

Summer
2017

The Leading Tone

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

FIM Recollections

*Naomi Bensdorf Frisch, ROPA Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention
Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra and Illinois Philharmonic*

On May 11-14, 2017, the 4th International Federation of Musicians ("FIM") International Orchestra Conference was held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I was honored to attend as the part of the AFM delegation to the conference and represent ROPA, along with our secretary, Karen Sandene. Musicians and managers from North America, South



America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa were in attendance, offering a truly global perspective. The conference focused on ways we can preserve our

orchestral tradition throughout the world and continue to keep orchestras "relevant" in our communities. Eight main topics were presented: (1) The Public Value of Orchestras; (2) Business Models of Orchestras; (3) Orchestras Integrating Digital Tools and New Approaches; (4) Role of Musicians on Orchestra Boards; (5) Bullying and Harassment; (6) the Practical Aspects of Outreach and Education; (7) Recorded Broadcasts and the Rights of Musicians; and (8) The Role of Trade Unions in the Future of the Orchestra. Each was presented in a panel discussion format where four panelists from different countries discussed the topic from their perspective. It was fascinating to hear musicians from Germany, Africa, the Netherlands, Uruguay, and many more countries discuss the challenges they face. I was especially intrigued at the role that government funding and public support played in the success of an orchestra.

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Local Officer Education Building a Stronger Union

By Rochelle G. Skolnick, Director, Symphonic Services Division and Special Counsel

During the seven years I spent as Counsel to the AFM's Symphonic Services Division I often heard from local officers (and orchestra committee members) who wanted very much to do the right thing as they represented musicians in collective bargaining and contract administration but who sometimes felt uncertain about how to fulfill those obligations. Over those years I worked with AFM staff to provide support and education to local officers and committees, most visibly through the series of educational webinars that is still available in the SSD Resource Center. While those webinars were and continue to be a valuable tool, they can't begin to support the multiplicity of responsibilities AFM local officers must discharge.

The delegates to the 2016 AFM Convention passed a resolution recognizing the need for investment in local officer training. In the wake of that convention, President Ray Hair charged a six-member committee (consisting of International Vice President Bruce Fife, Vice President from Canada Alan Willaert, IEB member Tina Morrison, Assistant to the President Ken Shirk, then-International Representative Barbara Ow-

ens, and myself) with developing and implementing a comprehensive local officer education program.

The committee met and brainstormed for two days last November. Our first task was to identify those topics and skill sets with which we believed every AFM Local officer should have a working familiarity. That list included the pragmatic (e.g., Department of Labor reporting requirements), the idealistic (e.g., encouraging diverse voices within our union), and everything in between. With that list roughly prioritized we analyzed how best to present each subject in an effective, fiscally responsible manner.

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The Leading Tone

Volume 32, Issue 3

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The Leading Tone is the official newsletter of the Regional Orchestra Players Association, a conference of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, and is published quarterly.

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Subscriptions

\$8.00 per year payable to
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- 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.

President's Notes

*by John Michael Smith, ROPA President
Minnesota Opera Orchestra*

As I am in the final days of planning the 33rd Annual Conference of the Regional Orchestra Players' Conference (ROPA), my first as President, I have found myself looking back on earlier Conferences that I have attended. I think of



ROPA President
John Michael Smith

the wonderful and informative presentations I have witnessed, the people I have met, the discussions, situations, and issues that have come up that have educated and empowered myself and my colleagues and others who have attended our conferences.

In 2011, at the ROPA Executive Board's Mid-Year meeting in Phoenix (the location of this year's Annual Conference), the Board participated in a strategic planning session. The goal was to create a guiding document that would assist the Board in defining ROPA, and its role in the leadership of the organization.

Who is ROPA? We are professional orchestra musicians of symphonic, chamber, ballet, and opera orchestras with medium and smaller-sized budgets with AFM collective bargaining agreements. We are a service organization with over 5,000 musicians and 86 orchestras represented in our membership. And we represent these regional orchestra musicians as members of the AFM at national and international forums.

Who does ROPA serve? ROPA serves the musicians of our orchestras. We serve future musicians by protecting today's jobs for tomorrow. We serve all orchestras – what affects one affects all. We serve the AFM. We serve the communities our orchestras play in. And we serve the elected representatives of those orchestras, the ROPA Delegates and orchestra committees of our orchestras.

Why does ROPA exist? ROPA exists to provide knowledge and tools to our Musicians to assist them in establishing fair working conditions, to educate them about industry stand-

ards, labor law, procedures and practices. ROPA is also there to empower and enable our colleagues to better their lives in their workplace, and to organize and communicate with colleagues and their community when there are those with agendas to dismantle labor organizing nationwide.

