



# Working together brings results!

*by Phil Ayling, RMA President*

In April we reported to you that the AFM International Executive Board (IEB) had made real progress towards finding resolutions to the difficult conflicts facing our union. The Board took a series of actions, including moving our motion picture negotiations up to precede the AFM Convention, establishing a committee to generate fair and realistic plans for ensuring revenue for the Federation from electronic media, and enacting policies that had previously been agreed to, but had been undercut by President Tom Lee.

More forward progress has been made by Secretary-Treasurer Florence Nelson. Lee undertook a long campaign to deny that there were problems or issues with the bills that had been sent for the fees on Secondary Markets and Special Payments distributions. With support from the IEB, Nelson has now worked with RMA leadership, made real efforts to overcome obstacles placed in her way, and generated a new set of bills that seem to be much improved, sympathetically organized and geared for results.

The process of creating more than 6,000 bills for AFM members with variable fees based on private financial information was a task of extraordinary complexity that the Federation had never before attempted. We all know how difficult and imperfect the process of collecting simple membership information is; imagine the problems involved with setting up a billing database, using information from the Sound Recording Special Payments Fund, the Film Musicians Secondary Markets Fund as well as the AFM's own membership database, to bill thousands and thousands of members!

The problems were compounded in a variety of ways. First of all, President Lee refused to allow the Film and Phono funds access to the AFM database in order to cross-check and cross people off their lists. Many members probably don't realize that fully one-third of the Phono Fund Participants are not even AFM members! Imagine the consequences of incorrectly billing beneficiaries, retired members, ex-spouses and other participants who are not members at all!

Imagine creating brand new billing forms, testing them on a computer, and then having the AFM President step in and insist on rushing out the invoices before they have been properly vetted and fixed. Imagine having members calling with all sorts of problems and not having good answers because the head guy has been busy telling people that there are, in fact, no problems – everything is perfect, and the only members who have problems with the bills are anti-union bellyachers!

After speaking with President Lee and sending him a letter trying get help in working out the many and various problems with the invoices sent out to members, he gave his response on October 22, 2004 (see back page.) Take a careful look at that letter; it is emblematic of the way this President has handled issues and problems. Notice that he has usurped the Secretary-Treasurer's role – and even her letterhead!

Now, however, invoices have been sent that seem to be correct and professional, and they were accompanied by a cover letter that conveyed a real connection with the players. I would like to congratulate Secretary-Treasurer Nelson for having moved this process forward in a constructive and cooperative manner. It is a

shame that the AFM President spent so much time demonizing recording musicians instead of working with them to solve this problem. Hiding the ball and playing the blame game will not bring us together. **Working together and embracing the input and voice of musicians in the workplace will always bring results!**

Secretary-Treasurer Nelson and the IEB have really stepped up to fill the leadership vacuum here. If you have any issues which remain unresolved relative to your bill feel free to call Secretary Nelson at (800) 762-3444. You may also call the RMA office as well at (323) 462-4762 and we would be glad to work out any necessary details so you can fulfill your AFM obligations.



## American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada

AFL-CIO/CLC Affiliated

VIA FACSIMILE

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October 22, 2004

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Dear Phil:

Thank you for your letter of October 20, 2004, regarding an agenda item for the meeting on October 26, 2004 with the IEB.

This office welcomes your assistance in clearing up any matters for the musicians who have received improper or confusing invoices. However, I must tell you that the staff in the Treasurer's office has capably handled the few calls that this billing has generated. At this point in time, about 50% of those receiving invoices have sent their payment. In addition, the Treasurer's office has quickly and courteously addressed the small numbers of calls asking for clarification.

The large majority of the few complaints concerned the perceived unfairness of the payment percentages. They did not understand why those who earned the most were paying a lower percentage than those earning the smallest. We would be delighted to listen to your advice and suggestions on ways to handle that question.

In the future, I suggest that any complaints that you receive regarding this most recent billing be referred to the Federation since we have a track record of resolving these issues quickly and efficiently.

Please be assured that this new revenue will be used to strengthen the Federation which will benefit recording musicians as well as all other musicians. As you know, the Federation has been balancing its budget over the past few years primarily by cutting staff. In the face of a cumulative inflation of 27% over the last ten years, a decreased membership as a result of significant per cap increases in 1991-93, and flat income in recent years, the necessity for additional revenue was the only viable economic course of action to maintain a Federation that is meaningful.

In closing, let me add that, despite your assertion, the Federation's staff has always worked in a highly professional manner - and will continue to do so. Musicians and local officers from all over the country, including Los Angeles, frequently give unsolicited praise to the Federation's overworked staff for all that it does to help and support them when there is a problem.

I look forward to seeing you and the rest of the folks in LA next week.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Lee  
President, AFM