

Winter
2022

The Leading Tone

ROPA

Regional
Orchestra
Players'
Association

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

Back to Work After COVID: Our Seasons So Far by Sharon Jones, ROPA Delegate, Elgin Symphony Orchestra Member-at-Large; Editor, The Leading Tone



The Boise Philharmonic rehearses with guest artists Percussion Collective, September 2021. Photo courtesy of Brooke Burton.

Happy Holidays, everyone!

Well, it was quite the year. Many of us got vaccinated, put on our masks and went back to work. In some areas, the audience followed the same protocols. And, in some orchestras, we saw that some of our colleagues didn't return, either because they refused vaccination, or the worst — they succumbed to the virus. It's been a trying year for us all.

Thankfully, we are better than we were a year ago, when there was little or no live music to be had. Audiences hungry to hear us came back, and though it's been a long, slow slog, something resembling normalcy is beginning to emerge.

What follows are updates from some of our ROPA delegates regarding their return to work and how they've fared. Many thanks for getting in touch. Looking forward to seeing all of you soon in California. — Sharon

cinated (with one or two exceptions who are responsible for daily testing) and audience members are required to show proof of vaccine or a negative test. We just hired a new concertmaster and have hired some new percussionists and brass players. Things are growing in the orchestra, just like the city of Boise. Our management has created several new positions to keep employees from being spread too thin. It is clear that this is helping with marketing and production.

When COVID first started, the Boise Phil season went online with a Digital Stage where we played chamber works. It was very exciting because this helped encourage management to sign the IMA, and we are adding our in-person concerts to the Digital Stage. We have also seen a small increase in programming performances with music by BIPOC and women composers. — Lauren Folkner, Delegate

(Orchestra Updates, continued on page 3)

The **Boise Philharmonic** is back to a full season! After canceling our first concert due to high COVID transmission rates, we have proceeded to play our planned season with the house at 50% capacity. The orchestra is masked and fully vac-

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The Leading Tone

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INFORMATION CENTER

- This newsletter will be posted online at: <http://www.ropaweb.org>
- To subscribe to the ROPA Internet Mailing List, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/ropa-discussion>.
- The list is open to musicians in ROPA member orchestras, and AFM Local officers for those orchestras.

Notes From the President

by John Michael Smith, ROPA President

As I write these notes, I look out my window today and it is the bleak midwinter. It is cold and snowing, less than a week before Christmas, and we are over 21 months into the Coronavirus pandemic, with no end in sight. Performances and rehearsals came to a complete halt in March of 2020, and then gradually and slowly have begun to return, with varying responses throughout the orchestra field, and many, many side letter agreements as COVID protocols changed. Vaccinations, testing, masking, distancing, air filtering, hand washing, sanitizing and shorter services are all part of a new reality for our concert seasons. Last spring and summer, there seemed to be a light at the end of the COVID tunnel. New cases of the virus were declining, vaccines became readily available, we were playing concerts outdoors and it was looking like we would be back to business as usual before long. For many of our orchestras, this past month or so has seen a return to *Nutcrackers*, *Messiahs* and other traditional holiday concerts. Our audiences and musicians greatly missed these seasonal traditions last year, and even in various modifications required by COVID protocols, these performances are greatly appreciated. The news in the past week of the new omicron strain, which appears to be moving very quickly through the population, is discouraging to say the least. It seems like we will never escape a confrontation with this disease, and that it will only be a matter of time before it comes to our door.



ROPA President
John Michael Smith

This issue of *The Leading Tone* offers some encouragement and hope, with the news from many of our orchestras who are playing again. It cheers me up to see so many colleagues and organizations continuing to make a go of it in these uncertain and troubling times. With guidance from the

AFM Symphonic Services Division, and federal, state and local authorities, orchestras have made adjustments to be out there playing, either virtually or in person. We are a resilient bunch and are finding ways to carry on.

Even with all the adversity we have been through and are still currently experiencing, ROPA would like to acknowledge and welcome our newest member orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, who perform in the Music Center at Strathmore in North Bethesda, MD. The National Philharmonic's CBA is through the D.C. Federation of Musicians, Local 161-710.

We'd like to congratulate ROPA Treasurer Matthew Oshida on his appointment as personnel manager of the Oakland Symphony! The appointment to a managerial or supervisory position in a ROPA orchestra makes him ineligible to serve as ROPA Treasurer. Katie Shields, who recently stepped down from serving on the Executive Board as a Member-as-Large, has agreed to fill in and has been appointed by the Board as Interim Treasurer until we can elect a new Treasurer at the 2022 annual conference. We wish Matthew all the best in his new position, and in his continued performances with ROPA orchestras, and we thank Katie for accepting this interim role.

