

Winter 2014

ROPA

Regional
Orchestra
Players'
Association

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

30th Anniversary ROPA Conference
Hosted at The Westin Pasadena Hotel
August 1st—3rd, 2014
Negotiations Workshop for Eligible Delegates on July 31st, 2014

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The Third Federation of International Musicians' Symphonic Conference

By ROPA President Carla Lehmeier-Tatum

Last month I had the pleasure of representing ROPA at the FIM Symphonic Conference in Oslo, Norway. Symphonic and opera musician representing musicians' unions from 30 different countries participated in the three day conference. Half of the conference included discussions with invited management representatives. Some of the topics explored during the three days were: balancing the preservation of jobs while raising levels of pay, aging and performance, Re- Auditions– the wrong tool, the future of symphonic orchestras, decision making within an orchestra. I was assigned to participate in a four person panel to discuss decision making within an orchestra. The panel included two management representatives. Prior to my presentation, I interviewed a number of individuals to ensure a broad perspective. What I discovered was that the opinions of musicians' involvement were very similar. Much of the input I received concluded that there was no formula for the industry. Some orchestras were successful in reaching a collaborative work place, while others found frustration from unsuccessful attempts of collaboration. My opening statement ended with the following remarks "As we move forward as an industry, I encourage you to learn from the organizations that have found a successful structure, they are out there. However, be mindful that there are no two orchestras alike and there is not a one size fits all answer for our orchestral institutions. There are some orchestras where the trust has been built and the musicians input has been valued, however they would be the first to say that they are not making decisions."

(Continued on page 5)

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ROPA

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karensandene@gmail.com
The list is open to musicians in ROPA member orchestras, and AFM Local officers for those orchestras.

2013 ROPA Conference Report

by Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary

The 29th Annual Regional Orchestra Players Association (ROPA) Conference convened last summer in Spokane Washington at the historic Davenport Hotel. The conference provided a terrific learning opportunity for the representatives of our 85 orchestras from around the nation.

Throughout the conference, representatives of the Symphonic Services Division (SSD) provided a wealth of knowledge. As well as being available for valuable 1-on-1 contact with delegates and speaking on several topics, SSD staff provided several hours of training for delegates from negotiating orchestras prior to the full conference. We thank Director Jay Blumenthal and Nathan Kahn, Debbie Newmark, Chris Durham, Rochelle Skolnick and Matt Cross for sharing their knowledge with the delegates.

The opening session began with roll call, followed by ROPA President Carla Lehmeier-Tatum acknowledging the recently elected AFM Executive Board members, who were elected at the AFM Convention the previous week. AFM Spokane Local 107 President Tina Morrison ROPA Member-at-Large Greg Youmans welcomed the delegates to the conference. Spokane City Council President Ben Stuckart and Tim

Ormsby, Spokane regional labor council president state representative spoke of Spokane's strong labor history and recent labor battles. Spokane Symphony musicians Greg Youmans and Anita Perkins went into specifics about the actions of the musicians during the Spokane Symphony Strike. A slide show by local photographer Marshall Peterson was shown to illustrate the strike.

Gary Hattal of the FMCS spoke about the service's role, and elaborated on the topics of improving communication and building trust. To conclude the first morning, the ROPA Board invited orchestra managers from the Portland Symphony and Orchestra Iowa to share success stories for their orchestras in the presentation, "Visions for Growth".

Following the morning session, delegates split into small groups with their Members-at-Large (MALs) and worked for several hours on the first steps in a process of strategic planning that the delegates assisted with during the conference. That evening, delegates had the opportunity to tour the recently renovated Fox Theatre, home of the Spokane Symphony, and the Spokane Local hosted a luau at Riverfront Park.

(Continued on page 5)

Making Connections: ROPA Delegates and Orchestra Committees

by Janice Galassi

Most people can agree that "communication" is a word that is used more often than we care to read or hear it. However, its prevalence in our daily correspondences and conversations may indicate that the case for staying connected needs to be continually reinforced.

