Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!

AGMA's Founders

1st Vice President Jascha Heifetz
2nd Vice President Alma Gluck
3rd Vice President Deems Taylor
4th Vice President Richard Bonelli

and Original Officers

President Lawrence Tibbett
"To AGMA, with unceasing devotion always"

Treasurer Frank La Forge
Recording Secretary Gladys Swarthout

Alma Gluck photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives
**The Inevitability of Transformative Events**

**AGMA—Past, Present and Future**

Alan S. Gordon  
National Executive Director’s Report

We live in an unpredictable world. Basic, fundamental change, occurring at an almost inconceivably cataclysmic speed, is taking place in every area of human endeavor. Some things about change can nonetheless be known: Change will always occur, it always has a down side but those who are prepared for it and have the courage to embrace it will have a better chance to prosper.

AGMA’s job is to recognize, accept its inevitability, and take advantage of the changes that occur. All of the obstacles to institutional transformation that once plagued AGMA are gone, but the job remains, for me, for our staff, and for our leadership, to define what the future looks like (both for AGMA as an institution and for our members), to align our members with that vision, and to inspire them to make it happen despite the possibility of unavoidable short-term sacrifices.

Others, in this and subsequent Anniversary editions of AGMAzine, will revisit AGMA’s history—from the turmoil of the labor movement of the 1930s, up to the end of the last century. For me, it is sufficient to note that the AGMA of today was almost unimaginable ten years ago.

Today, all of the conditions of the past that prevented AGMA from being an efficient and effectively run labor union are gone. Your union has an exceptional, professional and highly competent staff, with high morale and no turnover, a staff that understands the relationship between the jobs they do and the benefits and services that those jobs create for the membership. Your union’s dedicated, streamlined governance makes a difference in the working lives of its members. I am convinced that among entertainment and talent unions of the size and resources of AGMA, no union does a better job for its members than AGMA.

Our reputation with the employers of our members is that of a collegial partner, but a partner that is both aggressive and litigious in the defense of its member artists, and necessarily adversarial in negotiations. Our reputation among the other entertainment unions is that AGMA is a partner in the overall entertainment labor movement, but not one that can be crossed without consequences. Our fiscal operation and our safeguards of members’ funds are unequalled, and our financial resources have quadrupled since 2000. We make more money now for AGMA from non-dues-created sources of revenue than we do from all the AGMA members working at the Metropolitan Opera. Working members have an exponentially improved identification with the union and a high level of trust that AGMA will protect them and improve their contracts. The bureaucratic and political dysfunctional-ity of the past no longer exists and most barriers to change have been eliminated. I think it fair to say that the men and women who created AGMA 75 years ago would be pleased and proud of what their union has become.

But satisfaction with the present is not enough.

In its 75th year, the magnitude of changes that affect AGMA’s members, and the powerful macroeconomic forces that affect their employers, demonstrate that opera and dance companies are now required to consider and undertake drastic changes in the way they have been run, not only to prosper, but merely to survive. Employers find that they can no longer do business in traditional ways. More and more, non-profit entities are pressured to reduce costs, locate new avenues for growth, and increase productivity. Ways in which to exploit and distribute the work product of our members change on an almost monthly basis. How we deal with these facts

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One Special Evening, 75 Years of History

On November 8, 2010, I had the privilege of accepting, on behalf of AGMA, the Career Transition For Dancers Award at the Career Transition For Dancers’ 25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee. The award was given in recognition of AGMA’s “outstanding contributions to the world of dance”. Three of our sister unions—Actors’ Equity, SAG and AFTRA—also received CTFD awards for their contributions. It was a wonderful evening, filled with exciting dance performances featuring a large number of AGMA members. We have every right to be proud of both our support for CTFD and our support and representation of dancers during their performing careers.

When AGMA staff was informed that we would be receiving the award, our National Executive Director, Alan Gordon, immediately contacted me to determine if my performance and rehearsal schedule at Lyric Opera of Chicago would allow me to accept the award for AGMA. Although it was a tight schedule, it looked possible, and I booked my flight.

A few weeks before the gala, Mr. Gordon called to inform me that none of the presidents of our sister unions would be in attendance to accept the CTFD award on behalf of their unions, and that professional staff from our sister unions would be accepting their awards. Mr. Gordon felt that it was still appropriate for me to accept on behalf of AGMA. I agreed and we left our plans for the evening as they were.

