ROPAs Receive Accolades

Recent months have been quite eventful for several of our ROPA Orchestras. This issue highlights some of the positive activities and awards that our orchestras have been receiving.

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

Houston, February 9, 2017— Houston Grand Opera (HGO) has been named to the shortlist for the International Opera Awards. Founded in 2012, the International Opera Awards is an annual celebration of excellence in opera around the world. The awards aim to recognize and reward success in opera while raising the profile of the art form.

Funds from awards events provide support for aspiring talent from around the world in all aspects of opera. The International Opera Awards Foundation is affiliated with the English magazine Opera. Judging of the awards is carried out by a jury of industry professionals headed by Opera editor John Allison.

Winners will be announced May 7 at a ceremony at the London Coliseum. More than 20,000 nominations were submitted for 2017 from people associated with the opera industry around the world.

Houston Grand Opera is the only American company on the 2017 shortlist of six named in the Opera Company category. The list also includes London’s Royal Opera House and Milan’s La Scala along with companies in Germany, France, and Belgium.

“We are thrilled to receive this recognition from such a prestigious organization,” said HGO Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers and Managing Director Perryn Leech. “This affirms a fact that our audiences and supporters have long appreciated: that the quality of work produced by Houston Grand Opera is second to none.”

(Reprinted with permission)

In This Issue

Orchestra Accolades 1
President’s Notes 2
El Paso Youth Symphony Border Concert 3
Lincoln Symphony Outreach to Refugee and Immigrant Families 4
Binghamton Victory in ULP Case 5
Orchestra News 5
Conference Announcements 6
2017 Mid-Year Board Minutes 7
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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/ropada-discussion.  
  • The list is open to musicians in ROPA member orchestras, and  
    AFM Local officers for those orchestras.

We seem to be having an early turn toward spring here in the upper Midwest, and I believe in many other parts of the country this year as well. For many of us, our orchestra season may be half over, and we start thinking about summer. It’s been 7 months since our Annual Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. And that means that there is only 5 months until our next conference in Phoenix, Arizona August 1 to August 3, hosted by Arizona Opera.

On February 27th I participated in a group presentation by the AFM for first year fellows of the New World Symphony (NWS) in Miami, FL. Our group consisted of new ICSOM Chair Meredith Snow, new Director and Special Counsel of Symphonic Services Division (SSD) Rochelle Skolnick, SSD Director of Symphonic Media Debbie Newmark, Local 655 President Jay Bertole and Sec./Treas. Jeff Apana, and myself. We made a nearly two hour presentation about the AFM, Locals, the Players Conferences, and a Musician’s role as a Union member of an orchestra. It was a remarkable learning experience for the fellows, and we responded to many excellent questions.

I would heartily encourage us to become active in working with our Locals to develop educational programs similar to what we did with NWS for our schools and universities in our communities everywhere. We should be talking with our students and teachers in our home communities about what the AFM and unions are about. We need to take action in this area, as Unionism constantly grows smaller. Our communities’ knowledge of what a union is and does is often inaccurate and misunderstood. The new administration has made it pretty clear that they are not supportive of organized labor – we are being challenged almost daily! Education and activism will be needed in the coming months – we will be required to make a stand!

I can report that in recent months there have been a number of positive outcomes in negotiations in orchestras across the country: Jacksonville, St. Louis, Detroit, Indianapolis, Fort Worth; Oakland, Eastern Connecticut, and Palm Beach Opera. Please be sure and let ROPA know the results of your settlements. We need to share our good news!

Congratulations to LA Opera - they were nominated for two Grammys for the recording of John Corigliano’s GHOST OF VERSAILLES, and won in both categories: Best Engineered Album - Classical, and Best Opera Recording.

And congratulations to the Binghamton Philharmonic Musicians, who won a settlement of an over-a-year-long grievance for full payment of a cancelled concert. “...Nevertheless, they persisted”!

The El Paso Symphony traveled across the border to Juárez, Mexico to perform the musical score to the Mexican film REDES, with music by Silvestre Revueltas. The El Paso Youth Orchestra also participated in the first United States/Mexico Youth Philharmonic Orchestra (see following article on page 3). There is hope that these opportunities for sharing and working together will continue, even in these uncertain times.

