

# **PSO - FAQ's - 2/10/09**

## **1. What is the PSO reaction to the recent article in the Peoria Journal Star?**

The Peoria Symphony Orchestra (PSO) regrets that Mr. Commanday's comments in response to his performance review found their way to the media. These documents were confidential and never intended to be made public. As with any professional organization we have procedures to follow in regard to performance reviews. In the case of Mr. Commanday, his review was conducted by the Personnel and Executive Committees who would consider his input for further discussion before concluding the evaluation process. Instead, Mr. Commanday chose to send his comments to the full Board and also demanded the resignation of the board leadership. As his employers, we felt his conduct and the ultimatum he issued was unprofessional and unacceptable, as it would be for any employee of the PSO.

Because of those actions and the concerns outlined in his performance review, the board voted by an overwhelming majority not to renew Mr. Commanday's one-year contract. This decision was reaffirmed in a special board meeting in December 2008.

The board stands behind both its review of Mr. Commanday's performance and its decision not to renew his contract. As noted in the Peoria Journal Star article, the board did not have any issues with Mr. Commanday's extensive artistic qualifications in conducting the symphony.

## **2. Why did the PSO Board elect not to renew David Commanday's contract?**

Over the past eight years the PSO subscriber base has eroded by more than 30 percent. At the same time PSO season ticket sales decreased, many symphonies of the same size were thriving. The PSO drop in season ticket sales occurred during an extended economic upturn, which was of great concern to the Board.

The PSO Music Director is the chief architect of our program offerings and initiatives. In addition to the artistic presentation seen by the public at concerts, other performance measures of equal importance include: enhanced programming, community outreach, staff interaction, education and other leadership and administrative duties essential to promoting the health and prosperity of the PSO.

For several years and through several contract cycles the Board encouraged Mr. Commanday to fulfill all of the requirements of the Music Director position including addressing the loss of subscribers. Based on those criteria and Mr. Commanday's ultimatum calling for the resignation of Board leadership, the board determined that insufficient progress had been made and voted not to renew Mr. Commanday's contract.

## **3. Mr. Commanday is supported by the PSO Musicians (all professionals in Music as**

**opposed to the Board who are unpaid volunteers with little formal musical training) What is the PSO Board's response to this apparent disconnect? Do the musicians have a voice in the matter?**

The musicians' opinions are important. Currently, players have a representative at Board meetings and will have five representatives on the selection committee for the new Music Director / Conductor. The PSO musicians played an important role in the selection of Mr. Commanday and they will be key participants in the process of selecting his successor. The Board takes no issue with the musicians' respect for Mr. Commanday's music-making abilities.

Ultimately, the fiduciary responsibility for the long-term health and prosperity of the PSO resides with the Board. Given the long-term trends and lack of progress we have seen, the Board felt that the most responsible action was to implement change before the PSO's financial position erodes further.

**4. Commanday is hugely popular among the Peoria Community. Should this count in the board's decision?**

The Board agrees that Mr. Commanday's artistic contributions have been substantial but the actual statistics show a troubling and accelerating decrease in support for the programming of the PSO.

**5. In this downturn, was it fair to Mr. Commanday to not consider renewal of his contract?**

This question incorrectly assumes that the renewal of Mr. Commanday's contract was not considered, when in fact the issues regarding his renewal were given the most careful consideration.

**6. The entire process has been characterized as secretive and "cloak and dagger." Why hasn't the PSO Board been more candid and forthcoming?**

In personnel related matters, all parties have a basic right to privacy and confidentiality. Therefore it is not generally possible to share in depth details of discussions and negotiations. The Board has been exceedingly careful to honor the privacy of Mr. Commanday during this period and will continue to do so. We regret that despite our efforts this issue has now become public.

**7. What feedback will the public have in the selection process – will the audience be polled or other feedback solicited?**

-The public will have opportunities to provide input during the season of conductor-finalists just as they had which led to Mr. Commanday's selection a decade ago.

The PSO is excited about the upcoming season of conductor-finalists. The public will be invited to share opinions and feedback during the upcoming season. The current plan is to gather feedback via surveys on concert nights as well as through web-based forums. The public can also communicate to the PSO office during this process.

**8. Gary Panetta reported that the Board is unsure of its future direction. Would it not have been better to become sure before not renewing Commanday?**

As noted in Sunday's Peoria Journal Star, the Board is assessing options. Currently, the posting for the position is for a full time Music Director and conductor (as we have today). The Board is also working closely with the League of American Orchestras and its conductor review seminar series to insure that we get the most outstanding candidates available. The PSO is committed to protecting and growing our core mission of delivering world-class classical repertoire as well as exploring enhanced programming to appeal to a wider audience. We want to develop the next generation of classical music lovers in Central Illinois.

**9. Does the Board expect to lose revenue or subscribers from this action?**

Statistically, most symphonies enjoy a dramatic increase in subscribers and individual ticket sales during the guest conductor period and with the appointment of an outstanding new Music Director. Peoria also saw this upon the arrival of Mr. Commanday some 10 years ago. It is our hope that this will be a period of reinvigoration, for the PSO, its players, and audience