

Bruce Ridge

Chairman

International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians

American Federation of Musicians

of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO

Before the

House Committee on Education and Labor

Hearing on the Economic and Employment Impact of the Arts and Music Industry

March 26, 2009

Good morning, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and members of the Committee. My name is Bruce Ridge. I am Chairman of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, or ICSOM, which is a conference of the American Federation of Musicians, or AFM, and I'm also a double-bassist in the North Carolina Symphony. On behalf of ICSOM's thousands of members and AFM's tens of thousands of members – comprising over 230 affiliated locals across the country, including Local 367 in Vallejo, CA and Local 424 in Richmond, CA in Chairman Miller's district – I thank you for your attention to the impact of the economic crisis on the working musicians and performers ICSOM and the AFM represent.

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As you have already heard, the arts help drive the economy, build communities, and educate future generations. Too often forgotten, however, are the artists who make these contributions possible.

As an orchestral musician, I know how much people love to hear us play; and we love to play for them. The numbers bear out this popular commitment to the arts: Opera attendance has increased 40% since 1990. Classical music accounts for 12% of sales on iTunes, and music schools across the country are seeing an all-time high in numbers of applicants. America's talented young people are seeking opportunities to pursue their dreams of artistic excellence in record numbers.

Musicians love their work. None of us do this for the money. It takes years of hard work and dedication to perfect our craft. But we must still pay doctors' bills, make rent, and put food on our families' tables.

I've been fortunate in my career. I started playing at age 10, and I've worked steadily as an orchestral musician for 30 years, the past 22 of which I've spent in the North Carolina Symphony. But finding this stability has not been easy. By age 15, I was a working professional in the Virginia Symphony. I would go from school to symphony, then play in late-night jazz clubs I was too young to legally get into otherwise. Back home by 3 am, I'd be sitting at a desk in school just a few hours later. Although I may have started a bit younger than others, my story is not atypical. Many classical musicians work several jobs, driving from town to town as members of a "Freeway Philharmonic." Some

members work in as many as four different orchestras – each a different two hour commute from home, and each with its own set of concerts, rehearsals, and community involvement.

In today's economic climate, the challenges for working musicians are growing ever more serious. Some orchestras have already folded, and many more face the prospect of reduced seasons, layoffs, lower wages, and higher health care premiums. This is a national problem. The musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony, one of the world's finest orchestras, recently accepted an 11% pay cut. The Baltimore Opera Company has filed for bankruptcy. The Santa Clarita Symphony, in Ranking Member McKeon's district, cancelled its 2009 season. The musicians of the Honolulu Symphony are now *seven weeks* behind in paychecks. On a daily basis my phone rings with more news of yet another orchestra's financial crisis.

For musicians, the losses are immeasurable. Some must sell their instruments to make ends meet, while others face the loss of their careers altogether. Many of these musicians have children or spouses who depend on them and who also suffer from these cutbacks. What could I say, when a woodwind musician whose orchestra faced reductions in pay and healthcare benefits asked me how she would be able to take her child to the doctor with the orchestra's proposed cutbacks?

The problems extend beyond orchestral music. Musicians of all types are small businesspeople, patching together royalties, concert fees, and union benefits like session

fees, pension, and health care to come up with a decent living. On Broadway, musicians face replacement by “virtual orchestras” – recorded music substituted for live music. In Hollywood, outsourcing film scores to musicians abroad threatens American musicians’ livelihood.

Congress can make – and indeed already has made – a big difference in these musicians’ lives. The American Jobs Creation Act helped our recording musicians by providing tax incentives for domestic film production. Congress has also helped the AFM keep its defined-benefit pension plan available to its members, and we thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Congress continues to help working musicians. Several members of the Committee have co-sponsored H.R. 848, the Performance Rights Act, which gives recording artists a right to royalties when their performances are played over AM-FM radio. Most recording artists aren’t household names. They’re background performers and session musicians – the behind-the-scenes artists who make music happen. Even the more well-known recording artists often have a narrow window of popularity; their songs are then played over the radio for years thereafter. But unlike other copyright holders, performing musicians never receive a single cent when their recordings are played over the AM-FM radio. The Performance Rights Act would rectify this inequity, and we ask you to consider supporting this important legislation.

Entertainment – theater, film, video games, recordings, etc. – is America’s second-largest export, and music is a central part of that economic enterprise. But music’s value as a symbol of the American spirit is incalculable. We saw it when the New York Philharmonic, an ICSOM and AFM-represented orchestra, traveled to North Korea on a mission of diplomacy and artistry. We see it here at home when my own North Carolina Symphony – founded during another time of economic crisis, the Great Depression, as part of the WPA – plays free concerts for tens of thousands of schoolchildren each year. Our performers cherish at these opportunities, but they also need to make a living.

Thank you for your attention.