Preparing for the ROPA Conference
Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary

The 29th Annual ROPA Conference will be held in Spokane, Washington, during the week beginning July 29th. The theme of this year’s Conference is “Preparing for our Next 30 Years”, and will focus on our futures as Union members, symphony musicians and the strategic aligning of ROPA in preparation for our 30th anniversary in 2014. Delegates and the Board will join together to engage in internal strategic long-term planning. Sessions will be presented by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services on developing institutional relationships and contract administration. University of Wisconsin School for Workers Assistant Professor Don Taylor will show a film depicting the struggles Unions have faced recently in Wisconsin and how they are relevant to all Union members. William Thompson will offer public relations approaches on connecting with our communities. Also to be highlighted will be some successful outreach projects by our orchestras. AFM Attorney Rochelle Skolnick will lead a session on Obama-care and what we as symphonic musicians should know. Other speakers will include AFM President Ray Hair, and members of the AFM Symphonic Services.

The ROPA board offers its sincere appreciation to our conference hosts: Spokane Symphony Musicians and Spokane Symphony member/ROPA MAL Greg Youmans. A special thanks to our hosts from The Professional Musicians of the Inland Northwest, AFM Local 105, and President Tina Morrison. Our gracious hosts are arranging special events to ensure that we experience the beauty and artistry of the Spokane region. This will be an informative and memorable conference for the friends and members of ROPA. See you in Spokane!

Run for Office

Vice-President, Secretary, 4 Member-at-Large positions, and Delegate to the AFM Convention are up for election this year. Please consider serving in one of these capacities – we need your energy, skills, dedication, and determination on the ROPA Executive Board. If you plan to run for office, you should stay over Thursday night in Spokane. The Executive Board will meet Thursday evening after the Conference, and this meeting will be especially important for new board members.

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2013 ROPA Conference - A Path to Our Future

by Carla Lehmeier-Tatum, ROPA President

It is that time again when the number of conference planning emails starts to fill the ROPA Board member’s email accounts. Details are coming in and going out with the hopes of planning a ROPA conference that will top the experience of the previous year’s experience. The amount of energy behind the scenes to make each element of the event successful is very time consuming. The local hosts are lining up volunteers, finalizing details for the special events and assisting the ROPA Board with conference needs. Once the attendees arrive and begin to network, learn, and share there is an overwhelming sense of gratification.

At every conference the ROPA Board works to add a new dimension or format to the conference that will create diversity and freshness to our agenda. This year is no exception. During the past decade, the ROPA Board has focused their energies around a strategic plan that has shifted as the recognized needs have changed. Conference planning and projects that the Board have undertaken have been guided by a strategic plan. During the ROPA Board’s midyear meeting conference planning, we reviewed how the ROPA Delegate is an integral part in the success and effectiveness of our organization. In order for our strategic planning to be truly representative of our membership, we have to include input from one our most important constituencies: the Delegates.

The 2013 ROPA Conference will undertake an exciting challenge which will be to expand the ROPA Strategic Planning to the ROPA Delegates. Before arriving in Spokane, it would be extremely productive for the representatives to speak to their orchestra committees and discuss how ROPA could serve their membership. It would be very helpful for Delegates to brainstorm on how they as elected representatives might have more involvement providing input and participation with the ROPA Board as well as finding ways to involve their own orchestra membership in ROPA.

When networking questions appear on the ROPA e-list, it is up to the Delegates to find the answers. Those individual answers create the broad knowledge of our ROPA orchestras. I find it amazing that within a few days’ time, information about instrumentation on a specific piece of music, or a contractual issue can be provided to an orchestra who is researching this for their own orchestra. Is there anything we can do to get more participation from the Delegates? It might be useful for the Delegates to explore how the conference information could be streamlined into a system that would make orchestra and local reports an efficient and effective process.

