

Senza Sordino

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A Casals Legacy

by Emma Matos

The Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (PRSO) is ICSOM's newest member, and that is something that takes both the PRSO and ICSOM to another level. The former because we have become part of the great family of symphonic musicians working towards shared goals; and the latter to have as a member an orchestra so representative of the diversity that exists in the symphonic orchestra world. The musicians of the PRSO are very pleased and proud to be part of this ICSOM—very happy as well because we have had the opportunity to make contact with friends we haven't seen for some time and to establish new friendships that will surely last a long time. One reason we wanted to join ICSOM was that we needed better ways to demonstrate our value and strength as artists who are part of the legacy of one of the legendary performers and humanists of the 20th century, the Catalan cellist Pablo (Pau) Casals.

Our orchestra's history goes back to 1956, when Maestro Casals visited Puerto Rico for the first time. He had come to spend time in the land of his mother, Doña Pilar Defilló. On that visit, Maestro Casals, accompanied by pianist Narciso Figueroa, played facing one of the downtown Mayaguez streets from the balcony of what used to be his mother's house. Pictures exist of that historic moment, showing people surrounding the maestro from inside the house and gathering to watch from the street. From that moment, Maestro Casals dreamed of founding a symphony orchestra in Puerto Rico. His first step was establishing a music festival.

The first Festival Casals was held in April 1957. For the next 18 years until death his in 1973, Maestro Casals was the central figure not only for the Festival, but for the PRSO and the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music as well. Because of his aura, love, and commitment for music, many renowned artists came to play with Maestro Casals, both in chamber music and as part of the Festival orchestra. Rudolph Serkin and Alexander Schneider were close collaborators during the early years. Renowned Puertorrican musicians (like pianist Jesus María Sanromá, who played the world premiere of

Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*) joined international artists not only to be part of the Festival Casals but also to become the first core musicians of the Puerto Rico Symphony and faculty of the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music. Notable musicians from that period include violinist Henry Hutchinson (father of our concertmaster, Henry Hutchinson, Jr.), the Figueroa family (who met Casals in Paris while they were students of pianist Alfred Cortot, violinist Jacques Thibaut, and cellist Diran Alexanian at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris), trumpeter Henry Novak, flutist Peter Kern, Spanish bass player Manuel Verdeguer, the Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet, and French hornist John Barrows.

The miracle of the PRSO came to life in 1958 with Pau Casals as the father and the Puerto Rico legislature as the mother. In that year the legislature signed a joint resolution creating the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (la Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico). The inaugural concert was held April 6, 1958, in the city of Mayaguez, the birthplace of Casals' beloved mother.

Since the beginning, symphonic musicians in Puerto Rico (as in all orchestras) have been struggling not only to receive the respect and treatment they deserve, but also to create the highest level of artistic quality for their orchestra. Pau Casals himself was a great advocate of musicians' rights throughout his lifetime. Unfortunately, no one since has provided the same degree of leadership to our struggles. Nonetheless, thanks to the devotion and dedication of many of our valiant and heroic musicians, the PRSO 48 years later is the institution that gives our public artistic excellence—whether it may be in standard symphonic fare, opera, ballet, or pops.

Throughout its history, the PRSO has always been managed by governmental entities. Since 1985 we have been under the Corporación de las Artes Musicales (CAM, the Corporation for the Musical Arts). It was created to develop and coordinate programs related to the musical arts in Puerto Rico. In short, the PRSO is a public entity whose funding is provided entirely by budgets assigned by the legislature and the executive branch of government. Another important detail to understand is that CAM not only oversees the PRSO, but also the Festival Casals and the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music.

