# Minnesota Orchestra musicians locked out

**Ron Jorgenson**
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Minnesota Orchestra management locked out its musicians Sunday after the players voted unanimously the day before to reject a concessions contract that would reduce salaries by 30 to 50 percent and impose $5 million in annual cuts.

Douglas Wright, the orchestra's principal trombonist and a negotiator for the union, Local 30-73 of the American Federation of Musicians, charged management with seeking 250 changes to the old contract agreement that would erase "40 years of accrued working conditions and rules."

In downtown Minneapolis, outside the symphony's home venue, Orchestra Hall, Tim Zavadil, a clarinetist with five years with the orchestra and member of the negotiating committee, told the WSWS, "Today the board and management of the Minnesota Orchestra Association canceled seventeen concerts and locked out the musicians of the orchestra. We voted unanimously to play and talk, which means we would like to keep bargaining in good faith. We always want to perform for our fans. But the 30 to 50 percent pay cuts that management has on the table will destroy the world class status of this orchestra."

Basing themselves in particular on the experience of the six-month strike at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) in 2010-11, which resulted in the slashing of wages by 25 percent, a reduction in the size of the orchestra and other concessions, Minnesota Orchestra officials are calculating they can isolate the 81 musicians and use the lockout to bludgeon them into accepting their demands.

Orchestras across the country have faced similar assaults. Last week the Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians ended a four-day strike after ratifying a concessions pact. There have also been lockouts this year in Indianapolis and Atlanta.

Across the Mississippi River from Minneapolis, the contract of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) expired on the same day as that of the Minnesota Orchestra and players are working without an agreement. SPCO management recently rejected a three-year $700,000 concessions package offered by musicians, declaring they needed "real, permanent change in the fixed costs of the contract."

Minnesota Orchestra management, led by the orchestra president Michael Henson, board chair Jon Campbell and lead negotiator Richard Davis, has kept up a constant drumbeat in recent months that the orchestra cannot sustain the costs of one of the preeminent symphonic organizations in the US. Last year the orchestra posted a $3.9 million deficit and it claims this year's shortfall will be even larger.

Management's contract demands have astounded musicians and their supporters. Zavadil points out that the 50 percent cuts are aimed at principals and assistant principal chairs. "These are the soloists, the leading players in the orchestra," Zavadil told Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). He indicated that these musicians would be compelled to look elsewhere for employment should the cuts go through, thereby fundamentally changing and undermining the character of the orchestra.

This does not trouble board chair Campbell, who is conducting himself in a particularly arrogant and philistine fashion. He told MPR, "The number of highly trained musicians that this country is producing every year is really quite remarkable. … So couple what's happening in the marketplace with a large supply—not to dismiss the fact that we don't want to lose any of our wonderful musicians—but there may be some changes."

The musicians surrendered $4.2 million in concessions in 2009, but that only whetted management's appetite for more.

Zavadil points out that the orchestra is not precisely broke. "We are looking at these proposed pay cuts juxtaposed alongside the $140 million they have in invested assets, another $97 million they have raised," and, he added, the orchestra has also spent $52 million on a lobby renovation. The players have called for an independent audit of the orchestra's finances--something management has refused.

In a calculated effort to isolate musicians from broader sections of workers, management for the first time made public their contract proposal, citing the average musician's salary of $135,000, along with their proposal to slash that to $89,000.

But what about those who are directing the onslaught against the symphony players?

Michael Henson, as president of the Minnesota Orchestra, will pull down a salary of $404,049 for the current year.

Richard Davis, the lead negotiator for management, is CEO of US Bank, a major regional bank that has profited nicely from the financial crisis. In 2010, his pay was $18.8 million, while in 2011 he made $13.6 million. Davis is also president of the Minnesota Business Partnership lobbying group.

Campbell, who took over from Davis as board chairman of the orchestra at the end of last year, has a telling résumé as well. He is the chief executive officer of Wells Fargo Minnesota, the giant bank. He sits on multiple boards, and in August of 2011 was elected chair of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Both US Bank and Wells Fargo are accused of being behind ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) initiatives, such as the reactionary proposed Minnesota voter ID law.

An article posted April 13, 2012 on the Finance & Commerce web site announced the start of the expansion of the Orchestra Hall lobby:

"The Minneapolis City Council agreed April 3 to issue revenue bonds on behalf of the orchestra, and Wells Fargo Bank and US Bank made commitments to buy the bonds. The two banks will treat those securities as bridge loans with a three- to five-year term, giving the orchestra time to collect its final pledges, according to a city staff report."

Bryan Ebensteiner, the orchestra's vice president for finance, is quoted as saying, "The banks are more conservative in underwriting than they were five years ago, but I know they look at the orchestra as a good risk. And we all know how low the rates are now."

In carrying out the lobby construction project, orchestra executives were able to rely on the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and the building and construction trades, who negotiated a contract that prevents construction workers from honoring the musicians' picket lines. "[I]t would be a violation of our contract if we were to walk out," Dan McConnell, business manager of the Minneapolis Building and Construction Trades Council, told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.

In a statement released following the lockout of the players, the Minnesota Orchestra management asserted that "we need our players to accept the financial realities of 2012."

Which "realities" are those? That the banks and financial institutions are handed trillions of dollars with virtually no strings attached, and that figures such as Campbell and Davis make tens of millions for their ruthless, parasitic activities? Or that there is "no money" for health, education and culture for broad sections of the American population?