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## Minnesota Orchestra Going to Cuba

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The Minnesota Orchestra announced Thursday that it would travel to Havana to play two concerts in May, making it the first major American orchestra to play there since [President Obama moved to normalize relations](#) with Cuba.

It will be a return engagement of sorts: the orchestra played there on tour in 1929 and 1930, when it was known as the Minneapolis Symphony.

The tour is a sign that the Minnesota Orchestra is moving to recover from a withering labor battle and 16-month lockout by taking on ambitious challenges. The orchestra said that it had been invited by the Cuban Ministry of Culture to perform at a music festival in May.

Although that is short notice in the classical music world, the orchestra jumped at the chance — and its musicians agreed to postpone a vacation week to make it possible, Kevin Smith, the orchestra's president and chief executive officer, said in a statement. "It will be the Minnesota Orchestra's privilege to perform for audiences in Havana," he said.

The concerts, led by the orchestra's music director, Osmo Vanska, will be held at the Teatro Nacional on May 15 and 16, as part of an annual festival, the [International Cubadisco](#). The orchestra will play the Beethoven Choral Fantasy with the Cuban National Choir and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, which it played on its visit to Cuba in 1929.

The New York Philharmonic thought of touring Cuba several years ago, but [wound up canceling](#) twice — first when the United States Treasury Department declined to allow patrons to accompany the orchestra, and then, when that issue had been ironed out, for internal reasons.

The Minnesota tour is being made possible by a gift from Marilyn C. and Glen D. Nelson. "This initiative will demonstrate the power of music to offer extraordinary opportunities for cultural exchange," Marilyn Nelson, a director on the orchestra board, said in a statement.