A reminder that ROPA dues for the 2021-22 year are due. With the 50% "COVID Relief" reduction, the amount is \$450 for full member orchestras, which includes the \$100 annual ROPA-Emergency Relief Fund payment, and \$110 for Associate Member Orchestras.

2022 is an AFM Convention year, and is currently scheduled for June 20-23, in Las Vegas. The deadline for submitting resolutions for consideration at the Convention is March 1st. If anyone has a resolution that they would like ROPA to introduce, please contact Naomi Bensdorf Frisch, our ROPA Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention.

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(Orchestra Updates, continued from page 1)

The **Boston Ballet Orchestra** returned to the pit after a 19-month force majeure for 35 live performances of *The Nutcracker* in 2021. The entire company is tested twice a week for the COVID-19 virus. – *Bob Marlatt, Delegate*

The **Chicago Sinfonietta** 2021-22 season consists of three regular series concerts, down from five concerts pre-COVID, in addition to a season opener at Ravinia.

All musicians and personnel in contact with the musicians must be fully vaccinated. There are no exceptions. One musician is unvaccinated and while has protested vehemently, is not allowed to perform. They were given other virtual opportunities to earn revenue; I am not sure if they availed themselves to this.

Wind and brass players have to provide a negative COVID test within 72 hours of first service, which then allows them to only wear a mask when not playing. String players are masked and are one to a stand.

For our next series in January, management asked if string players could again share a stand. We polled the orchestra — 80% said they were okay with this, so it will be put into practice. – *Ann Griffin, Delegate*

The **Colorado Springs Philharmonic** returned to work in November 2021 with nine *Nutcracker* services Thanksgiving week. Christmas and New Year's Eve specials followed in December, with the subscription season scheduled to begin in January. Our previous guarantee stood at 100/80 services. The guarantee for this season is 59 services with five of the usual seven Masterworks programmed along with two of three Signature Series, and four of six Pops Concerts.

We have had one resignation to date, but with no attendance requirement this year, there is no need for anyone to resign yet. At least five musicians are on unpaid leave because management refuses to grant any other accommodations to the vaccine mandate.

COVID health and safety protocols require musicians to be vaccinated. Masks are also required of all musicians except for winds, brass, conductor and guest artists when they are perform-



The Dayton Philharmonic. Photo courtesy of John Kurokawa.

ing from their assigned position. Strings are sharing stands with minimal additional space between sections and between conductor and first stands. Testing for winds and brass can be required by mutual agreement of the Employer and the Union depending on community transmission, with management providing antigen tests, as long as tests are reasonably available to purchase. Musicians with known exposure or infection must stay home, report them to Management and provide proof of a negative PCR test or be symptom-free for 10 days before returning to work. Incidence in our community was very high as we restarted, and testing was implemented. The audience is advised to wear masks and be vaccinated, but it is neither required nor enforced. Ventilation reports for the hall have been repeatedly requested, and not provided for review, leading us to believe that the ventilation has been neither reviewed nor enhanced for safety. Given that our community is very conservative and libertarian, masking and vaccination rates are relatively low. An informal estimate of only 5% of today's audience being masked made for some very Merry Christmas super-spreader sing-a-longs.

The musicians of the Colorado Springs Philharmonic express our deep gratitude to the members and leaders of ROPA for all the financial and moral support provided to us while our contract was cancelled and we endured a year with neither work nor compensation. We wish you all a healthy and happy New Year! – *Ann Rule, Delegate*

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(Orchestra Updates, continued from page 3)

The **Dallas Opera Orchestra** has gone back to work! We had a four-week season in October: concerts of arias by a few singers, the vocal competition and the International Institute for Women Conductors. Next spring the plan is to present four fully-staged productions. The number of weeks for this season is down from 16 to 13, but we are still negotiating at the moment. I'm not aware of any changes to management personnel, but we have had a resignation in the orchestra during the pandemic.

For the first three weeks, the solo singers were onstage, far enough away from the pit edge. The orchestra is in an expanded pit configuration, on individual stands and spaced apart. All personnel must be fully vaccinated and wear masks at all times in the building unless actively playing a wind instrument. To my knowledge, only one contracted player refused to be vaccinated, as well as a few subs who would have played had they been vaccinated. They did not play and did not get paid, but no one was fired.

