



# Society of Composers, Inc.

*... dedicated to the  
promotion, composition,  
performance, understanding  
and dissemination of  
new and contemporary  
music ...*

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## Atlanta in Distress & Why You Should Care

by Nickitas Demos



*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Society of Composers, Inc.*

At midnight on September 7, 2014, the 70th Season of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra came to an abrupt halt before it even began. The Woodruff Arts Center (WAC), the institution entrusted not only with the symphony but the High Museum of Art and the Alliance Theater among other arts groups, chose as their very *first* option in a labor dispute to lockout the musicians. Unlike the last minute heroics in New York and a willingness to “play and talk” that prevented the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra from sharing a similar fate, the situation in Atlanta is far too similar to the acrimony the nation witnessed in Minnesota. In some ways, this work stoppage is a continuation of a lockout that actually began two years ago. Back then, the WAC board also locked out the Atlanta Symphony musicians who, in that case, agreed to painful—and significant—reductions of their ensemble size, salaries and concert

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## About the Newsletter

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## How to Submit Items to the Newsletter

**Articles:** The Newsletter welcomes submissions of articles to run in future issues. Articles, if accepted, may be edited for length and content. Please include a photo with all submissions if possible (photo may be of author).

**Member News + Photos:** Please send all member news and activities with a photo. Submitted items may be edited.

**Ideas/Suggestions:** The Editors welcome any other ideas or suggestions.

Submit to the newsletter via email at: [newsletter@societyofcomposers.org](mailto:newsletter@societyofcomposers.org)



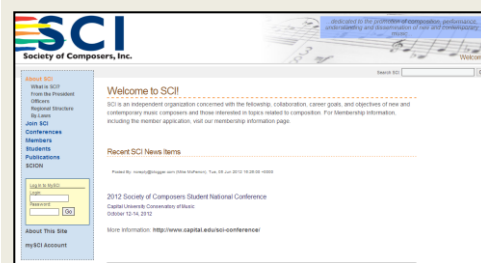
## Upcoming SCI Events

### 2015 Region VI Conference March 6-8, 2015

Henderson State University  
Phillip Schroeder, Host

### 2015 SCI National Conference Fall 2015

In collaboration with the  
Florida Contemporary Music Festival  
James Paul Sain, Co-host  
Paul Richards, Co-host



## Internet & Email

[www.societyofcomposers.org](http://www.societyofcomposers.org)

- Conference dates and submission guidelines
- Contact information and links to member web-pages
- Student chapters and opportunities
- CDs and journals produced by SCI
- Details on SCI such as membership, contacts for officers, regional structure, by-laws, newsletter archives and more...

## SCION

**SCION** is a listing of opportunities on our website exclusively for members. It is updated on a continual basis so that it may be checked at any time for the most current notices. In addition, members are emailed on the first Monday of each month to remind them to visit the site for new or recent postings. The large number of listings is easily managed by a table of contents with links to the individual notices. In-depth coverage; contest listings in full; all items listed until expiration; this is a valuable resource that you may print in its entirety or in part at any time.

John Bilotta, SCION Editor  
[scion@societyofcomposers.org](mailto:scion@societyofcomposers.org)

## scimembers

**scimembers** is a member-driven e-mail mailing list that is intended to facilitate communication between members of the Society on topics of concern to composers of contemporary concert music. It conveys whatever notices or messages are sent by its members, including announcements of performances and professional opportunities, as well as discussions on a wide variety of topics. For more information, including how to join and participate in the listserv:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/listserv.html>

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## Membership Information

*For complete details, please visit*  
<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/join/membership.html>.

**Full Membership** (\$75/year): Eligible to submit scores to the National Conferences, regional conferences, SCI Recording Series, SCI Journal of Music Scores. Access to the SCI Newsletter in electronic form. Optional subscription to [scimembers], the SCI listserv and all other SCI publications. Eligible to vote on Society Matters and in elections for the National Council.

**Joint Membership** (\$100/year): Same benefits as full members

**Senior Membership** (\$35/year): Open to those 65 years of age or older, or retired. Same benefits as full members.

**Associate Membership** (\$40/year): Open to performers and other interested professionals. Receives the SCI Newsletter in electronic form and can participate in national and regional conferences.

