

Winter
2020

The Leading Tone

Notes from the President

by John Michael Smith, ROPA President

Much of my recent focus, probably like many Americans, has been the goings-on in Washington, D.C., and in particular the Senate. I have great faith in our government; but it is indeed a tumultuous process. This past fall I encouraged ROPA delegates and orchestra members to contact their senators in support of legislation to aid multi-employer pension funds, the so-called Butch Lewis Act, HR 397, which was passed in the House of Representatives and moved on to the Senate. Not much has happened since, as I believe it has found its way to the pile of legislation that is not favorable to Senate Republican goals, and now sits on Senator Mitch McConnell's desk untouched. This legislation would create a government-sponsored loan program to the multi-employer pension funds, which includes the AFM and many other union pension funds.

The International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) created a campaign, Phone2Action, funded by themselves, to get the message out and encourage their membership, as well as the musicians of ROPA, the Recording Musicians Association (RMA) and the Theater Musicians Association (TMA), to join them in a united effort. Our combined efforts in this campaign were unfortunately not as strong as hoped for. Only about half of ROPA's orchestras are in the AFM-EPF. But many musicians in ROPA orchestras are in the AFM-EPF through other gigs and from contractors who collect pension payments from the employers, or are employers themselves. ROPA has more "skin in the game" than many may realize. This retirement benefit is an actual benefit you earned in addition to your scale wages. In many cases it is the only benefit we



ROPA President
John Michael Smith

receive from our employers. It's your — and your ROPA and AFM colleagues' — benefit. You know the old union saying "what hurts one of us, hurts us all". Well, this is one of those cases.

In this issue of *The Leading Tone*, there is an article "United We Stand" by ICSOM President Paul

Austin, a former Vice President of ROPA which he wrote for the latest issue of *Senza Sordino*, the newsletter of ICSOM orchestras. He is still an active participant in the campaign.

The Trustees of the American Federation of Musicians and Employers' Pension Fund (AFM-EPF) have recently applied to the U.S. Treasury Department to prevent insolvency of the AFM-EPF by reducing benefits as necessary through the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act (MPRA). MPRA will not be as helpful to beneficiaries as the Butch Lewis legislation. There will be cuts to benefits for AFM-EPF recipients. Doing nothing would have resulted in the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) handling the maintenance of the AFM-EPF, which would result in even deeper cuts. There is still hope that before the year is out that the Butch Lewis legislation can still be revived. The Phone2Action campaign is still ongoing, and you can still contact your senators in support of passing legislation that will create loans for the multi-employer pension plans that will try to save the benefits that musicians have earned and expected to receive as their retirement benefit. Here is the link to the Phone2Action campaign: <https://p2a.co/DcR7C72>

We are always looking for articles of interest to ROPA musicians for *The Leading Tone*. This is YOUR newsletter, and you are welcome to contribute articles you have written yourself, something interesting from your own Local's newsletter or Central Labor Council or orchestra program notes (with permission, of course!). Please consider submitting articles and newsworthy items to myself or our great *Leading Tone* editor, Sharon Jones.

(Minutes continued on page 4)

In This Issue

Notes From the President	1
2020 ROPA Executive Board Mid-Year Meeting Minutes	2
United We Stand	3
What's New with ROPA Orchestras	6
Labor Employment Laws; What's Changing in Your State?	7
The Kids Are Alright	8
Save the Date! 2020 ROPA Conference in California	9
Labor Notes Conference and ROPA Scholarship	11

The Leading Tone

Volume 35, Issue 2

Editor

Sharon Jones
bellsauf@gmail.com

Proofreaders

John Michael Smith
Amanda Swain

Letters to the editor can be sent to the e-mail address above,

ROPA

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. Unauthorized reproduction of any part of *The Leading Tone* is strictly prohibited.

Copyright © 2020
All Rights Reserved.

Subscriptions

\$8.00 per year payable to
ROPA
c/o Sean Diller
505 S. 36th Street
South Bend, IN 46615
ropatreasurer@gmail.com

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/ropa-discussion>.
- The list is open to musicians in ROPA member orchestras, and AFM Local officers for those orchestras.

2020 ROPA Executive Board Mid-Year Meeting Minutes

January 3-4, 2020, Chicago, IL

by Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary

Attendees:

M. Smith, A. Swain, K. Sandene, S. Diller, C. Bozell, L. Davis, C. Green, K. Hawley, B. Setzer, K. Shields, C. Tiffin, S. Wade, N. Bensdorf Frisch

Proceedings: January 3, 2020

Called to Order at 4:18 pm CST

MAL Report: Casey Bozell

Casey brought to our attention some orchestras needing assistance to improve relationships with their Locals. She clarified that the delegates are the ones who need to fill out the Summer Festival survey, as they are being used as the beta-testers. A concern was raised about a ballet performed with tape. One orchestra spoke of their success using a mediator in negotiations. One orchestra has been pushing strongly to support the Butch Lewis Act.

