Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!

AGMA’s Geographical Areas
Executive Director’s Report

By Alan S. Gordon

The contact information set out below constitutes the entirety of my Report for this issue of AGMAzine. The reason is quite simple: AGMA exists to help its members. When an individual member, or a category of members, asks: “What has AGMA done to help me?” my first response is “What have you asked us to help you with?”

We routinely assist scores of members monthly with work-related issues. Not only do we help with contract negotiating and enforcement questions, but also soloist agent issues, legal issues, dancer health issues, pension matters, and all manner of problems relating to your careers. We spend a significant amount of time and resources litigating matters, protecting members’ rights, and enforcing contracts so that you don’t have to, and we regularly recover large amounts of funds for members from employers.

BUT: We need to know if you have a problem before we can be of any help. That’s why we are here. You can contact me directly—entirely confidentially—in any of the following ways. You’re not “bothering us” when you call to ask a question, and we’re not “doing you a favor” when we help you. It’s our job, and it’s what you get for paying your dues. ♦

By-Law Amendment

At the August 22, 2011, meeting AGMA’s National Officers and Board of Governors approved an amendment to By-Law Article XXVII: Resolution Creating an Executive Council of the Board, deleting text shown in strikeout and adding words that are underlined, as follows:

4. The Board shall appoint the Executive Council’s membership annually following the biennial national Board elections, no earlier than the first scheduled Board meeting following August 1 and no later than the first scheduled Board meeting following October 1. The Committee on Committees shall present nominees to the Board. In accordance with Robert’s Rules of Order, other nominations may be made from the floor;
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AGMA's 75th anniversary year has been, for me, incredibly busy, infuriatingly frustrating, amazingly rewarding, and completely satisfying. The busy, rewarding, and satisfying parts had a lot to do with visiting some of AGMA's Local Areas. Those trips gave me the chance to meet more of you that I hadn’t yet, and to see longtime friends that I don’t get to see often enough. Frustrating, you ask? Well, least said, soonest mended, as Grandma Beck used to say. I’ll just say that my frustration was most frequently a result of difficulty in communicating, and very seldom, if ever, had anything to do directly with AGMA members.

Areas. That’s what we’re looking at in this issue, so let’s start with a little background—just in case you aren’t clear about how this works. In past issues of AGMAzine, we’ve been through how the national governance of AGMA works. The members elect representatives, called Governors, who represent them on a national board, which sets the policy for and oversees the running of the union. And that’s where local Areas come in.

Most unions have “locals”, which are largely autonomous individual unions in individual cities or somewhat larger geographic areas. The locals are then organized under a broader national organization. AGMA does not have locals. We are a single national union. However, the United States is a big country, and AGMA has members all across it. So it’s necessary to have a method to make certain that all our members all across the country have a voice in the governance of the union. As AGMA gained signatories in various parts of the country, local areas were established in order to guarantee that voice, or representation.

AGMA currently has eleven geographic Areas. Historically, Areas were added when a Basic Agreement was negotiated with a company in a new city. Areas have both a number and a name: for example, Area 1 is the New York Area, Area 2 is Southern California, Area 3 is Chicago/Midwest, and on through Area 11, Northwest. (You may have noticed the map on this issue’s cover which shows each of AGMA’s geographic areas with their names and numbers.) It is important to remember that the division into Areas is strictly for political reasons. In terms of representation by AGMA’s professional staff, AGMA’s National Executive Director monitors what needs members in a particular area have and assigns the staff member he thinks will handle the situation best.

Each election year, the Board of Governors directs the Membership department to conduct a census of all members in good standing. The percentage of members in each Area is established, and that percentage broken down further by working category. Those percentages are used to establish the number of Governors each Area is entitled to have represent them on the Board. (N.B. In case you missed it, the results of the 2011 election are available on AGMA’s website, musicalartists.org.)

Which brings us to this issue of AGMAzine. This issue’s focus is Area News. In it you will find articles about what your colleagues have been doing all across the country. There are also lots of pictures of them doing it. Enjoy.

**Did You Know?**

In 1950, AGMA divided the United States into the following geographic areas: New York and vicinity (including New England); Philadelphia and vicinity; Chicago and the Mid-West; New Orleans and the South; Los Angeles and vicinity; and San Francisco and vicinity.
Negotiating Allies in Today’s World

By Alan S. Gordon, National Executive Director

Members sometimes are unaware that, in today’s world, contract negotiations don’t take place just “across the table.” In our continuing effort to negotiate the best contracts for our members, we look for allies wherever we can find them, and those allies invariably provide away-from-the-table help in successfully concluding the negotiations.

Thus, although the face-to-face part of negotiations do take place across a table from employers, invaluable assistance comes from the members involved, the media, the press, Congress, governmental agencies, and other entities that share a common interest in opera, ballet or the arts in general.

First, in any very adversarial negotiation, we pay keen attention to the comments and conduct of employer representatives. Anything that hints of an unfair labor practice results in our filing charges with the National Labor Relations Board. Although getting an actual “decision” from the Board can take months, the filing of the charge itself, and the press coverage we generate about it, becomes public and puts outside pressure on the employer to reach an agreement more expeditiously. It also provides a measure of protection for employees, because in the unlikely event of a strike, employer-committed unfair labor practices turn the work stoppage into an unfair-labor-practice-strike, in turn guaranteeing employees the right to be reinstated.

Thus, when Joffrey illegally “locked-out” its dancers before an impasse had been reached in the negotiations, the threat of unfair labor practice charges helped us to reach an agreement. Likewise, when the dancers threatened to leaflet a Joffrey open house, the across-the-table negotiations took a decided turn for the better.

Members may not be aware that AGMA processes thousands of visa petition reviews every year, providing peer-review letters to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the Department of Homeland Security. When these Petitions come from employers that might potentially be faced with a strike, like New York City Opera, we are able to warn ICE about the impropriety of allowing alien workers to do struck American work. In turn, that ability puts some degree of pressure on the employer to settle contract negotiations in a mutually satisfactory way.

AGMA also uses, at no cost to members, the services of a federal “arts” lobbyist who, in turn, facilitates “back channel” discussions with other arts organizations and arts professionals who reach out on our behalf to people who can assist us. For example, in one particularly hostile situation (which is not appropriate for me to identify), our lobbyist arranged for me to meet privately with the Board chairman of an employer and, as a result of that discussion, our negotiator was able to quickly conclude an agreement across the table with the company’s negotiators. In another situation, he facilitated having one artistic director talk to an artistic director at a company where we were negotiating, to explain to the latter why a contract with AGMA had helped, not hurt, an artistic director’s prerogatives.

By far, a most effective level of assistance comes from the print and online media. One of our goals, in all of our negotiations, is to keep the negotiations in public view, which would be impossible without constant press coverage. Media help comes from the confluence of several factors: First, reporters always need stories to report and are receptive to hearing from AGMA. Second, employers are generally opposed to “negotiating in the press” and so usually refuse to comment on negotiations, while AGMA is always willing to do so. Third, AGMA has developed a successfully aggressive media strategy, which includes always telling the truth even if it’s negative, always being available to the press either on or off the record, and never saying “no comment.” Reporters know that AGMA is a good source of accurate information which, in turn, results in regular press coverage about AGMA.

When Lyric Opera of Chicago threatened a lock-out, we immediately advised all of our media contacts that any such action would result in a cancelled season, which generated very extensive press coverage. The possible loss of ticket sales that would result from the public perception that the season might be cancelled quickly led to a contract.