The evening arrived. Now, I know (or at least see) a lot of really famous people and don’t think a lot about it because they’re mostly people I work with. But, HELLO! ANGELA LANSBURY! She was amazingly gracious, held both my hands, and talked to me as though we had known each other since the original production of Mame. Then, a little later, Karen Ziemba dashed past and smiled and said hello as though we were old friends. I suspect, though, that she was just being nice to someone she wasn’t sure she recognized, but thought she was supposed to know. Fabrice Calmels and Valerie Robin from the Joffrey Ballet were warming up next to me, but no biggie because they’re my homies, right? Yeah, right. Okay, I admit it. I try to be cool, but I’m just a big ol’ star-struck nerd.

So I’m standing backstage, basking in reflected glory, trying to remember that these are just people doing their jobs the same way that I do my job pretty much every night (and the occasional afternoon matinee) of my life, when it happens. One of the staff members from one of the other unions says to me, “So you’re not paid staff, are you?” I replied, “No, I’m elected leadership.” This person was not being nasty. I really think it was an honest attempt to determine where I fit in the overall scheme of things. Or perhaps it was an attempt to understand the governing structure of AGMA. (I have discovered over the last few months that our sister unions often have only the vaguest of ideas about how AGMA works. But that’s a story for another day.) In any case, it gave me pause.

You see, of the four unions represented on that stage, accepting that award, I was the only elected, working member. And if you go back to March of 1936, you will find working members forming AGMA. For seventy-five years, members of AGMA, working with professional staff, have guided the growth and focus of the union. As I have often said, there have been periods when we have been more successful than others, but members have always been there. When there have been—or are—inequities, members identify them and then work with staff to address and alleviate them. I believe that it is this partnership between working members and professional staff through the years that has given us a unique balance: a member-driven union with effective and enthusiastic professionals running the day-to-day operations.

For seventy-five years, it’s been about the members, by the members, for the members. That’s the whole point.

AGMA President Jimmy Odom accepts the Career Transition For Dancers Award on behalf of AGMA.*

AGMA President Jimmy Odom and Angela Lansbury backstage at the Career Transition For Dancers’ 25th Anniversary Gala.

James Odom

*Jimmy Odom accepting award, photo by Richard Termine at the Career for Transition For Dancers’ 25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee on November 8, 2010
requires in no small part a change in our way of thinking; recognize that people are generally comfortable with the status quo and afraid of change, they focus on the downside instead of the possibilities, and struggle to maintain what is, despite the inevitability of transformative events.

Accepting the inescapability of change is the first step toward being able to recognize the possibilities and advantages it might present. While we can’t be certain of the future, we need to recognize and get a handle on the trends that will affect our members, which is one way to cope with change and convert risks into opportunities. Five years ago, Facebook and Twitter did not meaningfully exist; today, they are a powerful forum for concerted activity among our members. Most of us have become comfortable with email, yet it has been said that email is passé and that instantaneous, short texts are replacing it. Trying to fit tomorrow’s digital world into today’s analog contractual parameters will be no simple task.

Helping members to embrace change, to be comfortable with a different reality, to understand the need for urgency, to take non-traditional risks, to accept a vision of the future different from the one they now have, will require a strong leadership coalition that accepts the certainty of this need.

External transformation will, in turn, necessitate consideration of internal changes. As with most unions, AGMA must take note of the diversity within its membership. Older members and younger members don’t necessarily share the same concerns. Members working under AGMA contracts may have different priorities than those members who work primarily for non-AGMA or foreign employers, or who no longer work as performing artists. In many situations, what was once standard union axiom no longer meshes with what our members do.

To anticipate the future, I think it remains necessary to challenge some of our own basic beliefs and see if they remain sound. In turn, that means that there are internal issues that need to be discussed and analyzed, even if it is uncomfortable to do so.

In theory, AGMA is a model of geographic and working category electoral democracy, but is that kind of democracy “fair” to those members who work regularly for AGMA signatories and whose dues fund all of AGMA’s operations? Do our efforts to treat all members equally diminish the representation of those working members on our Board? Is it appropriate that our democratic structure allows members who no longer do any significant work as performing artists, or who work primarily for non-union or foreign employers, to hold office based upon their place of residence, rather than on any connection to AGMA signatory employers? To some extent, questions about the relationship between working members and other members is inherent in all labor unions, but AGMA should at least consider whether this lessens AGMA’s strength in its basic job of negotiating and enforcing collective bargaining agreements.

This is not to say that all members, working or not, don’t have valuable input and creative thoughts, nor does it say that we cannot learn from history. But what members want from their union depends in significant part on where they are in their career progression. AGMA tries to be all things to all members, but our leadership will need to consider whether that traditional union goal remains viable.