ROPA is a place for our member orchestras to turn for support. We have established a forum for discussion of concerns, current trends, and solutions. ROPA provides assistance for orchestras in crisis with advice and information, working to create fair collective bargaining agreements, fair working conditions, and fair compensation.

In what ways do we seek to accomplish our goals? Information sharing is key - orchestra to orchestra, musician to musician, players' conference to players' conference, and with the AFM. This is vital to our mission. Information is shared through e-mail lists, website, Facebook, telephone calls, our quarterly newsletter *THE LEADING TONE*, and of course our Annual Conference. We work to create an atmosphere within ROPA orchestras of concern and commitment for our common cause. This is primarily done through our network of ROPA Delegates, selected by each orchestra and AFM Local.

So I encourage all AFM members who have an interest in orchestras, especially regional orchestras, to attend our annual conference this August 1st through 3rd in Phoenix, Arizona, at the Westin Phoenix Downtown Hotel. You can get more information and register for the conference and hotel on the ROPA website: ropaweb.org/support/2017-annual-conference/. Members of ROPA orchestras and other interested AFM members may join our moderated e-mail discussion list:

ropa-discussion@googlegroups.com

We are stronger together!

John Michael Smith
President
Regional Orchestra Players Association

(FIM, continued from page 1)

It's common for us here in the United States to think that orchestras in Europe have it better because they are publicly funded. But the public funding places limits on what they can do and can be taken away at any time, which requires that orchestras jump through a lot of the same hoops that we do.



(Above: Naomi Bensdorf Frisch, as panelist discussing the role of musicians on boards. Below: SSD Director Rochelle Skolnick as panelist on bullying and harassment. Right: ICSOM delegates Meredith Snow, Paul Austin, Kevin Case (ICSOM Attorney), George Brown, and ROPA Secretary Karen Sandene. Photo Credit: Jacinthe-Lory Bazinet.)

I was honored to speak on the panel about the Role of Musicians on Boards. My fellow panelists were: a violinist in the Bergen Philharmonic; a former orchestra manager from Canada; and an orchestra manager from South Africa. Though we all had different logic and reasoning behind our positions, it was clear that none of us thought that it was a good idea for musicians to hold seats on orchestra boards. We all thought it was important to keep the lines of communication open between musicians and board members, but the potential conflicts that could arise when musicians hold board positions were enough to make most of us think that it is wiser to keep those roles separate. At the end of the day, it is the Board's job to govern the orchestra and the musicians' job to make the music. Both want the orchestra to succeed and need to work together towards that common goal, but mixing roles is almost never the right way to do that.

One of the interesting things about this conference was that it



was divided into two halves: the first half included managers in the discussion and the second half was musicians only. I think that including managers at the beginning allowed some important issues to come out, but also made the musicians in the room a bit skeptical and careful. Once the managers left, musicians spoke more freely about some of the problems they face, including managers who make decisions that are ultimately destructive to an orchestra. However, just as with musicians and board members, it is important to keep lines of communication open between musicians and managers, and this is one way to achieve that goal. I was especially impressed by a manager from Finland who spoke about an anti-harassment program she had set up for her musician-employees. It sounded like she had worked hard to create a positive and supportive working environment for the musicians in her orchestra. She made it clear that everyone, including music directors and union stewards, were held to the same "no tolerance" standard for bullying or harassing behavior. Her presentation was refreshing to hear and created a bit of optimism amongst the musicians in the room.



One thing that really struck me at this conference was that the issues we face in our ROPA orchestras are the same issues faced by orchestras around the world. An orchestra manager from Africa talked about throwing pre-concert cocktail parties in order to grow his donor base. A musician from the Netherlands talked about how orchestras in her country were folding due to lack of public support. A musician from Uruguay talked about how his orchestra does a lot of pops concerts to make ends meet. A musician from Costa Rica talked about the struggles they have had in getting fair pay for recordings. Our issues are the same; we are just at different stages of need. Coming together to learn from each other is therapeutic for all of us, and helps us to promote the mission of FIM: to work towards high levels of support for the arts in communities everywhere. Our ROPA conference provides this same therapy for those of us who have common challenges. Through our work together, in solidarity, we continue to increase awareness and support for the Arts throughout the United States. Conferences like the FIM IOC allow us to similarly spread the word globally about the importance of the arts and especially of orchestras. Together, we are stronger and more able to promote the amazing work we do. It was an honor to be a part of the 2017 FIM conference and I look forward to sharing more about what I learned with all of you in Phoenix this summer.



