The year 2023 offers us a number of interesting and important anniversaries. We are all more than aware, for instance, that this year is the 150th anniversary of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s birth, for sure. But, did you know that 2023 is the 250th year since the Boston Tea Party? Did you know that it has been 50 years since the first call on a handheld mobile phone? It is now 25 years since the ending of “Seinfeld” and the beginning of Google. What could that mean? In our world, ICSOM turned 60 last year, and we celebrate 40 years since ROPA’s founding.

The Sphinx Organization is now 25 years old. Sphinx was founded in 1997 by violinist and poet Aaron Dworkin, and is now led by Artistic Director and President Afa Dworkin. The SphinxConnect: Impact 2023 Conference was held at the Renaissance Center Marriott in Detroit, MI from January 26 through January 29. Five AFM leaders were in attendance this year: Symphonic Services Division Director Rochelle Skolnick; AFM Diversity Committee Member and the host of our 2022 Conference in Orange County, AFM Local 7 President Edmund Velasco; President of Local 802 in New York Tino Gagliardi; President of ICSOM Paul Austin; and myself as ROPA President.

From its beginnings as a concerto competition, Sphinx has steadily developed into a remarkable assembly of inspirational talent and resources. Over $10 million has been invested in scholarships and grants over the years, and Afa Dworkin numbered the alumni of the organization at over 1,000 in her opening message. The Conference has stayed true to form of late, with its succession of panel discussions punctuated by master classes with visiting artists, and concluding with the finals of its Concerto Competition in Detroit’s Orchestra Hall. There were no fewer than 26 panels over the course of three days, most of which were made up of a moderator and three guests. Topics ranged from “Artist-Centric Philanthropy” to “Show Me The Money”, from “Keeping Up With Composers” to “Bringing the Past Center Stage”, from “You’re Hired: Now What?” to “Ending the Musical Chairs”. Master Class presenters included Jennifer Koh, Patrice Jackson, Juan-Miguel Hernandez, Zuill Bailey and Joseph Conyers. The concluding concert featured three finalists. The winner of the $50,000 First Prize was violinist Njioma Chinyere Grevious, accompanied beautifully by the Sphinx Symphony Orchestra led by Kalena Bovell.

Our AFM group was invited to a luncheon meeting with participants in two of Sphinx’s newer programs. Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity (LEAD) is a two-year full-scholarship leadership program started in 2019, and the Sphinx Orchestral Partnership Auditions (SOPA) were first held in...
(Notes from the President, continued from page 2)

2021. The discussion was a fascinating one, as many are at Sphinx, given the wide range of ages and life experiences gathered in the same room. Side by side with our AFM leadership were kids from the audition excerpt competitions, arts administrators and educators from a number of different institutions, fellows from a couple of different programs and facilitators of a variety of specializations. I had a great time getting to know Citlalmina Hernandez Toro, a clarinetist from Mexico, as well as Dr. Ian Saunders, Artistic Director of Project Step in Boston and Assistant Dean for Artistic and Social Change at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, MA. The occasion proved to be a great chance for all of us to get to actually meet and really see each other. I’d like to offer my personal thanks to Bill Neri and the Sphinx leadership for giving us all this opportunity.

Anyone who goes to Sphinx will be immediately aware of the dedication of its leadership and dynamic energy of everyone involved. They are all to be congratulated on a great achievement, a generation of making a difference. What they have built is indeed remarkable. In a way, ROPA and Sphinx share something – coming together in solidarity shows us what’s possible.
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.
The Fort Wayne Strike is Over!

Fort Wayne, IN (March 8, 2023) -- Fort Wayne Philharmonic concerts will resume following the tentative agreement today of a new contract between Fort Wayne Musicians Association (AFM Local 58) and the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. The new agreement expires in August of 2026.

"With a new agreement, we will be able to move forward together and return excellent programs and performances to the public," said Philharmonic President and CEO Brittany Hall. "The Philharmonic has a bright future, and we are committed to rebuilding our culture to continue to serve as a source of community pride and regional strength in Northeast Indiana."

