

Management cancels rest of concert season

DSO musicians reject “final offer”

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Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians, on strike since October 4, unanimously rejected Saturday a proposal management provocatively termed its final offer. DSO officials responded by suspending the rest of the 2010-2011 concert season.

Speaking for management, DSO Executive Vice President Paul Hogle said that its offer had been withdrawn and that negotiations were over. “We see no purpose in further negotiating,” said Hogle.

The scrapping of the current season puts the 2011-2012 concert season at risk as well, since normally planning is well underway by this time of year for the upcoming season, including guest artist bookings and advance ticket sales.

Speaking for the DSO musicians, violinist Joe Goldman said, “The musicians made the only choice they had.” Indeed, management inserted provisions in their final offer virtually ensuring its rejection by musicians.

The proposal included new takeaways, including an 800 percent increase in healthcare deductibles and a management stipulation that it would not cover travel expenses for trips of less than 75 miles.

On top of that management wanted to remove DSO principal librarian Robert Stiles from the union, a move interpreted by musicians as the first step toward eliminating his job. At a press conference Saturday American Federation of Musicians Local 5 President Gordon Stump denounced the targeting of Stiles, declaring, “Can you believe they asked good people to sacrifice one of their colleagues to save their own skins? That was in the proposal. It was a Faustian choice.”

Talks over the weekend of Feb 12-13 included

prominent Michigan politicians and corporate heads, including US Senator Carl Levin and Quicken Loans Chairman Dan Gilbert, who put up an additional \$1 million to bridge the gap between management and the players. However, according to musicians’ representatives the additional money did not show up in management’s offer.

On Tuesday management suspended the talks, demanding the union schedule a vote on its proposal by Thursday in violation of its bylaws, which require a 72-hour waiting period before a contract vote. At a membership meeting Thursday members of the bargaining committee recommended a rejection of management’s offer.

The musician’s union has already offered to accept huge cuts, including a reduction in starting base salary of around 25 percent, with a partial restoration in the third year. Musicians have insisted that the even steeper cuts demanded by management would lead to an erosion of the quality of the orchestra, making it unable to attract top talent. They have also opposed changes in work rules that would in essence convert the DSO into a part-time orchestra, with players burdened with all sorts of non-performance-related duties.

The WSWS salutes the principled stand taken by DSO musicians. At the same time we warn that appeals to the Democratic Party and corporate establishment are futile. Musicians must align themselves with the growing movement of the working class against the attacks on its jobs and living conditions, revealed powerfully in the mass demonstrations in Wisconsin.

No concessions should be offered or accepted. Why should the musicians pay one penny for the crisis of this economic system? The DSO board members are representatives of the banks and corporations, who are awash in cash. The argument that American society or

Detroit in particular cannot afford a world-class orchestra is obscene. A socialist critique of the profit system and its priorities needs to become more and more the basis of artists' thinking.

On February 16 DSO musicians performed with members of the Groves High School Symphony Orchestra at a support concert in the Detroit suburb of Beverly Hills. The concert featured Groves High School student Margaret Starr in a performance of the first movement of Samuel Barber's violin concerto. The concert concluded with a performance of the Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Christopher Confessore, Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Brevard Symphony Orchestra, was the guest conductor.

The WSWS spoke to those attending the Groves High School concert about the ongoing struggle by DSO musicians. Shearon Williams said her daughter Marisa, was performing with the DSO. "We are so excited that this would happen in her first year of high school."

She reacted angrily to the DSO threats to cancel the 2010 – 2011 concert season. "I think it is a travesty. Detroit needs the symphony. They have inspired my daughter. That's how I get her to practice.

"I remember one of the conductors at the children's concerts and he said you have to practice. It is what made her want to become a violinist."

Her husband Carnell added, "It is an unfortunate situation. To not support this wealth of talent and culture in our community is sad.

"When our daughter started playing violin one of her dreams was to play with the DSO. It is materializing tonight. It is true that it is an opportunity, but we would be better off if we didn't have the opportunity in this particular way."

A Groves High School teacher said, "It is awful. As educators we look to art and music. I feel saddened if people are beginning to diminish its importance.

"Look at all the people. This place is alive on orchestra night. If you take away music and art you are cutting out a lot of children."



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