**Student Membership** (\$35/year): Eligible to submit to national and regional conferences and to vote in society matters. Access to all SCI publications.

**Student Chapter Membership** (\$25/year): Same benefits as student members, but only available on campuses having Student Chapters.

**Institutional Membership** (\$40/year): Organizations receive hard copy of the SCI Newsletter and other mailings.

**Lifetime Membership** (\$1400 or \$150/year for 10 years): Benefits the same as full members, for life.

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## Atlanta in Distress & Why You Should Care

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season. The players were assured that these draconian measures were absolutely necessary and a one-time only occurrence.

Curiously, however, during the intervening two years leading up to the current lockout, no major broad-based symphony fundraising campaigns were publicly announced. This dearth of WAC fundraising left unmet goals dangling from the previous lockout. To make matters worse, substantive gifts from donors and the selling of a major piece of property by the WAC were not shared with the ASO. However, millions of dollars were allocated to Alliance Theatre and High Museum debt. To date, eight weeks into the lockout, there has been very little movement on the part of management. An early casualty was the resignation of the ASO Board President, Stanley Romanstein. However, everyone in the city views him as merely an underling tossed under the bus by his superiors on the WAC Board. The real power belongs to WAC Board Chairman, Doug Hertz. Unfortunately, he has revealed his position (perhaps inadvertently) via a recent disastrous interview with the Atlanta Journal

Constitution wherein he called the players “crazy,” demonstrated that he views the operation of the symphony in purely business terms, and admitted that he saw no problem with hiring subs to fill in the depleted ranks of a once proud musical ensemble ([http://myajc.com/news/online/woodruff-board-leader-s-discusses-atlanta-symphony/nhZ8L/?\\_\\_federated=1#45167104.169071.735509](http://myajc.com/news/online/woodruff-board-leader-s-discusses-atlanta-symphony/nhZ8L/?__federated=1#45167104.169071.735509)).

So why should a *composer* care about all this? After all, most major orchestras are not exactly beating paths toward contemporary music and relatively unknown composers. So does a composer really have a stake in the lockout of orchestral musicians? Does the lockout of players really affect a typ-

ical, non-famous, run-of-the-mill composer out there? As a composer living and working in Atlanta, who considers many of the ASO players as friends, it may be easy to understand my interest in what is going on with the ASO. But should composers living outside Atlanta care?

Absolutely. Here are at least four reasons why:

First, we should all care out of pure respect for the musicians. Unless we, as composers, forego writing for acoustic instruments altogether and create purely electronic music, we need to always realize that performers and composers form a symbiotic relationship. Sure, most major orchestra do not program a large amount of contemporary music. Nevertheless, many performers in those same orchestras are members of vibrant contemporary chamber ensembles in their com-

munities. That is certainly the case here in Atlanta. A major symphony orchestra, therefore, can serve as the center of a healthy music eco-system in a city. If the quality of the symphony suffers, the entire music scene in a city is in jeopardy.

Secondly, the ASO *has* been better than most major orchestras in programming contemporary music. If nothing

else, composers should rally behind a group with a history of supporting living composers.

A third reason to care about the lockout in Atlanta is that it is symptomatic of a greater disease eating its way through our culture: the marginalization of art music. There is no doubt that symphony orchestras need to rethink how they interact with 21st Century patrons. However, watching passively while these venerable groups are swallowed in the maw of pop culture should not be an option. I’m not prepared to live in a world where great new pieces like John Luther Adams’s Pulitzer Prize winning *Become Ocean*, as well as older masterpieces like the *Rite of Spring*, *Symphonie Fantas-*



tique, or even works by Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn & Brahms exist only on recordings. When orchestras cease to exist and orchestral music lives only as data on streaming services, it is merely a prelude to musical extinction.

