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February 6, 2014

Hand-Delivered

Mr. Gordon Sprenger
Chairman of the Board
Minnesota Orchestral Association
1111 Nicollet Mall
Minneapolis, MN 55402

**Re: *Minnesota Orchestra
Audience Feedback Regarding Osmo Vänskä***

Dear Mr. Sprenger:

Congratulations on your election as Chairman of the Board of the Minnesota Orchestra. You have been tasked with the unenviable challenge of resurrecting the once world-class Minnesota Orchestra. Things have not gone well for anybody over the last 16 months and that includes the audience.

I decided to get more involved in this dispute for only one purpose – to help preserve a world-class orchestra in Minnesota. I have argued all along that the only way the organization can preserve its world-class status is to keep or return Osmo Vänskä as the orchestra's Music Director and artistic visionary. Any other outcome will set back the orchestra for years, if not decades, in its ability to perform at the level that it did prior to the lockout.

The StarTribune ran an opinion piece of mine on the editorial page on Saturday February 1, 2014 advocating the return of Osmo Vänskä as Music Director and Artistic Director of the Minnesota Orchestra. In that piece, I invited the views of the audience and promised to gather their opinions and report the results to you.

Approximately 2,500 people responded favorably to the op-ed piece in just four days. That represents enough people to fill Orchestra Hall! It also represents one third of a typical week's concert attendees. No matter what business you are in, knowing that one third of your regular customers have the same concerns on a single issue should immediately launch efforts to correct the problem. No business can survive with one third of its regular customers dissatisfied with its product or service.

I have tabulated the results and enclose for your review all of the raw data – the heartfelt comments of almost 500 people. I urge you to take the time to read what it is they have to say. It is critical to the future success of the MOA.

Here are the general results¹:

1. Over 2,500 people responded to the invitation to express their support for Osmo Vänskä. This included sharing the op-ed link on Facebook, liking the link, and writing emails and comments either directly to me or at online locations.
2. Just under 500 people wrote comments or sent e mails (and I am still getting responses on a daily basis). Of those people:
 - a. 99+% support Mr. Vänskä's return as Music Director
 - b. 40% specifically stated they will not make financial contributions to MOA unless Vänskä returns as Music Director
 - c. 20% specifically stated they want Michael Henson terminated²
 - d. 10% specifically stated they will not make financial contributions to MOA until Mr. Henson is terminated even if Mr. Vänskä returns.

Here are a few sample comments that were received:

From Students:

As a recent college graduate, I can attest that Osmo and the Minnesota Orchestra have grabbed the attention of a younger generation with their incredible interpretations of Sibelius. Osmo Vänskä is now a well known name among my friends. We are the generation who will be supporting you in 20 years. We are your future. If you want to keep us coming, show your dedication to producing truly moving music. Bring back Osmo Vänskä.

¹ I realize this is not a scientific sample and that those most interested in Mr. Vänskä's return are the most likely to respond. However, this group is the customer and donor base for the MOA and so sampling the general public would not be nearly as informative. Had I only had 50 responses favoring Mr. Vänskä's return, you could have concluded there was public apathy about this decision. The opposite is just as important. The overwhelming response tells the MOA what its customer base for both ticket sales and donations are thinking.

² The Op-Ed did not solicit comments regarding Mr. Henson and his continued role with the MOA. The fact that so many people responded with comments regarding Mr. Henson confirms that his continued role with the organization is an issue to both ticket buyers and donors. From outward appearances, the only people who seem to be interested in Mr. Henson remaining in his position are Board members. While they may like him personally, their duty is to do what is in the best interest of the organization and that seems pretty obvious given current circumstances.

I am a graduate student at Columbia University, having originally grown up in Edina, Minnesota. Having started the violin at a young age, the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä as its conductor played a great role in my youth... I cannot thank Mr. Vänskä enough for what he was given to the orchestra in the form of energy, passion and life, and I only hope that he reconsiders returning to conduct an orchestra that Minnesota sorely misses. Thank you for being an inspiration, Mr. Vänskä, and I hope you understand the profound impact you have had.

From a Teacher:

I want Osmo back because with him the orchestra sounded amazing. His comment, "Every rehearsal, every performance, I try to make better than the one before," has touched me deeply in my personal life. I am a K-8 general music teacher, and have taken this attitude to my students. He has encouraged the orchestra to do the same thing, and it shows.

