

# AGMAZINE

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**A Branch of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America • Affiliated with the AFL-CIO**

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*Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!*

*Representing musical artists since 1936*

AGMA

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## Welcome to the 75th Anniversary Commemorative Issue of AGMAzine!

*AGMA's staff and the Membership and Member Relations committee have worked especially diligently on this very special issue. Their goal was to give you an overview of AGMA's history and how we fit in with the history of the labor movement. There are remembrances of and by AGMA's past and current leaders, and articles that discuss how AGMA worked in the past and how it works today.*

*I would like to personally thank AGMA staff members Denise Baker and Gerry Angel as well as the members of the Membership and Member Relations committee for their work on this commemorative issue and for their continuing dedication to improving AGMAzine and filling it with the information that you, the members, need.*

*Enjoy the issue! Happy Birthday to us!*

**AGMA President James Odom**



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## “Don’t Know Much About History” Before AGMA

Sam Cooke

By Alan S. Gordon, National Executive Director



The core function of any labor union is to negotiate collective bargaining agreements that protect the union’s members and improve their working lives. As *AGMAZine* was going to press, we had just concluded the renegotiation of two of our major contracts, those with the Metropolitan Opera and New York City Ballet.

As the 75th Anniversary editions of *AGMAZine* focus backwards toward AGMA’s past and forward to its future, it

of union men and women did actually make an ultimate sacrifice to win that battle, and our members today fall heir to those sacrifices.

Railroad strikers were shot to death and others injured in 1851 by the state militia in a strike in Portage, New York, and in New York City, as workers demonstrated in Tompkins Square Park, a detachment of mounted police charged into the crowd, beating men, women and children indiscriminately and causing hundreds of casualties. The New York Commissioner of Police said, “It was the most glorious sight I ever saw...”

At the “Battle of the Viaduct” in Chicago, between protesting members of the Chicago German Furniture Workers Union and federal troops, 30 workers were killed and over 100 strikers wounded.

In 1886, 2,000 workers walked off their jobs and gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, angrily denouncing the ten-hour workday. Wisconsin Governor Jeremiah Rusk called out the state militia and the commanding General ordered his soldiers to shoot into the crowd. Fourteen unionists and one child were killed. The next day, the Haymarket strike and massacre took place in Chicago, where eight more unionists were killed.

In 1892, during the Homestead, Pennsylvania steel strike, Pinkerton Guards opened fire on striking Carnegie Mill steelworkers. In the ensuing battle, seven guards and eleven strikers and spectators were shot to death.

In the 1897 Lattimer Massacre, 19 unarmed striking coal miners were killed and 36 wounded by a posse organized by the Hazleton, Pennsylvania Sheriff for refusing to disperse.

In 1902, fourteen miners were killed and 22 wounded in an Illinois coal miners’ strike. The following year, a battle between the Colorado Militia and striking miners at Dunnville ended with six union members dead and 15 taken as prisoners.

In 1916, strikebreakers hired by Everett Mills attacked and beat picketing strikers in Everett, Washington. Local police watched and refused to intervene, claiming that the waterfront where the incident took place was Federal land and therefore outside their jurisdiction. Three days later, 22 union men attempted to speak out at a local meeting, but each was arrested; arrests and beatings of strikebreakers became common throughout the following months. In response, the local union called for a meeting, but when the union men arrived, they were fired on; seven people were killed, 50 were wounded.

In the 1917 “Bisbee Deportation,” several thousand armed company vigilantes forced 1,185 unionists in Bisbee, Arizona into manure-laden cattle cars and left them to the New Mexico desert. The action was precipitated by a strike when workers’ demands (including safety and working condition improvements at the local copper mines, an end to discrimination against labor organizations and unequal treatment of foreign and minority workers, and the institution of a fair wage system) went unmet. The “deportation” was organized by the local



Haymarket massacre of 1886

seems also appropriate to look further back, back another 75 years, to the time before AGMA existed, before most of today’s unions existed, back to the beginnings of the American labor movement, to see what originally was necessary to win the struggle for workers’ rights that we take much more for granted today. As our members participate in negotiating committees, it’s crucial that they are at least aware of their role in the long, historical continuum of the labor movement. Unionists are fond of repeating the traditional saying that “people died to achieve the eight-hour day,” but scores



Bisbee deportation



sheriff. In 1931, gun-toting vigilantes attacked striking miners in Harlan County, Kentucky, killing many and wounding dozens. The wife of one of the murdered strikers then wrote the traditional union anthem, “Which Side Are You On?”

In 1936, the year that marked AGMA’s birth, two strikers were killed and over 200 wounded by National Guardsmen in the Electric Auto-Lite Strike in Toledo, Ohio. In Minneapolis, police attacked and fired upon striking Teamster truck drivers who were demanding recognition of their union, wage increases, and shorter working hours. As violence escalated, Governor Olson declared martial law in Minneapolis, deploying 4,000 National Guardsmen to quiet the strikers. Almost simultaneously, police killed 10 strikers and wounded 30 during the “Memorial Day Massacre” at the Republic Steel plant in Chicago.

Although General Motors eventually recognized the United Auto Workers union following a sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, two months later, Ford Motor Company guards attacked and tried to kill the United Auto Workers’ leadership at Ford’s River Rouge Plant, in River Rouge, Michigan, immortalized in the historic photographs of Walter Reuther bloodied at the plant gate.

Such was the state of the American labor movement when AGMA was born. Our founders may have created the union on a golf course, but it was certainly not a safe and genteel thing to undertake. Although it’s true that no AGMA member had to die to secure

advance schedule-posting or heavy-carry fees, our members cannot forget that they are heir to the legacy of those who did make an ultimate sacrifice in order to secure the ability to peacefully negotiate the contracts and benefits our members enjoy today.

Fast forward 75 years to the 2011 negotiations with New York City Ballet. Eleven and a half grueling hours into the last day of negotiations, the Ballet’s lawyers left the room to consider what was, essentially, our final proposal. Talk among the six dancers comprising the negotiating committee and the more than 50 City Ballet dancers who had come day after day to negotiations as a demonstration of their determination to secure meaningful contract gains, turned away from the negotiating process, and, instead, began to discuss the ways in which to have the most effective job action against the Company.

Favorite among the proposed actions to get management’s attention was to strike and picket the Spring Gala, just two days away. The dancers understood that a strike would be nothing less than a declaration of economic war, and they were fully prepared to start that war as an unmistakable exhibition of their intention to have a more meaningful role in protecting and enhancing their careers, assuring a substantial measure of self-determination and



*AGMA members march in the 1960 New York City Labor Day Parade.*

insisting that City Ballet treat them both as dancers and as employees, entitled to professional respect and financial reward. Ultimately, a mutually acceptable contract was cobbled together after midnight, and the City Ballet dancers overwhelmingly ratified it the next morning.

For me, the most significant part of the negotiations was the unique willingness of an entire company of dancers to all attend the meetings to support their negotiating committee. Their inherent readiness to demonstrably resist the culture of ballet—a tradition of treating dancers as subservient to their “masters”—put these dancers squarely into the continuum of the organized labor movement.

As AGMA moves forward into the future, organized labor generally, and entertainment unions specifically, face a continuing fight to resist inroads upon collective bargaining and attempts by employers to take back protections won over decades of bargaining.

AGMA is fully prepared—and able—to successfully undertake that struggle. ♦

*New York City ballet dancers come to negotiations to show their support for their contract demands. The NYCB negotiating committee, aided by FMCS Mediator Joel Schaeffer, concluded a contract after a 14-hour day of negotiations. The following day, the contract was ratified 63-1 by the dancers.*



## Meet the AGMA Presidents

### *Celebrating 75 Years of Extraordinary Leadership*

*By Sara Stewart Schumann, 3rd Vice President and MMRC Chair*

The men and women shown below agreed to take on the role of AGMA's highest elected office—that of president. The membership elects AGMA's president, but what many members may not realize is that the office of president, under AGMA's Constitution, is an entirely voluntary position. It is an awesome responsibility without any remuneration. In meeting that responsibility, these individuals have undoubtedly made many sacrifices, both personal and professional.

We owe each president a great deal of gratitude and respect. For those who are no longer with us, we honor their commitment to AGMA as well as their memory. To those who contributed their thoughts in writing, I send a special “thank you” for sharing your unique perspectives with the membership in this commemorative issue of *AGMAzine*. It is invaluable, as AGMA celebrates 75 years, to reflect on its history and learn from the past so that we may better prepare for AGMA's future.



