

Dear PSO Colleague,

I'm writing to let you know I'll be voting **FOR THE UNION** in the forthcoming PSO election because *we can accomplish far more for ourselves as a group than we can as individuals* in creating an atmosphere equality, fairness and artistic integrity. Here's why.

One question I'm frequently asked in conversation about a union contract is, "What's in it for me?" I can answer that by posing the greater question, "What's in it for us?" With few exceptions, most of us are expected to work in groups, and as such, it is far more beneficial to approach our services as members of an ensemble, not as individuals. When we focus on circumstances that benefit the group as a whole, *all individual members* will benefit from the results. Having a Union collective bargaining agreement (CBA) assures that the entire ensemble - with its current and future personnel - will enjoy working conditions far superior to conditions where musicians are treated as individuals.

After the "What's in it for me" question, the issue of compensation usually follows. While it's true that the Union works effectively to increase pay scales for musicians, there are other important elements to a collective bargaining agreement that can *only be achieved if we work as a group*. Musicians with a CBA enjoy an orchestra roster, tenure, seating order, peer review for job protection, input on sub lists, sick leave, and many other benefits that we can negotiate only through the Union. Otherwise, we are left to beg individually for unilateral edicts from management. In other words, *we as a group can focus our power together and elevate ourselves to a level equal to management*, sit across from them at the negotiating table, and set our own working conditions on a level playing field.

Even if you think the current PSO environment is okay without a CBA, the fact is that we are still greatly disadvantaged because management retains complete control over everything we do with absolutely no room for negotiation. On a whim, they can reseat, replace or quit hiring us for no reason, decrease or freeze pay indefinitely, reduce the season and make recordings without compensation, because they maintain total control over the product that *WE create together as a group*. While it's conceivable that a "special" individual can take advantage of an "open door policy" and get something better for him or herself, where does that benefit the ensemble as a whole? Would it not be better for the entire group to be represented as equals? Without a Union agreement, the avuncular veneer of management can quickly erode to reveal an aloof, calculating despot who cares little about the welfare of musicians but more about preserving an atmosphere of covert intimidation and maintaining the servile gratitude of individual contractors.

Finally, I'd like to answer another important question, "Who is the Union?" It's not some secret society with arcane robes and rituals or a group of faceless men in 3-piece suits bullying management. It's not some renegade group of labor vigilantes. The Union is a fraternity of musicians with the single goal of ensuring good working conditions, fairness, and better economic circumstances for musicians everywhere. In other words, we are the Union and *they are us*. We don't work for the Union, *we are the Union!*

Please join me in voting **FOR THE UNION** this September. We'll get far more together than we ever will alone.

Sincerely,



Brian Brown