

Oracle comes to the “rescue” of the Nashville Symphony

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Last Monday brought the news that Oracle, the giant US tech and database management firm founded and controlled by Larry Ellison, had made a \$10 million gift to the ailing Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

This will plug the hole in this year’s budget and enable the ensemble to continue with its 2026-27 season. A few days earlier, the symphony in Tennessee’s largest city, with a population of 725,000, had announced that it was suspending the season and furloughing its 77 musicians and 27 staff for the entire year.

Far from representing a genuine solution to the crisis of classical music performance, Oracle’s gift only underscores the extent to which it is being attacked. Culture is increasingly dependent on the largesse of the fabulously wealthy. Opera companies and regional symphony orchestras have been hit particularly hard by a combination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virtual elimination of music education in the public schools and the decline in government grants and support. Federal subsidies, never more than minimal in the US, have been all but eradicated by the cutbacks of the Trump administration.

The 82-year-old Ellison’s wealth is estimated at \$194 billion, making him the eighth-richest oligarch in the world. With Oracle posting net income of \$17.087 billion on revenues of more than \$67 billion in the current fiscal year, up from \$12.443 billion in fiscal 2025, a few million dollars is the equivalent of pocket change for its founder and chief shareholder, whose stake in the company is a massive 40.6 percent. Ellison and his son David have been front-page news recently because of their successful mergers and acquisitions, aided by Ellison’s longtime friend in the White House, which have given David Ellison control over a media and entertainment empire, including both CNN and

CBS News, that is historically unprecedented.

Oracle is moving its headquarters from Austin, Texas to Nashville. It is being given close to \$250 million in state and local tax abatements and other incentives. Its meager \$10 million donation, less than five percent of the incentives, is part of its cost of doing business. At least in the beginning stages, it wants to be seen as a generous participant in civic life in the city, and is undoubtedly trying to answer the critics of the incentives.

Nashville Symphony president and CEO Mark Tillinger responded to Oracle’s gift with a groveling statement speaking of his “immense joy and gratitude” and hailing “this extraordinary partnership.”

“This gift from Oracle is a profound vote of confidence in the Nashville Symphony and the important role we play in the cultural fabric of our city,” wrote Tillinger. “We are deeply grateful for their generosity, which gives us time and momentum to address our longer-term financial challenges. We will honor that investment through the difficult but necessary work of restructuring our operations, bringing our costs and revenue into balance, and strengthening our financial foundation for a sustainable future.”

Supporters of classical music and its live performance should keep in mind that the billionaires Tillinger is thanking, the new “saviors” of classical music in Nashville, are close friends of Donald Trump, that noted supporter of the arts whose vision of culture is to threaten to “demolish” Washington D.C.’s Kennedy Center unless his name is placed on the front of the façade. It certainly remains to be seen whether Larry Ellison will seek to fill the gap left in the Nashville Symphony’s finances left by the recent death of its longtime benefactor, the wealthy Nashville

philanthropist Martha Ingram.

Musicians as well as supporters of the Symphony should take note of the statement's reference to the "necessary work of restructuring our operations" and balancing the symphony's budget. These words are completely in line with the views of Ellison, Elon Musk and other oligarchs. Restructuring means that any action to deal with the crisis facing the Symphony will come at the expense of the musicians and staff, and above all that there will be no expectation and no demand for public subsidies and support. The base salary of most of the symphony's musicians now stands at \$72,000 a year, at a time when the MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates that a family of four needs at least double that figure to live comfortably in this growing city.

It bears repeating that the temporary "rescue" of live classical music in Nashville highlights the contradiction between the need to defend and develop culture, on the one hand, and the requirements of declining American capitalism on the other. Classical music and other art forms that need and deserve subsidies are facing a ruling class increasingly focused on spending for war and at the same time resolutely ignorant and contemptuous of culture.

Access to culture is no less important than jobs, health care and education. All of these are menaced by the deepening crisis of capitalism. What is needed is a socialist program, based on meeting human needs and not the profit considerations of parasitic oligarchs. The only force in society that will fight consistently for this program is the working class. Musicians and other artists and cultural workers must turn to the untapped strength of the working class based on the fight for socialism.



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