

Former York Symphony Orchestra manager charged with stealing more than \$200,000

York, PA - A woman told police she stole more than \$200,000 from the York Symphony Orchestra to support her gambling addiction while she was the orchestra's office manager, according to charging documents.

Phyllis Ann Shoff, 55, who also used the name Phyllis Ann LoPresti, faces five counts of theft by deception and two counts of access-device fraud. She is free on \$10,000 bail.

Shoff declined to comment Wednesday through someone who answered the phone at her room at the Travel Inn in New Cumberland.

With an audit of the orchestra's funds under way, York City Police charged Shoff in August with taking roughly \$58,000 during a four-year period.

Police filed additional charges Dec. 6, citing another almost \$150,000 that was taken and stating that the thefts began in 2004.

"It took additional time to complete the restoration of records," York City Police Detective William Follmer said Wednesday. "Bank records had to be re-created so that the audit could be completed."

In an interview with Follmer on Aug. 11, Shoff "admitted that she had stolen money belonging to the YSO, saying only that she had a gambling problem and she didn't realize the extent of her problem," according to charging documents.

Follmer said that, once she said that, "She asked that the interview be stopped at that point."

On June 28, Henry Nixon, the orchestra's then-executive director, reported to police that a large amount of money belonging to the orchestra, at 50 N. George St., York, had been stolen over an extended period of time, according to charging documents.

Nixon told police he suspected the orchestra's only other full-time employee: Shoff, whose responsibility it was to manage the symphony's funds, according to charging documents.

He believed that Shoff had posted 48 checks to a check-register program -- to be paid to various vendors -- but later discovered that 47 of them had been made out to "Phyllis A. LoPresti" and one to "Phyllis A. Shoff."

Police also spoke to the orchestra's board treasurer, Jolleen Biesecker, a certified public accountant, who said she initiated the financial investigation after finding discrepancies between the check-register program records and actual canceled checks.

In addition to the 48 checks that Shoff paid to herself, Biesecker discovered an additional 30 checks that Shoff made payable to a former orchestra musician, which she then used to pay herself, according to charging documents.

Biesecker also told police she believed Shoff extracted money by using three credit-card accounts belonging to the orchestra. Nixon said one of the credit cards was to have been canceled, but Shoff had instead used it for "personal purchases of goods and services," according to charging documents.

After Follmer interviewed Shoff, Biesecker reported an additional \$15,000 taken from the orchestra's line of credit at a local bank, charging documents state.

Henry Nixon said in August, after the first charges against Shoff were filed, that she had worked for the organization for eight years and was fired May 6 for an unrelated issue. A short time after Shoff left, Nixon said, he discovered the missing funds.

Ken Wesler, executive director of the York Symphony Orchestra, said the case has not affected programming. The orchestra's past financial struggles were tied to the missing money and were not caused by an overall lack of funding, he said.

When the dust settles, the York Symphony Orchestra hopes its insurance company will reimburse it for the lost money, Wesler said.

"We're just letting the wheels of justice turn," he said.

Staff writer Teresa Ann Boeckel contributed to this report.

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