



UNA VOCE

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The Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians (OCSM) is the voice of Canadian professional orchestral musicians. OCSM's mission is to uphold and improve the working conditions of professional Canadian orchestral musicians, to promote communication among its members, and to advocate on behalf of the Canadian cultural community.

Courage, Enthusiasm, Resilience

Barbara Hankins
OCSM Editor

Sixty-two years ago, six musicians of the Toronto Symphony were denied visas to perform in Detroit because of their perceived left-leaning sympathies. They lost their contracts with the orchestra because of this, and received little support from the conductor, their colleagues, or their union. American McCarthyism took away their Canadian jobs.

As you can read in Matt Heller's interview with Ruth Budd, one of the "Symphony Six," this shoddy treatment did not dampen the spirits of these musicians; they continued on with illustrious careers and contributed much to the Canadian orchestral community.

Ruth Budd's story is an inspiration to those who sometimes feel shunned and punished when attempting to stand up for what they feel is right. Her efforts to unite symphonic musicians across Canada have benefited thousands of musicians since the formation of OCSM in the early 1970s.

The orchestral community recently lost Evelyne Robitaille, a violist and union advocate. Rob McCosh's reminiscences of this "larger than life" woman are both touching and amusing.

Thanks also go to Kirsty Money for a summary of the Symphony Nova Scotia negotiations, Mary Sokol Brown for information about the VSO job sharing program, and Steve Izma for background to Bill C-377.

The Orchestra Mender: OCSM Founder Ruth Budd

by Matt Heller
OCSM President

Before there was an OCSM or a Symphony Six, there was a school orchestra in Winnipeg with a problem. "The person who was playing the bass either broke his leg or



his arm on the football field," recalls Ruth Budd, who was a 16-year-old violinist at the time. "The conductor said, 'Who would volunteer?' and I said I would! He said, 'Don't be silly. You know a girl couldn't play the bass.'"

This was in the early 1940s, and another sort of person might have believed it to be true or just accepted it as the way of the world. Not Ruth Budd: "I played a violin, and I knew that the strings were just backwards, and I thought, 'Well, if I just think in negatives, I should be able to do this.' So I practiced by myself. We entered the festival and won our class. The adjudicator made some comment about it being the first time he'd ever seen a girl playing the bass. Well, I really liked it!"

That was the beginning of an incredible symphonic career for Ruth, which included major contributions to all Canadian orchestras. Over the course of five decades, Ruth became the first female professional bass player in Canada, joining the Toronto Symphony in 1947. She left the TSO in 1952, a casualty of the infamous "Symphony Six" scandal. She then played in the Halifax Symphony and other orchestras before returning to the Toronto Symphony in the mid-1960s. She founded OCSM, together with like-minded colleagues, in the early 1970s. I recently spoke with Ruth by phone, from her home at a seniors' residence in Toronto. At 89, she speaks with precision and charm, filling her stories and recollections with great warmth.

I first asked Ruth how the Symphony Six scandal came about. "The orchestra had not done much touring, but Ernest [MacMillan, the TSO's music director] really wanted to. At that time we did not have many guest conductors, neither did we go anywhere very much, if at all.

"I was in the TSO for five years before the McCarthy era really struck and before the opportunities came along for the Symphony to go somewhere. When the invitation came to travel to Detroit for one concert, I think the conductor and the management probably thought this was a glorious opportunity to spread the wonders of the Toronto Symphony! And unless you can fulfill your contract, then you're out."



Ruth Budd. Photo by Frank Harmantas, courtesy of the City of Toronto Archives, Series 1569, File 429, Item 1

Ruth, of course, was one of those who could not. The six players were denied visas by the U.S. State Department, under suspicion of leftist activities. "The McCarthy era was a terrible time, when nobody had to prove anything. You had only to be suspected of left leaning and that was enough. As I was walk-

ing past the women's dressing room, I heard one of my colleagues say, 'Well, she reads a lot so she must be a communist.' And so on!"

