

Senza Sordino

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Orchestra Players Make Significant Gains at AFM Convention

A motion passed at the 1988 ICSOM conference directed the governing board to "pursue the establishment of a committee to formulate a working model demonstrating the governing structure, budget, services, and other features of a symphony, opera, and ballet trade division within the AFM." Subsequently, such a committee was formed with the other player conferences (ROPA, OCSM, and RMA) and representatives of the AFM. A labor expert recently retired from the AFL-CIO was found by the player representatives and engaged to advise the committee; his fee is being paid by the AFM.

Considering the complexity of this issue and the short time available before legislation had to be submitted in order to be acted on at the biennial AFM convention, the committee examined what could be done to address some immediate problems of orchestra players. The committee proposed two changes in the AFM bylaws; these changes were presented at the 1989 AFM convention as International Executive Board recommendations #20 and #24.

IEB recommendation #20 amended the AFM bylaws to require that in representing members of ICSOM, OCSM, and ROPA orchestras, local unions shall provide at no additional expense to the members involved, other than their regularly imposed initiation fees, periodic dues, and work dues:

- competent representation in negotiations, as the situation requires and the orchestra may reasonably request;
- continuing contract administration, including the handling of grievances and arbitration;
- reasonable and necessary out-of-pocket expenses (phone, copying, etc.) incurred by the orchestra committee in assisting the local in negotiations and contract administration;
- reasonable and necessary expenses of sending one delegate to the appropriate annual conference (ICSOM, OCSM, or ROPA).

The symphony department will supervise the locals' responsibilities, including determination of the adequacy and suitability of representation furnished for negotiations. Recommendation #20 also provides that members of an orchestra may request for reasonable cause to have the orchestra placed in the orchestra service program. (Prior language allowed only a local to request to place an orchestra in the OSP.)

Recommendation #24 provides that each player conference can send to the AFM convention "3 non-voting delegates who shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges of other delegates except the right to nominate candidates for office, to participate in any

debate of nominations, to serve on AFM convention committees, and to vote in election of officers or on any matter presented to the AFM convention." This "voice without vote" was considered necessary for any future changes proposed by the committee, as player conference representatives have previously been at AFM conventions by invitation rather than by right.

The impact of these bylaw changes on symphony musicians is significant, and the fact that representatives of the four player conferences were there as a united front talking to delegates and testifying in the law and finance committees on behalf of these changes is equally significant. Both recommendations were passed by overwhelming margins and will become Federation bylaws on September 15, 1989.

Of great concern was resolution #8 (not an IEB recommendation), which would have increased the work dues of orchestras and musicians doing work under national contracts (phonograph, television, or radio). This proposal would have resulted in some members of the union (symphony and recording musicians) paying work dues while others did not. Although it would not have been the first instance in our union, the issue of unequal work dues collection is of great concern to all of us. The attempt to legitimize such a structure with a Federation bylaw was astonishing. We were dismayed that the champions of this resolution had not bothered to consult those members of the union (symphony and recording musicians) who would be most affected. Happily, good sense prevailed and the resolution was defeated.

This was an important AFM convention for the union concerns of ICSOM and the other player conferences. While the representatives of the player conferences worked hard before and during the convention, none of what happened would have been possible without the support of numerous Federation and local officers.

Attending from the four player conferences were Brad Buckley, ICSOM chairperson; Melanie Burrell, ICSOM president; Carolyn Parks, ICSOM governing board; John Trembath, OCSM chairman; Evelyn Robitaille, OCSM vice-chairman; Rosemary Estes, ROPA president; Dennis Dreith, RMA president; Jay Berliner, RMA secretary; and Sheldon Sanov, RMA executive board. The collegiality and unity of purpose among the player conferences is gratifying and will be a source of strength in future endeavors.

Brad Buckley
ICSOM Chairperson

Black Musicians in the ICSOM Orchestras

by Debbie Torch, Editor

Given the overwhelming majority of white players in ICSOM orchestras, many musicians might be tempted to think minority issues are someone else's problem, if anybody's. However, for ethical as well as pragmatic reasons, this is a subject we must confront if our institutions are to move forward. To make informed decisions and reach an intelligent organizational stance about this topic, we must consider carefully the hiring practices of symphony orchestras, as well as the history of minority employment and participation both on and off the stage.

