

AGMAZINE

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AGMA Accomplishing The Amazing



Amazing vs. Unexpected

By Alan S. Gordon, National Executive Director



As with most lawyers, it's important to me to find exactly the right word when I want to describe something. While trying to find the right word to portray the recent contract negotiations at the Met, I first thought of "amazing." That word, however, is defined as "causing great surprise" and, frankly, it was not a great surprise to me that our team of negotiators would beat back the attempt by the Met to decimate our contract. We had exactly the right mix of strategy, tactics and negotiators; our assumption (lockout or no lockout) was that we would eventually prevail. So it wasn't an "amazing" negotiation because defeating the Met's proposals wasn't really a "great surprise."

What, however, was "unexpected" ("not regarded as likely to happen") were two of the unique consequences of the negotiation: independent, meaningful, and enforceable oversight of the Met's spending, and the spirit of unity that emerged between AGMA, AFM's Local 802 and IATSE's Local 1.

The catchphrase that became viral during the summer, "Save the Met," was not simply a slogan to the three negotiating committees. Instead, it was the goal that permeated the negotiations. It would not be enough, the negotiators believed, simply to defeat the Met's destructive contract proposals; rather, to actually "save the Met" from a legacy of waste, excess and extravagance, it would be necessary to achieve enforceable contract provisions to control spending, both administrative and artistic.

Towards that end, we came up with the plan to treat the Met's requests for concessions as a request for the members of the three unions to "invest" in the Met's future. In turn, we wanted to be treated as any major

investor would be treated, including: access to all relevant financial information; controls over labor costs, both union and nonunion; controls over future spending; a mechanism to enforce those controls; a continuing review of the fiscal operations; and meaningful access to the Board of Directors.

To achieve these goals, as would any investor, we hired an investment banker to serve as our independent financial analyst to analyze the Met's finances, report back his "investment" conclusions to the negotiating committees, make recommendations as to what was actually needed to be done on both sides to actually "save the Met," and to continue over the term of the contract to monitor the Met's spending. The banker we hired was Eugene Keilin, who was heavily involved in saving New York City's finances in the past. He has a long and distinguished reputation as an independent financial analyst and who, incidentally, is a lifelong opera patron.

Contractually, we secured Keilin's continuing role as well as his access to both the Met's finances and to the leaders of its Board of Directors. We also secured contractual commitments that the Met will reduce its spending by \$90 million

dollars over the term of the contract—commitments tracked and analyzed for compliance by Keilin and enforceable through arbitration.

The level of control over the Met's spending, the magnitude of the contractually required savings, the ability to challenge the number and kind of productions, is unique in labor contracts and was, in fact, an "unexpected" result of the negotiations.

The other unexpected consequence of the negotiations was an end to the decades-old rivalry between the orchestra and chorus, and the forging of a new alliance with the usually independent stagehands, all toward the mutual goal of "saving the Met." What began as a series of meetings between the chief negotiators of all three unions to plan a common strategy against a common enemy, turned into a joint negotiation with committees from both AGMA and Local 802 and, later, a three-way partnership (joined in by Local 1) to have Keilin analyze compliance with the contract so that the "equality of sacrifice" and "mandated expense reduction" provisions could be enforced.

Negotiating in partnership with instrumentalists created a set of problematic, unique issues, but philosophical and institutional differences faded as it became necessary to pursue a common position.

In retrospect, while the negotiations may not properly be called "amazing," there's no doubt that we achieved spectacular, unexpected results and went a long way towards "saving the Met."

Collective bargaining is the core function of every labor union, and with more than 100 separate AGMA contracts, 30 or so come up for renegotiation every year, so our staff is engaged in collective bargaining all of the time. I think the recent negotiation at the Met proves, once again, that AGMA is really hard to beat at its core function. ♦



Houston Grand Opera

Ask The President



FROM THE PRESIDENT JAMES ODOM

In my last *AGMAzine* article, I said something about a question coming from the “Ask Jimmy” column. Several people contacted me to inform me they weren’t aware of such a column and to ask how they could submit questions to the column.

The first issue is fairly simple. No one was aware of “Ask Jimmy” because it only existed in my head. (Feel free to insert your own joke here about the contents of my head.) That being said, I did author an advice/gossip column years ago in Dallas. It was called “Dear Diva” and I used the pseudonym of Madame Verita della Boccacavallo. Questions for Dear Diva would be found tucked into the frame of my dressing room mirror. Answers were posted on the call board. As you can imagine,

not many of the questions were of great import, and the most frequent advice offered by Madame was, “More blush!!!”

In spite of my somewhat checkered past in this area, questions did come in for “Ask Jimmy”. So we’re going to start what we hope will be a regular feature for *AGMAzine*, “Ask The President”. Send your questions to AGMA@musicalartists.org and put “Ask The President” in the subject line. I’ll answer as many questions as I can get to in each issue. And so, without further ado...

Question: *I don’t understand why I am getting a bill for my annual dues. My paycheck says that it deducts dues. Isn’t that the same?*

Answer: I want to start with a couple of very important facts: AGMA members pay the least in dues of any performing arts union, and AGMA dues have not increased in over twenty years. Furthermore, we do not anticipate the need to increase dues anytime in the foreseeable future.

There are two types of dues, Basic Dues and Working Dues. Basic Dues are annual dues which each member is required to pay to remain in good standing, regardless of whether they are working, unless the member has chosen to go on Honorable Withdrawal and informed the membership department of that decision. Working Dues are a percentage paid based on the amount of compensation a member has each year working under AGMA contracts. Basic Dues are \$78 per year and are due on January 1 each year. Working Dues are 2% of AGMA compensation and are capped at the first \$100,000, so the most any member would pay in Working Dues in a year would be \$2,000. For comparison, Actors’ Equity dues are \$118 annually plus 2.25% of gross earning up to a cap of \$300,000. So the maximum Basic and Working Dues an AGMA member pays annually is \$2,078. The maximum Basic and Working Dues an Equity member pays is \$6,868. Obviously, if you don’t make \$100,000 a year under AGMA contracts, you’re going to pay less than the maximum amount. You do not owe Working Dues for work that is not done under an AGMA contract.

Question: *How do I get involved in contract negotiations?*

Answer: Each shop selects a negotiating committee when it’s time to renegotiate that shop’s collective bargaining agreement. A member of AGMA’s professional staff serves as the chief negotiator, working with the negotiating committee. Being a member of your shop’s negotiating committee is a serious commitment. It will require a substantial amount of time and dedication. While there are basic structures that AGMA strives to adhere to in forming negotiating committees, each shop is slightly different in how it goes about the process. In some shops, the delegates (or shop stewards) serve as the negotiating committee, so the way to be involved would be to serve as delegate in the year that your basic agreement expires. Other shops conduct elections to add other members to the negotiating committee. Ideally, each negotiating committee will consist of representatives from each of the working categories in that shop.

The short answer is: check with your delegate and express your interest in serving on the committee. If you’re a delegate, you should be in regular contact with your Area Representative (a professional staff member) and your Area Chair (an elected member-leader). They will help you with becoming involved and will help with the committee’s preparations for negotiations. Area Representatives’ contact information can be found on the AGMA website (musicalartists.org) or you can always contact me at President@musicalartists.org.

Question: *I’m having so much fun with my choral group that I want to volunteer to sing for a concert. As an AGMA member, can/should I do that?*

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On the cover, left to right, bottom photos: Houston Grand Opera "Save the Met," Peggy Hickey with her friends, and San Diego Opera choristers unite to "Save San Diego Opera"; middle photos: Linda Mattos and Beverly O'Regan Thiele.

In This Issue

By Sara Stewart Schumann, AGMA's 3rd Vice President and MMRC Chair



The Metropolitan Opera negotiations were just wrapping up when the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC) was trying to determine the theme for this *AGMAzine*. AGMA's extraordinary "Save the Met" campaign was highlighted in the last *AGMAzine* issue, and it only seemed appropriate that this issue should also focus on some other amazing AGMA stories, even as AGMA was accomplishing the amazing (if not the unexpected) at the Met for AGMA's members there.

