

President's Address/2022

Paul Austin, ICSOM President

Wednesday, 24 August 2022

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Good morning. It really is wonderful to see all of you here in my city, Grand Rapids, for ICSOM's 60th annual conference.

Our organization was founded in 1962 when musician leaders from 16 orchestras came together in Chicago with the aim of improving the lives of professional orchestral musicians. Today ICSOM is made up of the top 53 orchestras in the US and Puerto Rico, with a membership of nearly 4000 musicians. ICSOM continues its founding mission: being a positive advocate for our profession. Today I will discuss several of the actions ICSOM took in furtherance of that mission.

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Last September I was pleased to spend a one-week residency in Puerto Rico, along with former ICSOM Chair Bruce Ridge, to support the musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra, a member of ICSOM since 2003. The week was very well organized, thanks to their ICSOM Delegate Miguel Rivera and AFM Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer José Villegas, who kept us very busy with meetings and interviews which allowed us to highlight the issues that the musicians were facing. This included a lack of any pay increase for over 15 years and no contributions during that time to their pension plan.

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Our week in Puerto Rico culminated with an extended meeting with Governor Pedro Pierluisi, and I am pleased to say that our voices were heard and respected by those in power. The musicians now have \$20 million allocated to their pension plan for the next ten years.

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A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of hearing the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra perform a concert in Chicago's Orchestra Hall, their first US tour since a Kennedy Center presentation in 2004, and their first performance outside of Puerto Rico since a concert in Spain in 2005. We congratulate the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra and its musicians on their recent success, and we continue to wish them well.

While several ICSOM orchestras had been furloughed during the pandemic, it is good to report that all of these groups have returned to work. All but one ICSOM orchestra was up-and-running this past season: that one would be the San Antonio Symphony.

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For decades these musicians have faced and shouldered concessions and in September 2021 finally said that enough is enough when faced with more unreasonable demands in their contract negotiations. They were on strike for the entire 2021-22 season and ICSOM supported them every step of the way, beginning with our Call to Action which raised a quarter of a million dollars for the musicians.

Thanks to all of you who responded to this action. In addition, ICSOM organized and moderated Zoom calls between members of the SAS musician committee and leaders from ICSOM orchestras who had been on strike or lockout over the past ten years. Thanks to those of you from the Atlanta Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony, and St Paul Chamber Orchestras who took the time to speak to the SAS musician team and provide lessons learned.

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The Governing Board sent Member-at-Large Keith Carrick to San Antonio twice to deliver a message of support from ICSOM at the musicians' rallies. Keith is shown here at the Tobin Center with San Antonio trumpet player Lauren Eberhardt and Debbie Brooks, ICSOM Delegate of the Fort Worth Symphony.

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Two months ago, the San Antonio Symphony board and management announced that they will be entering Chapter 7 bankruptcy and dissolving the San Antonio Symphony. The Musicians of the SAS have gone on the record to say that the music will continue in their city. Follow their developments at the MOSAS website as they are in the planning stages of producing an upcoming concert season. We welcome their representative Riely Francis, who is with us this week for the ICSOM conference and is on the agenda to speak on Friday morning.

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2022 marks the year when the contracts of nearly half of ICSOM orchestras are expiring. With this large number of our membership in negotiations, ICSOM provides support for our bargaining groups by hosting Zoom meetings with our attorney Kevin Case for the musician committees, their lawyers, and AFM Local officers. We had these calls in March, April, and July, and found this to be a very effective way to communicate and support our members in achieving the best possible contract at this time. We have seen progressive, multi-year contracts settled for several ICSOM orchestras, including the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, The Florida Orchestra, the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, and the San Diego Symphony. Although regressive contract settlements have not been reported at the moment, we know that some other orchestras are having a rough time in negotiations, and ICSOM stands ready to assist them in any way it can.

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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. In 2021, Member-at-Large Keith Carrick and I co-chaired a subcommittee that addressed and updated the wage chart questions so that it will be a more useful tool for today's 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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In addition, ICSOM has been using the DC based marketing firm Capitol Canary, formerly known as Phone2Action, to provide ICSOM musicians and their supporters with an easy way to contact politicians regarding legislation which is important to our members and to our profession. ICSOM will continue to use Capitol Canary as a means of having our voices heard by those in power.

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ICSOM's DEI Committee has reached a new level of vibrancy and activity this year. In June, ICSOM launched a new monthly video series called *Musician Profiles: Celebrating Racial Diversity*, of which I am proud to be the host. 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 interview Joseph Conyers as the first guest of ICSOM's new video series. I met Joseph when he became Principal Bass of the Grand Rapids Symphony, his first job after graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music. Since then, Joseph joined the bass section of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and is currently Assistant Principal Bass of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Last month our featured musician was Judy Dines, a member of the Houston Symphony flute section for 30 years and formerly their Negotiation Committee Chair. This month we featured Inés Voglar Belgique, Assistant Principal Second Violinist of the Oregon Symphony and a former

member of their negotiation committee. ICSOM hopes that you will take a few minutes to watch these videos plus our upcoming ones in this monthly series, which are housed at ICSOM's website plus at our "ICSOM Orchestras" YouTube channel.

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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. Our website is currently undergoing a facelift of sorts with improvements by our new web designer Bert Witzel, ICSOM Delegate of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. We encourage all ICSOM musicians to follow our social media accounts, and we thank those of you who have liked and shared our posts. We are @ICSOM on Facebook and Twitter, @ICSOM1962 on Instagram, and icsom.org is our website. Thank you to our Members-at-Large who handle that day-to-day attention to these accounts: Ken Thompkins for Facebook and Dan Sweeley for Instagram.

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Today our 60th annual ICSOM conference begins. Earlier this morning, I was pleased to lead the new delegate breakfast orientation meeting to a group of 20 new ICSOM delegates and alternate delegates. Welcome to the ICSOM family! And this afternoon I look forward to hosting our fifth annual "Orchestra

Projects of Note” presentation, when you will be hearing about impactful initiatives from five of our 53 member orchestras.

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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 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 Grand Rapids does not stay in Grand Rapids. We are counting on you, our ICSOM delegates, to communicate the information we share here to your committees and musicians back home.

Thank you for attending the 60th annual ICSOM conference, for the worthy cause of the betterment of our orchestras, and for going forth as inspiring ambassadors of our profession.