

Working time (work / life balance) - resting and recuperation - travel time
guidelines for increased efficiency and reduced stress
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Contracts and Agreements concerning working conditions are at the root of our work as orchestral musicians, so;

Two thoughts to start with:

The primary objective for all of us, I believe, is to play one's instrument to the highest possible standard within the orchestra.

Musicians usually play to their best when they feel in control.

These are two simple statements but the task we have, is to achieve these objectives within the working environment of a complex social model, the orchestra,

For a musician to feel a complete person and to perform to their best it is also important for them to have a balance between work and life outside the orchestra. The problem is that members of orchestras have many differing needs to achieve this balance. Some musicians like to play other forms of music such as chamber music or jazz, some like to teach, others have hobbies such as sport or photography and many do all these things! In addition, there is the need to practice and maintain one's individual competence. The common need, already identified earlier, is time: time to rest, time to pursue other activities, and time to recuperate from the demands of travelling, rehearsing and performing.

Sometimes travelling can be the most stressful part of orchestral life, particularly in today's world and it is important that this is fully recognised.

If we are to reduce stress and improve performance, we must first recognise what causes stress for the orchestral musician. Let us look at some of the causes of stress that can be dealt with in working and contractual conditions as other causes may be better dealt with under Health & Safety - perhaps in the next session.

If there is not sufficient time to recover from rehearsing, performing and travelling or not enough time to spend with one's families or to pursue other interests, then this is a major source of stress both physical and mental. This can lead to impaired performance and severe problems sometimes ending a musician's career, so it is something that must be taken seriously.

I believe that if we have international guidelines promoting best practice we will have a set of values that should improve the efficiency and reduce the stress levels of today's orchestral musician. One of the keys to this will be the exchange of information about contracts and working conditions for orchestras both nationally and internationally. As we have often seen both in musical performance and contractual negotiations "one musician's achievements becomes another musician's aspiration"

I think it is useful to start the discussion by suggesting some of the items that would be in the guidelines. The obvious start is to have limits on the number of hours spent playing, the number of hours spent travelling and a minimum number of hours between work on different days. I think there are many orchestras that have these already but what do we think is the best possible level to preserve excellence in performance in a fully productive environment. That is the question I would like you to consider in the following debate, but I will make some suggestions.

A maximum number of continuous days worked, number of free days, number of weeks holiday and a minimum period of notice for changes to the schedule are more components of contracts that have been fought out in negotiation in many countries. Recognition of the time spent in individual practice and the amount of free time before work after intercontinental travel are other items we may wish to be included such as time spent on committees. These are just a few indicators from a much longer list of conditions that could be contained in a set of international guidelines that would then be used to help achieve our aspirations.

I believe Fim has a strong role to play in keeping us all informed about what is currently being achieved. This work has already started with the International Survey on Orchestras, a useful database to use in negotiation. It is also important that we share the various national

information that we have such as wages and rates charts. In the UK the BMU did a survey called "What's It Worth" comparing the value of the work of musicians with that of other professions and this can be viewed on the BMU website.

<http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/site/cms/contentDocumentView.asp?documentId=999>

We have basic rights as "workers" under legislation in some of these matters in many countries but whilst this gives some protection, it does not fully address the needs of an orchestra to work at its best both economically and culturally. Orchestras work differently from industry in general, so legislation will only ever be of limited use in achieving the best possible working environment for an orchestra.

As I said earlier, one of the most important things is at least a feeling of having some control and to this end, I believe musicians should expect, as a right, to be consulted about the schedule and workload of the orchestra, something we have already heard about from Francine Schutzman from Ottawa.

In the UK we have a number of different contracts, and agreements covering orchestral work within a number of different situations. We have four self-governing orchestras in London and agreements covering Opera and Ballet Orchestras, the 5 BBC Orchestras, the Regional Symphony Orchestras and the many freelance orchestras. The BMU has representative here from all these areas and I or my colleagues from the UK will be happy to talk further with any of you on some of those details if you wish.

In the BBC, where I work, the five BBC orchestras now have a more flexible agreement than most other contract orchestras in the UK which has enabled us to survive in the much-changed world of broadcasting. However, because we have some "Operating Guidelines" which recognise some general conditions this flexible agreement has meant that we now have some important principles enshrined in the agreement.

The agreement has "a range of measures", such as some of the things I mentioned earlier, "to ensure that players have adequate time off and that there are proper protections for their social and family lives." There is a commitment to give as much notice as possible and to keep short notice changes of schedule to a minimum. "A regular dialogue will take place between players and their orchestra managements to discuss scheduling." The last guideline is perhaps the most telling: "schedules will be developed to take into account a balance between professional demands and the personal lives of players" You may think this is blindingly obvious but we all know managers who think differently.

As musicians, we take the notes on the page as a very important starting point and hopefully shape it into great music by collective effort. The overall result is the most important thing rather than the details contained in it and so it should be for the contracts and agreements that define our working conditions. If musicians have trust in the contract they work under, this also helps reduce stress and results in improved efficiency.

What I believe guidelines can achieve is this: an environment where both managers and musicians take these principles into account as a matter of course and where attitudes change for the better. This in turn, will lead to a more stress free and productive environment for the orchestra.

Let us use agreements to promote and encourage an attitude of openness and trust and a better working environment and let us produce contracts to achieve this.