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## **It's time to face the music**

**By James Reaney**, Free Press Arts & Entertainment Reporter

You have to admire the 'tude as well as the tunes of Orchestra London and its supporters.

One night, it's a from-the-heart show-stopper with the musicians joining other Londoners in putting up their own money to help face down insolvency woes.

Next night, it's back to the classical music business -- playing Centennial Hall as part of the London Life-sponsored Masterworks series.

In both cases, there is an encouraging willingness to step up.

Hearing long-time Orchestra London players Joseph Lanza and Christine Newland make impassioned pleas on behalf of the music they love, seeing a fellow musician hand over a cheque for \$13,500 on behalf of fellow orchestra members, would melt hearts of stone. In an accompanying offer to defer paycheques, the musicians make it clear they believe the orchestra's deficit can be beaten before it beats them.

Such gestures, made Tuesday evening as the orchestra brass held a fund-raising event for key private supporters, were the prelude to last night's Masterworks concert -- billed as Greatness in Our Midst.

The program title, selected months before the orchestra's most recent financial cataclysm, is nicely timed. The orchestra, at its best, does represent greatness in our midst -- and, on this night, was showcasing two of its own.

Lanza and Newland performed the challenging Brahms concerto for violin and cello with the orchestra and conductor Timothy Vernon. Vernon was another from-the-heart speaker and donor Tuesday.

Last night, he was a one-man motivating machine. Vernon helped Lanza and Newland through a dazzling display with the Brahms in the first half of the concert for a more than half-full house of 900 patrons.

He then guided the orchestra, playing as if its life depended on it, through the spring storms and serenities of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the Pastorale.

Vernon offered up a final surprise -- a sprightly Strauss polka. It was music, he said, to sign cheques by. He concluded by pantomiming his mock inability to stop these fine musicians from playing on and on.

The orchestra is striving to do things right off-stage, too. There seems to be a tacit agreement not to bad-mouth Centennial Hall during the "perilous" months till the end of the orchestra's 1999-2000 season.

There is welcome talk of more ties with the community and with such big-player partners as the Grand Theatre and the London Regional Art & Historical Museums.

Short-term, the orchestra is committed to raising \$330,000 from the community by May 31. The first \$50,000 was to be raised by yesterday -- and it was.

There's a wonderful vow from the musicians to step out and perform in every London school. There are with-it marketing ploys for the next three years. There is recognition that city council has done its part.

Clearly, the orchestra and its closest friends are stepping up.

Your opportunity to join them continues. Fortunately for you, last night's Masterworks program is being repeated tonight.

### **IF YOU GO**

What: Joseph Lanza and Christine Newland play the Brahms concerto for violin and cello with Orchestra London and conductor Timothy Vernon; also on the Masterworks program are Gellman's Jaya Overture and Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the Pastorale

Where: Centennial Hall, 520 Wellington St., London

When: 8 p.m., tonight

Tickets: \$20 to \$35; 679-8558