Very little united the six musicians. One was a book lover, another had played in Ukrainian cultural centres: that was Steven Saryk, just 23 at the time, who would later return as the TSO's concertmaster. Three of the Symphony Six, oddly enough, were bass players.

The story exploded in the papers for weeks, and some members of the TSO board quit in protest. But neither the union nor their fellow musicians did much to support the non-renewed musicians. "They didn't want to, they were too frightened," says Ruth. "People were so terrified of losing their jobs that they actually crossed the street in order not to talk to us. One was condemned by association. It was a pretty scary time."

The dark chapter ends rather quickly though, in Ruth's telling. "I was very quickly hired to play at one of the local theatres, and I loved it. Here I got a chance to hear and see the great theatre people. I was still aware of the political situation, but I didn't feel I could do too much about it."

While she was playing in the theatre, Ruth was also starting a family. "Concerts started at 8, so I could put my kids to bed at 7:30 and go toddling down to the the-

atre, because I didn't live that far away. Well it wasn't wonderful music, but I love theatre and that theatre, the Royal Alex, was great. I also got an awful lot of mending done in the pit."

I asked Ruth, was mending a hobby she enjoyed? "No, I hated mending. But my kids needed socks and I didn't have the money to buy them. So I did a lot of fixing down there in the pit."

Ruth describes with delight how her father altered his car to accommodate her bass: "He cut this door out in the back of the car, and he put a little handle on it, so he could get the bass in the back of the car. I'm pretty sure there wasn't another one like it; it may have been the first hatchback in Toronto, or in Canada! And he was a portrait photographer, not a metal worker."

That same spirit of resourcefulness wedded to necessity led Ruth into orchestral activism. She joined the Halifax Symphony in 1958, and found conditions there were appalling. "We needed to have enough light. We needed to have enough warmth so that the oboes wouldn't crack. We needed to make sure that we could see the music, and that it was printed well instead of reading chicken marks, you know? Things just as simple as that.

And I'm the kind of person who has a pretty good time wherever I go. I tend to say, 'Well, how can we make it better?' That's just my personality. So I loved being in Halifax and we made some wonderful friends."

In 1960, Ruth returned to Toronto to perform with the Hart House Orchestra, a celebrated chamber orchestra founded by Boyd Neel, which premiered many new works by Canadian composers. Toronto Symphony music director Walter Susskind heard her play there, and asked her to rejoin the TSO bass section in 1964.

"Right away I became a member of the Players' Committee, alternating with another very good friend who was a piccolo player, Tony Antonacci. Either he was Secretary and I was President, or he was President and I was Secretary."

The TSO was a member of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM), founded in 1962 – another international member was the Montreal Symphony. In the late 60s, Ruth began talking about forming a new, Canadian symphonic player conference: "It seemed to me really important to do that. Because we belonged to the American Federation of Musicians, ICSOM was relevant to the American law. It was not relevant to Canadian law. And we weren't used to standing up on our own two feet and saying, 'We can do this. We have another country, we need laws that are relevant to us.'

"And so, in about 1970, I went across the country during my summer holidays. I made contacts in advance

and stopped in various cities where there were orchestras. I took the train across the country, which was a wonderful thing to do; I wasn't in a hurry. I stopped in places like Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver, and talked to people about the possibility of starting a Canadian group called OCSM. Well, we weren't sure what we were going to call it, but we thought OCSM would be good."

The next fall, Ruth and her Canadian symphonic colleagues met for the first time in St. Catharines, even though they had to get permission from their orchestras to attend. "There was a little bit of fear, you know, you never know what you're doing. And I'll never forget the sort of fear from the union itself. They thought we were trying to break away! Our meeting was concurrent with the Canadian Conference, and I remember they were sort of pacing up and down and they wanted to know what we were talking about. But we weren't ready to give a report. And there really wasn't anything subversive, truly! We were trying to figure out how to make it work better for the Symphonic musicians. We wanted it to become an arm of the union, and to have a fraternal relationship with ICSOM.