During the calls from MAL representatives to our member orchestras, I was dismayed to hear from delegates that because they were not members of the Orchestra or Negotiating Committee, they could not answer questions we asked of negotiating orchestras as to their progress in negotiations as well as specific snags they were encountering. In addition to creating an unnecessary bump in the polling process, since the delegate had to go find the answer from a committee member, it was indicative of a communication gap that might be easily resolved.

Orchestras should consider inclusion in their Player Association Bylaws, that the ROPA

Delegate and the Union Steward (if applicable) are automatically non-voting members of the Orchestra Committee (and/or Negotiating Committee for those orchestras that have a separate committee to sit at the negotiation table). They have non-voting status only in those cases where the ROPA delegate and/or the Union Steward are not elected to actually serve on the Orchestra/Negotiating Committee. If they are also elected to so serve, of course, they would be entitled to cast a vote like any other member of the committee.

In those orchestras that utilize this committee relationship, the ROPA Delegate and Union Steward are included in all meetings and emails that are shared with the Orchestra and/or Negotiation Committee. This facilitates a communication process that is the ideal relationship between ROPA and its member orchestras.

The ROPA Delegate is able to integrate what he/she has learned at ROPA conferences into
(Continued on page 6)

Reflections on Negotiations: Things to Remember When Trying to Get a Deal

by Naomi Bensdorf Frisch

This past Spring and Fall, I was a member of the negotiating team for the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra. After big changes in the organization (New Music Director and Executive Director, major changes in board leadership), what was expected to be a positive, forward thinking time at the bargaining table was actually quite contentious.

For the first time, both the IPO and the Union hired attorneys and a federal mediator was used. Major points of contention for this part-time orchestra were attendance policies, firing practices, and right of first refusal for IPO musicians to IPO performances. In October, after musicians faced concession after concession, a strike vote was taken and passed 42-1. The musicians made a powerful statement. Two days later, management agreed to our last proposal and we did not have to strike our season opening concert.

Throughout this negotiation process, which dragged on for many months, I began to wonder why this particular session, after years of simple and effective negotiations with this management, had turned so ugly. I thought back to my last strike, during negotiations with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra management. In that situation, we saw the direction things were headed months ahead of time. Instead of trying to change things, we "prepared for the worst and hoped for the best." Unfortunately, the repercussions of such contentious bargaining are still being felt in the WCO and I am sure that the process we went through in IPO will take its toll on our ability to work in harmony with our orchestra staff to accomplish growth.

Having now been a part of several amicable negotiations, one negotiation that led to a strike and one negotiation that came very close to ending in a strike, I can reflect back and try to identify common threads of success. Certainly job actions, or the threat of them, were useful tools in both contentious negotiations.

On top of that, I think I can identify 2 keys to getting a deal without labor unrest. This is nothing new, but something I hope all ROPA musicians will remember when going into negotiations.

Key Number 1: Assemble a hard-working, dedicated, and educated team. When things are going well, pretty much any musician with knowledge of your orchestra can bargain a good deal for you. But, when things go bad, you want someone with good resources on your side. At the IPO, we were extremely lucky that the musicians on our committee were willing to put in countless hours at the table and were strong in their convictions. Also, we were lucky to have the expertise and experience of Gary Matts, Terry Jares, and the Chicago Federation of Musicians backing us up.

It's so important to have union representation who have experience with orchestral negotiations and can point to industry standards. At the WCO, we would have had a horrible time without the assistance of the SSD Negotiating staff. In both cases, access to the ROPA executive board and membership was key to our success.



Naomi Bensdorf Frisch

Site visits from Carla Lehmeier-Tatum at both orchestras helped galvanize and energize us. Having resources available to you in a negotiation is essential; make sure the people sitting at the table know how to access those resources.

Key Number 2: When Boards, Managements, and Musicians work together and try to understand each other, deals get done. The phrase I heard most often during the IPO negotiations from other musicians was, "don't they *understand*?" The truth is, if they understood, or tried to understand, our position then we'd be able to compromise.

This is of course a three-way street; musicians have to make the effort to understand the board and management, just as much as we ask them to try to understand us. But the bottom line is that things get done when we work together. We have worked hard over the last year at the WCO to establish an environment of communication and collaboration between the board, our new Executive Director, and the musicians, and we are optimistic that things will be different as we think about starting our next round of negotiations in 2014.

