

Striking DSO musicians perform Rodgers and Hammerstein in Detroit

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Repeated standing ovations greeted striking DSO musicians and members of the Vanguard Voices chorus at a sold-out strike support concert Saturday in Detroit. The concert at St. Patrick Catholic Church, around the corner from Orchestra Hall, featured the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Performing before a standing room audience of more than 650, guest conductor G. Kevin Dewey, director of choirs at Henry Ford Community College and artistic director of the Vanguard Voices, led the choir and orchestra in selections from *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Sound of Music* and other well-known Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. The concert concluded with a rousing chorus from *Oklahoma!* The concert featured outstanding vocal solos from guest artists Karin White, soprano; Lisa Agazzi, mezzo-soprano; Christopher Vaught, baritone and Karl Schmidt, tenor.

All musicians, choir members, guest artists and stagehands donated their services. Proceeds from ticket sales went to support the striking DSO musicians.

The concert, the first with the full orchestra to be held in Detroit since the start of the strike October 4, drew a diverse audience, including working people, professionals, young people and retirees. Braving extremely cold temperatures, many of those attending said they came to show support for the striking musicians.

In remarks before the concert, musician spokesman Haden McKay thanked local area restaurants for the statements of support they have given strikers. Midtown Detroit restaurant owners say they have lost considerable business due to the prolonged strike.

Another strike support concert is scheduled for January 22 at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Grosse Pointe Woods. It will feature DSO Concertmaster Emannuelle Boisvert in a performance of Romance for Violin and Orchestra, No. 1 in G major and No. 2 in F major, by Ludwig Beethoven. It will conclude with Camille Saint-Saens' Symphony No. 3 in C minor, the well-known "Organ Symphony." Kenneth Kiesler, director of orchestras at the University of Michigan, will conduct.

Negotiations in the strike are expected to resume this week. DSO management submitted a new proposal to a federal mediator last week, which, it claims, raises its total monetary offer to \$36 million, in line with the terms of the Granholm-Levin proposal accepted by the musicians but previously rejected by DSO management. Musicians' representatives are withholding comment until they actually see the offer.

The musicians have previously agreed to cuts totaling some \$12 million. Until last week management had been demanding even steeper cuts, totaling some \$15 million, including a more than 30 percent reduction in pay for orchestra members and 42 percent for new players. The proposed cuts are so draconian musicians say they would cripple the orchestra, making it impossible to attract or retain the high-quality talent it needs to maintain its status as one of the finest ensembles in the United States.

Management also wants drastic changes in work rules, including the elimination of tenure and requirements that musicians perform all kinds of non-performance related duties, transforming the DSO into an essentially part-time ensemble.

While indicating it wants a settlement, management has stepped up its attacks on musicians, distributing copies of a statement to concertgoers Saturday suggesting that musicians were turning down an offer of \$133,000 annually. In fact, starting pay for musicians was \$104,000 before the strike. This would be cut by more than 30 percent under management's last proposal.

DSO cellist and spokesman for the musicians, Haden McKay, said, "It kind of bothers us if they say they want to settle and they launch this kind of attack on us. When we pass out a leaflet we do it in person. They sent a couple of interns from Wayne State University. There was no staff or member of the executive committee present. If they want to say we are overpaid, they should do it themselves."

The WSWs spoke to several of those attending the Saturday concert. Grace, a teaching assistant and a DSO season ticketholder, said of the DSO's performance of the Rodgers and Hammerstein music, "The sound is something people are happy to hear. It brings hope that things can be improved.

"Sometimes when I have had a hard week of work I feel like I just can't make it to the Friday concert. But when I get to the concert and hear the orchestra play, the tiredness just goes away. It just erases it."

Speaking of the strike she remarked, "The musicians are willing to compromise, but not give up everything. They want people to realize they have something remarkable in this orchestra.

"I used to be a cashier at Kroger and we went on strike. I know what it is like to have no money coming in. People have to live day to day. You do wonder at the impact on the musicians of standing up for their beliefs. I hope they get what they want."

She spoke about the impact of the cuts taking place in the arts. "It would be good if artistic enrichment was a greater priority. Art is being cut out of so many schools."

Guest conductor G. Kevin Dewey spoke briefly with

the WSWs following the concert. He described his experience conducting the DSO musicians. "It is like driving a Ferrari," he said. "It is a world-class orchestra. They don't miss a note. They don't miss a cue. It is working with the world's top players. It is the world's top talent."



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