"Strangely enough, it sounds as if I got really involved in a lot of the political stuff. You know, I didn't. I didn't get involved in the political stuff at work and I didn't get involved in the political stuff in the union. I got involved in the political stuff that was necessary in the orchestra. So I didn't hang around and get to know the managers of the orchestra, or even the union officials. The only time I really was involved with them was during the negotiation period."

I asked Ruth her advice, for those going through tough negotiations today. "We all want the music, so our goal is the same: to have the best orchestra possible within the means of the city. That's one of my great lines: You want the best orchestra, so do I. In other words, instead of building barriers, break them down. Ultimately that's what you want, the best possible orchestra in that city. How do you get it? How do you attract really good musicians? Offer a really good package. Then we'll all have what we want."

Also, find a hobby - preferably something "that you can touch and feel and hold, or eat," she suggests. "I used to go downstairs where I had a potter's wheel and a kiln in the basement of my little house, and it was wonderful to work after a concert. If I hated the concert I could come back to joy by creating a pot out of clay, and if I loved the concert, well, that too. I could just work on the pot and love it."

As positively energized as Ruth gets in recounting her memories, she's just as enthused about her current projects. These include directing a choir of her fellow se-

niors at Christie Gardens. (As she firmly points out, she does not conduct.) "We're thirty-some people and we started out singing 'Frère Jacques' and I would say now, we do a reasonably respectable Hallelujah Chorus." No matter the place or the time, it seems, Ruth Budd finds a way to organize and make music.

For more about the "Symphony Six" story, go to:
(torontoist.com/2012/03/historicist-the-symphony-six/).

Vegas with Evelyne

by Rob McCosh

Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra

I was just an OCSM rookie when I first met then-President Evelyne Robitaille. The OCSM board had decided to create the position of liaison officer to improve communication between the delegates and the executive between conferences. Evelyne asked me to do this, after I had served only one year as OCSM delegate for Symphony Nova Scotia. I wasn't really sure what my duties were and I'm not sure the executive at the time knew either, but it was a great way for me to gain experience and insight into the workings of a player conference and the AFM. And what better mentor for a rookie than a leader such as Evelyne.



She was fearless, passionate, infuriating, intelligent, hilarious. I've never known anyone to make Eddy Bayens sheepish - but maybe that was because she could swear better in French than he can. She had no sense of time when it came to running a conference - well, she was a violist. The coffee

breaks were long, not just because of a badly needed smoke break but because she was always happy to get drawn into a passionate dialogue about anything with anyone. She never timed the delegate reports and indeed was sometimes louder with her sidebar conversations than the person holding the floor. So the agenda was really less a classical composition than a jazz improvisation.

But my strongest memory of Evelyne was at my first, or perhaps second AFM convention. After taking on all comers at the convention floor microphone or during

committee meetings all week she decided, on the last day, that we should rent a car and get out of town before our evening flight. We spent a beautiful day seeing Red Rock Canyon and the Hoover Dam, walking around in the outdoor furnace, wishing we'd brought water, or something stronger, as Evelyne liked to say.

When it came time to take back the car, I mentioned that we'd have to fill up first or pay a penalty. Well this was news to Evelyne who was not always the most detail-oriented, but rather a big-picture person. She thought it would be insignificant — until the lot keeper told her otherwise. She refused to pay the surcharge, so we went in search of a gas station, all the time the clock ticking on our flight. When I went to pull into a no-name gas station, all of a sudden it mattered to Evelyne where we filled up. No, it had to be Exxon or some other recognizable brand. Why she suddenly took an interest is still beyond me. So there we were driving all over rush-hour-construction-zone Vegas to find a suitable station. Finally we found one and pulled up to the pump to see a Vegas police car stopped with a cop draped over the hood of the car. He looked alive and we didn't know what was going on. When I went in to pay for the gas, the attendant thought it was quite funny that a drive-by-shooter had taken a shot at the cop, who wasn't hit but was in shock, a scant few minutes before we pulled in.