Everything went smoothly, as far as I could tell. Everyone was following the masking protocols except when in the lounge eating (and most went out to get food or ate it outside as October was very temperate). We will see what the spring brings. I just saw that the Met will now require boosters of both employees and audience starting Jan. 17, and Broadway has experienced some cancellations due to cast/crew positivity or illness. – *Grace Wollett, Delegate*

After a reduced, mostly virtual season last year, the **Dayton Philharmonic** began our 2021-2022 season fully in-person onstage and in the audience. Our current schedule is at about 75% of



Michigan Opera Theatre performs Ragnar Kjartansson's "Bliss" — where the composer took "Contessa Perdonno" from the finale of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and presented it in a 12-hour loop — in the historic Michigan Building Theater. Photo courtesy of Laura Larson.

our pre-pandemic service count level, and it is anticipated that next season may have similar numbers.

Our venue has a mask policy in place, and our orchestra safety protocols include a vaccination requirement, as well as requiring a negative COVID test prior to the start of a service week. Anyone approved for vaccine exemption must be tested twice in a service week. In spite of some disagreement over these protocols, no musicians have quit or been fired due to them.

We began our season with a new CEO, Patrick Nugent; in addition, we have a new personnel manager following the

retirement of our longtime PM, Jane Varella. Ticket sales have not met expectations, as audience return has been slower than anticipated, but they seem to be improving. Management would also like to push back the announcements of future seasons from our traditional New Year's Eve release to sometime possibly as late as the spring. – *Sheridan Currie, Delegate*

The **Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra** is performing a regular season with reduced strings and generally smaller numbers on stage so we have more space to spread out. We have a vaccine, test and mask requirement at the moment.

Before each service, we have a meeting with management and board to review the current protocols and make adjustments as necessary. We have a few persons who have taken a leave of absence and a few who have quit. The reasons for these are varied and not just COVID-related. There are quite a few substitutes due to lack of the ability to hold auditions and the ever-changing COVID situation. This makes for a hard job for our Personnel Manager to staff the orchestra. – *Christine Coyle, Delegate*

The **Elgin Symphony Orchestra** began live performance this past summer with three concerts at a semi-outdoor venue and returned to a full 66-service season in October. We have a completely new staff, including our CEO Marc Thayer, and are undergoing a search for a new Music Director. The candidates are very diverse and we also have had more women guest conductors than ever. Management is trying to attract members of Elgin's large Latino community by programming Mariachi concerts, which have proven to be very popular in the past. Also, the recording at the top of every concert reminding patrons to silence their cell phones, etc. is in Spanish as well as English.

Our COVID safety protocols include a vaccine mandate and masks for strings (who share stands) and percussion. All musicians must be masked backstage or

whenever they are not playing for an extended period of time. There is one musician who requested a religious exemption, which was denied, and therefore is on indefinite unpaid leave. Audience members must also show proof of vaccination to attend concerts.

As of this writing, Omicron has now become the primary variant, and I deeply hope this will not lead to canceled concerts and empty halls. For our first concert in January, we are going back to one string player per stand, distancing and altering our definition of "fully vaccinated" to include at least one booster. – *Sharon Jones, Delegate and Member-at-Large*

As the delegate for the **Erie Philharmonic** and the **West Virginia Symphony Orchestra**, I see similarities in how both orchestras are working and believe my answers for both are almost identical.

Both the Erie and WV orchestras are performing a normal season, with slight changes. Since the Erie performance hall is not completely renovated yet, the orchestra started the season late, but with a change in venue until completion. WV has returned to its performance hall.

Both orchestras require vaccinations in order to perform this year. Both have also had requests for a religious exemption. In Erie this has devolved into the filing of a

ULP on behalf of a musician. I do not know where this currently stands.

The traditional Holiday Pops concerts were tremendously popular, and the *Nutcracker* sold well in Erie and Charleston. Both orchestras presented *The Messiah* with their Symphony Chorus in December. However, what I am seeing is that many contract musicians have many opportunities right now and are turning down work with both orchestras and this has created an abundance of work for non-contract musicians and big problems for the PMs.

I'm also sorry to report that a violinist in the Erie Phil has just passed away from COVID. He was not vaccinated and had not played with the orchestra since last winter. – *Karen Barker Ferren, Delegate*

Last summer, the musicians of the **Glimmerglass Opera Orchestra** worked, but had fewer services. We won't yet know if next summer will be back to a normal number of services until the individual employment agreements come out in February, but we do know that we will be back in the Opera house doing the usual four mainstage productions. It should be back to close to the normal service count for most players.