Phoenix skyline. Photo credit: Nick Cote / Visit Phoenix

SAVE THE DATE: 2017 ROPA Conference

Tuesday, Aug. 1—Thursday, Aug. 3

Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Monday, July 31

Phoenix, Arizona

Westin Phoenix Downtown Hotel

333 North Central Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85004

Phone: 602-429-3500 • Hotel Reservations: 866-961-3775

Hosts: AFM Local 586, and Musicians of the Arizona Opera Orchestra

Your Invitation to attend the 2017 ROPA Conference!

The ROPA Annual conference provides educational seminars and workshops; networking opportunities for delegates from ROPA orchestras, Local officers and AFM staff; and information on current industry trends.

Along with ROPA Delegates, ROPA musicians and any AFM Local members are welcome to attend any of our open sessions. If you are near the Phoenix area during the first week of August, please consider attending.

Sessions, speakers, and registration information will be posted on the ROPA website (www.ropaweb.org) as it becomes available.

Transportation from Airport to Hotel

Along with taxi service from the Sky Harbor Airport, the Phoenix Metro Light Rail travels from the airport to a stop directly across the street from the hotel!

Elections

The offices of Vice President, Secretary and 4 Members-at-Large are up for election. We are also seeking a Leading Tone Editor. Please consider running for office!

Resolutions for the 2017 Conference

Consider submitting resolutions for the conference. A small part of the conference will be spent discussing resolutions (formal policy statements, honorary declamations, amendments to the ROPA bylaws, and so on). If you or your orchestra would like to put forward a resolution for deliberation at the Conference, please write it in accordance with Robert's Rules (as close as you can) and send it to the Legislative Committee Chair Naomi Bensdorf Frisch (nhb713@gmail.com) by July 1, 2016 (Reports and Recommendations deadline).

(Local Officer Education, continued from page 1)

We emerged with a tri-partite structure consisting of: (1) webinars in which we can deliver the “nuts and bolts” of running a local union; (2) education days added on to the five annual regional conferences of locals in which up to six different educational modules can be delivered face-to-face in a more interactive fashion; and (3) a stand-alone 3-day intensive introduction to union leadership. At its December 2016 meetings, the International Executive Board approved the program and authorized a budget.

The first two stand-alone union leadership programs will be held in July and November 2017 at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) School for Workers. Up to 15 local officers will be



invited to attend each program at Federation expense, with the intention of involving up to 30 officers each year. The leadership program will provide full immersion in labor/AFM history, leadership skills, and problem solving, among other topics. Both this and the regional conference add-on days will seek to foster mentorships and peer coaching relationships among local officers.

The regional conference add-on days allow us to reach even more officers each year, with up to 15 invited to attend each event at Federation expense; additional interested officers (and, potentially, orchestra committee members) may attend at their own or their local's expense. This portion of the training had its debut just prior to the meeting of the Eastern Conference of Locals, on April 20-21, 2017. Topics covered there included: grievance and arbitration; the union's duty of fair representation; internal organizing (including member orientation, committee roles, and preparation for bargaining); union administration in a

right to work climate; AFM electronic media agreements; intellectual property issues; electronic communications and social media for unions; and building community allies and networking. The participants came to the program from locals large and small and the officers themselves brought widely varying levels of experience. Throughout the 2-day program participants were encouraged to ask questions and to share their actual experiences as they related to the material. The resulting give and take, together with some enthusiastic role-playing, brought the material vividly to life. We look forward to working with additional classes of local officers just prior to the Southern, Canadian and Midwest Conferences.

The first of the new webinars will be rolled out shortly and will allow even greater participation, with space for up to 100 on each live presentation and the possibility for an unlimited number to view a recorded version of the webinar later.

Why is this program of interest to ROPA (and other symphonic) musicians? Because it has the potential to greatly improve your working lives. Educated and skilled local officers (many of whom are also musicians in ROPA orchestras) will be better equipped to work together with your orchestra committees to bargain and enforce symphonic CBAs. With well-trained leadership, our local unions become stronger; that strength translates to greater power in our bargaining relationships.

Invitations to in-person trainings are extended to officers who have expressed interest and been identified as having the potential to benefit from the training. If you think one of your local officers would be a good candidate, encourage him or her to participate. If you serve on your orchestra committee and are interested in participating in the regional conference add-on days, speak to your local officers about the possibility of attending. If you have questions or comments you can communicate directly with me at rskolnick@afm.org or with the entire local officer education committee at education@afm.org.



