



**RECORDING MUSICIANS ASSOCIATION LOS ANGELES**

## The Meeting

Monday, October 25th, 2004 will be remembered as one of the largest General Membership meetings in Local 47's recent history. An estimated 350-400 members were in attendance to participate in a question and answer session with AFM President Tom Lee. This was the first time President Lee had addressed a Local 47 membership meeting since he took office more than 3 years ago. Also in attendance and introduced were AFM Vice President Harold Bradley, AFM Secretary-Treasurer Florence Nelson, and International Executive Officers Ray Hair, Mark Jones and Ed Ward. Additional invited guests included RMA International Officers and Delegates Bruce Bouton (Nashville), Dave Pomeroy (Nashville), Janet Ketchum (San Francisco) and Tina Morrison (Spokane).

Local 47's auditorium filled beyond capacity and auxiliary speakers were set up in the lobby as members spilled outside. Parking overflowed the sizeable Local 47 lot for several blocks in all directions. The meeting was called to order shortly after 7 p.m. A Life Membership was presented to Vi Redd, a 50-year pin to Norm Pento, and the membership referred the evening's legislative business back to committee. At approximately 7:30 p.m., President Lee was introduced to the membership by Local 47 President and International Executive Officer and AFM Pension Trustee Hal Espinosa.

President Lee began with a brief introductory statement in which he referred to the financial problems the AFM finds itself in, as well as some of his goals for the Federation. He then asked for questions from the membership. Long lines

of members quickly formed behind each of three microphones set up for the occasion. The atmosphere was dignified and respectful, but feelings ran high. One result of the meeting was a promise by Lee and Nelson to return for another meeting at the beginning of 2005 in order to discuss AFM finances. They said that the complete financial report would be ready by then.

This was an extraordinary meeting. Local 47 members demonstrated once again their commitment to participation in union democracy. Needless to say, people needed and wanted to be heard. Many members were still anxious to speak when the meeting was adjourned – because of the late hour – shortly after 11:30 p.m. We all look forward to President Lee's and Secretary-Treasurer Nelson's next report to our membership.

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## The Details

*by Neil Stubenhaus*

Over the course of 4 hours, 26 musicians stepped up to the microphones to speak to President Lee. Many had questions, many made statements and some had combinations of both. Throughout the evening, there were several recurring themes, but most of the speakers referred to some variation of "Taxation Without Representation." Recording musicians from LA and all over the country had been asking for good solid reasons to justify the new SPF/SMF fees.

A young violist named David Walther was first to speak. He questioned what he perceived to be the difficulties AFM leadership had establishing and sticking to a budget. Dave asked President Lee whether or not he himself would pay the SPF/SMF fees, considering the huge and unnecessary *(over)*



expense of his anti-RMA letter campaign. Mr. Lee's answer was "yes" - possibly the only definitive answer to the many questions put forth that night.

Lee described his five-letter series as a "tragic event of the past". Piotr Jandula (viola), Steve Schaeffer (percussion), Jim Thatcher (Fr. Horn), Richard Todd (Fr. Horn), Bruce Babcock (composer/orchestrator) and others made reference to the letter campaign as well, asking Mr. Lee exactly how much money the AFM spent printing and mailing the five letters, and why he had felt the need to directly answer every RMA Newsletter. Lee was asked how members could trust this administration to use the SPF/SMF fee money responsibly.

Violinist Mike Markman asked several direct questions about why Mr. Lee had appointed new AFM pension trustees, incurring new expenses at a time when the Fund was slashing benefits. Paul Jackson Jr., a top R&B recording artist, characterized Lee's 9-page letter as an attack on his friends, saying it was "just plain low." Jackson challenged Mr. Lee's assertion that his mailing list was obtained from the RMA LA directory, pointing out that his address was not in the RMA LA directory. Echoing Mr. Jackson's remarks was the illustrious Wah Wah Watson, who emphasized that we needed to "come together" in a style as entertaining and distinctive as his guitar playing.

Prominent conductor and orchestrator Pete Anthony clearly illustrated to Mr. Lee that he and other professional musicians who work primarily on motion pictures know their business from the inside better than the Federation possibly could, and that it would behoove the AFM to embrace the professionals and take advantage of all of this valuable information. Mr. Anthony also observed that Mr. Lee seemed stubbornly concerned only with "being right." Pete said: "I'm not interested in 'right,' I'm interested in work!"

Violist Rick Gerding spoke from the gut. He said "We were invited to attend the Convention to

see the process at work. Many of us went, at our own expense, turning down work in the process. I foolishly hoped that in Las Vegas we would be welcomed.

The process disappointed me. Mr. Lee, you seem oblivious to the wants and needs of one of the most important groups of musicians on your team, the men and women still earning a union wage and paying union work dues... You have lost our trust. You've lost our respect. I believe you owe us an apology." Mr. Lee never offered that apology.

Local 47 members came together to ask questions and get answers. They came looking for leadership. Most people left without any feeling that Mr. Lee answered real questions, or that their message was heard.

The AFM now wants more money. Musicians want accountability. Recording musicians deserve real answers to their concerns to justify writing another check. How can you convince the recording communities that this new tax serves our best

interests? Why have we not been told how much the letter campaign costs? Why did Mr. Lee not come prepared with the financial information promised 16 months ago? Does the AFM plan to allocate these new moneys to our needs or do they plan to put it all in the general fund? How does President Lee plan to restore trust with the very musicians the AFM now wants additional money from? As cellist Steve Erdody so eloquently put it: "If you make me promises now, why should I believe them?"

The following day, the RMA Executive Board met with the AFM Executive Board. We are waiting for communications in response to many items. We asked for their support in ensuring that the SPF/SMF fees will end as of the upcoming July AFM Convention. We also asked for a more fair and universal approach to funding the financial needs of the Federation through more realistic per capita dues. As of this date, the 5 policies agreed to by the IEB and the RMA last June have not been confirmed in writing by Mr. Lee as promised, causing us great concern. Hoping for the best, we'll keep you posted.

