

Senza Sordino

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Minnesota Orchestra Lockout Continues

by Marcia Peck, Minnesota Orchestra

To our colleagues and friends across North America, all the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra want to express our deepest gratitude and thanks. You have helped us with financial support and offers of employment, both of which have enabled us to withstand unparalleled intransigence on the part of the Minnesota Orchestral Association (MOA). We appreciate the huge support that came from the AFM Strike Fund, which extended benefits to us for a longer period than any other situation has required.

We also acknowledge the support of Bruce Ridge, Brian Rood, and the entire ICSOM governing board, as well as Ray Hair, the IEB, Jay Blumenthal, and the SSD. They have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to provide what we need to try to resolve this conflict.

The continuous messages of concern and understanding from all of you have made us feel less alone. It has been a year—nearly 15 months, now—of stress, uncertainty, and suffering not only for us but also for our families. But for all of you and your extraordinary support and many, many kindnesses, the lockout would be truly unbearable. We sense your presence beside us. Thank you.

Last April, after we had already been locked out for more than half a year, our music director, Osmo Vänskä, notified the MOA board that he felt our early November Carnegie Hall dates could not go forward unless we were back on stage by September at the latest. We were to play the complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies, scheduled for two nights in November and two more in April 2014. Osmo stated that if those Carnegie Hall concerts were cancelled, he would be forced to resign on October 1.

In July the musicians accepted the proposal presented by our mediator, George Mitchell (the same George Mitchell who brokered peace in Northern Ireland and whom the MOA itself had chosen to mediate our conflict). The proposal would have put in place a four-month, concessionary framework during which, with his help, we might negotiate the full contract. The MOA rejected his proposal.

Instead the MOA sent its own contract proposal to each member of the orchestra individually, outside of the mediator's process and sidestepping the elected negotiating committee. The orchestra unanimously rejected that proposal. A nearly identical offer was made again in August, and again was unanimously rejected. Renovation of Orchestra Hall was completed in August 2013.

On September 26 the MOA made yet another contract offer, this time through the press, containing the now infamous \$20,000 "signing bonus" that enabled the MOA to characterize their offer as an average decrease of minus 17%—when in fact the three-year contract proposal contained a regressive pay structure that planned a three-year downward spiral from our last pay rate, starting with a cut in salary of 18% in the first year, down 22% in the second, and down 25% in the third. Our management indicated that further cuts in salary would likely be sought in 2016 as well, a so-called two-step process. Though CEO Michael Henson proclaimed publicly that his salary would be reduced by the same percentage as the musicians', there was no language in the final proposal regarding CEO or management salary reductions.

The proposal also contained a "poison pill" that virtually guaranteed its rejection: musicians who had committed to work elsewhere beyond October 15 were subject to termination. Many working condition gains negotiated over decades were stripped from the proposal, which also eliminated our personal contracts. Once again, this was a "take it or leave" proposal, distributed through the press, with no possibility of discussion whatsoever.

The musicians unanimously rejected this proposal by secret ballot on Friday, September 28. Efforts to communicate with the MOA's team over the weekend proved fruitless. On the morning of September 30, the day before Osmo Vänskä's resignation deadline, we issued a direct request to meet immediately and informed the MOA that we had also notified the media of this request. Our counsel flew in from New York, and by early afternoon we met with eleven members of the MOA negotiating team and management. We presented two offers. First, a modified version of the mediator's proposal designed to address the MOA's stated objections. It would have increased the time-frame to a full year and offered a deeper cut than Senator Mitchell had proposed. The second offer outlined a 3-year contract, beginning with an 8% cut and gradually working back up so that by 2016 we would return to the 2012 levels.

(continued on page 5—see MINNESOTA)

In This Issue

Minnesota Lockout Continues	1
Officers' Reports	2
Orchestra Newslets	4
Minnesota Legislators Call for Resignations	6

Chairperson's Report by Bruce Ridge



Last Year's Words and Next Year's Voices

In February of 1979, I joined my first professional orchestra at the age of fifteen. I remember everything about the night of my first concert, and I still have the program as if to prove it really happened. I remember how my 100% polyester tuxedo didn't fit all that well, and how my giant bow tie was probably more appropriate for those awkward senior prom photographs than for the orchestra's attire. I remember the feel of backstage, and the names of everyone on stage with me that night. I was joining a great orchestra, one that was composed of my teachers and mentors. I idolized them, and now they were graciously indulging and tolerating me by allowing me to join them. Walking on stage was so exciting that I kept going back off stage, just so I could experience walking on stage again.