"This 4-year contract gives us our first wage increase since 2019, brings Musician salaries above pre-pandemic levels, and expands our season to 30 weeks", said Musician Spokesperson and Philharmonic Principal Clarinetist Campbell MacDonald.

Philharmonic Board Chair Rick James said the Board is pleased that performances are returning with the new agreement and thanks the community for its patience and continued support. "The Philharmonic Board remains committed to our orchestra and appreciates the patience of patrons who are awaiting the return of music to the Philharmonic stage. The Musicians of our orchestra are a great treasure for our community and this agreement assures that we will continue creating the highest level of music-making together.

"We look forward to working collaboratively to create a stronger, sustainable, and more unified Fort Wayne Philharmonic for many years to come," he said.

The Philharmonic will resume on March 24 with the production of Swan Lake with our partners at the Fort Wayne Ballet. The remainder of the 2022-2023 season will continue as scheduled on April 13 with Bach in the Barn. More information regarding performances can be found at www.fwphil.org or by calling the ArtsTix Box Office at 260-422-4226.
The Opera Philadelphia orchestra committee, Local 77 President Ellen Trainer and Vice President Marjorie Goldberg and AFM Negotiator Todd Jelen began negotiation meetings in early July 2022 as the CBA was set to expire on September 1, 2022. After endless hours of talks and little movement, the committee held a meeting after one of our rehearsals in early September. The committee provided the disappointing news that talks were not productive and we might need to begin work actions to get management to change their position.

The first action taken by the orchestra committee was to release a flyer to all of the musicians showing the salaries of the top management positions. This was eye-opening to most of the players and set the stage for leafleting our audience. Prior to this, the musicians wore Local 77 t-shirts at the final dress rehearsals and entered the pit together five minutes before the call time. With input from our Local 77 organizer Scott Silber, the orchestra committee and Local 77 created a powerful leaflet. The leaflet stated the imbalance of salaries between management and musicians, and our disappointment in the continued reduction of grand opera at our beloved Academy of Music, the oldest opera house in America that is still used for its original purpose. We directed the patrons to the QR code that would allow them to leave comments that we could share with management, and to sign up for our mailing list so we could stay in touch.

Our musicians soon realized how much tremendous support they were getting from our patrons and that they too were disappointed by the small number of grand opera offerings that had become the trend for the past several seasons. A writer for the *New Yorker* magazine who attended the opera and received our leaflet wrote a review of the performance and included a few sentences about the work action and our appeal for more grand operas in Philadelphia.

While these actions got our message out to the patrons and the press, management refused to budge. We knew we needed to keep up the pressure. The orchestra members held a strike vote and the vote to strike was approved by a supermajority. The orchestra committee notified management, and within 12 hours, they were back at the table. The committee felt enough movement had been made to prevent a strike that evening.

The contract has still not been approved. However, the orchestra committee feels we will soon be able to go to the players with a strong contract that will be ratified.
Did you know that the Labor Notes Organization provides organizing and bargaining training to unions across the country? Check out their website at labornotes.org for more information. Aside from hosting an incredible labor education conference every other year, Labor Notes constantly hosts webinars and live trainings in various locations. ROPA will cover registration costs for any delegate to attend Labor Notes’ “Secrets of a Successful Organizer” online training. If you’re interested, just email ropapresident@gmail.com for more details. If you have been to a Labor Notes conference or training session, tell us about it by posting on the delegate discussion list! And, don’t forget that the next Labor Notes Conference will be held April 19-21, 2024 in Chicago. ROPA will sponsor one delegate or orchestra member by paying all of their expenses to attend the 2024 Labor Notes Conference. Mark your calendars and look out for application materials at this summer’s ROPA conference!

SAVE THE DATE! 2023 ROPA Conference
Tuesday, July 25th — Thursday, July 27th

Negotiating Orchestras Workshop: Monday, July 24th
Downtown Atlanta Sheraton, 165 Courtland Street NE
Host: AFM Local 148-462

Offices up for election: Four (4) Member-at-Large positions; Vice President; Secretary; Delegate-at-Large to the AFM Convention

Photo courtesy of the Sheraton Atlanta Hotel
Minutes: ROPA Executive Board Mid-Year Meeting, Chicago, IL
January 15-16, 2023
By Karen Sandene, ROPA Secretary

Attendees 1/15:

Proceedings: January 15, 2023

Meeting called to order at 3:10 CST.

