

The 2018 Regional Orchestra Players' Association Conference was held this year in Portland, Oregon. The focus of this year's conference was sexual harassment, as the #metoo movement has brought to light this systemic issue in many workplaces this past year.

On the first day, we were welcomed by Bruce Fife, the Vice President of Local 99 AFM in Portland. He shared with us a partnership their Local had with the Oregon Tourism Commission which hired local Union musicians to record the soundtrack for a whimsical commercial. Tom Chamberlain, President of Oregon AFL-CIO, also welcomed us. He spoke of the challenges facing unions after the Janus decision, which made all public sector work right-to-work, but also the opportunities it provides to strengthen internal organizing. To this end, he recommended a Netflix documentary, "Brothers on the Line", which catalogs the process by which payroll deduction of dues became common practice.

Heather Malyuk, an audiologist, returned to discuss how to address hearing safety in the orchestral workplace. She discussed the five-step OSHA process for evaluating a workplace's level of hearing safety and the challenges to applying these rules to the orchestral workplace. The first step is to monitor exposure, which is very easy in a factory, but not as easy in the orchestra, as sound levels vary across the stage and vary constantly throughout a performance. The second step is to use methods to reduce sound environmentally, in our case barriers, shields, risers, or setup, all of which have been largely proven ineffective. (One statistic she provided was that for the 1dB decrease a sound shield provides for the user, it amplifies sound behind the shield by 3 dB!) The third step is providing personal hearing protection devices (ear plugs). This is her specialty and provided a lot of great information about this last year. Most audiologists are not equipped to fit earplugs for musicians or to really know how to deal with musicians. The fourth step is to educate players and staff about hearing loss. Without this, no one understands the risks we face by not taking our hearing into our own hands. Finally, the last step is to have an annual audiometry test, covering a wider range of frequencies than a normal audiometric test, as this is what we use in our work. Heather offers residences for orchestras, and if we are interested we should reach out to her to talk about prices.

Liza Hirsch-Medina then spoke about the recent Janus Decision and its effect on unions. She discussed how the path was paved for this decision by Citizens United, which ruled that political spending is protected speech, by both corporations and unions. Lovie Smith-Wright, Chair of the AFM Diversity Committee, discussed how their committee had been working tirelessly to change the face of the International Executive Board.

Rochelle Skolnick of SSD then presented about sexual harassment in the workplace, and the duties and responsibilities the Union and OC have in those situations. It is our responsibility to inform a complainant about the employer's process and be supportive, but to not give judgment or take sides. It is important

to conduct an investigation, interviewing both sides and witnesses, if any. If the complainant invokes the employer's internal processes and is not satisfied with the result, the union can point to federal and state laws but has no duty to represent the member. Any grievance now would be against the employer and not against the accused employee. It is the employer's duty to provide a safe workplace, free of sexual harassment or discrimination.

Debbie Newmark, also from SSD, then discussed the OC's responsibilities under the IMA. She provided a lot of specific information but mostly emphasized that this was to be a collaborative agreement between management and the orchestra - each project must involve some discussion. She pointed to a helpful document on the AFM website about just this topic under Symphonic Electronic Media and encouraged us to contact her if we ever have questions about specific instances during the season.

Todd Jelen, an AFM negotiator and organizer, wrapped up the first day with a presentation emphasizing the importance of orchestra member orientations. He provided on every step of the process and contact point for a new musician in the orchestra. The most notable observation that he made was that management is the first contact for these people after they win their job, both at the audition and in subsequent communications prior to their first service.

The next morning we had our closed MAL group meetings with other orchestras around our budget size.

Ray Hair, AFM president, presented about the pension fund.

Rochelle Skolnick returned for a presentation about the resources available to member orchestras through SSD. She has started offering a free webinar for Local Officers and the OC, about how to handle their roles and the best practices in different situations. The only requirement is that we get everyone in the same room at the same time. It seems like a good idea.

Paul Austin, the president of ICSOM, then presented about the state of ICSOM. Then, he presented again (after the uneventful ROPA officer reports) about the new Online Conductor Evaluation Program. This has been in the works since 2012 and has finally launched this year. Notably, if management would like information, they can access it from the database and no longer through the delegate. Each musician gets a unique link (like in Survey Monkey).

After this we discussed and voted on various resolutions and held nominations for the ROPA Executive Board. I did not attend the final day of the conference, as I had to leave early.

David Barford