

## President's Address to the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual ICSOM Conference

Paul Austin, ICSOM President  
Wednesday, 15 July 2020

Hello everyone. You know, today's world is all about how to handle challenging situations.

Usually ICSOM conferences seek to inform attendees on how to succeed in the orchestra world. The 2020 ICSOM conference is different. This year's conference is all about survival. It is about staying focused and calm during tough times.

This year's conference is relevant to our world at a time in history that ICSOM has never before seen in its nearly 60 years of existence. All 52 ICSOM orchestras and its 4000 musicians have been affected by the coronavirus. ICSOM's Governing Board has put together an agenda for the 2020 conference that addresses issues so that we can handle the challenges of today's world in an informed and rational way.

The different responses to COVID-19 have allowed us to see the true colors of our organizations. Some orchestras have been shining examples of solid leadership during tough times. Others have become examples of exactly how not to handle a crisis.

It is absolutely criminal of leadership to endanger their musicians, the product of the organization, during a global pandemic. Shame on those who have chosen to furlough their musicians, for some since last March, for others who face 15 months off of work with no pay, and in one disastrous case to also discontinue the musicians' health insurance. Shame on the MET. Shame on the Nashville Symphony. And shame on the Indianapolis Symphony. Your musicians deserve better. Your audiences deserve better. Your communities deserve better.

Then again, some ICSOM orchestras have shown themselves to be creative and forward thinking in bravely meeting the challenges of our time.

Last week one manager addressed their musicians by saying that, for next season "we will NOT be taking the easy way out by furloughing musicians." This ICSOM orchestra will likely NOT end their 2019-20 season in the red, they did NOT cut the pay of its musicians, and they just negotiated a one-year successor agreement without any financial concessions. I am proud to say that this is the Grand Rapids Symphony, and that you will have an opportunity to meet its President & CEO Mary Tuuk when the 2022 ICSOM conference is held in Grand Rapids.

One note of caution though regarding the Grand Rapids Symphony. The fact that we agreed on an extension for a year without concessions does not guarantee that we will be paid 100% all season. While the possibility exists that terms may be renegotiated depending on circumstances, I'm proud to have a leader who is trying to do the right thing by the musicians and who recognizes the value in taking care of the musicians during this time.

There are moments to celebrate since I addressed you at last summer's ICSOM conference in Utah. At that time the Baltimore Symphony musicians were locked out and faced an uncertain future. The good work of the BSO musicians, guided by Randy Whatley, paid off and the outlook for this orchestra is promising. They have found a way to work together productively in Baltimore, which we should recognize and celebrate.

There are moments of sadness as well. COVID-19 claimed the life of Vincent Lioni, violist with the MET Orchestra for over 30 years and formerly with the Detroit Symphony. Cancer claimed the life of Ryan Anthony, Dallas Symphony's Principal Trumpet, who many had followed on social media through "Cancer Blows". For these two ICSOM musicians, as well as others we have lost this past year, please join me in a moment of silence to honor them.

(A moment of silence was held)

One thing to know is that ICSOM musicians support one another in a crisis. There is a COVID-19 resource page on ICSOM's website for our musicians. ICSOM's Emergency Relief Fund is also in place. I encourage you to visit our website [icsom.org](http://icsom.org) often to be aware of these offerings and to view current news items about our orchestras.

Last year ICSOM hired the digital advocacy marketing firm Phone2Action to assist our lobbying efforts. This provided an easy way for ICSOM musicians and their supporters to voice their support to politicians regarding legislation of interest to our membership. We prepared three Phone2Action campaigns, one to support the Butch Lewis Act, another to oppose the Grassley-Alexander proposal, and one to generate letters of support for the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra. This week we will be asking for your assistance in a Phone2Action campaign to promote the CARES act, Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security. More details will be forthcoming.

Today an ICSOM conference begins. Six new delegates had their orientation earlier this week. I was pleased to call each delegate and, along with their Member-at-Large, walk through their important tasks. Welcome to the new delegates for Atlanta, Houston, the MET, Pittsburgh, San Francisco Symphony and San Francisco Ballet orchestras. The welcome, roll call, and speeches have occurred. Now it's time to listen and learn, observe and ask, and be inspired to make a difference in your orchestra.

They say that hindsight is 2020. Let's hope that when we look back at this time it will be known for those who have survived and thrived. Know that ICSOM will be that resource to assist you in doing so. Thank you.