For 42 years the musicians of the PRSO have negotiated collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) to establish terms of employment in our orchestra. More than 25 CBAs have granted our musicians hard-fought benefits, basic working conditions, and

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Chairperson's Report by Jan Gippo



Just a few weeks ago, I came back from my second trip to Puerto Rico. There I helped members of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra (PRSO), including orchestra committee chair and Local 555 president José Martin, negotiate with the management of the PRSO and the Corporación de las Artes Musicales (CAM), the governmental agency that oversees the PRSO and other musical arts in Puerto Rico. It is a very complicated situation, including a lawsuit brought by CAM asking the court to declare that the orchestra is a governmental entity not entitled to workers' rights never before disputed. Such a declaration could deprive the musicians of privileges fundamental to labor, including the ability to negotiate collectively and to strike.

I was successful to a point. I got all parties to start talking—about suspending the lawsuit, starting bargaining for a new CBA, and forming a long-range planning committee. It's hoped that the long-range planning committee, composed of musicians, management, and governmental officials, will be able to facilitate a smooth transition from a wholly government-supported orchestra to a free-standing institution with an endowment, an autonomous board, and self governance. Len Leibowitz was unable to attend these discussions but participated by phone. He crafted a joint statement, agreed to by all parties, that was read at a press conference held at the Puerto Rico Federation of Labor office in San Juan. Len will also be involved with the on-going negotiations for a new CBA.

The reason I had the success I did was that the orchestra members were 100% in solidarity. When José and I spoke to the management, they knew that we were speaking for all the members of Local 555. It felt powerful. In the end, it proved to be the most important catalyst for moving discussions in a new direction.

That brings me to a concern I have on a subject that has been mentioned to me by at least thirteen delegates, committee chairs, and rank-and-file musicians. The concern is the lack of collegiality within our various orchestras. There seems to be far too much backbiting, open antagonism, and just plain bad manners toward older players from newer players.

This attitude is very harmful to any team-oriented operation, and surely to an arts organization like a symphony orchestra. It shakes the foundation of our commitment to ensemble, the shared experience, and the very nature of what we are trying to accomplish at our performances. Moreover, this attitude promotes a mean spirit that, once started, will permeate the entire organization.

A symphony orchestra has a unique structure. There are three distinct groups. There are the over-50, seasoned veterans. This group is the custodian of the institution's history, the masters of the folklore, and the curators of artifacts (e.g., pictures, instruments, and
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President's Report by Bruce Ridge



When I was a student, which seems an alarmingly long time ago, I remember reading a satirical piece called “An Efficiency Expert Looks at a Symphony Orchestra.” I thought I had saved a copy in my files, but a lengthy search the other afternoon proved fruitless. So, I “googled” it, and sure enough, I found a portion of it on some obscure website. The two excerpts I remembered most clearly were

For considerable periods, the four oboe players had nothing to do. Their number should be reduced, and their work spread over the whole orchestra.

and

Forty violins were playing identical notes. This seems unnecessary duplication, and this section should be drastically cut. If a larger volume of sound is required, this could be achieved through an electronic amplifier.

Somehow the joke isn't as funny these days, and when we hear the rhetoric coming from some of our boards and managements, we have to wonder if they know that it is a joke at all. There is irrefutable evidence that our orchestras are shrinking, and even further evidence that some of our boards want them to shrink even more.

I've always thought that the arts take a strange business model when dealing with tough financial times. The first instinct is always to cut the product, typically by reducing the size of the orchestra. In ballet companies, we see the orchestra eliminated entirely, and the audience must watch dancers perform to taped music, all the while suffering the indignity of being told that they are still paying for a full ballet performance.

Few businesses have ever succeeded in weathering tough financial times by offering an inferior product to their public. Yet, that is just what some of our boards seek to do when they advocate cutting the size of the orchestra. Even in situations where smaller deficits exist, managements will sometimes reduce the “extras” budget, thereby offering a smaller orchestra to the audience, hoping that they won't notice even as they are called on for contributions.

Ever more frequently though, we see a business model that is even harder to justify—that of the threat of bankruptcy. We have seen orchestras told by their boards and managements that if they do not agree to cuts in the size of the ensemble, then the organization must turn to bankruptcy to solve its financial woes.

