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Hayward woman held on suspicion of fraud

Police say accountant swindled \$17,000 from S.F. Symphony

By Alejandro Alfonso, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

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A Hayward woman hired as a bookkeeper at the San Francisco Symphony turned herself in to police Tuesday after it was discovered that more than

\$17,000 in cash had been stolen from the box office.

Linda Simwa, 29, was arrested on suspicion of fraud after an internal investigation by the symphony and San Francisco police indicated she had been replacing cash from ticket sales with donor checks, according to San Francisco Police Lt. Kenwade Lee.

Symphony officials caught on to the scheme when a donor called and asked why he hadn't received a letter of appreciation from the symphony, as he had in past years, Lee said. "Someone who made regular donations and would get a letter didn't get a letter," he said. The reason the donor did not receive the letter is because the check had been cashed as a ticket purchase and not as a donation, Lee said.

"That's why, when the box office ticket sales were added up, the totals matched; she would steal the same amount of money she would get a check for," he said.

The donations came in sporadically, and management had no way of tracking the checks, according to Lee. The symphony had to hire certified accountants to track the funds and hand over evidence to police.

The evidence in the case is overwhelming, Lee said.

"The paper trail rarely lies," he said. "And if one person is in charge of the funds, it is easy to narrow down who is responsible."

Simwa is currently on probation for another embezzlement case in Alameda County, Lee said, adding that when Simwa was hired, it's possible the case was still moving through the system and might have gone undetected.

Organizations should make thorough background checks when hiring employees in cash-handling positions, Lee said.

"There are people that are out there that will try to use a loophole in the system," he said. "Unfortunately, employers have to be more vigilant by making thorough background checks and keeping tabs on their employees."

Wire services contributed to this report.

Alejandro Alfonso can be reached at (510) 293-2469 or aalfonso@dailyreviewonline.com.