An article happened to come in from Linda Mattos, a Seattle Opera chorister who managed to train and climb Mount Rainier, which had been one of her long-term goals. Having recently seen Chicago Lyric Opera's production of *The Sound of Music*, I instantly thought of that song lyric, "Climb ev'ry mountain; ford every stream...until you find your dream." Then, there was a post on AGMA's Facebook page reporting that "Opera was alive and well" even at a roadside stand on the side of the road in the middle of what seemed like nowhere. MMRC thought it would be a fun article to include in *AGMAzine*, and perhaps it was time to start sharing posts and articles between *AGMAzine* and AGMA's Facebook site, as well as on the AGMA website (www.musicalartists.org).

We also received an article about several members' efforts to raise additional funds for San Diego Opera, which was a reminder that there are still plenty of challenges facing our members at San Diego Opera, as AGMA and its members are doing what they can to help. And finally, choreographer Peggy Hickey selflessly shared an article about her personal battle with cancer. MMRC found these feature stories so inspiring that we decided to give the "Who Inspired You" series a hiatus in this issue. It will resume in the next *AGMAzine*, so that gives YOU just enough time to send in your "Who Inspired You" article (or perhaps you have an amazing story of your own to share). Please send your ideas, articles and photos to denise@musicalartists.org.

As for the rest of this issue, AGMA President Jimmy Odom is launching a new series called "Ask the President," the National Executive Director explains the benefit of having a seniority provision in your agreement, and there is plenty of Area News. The "Day in the Life" series features four AGMA delegates sharing their individual day's experiences. Oh, and do not forget the AGMA Relief Fund Holiday Drive.

Accomplishing the amazing and overcoming difficulties is what AGMA members do! We are capable of being amazing onstage and off—in our art form, and in our lives. That is why AGMA as a labor union sets the bar so high. Amazing is exactly what is expected. As my term as an AGMA officer comes to an end, I must say that it has been an honor to serve the membership and—as the Chair of MMRC—to be a part of an amazing effort to literally transform your *AGMAzine*. This issue would never have been possible without the help of AGMA's exceptional staff, the hard work of the members of MMRC, and contributions of photos and articles from AGMA members like you. ♦

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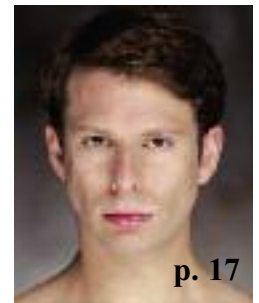
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AGMA Member Summits Mt. Rainier

By Linda Mattos, Seattle Opera Chorister



I have always been an avid hiker, but I seriously began training in the summer of 2013, continuing with a strict training regimen until my Mt. Rainier climbs. Seattle Opera was performing the *Ring Cycle* that summer. As a member of the women's chorus, there weren't too many rehearsals, so I was able to spend a lot of time in the mountains on various hikes that were anywhere from ten to fifteen miles round trip.

In August, I added running to my regimen, starting slowly with interval training, until I was able to run five to six miles. Once the winter weather arrived in Seattle, I turned my attention to downhill skiing. I ended up skiing for a total of forty days at various ski areas up and down the West Coast and in British Columbia. I also took up ski touring as another form of conditioning. With ski touring, "skins" are applied to the ski bottoms to allow skiers to climb the mountain while wearing skis. During the spring skiing season, often after finishing on the ski slopes, I was able to take a quick hike on my way home from the ski area. After the ski areas closed in May, I put skins on my skis and hiked to the top of the mountains (where I had previously spent time downhill skiing), and then skied to the bottom.

Climbing Mount Rainier with an experienced group of climbers is costly. I had to invest quite a bit more in my gear. For instance, my climbing boots alone were \$400. Plus, I had to pay fees to cover the costs for my ropes and permits.



Linda and her 35-pound pack

The route we took is called the Disappointment Cleaver and the climb is 9,000 feet on snowfields. The group I climbed with provided three formal training sessions. The first training session taught us how to maneuver the rope and harness in case one of us fell into a crevasse, and taught us how to lift ourselves out. The next training session was on ropes and arrest techniques and included a snowshoe conditioning hike. The last training session was a practice climb up to base camp called Camp Muir. We were all timed to see if we could make it there in less than five hours with our heavy packs, which each weighed about 35 pounds.

We began at Paradise Lodge where the elevation is 5,420 feet. The hike to base camp, Camp Muir, brought us to 10,080 feet at around 1:00 p.m. and we began to get ready for the climb the next day by melting snow for

drinking water, which takes a long time to do, and preparing our tents and bedding for the night as well as our packs for the ascent the next day. The weather was pristine. After our preparations, we went to bed around 8:00 p.m. and got up at midnight. We arrived at Ingram Flats Glacier (10,500 feet) at 2:00 a.m. and were asked who wanted to try to summit (later in the afternoon there is greater danger of an avalanche occurring, so the goal is to try to summit early in the morning and get down off the mountain by the afternoon). Four of our group, including myself, raised our hands. The rest of the group turned around there.

I ended up summiting with three men and our rope leader, Mark Fisher. After that initial summit, I was told that there wasn't room on the roster for me to summit later in the month during our regularly scheduled climb. However, over the course of the month, people dropped out, and they contacted me to summit again if I wanted to.

Days before the second climb, I came down with a terrible cold. I was extremely sick when we started out for the base camp, and the group told me to turn around and go home. Disappointed, I let them go on ahead. However, I couldn't get my feet to turn around. I pressed on and made it to base camp in about six hours.

I didn't think I could climb the mountain but Mark Fisher encouraged me to keep going. If it wasn't for him I would have turned around. I learned later that one should never attempt high altitude mountaineering while suffering from sinus congestions and overall fatigue.

My first climb on June 1 was crystal clear, 70 degrees, with no wind. My second climb on June 26 was cold with limited visibility. Both climbs were beautiful in their own way. I love being above tree line. What I saw was unmatched beauty all around me. I only had to sacrifice my left big toenail on my first climb and my right big toe nail on the second. But if I remember to tighten my boots at the top, then this should not happen again.

While climbing may not be for everyone, I feel physical conditioning is imperative for opera singers since what we do is so physically demanding. I am already hoping to be able to climb with the group again in the summer of 2015. ♦



Linda Mattos on top of Mt. Rainier

#WeAreOpera

By Beverly O'Regan Thiele, Soloist



©Chris Mucke

Editor's note: This article was first shared on Facebook.

On just the Idaho side of the Utah/Idaho state line, I followed little roadside signs and stopped to try some local buffalo, elk and beef jerky. Upon trying various samples and visiting with the gentleman running the roadside stand, I was *very* pleasantly surprised to see pamphlets for next year's season of Utah Festival Opera! I asked if he went to the Festival and he said, "Yes! I saw all four shows this summer!" When I told him I was the Vanessa in *Vanessa*, he gave me a big smile and asked, "May I give you a *hug*?!" This was about an hour and a half away from Logan, Utah, basically in the middle of nowhere!!!



Beverly O'Regan Thiele with her opera fan at his roadside stand on the Utah/Idaho state line.

To whom it may concern: OPERA IS ALIVE AND MORE THAN WELL!!! PEOPLE are OPERA!! Americans love opera!! A gentleman who sells elk and buffalo jerky on the side of the road comes to the opera! It means the world to him!! I may not be everyone's leading lady, but I made a major difference to this man and his life! *That* is what it's about! This gentleman may not be a wealthy businessman or board member (but then again, he may be!); he may not be a patron who pays hundreds of dollars for a seat or spends more on a gala (that can be over a thousand, no?); he may not be a donor who only gives money for a new production so his name can be seen (not caring at all about the artistic vision or musical/artistic quality and integrity and how it moves people, not to mention the cost); but *he is the opera audience!! He loves opera!* Opera is alive and well to him!! This gentleman is opera.

Opera is in the schools. Opera is in the small towns. Opera is in most large cities of America. Opera is in the rural areas—brought to them personally by the extremely important, amazing regional companies. Opera is in the hearts and minds of mil-

lions of Americans. Opera brightens the world of millions of Americans and makes their lives seem maybe just a little lighter, a little happier, or maybe it churns up some deep thoughts, demons and uncomfortable feelings which needed to be dealt with. Opera is in the colleges across America. Opera is in the high schools of America. These companies, schools and colleges nurture the singers that will one day be, and in many cases *have been and are*, on a "particular" stage!!! Instrumentalists, craftspeople, artists, makeup artists, seamstresses, singers, carpenters, composers, stage managers, poets... #WeAreOpera. Opera is alive and well in America.

