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Maestro Muti Supports the Musicians *Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians set to strike on March 10*

Chicago, IL (March 6, 2019) – In a letter delivered to the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, world-renowned Maestro Riccardo Muti expressed his support for the Musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra who, after 11 months of negotiations over a new contract, are poised to strike on the 10th of March if no settlement is reached. In a letter delivered today to Board of Trustees Chair Helen Zell and CSO President Jeff Alexander, **Muti** said:

“As Music Director and a musician of this orchestra, I am with the Musicians. I understand their needs and how they should be treated, and the fact that they are among the best musicians in the world. A crisis would damage the image of the institution. The Musicians themselves, the public and the entire musical world would be surprised to see the Orchestra in trouble. I hope before my return in a few days, everything will be settled, giving the Musicians the recognition they deserve. I hope that the Board [of Trustees] will remember that theirs is not a job but a mission, and that tranquility and serenity will be given for the Artists to do their work.”

According to Orchestra bass player Steve Lester, who leads the Musicians negotiating team: “Although the CSO has a multimillion-dollar endowment, and revenues from ticket sales and donations that have increased every year since our last contract in 2013, management is trying to reduce our basic benefit package and end our guaranteed retirement benefits which will harm members and present a danger to the future of the Orchestra itself.”

Lester explained that while for one-half century the CSO had offered the nation’s best compensation package, in the past few years Chicago’s contract offerings to musicians have already fallen behind those offered by the orchestras of Los Angeles and San Francisco – both augmented by housing assistance allowances – and if Management’s demands prevail, may soon fall behind Boston and other cities.

Reflecting on her own experience as a new CSO Musician, Cynthia Yeh, a percussionist with the Orchestra since 2007 said: “As Maestro Muti and others point out, the CSO maintains its position in the nation and the world because of its musicians, who are drawn from across the globe – as are our patrons. Today, however, after nearly a year of contract negotiations, the actions of the CSO Association management, led by Board of Trustees Chair, Helen Zell, and CSO President, Jeff Alexander, threaten the continued ability to attract the best talent as well as the future of the Orchestra itself.”

David Sanders, a cellist who has performed with the CSO since 1974 emphasized the importance of the dispute: “Musicians from around the world have always sought a place in our Orchestra, attracted by the assembled talent and the knowledge that their efforts and skills would be respected and valued by the Board of Trustees. For the last half-century Chicago prided itself on having the most highly-compensated orchestra in the nation. By attempting to diminish the well-being of Orchestra members, Management’s demands imperil the Orchestra itself.”

Robert Bloch, attorney for the Musicians of the CSO says that while negotiations over the contract are continuing, if no agreement is reached, the Musicians will go on strike after their concert on Sunday, March 10 at 3 pm. For additional information visit www.ChicagoSymphonyMusicians.com.