In New York, the culture reporters from both The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal keep our “Save City Opera” campaign continuously in the news, which has a multi-level and positive effect on negotiations: The public becomes, and remains, aware of our efforts to save jobs, the NYCO Board remains aware of the fact that the negotiations are a live issue and they cannot operate in secrecy, and other entities involved in the “Save City Opera” movement use AGMA as the focal point around which they can rally. Beyond that, the relationship that we’ve built with the Associated Press ensures that AGMA’s work on behalf of its members appears in papers throughout the United States.

When we take an aggressive media position during negotiations, it’s somewhat easier to generate press interest if what we’re telling the press is negative in content and if it focuses on a “target.” When we get that coverage, some members complain that it sours our relationship with the employers or that it hurts their fundraising. With regard to undermining our otherwise partnership-based relationship with employers, that hasn’t been the case. Actually, the opposite has been true: when we’ve targeted specific individuals in press releases during a negotiation, they’ve become more
involved and, once negotiations have concluded, they’ve become more willing to work effectively with us, even though that would seem counter-intuitive.

On the other hand, the negative publicity that we sometimes generate does have a harmful effect on ticket sales, in the short run. However, because that effect is very visible and potentially destructive, it has proven to be a very effective tool in driving negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Another, more traditional “ally” in negotiation is found in AGMA’s financial resources. Unlike most entertainment unions, AGMA does not run at a deficit, despite the fact that we have not raised dues or initiation fees in 30 years. As we approach our goal of having ten million dollars in reserve, our adversaries know that AGMA has the resources to counter and prevail over the most aggressive of opponents.

Finally, our best allies in negotiations are our own members. Their willingness to serve on negotiating committees, to attend negotiation sessions, to demonstrably show their support for improving contracts, and to evince their willingness to do whatever is necessary to have an active, effective voice in controlling the conditions affecting their working lives, has proven to be the most meaningful and valuable tool for securing better contracts.

During the years between contract negotiations, our practice is to work hand-in-glove with the employers of our members so as to produce the best possible workplace with the most collegial of working relationships. When contracts do come up for renegotiation, however, both sides understand that there will be adversarial moments. In the few instances when things turn really difficult, AGMA has developed a variety of allies, and we work with them to assure the best possible agreements for its members.

Pre-AGMA Awareness Committee Visits Two Schools

By Osceola Davis, Soloist and Board Member

AGMA’s Pre-AGMA Awareness Committee (PAAC) was created to reach out to future AGMA members to introduce them to AGMA and give them an idea of the benefits of belonging to a union.

Recently, PAAC visited the Juilliard School for the third time. An AGMA information table was set up in the beautifully renovated lobby to greet students and introduce them to our union. Some, but not all, were aware of AGMA. Many of the students who hurried by returned later to hear what we had to say. We distributed all of the booklets we had brought and several students thanked us for coming.

I wish to thank all of my colleagues who volunteered help to make the visit a success: Rose Anderson, Terry Ganley, Karen Grahn, Robert Kuehn and Louis Perry. But, I specifically want to acknowledge James Fayette, who acted as the anchor on this particular project. James calmly explained important facts about AGMA to each of the students and seemed to enjoy being bombarded by their questions. Thank you again James!

AGMA is grateful to Juilliard’s administration and staff for their support. PAAC will be giving presentations at other music colleges in the near future.

Anyone interested in having a PAAC presentation at a college or music school in your respective area, please feel free to contact Gerry Angel, Director of Operations, at gangel@musicalartists.org; or Alan Gordon, National Executive Director, at agmany@aol.com.

Celebrate AGMA’s 75th anniversary! Added by popular request, we now have baseball caps available on our online store that already sells shirts, mugs, and other fun items with AGMA’s snazzy 75th anniversary logo on it. Whether you need another dance shirt or just want to share the celebration with family and friends, you can find AGMA memorabilia for sale at AGMA’s online store: http://www.printfection.com/agma. One dollar of the purchase of each item is a direct donation to the AGMA Relief Fund.
The New York Area will combine its celebration of AGMA’s 75th Anniversary with the annual Area Meeting on December 12 at 4:30 p.m.

The year 2011 is a busy one for negotiations in the New York Area, with twenty contracts in or up for renegotiation.

Congratulations to Alan Gordon, Deborah Allton-Maher and James Fayette for successfully concluding the New York City Ballet/AGMA agreement in May! ♦

The AGMA shop members and orchestra of New York City Opera met with management, rejecting management’s proposal for a freelance system of employment and a very truncated season, and unanimously expressing a lack of confidence in George Steel’s continued leadership of the opera.

The New York City Labor Day parade was held on Saturday, September 10, 2011. Attendees, left to right, front: Joel Remde, Julia Williams, Linda Doria, Louis Perry, Jill Bosworth, Greg Hostetler; back: Raul Reyes, Frank Burzio, Lisa Remde, Beth Pensiero and Cynthia Edwards; photo by James Fayette.

James Fayette and daughter Grace backstage at the Metropolitan Opera House with ABT dancer and AGMA delegate Kelley Boyd after watching an amazing family matinée performance.

Japan Arts hosted a party for Metropolitan Opera Company members to officially begin the 2011 Japan Tour. The festivities included the ceremonial breaking open of a keg of sake and many speeches thanking the Met for being one of the first performing companies to visit Japan after the earthquake and subsequent disasters.
A Cold Day in L.A.

By Michael Freed, Los Angeles Master Chorale Chorister

It was a cold March day in Los Angeles. That is to say, it was below 60 degrees outside. However, inside the quaint Hollywood restaurant Off Vine, it was warm and cozy. The upper floor was transformed from a trendy dining room into a makeshift Union Hall so that the Southern California Area membership could celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the founding of AGMA. Some 32 members attended the luncheon meeting representing three of the Southern California Area signatory companies—Los Angeles Master Chorale, Los Angeles Opera and San Diego Opera—as well as recently transplanted members from New York and Arizona.

After socializing for a while, we took our seats for the business portion of the meeting. Southern California Area Chair and LA Opera chorister Jennifer Wallace informed us that the company’s schedule for the coming season has a few more opportunities for choristers than in the recent two seasons. Soloist Natalie Mann from San Diego Opera reported that its choristers would have fewer opportunities to perform with the company in 2011–12, but that the following season would have productions using much larger choruses. LA Master Chorale Delegate Leanna Brand reported that the number of “paid” singers in the group had again increased for the coming season, and that the Master Chorale had just announced more productions to be contracted in the coming season than in recent years. Along with the Master Chorale’s continued expansion of its regular season, the LA Philharmonic under Maestro Gustavo Dudamel was increasing its use of the Chorale both in its 2011–12 regular season and at the Hollywood Bowl in summer 2011.

AGMA President Jimmy Odom had flown in from Chicago to attend the meeting and gave a report on the state of our union. He said that although we are small, even tiny as unions go, we are in good shape financially, particularly compared with much larger unions which are having financial troubles.

Jan-Kees van der Gaag, a chorister from LA Opera and employee of The Actors Fund, discussed the AGMA Relief Fund and its big cousin, The Actors Fund, which administers the Relief Fund, explaining that “Actors” referred to all entertainers when The Actors Fund was founded in the 19th Century. He told us that few AGMA members in the Southern California Area use these resources, so either our local performers are blessed with fewer problems than most, or perhaps we aren’t as aware as we could be of the ways that both the AGMA Relief Fund and The Actors Fund can help (see www.actorsfund.org for details).

Our gracious and attentive host was restaurateur, Metropolitan Opera tenor and AGMA member Greg Fedderly. The food was terrific. We sang “Happy Birthday” to several members and, of course, to AGMA, in 32-part harmony (almost)!
AGMA Shop in Arizona Continues to Grow

By John Cleveland, Arizona Opera Steward

Keeping AGMA membership high in a right-to-work state is always a challenge, especially when two-thirds of the chorus has only one year of experience with Arizona Opera. For the second consecutive year, Arizona Opera’s General Director has contracted a record number of new choristers to support a season of five productions, four of which have large choruses.

