

Detroit and Windsor orchestras promote “Music has no Borders”

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An Instagram and Facebook posting by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Windsor Symphony in Ontario promoting collaboration between the two organizations has gotten well over 1,400 likes as of this writing. The post is titled “Music has no borders” and went out earlier this month as President Donald Trump was restating his threats to make Canada the 51st US state.

The progressive response from members of the two organizations undoubtedly reflects wider sentiments among the populations of the two countries and of peoples internationally, alarmed by the reckless stoking of ultra-nationalism by not only Trump, but by politicians around the globe.

Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario, are on opposite sides of the mile-wide Detroit River, which forms some 30 miles of the boundary between the US and Canada. The Instagram post includes a video of two young women, one African American and one white, standing on opposite sides of the river communicating by holding up signs.

The woman from Detroit holds up a sign reading “Does anyone like classical music” and scans hopefully the other side of the river. The young Canadian woman responds, holding up a sign saying “I do.” The Detroit woman’s face brightens. She holds up a sign reading “Wow!” and follows with a sign “Have you been to the DSO before?” The Canadian woman responds “No I haven’t” and follows with “Have you been to the Windsor Symphony Before?”

“Do you want to get together?” asks the Detroit woman in reply, jumping up and down in excitement. “I would love to,” replies the woman on the Canadian side.

The post concludes, “Music has no borders.”

There were scores of comments including

- “Fully support this, what a great message to send”
- “They speak for all of us. I live in Detroit and love Windsor”

- “Art has no boundaries”
- “Love this, perfect timing”
- “Yes, Yes, Yes”
- “Thank you DSO for this timely post. Here in Michigan we love our Canadian neighbors!”
- “We are friends and neighbors. We don’t like bullies.”
- “Leave it to the performing arts to do its thing during turmoil, as history has shown repeatedly. Love this so much.”

The modern symphony orchestra involves a collaboration and exchange of musicians, composers and conductors from all over the world. Virtually every concert performed by the Detroit Symphony, for example, involves a guest soloist, often not American or American-born.

Classical music is by its very nature global. Ossip Gabrilowitsch, an early conductor of the Detroit Symphony (1918 to 1936), helped transform it into a world class ensemble. A Russian-born Jew, he was conductor of the Munich Philharmonic and was married to American writer Mark Twain’s oldest daughter, singer Clara Clemens, whom he met in Vienna. When war broke out between Russia and Germany in 1914, Ossip was interned by the German government as an enemy alien. Only through the intervention of Bruno Walter was he released. The couple soon fled to Switzerland and then New York.

In February 1922, the DSO was the first orchestra in the world to broadcast a live concert over the radio. The program featured pianist Artur Schnabel, with Gabrilowitsch conducting.

The current music director of the DSO is Jader Bignamini, a native of Crema, Italy. He began his career as a musician (clarinet) with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi and has conducted at some of the world’s most acclaimed orchestras, including the Deutsche Opera Berlin, Osaka Philharmonic and Yomiuri

Nippon Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo. Also the Metropolitan Opera (New York), Vienna State Opera and Dutch National Opera.

Robert Franz, the music director of the Windsor Symphony, is also the Associate Conductor of the Houston Symphony and Artistic Director of the Boise (Idaho) Baroque Orchestra.

Enrico Lopez-Yañez, a native of Mexico, is the principal pops conductor of the Detroit, Nashville, and Pacific Symphonies, as well as the principal conductor of the Dallas Symphony.

On February 12, Lopez-Yañez conducted a free community concert in heavily Latino southwest Detroit. Despite a snowstorm in progress, the concert venue, St. Hedwig Catholic Church, was full and the crowd responded with enthusiasm. Significantly, the audience included many younger people.

Lopez-Yañez explained the origin of some of the pieces the orchestra played in terms of Mexican tradition and geography. He also referenced the stories that accompanied certain pieces which were written for either an opera or a ballet, or as an overture to a stage play.

The orchestra was led by Kimberly Kennedy and Hai-Xin Wu, who occupied the first and second violin chairs respectively. Hai-Xin Wu is a native of Nanjing, China and studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the New York School of Music.

The concert began with a performance by a youth orchestra from Detroit comprised largely of Latino youth. There was also a performance from a local amateur traditional Mexican dance school to accompany two of the pieces. Some of the pieces had romantic themes in celebration of Valentine's Day.

The most popular piece was a selection of numbers from a suite drawn from Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*.

Another piece was arranged in dedication to textile workers in the pueblo of Aguascalientes, Mexico.



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