There are so many aspects of what ROPA does that could be explored. A ROPA conference breakout session will provide the opportunity for Delegates to share their ideas. The Board looks forward to this invigorating process and hopes that ROPA will rise to a higher level for their 30th anniversary in 2014 and set the path for our future.
30 Days and 6 Hours - The Spokane Symphony Strike
Greg Youmans Bassist, SSO OC, Local 105 Board, ROPA MAL

On December 3rd, 2012, the musicians of the Spokane Symphony voted to ratify a new contract, ending a strike which began on Nov. 3rd.

In a Nut Shell-
The SSO management had made a "last, best and final" offer which was overwhelmingly rejected by players. The management then declared an impasse in negotiations and imposed their contract. The Union threatened to file an Unfair labor Practice (ULP) asserting that impasse had not yet been reached and requested to return to the table. Subsequent negotiating sessions yielded no meaningful movement from the imposed terms on three major issues. AFM Local 105 called a strike for 5 p.m Nov. 3rd, just prior to a Pops concert. Returning to the table after three weeks, both sides made compromises which resulted in the signing of a new contract.

With Details -
After three economically challenging seasons which included administrative cuts and pay freezes for musicians, negotiations began in March with a proposed 23% cut in core guaranteed services by management. Analysis of audited financial statements made in July showed a $27,000 surplus for the 2011 - 2012 season and no accumulated deficit.

Working in the fall under the terms of the recently expired contract, with help from a Federal mediator, little progress toward a new agreement was made at the table. Management held firm on their desire for pay cuts which the Orchestra Committee found difficult to accept, considering the less-than-dire economic situation. There have also been ongoing issues with leave policy which players wanted to address, especially if they were to consider any type of salary cuts.

In mid October, apparently unwilling to continue in talk-and-play mode, management made its "last, best and final" offer which included a 13% cut to the core guarantee, no meaningful modification of the leave policy which puts virtually all (unpaid) leave at the discretion of the Music Director, and a second year with a re-opener on economic issues without any guarantee or floor.

A very well attended players meeting was soon held at the Local where the contract was overwhelmingly rejected, followed by a strike authorization vote that also passed nearly as overwhelmingly. The strike authorization vote was taken in case things might progress quickly (which they did) and was kept confidential. Players also signed up for the various strike committees at this time.

Learning of the players’ rejection, management declared an impasse in negotiations and imposed their contract. The Union responded by threatening to file an Unfair Labor Practice charge with the Labor Relations Board asserting that an impasse had not in fact been reached and that there remained questions unanswered and issues left unaddressed.

Largely in order to fend off the ULP charge, management went back to the table. The management held firm on their financial offer and made only one insignificant change on the leave issue. After refusing to respond to the Union’s counter offer on financials, the management was informed of the strike authorization vote. Looking at the likelihood of an extended period of time before a ULP charge, and therefor the imposed contract would be ruled on, and unwilling to play under the imposed contract in the mean time, on Fri. Nov. 2nd the Union announced its intention to call a strike at 5 p.m Nov. 3rd if the SSO management failed to make movement on the issues of salary, leave, and 2nd year financials. Movement was not made and the strike was called.

The SSO management had one day to notify the public that the Arthur Fiedler Pops concert was cancelled. The few patrons who missed the notification saw musicians in black formal attire in a picket line rather than on stage. Some patrons joined the picket line. AFM negotiator Nathan Kahn turned out on the street and ROPA President Carla Lehmeyer-Tatum flew in to give advice and support.

Throughout the strike, public support for musicians was overwhelming. Some e-tech savvy musicians began building the Spokane Symphony Musicians website a year ago. It was up and running when negotiations began in spring. Intensified efforts to direct traffic to the players’ website and Facebook page began at the beginning of this season. Leaflets with the addresses were distributed at a free outdoor Labor Day concert attended by 8,000 people as well as at subsequent concerts, and to players’ friends, family, and students.

Original leaflets simply asked patrons to get to know the musicians and visit the sites - spokanesymphonymusicians.org and Musicians of the Spokane Symphony on Facebook. As things progressed, updated leaflets also mentioned pending issues.
Facebook friends went from 200 in the spring to over 2,000 by the time of the strike.

