

Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians ratify concessions contract

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Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) members voted Tuesday morning to approve a contract settlement reached the previous evening. Orchestra players had been on strike since Saturday over wages and increased health care contributions.

The musicians had been without a contract since September 16 and walked out just before a scheduled evening performance in response to management's "final offer" demanding what amounted to thousands of dollars in givebacks over the course of a three-year contract.

The ratification meeting was scheduled for 9 a.m. on Tuesday, just before a rehearsal with Music Director Riccardo Muti.

Little has been revealed about the details of the contract agreement, but CSO bassoonist William Buchman, a member of the negotiating committee, said that it would mean sizable increases in health care payments. He told the *Chicago Tribune*, "The musicians will be contributing significantly more toward health care costs," and noted that the increase in salary in the new contract "will not completely cover that jump" for some members.

Buchman disagreed with earlier reports in the *Tribune* that musicians were currently contributing 5 percent of their wages to health care and were being asked to pay 12 percent. He told the *Tribune*, "In our point of view, current costs are over 10 percent and will be over 20 percent."

Whatever the changes in the new CSO management proposal, the deal remains a concessions contract and part of the assault on cultural life in the US and the conditions of layers of professional workers.

CSO Association President Deborah Rutter said the union's ratification would take effect only after the board votes on the deal at a meeting to be held within

the next several days. This is largely a formality. One of management's biggest concerns was the potential disruption of the three-night season opener scheduled for October 3-5 in New York City's Carnegie Hall, a prestigious concert venue.

The Opening Night Gala planned for October 3 features Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel as honorary chairman of the event, presiding over a \$1,500 a plate fund-raising dinner. To have that event cancelled because of a strike would have been a major political embarrassment for Emanuel and the Democratic Party, especially following the seven-day strike conducted by 26,000 Chicago teachers against the policies of the Emanuel administration and, effectively, against Barack Obama's education program.

During the CSO strike, the *New York Times* reported Clive Gillinson, executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall, as saying, "You don't cancel opening night," adding "You've got to find a way of making it happen."

Gillinson had earlier expressed surprise at news of the strike. When Stephen Lester, the chairman of the Orchestra Members Committee, was asked whether the strike, "less than two weeks before a major New York appearance, was designed to maximize pressure on management," he replied "There's never a good time. Our concern is to get back to work and to play the concerts ahead of us, and that includes Carnegie Hall."

With the contract now ratified, a concert scheduled in Ann Arbor, Michigan for Wednesday night will proceed. Two concerts, including the annual fundraiser, are planned for Chicago on the weekend, to be followed by the Carnegie Hall event in New York.



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