ICSM
AN INVESTMENT TO PROTECT

Henry Shaw

While sifting through assorted ICSOM memorabilia recently, I slowly developed the mood necessary for putting the organization archives in order. I was immediately sidetracked upon picking up Volume I, issue No. 1 of Senza Sordino and became engrossed in re-reading it. It was dated January, 1963. The issue represented the carrying out of a mandate by the representatives of twelve major orchestras who met in Chicago in May, 1962 to discuss orchestra issues of common interest and concern. The first item on their agenda was the establishment of a Federation-wide orchestra newsletter. The priority is noteworthy, not so much because it was the first action in a long succession which would be taken in the ensuing fifteen years, but rather because it emphasizes the desire for communication that existed among those present. It was the hunger for information that was the catalyst which came to bind orchestra players into a new common bond and which has held them together for these many years. It was from this springboard that many began to profit from a new inter-relationship and to realize that a common bond can be helpful in solving common problems.

Flushed with the success of the initial meeting, the group decided not to wait a full year for another, so four months later, in September, 1962, delegates of these twelve orchestras, now joined by eight additional ones, met in Cleveland and chartered the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SYMPHONY AND OPERA MUSICIANS. What these orchestras shared were musicians, all of whom had a common interest; a need to earn a living from orchestra employment. In general, the goals of ICSOM were every orchestra musician’s goals and immediately struck a responsive reaction from its membership. Orchestra delegates agreed that the organization was a “can’t miss” success as long as it mirrored the orchestra musician’s needs and that its efforts were translated into tangible results.

Since it is a volunteer organization supported entirely by a voluntary dues structure, ICSOM has been a pay as you go, hand to mouth operation since its inception. While it may seem on the surface a flaw, it is most certainly one of its strengths. What has been accomplished has been done on a shoe string budget; the dedication of inspired officers over the years and, most of all, by the continuous individual support of its membership. What has resulted is an inexorable movement towards a more rewarding livelihood. For its part, ICSOM stands with pride as a model of democratic unionism in action.

One did not expect the immediacy of ICSOM’s popularity among its members to rub off on everyone else. In its formative years it was termed in various sectors a “group of abrasive trouble-makers.” But gradually attitudes softened. The press became more supportive. One by one high priority organizational goals were met.

An organizational newsletter was created. A Symphony Department was established by the American Federation of Musicians, Orchestra committee representation at local contract negotiations was permitted. Perhaps the most important change of all was that orchestra personnel now began to ratify contract proposals. Legal counsel was retained to advise on an organizational level and to be at the disposal of orchestra committees on a local level. A Strike Fund, the by-product of a decision of ICSOM members to seek Conference status within the American Federation of Musicians was begun. Distribution of Orchestra Wage and Condition charts became an annual event. There were other accomplishments too numerous to mention.

The tolerance level for ICSOM from outside the organization continues to rise. Acceptability for its own sake has never been striven for, however, ICSOM has much to contribute in addition to its service to its members. It is important to attract willing listeners for we have something to say. The subscription list for Senza Sordino now includes innumerable A.F. of M. locals; orchestra associations as far away as Hong Kong; virtually every governmental agency concerned with the Arts; a long list of periodicals, libraries, authors, critics and music schools. In addition, the appointment of ICSOM Chairman, Irving Segall to serve on the Orchestra Section of the Music Advisory Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts reflects with honor upon the organization as well as himself.

This vignette of ICSOM history and the accompanying summary of its accomplishments are common knowledge to most of its membership. Although not an organizational trait, it becomes necessary upon occasion to “blow ones own horn” for the influx of new players into our orchestras is constant. To tell what has transpired since 1962 should become a part of new member orientation. Also, for many, ICSOM may have become to mean little more than six issues of Senza Sordino and a request for a dues payment once a year. It is a problem we face, since more personal contact is primarily the privilege of our delegates and orchestra committees. However, it must be emphasized that ICSOM represents an investment and it must be protected. Perhaps an occasional reminder of difficulties that had to be dealt with in order, along with the admonition that history can surely repeat itself where complacency becomes the order of the day. The chart appearing in this issue will remind some of what earning a living 25 years ago entailed.