This “to cure you we must kill you” approach most certainly makes it difficult for a community to invest in its orchestra. People like to invest in things that are helping to make their communities thrive.

The successful marketing approach should be one of contributing to your community, and I think it is legitimate to question the effectiveness of the fundraising pitch that begins with “We are doomed.”

For too many years the messages in our glossy brochures have conflicted with the messages in our inky newspapers. Our seasons have slogans like “Experience the Excitement!” But some of our managements put out a message of “Invest in Our Demise.”

This isn't true everywhere, of course. There are many communities where orchestras are thriving and growing, and there are some managers who advocate for the growth in the size of their orchestras. Those are the managers who are succeeding, because they understand the importance of artistic quality and a positive message in the role of fund raising. But these successes can also be traced to a connection with the audience, an ambitious management, and musician involvement in the community. Where there is success there is also investment and a sense of community involvement. An orchestra can help a city thrive in so many ways—artistically, educationally, and financially. The way to encourage financial support of your orchestra is to demonstrate the value of the orchestra in its community, not by announcing publicly that the community cannot support a great orchestra.

Orchestras can only measure up to the task of serving their communities when they also aspire to achieve the highest possible artistic level. Aristotle wrote that “The true nature of anything is what it becomes at its highest.” Audiences, contributors, politicians, and school children can and will be inspired by the drive for excellence, and they cannot and will not be inspired by negative messages and a business plan that offers them an inferior product.

Boards who would advocate for a reduction in the quality of their orchestra are not just letting down their musicians and their audiences. They are missing an opportunity to elevate their community, and the lives of everyone who lives there, learns there, and does business there. But even more so, they are engaging in a poor business practice, undermining their own fund raising by asking people to contribute to something that is under the threat of not even existing past a few weeks or months. It simply does not make any sense.

The time is now to change this rhetoric. As musicians, let us resolve to work with those managements who offer a positive message to the community. Let us do all we can to help them inspire those we serve with our whole organization's commitment to excellence and to community service. But where a management is engaged in promoting a negative public message about its orchestra or about the orchestra field in general, then let all of us, including ICSOM, the AFM, and all our musicians, equally resolve to rise up to challenge that rhetoric and replace it with a positive and inspiring message.

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PRSO

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improved salaries. For example, the PRSO has progressed from a two-week season in 1958 to a 52-week season in 2001. Still, until 2003, musicians had to file for government unemployment benefits when the season ended because this, for many musicians, was their only income.

Some of the gains, though, have come through legal battles. Thanks to our legal counsel, Licenciado (Spanish for “attorney at law”) Miguel González Vargas, we were victorious in a court case brought against CAM for denying our musicians a Christmas bonus that, by law, the government gives to all its employees. For decades, management denied us this bonus, alleging that payment would be illegal. Even though there are some distinctions to be made between PRSO musicians and government employees, the court found that we were eligible for the bonus and ordered management to pay penalties plus retroactive payments going back 10 years.

This was not the last court case we would witness. In July 2005 CAM filed a lawsuit against AFM Local 555. The lawsuit requests the court “to declare that CAM has no capacity in law (ACT No. 130 May 8, 1945, Puerto Rico) under the Constitution of Puerto Rico and is not an employer in such a manner that it may collectively negotiate with the employees of this corporate entity.”

The lawsuit was filed a few weeks before our contract expired in July and about a month before a planned 21-day tour to La Coruña, Spain. After CAM filed the lawsuit, management wanted to wait until returning from the tour to discuss the lawsuit and contract negotiations. The contract had expired, but they wanted us to make the tour without one. The musicians committee jumped in, went into overdrive, and told management that, without a contract, the orchestra would not go on the tour.

