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MINNESOTA

Orchestra Plans Cuba Trip as Relations Warm

The Minnesota Orchestra on Thursday said it will play a pair of concerts in Cuba this spring, becoming the first U.S. orchestra to visit the country since President [Barack Obama](#) began re-establishing diplomatic relations with Havana.

The orchestra said it will play two shows in Havana in May, prompted by a December invitation from the Cuban Ministry of Culture. The concerts are planned for the Teatro Nacional, one of Cuba's largest theaters, and will include a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, which the orchestra performed on its first-ever trip to Cuba in the late 1920s.

The news comes as the orchestra continues to recover from labor and budget disputes that included a 16-month lockout by management and musicians organizing independent shows. The dispute was settled in January 2014, with a new contract that cut musician pay by more than 10% in some cases.

"Ever since the players came back, the name of the game has been rebuilding," said spokeswoman Gwen Pappas, who said the trip can help bolster the group's reputation internationally and build bonds between the musicians, while also serving as a diplomatic bridge between Cubans and Americans.

—Ben Kesling