

2021 President's Report

Paul Austin, ICSOM President

Wednesday, 11 August 2021

Good morning. It has been two years since we last assembled in person as an organization, and it really is wonderful to see all of you.

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The 2021 ICSOM conference seeks to empower our delegates. ICSOM's Governing Board has put together an agenda that we hope will both educate and inspire all of you.

Now as I wrap up my fourth year as ICSOM President, I extend a heartfelt thanks to every ICSOM delegate, all who bravely faced a historic moment in our organization and weathered unique situations in their orchestras. While the majority of ICSOM musicians have returned to work by now, some have not and are confronted with uncertainty.

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It was painful to see our ICSOM colleagues who were furloughed last season due to leadership that did not have the will or desire to support their organizations.

Whenever these furloughed musicians return to the stage or pit in the near future, they will be facing a rare situation. How can their product sound fresh and exciting when those who provide the product have been treated with such disrespect? They are professional musicians, and I know that they will face this challenge head on and rise to the occasion, in stark contrast to the way their managements faced their own challenges — with cowardice and a singular lack of vision. Know that ICSOM will continue to support all of our member orchestras and that we can be called upon at any time to help.

Here are just a few ways in which ICSOM is making a difference today.

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For starters, ICSOM is now entering our third year with the marketing firm Phone2Action to assist our lobbying efforts. This provides an easy way for ICSOM musicians and their supporters to contact politicians regarding legislation which is important to our members and profession. This year we had two highly-successful Phone2Action campaigns.

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The first, which supported the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra musicians, received thousands of responses and a positive end result: their situation was included as a main topic of a political debate of the candidates for Governor of Puerto Rico, and the Financial Oversight Board agreed to consider releasing financial resources that previously had been unavailable to the orchestra.

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And ICSOM's second P2A campaign, to support EPPRA, the Emergency Pension Plan Relief Act of 2021, also ended successfully in that the American Rescue Plan passed and

the pension relief legislation remained in the stimulus package. ICSOM will continue to use Phone2Action as a means of having our voices heard by those in power.

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Next, ICSOM's online presence is recognized and respected as a primary source of news about orchestras, classical music, and the arts. Our Twitter account, something that I am very proud to maintain, tweets dozens of news articles throughout the day. ICSOM's Facebook and Instagram accounts, plus our website, are resources with the purpose of promoting unity among musicians everywhere. And don't just take my word for it; the US Library of Congress agrees. They contacted ICSOM last year to let us know that our website was selected for inclusion in their Professional Organization for Performing Arts web archive. ICSOM shares the vision of the US Library of Congress in believing that preserving internet materials is important, and that permitting access to researchers worldwide is significant.

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Also, negotiation committees look to ICSOM for information to assist in getting the best possible contract. Our settlement bulletins, which are confidentially housed at our website, show the patterns and trends that are helpful for other committees to know. For the past six months, Member-at-Large Keith Carrick and I co-chaired a subcommittee that addressed and up-dated the wage chart questions so that it will be a more useful tool for our negotiation committees. In addition, our private Delegate-L email list is a quick way to gather information. Thank you delegates for being the voice of your orchestras for the settlement bulletins and the wage chart, plus the questions and responses on Delegate-L.

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Today an ICSOM conference begins. Earlier this morning, I was pleased to lead the New Delegate Breakfast which provided an orientation to a dozen new ICSOM delegates and alternate delegates. Welcome to the ICSOM family! And later today I look forward to hosting our fourth annual "Orchestra Projects of Note" presentation, when you will be hearing about interesting musician-driven initiatives from six of our 52 member orchestras.

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We are happy to be in Pittsburgh this week. This really is a place where the musicians are rightfully known as the Musicians of Steel. Those of us who participated in yesterday's service event with 412 Food Rescue now have first-hand knowledge of the impressive work that the PSO Musicians do and the difference that they are making in their community.

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Next month I look forward to spending a week in Puerto Rico, a trip rescheduled from March 2020. Former ICSOM Chair Bruce Ridge and I already have a full slate of meetings and interviews scheduled to support the musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra, and we are pleased to have two of their representatives with us today for the ICSOM conference.

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Our annual conference is a time to listen and learn, observe and ask, and be inspired to make a difference in your orchestra. For nearly 60 years, ICSOM has been a resource to assist professional musicians. But know that our goal this week is to not let the conversation end here. In other words, what happens in Pittsburgh does not stay in Pittsburgh. We are counting on you, our ICSOM delegates, to communicate the information we share here to your committees and musicians back home.

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Thank you for attending the 59th annual ICSOM conference, either in-person or virtually, for the worthy cause of the betterment of our orchestras and for going forth as inspiring ambassadors of our profession.