

To: The Pasadena Symphony and Pops Officers, Directors and Advisors

From: Aimee Kreston, Concertmaster

Date: November 30, 2017

Subject: Our Orchestra

Dear Pasadena Symphony Board Members,

I wish that I could be with you at this pivotal time in the Pasadena Symphony's life but unfortunately I am performing out of the country.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate everything that you do for the symphony, from fundraising, spreading the word, being with us at our concerts, to even feeding us sometimes. I know many of you personally, and I know that we all share a great love for classical music.

I, myself, have devoted my entire life to the exploration and perfection of my art. I will soon be celebrating my 50th year as a violinist, and I have enjoyed every one of those 18,000 days playing the violin.

After graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music (anecdotally, the most difficult college in the US in which to be accepted, in any field.) I began my orchestral career with the Minnesota Orchestra under Edo De Waart. I then moved to Paris, where I was Concertmaster of l'Orchestre de Paris. During my career, I have worked with many of the best artists in the world, including the Maestros Guillini, Solti, Sawallisch, and Boulez among others.

As wonderful as those experiences were, my favorite orchestra by far has been the Pasadena Symphony. It is in every way the equal of the other orchestras with which I have been affiliated.

The wonderful thing about the Pasadena Symphony has always been the joy that we, the musicians, feel to be able to work together and to perform for you all. The Symphony had the nick-name of "the happiest orchestra in town". Contract negotiations were routinely concluded over a cup of tea, with the musicians all agreeing that everything was wonderful, and the board offering the regular cost-of-living increase in salary.

Unfortunately, that wonderful relationship between you, our supporters, and us, your artists, has suffered immensely during the significant financial strain in the late 'aught-2000s. As many of you know, we, the artists, gave much to our organization to help it through its difficult times, from donated performances, to pay freezes. A particularly devastating development during this difficult time was the near total destruction of the warm relationship between the artists and the board.

I would like to ask you, at this pivotal juncture, to join with us to rebuild that relationship.

We, the musicians, want the highest quality of music-making that we can have, as well as warm and close relationships with you all.

We are living in a very expensive city.

We are not playing "for fun" and we do not have "day jobs." Most of us started practicing daily from the age of 5 or 6, and we continue to do so now in order to be able to make music at the incredible level that we do.

Many of you may be astounded to hear that the average pay PER YEAR for a Pasadena Symphony musician is around \$4,000. That's for 15 rehearsals, 10 concerts, plus all of the hours of practicing that we do prior to the first rehearsal. That's not PER CONCERT, as some board members have suggested. Frankly, I pay my babysitter better than that!

Every single musician that plays in the symphony is playing on an instrument that costs at least 5 times our annual wage, and there are a few, myself included, that play on an instrument that's worth more than 100 times that. We pay for those. We pay insurance and upkeep, strings, reeds, bow repairs. One of the reasons that we sound so great is because we are up on stage with literally millions and millions of dollars in instruments!

Our wages have not kept up with the cost of living in Los Angeles. Even with your proposed raise, we will be the lowest paid orchestra in the LA Metro area.

Here's what happens when you pay the lowest wages in town:

Musicians decide to work elsewhere, of course! To give you an example, for our opening concert, 49 violinists, both from our tenured musicians and our extensive substitute list, declined to play with the symphony because they had better work elsewhere. Pasadena Symphony might be a great orchestra, but when it comes to paying the mortgage or feeding one's kids, the choice is clear- people will take the job that pays more.

So, I, as Concertmaster, turned around at our first rehearsal of the year to see violinists that I'd never worked with, that I'd never heard, and that I'd never even met! I am captain of a team that I don't even recognize!

Please, let's agree to pay the musicians what we are being paid elsewhere, so that we can keep the integrity of the orchestra and the high level of musicianship. Make the decision to spend 40% of the budget on the musicians of the orchestra. Reallocate funds, or raise more. Make us feel valued--if indeed you do value us. And help to rebuild the wonderful cooperative relationship that we all miss.

Please treat us with respect.

Hugs to all of you,

Aimee