The Benefit Concert Committee scheduled a concert in place of a classics concert one week into the strike. Over 1,100 people flooded a local high school auditorium. Extra chairs were used to seat people in the aisles, on stage, and some people listened from the lobby. Others simply left donations and parted. The event raised nearly $20,000 for the emergency relief fund.

Other Chamber concerts were held as well as small ensemble informational presentations to various community organizations. Relief fund donations totaled nearly $60,000.

Local media covered the strike; there was also an article in the Huffington Post. Spokane’s free weekly paper, The Inlander, was particularly attentive. Facebook was the prime venue for player-public comment. Players were (and remain) gratified that public comments and editorials were hugely supportive of musicians.

Musicians picketed all four cancelled concerts. I think it’s safe to say that these were enjoyable events for the musicians-public loitering with scores of bright, clever colleagues, engaging the public, eliciting honks, chanting, an impromptu brass band. Community members including pa-

cil, patrons and community members for their moral and financial support and to the greater music community including our colleagues throughout ROPA, IC-SOM and the AFM for their various types of support.

A strike doesn’t mean not working. A strike is doing other kinds of work. Having a bargaining unit that is able and willing to serve on the various strike committees and do the public outreach is essential if a strike is to have any chance of being successful. The public, patrons, and Symphony Board became much more aware of musicians’ jobs and lives during the strike. We can be hopeful that this will lead to the creation of a better bargaining environment in the future.

“Spokane, Continued”
ROPAs and Their Musicians: The Artistic Pillars of Their Communities

Naomi Bensdorf Frisch - ROPA MAL, Principal Oboe Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra and Illinois Philharmonic

Recently, I had the opportunity to play Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony with the Elgin Symphony Orchestra and their final candidate for Music Director, Andrew Grams (who has now been appointed the new music director of the Elgin Symphony). It’s hard to remember a more electrifying performance of such an incredibly emotional piece of music. The level of playing that the orchestra achieved was inspiring. The sold-out crowd was treated to a live orchestral performance equal to what they might have heard “downtown,” but for half the price and with free parking too. Hearing musicians talk excitedly about the future of their orchestra and who the new music director might be was an uplifting experience. Our ROPA orchestras truly are some of the best in this country, and many are growing and thriving.

One of the things that amazes me about the musicians in ROPA orchestras is how quickly they adapt into their environment when they sit down in their seat. From week to week, a ROPA orchestra musician will be sitting next to different colleagues in different orchestras of all shapes and sizes. One week might be a ballet orchestra, the next a chamber orchestra, and the next something like Shostakovich 10 with full forces. Or, a ROPA musician might spend weeks at a time sitting next to their music students and not professional colleagues. But, ROPA musicians rise to the occasion and give performances that are technically polished and emotionally charged. It is a testament to the large amount of talent in our ROPA orchestras that these musicians can sit down next to someone they haven’t seen in weeks or months and play together like they see each other every day.

This talent is not going unnoticed. In the April 14th edition of Madison Magazine, Greg Hettmansburger says, ‘In the last three seasons, I’ve heard twelve of the fifteen concerts on the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra Masterworks series. Those audiences in the Capitol Theater have witnessed conductor Andrew Sewell nurture brilliant accompaniments to world class soloists, and the orchestra members were frequently stars in their own right in programs of unflagging taste and sophistication.” Of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra’s 2012 closing program,
Chicago Classical Review notes, “The climax of the evening was the rousing performance given to Scheherazade, showcasing a wealth of excellent orchestral soloists and some powerful ensemble playing.” Chicago Classical Review also mentions the exciting changes that have come to the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra this season: “Danzmayr certainly appears to be the right conductor to take the Illinois Philharmonic to the next level. In his first concert as music director Saturday at the Performing Arts Center of Lincoln-Way North High School, the 32-year-old Austrian showed himself a dynamic and charismatic podium figure drawing fizzing and intensely committed playing from the IPO musicians.” It is encouraging to see that some of our ROPA orchestras are finding ways to thrive artistically despite some of the challenges that face our musicians today. The music that’s out there is truly remarkable. ROPA orchestras and their musicians are entrenched in their communities. In Madison, Wisconsin, over 20,000 people come out every week from late June to early August to hear the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra play in the capitol square. These musicians are appreciated, valued, and deserving of admiration. While these organizations might not be turning a profit every season, they are dedicated to preserving and growing their community’s treasure: its orchestra. It’s good to know that at least in some cases throughout the country, great music-making is enough to inspire success.
Has it really been that long? Winter has a way of making you lose track of time, staring at the white bleakness and gray days, of which we have had more than our share in Minnesota. I asked myself this question as I put on my long Johns, Sorels, down coat, choppers and knit hat to go out for another evening of leafleting in front of a concert venue for the SPCO’s Liquid Music alternative chamber music series the last week of February. Leafleting SPCO audiences began with the concerts in September, over a month before the lockouts began. Beginning with the Ordway Center for the Arts five months ago, we are now standing in front of the Amsterdam Bar in downtown St. Paul, handing out leaflets and carrying signs to tell the story to 100+ patrons of this new music series.