(Orchestra Updates, continued on page 6)

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.

(Orchestra Updates, continued from page 4)

We will be holding auditions in January for two violin positions, clarinet and horn. However, the most significant news regarding personnel is that our General and Artistic Director will be departing after the 2022 season.

sonnel, HGO recently hired Khori Dastoor as the new General Director and Chief Executive Officer. She is in the process of transitioning to her new position, and she will officially begin her tenure in January of 2022. HGO also recently held auditions

requests, but none of them is being accommodated at this time. The medical advisory groups in both organizations believe that it's too risky to have unvaccinated musicians in the pit around the unmasked singers, dancers, and wind



The Mississippi Symphony Orchestra. Photo courtesy of James Patterson.

COVID protocols were followed – 100% vaccination rate in the orchestra, without a mandate; daily questionnaires, spacing onstage and masking towards the end of the summer when positivity rates went up in the county. For next summer, we hope for more normalcy, but it's too early to predict, of course! – *Katrina Smith, Delegate*

Both the **Houston Grand Opera (HGO)** and **Houston Ballet Orchestras** are back to work! HGO is performing five of our usual six opera productions, while the Houston Ballet has opted to do a full season. Both organizations will meet our minimum service guarantees. In terms of per-

for principal flute second flute, and bass trombone, all which were filled in the fall. The Houston Ballet personnel remains unchanged.

COVID protocols vary slightly between our two organizations. HGO does self-administered PCR tests for all of the musicians twice a week through a company called LetsGetChecked. Houston Ballet is only testing the wind players with one PCR test a week administered by a technician and two self-administered rapid tests a week. Spacing in the pit is challenging, so we have no minimum spacing requirements.

Regarding our nonvaccinated colleagues, they were all granted their exemption

players. The orchestra committees asked extensively about potential accommodations, and in our meetings with management we took very, very thorough notes in case our duty of fair representation was called into question. Since the musicians did not get the answers they wanted from either Houston Grand Opera, Houston Ballet or our local, they have engaged the services of outside counsel.

We are all so grateful to be back at work, and we hope that everyone continues to follow the safety protocols that allow us to keep the music going in our communities. – *Amanda Swain, ROPA Vice President and Delegate*

The **Kalamazoo Symphony** is back to a full schedule, but we have fewer education concerts due to public school protocols for COVID. We have a vaccine mandate for all musicians. There were a few (four) musicians asking for a medical/religious accommodation and they were denied due to lack of documented proof. Otherwise, musicians are flexible and in general, taking safety protocols seriously.

COVID protocols consist of mask wearing (including winds), health survey, absorption pads, enlarged spacing and temperature checks prior to entrance. Proof of vaccination was necessary to start the season and discussion is ongoing about recommendation of the booster. Our safety document follows CDC guidelines plus other precautionary items. Our personnel manager has been great in checking the validity of the vaccine cards and also enforcing the protocols!

We also ask for vaccination proof and masks for audience as well. Unfortunately, ticket sales are down, due to ongoing COVID variants. – *Nora Frisk, Delegate*

The **Knoxville Symphony** returned for its 2021-2022 season in September. Concert programming has returned to pre-COVID offerings, with the symphony performing Masterworks, Pops, Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Ensemble and Concertmaster Series concerts. The KSO held auditions for four openings before the season started, and welcomed Adam Ayers (cello), Sarah Miller (cello), Justin Cummings (principal bassoon) and Devan Jaquez (principal flute) to the orchestra. Also new to the staff of the KSO are Mario Lopez (Director of Education and Community Outreach) and Cory Wilhite (Director of Operations). While Music Director Aram Demirjian has been on a health leave this

fall, it was recently announced that his contract will be extended through 2026.

While the KSO's small ensembles have not been able to go into schools and hospitals this fall to offer our traditional outreach programming, some of these programs were transitioned to a digital format, such as the Storytime Quartet, and the Meet The Musician performance & discussion. Apart from this, the KSO has returned to its normal schedule of services and performances. KSO's main performance venues in Knoxville have been requiring proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test to enter the building this fall, and musicians unable to be vaccinated have undergone weekly COVID testing through the Symphony's partnership with the Covenant Health Network. Additionally, musicians must fill out a weekly health questionnaire, and non-wind playing instruments are required to mask.