**Lawrence Tibbett**  
1936–1953  
(d. 1960)



**John Brownlee**  
1953–1967  
(d. 1969)



**George London**  
1967–1971  
(d. 1985)



**Cornell MacNeil**  
1971–1977  
(d. 2011)

**Cornell MacNeil:** When I was asked to run for president of AGMA, I said yes, and was pleased when I was elected. What I did not realize at the time was how difficult it would be to manage such disparate groups as are included in AGMA. When you are bargaining, something good for one group might not be so advantageous for another. However, in my time as president, as well as when I was just a member, I felt that AGMA did its utmost to balance the needs of all, and many times succeeded.

I would like to thank the people who worked with me and helped me fulfill my responsibilities. Their efforts and dedication are what made the many successes possible.

It was a privilege for me to serve the membership as president, following in the tradition of such luminaries as Lawrence Tibbett, John Brownlee, and George London. What a pleasure it was to have played a part in bringing AGMA to the position it holds today!



**Gene Boucher**  
1977–1982  
(d. 1994)

[Editor's Note: It is with regret we inform you that Mr. MacNeil passed away on July 15, 2011.]

**Don Yule:** I came to New York in 1960, already a member of Actors Equity from singing with the St. Louis Municipal Opera. I went into the old Equity office that was in the Edison Hotel in Times Square and there was a notice posted that New York City Opera was auditioning to fill a sudden vacancy for one low bass. Well, I got that part and I joined AGMA. It was a wonderful time; and last year, after fifty years of performing with NYCO, there was a party to mark my farewell.

As for my AGMA presidency, it happened quite suddenly. After several years on the Board, I was elected the first vice president of AGMA while the president was Gene Boucher. Well into this term of office, the Metropolitan Opera offered Gene a wonderful role, and he really did not want to pass up this opportunity to perform something special. Then, DeLloyd Tibbs, the National Executive Secretary, retired; Gene was asked to take over the position, and that is how it happened. I suddenly found myself the president of AGMA! Because it happened this way, I really like to think of myself more as an “interim” AGMA president, rather like the Gerald Ford presidency. When the time for the next election came, I was nominated to run for president. However, when I went to the next AGMA Board meeting and heard the results of the tallied votes, I approached the lovely Nedda Casei, and said, “I understand that congratulations are in order.” With a hug and a kiss from the newly elected AGMA president, I was on my way.



**Don Yule**  
1982–1983



**Nedda Casei**  
1983–1993

**Nedda Casei:** Having enjoyed my work as an AGMA Board member and been involved in some serious contract negotiations, I became interested in developing a better understanding between performers and management and attaining a higher level of communications nationwide. When I was asked to consider running for president, I had just completed a degree in Performing Arts Management at Fordham University Lincoln Center and thought it was the perfect opportunity to put some of this new knowledge to work. I felt dedicated to something I thought was important and to colleagues whom I loved.

At the time, the National Executive Secretary was former AGMA President Gene Boucher, who had himself been an excellent performing artist, good friend, and an articulate, long-time AGMA advocate. There was an excellent staff, and with a strong, hard-working, committed Board from every layer of our shops, AGMA presented a powerful united front.

Looking back on my ten years as president, I am proud of the initiatives to build more communication across the country and a more cohesive union to face the challenges that artists and unions were dealing with in those years and indeed, that we continue to face today. I fought for copyright laws to protect performers, and I worked on health care reform in Washington during that time, only to see some of these ideas finally signed into law this past year!

Now that AGMA is celebrating its exciting diamond 75th anniversary, I think back on the festive Fiftieth Year Celebrations and the building of the AGMA Relief Fund Million Dollar campaign. We opened doors beyond our own membership to encourage foundations and private donors that were interested in the arts and its performers to help build the Emergency Relief Fund base. We helped build ties to Fordham University for Career Transition For Dancers and encouraged young artists to prepare for future endeavors. (Self-worth needed to be instilled in artists, often used to being constantly criticized in the search for perfection. I never wanted to see talented, disciplined artists, gifted in so many ways, end up waiting on tables.) We had a competition to encourage young singers and gave prizes donated by successful artists. There is no end to the possibilities of reaching out. It is the reason for AGMA, it's the heartbeat.





**Regina Resnik**  
1993–1994

**Regina Resnik:** Right from the beginning of my career, I was involved in AGMA. I was an active union member: attending all meetings, serving on the Board of Governors, accepting the position of 4th Vice President and ultimately being elected President.

My main concern was always for the well-being of all artists who had not yet achieved the status necessary to demand wages, working conditions and respect commensurate with their talents. I was not alone, for my AGMA colleagues and fellow world-class artists endeavored to limit the exploitation of emerging solo artists, choristers and dancers. We used the influence of our soloist status to support all AGMA groups in gaining the best protections possible. “All for One and One for All” was the AGMA way of life.

In the 1940s and '50s, AGMA's identity and mission were the focus of the AGMA leadership. All of the prominent vocal and instrumental solo artists struggled to stay together in one union (AGMA), but the American Federation of Musicians ultimately won this battle and began the separation of unionized vocal and instrumental artists. Twenty-five years ago, on the New York City Opera stage, I launched my tribute to AGMA on its 50th anniversary. What I said then holds just as true today:

*We are young in years, but we have witnessed the most incredible changes in our profession, considering how little time has passed. It seems fitting this evening to turn the clock back literally for a few moments to honor some of the greatest artists in our musical history who made this Guild the honored organization it has become.*

*Only very few of you may be aware that apart from the illustrious singers you have heard on the screen and in person, our founding fathers were also conductors like Walter Damrosch, Artur Rodzinski, Serge Koussevitsky, Paul Whiteman, Donald Voorhees, composers George Gershwin and Deems Taylor, and instrumentalists Jascha Heifetz, Albert Spalding and Efrem Zimbalist, to mention but a few. [Our list of supporters] read like a Who's Who of music. They wanted an amalgamation of the classical artists, and in the '50s, we came close to uniting with the instrumentalists to join us. It was not destined to be, but they constantly lent us their support.*

Today, I again see this unity with the instrumentalists in the ongoing struggle to save the New York City Opera. I was instrumental in the inaugural season of New York City Opera in 1943, and today, my support goes out to all my colleagues who are fighting for the very survival of this once-vibrant cultural institution. As a proud veteran of AGMA, the Met and City Opera, I am honored to be among the major names, adding my signature to the open letter of protest against the dismantling of the City Opera orchestra and chorus and the recently announced plan to move from Lincoln Center.

AGMA members everywhere, always remember to thank the “unsung” heroes: your presidents, the National Executive Director, AGMA staff and legal counsel. *Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!*

**Gerald Otte:** I think of myself as “The almost accidental President of AGMA.” There were no dancer Officers on the AGMA Board of Governors and I thought that was not quite right. I decided to run for First Vice President and to my surprise, won. It was a tumultuous time at the union and we were attempting to change the way we did business and get more and better participation from all our shops. Upon the resignation of Regina Resnik, I became President and suddenly had a full-time job.

The Board of Governors became very active and made the policy changes that eventually brought about the union we now have. It was an exciting time. We had a new and growing group of people that cared for this union and gave of themselves to keep it strong and growing. I had incredible support from all of the Officers and Governors.

To be president of AGMA is an honor. To see what a wonderful union AGMA has become is a blessing. To have made the friends I have at AGMA will always be a treasure.



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**Gerald Otte**  
1994–1999



**Linda Mays:** The 1990s were dark years in AGMA's evolution. We lost representation of American Ballet Theatre and faced the possibility of losing the Metropolitan Opera chorus and even the entire Met shop. In 1996, AGMA won the legal battle to keep the Met in the AGMA fold, but the members had no confidence in their Union's ability to represent them in negotiations and, indeed, AGMA and Met management did not have a viable working relationship. Since I was the Met AGMA leader who essentially willed my colleagues at the Met to remain in AGMA, I felt an enormous responsibility to turn AGMA into the powerful, respected and professionally-run union our members deserved.



**Linda Mays**  
1999–2007

When I was elected president in May of 1999, there was no National Executive Secretary on staff, so I assumed the duties of that position too! My pledge to the Board of Governors was that I would do “double duty” during my summer vacation from the Met while leading a search for the next National Executive Secretary (the title was later changed to National Executive Director). A team consisting of Jimmy Odom, Candace Itow, Barbara Hillman, Burman Timberlake, a brilliant Executive Council, many committed AGMA leaders, professional consultants and I performed miracles that summer. Jimmy, Candace and I worked in the office for 12 hours a day and worried about AGMA when we were not in the office the other 12 hours. Our executive search committee reviewed hundreds of applications, interviewed at least three candidates a week, and ultimately hired Alan Gordon in February of 2000 as the National Executive Director. By the time I left office in 2007, there was a great staff, an efficient (and smaller) Board of Governors, a terrific Executive Council, a productive committee structure, and an effective balance of control and responsibility between elected leaders and professional staff. The Met shop had become newly unified and American Ballet Theatre was in the process of returning to AGMA representation. AGMA had won the respect of members, managements, managers, other unions and the press.

