

ICSOM 2021

My dear delegates, AFM officers, friends and colleagues, I said to you, a little over a year ago, that I didn't want to lose a single orchestra to Covid.

And we haven't. Some of us came through more battered & bruised than others, a very few are in more precarious circumstances than we would want to see, but we are all still standing. Now begins the long road to recovery and to finding our way in the new, post-Covid landscape.

I am in awe of the dedication, the innovation and flexibility, the perseverance and the grit that we have witnessed from every orchestra in ICSOM---pulling together to find a path through this crisis.

We have seen the same dedication from AFM Symphonic Services---particularly Rochelle & Debbie---who worked tirelessly to keep the ship afloat,

From our Locals,

From some managers—we know who they are, as do they,

From our patrons & donors who came through for us in this crisis,

and last but absolutely not least, your Governing Board and ICSOM Counsel Kevin Case who have worked without respite throughout these long months of uncertainty. I am deeply grateful to all of you for your hard work, determination and willing participation.

My biggest takeaway from this pandemic experience is a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of each of us to one another and to the institutions to which we belong. The health & success of our orchestras is dependent on our full participation, not just in creating great music, but within each orchestras' community, its governing structure, and the AFM.

In order to heal the setbacks of the pandemic, our success will depend upon the relationships of our musicians to each other and their respective committees,

On our relationship with our Locals and Symphonic Services,

On the community that supports us,

And on the infrastructure of management and board which makes an orchestra possible.

Every one of those relationships is a two-way street with mutual responsibilities.

Perhaps the first and foremost of those responsibilities is to keep the road clear of

debris. It is imperative that we have open lines of communication with every constituency that supports us---the pandemic has certainly put that to the test.

Starting with the shutdown in March of last year, my weekly Zoom meetings with both Symphonic Services and the Player Conference Council not only nurtured closer relationships and helped keep us informed, but it enabled us to respond more quickly and to assist with greater clarity where help was needed.

The Player Conference Council, along with Legislative Director Alfonso Pollard and AFM Organizing, would not have been able to mount our phone-banking effort in support of The American Rescue Plan Act (which included our pension relief legislation) if we had not already developed a close working relationship. The timing was very tight---we had only a few short days to design and implement a complicated campaign. And we had a ready roster of musicians to call on **because** of our union. We were able to generate thousands of calls just days before the American Rescue Plan Act went to a vote on the floor of the Senate.

Up until the pandemic hit, the pension had been the most pressing and the most *divisive* issue of my term as Chair of ICSOM.

Every person who has advocated for pension reform over the past 5 years helped pass the Butch Lewis Act, Ray Hair and Alfonso Pollard on Capitol Hill, ICSOM's P2A email campaign, our Player Conference Counsel zoom-banking---I thank you **all** for your tireless efforts over these many years. Those advocates also include the voters in Georgia who put two more Democrats in the Senate. Ultimately, we have pension reform because tens of thousands of people exercised their political will. They participated in our democracy, which despite the Biden win in November and a narrow Democratic majority in Congress, remains in peril. **We** must help pass the For the People Act. If we can't vote or if our votes don't count, we will be stripped of the power to exercise our political will.

As orchestral musicians, we have been trained throughout our career to put up & shut up---to follow the leader. Even with steam coming out your ears, discipline prevails. That works to our disadvantage when it's time to speak up and speak out against what we deem wrong or unjust-- in our orchestras, in our government and in our society.

It is time---to speak up and speak out. Because of the devastation left in the wake of this pandemic, we have been witness to the racism and crippling inequality

that exists in our society. If racism exists in our culture, it exists in our orchestras because we are a part of that culture. Perhaps unknowingly, implicitly, but it is there and it is time for us to address it.

We need to use what power we have through our music and through our union of musicians to advocate, not only for our orchestras, but for the communities that we serve. I recognize that our managements are loath to step into the political arena for fear of offending donors. But the American Federation of Musicians is **our** political arm, not just to fight our managements, but to advocate for justice in the laws that govern worker's rights and our democracy.

We are ICSOM, and rightfully proud of it. We are the advocates for our orchestras within the AFM and also within the communities we serve. But we are also the AFM. Our union of musicians, across **all** the player conferences is the infrastructure that affords us the greatest impact in collective action. We have the **most** powerful voice when we speak in unison as the American Federation of Musicians.

We need to use that unified voice for change, not only in support of our orchestras but for the communities that we serve and that in turn support us. It is time to lift our gaze towards the horizon and see where we are headed. We are stewards of the music we love but we are also stewards of the human heart. Because we hold sway there, we have more power than we realize. And we have more power through collective action than we use.

We still have very difficult negotiations ahead for a number of our orchestras and we are not yet out from under the shadow of Covid. There is much work to be done in the coming year but we will do it together. We will do it in unity with our brothers and sisters across the AFM and we will do it for our orchestras and for communities.