The 4th International Federation of Musicians (FIM) Conference will be held in Montreal May 11-14. Our AFM Delegate-at-Large Naomi Bensdorf Frisch and Secretary Karen Sandene will be attending to represent ROPA. All ROPA and AFM Musicians are invited to attend the first of these conferences being held in North America. FIM is an international organization of organized Musicians. To learn more: www.fim-musicians.org.

And later in the year, negotiations will begin on the successor agreement to the current Integrated Media Agreement. These have been difficult negotiations in the past; what will this time bring?

As always, there is much to do in our efforts for fair wages and working conditions, and educating our members and others about what we stand for. Let’s roll up our sleeves, get out there, and together make a difference! We are stronger together!

President’s Notes  
by John Michael Smith, ROPA President  
Minnesota Opera Orchestra

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Concerts Unite Young El Paso, Juárez Musicians
(Dave Acosta, El Paso Times, Jan. 27, 2017. Reprinted with permission)

(Editors note: this article from the El Paso Times refers to the joint performances as up-coming concerts; these concerts were held January 28-29, with 1440 people attending the concert in El Paso and 1500 in the audience in Juárez.)

The power of music is strong enough to transcend borders.

And music will bring together two classical music youth ensembles, one from El Paso and one from Juárez, for a concert in each city Saturday and Sunday.

“We were excited to get the two orchestras together,” El Paso Symphony Orchestra executive director Ruth Ellen Jacobson said. “It’s been in the works for a while. This fall we just made it happen.”

The United States/Mexico Youth Philharmonic Orchestra is made up of the El Paso Symphony Youth Orchestras and the Orquesta Sinfónica Esperanza Azteca Ciudad Juárez.

The joint concerts will take place at 6 p.m. Saturday at Downtown’s Plaza Theatre and 6 p.m. Sunday at the Teatro Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda at the Centro Cultural Paso del Norte in Juárez.

“The concert in El Paso not only includes the binational youth orchestra, but also all of the El Paso Symphony Youth Orchestras, so we’ll have about 450 kids (Saturday),” said James Welsch, the EPSYO’s director and the ensemble’s conductor. “In Juárez, we’ll probably have close to 300 (children).” Welsch will conduct both concerts.

“It has its challenges, but all sleep deprivation aside and all stress aside, the youth find a way to enliven us adults to tap into unknown energy,” Welch said. “It’s exciting and exhausting at the same time, but we’re looking forward to it.”

The El Paso Symphony Youth Orchestras is the El Paso Symphony Orchestra’s largest education program and serves students from fourth-grade through college undergraduates. Students receive several hours of instruction each week and participate in four performances each year, including the Side by Side concert with the El Paso Symphony Orchestra.

Orquesta Sinfónica Esperanza Azteca Ciudad Juárez made its debut in 2011. It is part of the Esperanza Azteca Symphony Orchestras, comprised of youth orchestras throughout Mexico. The Juárez ensemble’s youth orchestra is comprised of 450 orchestra and choir members.

“We wanted (the pieces being performed) to reflect the diversity of the groups being brought together,” Welch said.

The concerts will include pieces by both American and Mexican composers, including George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue”}

(continued on page 4)
and “Canto a la Música” by Mexican composer Samuel Zyman. Welch said the orchestra also will perform “Triumphal March” from the opera “Aida” to showcase the immense size of the newly formed and unique ensemble.

“I think we’re the only (binational ensemble of this kind),” Jacobson said. “We want to make this an actual ensemble and (perform) often. We’re excited about that.”

In Partnership with Area Foundations and Civic Groups,
Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra Reaches Out to Immigrant and Refugee Communities
By Karen Sandene, Lincoln and Omaha Symphonies

Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra has a vibrant collection of performances and outreach activities that it utilizes to reach out to the youth in our area, hopefully to sowing the seeds of the next generation of concert-goers. Included in these activities are school residencies, artist visits, student tickets, and Young People’s Concerts. Student ticket prices to our Classical concerts are an affordable $5. Through its partnership with 12 service organizations, LSO provides free tickets to families at Title I schools and other underserved members of the community. These activities reach approximately 12,000 students annually in more than 90 schools throughout Nebraska.

LSO’s youth outreach programs enjoy great support from the community. The orchestra has partnered with Family Literacy, a program through Lincoln Public Schools, to make live classical music accessible for the immigrant and refugee community in Lincoln. Since 2011, LSO has provided approximately 600 complimentary tickets for each family concert through this partnership. LSO has also received funding from the Lincoln Arts Council, Woods Charitable Fund, the Lincoln Community Foundation, and Lincoln Rotary Club #14 for its work with Family Literacy.

Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra recently received a Challenge America grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for its Family Concert series. The Challenge America category supports primarily small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations – those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability.

“Regardless of upbringing, faith, language, or country of origin, we believe that music can speak to the deepest parts of the human experience, and I am honored to share this incredible art form with all members of our community.”

In the spirit of this broad community support, LSO has decided to expand the reach of this project. Through new partnerships with Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska, Center for People in Need, and other organizations that provide support for immigrant and refugee families, LSO offered free tickets to any immigrant or refugee family who wished to attend its most recent family concert, held on February 5, 2017.

Music Director Edward Polochick believes that this kind of inclusivity is exactly what an orchestra should embody. “We call ourselves Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra with an apostrophe ’s’ because our goal is to belong to our community,” said Polochick. “This is just one small way in which we can offer welcome and support to new members of our Lincoln community. Regardless of upbringing, faith, language, or country of origin, we believe that music can speak to the deepest parts of the human experience, and I am honored to share this incredible art form with all members of our community.”

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 Karen Sandene at karensandene@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.
The Erie Philharmonic performed the music for Casablanca as the movie was shown on Sat., Feb. 4 to a sold out crowd of 2,200. The concert was sold out two weeks in advance. Seeing how popular this event was, management has already planned to show another movie in Feb. of 2018, except they are planning two showings, one on Sat. evening and a second on Sun. afternoon.

As well, a friend of the symphony just presented management with a check for $100,000 to be used for future projects.

The hall, which is owned by the city, finally has the money and adjacent property which will allow an increase to our stage area. The size of the stage will be increased and some much needed updates will be added, including a pit that can be raised. All of this will take at least two years, but it has been so long in coming, that we're excited to know that plans will finally move ahead. I do hope this means that artists with handicaps can finally be accommodated on the stage level also.

Management is working hard to add services and seems to be raising money successfully. There is a possibility of the EP joining the IMA as soon as we can arrange a conference call between management and the orchestra committee.

Our hard won victory sends a strong message that the contract must be upheld and that no amount of stalling or roadblocks will deter us from seeking justice for our fellow musicians. We won thanks to careful documentation of the facts, sound legal advice and a healthy dose of tenacity. The support of colleagues from around the country after the cancellation helped strengthen our resolve: in solidarity is power!

For more, please see the Orchestra News section of the March Issue of the International Musician

Das Rheingold - our first performance of a Ring opera was a hit. Because the pit was too small to accommodate the orchestra, we performed on stage, with the dramatic action in front of us and in the pit, above us, behind us, and on runways dividing sections of the orchestra. It was definitely a new experience for the orchestra to be so integrated. Our first dress rehearsal happened on November 8 - election day. It did not seem inappropriate to be presenting an opera with themes of wealth, power, tyranny, contracts and integrity. Die Walküre will follow -- we don't yet know when.
SAVE THE DATE: 2017 ROPA Conference
Tuesday, Aug. 1—Thursday, Aug. 3
Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Monday, July 31
Phoenix, Arizona
Westin Phoenix Downtown Hotel
Hosts: AFM Local 586, and Musicians of the Arizona Opera Orchestra
Minutes
ROPA Executive Board
Mid-Year Meeting, Dallas, Texas
January 8, 2017 at 4:30 pm CST to
January 9, 2017 at 5:00 pm CST

Attendees
Mike Smith, Nancy Nelson, Karen Sandene (1/9 only), Donna Loomis, Taylor Brown, Lisa Davis, Sean Diller, Mary Anne Lemoine, Dave Shelton, Maya Stone, Steve Wade, Naomi Bensdorf Frisch. Todd Jelen, SSD

Proceedings: January 8, 2017
MAL Reports
The ROPA Board heard summaries from Members-at-Large fall contacts with their delegates. Reporting on January 8 were N. Nelson, T. Brown, M. Stone, S. Wade, D. Shelton, MA Lemoine, S. Diller. Orchestras with special concerns were discussed.

Proceedings: January 9, 2017
2016 Conference Minutes Approval:
The Board approved the draft of the 2016 Madison Conference minutes.

MAL Report: Lisa Davis
Lisa reported on her orchestras, and those orchestras with grievances were discussed.

