

*American Federation of Musicians
Symphonic Services Division
Canada*

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In Search of the Common Ground

There is no question that Canadian symphonic musicians have found new strength. Bargaining results over the last couple of years bear this out. But things are still tough at the table. Solidarity, self-respect, and a stern resolve to achieve fair and reasonable contract settlements will continue to be absolutely essential. At some point, though, we must set aside our anger and our militancy and look at the real issues that are behind the differences.

We all agree on common goals of artistic excellence and good fiscal health. The central issue dividing us is that the musicians are fighting for a larger piece of a pie that is just too small. It is inherently unpleasant for managers to try to explain to musicians who are already pretty hungry, that the plan is to take away their money or at most, to hold them to tiny below-COL increases. And musicians are so full of outrage at such treatment, that they have a really hard time acknowledging that orchestras cannot continue to spend more than they take in. Both sides feel compelled to defend the indefensible. Managements employ a range of tactics to whitewash the harsh realities of what they are asking for. On a good day they tell us that they are sorry. On a not so good day, they tell us that we are the ones who chose this crummy profession. Musicians just look across the table and say, "We don't care if you are tired or burned out. Find more money."

The true path to the common ground lies in mutual acknowledgement that arts excellence is costly. We must recognize that ways must be found to fund our organizations properly so that managements don't feel compelled to continually try to balance the books on the backs of the musicians. We must let go of business "solutions" that don't work for the arts. We must give ourselves permission to get past a pure cost-cutting approach.

It is OK for costs to go up. Let's accept the fact that orchestras are extremely labour-intensive. If one assumes that all staff members (including performers, administrators, and production people)

will, like the rest of the world, require reasonable annual pay increases, it can quickly be seen that costs will rise and that revenues must rise along with the costs. (See "Improving the Orchestra's Revenue Position: Practical Tactics and General Strategies" by Arthur C. Brooks, Symphony Orchestra Institute.)

It is OK to provide adequate compensation for musicians. For many years musicians were told behind closed doors that public and private sector supporters would consider it irresponsible to use grants and gifts for increases in musicians' compensation. Now we know better. Media and public response in recent years has been overwhelmingly in favour of using arts dollars to support artists' incomes. Once people learn the truth about our low income levels, our plummeting status relative to peer orchestras, our injury rates, and our lack of negotiated benefits or a social safety net, they understand that Canada's artists need to be supported.

It is OK to go for excellence. Organizations that enjoy the greatest success in private sector fundraising and in attracting strong board members are those that have created an aura of excellence, vision, and excitement. It is tough to attract money or people if there is a perception that the ship is sinking.

Short run cost-cutting can lead to long run malaise. Depressed incomes make it difficult to attract the best musicians to auditions. Reduced numbers of rehearsals, reductions in section size, repertoire choices that are severely curtailed by cost considerations, or replacing full-time contracted musicians with a variety of free-lancers, all adversely affect quality. When quality is compromised the product becomes unattractive and ticket sales drop. Public and private sector support decline. Then more cuts are needed. It is a better long run choice to go for excellence.

What can we do together to achieve stable funding for Canadian orchestras? We must join forces with the broader arts community in a lobbying and education campaign towards the following objectives.

We must work to change the culture of private-sector giving. Canadians on a per capita basis, give far less than their U.S. counterparts. Governments must create incentives for private sector giving that will support both operating expenses and the development of endowment funds that can provide income and stability. This must be done in tandem with a far-reaching education campaign that encourages Canadians to give some of their newly found “tax cut money” back to the arts.

We must work to ensure that government grants are maintained at all levels. All three levels of government must continue to play a major role. All too often, unanticipated grant reductions are the triggers for internal strife and long run decline.

We must work to bring music back into the schools. It is a well-documented fact that classical music enhances cognitive abilities. This fact can be used to encourage provincial governments, school boards, and parent groups to bring music back to the classroom. The future of our audiences depends on it.

We must work to be vital, relevant, and exciting. This doesn't have to mean tricks and gimmicks. It must, however, mean that we are in touch with what is appealing and challenging to our audiences.

We must work to educate all stake-holders. The arts are costly. The arts are worth every penny.

If artists and arts organizations begin to pour a significant level of energy into a united effort to achieve stable funding, perhaps we can look forward to a more peaceful future. Let's start today.

**Tips on Travelling with Musical Instruments
from a Document Prepared by Orchestras
Canada and the American Federation of
Musicians with ATAC**

Pre-planing time is essential for any air carrier. The more time the airline has to make the appropriate arrangements the easier and more stress-free the musician's journey. Some suggestions to facilitate travel with musical instruments:

- To reduce the risk of having a problem, your instrument should be your only carry-on (plus a purse). The overhead bins were designed for hats and coats, not for luggage. In a sudden change of altitude or in the event of a hard

landing, those bins may pop open and your instrument may fall on a passenger. If your instrument fits under the seat, you should be prepared to put it there;

- At check-in, request a special “fragile” exemption tag;
- The closet space at the front of the aircraft belongs to business class, however, there may be additional closet space in the economy or hospitality cabin;
- The major airlines include seating diagrams for all their aircraft in their schedules. These can be used to help plan seating and storage requirements;
- If storing instruments under the seat, window seats should be requested. If the instrument does not fit fully under the seat, you may not sit in a row with an emergency exit. (Make sure at check-in.);
- Many airlines already have special government-approved netting for cellos which could also be used for other seat-loaded baggage that does not exceed the design specifications for the particular net (i.e. horns, trombones). Airlines may also request approval for safety devices for specific aircraft types. Extra tickets will have to be purchased as before;
- For the cargo area, special codes or tags may be used which already exist for animals so that they will be stored in the heated and pressurized cargo areas. Not all aircraft have heated sections, however, the only widely-used commercial aircraft in Canada that does not have a heated and pressurized hold is the CL-65;
- If difficulties/problems cannot be solved by counter personnel, ask for the duty manager/shift supervisor who has authority to make certain decisions (Caveat: the pilot, like the captain of a ship, as the ultimate authority, can override such decisions for safety reasons);
- If forced to use baggage compartment without having adequate packaging/case, try asking for additional \$250,000 insurance. This tactic may result in finding cabin space for the instrument;
- It is suggested that passengers with stringed instruments release the tension on the strings due to the changes in temperature and pressure in aircraft during flight.

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