

2019 ROPA Conference Report

By Beth Larsen, PBO ROPA delegate

The 2019 ROPA conference was held in Boston, July 28-30, 2019 at the Boston Hilton Logan Airport hotel. The Boston Ballet Orchestra, Cape Symphony and the Portland Symphony were the host orchestras.

Topics covered included: negotiating, union organizing, diversity and inclusiveness, explanation of the new IMA, musician self-care, and the overall state of our profession.

Specific highlights from the 3-day conference:

1. Keynote speaker, Carolyn Nishon, Ex.Director of Portland Symphony gave a fascinating presentation of how the orchestra regained its financial health after nearly collapsing in 2008. The musicians and management worked together to find creative solutions through community involvement and better strategic planning.
2. Oboist and Alexander Technique practitioner Petrea Warneck , gave an informative and hands on lecture about musician self care.
3. Todd Jelen, AFM Negotiator and Organizer gave a class on ways to improve Union participation among members of our orchestras. The majority of the presentation was about changing our perception of the Union as “those People” to “we are the union” (transactional to transformational).
4. Debbie Newmark, AFM Symphonic Services Division, gave an in-depth explanation of the new, updated Integrated Media Agreement (IMA), which is current until 2022. Palm Beach Opera is still working under the 2009 agreement and needs to sign up for the “new and expanded” agreement.
5. The Conductor Evaluation Surveys have been streamlined and are now done electronically online. No more paper surveys! We will be using this system in March during our Eugene Onegin run.
6. Our own former colleague, Rochelle Skolnick, gave a short, general talk about the AFM’s Symphonic Service Division and what they do and have done this past year.
7. There was a lovely tribute and slide show of two long time ROPA delegates, Janice Galassi and Linda Boivin. We lost both of these wonderful ladies last year. Janice in particular was an expert union negotiator and helped the SWFSO get their first contract.
8. Labor Attorney Mel Schwarzwald held an insightful session of Q and A on how to deal with the negotiation process.
9. AFM President Ray Hair spoke about the lobbying and eventual passing of the Butch Lewis Multi-Employer Pension Act. This will help shore up the AFM-EPF pension.
10. Lovie Smith, AFM Diversity Committee gave a presentation on inclusion and diversity and how our institutions can address racism and unconscious bias.

THE NEXT ROPA CONFERENCE WILL BE JULY 28-30TH, 2020 IN ORANGE COUNTY, CA