Beyond the global economic, technological and social changes that affect AGMA and its members, we continue to face the more conventional issues that require vigilance: illegal age, race, sex, religious and sexual orientation discrimination against members; diminished governmental support for the arts; governmental inaction on improving workers’ rights; the ever-increasing cost of protective litigation; and continuing attempts by signatories to hire foreign artists for AGMA jobs.

In AGMA’s anniversary year, we will have thirty-four separate collective bargaining agreements to renegotiate and several first contracts to bargain. Many, if not all, of those contracts can involve novel issues. The mix of old and new concerns will tax our staff and our leadership: opera companies that can’t fill more than 40% of their seats at any performance, ballet companies seeking to limit members’ rights on social networking sites, work in non-traditional venues, expanding our jurisdiction into non-traditional kinds of performances, and the opportunities presented by as-yet-undiscovered technology.

Twenty-five years ago, on AGMA’s 50th anniversary, it would have been difficult to envision how AGMA would evolve. Faxes, cell phones and laptop computers, were just new inventions, not every day tools. Google didn’t exist until AGMA’s 62nd anniversary. Instantaneous electronic communication and a new definition of “mail” were only on the horizon. Opera in movie theaters and virtual dancers were the stuff of fantasy. No one can effectively predict exactly what the world, science, the entertainment business or AGMA will look like on AGMA’s 100th anniversary. The only certainty is that it will be different.

As AGMA begins to celebrate its 75th Anniversary, your union could not be in a better position to rise to the task of finding opportunities for its members as part of the inevitable changes within existing reality. What better way to celebrate AGMA’s 75th Anniversary than for its members to be confident that there is no challenge that its resources, its staff and its leadership are not able to meet.

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**2011 Election Reminder**

You should have already received initial election information and candidate petitions. Candidate petitions are due back in the National Office by March 1, 2011. All members will receive ballots and campaign materials on the candidates running in their areas and for national office in April.
75th Anniversary Plans for AGMA

by Sara Stewart Schumann, 3rd Vice President and MMRC Chair

In honor of AGMA’s 75th anniversary, and as chair of the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC), it is my pleasure to lead the committee in its efforts to encourage better communication within AGMA. We have many exciting plans in the works and already you have seen the fruits of our labors.

By now you probably noticed that the AGMazine came to you without an outside envelope, is printed on a new kind of paper, and is in color. Believe it or not, we are saving money while making AGMazine fresh and more exciting for you!

This first (Winter) issue in 2011 will uncover AGMA’s past: “How far has AGMA come?” The second issue (Spring) will be a commemorative booklet that will highlight today’s AGMA, with helpful information on how AGMA functions and serves its membership. The third (Fall) issue will explore AGMA’s future: “Where is AGMA going?” We want you to contribute any articles or photos; please feel free to do so. Just send your news or photos to Denise@musicalartists.org.

You will also notice that the long-awaited Members Only section of AGMA’s website is up and running. Many members have already used the site to pay their Basic Dues and update their contact information. Special thanks go to MMRC member Maren Montalbano and AGMA Staff for making this happen.

During this year, MMRC will make available to any AGMA shop having a meeting or finishing up their negotiations a packet containing items to help you commemorate AGMA’s 75th anniversary at your event. In the packet you will find balloons with an AGMA logo and various templates and ideas for decorations along with a small budget for expenses. Elsewhere in the AGMazine you can read about a website where you can order AGMA memorabilia. Are we having fun yet?

From myself, MMRC, and the Board, please enjoy the new and improved AGMazine and website and participate in the events that occur in your area. Get involved! Write to us at MMRC@musicalartists.org with your ideas or requests and be a part of celebrating AGMA’s 75th.

AGMA Recoups Money for Members in Baltimore Opera Bankruptcy

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

AGMA is pleased to report that after months of litigation in bankruptcy court, we were successful in recovering money for our members from the bankrupt Baltimore Opera Company. AGMA asserted a claim against the Company for pay that was due to members under the “pay or play” clause of AGMA’s Standard Artists Agreement for cancelled performances (specifically, for the cancelled December 2008 Winter Concert, the cancelled 2009 productions of The Barber of Seville and Porgy and Bess, and the cancelled 2009-2010 season productions of Rigoletto, Cyrano, The Magic Flute and Carmen).

The defunct opera company had dozens of creditors, almost all of whom received nothing on their claims against the Opera, while AGMA, by contrast, obtained a recovery for its members by successfully arguing in the bankruptcy court that the “pay or play” claims were entitled to priority status.

AGMA recovered $149,620.81, or about 20 cents on the dollar of its total claim; the lack of assets in the estate prevented a greater recovery. The entire sum will be distributed to those AGMA members who were owed money by the Company, with each member receiving a distribution proportional to the amount that he or she was owed.