MAL Report: Lisa Davis

One orchestra has received a significant estate gift, which led to a bonus for the musicians. The board had a general discussion about challenges contacting delegates, and making sure new delegates are knowledgeable and comfortable serving. Also brought up was the importance of rotating delegates in order to spread ROPA knowledge more widely. Mike mentioned that musicians in orchestras affected by natural disasters are not eligible for the ROPA ERF (which is designated for work stoppages) but are entitled to use the AFM Emergency Relief Fund.

MAL Report: Cory Tiffin

Cory talked about the number of attempts necessary to make contacts with his delegates but was ultimately successful in reaching them. Cory stated that one orchestra's management wants to renegotiate the terms of their current agreement. An orchestra has a personnel manager who is often absent from services.



ROPA Secretary
Karen Sandene

MAL Report: Christian Green

Christian mentioned the success of the online conductor evaluations. The board discussed dele-

gates creating musician email lists. One orchestra has cut several services this season.

MAL Report: Steve Wade

Steve reported on his orchestras. The board shared concerns with "split" orchestras (local and out-of-town players) and getting musicians together for meetings.

MAL Report: Kendra Hawley

Kendra reported on her orchestras. She stated she had good success communicating via phone calls. She mentioned potential ROPA orchestra candidates.

MAL Report: Beverly Setzer

The delegate from one of Beverly's orchestras has resigned from the orchestra and provided a name as a potential contact.

MAL Report: Katie Shields

Katie reported on her orchestras. She discussed handing out *The Leading Tone* among her members and the option of "going green". There was a discussion of reduction of services in various pit orchestras.

Discussion about Contacting Delegates

The board had a discussion about the best methods for getting delegates to respond. Mike stated that speaking on the phone makes more meaningful communications. It was mentioned that younger delegates tend to avoid using the telephone. A solution suggested was scheduling contacts via email then following up. Mike shared that when he was a MAL, he created an email list with just his delegates. There was discussion that some delegates feel overwhelmed with the number of emails.

Day One Adjourned at 7:00 pm CST

Proceedings: January 4, 2020

Day Two Called to Order at 9:15 am CST

Approval of Minutes

The board approved the minutes of the 2019 Boston Conference, motion by Bev/seconded by Sean. m/s/c.

(Notes continued on page 7)

United We Stand

by Paul Austin, ICSOM President

In 1858, during a campaign speech for the US Senate, Abraham Lincoln stated, “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” referring to the need for our country to agree about the slavery issue — or face destruction. While he lost that specific election to Stephen A. Douglas, we know that Lincoln eventually was victorious, both in winning the presidential election two years later and (posthumously) having the thirteenth amendment become law in 1865, making slavery illegal in the United States.

In 2007, I heard similar inspiring words from a speaker the first time I attended an AFM player conference annual event. That conference, of the Regional Orchestra Players’ Association (ROPA), was held in San Francisco and included information about the labor history of the city. Until that time, I was unaware of the violent past experienced by those seeking to gain rights for the working class. That discovery provided me with a deeper appreciation for all who came before me and paved the way for the rules we currently have, ranging from being able to bargain a fair contract to having our voices represented and heard.

To date, I have attended nine ICSOM conferences and nine ROPA conferences, and last summer in Boston I spoke at the Theatre Musicians Association (TMA) annual conference. In 2020, I look forward to attending my first Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians (OCSM) conference, which will be held in Regina, Saskatchewan, and I hope to attend a Recording Musicians Association (RMA) conference some day. It is important for the vitality of these organizations to have annual gatherings, share and learn together, and subsequently pass along information to our rank-and-file members.

This fall, ICSOM embarked on a new venture in hiring the Washington DC-based firm Phone2Action to provide us with the tools to launch our own online lobbying campaigns. Our first, to promote the Butch Lewis Act, began this October, and continues today. There will be other legislation that ICSOM will support, no doubt, and we will be calling upon our membership to give one minute of their time to participate.

Just one minute of your time. In the time you have read this article so far, you could have already accomplished this easy task!

With just a few strokes on your keypad, you can reach the politicians of your state simply by entering your zip code. By completing a few more entries, you can be an activist in a way that would have taken others much longer in the past.



A letter has already been written for you; however, if you wish to make adjustments, the option of creating a personalized message is provided. This link takes you directly to your senators.

So why did I support the Butch Lewis Act? It would appear that I don’t have skin in the game, since my orchestra does not participate in the AFM-EPF and my state’s senators already support this legislation. In fact, one of them, Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow, even co-authored the bill. Why should I bother supporting ICSOM’s online campaign when it seems to have no direct effect upon me?