Regional Orchestra Players' Association



FIM Conclusions

(Editor's Note: Three days of panel discussions, questions and comments from the attendees at the FIM Conference led to the formulation of the following conclusions, which were submitted to the delegates and approved. The Conclusions do not necessarily reflect ROPA policy, but are good topics for further discussion.)

1. PUBLIC VALUE OF ORCHESTRAS

- a. It should be the right of every citizen to have access to live orchestral music. To help achieve that goal, every child should receive exposure to and education about music.
- b. It is essential to engage in vigorous advocacy for orchestra institutions with in political frameworks at every level, from local to national.
- c. The exceptional skills and creativity of the musicians constitute the core value of the orchestra.
- d. Symphony and opera orchestras as well as radio ensembles, which are a part of our common cultural history, can play a prime role in promoting social cohesion in a fast-changing society.

2. BUSINESS MODELS OF ORCHESTRAS.

WHAT'S WORKING?

- a. There is no "one size fits all" business model. Various governance and funding models thrive in different social, historical and political environments.
- b. Orchestras should not be expected to be profit-making enterprises. However, they have a positive economic impact that extends far beyond the investment.
- c. Good governance is essential to the orchestra fulfilling its mission. All important decisions should be made with the musicians' involvement.

3. ORCHESTRAS INTEGRATING DIGITAL TOOLS AND NEW APPROACHES

- a. Some orchestras integrate digital tools successfully and use them to increase the size of their audience (for instance the Berlin Phil.: digital concert hall); however, the impact of similar digital policies may vary a lot from one orchestra to another.
- b. Digital tools cannot replace the unique experience of live performance, which remains the *raison d'être* of orchestras.
- c. Digitisation of archives is an efficient means of adding value and promoting the history of an orchestra, and provides easy access to its heritage.
- d. Digital access to orchestra performances is particularly useful in countries where long distances prevent large parts of the country from physically accessing live concerts.
- e. Specialised online video channels offer access to symphony and opera performances of a high technical and artistic quality; however, the monetization of these new services remains uncertain. It is also essential that business models be designed or redesigned in such a way that musicians are fairly remunerated.

4. RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: ROLE OF MUSICIANS ON ORCHESTRA BOARDS

- a. The voice of musicians is irreplaceable in shaping the decisions of the orchestra board or other governing bodies. It should not overlap the crucial role of the trade union as a legitimate

negotiating party.

- b. Potential conflicts of interest should not be used as a pretext to exclude the musicians from the decision-making process.

5. BULLYING AND HARASSMENT. RESPECTIVE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNION AND THE MANAGEMENT

- a. The close collaboration and emotional engagement required of orchestra musicians may also leave them vulnerable to those who might exploit any real or perceived imbalance of power to bully or harass.
- b. It is the responsibility of the orchestra management to ensure that the orchestra workplace is free from bullying and harassment but managers should involve unions in the process of developing policies and procedures to prevent and remedy such exploitative conduct. Unions should also be prepared with the skills necessary to represent musicians when conflicts arise.
- c. The establishment of policy alone is not sufficient; rather, policy must be put into practice through effective training in interpersonal communication for all organisational constituents and through early intervention when conflicts arise.
- d. Trade union representatives are particularly vulnerable potential targets of bullying or harassment and should therefore be adequately and efficiently protected against such abuses.

6. PRACTICAL ASPECT OF OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

- a. For many years, reaching out to the variety of audiences and educational activities have formed part of the orchestras' daily work. Orchestras may also face new expectations of a social nature. Although their motivations may be legitimate, they should not undermine the achievement of the core mission of the orchestra.
- b. Any activity that does not directly involve the act of performing should only be carried out on a voluntary and paid basis.

7. RECORDED BROADCAST AND RIGHTS OF MUSICIANS

- a. Recordings and broadcasts have an economic value that must be shared with performers fairly.
- b. No recording or broadcast should be used without the musicians endorsing the quality of the recording.
- c. Although in some cases, promotion may carry a value for the orchestra or its musicians, this should not be used as a pretext to deny the right of musicians to a fair remuneration. The possible benefit of promotion for the orchestra as an entity may be irrelevant to individual musicians, who are not necessarily permanent members of the orchestra.
- d. The gradual substitution of traditional broadcast with new forms of online music distribution will not generate fair revenues to performers unless the exclusive right of making available is complemented with a statutory, unwaivable right to equitable remuneration.

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Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Musicians Support Pittsburgh Ballet Musicians Endowment

By Susanne Park (reprinted with permission)

In this era of digital downloads and on-demand entertainment, the question is sometimes raised, "Why leave the comfort of my home to see a live performance? Why is it better to experience something live?"