Looking back, I think of myself as the “guilt” president because of the circumstances which made me take on the “role.” When reality hit, I wondered how I could possibly balance a full-time singing career and the presidency of a national union! The answer is that when it is your turn to step up, you are able to juggle your life to achieve the unimaginable. Luckily, union leaders, members, friends, family, colleagues and staff provided an unquantifiable amount of support that allowed me to enjoy what would be eight exhilarating, challenging, rewarding and unforgettable years of service to the membership of AGMA.



**James Odom**  
2007–Present

**James Odom:** I don't remember exactly when I was first asked, “Jimmy, when are you going to be the President of AGMA?” It must have been sometime in 2001 or 2002. My response at that time, and for the next few years, was that I would never be the president of AGMA, because I had no intention of moving to New York and I felt it was simply impossible for someone outside the New York area to be an effective president. But as time went by and the Board became more efficient, I began to think that maybe it was possible. When Linda Mays decided in 2007 that she would not run for another term, I decided to see if the membership agreed that it was time for a President who didn't live in New York. I am proud and honored to be the first president of AGMA who lives outside of New York.

During the preparation of this commemorative issue of *AGMAzine*, I have become engrossed in research about the Union's past. What is available in our archives is amazing. Equally amazing is what is missing but can be inferred. I have also discovered that there is truth in the adage that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The first issues of the AGMA newsletter—at that time called *Bulletin*—in 1936 and 1937 discussed three major issues: the problem of new technology in the form of radio broadcasts and how they were being used and how Artists should be paid for them, the need to increase membership and member involvement, and how to ensure the fair representation for all members all across the country. Seventy-five years later, the technology has changed, but those issues remain: the new forms of media release and how they're being used and how Artists should be paid for them, the need to increase membership (particularly in right-to-work states) and member involvement, and ensuring we continue fair representation for all members across the country. I suppose one could draw certain discouraging conclusions from the idea that we are still looking at the same issues. I believe, however, that we are instead showing that our core values remain the same. Because those values are strong and worthy, it is a good thing that while they adapt to the changing world, they remain steadfast.

I am proud to be the President of AGMA. But more than that, I am proud to simply be a member of AGMA. ♦

## AGMA's Board of Governors: Seventy-five Years of Growing Pains

*By James Odom, President*

AGMA has grown and evolved over the last 75 years, and its basic governing structure, the Board of Governors, has grown and evolved right along with it.

In 1936, AGMA's first Board consisted of fifteen Governors and seven National Officers. The Officers were President, four Vice Presidents, Recording Secretary and Treasurer. The Board and Officers were elected at the annual membership meeting. Governors were elected to a three-year term, with one-third of the Board elected each year. Officers served a single year term. Officers and Governors had to be in New York to participate, and the Board had the authority to appoint pro tem replacements for Governors, Officers and committee members who were not in the city. The Board had monthly meetings from September through May, and could delegate its powers to an Executive Committee for an indefinite length of time. The Board had five committees: Executive, Arbitration, Membership, Entertainment, and Legislative and Law.

Although we are missing copies of the Constitution from 1937–1945, we can determine certain changes in the Board during that time from issues of the publication that would eventually be known as *AGMAzine*. In 1938, there were 27 Governors and a fifth Vice President was added. In 1939, the Officers' terms were extended to two years.

We have (at least in the National Office) no documentation from 1940–1945. This is not particularly surprising, considering that the nation was so strongly focused on the war. The constitution of 1945 shows only two significant changes from the information available about 1939: that the Board was to meet twice a month from September through May and the addition of several committees to the roster of standing committees.

The next major change in Board structure came in 1948, when a per capita method of determining the number of Governors in each working category and each geographic area was adopted. This, of course, meant that the number of Governors varied from election to election.

Around 1990, many Governors were dissatisfied with the way the Board was functioning. The Board had been meeting every Monday except the first Monday of the month from September through May, and twice a month the rest of the year. Governors still had to be present in New York in order to attend a Board meeting, and a consequence of that was members from outside the New York Area felt they were not being represented fairly. In 1992, the Board instituted the practice of teleconferencing all its meetings. This began a complete change in how the Union functioned, and a major reform movement was born. For the first time, Governors from outside New York had a regular voice at the national level. AGMA truly achieved what had been the intention from the very beginning in 1936: the fair representation and protection of Artists all across the country. It wasn't easy, and the work continues.

Success brings its own problems, however. AGMA's growing membership and the per capita method of determining Board size and configuration led to an ever growing Board that was becoming mired in procedure, discussion and debate. The Board was still meeting at least twice a month, and meetings became increasingly longer as more Governors wanted their voices heard on issues. It was clear that more structural change was necessary. The Board created a Policy Reform Committee, which in 1993 presented a proposal for restructuring the standing committees of the Board. The new committee structure was intended to make the work of the Board more efficient. By 1994, the new committees were in place. They were: Committee on Committees, Finance and Budget, Administration and Policy, Work Rules and Contracts, and Membership and Member Relations. Although some "tweaking" has occurred over the years—including some renaming and the reestablishing of a sub-committee as a standing committee in its own right—those committees remain the basic structure underlying the work of the Board today. As the efficiency and effectiveness of the committees has increased over the years, the length of Board meetings has shown a corresponding decrease in length. Board meetings that once lasted four and five hours now average about an hour, and very seldom exceed an hour and a half in length.

The establishment of a new standing committee structure left only the problem of the ever-increasing size of the Board. In 1998, the Board consisted of 177 Governors. At that time, the Administration and Policy Committee began to work on a plan to reduce the size of the Board. It was not a simple task, and there was strong resistance to most of the plans presented. However,

in late 2001, it became clear that under the per capita method of Board seat allocation, the total number of Governors would reach 238. Spurred on by this knowledge, a plan was finally devised to reduce the Board permanently to between 75 and 77 Governors (depending on the need to ensure representation for specific areas and working categories), plus the eight National Officers. A constitutional referendum of the membership was held, and the Board was reduced to its current size.

Today, our streamlined, more efficient Board with its strong committee structure is able to effectively govern the Union and ensure that AGMA members are fairly represented in the leadership of their Union.

*Elizabeth Drorbaugh and Candace Itow contributed research for this article.*

### **Committee on Committees**

*By James Odom, Chair and President*



The Committee on Committees consists of the President of AGMA and the Area Chairs of each of AGMA's geographic areas. It is the only standing committee of the Board whose structure includes committee members who are not Governors or National Officers, since Area Chairs are not always Governors or National Officers.

The Committee on Committees recommends members for each of the Board's various committees after each election and makes recommendations for staffing in the case of resignations. Careful consideration is given to ensure that each committee has representatives from as many of the geographic areas and working categories as possible.

### **Administration and Policy Committee**

*By Gregory Stapp, Chair and 2nd Vice President*



The Administration and Policy Committee (APC) is charged with examining and debating AGMA's policies and its administration thereof, as well as formulating and recommending changes or new proposals, as appropriate, for the Board's consideration. Proposals may originate from within

APC, or be referred thereto by the Board, its committees, or AGMA's National Executive Director.

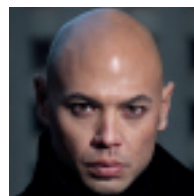
APC frequently weighs difficult policy options while sifting through lengthy and often obscurely worded documents in order to ensure that its recommendations to the Board enhance AGMA's ability to effectively and efficiently serve its membership.

In recent years, APC played an important role in streamlining AGMA's By-Laws; drafting the national referendum which substantially amended AGMA's Constitution in 2010; creating the Auxiliary Committee on Negotiations; determining AGMA's Smoke & Fog policy; designing AGMA's Guest Artist Agreement; and, crafting the Code of Professional Standards for Agents and Managers Representing AGMA Members.

Apprentice artist programs and foreign artist representation are but two of the topics under current consideration by APC, which is expected to shoulder the majority of the Board's work on these and other vital policy issues. APC may have up to fifteen members and usually meets 10 to 12 times a year at mutually convenient times

### **Finance and Budget Committee**

*By Keith Miller, Chair and Treasurer*



The Finance and Budget Committee is comprised of up to 15 members with a minimum of six members from outside New York. It is chaired by the Treasurer with a Vice Chair elected by the Committee.