I supported it because it was the right thing to do. I gave one minute of my day to support the musicians of other ICSOM orchestras, orchestral musicians of ROPA, touring musicians of TMA, recording musicians of RMA and millions of Americans who participate in multi-employer pension plans. In addition, I have shared the information on social media to encourage others to follow suit.

Know too that the government’s legislative committee will look at the total number of supporters the bill has in all states. Each of our individual senators will be gauging the support for this bill before making their decision about how to vote. It is vital for them to realize that the Butch Lewis Act is important to us.

While Abraham Lincoln was not the first person to coin this phrase about unity, it still rings true today. Combined activities are noticed and heard. Collective actions have strength and power.

Reprinted with permission of the author. This article originally appeared in the December 2019 edition of Senza Sordino. Link: <https://www.icsom.org/senzasordino/2019/12/united-we-stand/>

(Minutes continued from page 2)

Officer Reports

Vice President Amanda Swain

Amanda highlighted a few orchestras who are potential recruits to join ROPA. A delegate suggested to Amanda that there should be a script created that players could use when approaching their orchestras/locals about joining ROPA, an idea which the board embraced.

Treasurer Sean Diller

Sean shared financial documents with the board and highlighted his activities.

President Mike Smith

Mike discussed the selection of the conference hotel, Costa Mesa Hilton, and that John Wayne Airport is the closest airport to the hotel. The IMA negotiations have been completed so there has been less travel this year. Mike discussed the AFM pension fund and the response from musicians toward lobbying politicians for support.

Mike will represent ROPA at SphinxConnect in Detroit, February 6-8. In addition to attending the many and varied presentations and concerts, he will be participating in discussions with NAAS (National Association for Audition Support) and the Sphinx LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity) Program, a two-year program for 20 African American and Latinx leaders and entrepreneurs, along with SSD Director Rochelle Skolnick and ICSOM Chair Meredith Snow. Those chosen for the program tend to be mid-level arts administrators from many areas of arts administration: orchestras, performing arts centers, etc. Both programs are administered by Sphinx and supported by the League of American Orchestras.

Secretary Karen Sandene

Karen gave a report on her activities this season. She requested that any time that MALs become aware of changes in delegates and/or contact information, the

MAL forwards this information to the entire board.

Conference Call: Rochelle Skolnick

Conference Presentation – Rochelle suggested a possible role-playing presentation for the ROPA conference dealing with the negotiation process. She will implement the presentation at several local conferences prior to ROPA's. Discussed was the possibility of sending out preparation information in the conference packet.

Parameters for AFM Local Union and Symphonic Players Association Promotional Media Project Agreement – Rochelle shared a document she is developing with Debbie Newmark, protecting orchestra player associations who create media products for promotional work. The board shared with Rochelle thoughts about how ROPA orchestras would be able to work with the guidelines in this plan.



The 2019-2020 ROPA Executive Board: Members-at-Large Steve Wade (Hartford Symphony Orchestra); Kendra Hawley (Palm Beach Opera Orchestra); and Beverly Setzer (Symphony Tacoma); ROPA Vice President Amanda Swain (Houston Ballet Orchestra and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra); Member-at-Large Katie Shields (Arizona Opera Orchestra); ROPA President Mike Smith (Minnesota Opera Orchestra); ROPA Treasurer Sean Diller (Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra); Members-at-Large Christian Green (Ann Arbor Symphony) and Casey Bozell (Portland Opera Orchestra); ROPA Secretary Karen Sandene (Omaha Symphony Orchestra and Lincoln Symphony Orchestra); Member-at-Large Lisa Davis (Mississippi Symphony Orchestra); ROPA Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention Naomi Bensdorf Frisch (Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra); and Member-at-Large Cory Tiffin (Las Vegas Philharmonic). Photo courtesy of Sharon Jones

Music Festivals and Organizing – Symphonic Services Division is actively working on how to support organizing in festival orchestras. Rochelle stated that information collected by ROPA pertaining to festival orchestra participation might be valuable to SSD.

Reaching out to Potential Orchestras for Organizing – Rochelle spoke of how the success of organizing the Boise Symphony is building momentum toward organizing other orchestras.

Financial and Governance Models for Players' Associations – Discussion at the AFM Convention has led to discussions about whether players' associations should create their own 501(c)(5) and how these would be viewed by the IRS. Rochelle is working with attorney Kevin Case on the pros and cons of such organizing.

Good News Stories – Rochelle is looking for good news stories from orchestras for the International Musician and encouraged us to reach out to our orchestras and ask them to share their stories.

Orchestra/Local Relationship – Rochelle updated the board on an ongoing situation of an orchestra being at odds with its Local.

