

# University of Minnesota students speak out in defense of locked-out orchestra musicians

Our reporters  
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Monday marked the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the lockout of Minnesota Orchestra musicians by the bosses at the Minnesota Orchestral Association (MOA).

The lockout began after management attempted to force draconian pay cuts of 30 to 50 percent on the musicians—cuts that would have prevented the orchestra from preserving its status as a world-class institution. This past weekend, musicians boldly rejected, in a unanimous vote, an offer from management for a 25 percent pay cut.

In response, management spat on two concession contract offers put forward by the musicians' union and unilaterally cancelled the orchestra's planned performances at Carnegie Hall. But the union, for its part, has refused to criticize the Democratic Party (known as the DFL in Minnesota), which dominates local politics and has tacitly endorsed management's wage cut proposals.

The union bureaucrats in the Twin Cities are doing their best to ensure the defeat of the musicians. The AFL-CIO has kept the musicians isolated by refusing to call out workers in support of their fight to defend the right to culture. Instead, bureaucrats have made empty calls for boycotts in their attempts to corral widespread opposition to the attacks waged against the musicians into the safe channels of the Democratic Party. The president of the American Federation of Musicians, who was flown into town to calm tensions, went so far as to tell musicians to shut off their own electricity in protest against the energy company.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Minnesota have been campaigning daily on campus in support of the musicians, stressing that young people must appeal to the working class to mobilize in defense of the right

to culture and to break the stranglehold of the GOP-DFL alliance against the musicians.

IYSSE campaigners spoke with several students, who voiced their strong support for the musicians.

Steve, a music student and percussionist, said that “the owners refusing to agree with the musicians represents a general disregard for the art form itself. Art is not their concern. The destruction of the Minnesota Orchestra as a center for musical arts and for inspiration is a big loss. It's all about dollar signs. The Minnesota Orchestra is a collective of many individuals who provide a service for society. People are feeling the impact. I don't believe the claim that there is no money for the musicians.”

Gregg, a fellow student, added: “They [the MOA Board of Directors] don't give a rat's ass about what musicians and educators say. They're calling the shots and they don't deserve to.

“My grandfather was in the Minnesota Orchestra. My high school band got to play at orchestra hall. Now that we don't have an orchestra... who knows what will happen. If we are depriving young people of a classical education, the conduit for students to learn to speak for themselves will be lost.”

Steve agreed: “For dozens of people I know, exposure to music unmarginalized their lives and their views of themselves. Exposing young people to this, it still is exhilarating. I can remember going to the orchestra hall when I was young. Peoples' opportunity may be lost to engage with the music because of this lockout.”

Kuang, a photography student from China, said that “young people and the people who don't know what classical music is—they don't have an opportunity to learn about things, because of the shutting down of things. We can educate people better than this.”

A philosophy student named Joe told the WWSWS, “I think art should be affordable for all—not kept away. The government has to fund this. All people have a right to art and to participate actively in its creation.”

Joe said that the musicians’ fight for better pay was part of a wider fight to defend the right to culture.

“Culture is what helps us define who we are—the basic essence of human nature,” he said. “It is terrible for management to [cancel the Carnegie Hall shows]. For the musicians, music is their skill. They’ve put their lives into this. I can’t imagine—having it pulled away from them? It’s terrible.

“There has to be money for them. The banks get bailed out and get money thrown at them. It depends on priorities.”

Mahad, a piano student, said it is “definitely wrong that there is all of this money and they can’t support the musicians. There was money to bail out the banks, but none for the musicians.”

Mahad agreed with IYSSE campaigners that with production in the hands of the working class, massive quantities of money could be made available for art and culture.

“That would most definitely be better. We wouldn’t be having this conversation right now! It won’t get better until something happens. Obama, for example, said he was anti-war, then look at Syria!”

If the working class democratically controlled how resources were allocated, he said, “Who would ever vote for war? Only rich people would vote for war, and against higher wages for musicians.”

Mahad did not buy the lie put forward by the MOA that there is no money for the musicians. “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen,” he said.

He also issued an appeal to workers and young people in the cities to mobilize in defense of the musicians: “Just talking won’t do anything. We need to take action. First it will be music, then what next?”



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