The Finance and Budget Committee is charged with the responsibility of reviewing the annual audited financial statements; creating and monitoring the annual budget (in conjunction with the AGMA staff and financial consultants); and analyzing the revenue, expenditures and variances from the budget.

One of the recent goals of this Committee has been to ensure that all of AGMA's funds are deposited in federally insured accounts so that our members' money is not at risk. We are also constantly researching ways in which we can keep AGMA's money protected while still earning a profit on those funds.

### **Work Rules and Contracts Committee**

*By David Schnell, Chair*



The Work Rules and Contracts Committee (WRCC) is charged with the review of newly-negotiated contracts and is the fact-finding group that gathers the information needed by the Board so it can make a decision on a waiver to any section of an agreement.

All membership categories in AGMA (Soloists, Choristers in both opera and concert choruses, Dancers and Staging Staff) are currently represented on the WRCC, ensuring that no matter what the category of contract—Opera, Dance or Concert work—someone on the Committee works in that



category. After an AGMA staff person (usually in consultation with members of the shop) completes negotiations with management of the company, a shop vote to accept the new working conditions and wages is taken. Then, the contract must be reviewed by the Board and is not valid until the Board votes to ratify the contract. That decision is based on the details of the contract, as well as the shop vote, as presented to the Board by WRCC. Once the Board ratifies the contract, all conditions and wages are set until the ending date that was agreed to in negotiations.

However, situations arise when the management of an AGMA signatory requests permission to do something outside the parameters of the agreement with AGMA in terms of a working condition or a payment required by the contract. AGMA's Board must give its permission for any such waiver to be allowed. The Committee gathers as much pertinent information as is available and discusses the merits of management's request. This information is then presented by WRCC to the Board for its decision.

From examination and comparison of many contracts over several years, the Committee has also formulated lists of negotiating priorities for AGMA staff to use as guidelines when negotiating with Opera companies. Many of those priorities are also applicable to Ballet and Concert Chorus agreements.

Safety issues and new technological advances in the capturing of performances for distribution and broadcast are also discussed by the Committee, as are new additions to the Schedule C Classification of Roles in Opera—which can be found on the AGMA website in the Agreements area.

Because of the dedicated investigative work done by WRCC, the AGMA Board is able to ratify contracts and decide on contractual waivers in a timely manner, ensuring that AGMA members have agreements in force which allow them to work under the protections of a Union contract.

### Membership and Member Relations Committee

*By Sara Stewart Schumann, Chair and 3rd Vice President*



The Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC) is comprised of up to 22 Board members with a minimum of one Board member from each geographic area. Specifically, this committee facilitates the lines of communication between the AGMA membership and its elected leadership and professional staff. Communicating with AGMA members is this committee's primary purpose, and it accomplishes this in several ways.

First, MMRC hears reports from its committee members. MMRC members also hear reports from Area committees, company delegates, AGMA staff or other members. MMRC

reports any significant Area news to the Board, and when appropriate, will refer member issues to AGMA's professional staff by reporting to the National Executive Director (NED). The committee is especially sensitive to members' needs outside of the New York area. When members have an issue, MMRC will help make sure that information is communicated to the Board and, when appropriate, to AGMA staff or the NED.

Second, MMRC created sub-committees, sometimes called caucuses, which allow members to communicate confidentially with colleagues in their category. Each caucus has at least one MMRC or Board member serving as facilitator/liason to further assist the membership's ability to communicate with AGMA. The current sub-committees are: Concert Chorister Caucus, Dancer Caucus, Pre-AGMA Awareness Committee, Principal Singers Caucus, Safety Committee, and Staging Staff Caucus.

Third, MMRC oversees AGMA national publications, including *AGMAzine* and the various AGMA handbooks. In addition, MMRC consults with the staff on the maintenance and content of the AGMA website. (Please see the "Technology and AGMA" article on page 19.)

Since 2003, MMRC has been addressing its constitutional duty of creating "strategies for recruitment" through a sub-committee, the Pre-AGMA Awareness Committee (PAAC). PAAC presents outreach programs designed to introduce and educate pre-professional artists about the need for and benefits of AGMA membership. From PAAC's first appearance in 2004 at a *Classical Singer Magazine* conference, to giving presentations at universities and conservatories, PAAC has been actively spreading the message of the benefits of AGMA membership to our nation's next generation of classical singers, dancers and stage managers.

You can communicate directly with MMRC or any of its sub-committees or caucuses at [mmrc@musicalartists.org](mailto:mmrc@musicalartists.org).

### Personnel Committee

*By Louis Perry, Chair and Recording Secretary*



The Personnel Committee consists of five members. In addition, the president and the National Executive Director are ex officio non-voting members of the committee.

It is the responsibility of the Personnel Committee to evaluate the proposed staff salary portion of the annual budget and make a recommendation to the Board regarding the approval of that portion of the budget. With the exception of the compensation package of the National Executive Director, all staff financial packages are included in this recommendation process.

The committee also makes a recommendation to the Board regarding the approval of the National Executive Director's compensation package, the only individual financial package that is voted on by the entire Board.

From time to time, the Personnel Committee may be called upon to consider staff and staffing issues.

### I Remember

*By Candace Itow, Recording Secretary (1997–2003)  
and Membership Department Supervisor*



*Candace Itow in  
L'incoronazione di  
Poppea*

Since I served as a Governor from 1978 to 1997 (with a brief hiatus when a New York Dancer seat allocation was lost) and as the Recording Secretary from 1997 to 2003, I have witnessed a significant number of changes.

When I was first elected to the Board, meetings were held every Monday except the first Monday of the month. We met in the Executive Secretary's office in the National Office. The meetings were essentially reports from staff, and the Board would act on their recommendations. Board meetings were always better attended when there were problems or negotiations going on at one of the New York companies.

As time passed, the Board would meet only every other week in the summer months, and slowly, the number of meetings was further reduced to every other week throughout the year. Eventually Board meetings were scheduled once a month.

When AGMA moved to the offices at 55th Street and Broadway in August of 1987, for the first time there was an actual Board room for meetings. The biggest changes that took place were when the new committee structure was put into

practice, and teleconferenced Board meetings began. Teleconferencing had the most dramatic effect: finally AGMA members from other areas of the country could be heard and participate, not only in Board meetings, but actively serve on committees.

What vividly comes to mind is the first Officers Nominating Committee that was formed in 1995. The committee was made up of Jonathan Curtsinger (Southern California), Kenneth Dovel (New York), James Hampton (Washington/Baltimore), Linda Mays (New York), Lorene Richardson (Chicago/Midwest), Erma Thurston (Pittsburgh) and myself. We took our assignment very seriously and had an ambitious plan to create job descriptions for all of the Officers. In the time allotted to come up with an Officer slate, we did manage to come up with a job description for the Recording Secretary. In an attempt to implement the job description we developed, I ran and was elected Recording Secretary in 1997. Up to that time, the only function of the Recording Secretary that I was aware of was taking notes when there was an executive session of the Board. Some of the duties that were implemented during my tenure as Recording Secretary included taking attendance and votes by Area, monitoring of the Board referral/action sheets, presiding over the Agenda Committee, composing some Board correspondence, and reviewing and signing of the Board minutes. The job description developed by that first Officers Nominating Committee is still the basis of what the Recording Secretary does today.

Given my perspective of serving 25 years on the Board and now eight years on the AGMA staff, AGMA has come a long way in every respect. There have been some very difficult periods both financially and governmentally. Finding a good balance between staff and leadership has not always been easy, but it is essential to the success of any organization. Now, there is a strong professional staff in place and an elected leadership that work well together. I believe AGMA has never been a more effective union. ♦

## Who Inspired You?

When I was a kid, I knew that I was going to keep singing because I sang all the time. My mother was a very good soprano and she encouraged that in me. However, because she spent her own money travelling all over Minnesota to sing, she cautioned me to never sing a performance for less than five (!) dollars.

I did several Broadway shows, the last being **Gian Carlo Menotti's** *The Consul* [in 1950]. He was having a picnic at his country estate for the company. At the end of it, we were sitting together and he said, "You know, you really should sing opera." Thankfully, I listened to him.