Those of you who may think that opera is dying, I invite you to take a drive across our beautiful country and see *opera is alive and well!!! Opera is begging* to be performed, seen and heard!! Opera is not about the big names or the money. Opera is about the music, the art, the emotion and so much more. It is about bringing about emotions maybe a person thought were buried forever or never knew he or she had. Opera is about laughter. Opera is

about letting the music flow over oneself as if standing in a waterfall. Opera is *not* about one man. Opera is *not* about board members. Opera is *not* about complaining about how *much* "the unions" cost. ("Unions," by the way, are made up of people—the people who attract and *touch* those in the audience—the people the audience pays to see, hear, and enjoy: the end product!) Opera is a small town or country doctor or businessman who wishes he/she could sing or play an instrument or conduct! Opera is a mother and/or father who has no time to take a vacation, but can *go* to their local opera festival or outdoor concert! Opera is the kid who takes out over \$50,000 in loans to *sing* or direct. Opera is the five-year-old conducting his/her make-believe orchestra and singers.

Opera is the man selling beef, elk and buffalo jerky who goes to his terrific regional company and talks it up to all his patrons. Opera is getting hugs from strangers because he or she was so moved.

#WEAREOPERA! ♦

San Diego Choristers Rewrite History

By Natalie Mann, AGMA Governor, San Diego Soloist Representative



Recent history has taught us a new twist on an old colloquial saying, “It ain’t over ’til the San Diego Opera Chorus sings.” When blindsided with the immediate closure of the San Diego Opera, as announced in a newspaper article on March 19, 2014, the AGMA members of the chorus decided to fight back. Led by Chris

Stephens, the San Diego AGMA representative, a group called the White Knight Committee was formed. The committee included members from AFM, AGMA, and several IATSE locals, as well employees of the San Diego Opera. The committee, along with the help of the AGMA National office, kept the company open and helped turn the tide. Now that a new governing board has been elected and a reduced 2015 season is in place after an amazing online fundraising drive, the show will go on in San Diego.

The story doesn’t end there, though. The closure was stopped, but that did not fix the issue of strained budgets and a very uncertain future beyond the upcoming season. Many of the opera chorus members were struck by the difference they could make in saving the company, and realized that their mission was not finished until they could see the San Diego Opera returned to its former glory and financial footing. So the singers decided to do what they did best—put on a show.

Many chorus members donated their vocal talents and organizational skills. Members donated their time to sing at the popular Sicilian Festival and on recital series throughout San Diego to raise awareness of the general public about the talent working at San Diego Opera. Other members chose to raise funds directly for the opera through fundraising performances.

AGMA member Rebecca Steinke organized a November performance of Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* as a fundraiser for San Diego Opera based on an idea she came up with two years ago. With the

help of AGMA’s sister union, AFM, she found members of the San Diego Symphony who were willing to donate their time and talents; even Maestro Vignati, with whom she worked in Italy, offered to conduct as a gift. San Diego Opera provided the lighting and costumes. “This is a miracle!” said Rebecca, who reports the event raised \$7,900. She also commented that the input from the community and the San Diego Opera was amazing.

The work that choristers put into the San Diego Opera has been welcomed and appreciated by the San Diego Opera management. Dr. Nicolas Reveles, Director of Education and Community Engagement, put it best by saying:

One of the terrific things that the choristers are doing is calling me to volunteer to sing at community events, like Festas in Little Italy, conventions or meetings of national associations and organizations, and singing the National Anthem at community events. Their concern, now that the company is back on its feet, is to let the community know that we’re still here and that we’re willing and able to be a part of the things that the community sees as important. This was one of the things that I think we as a company neglected in the past, authentic community involvement. Now? We’re everywhere, thanks to our dedicated choristers!

Work by the company and the choristers is paying off. In a recent article, the San Diego Opera reported, “...a 377 percent increase in new subscribers and a 286 percent increase in lapsed subscribers (former subscribers that did not attend the 2014 season).” These numbers are clearly pointing in the right direction.

A new era of the San Diego Opera has dawned in large part to the members of the San Diego Chorus, who showed that artists with a cause can make anything possible. ♦



San Diego Opera chorus and staff for Don Quixote showed their solidarity by wearing “Save San Diego Opera” t-shirts. Don Quixote was the last opera of their 2013-14 season. The Fight poster, held by chorister Chris Stephens, was created by SDO graphic artist Rich Black. It says, “Fight! For... Life. Love. Art. Culture. Passion. Fight for... San Diego Opera” and includes two quotes: “Nothing risked is nothing gained” and “One cannot come away from great art unchanged.”

Cancer Warrior

By Peggy Hickey, AGMA Governor and Dancer



I was sitting in the same spot where I am currently writing, alone, in my house in May 2011 when I learned that I had breast cancer. I had been so confident that I, a choreographer, mother of two in great physical shape and no history of cancer in my family, would be spared, that I told my husband to go to work, I was sure everything was fine. Think again. I immediately plunged into a dark surreal pool of fear that took incredible will and support to fight. One of the great blessings of this terrible episode was that everyone gathered around me at once—husband, daughters, family, friends and dancers.

Those first two weeks were the worst. I went to bed crying and woke up crying, “How could this be happening to totally healthy me?” After about two weeks, alternating between disbelief and terror, I slowly started to make a plan.

Once the doctors had reassured me that this was a disease I could fight and conquer, I started to calm down a little, and I began to take my first shaky steps towards fighting back. Fighting the fear that I might die was the darkest part of this journey. The thought of leaving my two



Peggy Hickey (in front) celebrates the return of her health with dear friends who helped save her hair; middle row: AGMA members Yvette Tucker and Leslie Stevens; back row: AGMA member DeAnne Todd, close friend Christina Saffron, and AGMA member Karen Apostolina.

daughters motherless and my husband without his wife was unbearable. Seeing their fear, though, made me realize that I needed to pull it together and be strong for them. I was told this was a Stage Two cancer that had travelled to my lymph nodes in my left arm. I could expect surgery (a lumpectomy), chemotherapy, and after that, radiation. My life had taken a terrifying turn, and I felt my career was being taken from me. Luckily, it turned out better than that. Though I had to withdraw from a show at the Goodspeed, my dear friends at Seattle Opera allowed me to come a bit late, and even flew in my assistant, Adam

Cates, to help me get through staging the dances for *Carmen* in the middle of chemo. People were incredibly kind. I was also able, during radiation, to fly to Hartford Stage for the workshop of *A Gentleman's Guide To Love and Murder*. Again, my doctor allowed me to miss a few days of radiation that I made up on the other end in order to maintain some of my quality of life. Not wanting to look like a cancer patient, I was able to use a device little known in

U.S.A. called Penguin Cold Caps (www.penguincoldcaps.com) to save my hair. This gel cap freezes the follicle during chemotherapy and keeps the chemo from killing the hair shaft. It is so common in England that it is covered by state insurance! Not so here—I had to send my doctor all the current research on the product and he finally allowed me to try it. Well, it worked, and I was the first patient at The Disney Family Cancer Center in Burbank to save their hair this way. Now there is a freezer on the chemo floor and my doctor tells all his patients about this. I like knowing that lots of women I will never even meet are saving their hair during chemo. This wasn't so much about vanity (though I preferred not to be wearing a label saying cancer patient) as it was about fighting back. Cancer is so horribly scary that you feel like you belong to the doctors and their schedules, and you spend your days in waiting rooms with people who are terribly ill.

The support of my family and friends made all the difference. My eldest daughter Molly took a semester off from UC Berkeley and came home to help with chemo, and so many dear friends pitched in each chemo day helping change the freezing caps every 30 minutes and cheering me on. If I had to go through this, at least I was blessed to be supported by so much love. Though I was basically in treatment for almost nine months, I managed to keep a fairly regular schedule of work. I took days off when I just felt too weak, but mostly I showed up, and that helped me to feel a little less like I was outside of my life. It has been almost three years now since the end of my treatment, though I am still on tamoxifen, a drug I need to take for two more years. It is an oral chemo, not as intense, but still really affects my joints and muscles—not fun for a dancer but better than the alternative.