Agenda Overview
President Wade went over the agenda for the two days of meetings.

Approval of 2022 Conference Minutes
The board examined the minutes of the 2022 Conference and checked for accuracy. The board approved the conference minutes, as amended m/s/c.

MAL Report: Marjorie Goldberg
Goldberg reported that in one of her orchestras there are issues dealing with musician/musician conflict, and how management appears ill-equipped to handle the situations. This led to a discussion on the duty of fair representation by the Union. A few of Marjorie’s orchestras are dealing with difficult negotiations, with concerns about reduced seasons. One orchestra’s geographical region is experiencing rising Covid levels, which is causing conflicting opinions on masking protocol amongst the musicians.

MAL Report: Lisa Davis
Lisa reported on an audition that did not follow standard procedures. She mentioned a delegate resignation. Lisa’s report led to a discussion on how to get delegates to respond to MAL outreach.

MAL Report: Cory Tiffin
Cory’s report focused mostly on the situation in Fort Wayne. Other orchestras of his reported on upcoming and ongoing negotiations. One orchestra is regrouping after the effects of Hurricane Ian.

MAL Report: Beverly Setzer
Bev reported that she heard back from all of her orchestras. She covered the Hudson Valley Unfair Labor Practice. She said the musicians formed a 501c3 for assistance and asked about the appropriateness of ROPA to contribute to this fund. It was agreed that ROPA as an organization shouldn’t contribute, but it could easily post information on how individual musicians could contribute. The board agreed that there should be a place on the ROPA website to highlight struggling orchestras.

MAL Report: Richard Kelly
Richard reported that the Long Beach and Santa Barbara locals have merged. Several of his orchestras have changed delegates because of leaves of absences. He said that differences of opinion on Covid protocols have caused conflict. He also expressed concern that some audition announcements are not listing complete information about the positions, such as the number of guaranteed services for the job. He made the suggestion that when musicians leave orchestras, they should complete some sort of an exit survey. He also expressed appreciation for the SSD contract bank as a tool for negotiations.

MAL Report: Ann Rule
Ann reported that a few of her orchestras have new delegates. She shared difficulties that some orchestras are having when most of the musicians live out of town, sometimes without adequate mileage or lodging. She covered the status of negotiations for a few of her orchestras. One of her orchestras is expressing the goal to grow beyond a “community orchestra” mentality and think more regionally. One of her orchestras reported a significant contribution to its endowment.

MAL Report: Brandon LePage
Brandon reported that several of his orchestras currently have no delegates. He informed the board of the status of several ongoing negotiations. Aspects of auditions were discussed, such as recorded rounds and expenses to attend auditions.

Proceedings: January 16, 2023

Attendees 1/16:

Meeting called to order at 9:15 CST.

Agenda Overview
Steve went over the agenda for the day.

Officer Reports

Delegate-at-Large to AFM Convention Naomi Bensdorf Frisch
Naomi went over the process that the AFM Convention requires for resolutions to be brought to the floor to the delegates. Naomi discussed various resolutions to the AFM convention that the Players’ Conferences plan on submitting. She also covered possible resolutions that ROPA might submit. The process in order for AFM members to receive the rebate for belonging to more than one local was also discussed.
President Steve Wade
Steve reported on his activities as President since the 2022 Conference. He attended the OCSM Conference via Zoom in July and with Naomi attended the ICSOM conference in person in Grand Rapids. He covered a few ROPA Conference items. He said he would like the board to meet post-conference on site, rather than trying to organize a zoom meeting once the board returned home. The Conference is being held at the Downtown Atlanta Sheraton; the deadline for booking a room at the conference rate will be July 2nd. Steve complimented Mary Louise Hall from Helms-Briscoe, the travel consultant that ROPA uses, for getting ROPA some great deals on some nice rooms. He said the When is Good site has been successful for organizing meetings.