Of particular note so far this season was the KSO's September Masterworks program. Maestro Demirjian, violin soloist Robyn Bollinger, and Knoxville's The 5th Woman Poetry Collective collaborated together to create a new spoken word text to compliment the music of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Audience and musicians alike enjoyed this reimagined and collaborative experience! – *Audrey Pride, Knoxville Delegate*

The **Madison Symphony Orchestra** began the 2021-2022 season with an interim Executive Director, Ann Bowen, who is our General/Operations Manager. Our Players' Committee had met with her before and during the season to develop a

Health and Safety Document and tweak it before each cycle. Also, the MSO is currently conducting an Executive Director Search.

We have a vaccine mandate, and everyone takes a health survey before entering the Overture Center, as well as having a temperature check. We began the season with everyone testing for COVID twice during our seven-day cycles. For the past two cycles the testing has been for winds and brass only, while everyone else (strings and percussion) remain masked throughout the cycle. Despite safety precautions there have been two positive tests, one in September (which proved to be a false positive upon retesting) and one in December.

Our Holiday Concert included the Madison Symphony Chorus and the Madison Youth Choir, all of whom were required to be fully vaccinated and masked. The MSO purchased singers' masks for the Madison Symphony Chorus. The MSO also serves as the orchestra for Madison Opera and performed *Lucia di Lammermoor* in November.

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Knoxville musicians performing around the Knoxville Botanical Gardens, September 2021. Photo courtesy of Stacy Nickell

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We have extended our CBA twice due to the pandemic and expect to negotiate a new CBA in the coming year before the end of the current season. – *Lisa Bressler, Delegate*

The **Memphis Symphony** is back at work under a new one-year contract. We had no changes in personnel in the orchestra, and no significant changes in management. With COVID numbers high in August and September, our season started slightly later than usual, and some of our outside contractors (such as Shelby County Schools and Rhodes College) delayed some of our usual services until the spring, but we are performing close to our regular amount of services. Most recently, we performed a holiday pops series (and have *Nutcracker* and *Messiah* coming up. These last two months have felt the most like normal work months than has been the case since the beginning of the pandemic.

In spite of being located in a red state with relatively low vaccination rates, our orchestra is fully vaccinated, and our COVID protocols are being followed. Strings and percussion are masked, and winds and brass are being tested every week that they perform (allowing us to get rid of the dreaded bell covers!). All stage crew, soloists, chorus, etc. are vaccinated as well. – *Sandy D'Amato, Delegate*

As the year ends, **Michigan Opera Theatre** closes out the first half of its 2021-2022 season, which is being billed as Act I: Out and About. The three productions in this first half utilized fewer musicians and took place outside of our Opera House. *Cavalleria Rusticana* took place at the Meadowbrook Amphitheater and we welcomed the Detroit Symphony's new Music Director, Jader Bignamini, to lead us in our first performance since COVID lockdown.

The second production was Jeanine Tesori's *Blue* conducted by Daniela Candillari, which we performed on the waterfront at the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater. It was well received by the community and musicians. As our new Artistic Director Yuval Sharon likes to say, it also provided us the opportunity to embrace the sounds of our environment: rain, loud motor boats, blaring music from cars and boats, sirens, helicopters, water splashing up into the musician's space...

The third performance was in the historic Michigan Building Theater, which was gutted and partially converted into a parking garage within its main hall. It was a perfect match for Ragnar Kjartansson's *Bliss*, which took "Contessa Perdonò" from the finale of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and presented it in a 12-hour loop. Our

orchestra committee worked hard to negotiate Health and Safety protocols for both COVID and general musician health. We are very pleased that no one reported any injuries resulting from this marathon. MOT is in the middle of great changes to the direction of the company. To lead in this new direction, we have several new faces in our company: Yuval Sharon, Artistic Director; Christine Goerke, Assistant Artistic Director; Julie Kim, Chief Artistic Production Office (successor to our previous Director of Production); Matthew Principe, Director of Innovation; Nathelie Doucet, Head of Music; Michelle Devine, Director of Major Gifts; and Ataul Unman, Human Resources. – *Andrew Wu, Delegate*

The **Mississippi Symphony Orchestra** is performing a full season for 2021-2022. The first half of the season consisted of two classical concerts, one chamber concert, one pops concert and an outdoor concert. When the season was being planned, the Delta variant was becoming prominent, so the conductor programmed works on the two classical concerts that required a smaller string section, two of each woodwind, only two horns, no trombones and only two trumpets. However, there was a full orchestra pops concert in between the smaller (usually full orchestra) classical concerts. Go figure!



