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Mr. David Haward, General Manager
Orchestra London Canada
520 Wellington Street
London, Ontario N6A 3R1

Dear Mr. Haward:

I wish hereby to request a sabbatical leave, in accordance with Article XIV.2. of our current Master Agreement, from my post as the Principal Bassoonist of Orchestra London Canada for the duration of the orchestra's 2000-2001 season. While I recognize that the Master Agreement specifies that all requests such as this must be made on or prior to February first, it does allow requests made at a later date to be considered at the Association's discretion. I can recall that four years ago a request by a colleague for a sabbatical leave was honored in the middle of the summer. I now hope, therefore, that this late request will receive your favorable consideration.

This request is prompted by the ongoing trauma surrounding this orchestra and a fear of the person whom I envision myself becoming if I remain in its midst. When I began my career as an orchestral musician more than twenty years ago, I did so with full knowledge that I would always suffer a low standard of living and that there would be continual downward pressure on my income. The recompense for these difficulties would be the pleasure of working with remarkable colleagues (I have always found musicians to be among the most intelligent, motivated, and imaginative people I've met) and the joy of recreating, each time with subtly new nuance and color, the musical tapestries of our greatest composers. The company of my colleagues in Orchestra London has never failed to bring me pleasure, and the joy of a heartfelt performance of a true master work has often brought me nearly to tears.

Yet today, with Orchestra London going through its present turmoil, I find those pleasures and joys coming to me all too rarely. The pleasure of my colleagues' company is severely compromised by the personal trauma and fears which beset all of us due to the orchestra's ongoing financial difficulties and to the many anti-artistic pressures being brought to bear on our ensemble. None of us can concentrate on the job at hand and all of our relationships with our families, friends, and colleagues suffer under the stress. The psychological scars resulting from these experiences will be long in healing, no matter

how strong any of us may be in mind or spirit, and in many cases remnants of these scars are bound to be with us forever.

The joys, too, are compromised as our orchestra is pressured to perform an ever more overwhelming preponderance of music which has nothing at all to do with the basic function or purpose of a symphony orchestra. As a form of light entertainment I have nothing against rock or folk music, but I can't help bearing in my mind and my heart the feeling that, in an orchestral context, this music has essentially the same relationship with the classics of our repertoire as Dilbert has with Shakespeare. I care too much for my art, have worked too hard to become the bassoonist that I am today, and have just a bit too much personal and professional pride, to waste away the prime of my working life making a pittance of a living while being forced to play so little of the music which drew me to this life in the first place.

Years ago, when I chose to pursue a career as a professional symphonic musician, I promised myself that I would leave the field if ever I stopped loving it. Today, at least for the time being, I have reached that point. My livelihood, supported by a salary of less than \$26,000 (an unconscionably high figure, it would seem), is being attacked on an almost daily basis. Ongoing efforts are being made to phase from this orchestra's repertoire the only music that is truly worthy of performance by it (not to mention the fact that Orchestra London hasn't, in any case, enough of a budget to perform most of our greatest symphonic music in the first place). My cherished colleagues are being traumatized before my eyes by threats to those things which they, too, hold dear and require for their basic personal and professional dignity. In short, virtually every reason for my having come to Orchestra London is presently under siege and seems to be disappearing quickly. I simply see no reason to want to be here next season.

What will I do during my sabbatical? I haven't a plan. All I know is that any continuation at this point of that disappointment which I presently feel will leave me a profoundly unhappy, cynical, depressed and disillusioned person -- one whom I fear I would never want to know, much less to be. I also fear that I will become deeply resentful towards the art and the endeavor of symphonic music making, the love of which brought me to this career and to this orchestra in the first place.

I can not say now whether I expect to return to Orchestra London at the end of my sabbatical. The state of my own feelings and attitudes, and the state of the organization, will determine that when the time comes. I pray most fervently that I will want to do so.

Sincerely,

Spencer F. Phillips
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cc. London Musicians' Association