

## 2008 TMA Conference President's Report – Vicky Smolik

Theatre is live and well in Saint Louis at this moment. In the last eight weeks I have been through seven different shows rehearsing one while playing another. The shows produced at the Municipal Opera Theater (Muny) included *The Producers*, *High School Musical*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Muny's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, *Miss Saigon*, *My One & Only* and *Fiddler On The Roof*.

In every show, the minimum number in the pit was 25 and in several cases 31 – except for *High School Musical* – which used 13 musicians. Local 2-197 and its Muny negotiating team faced a long hard battle over the minimum number of live theatre musicians. The Local 2-197 team, of which I was a part, stayed tough to the end. Our contract runs for five years with raises of 3% each year and a 1% pension increase over the course of the contract.

My point is that we must strengthen our Local Theatre Contracts and our National Theatre Contracts in the number of musicians we have working. The question is, **How Do We Do That?**

Over the course of the last several years, we have seen the number of theatre musicians dwindle in the workplace. We have seen pits being covered over, orchestras put in a place where they won't be seen. We are seeing the mix of the sound of live orchestras becoming extremely electronic **and synthetic** sounding. We are seeing a smaller number of musicians being used in the rescoring of musicals. We have seen the inability to get the original orchestrations released that are scored for large orchestras when they are asked for – even by management. We have seen the Virtual Orchestra even in some of our large cities and large venues. We have also seen the use of tape (hard drive technology). **How Do We Combat These Problems?**

Stopping technology is an extremely difficult task to accomplish. In fact, it may be VIRTUALLY impossible.

What can we do? I believe educating the public is one answer. In order to do that, we must have a unified plan and money to work with. A carefully lined-out campaign that uses great public relations along with a lot of advertising could go a long way. Finding a way to hit every free **and affordable** venue of publicity with some great ads is essential. We must have a slogan. We must have an audio or even visual ad to back up our slogan promoting live music in general.

Another answer is to strengthen our contracts while building strong relations with our theatre owners and producers. Sometimes this is hard to do, but with a lot of effort, it is usually possible. These days, striking and leafleting don't seem to be the only answers, or in many cases not the best answers.

I have noticed that when we leaflet a show (especially when we are in the theatre) our leafleting seems to confuse the public and does not help them understand our position.

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A better solution might be to put on concerts promoting live music in general, or putting on demonstrations of the instruments in the pit before the show. Our concerts and demonstrations need to show the entire string, woodwind, brass and percussion sections playing music the way it was meant to be played by its original composer. **These concerts could also provide a side by side comparison to the reduced scores so often used today.**

We need to uncover our pits so we can see the live musicians or make announcements that there are live theatre musicians playing when we are not seen. We need to work with our sound technicians so that what is being heard by the audience sounds like a full theatre orchestra – not a recording made in a studio. We need to work with publishing companies to keep the original scores available. We need ads on radio, television and internet sites promoting live music in every city where we work.

We also need to let our Producers and Theatre Owners know we want to have good working relationships with them and the way to do that is through live theatre music and not the Virtual Orchestra or Hard Drive technologies.

The show *Dirty Dancing* has all the makings of a hug hit **and has already set many sales records**. They did not need to use a tape to replace live musicians to make plenty of money.

The Toronto musicians and their Union were faced with a dilemma. The producers were going to bring in this show. There were not **merely** one, but two tapes available for use that had no AFM ties to them. The union met with the producers and a deal was reached that **would allow** the show **to use** local musicians. The tape would be remade, in Toronto, under AFM contracts. The tape would be used on the show along with live local musicians and the recording musicians **would receive** payments for re-use.

The show will begin soon in Chicago, and then move to Boston and Los Angeles using nine locals and the Canadian tape. **There is significant risk that use of such taped music in theatre pits will increase, and as a result, will decrease Theatre Musician employment opportunities everywhere.**

We must take a **strong** stance on this issue at our next national negotiation. We need to let the producers know that **Tape Is Not the Answer**. If we don't we could find a new letter in front of TMA – the letter "E." E-TMA – the Extinct Theatre Musicians Association.

Thank you