



# UNA VOCE

**May 2001 Vol.8 No.3**

- 2001 OCSM-OMOSC Conference in Halifax
- OCSM-OMOSC 1<sup>st</sup> VP Edie Stacey asks us a few questions
- The Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Symphony Orchestra Institute

## **RUMOUR IS A PIPE**

(Message From the President)

“Rumour is a pipe Blown by surmises,  
jealousies, conjectures, And of so easy and so plain a  
stop That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,  
The still-discordant wav’ring multitude, Can play  
upon it.”

The quote comes from a speech by Rumour at the beginning of Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Part II. At the beginning of the play, Shakespeare invokes an Induction when Rumour tells the audience that all is not what it seems. He (or she) means that on many levels. Furthermore, Rumour is dressed in a gown decorated by numerous question marks to suggest both the multiplicity of rumours and the futility of putting them all to rest. As theatre, what he has to say of course can’t be true. However, Rumour tells us that what has happened in the previous Henry IV Part 1, and furthermore what we are about to witness in the ensuing play may not be true either. But because both the players in the play and we as an audience are deceived and deceiving, everyone is referred to as “the still-discordant-wav’ring multitude.” Because the “pipe” is so easy to play we find it very easy to be the purveyors and/or victims of rumour.

Although I think our industry is no stranger to rumour and/or innuendo, likewise it is not peculiar to our business alone. Having said that, it seems to me that we as individuals or as committee members, be it

union or management-related, spend a great deal of time and energy discounting rumours. Unfortunately sometimes we are even the source. Whether out of innocence or willfulness, it usually means we don’t have all the information. Whatever the case may be, rumours create an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, which can lead to bitterness, frustration and anger. This does not lead to a productive or healthy relationship, be it personal or business-related.

Such was the main subject of a meeting between the Symphonic Player Conferences (OCSM/OMOSC, ICSOM, ROPA), Symphonic Services Division of the AFM and the Symphony Orchestra Institute, represented by Paul Bouliane and Fred Zenone.

At the January meeting in New York we all had the opportunity to get to know one another better and to clear the air among the various parties about what we perceived to be our role in the symphonic community. It was gratifying to hear the parties clarify their roles. This may even lead to co-operative ventures in the future for the greater good – for stable, healthy orchestral institutions. Indeed that appears to be the direction being taken by the AFM and the SOI with a follow-up meeting in June in New York. We may not have slain the “blunt monster with uncounted heads,” but at least we gave one of the heads a good smack.

Rob McCosh – President, OCSM-OMOSC

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*The Toronto Symphony is currently working with mediators from the Symphony Orchestra Institute (SOI) which was founded in 1994 by Paul R. Judy, former President of the Chicago Symphony. The Institute defines the orchestra as "an organization consisting of musicians, staff, and volunteers assembled together as an independent, nonprofit institution in which the orchestra, comprised of professional musicians principally performing a symphonic repertoire, is the central component." SOI also publishes the semi-annual Harmony, which is sent to all OCSM-OMOSC delegates and to most orchestra managements in Canada. Their web-site is <www.soi.org>.*

### **The Toronto Symphony Orchestra A Year After The Strike**

(a chat with Gary Labovitz)

In September of 1999, the musicians of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra struck an organization that had no Executive Director, an ill-informed Board of Directors, an insignificant endowment, and a large accumulated deficit.

The TSO musicians have had representatives on the Board and on Board committees for close to ten years. Gary Labovitz is a violist and the chair of the negotiating team who has attended many Board meetings in the past and said "you know, there's a problem" only to be ignored. As the crunch approached nothing changed.

With the end of the strike 11 weeks later, it was obvious that the TSO as an organization needed stimulation. The perception was that the musicians had done well from a public-relations point of view, and that the contract they ratified was a good one. In order to take advantage of the subsequent labour peace, and at the initiative of Nick Webster who was an advisor to the TSO management through the strike, the Board, Management and Musicians invited the Symphony Orchestra Institute to come to Toronto to help the organization develop common goals.

