

New York Philharmonic musicians back DSO strike

A WSWS reporting team
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The Detroit Symphony Orchestra strike has received support from symphony musicians in New York City. The city has been hit by cuts in state support for the arts and falling revenues for cultural institutions since 2008. These cuts have brought staff reductions and the paring back of educational programs, and have raised the specter of an assault on the standard of living of orchestra musicians.

A case in point is the New York Philharmonic, the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States, which reported a record \$4.5 million deficit from its 2009 season and expects a similar shortfall in 2010.

The shortfall in ticket sales and in city, state and donor funding will almost certainly require the symphony to make cuts, including a freeze on salaries and reduced parks concerts. The Philharmonic receives funding from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, whose 2011 budget was cut by \$20 million.

The state arts budget, which provides funding for the Philharmonic and many other institutions, may see a cut of as much as 40 percent.

In September, the president of the Philharmonic, Zarin Mehta, announced his resignation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to New York Philharmonic musicians as they reported to work at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center to perform the music of Zukerman, Webern and Brahms.

Newton Mansfield, an award-winning violinist who has played with the Philharmonic for 50 years, spoke strongly in support of the striking Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians. “I think what is happening to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians is horrible,” he said. “They should stick it out. We had the same thing in 1973. The Detroit Symphony has the support of every orchestra in the country. My feeling is that

anything they want we should give them.”

Amanda Davidson is the associate principal trombonist for the Philharmonic. She told the WSWS, “I think what is happening with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra is a horrible situation because their salaries are being cut by 33 percent and the pay for newly hired musicians will be cut by 42 percent. I know some of the Detroit musicians by name and reputation, but I don’t know any personally, but these attacks are terrible, and I am happy they have taken a stand against them.

“I don’t know what the New York Philharmonic is doing to help them. I think there may be a fund. If they succeed in forcing these cuts in Detroit, it could set a precedent for all musicians and all of us as to how we make a living. I feel we are part of the working class in this way.

“I think this is also an attack on art and culture because it would redefine how we would have to work and make a living.

“I came to the Philharmonic from the San Antonio Symphony where I worked for five years. We were faced with some similar demands. We threatened to strike, and I know the fear involved in doing this. They wanted to start lowering pay, taking jobs and dividing the orchestra by instituting a two-tier pay system and reducing the number of musicians in the orchestra.

“By staying strong and showing we would strike, they eliminated the two-tier demand, and all the musicians kept their jobs. This was three years ago, and it has also happened in St. Louis. This is my second season with the New York Philharmonic, and people here feel horrible about what is happening in Detroit. We don’t feel it is an isolated struggle.”



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