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Our concertmistress, who refuses to wear a mask, be vaccinated or be tested, is taking a second year off. First year was a paid leave of absence, but this year she will not be paid. After 17 years, our well-liked Executive Director, Michael Beattie, is retiring at the age of (a very young) 70. Our new E.D. is Dr. Jenny Mann, bassoon professor at University of Alabama and E.D. of the Tuscaloosa Symphony. She will start in January.

At the start of the season, 92% of the (mostly local) orchestra provided proof of vaccination. Our COVID policy requires you to show proof of full vaccination or proof of a negative COVID test that is taken on the first day of a set of services. Additionally, any musician wishing to wear a mask in rehearsal or performance may do so as an added precaution.

The orchestra is very excited to begin the second half of the season with our always popular Mozart by Candlelight chamber concerts on January 14th, 15th and 16th, which will be performed at three different locations around the state. – *Lisa Davis, Delegate and Member-at-Large*

The **Monterey Symphony** will have a shortened season of only four subscription concert sets, February through May, each featuring one of four candidates for the Musical Director position. We did perform an outdoor Pops set in October but the indoor November reduced orchestra set was canceled.

During the COVID closure, our Personnel Manager/Librarian (who also plays cello in the orchestra) was laid off, but has been re-engaged now.



Memphis Symphony Orchestra members Delara Hashimi (second flute), Adam Sadberry (principal flute) and Erin Kaste (assistant principal second violin and personnel manager) get into the holiday spirit. Photo courtesy of Erin Kaste.

Vaccinations have been required for staff, crew and musicians, and there have been no requests for exemption. Wind players showed up a half hour before the two-hour rehearsals to be tested and waited 15-20 minutes for the results before being allowed on stage. The rest of us wore N-95 masks provided by management and practiced social distancing as much as possible. Strings could have individual stands if requested in advance.

The concerts in October sold out quickly, with the audience being vaccinated and masked, giving the impression that they really missed us and are hungry for live, symphonic music! – *Gigi Dang, Delegate*

The **New Haven Symphony Orchestra** is performing an almost-regular season. There is a vaccine requirement and a daily health quiz starting before the first

service all the way through the concert. The orchestra performed a Christmas Pops and the *Messiah* series. Everyone is excited to be back on stage. Like the ECSO, we have a few people who have taken a leave of absence and some have quit. Again, the reasons for these are varied and not just COVID-related. We are still in a logjam about guaranteed services and declaration of force majeure. – *Christine Coyle, Delegate*

The **Palm Beach Opera Orchestra** will return to work in January 2022. We will have a normal season of three productions running from January through March (25 services total). We'll be back at our normal venue (Kravis Center) and sitting in the pit (not distanced, but strings will be masked and winds/brass

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The Houston Ballet Orchestra performs *The Nutcracker*. Photo courtesy of Alex Navarro.

masked during long rests). COVID protocols: all musicians, conductor and staff must be fully vaccinated and be tested before the start of each production. The winds and brass will be tested twice during each production and strings once. The opera will provide masks for us for all rehearsals and performances. HEPA air filters will be placed in the pit for the winds and brass since they sit in a very small space under the lip of the stage. As far as I know, no musician has quit or been fired. Our protocols include the op-

tion of any musician to take the season off, without pay, without it affecting their tenure in the orchestra. There were no changes to the management, and I'm not aware of any in the orchestra. – *Beth Larsen, Delegate*

The **Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Orchestra** is looking forward to a good season in 2021-2022. The orchestra performed with the PBT in October 2021 and will join them

again for *Swan Lake* for two weekends in May 2022, which has been the status quo since 2007. New artistic director Susan Jaffe has publicly stated she wants to restore the orchestra for performances of *The Nutcracker*, and the orchestra endowment fund is continuing. Former artistic director (and former NYCB principal dancer) Patricia Wilde died earlier this year. Before her death, she asked that fundraising for restoration of live music for PBT be a primary goal for the company, and her family established a Live Music fund drive in her memory. – *Cynthia Anderson, Delegate*

The **Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera** has been back to work in full orchestra format since the 4th of July. Since that time, we've returned to a normal, "pre-pandemic" type schedule and number of services. Earlier this season we moved into our newly renovated concert hall, the SAFE Credit Union Center for the Performing Arts (formerly the Community Center Theater). We're also grateful to be back performing live music for the Sacramento Ballet and their production of *The Nutcracker*, which ran through December 23rd.

