

The summer of 2019 brought warm temperatures, a Red Sox team with a World Series hangover, and, perhaps most importantly, Theatre Musicians Association officers from all over the country to Boston. Our 24th annual conference was held within the jurisdiction of my home local 9-535 on July 29 and 30. It was a chance for TMA and AFM officers to get together to attend meetings, presentations, and join in on discussions pertaining to all things musical theatre. As a bonus, The Boston Musicians' Association and I were able to play host and show off the Hub of the Universe to our guests. My thanks to BMA president Pat Hollenbeck and the members of the Board of Directors for all their assistance with our conference and helping to make it the success it was. I'd like to use the space here to fill you in on some of the highlights of our conference.

- After opening remarks from myself and TMA Boston chapter president Walter Bostian, AFM International President Ray Hair took to the podium to report on the recently concluded 101st AFM Convention, the status change of the AFM-EPF, and how capturing streaming revenue is paramount to the efforts being made to bolster the pension fund. President Hair spoke about the upcoming negotiations for a successor agreement to the expiring pamphlet B touring musicals contract, and gave a short history of independent contractor laws and how changes to those laws have negatively affected the membership numbers of the AFM over the years. AFM Secretary-Treasurer Jay Blumenthal then addressed the attendees, and described the AFM's recent move up a few floors at 1501 Broadway, and what a massive undertaking that turned out to be.
- At this point it was my honor to address the conference and give my President's report. I began by pointing out Broadway and international touring musicals are having a record season vis-à-vis ticket revenue and attendance, and I wondered aloud how this fact will affect the Pamphlet B negotiations that are right around the corner. I spoke about my experience attending my first AFM Convention, and summarized the two resolutions TMA submitted and were able to get passed: First, to encourage the AFM to use its best efforts to influence producers of touring musical theatre productions to use fuller orchestras and employ more musicians. Second, to organize, on a national level, the proliferation of touring acts sometimes known as "star attractions" – the Josh Groban's, Two Cellos, and Il Divos of the world - that crisscross the country sometimes exploiting musicians with sub-standard wages and no benefits or protections. Finally, I spoke about what an honor it was to address the Convention and convey how proud I am of TMA, our officers and board, and all our members making first class music in the theater pits across our Federation. TMA Vice President Heather Boehm followed me and gave a report highlighting the recent campaign to organize the Porchlight Theatre in Chicago.
- We were then treated to reports from the other players' conferences – Paul Austin for ICSOM, Liz Johnson for OCSM, Martin McClennan for RMA, and Mike Smith for ROPA. Lovie Smith-Wright gave her always interesting Diversity Report. We then welcomed our first guest speaker of our conference – labor attorney Gabe Dumont. Gabe is perhaps the top labor lawyer in the Northeast, and the Boston local has been lucky to call him our attorney for many years. His talk, titled "Organizing Musicians At Theatre Venues" touched on voting eligibility, employee versus independent contractor status, and joint employer issue.

- Southern California chapter president Paul Castillo led a panel discussion entitled “Pamphlet B Issues and Solutions”. The purpose of this panel was to identify and discuss issues TMA would like to see addressed in the Pamphlet B negotiations that are just on the horizon. Participating in the panel were DC-Baltimore chapter Secretary Treasurer Brian Butler, TMA member from Philadelphia Susan Lerner, TMA Secretary/Treasurer Mark Pinto, and St Louis chapter director and TMA president emeritus Vicky Smolik.
- Our busy first day concluded with a presentation entitled “Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone – Hearing Health, Healing Loss” given by Dr. Stephen D. Rauch, MD – Professor and Vice Chair for Clinical Research, Dept. of Otolaryngology, Harvard Medical School

The day’s meeting adjourned, and conference participants were treated to a duck boat tour of historic Boston, followed by a meal at the Union Oyster House – America’s oldest restaurant.

The next day was highlighted by a report by Broadway director Jan Mullen on the newly ratified Broadway agreement. Finally, elections were held, and all national TMA officers were re-elected by acclamation: myself as president, Heather Boehm as vice-president, and Mark Pinto as secretary/treasurer.

It is always a pleasure to attend these conferences and meet with theatre musicians from all over the United States and Canada. Whether you only occasionally play musical theatre productions, or you make life in the pit your full-time job, I think you will find TMA membership worthwhile. Please go to afm-tma.org to learn more about our organization, or contact me at president.tma@afm-tma.org.