

No response by DSO management to arbitration offer by musicians

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There has been no formal response by Detroit Symphony Orchestra management to a proposal advanced by striking DSO musicians last week to submit outstanding issues for settlement through binding arbitration. In a March 7 press release, DSO musicians accused management of renegeing on a pledge to engage in talks on the arbitration proposal over the weekend.

Meanwhile, DSO President and CEO Anne Parsons sent a tersely worded message to members of the DSO board of directors urging them to ignore the musicians' arbitration proposal. DSO musicians have been contacting board members over the past several days, urging them to call a meeting to override DSO executives and accept the binding arbitration proposal.

DSO musicians are entering the 23rd week of a strike against massive concession demands, including a more than 30 percent pay cut and cuts to health and pension benefits. Under the recent proposal, musicians would agree to return to work under management's last offer while outstanding issues are arbitrated. Talks ended last month after musicians rejected a provocative "final offer" by DSO management, which then declared it was suspending the balance of the 2010-2011 concert season.

Musicians have agreed to substantial wage cuts, but differences remain over a number of issues, including a plan, sponsored by the League of American Orchestras, to drastically revise work rules so that orchestra members would be essentially at the beck and call of management.

The offer of binding arbitration reflects the difficult position facing the musicians, who have waged a

determined struggle over the course of the past four months, while the official labor movement in Detroit and nationally essentially sat by. The dispute is doing enormous damage to the orchestra, which recently lost its entire percussion section.

The DSO musicians continue to win broad public sympathy locally and nationally. An improvised March 3 concert sponsored by DSO management at Orchestra Hall attracted only a handful of people after the scheduled performer, Grammy award-winning singer Bobby McFerrin, cancelled in a show of solidarity with the DSO musicians. The R&B and gospel group Take6, tapped by the DSO to replace McFerrin, also cancelled, forcing the DSO to feature a "surprise" artist.

Over the weekend musicians from four orchestras: Boston, Denver, Philadelphia and Washington, DC, wore wristbands in a show of support.

DSO musicians held a pair of well-attended strike support concerts over the weekend. The first, at Kirk in the Hills in the Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills, attracted a near capacity audience. The program featured Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F Major* and Poulenc's *Concerto for Organ, Timpani and Strings in G Minor*. The second half featured Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings in C Major*.

That evening, DSO musicians performed at St. Jane Frances de Chantal in the Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights. The concert highlighted the talents of Russian born DSO Principal Violist Sasha Mishnaevski, who performed Telemann's *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra in G Major*. Mishnaevski also performed selections on the electric viola/violin, including a piece

by American composer and conductor David Eaton. Grieg's "*Holberg*" Suite rounded out the evening.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to musicians and supporters at Kirk in the Hills. Caroline Hutchinson, a member of the American Federation of Musicians and the wife of DSO bassist Larry Hutchinson, told the WSWS, "I was brought up in a liberal union environment in Wisconsin. I am from a musical family. I support the musicians. This would have been my husband's 28th season.

"The stance of the DSO is that they would like to get rid of the musicians. After [Senator] Carl Levin and [Quicken CEO] Dan Gilbert worked on the compromise agreement, and management came back with a worse proposal; right at that time [Governor] Walker was beginning to clamp down on the unions in Wisconsin.

"Even Reagan recognized the need for some safety net. I think there is going to be a backlash. What is happening in Wisconsin is similar to what is taking place in Egypt. It is strange how things come together."

A substitute violinist said, "It seems like the DSO board should be doing more, they are not doing their job."

A DSO violist added, "Anne Parsons has gone a good way towards her goal of destroying the orchestra. That is why she was brought in here. We have lost our percussion section and we could lose a lot of our violinists."

A DSO supporter said, "The last thing we would like to see is to lose the orchestra. Detroit is not in good shape as it is."



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