I remember that after the concert, there was a temporary bar in the lobby, selling small glasses of wine. I ordered a glass, and of course they questioned my age. But I replied with a huff and an indignation that only a 15-year-old can muster, saying "I'm in the orchestra." So, with some pretty apparent reluctance, they went ahead and served me. (I am assuming the statute of limitations has expired.)

I stood there that night thinking that absolutely anything was possible, and decades later I remain haunted by that potential.

Do you know what I mean by "the mirage in the road"? It's that shimmering illusion of water that taunts you on the highway about 25 yards in front of your car on hot humid days. On the coast of North Carolina, the salt air and humidity combine to make the mirage appear especially intense and enticing. I used to get frustrated with my father for not driving fast enough to catch up to the shimmering pool of water. I swore that, when I was older, I would catch the mirage. I could even imagine the splash as I caught up to it, drove through it, and left it behind.

With the arrival of the new year, literally on January 1, I will be fifty years old. I feel as if a threshold has been crossed, and I'm not certain of what lies ahead of me, or for that matter, what lingers behind.

On that first night back in 1979, there was meaning in everything I saw, heard, and touched. Every note of music seemed to mean more than the last. I sensed that a new age of enlightenment was about to ease the world's burdens. Music, art, poetry, compassion, love, empathy—these seemed to be the most important things. I was surrounding myself with people who all felt the same way and who were eager to live in ways that would allow them to approach expressing the inexpressible.

One of the Flying Wallendas once said: "Life is on the wire. The rest is just waiting."

(continued on page 7—see *CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT*)



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President's Report by Brian Rood



On December 5, 2013, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that the arts and culture industry provided \$500 billion, or at least 3.2% of total U.S. goods and service in 2011. In comparison, the arts and culture sector outpaced the travel and tourism industry, which was 2.8% of GDP in 2011. “Art and culture is a significant part of the U.S. economy—not just its contributions of ideas and creativity to the innovation economy but also as an important part of the labor force and our country’s GDP,” NEA Senior Deputy Chairman Joan Shigekawa said.

Despite this good news, and with U.S. financial markets setting all-time highs, why are some employers so intent on rolling back hard-fought wages as well as dismantling collective bargaining agreements that took decades to achieve? The answers are numerous and unquestionably include the continuing assault on unions and collective bargaining.

While further examination of these issues will rightfully continue, there is another concern that has received little attention to date. The leadership on orchestra boards inevitably turns over due to term limits and the passing of the proverbial gavel. Unfortunately, some transitions have proven disastrous to both the organizations and musicians. It used to be that potential board members were groomed by family members and civic leaders deeply rooted in their communities. Board positions were often passed down from generation to generation. The commitment of an increasing number of newer board members to their orchestras does not match that of previous generations.

With no slight intended towards bankers and lawyers, many of whom I am proud to call friends, it is interesting to note that boards nowadays have more bankers and lawyers at the helm than ever before. While no one disputes that lawyers and bankers might bring good business practices to their institutions, we have also seen catastrophic results when board members fail to recognize and embrace the unique character of our institutions. Symphony, opera, and ballet companies and their musicians are not widget makers. Good business sense without recognition of the differences between artistic and commercial enterprises and without a passionate commitment to music and artistic excellence will inevitably fall short. At an almost epidemic pace we are currently losing a generation of board leaders who staunchly supported their orchestras simply because they loved the music and their musicians.

Concurrently, tactics used by boards and managements to extract concessions from us have become increasingly destructive. Ten years ago, would anyone have believed that musicians in an orchestra the stature of the Minnesota Orchestra musicians would be forced to endure a second year of being locked out? There is no doubt that musicians and board leaders can have their differences

and that those differences can sometimes lead to disputes, but the kind of complete and total disregard for the welfare of the orchestra and the community we have witnessed recently would be unthinkable by a board that is committed to the institution and understands its charge as the guardians of its community’s cultural jewels.