Vice President Amanda Swain
Amanda reported on her activities, including the recruiting of three new orchestras: Philadelphia Ballet, Orlando Philharmonic and Springfield Symphony. She detailed upcoming Zoom meetings with Locals 47 and 802. She said that she has done some new delegate orientations, and the PowerPoint that she is using for educational purposes is working well. Steve said he would like to look at the presentation for his preparation for a New World Symphony visitation.

Secretary Karen Sandene
Karen stressed the importance of forwarding accurate delegate and contact information to the board, which is challenging with the growing number of orchestras. The board discussed a few things they would like to see on the website. Karen reported that the Fort Wayne Symphony is utilizing the AFM Strike fund.

Conductor Evaluation Database Administrator Lisa Davis
Lisa gave an update on database usage over the past months.

EDI Workgroup Update
Steve and Marjorie reported that the workgroup is considering language to address EDI issues on the Conductor Evaluation surveys, and looking for ways to address EDI on the ROPA wage chart.

IMA Mike Smith (via Zoom)
Mike submitted a report that covered the IMA Committee’s efforts to negotiate a successor agreement to the IMA which expired in June of 2022. He said that the next negotiation session with the EMA will be held February 5-6 in New York.

Symphonic Services: Rochelle Skolnick (via Zoom)
Wage Chart Website: Rochelle reported that the AFM is working on an updated version of the wage chart, which can be created in-house. They want to have it functional by the beginning of next season. Rochelle wants the board to look at the wage chart and determine if it asks for useful information, or if additional questions should be included. The addition of questions pertaining to EDI was discussed, as was the proper means for requesting this information. Rochelle will ask Laurence Hofmann if she has a date when she would like to have changes to the wage chart submitted to her.

NLRB: Rochelle said that there has been a budget increase for the department, the first in almost a decade. She said that there is a backlog on cases, due to lack of staff because of the underfunding of the board.

AFM Officers: Rochelle informed the board that Ray Hair and Jay Blumenthal are not running for office this year.

Specific Orchestra Concerns: Rochelle updated the board on the status of three orchestras dealing with a strike (Fort Wayne) and Unfair Labor Practices (Hudson Valley and Las Vegas). She said she will encourage orchestras to get out information about public actions sooner, so board members and other musicians can participate.

SSD Assistance for ROPA: Rochelle encouraged the board to send ideas about what ROPA needs from SSD, and what topics the board would like to see SSD provide at Conference.

MAL Report: Sharon Jones
Sharon reported that two of her orchestras have no delegates. She also said that some ROPA delegates are not being allowed access to Orchestra Committee business. The board was in agreement that delegates need to be made aware that they should be informed of Orchestra Committee discussions.

Conference Planning
The confirmed room rate is $155, with a minimum of 385 rooms.
Steve will set up online hotel reservations this week
Saturday, July 22nd: Board arrival date. First meeting of the board is tentatively scheduled for 3:00 pm.
Sunday, July 23rd: more Board Work.
Monday, July 24th: Legislative meeting, as well as Negotiations Workshop. Consideration needs to be made for the many board members who are also delegates and need to attend the workshop.
Tuesday, July 25th: New Delegate Breakfast will happen; the board discussed the benefits for having all guests attend coffee prior to the opening session; Full Conference beginning at 10:00; afternoon will have MAL breakout sessions.
Wednesday, July 26th: additional speakers, nominations.
Thursday, July 30: elections, other speakers.
COVID protocols: The board discussed whether to continue COVID protocols as were instituted in Orange County. It was decided to monitor conditions for the next several months and make decisions closer to conference time. Criteria could be posted on the ROPA website.
Sessions and Presenters: A variety of topics and presenters were discussed. Naomi is going to revisit a contract for presenters that she put together in the past. To be considered is whether having multiple concurrent sessions would be feasible. The board expressed interest in having Alfonso Pollard share more of his work on legislative issues.
Topic Dinners: The board considered the plus and minuses of the topic dinner logistics from Orange County. Steve mentioned that there are many restaurants a short distance from the hotel.