**Cornell MacNeil, Soloist, AGMA Past President, 1971–1977**

# Membership Has Its Benefits

## AGMA Health Fund and AGMA Retirement Plan

*By John Coleman, AGMA Health and Retirement Fund Trustee and 1st Vice President*

At the behest of AGMA's Board of Governors, the AGMA Health Plan and the AGMA Pension Plan were created in 1968 as separate entities to be governed by a Board of Trustees made up equally of union and management representatives. Since then, the Trustees of the Funds have helped guide the Fund Office to create health plans and retirement funds to meet the needs of AGMA members. The AGMA Pension Plan was replaced by the AGMA Retirement Plan in 1995, and AGMA Health Plan B was created in 1996. AGMA is committed to making these benefits available to every member and encourages every shop to negotiate the plans into their collective bargaining agreement.

Below is a description of the plans currently available and information for using the plans if you already have money with the plans.

**\* AGMA Health Fund Plan A** is a traditional health insurance plan with coverage offered through Aetna for medical/hospital benefits and EnvisionRX for pharmacy benefits. While it is generally available only to full-time AGMA members through employer contributions, an AGMA member may also qualify to pay directly for Plan A if

he or she has two years of Plan B contributions totaling at least \$1,200 (this check is performed each June 30 and can give two years of eligibility for self-payment for Plan A), but you must write to the Fund Office by July 31 to enroll.

**\* AGMA Health Fund Plan B** is a medical reimbursement account that is operated by Administrative Services Only, Inc. ([www.asonet.com](http://www.asonet.com)). Use their website to check available balances, download claim forms and enrollment forms, and find further information about the Fund. Upon proper submission of claim forms, Plan B reimburses you for current health expenses, including medical and dental insurance premiums as well as medical expenses incurred by you and your eligible dependents. Some commonly reimbursed expenses include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines as prescribed by a physician, dental care, vision care, chiropractor visits, psychiatric care, weight-loss programs and deductibles and co-payments under another health plan. Qualified expenses for the domestic partner of a member are also eligible for reimbursement, but tax regulations require that those payments be taxed; also, any pre-tax payroll deductions must be taxed as well. Statements are mailed quarterly; if you have not received one recently, call **ASO at 1-866-263-1185** to make sure your updated address is on file. If the account balance is not used within a

three-year period, a part of the balance may begin to be forfeited, so please submit claims regularly to take advantage of this benefit.

**\* AGMA Retirement Plan** is a direct contribution retirement account that is funded by employer contributions and invested at the direction of the Trustees. Statements are mailed annually. You may keep your funds with the Plan until retirement or can request a transfer to a qualified 401(k) or direct payout if you: (a) have stopped working under an AGMA contract at least six months prior, (b) are 55 or older and retired, or (c) are on disability.

**\* AGMA Pension Plan** is no longer an active plan, but there are some AGMA members who have not been located or sent a final payment. If your name is on the list at <http://www.agmafunds.org>, please call the Fund Office.

Please check out their new website [www.agmafunds.org](http://www.agmafunds.org), or call (212) 765-3664.

## AGMA Relief Fund

*By Linda Mays, Director of Development for the Relief Fund, Former AGMA President*

*The American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) Relief Fund is a charitable organization, wholly dependent upon contributions, whose mission is to provide funds and member services for classical performing artists of opera, concert and dance, and the stage managers, directors, and choreographers of opera and dance, when accidents, illness or other traumatic events threaten their careers, health or future, and to do so with compassion and the preservation of dignity.*

One of the duties of all AGMA presidents is to serve as the Chair of the Trustees for the AGMA Relief Fund. It is a very rewarding, though often heart-breaking, responsibility. The Relief Fund provides a unique umbrella for eligible

## Who Inspired You?

The singer who inspired me the most to do what I do was **Franco Corelli**. I would go to the Met and get standing room tickets; one year I went 37 times—I counted. To me, Corelli was the epitome of what I wanted to be. He was an incredibly handsome, vibrant singer with a glorious big ringing tenor voice. His high notes were thrilling and awe-inspiring. Both men and women idolized him, including myself. To me, he was Opera.

**Sigmund Seigel, San Francisco Opera Chorister (31 seasons)**



members, who through extenuating circumstances, need emergency assistance. Medical, financial and emotional emergencies can hit any one of us and affect all of us in our special artistic community. For example, one colleague could no longer pay her rent, yet had an upcoming long-term AGMA contract. The Relief Fund saw how emergency assistance could provide a lifeline and save a career, and it did. Another member needed help because she could not sing during chemotherapy treatments. Time after time, the Relief Fund has provided the means to weather the storm.

Abba Bogin has been a trustee since the Fund's inception on December 3, 1945. He vividly recalls that the Relief Fund was formed and supported by the artistic luminaries of the 1930s, '40s and '50s, who used their professional clout to help fellow members. From the time of its formation to the present, AGMA leaders and professional giants such as Nedda Casei, Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Jerry Hadley, Marilyn Horne, Anna Moffo, Patricia Racette, Regina Resnik, Beverly Sills and many others have been key advocates, donors and/or fundraisers.

Many AGMA performing groups have raised money by using their artistic skills, raffle-producing "chops," baking prowess and limitless creativity. Many members and other fans make annual contributions, bequests, tributes, memorial donations, and give Relief Fund calendars and other personalized treasures as gifts. Grateful members who have received assistance "pay it forward" by becoming donors to the Fund, holding fundraisers, encouraging other donors, and by letting members know that help is available.

In all likelihood, everyone reading this article knows someone who either has been or will be assisted by the Relief Fund. Please continue the open-hearted legacy of our predecessors and contemporaries by keeping the AGMA Relief Fund umbrella open for the future.

*No gift is too small or too large!*

## Who Inspired You?

Ironically, even though I have been a professional AGMA singer my entire adult life, my inspiration to become a performing artist came from seeing the ballet *Coppélia* danced magically by **Maria Tallchief** and André Eglevsky. When I was about eight years old, my family took me to the only large town for miles around to see a touring company performance of *Coppélia* featuring world class dancers. I didn't sleep for many nights. Instead, lying awake, I imagined myself dancing on the stage. My own ballet studies and career lasted until my teens and then my passion turned to singing and ultimately opera. One huge highlight of my AGMA Presidential career was attending, at the invitation of President Clinton, the presentation of the National Medal of Arts award to Maria Tallchief by the National Endowment of the Arts on September 29, 1999.

**Linda Mays, Metropolitan Opera Chorister,  
AGMA Past President, 1999–2007**

*For more information about or to make donations, contact Susan Davison at the AGMA National Office: (800) 543-2462 or [susan@musicalartists.org](mailto:susan@musicalartists.org).*

## Financial Resources and Support Available to AGMA Members at The Actors Fund

*By Jan-Kees van der Gaag, Los Angeles Opera Chorister, and Social Work Supervisor, Western Region at The Actors Fund*

While the economy is struggling to stabilize, many performers, including AGMA members, are trying to figure out how to make ends meet consistently. Since 1882, The Actors Fund has made certain that everyone in entertainment has a place to turn that recognizes and supports their needs. The Actors Fund is unique in that it has created a safe and confidential environment in which it operates programs designed to care holistically for the individual singer or dancer (or anyone who works professionally in our community).

As part of this holistic plan, The Fund awards grants designed to help a person stabilize financially for a period of time in emergency situations. These grants,

administered by The Actors Fund, come from the AGMA Relief Fund and are available to AGMA members in good standing or on honorable withdrawal. You will not be asked to pay this money back! AGMA members who meet certain financial criteria can also be eligible for funds granted through The Actors Fund as well as other Entertainment Assistance Programs we can link you to. These funds can be used to help pay towards your rent or mortgage, utility bills, health insurance, food, and other basic needs.

To support all aspects of one's holistic plan, The Fund has a broad spectrum of programs available, including: The Entertainment Assistance Program, a counseling and informational service; Mental Health Program, covering crisis intervention and evaluation along with referral services; Chemical Dependency Services, covering anything from evaluation to treatment; Senior and Disabled Care, helping to maintain independence through a connection to essential resources; HIV/AIDS Initiative, supportive individual and group counseling with a linkage to health care and other resources; The Dancers' Resource, support services for injured dancers; Phyllis Newman Woman's Health Initiative, a patient navigation program

for women who have received a serious health diagnosis; and the Conrad Cantzen Shoe Fund, a service providing one free pair of shoes each year to qualifying performers for audition purposes.

There are also some exciting health services provided such as: the Artists Health Insurance Research Center (AHIRC), providing information on accessing cost-effective health insurance and quality health care; Al Hirschfeld Free Health Clinic, the Fund's free health clinic in New York City serving the under- or un-insured; and the Performing Artists' Clinic at Venice Family Clinic in Los Angeles, a clinic for individuals who are low income or publicly insured.

