

## **President's Address/2023 Paul Austin, ICSOM President**

**Wednesday, 23 August 2023**

### SLIDE 1

Good morning. It really is wonderful to see all of you here in Milwaukee for ICSOM's 61st annual conference. The last time we held our conference here was in 1981, when ICSOM had been in existence for less than twenty years. Since then, so much has changed, yet our primary founding mission remains true: for our organization to be a positive advocate for orchestral musicians. Today I will discuss several actions that I took as ICSOM President to further that mission this past year.

### SLIDE 2

From last October to May, I was very fortunate to have been able to travel to visit ten ICSOM orchestras!

Those in-person meetings with delegates and committee members provided an excellent opportunity to hear the concerns of ICSOM members and become acquainted with their world. Here are a few thoughts from my time with those ten groups.

### SLIDE 3

My first stop was in October, when I drove to visit the Indianapolis Symphony and Louisville Orchestra. Recently both of these orchestras have had challenging times, and I met committee members who clearly were dedicated to improving their situation. With negotiations coming up in 2024 for both Indianapolis and Louisville, I believe that the direction of these orchestras will be shaped by their next contract. They know that ICSOM will be a resource for them in their bargaining, just as we have been for our other member orchestras.

### SLIDE 4

Traveling to New York in November for IMA negotiations gave me a chance to tag on an extra day beforehand to meet with the MET Opera Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic committees. Remembering how hard their city was hit by the pandemic gave me even more admiration for these musicians. They have been through a lot, and today they are rebounding strongly. For the Philharmonic, they were going through executive leadership change, about to announce their new music director, and had just opened the newly renovated hall. When the IMA bargaining ended a few days later, I was able to catch the MET's performance of Verdi's "Rigoletto" that evening. The orchestra sounded amazing, and there was no hint that they had just emerged from a dark season due to the MET's shutdown. Remember that the MET was too large of an

organization to qualify for federal funding during the pandemic, something that most of us were fortunate to receive (which kept the lights on for the majority of ICSOM orchestras).

#### SLIDE 5

ICSOM's Governing Board held its annual midwinter meeting in Chicago this year, which allowed me to stay an extra day to meet with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra, and Grant Park Orchestra. You know, I especially enjoyed seeing the CSO and Lyric Opera musicians indoors, since my first time to visit them as ICSOM President was to speak at their outdoor rallies and walk the picket line with them in the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018. Interestingly, all three of our Chicago orchestras were about to embark upon negotiations when we met last March, so we had great discussions about bargaining and the industry. Since that March meeting, I am happy to say that the Chicago Lyric and Grant Park Orchestras have concluded their negotiations with very impressive contracts! Congratulations, and we are hopeful that the CSO will follow suit soon.

#### SLIDE 6

By tagging on time before and after the annual AFM visit to Miami to speak with the New World fellows, I was able to see The Florida Orchestra and the Jacksonville Symphony last April. Actually, my schedule allowed me to spend several days at both places, so I had many opportunities to meet with musicians and hear them in concert. By doing so, I really have a feel for what our two ICSOM orchestras in Florida are facing these days, in some ways concerns that are unique to them.

#### SLIDE 7

In May I took a day to drive to Detroit to visit with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians. Now that I look back, the things that were mentioned to me in Detroit mirror what was brought forth to me at all of my other site visits this year, which mainly was asking how to unify colleagues in a post pandemic world. Since this is a concern for many at the moment, ICSOM's conference this year includes a breakout session about this topic. Tomorrow Member-at-Large Keith Carrick and I will be giving examples of how to unify colleagues, such as a new musician handbook that welcomes new hires, a musician newsletter to connect you with the community, social media accounts to build your online presence, and a mentor program to help newly hired musicians learn the ropes. All of this should assist in creating good orchestral citizens.

#### SLIDE 8

During my six years now as ICSOM President, I have been able to visit nearly a

third of our orchestras. For my first few years, I mainly traveled to see ICSOM orchestras when they were involved in labor actions. This past year it was good for me to see our members when they were working and not under the stress of a strike or lockout. Let me know if a visit to your orchestra by ICSOM would be helpful this coming year.

#### SLIDE 9

As ICSOM explored ways to assist in the training of young musicians from underrepresented groups, I researched summer music programs last fall. This led to the creation of an ICSOM Boston University Tanglewood Institute scholarship, a \$10,000 award, which will allow one high school musician to attend their three-month Young Artists Orchestra program. ICSOM has committed to sponsoring this scholarship for five summers, and I am pleased to say that tuba player Cameron Hall is our first recipient. Cameron just finished high school in Atlanta and is heading to the University of Miami's Frost School of Music for college.

#### SLIDE 10

After Cameron was named the recipient of our scholarship, we were surprised and delighted to discover his connection to ICSOM! His private lesson teacher in Atlanta was ICSOM Emeritus Treasurer Michael Moore.

#### SLIDE 11

ICSOM monthly video series "Musician Profiles: Celebrating Racial Diversity" is now in its second season.

These one-on-one interviews focus on hearing and lifting the words of ICSOM Musicians of Color, their experiences, and how they view the need for racial diversity within our orchestras. It was an honor and a pleasure to host the first year of the series, and I was pleased to pass the hosting duties on to Stephen Laifer of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra for this season, with the plan of always having an annual change of host.

ICSOM hopes that you will take a few minutes to watch these videos in our monthly series, which are housed at ICSOM's website plus at our "ICSOM Orchestras" YouTube channel.

#### SLIDE 12

Today our 61st annual ICSOM conference begins. Earlier this morning, I was pleased to lead the new delegate breakfast orientation meeting to a group of 16 new ICSOM delegates and alternate delegates. Welcome to the ICSOM family!

## SLIDE 13

Speaking of ICSOM family, I have to say something about Meredith Snow. We are in the final days of her term as ICSOM Chair, and Meredith is someone whom I consider to be my ride or die. You know, the pandemic really isolated some people. But, in our case, the pandemic brought the two of us closer together. The countless calls about how ICSOM was going to get through the pandemic, and our concern for all of our membership, and wondering how ICSOM could be the best resource possible, well, those were bonding moments. Meredith has a special and unique style of bringing people together, which has served ICSOM well. Her common sense approach to our challenges got us through a lot. Thank you, Meredith! Your work for ICSOM made a difference and won't be forgotten.

## SLIDE 14

Our annual conference is a time to listen and learn, observe and ask, and be inspired to make a difference in your orchestra. For over 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. We are counting on you, our ICSOM delegates, to communicate the information we share here to your committees and musicians back home, and to go forth as inspiring ambassadors of our profession. Thank you and have a wonderful conference here in Milwaukee!