

# The Facts about Orchestra Salaries

The International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) is comprised of 52 American orchestras. These orchestras comprise virtually all of the American orchestras that pay a full-time living wage.<sup>1</sup> There have been several stories in major American newspapers recently that may have led to misperceptions about orchestral salaries by noting that “no orchestra member is paid the minimum scale” and then citing the salaries of the handful of highest paid musicians using data obtained from orchestras’ federal tax forms. In order to clarify this, we offer the following analysis.

- There are 52 ICSOM orchestras employing a total of about 4,200 musicians.<sup>2</sup>
- During the academic year 2002-2003, American colleges, universities and conservatories graduated 14,601 students with degrees in music.<sup>3</sup>
- During the 2003 calendar year there were 159 openings for musicians in ICSOM orchestras.<sup>4</sup>
- The average minimum salary for the 2003-2004 season for musicians in ICSOM orchestras was \$57,370.<sup>5</sup>
- The lowest minimum salary was \$23,000; the highest was \$104,000.<sup>6</sup>
- The average seniority pay for an ICSOM musician with 10 years seniority was 2.8% above minimum scale. The average seniority pay for an ICSOM musician with 20 years seniority was 5% above minimum scale.<sup>7</sup>
- The lowest seniority pay for a musician with 10 years seniority was 0.8%; the highest was 6.8%. The lowest seniority pay for a musician with 20 years seniority was 1.3%; the highest was 15.5%.

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<sup>1</sup> There are a handful of other orchestras that are fulltime, but not members of ICSOM, such as Seattle and Toledo.

<sup>2</sup> For the period covered by this research, generally 2003, there were 51 orchestras.

<sup>3</sup> “Music in Higher Education: Facts and Figures Concerning Music and Higher Education in the U.S.”; The College Music Society; <http://www.music.org/InfoEdMusic/HigherEd/SumFacts.html>

<sup>4</sup> Openings advertised in the International Musician in the 12 monthly issues of 2003.

<sup>5</sup> “Wages and working conditions in ICSOM Orchestras 2003-2004”, known colloquially as the ICSOM wage chart.

<sup>6</sup> ICSOM Wage Chart

<sup>7</sup> ICSOM Wage Chart

Concertmasters, first-chair players and other players with key responsibilities receive salaries above the minimum scale. Extensive data about individual contracts are not available, but orchestras' federal tax forms are publicly available and reveal the following:

- Approximately 24 musicians in 11 ICSOM orchestras earn more than \$200,000. This equals 0.6% of ICSOM musicians.
- Around 100 musicians in 19 orchestras earn more than \$150,000. This equals 2.4% of ICSOM musicians.
- 5 musicians, or 0.1% of ICSOM musicians, earn more than \$300,000.<sup>8</sup>
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average salary as of May 2003 for a lawyer was \$107,000.<sup>9</sup> The average salary for a doctor was \$139,640.<sup>10</sup> The average salary for a financial manager was \$87,190.<sup>11</sup>
- The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile for salaries in each profession is:

Lawyers	\$139,130
Doctors	*
Financial managers	\$106,490
ICSOM musicians	approx. \$100,000

\* The Dept. of Labor does not compute percentile for salaries above \$145,600, which is only \$12,260 above the median salary (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) for family doctors and general practitioners.

During the 1990s, orchestra revenues and expenses increased at impressive rates. Expenses increased at a much greater rate than musicians' salaries until the 2001 recession, as shown in this graph.