There were musicians who wanted to go on tour even under this unprecedented attack; this is something we have to work with. Solidarity and education is something that needs to be developed. As Licenciado Leibowitz said in last issue of *Senza Sordino*, “there is one more B after Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms that stands for Bread.” After a frantic weekend of meetings, both parties agreed to a one-year extension of the expired contract—just 12 hours before musicians were scheduled to leave on the tour. No executive of CAM accompanied the orchestra to Spain.

This lawsuit is a direct attack on our basic right to bargain collectively. Its effect could be to decertify and kill Local 555 because, if the lawsuit is successful, there will be no collective bargaining and there will be no reason for the local to exist (since all of its members are PRSO musicians). Even our membership in ICSOM is at risk.

When management was asked about the lawsuit, their first answer was that we shouldn’t consider it a lawsuit—they were just asking for “an opinion” from the court. We think that this “innocent consultation” is very damaging for labor relations and is an attempt to put a sword over the musicians’ heads. Quoting our lawyer’s an-

swer to the lawsuit, “These proceedings would contravene the constitutional principle of justice, contained in the rule that it is not the function of the courts, nor can they, act as advisors or consultants, to thus avoid that decisions be produced in a vacuum, in the abstract, or under a hypothesis of a speculative nature.”

A further issue has arisen relating to the lack of support shown by CAM for the PRSO. This year, which is the 50th anniversary of Festival Casals, CAM expanded the budget for the Festival while at the same time slashing ours. It found all the funding necessary to import two internationally renowned orchestras and to expand the normally three-week Festival into a five-week event; but the same organization claims that there are no sources of funding for our orchestra.

It is always very uplifting to listen to the complimentary comments made by visiting artists—to mention just a few, Jean Pierre Rampal stressing how well the PRSO plays Mozart, pianist Horacio Gutierrez praising how beautifully the orchestra performed, and Cuban sax player Paquito D’Rivera telling the orchestra how impressed he was about the way we were able to change our “mind frame” to play jazz with him. Evidently, though, the same respect for our musicians does not seem to be shared within our own organization.

Recently the principal newspaper on the island quoted the artistic directors of the Festival Casals (probably one of the few music festivals in the world with *two* artistic directors) as saying that PRSO musicians have myopic intellect—this for denouncing the disparity between the budget size for the Festival’s five weeks and for the PRSO’s 52-week season. They even went as far as questioning the musical ability of our musicians, suggesting that they should be more humble. Such words, coming from fellow countrymen and colleagues, are not only humiliating to our musicians but are an attempt to paint us as opposed to having other orchestras come to Puerto Rico.

They claim that we don’t appreciate the great artistic value of our colleagues and that we would deny the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to see and hear the best performers music has to offer. They do so to drive a wedge between the musicians of the PRSO and the citizens whose taxes sustain both the Festival and the PRSO. We hope they will not be successful in this.

This is a labor issue, not an artistic issue. Many musicians who hold important positions in orchestras throughout the U.S. have at some point played with the PRSO or have studied with members of our orchestra. These include Guillermo Figueroa, Jr., former concertmaster of the New York City Ballet, Rafael Figueroa, principal cellist Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, his brother Narciso Figueroa, violinist of the same orchestra, Pedro Díaz, English horn at the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Ricardo Morales, principal clarinetist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, to name just a few. As Latinos we like very much to make our guests feel at home, and the PRSO musicians have told management several times that we want to interact more with guest orchestras to show them our hospitality. The real question is why

money cannot be found to sustain the year-round operation of the PRSO while even more is found for a short festival.

During this *annus horribilis*, ICSOM has responded to our call for help more than once. Chairman Gippo and President Ridge came to Puerto Rico last December to take a first-hand look at the situation. They were able to meet with our legal counsel, local officers, and especially with our musicians to let them know they are not alone and that ICSOM will help however it can. During that trip, Chairman Gippo also had a meeting with Dra. Evangelina Colón, the executive director of CAM.

