

President's Report
22nd International TMA Conference
Phoenix, AZ

Once again, I'd like to extend the warmest of welcomes to all AFM national and local officers, TMA delegates, and guests here today. We choose Phoenix as the location of this year's conference for a few reasons. Phoenix is the only city TMA has a chapter where our annual conference has not been held. Also, in recent years we have tried to piggyback onto the meetings of other AFM conferences to save travel expenses for AFM and TMA officers. This is one of the reasons Washington DC was the site of last year's conference – to join up with ICSOM. This year, the ROPA conference is gearing up across town even as we speak. I know asking a local to host two player conferences in quick succession is burdensome. But, Jerry Donato of the Phoenix Local 586 has been nothing but gracious and helpful – witness the excellent tote bags I hope you have picked up by now. I'd also like to publically thank Phoenix chapter director Jeff Martin for being our contact here and doing so much to scope out this hotel, and obtain the PA equipment and projector for our conference. Finally, for me personally, I've always been interested in visiting Phoenix in July, and experiencing 110 degree weather. The folks who live here have assured me that it's a dry heat, so there's that.

While planning for this year's conference, I went back to our last year's meetings in Washington DC to reconnect with what we discussed, with the hope that we would build on those ideas this year. As many of you will recall, the theme of our previous conference was "the future of TMA". After a round table discussion facilitated by TMA vice president Paul Castillo, four main resolutions were brought to the TMA executive committee and passed:

- 1) TMA shall engage in and develop an outreach program that shall include the education community, organizations that offer assistance such as the Actors Fund, and expand other TMA programs such as academic presentations
- 2) TMA shall urge its Chapters to contact their respective AFM Locals and offer assistance in ways that are mutually beneficial and further request that the Locals regularly communicate with the TMA Chapters on all matters concerning Musical Theatre musicians.
- 3) TMA shall urge the AFM to suggest to its Locals that they reach out to TMA Chapters in their jurisdictions to establish a mutual working relationship on matters concerning Musical Theatre Orchestras and the musicians who perform in them
- 4) TMA shall implement an email forum, similar to that of ICSOM Orchestra L, for which TMA members, AFM Local Officers and Federation Officers and staff shall be permitted access

These are all worthy objectives, and each is in its own various state of progress towards a final realization. With these resolutions as groundwork, I'd like to talk a bit about the broader role of TMA – how do we fit into the AFM and the music business in general of the United States and Canada.

In spite of the claims made by the Broadway League we heard this past fall at the Pamphlet B bargaining table, musical theatre in the United States is doing extremely well. I would hope Touring, Travel, Theatre, Booking and Immigration director George Fiddler will correct me if my numbers are off in any way, but my research shows touring shows for the 2016-17 season have grossed 1 billion 700 million dollars - that's billion with a B - with over 13.9 million people taking in a touring musical. Broadway has also seen booming business, with gross earnings totaling just under 1.5 billion dollars. 13.27 million people took in a Broadway show during the 2016-17 season. Undeniably, musical theatre in 2017 is a mammoth hit across North America and big business.

Also undeniably, it is the professional theatre musician who adds the unquantifiable "something" that compels the public to leave their homes, which are often filled with endless entertainment options, and to spend their hard earned money to take in a Broadway or touring show. I would argue theatre musicians are some of the most talented, versatile, and often unsung artists in our industry. Often called upon to play increasingly difficult scores with next to no rehearsal time under the baton - or now more often in the case of the keyboardist/conductor - the head nod of someone they just met. With the continued downsizing of the orchestra pit, (arguably the greatest threat to the musical theatre player today) while ticket prices continue to rise, today's theatre player must do more to cover for the musicians cut for budgetary reasons. Also, in many cases the scores are becoming more and more sophisticated. Woodwind players need to be ever more highly skilled on multiple instruments, brass players must play increasingly punishing scores 8 times a week and are expected to not chip a note, keyboard players operating a rig more suited for a NASA mission than the theatre pit, bass players throwing their double basses to the side to grab an electric for that quick change... What we do is a highly skilled job, and in many ways unique when compared to the way our other AFM brothers and sisters make their living. I, like many of you, are enormously proud of my fellow theatre musicians. This past spring, I had the pleasure of sitting in the pit of Hamilton in Chicago to watch that highly skilled group of players - Chicago chapter director Heather Boehm and TMA president emeritus Tom Mendel prominently among them - play that very difficult score. It was an inspiring evening to say the least.

The Theatre Musicians Association is the one AFM conference that addresses the complex, specialized issues of playing musical theater in the 21st century. During this past year as president of this remarkable organization, I often find myself asking if we are strong enough, creative enough, and adaptable enough to take on those issues. I'm inclined to think we are, but I also believe that we as an organization can be so much more. At the last conference, I think we began to answer our questions of identity and purpose in a clear and purposeful way, but now we must add on to this work. Because of my position as TMA president, I was able to sit down at the Pamphlet B negotiating table this past fall and advocate for our members, and thanks to the invitation of Ray Hair, was able to add my voice to the small side caucus meetings where much of the final deal came together. We have

tackled the problem of the virtual pit orchestra head on. In the recent past, we strongly advocated to do away with the unfair tier system that sent our brothers and sisters on the road under a union contract earning embarrassingly low wages. We have written language local negotiators can add to their contracts to put rules in place to fairly treat local keyboard substitute players fairly. We have done quite a bit.

I'm proud of this organization. It's my honor to serve it. Yet I often find myself asking – why isn't every theatre musician in the United States and Canada a TMA member? Why don't we have chapter in every city where tours regularly stop, or where there is a vibrant regional theatre scene? When I was a kid in college, I couldn't wait to join the AFM, because that was the organization in which all the best professional musicians belonged. TMA must have this same sort of allure to the theatre player. Immediately after a musician plays his or her first Broadway show, or gets hired as a local musician to play in a touring production, it should be automatic for that musician to contact his or her local TMA chapter and join up. Later in the conference, you will be hearing presentations on recruitment given by Heather Boehm, who has done wonders adding members in Chicago, and on outreach by vice president Paul Castillo. I urge all the chapter directors here to bring what is said in these presentations back home with you and share it with your members, in order to energize them. You are here today in Phoenix because you believe in TMA's mission and potential. I hope you will be inspired by what happens here today and tomorrow, and I look forward to bright future of the Theatre Musicians Association. Thank you and enjoy the conference!