

Vancouver Symphony says no to Olympic opening

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VSO musical director Bramwell Tovey compared the request to prerecord the opening music for the Winter Olympics to 'Ben Johnson's fraud.' (Tyler Boye/TSO)

The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra has turned its back on the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics after Games organizers requested the orchestra prerecord the music.

The symphony's conductor, Bramwell Tovey, told the Globe and Mail that officials with the Vancouver Olympics organizing committee, known as VANOC, said the prerecorded music would be mimed by others during the opening gala Feb. 12.

"I felt it was dishonest. I thought it was fraudulent," Tovey told the newspaper.

"It's promoted with public money, and I didn't want anything to do with this kind of dishonest practice."

Tovey went on to compare the action to Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson's situation at the 1988 Summer Olympics. Johnson was stripped of his gold medal in the 100 metres when he tested positive for a banned steroid.

VANOC's plan would be "on par with Ben Johnson's fraud," Tovey said.

The VSO will still have performances used throughout the Games, as it recorded all 98 national anthems that could be played during medal ceremonies.

In a response to the Globe report, David Atkins, artistic director of the Games ceremonies, said that it's standard practice to have prerecorded music on internationally televised events and that it was necessary in case of technical difficulties.

This isn't the first time VANOC has had to deal with a music controversy. Earlier this week, professional singer-songwriter Nicole Scoffield protested against the committee's treatment of her original compositions.

Scoffield wrote a piece called *Sea to Skyway* and sent it to VANOC. She was shocked to receive in return an agreement from the organizing committee that required Scoffield to sign away the rights to the song if she wanted it used during the Games. Scoffield said she was obliged to sign it before the committee would even look at her composition.