

# Delaware Symphony Orchestra suspends 2012-2013 season

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In the latest example of the ongoing and deepening crisis in the field of classical music, the Delaware Symphony Orchestra (DSO) announced this week that it was suspending its 2012-2013 season “as originally programmed.”

The Symphony’s website quoted Ann Hamilton, chair of its board: “It is a regrettable situation that mirrors what many of the nation’s other orchestras and cultural institutions have experienced over the past few years. But DSO is determined to move forward. Our immediate goal is to conduct a three-month operational analysis in pursuit of a new business model designed to help the organization achieve financial stability.”

Based on the experiences in much larger cities, Detroit and Philadelphia in particular, the outline of the “new business model” that the Delaware orchestra’s trustees are searching for is not hard to guess. The Delaware musicians are already meagerly paid. They are paid only by performance and receive no benefits, but the orchestra is in contract negotiations with the musicians, and the groundwork is undoubtedly being laid for new concessions.

After the three-month “operational assessment,” the orchestra is expected to announce an abbreviated schedule of concerts for the 2012-2013 season, in somewhat the same fashion as the New York City Opera has done in recent years.

The Delaware Symphony Orchestra was founded 100 years ago. It was originally called the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra, after the state’s largest city—where it is still based—and was given its current name in 1971. Over the years, it grew into a respected regional orchestra on the US East Coast. For the last decade or so, it has been led by music director David Amado.

Wilmington is a city of only 70,000 people, in a state that has fewer than 1 million inhabitants and is the second smallest in the US by area, after Rhode Island. Wilmington is also only 30 miles southwest of Philadelphia, roughly halfway between the major centers of New York and Washington, DC.

In the background of the Delaware announcement is the experience of the lengthy and bitter Detroit Symphony Orchestra strike, which ended in early 2011 with major concessions imposed on the musicians and other cutbacks as well. In April 2011, just days after the end of the Detroit strike, the Philadelphia Orchestra became the largest institution of its kind by far to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

After more than 13 months, on May 23, the latter orchestra submitted a reorganization plan to the US Bankruptcy Court in Philadelphia. The presiding judge, Eric L. Frank, along with the orchestra’s creditors must still approve the plan, which would transfer unfunded pension liabilities to the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, and provide about 50 cents on the dollar to unsecured creditors, including such expenses as printing costs, advertising and hotels.

The most important moves by the Philadelphia Orchestra were taken in the months leading up to its reorganization filing. Management negotiated a concessions contract with its musicians, and reached an agreement to pay a small sum in order to withdraw from the musicians’ union pension fund. As in Detroit and elsewhere, the musicians who make the music must make the lion’s share of “sacrifice.”

This is the meaning of the “business model” that is demanded by the ruling class patrons of all major cultural institutions, especially the smaller regional companies, but increasingly the largest as well.

In Delaware, the major patron of the orchestra is

Tatiana Copeland. Ms. Copeland, who is quoted on Philly.com as declaring that “the time has come to change the model,” is a great-niece of famed Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. No doubt this background adds some luster to the DSO, but what makes everyone listen to Ms. Copeland is the fact that she is the wife of an heir to the Du Pont fortune.

The giant Du Pont chemical company reportedly employs, alongside related companies, between 5 and 10 percent of Delaware’s population. The fate of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra rests to a large extent in the hands of the Du Pont heirs.

Urgently needed to change the current situation and atmosphere is a political struggle that raises the issue of the funding of music and all other cultural institutions on the basis of their social purpose and need, and not in line with the money interests of the super-rich.



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