

Report on the 42nd Annual ROPA Conference

Philadelphia, PA - July 28-30
José Leonardi Moore, Delegate

Day 1 Highlights

Roll Call: Karen Sandene welcomes 97 orchestras
Local 77 Welcome: Ellen Trainer
Announcements: Amanda Swain, Vice President
President's Report: Steven Wade

Keynote

Speaker: Jordan Konell, Associate at Willig, Williams & Davidson

Mr. Konell spoke about his upbringing and his experience as a working class member and a musician himself. He represents various orchestras and unions. Mr. Konell also talked about the importance of Unions and political discourse and how these can be used to strengthen your CBA negotiations. He also encouraged all musicians to get involved with their locals and unions, as well as with management to start conversations and share experiences that will help them understand what you do and how important this is, not only for their organization, but for their community.

Nathan Khan Award

Recipient: The Philly Pops

Award for outstanding contributions to professionalism, diversity, and solidarity among orchestra musicians. The Philly Pops, is an orchestra with an incredible comeback story, which can be found here: <https://phillypops.net/about/>

Mobilizing the Membership!

Speaker: Robert Bruno, Director, Labor Education Program and the Project for Middle Class Renewal, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign of Labor and Employment Relations

Mr. Bruno spoke about how the American Reduction Act signed by the previous administration helps strengthen unions across the United States and how the current administration is dismantling all that across the board. The Supreme Court vs. The Lower Courts: Rulings on the Trump Administration. The Trump Administration is losing court cases at the Federal District Court levels at a higher rate but winning more when taking these cases to the Supreme Court.

He also shared ideas on how to turn unions into a more effective organization to increase their membership. Individuals may have some concerns when joining unions. Some don't know how to join, haven't been asked, don't have time, or have concerns with the union culture, among others. Features of an internal organization plan: membership education, assesses the strength of the Union identity, focuses on winning public support, builds stringent labor-community coalitions, develops campaigns to defend membership interests, creates local workplace mobilization structures, asks and incentivizes members to act collectively.

Nine historical reasons for labor's renewal: Strikes have increased and more are effective, new labor bodies are forming and organizing workers, public approval for Unions is at a near record high, income and wealth inequality are extreme, existential threats help unify labor, new ways to organize have emerged, a lot of unmet demand, average union premium 20%, the alternative is unacceptable.

Member-at-Large Breakout Sessions

Here we discussed our orchestra's annual report and shared ideas regarding better work environment, CBA language or changes, budget, grievances, management relationship, among others.

Day 2 Highlights

Standing Committee Report

Electronic Media: Debbie Newark, AFM Director of Symphonic Electronic Media

Treasurer Report and Budget: Rick Basehore, ROPA Treasurer

Connections That Count

Speakers: Ben Waxman, Representative, District 182 of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives ; Evan Kassie, Organizer Philadelphia AFL-CIO; Marjorie Goldberg, Vice President, AFM Local 77; Carmella Green, Labor & Community Liason for Philadelphia Councilmember & Majority Whip Isiah Thomas

- [10 Tips for Lobbying](#)
- [Best Practices for Lobby Meetings](#)

AFM International Secretary/Treasurer Address

Speaker: Ken Shirk

Mr. Shirk spoke of the need for stronger union alliances which can help strengthen bargaining power and legislative influence across multiple entertainment sectors. AFM now has a fully staffed organizing department with a strong plan to organize and redevelop the freelance sector where union density is weaker. Call to action: members must engage politically to protect the arts and workers' rights.

He also addressed how Project 2025 is affecting the pocket of musicians and unions and how the National Endowment for the Arts its been reduced. Technology: using AI without any interactional guidelines regulations

AFM Legislative and Political Report

Speaker: Ben Kessler, AFM Director of Government Affairs

Mr. Kessler spoke about the AFM Legislative proposal having bipartisan support. He also mentioned that based on current copyright law, there is no such thing as "fair use" within AI. The TRAIN Act was introduced: Transparency and Responsibility for Artificial Intelligence Networks Act. NEA - there is hope that we will maintain funding but it will likely be cut, hopefully not eliminated. The goal is to keep the bones of the fund intact for resurrection in the future when needed. He also mentioned the American Music Fairness act - to compensate musicians for AM/FM radio broadcasts. Mr. Kessler encouraged everybody to include language in our CBAs to prevent the use of musician replacement technology like KeyComp. TEMPO is ROPA's PAC that funds lobbying efforts in D.C. on behalf of all AFM musicians. They are also working on: Streaming issues, instrument handling in airlines, Canadians can make living and work in the United States More info: <https://actionnetwork.org>

ICSOM: International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians

Labor management meeting with EMI about royalties, AI, and streaming. This year ICSOM visited orchestras around the United States who are facing struggles with negotiations. Helped with wild fire relief fund, and worked with Puerto Rico Symphony to approved their CBA. They also provided sexual harassment training to all members.

OCSM: Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians
Robert Frasier, President

OCSM had multiple presentations with many orchestras covering topics such as place culture, human rights accommodations, current bargaining contracts, strategies for programming, works by women and nonbinary composers, etc.

TMA: Theater musicians Association
Heather Boehm, President

Ms. Boehm discussed a few trends in the industry such as shows starting at the regional stage rather than directly on Broadway. She also discussed Disney starting shows in states that have less regulations and the surge on bargaining amongst theater groups.

