

Detroit Symphony cancels more concerts as strikers hold firm

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The Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) has cancelled the remainder of its scheduled concerts for the month of December in the face of the determined strike by musicians, now in its eleventh week. If it continues, the walkout will soon be the longest in the orchestra's history.

Management cancelled six "Home for the Holidays" concerts. It also postponed for one year a scheduled December 21 performance by the Canadian Brass, after the group members said they would not cross the DSO musicians' picket line. A December 14 concert by the vocal group Manhattan Transfer went ahead as scheduled, despite a picket by members and supporters of American Federation of Musicians Local 5. Management had to cancel a December 12 concert by the Canadian string group Bowfire after road crew and band members refused to cross the picket line.

DSO musicians struck October 4 after management, citing mounting deficits, insisted that players accept huge concessions. The musicians offered to take steep, though somewhat less onerous cuts, including a 22 percent pay reduction, with partial restoration in the third year. In addition to the pay cuts, management provocatively insists on changes in work rules that would transform the character of the orchestra, shortening the concert season and requiring players to carryout a host of non-performance-related tasks.

There continues to be significant public backing for the musicians. Two support concerts held this week drew large and appreciative audiences. A December 12 concert in the working class suburb of Warren was well attended, despite a snowstorm. A December 14 concert at Stoney Creek High School in Rochester Hills drew a

standing-room-only crowd, as DSO musicians shared the stage with the Stoney Creek Grand Chorus. Guest conductor Randol Bass led the DSO musicians while Brandon Ulrich led the chorus.

Bass, a noted conductor, composer and vocalist, has been associated with numerous commissions and performances at such ensembles as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony of Washington, DC and the Boston Pops Orchestra. The concert included a performance of his work "A Symphony of Carols."

All the artists and stagehands at the concerts donated their talents with proceeds going to support the striking musicians.

In an interview published in the *Rochester Hills Patch* earlier this week, Stoney Creek chorus director Ulrich said the group responded to a request by the DSO musicians to perform with them in a joint concert at the high school. "Their current strike situation prohibits them from performing in their usual location, and we have worked with them several times in the past."

"We were happy to do so because we are in complete support of their struggles," he said.

At the concert, Judy Doyle, representing the SOS (Save Our Symphony), a coalition of donors, audience and board members of the DSO, addressed concertgoers with an appeal on behalf of the striking musicians.

A member of the DSO viola section praised the Stoney Creek chorus. "I was blown away. These kids are fantastic," he told the WSW. "It was a great

experience for us too. It was an all-round success.

DSO Principal Trombonist Kenneth Thompkins, another spokesman for the musicians, commented on management's decision to cancel the season. "Obviously they are not too concerned with getting us back on stage and giving the people of Detroit the music they deserve. It is obvious they want to bring us to our knees."

He continued, "There is a claim by management that we are not engaging the public. The DSO musicians have been engaging the public for years—teaching, performing, and giving classes. It is our community. We want to make it better.

"The difference it is that it is not directly under the banner of the DSO, with the DSO directors getting credit. However, whatever we do on our own we do as members of the DSO." He said that management's blather about creating a "community of musicians" was a "ploy to get us to do these services and not get paid."

"Once they look at the true issues and get beyond the claim that the musicians are 'greedy,' people are supporting our cause."

In another development, two strikers met with DSO conductor Leonard Slatkin this week. The world famous conductor had until recently maintained a public silence regarding the conflict. Slatkin called the meeting a "fact-finding" mission. DSO cellist Haden McKay, the chief spokesman for the musicians, who did not personally take part in the meeting, reported that Slatkin "showed a lot of understanding" and vowed to be a "positive force" for the musicians.



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