Although the term "minority" is often used to categorize Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, women, and so on, this article will confine minority issues to those of Afro-American (black) players in our orchestras. Black musicians interviewed for this article were: Darwyn Apple, violin, St. Louis Symphony; Ralph Curry, cello, Cleveland Orchestra; Patricia Prattis Jennings, keyboard, Pittsburgh Symphony; Elayne Jones, tympani, San Francisco Opera; Ann Hobson Pilot, harp, Boston Symphony; Rick Robinson, bass, Detroit Symphony; Joseph Striplin, violin, Detroit Symphony; and Donald White, cello, Cleveland Orchestra.

Information indicates that since colonial times, there have been black musicians trained in classical music. In her article, "American Orchestras and the Black Musician" (*Symphony Magazine*, August/September 1988), D. Antoinette Handy refers to newspaper advertisements of the 1700's citing slaves who played French horn and violin. Why is the integration of orchestras such a recent phenomenon?

The History of ICSOM Involvement

The scarcity of black players in ICSOM orchestras has long been an issue for ICSOM. In 1962 and 1963, ICSOM publicly called for equal employment opportunity for black musicians and integration of the concert hall audience.

A front-page story in the January 1969 (Vol 7, no. 2) issue of *Senza Sordino* saluted musicians of the Buffalo Philharmonic for initiating a minority outreach program. *Senza Sordino* articles in the 1970's detailed the minority training programs in other orchestras including Los Angeles, Honolulu, and Seattle.

As race relations and affirmative action became more compelling issues for society in the late 1960's and early 1970's, ICSOM became more committed to the area of minority concerns. Dr. Leon Thompson, administrator of the Music Assistance Fund (MAF), was a guest speaker at the 1976 ICSOM conference. A new committee was formed to help Dr. Thompson implement the MAF Orchestral Fellowship program in ICSOM orchestras. A minority affairs committee created at the 1977 ICSOM conference in Cleveland recommended increased participation in the MAFOF program, support of other existing community-based programs, and creation of programs where none existed.

At the 1987 ICSOM conference in Salt Lake City, a resolution was passed expressing concern that despite attempts to increase hiring of minorities in orchestras, there has not been appreciable progress. The conference voted that one of three annual ICSOM scholarships to the Congress of Strings be devoted to a minority

musician. A minority committee was appointed to explore all aspects of minority membership in orchestras.

In 1988 that committee reported its findings to the Buffalo conference: There are approximately 94 black instrumental students enrolled in the nation's conservatories and music departments. Thus, even if every black student wanted to play in an orchestra and each won an audition, there would still only be a few in each orchestra. A further problem is the low audience turnout among blacks.

Why aren't there more black players in orchestras?

Two general explanations have been advanced for this phenomenon, one economic, the other cultural. In one view, classical music is a luxury enjoyed by the upper class, regardless of color. Many children don't have the opportunities for exposure to classical music. The cultural explanations for lack of black participation in all aspects of the orchestra are manifold. First, as with the general population, classical music is not the most popular form of music in the black community. There are perceptions in the black community that classical music is a white plaything and that the orchestras are white institutions. Joe Striplin offered an explanation of why some blacks might view participation in such white institutions as betrayal of black culture and people. "A long time ago, some black slaves got preferential treatment such as jobs in the house. They were paid to inform on the other slaves and tended to identify with the owners. At that time, as well as today in South Africa, persons born of a white man and black woman would be treated better. That's the original meaning of the term 'oreo'; but now it means one whose loyalty is not wholly on the side of blacks." The stigma attached to such disloyalty may be felt by blacks who participate in orchestras as performers, staff, audience, or volunteers.

Elayne Jones explained that awareness is a big component of the cultural problem. "We need to make people aware that the music is around them—at church, at the movies, lots of places—and that it is for everybody; there's nothing exclusive about it. Then more people will pursue it and come to concerts."