The SPCO has locked out its Musicians since Oct. 21, and there have been no concerts of the SPCO since. However, the SPCO this year has a new music chamber series called Liquid Music, which brings in musicians almost completely from the outside to various small alternative venues, such as the Amsterdam Bar, The Music Room at the SPCO Center, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. It seems the SPCO is more interested in presenting music than creating it, and it doesn’t need the world-class chamber orchestra that it has nurtured for the past 50 years. A world-class chamber orchestra is not financially sustainable, they say.

The Minnesota Orchestra has likewise been locked out since Oct. 1. Again, we are told a 110-year-old world-class symphony orchestra is not financially sustainable. However, there is a need for a $50 million addition to the lobby of Orchestra Hall.

The legal representative for both orchestras are lawyers from the Minneapolis firm of Felhaber, Larson, Fenlon & Vogt. They are the law firm who are also representing the management of American Crystal Sugar of Crookston, MN in their legendary nearly two year lock-out of their employees.

The Locked-Out-Musicians of both orchestras have put on their own concerts to continue to bring their music and message to the community. For the SPCO, a fall concert with former Music Director Pinchas Zukerman, performances of “Messiah” with former Music Director Hugh Wolf, and a baroque concerto concert with members of the orchestra as soloists have been presented. The Minnesota Orchestra Musicians have presented Gershkovich Symphony #5, and the Dvorak Cello Concerto with former Music Director Stanislaw Skrowaczewski; Beethoven’s 9th Symphony and Bach Concerto for Two Violins with former Music Director Edo De Waart; and a Grammy-nomination celebration concert of Sibelius’ 2nd and 5th Symphonies with current Music Director Osmo Vänskä. These concerts were played to full houses of people who love these orchestras and their Musicians, and are being deprived of the live performances they value so deeply. Recently, the Minnesota Orchestra Musicians have been doing their own educational services, going out to communities for school concerts and family concerts.

What’s the community been doing? Both orchestras have support groups: the SPCO has Save Our Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SOSPCO), and the Minnesota Orchestra has Orchestrate Excellence. Both these groups have done a great job of supporting the Musicians, and talking up the story to whoever will listen. The community as a whole and both of these organizations have written countless letters to the editors of newspapers and online news media, letters to the boards of orchestras, Facebook pages, blogs, media interviews and reports.

Morale in each orchestra is still strong; there has been tremendous support, both financial and moral, from orchestras, Locals, and individuals from around the US and Canada. Musicians have spoken in legislative hearings, AFL-CIO meetings, and a live public television news magazine program with management and board representatives also being interviewed.

Currently a new focus has been coming from the state legislature. Most Minnesota arts organizations receive a major portion of their
Minnesota Lockouts—Continued

and into May. The lock-outs have also continued.