That whole Vegas experience summed up Evelyne's indelible impression she left on me: somewhat surreal, over-the-top, larger than life. We meet a lot of people in our lives but it's the special ones whose character and force of personality leave a lasting legacy, not just on what they achieve, but more importantly on the people whose lives they touch. And when we all go to that better place, whatever that means to you, you can bet you'll hear Evelyne's smokey baritone interspersed with raucous laughter.

Evelyne Robitaille (1935-2013) was a violist with the Orchestre Symphonique de Quebec from 1962 until her retirement in 2005, with a few years served with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in the 1970s. She was President of the AFM Local 119 (Quebec City) for many years, as well as OCSM President from 1989-1997.

SNS Negotiations Finally Come to a Close

by Kirsty Money

Symphony Nova Scotia

In mid-February Local 571 and the Musicians of Symphony Nova Scotia reached an agreement with the Management (Erika Beatty, CEO) and Board. After over a year of this process (for the musicians), business can get back to normal, or can it? Because the negotiations took such a long time to resolve, there is now a divide between the players, management and the board. No one has kissed and made up, in other words. I suppose one can say it was a successful negotiation if neither party is particularly happy!

This was my third negotiation, and never has there been one this difficult for me. What was different this time?

1. Communication, and trying to get meetings set.
2. At the first meeting in March 2012, the musicians were told the management and the board were not prepared to talk about money. In fact, money was not discussed in earnest until the last month of the negotiation. A normal occurrence in many negotiations, but much time was lost because of this.
3. The board's choice for a negotiator was a labour lawyer who serves on the board and sponsors a musician's chair. It was very difficult for the musicians and the local to deal with this situation, both emotionally and financially. The local decided to hire legal counsel to speak the same language and support the musicians from across the table. SNS players were so fortunate to have this support.
4. The musicians had not attended a board meeting in over a year (it is a policy amongst the players not to attend board meetings during negotiations, a policy that needs to be revisited perhaps), thus there was poor information sharing between the board and the musicians.
5. A steep learning curve occurred in dealing with the media, the provincial labour board, and the public. SNS musicians learned how to get the message into the public arena in a succinct way, garnering support from the community. The President of the Halifax and Dartmouth Labour Council, Kyle Buott, was instrumental in helping the musicians get their message across.

In addition to the above, the musicians realized that in order to improve their situation, they really had to unite and get involved. The union local 571, represented by Varun Vyas (Secretary/Treasurer) and Tom Roach (President), was the most supportive in my 13-year tenure

here. The solidarity the musicians and the local shared during this process was unprecedented. This was the most important "win" that happened this past year. Through this process it has been made clear that the musicians **MUST** get involved with the inner workings of the organization if they are to thrive and survive. Gone are the days of management doing their job and the musicians doing theirs.

But how do we pick up the pieces and move forward right now? Always during negotiations, many issues arise and some are exacerbated due to the intense and microscopic work that occurs at the table. The musicians can see many places where management and support for the orchestra can be improved. It is their hope to get back to the board meetings ASAP and invite board members and musicians to have brainstorming sessions to see where improvements can and must be made. A good starting place would be to continue to put pressure on the Halifax Regional Municipality to support arts organizations like SNS, as it is the poorest supported orchestra municipally across the country!

Let's hope that we can mend the bridges that need some repair, for arts organizations are fragile entities. My three words to bring to the next board meeting are communication, collaboration and innovation – emphasis on innovation!

Two Decades of Job Sharing in the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra

by Mary Sokol Brown

Vancouver Symphony Orchestra



I became interested in the idea of job sharing in 1989 after my second child was born. Knowing that job sharing was already being implemented in some professional organizations, it seemed absurd to me that I should have to quit my full-time job as a violinist in the VSO in order to spend

more time with my children in their early years.

