

# Minnesota Orchestra lockout approaches one year

**Gary Joad****23 September 2013**

The management of the Minnesota Orchestra, based in Minneapolis, locked the doors on the organization's musicians on October 1, 2012, demanding that musicians accept draconian pay cuts of up to 50 percent amongst some other 240 contract "adjustments." For the duration of the lockout, the musicians have gone without pay and benefits, though they have performed a number of free concerts in the Twin Cities area in the last year, including most recently on Sunday, September 15 at the Lake Harriet band shell.

Governor Mark Dayton and Minneapolis mayor R. T. Rybak, Minnesota Democratic Party politicians, gave a press conference on Thursday afternoon at which they both made short statements. While professing not to be "taking sides," Dayton and Rybak urged both parties to return to the bargaining table. With such ostensibly neutral remarks, they purported to draw an equals sign between the musicians struggling to defend their pay and conditions and the intransigent management, which is demanding that the musicians accept drastic cuts.

The real purpose of Dayton and Rybak's press conference was to signal that it is time for the musicians to give in and accept pay cuts as inevitable. "The future of the Minnesota Orchestra is at stake," Rybak said.

The musicians enjoy popular sympathy in their struggle. Some 4,000 people attended the late summer concert. The attacks on the Minnesota Orchestra musicians are in line with the attacks on culture and the destruction of wages and living standards taking place across the board in the US and internationally.

Many orchestra association CEO and board members double as Twin Cities bankers, raking in seven-figure incomes. MOA board members and First Bank and Wells Fargo bankers are also involved in a \$14 million state and municipal general obligation bond business

with which the Orchestra Hall underwent its current \$50 million renovation.

The Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra website (distinct from the Minnesota Orchestra Association website, i.e., the web site maintained by the bosses) currently lists a total of 28 vacancies, many of whom represent players "lost" to the lockout. These include Burt Hara, the principal clarinetist, now with the Los Angeles Philharmonic; David Pharris, second clarinet, now with the Houston Symphony; and Mike Gast, principal horn, now with the New York Philharmonic. The musicians point out the MOA has, on a number of occasions, refused outright to even schedule auditions for retirement vacancies.

Management has been taking cues from Detroit, where musicians were menaced with very comparable pay cuts and struck for six months in 2010-2011. The Democratic Party in Michigan and their trade union and pseudo-left appendages isolated the strike, leading to the defeat of the Detroit musicians after a protracted struggle.

When the MOA locked out the players last October, the entire 2012-2013 season's performances were cancelled. Millions of dollars in Orchestra Hall revenue were lost (scheduled at the Minneapolis Convention Center, since the Hall was undergoing the renovation while the MOA pled poverty), in addition to lost monies for concessions and downtown businesses and restaurants.

The MOA lockout now threatens the entire 2013-2014 performance season. In April, the Minnesota Orchestra's famed Finnish conductor Osmo Vanska, hired in 2003, notified MOA management by letter that the lockout had to end by September 9 or he would be compelled to resign. He has since observed that if he cannot get the musicians rehearsing by September 30, a

scheduled performance in early November at New York's Carnegie Hall will have to be cancelled.

The MOA lockout constitutes the longest work stoppage by a United States orchestra in US history.

The 110-year-old Minnesota Orchestra recorded albums of Beethoven and Sibelius that have been nominated for Grammys, and on tour the orchestra obtained positive reviews in London, New York, and Europe. Scheduled recordings with Vanska of Sibelius earlier this year were cancelled.

In a candid moment of callousness, MOA management and board members surprised music fans and the public early September when they asserted that Vanska might have to go.

The former Democratic Party Senator and diplomat George Mitchell was brought in mid-year to attempt to force through the 25 percent average pay cut, which the musicians voted down on September 5. The musicians have maintained that what is in order is not a cut but an increase in their compensation, especially in light of an entire year's lost pay. Musicians have also observed that management's proposed givebacks would reduce their compensation to 1983 levels.

Management has yet to produce a complete public accounting of the MOA's finances. Musicians have only been told that there are "structural deficits" necessitating cuts.



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