The symphony scene is perpetually in crisis. Orchestra associations in many instances are financially strained. The role of government in perpetuating the symphony orchestra as a fully functioning institution in our communities will become increasingly crucial. There is developing a new group of orchestras whose members are clearly voicing their discontent with the condition of part time employment in their orchestras. Orchestra opportunities for exposure, as electronic media becomes increasingly important in bringing the performing arts into the living room, will open up new areas for discussion.

The ICSOM conference table must remain a significant site for discussion of these subjects along with others.
### MAJOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SURVEY — 1952-1953

THIS SURVEY COVERS EMPLOYMENT BY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS WHOSE MEMBERS ARE EMPLOYED BY THE WEEK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>NAME OF ORCHESTRA</th>
<th>Number of Men No. of Orchestras</th>
<th>Number of Weeks</th>
<th>Minimum Scale</th>
<th>Seasonal Budget</th>
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<td>Boston</td>
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TWO VIEWS ON TECHNICAL PERFECTION

(From Senza Sordino, April, 1965)

Victor Alessandro
Conductor of the San Antonio Symphony

In an interview with the sports editor of the San Antonio News, Mr. Alessandro finds that symphony musicians are “far beneath the study pace of less complicated things—like football.”

Mr. Alessandro explains: “I’m referring to the study. The homework. A good college or pro football team is far advanced in technical study over us. They have first class movies made of every performance—sometimes films made of just workouts—and they study them carefully. When they make an error they know exactly who did it and why. They work for long hours to correct each error. They have end coaches, line coaches, backfield coaches, defense coaches, offense coaches, and head coaches. They’re far advanced over musical groups.”

Mr. Alessandro feels that symphonies won’t be able to catch up for a long time. “But”, he says, “if we had the money, I’d love to put a tiny tape recorder on or near each instrument during a performance. Then, and only then, would we be able to determine exactly who did exceptionally well and who committed errors during a difficult selection.” Mr. Alessandro says that several hundred errors can be committed in just 2 or 3 seconds at some concerts. He concludes: “...it makes no difference which orchestra you’re talking about. There’s that much margin for error, and when you’re dealing in the possibility of hundreds of errors in a 2 second period, just imagine how many boots you might get during a lengthy selection. No, I’m afraid we’re not nearly far enough advanced. Certainly, not as far as professional football.”

A View of Conducting Technique

“(Conductors) also possess their own brand of technique. Evidently there is such a thing as technique, but if there is, then how is it that a man who has never conducted or studied conducting is capable of giving an acceptable performance without warning and on the spur of the moment? No one can expect a comparable feat on any instrument.” —Gregor Piatigorsky

CONFERENCE DATE ANNOUNCED

The 1977 ICSOM Conference will be held in Cleveland from Monday, August 29th to Friday, September 2nd. Registration will take place Monday morning. The first meeting will begin in the afternoon. The Conference will terminate Friday afternoon. One day has been added to accommodate an expanding agenda and more work sessions. Delegates are urged to note the above dates. Further information will be forthcoming in the near future.

“PARDON US!” DEPARTMENT

Data pertaining to the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra in the Wage Chart appearing in the last issue of Senza Sordino was not accurate. Their season is 41 weeks long; $200, weekly wage; $8,200 guaranteed annual salary.

The basic salary attributed to members of the Berlin Philharmonic in the last issue of Senza Sordino was incorrectly translated from Deutsche marks to dollars. The basic salary is $32,807 yearly, not $27,600, yearly as quoted.

A very different point of view is expressed by Mr. Rich in a recent article entitled: In Defense of Wrong Notes. Mr. Rich says: “...Lately there has come about a rather distorted attitude toward the value of technical perfection in the total scheme of a musical performance.”

