

ORCHESTRA LONDON PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION

CASE SUMMARY

Orchestra London Canada has made a remarkable recovery from its near-extinction in 2000. The operating budget has more than doubled to \$4.2 million (including an annual staged opera). The orchestra has had stable leadership on the Board, in the Administration, and in its Music Directorship. Revenue from government and community sources has increased by approximately \$500,000.00. Ticket revenues have increased by roughly \$900,000.00. A recently-created Education and Outreach Program has generated substantial funding, attracted sponsorships, and now boasts both a full-time Coordinator and an Assistant Conductor.

In 2002 Orchestra London's contracted musicians committed to a four year contract with minimal wage increases (as they had done many times in the past, including in 2001) in order to save the orchestra, to bring the organization out of bankruptcy protection, and to secure its future. Now they find that in the years since 2000 – a period in which the musicians' modest standard of living has decreased by five percent – Administrative wages have increased by \$232,496.00 (74%). Conductors' wages have increased by \$76,858.00 (54%). Payments to Guest Artists have increased by \$270,196.00 (234%). Wages paid to the Stage Crew have increased by \$125,685.00 (202%). Payments to non-contracted players have increased by \$55,211.00 (66%).

This is great news for everyone except those contracted musicians who today, despite having no contract in place and being engaged in difficult negotiations, continue to present concerts for your enjoyment and for your children's education. The musicians' base salary back in 2000 – the salary of a newly-hired full-time rank-and-file member – was so modest that it amounted to less than 36% of the median family income in London (according to Statistics Canada). By 2005 it languished 18% below the Canadian Council on Social Development's poverty line for a family of three. That base salary, which in 2000 sat at \$21,248.00, has since risen by just 9% to \$23,223.00 – a rate of increase which, as noted above, represents a substantial decrease in their standard of living (inflation since 2000 having approached 15%).

In the current negotiations the musicians are requesting that, by the 2009-2010 season, their base pay rise to \$30,000. This is barely more than half of 2000's median family income in London. With their current base rate at \$23,223.00, the actual cost of such an increase is fair and affordable; and they consider this a minimal figure considering that none of them receives health benefits of any sort from the orchestra and many of them incur hundreds or thousands of dollars in annual professional expenses.

Orchestra London is a publicly funded charitable organization. According to its website, "Orchestra London is committed to being one of Canada's greatest orchestras." Yet without the passion and commitment of its musicians – without their being able to live and to raise their families in even modest security or dignity – the orchestra cannot hope to aspire to, much less attain, this goal. The orchestra's Board of Directors is in a position to nurture every aspect of the organization and has clearly directed large funding increases in many directions, yet thus far the musicians' financial well-being seems the least of its priorities.

Orchestra London's musicians are asking for nothing more than fair compensation and respect from their organization and for modest comfort and security for their families. They fervently hope for an amicable settlement in these ongoing negotiations, and hope for your understanding and support as they continue to labour in the absence of a contract.

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DID YOU KNOW?

- More than 70% of Orchestra London's contracted musicians have played with the Orchestra for 15 years or more. They have grown with the organization – through its name changes and a number of Music Directors – to become a nationally-acclaimed ensemble with a unified sound and spirit.
- Orchestra London's musicians bring a wealth of training and musical experience to Orchestra London and the community. Many of them have studied at top universities and conservatories in North America and around the world, including The Eastman School of Music, The Juilliard School, Oberlin Conservatory, Indiana University, the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Yale University, the San Francisco Conservatory, McGill University, the University of Michigan, the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève, the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, the Staatlich Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg....
- Orchestra London's musicians reach out into the community as arts educators and musical leaders. They teach private lessons to aspiring students of all levels, they coach student chamber groups, and they are lecturers or professors at the University of Western Ontario. They participate in chamber music performances, solo recitals, in churches and with choirs. They are at the heart of our city's musical life.
- In the course of a symphony season, which runs from late September to early June, Orchestra London's musicians play as many as 240 rehearsals and performances. Although their training is mostly in the classical tradition, they are at home while playing many styles, including opera and avant-garde classical music as well as big band, jazz, Broadway musicals, and even rock. Some days they may rehearse Beethoven and Brahms in the morning and perform Lerner and Loewe in the evening.
- Often, Orchestra London's musicians receive their orchestral music on a few days' (or even a moment's) notice. Their extensive musical training and experience enable them to sight read and learn difficult parts in a very short time.
- Much has been written lately about what makes a "Creative City". Creative cities have a special cultural environment – full of activity and community spirit. As members of London's fully professional orchestra, Orchestra London's musicians are proud to contribute to making London a creative city and a more attractive place for people to live and work.
- Since 2000, Orchestra London's budget has increased by more than 100%. Wages have increased substantially for many parts of the organization, but the musicians' real earnings have decreased. Those musicians have loyally sacrificed income over many years to ensure the survival of Orchestra London in difficult times, and the base salary of a full-time rank-and-file musician currently sits at just \$23,223 per year.
- Orchestra London's musicians are currently working without a contract and are striving to negotiate a new one with Orchestra London's Management and Board. They are simply asking for minimal financial security for themselves and their families. They hope for a favourable outcome, but thus far a strike or a lock-out appears a real possibility.

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