In the 2010–11 season, Arizona Opera hired 32 new choristers to support a season of productions with large choruses, drawing most of these choristers from the university system in Phoenix. For the 2011–12 season, 26 new choristers were hired, representing 36% of the total chorus roster. Again, these choristers are mostly university students. Currently, the new hires from last season and this season represent two-thirds of the total chorus with chorus veterans representing one-third.

As we reported in the summer issue of AGMAzine, our recruiting efforts for 2010–11 paid off with the addition of 15 new members to the Arizona Opera AGMA shop. One of the most gratifying outcomes of our outreach to new choristers was to discover the high level of interest that they already had in joining AGMA.

Unfortunately, during the summer of 2011, we lost 12 AGMA members from the chorus: four moved out of the area or left for other artistic endeavors and eight of our members who were not core choristers were not hired back this season. Chorus turnover is not uncommon in right-to-work states, but this was much more severe than normal.

The recruiting efforts last season added five new AGMA members over the summer. These were first-year choristers that we worked with, and after observing the power of AGMA working in their chorus lives, they decided to join. We were also excited to have nine of the 26 new chorus hires for this season decide to join AGMA. So, we have 14 new AGMA members in our Arizona shop and instead of declining, AGMA membership has remained steady at 60%.

The new energy and commitment that the younger singers are bringing to our membership has truly strengthened our AGMA shop. In contrast to past years, when the vast majority of members were chorus veterans with many years of service working in Arizona Opera, now half of our shop are new choristers who have experienced first-hand how AGMA helps its members, and joined with a sense of pride and professionalism. ♦

Who Inspired You?

I know it may sound cliché, but my inspiration for becoming an opera singer was my parents. My first flush of love for the theater came when my father was doing Candide at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco. I was just a kid and seated on a stool by the stage manager’s call desk. My dad, as Candide, had just returned from El Dorado dressed in a striking blue doublet decked out with a medallion of silver and jewels. He was down right in a hot spotlight, singing his heart out and it pretty much bowled me over. Later on as a teenager I saw my mother’s work. She had her career after five children! I studied voice with her at first, and later on with my father. Then it was off to Juilliard for me. It’s been a wild ride since then, but I have never lost my love of the theater and I have seen the world in the process. You gotta love this job!!

Frank Porretta, Soloist
Chicago/Midwest

By James Odom, President and Area Chair

Chicago/Midwest is the largest AGMA area geographically and consists of thirteen states with sixteen signatory companies.

The Chicago/Midwest Area combined an Area Meeting with a 75th Anniversary celebration in February. Thirty-five members attended the meeting, where they conducted Area business, heard reports from the local shops and shared some anniversary cake and a toast to AGMA.

And the Grammy goes to...the Chicago Symphony Chorus!

By Cole Seaton, Chorister and AGMA Board Member

This past February, the 175-member Chicago Symphony Chorus (CSC), AGMA’s largest chorus, was awarded two Grammy Awards from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences during the 53rd Annual Awards ceremony held in Los Angeles.

The Grammys were for the CSC recording of Verdi’s Messa da Requiem, and won for both Best Classical Album and Best Choral Performance, the chorus’s 10th win in that category! The recording, issued by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s own CSO Resound label, was new Music Director Riccardo Muti’s first recording with the Chorus and his first Grammy. This also marked the first Grammy win for Chorus Director, Duain Wolfe.

The Chorus followed up its win with a critically acclaimed tour to New York City in April, performing Verdi’s Otello and Berlioz’s Lélio at Carnegie Hall. The CSC opened their 2011–12 season with Liszt’s A Faust Symphony and Haydn’s The Creation. ♦

In front of their new performing home, the Kauffman Center for Performing Arts, members of the Kansas City Ballet negotiating committee: Yoshiya Sakurai, Michael Eaton, Michael Davis, Geoffrey Krapp, Charles Martin, Catherine Russell and Stayce Campano.
Ongoing negotiations at the San Francisco Opera and Ballet San Jose have continued to keep the Northern California Area members and National Dance Executive Nora Heiber busy. AGMA is happy to report that with the help of exceptional negotiating committees at these companies, there are hopes that the new contracts will both honor and support Area members.

San Francisco Opera
San Francisco Opera (SFO) negotiations began on April 25, 2011, and continued slowly. San Francisco Opera and AGMA initially agreed to extend the current contract until July 31 to coincide with the expiration of SFO’s contract with the American Federation of Musicians. In an effort to address what SFO has expressed to be serious financial concerns, the company has proposed to make some extreme changes in the way it operates that will drastically affect both unions. After continued negotiations led to tentative agreements regarding several non-economic issues, AGMA remained firm, rejecting major financial concessions proposed by San Francisco Opera by pointing out the enormous economic disparity between the orchestra and AGMA choristers, production staff and dancers. Ultimately, AGMA was able to secure the 2011–12 wages for its members by negotiating an extension of the 2006–11 collective bargaining agreement, while agreeing to implement all signed tentative agreements upon date of ratification. Ms. Heiber and San Francisco Area Chair Colby Roberts will continue to lead an active negotiating committee in discussions with Associate General Manager Matthew Shilvock until a successor contract is negotiated.

Ballet San Jose
Ms. Heiber and the Ballet San Jose dancers sat down to negotiate with BSJ Executive Director Stephanie Ziesel on January 10 with the intention of completing the contract negotiations before the company was obligated to send out next season’s offer letters. Unfortunately, the negotiations were delayed for five months until management responded to AGMA’s request for a comprehensive proposal explaining the company’s desire for major changes in the dancers’ schedule and compensation structure. Although Ms. Ziesel assured AGMA that these changes are not meant to lower the dancers’ annual wages in any way, the company’s proposals to change a long-standing company practice of compensating the dancers at a higher premium for performance weeks, seniority payments and exit/severance pay, are of great concern to AGMA and the dancers of Ballet San Jose. AGMA was able to secure three negotiating dates with Ballet San Jose in October.

In other news, AGMA filed two grievances against Ballet San Jose. The first grievance is for failure to provide the dancers with employment dates by March 1 along with information regarding the season’s repertory prior to when the dancers have to sign their contracts. Although the dancers did receive their employment dates, at the time of publication, Ballet San Jose still has not given the dancers any information regarding the repertory for this coming season nor has it announced the season publicly. AGMA remains concerned about the company’s ability to honor the dancers’ weekly guarantee set forth in the agreement. The second grievance is for failure to provide an AGMA individual contract for a guest artist.

San Francisco Area Meeting
On February 11, 2011, the San Francisco Area held an Area Meeting where shop reports were given and a committee was formed to suggest a slate for the Board elections. The meeting was followed by a festive dinner celebrating AGMA’s 75th Anniversary.

Did You Know?
In 1939, AGMA had offices in Hollywood, San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia.
NEW ORLEANS

Golden Opera Choristers
Honoring 50 Plus Years in the New Orleans Opera Chorus!

By Givonna Joseph, New Orleans Opera Chorister

Our Golden Choristers—Mary Bertucci, Karen Kalin, Shirley Bertram, Lydia Burks and Charlie Matkin—have played a significant role in the presentation of wonderful music and culture in our city. This season, each will mark over 50 years of service to New Orleans Opera as professionally paid opera choristers.

During the 2005–06 season, Mary Bertucci and Karen Kalin marked 50 years, while Shirley Bertram marked 51 years with the company. But Hurricane Katrina did not allow the company or fellow choristers an opportunity to mark that special moment in history. This year, the company and their fellow choristers took their chance.