Sharon Jones – The Leading Tone Editor

Sharon shared how much of the content for *The Leading Tone* has been delegate-generated. Mike encouraged the board to contribute articles. The board discussed how much political content could be included in *The Leading Tone*, as it's an election year. The consensus of the board was that the voting process can be encouraged, as well as pro-Union activities, but articles cannot advocate for any political viewpoint. Reprinting of local articles, with permission, is also encouraged. There was a discussion about hard copies vs. electronic issues. The use of a Constant Contact style of newsletter was discussed as a possibility.

Katie Shields – Social Media Coordinator

Katie reminded us of the hashtags used for our social media: #ropaorchestras and #ropamusicians. She said that she tries to post five times per week on the various platforms, conferring with Randy Whately to make sure the posts are using effective messaging. Katie said that many orchestras don't have a social media page. It was suggested that a conference session could have delegates sharing how they created successful social media pages, which could also be a good topic for a *Leading Tone* article. She mentioned that few musicians are trained in marketing.

Lisa Davis – Online Conductor Evaluation Process

Lisa discussed the roll-out of the online process. She said one executive director has requested files. She pointed out that the email addresses which are collected in order to send the survey need to have any extra characters removed for Survey Monkey to accept them. Lisa's sister made digital copies of all of the conductor evaluations for the past 10 years. It was mentioned that the conductor evaluation bank administrator currently receives no honorarium; a motion would need to be made at conference to add an honorarium to this position. The handbook and by-laws need to be updated to include new language for the Conductor Evaluation process and the ERF.

Labor Notes Conference

The board discussed sending a representative to the Labor Notes Conference, which will be held April 17-19 in Chicago. Scholarship money can be made available to defray expenses. A call will be made to the general membership to see if one of our members would like to go; February 15 will be the cut-off date, and if there are no applicants, a board member should go.

Conference Planning

Mike shared the dates for the conference: Board arrival is Saturday, July 25 and departure is Friday, July 31. The Negotiations Workshop will be Monday, July 27

and the full conference is Tuesday, July 28 – Thursday, July 30. The board brainstormed session topics dealing with financials, self-care and working with underserved communities. The board discussed scheduling of speakers and social events. Board members discussed the need to have a food committee to monitor special dietary needs; Casey volunteered to head that effort. A committee consisting of Cory, Steve and Christian will help coordinate the Monday night Meet and Greet and monitor the hospitality suite. Naomi discussed feedback from using the app. She stated that paying for more features would be beneficial; she went over those features and expenses. Kendra volunteered to help load content onto the app. The board discussed how to monitor technology during presentations, and assigning a designated parliamentarian. Another idea suggested was having live performances during the conference. The board pondered how to offset a meal cost while providing more time for MAL groups. Naomi has developed a draft of a contract for guest speakers, for which the board will offer revisions; she will send out the draft by February 15. Amanda suggested that there are items that are covered in the New Delegate Breakfast that would be good as refreshers for all delegates. Discussed were ideas for welcoming new delegates. It was suggested that the History of ROPA should be reprinted. The board discussed phasing out the mailboxes after the Orange County conference.

Electronic Media Committee

Mike stated that the Electronic Media Committee should have an additional member.

Non-Responsive Orchestras

The board discussed options available to handle non-responsive orchestras who have not yet paid dues or whose delegates have not been in contact with MALs.

Day Two Adjourned at 5:00 pm CST

What's New with ROPA Orchestras

By Sharon Jones, Editor, *The Leading Tone*



The Madison Symphony Orchestra featured three of their principal players on a March 2019 concert weekend titled "Three Virtuosi". Principal clarinetist JJ Koh played Claude Debussy's *Rhapsody for Clarinet and Orchestra*, concertmaster Naha Greenholtz, performed Sergei Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 2*; and principal tubist Joshua Biere performed Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Concerto for Tuba and Orchestra*. Photo courtesy of Lisa Bressler

The Tucson Symphony Orchestra has a new CEO. Steven P. Haines was appointed to the job by the TSO's Board of Directors last December. Haines, who has more than 25 years of experience in arts administration, began his career as the marketing and communications director with the Florida Symphonic Pops in Boca Raton and the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra in Fort Lauderdale. He went on to be President and CEO of the Philly Pops, and later as Executive Director of the Stern Grove Festival in San Francisco, CA. Before coming to Tucson, he was CEO of

The Young Americans College of the Performing Arts in San Francisco. — *Dario Brignoli, TSO Delegate*

The Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra has a new Executive Director. Jessica Mallow comes from the Jacksonville Symphony where she was Director of Business Partnerships. She has held positions with the Washington Performing Arts, American University, Orchestra Iowa, Rockwell Collings and Simpson College. Formerly a professional opera singer, she graduated Summa Cum Laude

from Simpson College and earned a Masters Degree Summa Cum Laude from American University. She will be joining the KSO management negotiating team as KSO musicians are in mid-negotiations for a new contract as the last one expired August 2019. — *Nora Frisk, KSO Delegate*

The Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra has a new Executive Director. Joe Loehnis is a former professional golfer and the former Executive Director of the First Tee of South Central Wisconsin, a mentoring program for youth utilizing comprehensive golf and life skill instruction. He has a degree in cello performance from Lawrence University and an MBA from UW-Madison. — *Nora Frisk, WCO Delegate*

The Mississippi Symphony Orchestra was a beneficiary in a substantial estate gift. The MSO board has chosen to invest a significant portion of the \$650,000 gift in its restricted endowment fund, thereby increasing the annual interest stream to the MSO operating budget. The funds will also be used to purchase new timpani and office IT equipment, and to go towards bonuses to staff and musicians. — *Lisa Davis, MSO delegate*

The California Symphony has a new Executive Director. Lisa Dell has worked with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Grant Park Music Festival, Music of the Baroque, the Chicago Latino Music Festival and many others. She is highly regarded for innovative marketing strategies that have increased attendance and sales. — *Mike Smith, ROPA President*

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 Sharon Jones at
bellsauf@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.

Labor and Employment Laws: What's Changing in Your State?

By Naomi Bendsdorf Frisch, Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention

This year, 2020, is not only the start of a new decade, but the start of a new era for many workers throughout the country. While the Trump-appointed National Labor Relations Board continues to make it harder for workers and unions to organize, many states are expanding protections for gig workers, mandating paid family leave, expanding existing requirements for employers to provide workplace harassment training and more. In addition, the Department of Labor finally pushed through a final rule that raises the federal salary threshold under which salaried employees must receive overtime, bringing additional overtime income to 1.3 million American workers. I urge you all to visit the websites of your state's department of labor to learn what's changing for you in 2020, but here are some highlights:

In my home state of Illinois, changes to the definition of "employer" under the Illinois Human Rights Act will bring employees of smaller employers under the protections of the Act. Where previously an employer with fewer than 15 full-time employees was exempt from charges of discrimination and harassment by their employees and from the regulatory requirements under the Act, now any employer who employs one or more person(s) may be liable. This will surely affect arts organizations, and especially regional orchestras in Illinois, many of whom employ fewer than 15 full-time staff members.

California has implemented many new worker-friendly laws for 2020. The minimum wage will increase state-wide. Also, there will be stricter standards for classi-

fying a worker as an independent contractor, increased protections for nursing mothers in the workplace and increased penalties for late wage payments, among others. By 2020, several states also will have implemented salary-history bans in employment interviews, as well as paid family and medical leave. And, as a growing number of states legalize marijuana, in Nevada it is now illegal to refuse to hire someone who tests positive.

In these times, it is easy to become discouraged as a member of America's workforce. However, states around the country are beginning to listen to working people and are providing additional legal protections their workers deserve. I look forward to seeing what further protections this decade brings to workers around the country.

(Notes continued from page 2)

I've noticed it has been quiet recently on ropa-discussion@googlegroups.com and ropa-delegates-discussion@googlegroups.com. We've been through the holidays now, and I imagine most of us are back to work in our orchestras. These email lists are another great place to post articles and news, as well as a place to generate discussions about issues that come up in our orchestras. We also have a Facebook page, as well as Twitter and Instagram, if those social media are more to your liking. The important thing is to communicate – delegates and guests love talking at our ROPA Conferences; this can happen all year round!

Our new online Conductor Evaluation process is up and running successfully! Delegates now may contact our Conductor Evaluation Bank Administrator, Lisa Davis, to request a survey to be created

for their orchestra for a particular program and conductor. The delegate will need to submit the email addresses of the orchestra members eligible to participate in the survey, and then the survey will be sent to each eligible musician. An orchestra manager, when requesting surveys for conductors, will fill out a request form in which they agree to be responsible for any and all losses, damages or expenses in connection with any claim, action, liability or suit brought by any party that may arise or result from their use of the conductor evaluation results. The ROPA Conductor Evaluation Program closely follows the same form and procedures as the ICSOM Conductor Evaluation Program, which makes it easy to request and read forms from either online database. The Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians (OCSM) online survey is a little different, but their conductor database is

also available to ICSOM and ROPA orchestra managements.

I have upcoming trips to Detroit, MI for the annual SphinxConnect Conference in February, and an annual union presentation to the fellows of the New World Symphony in Miami, FL in March. In both meetings, I will be participating with my colleagues Meredith Snow, Chair of ICSOM, and AFM Symphonic Services Director and Special Counsel Rochelle Skolnick. At SphinxConnect, I will be meeting with both the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), and the Sphinx LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity), a relatively new two-year professional empowerment program for developing arts leadership. I will report back to you in the next issue of *The Leading Tone* about my experiences at these meetings.

The Kids Are Alright

by Alana Richardson, Director of Education, Tucson Symphony Orchestra

Two years ago, I had just bought my ticket to the Joint Arts and Education Conference in Phoenix when they announced something radical: the whole conference would be coordinated by high school students. They wrote the agenda, booked the speakers, led the workshops and moderated panel discussions. Students were in control the entire weekend.

