

DSO musicians offer to submit outstanding issues to binding arbitration

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Striking musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra voted Tuesday to offer, pending the agreement of management, to submit outstanding issues in their ongoing strike to binding arbitration. Under the proposal, if management accepts arbitration the musicians will return to work while awaiting a settlement.

According to a press release, musicians are proposing the establishment of a three-person panel. The musicians would select one member, management would select one, and these two individuals would select the third. If the arrangement is accepted by the DSO, musicians agree to resume performances while the arbitration case proceeds.

Management called the offer “encouraging” but reserved further comment until it had seen a formal written proposal.

The offer of binding arbitration represents a further retreat on the part of the musicians union and reflects the enormous pressures being brought to bear on the players due to the isolation of their strike by the AFL-CIO and Change to Win Coalition.

Initial press reports incorrectly indicated that the musicians were offering an unconditional return to work. The way in which the binding arbitration offer was initially presented to the media encouraged such an interpretation. The confusion suggests that top-level AFL-CIO officials in Detroit and Michigan are exerting enormous pressure behind the scenes for a rapid end to the strike on management’s terms.

Musicians struck October 4 against massive concession demands, including a more than 30 percent cut in pay, 42 percent for new musicians. Management also wants major changes in work rules, forcing musicians to carry out non-performance-related duties without additional compensation. The musicians union

offered its own deep pay cuts, but these were rejected by management as inadequate.

In February, musicians rejected unanimously a proposal management termed its final offer. DSO officials responded by declaring negotiations over and suspending the balance of the 2010-2011 concert season. In an interview with the *Detroit News*, DSO Executive Vice President Paul Hogle indicated that management planned to field a replacement orchestra. While Hogle later retracted his comments, there can be little doubt that management aims at inflicting a crushing defeat on the musicians.

Reflecting the mounting hardships due to the prolonged strike, the musicians union has reported that the entire DSO percussion section is leaving. Jacob Nissily recently won the principal percussion position with the Cleveland Orchestra. Brian Jones, principal timpanist, is leaving to join the Dallas Symphony, while Ian Ding, the assistant principal percussionist, is moving to Minneapolis to continue his career. A fourth percussion position was already vacant.

A veteran DSO musician told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “That’s really a shame. Those guys are so good. We will miss them tremendously. This is the kind of talent the DSO has throughout and management doesn’t care or understand.”

The DSO musicians continue to win wide support for their strike, holding a series of well-attended support concerts over the past two weeks. The musicians have also won support from performers for their call for a general boycott of Orchestra Hall, with the R&B and gospel group Take6 being the latest to cancel. They were to replace Grammy award-winning singer Bobby McFerrin, who cancelled his scheduled March 3 performance due to the strike.

Musicians have announced five more community

concerts for the month of March. The first concert, “An Afternoon of Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Poulenc,” is set for March 6 at Kirk in the Hills in the Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills. The program includes Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major, Poulenc’s Concerto for Organ, Timpani and Stings in G minor, and Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings in C major. That concert will be followed the same evening by “An Evening of Baroque to Bach” in Sterling Heights, featuring DSO principal violist Alexander Mishnaevski.



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