Negotiations are always a stressful time for orchestras. Thanks, however, to the resources and dedication of ROPA, the SSD, the AFM, and our musicians, we are all poised to use collective bargaining even more effectively as a tool to improve our standard of living. When we stand together, we are stronger. For those of you entering into negotiations this season, I urge you to remember that your colleagues in ROPA, who have been there before, are here to help you. Chances are, a delegate somewhere has faced the same challenges you will face. Reach out, use your resources, and try as hard as you can to get your board and management to understand the unity of the Regional Orchestra musicians in this country. Our solidarity is your biggest asset. *Naomi Bensdorf-Frisch is a ROPA Board MAL and is a member of the Illinois Philharmonic and Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra*

Erie Philharmonic Reaches a Milestone—100 Years

by Karen Barker Ferren

As the 99th season came to a conclusion, the Erie Philharmonic was looking forward to the big 100th anniversary year, with concerts featuring Gil Shaham and the premier of a new composition written for the Erie Philharmonic. At the same time, the musicians were gearing up for contract negotiations with management and the Philharmonic board.

Looking back 101 years, to 1912, Albert Glaser, the music director of a local choral group rehearsed a program that was to include Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture and the Peer Gynt Suite.. Unfortunately this program never happened, but a few months later the Erie Symphony came into being under the direction of Franz Kohler. Unfortunately not long after that, Maestro Kohler's health began to fail and with financial constraints and the U.S. entrance into World War I, the symphony stopped performing in 1916.

Future performances were suspended until 1921 when the Erie Symphony was revived, spearheaded by Henry B. Vincent and assisted by William Brakeman of the musicians' union and John Metcalf, an industrialist. About the same time, another orchestra was formed which called itself The Philharmonic. However, both the symphony and philharmonic disbanded during the Great Depression. An Erie Philharmonic Society made up of philan-

thropists came into being around 1931. Its purpose was to support orchestral music in Erie and the second Philharmonic Orchestra with 75 members came into being.

As the world became embroiled in another World War, musicians of the orchestra began to leave to join one of the services, and again the orchestra was disbanded in 1941. After the war, the orchestra resumed performances in 1945 and hired the young Mario Lanza as its first soloist. In 1947 Fritz Mahler, cousin of the famed composer Gustav Mahler, was selected to conduct their orchestra. From that time forward, the Philharmonic has continuously served the city of Erie and northwest Pennsylvania.

Moving forward to 2012, in preparation for our recently completed negotiations, the orchestra committee did the usual things of surveying our orchestra members.

The Philharmonic has witnessed economic downturns in the area, yet it's obvious that some parts of the economy are thriving. Money was borrowed not very many years ago to pay bills, but this loan was repaid with money coming into the Philharmonic to fund the 100th anniversary concerts.

During our negotiation last year we were reminded of how poor the Philharmonic was, that all the money that had been donated for the 100th anniversary had gone to repay the existing loan and to cover costs of the 2012-13 season, and maybe some of the coming season. We were constantly told that the board did not have monies for the future

We offered ideas that might enable the orchestra to be heard and seen in new venues to attract fresh donors, but always this met with the same negative responses.

Each negotiation session was met with the same dismal prospects – a raise of \$1 and a cut in guaranteed services, an extra penny per mile, and \$.50 more for a per diem. But we knew we had one window of hope. As we got closer to the opening of the 100th season, we knew our employer would be anxious to present the opening concert with a famous guest artist.

We strategized that as we got closer to the fall event, we would be in a better position. With negotiations still not going well, we took a strike authorization vote. Our orchestra committee agreed that a press release was in order.

(continued on page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

Newspapers in Erie, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Cleveland were sent the announcement, but we soon learned that the story was picked up near and far, announcing to the public that the Erie Philharmonic may go on strike. Erie TV stations jumped on the story and one sent a reporter and cameraman to our final day of negotiations.

