



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF THEATRICAL STAGE EMPLOYEES, MOVING PICTURE TECHNICIANS,
ARTISTS AND ALLIED CRAFTS OF THE UNITED STATES, ITS TERRITORIES AND CANADA

Affiliated with
the AFL-CIO, CLC

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July 18, 2014

Dear Members of the Metropolitan Opera Board of Directors:

As the deadline draws near for negotiating a new agreement that, if successful, will sustain the Metropolitan Opera for years to come, we are struck by how little of what is being said and written about the members of the IATSE reflects a true understanding of how much those of us working behind the curtain love this great art form and how deeply committed we are to its perpetuation.

Like any love, ours cannot be measured solely in dollars and cents. We are not merely "the unions." We are not only the backstage artists whose technical expertise, night in and night out, helps to make possible the world's greatest opera. We are part of the Metropolitan Opera family, and our love of this family is why we believe that a solution for saving the Met lies in expanding the dialogue in our deliberations beyond a singular focus on work rules, wages and benefits.

Indeed, a more collaborative dialogue about viable solutions might be possible if all parties involved simply understood how much saving the Met means to our family of backstage artists, and how our collective expertise could be of value in creating long term cost saving strategies.

Ted Sydor, Video Projection Specialist, and his wife, Arlia Wilks, a supervisor in the costume shop, are two typical examples of the unflagging dedication of IATSE members in the Met Opera family. Ted drove to work after learning of his father's death. He wanted to ensure that his cue for projecting the final title for that night's performance of *Madame Butterfly* was covered before he traveled to New Jersey to attend to his father's wishes at the funeral home.

Soon after, Arlia gave birth to their son. Ted, concerned that the Met's computer system had been experiencing massive failures in recent days, got his family home safe from the hospital and went back to the Met Opera the next morning. He was determined to arrive in time for the international simulcast of *La Damnation of Faust*, as there was no backup operator or any other technician at the Met who knew how to set up and focus the show. That was also the day of the memorial service for his father.

Like her husband Ted, Arlia's commitment to the Met family is boundless. She literally saved the Opening Night of *Anna Bolena*. When the costumes for the show arrived late from a costume shop in England, entirely mis-sized and without seam allowances, Arlia organized and led an expanded crew that worked around the clock in the week prior to the opening to reconstruct them all – a feat that management acknowledged was all but impossible.

Men's Chorus Wardrobe Supervisor Michael Reid expressed the depths of our Met Opera family's tireless love for the work we do when he said, "We all live and breathe the Met, whether the cameras roll or not. Throughout double shifts and six day work weeks, artists, administration, management, per-diems and steady extras all contribute to the superb effects a house like ours demands. Each and every one of us is committed to doing our bit to facilitate our opera's true grit. Nowhere in the world exists a backstage like ours."

It is this overarching spirit of partnership, born of a love for the Met and the work we do, that has inspired us to achieve the expanded production demands of Peter Gelb's vision for Grand Opera. We have worked to achieve his vision and do not fault the fact that the arrow of his aspirations may have sometimes fallen short of their financial mark, given his awareness of the increased production costs and the concomitant need for overtime that would be induced under the terms of our existing contracts.

But we take profound exception to the singular focus on our livelihoods as the "solution" for addressing the financial challenges facing the Met that have been created in part by these aspirations. Not only because that singular focus is unjust, but because it is far too narrow in scope as a strategy for saving the Met.

Much as the artistic vision for the Met has been expanded, we urge you now to call for the deliberations in bargaining to become more expansive. Our love of our work has engendered an institutional knowledge of the Met's productions that can be a source of savings, as it often has been in recent years.

For example, our members first used large, high-power, cinema-like projectors over five years ago with the *Damnation of Faust*, part of a test run of technology to be used with the forthcoming *Ring Cycle*. The Met now owns four of these projectors and regularly uses them in a wide variety of shows and our outdoor HD Festival each summer.

This season, our members noticed that one of the projectors had developed a serious issue with its color convergence: the alignment of the red, green and blue color processing boards that surround and induce their respective colors into the optical prisms of the projector's light engine. The repair was costly, estimated by a factory technician at \$4,000.

With the cooperation of our primary equipment rental company, WorldStage, we were able to coordinate a Christie Digital repair-training course on site. Using our ailing projector as the class subject, the convergence repair was completed as part of the training. The cost of the training course was \$3,500, a \$500 savings off the initial estimate for the repair work.

By including technicians from WorldStage, as well as the Met Opera Local One

IATSE Projection Crew, we were also able to split the cost of this training 50/50, realizing a total savings to the Met of \$2,250. By having learned how to service these projectors, we will now be able to reduce annual repair costs to the Met by thousands of dollars in the future, a strategy that will show positive returns for years to come.

In other words, our working knowledge of production and our love of innovation turned a crisis into an investment and a deficit into a yield – ample evidence that we are not just interested in saving the Met; we're doing whatever we can to help it thrive.

Our members hoped to bargain collaboratively in the spirit of family and the values shared by the Met Opera and its dedicated employees. Instead, we are being subjected not only to a narrow set of demands that ignores our commitment to achieving Mr. Gelb's vision, but also to blindness to the savings that a more comprehensive deliberation might achieve.

Therefore we strongly urge the Board to encourage Mr. Gelb to engage in bargaining that embraces the collaborative spirit that has characterized our Met family's work in pursuing his vision.

Sincerely,



INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

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Six local unions of the **International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE)** represent backstage employees at the Metropolitan Opera: **Local 1** represents skilled craftsmen who are experts with carpentry, lighting, sound, props, set and building construction. **Local 764** includes costume shop employees who create the costumes, along with dressers who assist the performers with their costumes. **Local 751** are the workers who most frequently interact with the public, box office employees such as Treasurers and Ticket Sellers. **Local 798** are the artists responsible for hair and makeup. **Local 794** represents technicians involved in the Met's live broadcasts. **USA 829** (Scenic Artists and Designers) represents scenic artists as well as the designers of sets, lighting, costumes, and sound.