If music is the universal language, or as LA Phil music director Gustavo Dudamel says, “music is a fundamental human right,” then we must find new and creative ways to reach board leaders. We need to reach them in ways that resonate personally to them. Most board members view us as exceptionally gifted artists—notwithstanding the shenanigans still in use by the Minnesota Orchestra Association.

So, what can we do?

One corporate CEO took matters into his own hands several years ago. When his senior vice-president sought to retire, the CEO requested that he begin a new role to mentor junior executives on their generation’s philanthropic and civic duties. This insightful and proactive move continues to benefit the CEO’s community greatly. Surely this model would work elsewhere.

Fortunately, many board members and leaders continue to share our love of music and to demonstrate respect for the musicians and for our institution’s important place in the cultural life of our communities. As musicians, we need to increase productive interactions with board members. An example is taking the initiative to talk with board members at parties and receptions. Meet-and-greet functions, donor events, and visiting donor suites during intermissions all can prove beneficial. Naturally, such efforts should be done in consultation with elected musician leadership to ensure that everyone understands the current dynamics of the musician-employer relationship.

On behalf of the ICSOM governing board, I wish you all a Happy New Year. May 2014 bring everyone good health and increased prosperity.

Senza Sordino is the official voice of ICSOM and reflects ICSOM policy. However, there are many topics discussed in *Senza Sordino* on which ICSOM has no official policy; the opinions thus expressed in *Senza Sordino* are those of the author(s) and not necessarily of ICSOM, its officers, or members. Articles and letters expressing differing viewpoints are welcomed.

Orchestra Newslets

The **Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra** showcased the arrival of its thirteenth music director, Louis Langree, with a series of special activities. In November 2012, the *One City, One Symphony* initiative presented Maestro Langree as the music director designate in performances of Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw* and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. After that initial success, funding was secured for a multimedia project in August. According to delegate Paul Frankenfeld, the series of two concerts, called LumenoCity, took place outdoors in Washington Park, just across the street from Cincinnati Music Hall, and featured a light show projected onto the front of the hall behind the orchestra. The free performances drew over 35,000 audience members who watched the CSO collaborate with members of the Cincinnati May Festival, the Cincinnati Opera, and the Cincinnati Ballet. As designed, everything generated great public interest for Mr. Langree's inaugural three weeks of concerts as music director in November. The first week's concerts featured Dr. Maya Angelou, who narrated Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* (premiered by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1942), and the ensemble eighth blackbird, which was featured in a piece composed by Jennifer Higdon. The second week presented this season's *One City, One Symphony* project, with Mozart's *Da Ponte* and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4. The third week's concerts included Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and music of Ravel, resulting in near-sellout crowds. Having recently purchased a home in Cincinnati and with plans to move his family to the city next year, Louis Langree has shown genuine affection for the city and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Without a doubt, it has been a successful start to his tenure as music director.



The **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** celebrated Giuseppe Verdi's 200th birthday in a big way, with a performance of the Requiem Mass heard worldwide, both live and streamed, by an estimated audience of 61,000 in the first three days. The October 10 concert, performed for a sold-out audience at Chicago's Orchestra Hall by the CSO under its music director, Riccardo Muti, also featured the 150-voice-strong Chicago Symphony Chorus and soloists Tatiana Serjan (soprano), Daniela Barcellona (mezzo-soprano), Mario Zeffiri (tenor), and Ildar Abdrazakov (bass). The Requiem had special significance for the celebration, as it was also on the program for Muti's debut as the orchestra's music director designate in 2009, with the same male soloists.

The concert was beamed by satellite to local viewers of free simulcasts on Pritzker Pavilion's 40' by 22½' outdoor LED screen (in downtown's Millennium Park) and at Benito Juarez Community Academy (in the Pilsen neighborhood). This was the first time the CSO streamed any concert live on its own website, and the webcast will be available for on-demand viewing there for one year. The webcast was carried live on more than 30 websites worldwide, including in the U.S., Canada, Italy, Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, the Canary Islands, Spain, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea.