The New Orleans Opera Association (NOOA) honored the “Golden Choristers” this past April in an insert to the Il Trovatore program that included pictures and a statement from Chorus Master Carol Rausch. The honorees who were not in the Trovatore cast were thrilled that the company gave them box seats to attend the Sunday matinee.

After the performance, a “Sparkling Grape Juice” reception was held for them at the fountains in Louis Armstrong Park outside the Mahalia Jackson Theater. Maestro Robert Lyall led everyone in words of appreciation and admiration as we raised our glasses and sang the chorus of the “Brindisi” from La Traviata. Carol Rausch spoke about the joy she has had in working with the “Golden Choristers” during her time as Chorus Master.

The stars of Il Trovatore, Mark Rucker, Mary Elizabeth Williams, Renzo Zulian and Valerie Francis, as well as all of the members of the opera chorus came to celebrate with the Honorees. Retired soprano LaVergne Monette, who, in 1968 became the first person of color to sing with NOOA, joined other audience members in greeting the honorees.

It was an honor to be a part of the celebration and to work with Carol Rausch to plan the reception. It was almost as wonderful as getting to know these ladies better and hearing their hilarious stories. The best thing of all is that at least two of the honorees are ready to sing again next season! ♦

Honoree Karen Kalin (right) with her mother, Beryle Kalin, recalls, “When I was in kindergarten, my mother sang the role of Suzuki and my older sister played Trouble in Madama Butterfly. Mother sang with New Orleans Opera from the 1930s to around 1990. She was 95% deaf from the age of 6, but had perfect pitch and the ability to read music, although she never heard her own voice.”

From left, Karen Kalin, Lydia Burks, Givonna’s daughter and NOOA Chorister Aria Mason (holding the cake), Mary Bertucci, Shirley Bertram and Charlie Matkin. The cake reads, “Congratulations Shirley, Mary, Karen, Lydia and Charlie 50+.”
In Philadelphia, there are three AGMA signatories: the Opera Company of Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Singers and Pennsylvania Ballet. Below is an update on what has been happening in the City of Brotherly Love.

### Opera Company of Philadelphia

Negotiations for the 2010–13 contract began in the summer of 2010 after a one-year extension on our past contract with the Opera Company of Philadelphia (OCP). After a year of wage freezes for AGMA staging staff, ballet dancers and choristers, we were anxious to make some headway with fees. The negotiating team consisted of a great cross-section of our AGMA membership including dancers, choristers and stage management. We were even lucky enough to have AGMA President Jimmy Odom attend one of our early meetings and offer us some sound advice.

After many grueling hours of negotiations and concessions on our part, AGMA members were deadlocked with the negotiating team from OCP management. Even with the help of a mediator we remained at a standstill. By this time, rehearsals for Otello, the opening show of the season, were going strong and we were still without an agreement. Our negotiating team did not want to start performances without a contract in hand, so some difficult decisions had to be made. AGMA members were approached about the possibility of a strike in case OCP was unwilling to offer acceptable rehearsal and performance fee increases. It was quite a sight to see 68 choristers dressed in Venetian court costumes for the orchestra dress rehearsal of Otello, voting to strike on opening night of OCP’s 35th Anniversary Season! The members voted in support of a strike, and had the support of the IATSE members should it come to fruition.

Although it was both frustrating and frightening to think that a strike could be imminent, our strength and perseverance as a union paid off and we were pleased with the final increases. We feel very lucky that OCP is still alive and thriving and able to meet the members’ needs in this difficult economic climate for the arts.

### The Philadelphia Singers

After the Philadelphia Orchestra Association declared bankruptcy in April 2011, many opinions were published about this subject, some of which were anti-union. It’s important that our members understand that this action not only affects our sister union, the American Federation of Musicians, but our members as well.

The Philadelphia Singers has been the resident chorus of The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2001. The Orchestra’s dire financial straits necessitated cut-backs on programming for the 2011–12 season, which included fewer choral works than ever before. This directly affected the amount of work available for our Philadelphia Area members. In tough economic times like this, we are standing together and supporting each other—not just as a union, but as a community of artists.

Despite the Philadelphia Orchestra’s financial woes, AGMA members had more work in the 2010–11 season than ever before. The months of April and May were packed full of rehearsals and performances for Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms, Holst’s The Planets, and the season finale, Damnation of Faust by Berlioz.
Pennsylvania Ballet

By Jonathan Stiles, Pennsylvania Ballet Dancer and AGMA delegate

In the past few years the Pennsylvania Ballet dancers and AGMA have made great strides in working with the Ballet’s management in an ongoing and cooperative fashion. Although the summer of 2009 was not a great time to be negotiating a collective bargaining agreement, by working with management, we were able to reach a contract agreement that saved the company money while maintaining our minimum salaries and work weeks.

During AGMA’s 75th anniversary year, the Pennsylvania Ballet dancers are extremely excited about the plans for the company’s new home! There was an official groundbreaking ceremony on October 11. The dancers are eagerly looking forward to the completion of this project and wanted to share a picture of exactly what the new home for the Pennsylvania Ballet will look like according to the company’s current plans. Located on North Broad Street and just a few blocks from City Hall, the new building will put Pennsylvania Ballet right in the center of Philadelphia’s expanding Avenue of the Arts.

Who Inspired You?

The person who inspired me to want to be a ballerina was my mother, Gloria Gaither. My mom was my ballet teacher growing up and I remember how beautiful she was when she would teach and demonstrate the combinations to the class. Her arms seemed to be like wings and she would just float across the studio floor to the music. She was such a ballerina! I truly believe that the love of dance was in my blood from the start and my mother gave me the greatest gift of my life. She transferred her knowledge and love of this beautiful art form to me through her wonderful teaching and I have been able to live out my dream for the past 21 years as a ballerina... Actually, I have both my mother and father to thank for always believing in me and my dream!

Elizabeth Gaither, Dancer at Washington Ballet and American Ballet Theatre

IN MEMORIAM

Theoni V. Aldridge, Costume Designer
Edward Bigelow, Dancer
Abba Bogin, Soloist
Daniel Catán, Composer*
Dotty Dean, Choreographer
Elena Denda, Director/Choreographer
Jack Eddleman, Director/Soloist
Paul Franke, Soloist

Toni-Ann Gardella, Dancer
Michael Gray, Choreographer
Lee Hoiby, Composer*
Karen Krueger, Choreographer
Vincenzo La Scola, Soloist
Salvatore Licitra, Soloist
Cornell MacNeil, Soloist and former AGMA President
Catherine Niziol, Choreographer
Nancy O’Brien, Choreographer
Richard Pease, Choreographer

Garry Reigenborn, Dancer/Choreographer
Lillas Sims, Choreographer
Rodney Stenborg, Choreographer
Robert Tear, Soloist
Robert Thorson, Dancer
Giorgio Tozzi, Soloist
Floran Yagoda, former AGMA Relief Fund Administrator*

*Indicates a distinguished individual in a related profession
The Washington Ballet

Negotiations with The Washington Ballet were completed for a three-year successor agreement commencing on August 1, 2011. The process began in early January, 2011, with committee meetings and input from all company members. Participation was strong throughout the process, which included three bargaining sessions with 13 to 17 dancers present at any time. The presence of principal dancers to future apprentices (current Studio Dancers) at the negotiation table demonstrated the commitment and solidarity of the professional artists in the company and those who would soon join the ranks. Together, they stood behind their proposals to maintain benefits of the past as well as add numerous improvements, which included additional work weeks in all three years, modest increases in wages, and numerous work, health and safety provisions.