Finally, the Fund helps in the areas of employment and training, and housing. Some of the programs are: the Actors Fund Work Program, a sideline and parallel career training program; The Lillian Booth Actors Home in Englewood, New Jersey, a state-of-the-art assisted living and skilled nursing home for performing arts professionals; The Palm View, a 40-unit low-cost garden apartment complex in West Hollywood for those living with HIV/AIDS; The Dorothy Ross Friedman Residence (formerly The Aurora), 178

units in midtown Manhattan for low-income working professionals, people living with HIV/AIDS, and seniors; and The Schermerhorn House, a 216-unit "green" facility in downtown Brooklyn with affordable, supportive housing for single adults and a multipurpose community room/performance space for resident activities. The Actors Fund is there to help all AGMA members in times of need, crisis or transition.

The Actors Fund operates nationwide, and if you're not familiar with it or its two dozen programs, you should know what's out there for you. I'm very proud to be part of an organization that helps more than 12,000 people every year.

[www.actorsfund.org](http://www.actorsfund.org)

### AGMA and Career Transition For Dancers, Stepping Together

*By AJahi Nicole Adams,  
Director of Development,  
Career Transition For Dancers*

The American Guild of Musical Artists and Career Transition For Dancers have maintained a relationship that has spanned nearly three decades. This partnership began when members of AGMA and various other unions sought to address the trauma facing professional dancers both during and at the culmination of their careers. From an investigatory conference organized at Lincoln Center in 1982 and chaired by Agnes de Mille, Career Transition For Dancers was born. With the support of AGMA and in partnership with other performing arts unions and major foundations (including the National Endowment for the Arts and the AFL-CIO Labor Institute for Human Enrichment), Career Transition For Dancers, Inc. was formally founded in 1985, and the funding provided by AGMA and its fellow unions continues today. Career Transition For Dancers received their not-for-profit 501(c)(3) status in 1989 with the goal of providing assistance for dancers transitioning into new professions that would make use of their

individual backgrounds, talents and skills. Allied with dance companies, musical theatre productions, television studios, and film establishments, Career Transition For Dancers became and remains the only arts-service organization in the United States dedicated solely to the planning and post-performance needs of all dancers nationwide—entirely free of charge. This organization has created a tremendous support system to the dance community, but the true soul of its value is as varied as the chosen career paths of each individual dancer across the United States.

Executive Director Alexander J. Dubé best rearticulates the organization's philosophy and passion as helping dancers transition with confidence. "Every member of Career Transition For Dancers realizes that the demands of rehearsing, performing and perfecting one's technique and artistry can create an insular world in which time and focus are almost entirely given over to dance. As a result, most often dancers are unprepared for the daunting challenges involved in preparing for and eventually making a career change. The endless regimen of staying in shape, auditioning, and touring, compounded with worry about advancing age, competition, and financial security coalesces toward a breaking point which illuminates the need for a new path."

AGMA members have expressed elation and relief for services such as individual career counseling, group counseling, exploration of options through Career Conversations programming or receiving a scholarship or grant provided by Career Transition For Dancers. Since the beginning, Career Transition For Dancers has provided 1,205 AGMA members with over \$1.3 million in scholarships and grants, over 4,300 one-on-one counseling hours and countless hours of additional programming and services. Former AGMA member, Career Transition For Dancers dancer-client and current American Ballet Theatre Executive



© Richard Termine

*AGMA President Jimmy Odom accepts the Career Transition For Dancers Award on behalf of AGMA at the 25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee on November 8, 2010.*

Director Rachel S. Moore shared, “Don’t be afraid of exploring the world in any way; don’t be close-minded. You have license to travel, read books, or go to a museum. It will influence you throughout your life and in all the decisions you make.” Career Transition For Dancers can be a guide on that voyage.

[www.careertransition.org](http://www.careertransition.org)

### Union Plus: Savings and Benefits for You and Your Family

*By Seth Hoff, AGMA Member*

Twenty-five years ago, the AFL-CIO established Union Privilege to administer Union Plus in order to provide union members with consumer benefits to help improve the lifestyles of union members and their families. AGMA is one of the

performing arts unions affiliated with AFL-CIO, and members and retirees can take advantage of the purchasing power of 13 million union workers through Union Plus.

Union Plus makes being socially responsible easy and rewarding. From sweatshop-free discounted clothing to U.S.-based customer service call centers for all major programs including the Union Plus Credit Card, Union Plus helps AGMA members locate and utilize organizations that reflect their shared values. Members can also save money and the environment with “go green” and “save green” tips and rebates. Fully invested in labor’s future, Union Plus can help make getting an education more affordable by offering scholarships, financing and discounts. Union members can even earn a \$500

College Savings Grant when they open a 529 college savings plan for any beneficiary 12 years old or younger.

For AGMA members who may be facing financial difficulties in the face of a lay-off, strike, disability or natural disaster, Union Plus offers assistance such as counseling, grants and legal services.

Whether you need mortgage assistance, credit counseling, or discounted dental care, health club memberships and movie tickets, a free monthly e-newsletter offers reminders of current discounts and benefits. Providing AGMA members with valuable services and savings while utilizing labor’s collective strength is what Union Plus is all about.

[www.UnionPlus.org](http://www.UnionPlus.org) ♦

## Who Inspired You?

For four decades, **Dame Joan Sutherland** demonstrated the “Art of Singing” to the world in concert, on stage and in recordings. In person, she showed me what a truly gracious lady she was. I was a college student in Texas when my voice teacher sent me to the library to listen to *Lucia di Lammermoor*. My teacher wanted me to familiarize myself with the tenor’s music. It was Ms. Sutherland’s first recording of *Lucia*, and her mad scene knocked me out. It was the most extraordinary, thrilling and beautiful singing I had ever heard. I listened to it over and over. What tenor? Not long afterwards, I crashed a rehearsal for a performance Ms. Sutherland did with the San Antonio Symphony on October 15, 1966. While Richard Bonynghe rehearsed the orchestra in the empty theater, I shook my way over to the great lady. I was so *verklemt* that I only managed to blurt out, “Miss Sutherland, I love you!” She understood what she was dealing with; she put down her knitting, took my hand, and invited me sit down for a chat. She wanted to know all about me, asking what I was singing and what I hoped for. I told her my big dream was to someday sing in an opera with her. She laughed and said, “Well, you’d better hurry, dearie!” Then, she kissed my cheek and took to the stage to rehearse. The concert, by the way, was spectacular. Meeting Ms. Sutherland remains one of my fondest memories. She inspired me to spend my life as a professional singer. To me, she is an angel, her singing still the most glorious of all—and still my inspiration for what singing can be.

**Louis Perry, New York City Opera Chorister, AGMA Recording Secretary**



## AGMA Today

### Union Training Within AGMA

*By Eleni Kallas, National Director of Organizing and Training and Mid-Atlantic Area Representative*



*Left to right, kneeling: Haley Henderson Smith, Jacqueline Straughan, Whitney Huell, Elizabeth Murphy and Jenna Rae Herrera; standing: Easton Smith, Eleni Kallas (National Director of Organizing and Training), Owen Gaj (delegate), Jennifer Robinson, Christopher Anderson, Elizabeth McGrath, Kathryn Meeusen and Christopher Sellers; behind the camera: Alison DeBona (delegate)*

Delegate training, educating our members about the benefits and responsibilities of membership, as well as new and potential member awareness training, are among the activities which help to build a strong union.

In 1993, the Washington/Baltimore Area Committee developed the first AGMA Delegate Training Reference Book and program to educate not only the delegates, but entire Areas of AGMA's respective shops, as to the duties and responsibilities of delegates, along with a better knowledge of the membership's role and responsibilities. This training and education continues to this day and has been developed further to incorporate any Area within AGMA's jurisdiction. A number of Areas and shops across the country have taken advantage of the program: Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, Southern California, and most recently, Utah's Ballet West (see photo).

staff regularly visit universities, dance schools and performing studio companies within our AGMA signatories to educate prospective professional singers, dancers and production personnel about what is involved in Union membership, its benefits and responsibilities, and how to evaluate contract offers from professional companies in the U.S. Our programs are so beneficial that AGMA presentations have become a regular part of their curriculum. ♦

Another aspect of building a strong union comes before an Artist embarks on his/her professional career. Some AGMA members and

### “...had it not been for AGMA”

*By J Austin Bitner, 5th Vice President and Soloist*

In March 2009, the Baltimore Opera Company filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Immediately, National Director of Organizing and Training and Washington/Baltimore Area Representative Eleni Kallas and AGMA-appointed lawyers set to work protecting our members' interests. From ensuring that proprietary and sensitive member information was not sold at auction to preparing an administrative claim, they acted swiftly in an effort to obtain as many funds as possible to honor those members' pay-or-play contracts.

