

DSO seeks mediator; musicians set to strike

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Facing a Dec. 9 strike deadline, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra management wants for a mediator to help it reach contract agreement with its 100 union musicians.

"We have asked our attorney to seek the assistance of a state or federal mediator," said Oleg Lobanov, executive vice president and managing director of the DSO, minutes after the musicians announced a strike deadline of 2 p.m. next Thursday.

The Michigan Employment Relations Commission late Tuesday assigned Edward Phillips to the case. Major issues, both sides agreed, are pay scales, pensions and the musicians' current right to be involved in selection of a music director.

As of Tuesday, the bargaining teams hadn't met in about a week. Both sides expressed willingness to continue talks. The musicians, members of Local 5 of the Detroit Federation of Musicians, have been working since Sept. 19 on a week-to-week extension of the previous 18-month contract.

MUSICIANS' SPOKESMAN Douglas Cornelison, a clarinetist, said DSO is "the only American orchestra" where musicians have a contractual right to approve a list of "artistically acceptable conductors," although management and the board of directors retain final power to hire the person.

"This provision our management now wants to remove from the contract," he said. "Our belief is that this process, as it stands, is as close as we can get to an actual guarantee of the continuation of our orchestra's traditionally high artistic and musical standards."

The DSO is seeking a permanent replacement for Antal Dorati, who resigned as music director in 1981 and holds the title of "conductor laureate." Gary Bertini, DSO's most frequent conductor, has the title of "music advisor."

LOBANOV DECLINED to state management's view on the hiring procedure because "I don't want to negotiate in the press." He said the provision is contained in a "temporary memo of understanding."

He advised DSO patrons holding tickets for any of the remaining concerts

on the 1982-83 schedule, including 22 holiday festival events, to retain their tickets.

No events have been canceled as of press time. The DSO plays approximately four times a week, 52 weeks a year, Cornelison said.

A management spokesman said the operating budget is about \$9.1 million with 52 percent going to labor costs, including wages and fringes.

CORNELISON SAID DSO musicians are seeking settlements comparable to the New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony orchestras, both of which reached three-year contracts in recent weeks.

"The musicians are seeking wage increases which will keep the DSO competitive with other major American orchestras. It is important to remember that the DSO must recruit nationally," Cornelison said. "The first thing musicians look at is wages."

Currently, DSO starting salary is \$800 a week, he said, ranking DSO seventh in the country. Management added that 85 percent of the members are paid more than the minimum.

Cornelison said the strike would occur if there were "no significant change in the current management offer." The musicians gave their negotiating committee unanimous approval Nov. 22 to set a strike deadline.

THE UNION spokesman gave this outline of bargaining positions:

- The union proposes increases totaling 35 percent over three years. This would place DSO starting pay at \$870 (still seventh) in the first year, \$740 (sixth) the second year and \$810

the third year. Management proposes raises totaling 19.2 percent -- \$835 (ninth) the first year, \$880 (still ninth) the second and \$718 the third.

Under Chicago's contract, musicians will receive \$850 the third year; under the New York Philharmonic's, \$810, union sources said.

The union spokesman said DSO pensions are at a peak of \$10,000 while most major orchestras are \$15,000 to \$16,000. "We're 35 to 50 percent be-

hind, and management doesn't want to improve the pensions," he said. Lobanov put the cost of the union proposal at 42 percent versus the 35 percent figure the union gave. He said the management proposal would cost 25 percent, not 19.2 as the union maintained. He declined to elaborate.

A STRIKE would be the first ever for the Detroit Symphony, Cornelison said, terming a 1975 stoppage of several weeks a "lockout" because "management canceled the schedule."

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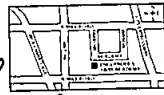
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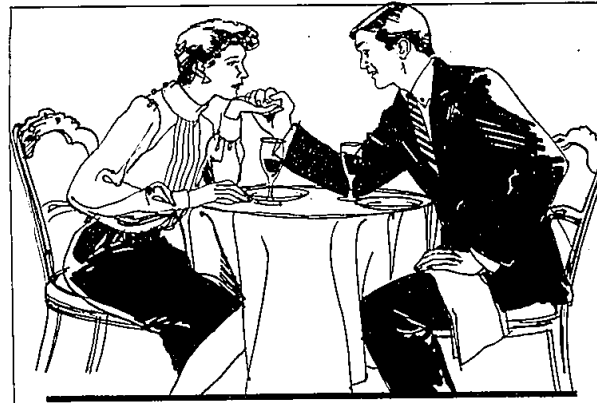
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