This terrifying episode in my life forced me to slow down, look inward, and really think about life as I knew it. For several months, towards the end of treatment, when I was weakest and sick with double pneumonia, I would look out my bedroom window at my garden and think if I never dance again I will be really sad, but I will also be grateful to be alive, to treasure my family, my garden and my health. My health has become my most treasured possession, something I work at every day. Exercise, meditation, diet and sleep now come first. They used to be way lower on my list. Luckily, I have regained the majority of my strength and was able to go on to see a show of mine, *A Gentleman's Guide To Love and Murder*, finally make it to Broadway. It's funny how that happened after I was forced to take a step back and just appreciate my health and family more. I have always been grateful for my family, my career and my health, but those things are twice as precious to me now. ♦



Two years after treatment, Peggy with the Tony award for Best Musical in 2014, A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder.

An Audience with AGMA: My Ticket to Broadway and Beyond

By Rachel A. Antman, Chorister



It's been a loooooong time since I had an AGMA gig as a chorister. So long, which offers incredible discounts to theater and concerts and has strict eligibility requirements. One way you can meet the requirements is with union membership. Bingo!

in fact, that the last time I called AGMA to renew my dues, the membership representative suggested that I might wish to apply for an honorable withdrawal. Nope, not interested. Why not? Because I derive many benefits from my AGMA membership.

The main one for me—as a resident of New York City—is my membership in the Theatre Development Fund (TDF),

My annual AGMA dues plus my annual TDF membership fee total approximately \$100, which is roughly the cost of a so-so seat at a Broadway show. Through TDF, I can purchase tickets to the same show typically at \$39 per seat. I've bought TDF tickets to operas, too. And off-off-Broadway shows cost me a grand total of \$9 per ticket. That's basically the price of a Grande Caramel

Frappuccino®, or whatever it's called these days.

Granted, TDF doesn't typically offer discounts to the most popular Broadway shows. But I often find that my favorite shows aren't the most popular ones. And if you spend only \$9 for an off-off-Broadway play that disappoints, you won't kick yourself for buying a ticket.

I see about one performance a week, on average, and I'd say 50% of these are through TDF. You don't have to be particularly good at math to imagine my savings.

But I'm also happy to pay my

dues for other reasons. One, it's reassuring to know that if for some reason I lose my job (I'm in public relations, and it's not the most stable of professions), there is a support network I can access through the AGMA Relief Fund. Also, on a more general level, since I know so many talented people who either sing full time or would like to, I'm glad that there is a union that looks out for their interests.

So, AGMA, keep sending me those invoices, because I plan to keep paying my dues year after year. And whether I'm backstage or in the audience, one thing is certain: I'll be applauding you. ♦

Union Plus by Union Privilege: Making the Most of Your Membership

By Karen Grahn, AGMA Governor, MMRC Secretary and New York Area Chorister



As a long-time member of the Membership and Member Relations Committee, good union/member communication has always been important to me. In this *AGMAzine* I'm excited to remind you of a unique perk of AGMA membership, Union Plus. On their website you can create your own handbook of the benefits for

downloading and sign up for their monthly newsletter to receive timely announcements.

My favorite benefit is the rental car discount. When I go back home to visit family, I regularly use the Union Plus discount because I find that it's a much better deal than any other offers. I mean, 25% off is pretty substantial!

The flower and gift delivery option was especially useful to me this year. A colleague of my husband who sails was celebrating his 80th birthday in Illinois, and I was able to request a modification of a sailboat arrangement from their website by calling them on the phone. Teleflora was extremely helpful and the arrangement was delivered in time for a Sunday afternoon party. Fantastic!

Ever since I signed up to receive their monthly newsletter, I have been continually impressed by the scope and variety of benefits Union Plus offers AGMA members. For instance:

1. Union members and their families who will begin or continue their post-secondary education can apply for a scholarship by January 31, 2015.
2. There are many health savings plans that offer members a variety of discounts, and there is even a Union Plus Medical Bill Negotiating Service if you have a large medical bill.
3. Using a Union Plus Credit Card entitles you to extra benefits like rebates on buying cars, and, if needed, financial hardship grants.

I also wanted to make sure you knew about the rebate for upgrading to a new AT&T smartphone and the health club discounts through GlobalFit, but really, there are so many benefits available, I urge you to go to UnionPlus.org and explore them all yourself. ♦



AREA NEWS

PITTSBURGH



Pittsburgh held an Area Meeting on Saturday, November 1 at the Spaghetti Warehouse, two blocks from Pittsburgh Opera's headquarters in Pittsburgh's Strip District. Forty-three AGMA members attended and were treated to lunch and an inspirational and informative speech by Eleni Kallas, AGMA National Director of Organizing and Training and Mid-Atlantic Area Representative.

After the meeting, Ms. Kallas joined some members of the Otello cast for a photo on the escape stairs before the studio run of the show; left to right, front row: Opera Executive Committee member Bill Fisher, Delegate Josh Mulkey, Delegate Jara Dorsey-Lash, Eleni Kallas; second row: Pittsburgh Area Chair Bill Buchanan, Opera Executive Committee member Cindy Pratt; third row: AGMA Governor Kellie McCurdy Ryan and Pittsburgh Area Vice-Chair Carol Wolfe; on top of the stairs, Delegate Jeff Gross.



Pittsburgh Opera presented Verdi's Otello in October 2014, 24 years since the last time Verdi's penultimate opera was seen in Pittsburgh. These 13 choristers were in the 1990 production and again in 2014. Left to right, kneeling: Janice Garrone and Robert Pruitt; first standing row: Barbara McDonough, Cynthia Pratt, Barbara Crigler, Carol Wolfe and Lisa Brovey Kovach; back row, William Buchanan, Robert Simoni, Denise Sheffey-Powell, Peter Bianchi, Edward Moore and John Hastings.

NEW YORK

By Louis Perry, New York Area Chair, AGMA Recording Secretary and Chorister



The New York Area annual meeting was held at the National Office on November 12, 2014.

Prior to the meeting, members received a free flu shot, courtesy of The Actors Fund, and after the meeting they enjoyed a buffet dinner and some socializing.

At the meeting, members re-elected New York Area Committee members Osceola Davis, Linda Mays, Raymond Menard and Roger Ohlsen for a term of three years.

The continuing Area Committee members are Kim Araki, Ann-Carolyn Bird, Ann Chiaverini, Ruth Ann Cunningham, Juan Jose Ibarra, Peggy Imbrie, Jann Jaffe, Robert Kuehn, Kathleen Mangiameli, Aisha Mitchell, Louis Perry, David Saybrook and Raven Wilkinson.

Invited guest Christopher Bloodworth, the National Director of the Actors Fund Work Program for The Actors Fund, made a presentation explaining the services and value of the Actors Fund Work Program to

AGMA members. After the presentation there was a brief Question and Answer session.

Reports from the staff regarding the recently concluded Metropolitan Opera negotiations and other New York contracts were given by Alan Gordon, National Executive Director, and Deborah Allton-Maher, Associate Executive Director.

Pamela Smith, Chair of the Concert Singers Committee, gave an update on ongoing and concluded Concert Singers contracts.

Derek Davis, Executive Director of the AGMA Retirement Plan and Health Fund, updated members about Plan B and other AGMA Health Plan issues. Up-to-date retirement and health information may be found at <http://www.agmaretirement-health.org>.

The New York Area wants to thank our National Office staff for their excellent help in bringing to our members another successful Area Meeting, especially, thanks to Gerry Angel, Denise Baker, Candace Itow and Elizabeth Drorbaugh. ♦

PHILADELPHIA

By Maren Montalbano, AGMA 4th Vice President, MMRC Member and Chorister



©Becky Oellers

AGMA work in Philadelphia continues to be steady, thanks to new and diverse performance opportunities with Opera Philadelphia and The Philadelphia Singers.

Recently, Opera Philadelphia has been encouraging the growth of new music. In addition to its commitment to programming new American operas (2014-15 will feature the East Coast premiere of *Oscar* by Theodore Morrison and the world premiere of Charlie Parker's *YARDBIRD* by Daniel Schnyder), Opera Philadelphia's

composer-in-residence program has provided opportunities for members of the opera chorus to be a part of the creative process through workshops in both Philadelphia and New York.

Summer is when The Philadelphia Singers get to perform "pops" concerts at the Mann Center for Performing Arts; this year, those concerts included Hans Zimmer's film score from *Gladiator*, as well as a "Gospel Meets Symphony" project that involved over 150 members of church and gospel choirs from around the city.

