



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chicago Symphony Orchestra Musicians Strike

“We act to protect the well-being of the Musicians and the Orchestra”

Chicago – **(March 10, 2019)** – After nearly a year of negotiations for a new labor agreement, and with management still trying to reduce their pension benefits, the musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra are on strike. After completing a Sunday afternoon concert and negotiating all evening, the musicians walked out and announced there would be no return until a contract agreement is reached.

“We have been clear from the beginning that we will not accept a contract that diminishes the well-being of members or the imperils the future of the orchestra,” says Steve Lester, bassist and Chair of the Musicians of the CSO negotiating committee. “As of today, the Musicians of the CSO are on-strike.” Lester adds: “Beginning at 8am on Monday morning, March 11, picket lines will stretch across all of the doors of Orchestra Hall through 8pm daily until a contract that is fair to the musicians is reached. It is requested that no orchestra, performer or patron cross the line.”

Cynthia Yeh, a percussionist and member of the Negotiating Committee, said that while Jeff Alexander, on behalf of the Helen Zell led Board of Trustees, has tried to convince members and the public that the Board of Trustees is offering a good contract – the truth is quite different. “The core difference between our plan and their proposal is that our plan keeps the guaranteed retirement benefit funded by the Association that has been the hallmark of the Orchestra’s benefits package (and those of other leading orchestras) for over 50 years,” says Yeh. “The Board of Trustees’ proposal strips the membership of that guaranteed benefit and shifts the investment risk to the individual member. The Board’s communique to Orchestra members and the press represents an unrealistic, snake oil, ‘rosy scenario’ sales job of their proposals,” adds Yeh.

Lester added: “Management’s release to the Orchestra and the media also fails to mention the other concessions the Association continues to demand, such as reducing sabbatical weeks, reducing substitute pay, and eliminating the \$3,000 annual individual pension supplement. We won’t be fooled.”

Despite Maestro Riccardo Muti and others pointing out that the CSO has long been considered to be the nation’s finest because of its ability to attract and retain superb musicians, Management has offered the Musicians a reduced benefits package which includes ending their guaranteed retirement benefits. All of this comes at a time when the CSO’s revenues from tickets sales and donations have steadily increased every year since 2013, while the Musicians’ wages and benefits have stagnated.

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David Sanders, cellist and one of the longest-serving members of the Orchestra (hired in 1974) emphasizes: "Management's last offer puts the Chicago Symphony Musicians' basic compensation package squarely behind the ones offered by the orchestras of Los Angeles and San Francisco, both augmented by housing assistance allowances, while also ending our guaranteed retirement benefits."

The CSO labor contract with the Chicago Federation of Musicians, which expired September 17, 2018, was extended to March 10, 2019 in order to facilitate discussions and to further explore the Musicians' retirement needs. On Feb. 14, 2019, the Musicians voted to authorize a strike if no agreement was reached by the end of March 10, and all performances would be suspended, and all 100 of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's musicians would walk out.

"The walk out and forming of a 12-hour daily picket line is driven by management's insistence on reducing retirement benefits. When the Orchestra is performing at the top of its game and having its best year ever at the box office, we've got to protect the artistic integrity of one of the world's great orchestras," adds Lester.

For more information, visit www.ChicagoSymphonyMusicians.com, facebook.com/csomusicians, or write musiciansofthecso@gmail.com.

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