The Pittsburgh news showed extra interest as our maestro was formerly the assistant conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony. That final meeting with management met

with a considerable improvement in offers and we are happy to announce that our 5 year contract will include a raise of \$11.00 per service over the course of the 5 years, improved mileage, per diem, and no cuts in services. However, while mileage compensation has improved, no hotel accommodations are covered, and per diem for two service days is only \$10.00. Yet overall, at a time when negotiations have proved to be very difficult for all orchestras, we believe that negotiating on the eve of our 100th anniversary concert was an excellent catalyst for motivating the Phil-

harmonic board to come to an agreement that we felt was acceptable to both sides. Sincere thanks goes to Chris Durham, our negotiator, Local 17 president, Bill Fairgraves, and the orchestra committee consisting of Maura Pelinsky, Daniel Brye, Sloan Ladwig, Karen Barker Ferren, Danna Sundet and chairperson, Leanne Wistrom. Early history notes: courtesy Erie Philharmonic
Karen Barker Ferren is a ROPA Board MAL and member of the West Virginia Symphony and Erie Philharmonic

The Third Federation of International Musicians' Symphonic Conference

(Continued from page 1)

"I think it is important to note that many musicians have found very important roles within their orchestras and that is they have become strong advocates. For a number of reasons, musicians have created their own orchestra musicians Facebook pages and have learned the benefits of creating a direct connection with their community. "

My experience speaking with FIM Delegates from all over the world was incredibly inspiring. We have a multitude of funding structures, employment levels and security. The atmosphere during the three days was filled with finding answers to challenges, sharing success stories and appreciation for the differences and a recognition of our similarities. I look forward to maintaining the connections I have made during these three days as they will be a valuable resource for ideas, experience and knowledge for years to come. *Carla Lehmeier-Tatum is the President of ROPA and a member of the New Mexico Philharmonic*

2013 ROPA Conference Report

(Continued from page 2)

The second day included numerous presentations. ROPA Board Member Mike Smith briefly addressed the Minnesota Orchestra lock-out situation. Don Taylor, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin School for workers spoke, the title of his presentation being "Understanding and responding to 'Right to Work' (for less)". Prior to the Taylor's presentation, delegates viewed the film, "We are Wisconsin", which highlighted the battle against anti-union legislation in Wisconsin during the Winter of 2011; the film received a standing ovation. In his talk, Taylor discussed the rise and fall of union membership and the related income inequality during the latter half of the 20th century. He also outlined the basic principles of organizing and expressed his viewpoints on how unions should adapt in order to succeed in the future.

William Thompson, University of Louisville, spoke on "The Public Relations Plan (preparing for the threat may stop the coming conflict)". Following ROPA officer reports, representatives from RMA, TMA, OCSM, and ICSOM gave updates from their respective conferences. Presen-

tations by the SSD staff included, "Musicians Serving on Boards" and "Orchestra/Negotiation Committee Fundamentals". AFM President Ray Hair addressed the delegation to conclude the second day of the conference. On the final day, SSD attorney Rochelle Skolnick presented an important and timely discussion on the Affordable Care Act. Other agenda items included nominations for the ROPA Executive Board, and voting on resolutions, which can found elsewhere in this *Leading Tone*. Delegates received an update on the status of the Napa Valley Symphony. And looking ahead, delegates selected Toledo, OH as the site for the 2015 Conference.

Strategic Planning ended the conference, led by Don Taylor. Delegates once again worked in small groups to define strengths and areas for improvement for ROPA. Information submitted by the delegates will be used to help guide the Executive Board to fine-tune the mission of ROPA as we enter our fourth decade.

The 2013-14 ROPA Executive Board elected on the final day of conference

included President Carla Lehmeier-Tatum, Vice President Nancy Nelson, Secretary Karen Sandene, Treasurer Dennis Danders, Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention Maurice Grants, and Members-at-Large Karen Barker, Naomi Bendorf-Frisch, Janice Galassi, Richard Kelly, Mary Anne Lemoine, Tim Michling and John Michael Smith. ROPA thanked departing board members Greg Youmans and Donna Loomis for their outstanding service on the ROPA Board.