(Mid-Year Meeting Minutes, continued on page 10)
MLK Museum: The board discussed the possibility of visiting the museum as an evening activity.

Musicians and Taxes: It was suggested that Rick could do a presentation about taxes for musicians. Sharon stated that she is willing to do a Leading Tone article on the topic if Rick provides her information.

New Delegate Breakfast: It worked to have it open to everyone.

Conference Swag: There was a discussion as to whether ROPA wanted to provide some sort of swag for attendees at the conference.

Land Acknowledgement Statement: Steve asked the board’s opinion on making a Land Acknowledgement Statement to honor indigenous people in the Atlanta area in his opening remarks.

Treasurer Rick Basehore
Rick went over income and expense statements, and the balance sheet. He informed the board that 1099 forms will be going out soon. There was a discussion on reimbursement procedures, and it was decided that Naomi will come up with a written policy for the reimbursement process. There was also a discussion on the interest rate the ROPA savings account is receiving, and whether it would be beneficial to look to other institutions for better rates.

Motion: Bev/Richard moved that ROPA take a portion of the savings and have Rick research institutions which might offer better interest rates. m/s/c.

Nathan Kahn Bequest
The board brainstormed ideas for how to take advantage of funds Nathan Kahn is providing to enrich musicians’ knowledge of unionism.

Leading Tone Ideas
The board shared ideas for stories and articles for The Leading Tone. They also discussed how many issues per year should be published and the timing of the publications.

Social Media
Bev shared a text from Katie Shields, Social Media Coordinator. Katie would like to send something to the MALS to share with delegates informing them that any of the delegates or MALS can put material on ROPA Social Media. The board was encouraged to think beyond current social media platforms, as some are losing favor with the public.

2024 Conference Site Possibilities
Several locations for the 2024 ROPA conference were discussed. Steve said that delegates who are interested in having their Locals host a conference should put together a formal presentation to share with Delegates this summer for consideration and voting.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:00 pm CST
The Springfield (MA) Symphony Orchestra rejoined ROPA in 2022 and I was selected to be their delegate. My colleague, Sarah Sutherland, is the alternate delegate. I'm happy and honored to be the new ROPA delegate for the Springfield Symphony Orchestra and look forward to sharing news, information and resources with my fellow ROPA delegates.

I’ve been a member of the First Violin section of the SSO for 30 years, as well as a member of Local 171 Greater Springfield, Berkshire County and Vermont Musicians Association. I reside in New York City and have been performing and teaching here since I was a student at the Juilliard School. I was a member of the AFM Diversity Committee for 15 years and attended five AFM Conventions where we held a Women’s Caucus. Recently, I became a member of the SSO Orchestra Committee and a Board Member of MOSSO – Musicians of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra Inc.

The last CBA between the musicians of the SSO and SSO management expired in 2020. Since then, the musicians have 1) created their own nonprofit organization, MOSSO, to produce concerts which the SSO management failed to do; 2) pleaded with the SSO Board for a change in their leadership to no avail; and 3) filed several Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). For two consecutive years, the NLRB filed a Complaint with the SSO for violating federal labor laws. Specifically, the NLRB cited that the SSO did not uphold the status quo of the expired CBA, including a minimum of 10 concerts per season, and that the SSO illegally declared impasse in negotiations. The SSO chose not to settle the second complaint, and instead retained a large, union-busting NYC law firm to fight the complaint at an NLRB hearing set for May in Boston.

I’m sure this latest labor dispute, sadly, sounds all too familiar to you. And all because of an incompetent Board of Directors who drove their organization to the ground. The musicians of the SSO have appealed to the community, to the Mayor of Springfield and to major donors for support in preserving this orchestra. But at this moment, we are still facing an existential crisis and would appreciate any support, guidance and advice from our fellow ROPA member orchestras.

See you all in Atlanta this summer!