Then in March 2006, Chairman Gippo came back to have a meeting with the president of the CAM board of directors, the executive director, their legal counsel, our legal counsel, and José Martín, the president of Local 555 and chair of our orchestra committee. Lenny Leibowitz participated from New York via conference call. Chairman Gippo started the meeting explaining that the lawsuit was not in the best interest of either side. He suggested that a better option would be to form a joint committee with the goal of transforming the orchestra into a self-sustaining, independent organization, and to suspend the lawsuit until a new contract is signed. Management saw the idea as a good one in principle, but the president said that he needed to bring that issue to all members of the board. (This issue was previously discussed in the first meeting between Dra. Colón and Chairman Gippo, at which time she said that she would bring the idea to the attention of the board. It seems that never happened.) At the end of the meeting, management agreed to a joint press release drafted by Lenny that announced the agreement between the parties to pursue the goal of transforming the orchestra into a better organization. A press conference was held the next day by the Local and ICSOM. No one from the board or management attended due to previous appointments. Another press release from the Philadelphia Orchestra musicians in support of the PRSO musicians was also disclosed at the press conference.

We are very grateful for the support Chairman Gippo and president Bruce Ridge have shown toward our situation. We thank our colleagues from the Philadelphia Orchestra for taking time from their busy schedule while they were here for Festival Casals in March to write a press release in our support and on how important collective bargaining is for all symphonic musicians. A special thanks belongs to our beloved Licenciado Leonard Leibowitz who, although not able to be here in person, was, as usual, very articulate in defending symphonic musicians, this time to our great benefit.

Emma Matos is a violinist with la Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico and is that orchestra's ICSOM delegate.

Chairperson's Report

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awards) collected throughout the orchestra's history. All this, plus they have the experience of years of musical performance, contract negotiations, and, in general, the life of the orchestra. These people are tangible assets for every musician. There should be a great deal of respect for those who have stayed the course and have made the job and the music making available to the younger generation.

The next is the 30- to 50-year-old group. These are the career-track musicians with the will and dedication to continue the legacy, who strive for the highest possible musical performance achievable. This is the largest group in the orchestra, and it is the group that has the energy and the will to demand of management and musicians alike to reach for the highest possible goals. This is the group that teaches the new players the stage etiquette, the procedures of governance, and respect for the entire institution. It is the group that motivates, and it should be the group that sets the tone for respect, good manners, and solidarity for all musicians.

The last group is the 20- to 30-year-olds just out of school or moving up from another orchestra. In my experience these players are the best ever in the forty years of my career. They can flat-out play! They are, however, woefully uneducated about labor relations, contract negotiations and their history, the function and success of ICSOM, personal contracts, pensions, life after retirement, and all the other aspects of symphony life. They are looking for guidance, and the way each of us approaches the new musicians will mold and shape the attitudes of this next generation of players.

A revolutionary once said, "We must hang together, or we will surely hang separately." This is true of symphony orchestras as well. Not only in contract negotiations must we show solidarity, but also during every aspect of performance, we must believe in and demonstrate collegiality. It is the only way to achieve excellence.

The newer players are sometimes much better players than the old guard. This is the way of life. When we teach, we want our students to experience such success. Sometimes it takes a "village" of all an organization's members to help set things right. We must always believe in respect, good manners, and a professional courtesy to all our members. Compassion is our greatest gift to a colleague.

Senza Sordino is the official voice of ICSOM and reflects ICSOM policy. However, there are many topics discussed in *Senza Sordino* on which ICSOM has no official policy; the opinions thus expressed in *Senza Sordino* are those of the author(s) and not necessarily of ICSOM, its officers or members. Articles and letters expressing differing viewpoints are welcomed.

Reflections

by Leonard Leibowitz, ICSOM Counsel



Today's "Peculiar Institution"

The symphony orchestra is surely the only institution which, in times of fiscal distress, blames the crisis on its product and then declares that the solution lies in downgrading the quality thereof! This phenomenon was never more glaring than in the recent contretemps in Louisville, an orchestra which, after a glorious period of making some of the finest recordings in the industry, has suffered years of financial struggle, including salary cuts, reductions of season length, etc.

