



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:**

David Sherry  
505-944-2571  
dsherry@nmso.org

## **New Mexico Symphony Orchestra Delays Start of 2009-2010 Season**

### ***NMSO Continues To Negotiate with Musicians***

**(ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., Sept. 4, 2009)** – The New Mexico Symphony Orchestra (NMSO) will not be performing at Bernalillo County’s fourth annual International Community Day on Sept. 12, 2009 at Hyder Park in Albuquerque because NMSO management and union musicians have not yet completed successful negotiations for a new master work agreement.

At this time, the NMSO Classics Series performances on Sept. 25-27 at Popejoy Hall are still scheduled.

Eric Meyer, president and CEO of the NMSO, explained, “The difficult decision to delay the opening of our season was made after extensive analysis. The NMSO Board of Trustees and management team believe that it would be irresponsible for us to begin the season. With our financial situation, we would not be able to pay our musicians under the provisions of the expired master work agreement.

“The weak economy has severely impacted the NMSO, just as it has affected many individuals, businesses and other non-profits,” said Meyer. “Financial pressures, including tight credit and investment losses, have put severe strains on the NMSO’s budget. Earlier this year we anticipated a \$500,000-\$600,000 deficit for the fiscal year that ended Aug. 31. That deficit ballooned to over \$900,000 due to the recession’s impact on our fundraising.

“Like many other arts organizations, we have felt the pain of declines in corporate and individual donations. Because of these economic pressures we are facing, the NMSO can no longer meet the financial obligations included in the old, now expired, agreement with our musicians. NMSO management and our musicians’ union must work together to craft a new master agreement that reflects current economic realities.”

“We are hopeful that we will rapidly reach agreement. Once we do, we will begin the 2009-2010 season, and with renewed financial support from the community we can do what we so enjoy – offer concert-goers the ability to capture the magic of live music performed by our professional, talented musicians.”

The master agreement for NMSO musicians stipulates compensation, benefits and work rules. NMSO musicians and management began bargaining discussions for a new master agreement on July 6 and are continuing to negotiate.

NMSO musicians, like other musicians with symphony orchestras across the country, are contracted to work part-time for the NMSO. Many also must work in private industry or have other jobs in the music field including performing with other groups, such as the Santa Fe Symphony and Santa Fe Opera, and holding faculty positions at the University of New Mexico and Albuquerque Public Schools.

Through the old master agreement, NMSO musicians who are classified in the highest of the three part-time levels are guaranteed compensation for working 467 hours per year. If that number is doubled to recognize that musicians must spend time practicing to maintain their performance level, the result would be 934 hours – less than half the standard for full-time employment. NMSO musicians in the lower two levels work fewer hours and are compensated accordingly for their part-time contracted work.

The expired master agreement provides NMSO musicians with a benefits package, including health care and life insurance, which is richer than that provided by NMSO's peer orchestras across the country. For example, the NMSO provides each musician a \$2,750 annual subsidy toward the premium of our health coverage. Fifty-nine of the 79 musicians in the orchestra have opted out of receiving our health care coverage, yet the old master agreement guarantees that they still receive 100% of that subsidy in cash.

Following work rules in the old agreement, such as those that provide extra pay and personal and sick day allotments to NMSO musicians, had an adverse economic impact on the NMSO last year. In addition, the old work rules limited NMSO in many ways from conducting more community outreach performances, outdoor concerts and educational programs throughout New Mexico.

“We have the greatest respect for our orchestra members as individuals and musicians. However, as trustees we have a legal and moral fiduciary responsibility to guarantee the preservation of this cherished institution for the community and everyone it touches. We just can't afford the prior agreement – especially with our current economic realities,” said Coleman Travelstead, chair of the NMSO Board of Trustees. “The future of the NMSO, our state's official orchestra, is at stake, and we take that responsibility seriously.”

In working toward a balanced budget, NMSO management already has taken a number of financial steps, such as leaving staff vacancies unfilled and eliminating staff positions, cutting salaries and benefits of remaining staff, paring the performance schedule and creating a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) for a needed cash infusion.

“To be able to open our season and operate with a balanced budget, one major step remains: NMSO management and musicians must agree upon a master agreement that is affordable and in line with our community’s propensity to support us,” concluded Meyer. “Through an agreement that reflects our current economic realities, NMSO management and musicians will be able to preserve this cultural treasure for our state and for everyone who benefits from our concert, outreach and touring programs.”

**About the NMSO**

The New Mexico Symphony Orchestra is the official orchestra of the State of New Mexico, serving over 130,000 people each year through its Classics, Pops and Symphony Under the Stars series, as well as many free NMSO Family Concerts. The NMSO is the largest non-governmental provider of music education in New Mexico and has also been recognized by the Mellon Foundation for its innovative community engagement efforts. The NMSO, beginning its 77<sup>th</sup> season, is under the baton of Guillermo Figueroa, its tenth music director, and Resident Conductor and Chorus Director Roger Melone.

For more information about the NMSO, visit [nmso.org](http://nmso.org).

# # #