



## IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Chicago Symphony Orchestra Musicians Vote to Strike *Will act to protect future of musicians and orchestra*

Chicago – (February 14, 2019) – After 11 months of bargaining for a new labor agreement, the musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) have voted to authorize a strike on March 10<sup>th</sup> if negotiations fail to achieve an agreement. At a mid-day press conference at Orchestra Hall, representatives of the musicians said they hoped not to strike, but would, if necessary, to protect the health of both individual musicians and the orchestra itself.

Long considered to be the nation’s finest orchestra, able to attract and retain superb musicians, over the past decade the musicians have seen their compensation and benefits stagnate, while their schedules increased and working conditions deteriorated. Over the same period, the musicians stated, competing orchestral associations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Boston increased their musicians’ wages and benefits relative to Chicago.

“We want a fair and competitive contract that will ensure the excellence and sustainability of one of the world’s great orchestras for years to come,” said Stephen Lester, symphony bassist and chair of the negotiating committee.

“With the CSO maintaining stable revenues, ticket sales, and donations, management’s attempt to squeeze the orchestra by ending our defined benefit pension plan, raising health care costs, and stagnating wages is both an insult to each of us and a danger to the reputation and viability of the institution itself,” says Gina DiBello, violinist.

Percussionist Cynthia Yeh adds: “Management is trying to squeeze us to pay their bond debt for a rehab of Symphony Center costing more than \$100 million. We know that when people refer to the CSO they mean the musicians, our Maestro Riccardo Muti, and the music – not the building, however lovely it is. And it is this, the music and musicians, the heart of the CSO, that we are willing to strike to protect.”

“The overwhelming vote to strike was driven by management’s insistence on reducing benefits and offering inadequate compensation,” added Lester. In fact, the past year marked the Orchestra’s best year ever in ticket sales, with nearly 350,000 tickets sold, representing more than \$23 million in revenue.

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After returning last week from a successful three-week tour of Asia, performances will resume this week. Negotiations with management have also resumed for a new three-year contract. 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 further explore the musicians' retirement needs. If no agreement is reached by March 10, performances will be suspended and the Orchestra's 100 Chicago musicians will walk out.

Negotiation sessions are scheduled through the March 10 deadline. Though the parties remain far apart, the Chicago Symphony musicians remain ready and willing to work with management to reach an agreement to ensure the sustainability and long-term success of one the world's greatest orchestras.

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