Before the season was officially under way, The Philadelphia Orchestra

approached The Philadelphia Singers to be a part of a world premiere of "Ode to Humanity," a work by Chinese composer Wang Ning, to be performed at the United Nations. The piece was commissioned by the Shenzhen Association for International Cultural Exchange, and the performance was streamed live on the UN website. This was an enormous opportunity, not just for the performers involved, but also for the nations of China and America to use art to strengthen political ties.

With so many performances already behind us, we are ready for a fruitful and exciting 2015! ♦



Members of The Philadelphia Singers joined The Philadelphia Orchestra for a performance at the United Nations on September 22. Pictured, from left to right: Rebecca Siler, Kryss Cooper, Stephanie Overton-Hall, Alyson Harvey, Jenifer Smith, Susan Weinmann, Fernando Mancillas, Music Director of the Philadelphia Singers David Hayes, Michael Hogue, Michael Savino, Greg Cantwell, Lucas DeJesus and Colin Dill.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Tim Smith, AGMA Governor, MMRC Vice Chair and Chorister



The Southern California Area met on Saturday, November 22, 2014 to elect James Guthrie as Area Chair and Leanna Brand as Vice-Chair. Many thanks go to Jennifer Wallace, the outgoing chair, for her years of service to the Southern California Area.

Mr. Guthrie has worked in Chicago, San Francisco and is currently with Los Angeles Opera, and Ms. Brand is a member of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. Both are looking forward to serving the membership and helping the various managements in the Area remember that AGMA members are part of the "business" side of music, as well as art. ♦

CHICAGO/MIDWEST

By Cole Seaton, AGMA Governor, MMRC Member, Chicago Area Committee Member and Chorister



AGMA and the Chicago/Midwest Area signatories would like to congratulate our friends and

©Michael Brosilow



Lyric Opera of Chicago's one-night-only 60th Anniversary Celebration Concert featured a stellar cast.

colleagues of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Lyric Opera Chorus on their 60th Anniversary, which is being celebrated throughout the 2014-15 season! It was a true pleasure for this contributor to attend the kick-off celebratory concert of this magnificent chorus on September 12, when they performed in the beautiful and historic sanctuary of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, rather than their familiar home stage of the opera house. The singers sang to a packed audience of some 1,200 very enthusiastic music lovers! Led by Chorus Master Michael Black, this concert, entitled, "A Wondrous Sound," featured excerpts from this season's *Anna Bolena*, *Tosca*, *Il trovatore*, and their upcoming summer production of *Carousel*, along with many beloved choral favorites from *Nabucco*, *Macbeth*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Carmen* and *Fidelio*. Several chorus members were featured in solo roles highlighting their incredible talents. This concert was again presented to a sold-out audience in late November, in Evanston, Illinois, at Alice Millar Chapel.



Chicago Symphony Chorus at the Ravinia Festival in August of this year.

The Lyric Opera also held their one-night-only 60th Anniversary Celebration Concert on November 1, that featured the Lyric Opera Orchestra and Chorus and a stellar cast including Renée Fleming and jazz legend Ramsey Lewis, Susan Graham, Stephanie Blythe, Johan Botha, Christine Goerke, Quinn Kelsey, Mariusz Kwiecien, Ana Maria Martínez, Eric Owens, Marina Rebeka and Amber Wagner. The very funny comic actress Jane Lynch was the event's emcee. The Chorus began their main stage season in September with the highly anticipated production of *Don Giovanni*, followed by *Il trovatore* in October/November and the long awaited *Porgy and Bess* which runs through December, as does *Anna Bolena*. The new year will see the opening of *Tosca*, which runs from January through March and then *Tamhäuser*, which opens in February and runs through March.

©Cheryl Mann



The Joffrey Ballet's Swan Lake with Victoria Jaiani as Odette

The Chicago Symphony Chorus (CSC), fresh off their performances of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Ravinia Festival in August, began their fall season in September with several performances of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*. In December, they were once again the featured performers in the annual spectacular *Welcome Yule* holiday concerts, which celebrate its 20th Anniversary this season. In 2015, the CSC will prepare Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* and Scriabin's *Symphony No. 1*, which will be performed in late January at Symphony Center in Chicago and then take this same concert to New York City for a performance on February 1 at Carnegie Hall. Upon their return from NYC, they will begin several concerts of Mozart's *Requiem* back in Chicago.

Kudos to our always amazing dance colleagues of the Joffrey Ballet for their beautiful and breathtaking performances of Christopher Wheeldon's *Swan Lake*, which the Joffrey premiered back in October. This lover of dance couldn't have been more moved or entranced during this spellbinding production, which the *Chicago Sun-Times* hailed as a triumph! The Joffrey began their season in September with

(continues on page 14)

WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE



The **Washington/Baltimore Area Meeting** was held on Saturday, October 11, 2014. Attendees of the meeting posed for this group photo, left to right, sitting on the floor: Lynn Krynicki, Mimi Legat and Area Chair Harvey Fort; first row, seated: William Jones, Vijay Ghosh, Vito Pietanza, Nicholas Houhoulis, Amy Allen, Marta Kirilloff Barber, Maria Dolan, Adam Caughey, Sean Corcoran and Connie Coffelt Bailey; first row, standing: Lisa Berger; Dorothee Bodner, Elizabeth Freeman, Alexandra Christoforakis, Delegate Pamela Simonson, Patricia Hussey, Anne Sommers, Patricia Renfro, Kehembe Eichelberger; Sean Pflueger, Joshua Hong, Robert Cantrell, Delegate Jarrod Lee, David Toulson and James Bailey; back row: David Prager, Tim Augustin, Patrick Cook, Spencer Adamson, AGMA 5th Vice President J Austin Bitner; Christopher Rhodovi, Thomas Ortiz, James Shaffran, Megan Krauszer, Maverick Lemons and Andrew Sauvageau.



The **Florida Grand Opera** negotiations took place in late September. The AGMA Negotiating Committee consisted of Assistant Stage Managers Megan Bennett and Bryce Bullock, Eleni Kallas, Chorister Enrique Estrada, and Chorus Delegates Donna Lane and Michael Testa.



The **Washington Ballet Joint Committee** members, left to right: National Director of Organizing and Training and Mid-Atlantic Area Representative Eleni Kallas, Delegate Francesca Dugarten, Delegate Brooklyn Mack, and Tamas Krizsa



In late September, **Washington National Opera** choristers performed in *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Left to right, kneeling, are Jennifer Anderson, Patricia Hussey, Samantha McElhaney, Denise Gulley, Katie Katinas and Alizon Reggioli; standing, first row: Peter Burroughs, Joe Minor, Norwood Robinson, Suzanne Chadwick, Maria Dolan, Pamela Simonson, Delegate Patricia Portillo, Louis Davis, Anamer Castrello and Grace Gori; back row: Delegate Nick Houhoulis, Pablo Talamante, Eduardo Castro, Aurelio Dominguez, Jose Sacin and Frederic Rey.

Chicago/Midwest Area News (continued from page 13)

Stories in Motion, a group of three ballets, including *Prodigal Son*, *Lilac Garden* and *RAKU*, (a Joffrey premiere). *The Nutcracker*, a holiday tradition and a favorite for Chicago families, will once again be running through December. Then, in February, our hometown dance troupe will offer us *Unique Voices*, a grouping of three ballet premieres, newly added to the company's repertoire. The three ballet premieres are titled: *Maninyas*, by choreographer Stanton Welch, with music by Ross Edwards; *The Man in Black*, by choreographer James Kudelka, with music by Johnny Cash; and *Tulle*, by choreographer Alexander Ekman, music by Mikael Karlsson. ♦

SAN FRANCISCO



Colorado Ballet dancers (shown above) met with National Dance Executive Nora Heiber during a shop meeting in late October.



The San Francisco Area Meeting was held on October 30: left to right, sitting: Chris Corley, Kathy Bayler, Sally Mouzon, Area Chair Colby Roberts, Ann Hughes and Benjamin Stewart; standing: Val Portnov, Chung-Wai Soong, Joy Graham-Korst, Buffy Baggott and Leandra Ramm.

President's Message (continued from page 3)

Answer: I'm going to assume here that by "choral group" you mean a professional company and that you are working under an AGMA contract. The short answer here is "no". You cannot agree to work for less than the minimum compensation and provisions in your Basic Agreement. In addition, working for free—particularly when you would otherwise be paid for your work—is a very good way to indicate that you do not value yourself or your work as a professional Artist, and will certainly lead to requests that you work for no compensation on other occasions.