Mayor Chris Coleman of St. Paul stepped in on behalf of the city to see if he could facilitate some movement with the SPCO negotiations. Running for re-election, it was an opportunity for the DFL (democrat) mayor to get into the mix: a “friend” of Labor, but also supported financially by several of the SPCO large donors. At the conclusion of his involvement as a mediator, he sent this message to the Musicians of the SPCO:

“I have made all possible attempts to bring this orchestra lockout to a resolution. I have reviewed the Society’s proposal and your feedback on that proposal, and it appears to me that all of these issues have been resolved. Any remaining differences are either minor or negligible. None of your remaining concerns, in my opinion, rise to the level of importance that would be worth jeopardizing the long-term viability of this orchestra. I urge all the musicians to work together to save this Saint Paul treasure.”

Progress was made during this time. Not so much from the mayor’s involvement, but from the somber realization that such serious damage was being incurred as to prevent salvaging the SPCO for the next season and future years. An agreement was tentatively reached, although it took even more time to get to a ratified agreement, as the management did not provide written documentation of the agreement, and when they did so, changes had been made in the draft document in many areas that had not been discussed or agreed to. It took a long weekend of work between the Musicians lawyer Mel Schwarzwald, Local 30-73 President Brad Eggen and the SPCO’s lawyer to finally get the document to reflect what the musicians of the negotiating committee had agreed to.

The SPCO cancelled an additional week of the season when the musicians decided to do the ratification vote by mail ballot, as nearly a third of the musicians were not available locally to vote. The Musicians of the SPCO wanted every player to have the opportunity to vote on this ratification, with the 22% salary reduction, other benefit reductions, and the reduction of the orchestra by 6 musicians, from 34 to 28. As has been the case with the Minnesota Orchestra Musicians and their performances, many of the members were out of town working with other orchestras.

The agreement was ratified, and the Musicians of the SPCO returned to performing concerts as the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra on Wednesday, May 8. The musicians have been warmly received by their audiences, who were also “locked-out” for nearly seven months.
Meanwhile, the Minnesota Orchestra Musicians have continued to be locked out. The Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra have played educational services in schools and churches. On April 25th they performed with Conductor Laureate Stanislaw Skrowaczewski the Bruckner 4th Symphony, and Mozart Clarinet Concerto, with Principal Clarinet Burt Hara as the soloist. Hara has since left the orchestra to take another job with the LA Philharmonic.

There has been an attempt to do a joint financial analysis, with the MO and the musicians choosing two firms to do this study. The management disagreed with the scope of what the musicians wanted included in the analysis, and pulled out, stating that they would have their own analysis done by an independent firm of their own choosing. More recently Music Director Osmo Vänskä has publicly said that if the Minnesota Orchestra loses their performance date at Carnegie Hall in the fall because of the lock-out, he will resign.

The Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra, in an open letter to the people of Minnesota, have asked the community to urge board leaders to step aside so that truly civic-minded and globally aspirational leadership can step forward. The orchestra has lost more than 20 musicians from their full compliment.

On May 8, the Minnesota Orchestra canceled the rest of the remaining season. However, curiously, they scheduled three new concerts in July and August. Those concerts were cancelled by the Minnesota Orchestra on July 10. The Minnesota Orchestra musicians are making contingency plans for a concert season in the fall.

The Minnesota Orchestra Musicians are offering two free concerts in May, thanking their audience and community for their support with the Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, and Vivaldi and Piazzolla movements from the “Seasons”.

There is also a jobs bill in the legislature that would extend unemployment benefits for locked-out employees in Minnesota.

And, in the mean time, Minnesota has become the 12th state to legalize same-sex marriage. How can a state be so progressive and enlightened in one area, and then have two world-class, century and half-century old arts organizations led by such un-enlightened and regressive boards and managements?

For the latest update on the Minnesota Orchestra please visit: http://www.minnesotaoorchestramusicians.org/
Job growth picks up

Election 2012

What next on employment report?

Spokane Symphony musicians strike after talks fail

Symphony musicians strike after talks fail

The show won't go on - it hasn't even begun.

Spokane Symphony Orchestra is going on strike and an ongoing contract dispute.

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