



Despite the JSO lockout, tuba player James Jenkins recently performed as part of an educational program at St. Mark's Episcopal Day School.

After The Lockout

OUT OF WORK JSO MUSICIANS PONDER A FRUGAL FUTURE

Andy Bruck earned \$200 last week. For a 46-year-old with a master's degree from the Yale School of Music, a mortgage payment on a three-bedroom house in Avondale and a volunteer gig teaching violin at Martin Luther King Elementary School, a couple of music lessons aren't going to keep the wolf from the door.

After the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra board shut down contract negotiations two weeks ago, the realities of life as a classical musician in Jacksonville began hitting home. Bruck earns enough for a modest existence — a trade-off he accepted for being able to live his vocation. But there aren't a lot of corners to cut. In his 15th season with the symphony, Bruck earns the base minimum pay of \$1,028 weekly for a 37-week season, or about \$38,000 a year. His wife, Cynthia Kempf, (the couple met at Yale) plays the viola with the orchestra.

Musicians' modest pay was part of the reason their union rejected a contract offer that included pay freezes, and cuts to pension and to the pay of part-time musicians. When the JSO board responded by canceling performances and locking the players out of their rehearsal hall, Bruck says, management sent a message about how the JSO values its musicians.

The chairman of the symphony's board of directors, Jim Van Vleck, argues the symphony has operated at a deficit for eight of the past 10 years and accumulated a debt of \$3 million. Cuts to benefits are needed to try to balance the budget, he says. Van Vleck was also quoted in the Florida Times-Union as saying that he didn't find the notion of a 37-week year and a 20-hour work week "too onerous." Although Van Vleck has since written to city officials to explain that he respects the musicians and the time they spend practicing their craft (three to four hours a day), Bruck and others say the comment contributed to ignorance about their work.

"It's his job to educate the public," says violinist Glynda Newton.

Bruck and other musicians say the symphony board needs to think about the quality of the product and the money it takes to build a quality organization — not just about asking for sacrifice. "I just don't think they have a clue of the kind of lives we lead with the salaries we earn," says Bruck of symphony management. "If they realized what impact these kind of pay cuts and not having a reliable income has on people, I think they would change their stand."

While the board is asking for cuts in musician salary and benefits, those of

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the orchestra's executive director and music director have steadily risen. Between 2003 and 2005, executive director Alan Hopper's salary has risen 14 percent, from \$139,423 to \$159,500, and the salary of music director Fabio Mechetti has risen almost 12 percent, from \$170,000 to \$190,000, according to the symphony's 990 income tax forms. If sacrifice is warranted, says violist Susan Pardue, a Juilliard grad and Fulbright scholar, it should be shared by all.

Despite the deficits, gross receipts, which includes ticket sales, have rebounded after a dip in 2001 and 2002 to \$3.46 million in 2004. The orchestra has also invested in marketing and tele-marketing campaigns to reach audience members and increased popular offerings that the JSO leadership believes bring people to concerts. Hopper agrees there is a need for a major endowment drive to build the orchestra, but he says that donors told him that they would not be willing to give until they see a balanced budget. "This is a conservative community," explains Hopper.

Orchestra members believe management has to build excitement for the orchestra, and commit to its survival and growth. "We can agree there is a

cash-flow problem," says Bruck. "But one of the principal jobs of management and the board is to raise money. That's their mission. ... When times get tough, you don't cut the product."

Repercussions from the lockout extend beyond paychecks. Musicians elsewhere have heard about the standoff, says Pardue, which could make potential members think twice about auditioning. Even existing orchestra members are scanning trade publications for audition notices. Bruck says he's heard of several who've scheduled auditions, and he wouldn't be surprised if the orchestra loses some players because of the lockout.

"In our view, they are threatening the artistic integrity and competence of our institution," says violinist Newton, a Jacksonville native.

On Tuesday, members of a brass quintet performed at St. Mark's Episcopal Day School despite the contract disputes and the threat that they will not be paid on Dec. 1. "We don't feel that children should be denied the educational experience of hearing us perform," says Bruck.

"We all had that kind of experience in our past," adds Pardue. "That's why we became musicians." ◉