Previously I have stated that there are times when you will want to volunteer your services to your employer for specific occasions. There are procedures for doing this, and Management knows what they are. But no individual member can or should ever agree to waive any provision, including minimum compensation on his or her own.

If, on the other hand, you are talking about a non-professional church or community group with which you sing without the benefit of an AGMA contract, then you can, of course, do what you want. But my personal opinion is that you remember what Grandma Beck always said: "Nobody's going to pay for milk when the cows are running free." ♦

IN MEMORIAM

Licia Albanese, Soloist

Gene Bullard, Soloist

Carlo Bergonzi, Soloist

Anita Cerquetti, Soloist

Russell Christopher, Soloist

Mervin Crook, Chorister

James Flynn, Chorister

Nino Garcia, Chorister

Richard Guido, Actor/
Supernumerary

Michael Hesse, Sound Engineer*

Geoffrey Holder, Dancer/
Choreographer

David Larson, Chorister

Richard Livingston, Chorister

Loren Maazel, Maestro*

Chris Nance, Chorus

Master/Conductor*

Magda Olivero, Soloist

Henrietta Pelta (Pianist
and Vocal Coach)*

Donald Saddler, Dancer/
Choreographer/Director

Rita Shane, Soloist

*Indicates a distinguished individual in a related profession

“A Day in the Life” is an ongoing series to acquaint members with the various categories that AGMA represents. This issue features A Day in the Life of Delegates. If you are interested in contributing, please send your story to denise@musicalartists.org.

A Typical Day as AGMA Soloist Delegate at the Metropolitan Opera

By Belinda Oswald*



My name is Belinda Oswald, and I am an AGMA Soloist Delegate at the Metropolitan Opera. After a decade of Principal solo work in the United States, Canada and Japan, I joined the Metropolitan Opera (the Met) as a Regular Chorus member and have served as the AGMA Solo Delegate, the AGMA Chorus Women’s Delegate, as a member of the Metropolitan Opera Safety Committee, as well as being an elected AGMA Board member since 2004. I have also been on the contract negotiating committee at the Metropolitan Opera for the past three negotiations.

As the AGMA Soloist Delegate at the Met, I help with questions regarding the AGMA contract and deal with safety issues and concerns. Seeking the Artists’ input regarding working conditions and performance issues is very important and helps me—and AGMA—to better represent soloists with their work at the Met. I represent all solo singers at every level, and, due to my tenure at the Met, I am able to be their representative and act as a buffer for them in complete confidentiality, without fear of reprisal.

Most of you have heard about the successful negotiations, which were recently completed at the Met, comprising a four-year contract with no lockout, no changes in work rules, insurance or pension. During these negotiations, along with two of the Met’s full-time Solo Artists (Plan Artists) Scott Scully and Richard Bernstein, we helped to shape the proposals directly involving all Soloists. We were involved in the discussions across the table in the negotiations, and I was one of the Solo Artist voices, speaking on their behalf and protecting their interests.

On a typical day, however, what I generally encounter as a Soloist Delegate is that I am frequently called to rehearsals to aid in safety issues for principal artists involving jumps, fights, the use of fog, extreme raked stages, etc. Just a few weeks ago I was called to the stage to make sure “Cherubino” was comfortable with a jump from the set to just off-stage into the arms of several dancers. The jump was highly choreographed and rehearsed, yet we also arrived at other alternatives if the singer might become uncomfortable at any performance and also offered her cover (who also rehearsed this on stage) these same options. In *The Death of Klinghoffer* last week, I was on the set to witness the principal singer portraying Molqi shooting live rounds from a pistol and also an AK-47. Different rounds were used and we decided on the correct ammunition to achieve the

safest sound level for all on stage, yet also accomplished the desired sound effect. This, again, was highly rehearsed with the singer and his cover to assure that they were comfortable and secure with the firing of the guns.

Several times I have been contacted by the Met’s Artist Liaison regarding medical emergencies involving a foreign or domestic artist. Often, Artists far from home may require some financial assistance with medical costs. I have aided Principal Singers, visiting Stage Directors, as well as Principal Dancers who are performing a solo role on these occasions by referring them to a direct contact at the AGMA Relief Fund. The AGMA Relief Fund is there for this purpose and can help when artists are in need.

Additionally, it is my duty as a delegate to make sure the Met adheres to all areas of the Principal’s contract. This includes monitoring rehearsal schedules to prevent overworking artists, addressing safety concerns, making sure covers receive adequate rehearsals, fielding and resolving emails/texts/Facebook messages regarding questions about their contract, enforcing work rules, verifying that scheduled overtime is being paid correctly, and most importantly, with the full force of AGMA, protecting the singer’s fees if he or she is released from their contract. Also, I have helped to protect the voices of the Young Artists at the Met, by limiting the hours they are required to sing, with the help of former Met Young Artist Mark Oswald and Maestro Levine.

Even though I have many extra duties as the AGMA Soloist Delegate at the Met, I find it a great honor to serve as the delegate to so many talented and wonderful Principal Artists.

*Written on 10/18/2014 ♦



Belinda as Mother in *Madama Butterfly* at the Metropolitan Opera earlier this year.

A Day in the Life of an AGMA Dance Delegate at Kansas City Ballet

By Charles Martin



I'm new to being an AGMA delegate this season, though I've been involved in our contract negotiations since I first joined the company in 2007. Writing contracts and negotiating their terms is a skill that I acquired in high school, and I never thought I would be able to put it to as much use as I have. Becoming a delegate is more than just working on the contract; the delegate is also the front-line representative for the company to try to resolve and avoid any problems that may occur. I've learned that there are days when being a delegate is quite easy, and then there are days when it feels like you never have a second to breathe. It gets busier the closer we get to theater week. Our most recent production was Septime Webre's *Alice (in wonderland)*.

On Thursday morning, the day before we open the show, I wake up at 9:30 a.m. to make it to the gym by 10:00 a.m. *Alice* has a lot of cardio and lifting in it, so I don't stay very long. Next on the list, I run by the studio and grab an extra pair of shoes, just in case something happens. I get to the theater, change and start stretching before class. Class goes from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. and we now have a 20-minute break before we need to be in costume. During that time, I'm running around putting all the props and costume pieces I need in certain places, ready for a run-through.

At 1:50 p.m. we get into costume and proceed with the only Cast B run-through onstage before our shows opens. The orchestra stops promptly at 4:00 p.m., just before my hard section of the ballet, as Tweedle Dee, so the cast continues the rehearsal with music from a pre-recorded CD until we end up downstage center at the end of the ballet and receive some notes. We now have a break from 4:50 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. We don't notice what time it is right away and accidentally go nine minutes over our allotted rehearsal period with the notes. Once our Stage Manager notices, she alerts a Ballet Master and rehearsal is finished.

I eat some food I brought and then the delegates get together to discuss some options with our company manager. He suggests we should have stopped rehearsal on time, and we point out that we were onstage with everyone else receiving notes without a clock. He then asks if they could give us only a quarter hour of overtime instead of half an hour. Most of us seem to be fine with this, it was accidental after all. One delegate, however, reminds the rest of us that our contract clearly states it is accrued in 30-minute increments. We, as delegates, don't have the power to waive the contract in such a way, so we decide to send an email to our AGMA attorney.

By this point, it is time to get ready for dress rehearsal: 6:15 p.m., make-up; 6:30 p.m., a wig; and at 6:45 p.m., I add a pocket watch. I'm ready to get back on stage and jump around. Our dress rehearsal goes pretty smoothly throughout Act One. Intermission rolls around and a couple of delegates send emails in response to the AGMA attorney. Act Two is a whirlwind to the end, adding more characters to the maddening plot until all of the characters disappear and Alice is left alone with a book. We continue to take notes, and the delegates take turns monitoring the clock off-stage to help ensure we don't go over time again. At 10:00 p.m. we are released for the day. I gather my things for studio class tomorrow and head home. At home, I make a light dinner and relax on the couch for a moment. After checking the contract just to make sure, I respond to the emails about overtime. And at 11:30 p.m. I climb up the stairs to shower and lay down for the night. Today was a long day, but I love my job. ♦

©Kemp Johnson



Charles as the White Rabbit in Kansas City Ballet's Cast A of *Alice (in wonderland)*.