The negotiations were conducted in an amicable atmosphere and began with both sides of the table applauding each other for their partnership, saying thanks for all that had been accomplished throughout the season. This contrasts greatly with the unionization of the company in 2005, which was one of the most difficult in our union’s history. At the conclusion of the negotiations, management provided champagne, and we all celebrated a successful negotiation.

Immediately following the 2011–14 Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations, company dancers and Eleni Kallas also negotiated an agreement for the August tour to Turkey, where the dancers performed in the 9th Annual Bodrum International Ballet Festival.

Washington National Opera

Maestro Steven Gathman and the Washington National Opera (WNO) chorus performed a benefit concert for the AGMA Relief Fund on February 13. This is the second benefit concert performed by the WNO chorus that has raised over $10,000 for the AGMA Relief Fund.

Over 65 choristers and members of WNO production staff donated their time to rehearse and perform a program that varied from spirituals to excerpts from La Rondine, Hamlet and Fidelio. Ken Weiss volunteered his services as accompanist.

Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA

A most festive celebration of AGMA’s 75th Anniversary took place at the Spring Membership Meeting on April 10. Alice Vienneau, special guest speaker from The Actors Fund, informed members about all the avenues of assistance available to them. Dancer Lisae Jordan was re-elected to the Washington/Baltimore Area Committee, and local candidates for national office gave short presentations.

The Fall Membership meeting was held on Sunday, October 9. Continuing AGMA’s 75th Anniversary celebration, Valerie Cole from Union Plus was invited to speak to the members about the many benefits available to them. Christopher Rhodovi was re-elected to the Area Committee, and a report was given to the membership about AGMA Health Plan B submissions.
As part of AGMA’s year-long celebration of its 75th Anniversary, AGMA President Jimmy Odom attended Pittsburgh’s Area Meeting in February. Area Vice Chair Carol Wolfe presented Jimmy with a “Terrible Towel™,” which, for those of you who do not know, is used by fans to show their enthusiasm and support for our football team, the Pittsburgh Steelers (proceeds of Terrible Towel™ sales benefit Allegheny Valley School, an organization that cares for people with physical and mental disabilities). The meeting, held at Pittsburgh Opera’s offices, was scheduled prior to a chorus rehearsal for Turandot, and featured a buffet lunch and festive AGMA 75th Anniversary balloons.

It’s been a busy spring at Pittsburgh Opera—so busy, in fact, that we have had a hard time not losing our heads (unlike the Prince of Persia and the Carmelite nuns, but more about that later).

In March, we premiered a co-production of Turandot created by the team of Renaud Doucet and André Barbe. This production garnered both critical and audience acclaims but required substituting two tenors for our Calaf, who became ill during the run. It was a beautiful and colorful production built by Minnesota Opera, where it will run after performances at the other co-producing companies: Utah Opera, Austin Lyric Opera and Cincinnati Opera. In Pittsburgh, our orchestra used the set of 13 gongs that Puccini had originally commissioned for the opera’s 1926 premiere.

On Turandot’s heels came Pittsburgh’s first ever production of Poulenc’s Dialogues des Carmélites with sets from Calgary Opera and costumes from Seattle Opera. Our music director, Antony Walker, was scheduled to conduct, however, he was offered the opportunity to conduct at the Metropolitan Opera and was replaced with Jean-Luc Tingaud.

The 2011–12 season promises to be safe but challenging, in no small part because we are presenting our first production of The Pearl Fishers in over 30 years. Former Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artists Craig Verm and Sean Panikkar return to the Benedum Center stage as Zurga and Nadir joining Leah Partridge and Andrew Gangestad in a colorful production by Zandra Rhodes. Speaking of our Resident Artist program, four new RAs have joined our company, one of which is the first production assistant RA in the program’s long history. Other productions this season include La Traviata, Tosca, The Abduction from the Seraglio, and a Resident Artist production of Hansel und Gretel that will be presented in the intimate, 400-seat theater at Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts High School. Pittsburgh Opera is also presenting its first concert in a number of seasons featuring local America’s Got Talent sensation Jackie Evancho, the Pittsburgh Opera Chorus and Orchestra, and our resident artists.

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

By Stephen Hadala, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Dancer and Delegate

Last season was a busy one for Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, beginning in October with the Pittsburgh premiere of The Three Musketeers, choreography by André Prokovsky, and performed with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Orchestra (AFM Local 60-471). The company spent the month of December performing Terrence S. Orr’s The Nutcracker to very full houses. In February, PBT performed Ben Stevenson’s Dracula to sold-out performances and standing ovations every night. In March, the company performed A Gershwin Fantasy; the program opened with Hungry Heart… ‘we all have one’!!, choreography by Derek Deane and set to the music of Bruce Springsteen; and continued with the world premiere of Shall We Dance, which was choreographed by Viktor Plotnikov and set to the music of George and Ira Gershwin. Shall We Dance was performed with vocalist Ann Hampton Callaway and her jazz band. Ann’s voice was smooth as velvet, the band was tight with a strong connection to score, and PBT dancers moved with a whimsical quality. The season finished in March with George Balanchine: Celebrating a Legend, a program featuring the PBT premiere of Agon, followed by the Sylvia Pas de Deux and closing with The Prodigal Son.

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre (PBT) is in the second year of a three-year collective bargaining agreement.
The 2010–11 season for Boston Ballet bubbled with artistic unveilings that created an atmosphere of pride within the walls of 19 Clarendon Street, and the upcoming season looks to be following the same joyful path. Each AGMA dancer is feeling it as we plié through sore muscles at the beginning of each new work/play day.

Last season opened with the annual Night of Stars gala. It was a good time had by all: the debut of the Boston Ballet’s 2010–11 team and a fabulous after-party full of mingling and un-choreographed dance moves.

The gala was followed by a ravedly-reviewed version of the classic La Bayadère. The Corps de Ballet bonded with Boston Ballet II, our pre-professional dancers, as they formed a breathtaking regiment of shades arabesqing down one of the steepest, highest ramps the “Shade” world had ever seen. After several respectful back-and-forths and a lot of ramp testing, the AGMA delegates and management worked out a way for the AGMA women and a most grateful, yet tortured, Solor to receive hazard pay for our triumph over our fear of heights.

The “newness” of the season continued as Boston Ballet’s resident choreographer created a world premiere work to add to a full length evening of Jorma Elo goodness. The ballet, Elo Experience, added even more artistic edge with the addition of speaking roles performed with eloquent ease by AGMA dancers Jeffrey Cirio and Larissa Ponomarenko. And thanks to the BB contract, they received a little bonus compensation from the company for all their vocal stylings.

The season came to a close with an outstanding presentation of Balanchine and Robbins. George Balanchine’s Symphony in Three Movements had us counting our brains out while his Divertimento No. 15 had us finishing a stellar year with out-of-this-world turnout and feet-pointing. Jerome Robbins’ Antique Epigraphs was performed for the first time outside of the New York City Ballet and Afternoon of a Faun was nothing less than breath-taking.

The highly anticipated renovations to the Boston Ballet building put the finishing touches on a magical transformation during the first summer weeks after last season. Items such as new carpets, a new dancers’ lounge, a new kitchen, freshly painted walls, and even a brand new Pilates/physical therapy area were a welcome gift the dancers received for a brilliant performance year. With the renovation came the added availability of a black box theater in our large Studio 7 space. This will give Boston Ballet the ability to perform small home-field works without negotiating rental at the Opera House.

Once the 2011 season came to a close, it was time for the Boston Ballet delegates to team up with our savvy AGMA lawyer, Eastern Counsel Deborah Allton-Maher, to negotiate another excellent three-year contract. The team, consisting of James Whiteside, Kathleen Breen Comes, Alison Basford, Rachel Cossar, Brad Schlagheck and myself, could not have been more pleased with the outcome. The whole process ran very smoothly and after all was said, signed and done, the Boston Ballet Contract and the Boston Ballet team feel stronger than ever.