Despite these rigors, the quality of the orchestra has not only held together, but actually improved. This state of affairs was, nevertheless, unacceptable to the new board chair and others in the community who bemoaned the need to continue to fund this remarkable community asset. Thus, as the inevitable deficits grew, it apparently occurred to those folks that the reason the fiscal challenges continued to mount might be that, despite all their previous efforts, they had somehow failed to downgrade the quality of the product! Finding new revenue sources, competent management, or imaginative marketing, was obviously not the solution, and, besides, it was too much trouble.

It was far more expeditious to find a way to ensure that this ensemble was brought down to a level they could fund without too much effort. Simply cut the size of the orchestra. Or at least cut the pay of musicians whose instruments were used less often than others. Yes, there was an idea! They would determine that 71 full-time musicians were unnecessary. Only 50 or so really played most of the time. The balance need not be paid a full-time salary for basically part-time work. And, of course, there is no reason to believe that a fifty percent reduction in income would result in those musicians looking for work somewhere other than Louisville. Moreover, even if that did occur, finding top quality musicians to replace them for a salary of \$15,000 per year shouldn't be a problem.

One might be tempted to think that maybe these folks really did understand the impact on the quality of the product but saw no other way to effectuate the savings in expense necessary to maintain any orchestra at all. But one would be wrong to come to that conclusion. When the musicians counter-proposed an offer that would have maintained all 71 full-time musicians *and* save the organization even *more* money than the reduction of size proposed by the board, the offer was rejected because it did not contain their two-tier idea. Clearly, to them, the only viable way to save the institution was to downgrade the quality of the very service it was in business to supply. Amazing!

This story now has an ending. The good news is that the board ultimately accepted a proposal from the union negotiating team that did *not* include a reduction in the size of the orchestra, nor a two-tiered, "A-B" type arrangement. The bad news, as has already been

reported, was that the musicians figuratively swallowed hard, held their noses, and ratified a contract that contains severe reductions in income, loss of sick and personal days, and the loss of important working condition protections. Once again, musicians were forced to pay dearly for simply wanting to maintain the artistic integrity of the ensemble, aka the product.

On Early Negotiations

Below is Lenny's response when someone asked his thoughts about a management request to begin negotiations earlier than normal.

Hi John,

Early negotiations don't always result in an early settlement, which is what your board chair really wants. Early settlements require a good deal of *trust* on both sides.

If an early settlement is to be achieved the union side must believe (*trust*) that an offer designated as "final" really is such, or very close to it. That is the only way they will be willing to take it to the orchestra and recommend ratification some months before the expiration of the previous contract—because they *trust* that it is as good as it's going to get even if they wait til the deadline. The orchestra has to *trust* that the committee is right about that and that there are good reasons not to drag it out til the end..

And, of course, the management has to *trust* that the committee will accept that an offer made some months before the deadline will, in fact, be as good as it's going to get, and that there is more to be gained in the relationship than is being given up by not waiting til the very end.

It's all a tall order I know, but there are some very good results to be gained from such a negotiation, if successful. The improvement in the relationship is immeasurable, the heightened morale in the orchestra and on the board, and even on a community which has grown tired of the "tri-annual fang-bearing." If you can make all parties understand the risks and the potential rewards, it's worth a shot.

Len

President's Report

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We live in a time that is hungry for leadership. To lead, you must inspire. That is what orchestras are designed to do. While our orchestras are inspiring our cities, they should be touted as models of excellence in a world that is all too often content with mediocrity. Where there is a negative image, we must change the message, repeat a positive message, and stay on our message: Orchestras are invaluable to our communities.

