the board that if there are any changes to delegates or contact information, that information should go in an email with a subject heading that makes it clear a change is needed. Coordination between the Secretary, Vice President and Treasurer for roster information was discussed, with rosters to be placed in the new board Google Drive. Karen asked the board to look over the website to spot possible ways to improve access and usability for the site. MALs will also have delegates do the same.

**Treasurer Sean Diller** — Sean shared financial documents with the board and highlighted his activities.

### AFM Convention

The AFM Convention will be held June 15<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> in Las Vegas. Naomi discussed thinking about possible resolutions that could be offered up at the Players Conferences. Karen mentioned that many Local boards have members of ROPA orchestras in their ranks who could advocate for ROPA at the convention.

### SphinxConnect

The SphinxConnect conference will be held January 31<sup>st</sup> – Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> in Detroit. The board discussed sending a representative from ROPA to attend. The roles of the AFM versus the League of American Orchestras at the conference were compared. Maya has attended for several years as a member of the Sphinx Orchestra. (**Note:** MAL Steve Wade attended, along with ROPA President Mike Smith.)



(Minutes, continued from page 5)



Left to right: Lisa Davis (Mississippi Symphony); Katie Shields (Arizona Opera Orchestra); Christian Green (Ann Arbor Symphony); Maya Stone (Huntsville Symphony); Amanda Swain, ROPA Vice President (Houston Ballet Orchestra and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra); Kendra Hawley (Palm Beach Opera Orchestra); Casey Bozell (Portland Opera Orchestra); Sean Diller, ROPA Treasurer (Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra); ROPA President Mike Smith (Minnesota Opera Orchestra); Cory Tiffin (Las Vegas Philharmonic); Karen Sandene (ROPA Secretary, Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and Omaha Symphony Orchestra); Naomi Bensdorf Frisch, Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention (Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra and Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra); Steve Wade (Hartford Symphony Orchestra). Photo courtesy of Sharon Jones

**A Motion was made by Casey Bozell/seconded by Katie Shields, to send Mike Smith and Steve Wade to the Sphinx-Connect conference, with total expenses for both not to exceed \$1400. m/s/c.**

#### **New World Symphony Visitation**

The annual visit by the Players Conferences will be held February 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>.

**A Motion was made by Sean Diller/**

**seconded by Amanda Swain to send Mike Smith to Miami for a New World Symphony visitation from February 11<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup>, with expenses not to exceed \$525. m/s/c**

#### **Conductor Evaluation**

Steve Benne has stepped down as the Evaluation Bank Administrator. Mike currently has the files at his home. Mike discussed how the ICSOM process works. The board had an extensive discussion

about the pros/cons of a paper vs. an online evaluation process. A board subcommittee was formed to discuss this situation further consisting of Mike, Cory, Lisa, Christian and Naomi. A replacement for Steve Benne was discussed. Mike will contact a delegate who expressed earlier interest in the position, and a board member also expressed interest. For the time being, completed surveys should be sent to Mike Smith.

Do you have news about your orchestra?

An article to submit?

A letter to the editor?

We'd love to have you contribute  
to the *Leading Tone*!

Submit articles to Sharon Jones at  
bellsauf@gmail.com

*The Leading Tone* is the official voice of ROPA and reflects ROPA policy. However, we do appreciate and encourage the contribution of articles and letters by others. These submissions may cover topics on which ROPA has no official position; the opinions expressed therein are solely those of the author(s) and not necessarily of ROPA, its officers or members.

(Minutes, continued from page 6)

### **ROPA Brochure**

A board subcommittee was formed to redesign the ROPA Brochure: Amanda, Katie and Karen.

### **Labor Notes Conference**

The board discussed sending someone to the Labor Notes Conference in 2020. The funds would come from the Lew and Lenny Fund, managed by Nathan Kahn. Naomi suggested making Labor Notes an agenda item at the Boston Conference.

### **Conference Planning**

Mike discussed several options for presenters at the conference, many who live in the Boston area. The Massachusetts AFL-CIO or Pat Hollenbeck, President of the Boston Local were considered as con-

tacts for speakers. Casey stressed the importance for the Boston area host delegates to be in contact with her and others with experience to describe duties needed for the host/volunteers. She said that a checklist/timeline of volunteer tasks would be helpful. TMA will piggyback their conference at the end of the ROPA Conference. The New Delegate Breakfast will be at the beginning of the conference.

The board brainstormed session topics. It was mentioned that Todd Jelen might be available to lead a presentation pertaining to organizing. It was brought up that there is a strong El Sistema program in the area. A representative from Sphinx was suggested. Naomi was asked to lead a session pertaining leading effective dis-

cussions. During Rochelle's conference call earlier she requested the board think about what we would like SSD to cover this year. There was board interest in exploring how to handle member-on-member disputes and striving for fair representation with both members. The board talked about past conferences where there were several concurrent sessions taking place, where delegates select from the available topics to attend, depending upon their interest and needs. Health and wellness topics have also been very successful in the past. Contacts for local groups that bring the orchestral music to people with physical or mental/emotional challenges were shared.

**Day Two Adjourned at 4:07 pm CST**

## **SAVE THE (NEW) DATE! 2019 ROPA Conference**

**Sunday, July 28th — Tuesday, July 30th**

**Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Saturday, July 27th**

Hilton Boston Logan Airport, Boston, MA

Hosts: AFM Local 9-535, the Boston Ballet Orchestra, the Cape Symphony and the Portland Symphony



Boston skyline from Longfellow Bridge. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

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The Leading Tone  
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## ROPA Member Orchestras

### Full Members

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Cape Symphony  
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera Orchestra  
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Dallas Opera Orchestra  
Dayton Philharmonic  
Delaware Symphony Orchestra  
Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra

East Texas Symphony Orchestra  
Elgin Symphony Orchestra  
Erie Philharmonic Orchestra  
Eugene Symphony  
Fort Wayne Philharmonic  
Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra  
Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra  
Hartford Symphony Orchestra  
Houston Ballet Orchestra  
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra  
Huntsville Symphony Orchestra  
Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra  
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Lexington Philharmonic  
Long Beach Symphony Orchestra  
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New West Symphony Orchestra  
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Omaha Symphony Orchestra  
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Pacific Symphony  
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Symphony Silicon Valley  
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