A Day in the Life of a Chorus Delegate for San Diego Opera

By Chris Stephens



A few years back, San Diego Opera learned that of the 100+ choristers, more than 60% either are, or at some point, have been educators. I am no exception. In my life, I have held jobs in two major fields: music and education. I have a deep passion for each, and as a result, I have held three jobs for the past 15 years. Like many of us, one of those jobs is singing in the opera (where I am both a chorister and the AGMA representative) and another as a church soloist. My third job is as an assistant principal at a middle school.

The middle school where I work has an enrollment of 1,500 students, grades 6 to 8. Each and every day is different; from supporting teachers to helping students, I make a difference.

As usual, today was full of the unexpected. My day began when a friend picked me up at my home and dropped me off to get my car from the repair shop. I then drove to work, wondering what the day would bring. About 20 minutes into the day, the fire alarm went off. Instantly, the staff sprang into action, realizing that there was not a

scheduled fire drill today. I grabbed my megaphone and headed outside to help ensure that students were walking with their classes, silently, and in single file lines, down to the field. The rest of the day was filled with student discipline, lunch supervision, parent phone calls, district emails, and everything else that you can imagine that comes along with being a vice principal.

After nine hours at my day job, I made my way downtown to pick up some food at a nearby restaurant, and then off to rehearsal. The opera schedule requires rehearsing for three to four hours every evening, and six hours every Saturday and Sunday. My one night off is Thursday, which is, of course, church choir. This is my schedule for four months straight—15 hour days. Thankfully, I love all three of my jobs!

During a typical rehearsal day, as an AGMA rep, I might field questions from both choristers and management. Management talks about the evening break schedule, upcoming rehearsal changes, and



At one of the Don Quixote rehearsals earlier this year, from left to right, front, are choristers Timmy Simpson and Alexandra Rodrick; back: Vincent Martin, Christopher Stephens and Steve Hoagland. The t-shirts that Chris and Steve are wearing (“Fight to Save San Diego Opera” and “Stop Being Passive and Fight San Diego Opera,” respectively) were created to bring attention to what was going on at San Diego Opera earlier this year.

other pertinent issues. Choristers talk about contract issues, rehearsal practice, as well as any number of other topics that I might be able to assist them with.

So, perhaps a bit overboard, I’ve described a day in a couple of lives; but both of them are mine, and I wouldn’t trade them for the world. Whether I’m sharing my joy of teaching paired with the gift of shaping young lives in preparation for the future, or sharing my joy of singing paired with the gift of providing other AGMA members with the confidence that I’ve “got their back,” I couldn’t be happier with the “days in my life.” ♦

A Day in the Life of a Principals and Production Staff Delegate at Los Angeles Opera

By Melissa Sardella



Currently, I am the stage left Assistant Stage Manager for Los Angeles Opera (LAO)’s double bill production of *Dido and Aeneas* and *Bluebeard’s Castle*. For this show, I am overseeing the props, audio and carpentry departments, while my colleague is working with the costume, wardrobe, wigs and makeup departments. I also have the unique opportunity of being the AGMA Delegate for the Principals and Production Staff on this production.

For me, it is appealing that no two days are the same in my job and I never know what my day will hold. Some days are short, some are long, and on a rare occasion there is a day with no rehearsal and no performance. The days that I am at work can have me doing any number

of activities, but for the purpose of this article, I will highlight an onstage technical rehearsal day. They generally are our longer and more exciting days.

9:30 a.m. Today is our first full day of onstage rehearsals so, although we don’t officially begin for an hour, I am here. I make sure I have all the appropriate paperwork printed out and ready to go for the various departments I am responsible to communicate with. I also have all of that information for my own score. I can’t complain though; the crew has been here for an hour and a half getting the stage ready for us.

10:00 a.m. Coffee. And donuts. This is usually the time the onstage crews take their morning break. On long days like today I try to join them. It’s one of my favorite times onstage, not only because they

provide coffee and donuts and I have an unhealthy love of both, but because I enjoy the opportunity for some down time with my colleagues to catch up before a day full of what can be tense and stressful rehearsals.

10:20 a.m. Break time is over and we have ten minutes to assure the stage is completely set for the rehearsal. This morning we are starting with *Bluebeard's Castle* which, during performances, will actually come after intermission. The set consists of a white, raked turntable, 53' in diameter (which is the entire playing space) on a black surround. As the AGMA Delegate, anytime I learn if a set (or any portion of a set) is raked, it's a red flag. In the AGMA Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with LAO, it is stated that "the company must make rake (or physical safety) training available to artists when the rake ratio is 1:10 or greater." I've already checked in with our Production Manager in the tech department and I know that this rake is 0.628:10 so training will not need to be provided.

10:30 a.m. At four minutes into *Bluebeard*, the turntable begins rotating counterclockwise and will remain in motion until two minutes before the end of the piece. That is 50 minutes of continual rotation. It seems simple enough but the catch is, since it is raked, it needs to be in certain positions for certain moments which means it must change speeds throughout its four slow rotations in context to the staging. Given this production came from Frankfurt Opera and is a remount for us, a lot of the legwork has been done. There are numbers written in ultraviolet paint a meter apart on the side of the turntable and, from the Frankfurt Opera's Stage Manager score, I know when we need to be passing which number. However, the motor on our turntable operates using a different speed system from the one they had in Frankfurt. The next two hours before the cast arrives are an opportunity for me to work with the turntable to set appropriate speeds using a CD recording from a previous performance. Essentially, I am sitting at a table following along with music, watching numbers go by and asking the turntable operator to speed up or slow down in accordance with the numbers in my score. It is a slow-moving, inexact process that at times can be quite frustrating, but I know it will make today's Piano Tech run much more smoothly. We press on and set some approximate speeds that will get us through this afternoon's rehearsal.

12:30 p.m. LUNCH. I'm not usually one to work through my lunch but today requires that I spend some time making sure the new turntable speeds I have found are written legibly in my score. I brought my lunch so I eat over my work, trying to not get too many crumbs in my book. Since the schedule did not allow for my required one-hour lunch, the company will be paying me a meal penalty.

1:30 p.m. The crews, the rest of the stage management team, and I all head to stage for half hour call. Cast is beginning to arrive and get into costume. Usually, we don't have costumes for tech rehearsals, but this production requires the cast to get wet and covered with blood and glitter (like I said, I never know what my day will hold). In order to work through all the technical elements, the company has decided to put them in costume. While they dress, we are onstage resetting the turntable to its starting position and assuring the rest of the stage is ready for the start of rehearsal.

2:30 p.m. *BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE* PIANO TECH #1. After allowing the cast to walk around the stage and get acquainted with the rake and their entrances and exits, we begin at the start of the show and work our way through to the end. I'm feeling pretty great about the rehearsal since we only have to stop a couple of times for me to readjust the turntable and reset speeds.

There are a number of other technical elements that must be sorted out today, one of which is the use of fog or, for us, liquid nitrogen (LN2). In Frankfurt, they used a fogger with a substance that is not approved by our CBA. Even though LAO is always diligent about making sure the rules regarding special effects are followed, naturally, as the AGMA Delegate, I have kept this on my radar. The physical nature of LN2 is a bit heavier and doesn't work quite the way the fog in Frankfurt did, so this element takes some time and futzing around with to get just right. Eventually we find a solution that works well for the directing and design staff as well as all of us on and backstage.

Another interesting element we work with today is water. Under their costumes, the three supers in the show are wearing a vest comprised of tubes that connect down through their shoes. In the tubes are little holes. On the turntable are little metal connectors that the supers will step on to connect their shoes to the water pump below the deck. On the stage manager's cue, an electrician will start the water pump and water will come up through the deck into the supers' tube vests and out the holes to create the effect that they are leaking water all over. I must say it looks pretty great. Unfortunately, we can only allow so much water to run without flooding the stage. Once the costumes are wet they take time to dry, especially the shoes. Therefore we only get so many times to perfect it.

5:30 p.m. DINNER. Generally, on three-session days I only pack one meal for myself so that I am forced to walk down the street for food and see the sun. After two hours in the dark, staring as numbers slowly pass by, I am grateful for the walk, the last glimpse of sunlight and warm food.