I was rather apprehensive: this is taking student-led programming a bit too far, isn't it? Am I wasting my precious professional development dollars on a conference where I won't learn anything?

I was in for a wake-up call. This was perhaps the most smoothly-run, interesting and informative conference I'd ever attended. The student leaders were articulate and passionate, and I left inspired and full of ideas to take back to the Tucson Symphony Orchestra (TSO). Why had I been so concerned? What was so scary about listening to the students I proclaim to be serving?

Like most symphony orchestras, the TSO holds youth concerts to help engage younger audiences and introduce students to the instruments of the orchestra. In Tucson and across southern Arizona, the TSO serves over 35,000 students and teachers each year, through seven distinct education programs.

I am well aware how much time orchestra administrators, board members and funders spend discussing how to "build the audiences of tomorrow" – reaching more children, engaging younger audiences, growing our future donor base.

We program more pops shows, use screens during youth concerts, lower prices or make tickets free and still have to read articles joking about the "sea of white hair" and answer the patrons who are asking, "where are all the young people?" It seems like we try every possible way to serve children, except one. Asking

Children and teens today are more worldly, well-informed and connected than ever before. They discuss politics with their friends, encourage those old enough to vote and spark movements taking on climate change and gun reform. Students already have strong opinions that they share with their friends and online, so this isn't about giving them a voice. They already have one. It's about us listening.

Out of our seven education programs, the flagship is the TSO Young Composers Project. Students ages 8 to 18 spend Saturdays throughout the school year learning how to compose chamber and orchestral music, working directly with professional musicians and composers. At the spring Young Composers Festival each year, the TSO performs and records their original compositions.

We have seen firsthand that when we connect students with the tools to communicate through music, they use them to access their creativity, process their emotions and interact with their changing world. Our students have written compositions about school shootings, first loves, loss of a parent and excitement for the future. What these students have to say is important. Orchestras need to work to cultivate a platform for them to share it.

After the conference, I immediately wanted to use my newfound perspective with the Young Composers Project. Updating a successful program with a 27-year history is no small undertaking, but I knew where to start: asking the students. I coordinated a student think tank to hold an open discussion on each aspect of the program. I was the only adult in the room, no parents or instructors, and my job was simply to listen and take notes.

It was a challenge. I wanted to jump in and explain why certain things weren't possible. We adults are excellent at saying no to things, and that is amplified in nonprofits with our scarcity mindset. After the discussion, I was open with the stu-

dents about my limitations – budget size, union agreements, board of trustees – but I promised to advocate on behalf of their ideas.

This year, based on student suggestions, we launched a third class level to ease the challenging transition between the Introductory and Advanced classes, and hired a second composition instructor. With the addition of the Intermediate class, they could write first for string quartet, then wind and brass quintets before taking on the full orchestra in the Advanced class.

Students also informed us about what not to do. We were considering adding a competitive aspect, selecting the best composition and offering prizes, but that idea got shot down. Keeping the program collaborative and giving everyone an equal opportunity to be heard meant students were meeting after class, reading through scores and giving each other feedback. They were also more likely to experiment with a new style or technique, opening students up to more creativity.

Creating a supportive educational environment also encourages them to feel like part of the broader music community. Whenever guest artists, composers and conductors come to perform with the Tucson Symphony, we invite them to meet with our Young Composers students. Most recently, students met with composer Michael Torke and Grammy nominee Tessa Lark, who had just performed the bluegrass-inspired violin concerto *Sky*, written for her by Torke.

The Tucson Symphony's mission calls us to transform lives through music, and Music Director José Luis Gomez champions the Young Composers Project as central to his vision of our symphony. If orchestras are serious about fostering the future of music, we need to shout it from the mountaintops. We can't be siloed into a peripheral education program that the community, donors and even some board members don't know about.

We also need to give students our best tools and resources. Shouldn't students learn from the beginning that their time and hard work is valuable, and valued by us? For this reason, the Young Composers Project uses contracted musician services, not university students or community musicians. During the first semester, students write sketch compositions for small ensembles, who then sight-read the works and give feedback.

At the Young Composers Festival in the spring, the TSO performs and records each student's final composition. Pieces are performed twice, allowing the composer to give feedback to Maestro Gomez ("A little faster at C," "Less trumpet at measure 52,") before the second perfor-

mance is recorded. Every step of the way, students receive immediate aural feedback through the lens of our professional musicians, comparing what they wrote on paper to the music they hear in their head.

The students of the Young Composers Project are extremely talented, and we are proud that their creativity and voices have been cultivated here in Tucson. Each year since 2017, Maestro Gomez has commissioned Young Composers Project alumni to write for the Tucson Symphony. We have premiered two orchestral works already, and this year we will perform a choral composition by alumnus Robert Lopez-Hanshaw. We also always feature one Young Composers piece on our youth concerts, sharing with over

10,000 students the idea that they, too, could become composers.

