



An Open Letter to the Patrons of Strathmore from the Embattled Ticket Sellers who Serve You and the Montgomery County Community

Employees of The Music Center at Strathmore's ticket office, proud members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local 868, extend our thanks to the hundreds of patrons and community members who have supported and continue to back our efforts to serve concertgoers, defend our livelihoods and protect our profession.

Since the opening of Montgomery County's premiere concert venue, ticket office employees have played an important role in Strathmore's success. We're the face of Strathmore. Not only do we make it possible for the public to purchase tickets, we provide the personalized customer service necessary to ensure that every patron, at every performance has an enjoyable experience.

Strathmore is an important and valued local institution. It is in the public's interest, and especially in Strathmore patrons' interest, to fully understand the facts about the dispute between Strathmore's executives and its frontline workers, and between Strathmore and its founding partner, The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Strathmore has been dishonest in its public statements. **Here is what Strathmore is not telling you:**

- 1. Strathmore and IATSE Local 868 had a tentative overall agreement as of April 15, 2020, with the exception of one minor item (related to training), but Strathmore reneged on the entire deal.*** Strathmore cynically chose to use the pandemic as a guise to rewrite terms and conditions of its contract with Local 868 for perpetuity, not for the period of the shutdown caused by the pandemic.

2. ***IATSE Local 868 members were willing to tighten their belts to help Strathmore during the shutdown, but Strathmore’s managers repeatedly rejected all offers of economic relief from the union.*** Local 868’s members were willing to provide Strathmore managers with many of the changes they sought on a temporary basis, as well as to bargain over the scope and duration of additional relief, but Strathmore refused. In stark contrast, other area venues did not use the pandemic as an excuse to gut ticket seller contracts. Instead, ticket sellers were used to maintain contact with patrons, sell tickets to future shows, and prepare for the reopening.
3. ***Strathmore’s managers’ claim that that they are “forced to rethink what ticket-buying will look like in the future,” isn’t supported by industry trends or their own statistics.*** Strathmore’s managers would like the community to believe that because an increasing number of tickets are sold online, it “needs flexibility” and cannot guarantee full-time employment. However, Strathmore’s own documents show that 71 percent to 77 percent of tickets were sold online from 2015 to 2017, during which time Strathmore employed three full-time employees. Those numbers increased through 2020. Strathmore employed those full-time employees because they do much more than sell tickets. They are responsible for ensuring the entire ticketing system, both in-person and online, works properly. This is in addition to all of the other customer services that surround the ticketing process, including offering advice to concertgoers at the ticket window and by phone, and many other customer interactions, including refunds and exchanges.
4. ***Strathmore claims that “this is our opportunity to embrace new approaches that reflect new realities,” but the new approaches involve nothing more than depriving its employees of their livelihoods and professions.*** Strathmore has unilaterally eliminated the guarantee of 40 hours per week for its full-time employees. While Strathmore claims that it will continue to employ full-time employees, there is no guarantee. Strathmore’s poor record of managing its ticket sellers and other employees, its reneging on labor agreements, and its spreading of misinformation over the past 18 months has destroyed any sense of trust. Furthermore, Strathmore has proceeded with the leasing of expensive computer kiosks. While Strathmore claims that these kiosks enhance in-person customer service, kiosks cannot handle all of the functions of an employee and cost more on an annual basis than the wages paid to some of the employees in the ticket office.

5. ***The National Labor Relations Board has determined that Strathmore has bargained in bad faith ... twice.*** An NLRB Regional Director issued two complaints alleging Strathmore bargained in bad faith. The first complaint involved Strathmore's failure to bargain with IATSE Local 868 over the layoff of full-time employees. The second complaint regarded Strathmore making proposals solely to avoid reaching an agreement with the union. Strathmore settled both cases.
6. ***Strathmore has received more than \$6 million in pandemic-related aid, some of it directly linked to maintaining employment at the arts center.*** Strathmore received a Paycheck Protection Program ("PPP") loan of \$891,006.00 on April 27, 2020 (which has been forgiven) and a second PPP loan of \$1,021,193.00 on April 27, 2021. Strathmore also has received \$2,962,133.84 from the federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grants; \$484,286.00 from the State of Maryland; and \$644,568 from Montgomery County's Tourism Anchor Institution Grant Program and other grant programs.
7. ***Strathmore's President and CEO Monica Jeffries Hazangeles has created a hostile environment, for Strathmore's employees and for others – including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.*** The BSO refuses to sign a contract with the Strathmore as a result of contract terms proposed by Strathmore that, to quote the orchestra, are "an ethically and legally impossible ask for the BSO." As a direct result of Strathmore's actions, the BSO has canceled its remaining 2021 performances at the music center.
8. ***Strathmore's actions define poor management.*** Chasing away a principal partner and the revenue that comes with it, devaluing a dedicated workforce, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on needless legal bills in a cynical attempt to exploit weaknesses caused by the pandemic--this is not what concertgoers and contributors to Strathmore signed up for.

Throughout this dispute, Strathmore's dedicated ticket office employees have worked to ensure that every guest has the best experience possible, despite the demoralizing attempts to undermine the work ticket sellers perform and the concerted effort to harm the quality of our lives and our work lives by Strathmore's management. Ticket sellers and our Union seek a fair contract so that we can provide for ourselves and our families. **Stand with Strathmore's ticket sellers now so that we can serve you in the future.**