First, the Board and Management proposed a list of four necessary objectives that would please the auditors:

- hire a new Executive Director
- hire a new Director of Development

- hire a new Music Director (Jukka-Pekka Saraste will leave at the end of this season)
- meet targetted budgeting goals

The last point was the most important in the short-term. The orchestra needed to raise \$1.5million by December 2000 or the orchestra may collapse, and they accomplished that goal.

In the Fall of 2000, a large group formed from the main constituencies of the organization – Musicians, Board, Management and Volunteers. At one point there were 20 musicians involved. There were new people at every meeting, both Board members and musicians. The intent was to develop 'breakthrough objectives' that everyone could buy into in order to attain an 'outstanding organization'.

Paul Judy writes in the October 2000 issue of *Harmony*, "Bridging, then squeezing down, and finally eliminating the space between the constituencies of a symphony organization is not easy, and is a process to which too few symphony organizations are seriously committed. The gaps between orchestra and staff, and between orchestra and board, are the widest and most boundaried in most symphony organizations."

During the initial stages, the SOI-led organization developed into 4 groups. Once the most important issues had been identified, they decided that the primary issue was to increase the endowment. The groups worked to develop a 'Case Statement' for the Endowment Campaign. At this point the musician contingent was winnowed down to four appointed representatives – Gary, Jenny Thompson, John Rudolph and Chris Redfield. As Gary explains, "John and Chris were involved in negotiations and are politically active, while Jenny is the newest tenured member of the orchestra and the I feel that a fresh outlook will be helpful."

The endowment campaign will be launched in September 2001 and the immediate goal is to raise \$30 million, then continue the campaign once that is achieved. "We need to ensure the future. If you want something that is top-notch, with high achievement standards, you have to pay for it. The case for the endowment is that the TSO should be the focal point and pre-eminent cultural institution in Toronto. We need the Board to believe in that. It's positive for the Orchestra, the Board, politicians and the community."

The TSO is an aging orchestra that maintains high standards. "That is a testament to the

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commitment of the long-term people, but how do you replace those musicians when they retire?" One 'breakthrough objective' established in the SOI process that may go a long way to alleviate the personnel problem is the 52-week season. The Board says that that is not attainable in the next round of negotiations but more and more, the top Canadians are travelling to the U.S. for auditions rather than taking a TSO audition. In April, the orchestra held auditions for three violin openings and was not able to fill any of them. "How do we develop the orchestra so that in three to five years it is an organization that is attractive to young musicians, and that the public supports?...It's not as if we're not attracting top players, but they have to be aware of the prospects. We've been forced to create a more Canadian reality because we can't compete with the U.S. economy."

It's not the mandate of SOI to find ways to make money for the musicians. But with the SOI focus on an endowment campaign, things could work to the musicians' favour. The future is still not assured at the TSO but if they raise enough endowment and more money on an annual fundraising basis - add to the mix a renovated concert hall and a new Music Director - then the orchestra may attract new people to the Board who can make a difference.

Gary feels that things have already changed at all levels. "SOI has given us a forum to discuss things in a non-confrontational manner. You can still get your back up, but it's soon forgotten in a forum such as this." Has Gary changed his way of looking at the organization? Has he softened? "I like to think that I've modified my stance. Management work is still their work and they have to be supported. But the orchestra's reality has to be very strong. If we don't take our position, then we will be taken advantage of...Every major orchestra in North America has a 52-week season and we're not hesitant to remind the Board of that. Nor are we shy about pointing out the disparity between the TSO and our comparatives in the AFM Wage Chart."

To open the 2000-2001 season, Gary was asked to address the audience as the representative of the organization, something that had never happened before. Earlier, in his remarks to the Board he said, "for the first time I feel like part of the Board." In just one year he has gone from "Board pariah - hard-assed strike leader" to someone who has the respect of the

Board. "This is absolutely because of the SOI initiative."

Gary is also quick to point out that he has no regrets about the time the musicians spent on the picket line. "None of this would have happened without the strike. There would be no impetus to work together. Until you stand up and assert yourself, the Board is in the dark. For the first time management felt our strength."

Lately, things have been running more smoothly at the TSO. There's a new Executive Director, Ed Smith, who held the same position with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. There's a new Director of Development and a conductor search is ongoing but it's still a long way from being the ideal workplace - says Gary, "I don't know if we plan to continue with SOI next year. We'll need funding for that if we want to keep it going. However, the organization is not yet healthy enough to continue the initiatives without the help of SOI."

