

New York Philharmonic forced to reinstate two musicians victimized by #MeToo campaign

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11 April 2020

The New York Philharmonic announced last Monday that an arbitrator's ruling had obliged it to reinstate two musicians the orchestra dismissed in September 2018 for alleged sexual misconduct.

The two men, principal oboist Liang Wang and associate principal trumpeter Matthew Muckey, disputed the firings and their union, Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians, filed a grievance. An independent arbitrator heard the case and found the musicians had been terminated without just cause and should be reinstated.

The orchestra issued a bitter statement, complaining that its actions had been countermanded. "We are profoundly disappointed by the arbitrator's decision," the Philharmonic commented, adding: "While we obviously disagree with the arbitrator and stand by our original actions and decisions in this matter, we will, as we must, abide by the arbitrator's ruling and reinstate both players."

The dismissals of Wang and Muckey came in the midst of the #MeToo hysteria as it swept through various fields, including classical music. The downfalls of such prominent figures as James Levine of the Metropolitan Opera, one of the most significant conductors of his generation; William Preucil, concertmaster for the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and a longtime faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music; Charles Dutoit, principal conductor of the Royal Philharmonic of London; and Massimo La Rosa, principal trombonist with the Cleveland Symphony, were among the most spectacular.

In regard to the cases of the reinstated Philharmonic players, the *New York Times* noted this week, "No details of the allegations against Mr. Wang and Mr. Muckey have been provided." In 2018, the Philharmonic hired Barbara S. Jones, an attorney at Bracewell and a former federal judge, to investigate. "Following the investigation, the orchestra terminated the players," the newspaper said.

In an e-mail to the *Times*, Alan S. Lewis, an attorney representing Wang, explained that "the 20-day arbitration

hearing (which took place over the course of eight months), at which Liang testified, finally allowed all of the facts to be fully examined, and after that hearing, Arbitrator [Richard] Bloch concluded that the Philharmonic had simply failed to prove any misconduct by Liang." Steven J. Hyman, a lawyer for Muckey, said that his client "is eager to return to his position at the Philharmonic."

In its statement, the Philharmonic objected to the fact that, in reaching his conclusion favoring Wang and Muckey, "the arbitrator opted to apply a higher standard of proof than is typically applied in labor disputes. He found that the evidence did not meet this higher standard. In our opinion, the arbitrator failed to give appropriate weight to the events supporting the victims' claims" (not "alleged victims," but "victims"). In other words, the arbitrator based himself on the notion that the accused had rights in such a case.

In 2018, there was much gloating about the firings of Wang, Muckey and other musicians in #MeToo circles, on the part of individuals who, like everyone else, had absolutely no idea what the facts of the case might have been.

The headline of an article posted on the *Daily Kos* in November 2018, for example, by Katelyn Simon, asserted that "Classical Music #MeToo Firings Send Signal: Time's Up." Simon observed that "Somewhere just outside the limelight of celebrity and political #MeToo takedowns (or should-have-been takedowns), classical music is having an unprecedented reckoning. ... Could it be that in the most reform-proof corner of the performing arts, the paradigm is starting to shift?"

In a piece that listed the dismissals of Wang and Muckey as among those welcome "takedowns," Simon asked, "Where do we go from here? The shakedowns are not in themselves the victory. But one can hope that they're an opening" and that, first and foremost, "women will fill some of these new vacancies and change the balances of power."

Again, one needs to recall, despite Simon's sweeping,

presumably rhetorical claim in the column that “Everyone knew everything about these men already,” in fact, *no one knew anything* about the allegations against the Philharmonic musicians.

In regard to the cases of Levine, Dutoit, Preucil and others, Zoë Madonna, who covers classical and pop music for the *Boston Globe*, ludicrously argued in December 2019 that “classical music continues to lean hard on the great-man myth—they are almost always men, our master Maestros—and brush aside any inconveniences in their biographies, such as sexism or Nazism.” Making sexual advances was thereby equated to mass murder!

In this media-driven, frenzied atmosphere, the latter-day Victorians and blacklisters had no difficulty in destroying dozens of reputations and lives.

Both Wang and Muckey are substantial artists—not that this would constitute a defense if they were hardened sexual abusers. NPR reports that Wang was one of the Philharmonic’s most highly paid members. “Within an orchestra,” NPR notes, “the principal oboe holds a particular leadership role: that instrumentalist gives the ‘A’ pitch that everyone else in the orchestra uses to tune, is considered the leader of the woodwind section, and often plays solos.”

Wang’s website explains he was born in Qing Dao, China, in 1980 and “began oboe studies at the age of seven. In 1993, he enrolled at the Beijing Central Conservatory, and in 2003, he completed his bachelor’s degree at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. ... He is an alumnus of the Music Academy of the West, now a partner in the New York Philharmonic Global Academy.”

The website further notes that before joining the New York Philharmonic in September 2006, Wang “was principal oboe of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (2005–06), Santa Fe Opera (2004–05), and San Francisco Ballet Orchestra; associate principal oboe of the San Francisco Symphony; and guest principal oboe of the Chicago and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras.”

In addition to his many other accomplishments, the oboist “has given master classes at the Cincinnati Conservatory, The Juilliard School, Mannes College of Music, Manhattan School of Music, The Curtis Institute of Music, Seoul University, New York University, and the Beijing, Shanghai, Hanoi, and Singapore conservatories. He is currently on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and New York University, and is an honorary professor at Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.”

Muckey also joined the Philharmonic in 2006, directly after graduating from Northwestern University. The Northwestern student newspaper, in April 2006, provided a glimpse into the high level of competition for Philharmonic

positions:

“Muckey was selected from a pool of 500 trumpet players, each vying for one of two open positions. He has flown to New York City three times since January for auditions. During the final round, Muckey was one of three musicians competing for a place in the orchestra. ‘I prepared quite extensively for the final,’ he said. ‘They said they could ask for practically anything in the trumpet literature.’ Music Director Lorin Maazel personally selected Muckey for the associate principal position, or third chair. This is the first time in 25 years a trumpet player as young as Muckey has been selected to play for a major orchestra, Muckey said.”

Wang and Muckey may have escaped having their musical careers destroyed—if so, a very welcome development.

The *Times*, in its recent report on Wang and Muckey, also refers, somewhat regretfully, to the case of Amar Ramasar, a star dancer at the New York City Ballet and now a prominent performer in the revival on Broadway of *West Side Story*, the famed musical. Ramasar was fired from the ballet company “for sharing vulgar texts and sexually explicit photos of a dancer with a colleague,” but “won his job back through arbitration with the help of his union, to the dismay of some women in the company.”

The reinstatements of Wang and Mackey suggest that the overreaching by #MeToo crusaders may be backfiring. In particular, the use of media sensationalism and of anonymous and unspecified charges is beginning to reveal the real significance of the witch-hunting campaigns.



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