We're also very happy to announce that a new Executive Director has been named to succeed long-time ED Alice Sauro. Starting February 1st, 2022, 28-year old Guiliano Kornberg, who has been with SP&O for a number of years now in other capacities, will be taking the reins as head of the organization.

COVID protocols agreed upon by both the players and management have been in effect since the return to full orchestra services. These include 1) full vaccination for all players and staff members; 2) a PCR test taken within 72 hours of the first ser-

(Orchestra Updates, continued on page 12)

ROPA Welcomes Adam De Sorgo to the SSD!

The Symphonic Services Division is proud to announce Adam De Sorgo as its newest negotiator! Adam played for 16 years in the Sarasota Orchestra, during which time he served on the Orchestra Committee. The committee, with the help of Local 427-721 (Florida Gulf Coast) and the support of ROPA, negotiated three CBAs, including one which resulted in a 54% increase in base pay. He also served as ROPA delegate and chaired the Artistic Advisory Committee. His record of service to his fellow musicians includes having served

on the Executive Board of Local 427-721 from 2005-2010 and as VP of Local 427-721 from 2010 to the present. Adam has played with the Kansas City Symphony, Utah Symphony and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, among others. He has been very active in the West Florida Labor Council and affiliate organizations, and has a great understanding of advocacy and of our industry.

"I'm exhilarated to be joining the AFM Symphonic Services Division at this

time," says Adam. "While we are facing unprecedented challenges because of the pandemic, it has been uplifting to see the explosion of creativity from my colleagues, as well as our solidarity with each other in the face of tremendous pressure. It is a time where working people across the country are fighting and winning respect and dignity in the workplace. I'm looking forward to being a part of this movement alongside the musicians who inspire, educate and entertain their communities."