As we aim to shift the culture surrounding composition, new works and young audiences, promoting our own students is not enough. Orchestras need to program works by other budding composers, commission and co-commission more works and expand the audience for new music. By appealing to and advocating for young composers, musicians and audiences, we can ensure our future. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was new once.

And people listened.

Reprinted with permission of the author.

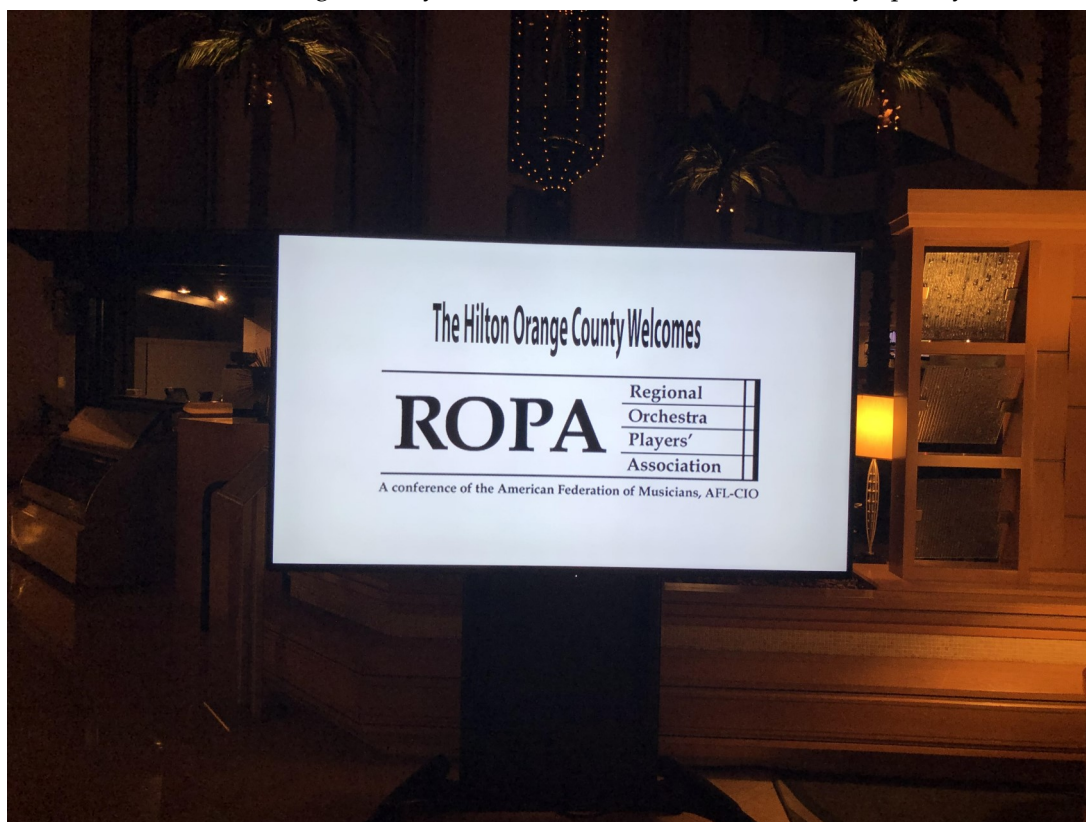
SAVE THE DATE! 2020 ROPA Conference

Tuesday, July 28th – Thursday, July 30th

Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Monday, July 27th

Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa Hotel, Orange County, CA

Hosts: AFM Local 7 Orange County Musicians' Union and the Pacific Symphony Orchestra



Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa Hotel, Orange County, CA. Photo credit: Mike Smith

Labor Notes Conference and ROPA Scholarship

Friday, April 17th– Sunday, April 19th, Rosemont, IL

This year's Labor Notes Conference will begin at 9 am on Friday, April 17, and end at 3 pm on Sunday, April 19. The conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Chicago O'Hare Hotel, 9300 Bryn Mawr Avenue, Rosemont, IL. Early Bird Registration is \$115 until February 28; the regular price is \$160. More information can be found at <https://labornotes.org/>.

The Labor Notes Conference is the biggest gathering of grassroots union activists, worker center leaders and all-around troublemakers from across the country and around the world. Join thousands of union members, officers and labor activists who are on the front lines in our workplaces and our communities, organizing new workers and agitating together.

Face-to-face meetings to share ideas and swap notes are the heart of the Labor Notes Conference. More than 200 meetings and workshops will include creative organizing tactics, beating apathy, running for local union office, winning contract campaigns, bargaining over technology, understanding the economy, surviving "right to work" and reviving the strike.