From a Young Professional:

We are professionals, in our mid thirties with no children, and have been MN Orchestra subscribers for the past 10 years. We are classical music lovers who enjoy dining at nearby establishments before and after concerts, often inviting friends to join us in experiencing a Saturday night at Orchestra Hall. I believe that we are the exact demographic that the MOA wishes to attract and retain for the future stability of the Minnesota Orchestra. I've thought about this often in the past couple of years, and have decided that the Minnesota Orchestra is my absolute favorite perk of living in the Twin Cities. Osmo Vänskä is a big part of that.... I beg MOA - please bring Osmo Vänskä back to the podium where he belongs. If the board's true intent is what is best for the Minnesota Orchestra, then I don't understand how this decision could possibly be in question. Maestro Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra belong together, and they have the accolades to prove it... Will our support continue in the future if Osmo Vänskä does not return? It's hard to imagine getting excited about anyone else on the podium. I truly think that my interest would wane. We would be unlikely to renew our subscription at the same level that we have today. We certainly would not increase our level of subscription and giving in the way that we would if Vänskä were to return.

From Long Time Season Ticket Holders:

We were members of the Laureate Society of the MN Orchestra before the lockout. But about a year ago as we were getting ready to take an airplane trip, I woke up suddenly in the middle of the night: "What if the plane crashes? What if our legacy gift merely ends up in Michael Henson's pocket?" We went next day to our lawyer's office and took the MN Orchestra off our list of beneficiaries.

My wife and I have been subscribers for over 30 years, and are thoroughly disgusted with the totally unnecessary damage the board has inflicted on the Minnesota Orchestra. If Osmo is not returned, we will not support anything that the board proposes in the future... The chances for healing the rift caused by the actions of the board would be greatly enhanced if Michael Henson, the architect of this debacle, was terminated and replaced.

We are season ticket holders and donors since 1976. We will seriously consider not donating more until Henson is gone and Osmo is back. We do not want Henson to have ANY say in how our money is used.

The tenure of Osmo Vänskä has been the highlight of my 30 years as a season subscriber. Renewing for 2014-15 depends on his return; donating to the Guaranty Fund depends on his return.

Music, when created by Osmo Vänskä and our superlative musicians, quickens the heart and enriches a sense of well-being and hope. Mr. Henson and anyone else supporting the plans to destroy our great Orchestra needs to beat a quiet, hasty retreat.

Simply put, as subscribers for over two decades, we know that the Minnesota Orchestra was transformed under Musical Director and world class conductor Osmo Vänskä. The music came alive, the orchestra came alive. We witnessed magic on the stage when the orchestra played under his leadership. The synergy and love was palpable. We don't see how the musicians can rebuild the trust with MOA or produce the grandeur, electricity, and vibrancy of the music without a return of our beloved Osmo Vänskä... When the lockout occurred we stopped donating to the guarantor's fund; we more than doubled what had been our donation and gave directly to the musicians. If MOA can bring back Osmo Vänskä, we would be happy to resume our donations to the Guarantor's Fund.

You have spoken publicly of the need for healing. It is without a doubt the overwhelming consensus of the ticket buying public that such healing will only take place with the return of Osmo Vänskä as Music Director. The administrative staff is present only to support the mission of the organization, which is to ensure that the Music Director and the orchestra can deliver world-class music to the audience. If there are conflicts within the administrative staff that inhibit the ability to bring Mr. Vänskä back, there is no decision to be made - the production of world-class music must be paramount. For without that music, there are no young students growing into donors, teachers teaching young people to love music, young professionals buying tickets and eating at downtown restaurants, and long time donors will give up in disgust and close up their wallets.

The orchestra needs all of its energy focused on the future. Every day that is spent stuck in the snow with wheels spinning, sets the organization further back and increases the risk of implosion. Relations with the City of Minneapolis and state legislators are already

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strained. No substantive changes in the administrative staff or the failure to return Mr. Vänskä to the podium will only increase the time spent looking backwards, not forwards.

We (and I mean a collective we) need to develop a broader audience, more donors, more creative marketing, more innovative programming, and more exploration of digital delivery of music, in addition to ensuring that the orchestra is maintained with world-class musicians and a world-class conductor. I am only one of many people willing to roll up their sleeves and work towards those goals. All of that creative energy is currently bottled up however, pending the decision of what you do to return Osmo Vänskä as Music Director. Ambivalence, silence or delay sends a powerful message on its own. The organization will begin to crumble with its lack of healing, the musicians will begin leaving (and those who left will not come back), and the audience will disappear.

Osmo Vänskä is a critical key to the re-establishment of the Minnesota Orchestra as a world-class ensemble. You should be prepared to move mountains to ensure his return. This is not a decision that can take months. Mr. Vänskä has lots of other options and it is his love for this orchestra that is the only reason he would consider coming back. The time to re-connect him with the orchestra is now. Public affirmation of that intention would go a long way towards convincing the audience that the Board is serious about maintaining a world-class orchestra.

We stand ready to help you, the Board and the orchestra succeed. The audience has spoken very clearly. Please read their views in this binder. It is your move. We all hope you will do the right thing.

Best regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee A. Henderson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lee A. Henderson