And lastly, we offer our sincere appreciation to conference hosts, the Spokane Symphony musicians, Local 107 (Spokane, WA), Spokane Local President Tina Morrison, and numerous hard-working local volunteers. We would also like to thank Conference Coordinator/ New Mexico Symphony Delegate Linda Boivin and ROPA Board Member-at-Large Greg Youmans for their outstanding work assisting the ROPA Board in presenting a well-run conference. We look forward to our 30th Anniversary Conference in 2014 in Pasadena, CA.
Karen Sandene is ROPA Secretary and a member of the Omaha Symphony and the Lincoln Symphony

Making Connections: ROPA Delegates and Orchestra Committees

(Continued from page 2)

the information bank of the Orchestra/Negotiating Committee(s), and the Committee members are able to relate particular questions and/or information to ROPA, either through the delegate email list or, in cases where more discretion is needed, directly to either the MAL or a member of the ROPA Board. More discretion might be needed, for instance, in discussing some negotiation points or strategies that the committee member may only want to share on a very limited and confidential basis.

Networking with other orchestras is, after all, one of the most valuable aspects of ROPA membership, as has often been expressed by delegates themselves. However, if a wall is inadvertently placed between the delegate and the Orchestra/Negotiation committee, the benefits that are an integral part of sharing information may be lost.

As has often been discussed, dissemination of information with orchestra musicians during negotiations has to be carefully monitored: general principals are often shared without going into specific details about the give and take at the negotiating table. However, between the Orchestra/Negotiation Committee, the ROPA Delegate and the Union Steward,

all information can and should be shared on an equal basis in order for all those folks to serve the membership to the best of their ability. The relationship between the Players Association, ROPA and the Local Union should also be spelled out in the Player Association Bylaws, since the Local Union is the legal bargaining representative for the orchestra musicians.

To include the ROPA Delegate and the Union Steward as non-voting members of the Orchestra or Negotiating Committee, it is best if the Player Association Bylaws specify that provision, which can be inserted into the language governing who shall serve, how they are elected, when they are elected, etc. The Union Steward is the Local's representative in the workplace, and the duties of that person and the manner in which he/she is selected is governed by the Local, usually in conjunction with the Orchestra Committee. However, references to serving on the Orchestra/Negotiating Committee should be included in the Player Association Bylaws so that everyone is clear on the relationship.

All orchestras should have Player Association Bylaws, of course. An excellent template can be found on the AFM website, under Symphonic Services and SSD Handouts, in the handout titled *Committee Responsibilities*.

All orchestra musicians should have a copy of the Player Association Bylaws, once the orchestra membership has voted to accept them. The relationship between ROPA, Orchestra/Negotiating Committees and the Local should be clearly understood by all parties. It is only by this kind of open, forthright and transparent relationship that musicians in ROPA orchestras can be part of the symphonic community, and link arms with musicians of all musical genres to work for their collective welfare. Once that relationship is well established and maintained, musicians, Orchestra/Negotiating Committees and AFM Locals can move to the next logical and necessary step of integrating their endeavors with local labor councils to work for the general benefit of all people in the labor movement, whose working lives are inevitably and inextricably entwined with one another. *Janice Galassi is a ROPA Board MAL and is a member of the Allentown Symphony*

Contract Negotiations with the Ann Arbor Symphony

by Barbara Zmich

With a contract already in hand that has developed tremendously through numerous nuts-and-bolts negotiations over the past two decades, the current Ann Arbor Symphony musicians' committee was able to sit down this summer at a cordial and familiar negotiating table to work out a five-year deal that brings security and growth to our musicians for the foreseeable future.

The A2SO Board came to the negotiation with the five-year proposal and a fair first offer of remunerative improvement. The musicians countered with some higher figures and after a bit of back and forth all agreed that the Board had done its best, and final figures for each year were settled upon, with base pay reaching \$90 by the end of the contract term. One Board mem-

ber even requested that the committee convey to the musicians that the Board wished it could do still better, a gesture that was gratefully received by our team.

Also notable was that, Michigan's 2013 anti-union law (framed by anti-unionists as "Right to Work") notwithstanding, A2SO management team members were sensitive to the ongoing importance of the Union to the musicians and the bargaining process. Management and Board unhesitatingly agreed to leave the union security clause intact, anticipating a possible eventual return to Union Security in our state. Management and musicians worked together to craft additional language to reflect compliance with the law, supplemented by standard severability language.

