



DALLAS-FORT WORTH PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS ASSOCIATION

LOCAL 72-147 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS

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A Message to Texas Ballet Theater Employees, Patrons and the Public
from
The Dallas Fort Worth Professional Musicians Association,
American Federation of Musicians Local 72-147

March 17, 2009

Since August, 2008, we have been following the announcements in the press and elsewhere concerning the financial difficulties surrounding the operations of the Texas Ballet Theater. As the professional musicians who bring to life the power and beauty of Ballet orchestral accompaniment, we want you to know that we believe it is in the public interest to have a great state-of-the-art classical ballet company in Dallas-Fort Worth.

As you may know, the ballet company said it would file bankruptcy and close its doors unless substantial donations are received before the end of June, 2009 – reportedly up to \$2 million. You may be unaware that the company's pleas of poverty have come against break-even years in 2006 and 2007 (TBT's net assets were \$1 million in 2006) and a \$400,000 deficit in 2008.

The problem TBT is currently facing is the result of fiscal irresponsibility and mismanagement, including but not limited to the financing of a gorgeous home for artistic director Ben Stevenson and extensive foreign travel for management staff and Board members. Now, TBT says it cannot pay its bills, and it wants to balance its budget on the backs of professional musicians.

The company has decided to plug an alleged hole in its budget by indefinitely displacing the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra and Dallas Opera Orchestra as its pit orchestras and using pre-recorded music instead. When TBT still owed the Fort Worth Symphony Association \$150,000 and Bass Hall \$150,000 for 07/08 services, the company's artistic staff traveled to China and paid the communist

“Music is the Universal Language of Mankind.”

Chinese government \$30,000 for a recording it is using to displace musicians for performances of *Cleopatra* March 27, 28 and 29, 2009 at Bass Hall. The company continues to sell season tickets to patrons without acknowledging that consumers will not be getting what they have paid for.

Despite being shut out of its own orchestra pit, the executive director of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra found a donor to pay musicians for the October, 2008 performance of Mozart's *Requiem*. We would think Ms. Koonsman would be busy enough with her own job without having to do ballet company Margo McCann's job as well. However, the TBT's only financial strategy is to continue fleeing the public by outsourcing the jobs of local professional musicians, *and our culture as well* with recordings it made in China.

A great ballet company needs a great orchestra to give it breath and depth. We believe live orchestral accompaniment adds an inseparable quality to the presentation of dance. Without it, the audience, patrons and dancers suffer an irreparable loss. The absence of a live orchestra deprives the patron of an important dimension – the spontaneity and freshness of theatrical ballet – just as the composer intended, and that the ballet company long ago priced into the cost of admission. *It appears the company is hoping its patrons will neither notice or care.*

No ballet company has ever recovered from dumping their orchestra. According to Dance USA, the statistics are there. Jettisoning professional musicians tends to actually hasten the demise. Cutting the orchestra is usually the last gasp of a broke, mis-managed ballet. In this instance, it is probably already over.

We know that many have been working 24/7 to engender community support to save the ballet company. We know and understand that ballet company staff and employees have a personal economic and artistic interest in seeing the company survive. But we are keenly aware of their silence, and in some cases their complicity, as its Board of Directors and manager Margo McCann threw us under the bus. The company's canned music policy will affect the artistic standards throughout our community and around the world. If we are complacent about the company's actions toward professional musicians now, what will happen next?

We cannot stand idly by and see beautiful Bass Hall transformed into a Big Box discount store where the goods are made in China. We will not sit quietly while local professional musicians are hurt from the ballet company's mismanagement. We think consumers who have paid for a professional ballet experience – with a live orchestra – deserve to get one.

Margo McCann wants sympathy. We had sympathy until we learned that Ben Stevenson and company traveled to China and recorded an orchestra with which to replace live musicians at home. The professional musicians of Dallas/Fort Worth have worked with struggling companies many times before for everyone's

mutual benefit, including that of our audience. However, this ballet company has made no attempt whatsoever to work with us.

That is why we will gather outside Bass hall prior to performances of *Cleopatra* to present our views to the public through informational means. We will be joined by musicians from across the nation, as well as from 50 other Tarrant County labor unions who share our concern.

We want the public, your patrons and arts lovers everywhere to know that the ballet company's actions and its attitude toward professional musicians have damaged the credibility of the company, cheapened the art form, and are totally unacceptable to us.