I began researching job sharing and gathered information by attending teachers' meetings and contacting friends in European orchestras where flexible contracts were possible. After compiling the necessary information I created a proposal which I then presented to the Vancouver Symphony administration. Although there was receptivity from management, the next challenge

was to address the artistic concerns of the musicians.

The chair of the negotiating committee, Brent Atkins, championed the concept of job sharing and crafted the mechanism and contractual language that would enable this to be implemented while satisfying all concerns. It took two years for the process to be completed and has now been a part of our VSO collective agreement for the past twenty-two years.

Over the years I have had enquiries from musicians from other Canadian orchestras, and similar job-sharing provisions have been adopted by the Winnipeg Symphony and, most recently, the Calgary Philharmonic. I hope this article will inspire other OCSM orchestras to implement job sharing in their contracts.

Purpose

- To provide easement for musicians with young children, for musicians wanting to divide their time for other pursuits (touring, composition, upgrading skills), and for older musicians wanting more work relief.
- To enable valued musicians to maintain their involvement with the orchestra while providing them with the needed easement in the work schedule.

How It Works

Two musicians in the same string section decide to job share, therefore their two half-time positions are equivalent to one full-time job. An audition is then held for a full-time replacement. The two musicians split the workload and salary of one full-time player. The musicians can define their own schedule, splitting the services generally by programme or weeks. The main point is that both musicians should do the same number of services each season in order to equally split the full-time salary. It is possible on occasion for both musicians to perform the same services and they can also arrange to do additional work over their 50 per cent by being hired back as an extra.

If a job-sharing musician retires or leaves the orchestra their job-sharing partner would either need to find a new job sharer or possibly have to return to full-time employment. A job-sharing musician cannot return to full-time employment unless a full-time opening is available in their section. As it currently stands, job sharing in our orchestra is only available to string players.

An Onerous Burden on Unions

by Steve Izma

OSSTF-WLU Staff Association

In December 2012, the federal government passed Bill C-377, which amends the Income Tax Act to require labour organizations to increase their financial reporting to the Canada Revenue Agency. This inflates a union's paperwork with the inclusion of the details of most transactions greater than \$5000, including the names of companies and individuals paid more than \$100,000.

This call for increased exposure of financial matters might surprise some people, coming as it does from a government famous for its secrecy. More transparency about military spending anyone? How about a Parliamentary Budget Office whose questions to the government get answered?

Less surprisingly, most unions have publicly stated their opposition to the bill, pointing out the increased bureaucratic load on their staff. And most of us who are members of a union know that our representatives already have a fairly long list of things to do. Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, claims that "legal and privacy experts have testified the bill is likely unconstitutional, infringes on provincial jurisdiction, and constitutes a violation of personal and commercial privacy laws."



But more of a shock comes from hearing opposition to the bill from less likely sources. The Federal Privacy Commissioner managed to have the bill modified so that the original tipping point of \$5,000 relating to compensation to individ-

uals was increased to \$100,000. And the Ontario Minister of Labour at the time, Linda Jeffrey, wrote a letter to various members of the government and the Senate complaining about "the inexplicitly intrusive nature" of the bill's obligations. She continued, "The requirements would impose an onerous administrative burden on both organized labour and on government to collect and file these returns, potentially compromise the privacy of individuals, and could represent an unwarranted interference with the collective bargaining process in Canada."

While the Federal government argues that the bill will expose corruption and misuse of funds within unions, Jeffrey points out that Ontario, at least, already

has sufficient legislation for its labour relations board to properly investigate any complaints from members of unions, including those of misuse of funds. She also pointed out that the previous Tory government in Ontario had enacted intrusive legislation similar to Bill C-377. These laws not only "failed to promote productive labour relations," they also "used up scarce government resources and were a poor use of taxpayers' dollars." The Ontario Liberals scrapped the laws in 2005.

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