(Continued on page 7)

A Reflection on Orchestra Iowa's Contract Negotiations

by Matthew Ransom

Contract negotiations for Orchestra Iowa began in late 2012. The previous contract had been ratified in 2008 during great financial difficulties for the orchestra, which had funding problems even before flooding ruined the orchestra's home, the Paramount Theater in Cedar Rapids. As a result the musicians were in the fourth year of a pay freeze, putting us at the second lowest base pay rate in ROPA. One of the primary goals of our Orchestra Committee was to make progress toward more competitive pay in the new contract. The resulting 3 year contract, with a 10% base pay increase the first year and 5% increases the next two years, was a success in that regard. It was not an unqualified success, as musicians made concessions in travel pay, doubling pay, and seniority pay.

We encountered a few specific challenges in our negotiations. Before negotiations our management and board engaged in strategic planning for the organization. They did so without input from the musicians. Many of our priorities overlap, but not necessarily in the same order of im-

portance. This created difficulty in negotiations when progress toward one goal had to come at the expense of another.

Throughout many of our initial negotiating sessions we found a lot of common ground with our management over minor changes to the contract and wording fixes. We had conceptual agreements on many of the issues of the contract, but our management did not want to talk about numbers at that point. It was only after the board passed management's budget proposal that they were willing to go into specifics about compensation. When our committee presented our proposals for changes to any sort of pay in the contract, we were told that the "pot" for every musician-related expense was a certain size and could not be increased because the budget was already set. This may or may not have been a deliberate strategy on their part, but it was perceived that way by our negotiating committee. My takeaway from this: focus on the specific, difficult details as early as possible in a negotiation. They become even more challenging as time passes.

Our negotiation process went on for a very long time; our new agreement was ratified just before the 2013-2014 season began. Many of our board members expressed some surprise that the negotiations were long and difficult; they were not directly involved in the process, with board representative attending only two of our sessions. An unexpected positive that has come out of the process is that our board has expressed a renewed interest in getting to know and understand our musicians better. It is our hope that we can build better relationships with them over the next few years and that our mutual interests will align more easily in the future.

This was the first contract negotiation I have been involved in. I understand that they are all quite unique! I hope that my reflections on this experience aid you in getting the best possible contracts for your own musicians.

Matthew Ransom is ROPA Delegate and Principal Bassoon for Orchestra Iowa.

Contract Negotiations with the Ann Arbor Symphony

(Continued from page 6)

This nod to the musicians has been received by us as a welcome and greatly appreciated sign of respect.

The musicians' committee did hold firm about not increasing the attendance requirement since even these good new compensation numbers were not enough to entice musicians to pass up more lucrative work elsewhere.

The importance of the knowledge the committees have gained from ROPA over the years and the invaluable assistance of AFM negotiators since 2000, when the musicians first asked for negotiating assistance, can't be stressed enough. Before our first negotiation with Janice Galassi, base pay was \$49/service, and at that negotiation the contract underwent a complete overhaul to bring it into line with industry standards. Chris Durham joined us for a round a few years later, and at the last few negotiations we have been assisted by Nathan Kahn. All three of these wonderful and remarkably knowledgeable colleagues have taught our committee members both the technical and personal skills needed for optimum success at the negotiating table.

Committee chairs and members have come and gone over the years, but we have been fortunate to always have experienced members balanced by new faces and ideas.

Our A2SO ROPA membership has also paid off in spades, with several current and former committee members having been inspired over the years to participate as ROPA delegates and in ROPA leadership positions, including President Emerita Barbara Zmich, Vice President Emerita Kathleen Grimes, our current committee chair, Member at Large and Leading Tone Editor Tim Michling, and longtime A2SO ROPA Delegate Greg Lanzi.

Whether ROPA inspires you to become a negotiating committee member in your orchestra, or your committee membership motivates you to become involved with ROPA, you will be part of valuable groups that serve to help your musician colleagues gain respect in our profession. The success story of the Ann Arbor Symphony negotiations is an excellent example of the worth of that positive energy. *Barbara Zmich is a Violist with the Ann Arbor Symphony. She is the Secretary-Treasurer of Ann Arbor's Local 625 and a ROPA President Emerita.*

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ROPA Member Orchestras

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