

TMA and Building Solidarity

By Paul Castillo

Guest Contributor, Theatre Musicians Association

I want to begin by thanking TMA President Tony D'Amico for the opportunity to write this month's column. Solidarity is at the heart of the Theatre Musicians Association (the "TMA"). A primary goal is to strengthen relationships with the Federation and the AFM Locals. The current issues include the ever-diminishing pit orchestras and musician/actors on the musical theatre stage. The TMA is building solidarity to fix the problems with those and other issues.

Part of solidarity involves supporting others in one way or another. This year TMA Vice President Heather Boehm, TMA President *Emeritus* Tom Mendel, and other TMA members attended rallies and spoke in support of the Chicago Symphony Musicians, who at the time of this writing are on strike over fair wages and benefits. In March, at the invitation of my AFM Local, I attended the first negotiation session of the Motion Picture and TV negotiations as an AFM member and a representative of TMA. In February I attended the AFM Western Conference on behalf of TMA.

Members working together with AFM Locals and officers is critical to solidarity. In a recent conversation with a Local officer, it was mentioned that prior to a local negotiation for a musical theatre agreement an email survey was sent to AFM members who had worked under the local agreement, some of whom were members of other Locals, and that there were few responses. A survey is a union's way of asking for help with negotiations so that the union can help members get what they want in an agreement. It builds union solidarity. Without it, the union has little choice but to bargain the level of exploitation the employer will be allowed to commit upon the musicians, instead of bargaining for what musicians want. Connecting with the union is vital to successful employment.

The concept of solidarity and employment is certainly not new, and much has been written and said about it. In contemporary terms, solidarity is a major part of a support system for musical employment of all kinds. The TMA is an integral part of the AFM and musical theatre employment for musicians, and the TMA, along with the AFM, are fundamental to the support system for musicians employed in musical theatre. Simply put, Solidarity = Support System + Unity = Successful Employment!

As the TMA continues to build solidarity, we will be looking at principles to incorporate in our efforts. Here are several to consider:

There is always one more thing you can do to influence the matter to your favor. Few things are more frustrating than being told "can't do" when asking for help or information. The emphasis needs to be on what can be done. It's not always easy to come up with "can do" items. Sometimes it's necessary to get ideas from others, i.e., the support group. Then, and this is the most important part, we go and do that one thing. After that, "There is always one more thing..."

Empty your bowl so that it may be filled. Things accumulate over time, often to the point where they are not only useless, they may be harmful. We must ask, "What are we doing that we

should not be doing?” and hack away the unessential. This makes way for new things that yield better results.

Use ecological solutions. For any solution we must ask two questions: (1) “Will this cause harm to ourselves?” and (2) “Will this cause harm to any other musicians?” If the answer is “No” to both questions, the solution is ecological and consistent with solidarity. If the answer is “Yes” to either question, then the solution needs to be modified. If it becomes necessary to ask someone to make a sacrifice so that we may benefit, we must first ask ourselves what sacrifice we will make so that they may benefit, and make that sacrifice.

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