

Internationale Posaunen Vereinigung, Germany

Affiliate Society of ITA

Founded 1988

Interview

with Prof. Ken Hanlon from Las Vegas, President of ITA

Prof. Ludwig Nuss and Andreas Mössinger talked with Ken Hanlon while the Music School Forum Posaune in Detmold , 2007-11-24, also present were Josef Gebker und Magnus Nilsson, Executive Director ITA.

(see ITA-Präsident Ken Hanlon's biography under <http://www.trombone.net/about/bio.cfm?id=2>)

Abbreviations: Ken Hanlon (KH), Ludwig Nuss (LN) and Andreas Mössinger (AM)

LN:

What interests me is the USA is such a big country and Germany is rather small and we have more difficulty getting people interested in joining the trombone association. Where do you see the differences between your country and ours, and how can I manage to get more people interested in the association? Do you have any tips for us?

KH:

I believe we have the same problem in the U.S.. As with every organization there is a core group who does all the work and everybody else joins for the fun and benefits of membership. I don't know whether or not the Hochschulen encourage their professors to participate in the IPV, but U.S. universities highly encourage their professors to participate in the ITA and often support them monetarily and/or in terms of a reduced workload. For example, I ordinarily teach three courses each semester, but because I am president of the ITA, I only teach one course each semester. This is in recognition of the amount of work and travel required of me in this position and to give me the incentive to serve. Also, most U.S. universities have merit pay systems through which professors are rewarded with additional pay raises for their work in the ITA. This is particularly true if the individual brings national or international recognition to the university. This, combined with a professor's personal ambition and desire to further the cause of the trombone, gives professors the incentive to not only join the ITA, but to encourage their students to do so as well. When the ITA was first started in Nashville, Tennessee, in the early 1970s, all of the people who formed the organization were professors; it was only later that professional trombonists began joining as well. The reason for this is simple: professional orchestras in the U.S. do not reward their trombonists for their participation in the ITA as the universities do. They are more likely to reward them for important solo performances, thus, the greater willingness of professional trombonists, such as Joseph Alessi, to serve the ITA as soloists and clinicians at International Trombone Festivals. Their great performance skills and artistic guidance are invaluable to the organization. Obviously, there is encouragement here in Germany as shown by the Hochschule's willingness to sponsor this forum on the Detmold campus, as well as the needed support of the instrument companies.

LN:

Maybe on a smaller scale, but the Hochschulen also encourage their professors to do extra things to enhance the school's reputation. So, they also produce extra pay for these kind of activities, but it may not be as much as in the states.

KH:

I don't know personally whether that's true or not. Certainly, all U.S. universities do not support their professors equally well. However, I can tell from my observations here that, as in the U.S., many of the individuals in the IPV participate because of the love of the instrument. You want to see good things happen and I think that is the same everywhere.

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AM:

With which arguments would you invite younger people to join the ITA or the IPV?

KH:

My response is to try to get students to look at it from the most self-serving perspective: What's in it for them? Why should they do it? I think that journals and festivals provide very important information and experiences for every student. However, what is possibly of greatest importance to them, and something that most students are totally unaware of, is the potential for networking that is provided by the IPV and ITA.

We all know how often we have gotten a job because someone else recommended us or at least informed us that the job was available. You don't do that for someone you don't know, no matter how good a trombonist he or she may be. I think that the number one thing a young trombonist can get out of membership is networking. By attending association functions, a young player not only gets to meet fellow trombonists and the top players in the field, but they also get to be known. The young often mistakenly believe that the great players, both symphonic and jazz, pay no attention to them.