So far, under the new contract, the 2011–12 season has started fantastically. We are learning our choreography for the upcoming season with eager, artistic minds, enjoying our renovated building, and learning so much each day.

Thanks for another great year of ballet, AGMA! ♦
TEXAS/OKLAHOMA

By Matt Woodbury, Chorister, Board Member

Both opera companies in our Area (Dallas Opera and Houston Grand Opera), successfully negotiated new contracts recently, with substantial assistance from lawyers provided by AGMA.

The Dallas Opera recently moved into a new theater, the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, which became the occasion for expanding the number of AGMA chorus delegates, who have worked to improve communication with the stage managers and dancers. The shop is fortunate to have so many people eager to participate and volunteer their time.

The Dallas Opera finished their first season (2009–10) at the Winspear last year with the world premiere of Jake Heggie’s Moby Dick to critical and popular acclaim. Likewise, the 2010–11 season ended with the critical and popular success of Boris Godunov. AGMA members have appreciated the company’s willingness to continue producing operas that include choruses and dancers, as well as soloists.

On April 9, 2011, the AGMA members working at the Dallas Opera held a meeting that was attended by 22 members and AGMA President Jimmy Odom. President Odom and shop delegates have been successfully reaching out to artists in this right-to-work state, resulting in the addition of several new union members.

The Texas/Oklahoma Area is pleased to welcome a new member to the AGMA Board of Governors from our Area, Soloist Kyle Hancock. ♦

TULSA BALLET

Tulsa Ballet negotiations were held in October. Pictured in front of their brand new facility are, from left: Artistic Director Marcello Angelini; Dancer/Delegate Alexandra Christian; Dancer/Delegate Ian Buchanan and Eastern Counsel Deborah Allton-Maher.

NORTHWEST

By George Scott, Northwest Area Chair and Chorister

The Northwest Area AGMA signatories include the Seattle Opera, Portland Opera and the Pacific Northwest Ballet.

From a historical perspective, for the 1962 World’s Fair, and as part of the Seattle Symphony’s 1962 season, the opera Aïda was produced and performed in the brand new Seattle Opera House. Seattle Symphony was the first company to sign choristers, dancers and principal singers to AGMA contracts for the duration of this production. Soon after this significant and successful Seattle operatic debut, the Seattle Opera was born in 1963.

Seattle Opera’s upcoming season for 2011–12 includes Gershwin’s Porgy & Bess, Bizet’s Carmen, Verdi’s Attila, Puccini’s Madama Butterfly and Gluck’s Orpheus and Eurydice.
Portland Opera

By Wade Baker, Soloist, Board Member and Portland Opera Steward

AGMA’s Western Counsel John Russum worked with the local shop steward and a select committee to negotiate a new contract with Portland Opera this fall. The Portland shop voted 98% in favor of ratifying the new agreement, and the proposed CBA has been sent to the Board for approval. Some of the gains negotiated in the contract include a new seniority system for choristers, a 30% increase in AGMA Health Plan B contributions for the chorus and corps de ballet, across-the-board regional COLA (cost of living adjustment) compensation increases, and extra bit pay for reduced-size choruses utilizing three or fewer voices per part.

Portland Opera’s 2011–12 season opened with a Gala Concert that was HD simulcast outdoors in the plaza around the auditorium, free to the city of Portland. Festivities included a beer garden, food vendors, pre-concert entertainment, and featured Mayor Sam Adams opening the season by banging the anvil to open the Gypsy Chorus from Verdi’s Il Trovatore. Portland Opera’s 2011–12 season continues with productions of Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro, Puccini’s Madame Butterfly, Philip Glass’s Galileo Galilei, and Bernstein’s Candide.

Portland Opera Picnic

By Joanna Ceciliani, former Portland Opera Chorister

The 3rd Annual Portland Opera Chorus picnic brought great weather and happy spirits to those who attended. Because it was the third year, we considered skipping a year but I am so glad we didn’t. We all agreed that if we skipped a year it would lose momentum so we went for it. It turned out to be really wonderful. We had about 67 people this year and many came up to the committee members and said how appreciative they were that we continued to have the picnic. Invitees donate toward the expense of the picnic and all they bring is their side dish contribution. The rest is provided: water, sodas, hamburgers, hot dogs, etc.

The bake-off contest is always a big hit. Tim Lafolette, Beth Hiller and Rob Ainsley volunteered to do their tasting duty and judged the bake-off contest this year. Picnic attendees had a hard time waiting to take a fork to the bake-off table. Yum! This year we had four categories. Opera Cakes’ winner was Kirsten Hart with Ginger Lemon Chiffon Cake; Chorus of Chocolate’s winner was Hannah Penn with her Chocolate Turtle Cake; Cast of Cookies’ winner was Barbara Berger with A-Cinnamonated Star Cookies and Lemon Cookie Sweethearts; Tutti Frutti’s winner was Kate Strohecker with her Raspberry Key Lime Bars! Just hearing about all these winners might make you want the recipes... Well, we plan to make a recipe book one of these years too.

The raffle, which was even more exciting this year than last because the Portland Opera Company donated two tickets to next year’s Candide, and from their store, several pieces of clothing, four CDs, and a few other items. We certainly had everyone’s attention during the drawing!

Thanks go to Jennie Spada, Barbara Berger, Darcy Dillon, Tom Skyler, Carlo Antinucci, Damien Genardi, Paul Wright, Raoul Bellis-Squires, Maria Leatha and Chris Harper for helping make this year’s picnic a success.

Pacific Northwest Ballet

By Nora Heiber, National Dance Executive

After six full days of negotiations, Pacific Northwest Ballet, AGMA’s Western Counsel John Russum and AGMA’s National Dance Executive Nora Heiber completed a new four-year agreement on July 9, 2011. Concerns regarding a possible loss of seniority pay played a key role. The Negotiating Committee, consisting of Barry Kerollis, Carla Korbes, Carrie Imler, Jonathan Porretta, Kiyon Gaines, Kylee Kitchens and Lucien Postlewaite, participated in negotiating great improvements to an already terrific contract; they were joined by several of their fellow dancers who showed up to all of the negotiating sessions to offer their support.

Some of the improved provisions included: 2.1%, 3.6%, 3% and 3.25% compensation increases in each year of the contract; increases to vacation pay and matching contribution to pension; access to the Pacific Northwest Ballet Board, including the ability to provide input to their strategic planning process; 50% of corps de ballet roles in any given scene shall consist of Pacific Northwest Ballet dancers; no loss of overtime for failure to submit overtime sheet within two weeks; Dress Rehearsal required for all programs; guarantee of 15 days of rehearsal, nine of which must be consecutive for any repertory that has not been performed within the last two seasons; and, at least one run-through in addition to Dress Rehearsal prior to leaving for tour.
A Day in the Life of...Staging Staff

This is a new AGMAzine series to acquaint members with the various categories that AGMA represents. The next issue will feature “A Day in the Life” of some dancers and the perspective of a ballet stage manager. Let us know if you like this series: mmrc@musicalartists.org.

Staging staff for any opera, ballet, musical or concert is made up of the positions of Director, Assistant Director, Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager. On a large production there may be multiple people with the same title looking after different aspects of the production. Most of us are familiar with a Director and the role they play in the creative process; but what about those other three positions? You may recognize the titles but what do an Assistant Director, Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager actually do on a daily basis? Keep reading to find out what a typical day might be like for these professionals at an AGMA opera company.

AGMA Procedure on Dues Objections

Union collective bargaining demands.

