

*American Federation of Musicians
Symphonic Services Division
Canada*

February, 2003

In the News...

Soundings gears up for Phase II

The interview phase of *Soundings* is drawing to a close. Written surveys have been distributed to musicians, board members, administrative staff, and music directors in the 26 largest budget orchestras. The *Soundings* report will be presented during Phase II, to be held at the upcoming Orchestras Canada Conference in Toronto, June 5-8. An initiative of Orchestras Canada and the Canada Council, *Soundings* is designed to afford stakeholders the opportunity to express their views about the current and future state of orchestras in Canada. The insights gained from these conversations will be used during Phase II to develop a blueprint for the design and implementation of tools that will enhance the health of Canada's orchestral community.

Help on the way for Canadian managers

Creative Management is a project of the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA). Its purpose is to address the problem of high turnover among Canadian arts managers. For information and discussion papers please visit www.ccarts.ca.

Media meeting held in Chicago

Local and AFM officers, AFM staff, and symphonic musician representatives met in Chicago on January 13 in a bid to consolidate AFM policy on symphonic recording. The sessions were productive and together with input from the EMF surveys, will lend a solid basis from which the AFM will proceed.

New President/CEO named to ASOL

Henry Fogel will succeed Charles Olton as head of the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL), the U.S. counterpart to Orchestras Canada. Fogel headed the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association for

eighteen years and has served as the League's board chairman since 2001.

Artists' organizations take a political stand

A provincial election is on the horizon for Ontario. The SSD has been meeting with other provincial artists' organizations for the purpose of making arts and culture an issue for political debate. The starting point for this process is a document called "The People's Charter" which can be found at www.ofl-fto.on.ca. The Arts, Heritage and Culture portion of this document contains information that we hope will be highlighted in the upcoming election debate. In particular, the focus will be on the questions of arts funding, and the implementation of Status of the Artist legislation.

...and some views

A Kinder, Gentler Way?

Every season a few phone calls come in to the SSD office concerning musicians that are being subjected to the dismissal process. What is shocking is the number that involve musicians who are over the age of 60. This is a time in a musician's life when he or she should be looking forward to attending a lovely retirement party and hearing expressions of appreciation and gratitude for a lifetime of service to the arts. Instead, the older musician is all too often attending a series of humiliating meetings and hearing expressions of criticism and threats.

Issues around the aging artist are not unique to Canada or even to music. The January 23, 2003 issue of the *Globe and Mail* carried a story about a class-action age discrimination suit brought by screenwriters aged 40+ in the United States. In 2000 we had the notorious Glasco affair with the National Ballet of Canada in which age played a part. Just last year there was a shocking situation in Richmond, VA where a multi-million dollar gift was given to the orchestra for the purpose of

encouraging the retirement of musicians with more than 25 years of service. Unlike athletes and dancers, many musicians perform up to or even past the normal age of retirement. Other musicians experience age discrimination or declining skills. The challenge is to know the difference and to handle each case fairly.

Among musical organizations, the larger budget orchestras tend to do a better job of caring for the aging musician. During a discussion of dismissals at an ICSOM Conference the delegate from a major orchestra rose to announce that no one had been fired from that orchestra in 25 years. That doesn't mean that people were not encouraged to leave; it simply means that an organization with adequate resources can afford to take care of people. And a musician who has been earning a good salary for many years can afford to retire. The situation worsens in the regional-sized orchestras. All too often strife occurs because the musician cannot afford to stop earning and the organization has not budgeted for retirement packages.

What can we do about it?

A good first step is to ensure that Canadian symphonic musicians are financially able to retire. Negotiating committees should make an ongoing commitment to securing seniority pay and adequate pension contributions during contract talks. There has been considerable recent success in that regard. Musicians of the Windsor Symphony, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, Tafelmusik, Symphony Nova Scotia, Hamilton Philharmonic, Orchestra London, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, have all achieved pension increases in their most recent round of bargaining.

It is also important to ensure that musicians are aware of their retirement options. In recognition of the fact that some musicians may need to retire earlier than the societal norm of age 65, the AFM-EPW Fund has made a commitment to reducing the retirement age as far as possible without jeopardizing the fiscal health of the Fund. As of January 2000, a working symphonic musician with 15+ years of seniority can retire at age 55 with 76% of the full retirement benefit, and at age 61 with 100% of the full benefit.

Another option in some provinces is to establish a normal age of retirement. (Age discrimination provisions vary by province; detailed information is available from SSD.) If the provincial human rights code permits, an organization may establish a uniformly enforced mandatory retirement policy. There are pros and cons to this approach. On the plus side, a retirement policy eliminates the stigma of being asked to go. Instead, the age of retirement becomes a normal passage from one phase of life to the next.

Most importantly, orchestra committees and Local officers have an obligation to ensure that each individual case is handled in a sensible and humane fashion. For example, if a musician experiences decline but is a year or two short of full EPW eligibility, perhaps a way can be found to change responsibilities so that the person can bridge that gap. If it is clear that the musician will be separating from the organization, management should be approached with a view to negotiating a settlement – and a proper send-off - on behalf of the departing musician.

On-line at the AFM

Many of our services and resources are available on-line at www.afm.org. In the members only area, you can access the symphonic forum discussion panel, read the International Musician, including audition ads, and view wage charts from OCSM, ICSOM and ROPA. You can also request orchestra contracts, and find links to orchestra websites.

In the Canadian SSD area, you'll find settlement summaries (including the most recent 2001-02 edition), Status of the Artist documents, the 1999 Summary of CBC Radio and TV provisions, a copy of the Symphonic Limited Pressing Agreement, frequently asked recording questions, and back issues of the SSD Newsletter in both official languages. If you have suggestions for other items you'd like to see on-line, contact us!

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