



CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION

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News

**For Immediate Release:**

March 11, 2019

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## **CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION DISAPPOINTED IN UNION DECISION TO STRIKE; STANDS READY TO RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS WITH MUSICIANS**

CHICAGO – Despite 11 months of negotiations, which included the services of federal mediators, expert third-party actuaries, and labor and benefit attorneys, Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) musicians -- represented by the Chicago Federation of Musicians (CFM) -- and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) did not reach agreement on a new contract. The previous contract expired at 11:59 p.m. on March 10.

At the close of today's negotiating meeting, the union indicated that the musicians have decided to go on strike.

"We are disappointed by the union's choice to disrupt the CSO season now underway, and we are available to return to negotiations when they are ready," said CSO Association President Jeff Alexander. "We have worked tirelessly to be responsive to the musicians' many proposals during negotiations and have responded with a package that provides exceptional benefits, offers salary increases, improves working conditions and protects their retirement benefits.

"We value the musicians, and our commitment to the artistic quality of the Orchestra is unwavering," he said, adding that other CSOA unionized employees and administrative staff have made concessions over the last several years to help ensure a long future of the CSO."

The musicians are now engaging in a strike for terms that the Association and Board of Trustees believe are unreasonable and detrimental to a sustainable future for the CSO.

CSO musicians have one of the most lucrative salary and benefit contracts in the industry. In 2017/18 the minimum annual salary was \$159,000, the average annual salary was \$187,000 and the average total compensation, e.g. including media payments, was \$209,000. Even though the Association has experienced annual operating deficits for several years, it offered increased wages, improved working conditions, and a generous retirement package.

**RICCARDO MUTI**  
Zell Music Director

**HELEN ZELL**  
Chair, Board of Trustees

**JEFF ALEXANDER**  
President

**YO-YO MA**  
Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Under the new contract offer, CSO musicians would receive the following benefits and more:

- This offer would increase musicians' minimum annual salary in the final year to more than \$167,000 annually.
- Increased ancillary payments related to scale by the same percentages
- Paid time off at a minimum of 12 weeks per year
- Retention of current medical, dental and life insurance coverage with no increase in weekly contributions toward the cost of the premiums, and no reduction in the plans' features
- Increased long-term disability benefit from \$10,000 to \$15,000 per month
- Increased paid parental leave from 4 to 6 weeks

In addition, and at the heart of the difficult work ahead is reaching agreement on a new retirement benefit program.

The CSOA is not alone in dealing with the financial challenges of the traditional Defined Benefit Pension plan model.

As has occurred with most Defined Benefit Plans across the country, the financial obligations to continue this plan have become an increasing and significant financial burden for the Association. It must shift and modernize the type of retirement benefit offered going forward if it is to protect the musicians and the long-term future of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for future generations.

“The CSO Board of Trustees is responsible for the financial well-being of the Association that governs the Orchestra. We know the financial facts and challenges, and we know that if a change is not made to retirement benefits, there is risk to sustaining the CSO. We have witnessed other organizations that did not act soon enough to address pension issues, and as a result, they suffered devastating consequences,” said Helen Zell, CSO Board chair. “We are committed to offering a retirement plan and other benefits that provide our exceptional musicians the secure retirement that they deserve as well as protect the CSO for future generations.”

“We are committed to reaching an agreement with the musicians that is good for all involved, including the City of Chicago and the community that loves and supports our orchestra,” Alexander said. “The CSOA values and respects the musicians, who are among the finest in the world and have been a cultural treasure for the Chicago community for more than 128 years. As such, we look forward to resolution and continuation of an already outstanding concert season.”

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**The Chicago Symphony Orchestra: [www.cso.org](http://www.cso.org) and [www.csosoundsandstories.org](http://www.csosoundsandstories.org)**

Founded by Theodore Thomas in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the greatest orchestras in the world. Since 2010, the pre-eminent conductor Riccardo Muti has served as its 10th music director. Yo-Yo Ma is the Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant, Missy Mazzoli is Mead Composer-in-Residence and Erina Yashima is the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Apprentice.

From baroque through contemporary music, the CSO commands a vast repertoire. Its renowned musicians annually perform more than 150 concerts, most at Symphony Center in Chicago and, each summer, at the suburban Ravinia Festival. They regularly tour nationally and internationally. Since 1892, the CSO has made 60 international tours, performing in 29 countries on five continents.

People around the globe listen to weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings on the WFMT radio network and online at [cso.org/radio](http://cso.org/radio). Recordings by the CSO have earned 62 Grammy Awards, including two in 2011 for Muti's recording with the CSO and Chorus of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* (Muti's first of eight releases with the CSO to date). Find details on these and many other CSO recordings at [www.cso.org/resound](http://www.cso.org/resound).

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, Director and Conductor) and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, a training ensemble for emerging professionals. Through its prestigious Symphony Center Presents series, the CSOA presents guest artists and ensembles from a variety of genres—classical, jazz, world, and contemporary.

The Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO offers community and education programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds. Through the Institute and other activities, including a free annual concert led by Muti, the CSO is committed to using the power of music to create connections and build community.

The CSO is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The CSO's music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from the Zell Family Foundation. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.