

Detroit Symphony management escalates threats as musicians continue strike

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Talks are continuing in the 18-week strike by musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) under a media blackout and in the face of a management-imposed February 11 deadline. DSO management has indicated that if no contract agreement is reached by that date it will likely cancel the balance of the 2010-2011 concert season. Such a move could jeopardize the 2011-2012 season as well, since the booking of guest artists for the upcoming season is typically completed by February.

The DSO has already announced cancellation of a scheduled performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 at the Detroit Opera House on March 18 and an appearance with the University Musical Society at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor on March 19.

A source close to the musicians told the WSWWS that orchestra members unanimously rejected a proposal management termed its "final offer" earlier this week. The offer was based on management's Proposal A, already rejected by musicians before the start of the strike. In addition to imposing a massive cut in pay it would—like earlier proposals—transform the DSO into essentially a part-time orchestra, with musicians required to do "community service" work for reduced wages.

For public consumption, management has asserted that its recent offers have adhered to the terms of the 'compromise' proposed by former Michigan Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm and US Senator Carl Levin. Musicians reject the claim, insisting that management's offers have largely restated the terms of previous proposals. The Granholm-

Levin proposal, which entailed drastic pay cuts, called for \$36 million in orchestra costs over the span of a three-year contract with community outreach work to be voluntary.

In January DSO musicians rejected a management proposal that reportedly would have slashed annual starting base pay from \$102,650 to \$82,000, rising to \$87,000 in the second and third years, contingent on musicians participating in outreach and educational work. Those musicians not participating would only earn \$75,000 the first year and \$80,500 in years two and three.

"They [management] believe Detroit is down for the count, it's not a major city anymore and cannot support a major performing arts institution," said DSO cellist Haden McKay.

DSO musicians are increasingly concerned that management is not interested in a settlement at all and is out to destroy the orchestra as it is presently constituted. As one musician explained to the WSWWS, "When the strike first started the goal was to bring it down to a third-rung level. Many people in the orchestra now think they want to go further."

A veteran DSO violist told the WSWWS, "All they do is repeat themselves over and over again. We are holding out for principle and what is right; what the people want.

"What they are trying to do really is turn us into a gig orchestra. People want a symphony because of the big sound; they don't want to hear a chamber orchestra. To have that as a big part of the season is nuts.

“What I get from my students is that they are inspired having a world-class orchestra in Detroit. It is all about having a major symphony and the enrichment it adds to peoples’ lives.

“It is not about money—even now we are below other major orchestras—but management is not even trying to raise money. They are trying to stick with the plan of the League of American Orchestras that they want to impose on all orchestras. It is an agenda of a few people in big positions who want to impose their views on the masses.”

DSO musicians are continuing efforts to mobilize public support for their struggle by holding support concerts. A February 5 concert at Kirk in the Hills in the suburb of Bloomfield Hills drew a good turnout despite a snowstorm. The concert featured DSO French Hornist Karl Pituch performing Mozart Horn Concerto No. 2. It also featured Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 and Mendelssohn’s Symphony No. 4. Clark Suttle, director and conductor of the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, was the guest conductor.

On February 8 DSO musicians joined the L’Anse Creuse High School North Choir and Select Ensemble for a concert at the John Armstrong Performing Arts Center in the Detroit suburb of Clinton Township. The program included an arrangement of the spiritual *Michael, Row the Boat Ashore* by Earlene Renz; a musical arrangement of E.E. Cummings’ poem *i carry your heart with me* by David C. Dickau, and the *Sanctus and in Paradisum* from the Requiem by Gabriel Faure. The concert also included orchestral works by Bach, Pachelbel and Mendelssohn. Clark Suttle and L’Anse Creuse Choral Director Evey Simon shared conducting duties.

DSO musicians and supporters picketed a concert sponsored by the DSO at Orchestra Hall on February 4. The concert featured former colleagues of jazz great Miles Davis performing selections of his work. DSO musicians offered concert-goers free tickets to their Saturday support concert.

Despite the principle and courage shown by musicians, their struggle is in great danger due to the

isolation imposed by the AFL-CIO, the corporate media and the Democratic Party politicians, who all want to see the strike ended quickly on management’s terms. DSO musicians must turn out broadly to the working population in Detroit and beyond, the only social force that has an objective interest in the defense of art and culture.



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