Letters were mailed from AGMA on January 14 to all Artists who were contracted for the above-listed productions stating the amount they should expect to receive after responding to us. If you were under contract with the former Baltimore Opera Company for one of the above-listed productions and did NOT receive a letter from AGMA, contact Eleni Kallas directly at agmadc@comcast.net.

In Memoriam

Christina Andreou  
Jack Beeson*  
Hugues Cuenod  
Frances Ginsberg

Lone Isaksen  
Osborn Moe  
Walter Richardson  
Shirley Verrett

Howard Van Hyning*  
Dolores Wilson  
Edward Zimmermann

*Indicates a distinguished individual in a related profession
A Guide to AGMA’s New Site for Members

by Maren Montalbano, AGMA Board Member, MMRC Member and Chorister

At this point, you should have received your annual Basic Dues statement with a notification that you are now able to pay your dues online on our website via the new password-protected “Members Only” section. This is a project that we on the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC) have been working on for several years, and we are very excited about its launch!

That being said, this site is still a work in progress and we plan to expand the website’s capabilities. AGMA is able to accept payments online and you can already find audition information and our collective bargaining agreements available for members’ eyes only.

You can find the Members Only site in two different ways. Either go directly to http://members.musicalartists.org or visit AGMA’s home page (http://musicalartists.org) and click on the “Members Only” button located in the top banner on the right side of the page.

You will be taken to the Welcome page. It has the same design as the main AGMA home page, but the left-hand navigation pane is slightly different:

Click on “Login” on the left-hand side, and follow the instructions.

In the User Name field, type the first five letters of your last name (or your full last name if less than five letters) followed by your ID number. The user name is not case sensitive. In the Password field, type your AGMA ID number. (Your ID number can be found on your invoice or on your AGMA membership card below your name.)

Example:
Name: John Smith
ID Number: 12345
User name: Smith12345
Password: 12345

In the event your user name does not work:
Try logging in using just your ID number.

Example:
Name: John Smith
ID Number: 12345
User name: 12345
Password: 12345

(continues on page 8)
If you still cannot login, click on “Forgot Your Login Information?” This link will take you to a page that will prompt you for the necessary information we will need to help you.

Once you have logged in, you will be able to access any of the options on the left-hand side. You can view/pay your dues, change your address, and even read past issues of AGMAzine in PDF format.

If you want to change your password or update your mailing address, click on “Personal Record.” Your address and other membership information will appear on the screen. If you need to change your address, just click on the “Change Address” button. You will be taken to a screen where you can edit your address.

If you want to change your user name or password, click on the drop-down box at the top of the record. Choose the second option, “Change Password,” then click on “Go.” You will then be taken to a page where you can change your user name and password to something that might be easier for you to remember the next time you log on.

If you have any questions or if you get locked out of your account, you can always call the National Office at (800) 543-2462 during regular business hours and ask for the Membership Department.

There is also a “Help” link on the left-hand navigation bar that will take you to a page with more explanations on the other pages you are able to access in the “Members Only” area. If you have comments or suggestions about the site itself, please email MMRC@musicalartists.org.
Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!

by Sara Stewart Schumann, 3rd Vice President and MMRC Chair

Thanks to the founders of AGMA, our union has made great progress in representing singers, dancers, choreographers, directors, and staging staff in the performing arts over the past 75 years.

Founded in the spring of 1936 as an organization of solo musical artists, AGMA's humble beginnings were the result of a conference between Lawrence Tibbett, Jascha Heifetz, and Alma Gluck (see cover). The earliest members and advisors included the likes of Richard Bonnelli, Frank Chapman, Richard Crooks, Kirsten Flagstad, George Gershwin, Frank La Forge, John McCormick, Lauritz Melchior, James Melton, Lily Pons, Andres Segovia, Gladys Swarthout, Deems Taylor, Fred Waring, Paul Whiteman, Efrem Zimbalist and many others.

Originally, AGMA was an independent organization. However, in August 1937, AGMA was granted a charter from the Associated Actors and Artistes of America (the "4As") to cover the fields of grand opera, concert, and recital. AGMA immediately began an intense campaign to organize artists throughout the country. By the fall of 1937, the very first negotiated AGMA agreement was signed with the Southern California Symphony Association, recognizing AGMA as the exclusive bargaining agent for all solo and chorus singers and ballet dancers. Meanwhile, AGMA informed the Metropolitan Opera Association that it represented a majority of the Met's performers and was ready to begin negotiations for an agreement. By the end of 1937, AGMA was also negotiating with the Chicago Opera Company and the Philadelphia Civic Grand Opera Company. The rest is history…

AGMA's historical journey will be continued in our next AGMAzine.

