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Philharmonic Chooses Silence over Service

Musicians of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic were informed today that the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Board of Directors voted yesterday to suspend all performances through the spring, citing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Earlier this fall, musician negotiators were prepared to bring a COVID side-letter agreement to musicians for a vote, an agreement that included musician wage cuts in excess of 30% and provided considerable scheduling flexibility to management. In what could have been the final session of negotiations for an agreement to continue presenting music to the community, Philharmonic management informed us of their intent for the side-letter agreement to supersede and replace the conditions of a decades-old Collective Bargaining Agreement. We responded to this position, and expressed that we would not take an agreement with such grievous implications to a vote. The shocking and cavalier refusal by management to attach the side-letter to the conditions of the CBA was clearly unacceptable. Amidst these talks, no substantive plan for performing concerts in the fall were presented.

On September 28, 2020, Philharmonic management met with musicians once more, and presented a proposal for a new Master Agreement centered around catastrophic and draconian cuts that would set the orchestra back over 40 years, including massive reductions in wages, contracted players, benefits, and conditions. As we prepare to return to the negotiating table with an offer of our own, we face a position that would undermine our livelihood and remove conditions that have been negotiated over the course of decades. At the time of the Philharmonic's announcement today of continued musician furloughs, no substantive plan to present music to the community safely by its musicians has been discussed.

Meanwhile, the Philharmonic has continued to pay the the salaries of their executive management and conducting staff, while musicians remain unpaid. A new series, entitled "Philharmonic Presents!" was unveiled, featuring outside performers. The Philharmonic's current capital campaign has raised over 10 million dollars, and the value of its endowment exceeds 20 million dollars.

While orchestras across the country continue to work with musicians and communities to creatively and safely present the precious unifying bond of music, the leadership of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic has chosen opportunism, disrespect, and silence.