Last fall, the **Grand Rapids Symphony** began a partnership with Spectrum Health, West Michigan's largest employer. GRS violinist Diane McElfish Helle organized the project, called the Music for Health Initiative: Music, Brain & Body, in collaboration with Spectrum Health's Music Therapy department. Pairs of GRS musicians perform in active music therapy sessions designed to bring live music into health care settings. The program aims to enhance movement, communication, and cognitive functioning of residential, long-term-care, and sub-acute patients at Spectrum's Neuro Rehabilitation facility. GRS musicians participate in the Music for Health Initiative with optional services. The one-year pilot program is funded by a grant from Perrigo Company Charitable Foundation.



Photo by Mary Taber Photography, LLC
Music Therapist Erin Wegener works with patients at Spectrum Health with musicians from the Grand Rapids Symphony in the Music for Health Initiative: Music, Brain & Body. Pictured behind the patients are GRS delegate Paul Austin (horn) and program organizer Diane McElfish Helle (violin).



On June 21, 2013, the **Houston Symphony** performed at Miller Outdoor Theatre, exactly 100 years after its first concert. The performance, carried live on KTRK Channel 13, was preceded by a half-hour special dedicated to the Symphony's history, garnering more than one million impressions in the Houston media market. For its centennial season, the Houston Symphony has assembled an extraordinary group of guest artists. First and foremost is the 36-year-old, Columbian-born and Vienna-trained conductor, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, the Symphony's music director designate. Opening night featured Renée Fleming. Other guests include Joshua Bell, Midori, Gil Shaham, Sigourney Weaver, trumpeter Chris Botti, Megan Hilty (of NBC's *Smash*), composer John Adams, and conductors Hannu Lintu, Peter Oundjian, and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. John Williams and Yo-Yo Ma will perform Williams' Cello Concerto together, and Christoph Eschenbach will conduct Mahler's Symphony No. 8 ("Symphony of a Thousand"). Houston delegate Christopher Neal reports that, in its 100th year, the Houston Symphony is connected to the people of Houston more than ever, performing more than 350 concerts for 300,000 people annually. For the past three years, it has achieved a record-breaking annual fund, increased ticket revenue, and balanced budgets.

Minnesota

(continued from page 1)

The MOA caucused for two hours before returning long enough to state that we were too far apart and there was nothing more to discuss. Within five minutes they issued a press release cancelling our November Carnegie Hall dates. Thus, at 4pm, with hours left on the negotiating clock, they ensured Osmo's resignation, which followed the next morning.

After Music Director Osmo Vänskä's resignation, board chair Jon Campbell stated that attempts to reach a settlement on a new contract would continue, but not anytime soon. "The time pressures we were under are now removed," Mr. Campbell said. "We're probably in a pause for the next few months." The musicians find it unthinkable that the trustees of the community's cultural gem would consider the ongoing lockout a matter of such little urgency.

In spite of that statement, we have continued to try to make progress through back-channels. Two of our negotiating team met twice with leading members of the MOA's negotiating committee in an attempt to begin a dialogue. However, it became clear through these meetings that there is no shared vision or common goals between the musicians and the members of the MOA's negotiating team. The current direction toward a diminished orchestra, diminished presence and visibility within our own community, and diminished artistic viability is a vision the musicians can neither agree to nor support. Due to this fundamental lack of unified purpose, we viewed the two-on-two discussions as ultimately fruitless. While there was no shouting, there also was no commonality or agreement as to what the future of our organization should be.

It has been heartbreaking to realize that the MOA leadership believes that the Minnesota Orchestra's musicians are easily replaceable, that its maestro is easily replaceable, and that residencies such as Carnegie and BBC Proms can be casually dispensed with. This proves a profound lack of understanding and belief in the organization's own product. The MOA has chosen to protect one-third of the organization's income, the endowment, at the extreme expense of earned and contributed income.

Here are a few of the facts that have been misreported, under-reported, or ignored by the press: For the fiscal year ending August 31, 2013, the MOA spent \$13.7 million without paying a single musician or producing a single concert. The MOA's law firm, Felhaber Larson Fenlon & Vogt, is the same firm that represented Minnesota-based American Crystal Sugar in the almost two-year-long lockout of its workers. The publisher of Minnesota's most widely read newspaper, the *Star Tribune*, is a Minnesota Orchestra board member. Each musician has now "contributed" 100% of his or her salaries for more than an entire year to the MOA's bottom line.

