

# American Federation of Musicians Symphonic Services Division Canada

February 2002

## CANADIAN ORCHESTRAS IN CRISIS: The AFM Response

Canadian symphonic musicians are experiencing a phenomenon. Someone has dubbed it the "Lockout Express". The Express has rolled through Calgary. It is currently wreaking havoc in Winnipeg. Both Vancouver and Toronto have felt the power of its "take back" agenda. There are dark rumours that the Express has planned further destinations.

You could see it coming. The signs were there. But few believed that our boards and managements would actually go through with the plan. A lockout is profoundly damaging. It sends a very public message of discord and failure, not to mention just plain mean-spiritedness. It is to the surprise and dismay of many that the lockout strategy has become a grim reality. The single-minded purpose is to extract deep financial concessions from the musicians. Symbolic of the new order is the fact that the familiar SOS slogan has evolved from the traditional "Save Our Symphony" to "Stamp Out Scrooge." (Coined by conductor Bramwell Tovey, a powerful force in support of the musicians' cause.)

This is our new reality, and we have to deal with it. The addition of crisis management to the normal workload has been daunting, to say the least. In more settled times, SSD Canada is busy with the usual mix of negotiations, grievances, recording issues, and requests for advice and information. There is, however, nothing more important than searching for and implementing effective solutions to the current situation. The manner in which this crisis is handled will set the tone for our bargaining relationships and ultimately for the health of our symphonic organizations for many years to come. For SSD Canada, short-term management of this crisis consists of analysis, communication, strategic planning, and the gathering and deploying of resources. At the same time, serious attempts

are being made to engage other industry stakeholders in a search for a better way for the long run.

**Analysis.** Before good decisions can be made about a course of action, it is important to understand exactly what is happening and what the underlying reasons might be. Such analysis can help people see past the spin and the myths to the truth. Much time has been spent crunching numbers and identifying patterns in a bid to gain greater understanding.

**Communication.** It takes time, but the writing must be done so that the understanding can be shared. SSD Canada had a major role in preparing a feature article about the Canadian situation that will appear in the January issue of the *International Musician*. The October issue of *Una Voce's* SSD Page contained a "Good News" article, written for the express purpose of challenging a favourite excuse for failure, i.e. that all symphonies are failing. (See "Good News II" on this page for further evidence that such is emphatically not the case.) Equally important is the ongoing communication that occurs with committee members, Local officers, and the OCSM board. The phone and e-mail lines are in constant use.

**Strategic Planning and Organizing.** The most brilliant plan in the world is worthless without the support of those directly involved. To that end, the Canadian Office is organizing two meetings – one in the West, one in the East - for the purpose of bringing together the leadership of those orchestras and Locals that have been or might yet be affected by this crisis. The agenda will include dealing with the immediate needs of locked out musicians, as well as the development of a plan for long term peace. Such a plan might include developing a strategy of deterrence, building an alliance for political action, or simply dishing out a bit of aversion therapy. A plan might involve reaching out to the entire industry in a bid to find a better way.

More than likely, there will be elements of all of these approaches.

**Resources.** Success is dependent upon money, people, and information, probably in that order. Fortunately all of the orchestras currently facing problems are now members of the AFM Strike Fund. The Fund's benefit structure was changed in 1996 from a flat weekly payment of \$150/week to the current system that provides escalating benefits up to \$450/week as the dispute progresses. This change served its purpose in '96, allowing several major U.S. orchestras to achieve their bargaining objectives. The current challenge is to help musicians survive until those higher levels kick in. SSD Canada is working hard to see that this need is met. Planning for the future must include the strengthening of financial resources.

People are also important to success. For orchestras facing a crisis, SSD tries to match highly motivated individuals with peers in other orchestras who have experience in such matters as handling the media, communicating with public officials, producing concerts, or building audience associations. The musicians in Winnipeg are doing a superb job in this regard. Others could learn much from them. The Calgary meeting will provide an opportunity for musicians to meet and compare notes.

The Canadian Office is also a source of information. Comparative settlements, industry information, public relations materials and legal advice are all made available to those in need.

**The long run: In search of a better way.** As the saying goes, we can't go on like this. Settlements that are imposed by one side or the other through the brute force of strikes or lockouts rarely lead to long term peace or stability. In the interest of finding a better way to resolve differences between musicians and symphonic organizations, the AFM Canadian Office has approached Orchestras Canada. The good news is that there seems to be genuine interest and enthusiasm for the development of a document that will express core values for relationships among board members, managers, and musicians. There is also interest in developing analytical tools and a dispute resolution mechanism for the purpose of furthering reasoned debate and promoting

mutually acceptable outcomes. The bad news is that the new leadership of Orchestras Canada has several other issues to deal with before attention can be given to the thorny issue of peace. So in the meantime, the war continues. We are under attack, and we must defend our art and ourselves.

### **"GOOD NEWS II": RECENT SETTLEMENTS**

All is not red ink for Canadian symphony musicians. The following settlements have been reached for the 2001-2002 season.

**National Arts Centre Orchestra.** Year One: 9.2% increase to \$64,676. Year Two: 6.7% increase to \$69,000. Year Three: 3.4% increase to \$71,346 plus an increase in the EPW contribution from 8% to 8.5/9% (staggered).

**Canadian Opera Company Orchestra.** Year One: 3.75% increase in the per service fee to \$165.52. Year Two: 4% increase to \$172.14. Year Three: 5% increase to \$180.75. Services remain at 104 per year. EPW contribution stays at 8% in Year One and goes up to 9% for Years Two and Three.

**Victoria Symphony.** An increase of 3% resulted from a scheduled wage reopener for Year Three of the current agreement.

### **Late Breaking News...**

Musicians of the WSO have ratified a three-year agreement ending a 32-day lockout by the WSO administration. The three-year agreement includes NO cuts to the orchestra nucleus or the 38-week season. The musicians accepted a wage freeze for the current season and increases of 3% and 5% respectively in the second and third years.

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"Orchestras are not only artistically and financially strong institutions, but in addition to that, they're meaningful institutions..." (Charles Olton, President, American Symphony Orchestra League.)

**Symphonic Services Department**  
**Laura Brownell • lbrown@ican.net**  
**Christine Little Ardagh • cardagh@afm.org**  
**416.391.5161**  
**1.800.463.6333**