Players disagreed over whether the small number of black musicians in ICSOM orchestras is a problem. Ann Hobson Pilot stated, "I think anything we can do to bring more blacks into the orchestras is good." However, there seemed to be great reluctance on the part of most players interviewed to extend affirmative action to orchestras. Joe Striplin maintained, "Blacks don't need affirmative action; they can win orchestra jobs [on merit]. It is not a disgrace that there are few blacks in the orchestras. It is a disgrace that there are no black senators or governors, and *that* is a result of racism."

Striplin brought up some reasons why blacks are different from other minorities. He cited how some groups such as the Irish were discriminated against at the turn of the century but have now assimilated. The Irish were a religious as well as cultural minority, but they emigrated to communities already in place, had a support system, and were Caucasian. Blacks have been here hundreds of years but they were slaves: in addition to their forced labor, they

were indoctrinated with their masters' attitudes about the inferiority of blacks. Another legacy of slavery is the lack of good black family life—families were often split up and sold and people were made to breed with whomever the owners wanted them to. This led to family trouble. I think people have more aversion to blacks than to any other ethnic group. Technically we've had equal rights only since 1964. That's only 25 years ago that a person living in Mississippi could go to the University of Mississippi."

Black musicians who have been in the profession longest seem to have experienced the most racial discrimination. Perhaps there is solace in knowing that some doors have been opened for later generations of musicians. Donald White related his entry into the profession. "When I first started, people thought blacks didn't have the potential to play serious music. It used to be insufferable. In the Midwest, employers would tell me point-blank, they did Southern tours and didn't take black musicians (in those days, Negroes)."

He recalled, "When I got out of the Navy, I wanted to use my G.I. benefits to study cello seriously. My teacher took me down to Cincinnati, which was the closest conservatory. We waited for Walter Herman, who was principal cellist in the orchestra and head

of the cello department. He came out of his studio, took one look at me, and said to my teacher, 'Oh my God, I didn't know he was black. We don't take black students here.' That was in 1945 or '46. So we packed our things and went back to Indiana."

White has now played in the Cleveland Orchestra for 32 seasons. "I was a curiosity when I came into the CO. I got into the orchestra before public accommodations. We made a Southern tour in about 1959. The orchestra signed a letter with George Szell's name at the top, saying they would refuse to play anyplace in the South that there was difficulty in my going on stage. But the orchestra did not support me in accommodations. I stayed on black campuses or with black families and I had a special per diem. The CO gave me big support on playing conditions. When we got to Birmingham, the hall officials said there was some kind of city ordinance which didn't allow the hall to be integrated. Integrated meant one black in a 105-piece orchestra. The concert had sold out about three months before, so the problem was solved immediately. It's hard to believe that then, even in the late fifties and early sixties, I didn't have freedom of movement. It was incredible."

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Hiring of Rick Robinson Provokes Strong Reactions

When the Detroit Symphony appointed bass player Rick Robinson to a tenure-track position last March, national reaction was considerable. Robinson had played as a substitute in the DSO occasionally and during the orchestra's 6-week European tour in 1988. His appointment followed widely publicized threats by two state senators from Detroit to cut over \$1 million in state aid if more black musicians were not hired by the DSO.

Although not the typical hiring practice today, certainly the appointment of a substitute player to a permanent position without an open audition is not unheard of in ICSOM orchestras. Yet black musicians were sharply divided in their attitudes about Robinson's hiring. Some players, like Ralph Curry, were opposed to the hiring on the grounds that "it might have set back the cause of black musicians quite a bit, because it opens the door for questions of reverse discrimination, for problems of artistic integrity. It makes people look at me and say 'Maybe he got his job the same way.' That's conviction without a trial." Some players went so far as to say they wish Robinson had turned down the job and that they hope black musicians will boycott DSO auditions.

On the other side, players like Ann Pilot observe a double standard along racial lines: "In an unusual circumstance like the DSO was in, someone should be able to have a job without an audition. Rick had proven himself as a player there. This has happened before—not necessarily for blacks, but it's happened for whites. For example, there have been players in Boston who subbed with us for many years and were just given the job when it

became available. But when it's a black player, everybody seems to think that's wrong, that standards are lowered."

The DSO's managing director, Deborah Borda, feels that Robinson has gotten short shrift in all the media coverage. "The most important fact in this whole matter is that Rick Robinson is a tremendous musician and will make a very strong artistic contribution to the orchestra. But the national press made it sound like he'd taken up the bass a couple of weeks ago. If people ask honestly how auditions are carried out in this country, he had the most rigorous audition a person could have. He spent close to a year playing in this orchestra. His colleagues unanimously said he would make a strong contribution to the orchestra. Some major orchestras do not have really open auditions, but they manage to get away with it.

"The DSO looked something in the face and took action. It's a symbolic action because it was only one person. The legislators raising the question felt ignored and shut out; we hadn't had good lines of communication with them, and that has changed. The orchestra is facing serious financial difficulties, and Senators Holmes and Hood have been advocates for us in the press. That's a real turnaround.

"I think we are probably the national leader of all the orchestras in terms of our affirmative action program. Our story wasn't being told, and as a result, the issue telescoped into the single issue of how many black musicians were on the stage. But it's a broader and more complex question than that."

Robinson Responds

What do you say to black players who claim your DSO appointment negates their achievements?

I wouldn't outright disagree. I understand where they're coming from. My appointment may make them feel devalued as professional musicians. These players got their jobs by audition and they certainly deserve to be there. Only with my appointment has the question of minority player quotas come up. I think this has been the first affirmative action hire. I think there are only long-term solutions to this problem. I hope there aren't hiring practice changes—I don't favor affirmative action in the orchestra even though I'm an example. But I only did it to help bridge the gap between Senator Hood and the orchestra.

How do you respond to black players who wish you'd turned down the job?

I thought long about turning it down, because I really didn't want to get involved in the politics and the implications of the situation. But I thought about all the orchestra had been through, with its former management and its ever-continuing financial crisis. Not to receive the state funds would be the last thing the orchestra needed. So I thought I'd jump in. I can see two sides of the coin. But what I had to decide was what's best for me. I've taken about 20 auditions and will take more in a few years.

How do you feel about the press coverage you've had?

I wrote a letter to the *New York Times* saying that they made me look like just any Black Joe the DSO was hiring, and they sent me a rebuttal saying they made me look qualified because the bass section had unanimously voted me in and that I'd been subbing with the orchestra off and on—but both of those could be mistaken as politically motivated. The press really didn't mention my credentials—I've subbed with the Boston Symphony after I made the finals there, have played with Boston Pops for several seasons, won a concerto competition in New Jersey, studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and completed one year of graduate study at the New England Conservatory. I've played with the Aspen, Spoleto, and Colorado Philharmonic festivals.

How did you get to be a sub in the DSO?

I'm from Detroit. When I went back for Christmas vacation, the assistant personnel manager (who is also the assistant principal bass player) called and offered to let me play for him. The DSO was using out-of-town bass subs while two players were on sick leave. I played for him, he seemed favorably impressed and they used me a few weeks here and there in 1988. My longest engagement with the orchestra was a 6-week European tour last June.

Have you had feedback from other black players around country?

A little bit; it's largely favorable, and also confused—they didn't think hiring me would grow into the issue that it has.

What do you think it will be like when you start your job?

I plan to go in and be as professional as I can.

Do you feel under pressure that you have to be better than professional?

Not really. I plan to go there and be comfortable doing the job I usually do. I don't think they would have hired me if they didn't think my professional standards were high enough.

How do you feel about the public's perception of your hiring?

Not uncomfortable. I'm still young and ambitious. I plan to do at least three recitals next year. I plan to get out and prove myself in solo playing and play the best I can in the orchestra as well. I think that should be proof enough. I'm more concerned about the enrollment of blacks in music conservatories or just black involvement in classical music. I'm thinking of working up a program and going out into the schools and giving lecture-demo music appreciation programs.

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Elayne Jones feels she has faced racism throughout her career, and noted, "You have to be a strong person to pursue music when you're faced with all that. A lot of young people aren't aware of what it was like. I guess it's hard for people to keep dwelling on it, but if you don't, you don't make enough progress, or when you do come up against racism, you don't know how to deal with it."

"Loneliness in the group" is a common phenomenon. Ann Hobson Pilot has been the only black player in the Boston Symphony for 20 years. "At first it was kind of awkward, and I think it was awkward for the other players too, because I got some strange comments. One guy came up to me and said, 'You must fry some *mean* chicken!' I guess that's what he thought was kind of cool or what you're supposed to say to a black person. I just thought 'Well, this is strange!' It was the same in the National Symphony; I was the only black player there too. After a while you get used to it. I keep hoping with every audition that another black player will come. And it's gotten close. Eventually it will happen!"

Joe Striplin noted, "I don't get any extra pay for being the only black in the orchestra! I haven't experienced any overt discrimination here. Some people have never known a black and say things out of ignorance, not malice or racism. For example, someone interested in history was a Civil War buff and kind of gung-ho on the Confederacy, and I had to explain that the Confederate flag to me is like a swastika would be to a Jewish person. I didn't assume the person was saying he wanted to see slavery, but figured that he had some regional pride being from the South. I didn't encounter any resentment at all when I came into the orchestra. Most of the time I don't think about the fact that I'm the only black here. When the question of affirmative action came up, suddenly I became really conscious of being black. It was awkward because I can see both sides of the issue. You have to be confident and when necessary, put forth a point of view people haven't heard before. Some of my colleagues have a very hypocritical and stern response to affirmative action. I'm not afraid to talk with them about it. It's uncomfortable to think that people have those views and that maybe even more do who won't say it out loud when I'm around."

Networking Among Black Musicians

Last September, the first conference of black orchestra musicians took place at Arden House in New York. (More details about the conference, which was sponsored by the Music Assistance Fund, will appear in the next issue of *Senza Sordino*.) One outgrowth of that conference was a black players' newsletter *Symphonium*, produced by Patricia Prattis Jennings. "I started the newsletter because Arden House was a fabulous conference, and I met musicians from all over whose activities I didn't even know about. I think people really need to know there's a lot of good stuff going on. I printed 250 copies of the first issue, 700 of the second. Right now I'm still in the hole financially, but I don't mind losing a few hundred dollars to get the newsletter going. One of my interesting discoveries has been that there is a lot of inter-racial marriage; apparently it's difficult for black classical musicians to

find a black spouse." [For subscription information, contact Patricia Jennings, 1349 N. Sheridan Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15206.]

Although several players noted the emergence of local networks of young classical players, there has not been much national networking among black musicians. Ann Hobson Pilot maintains, "One of the reasons the black players don't have a sense of community is because we are so scattered. There's one black player in Boston, none in Chicago, three in Philly, one or two in NY... One meeting in 20 or 30 years does not make any kind of a network. The newsletter is good—young people can read it, get ideas, have a support system. If we could have a meeting once a year, we could get more of a support system."

The black audience member also usually faces being one of few, if any, at concerts. Few whites probably relate to this common experience, which some blacks describe as an intimidating one. Ralph Curry noted that sometimes the presence of even one black person on stage can make a difference: "You know the door isn't completely closed."

Black Role Models

The importance of black role models is controversial. Some black musicians felt black role models were not necessary. Darwyn Apple recalled the first symphony concert he attended as a child: "I wasn't looking for blacks—I was looking for that instrument that had caught my ear when I listened to records. Role models were of no significance in my growth." But Ann Pilot remembers noticing as a child that there were no blacks in the Philadelphia Orchestra and that she thought to herself, "That's something I can't do." Seeing no blacks in the Detroit Symphony didn't intimidate Joe Striplin, who vowed that someday, he would be playing in the orchestra. However, he posed the question of why there are not more women composers or conductors. "Is it because women, like blacks, have learned not to aspire to be certain things?"

Musicians are reaching out to their local black communities in a variety of ways. Some accept students who are unable to pay. Some, like Joe Striplin, go to the schools to promote classical music and are also involved in training or community orchestras. Others, like Elayne Jones and Donald White, have done Young Audiences programs to foster music appreciation. Darwyn Apple has addressed schools and civic groups. Patricia Jennings is producing a chamber music series for which organizations like the NAACP market tickets in return for a portion of the ticket revenue.

What Should Hiring Practices Be?

Auditions have their proponents and their detractors. Some blacks would prefer to keep an audition system with screens up to the time a candidate is hired. Donald White suggested dispensing with the current system altogether, in favor of one which would employ an emeritus panel of musicians retired from major orchestras or other arts establishments. "Emeritus musicians wouldn't have too many axes to grind: they're out of the field, they've got overview, and they've got experience—the best requirements for objectivity. I'd rather not throw power into the hands of musicians; they have too much personal agenda. I think auditions are fraught with favoritism."

Elayne Jones proposed that the professional sports draft

**One guy
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chicken!"**

system be adapted to fit orchestras.

Ann Pilot pointed out, "Absolutely no lowering of standards is needed to get black players in. For example, I've been on [audition] committees here in Boston where there has been a black player who was obviously excellent, who made the finals and for one reason or another was not chosen. That can happen time after time. Once it came down to a black man and a white woman who was the girlfriend of an orchestra member. Both of them played very well, but the committee knew her. It would be hard for me to believe they didn't take that into account. If you're not known, everyone is cautious of you, even though they may not be consciously saying, 'I don't want that guy cause he's black.' We need to enlarge the pool of players."

Ralph Curry voiced concern that screened auditions can't be changed in a way to preserve everybody's rights. "People in the profession have worked so hard to make it fair for others to join that it would be a step backwards to do anything to the audition procedures."

Regarding screens, Darwyn Apple commented, "For concertmaster or leadership positions, you would want to see the person playing in the orchestra, but for other positions, I wonder why people want to see the auditionees if playing skills are the only skills that matter."

The players interviewed for this article constitute only a cross-section of black musicians in the ICSOM orchestras. It is apparent that many factors contribute to the small number of black musicians in our orchestras. It is also apparent that the black presence in ICSOM is made up of many varieties of outlook and experience. There is not *one* black voice, there are many. It is time those voices were heard as all of us grapple with seemingly unanswerable questions.

Part II of this series will examine outreach programs.

NEA Appropriations

The June 30, 1989, ICSOM Bulletin alerted ICSOM orchestras that funding for the National Endowment for the Arts was seriously threatened. AFM President Emerson personally solicited help from officials at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington and was promised full support. AFM National Legislative Director Ned Guthrie was directly involved in this effort. President Emerson was in phone contact almost daily with ICSOM Chairperson Brad Buckley. At press time, the minimally cut NEA appropriations had passed the House, and there was significant AFL-CIO presence in the House during debate on this bill.

Agenda:1989 ICSOM Conference at Aspen

Wednesday, August 23, 1989

Address by AFM President J. Martin Emerson
 Reports by ICSOM Officers
 Remarks by OCSM Chairman John Trembath
 Address by ROPA President Rosemary Estes
 Address by RMA President Dennis Dreith
 Address by ICSOM Emeritus Program Coordinator Abe Torchinsky
 Nominations for Governing Board Members-at-Large and Secretary
 "Unity & Solidarity" Address by Retired Symphony Player Russell Brodine

Thursday morning, August 24, 1989

Report of the Structure/Trade Division Committee
 Discussion of Officers' Reports
 Report of ICSOM Counsel Leibowitz/DuBrul
 Report of AFM Symphony Department

Thursday afternoon, August 24, 1989

Report on Amalgamation of Medical Plans
 Media Committee Report
 Open Forum Discussion
 Workshop: Signs of Trouble, Continuance, and Growth

Friday morning, August 25, 1989

Special Situations
 Minority Issues
 Election of Officers

Friday afternoon, August 25, 1989

Panel discussion: What Should a Local Do For Symphony Musicians? What Should Symphony Musicians Do For Their Local Union?

Moderator: Richard Q. Totusek, IEB

Participants: Local Union Presidents Milton H. Carter (Honolulu), John Glase (NYC), Dick Renna (St. Louis), Tim Shea (Orlando), and Steve Young (Boston; IEB)

Reports from Negotiating Orchestras
 Workshop: Negotiations & Pensions

Saturday morning, August 26, 1989

Address by Anne Murphy, Executive Director, American Arts Alliance
 Reports from Negotiating Orchestras

Saturday afternoon, August 26, 1989

New Business
 Workshop: Committee Administration and Accessing the AFM

Sunday morning, August 27, 1989

Selection of 1990 Conference Site
 Good and Welfare

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