Audited financial statements are prepared for AGMA which calculate the percentage of expenditures made for representational and non-representational activities. While the exact amount varies slightly each year, approximately 99% of the expenditures each year are for representational activities. Non-members may object to payment of that portion of AGMA dues which are spent on non-representational activities. These include expenditures such as community service and charitable contributions; lobbying; legislative efforts and political activities; members-only benefits; and litigation which is not germane to collective bargaining, contract administration or grievance adjustment. Non-members are legally obligated to pay for expenses connected with representational activities, which include negotiations with employers; enforcing collective bargaining agreements; meetings with employer representatives; member and staff committee meetings concerned with matters relating to employment practices and/or collective bargaining provisions; discussion of work-related issues with employers; handling employees’ work-related problems through grievance and arbitration procedures, before administrative agencies or in informal meetings; and union administration, litigation, publications, and professional services relating to any of the above.

We believe that without the concerted political activity of the union movement, the great social legislation of this century such as the Social Security Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, minimum wage laws and the Occupational Safety and Health Act would never have become law. This remains truer than ever today. In our opinion, community service, legislative activity, lobbying, political activities, and litigation related to broader issues of concern to Union members as citizens are critically necessary for the improvement of working conditions for all members we represent. It is for this reason that we believe that it is essential for AGMA to support such activities which benefit all working people in the United States.

You have the right to decide whether to be a part of this important effort.

AGMA’s procedure regarding non-member dues-payers and their right to seek a partial reduction of their dues and initiation fees has been developed in response to decisions of the United States Supreme Court.

Pursuant to AGMA’s procedure, there is an annual period for a non-member to indicate an objection to AGMA’s expenditures. Objections filed within thirty days of your receipt of this notice will be effective immediately. If you choose to object at a later time, an objection may be filed in the thirty days following your resignation from membership or in the objection period. The objection period is from December 1 through December 31. Non-members who express their objection within that period will have their dues (and, if applicable, initiation fees) reduced for the 12 months beginning January 1 and running through December 31. AGMA estimates that any such reduction will be less than 1% of total dues and fees otherwise due.

The AGMA objection procedure works as follows:

Dues and initiation fees payable by objectors will be based on AGMA’s expenditures for those activities it undertakes to advance the employment-related interests of the employees it represents, described above as representational activities. Non-members who object to payment of full dues will receive an explanation of the basis for their reduced dues/fees. That explanation will include a list of the major categories of expenditures for activities deemed to be both “representational” and “non-representational,” and an accountant’s report verifying the breakdown of these “representational” and “non-representational” expenditures. Objectors have the option of challenging AGMA’s verified calculation of the reduced dues/fees before an impartial arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association, and a portion of the objector’s dues/fees reflecting sums reasonably in dispute will be held in escrow pending the arbitrator’s decision. Details concerning the arbitration process will be provided to any objectors who challenge the dues/fees.

Non-members who have objected to payment of full dues will be required to pay that percentage spent on representational activities and will have their dues reduced by the amount spent on non-representational activities. They will not receive any members-only benefits or privileges.

Objections should be directed to the AGMA Membership Department Supervisor, 1430 Broadway, New York, New York 10018. All objections must contain the objector’s current home or mailing address. The reduced dues/fees of objectors will be calculated and reflected in the dues/fees bills. Individuals desiring to retain “objector” status must renew their objections during each annual objection period.
**Assistant Director**

*By Seth Hoff*

In opera rehearsals, the assistant director (AD) often sits between the stage manager and the director. From the beginning of the process, we work closely with both to help produce a successful opera production. Before staging rehearsals begin, if we are contracted for prep time, we can be found in the office with the stage management team, prepping paperwork, organizing our score and learning about the set, costumes and props. As staging rehearsals begin, our days are all about “minis.” Minis are page-size graphic representations of the stage space on which we keep track of all the blocking. This involves notating and mapping all the onstage action, linking it to the music, and keeping it in the musical score. We also work with the director as another set of eyes and opinions, doing research, or as a body to work out staging issues.

While the principals are primarily rehearsing during the day, the chorus, dancers and supers rehearse mostly at night. It is “all hands on deck” as we, and the stage managers, do whatever is necessary to make the rehearsal a success. We keep track of everyone’s staging on “large minis,” quite a trick if we are walking a role, helping stage the supers, and writing down chorus staging. At the end of the rehearsal day, the stage manager will go through the day’s notes with the assistant stage managers and AD to make sure that all technical notes have been covered.

Before, during and after rehearsal, we have other tasks to accomplish. If there are text changes, we will compile and distribute them. A “critical list” is also created, so if a performer is missing, integral stage actions are covered. We might produce staging notes for the chorus or supers and then set the bow list and present it to the company director for approval. Cleaning our score is an ongoing task as the opera’s staging continues to evolve through the opening night performance. If there are covers (understudies) to rehearse, we will direct their rehearsals and room runs.

When the opera moves to the stage, we work with the stage management team and the director as adjustments are made. We often direct the light walkers in lighting sessions and give the director’s notes to the cast and technical staff. If someone is ill or injured, we could be called upon to cover their part. Suddenly, we may be onstage like a ninja in our blacks and headset, or be put into a costume to walk a role.

On opening night, we begin finalizing our paperwork, give notes to the cast and stage managers from the director, and sometimes work in a final light cueing session. This is usually the first time we can actually watch the show without interruption, although we will also be taking notes. Depending on our contract, we may stay with the opera through its performances to take notes, rehearse the supers, or put a cover onstage, or we may head home or to another gig. Either way, we will have had the rich and rewarding experience of being part of a dedicated team of artists and technical staff who worked together for many long days to put an opera onstage.

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**The Stage Manager**

*By Lisa Anderson-Bongers and John Coleman*

There are few jobs that get as many puzzled looks as “Stage Manager.” You always see them around, but who exactly are they and what do they do? First off, many people don’t even realize that the stage managers are AGMA members, and, like Equity, stage managers are part of the performers’ union.

Stage managing is one of the most unique jobs because a stage manager gets to deal with almost everyone on a daily basis; not only their AGMA brothers and sisters (the principals, the chorus and dancers, the directors and choreographers), but also the stagehands, the administrative staff, wigs, make-up and wardrobe—sometimes even the ushers and the box office. We are literally the go-between for everybody. Our job is to make sure that people have the information they need to do the show. That could be knowing the timing of cues, what the set limitations are, quick costume change logistics, running times for the show, or even when the breaks fall. “Calling the show” is an extension of that: making sure that the technical departments know when to execute their cues and the artists know when to come to stage. It could be any number of things, and that is what keeps it so exciting.
For example, a typical day for a stage manager at San Francisco Opera or Lyric Opera of Chicago could start out first thing in the morning with a meeting of the crew department heads to discuss what needs to happen on stage and in the rehearsal halls for the next week. It could be a meeting with some of the administrative staff and the assistant directors of all of the shows in the current season to discuss how the next week’s schedule is going to go. Often there will be a morning rehearsal of one of the shows with principals. After a lunch break, there may be a chorus rehearsal which could be for the same show as the morning rehearsal, or possibly for a different show, usually lasting three hours. After the dinner break we take care of notes from the previous two rehearsals, check emails and catch up with the day’s news, as well as communicate the needs for the next day’s schedule. Then we change clothes and go onstage to call a performance of yet another show. There is very rarely a chance to get bored. So, dealing with all of those people each day in all of those situations, we may not know the answers to everything, but we bet we can figure out who to ask.

Thirty minutes before rehearsal is scheduled to begin we head into the rehearsal hall and set up the room for the first scene on the day’s schedule. Remember when you were about five years old and you’d throw a big bed sheet over the dining room table to make it into a cave? This part of the day requires the same spirit of make-believe! Since we usually do not have the actual set in rehearsals, we must create the basic structure of the space out of the items we DO have available. We might space two music stands a few feet apart and post a sign saying “doorway,” and, ta-da! This becomes the entrance and exit for the day. We also check that all props are set up correctly and that the proper rehearsal costume pieces are on hand for the singers to work with.