Recently the MOA's IRS-mandated 2012 Form 990, one of a number of requested financial documents the MOA repeatedly refused to provide to the musicians' negotiating team, was quietly posted on *Guidestar.org*. It shows that Minnesota Orchestra CEO Michael

Henson was awarded two bonuses totaling \$202,500 between September 1, 2011 and August 31, 2012, as he was planning for the musicians' work stoppage. Coming at a time when the management said they were forced to fire 17 staffers because they had fiscal woes, Henson took home \$386,916 in base compensation, \$202,500 in bonus and incentive compensation, \$9,800 in retirement and other deferred compensation, and \$20,097 in non-taxable benefits, for a grand total of \$619,313. Given the budget size of the Minnesota Orchestra, Henson's compensation is 1.9% of expenses, or roughly double the rate of nearly all other top ten orchestras. It should be noted that Mr. Henson has continued to draw a full salary throughout the lockout of the musicians.

After Osmo's resignation, the first news to lift our spirits came a few days later when he agreed to conduct two concerts, on October 4 and 5, at Ted Mann Hall on the University of Minnesota campus. Those concerts sold out within hours of Vänskä's announcement. At the eleventh hour we were able to add a third performance. Tickets went on sale for that performance online at 8:00 a.m. Friday morning and were sold out by 8:30 a.m. It was reported that the U of M's box office website received over 40,000 hits that morning. The concerts were a huge success and incredibly emotional. Our thanks go out to Osmo for agreeing to conduct and to Emanuel Ax, who played two concerti on each program and did these three concerts (six concerti!) in the space of 26 hours. If Manny is playing with your orchestra this season, please take a moment to thank him; he is the embodiment of a *mensch*.

On November 14 and 15 we performed two concerts with our very dear, 90-year-old conductor laureate, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, who has been incredibly supportive and outspoken in support of the orchestra he led for nineteen years (1960-1979). He conceived a powerfully moving concert that included Wagner's Prelude and Liebestod, Mozart Piano Concerto No. 23 (with the extraordinary Lydia Artymiw), and Brahms Symphony No. 2. On December 14 and 15 we had the pleasure of collaborating once again with Eiji Oue, our music director from 1995 until 2002, and our dear friend Jon Kimura Parker in two all-Tchaikovsky performances at the Minneapolis Convention Center. It's impossible to convey the depth of our gratitude to all these artists who have stepped up to help us. They are true heroes.

We continue to plan a winter-spring season. As I'm sure you can appreciate, it requires much heavy-lifting. A huge amount of the weight has been borne by cellist Tony Ross for artistic administration and Marni Hougham, English Horn, for every aspect of concert planning and execution. I hesitate to begin to mention individuals because, in truth, everyone plays a vital part in making these concerts happen. Nevertheless, special thanks to librarian Eric Sjostrom (our perfectionist program-guy), librarian Valerie Little (acting personnel manager), flutists Wendy Williams and Greg Milliren (who head the 24/7 PR team and whose writings I have drawn from for this article), our amazing stagehands, and the many friends and family who contribute their skills pro bono. To

(continued on page 7—see MINNESOTA)

Minnesota Legislators Call for Resignations

On December 10, in a letter to the board of the Minnesota Orchestra Association, ten Minnesota State legislators called for the resignations of Minnesota Orchestra CEO Michael Henson, board chair Jon Campbell, and past board chair Richard Davis, accusing them of financial mismanagement. They also called for an immediate end to the lockout of the musicians. The letter is excerpted below.

Leadership of the Minnesota Orchestral Association manipulated financial results in a deliberate deception of the public, first to gain public funding for Orchestra Hall, and then to justify locking out the musicians for well over a year.

This intentional deception was spelled out in September 2009, by MOA VP of Finance Bryan Ebensteiner to MOA's Finance and Executive Committees, "Balances in 2009 and 2010 would support our state bonding aspirations, while the deficits in 2011 and 2012 would demonstrate the need to reset the business model." This statement was made, not as a prediction, but as a fact — long before Mr. Ebensteiner had any real ability to know what would happen with MOA finances.

MOA achieved exactly the result Mr. Ebensteiner said it would, with balanced budgets in fiscal years 2009 and 2010 and then large and increasing deficits in FY 2011 and 2012.

It is not only the deception that is troubling, but also the apparent fiscal mismanagement:

Since Michael Henson was hired as CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra, from 2008–2012, the Minnesota Orchestra's revenue from operations has decreased over 15%, contrasted to the Cleveland Orchestra's increase of over 8%. Likewise, for donor contributions; from 2008–12, the Cleveland Orchestra increased its donor contributions (excluding capital campaigns) by over 25% while the Minnesota Orchestra has shown a decrease of over 15%. The Minnesota Orchestra's return on its investments did not match that of the Cleveland Orchestra nor of its peer group of similarly-sized endowment funds. We urge you to read the entire comparison at <http://www.orchestrateexcellence.org/a-tale-of-two-orchestras/>

Despite the subpar financial management of Mr. Henson, and the deliberate deception carried out by his administration, MOA rewarded him with not one, but two, bonuses, totaling over \$200,000, bringing his total compensation to over \$619,000 during the 2011 calendar year. These bonuses were paid in the midst of the financial crisis that was later used to justify the lockout. The results under Henson's management have been nothing short of a disaster.

It is clear that MOA management and Board leadership is willing to destroy the orchestra in order to "reset the business model."

We call for:

- the resignation of CEO Michael Henson, Chairman Jon Campbell, Past Chair Richard Davis and any others in MOA leadership involved in the public deception and the financial mismanagement of the organization. To restore public trust in the Orchestral Association, it is time for new leadership.
- an immediate end to the lockout of the musicians and resumption of negotiations over a new contract. The MOA has locked out the musicians; the MOA is the only one who can end this debacle. In other words, accept the mediator's proposal.

The Minnesota Orchestral Association Board will need to decide the direction it will pursue. If the board fails to replace MOA leadership and end the lockout, it will force the hands of other stakeholders, including the state, which provided major public funding for the renovation of Orchestra Hall.

We believe there are members of your MOA board who truly care about the Minnesota Orchestra, members who question why board leadership and management has been willing to destroy the orchestra that they claim to love. And with the loss of more than one entire season, the departure of Osmo Vänskä and some of the top musicians, the cancellation of Carnegie Hall and BBC Proms performances, they are destroying the Minnesota Orchestra.

Minnesota

(continued from page 5)

date, we have produced more than 30 concerts for approximately 30,000 music lovers.

At most recent count, we have thirteen active committees: Advancement and Philanthropy, Artistic, Concert Production, Education, Finance, Hospitality, House Concerts, Logistics, Members, Merchandise, Negotiating, Program Books, and Public Relations/Marketing. All arose organically to meet a need. And all are staffed by our multi-talented musicians and their spouses. Our amazing solidarity, especially while many of us are enduring extreme hardship, is a source of inspiration every single day.

We held a “Community Meeting” on December 9, open to the public, at which we reported on what we have accomplished during this year of the lockout and expressed our gratitude for all the ways the community has supported us. It was our low-tech version of an annual meeting at which we tried to set an example for transparency.

We expect to have announced our winter-spring “season” by the time you are reading this. Proceeding with our own self-produced concerts while locked out has served a two-fold purpose. By paying our players for what has averaged one week of work a month, we have been able to bring the orchestra together both for the obvious morale boost and to keep alive not only the perception, but also the reality, that we are indeed still an orchestra. In addition we have tasked ourselves with providing concerts to a community that is starved for great symphonic music.

It is clear that the musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra have a deep conflict in vision with our management. Management has made negotiations entirely about money at the expense of the mission, while the musicians believe that carrying out our mission with competence will ensure financial success. As you know, as part of the “new business model,” the MOA changed the mission statement, removing the word “orchestra” altogether. This was done in secret, without knowledge of or input from either the musicians or the community at large. Prompted by community outrage, the MOA has returned to an abbreviated version of the former mission statement that reinstated the word “orchestra” and simultaneously emphasizes financial sustainability.