Roughly two years and multiple court appearances later, AGMA's perseverance was rewarded; AGMA obtained funds from the bankruptcy while countless other claims went unpaid. The funds awarded by the courts were enough to pay the contracted AGMA artists who had lost work from seven cancelled productions about 20 cents on the dollar.

Equally extraordinary efforts commenced to contact those artists, nationally and internationally, so they could receive their portion of the settlement. Washington/Baltimore Area Chair Tricia Lepofsky said, “They are going to love having that money.” Chorister Jennifer Blades couldn't have been more spot on as she responded to the news: “Thank you for all your work on this. There would not be a penny to distribute, had it not been for AGMA.”

Amongst the many “thank yous,” “great jobs” and pats on the back, soloist Madeline Gray stated it best: “I hope that it gets sung from the rafters as [to] the STRENGTH that AGMA can offer its members when the chips are really down.” In the current climate of uncertainty that surrounds many AGMA companies, our members can be assured that their union will continue to make every effort to protect their interests. ♦

## Technology and AGMA

*By Maren Montalbano, 4th Vice President and Chorister*

When I joined AGMA, the first place I went for information about the Union was [www.musicalartists.org](http://www.musicalartists.org). It was 2002, and my initial impression of the website was not good. The design was clearly a five-year-old Microsoft template, peppered with some useful static content and a few random links to other pages (for those of you who aren't geeks like me, that translates to "looked outdated and hard to navigate"). I immediately saw that there was no place to pay your dues, which was a feature other unions had introduced at least a year earlier. Even in my first year as a member, I wondered if there was a way for me to get involved with the redesign of AGMA's website.

When I was elected to the Board of Governors in 2006, one of the roles I took on was as "Website Liaison" for the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC). This was a brand new position, and nobody (including me!) really knew what it entailed. It took a few years to find my place, but I never forgot my initial goal: to improve AGMA's website and to make it possible for members to pay their dues online.

It is now 2011. The website has been redesigned, and the "Members Only" section of the website is now live (<http://members.musicalartists.org>). Members can finally pay their dues online, and we continue to make improvements to the website on a regular basis. We don't have flashy graphics or an iPhone app, but while we are slowly moving in that direction, you can follow us on Facebook (search for the group "American Guild of Musical Artists") and/or Twitter (@AGMusicalArtist).

As we look to the future, we see clearly that technology is here to stay, and it is something that we need to embrace as a Union. Technology has already served to create a hub for information, so all your questions about the Union can get answered quickly and comprehensively. Who knows what else it can help us accomplish in the future?

Do you have questions, comments, or suggestions about the website? Send them to [MMRC@musicalartists.org](mailto:MMRC@musicalartists.org). We want to hear from you. ♦

## Protecting Members' Livelihood: AGMA Engineers a Settlement That Continues to Pay Some Members More Than a Decade Later

*By Michael Anderson, AGMA Dancer*

The summer of 1995 found the Joffrey Ballet facing enormous decisions. In order to survive, the company needed to alleviate its debt and find a more economical business model. Survival meant leaving its longtime New York City home and relocating to Chicago, with a plan to downsize the company from 45 AGMA dancers to only 25. Many dancers were skeptical about the move because the company had been having trouble over the past 10 years meeting contractual minimum weeks of employment. The dancers had even worked two weeks in 1994 in preparation for the State Theater season without being paid. AGMA artists did not want to move to Chicago without some kind of guarantee that they and other artists who had already left the company were going to be paid what was owed to them. These artists, combined, were owed nearly \$1 million by the company, and it was time for AGMA to come to the rescue.

In an effort to work with Joffrey management, AGMA sent in Chicago negotiator Barbara Hillman to represent the AGMA artists in settlement discussions with the Company. After several months of negotiations with a committee of artists led by Ms. Hillman, a deal was struck that would pay artists more than \$252,000 over the next several years, which included 100% payment for actual services rendered by AGMA artists that had not been paid, and a percentage for contractual shortfalls in guaranteed work weeks and exit pay. The Company agreed to pay off this settlement from the sale of company merchandise at its boutique store. In this way, no funds would be taken out of the Company's much-needed operating budget, and instead, all of the settlement dollars would come from merchandise sales such as signed pointe shoes, posters and t-shirts. Eighty-eight AGMA artists benefitted from the final settlement. Fifteen years later, the Joffrey Ballet has successfully paid off 68 of those artists. Today, 20 dancers continue to receive payments from these funds. "When I speak to these artists, they have all expressed great appreciation for the work AGMA did to get them money that they thought had been lost forever," says Michael Anderson, who served on the negotiation committee and worked with artists and the Joffrey to make these payments to AGMA members over the years.

Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA, and thanks for being there when your members need you! ♦

## “Don’t Call it a Comeback”

LL Cool J

By Alan Gordon, National Executive Director and James Fayette, New York Area Dance Executive

In our 75th anniversary year it is important to reflect on one of the most disappointing events in our union’s history and how we learned from that experience to evolve into a stronger, better union today. On December 21, 1994, Jennifer Dunning reported in *The New York Times*,

*The American Guild of Musical Artists first took dancers under its wing in 1939. . . . But the guild lost a major constituent when the 75 dancers and stage managers of American Ballet Theater [sic] broke away in June and then voted this month to ratify a contract negotiated by a new union, the Independent Artists of America, which represents only Ballet Theater [sic].*

The mid-1990s was a difficult time for both American Ballet Theatre (ABT) and AGMA. The ballet company was experiencing a multi-million dollar deficit and cutting back on work for the dancers. AGMA was experiencing internal challenges of its own and struggled to represent some of its dancer members, as was noted in Dunning’s article.

*Ultimately, however, the leaders of the new union said the break had occurred because of a longtime dissatisfaction with the guild, going back to the mid-1970’s. “Our dancers now know they’re in a union,” said Lori Rosecrans, a principal stage manager who is the vice president of Independent Artists.*

The departure of ABT dancers at that time shook AGMA to its core and caused the union to reevaluate its internal leadership and its effectiveness in dancer representation.

Alan Gordon was recruited in 1999 as AGMA’s new Executive Director and committed the union to reinvigorating AGMA’s representation of dancers; he promised dancers that AGMA would make their contracts—and their working lives—better. Among his first acts was to add three former dancers to AGMA’s staff, dramatically increasing the power and resources to support dancer members.

The improvement in AGMA’s representation of dancers initially led the dancers from Ballet West, Ballet San Jose, The Washington Ballet, Colorado Ballet and Kansas City Ballet to seek AGMA representation, but it wasn’t until the summer of 2007 that the dancers from ABT became aware of problems with the attorney representing their independent union.

The ABT dancers discovered from a review of Department of Labor documents that significant and unauthorized payments were being made by the attorney representing their union for his own personal expenses from IAA’s treasury, and that he had forged dancer’s signatures on those documents to cover up the thefts.

### Who Inspired You?

At the age of eight, I started taking ballet, tap, and jazz classes at a small studio. I can recall how much fun I had and that’s what made me truly love it so much. As I danced more and more, I knew I wanted to be a dancer someday. I

loved watching Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire in the big movie musicals like *Singin’ In The Rain* and *On The Town*, and every time I saw a Broadway musical it made me so excited. I did all forms of dance and musical theater right up until I moved to Boston in 2004 and I’ve been with the Boston Ballet family ever since. To this day, I still watch those old movies and see Broadway shows because it makes me remember the fun I had as a kid and, even though it’s my job now, I still have a blast doing it.

**Brad Schlagheck, Boston Ballet Dancer**

Because of their experiences with that lawyer, there was some hesitance about returning to AGMA. Consequently, AGMA proposed to negotiate the ABT contract on behalf of the dancers and pursue the lost monies that were taken from their treasury without requiring the Artists to join AGMA. If they were satisfied with the outcome, they were welcome to rejoin the Union.

In October of 2007, AGMA successfully negotiated a successor agreement containing significant gains in all areas of the agreement. Charges were pursued against the former IAA attorney first by the Department of Labor and then by the Department of Justice, and he was later indicted for embezzlement and forgery and arrested. After several meetings with AGMA staff and some AGMA-represented dancers from other companies, the ABT dancers and stage managers, with restored confidence, voted unanimously to return to AGMA.



On July 7, 2011, IAA's former attorney pled guilty to charges of forging a Department of Labor report and will be sentenced in October. The Department of Justice has advised us that it will seek a "guidelines sentence," which would include a 13-year ban on working for any union, and imprisonment for up to one year. AGMA has, thus far, recovered almost \$100,000 of the stolen money and is aggressively pursuing the rest.

