

Detroit Symphony renews contract of Anne Parsons

DSO president led assault on musicians

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The Detroit Symphony Orchestra board of directors has agreed to a three-year contract extension for DSO President and CEO Anne Parsons. Parsons oversaw the imposition of drastic concessions on musicians in the agreement ending the recently concluded six-month strike.

Parson's contract renewal was agreed to late last March, but management delayed making public its decision until the conclusion of the strike-shortened 2010-2011 concert season and the announcement of the 2011-2012 season.

The decision to retain Parsons is an expression of the contempt of orchestra management for DSO musicians and the broader musical community in Detroit, as it continues its plan to impose a for-profit business model at the expense of artistic excellence.

Parsons received \$299,679 base salary in 2009 and \$93,000 in "other compensation," including a house, pension, health care and a car allowance. For their part, DSO musicians took a more than 23 percent cut in pay under terms of the agreement ratified in April at the conclusion of the strike. The cuts dropped the DSO, long considered one of the best orchestras in the United States, out of the top 10 in terms of pay.

Linton Bodwin, a DSO bassist and chairman of the orchestra committee, told the WSWS that the decision by management to retain Parsons was "puzzling based on what has happened over the last five years, that she would be rewarded. We had hoped for a clean start at the top. It wasn't a great surprise, but it wasn't great news. It boils down to a few people making a decision to continue carrying out their philosophy."

Musicians struck on October 4 last year against concession demands, including a more than 30 percent

pay cut and changes in work rules that would turn orchestra members into little more than servants at the beck and call of management. Musicians turned out to the community, organizing well-attended support concerts that kept the dispute in the public eye.

As important as the economic issues were in the strike, perhaps more significant was the determination of the musicians to defend the DSO as one of the greatest orchestras in the world. However, the efforts of the musicians could not overcome the impact of the isolation from the official labor movement, which refused to organize any serious support for the strike in the Detroit area. In April, musicians were finally forced to agree to a contract with deep pay cuts.

The DSO strike drew national attention as orchestras across the United States struggled with declining corporate donations and ticket sales in the wake of the financial crash. The end of the DSO strike was followed within days by an announcement from the Philadelphia Orchestra that it was declaring bankruptcy and would seek to abrogate its contract with musicians.

Since the end of the strike, the orchestra has lost several of its most talented musicians, including Emmanuelle Boisvert, DSO concertmaster for the past 23 years. Boisvert joined the DSO at the age of 25, the first female to win the concertmaster position at a major US orchestra. Her departure is an implicit rebuke to DSO management. She is leaving to take a lesser associate concertmaster position with the Dallas Symphony. On previous occasions Boisvert had indicated her intention to remain with the DSO until the end of her musical career.

The DSO has suffered other major losses, including Philip Dikeman, acting principal flute since 2010;

violinist Lilit Danielyan, an 11-year DSO veteran; and the entire percussion section.

Concerning the departure of Boisvert, Bodwin indicated that the highly talented violinist had been the target of personal attacks on the DSO Inc. Facebook page during the strike, which at least in part influenced her decision to leave for Dallas. He added, “We are sorry to see her go. I hope she will be better off where she is going. It is a gamble, because she is leaving some of her family behind.”

Reflecting on the mood of orchestra members, Bodwin added, “It is still an unsettled situation. I think the musicians are unified as a group and are not prone to letting themselves be divided. Unfortunately, we still have to be in a reactive position.

“I have to say that the reception we have been getting at concerts is like we are heroes. I think the public is standing with the musicians.”

DSO musicians gave thanks to supporters of their strike, including the *World Socialist Web Site*, at a post-concert party held backstage at Orchestra Hall on June 4. Musicians expressed their appreciation to this reporter for the honest coverage and analysis of the strike, which stood in sharp contrast to that provided by the corporate media. Many musicians indicated that they felt their struggle was part of a broader defense of art and culture and expressed determination to continue to oppose the agenda of DSO management.



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