6:30 p.m. Again we all head up to stage for half hour. This time is used to set up for *Dido & Aeneas*, which is completely different than *Bluebeard*. There is a long bench and wall upstage from it. We only use the ten furthest downstage feet of the stage and we also use the orchestra pit as playing space.

7:00 p.m. *DIDO & AENEAS* PIANO TECH #1. Because the cast is staged to sit and stand on chairs in the pit, we spend the first few

(continues on page 21)



Claudia Mahnke as Judith and Robert Hayward as Bluebeard in *Bluebeard's Castle* on the raked turntable.

AGMA Procedure on Dues Objections

This is a formal notice, required by law, for all members, new members, joining members, and all other persons working under, or being hired to work under a collective bargaining agreement between AGMA, the American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO, and an opera, ballet, dance programming, concert, or other company producing operatic music, dance, concerts, or other types of productions. This notice covers all such singers, dancers, stage and production personnel, choreographers, and others rendering services to or employed by such opera, ballet, dance, concert, or other companies producing operatic music, dance programming, concerts, or other types of productions.

The following notice and the procedures related thereto were developed in response to the holdings in a U.S. Supreme Court case known as *Communication Workers of America v. Beck*, relating to the expenditure of dues income for non-representational purposes.

All persons working under an AGMA collective bargaining agreement containing a union security clause are required, as a condition of employment, to pay dues and initiation fees to AGMA. Employees have the right to decide whether they wish to be members of AGMA. Employees who decide not to join AGMA remain obligated, under the union security clause, to pay an agency fee to AGMA equal to regular AGMA dues.

Employees who are not members of AGMA, but who pay dues to AGMA pursuant to a union security clause of a collective bargaining agreement, have the legal right to object to supporting certain activities which are not related to collective bargaining, contract administration, or grievance adjustment (representational activities) and may obtain a reduction in their dues and initiation fee.

Employees who choose not to become AGMA members and object to paying full dues should be aware that by electing not to become full members, they forfeit the right to enjoy a number of benefits available to members only. Among the benefits available only to full AGMA members are the AGMA Relief Fund; Union Privilege, insurance, health, and loan benefits; the right to attend and participate in Union meetings; the right to run for Union office and to nominate and vote for candidates for Union office; the right to participate in contract ratification and strike votes; the right to participate in development and formulation of Union policies; and the right to participate in the formulation of

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 of 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. ♦

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A Word about Seniority and Why Recognizing Seniority Is Eventually a Benefit to Everyone

By Alan S. Gordon, AGMA National Executive Director



By Seniority, in a labor relations context, is defined as the length of time that an individual has worked for a particular employer. Seniority can bring higher pay, better vacation benefits, and improved job security or reemployment preference to an employee who has worked for an employer for a longer period of time. It also encourages loyalty among experienced employees.

Nearly all AGMA contracts recognize, to one extent or another, some concept of seniority. Pay scales, in both opera and ballet contracts, increase along with the length of time that a member has worked for the same company. Some AGMA opera contracts provide for preference of re-employment based on the length or amount of prior work for a company.

Occasionally, newer members question the concept of seniority and argue that the notion of seniority keeps them from more regular employment, or limits members who believe themselves to be “better” or “more qualified” artistically.

Actually, both objections are misguided. In ballet, seniority relates primarily to pay scales, while reemployment decisions are almost 100% talent-driven. In opera, rewarding employees for prior service and experience ultimately benefits every employee because, eventually, every employee achieves a greater level of seniority. The concept of seniority rewards performers for the length of their experience. Senior employees who effectively contribute are valued by employers for their experience, historical knowledge about the company and its productions, and for their loyalty. In the unusual instance in which an employer tells a member, “I’d like to hire you but the union won’t let me because of seniority,” that’s nothing more than a fictitious excuse for not hiring the person.

Also, and perhaps of more relevance in today’s youth-oriented looks-and-age opera workplace, seniority prevents arbitrary, disparate and discriminatory treatment in hiring, firing and some reemployment decisions. In nonunion workplaces, where seniority is not a factor, employers are free to churn employees so they can hire younger, cheaper workers or make capricious and

inequitably discriminatory hiring decisions.

Even in workplaces that do not consider seniority in employment-related decisions, seniority may still be honored in other ways. Especially in ballet companies, experience gained through length of service is almost always a factor in promotions to soloist and principal roles. Even from the management perspective, seniority encourages employee longevity so that the company can benefit from having senior employees with company knowledge and experience.

In the not-for-profit world, as baby boomers grow older and retirement age can be pushed to 75 or more, seniority is experiencing a broad resurgence of acceptability as employers want to retain employees with substantially greater and more diverse experience. And every contract provides a mechanism to replace performers if they can actually no longer do their jobs.

Thus, while the concept of seniority might inherently disadvantage some newer, talented employees initially, it ultimately protects them as their tenure and experience develop. ♦

A Day in the Life of an Assistant Stage Manager (continued from page 19)

minutes of this rehearsal adjusting the placement of the chairs so that everyone can see the conductor and safely get up and down from their chairs. This requires the props department to unscrew and rescrew the chairs into the floor. We realize that members of the orchestra will also need to be moved around since the cast is in the pit. The props department is also responsible for moving them. Each instrument has a microphone attached to it so that the sound can be fed into the fold back in backstage monitors for the cast and staff to

hear, so the audio department also helps adjust everything.

After the initial walk-through of the stage and pit, we start from the beginning of the piece and slowly work through it. Unlike *Bluebeard*, I don’t do much during the course of this performance. I stay on stage left in case anybody needs any assistance or information. Fortunately, this is an uneventful rehearsal so I have an opportunity to enjoy our cast and chorus’ beautiful voices accompanied by the continuo. Ten minutes before the piece is over I head to the lobby,

since that is where the cast and orchestra exit for this piece. Overall, it is a low-key way to end the day.

10:00 p.m. Rehearsal is over. After making sure the cast is safely offstage and saying goodnight to the crew, stage management and production staff head to the house for a quick production meeting. We discuss things that worked well and problem-solve those that did not. It was a relatively smooth day so there isn’t much to be discussed before reviewing tomorrow’s schedule.

10:20 p.m. After the production meeting, the stage management team heads back to the office to review the day with each other and make a plan for how we will staff the next day for lighting rehearsal and more tech.

10:30 p.m. HOME. It’s time to head home and hope I don’t have nightmares of numbers flying by my head.

Tomorrow will be an entirely different schedule with new priorities and problems to solve. There is never a dull moment for us during tech week! ♦

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2014 Holiday Greetings from Christine Goerke



Dear friends, family, colleagues and other loyal supporters of the AGMA Relief Fund,

I'm sure most of you are surprised to see mail from me. I'm writing to urge you to join me in an operatic style show of support for AGMA members in need. As the trend to decimate the Arts continues, our hardworking, immensely talented colleagues become more and more vulnerable when a devastating emergency occurs.



One friend hired for her "big break" did not have enough rent money to make payments, waiting for the rehearsal period to begin. Luckily, an AGMA colleague suggested that she contact AGMA. Without emergency assistance from the AGMA Relief Fund, the world would be missing a major artist. When San Diego Opera and the Met threatened to close their doors, the Relief Fund was the only hope that allowed artists to sleep at night while the Union was working tirelessly to keep the doors open at these legendary Opera houses.

We all know colleagues whose careers have been interrupted or even abruptly ended by an injury or serious illness.

We also know colleagues who have been able to realize their artistic dreams because donors like you have enabled the Relief Fund to exist as a safety net in tragic times.

Please make the Relief Fund your donating priority because you know your donation will reach singers, dancers, actors, and production staff in dire need in our intimate and artistically rich family. We have a unique opportunity to continue to "invest" in our own community.

As you may know, we only approach you once a year, but we do offer perks, in addition to tax receipts. Throughout the year, we can save you time, money, and anxiety by customizing your holiday gifts and by commemorating your special occasions as a way of acknowledging your donation. Let us work with you to personalize every gift with your photos, text or design.

While I sing in the U.S. and abroad I come in constant contact with fellow AGMA members who talk about the particular struggles caused by our times and artistic calling. Let's continue the legacy of the soloists who formed the AGMA Relief Fund in 1945 and let our members, in need, know that they are not alone or forgotten.

Thank you in advance for your generosity. Have a wonderful holiday season and a prosperous and happy 2015!

Warmest wishes,



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Goerke".

Christine Goerke



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