SAVE THE DATE! 2022 ROPA Conference

Tuesday, July 26th—Thursday, July 29th

Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Monday, July 25th

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

Host: AFM Local 7 Orange County Musicians' Union

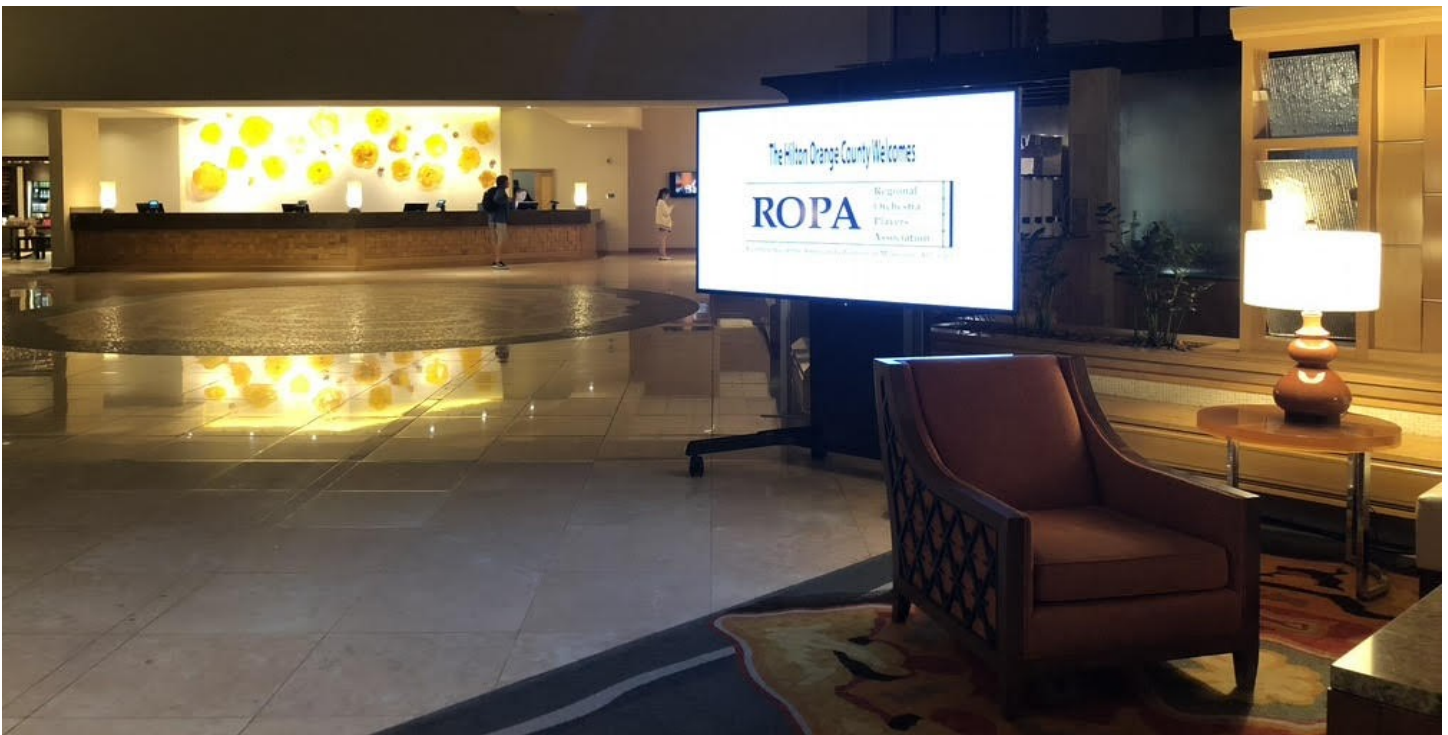


Photo courtesy of Mike Smith.

(Orchestra Updates, continued from page 10)

vice of a set; 3) additional antigen testing for all wind and brass players upon arrival of the first service of a set; and 4) the wearing of masks at all times for all players and staff while inside the service venue (except for wind and brass players while playing). – *Darren Sagawa, Delegate*

In the **Sarasota Orchestra** we went back to work as usual in September to a full season. We mostly have the same number of series, although our youth concert series was changed from an in-person performance to a video performance that was given to our schools to use. Due to popularity, some outside parks concerts have been continued from our unusual 2020 “season”.

Vaccines are required for all musicians, including subs, extras, conductors, guest artists and staff. Venue personnel are also required to be vaccinated or show proof

of a negative test. Masks are required for all while at each venue. Winds may remove theirs only while they are playing. Guest artists are also required to wear their mask unless necessary to perform, in which case they must provide a negative PCR the day before the first rehearsal. Conductors may remove theirs while conducting. Winds and brass are required to take a PCR test 2-3 days before the first rehearsal of a series and show a negative outcome in order to play. We had one positive test that affected a series and those sitting close by had to be quarantined until their test became negative.

There have been musicians out for various reasons, but not COVID-related to my knowledge. – *Carmen Bannon, Delegate*

The **Wichita Symphony Orchestra** is back to work and we have returned to our normal amount of services, with the excep-

tion of the Holiday Concert (an annual production sponsored by Spirit) because it's a free concert and usually a packed house. Musicians must show proof of vaccination for COVID-19 (we are anticipating that this will include the booster in 2022) and most musicians have been compliant. Those who were not have been required to show proof of a negative COVID test twice in a Masterworks rehearsal week.

All musicians are masked with the exception of winds and brass, and only while playing, and everyone has been compliant. All positions have been retained in our organization with the exception of those retiring and some non-COVID-related deaths. The Orchestra Committee and the management have bi-weekly meetings to discuss any and all topics, and after a breakdown in communication in the past, we are glad to have a good working relationship with them. – *Judy Naillon, Delegate*



Performers take a bow with the Detroit Symphony's new Music Director, Jader Bignamini, after a performance of Michigan Opera Theatre's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Photo courtesy of Sara Ciesia.



The Houston Grand Opera performs *Carmen*. Photo courtesy of Maricruz Kwon.

(Notes from the President continued from page 2)

The current Integrated Media Agreement will expire in June of 2022. It will be interesting to see what new shape and direction this media collective bargaining agreement will take after the many special allowances and adjustments that were provided to orchestras to get their music out to the public during the COVID times, when public performance was not possible.

Finally, I would like to welcome the newest negotiator for the SSD, Adam De-

Sorgo! Adam is joining the SSD at a moment when we face difficult negotiations as we emerge from pandemic-related challenges. We are confident that his deep knowledge of our industry, his experience advocating for his colleagues and his ability to build consensus will serve well the musicians and locals he assists in the months and years to come.

All of us on the Executive Board express our heartfelt gratitude to Nathan Kahn for jumping to help when Chris Durham

became too ill to continue negotiating. We have benefitted tremendously from his expertise during this extraordinary stretch.

I wish everyone in ROPA a happy and healthful new year. We've had some challenges the past couple of years – let's keep it together, stay calm, be gentle with each other and keep moving in the right direction. Here's to better days ahead!

We are Stronger Together!

ROPA

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

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