

## Report to the Delegates of the 2019 ROPA Conference regarding the 101<sup>st</sup> AFM Convention

As your Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention, I had the honor and privilege of attending the 101<sup>st</sup> AFM Convention this past June 16-20 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Delegates from each AFM local, AFM staff and IEB members, representatives from player conferences ROPA, ICSOM, OCSM, TMA, and RMA, and guests attended four days of informative presentations and participated in the governance of our union. Of course, we heard some amazing music too! Deacon John Moore, president of Local 174-496 New Orleans, sang the National Anthem to open the convention. Local professional musicians performed at all of the breaks and before each day's session. It was a great addition and reminded us why we were all there. I am not sure if your ROPA dues cover the cost of paying all those musicians to perform throughout the day at our conferences, but it's something I hope we'll be able to do more of in future ROPA conferences.

The convention opened with a speech from President Ray Hair about the State of our Union. He discussed the work that has been done and is ongoing to increase revenues to musicians from streaming media. Recent negotiations have secured higher payouts to musicians as well as additional contributions to the pension fund. Presentations from the Sound Recording Special Payments Fund, the AFM & SAG-Aftra Intellectual Property Rights Distribution Fund, the Film Musicians' Secondary Markets Fund, SAG-Aftra, and even the president of Actor's Equity, Kate Shindle, former Ms. America and my classmate at Northwestern, were peppered throughout the conference to provide inspiration and information. We also heard from members of Local 10-208, Chicago, regarding the two strikes undertaken by the Lyric Opera Orchestra Musicians and the Chicago Symphony Musicians. Member of the IMA bargaining committee and Lyric Opera Orchestra member Matt Comerford gave an excellent speech about the impact their strike had on the community. We heard from the musicians of the Fort Worth Symphony about their successful "Growth not Cuts" campaign, and there was also an excellent presentation by the musicians of the Boise Philharmonic about their recent organizing campaign and winning the rights to bargain their first union contract.

Our pension was a consistent concern throughout the conference. There were presentations from Trustees about the state of the Fund and Retiree representative Brad Eggen led informational sessions. The most hotly contested resolution up for debate was a proposal out of Local 802 in New York to add an investment expert and an expert in actuarial science to the pension trustees. This resolution was debated extensively in committee and on the floor. The report from the chair of the finance committee, which I have made available on the app and on the ROPA website, explains the very thorough process they undertook to evaluate this resolution. Proponents of the resolution argued that rank and file musicians wanted to see some change, some action, to show them that the IEB and the Pension Trustees understand the urgency of our situation. Those who were not in favor argued that the Pension Trustees' role is to hire the best financial and actuarial experts while promoting the interests of the beneficiaries, which they all are, and therefore this change would not only be difficult to implement but would not make a difference overall in the performance of the Fund. The debate was intense but civil, and left all in the room proud to be a part of the democratic process. The resolution did not pass and the makeup of our pension board remains unchanged; however, I encourage all of you to get involved in the future of our pension by contacting your senators to support the Butch Lewis Act, which would provide relief to our pension fund in the form of government loans.

Several other resolutions and recommendations were discussed and voted on at the convention. Of particular interest to ROPA members were small changes to the rules regarding who can apply for loans from the ROPA-ERF and how those loans are collected. The process for applying is now in alignment with our own bylaws, and there are more serious penalties for failing to repay ERF loans. We also changed the way ROPA is defined in the AFM Bylaws by removing the words “with lower operating budgets” from the definition. This aligns with the fact that our orchestras are growing and the new definition is also aligned with how the other player conferences are defined.

The Boston Local also proposed a resolution to make the national dues rebate for members who belong to more than 2 locals an automatic process. We were in favor of this; it is likely the vast majority of AFM members who belong to more than 2 locals are in at least one ROPA orchestra. However, discussion centered on the fact that the AFM does not currently have the technology to do this easily on an automated basis, and the resolution was defeated. We were glad that the subject came before the convention, however, and hope to explore other ways to make belonging to multiple locals easier on members in time for the next convention in 2022. For those who are curious, I have made the 2019 Recommendations and Resolutions available on the app and on our website, so you can review what was proposed.

Throughout the conference, the plight of the musicians of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra was on everyone’s mind. The musicians had been locked out just days before we all convened in Las Vegas. ICSOM Chair Meredith Snow announced a Call to Action to support the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, which began with generous kick-off gifts of \$10,000 from the musicians of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and \$3000 from the musicians of the Kansas City Symphony. AFM delegates approached the microphone at seemingly every opportunity to donate money to the musicians and to the Baltimore Local to support them in their labor struggle. All together, the Delegates of the 101<sup>st</sup> AFM Convention raised approximately \$100,000 for the musicians, including a \$250 gift from ROPA, and approximately \$15,000 for the local.

This was my first AFM convention and I was incredibly impressed at the level of professionalism and care and concern for our union I saw from the IEB, staff, and delegates alike. It was a very positive and uplifting experience. I enjoyed serving on the organizing committee and meeting Alex Wiesendanger, and am glad he was able to join us at this ROPA conference to share some of the things that the AFM is doing to organize and recruit new members. The highlight of the convention for me was when Dave Pomeroy, IEB member and president of Local 257 in Nashville, shared the song he wrote for the March 2019 pension rally in Columbus, OH. In closing, I’d like to share it with you now. If any of you have any questions about the AFM convention, I would be happy to chat with you any time! (play video).