Our first priority remains what it was at the outset: to reach a fair settlement with the MOA that returns our orchestra to the stage at Orchestra Hall. Our goal has never been to “win.” When we began negotiations a year and a half ago, our goal was to reach an agreement that allowed our orchestra to thrive. After all that has happened, we have had to modify that goal; we now seek an agreement that would allow us to begin to rebuild our depleted team.

We have an opportunity to convert the immense amount of attention this organization has received into a positive force behind a new way of doing things. Together with the board and community, we want to rediscover a way of working that is inclusive of all

constituencies rather than divisive and secretive. We need a model that preserves and grows the “product” rather than diminishes it. We would argue that the path toward greatness is far less risky than the path toward mediocrity. The “good enough” orchestra excites no one. The great orchestra inspires buy-in and pride. We know that in decades past we have accomplished great things, working together with our board. We still believe we can do so again.

Our gratitude goes to the many bloggers and journalists who have shed light and understanding on a complex situation. We thank our devoted audience and followers, community leaders, and all those who believe in the power of great music and stand together with us in support of a world-class orchestra for Minnesota. While we hope for and work toward the day when we, the Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra, can begin the process of rebuilding the Minnesota Orchestra, we have promised our community and ourselves that we will keep the music alive.

This ordeal has taught us that people do matter. Our institutions are guided by the personalities and values and character of the people who sit in the seats of power. Our orchestra has suffered grievously as a result. And we musicians are, of course, real people suffering as a consequence. Nevertheless, we continue to believe in the institution. We continue to fight for an orchestra Minnesota can be proud of and for an art-form that represents to us the highest aspirations of our lives.

Chairperson’s Report

(continued from page 2)

I want it back. I want to feel again the excitement I felt when I was hearing music for the first time; I want to be a part of an idealistic community that only musicians can truly create as we live and work together, and I want to believe again, with apologies to Keats, that the truth and beauty to which we aspire is still within reach.

As musicians, we invest our lives in the pursuit of beauty, spending our days (and especially our nights) reaching for something we all know is greater than ourselves. It is all the more remarkable that we still believe at all, despite working in a field that is so ugly at times.

In a field that offers the world beauty, peace, solace, inspiration, and communion, the sounds of our instruments and the voices of Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms must work to be heard over a din of destructive negativity, where self-promoting and self-fulfilling advocates of the demise of music engage in meaningless personal attacks, and a handful of divisive and polarizing figures attempt to dictate the future based on the tenets of their failed pasts. But one thing I have learned in life is that what you allow to continue is

(continued on page 8—see CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT)

Chairperson's Report

(continued from page 7)

what will continue, so we must never allow the negative voices to silence us, either as musicians or as citizens of the world.

I have also learned another truth: people always overplay their hands. Those who deal a negative hand will not be heard, will not be remembered, and through the passing of time will be proven to have been on the wrong side of history.

That is not to say though that change is not required; change must be welcomed in all endeavors. And while I am indulgently reflective for the moment, I think we sometimes approach the future while still facing the past. All of our organizations must change, and every facet of our lives must be ready and eager to adapt. Constant change is here to stay, and I've recently heard it said that "only a fool trips on what is behind him."

Answers may be found in the past, but solutions are found in the future.

Life can be a process of learning how to live with disappointment while still allowing yourself to hope. I find my hope in the next generation of musicians, many not yet born when I repeatedly walked on and off stage that first night in 1979. I see and hear in these musicians the same belief that I had then, and there is no part

of me that wants to teach them to doubt. I am not at all eager to tell them "how things really are." Actually, I'm kind of hoping that they will remind me of how things could be. Some of the leaders and musicians I am working with had not even touched a musical instrument when I joined my current orchestra. Yet I do not doubt that they will achieve far greater things, through music and through ICSOM, than I could have dreamt even all those years ago.

In every orchestra I have joined, I was the youngest member for a while. In 2006 I was the youngest person to become ICSOM chair. Such accolades are past me now. As George Carlin said, "You can't tell time; time tells you." Still, I want to chase the mirage in the road again and imagine my wheels splashing through the water as I leave all illusions behind—even if my fifty years have tried to convince me that the goals I once set for myself will always remain ahead of me.

"For last year's words belong to last year's language, and next year's words await another voice." —T.S. Eliot

I wish you all a brave New Year.

With love and admiration,
Bruce Ridge