On the contrary, I have yet to meet a fellow professional who is not highly aware of young up-and-coming trombonists. Look at how often it is the younger player who is getting the job! Students often will say: Yeah, I get the Journal, but I can't afford to attend the festivals, so how much am I getting out of being a member? Networking doesn't require travel due to the ability to network through the internet. When you have access to the directory of the association's membership, you can contact whomever you wish. You can send an e-mail or call someone, ask questions and make yourself known to them. I think that this is invaluable. In the commercial music business networking is everything because there are seldom auditions held for jobs in this sector of the music business. A trombonist leaves the job at Caesar's Palace and the person who replaces him or her will most likely be someone who was recommended by another member of the orchestra. It is why the "kicks" bands (after hours rehearsal bands that musicians participate in strictly for fun) are so important. A new player in town goes to these rehearsals in hopes that one of the regular members cannot make it, thus creating an opportunity to "sit in." Through nightly attendance at the various bands' rehearsals, the new player gets to be heard and, at the same time, gets to know the other musicians. Many musicians have been hired on the recommendation of another musician who heard them play at one of these rehearsals. This is only one form of networking.

Whether a young player is a member of the IPV, ITA or the Brazilian Trombone Association, the process of networking is the same. Networking is not only invaluable, but indispensable to a young trombonist who wishes to join the professional ranks. This is a process that far too many young players are unaware of and, therefore, have no idea of its value.

Take the IPV Forum taking place here in Detmold this weekend. In addition to some marvellous performances and enlightening presentations---all of which are highly valuable to a young trombonist's development---no one will leave here without making the acquaintance of fellow trombonists whom they have never met before. You need only look at the performance of tonight's recital. There were students here who heard things that they had not heard before, in terms of what is possible on the trombone if you work hard and have the ability. Hopefully, every one of them took advantage of the situation and made themselves known to the performers.

AM:

Thank you, Ken Hanlon, and now a question about the role of the IPV as an affiliate of the ITA. What can the IPV do to contribute to the ITA?

KH:

As we discussed before we started this interview, it is extremely important that we recognize that organizations of trombonists will make things happen that we cannot. We have to accept the fact

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that our national trombone associations are not big enough to attract the corporate underwriting that we need to support the cause of the trombone.

The example I use is the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE). Since their organization is made up of many different instrumentalists: drummers, saxophonists, guitarists, etc., they have a much larger membership than we do for trombonists, tubists and other single instruments. The IAJE's membership is in five figures and because of that they are able to convince corporations that they represent a large enough portion of the marketplace that these corporations are trying to reach, that it is worthwhile for the corporations to help underwrite the IAJE with sponsorships.

Imagine several of the trombone manufacturers being willing to fund a \$25,000 sponsorship for a global trombone association.

I say global, because no one country is currently able to produce a five-figure membership. It is only through trombonists organizing internationally that we will be able to produce a large enough membership to attract corporate sponsors. In return for these sponsorships, the IAJE publishes in every issue of the journal a column about each corporate sponsor, including a photo of the company's CEO. They also make sure that attendees at their annual conferences are aware of the support given by these companies.

Trombonists are capable of having the same kind of support if we can unite in a single international organization. To address this, the ITA is planning to produce a membership fee that is tied to the economic level of each country to make the association more affordable for everyone. To further help reduce membership fees, the ITA is making plans to produce its journal online, thus, greatly reducing printing and postage costs. A hard copy of the journal will still be available for those willing to pay higher membership dues.

This is where the IPV and other national trombone associations can be of great help in realizing this goal by providing translators of journal articles to be placed online so that members of each national organization can read articles in their own language. Even though English has become the international language of business, it is difficult for any of us to understand all of the subtleties of a language that is not our own. As musicians, we know that much of what is discussed about our art is of a subtle nature and translations are a requirement for full understanding of articles written in another language. This is what is going to bring trombonists around the world together, sharing information in everyone's language. While I can take an article in German and translate it using my Langenscheidt's dictionary and my German book of verbs, the result will be a cursory understanding of what the article is about, but I am certain that there will be shades of meaning that I will miss. I believe this is true for anyone unless they can think in the language in which the article is written.

Obviously, each national association will have the responsibility of finding members willing and able to translate the contents of the journal. This is a big undertaking, but totally necessary if we are going to attract the kind of support necessary to accomplish what all of us want: greater visibility for the trombone, more new works, better pedagogy and more trombone solo and ensemble performances.