

# Minnesota Orchestra musicians mark anniversary of lockout with large demonstration

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Musicians with the Minnesota Orchestra held a demonstration yesterday in downtown Minneapolis to mark the one-year anniversary of the lockout imposed by the orchestra management in the Minnesota Orchestra Association (MOA) on October 1, 2012.

Hundreds of supporters attended the rally. Although demonstrators met to celebrate the resilience of the locked-out musicians—who have gone without pay or benefits—the event was held under conditions in which the very future of the orchestra is in question.

Earlier in the day, music director and famed Finnish composer Osmo Vänskä resigned after management rejected the latest concessions offer from the musicians' union and cancelled planned concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The orchestra has already been seriously wounded by management's attacks. Vänskä joined 28 musicians who have already left the orchestra due to the lockout.

For 110 years the orchestra has been a pillar of cultural pride for all Minnesotans. It is entirely possible that management's efforts to shakedown the musicians will lead to its total destruction.

Management marked the one-year anniversary of the lockout by lobbing insult after insult at the musicians. On Monday afternoon, the coterie of bankers and corporate CEOs that comprise the MOA flatly rejected two concession proposals put forward by the musicians' union, which would have cut wages by up to 15 percent. After rejecting the contracts and walking out of negotiations, the MOA immediately telephoned Carnegie Hall, where the musicians were scheduled to play in November, to unilaterally cancel the appearances.

The actions of the orchestra bosses are motivated in

part by a desire to make an example of the musicians, who last weekend repudiated management's proposal for a 25 percent pay cut with a courageous 60-0 vote. However, management's hostility to the musicians is motivated by a hostility to the cultural rights of the entire population of Minneapolis. Like their brethren in Detroit, who are plotting to sell-off the art in the Detroit Institute of Art to pay off bondholders, the representatives of the MOA believe that art is a privilege that should be available only to the wealthy.

The union representing the musicians flew in Ray Hair, the president of the American Federation of Musicians, to speak at the rally.

Hair's speech was full of hollow demagoguery. Completely absent was any criticism of the Democratic Party (known in Minnesota as the DFL), which controls the Minneapolis political machine. Both DFL governor Mark Dayton and DFL Mayor R.T. Rybak have come out in tacit opposition to the musicians, claiming that management and musicians have equally valid points. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

In an attempt to direct opposition to the attack being waged against the musicians into safe, nonthreatening channels, Hair called on musicians and supporters to boycott Wells Fargo Bank and Carlyle Food Group. Hair also called on musicians to cancel their electricity accounts with Xcel Energy—Minneapolis' only energy provider.

A Socialist Equality Party campaign team intervened in yesterday's demonstration. Campaigners were immediately approached by a small handful of union bureaucrats, who told them to leave and said that they were not welcome at the demonstration. From musicians and other demonstrators, however, the

campaigners were met with support. Many thanked SEP campaigners for attending the demonstration and distributing material.

“I played with the Minnesota Orchestra, and I was a career musician for 29 years,” violinist David Wright told the World Socialist Web Site. “I heard from [MOA board member] Jim Davis last year, and I knew that this was not going to go well, so I left and took a severely reduced pension, with a cut of 11 percent.”

In reply to a comment by SEP campaigners that workers in the outlying areas have responded positively to the campaign being waged by the SEP in the musicians’ defense, David said: “It’s only the press that is controlled by the same banks that run the orchestra that attack the musicians. There is a complete lack of respect and a complete lack of understanding. They are selling-off the very infrastructure of the [Twin] Cities [Of Minneapolis and St. Paul], and the wealthy don’t even pay their goddamn taxes!”

Jim, who works downtown, said: “I don’t buy the claim that there is no money. I don’t buy that for one second. There is plenty of money for a new [\$50 million orchestra hall] building. There is always enough money for the executives.”

Alisha, a local resident, added, “The musicians should be allowed to play. Art and music are very important parts of our culture, and they should not be stifled for economic and financial reasons. There is always money for art and culture, it’s just not being allocated.”

The orchestra’s lead cellist, Tony Ross, told the WSWS: “We are defending classical music and the mission of the institution. Management believes in a building—they don’t believe in artists. The former chair of the board of directors of the MOA is Richard Davis. He is a supporter of Wisconsin Governor [Scott Walker, who has led numerous attacks on workers]. That is what this is about.”

“Orchestras are by nature collectives that make amazing art together. I don’t know of another art form that gathers artists together like we do.”

When asked about the role of the DFL in supporting management, Ross responded: “Someone needs to answer what the DFL stands for.”

Carolyn, a piano teacher, said, “This is a nationwide phenomenon. The rumblings have already started. I’ve been telling people: You’ve got to start reading about

the French Revolution. I don’t know when it will come, but it will.”



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