Finally, one of the best explanations for why one should be paying attention to the events unfolding in Atlanta actually comes from an outside observer. Andrew Goodlett is a young double bass player who had hopes of coming to Atlanta but is now rethinking this course of action. (Read his full commentary at: <http://slippedisc.com/2014/09/if-atlanta-fails-there-goes-the-southeast-usa/>). The future looks increasingly bleak for the Atlanta arts scene if great young players like Andrew take a pass on moving here. If the orchestra simply becomes a AAA or AA farm club for the pros, how long will it be before the other arts in the city follow suit? Yet, the devastation wrought by a significant degradation of the symphony extends far beyond the city limits. To quote Andrew Goodlett, *"I completely stand by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra musicians when they say they are an incredibly important part of the arts in their city. But I think America needs to understand they are their flagship arts organization not just for the city of Atlanta or state Georgia, but an entire region of the country."*

These are but a few of the reasons I care so deeply about what I'm currently witnessing in Atlanta. This slow, merciless destruction of an orchestra is almost too painful to watch. That's why I urge all composers—in and outside of Atlanta; student or seasoned pro alike—to lend whatever support you can to the ASO Symphony Musicians. This fight is *all of our fight*. Here are three ways to help:

Share, tweet, and retweet articles about the plight of our musicians to all your social media

networks as often as time allows. Some great blogs to follow include:

- <http://maskoftheflowerprince.wordpress.com>
- <http://adaptistration.com>
- <http://artsatl.com>
- <https://facebook.com/notes/malcolm-randall-caluori/incensed-public-locks-out-woodruff-arts-center/10152805551613838>
- And my own blog:  
<http://greekandcomposing.blogspot.com>

"Like" *Save Our Symphony Atlanta* on Facebook (<https://facebook.com/pages/Save-Our-Symphony-Atlanta/763900620340800>).

If you are able to help out financially, visit: [http://icsom.org/news/20140910\\_call-to-action.php](http://icsom.org/news/20140910_call-to-action.php).

Every little bit helps. I believe that we should not allow great orchestras like the ASO to be degraded and their musicians broken and scattered. Other administrators at other orchestras as well as other performers are watching what happens in Atlanta very carefully. It's up to us to make sure everyone understands once and for all that this art form matters.



## UPDATE:

A few weeks after I completed my article for SCI, a resolution to this painful start to the symphony's 70th season was reached. As far as I can tell, the bleeding has been stopped and healing has begun. The musicians agreed to a new four-year contract and on November 13, 2014, the orchestra was back in business with Maestro Robert Spano leading the symphony and the ASO Chorus in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*. I was on hand the next week (November 22) to hear performances of Debussy's *Première rhapsody* (featuring principal clarinetist Laura Ardan), Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, and the *Symphony No. 3* by Atlanta based composer Richard Prior.

As good as it was to be back in Symphony Hall and hearing great music being performed by an elite orchestra, I still could not shake some troubling thoughts. First, the newly inked four-year deal will not guarantee that musician salaries will return to pre-2011 levels or even reach those levels by the end of the contract period. Second, in addition to other concessions, health insurance costs for the players have also gone up. Finally, there are still many questions surrounding the finances of the WAC and how it allocates funding to the symphony. Despite these shortcomings, the musicians did win one significant victory. The WAC board had pushed hard to dictate the size of the orchestra. This was an egregious demand and ultimately, the line in the sand that the players would not cross. The new contract stipulates that the compliment of the orchestra will grow back to near its pre-

2011 level of 95 players. While this is still smaller than other major symphony orchestras, the restoration of performers nevertheless allows the group to remain at the status of a top tier professional orchestra.

So if I examine the glass as half full, the orchestra emerged from an acrimonious stand-off with administrators and won a hard fought victory over the size of the ensemble; a critical component to maintaining artistic integrity. Without this victory, the ASO would have been reduced to a regional training orchestra and lose its luster as one of the finest orchestras in the country. If, on the other hand, I look at the glass as half empty, I see a struggle that resulted in lower pay and higher insurance costs for the musicians and a battle that merely returns the group (almost) to where it was back in 2011 in four years' time. Then there is the WAC board. It still calls the shots for the orchestra and its chairman, Douglas Hertz, famously described the symphony supporters and musicians as "crazy people" (<http://artsculture.blog.ajc.com/2014/10/04/woodruff-arts-center-board-leader-takes-stands-on-atlanta-symphony-crisis/>). I can't help but be nervous about what lurks ahead in four years when this contract ends.

Still, things could have turned out much, *much* worse. The ASO musicians as well as the musical soul of the city of Atlanta has been spared. I choose, therefore, to look at the glass as very much half-full.

- Nickitas Demos