

Dear Members of the Minnesota Orchestra Board and the Musicians of the Orchestra:

In the last few years, the Minnesota Orchestra has truly established itself as a world-class orchestra. Critics and audiences around the world praise what we have achieved together. The national and international attention we have attracted through our Beethoven and Sibelius recordings, our Carnegie Hall and BBC Proms engagements, as well as our crucial work at home is the result of the invested talent, energy and commitment of an exceptional group of artists, not merely competent professionals.

The Board is justifiably proud of the results which the Minnesota Orchestra has achieved; many other Boards would be delighted if their own orchestras achieved anything like the level of the Minnesota Orchestra. This is all the more gratifying when you compare our costs with our peers in Chicago, New York, San Francisco or Los Angeles.

The Twin Cities area is such a special place. No metropolitan area our size can boast the award-winning cultural offerings that we do. We are the home of several Fortune 500 companies as well as many other innovative businesses. Our downtown is thriving, our unemployment low. Smart, creative people choose to live here because of all the Twin Cities has to offer. No other market our size has an orchestra such as ours, playing at the same level as the greatest orchestras in the world. A metropolitan leader as cultured as this must protect, preserve and cultivate such an asset.

But now I fear we may be on a path to diminishing greatly, if not destroying, the Minnesota Orchestra as an artistic and cultural leader. While there is no progress in the contract negotiations; while players are unable to rehearse and perform together; while some are obliged to seek jobs elsewhere – I am desperately anxious about the risk posed to the quality and spirit of the orchestra for the future. I become deeply emotional when I listen to our latest Sibelius recording edit of the 1st and 4th Symphonies, first because the music is so moving and superbly played in the hands of our musicians, and second because I fear that to preserve our reputations I may need to consider letting go of the remaining recording projects we have planned. I will also be in a position to think seriously about the viability of bringing a diminished or compromised orchestra to Carnegie Hall for our four concerts in the 2013-14 season, plus international touring thereafter, including a re-invitation to the BBC Proms.


It is difficult to imagine that the current negotiation process will sustain the orchestra's future. Rather, the process may rob us of the chance of having a world class ensemble for years to come. When the lockout is over, the Twin Cities may have a "professional orchestra," but inevitably not the same one, nor a highly regarded one. Will anyone—either the Board or the Musicians—be able to reflect back with pride at what was accomplished during this season? The Association and the Musicians must come together to mitigate any more damage.

It is clear that the orchestra's finances are deeply troubled and finding a solution must balance business and art. I urge the Board and the players of the MO, from the bottom of my heart, to seek new and creative ways – without insulting or demeaning – to pursue these negotiations, to re-establish a common vision, to identify a path forward, in partnership, to a financially and artistically sustainable future. There must be some way to re-establish trust and bring both parties to negotiate once again.

The Twin Cities is a unique and great place to live. The 109-year-old Minnesota Orchestra is a great orchestra. We are all proud of what we have achieved here. The world-class Orchestra Hall this orchestra needs and deserves is only months from completion. Once again, many other orchestras envy our significant accomplishments.

Nine years ago, you brought me here and entrusted me to lead a world-class orchestra, which I have enthusiastically and faithfully done. It is my responsibility as Music Director, and one that I take extremely seriously, to maintain and develop the artistic level of this great orchestra. If the orchestra does not play, its quality will most definitely diminish. Please, do what it takes, find a way, talk together, listen to each other and come to a resolution of this dreadful situation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Osmo Vänskä', written in a cursive style.

Osmo Vänskä