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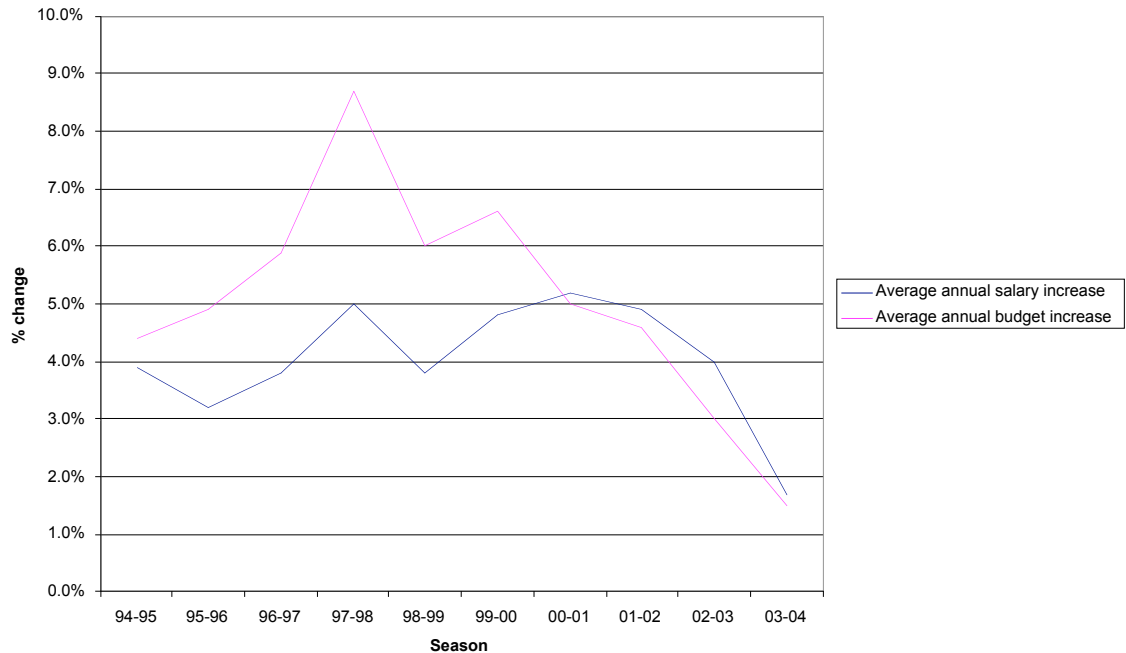
<sup>8</sup> IRS Form 990s found at <http://www.guidestar.org>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Division of Occupational Employment Statistics: May 2003 National Occupation and Wage Estimates; Category 23-1011; [http://www.bls.gov/oes/2003/may/oes\\_231e.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2003/may/oes_231e.htm)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Division of Occupational Employment Statistics: May 2003 National Occupation and Wage Estimates; Category 29-1062: Family and General Practitioner <http://www.bls.gov/oes/2003/may/oes291062.htm>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Division of Occupational Employment Statistics: May 2003 National Occupation and Wage Estimates; Category 11-3031: Financial Managers "Plan, direct, and coordinate accounting, investing, banking, insurance, securities, and other financial activities of a branch, office, or department of an establishment." <http://www.bls.gov/oes/2003/may/oes113031.htm>

**Average annual budget increase vs. average annual salary increase for ICSOM and ROPA Orchestras**



The data for this graph is from ICSOM and ROPA Wage Charts as analyzed by Eric Beers for his article in the August 2004 [International Musician](#).

Additional reading:

[Historical information on orchestra salaries from 1952-2000, including salaries indexed to the Consumer Price Index](#)

[An insightful essay on musicians as professionals](#)

Baumol, William J.; “Children of the Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma,”  
Journal of Cultural Economics, Volume: 20, Issue 3, 1996, pp.183-206

An article by William Baumol, the pre-eminent cultural economist, about the economic structures and issues for education, health care and the performing arts

Felton, Marianne Victor; “Historical Funding Patterns in Symphony Orchestras, Dance and Opera Companies, 1971-1992” Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society; Spring 1994, Volume 24, Issue 1

An article on the economics of symphony orchestras and their historical trends

The Baumol and Felton articles can be found by searching in library databases. We have asked for permission to post them on this site.

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All musicians in all ICSOM and ROPA orchestras are represented by the American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO.

If you need additional information, or have suggestions for additions to these pages, please [contact us](#). While we cannot comment on individual orchestras' situations, we would be glad to provide context about the industry as a whole. For further comment for publication, please contact Jan Gippo, Chair of ICSOM at: (314) 971-2023, or via [e-mail](#).