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The Philadelphia Ballet was founded in 1962 as the Pennsylvania Ballet. George Balanchine had a hand in the formation and hiring of the first cast of ballet dancers and even came to Philly for rehearsals. Thereby, we are one of a handful of ballet companies in the United States who are allowed to perform his choreographies. During COVID, our name was switched to Philadelphia Ballet. We have 44 musicians, Angel Corella is the current Artistic Director and the conductor is Beatrice Jona Affron.

Negotiations recently have gone well, but haven’t always in the past. After talking to the orchestra committee, the musicians decided we wanted to have all the resources and benefits that membership in ROPA brings. Our orchestra is like a big family, and we went ahead and paid the union dues out of pocket.

I ran for delegate because I wanted to step up and do something for my orchestra. It wasn’t a hard decision. I’m looking forward to going to the conference in Atlanta this summer as I am eager to meet other reps from ballet orchestras and learn all I can.

Our orchestra is thrilled to be a part of ROPA and we look forward to fruitful collaborations.
ROPAA conference of the American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO

The Leading Tone
901 C Street
Lincoln, NE 68502

ROPAA Officers

Steve Wade, President
Hartford Symphony Orchestra
ropapresident@gmail.com

Amanda Swan, Vice President
Houston Ballet Orchestra
Houstan Grand Opera Orchestra
ropavicpresident@gmail.com

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

Rick Basehore, Treasurer
Annapolis Symphony Orchestra
ropatreasurer@gmail.com

Members-at-Large
Lisa Davis
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
horn3mt@gmail.com

Marjorie Goldberg
Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra
margoldberg@gmail.com

Sharon Jones
Elgin Symphony Orchestra
bellsauf@gmail.com

Richard Kelly
Portland Symphony Orchestra
kellydru24@yahoo.com

Brandon LePage
Flint Symphony Orchestra
lepagebrandon@gmail.com

Ann Rule
Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra
anncarpule@gmail.com

Beverly Setzer
Symphony Tacoma
beverlysetzer@frontier.com

Cory Tiffin
Las Vegas Philharmonic
Cory.tiffin@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
RacCox@cs.com

Adjunct Officers
Beverly Setzer
Symphony Tacoma
beverlysetzer@frontier.com

Beverly Setzer
Symphony Tacoma
beverlysetzer@frontier.com

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

Katie Shields, Social Media Coordinator
Arizona Opera Orchestra
Katherine.shield2@gmail.com

Karen Sandene, Webmaster
karensandene@gmail.com

Lisa Davis, Conductor Evaluation Bank Administrator
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
ropaceba1@gmail.com

ROPAA 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
Austen Symphony Orchestra
Ballet West Orchestra
Binghamton Philharmonic
Boise Philharmonic
Boston Ballet Orchestra
Boulder Philharmonic
California Symphony Orchestra
Canton Symphony Orchestra
Cape Symphony
Central City Opera Orchestra
Chattanooga Symphony & Opera Orchestra
Chicago Sinfonietta
Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra
Dallas Opera Orchestra
Dayton Philharmonic
Delaware Symphony Orchestra
Detroit Opera 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 Opera 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
Minnesota Opera Orchestra
Mississippi Symphony Orchestra
Moderay Symphony
National Philharmonic Orchestra
New Haven Symphony Orchestra
New Mexico Philharmonic
New West Symphony Orchestra
Oakland Symphony
Omaha Symphony Orchestra
Opera Philadelphia
Orchestra Iowa
Oregon Ballet Theatre Orchestra
Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra
Palm Beach Opera Orchestra
Pasadena Symphony Orchestra
Philadelphia Ballet 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

Associate Members
Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra
El Paso Symphony
Flint Symphony Orchestra
Glenn Street Opera Orchestra
Lincoln Symphony Orchestra
Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra
Opera San Jose
Pittsburgh Ballet Orchestra
Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra
Tri-Cities Opera Orchestra
Tulsa Opera

Spokane Symphony Orchestra
Springfield Symphony Orchestra
Symphony San Jose
Symphony Tacoma
Toledo Symphony Orchestra
Tucson Symphony Orchestra
Vermont Symphony Orchestra
West Virginia Symphony
Wichita Symphony Orchestra
Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra