On March 26, 2009, in Washington, D.C., ICSOM Chairperson Bruce Ridge was honored to deliver testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor at the Committee’s Hearing on the Economic and Employment Impact of the Arts and Music Industry. The trip was arranged through AFM’s Legislative Office with the help of Director of Government Relations Hal Ponder. Below is the text of Chairperson Ridge’s testimony.

Good morning, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and members of the Committee. My name is Bruce Ridge. I am chairman of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, or ICSOM, which is a conference of the American Federation of Musicians. I’m also a double-bassist in the North Carolina Symphony. On behalf of ICSOM’s thousands of members and AFM’s tens of thousands of members—comprising over 230 affiliated locals across the country, including Local 367 in Vallejo and Local 424 in Richmond, in your district, Mr. Chairman—I thank you for your attention to this issue.

In 1932, my orchestra was founded by the WPA. That was also a time of economic crisis, but instead of cutting back, we invested in the arts.

Critics sometimes say that classical music is just for the elite. But as an orchestral musician, I know how much everyone loves to hear us play. The numbers bear this out: Opera attendance has increased 40% since 1990. Classical music accounts for 12% of sales on iTunes, and music schools across the country are seeing an all-time high in numbers of applicants.

Musicians don’t do it for the money. We’re ultimately the nation’s biggest donors to the arts, and we’re the ones who sacrifice to keep orchestras alive in hard times. We happily give to the arts, but we must still pay doctors’ bills, make rent, and feed our families.

I’ve been fortunate in my career. I started playing at age 10, and I’ve worked steadily as an orchestral musician for 30 years. By age 15, I was a working professional in the Virginia Symphony. I would go from school to symphony, then play in late-night jazz clubs I was too young to legally get into otherwise. Back home by 3:00 AM, I’d be sitting in school just a few hours later. Although I may have started a bit younger than others, my story is not atypical. Many classical musicians work several jobs, driving from town to town as members of a “Freeway Philharmonic.” Some members work in as many as four different orchestras — each a different two-hour commute from home, and each with its own set of concerts, rehearsals, and community involvement.

In today’s economic climate, the challenges for working musicians are growing ever more serious. Many orchestras face the prospect of reduced seasons, layoffs, lower wages, and higher health care premiums. This is a national problem. The musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony, one of the world’s finest orchestras, recently accepted an 11% pay cut. The Baltimore Opera Company has filed for bankruptcy. The Santa Clarita Symphony, in your district Congressman McKeon, canceled its 2009 season. The musicians of the Honolulu Symphony are now seven weeks behind in paychecks. On a daily basis my phone rings with more news of yet another orchestra’s financial crisis.

For musicians, the losses are immeasurable. Some must sell their instruments to make ends meet, while others face the loss of their careers altogether. Many of these musicians have children or spouses who depend on them and who also suffer from these cutbacks. How could I respond, when a woodwind musician asked me how she could afford to take her child to the doctor after her orchestra’s proposed cutbacks?

Our losses are everyone’s losses. If musicians can’t afford to stay in the profession, the nation will lose its music.
I see little more of importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. How forward to an American which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft. I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens.

—John F. Kennedy, October 26, 1963

Advocacy and Activism: No More Than Ever

On January 20, all of America celebrated some of the nation’s greatest instrumentalists when Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Anthony McGill (Metropolitan Opera), and Gabriela Montero performed immediately prior to President Obama’s oath of office. I was privileged to be standing backstage at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis, watching the historic event with the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra. Regardless of political ideology, all Americans could feel pride in celebrating the great tradition of the arts in this country, as represented by some of the greatest musicians of the century.

But less than 20 days after that inspirational moment, the music almost died in Congress.

There can be no doubt that America faces a recession the likes of which most of us have never seen in our lifetimes. As Washington has pondered how to construct a stimulus to our nation’s economy, huge numbers like $800 billion or $900 billion were discussed as if it were possible to comprehend them. Now, as of the Senate’s final action on the package, it is set at $783 billion.

Of that huge number, I saw no appropriation attacked as vigorously as the $50 million that was destined for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In fact, an amendment proposed by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) was adopted. The Coburn amendment prohibited the use of stimulus dollars for “museums, art centers, and theaters.” In proposing this egregious amendment, Senator Coburn somehow masterfully (or should I say artlessly) tied funding for the arts to proposing this egregious amendment, Senator Coburn somehow pondered how best to construct a stimulus to our nation’s economy, but less than 20 days after that inspirational moment, the music almost died in Congress.

The National Review wrote: “The National Endowment for the Arts is in line for $50 million. The unemployed can fill their days attending abstract-film festivals and sitar concerts.”

This statement of course astonishingly ignores the fact that 5.7 million jobs are provided by the arts. And really—sitar concerts was the best they could come up with?

Representative Jack Kingston (R-GA) said (from the Congressional Quarterly): “I just think putting people to work is more important than putting more art on the wall of some New York City gallery frequented by the elite art community. Call me a sucker for the working man.”

Whether or not Rep. Kingston happens to be a sucker, I will suggest that he is terribly misinformed and is merely repeating the tired talking points provided by pundits from over two decades ago.

The press was quick to add nothing to the debate, aside from ill-informed stereotypes.

True to form, Congress has loaded the bill with hundreds of billions in wasteful spending. The bill includes $550 million for digital TV coupons, $140 million to study the atmosphere and weather for the National Endowment for the Arts. None of these proposals would create jobs or boost our economy. They’re just old-fashioned waste.

The National Endowment for the Arts would get $50 million for new exhibits to deem America racist and sexist.

The arts in America are a tremendous investment, providing an almost unprecedented return. Every dollar that the government invests in the arts returns seven dollars to the community. The $50 million dollars that Senator Coburn attempted to rip from the stimulus package has the potential to return $350 million to our nation’s economy. What other elements of our government spend the value of the taxpayer’s hard earned dollar?

Here is what the arts mean for the economy of our nation each year:

- $104.2 billion in household income
- $7.9 billion in local government tax revenues
- $9.1 billion in state government tax revenues
- $12.6 billion in federal income tax revenues

It easy for Senator Coburn and the National Review to repeat an unchallenged rhetoric from the 1980s about NEA funding of specific projects. But their constituents, and the entire nation, deserve better at this time of economic crisis.
In Troubled Times: The Case for the Arts
by JoAnn Falletta

From the Virginian-Pilot, February 15, 2009

I am a musician. I have known that simple fact since my seventh birthday, when I strapped my medicine bag and face mask around the little guitar that had been a gift from my grandmother. The bell on the front of my violin rang, as the cello and the bass did the same, as I tried to accommodate the double thickness of cloth and varnish, when I touched the golden fingerboard that would become my personal road to enchantment. Despite challenges, I have never had one moment of regret about that calling, nor a second of doubt about the vital role that music plays in the world around us. As a conductor, I have witnessed thousands of audiences—literally millions of listeners—come to the concert hall and leave, two hours later, in a place they would never have been able to imagine when they arrived, dazzled and distracted, earlier that evening. I feel a certain conflict of emotions as I write this essay—gratitude, certainly, for being given this opportunity to talk about the importance of the art form, but also a profound sorrow that classical music somehow finds itself desperately in need of advocates. Why should that be especially so in troubled economic times? Perhaps you might answer perhaps by Wall Street greed, by ineptive governance, by political leadership. But music has never betrayed us, never let us down. It constantly gives us back, as a boundlessly beautiful repository of the past or a vibrant mirror of our current society. The need for music is not learned—it is “hard-wired” into our being. Even infants respond to it and understand it. As we grow, our exposure to music sharpens our brains, awakens a heightened sense of individual awareness, helps us develop an appreciation for beauty and value.

The ancient Greeks in their extraordinarily sophisticated society understood the tremendous power of music. Plato himself espoused careful planning of the number of hours young people should listen to music in certain keys—so powerful was the influence of each key that it would have strong effects on the long-term personality and character of the young listeners! In my many visits to schools, I have observed that the musicians in the orchestra, band, or chorus are most often the students on the dean’s list, on the student council, in clubs and after-school activities and are often involved in community service as well. A strange coincidence! I don’t think so—I am convinced that the making of music teaches them the skills—discipline, patience, respect, and dedication—that enable them to succeed in all their endeavors.

We remain for all of our lives extremely sensitive to that power of music, which, when we harness it, gives us the confidence and the courage to negotiate that power. I have always been fond of Garrison Keillor’s words: “An orchestra concert is where people go to find their souls. Having worked so hard to lose them, people come and sit in the dark under the spell of music and are reminded of their humanity.” What happens? That room full of people—all with different issues on their minds—experiences a force that we can never fully explain. Listening, our sense of time changes, our focus sharpens, our problems fade, our priorities shift.

We all know that the “music business” has a strong positive effect on our economy. Facts and figures will bear out the statement that considerable economic benefits result from events and concerts. In many cases the cost comes back to the community. But that is truly beside the point. Music has a profound effect on our psyche, our understanding of ourselves, our view of a world grown inordinately small. In a global community where solutions will be found through creativity, ingenuity and imagination, music holds the key to nurturing the values that will help us find answers to seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Why do we need music as a nation, as citizens of the United States? Some Americans might claim that we are not an artistic people. I could not disagree more strongly. Americans invented film, jazz, modern dance, musical theater, country music, abstract impressionism. We are expressive, imaginative and imaginative. Our art echoes our essential American-ness—our willingness to experiment and to take risks, our desire to share and borrow and change, our egalitarianism, our inclusiveness, our endless curiosity and humor. This American art echoes every culture in the world, and has spread to the furthest reaches of the globe. The arts are how we explain ourselves and to know ourselves. They are woven into the very fabric of our complicated democracy and into the lives of the people. They are, in a very real way, the sum of our collective soul. American orchestras—and the Virginia Symphony and Buffalo Philharmonic music—are shining examples of this—are at the center of the arts in our country, and the cornerstone of our cultural society. Orchestras preserve our heritage, foster diversity, encourage creativity, and stand as a shining paradigm for excellence.

What do we remember and value from great civilizations of the past? Certainly it is not their business plans, their economic challenges, their financial success; nor their wars, their fleeting conquests, their eventual collapse. We remember the beautiful and telling legacy of their artistic life—the paintings, poetry, architecture, music, glowing brightly centuries after their creation, still able to move and touch us. Through their art, we realize that these long-dead creatures were really not so very different from us, filling their small parcel of life with as much beauty as they could. What will our great-grandchildren inherit from us? What will they remember? What will the economic recession of the early 21st century color their vision of the past or a vibrant mirror of our current society. The need for music is not learned—it is “hard-wired” into our being. Even infants respond to it and understand it. As we grow, our exposure to music sharpens our brains, awakens a heightened sense of individual awareness, helps us develop an appreciation for beauty and value.

In times of economic difficulty, the arts, rather than languishing as a discretionary luxury, becomes more vital to the human condition than music, what we hope our honor, our celebration of the past, our vision of a future. The very best of who we are is inherent in the arts, and the arts are at the core of the continual reinvigoration of our human spirit.

JoAnn Falletta has served as the music director of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra since 1991 and of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra since 1999. In 2008, he was appointed to be a member of the National Council on the Arts.

A Tribute to Ron Bauers
by Robert Levine, ICSOM Chairman Emeritus

The sexy end of our business is what happens on stage—maestri with great hair emerging from the wings to lead legendary orchestras and their performances of works representing the very pinnacle of human creativity before cheering crowds in historic and acoustically perfect halls. At least, that’s what our business looks like on a really good day.

But, like most human endeavors, what’s not visible is the whole picture. Our industry has spawned an entire ecosystem of support workers, from orchestra managers to music schools to labor unions. And all of those ventures spawn additional support systems of their own.

One of the most unique contributions to our business, and one that was seemingly far removed from the cheering crowds and great masterworks, was made by a musician and accountant named Ron Bauers. Ron died on January 12, 2009 at the age of 60. He left behind a remarkable record of achievement, a great many friends and admirers, and a gaping hole in our ecosystem.

Ron began his career in our business as a musician, although not an orchestral musician. He was a working guitarist who moved into union activism as a member of the executive board of the Omaha local of the AFM. He went back to school and earned an MBA from Creighton University in 1988, which led to his second career as an academic and the country’s leading expert on orchestral finances.

Ron’s contributions to our field began in the early 1990s, when he did a financial analysis of the Omaha Symphony, at the request of the local and the orchestra’s musicians, in order to assist them in negotiating a new contract. The analysis he did was so remarkable that he was soon engaged by other orchestras (including mine in 1993) and subsequently the AFM.

His work was distinguished from previous financial analyses done for AFM orchestras by three key factors: its quality, its pedigree, and the fact that it was intended for public consumption. Ron only worked from validated financial data; reports that orchestras were required to file and make publicly available. It was thus hard for orchestra management to argue with his figures—they were, at the end of the day, the figures that management had sworn were accurate.

If they tried to argue with his conclusions, they came up against another obstacle—Ron simply knew more about finances, accounting, and what their numbers meant than they did. And, because he worked from data that was publicly available and verifiable, and because he was not only an accountant but taught accounting at a major academic institution, his reports had great credibility with the press and the public.

But none of this would have been possible without Ron’s rigorous intellectual honesty. He was not shy about telling musicians who had commissioned his analyses that there were problems in trouble if that’s what the numbers showed him. While often his analyses showed that management could do much more for musicians than they thought possible, the main reason he refused to make any suggestions was in convincing the musicians that management had real reasons for concern and that the musicians needed to take those concerns seriously.

I vividly remember a meeting several years ago in Chicago where Ron did a presentation to a group of orchestra activists on orchestra finances. At one point he talked about how to think about endowments, in particular, how much money management should draw from endowments if they were to be sustainable of funding. Ron’s approach was extremely conservative, which did not surprise anyone who knew Ron. He was undoubtedly hoping that, when they went home and thought about the issue, they would realize that proposing unsustainable support for something like that was not in their long-term interests without him having to draw the conclusion for them.

But I have no doubt at all that Ron would have told them exactly what he thought of such proposals had anyone been impolitic enough to ask.

I had the pleasure of working extensively with Ron in my orchestra’s negotiations in 1993/94, as well as during my time as ICSOM chair. He not only did a wonderful analysis of our situation in Milwaukee, but talked at length to several local newspapers about that analysis, which resulted in some incredibly useful press for us. And he even came to Milwaukee, in the dead of a very cold winter, to present his findings to a “town hall” meeting and a negotiation session.

As time went on, he became known within the community of orchestra musicians as the person to go to for all things having to do with institutional finance. Ron was an extraordinarily popular and well-respected union activist about those issues with his many presentations at ICSOM and ROPA meetings, as well as with articles in union publications and on the Polyphonic site.

I wrote earlier that Ron’s work seemed far removed from the bright lights and the great performances. But, in many situations, it was his careful and indispensable analysis that was key to management activists about those issues with his many presentations at ICSOM and ROPA meetings, as well as with articles in union publications and on the Polyphonic site. (continued on page 8—see Ron Bauers)
Rely on Your Body? A Survey of Performing Arts Medicine by Richard Levine

First, a disclaimer—what this article is not intended to be: This article is not a substitute for medical care or medical judgment. If you have any medical concerns about your performance, you should consult a physician. (That first issue, by the way, included an article by our own former Senza Sordino editor, Tom Hall.)

In the intervening years, there has been much progress in meeting that need and disseminating such information. The first issue of Medicine and the Performing Arts was published in the April 1976 issue of Senza Sordino. It was a reprint of a letter in the New England Journal of Medicine that cautioned doctors to be aware of cardiac stresses on performing musicians. The subspecialty of performing arts medicine was in its infancy back then. In fact, an article from the New England Journal of Medicine that was published in the April 1976 issue of Senza Sordino was from a doctor with an interest in the developing field, for which he suggested the name “music medicine.” (The more widely used term “music medicine” eventually morphed into the more encompassing “performing arts medicine” in part to differentiate it from the field of music therapy, which uses music to heal.) He encouraged similarly inclined doctors to establish a network between health-care professionals and performing artists on a regular basis to share what was learned about health care when on the road. The July 1982 issue of Senza Sordino offered a cover story about the then-new use of beta blockers by musicians.

The first Symposium on the Medical Problems of Musicians was held in Aspen, Colorado, in 1983. The second Symposium was held in August of 1984. Janet Horvath, and Lucinda’s interest in embouchure injuries has turned into a massive, open-ended research project, covering many facets of the medical and psychological aspects of playing wind instruments. Janet’s research on embouchure injuries has taken her to every continent on the planet, and she has become an expert on the subject.

One musician who entered the field early on was Minnesota Orchestra cellist Janet Horvath, who got involved after having other problems with tendons. She established the Playing (less) Hurt™ Injury Prevention conference and lecture series, the first of which was held in 1984. Janet has been preeminent in focusing attention on the medical problems of performing musicians. She published the first edition of her book, Playing (less) Hurt: An Injury Prevention Guide for Musicians, in June 2002. It is one of the most comprehensive resources available, having chapters dealing with (among other topics) overuse, risk factors and stressors, dynamical demands, position, anaesthesia, functionality, instrument design, preventive and restorative approaches, stress and posture, physical therapy, hearing, instrument modifications, and what to do when you’re hurt. A newly revised 2009 edition of the book has just been released. It contains a resource list of carefully researched listings of doctors and therapists, videos, tapes, books and CDs, websites and organizations, products, props, splints, and adaptive equipment including ergonomic instruments and accessories. Copies may be ordered through playinglesshurt.com, where you can also find the Dr. Norris book (as well as a DVD he produced), helpful links, and “stretch cards” that include all 90 stretches featured in her book. Janet has been kind enough to allow us to reprint an excerpt from her book, which you will find on page 12.

Lucinda Lewis, principal horn of the New Jersey Symphony, is another musician who has contributed to the field. What started in 1987 as a small symposium held in Denver eventually morphed into the more encompassing “performing arts medicine.” (The more widely used term “music medicine” eventually morphed into the more encompassing “performing arts medicine” in part to differentiate it from the field of music therapy, which uses music to heal.)

According to Lucinda, “Overuse has the potential of inflicting significant detriment to a player’s embouchure that can linger for years, something few players realize until they become a victim. Unlike any other performance injury, embouchure overuse syndrome does not respond to rest, and there is no medical treatment for it or speedily of reversing its disabling effects. Every musician has to learn to navigate a busy performance schedule and weeks of heavy orchestral repertoire, but it is especially critical for wind players to be mindful of symptoms such as facial fatigue and lip swelling. These are the early warning signs of embouchure overuse. As much as possible, these symptoms are a sign of caution and a reduction in playing time and playing intensity. The good news is that even the most painful and disabled of embouchures can be restored to full and normal function.” Lucinda’s website, embouchures.com, holds a wealth of information, some of which is geared toward brass players. Her two books, Broken Embouchures and Embouchure Rehabilitation are also available for purchase there.

Another resource of information, Polyphonic.org, (Eastman School of Music’s Musician’s Orchestra) is a fairly new entry to the scene. It was launched in April 2006 and already offers many articles about musicians’ health and links to health-related websites. In addition to contributions from Dr. Alice Brandfonbrener, Janet Horvath, and Lucinda Lewis, there are also articles by Milwaukee Symphony violinist Samantha George, Alex English teacher Barbara Conable, Pittsburgh Symphony violinist Penny Anderson Brill, and flutist Amy Likar. One of the nice things about Polyphonic.org is that it is constantly being added to. Also, being a forum, it allows for discussion of issues through the posting of comments. The health-related articles can be found under the “Orchestra Life” article category.

If you are going to explore treatment alternatives, a good place to start is Dr. Brandfonbrener’s cautionary and informative article on Polyphonic.org. Although she acknowledges that reading never hurts anyone, she cautions that medical study, which makes up the bulk of things to consider, is often faced with medical problems that impact one’s performance. These warnings might be especially important when considering advice from the many sources available on the Internet, including from physicians, physical and occupational therapists, chiropractors, holistic medicine practitioners, spiritual counselors, fitness trainers, musicians, and lay people. All one need do is use a search engine to find such sources, but determining whether the advice might help or hurt might be more problematic. One site of interest, though, is that of SHAPE, a Canadian not-for-profit organization whose mandate includes providing health and safety information for the performing arts and film industries. Their website, www.shapecanada.com, includes many downloadable pamphlets and studies related to our industry.

In addition to the books already mentioned, there are a good number of interesting titles available through normal channels. A partial list includes: The Athletic Musician: A Guide to Playing Without Pain by Harrison Cristine; What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body: The Practical Application of Body Mapping & the Alexander Technique to Making Music by Barbara Conable and Benjamin Conable; Indirect Procedures: A Musician’s Guide to the Alexander Technique, by Pedro de Alcantara; The Musician’s Body: A Maintenance Manual for Peak Performance, by Jaerosem Llobet and George Odum; and The Percussionists’ Guide to Injury Treatment and Prevention by Dutan Workman.
Ron Baurers
(continued from page 5)

Chairperson's Report
(continued from page 3)

and musicians being able to reach agreements that management could afford but that would also provide musicians with wage increases enabling the orchestras to retain and attract the talent needed to make great performances.

Ron's financial analyses will never be mentioned in a review of a great concert. But his contribution to the quality of countless performances was just as real as that of the superstar soloists, world-famous conductors, and well-paid performers. Robert Levine's tribute to Ronald J. Baurers is reprinted by permission, Orchestra Musicians' Forum, Polyphonic.org. Photo courtesy of Dan Cerveny, Secretary/Treasurer of Omaha Musicians' Association, Local 70-558.

House Committee Testimony
(continued from page 1)

care to come up with a decent living. On Broadway, musicians face replacement by recorded music substituted for live music. In Hollywood, outsourcing film scores to musicians abroad threatens our recording musicians by providing tax incentives for domestic film production. Pension reform legislation has also helped the AFM keep its pension plan available to musicians. Chairman Miller, we thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Several members of this Committee have co-sponsored H.R. 848, the Performance Rights Act, which gives recording artists a right to royalties when their performances are played over AM/FM radio. Recorded music makes money for radio, but radio doesn't pay performers a single cent. The Performance Rights Act would correct this inequity, and we ask you to consider supporting this legislation.

Let our community of musicians serve as an example to those places across the globe that are aching to hear a positive message. It is a right of the people that they not be deprived of hope. As they hear our music, let them also hear our voices. We are the advocates for our art form, we are the advocates for our communities, and we are the advocates for our children. Through our music, we offer a message of hope that the world is longing to hear.

Let us not falter in our mission. Let us not be discouraged, but instead let us be inspired to greater activism by the recent successes. As the economy faces the prospect of getting worse before it gets better, we all must be engaged in advocacy for our art form, for our communities, and for our friends. We must not allow hard times to impair our idealism. I do not doubt that we will weather this crisis, because I have faith in the musicians of ICSOM, and I have been inspired by the unity we have demonstrated. Soon there will be even more opportunities for semi-monthly paychecks as a means of equalizing the difficulties of salary reductions.

I know we all will respond.

Ron Baurers
(continued from page 5)

Chairperson's Report
(continued from page 3)

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.

According to an Oregon Symphony newsletter, more than $5.7 million worth of tickets were sold for the season through December. That's better than they did for the entire season last year and also boasts of a double-digit increase in attendance, with concerts at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall averaging more than 71% full, with several of those virtually sold out.

Members of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra ratified a one-year contract on January 24. It provides for a wage freeze and higher health insurance copayments—the latter change unilaterally imposed by management before negotiations were concluded. According to committee chair Martin Anderson, the orchestra committee's biggest disappointment was the failure to secure a multiyear settlement, which management originally sought but withdrew on fears of diminished funding and ticket sales because of the current recessionary economy. Complications in the process included: a seven-month bargaining period; friction with the New Jersey local union; the economic downturn; and the creation by the NSO board of a "Special Board Subcommittee" to formulate a plan for the orchestra's 2009-2010 season— to which they invited musician board members—while negotiations were still going on. The resulting board plan calls for significant cutbacks next season.

Battered by a $3.8 million deficit in 2007-2008 and a $26 million decline in endowment investment value as a result of the current recession, the Honolulu Symphony Society has endured three weeks of wage freezes in the past two months. Since 2002, they have nonetheless agreed to wage reductions of 11% for the first two years of their new CBA in order to avoid operational insolvency from declining credit lines. The restoration of current levels and progress are included in the final years of the agreement. The agreement also includes even more opportunities for semi-monthly paychecks as a means of equalizing the difficulties of salary reductions.

After more than a century of punctual payrolls to Honolulu Symphony musicians, the Honolulu Symphony Society managed only one timely musician payroll during the entire calendar year of 2008. This dubious record is the result of a long-term lack of board leadership that was further tested by concert hall availability issues last year and the recession this year. During a challenging 2007-2008 season, Honolulu Symphony musicians went up 11 weeks late in pay before gradually being caught up a few weeks after their season ended in May. The Honolulu Symphony musicians have once again fallen behind in pay this 2008-2009 season, despite having accepted a wage freeze for the current season. This season, the crisis arrived even earlier and with greater severity, with even the very first payroll arriving late. Since then, paychecks have arrived sporadically. ICSOM delegate Steve Flanter reports that the musicians have not been current in pay during any of autumn or, so far, any of this winter. As of the third week of February, musicians were owed seven weeks of pay. [Editor's Note: At print time, HSO musicians have fallen 11 weeks behind in pay.]

In order to keep the organization afloat, the Honolulu Symphony Board decided last November that it would raise $700,000 in additional funds before January 1, 2009. This sum would have made it possible to get the musicians paid up by the beginning of the calendar year. Unfortunately, the board members' response to their own call to action was lackluster. They raised only $92,800 of the $700,000 they had committed to, a shortfall that has meant further pain for the musicians.

Steve says that, just as they did last season, the HSO musicians have continued to perform throughout this crisis. No concerts have had to be cancelled, and the music is continuing for the people of Honolulu. "Considering how far behind we were, considering the financial situation of the board, we're producing music for the people of our communities as we help attract businesses, educate our children, and spread the name of our great cities.

We must remember: this we did with our lives for a reason. While it is and has always been so in vogue for orchestral musicians to be cynical, it is not beyond us to continue to indude in our dreams. The greatest musicians among us are those who are still inspired by the opportunity to inspire. Through uniting together and reaching out to our communities, we can and will ensure that the arts continue to thrive, and we will continue to enrich the lives of our audiences as we improve the livelihood of our colleagues, all while inspiring the next generation of musicians.

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Members of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra ratified a one-year contract on January 24. It provides for a wage freeze and higher health insurance copayments—the latter change unilaterally imposed by management before negotiations were concluded. According to committee chair Martin Anderson, the orchestra committee's biggest disappointment was the failure to secure a multiyear settlement, which management originally sought but withdrew on fears of diminished funding and ticket sales because of the current recessionary economy. Complications in the process included: a seven-month bargaining period; friction with the New Jersey local union; the economic downturn; and the creation by the NSO board of a "Special Board Subcommittee" to formulate a plan for the orchestra's 2009-2010 season—to which they invited musician board members—while negotiations were still going on. The resulting board plan calls for significant cutbacks next season.

Battered by a $3.8 million deficit in 2007-2008 and a $26 million decline in endowment investment value as a result of the current recession, the Honolulu Symphony Society has endured three weeks of wage freezes in the past two months. Since 2002, they have nonetheless agreed to wage reductions of 11% for the first two years of their new CBA in order to avoid operational insolvency from declining credit lines. The restoration of current levels and progress are included in the final years of the agreement. The agreement also includes even more opportunities for semi-monthly paychecks as a means of equalizing the difficulties of salary reductions.

After more than a century of punctual payrolls to Honolulu Symphony musicians, the Honolulu Symphony Society managed only one timely musician payroll during the entire calendar year of 2008. This dubious record is the result of a long-term lack of board leadership that was further tested by concert hall availability issues last year and the recession this year. During a challenging 2007-2008 season, Honolulu Symphony musicians went up 11 weeks late in pay before gradually being caught up a few weeks after their season ended in May. The Honolulu Symphony musicians have once again fallen behind in pay this 2008-2009 season, despite having accepted a wage freeze for the current season. This season, the crisis arrived even earlier and with greater severity, with even the very first payroll arriving late. Since then, paychecks have arrived sporadically. ICSOM delegate Steve Flanter reports that the musicians have not been current in pay during any of autumn or, so far, any of this winter. As of the third week of February, musicians were owed seven weeks of pay. [Editor's Note: At print time, HSO musicians have fallen 11 weeks behind in pay.]

In order to keep the organization afloat, the Honolulu Symphony Board decided last November that it would raise $700,000 in additional funds before January 1, 2009. This sum would have made it possible to get the musicians paid up by the beginning of the calendar year. Unfortunately, the board members' response to their own call to action was lackluster. They raised only $92,800 of the $700,000 they had committed to, a shortfall that has meant further pain for the musicians.

Steve says that, just as they did last season, the HSO musicians have continued to perform throughout this crisis. No concerts have had to be cancelled, and the music is continuing for the people of Honolulu. "Considering how far behind we were, considering the financial situation of the board, we're producing music for the people of our communities as we help attract businesses, educate our children, and spread the name of our great cities.

We must remember: this we did with our lives for a reason. While it is and has always been so in vogue for orchestral musicians to be cynical, it is not beyond us to continue to indulge in our dreams. The greatest musicians among us are those who are still inspired by the opportunity to inspire. Through uniting together and reaching out to our communities, we can and will ensure that the arts continue to thrive, and we will continue to enrich the lives of our audiences as we improve the livelihood of our colleagues, all while inspiring the next generation of musicians.

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.
An ICSOM Site Visit to the Twin Cities
by Norbert Nielsubowski, Leslie Shank, and Paul Gunther

Chairperson Bruce Ridge made a site visit (January 19-21) to the Twin Cities to meet with musicians from both the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. As usual with such visits, Bruce met with others interested in the orchestras. Below are reports from the delegates of those orchestras as well as a short addendum by Minnesota librarian and ICSOM Governing Board member Paul Gunther.

On Monday evening, musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra gathered informally at our home, ICSOM Member at Large Paul Gunther, to meet Bruce and to discuss current conditions and concerns at the Orchestra. Bruce spent the next day visiting Minnesota Orchestra rehearsals and addressing the musicians at a full orchestra meeting.

The worsening economic conditions and their effect on the arts concern all of us greatly. In speaking about these issues Bruce gave an eloquent report on how various orchestras have been weathering the storm. He spoke very eloquently of his belief that the current downturn was a matter of managing short term debt and shouldn’t be looked at as opportunities for management to rewrite our contracts. Bruce also made a statement of fact regarding the individual involvement in Americans for the Arts. With a wealth of facts and figures at his command he showed (as many of us had learned at the 2009 ICSOM Conference) that, rather than being a luxury, the arts are an important part of the economic vitality of a community. It helped put some perspective on the doom and gloom we’ve been hearing and helped remind us of the importance of what we do.

While on the Minneapolis side of the Mississippi, Bruce also met with Executive Director Michael Henson. Bruce and Paul met also with the AFM Local 30-73 board of directors, and with President Leslie Shank, and with Secretary-Treasurer Tom Bakke. Our Minneapolis/Saint Paul local board and officers have long been strong supporters of both the Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and have tried to improve our embarrassingly inadequate radio payment on the $30. So media would have to improve dramatically—a convergence agreement that would allow them to capture unlimited audio and video material of all orchestra services, including activity around the stage before and after services, for no compensation. For unlimited release of any of these materials, the management would pay our current radio fee of $30 per week ($1,560 per year) plus 50% revenue sharing.

For years, the negotiating committee and the media committee of the SFS have tried to improve our embarrassingly inadequate radio payments. For audio they were getting $50 per week for about two hours. For video they were getting $30 per week for unlimited radio broadcasts. To our dismay, many of our colleagues around the country have seen this radio language in front of them at their local negotiations, presented in an effort to enhance the marketing department’s marketing and imaging efforts. It is very clear that no resolution could be reached on media by the new deadline. The first formal bargaining meeting with management took place in September, just as the markets were beginning to take a nosedive. On the day opening proposals were to be exchanged, John Kieser, general manager and director of electronic media for the SFS, informed the committee that the SFS would be pulling out of the upcoming IMA talks, and wanted to bargain media at the local level. Two weeks later, management’s opening media proposal was revealed—a convergence agreement that would allow them to capture unlimited audio and video material of all orchestra services, including activity around the stage before and after services, for no compensation. For unlimited release of any of these materials, the management would pay our current radio fee of $30 per week ($1,560 per year) plus 50% revenue sharing.

2009 ICSOM Conference
August 19–22, 2009
Hosted by
The Musicians of the Virginia Symphony and
Norfolk Musicians’ Association, Local 125, AFM
Norfolk Waterside Marriott
235 East Main Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23510
757-627-4200
All attendees must register with Secretary Laura Ross
Conference packets will be mailed in Spring 2009

San Francisco Symphony Ratifies Four-Year Agreement
by Cathy Payne, ICSOM Delegate and SFS Media Oversight Committee Chair

Late last spring, as the SFS negotiating committee was gearing up to meet with management, it seemed like it would be a straightforward negotiation. The orchestra’s finances were in excellent shape, as confirmed by a Ron Bassung, one of the healthiest arts organizations in the country, (he reported) and by our board president, John Goldman (at the December 2007 Annual Meeting—six months before negotiations were to begin in earnest). The SFS had exceeded their entire year’s budget, a surplus of $454,000 on an operating budget of $58.3 million. SFS Executive Director Brent Assink anticipated healthy finances for the near future, telling the San Francisco Chronicle, “We don’t see this as an aberration…we see this in our financial forecast for the next two or three years.”

Media was being negotiated at the national level, with bargaining on a national Integrated Media Agreement (IMA) slated to begin in September. The SFS was signed on for those talks, so media would not be an issue. Pension might be a bit thorny (what with the 2006 Pension Protection Act), and management wanted to make some changes in auditions, but relatively speaking, it seems like a no-brainer. Collective bargaining agreement would be negotiated without too much difficulty. The orchestra had great confidence in our attorney, Susan Martin, and the experienced members of the negotiating committee, chaired by violist David Gaudry.

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For years, the negotiating committee and the media committee of the SFS have tried to improve our embarrassingly inadequate radio payments. For audio they were getting $50 per week for about two hours. For video they were getting $30 per week for unlimited radio broadcasts. To our dismay, many of our colleagues around the country have seen this radio language in front of them at their local negotiations, presented in an effort to enhance the marketing department’s marketing and imaging efforts. It is very clear that no resolution could be reached on media by the new deadline.

With the economic news worsening by the day, the committee engaged in intense bargaining two days before the new deadline. Thanks to Susan Martin’s expertise in pension and the diligence of the committee, management finally relented and agreed that the defined benefit pension would remain in place. On the afternoon of the day of our last bargaining session, management seemed to be resolved except for electronic media. The committee offered a two-year agreement with no changes to media. This was rejected by management—who continued to insist that the board would not accept any contract that did not have a convergence agreement.

From the outset, the negotiating committee insisted that no media, aside from radio, could be bargained at the local level—the bargaining rights were with the AFM. Management disagreed, insisting that the AFM “may” have to bargain for us at the local level if the board didn’t accept a contract with no media. In the end, when the board dismissed the complaints that things weren’t happening fast enough for the SFS at the national table, the SFS offered to work with the SFS in an effort to come to terms on a convergence agreement that could be a model for a large-scale institution going forward, and while the SFS would not agree that they did not have the right to bargain media locally, they agreed to negotiate directly with the Federation.

The deadline for our CBA was fast approaching (November 28) with no commitment from management to return to the national table for media and serious problems with the pension aspect of the negotiation. The success of the national management was proposing changing the 2006 defined benefit pension of $64,000 to a frozen accrual type of plan which would have had devastating consequences for the pensions of younger members of the orchestra. Many members would have seen their defined benefit pension reduced to a “notional” level, according to figures provided by two different actuarial firms—a result that was totally unacceptable to the negotiating committee. Susan and the committee urged the orchestra to play hardball, and extended our November 28th deadline to January 17, 2009, two days before the scheduled SFS west coast tour.

There was not much progress on the media front during this time. Throughout the process, management argued that having cameras on stage 24/7 and doing media for almost no payment was “part and parcel of being a musician in the SFS today.” They said the board would not accept a contract without a “groundbreaking” agreement for media. Despite hours of negotiations by phone with the AFM and a subcommittee of musicians from the SFS and ICSOM Media Committee, and a full day of negotiations with the AFM team in San Francisco on January 5, the SFS’s offer for a convergence agreement went up only $15 a week, to $45 dollars for unlimited capture and exploitation of recorded material. It was clear that no resolution could be reached on media by the new deadline.

(continued on page 15—see SAN FRANCISCO SETTLEMENT)
Playing (less) Hurt: an Excerpt from the Hearing Chapter by Janet Horvath

We have retained the original numbering in this abridged excerpt from Chapter 15, titled “Hearing Is Our Business.” It is a tiny sample of what can be found in Janet Horvath’s book, Playing (less) Hurt. It is full of up-to-date information about how to protect yourself from potential dangers that could affect your ability to continue playing, as well as information about what to do if you fear you may have sustained an injury. Janet Horvath has been the associate principal cello of the Minnesota Orchestra since 1980.

Prevention Strategies

There are many things we can do to protect our ears. For the sake of clarity, although all of the information is important, additional suggestions for young and inexperienced musicians who perform in a band, who perform “pops” concerts regularly, and who teach band in classrooms are in italics.

1. Practice more softly. It is important to practice and rehearse at softer dynamics. Save volume for the concert and, if possible, avoid practicing in small rooms with hard surfaces. The smaller the room you practice in, the greater the risk of hurting your ears at lower volume. When practicing louder dynamics, all sound is absorbed in a small practice room. But such small spaces can be harmful to our hearing. Practice with earplugs. Violinists especially should use an earplug in their bathroom, but such spaces can be harmful to our hearing. Practice

2. Distance yourself and stay out of the line of fire. Whenever possible, increase the space between yourself and the noise. Onstage, this means away from the percussion, brass, piccolo, and any loudspeakers or monitors. Do not allow soprano, trumpet, or piccolo soloists to face the orchestra. When distancing is impossible, use hearing protection and/or barriers or shields.

3. Use shaker loudspeakers. These small devices that enhance the low-pitched bass notes and are plugged into the main amplifiers. As a result, the overall sound level is reduced because the bass player can play less loudly. On-stage monitors add troublesome decibels to the overall sound levels. In-ear monitors are small devices that look like hearing aids, but are connected to cables and are able to be plugged into the amplification system, thereby reducing the overall decibel levels. They also allow the bass players and drummers to hear their music better, while giving some hearing protection.

4. Use acoustic plexiglass shields. Many orchestras have some hearing protection language in their contracts, and many provide plexiglass acoustic shields. To achieve any benefit, the shield must be placed a few inches from one’s head. If screens are placed too close to the brass or percussion, their own sounds tend to be reflected back to them, making it difficult for them to judge their volume and projection. Experiment in order to accommodate everyone. Shields are effective in reducing the impact or attack of loud sounds, but they are of limited value regarding the protection of your hearing. Remember that cotton and Kleenex do nothing to protect your hearing.

5. Use in-ear monitors. These devices allow the bass player to hear himself better, while offering some hearing protection, and the overall sound levels can be lowered.

6. Tilt or elevate loudspeakers to ear level if possible. Depending on the type of speaker, this can result in a “flatter” response, allowing the overall sound level onstage to be reduced.

7. Place the treble instrument players on risers.

8. Avoid rehearsing in small rooms with reflective surfaces and turning up the volume on the amplifiers.

9. Have access to a sound level meter and monitor the decibel levels. Have some written contractual language limiting exposure to inordinately intense levels of sound.

10. Wear hearing protection!
...in their debt.

While orchestra members were hammering picket signs backstage on that Saturday night during the concert ("THE SFS IS NOT A REBEL!/WE WISH TO SHOW!"), an agreement was reached. Scarcely an increase by about 4% for each year of the agreement, pension would go up to $75,000 in the final year of the contract, and media work under LBA for a payment of 8% of scale (waiving project approval), allows digital downloads for no upfront payment but a revenue sharing model similar to Chicago Symphony’s, and expanded and mutualized funding, were all exchanged for these changes, Management agreed to increase our audio compensation to 3% of scale for 39 weeks, the standard pay...
Nominating Committee Input

In accordance with ICSOM bylaws, there will be elections at the 2009 ICSOM Conference for the positions of ICSOM President, Secretary, two Members at Large, and Delegate to the AFM Convention. Also in accordance with ICSOM bylaws, the Governing Board has appointed a Nominating Committee that may, at its discretion, nominate candidates for those positions. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the Conference.

The Nominating Committee will consider all worthy candidates, including those incumbents intending to seek re-election. The duties of all ICSOM officers are spelled out in the ICSOM bylaws. The ICSOM bylaws are available online at icsom.org, and a copy is included in the ICSOM delegate manual. Among the criteria applied by the Nominating Committee are candidates’ personal abilities, experience and activity in ICSOM, compatibility with ICSOM policies and personnel, and willingness to serve. Balance of orchestra size and diversity on the Governing Board are also considerations.

As part of its procedure, the Nominating Committee is soliciting comments and opinions, favorable or otherwise, regarding the incumbent officers and the dispatch of their duties. Delegates and members of ICSOM orchestras may contact any member of the committee. The committee also welcomes suggestions of other possible candidates for these positions.

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 10.

Members of the nominating committee are:

- Mary Plaine, Chair  
  Baltimore Symphony Orchestra  
  410-433-6063  
  mary.plaine@gmail.com

- Dolores D’Aigle  
  Oregon Symphony Orchestra  
  503-675-9433  
  ddetalk@yahoo.com

- Eric Arbiter  
  Houston Symphony Orchestra  
  713-869-6266  
  eric.arbiter@sbcglobal.net