Detection, Invention, and Prevention: The union member's role in addressing conflict and creating safe an inclusive workplaces

Speakers: Naomi Bendsdorf Frisch, ROPA Legal Counsel, Karen Suarez FLint, Secretary-Treasurer, Chicago federation of Musicians, Local 10-208

Ms. Bendsdorf talked about how union contracts need to include the following things: it needs to have a clear language, and need to start building trust between musicians and management. She also talked about a new app to report workplace misconduct.

Ms. Suarez talked about how our current law protects employees from discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Download the app: <https://www.afm.org/not-me-app/>

ROPA EDI Workgroup
Speaker: Alana Wiesing

Alana discussed the history of the EDI group and its achievements. “Formed in 2020 and formally recognized by resolution in 2021, the ROPA Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Workgroup seeks to address the critical ideals of equity, diversity, and inclusion in ROPA orchestras. Under the founding direction of Casey Bozell of Local 99 (Portland, OR) (Portland Opera Orchestra and Oregon Ballet Theater), the group gained membership and has regularly convened over Zoom to exchange thoughts, ideas, and experiences.”

The Workgroup is actively working on developing resources and strategies related to unconscious bias training, audition guidelines, tenure review guidelines, fellowships, contract language, an EDI data chart, and an EDI advocacy survey, with the goal of integrating these resources into ROPA orchestras and future collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).

Leading Tone Editor
Speaker: Judy Naillon

Ms. Naillon asked the member to send pictures or stories to her so they can be included in the next newsletter.

Conductor Evaluation Bank Administrator
Speaker: Lisa Davis

Ms. Davis discussed the Conductor Evaluation Bank: resource to gather information about guest conductors for internal purposes only. The information received is only shared with the management of the organization and everything is confidential and surveys are anonymous to limit ROPA and musician liability.

Vice President Report
Speaker: Amanda Swain

Ms. Swain shared some highlights of this season including attending mid-year board meeting, new delegate orientation, recruitment meetings with Lancaster and OKC Phil; managed new delegate information, sent recruiting email to regional orchestras, among others.

Secretary Report
Speaker: Karen Sandene

Ms. Sandene explained the difference between the ROPA General Discussion List and the Delegate Discussion List. General Discussion List: The ROPA General Discussion List is intended to serve as an electronic forum for issues pertaining to the orchestra industry. Participating members use the mailing list to share information regarding the orchestra industry, and to post information of interest to ROPA orchestra members. Anybody can join this list.

Delegate Discussion List: Delegates use this mailing list to network exclusively with all the ROPA Delegates and the ROPA Board. This list is used to compare contract language and to conduct surveys about conditions or circumstances in other ROPA orchestras. This forum is closed to AFM staff and officers. Only delegates can join.

Day 3 highlights

Protecting the Musicians's Mind and Body
Speaker: Christine Guptill, Professeure agrégée, École de réadaptation, Université d'Ottawa; Cross appointed, School of Music, University of Ottawa; Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Alberta; Status Professor, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto

Professor Guptil talked about preventing work injuries, specifically while playing an instrument. As an oboist herself, she mentioned that 80% of musicians have had injuries while performing. 70 -80% of students at the college level are injured.

She also shared Information on musicians' mental and physical health issues, offered encouragement to engage in occupational therapy, spoke to the health issues that students experience in music education, and the importance of safety in the workplace. Stress can cause hearing loss! Research shows that when people are stressed for whatever reason they can be at a higher risk of hearing loss. She concluded by recommending musicians to visit a rheumatologist to prevent arthritis.

- Christine Guptill Presentation

Leadership Roles: Becoming and Orchestra Committee Member or a Union Officer; and key Legal Cases for our Union
Speaker: Rochelle Skolnick, Director, AFM Symphonic Services Division
Filled

Ms. Skolnick encouraged current members of a committee to recruit new musicians to join the committee. “It is our job to show them how to join, job responsibilities and duties, etc”. There is training that can help current committee members understand how to recruit other musicians. It can be tailored specifically to your orchestra.

Studies show that ticket sales among younger patrons have increase!

She also spoke about all the legal challenges unions are facing due to the current administration. Explained the importance of having the right people at the National Labor Relations Board and how this can affect negotiations regarding compensation, protections, etc. The NLRB is responsible of maintaining the legal rights of all musicians.

Equity Arc

Speaker: Magee Capsuoto, Associate Director, Equity Arc

“Equity Arc provides specialized mentoring support for young BIPOC musicians and helps institutions take meaningful steps toward equity and inclusion. We pursue a multi-dimensional approach to create positive outcomes for musicians of color.” Their mission statement is “Equity Arc is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of local and national organizations to align, promote and develop equitable opportunities for aspiring classical musicians from underrepresented ethnicities.” More information: <https://equityarc.org>

This year’s conference was full of many social and networking opportunities. Not only we had the opportunity to listen to a diverse lineup of guest speakers on a variety of topics, but we also had the opportunity to get to know each other during our Monday night mixer, the nightly hospitality suite, the new delegate Meet and Greet, and the Local 77 bus tour of Philadelphia sights of interest. Delegates and guests had the opportunity to donate to TEMPO and raised \$2,026 at the conference; explored new sections of the AFM website, and learn valuable information to share with our orchestras, including how to get more involved with our Local. Next year’s ROPA conference will be held in Dallas, TX – dates TBA.

For more information visit: <http://ropaweb.org/news/2025-annual-conference/2025-documents-and-schedule/>

Google Drive: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1WJh6hibX2qaXnOgO-HOwriDJFEIKL24>