

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Northern New Jersey Musicians' Guild announce new one-year side-letter agreement

NEWARK, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra Board of Trustees and Northern New Jersey Musicians' Guild, Local 16-248 of the American Federation of Musicians, have ratified a new one-year side-letter agreement in recognition of the financial emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NJSO President & CEO Gabriel van Aalst says: "The Orchestra is extremely grateful to our musicians for their strategic insight in this challenging time for all arts organizations. The NJSO is fortunate to have musicians with such foresight and commitment to the long-term sustainability of our orchestra. This agreement provides additional flexibility for both the Orchestra and our musicians, and we are committed to further conversations to ensure the survival of the NJSO."

Orchestra Committee Chair and Assistant Concertmaster David Southorn says: "This side letter represents concessions by the musicians that will result in a year of significant economic hardship, as well as giving the Symphony increased flexibility in the ways in which we perform our jobs as symphony musicians. We have reached this agreement with the expectation that these temporary drastic cuts will allow the NJSO to not only survive this 20–21 season greatly affected by the pandemic, but will give us the tools and resources to make a full financial recovery and lay the foundation to thrive in a post-pandemic world. The Musicians of the NJSO look forward to seeing our audiences later this season in whatever capacity that safety allows, and are eager to begin working towards a stronger future leading into the NJSO's centennial season, as we continue to serve and expand our reach to our diverse communities in New Jersey with symphonic music at the highest artistic levels."

Under terms of the new side letter, weekly base pay and paid health insurance remains the same, with a 40% reduction in the number of orchestra services and a freeze on hiring two open positions within the orchestra.

The side letter includes media terms allowing the orchestra to record in-person performances and broadcast virtual concerts; an announcement of virtual concert plans is forthcoming.

Underscoring a mutual commitment to serving communities virtually during the pandemic, the side letter continues and expands the innovative, flexible model of orchestra services agreed upon in May. Services can be used for solo and chamber performances for virtual events and social media; private, semi-private and small-group lessons for children and community members, including essential workers and education partners; work with the NJSO Youth Orchestras; interviews and development outreach.

Musicians may take an unpaid sabbatical for all or part of the 2020–21 season; musicians at high risk of coronavirus may complete all services virtually.

With approval from the Orchestra's safety task force, the NJSO will hold auditions for the Colton Fellowship in the spring or summer of 2021.

Upon the conclusion of the 2020–21 season, the full terms of the current collective bargaining agreement, which runs through August 31, 2022, will resume.

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

Named “a vital, artistically significant musical organization” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra’s superb musicians.

Music Director Xian Zhang—a “dynamic podium presence” *The New York Times* has praised for her “technical abilities, musicianship and maturity”—continues her acclaimed leadership of the NJSO. The Orchestra presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick, Count Basie Center for the Arts in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra’s statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include school-time Concerts for Young People and the NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles, led by José Luis Domínguez. NJSO musicians annually perform original chamber music programs at community events in a variety of settings statewide through the NJSO Community Partners program.

Tickets are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or at njsymphony.org.

The Orchestra’s online hub for free, on-demand NJSO at Home audio and video content is njsymphony.org/njssoathome.

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Press Contact

Victoria McCabe, NJSO Director of Public Relations & Communications | 973.735.1715 | vmccabe@njsymphony.org

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