Mr. Rich feels this mania for perfection has been fostered largely by the recording industry. He finds that “Symphony orchestras do not play in person the way they do on records, even setting aside the distortions in total sound introduced by the so called ‘high-fidelity’ recording process. They are more human in person, and in being so they are more prone to the weaknesses of the flesh.” After recalling some concerts in which artists goofed, Mr. Rich concludes that none of the “errors” have anything to do with the artistry of the people involved, but have a great deal to do with their humanness and fallability. He says, “Superior persons tend to rise up in overwhelming wrath when a horn-player at a symphonic concert bumps an occasional note, or when a pianist or singer runs into an air pocket on the way to his goal. A baseball player who can finish a season with a batting average of .300 is a rare and wonderful phenomenon, but in music we demand 1.000 or there is no contest.

(P.S. The .400 hitter will make more money than the 1.000 singer could ever count.)”

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CSO PREMIERES BICENTENNIAL FANFARE FEATURING BASSES

The world premiere of Frank Proto’s Bicentennial Fanfare, commissioned by Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra Music Director Thomas Schippers, was performed by the CSO November 5 and 6 at Cincinnati’s Music Hall under the baton of Maestro Schippers. The work was one of a series commissioned by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in celebration of the bicentennial year.

BIRDLAND CONCERTGEBOUW

(From Senza Sordino, 1964)

“The union’s concern—and the public’s—must be for ‘sandlot’ players from the colleges, the dance bands, the night clubs and the bandstands who must fill the symphonic chairs of tomorrow.”

Herman Kenin (from “Conserving America’s Cultural Resources” Published in the AFL-CIO “American Federalist”)

FM LISTENER BUYING PREFERENCES SURVEYED

A rather impressive fifty volume survey was completed by a New York research firm last year concerning itself with the buying habits of radio listeners. The analytical material is drawn from the preferences of music listeners of every persuasion from classical to rock. A summary of the survey was presented last summer at the Concert Music Broadcasters’ Association conference. They learned that classical listeners are the superior consumers of more than half of the 900 products mentioned in the research. The study disproves what manufacturers generally assert; that classical listeners aren’t worth a mass appeal.

If you tune in to your local F.M. classical station, you are apt to be a most susceptible target for pitches on European vacations, wines, imported cars and banking and investment services, according to the survey. In addition, broadcasters think that they can now more adeptly advertise to your taste preferences in such mundane items as salad dressings, toilet tissue, dog food, hair spray and vacation spots.

You are an excellent target for books and records by mail; a consumer of yogurt and roquefort or blue cheese dressing. You are twice as likely to spend $100 a year on camping equipment and four times as apt to own a sailboat.

So, be on guard when you set your F.M. radio dial. It seems that you have been computerized by the advertiser.

TO A CONVALESCING FIRST CHAIR PLAYER

(From The Music Journal, 1963)

The boys here at the Philharmonic Miss you very sadly.
Old Harry Brown, who’s in your chair, Says he, too, feels badly;
He played your solo well last night.
He never missed a phrase.
He played it just like you used to do.
With all your winsome ways.
Twelve encores he played with ease.
Each note by you inspired.
And by the way, the maestro says To tell you that you’re fired!

—Harvey Rudoff

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New Haven Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, New York City Ballet, New
York City Opera, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Rochester
Philharmonic, Syracuse Symphony, National Symphony.

SOUTHERN ORCHESTRAS
Elizabeth Patterson Girko, Dallas Symphony
4051 Meadowdale Dr., Dallas, Texas 75209,
Phone: (214) 350-7196

Atlanta Symphony, Birmingham Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Florida Sym-
phony, Houston Symphony, Kansas City Philharmonic, Nashville Symphony,
New Orleans Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, St. Louis Symphony.

CENTRAL ORCHESTRAS
Bert Siegel, Cleveland Orchestra
2821 N. Moreland Blvd., Cleveland, O. 44120,
Phone: (216) 752-0344

Chicago Lyric Opera, Chicago Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Clevel-
land Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Milwaukee
Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony.

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