

Broadway violinist on the issues of the strike

"Jobs have been cut and music has suffered"

Bill Vann
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Marshall Coid, a violinist in the Broadway musical "Chicago," spoke on the issues that arose in the four-day musicians' strike.

"The strike transcended the issues of the separate unions. This went way beyond just involving the musicians. People could begin to see the escalation in the union-busting mentality represented by the recent actions of the producers. Their initial proposal was so ridiculous and extreme, amounting to eliminating all live music. They expected us to be weak and isolated, as perhaps we were to some extent in the past. The perception was that there was no unity, no coalition. They did not expect solidarity.

"It was not just token solidarity either. There was really solidarity—passion, and a sense of outrage among the other unions, the actors and stagehands. The issue became the disrespect for the art that has made these people so powerful and given them their millions, on our backs. They expressed complete ignorance, a lack of awareness and basic education on the art form that they supposedly represent. It is just corporate greed, and it was exposed.

"Technology is accelerating in the arts, and used to threaten the artists. There is a real threat of virtual orchestras and tapes that have already replaced performers in national tours. They are using non-Equity performers and virtual orchestras and calling these Broadway tours. That's why the actors see this as their fight as well.

"They've been steadily whittling down the size of the orchestra, and demonstrating a complete lack of appreciation of what an orchestra is. Jobs have been cut and music has suffered. John Kander said recently that 'Porgy and Bess' in its original production had an orchestra of 63 in the Music Box, which is one of the smaller houses. Now the minimum is going down to 18.

The present minimum of 26—that is just the number of violins in a symphony, which shows how small the current Broadway orchestras really are.

"People have mixed feelings about the settlement. We gave away more than we should have, in exchange for a guarantee for the next 10 years. I understand the nature of compromise in the negotiations, but there are concerns over the numbers. Our biggest victory is the kind of awareness we created.

"We are hoping that this is just the beginning of a major public awareness of this issue. This would be a major victory. I have heard of people in symphonies talking to younger administrators in arts organizations who are absolutely uneducated about the arts they are involved in. The bottom-line mentality, divorced from the whole reason we are there to perform in the first place—this must be exposed."



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