There are many ways to answer this, but for us, one of the most important reasons is the feeling of community that happens during a live concert. There is something incredibly powerful about sharing an activity where art is being created. We're not talking about the audience as mere spectators - the energy that flows between artists and audience is palpable and unmistakable. It's often the very thing that pushes a performance over the edge from "good" to "great." We live with this reality every time we take the stage.



When the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre announced in 2005 that it was eliminating live music for its entire season and using recordings instead, the outcry from the Pittsburgh community was immediate. The PBT cited \$1 million of actual debt as the reason it couldn't afford to continue using its 49-member orchestra. The loss of *The Nutcracker*, with its 20 performances a year, was an especially bitter pill for the musicians. Although the orchestra returned the following season, the number of productions using live music was drastically cut from five to only

twice a year, where it has remained ever since. As wonderful as the sets and costumes were, no one could argue that having these talented dancers perform to "canned" music was anything but a shame. Thankfully, the PBT recently began an endowment campaign, a portion of which contains funds earmarked for productions with live orchestral music. When the Musicians of

the PSO learned that donations could be specifically designated for increasing performances with the PBT Orchestra, we voted to send a contribution of \$10,000 in a show of support for our local colleagues.

American composer Aaron Copland, writer of some of ballet's greatest music, explained things succinctly:

"For me, the most important thing is the element of chance that is built into a live performance. The

very great drawback of recorded sound is the fact that it is always the same. No matter how wonderful a recording is, I know that I couldn't live with it—even of my own music—with the same nuances forever." We wish our colleagues in the PBT Orchestra all the best; we believe that your artistic contribution is crucial to the creation of great art at the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and are proud to support its continuation for generations to come.

(FIM Conclusions continued from page 6)

8. THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN SAFEGUARDING THE FUTURE OF THE ORCHESTRA

- a. Trade unions fight to improve the musicians' working conditions and salaries, but also to preserve the quality of orchestras. This requires innovative approaches, a constructive relationship with the management and a higher involvement of trade union members.
- b. Circumstances can place the very existence of the orchestra at risk. In a time of crisis, musicians are generally the first victims. If cuts happen, equality of sacrifice between the musicians and the rest of the institution should be paramount.
- c. Crises in orchestras are never caused by quality issues. Trade unions have a crucial role to play in influencing and educating politicians, decision makers and the general public of the value and the importance of securing a positive future for our orchestras.

GENERAL REMARKS

- a. Although the situation of some orchestras may have improved since the last IOC, sadly, it has significantly deteriorated in many places, hence damaging the musicians' lives, sometimes with violence and brutality.
- b. International solidarity campaigns are an essential tool to address these challenges.
- c. Permanent employment is key to building long term and high quality artistic projects, as well as offering access to the broadest possible variety of repertoires.

RESOLUTION

The representatives of orchestra musicians assembled in Montreal for the 4th IOC reaffirm the importance of democratic values and human rights to resist the critical threat that populisms pose on peace, access to culture and freedom of expression in several countries.

ROPA

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ROPA Member Orchestras

Full Members

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Albany Symphony
Allentown Symphony
Annapolis Symphony
Ann Arbor Symphony
Arizona Opera Orchestra
Atlanta Ballet Orchestra
Atlanta Opera Orchestra
Austin Symphony Orchestra
Binghamton Philharmonic
Boston Ballet Orchestra
Boulder Philharmonic
California Symphony Orchestra
Canton Symphony Orchestra
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera Orch.
Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra
Dallas Opera Orchestra
Dayton Philharmonic
Delaware Symphony Orchestra
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East Texas Symphony Orchestra
El Paso Symphony

Elgin Symphony Orchestra
Erie Philharmonic Orchestra
Eugene Symphony
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Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra
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Houston Ballet Orchestra
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra
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Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra
Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra
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Lansing Symphony Orchestra
Las Vegas Philharmonic
Lexington Philharmonic
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Los Angeles Opera Orchestra
Madison Symphony Orchestra
Memphis Symphony Orchestra
Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra
Minnesota Opera Orchestra
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra

Monterey Symphony
New Haven Symphony Orchestra
New Mexico Philharmonic
New West Symphony Orchestra
Oakland Symphony
Omaha Symphony Orchestra
Orchestra Iowa
Pacific Symphony
Palm Beach Opera Orchestra
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Pittsburgh Opera Orchestra
Portland Opera Orchestra
Portland Symphony Orchestra
Reading Symphony Orchestra
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South Bend Symphony
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Glimmerglass Opera Orchestra
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