Serge Koussevitzky said "A city without a symphony is a city without a soul." A city should not tolerate a management or a board that would threaten to sell its soul into bankruptcy. Instead, the community should demand what it deserves: creative, positive stewardship of one of its most precious commodities—its own symphony orchestra.

Nominating Committee Announcement

In accordance with ICSOM bylaws, elections are to be held at the 2006 ICSOM Conference for the positions of Chair, Treasurer, Editor of *Senza Sordino*, and two Members at Large (all two-year terms), as well as for the third delegate to the 2007 AFM Convention. The duties of all ICSOM officers are spelled out in the ICSOM bylaws, which are available on the ICSOM website (www.icsom.org) and in the ICSOM delegate manual.

Consistent with the bylaws, the Governing board appointed a Nominating Committee in early March. The Nominating Committee may, at its discretion, nominate candidates for these positions. The Nominating Committee will consider all worthy candidates, including those incumbents intending to seek re-election. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the Conference.

The Nominating Committee is now able to report on the plans of most of the incumbents. Chairperson Jan Gippo will not seek re-election. Treasurer Michael Moore and *Senza Sordino* Editor Richard Levine will stand for re-election to their respective positions. Member at Large Nancy Stutsman will not seek re-election. Member at Large Meredith Snow has not yet made a final decision as to whether she will run again.

Among the criteria applied by the Nominating Committee are candidates' personal abilities, experience, activity in ICSOM, compatibility with ICSOM policies and personnel, and willingness to serve. Balance of orchestra size and diversity on the Governing Board is also a consideration.

As part of its procedure, the Nominating Committee solicits from delegates and members of ICSOM orchestras any comments and criticisms, favorable or otherwise, regarding the incumbent officers and the dispatch of their duties. The committee also welcomes suggestions for other candidates for nomination for these positions. Any member of the committee may be contacted. All input to the nominating committee will be held in the strictest confidence. Committee members may be contacted by telephone or e-mail. The deadline for input is June 15.

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2006 ICSOM Conference August 16–19 in Nashville

The musicians of the Nashville Symphony and Local 257 will host the 2006 ICSOM Conference at the Hilton Nashville Downtown Hotel, in Nashville, Tennessee. The Conference will start the morning of Wednesday, August 16, and will conclude on Saturday, August 19. The draft agenda and information packet for the Conference have already been sent to delegates. Delegates and others planning to attend should make their hotel reservations by July 10. All attendees must register with Secretary Laura Ross. This year's Conference will be dedicated to Bill Roehl. Look for further information about the Conference in the next issue of *Senza Sordino*.

New Webmaster Appointed

After many years of dedicated service, Robert Levine has stepped down from his post as ICSOM webmaster. The ICSOM Governing Board wishes to express its great appreciation to Robert for the outstanding job he did for so long in that role and for his pioneering that established ICSOM's presence on the Internet. We all owe Robert a debt of gratitude for leading the way in this technology. In 1995, when our website was created, few nonprofit organizations had a Web presence; it was Robert who gave us ours.

The Governing Board is pleased to announce that Bruce Christensen of the Nashville Symphony has agreed to assume the duties of webmaster for ICSOM. His experience in this area will be a tremendous asset as we further enhance the ICSOM website in order to make it an even more vital resource for our member orchestras.

ICSOM's website is located at www.icsom.org. It is a valuable source of information for both delegates and other musicians. Among other resources to be found there are Web links to relevant organizations, Governing Board minutes, ICSOM bylaws and settlement bulletins, past issues of *Senza Sordino*, and instructions for subscribing to Orchestra-L, ICSOM's Internet mailing list.

The ICSOM web committee, chaired by ICSOM President Bruce Ridge, is exploring ways to expand and improve the ICSOM website and our presence on the Web. The web committee would like to hear from everyone who has suggestions and ideas that might prove helpful in this regard. Please send your suggestions to the web committee, in care of Bruce Ridge, at bruceridge@earthlink.net.

International Conference of Symphony & Opera Musicians

Senza Sordino

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