As part of AGMA's institutional philosophy, we believe that when one group of dancers suffers, all dancers suffer, so we encourage dancers everywhere to empower themselves by seeking out a strong advocate to be their voice. ABT artists leaving AGMA was a catalyst for this union to change the manner in which it represents dancers, and AGMA is proud to have ABT dancers and stage managers as members again and to be recognized as the true home of the American dancer. ♦

## Unionism in Right-To-Work States

Under the federal law known as Taft-Hartley, unions are permitted to negotiate collective bargaining agreements that contain "union shop" provisions. Those provisions make union membership mandatory after 30 days of employment. Under union shop provisions, which are contained in most AGMA contracts, all of the employees in AGMA-represented work categories must become and remain members of AGMA as a condition of continued employment.

However, another provision of the Taft-Hartley law allows individual states to pass "Right-to-Work" laws that prohibit mandatory union membership as a condition of continued employment. Thus, in the 22 states that have adopted right-to-work laws, artists employed under AGMA contracts are not required to be, become or remain AGMA members to keep their jobs. They are, nonetheless, covered by the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement and AGMA has a legal obligation to represent them and enforce their rights under the contract, even though they do not pay dues or initiation fees to AGMA.

Right-to-work laws, which the AFL-CIO calls "right-to-work-for-less" laws, make contract negotiations very difficult in those states for two reasons. First, employers know that the union does not have unanimous support from the employees, which inherently weakens the union's bargaining position and essentially eliminates a union's ability to strike if there's an impasse in bargaining. Second, these laws create what's called a "free rider" problem, which means that the non-members get all of the contract's terms, conditions and protections without paying their fair share of the costs. While members pay their dues, free riders do not. In addition to allowing non-members to benefit from the work the union does, having free riders in a shop creates inherent internal conflict within the shop.

National Executive Director Alan Gordon notes, "AGMA has had noteworthy negotiating successes even in right-to-work states. But what we're able to do for employees would be significantly strengthened if right-to-work laws were abolished."

The states with right-to-work laws in which AGMA has contracts are Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah. ♦

## Bargaining in a Right-To-Work State: How to Make it Work

*By John Cleveland, Arizona Opera Steward*

On December 11, 2010, the AGMA shop at Arizona Opera ratified a new Collective Bargaining Agreement between AGMA and Arizona Opera for 2010–13. The shop's negotiating committee and Western Counsel John Russum worked 11 months through the negotiation preparations and sessions with Arizona Opera's management. AGMA's Board of Governors ratified the agreement in April 2011. These contract negotiations were the most challenging in the 17-year history of AGMA and Arizona Opera. The new agreement represents all Choristers and Solo Artists in Supporting and Solo Bit roles. Arizona is a right-to-work-state, so the Agreement represents both AGMA and non-AGMA members.

Arizona Opera is a two-city company that rehearses and performs in both Phoenix and Tucson. The negotiations took place within the context of an opera company making aggressive efforts to stay operational and restore its fiscal health, given their history of significant long-term deficits and annual operating losses.

Arizona Opera started the negotiations by proposing a 10% pay cut in the first year for the chorus, pay freezes for the second and third years, and elimination of all bus, hotel, *per diem*, and the four-hour round-trip pay for choristers traveling between Phoenix

## Who Inspired You?

My inspiration was a performance of San Francisco Opera's *Das Rheingold* in 1967. I had not been exposed to opera before that time, save vague memories of listening to Hansel and Gretel at a family friend's home. I'd sought to emulate Grace Slick and Janis Joplin prior to experiencing the Rhinemaidens!

The impact of hearing live performers singing Wagner in the beautiful setting of San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House reminded me of visiting a cathedral. A secret society focused on a storyline I'd never before known; performers whose vocal technique soared over the orchestra without "enhancement"; and most memorable was the set: expertly designed and crafted scrims and lighting made it easy to suspend disbelief and travel the depths of the Rhine. It was mind-blowing.

The performance featured Mignon Dunn, Irene Dalis and a cast of singers and pit musicians whom I never forgot. Upon joining the San Francisco Opera Chorus and AGMA in 1970, it was (and still is) a thrill to be performing on the same floorboards walked by so many great artists.

Card-carrying members of AGMA are connected to hundreds of dedicated singers. Our Union has achieved great benefits for its members through collective bargaining and guardianship of our talent bank. Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA, and THANK YOU.

***Claudia Siefer, San Francisco Opera Chorister***

and Tucson for rehearsals and performances. Additionally, they proposed that all music rehearsals be held in Phoenix, creating a difficult situation for choristers living in Tucson. The new General Director also indicated his intention to reduce by half the hiring of choristers residing in Tucson.

In the end, AGMA was able to successfully negotiate an agreement that had no wage cuts, preserved all bus transportation and hotel accommodations with no cost share borne by any chorister, all music rehearsals held in the city of domicile, and a commitment by Arizona Opera that all incumbent choristers who reside in Tucson would be rehired for the 2010–11 season. AGMA also implemented proposals for the expansion of the core chorus by making eligibility requirements for entry into core status more flexible.

During the contract ratification meeting, the membership noted three strategic advantages from this negotiation. First, the chorus has been preserved as a two-city artistic team that will be in a stronger position in 2013 to increase wages and restore lost travel benefits. Second, choristers will have opportunities over the next three seasons to receive contracts and work while the company hopefully climbs out of their severe economic situation. Third, by expanding the core chorus, talented non-core choristers will have new opportunities for stable employment that come with core status, and the quality of the chorus will be preserved and improve over time.

Adding to the challenges of the negotiations, Arizona Opera decided to present a very big 2010–11 season with large choruses in four of the five major productions. The size of the chorus almost doubled from 37 choristers to 72. Thirty-two singers (44 percent of the chorus) for that season were first-time choristers with Arizona Opera, so AGMA members in Arizona launched a membership drive and welcomed 11 choristers as new AGMA members. Additionally, four veteran Tucson choristers became new AGMA members because they saw first-hand how AGMA protected their employment and achieved a good contract for its members.

Despite having a new General Director, protracted and difficult collective bargaining negotiations, and a record number of first-year choristers, 15 new AGMA members were added to the chorus and the percentage of AGMA chorus members today is a healthy 60 percent. In this 75th Anniversary year for the American Guild of Musical Artists, the AGMA experience in Arizona is a celebration of the strength, power and relevance of AGMA to working artists everywhere. ♦

## AGMA Companies in Right-To-Work States

Arizona:	Arizona Opera	Oklahoma:	Tulsa Ballet
Florida:	Florida Grand Opera	Texas:	Dallas Opera, Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera
Georgia:	Atlanta Ballet	Utah:	Ballet West
Louisiana:	New Orleans Opera		

## Who Inspired You?

The two people who inspired me to dance are **Michael Jackson** and **Patrick Swayze**. They made dancing for guys cool. I am also a tap dancer and picked up my tap style from both **Gregory Hines** and **Fred Astaire**.

*James Kopecky, Ballet San Jose Dancer*

There are so many people I could cite as my professional inspirations—voice teachers, coaches, conductors, directors, admired colleagues, and my long-time manager, Martha Munro—however, the briefest and most dramatic single influence came in a 20-minute master class with **George London** at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He saw me emotionally struggling with the demands of high Cs in *Faust* and asked if I knew Pedrillo's aria from *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. I did. I sang it well and he said I had the opportunity to have a long career in bigger opera houses if I chose to specialize in singing supporting roles. He had instantly identified my comfort zone and hit the nail on the head. I followed his advice to the letter, had no ego issues, and 35+ years later, that is the history of my career.

*Jonathan Green, Soloist and AGMA Board Member*

When I was a young dancer, my Cuban parents took me to the Tampa Theatre to see a film about the legendary Cuban ballerina, **Alicia Alonso**. Nearly blind, she managed to perform with strength, balance and (being Cuban) great bravado. Neither *pirouettes* nor *fouettés* seemed to really challenge her, and she performed with great ease. My parents made sure that I understood that she was in Cuba and not here in the U.S. To all Cubans she was and still is a cultural institution because she was a great artist and accomplished much. To me, she was always an inspiration because she demonstrated that the art of accommodation—whether it be physical, personal, or even political—was indeed necessary for artistic survival and longevity. Good dancers are made, not born, and great dancers must accommodate.

*Blanche Hampton, San Francisco Opera Dancer*




*AGMA members participate in an undated New York City Labor Day parade.*



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# AGMA

*We are the labor organization that represents the men and women who create America's operatic, choral and dance heritage.*