

Beleaguered Minnesota Orchestra musicians nominated for Grammy award

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The musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra, locked out and much abused by the powers that be for the last 14 months, received a Grammy award nomination December 6, their second in two years, in the Best Orchestral Performance category.

The nomination, announced in Los Angeles, is for the orchestra's recording of Jean Sibelius's Symphonies Nos. 1 and 4 on the BIS Swedish classical label. Last year, the orchestra received the nomination for their rendition of Sibelius's Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5. The Grammy awards ceremony will be held January 24.

The 90 or so musicians are now in their 15th month of being locked out of the municipally owned Orchestra Hall, their downtown Minneapolis venue. In the lead-up to the lockout on October 1, 2012, the musicians repeatedly refused to accept draconian demands for a 30 to 50 percent cut in pay made by the Minnesota Orchestra Association's (MOA's) CEO, Michael Henson, and the MOA Board. The musicians accepted major concessions in a contract signed in 2009, which expired last October 1.

Coinciding with the lockout, the longest such work stoppage in US history, the MOA executed plans for renovation of Orchestra Hall for \$50 million, which it is currently leasing from the city of Minneapolis for a term of 50 years. During the renovation and lockout, management saved itself paying salaries and benefits to all the orchestra's players, canceling the entire 2012-2013 season. The MOA's plans to rent space at the downtown Minneapolis Convention Center for the course of the Orchestra Hall facelift were scrapped when the players could not be brought to heel.

Throughout the ongoing lockout, the musicians have overwhelmingly rejected the pay and benefit cuts, including the last vote in September, by a margin of 60-0.

The MOA management and board, composed of a who's-who of the Twin Cities' financial elite, including the multibillionaire Marilyn Carlson Nelson, has also cancelled the 2013-2014 season.

In its attack on the musicians, the MOA has demonstrated more than callousness and contempt for music lovers in Minnesota and neighboring states who travel to enjoy world-class classical music. In a public hearing in Minneapolis November 20, an orchestra support group calling itself Save Our Symphony Minnesota (SOS) pointed out that the orchestra played 85 concerts in 2002, but that the MOA had only scheduled 49 for the canceled 2012-2013 season.

An MOA representative in the audience, Gwen Pappas, offered a "free market" explanation for the decrease in the numbers of concerts, namely that management was simply "matching supply to demand." SOS presenters noted that the MOA had laid off marketing staff and cut its advertising budget in the last decade.

SOS has also echoed comments made by the musicians themselves, namely that a thoroughly open and public disclosure and review of the MOA financial practices and books have never been permitted by management. SOS has suggested that numbers have been manipulated by the MOA to suit its own ends. In general, the MOA management and board behave as though the fate of the Minnesota Orchestra players and the public's access to classical culture are entirely a matter of the wealthy elite's proprietary and private decision-making.

Conductor Osmo Vänskä (obviously beloved by the musicians) is said by many to have guided the players to a high level of performance (the Grammy nominations proving the point). The conductor expressed sincere regret in departing the orchestra this

fall, after issuing multiple warnings to the MOA that he could not remain in Minnesota if another season were cancelled and the scheduled two evenings at Carnegie Hall in New York City went unrehearsed, forcing their cancellation.

When the musicians voted unanimously in September to reject a contract to cut their pay an average of 32 percent, players' representatives met with MOA management and board representatives twice in two days to test the seriousness of their respective positions. Following those sessions, management summarily canceled the two Carnegie Hall concerts.

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, the billionaire MOA "Life Director" (permanent), obtained pledges of a meager \$1.68 million in donations from other wealthy persons in the Twin Cities last summer, in an unsuccessful attempt to induce musicians to ink a rotten contract in exchange for a \$20,000 signing bonus.



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