

Solidarity — Common interest and active loyalty within a group

Regardless of the nature of our workplace, the type of music that we perform, or the instruments that we play; there is little doubt that musicians share many common interests.

First and foremost; we all want the opportunity to perform and have our music enjoyed and appreciated by others. Without the opportunity to perform, what do we have? It's this passion to perform that may be both our greatest attribute and the cause of much of our own vulnerability. In the absence of solidarity; it may even have the potential of being the cause of our own demise.

The 93rd AFM Convention, held in July of 1999 approved a new Mission Statement aimed at more clearly defining *who* we are and *what* we stand for. It now forms part of the AFM International Bylaws as revised September 15, 1999:

ARTICLE 2—MISSION

SECTION 1. We are the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, professional musicians united through our Locals so that:

- We can live and work in dignity;
- Our work will be fulfilling and compensated fairly;
- We will have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect us;
- We will have the opportunity to develop our talents and skills;
- Our collective voice and power will be realized in a democratic and progressive union;
- We can oppose the forces of exploitation through our union solidarity.

To achieve these objectives, we must commit to:

- Treating each other with respect and dignity without regard to ethnicity, creed, sex, age, disability, citizenship, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or national origin;
- Honoring the standards and expectations we collectively set for ourselves in pursuit of that vision, supporting and following the Bylaws that we adopt for ourselves;
- Actively participating in the democratic institutions of our union.

With that unity and resolve, we must engage in direct action that demonstrates our power and determination to:

- Organize unorganized musicians, extending to them the gains of unionism while securing control over our industry sectors and labor markets;
- Bargain contracts and otherwise exercise collective power to improve wages and working conditions, expand the role of musicians in work place decision-making, and build a stronger union;
- Build political power to ensure that musicians' voices are heard at every level of government to create economic opportunity and foster social justice;
- Provide meaningful paths for member involvement and participation in strong, democratic unions;
- Develop highly trained and motivated leaders at every level of the union who reflect the membership in all its diversity;
- Build coalitions and act in solidarity with other organizations who share our concern for social and economic justice.

=====

The AFM's new Mission Statement has no relevance what-so-ever unless we, as members, decide to embrace its ideals. We are not going to achieve all these ideals overnight nor is there a magic wand that can be waived that will instantly turn all these ideals into reality. We can however, start the process. We *must* strive to make these ideals a reality within our Local and within our community. An opportunity presents itself.

I do not recall a more serious threat to an extremely important segment of our Local's membership than the possibility that Orchestra London may not exist in the future. The crisis within that organization has been well publicized for many months through local and national media coverage. Although a number of obstacles to the continuation of the Orchestra have been cleared; many more remain.

Should Orchestra London survive, the issue of musicians' solidarity will play a *key* role in determining much of the structure and policy of the organization for the future. There are many issues to consider.

A ruling by the Ontario government in November of 1999 determined that the relationship between Orchestra London Canada and its musicians was that of employer - employee. This is contrary to the way the orchestra has been operating. The orchestra was assessed an amount of \$128,000.00 for Employer Health Tax (EHT) determined to be owed to the Ontario government. The Ontario government based its determination of employer - employee status (for the most part) on language contained in the negotiated Master Agreement between Orchestra London Canada and the London Musicians' Association. The government cited many factors in support of their ruling including:

- The Artistic Executive and the Executive Council retain the majority of control over the musicians.
- The musicians and OLC are bound by a Union contract typical of an employer/employee relationship.
- Each musician is paid a rate stipulated in the Union contract and is provided a guaranteed income.
- OLC is required to make contributions to the musicians' pension fund.

The million dollar question that the musicians must answer is: Are they willing to risk giving up the above noted benefits, as well as tenure and many other hard fought for benefits, in exchange for retaining an independent or self-employed status? That alone is indeed a very tough question. There are many others that will require a high degree of solidarity in order to arrive at acceptable answers.

How might we express our solidarity? All members are encouraged to write letters of support for Orchestra London to the London Free Press, Scene Magazine, The City of London, as well as local, provincial and federal politicians. Local talk radio shows are an excellent forum to express your support for the orchestra. Why not consider purchasing tickets to one of the remaining concerts of the current season? You might even consider a full subscription for the 2000-2001 season. In addition, the orchestra would be more than pleased to receive your tax-deductible donation to help them achieve their current fund-raising goals.

The musicians of Orchestra London have already shown their dedication to the organization during these very trying months and, in many cases, years. They have donated substantial amounts of money to the current fund-raising efforts and may face the loss of thousands of dollars of unpaid AFM-EPW Canada pension contributions. They have given much of their time to help promote the orchestra. They have written many letters of support. They continue to perform at high artistic levels while they and their families face an uncertain future. I commend them for their efforts. Although I am reluctant to ask them to do more — I must.

As musicians; our passion to perform may sometimes cloud our ability to protect our own best interests. I'll say it again..... In the absence of solidarity; it may even have the potential of being the cause of our own demise. It is possible to want something so much that you may overlook what you may have to sacrifice to get it.

In the case of Orchestra London, musicians have accepted many wage, benefits and artistic concessions in the past that have never been fully restored. Our musicians deserve better! The current Master Agreement between Local 279 and Orchestra London has been under fire for quite some time. The Local has refused to modify its terms and conditions even after repeated requests and demands to do just that. This resolve could not be accomplished without the support of the musicians involved. It is appreciated. However, I expect that further attempts will be made to modify the Agreement for the 2000-2001 season.

The Local and the Orchestra are required to meet prior to November 15, 2000 to begin negotiations toward determining the contractual obligations for the 2001-2002 season and beyond. Under the terms of a Proposal accepted by Creditors on April 10th, the orchestra must prepare a Business Plan containing a balanced budget (for the next three seasons) by May 31, 2000. This plan will *clearly* define the intentions of the Orchestra Board as they pertain to the cost of musicians' wages and benefits. It seems unlikely that an accurate determination of these costs can be made without knowing the terms of the next Agreement. It seems only logical that the Local and Orchestra London should begin the negotiations for a successor Agreement as soon as possible and with the intent of having them successfully conclude before May 31st.

Should this be done? If so, we have many questions that require answers. I very much want the musicians of Orchestra London to be a part of the process that provides those answers.

As your President, I have never favoured a "top-down" approach to decision making. This is not to suggest that the Local or I will dodge our responsibility to represent the entire membership. Rather; I have always preferred a "bottom-up" approach that empowers the members in ever aspect of the decisions that directly affect their professional working lives. That is why Local 279 provides a democratic structure to help facilitate these types of important decisions. That structure provides that the musicians instruct the Local of their wishes after thorough debate and voting by the eligible members of the orchestra. Regardless of the outcome of that vote, the musicians' degree of solidarity will determine the ability of the Local to negotiate any future working terms and conditions on their behalf. Whatever the decision, we *must* all support it and communicate clearly through a single *united* voice. This is not a time to be sending mixed signals. This is not a time to be splitting into smaller groups that may or may not mirror the majority intent. This is *not* a time for the Local to be imposing unilateral decisions. It is a time to come together.

Yours in solidarity;

Paul Sharpe
President