*Steve Mosher OCSM 2<sup>nd</sup> VP*

## **OCSM-OMOSC CONFERENCE 2001**

The Lord Nelson Hotel  
Halifax, NS  
August 14-19, 2001

The first day (Aug. 14) of the conference is the Negotiating Orchestras' Workshop hosted by the AFM. The first full conference session begins at 9:30 a.m. on August 15 and continues until noon on Aug. 19. Delegates will receive updated information in the next few weeks, including a draft agenda. Please contact your Local as soon as possible to work out the details re: travel/hotel expenses and per diem.

### **OCSM-OMOSC Directory Erratum**

The name of the orchestra in Hamilton is, once again, The Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra. We apologize to the members of the HPO for that oversight.

## Do you look in the mirror when you practice?

We often hear Managements and Boards of Directors of Symphony Societies pontificate that we need to work harder at improving the relationships between the various "Divisions" that make up our "Symphony Family" (Board, Management, Musicians, Audience, Stake-holders, Volunteers, etc;). "Divisions" is a lovely choice of words in this context. Yet the most divisive element in many symphony orchestras is the relationships between the musicians.

During rehearsals and performances our concentration on the music essentially silences us. We are also overloaded by many difficult and under-rehearsed programs, a heavy teaching schedule and family commitments. We often do not have the energy to take notice of what is happening to our own workplace and to our colleagues. There is a price to be paid for that inattention.

When a colleague is absent, do you notice, wonder why, or even care? When a Management says that "we" can save money by not replacing a string player who is sick or on maternity leave, do you find that acceptable? That practice has many negative consequences. What does your audience think when it sees and hears your perpetually under-staffed string sections? What extra burden does the rest of the under-staffed section carry as a result? What inference does an uninformed Board Member draw when he finds that the orchestra sounds good enough with four violas or three basses, assuming that he or she goes to any concerts at all? That well-meaning volunteer may be encouraged to reduce the orchestra even further in a year when the money is tight.

How does this under-staffing affect the freelancer's pocketbook when he is hired on an even more "casual" basis? Does the personnel manager, orchestra member and section leader defend the integrity of each and every section by maintaining its strength in numbers? Do they show loyalty to the regularly hired casuals? We must remember that those casuals allow the core to perform the larger works that motivates the audience to buy season subscriptions. But do the core musicians really care how these very qualified casual players make ends meet when engagements become even more sporadic? Do your casuals work under the same agreement as the core players? If so, do they enjoy all of the same rights and

benefits including some form of job security? Casual players usually can not amend, vote on, have input into the negotiation process or protest an unfair application of the contract. Provincial and Federal labour laws offer basic fundamental protection to all workers who are *employees*. If the members of an orchestra are self-employed, the casual players in that case will not even enjoy the protection under provincial legislation available only to employees.

Your Local Union Office is obliged by the virtue of the Duty of Fair Representation to enforce its members' rights. But how does a Local Union Officer protect the interest of that casual player who feels unfairly treated? When we read in the newspaper about a government, or a corporation that takes advantage of a small unprotected minority, we retreat to our affluent armchairs in the blind conviction that such abuse would never happen to us. When managements start chiseling away at your orchestra from the back of the section towards the front, when will you sit up and take notice? Only when it is your turn? We just have to open our eyes in our very own orchestras to see that the corporate world does not hold a monopoly on the undignified treatment of its workers, your colleagues.

The most insidious application of that state of affairs is when these conditions are not only imposed by Management but are condoned by the silence of the, for now, comfortable core players. Sometimes that practice is actively initiated by a personnel manager who conveniently forgets that he or she is also a musician and a union member, or by a principal player who, not always for artistic reasons, decides who shall be engaged as a casual player or not. In the latter case, a colleague allows himself to do the "dirty work" on behalf of Management. Not only do these activities undermine the cohesion of the bargaining unit, they also diminish the effectiveness of the safeguards contained in the agreement when those very same perpetrators need that protection at some time in the future. And that day will come as surely as a violin has strings.

*Edie Stacey - 1<sup>st</sup> VP, OCSM-OMOSC*

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