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Press Contacts:
Eileen Chambers
312-294-3092
Dana Navarro
312-294-3090

COOPERATION ACROSS ORGANIZATION LEADS TO EFFORTS TO REDUCE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION

CHICAGO—In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and canceled concerts in the 2019/20 season—the 129th season of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO)—the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) administration, the musicians of the Orchestra and Chorus and the CSOA Board of Trustees, led by Board Chair Helen Zell, have worked together in recent weeks to address the financial impacts of the current situation. Cooperation across the organization has led to cost-saving measures focused on retaining a strong future for the CSOA, which oversees not only the CSO, but also the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Symphony Center Presents, the Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO and the Symphony Center complex. The CSOA is anticipating significant financial losses for the 2019/20 season based on the cancellation to date of 58 paid, ticketed concerts, as well as facility rental events for the period between March 12 to May 10, 2020 when large public gatherings have been restricted in the State of Illinois as part of the community-wide effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

To lead these efforts, Zell Music Director Riccardo Muti and CSOA President Jeff Alexander have each volunteered a 25% salary reduction. Among other cost-saving measures agreed upon will be a 20% reduction in wages for members of the CSO beginning April 27. Members of the Orchestra will continue to retain all healthcare, insurance and retirement benefits during this period. Musicians also agreed to relax scheduling restrictions to allow for flexibility with postponed or rescheduled programs, and it is anticipated that restrictions pertaining to the Orchestra’s significant archive of audio and video assets will be adjusted to make digital content available more broadly during the pandemic.

During this period, the Chicago Symphony Chorus will also experience 20% wage reductions and has agreed to flexibility in scheduling postponed and rescheduled concerts. Musicians of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the CSO’s distinguished pre-professional training Orchestra, will receive a 20% reduction in their remaining stipend for the season. In addition, reductions of 20% will also be in effect for stagehands, and conversations are continuing about cost-saving measures with the other trades at Symphony Center.

The CSOA Administrative staff will also observe a reduction in wages including a 20% reduction for CSOA Vice Presidents and a reduction of 5 to 15% on a sliding scale depending on salary level for other full-time administrative staff, who will also retain all healthcare and other benefits.
“We are grateful for the tremendous spirit of collaboration among the entire CSOA family who have worked together to develop ideas and make sacrifices that will allow us to balance taking care of our employees while mitigating a portion of the significant financial losses created by the difficult circumstances we are facing,” said CSOA President Jeff Alexander. “The legacy of this great Orchestra and its ongoing contributions to Chicago and the world will be more secure thanks to extraordinary cooperation during a time of great uncertainty.”

“The musicians of the Orchestra are committed to working with the Board of the CSOA and its leadership to address this crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential to protect the Orchestra and this Institution so that we can continue to prosper and again make music for our audiences,” said James Smelser, Chair of the Members’ Committee of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. “We are also moved by the messages of support and generosity from our patrons, whom we look forward to welcoming back to concerts as soon as we can all be together again. We are wishing everyone continued safety and good health.”

To further reduce the significant losses for the organization in the 2019/20 season, the CSOA continues to work with patrons holding tickets to canceled concerts, encouraging them to convert the value of tickets to a tax-deductible contribution, exchange tickets into future concerts, or return tickets and put their money on account. Patrons who have not yet donated their tickets to canceled performances can email patronservices@cso.org to request personal assistance with their donation or visit cso.org/exchangetickets to complete their ticket exchange or donation online. Patrons are also encouraged to make special, one-time gifts in support of the CSOA’s commitment to sharing the music with audiences in Chicago and worldwide now and into the future by visiting cso.org/make-a-gift.

Creative collaboration across the organization has also led to the release of expanded digital content, including a virtual concert to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the new CSO radio series—From the CSO’s Archives: Maestro’s Choice, presented in partnership with WFMT (Chicago’s Classical Music Station), and personal video messages from musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra which are being shared regularly on the CSO’s Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube channels. The CSOA will also present a Facebook Premiere event featuring the 2014 concert video of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 led by Music Director Riccardo Muti leading the CSO and Chorus and distinguished soloists on April 12, 2020. More digital content, including CSO concert performances from the Rosenthal Archives at the CSO and other previously broadcast programs, as well as music education resources for teachers and parents created by the Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO, will continue to come online throughout Spring 2020. Patrons can connect with this special digital content, and more content to be announced, through a new landing page for “CSO From Home” available at csosoundsandstories.org/category/cso-from-home.

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