The ROPA Executive Board encourages ROPA orchestra members, particularly in

leadership positions in their orchestras, to attend this terrific labor conference.

ROPA is offering a scholarship to a ROPA delegate, officer or orchestra musician who applies for it, through the Lew and Lenny Legacy Fund. The scholarship will cover hotel, per diem for meals, and the registration fee. Lodging will include three nights, April 16 through April 18. Per diem is at GSA rates: two travel days at \$57 per day and two days at the full day rate of \$76. Hotel rates will be in the \$140 range, and is currently in overflow to other hotels, with free shuttle to the Hyatt Regency O'Hare. Travel fees to Chicago are not included in the scholarship.

The Lew and Lenny Legacy Fund, whose mission is to inspire, incite and fund progressive union activities and projects within the symphonic and labor communities, is asking us to identify an active leader in a ROPA orchestra. The fund perpetuates the memory of two legendary figures in musicians' union activism, Lewis Waldeck and Leonard Leibowitz.

To qualify for the scholarship, the recipient must be a member of a ROPA orchestra and an AFM member in good standing. We are looking for someone who

exhibits leadership qualities in a ROPA orchestra committee or negotiating committee, or someone who has actively demonstrated efforts to effect a positive change for musicians.

The ROPA Board believes the tools gained during the conference must be utilized by someone actively filling a leadership position in their orchestra, or by someone who is interested in becoming an active committee member or steward. We feel that it is important for the tools and knowledge gained during the conference be utilized and shared with the ROPA Delegate, Orchestra Committee, and the Local Board

Interested parties can apply or be nominated by their AFM Local, Orchestra Committee or peers. Please submit the name of the individual applying for the scholarship and a short summary as to why this candidate is an exemplary activist for your orchestra.

Please submit the nominations to: Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary
karensandend@gmail.com

The deadline for submission for the scholarship is Saturday, Feb. 22.



Regional Orchestra Players' Association

ROPA

Regional
Orchestra
Players'
Association

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

The Leading Tone
901 C Street
Lincoln, NE 68502

ROPA Officers

John Michael Smith, President
Minnesota Opera Orchestra
ropapresident@gmail.com

Amanda Swain, Vice President
Houston Ballet Orchestra
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra
ropavicepresident@gmail.com

Karen Sandene, Secretary
Omaha Symphony Orchestra
Lincoln Symphony Orchestra
karensandene@gmail.com

Sean Diller, Treasurer
Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra
ropatreasurer@gmail.com

Members-at-Large
Casey Bozell
Portland Opera Orchestra
caseybozell@gmail.com

Lisa Davis
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
horn3mt@gmail.com

Christian Green
Ann Arbor Symphony
christiangreen2015@u.northwestern.edu

Kendra Hawley
Palm Beach Opera Orchestra
oboekendra@gmail.com

Beverly Setzer
Tacoma Symphony Orchestra
beverlysetzer@frontier.net

Katie Shields
Arizona Opera Orchestra
Katherine.shields2@gmail.com

Cory Tiffin
Las Vegas Philharmonic
Cory.tiffin@gmail.com

Steve Wade
Hartford Symphony Orchestra
steve.wade58@gmail.com

Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention
Naomi Bensdorf Frisch
Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra
nhb713@gmail.com

Adjunct Officers
Rachel Cox, Historian
Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra
RacRCox@cs.com

Sharon Jones,
The Leading Tone Editor
Elgin Symphony Orchestra
bellsauf@gmail.com

Katie Shields, Social Media Coordinator
Arizona Opera Orchestra
Katherine.shields2@gmail.com

Karen Sandene, Webmaster
karensandene@gmail.com

Lisa Davis, Conductor Evaluation Bank
Administrator
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
horn3mt@gmail.com

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 Symphony Orchestra
Canton Symphony Orchestra
Cape Symphony
Central City Opera Orchestra
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera Orchestra
Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra
Dallas Opera Orchestra
Dayton Philharmonic
Delaware Symphony Orchestra
Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra

East Texas Symphony Orchestra
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
Marin Symphony
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
Sacramento Philharmonic & Opera
Santa Barbara Symphony
Santa Rosa Symphony
Sarasota Orchestra
South Bend Symphony
Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra
Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra

Spokane Symphony Orchestra
Symphony Silicon Valley
Symphony Tacoma
Toledo Symphony Orchestra
Tucson Symphony Orchestra
Vermont Symphony Orchestra
West Virginia Symphony
Wichita Symphony Orchestra
Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra

Associate Members

Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra
El Paso Symphony
Flint Symphony Orchestra
Glimmerglass Opera Orchestra
Hudson Valley Philharmonic
Lincoln Symphony Orchestra
Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra
Opera San Jose
Pittsburgh Ballet Orchestra
Tri-Cities Opera Orchestra
Tulsa Opera Orchestra