Skype call with Rochelle Skolnick
SSD Director: The board congratulated Rochelle on her new position as SSD Director.
Local Officer Education Initiative: Rochelle discussed the initial preparations for a proposed Local Officer Education Initiative, including committee formation, program and budget. Initiative will begin at the Eastern Conference of Locals in April, with the meeting to be held in Norristown, PA. She discussed various ways that instruction could be given, as well as times when in-person instruction could occur.
FIM: FIM will be held in Montreal in May 11-14, with orchestra managers being invited for the first day. As the conference is in North America, it is hoped that attendance from American musicians could be increased.
SRLA Negotiations: SRLA negotiations will occur this week (Jan 9). There was an earlier negotiation session this past October.
IMA Negotiations: IMA negotiations will begin soon, with a previously scheduled Labor/Management Committee meeting to be held prior to the beginning of negotiations. Rochelle identified some of the topics up for discussion.
OC/Local Relationship: Rochelle discussed relationship between Local and the OC. She also addressed specific questions about grievance filing.
Delegate List: Rochelle made a request to be included on the delegate list.
Request for Leading Tone Article: A request was made by Karen for Rochelle to to submit an article for the upcoming Leading Tone.

Todd Jelen Presentation
Right-to-Work Powerpoint: Todd discussed the background of the Right-to-Work presentation, and shared the Powerpoint presentation that he’s been utilizing at on-site presentations.
Union Density in Selected ROPA Orchestras: Todd shared a spreadsheet showing those orchestras he’s been in contact with, or has visited, with Union density in those orchestras.
Current Legislative Trends: Todd and the board shared anti-union legislative activities across the nation.
Presentation for Conference: The board discussed aspects of Todd’s presentations that could be highlighted during his presentation at the annual conference.

Union Organizing Discussion
The board discussed strategies for optimizing Union Organizing efforts, both on site with orchestras and at Conference.

Possible Resolutions for Conference
The board brainstormed possible Resolutions for the 2017 Conference.

Possible By-Laws Changes for Conference
• MALs: The board discussed the process for increasing the number of MALs in the By-Laws. The related articles in the by-laws were identified. Discussed was how the number of delegates per MAL impacts break-out sessions at Conference.
• Leading Tone/Social Media editor is currently one position; discussed was the need to separate these positions.
• The board discussed the budget sizes for Full and Associate Membership status.

Conference Preparation:
The Board brainstormed 2017 Conference topics. Mike has been in contact with people in Phoenix; planning there is under way. For the 2018 Conference, Mike has had more conversations with contacts in Portland, OR. Looking ahead, the board also discussed options for the 2019 conference.

Endowment regulations:
The board discussed the considerations necessary to set up an Endowment Fund for ROPA, with a potential future gift.

Officer Reports:
1) Mike summarized his activities as President since the season started. He updated the board on Media Committee activities and media situations that have arisen recently.
2) Karen provided her activities as Secretary. Handling of email lists and settlement bulletins were discussed.
3) Donna summarized her activities as Treasurer. She discussed the rules for handling receipts for reimbursement. 1099s for officers will be sent out soon.

Adjourned at 5:00 pm CST.

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Regional Orchestra
Players’ Association
A conference of the American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO

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ROPA Member Orchestras

Full Members
Akron Symphony Orchestra
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 Philharmonic
California Symphony Orchestra
Canton Symphony Orchestra
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera Orch.
Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra
Dallas Opera Orchestra
Dayton Philharmonic
Delaware Symphony Orchestra
Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra
East Texas Symphony Orchestra

El Paso Symphony
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
Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra
Knoxville Symphony Orchestra
Lansing Symphony Orchestra
Las Vegas Philharmonic
Lexington Philharmonic
Long Beach Symphony Orchestra
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
Pasadena Symphony Orchestra
Pittsburgh Opera Orchestra
Portland Opera Orchestra
Portland Symphony Orchestra
Reading Symphony Orchestra
Rhode Island Philharmonic
Richmond Symphony
Santa Barbara Symphony
Santa Rosa Symphony
 Sarasota Orchestra
Shreveport Symphony Orchestra
South Bend Symphony
Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra

Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Spokane Symphony Orchestra
Symphony Silicon Valley
Tacoma Symphony Orchestra
Toledo Symphony Orchestra
Tucson Symphony Orchestra
West Virginia Symphony
Wichita Symphony Orchestra
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Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra
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