Around 10:00 a.m. the principal singers arrive for the first of the daily rehearsals. We make sure the artists have the props and costume pieces they need and give the entrance cues. We also keep an eye on the stage set-up. Since there is much repetition during a rehearsal session, we reset the props as needed so that everything is correct wherever in the music the director chooses to restart the rehearsal. Copious note-taking is a must! For the evening rehearsal session, we typically add the chorus and supernumeraries to the picture, so a bit of crowd control becomes part of our jobs. After the day’s rehearsals end at 10:00 p.m., we review the day’s notes so the stage manager can type them up and distribute them.

After roughly two weeks of this, the whole game moves onstage. The stage manager and ASMs, who have all been learning the show with the singers in the rehearsal hall, must now teach the intricacies of running the show to the stage and wardrobe crews who will actually execute the moves in performances. To this end, we create extensive paperwork listing all the cues for a particular department, often including diagrams of how the stage is to be set up for each scene. We might schedule meetings with department heads to talk through their cues: “Yes, that scene change/costume change must be complete in two minutes … sorry, but the composer just didn’t write any more music!”

Finally, the curtain goes up on opening night and there we are on our respective sides of the stage, waving our arms (or our glow sticks), and sending you onstage at precisely the right moments. We are also supervising the crews moving the scenery and props and doing quick costume or make-up changes in the wings. “This is a five minute warning to the scene change…” or “Stand-by for the soprano’s quick-change, please!” You may even see or hear us standing in the wings as you take your final bow, warning you to “take one more!” or “bow in place!” as the stage manager cues the curtain in.

How to Get Involved
If you happen to be a member of a Staging Staff, perhaps you would like to help make a difference in your Union and for your colleagues. If so, consider becoming a part of the Staging Staff Caucus. Since we are often the smallest group of an AGMA shop, the caucus can be a valuable resource when it comes to negotiating agreements, navigating through the AGMA hierarchy and soliciting general support from people who have been in your shoes.

For more information about the Staging Staff Caucus, or if you are interested in becoming a member, contact Christine Sanzone, caucus chair, at cmsanzone@cox.net.
Who Inspired You?

I hesitate to date myself, but it was watching Leonard Bernstein’s Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic (in black and white) that first interested me in classical music. Bernstein had such a talent for engaging young listeners with his energetic enthusiasm, and he got me hooked. I always sang, but I assumed that I would go into conducting; however, the offer of a scholarship to study voice steered me in another direction. My interest in opera started when I was on a high school field trip to New York City and my teacher gave me a ticket to the Met where I heard Jon Vickers sing Peter Grimes. I had no idea who Britten even was then, but I knew I liked what I saw and heard and have been a fan of Britten and Pears (and opera) ever since. And an opportunity to hear Pavarotti in a piano-accompanied recital in 1979 in the historic Warner Theatre in Erie, PA led me further away from symphonic and choral music to opera. But most of all, I have to thank my parents for making me a staunch union supporter; their union involvement inspired me to be active in AGMA.

Bill Buchanan, Pittsburgh Opera Chorister, Pittsburgh Area Chair

Even as a little girl, I was never the type to idolize a particular person. Throughout my 17 years as a dancer, which began professionally three years ago with the San Francisco Ballet, I have encountered a number of dancers who have inspired me. I have learned to appreciate these individuals’ gifts—whether it is of humility, perseverance or passion—and incorporate them in my dancing. However, I have recently realized that my strongest inspiration is this God-given opportunity, as the only African-American female ballerina in one of the best and largest companies in the nation, to represent and inspire hope for all the upcoming ballerinas of color.

Kimberly Braylock, San Francisco Ballet Dancer

While in my first semester as a vocal music major, a tenor friend introduced me to the recordings of Joan Sutherland, Marilyn Horne and Luciano Pavarotti. I was totally blown away by them! Until then, I had been studying music simply because I couldn’t think of anything better to do. After experiencing the level of artistry that these three vocal giants brought to their work, I became much more dedicated to my own studies. I have been a working member of AGMA for 25 years now and I’ve had the great pleasure of performing alongside two of my three idols, as well as hundreds of other brilliant artists.

Jennifer Wallace, Los Angeles Opera Chorister and Southern California Area Chair

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1953, two more areas were created: Boston and Pittsburgh, each of which would elect a soloist and a chorister, respectively, to the Board.
### Contact List of Assistance, Member-Only Services, and Discounts

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<td>Actors Federal Credit Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Fund - East Coast</td>
<td>(212) 221-7300</td>
<td><a href="mailto:seligson@actorsfund.org">seligson@actorsfund.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Actors Fund - Midwest</td>
<td>(312) 372-0989</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dtowne@actorsfund.org">dtowne@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Fund - West Coast</td>
<td>(323) 933-9244</td>
<td><a href="mailto:intakela@actorsfund.org">intakela@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Work Program</td>
<td>(<a href="http://www.actorsfund.org/services/Sideline_Work_and_New_Careers/Actors_Work_Program">www.actorsfund.org/services/Sideline_Work_and_New_Careers/Actors_Work_Program</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Work Program - New York</td>
<td>(212) 354-5480</td>
<td><a href="mailto:blevinso@actorsfund.org">blevinso@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Work Program - Chicago</td>
<td>(312) 372-0989</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dtowne@actorsfund.org">dtowne@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Actors Work Program - Los Angeles</td>
<td>(323) 933-9244, ext. 50</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ltrotter@actorsfund.org">ltrotter@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>AGMA Relief Fund - Donations</td>
<td>(800) 543-AGMA (2462)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:susan@musicalartists.org">susan@musicalartists.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGMA Relief Fund - Intake East</td>
<td>(212) 221-7300</td>
<td><a href="mailto:seligson@actorsfund.org">seligson@actorsfund.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGMA Relief Fund - Intake Midwest</td>
<td>(312) 372-0989</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dtowne@actorsfund.org">dtowne@actorsfund.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGMA Relief Fund - Intake West</td>
<td>(323) 933-9244</td>
<td><a href="mailto:intakela@actorsfund.org">intakela@actorsfund.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGMA Retirement &amp; Health (Plan A, AGMA Retirement Plan and AGMA Health Plan)</td>
<td>(212) 765-3664</td>
<td>agmaretirement-health.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGMA Health Plan B (“Administrative Services Only”)</td>
<td>(866) 263-1185</td>
<td><a href="mailto:agmaretirement_health@yahoo.com">agmaretirement_health@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists’ Health Insurance Resource Center - NY</td>
<td>(212) 221-7300, ext. 165</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ahirc.org">www.ahirc.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Artists’ Health Insurance Resource Center - LA</td>
<td>(323) 933-9244, ext. 32</td>
<td><a href="mailto:AHIRC@actorsfund.org">AHIRC@actorsfund.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Transition for Dancers - Outside of New York and Los Angeles</td>
<td>(800) 581-CTFD (2833)</td>
<td>careertransition.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Transition for Dancers - New York</td>
<td>(212) 764-0172</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@careertransition.org">info@careertransition.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Transition for Dancers - Los Angeles</td>
<td>(323) 549-6660</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info-la@careertransition.org">info-la@careertransition.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEIGIT (The Entertainment Industry Group Insurance Trust)</td>
<td>(800) 886-7504</td>
<td><a href="http://www.teigit.com">www.teigit.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Privilege/Union Plus</td>
<td>(800) 452-9425</td>
<td>(202) 293-5330</td>
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