Members, you are invited to share in this journey and be a part of AGMA's 75th Anniversary Celebration!

AGMA Presidents Chime In

"Best wishes to AGMA for the next 75 years!"
Cornell Mac Neil, AGMA President 1971–1977

"I was lucky in having an excellent staff of professionals… with a strong, hard working Board from every layer of our theaters, we (AGMA) presented a strong, united front."
Nedda Cassai, AGMA President 1983–1993

"Tumultuous times often precede great progress. AGMA struggled through some difficult but ultimately profitable times while I served as president. The foundation for an entirely new structure was begun that brought wonderful new leadership, participation, and relevancy to the union. I am still proud to be the first dancer to head AGMA and prouder still to see how well our union serves the performing arts community in the 21st century."
Gerald Otte, AGMA President 1994–1999

"AGMA is a union which represents individuals and groups with an unparalleled level of professionalism and skill while maintaining the lowest dues schedule of any other performance union."
Linda Mays, AGMA President 1999–2007

"Every organization must continue to grow in order to remain viable and effective. Over the past seventy-five years, AGMA's member-leaders and staff have continually worked to find new and more effective ways to represent and protect AGMA members. It hasn't always been easy, and we haven't always been as effective as we would have liked. But, we continue to grow and to learn—never allowing ourselves to be discouraged by setbacks, never resting on our accomplishments. That is what makes AGMA strong, and will continue to build our strength and ability to represent our members."
Jimmy Odom, AGMA President, 2007–present

Happy 75th Anniversary, AGMA!
New York Area Meeting
by Louis Perry, New York Area Chair, Recording Secretary, New York City Opera Chorister

The first order of business at the well-attended November 15 New York Area meeting was the election of new committee members and the new chair, Louis Perry. We bid farewell to outgoing chair, Tim Breese, and thanked him for his efforts. As well, we thanked departing committee members for their service.

AGMA National Executive Director Alan Gordon and Eastern Counsel Deborah Allton-Maher spoke to the union’s achievements in 2010 and to the challenges facing the union with the numerous New York Area contracts being negotiated in 2011.

Mr. Gordon’s and Ms. Allton-Maher’s comments were followed by an informative question-and-answer period.

Area members enjoyed the good food and appreciated the free flu shot provided by The Actors Fund.

As always, the Area Committee thanks Gerry Angel and the staff for helping make the meeting a success.

Metropolitan Opera Choristers Help Fellow Artists
by Linda Mays, Board Member and Metropolitan Opera Chorister

A group of 19 Metropolitan Opera regular and extra choristers were once again led valiantly by Daniel Clark Smith to expedite the auditions at the Met to fill regular and extra chorister positions for the 2010–2011 season. The volunteers all donated their precious time off (approximately 20 hours) to help future Metropolitan Opera AGMA choristers. The process gave more than 260 auditioners respect, courtesy, compassion and physical comfort as they waited to be heard. An audition schedule was enforced so that each individual’s waiting time was minimal.

Daniel Hoy and John Smith assisted Daniel Clark Smith, whose team also included Katie Bolding, Jean Braham, Laurel Cameron, Nathan Carlisle, Stephanie Chigas, Catherine Choi, Suzanne Falletti, Laura Fries, Michael Gray, Dan Hoy, David Lowe, Brandon Mayberry, Belinda Oswald, Chester Pidduck, Michael Reder, Deborah Saverance, John Smith and Christina Anderson.

In addition to Chorus Master Maestro Donald Palumbo, AGMA members Kurt Phinney (Chorus Manager), Stephen Paynter (Assistant Chorus Manager), Carole Wright (Chorus Ladies’ Delegate) and Craig Montgomery (Chorus Men’s Delegate) were observers at all of the auditions.

Steven Losito (Chorus Administrator) organized the screening and scheduling of auditioners over the preceding months.

Thank you to all.

Visit the AGMA website www.musicalartists.org and click on “Auditions” for all future audition information.
Backstage at Pittsburgh Opera’s November 2010 production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, ladies in front, from left: Area Committee Vice-chair Carol Wolfe, Cheryl Shenefelt Bush (a member of the AGMA negotiating committee from this summer’s CBA negotiations) and Area Committee member Katy Shackleton-Williams; men in back, from left: Area Committee member Sean Donaldson, Area Committee Chair Bill Buchanan, and delegates and Area Committee members Joshua Mulkey and Bill Fisher.

Tell Us Who Inspired You!

As AGMA enters its 75th year, we want to know, “Who was your inspiration?” Who did you idolize and want to be “just like” them? Was it a singer, like Maria Callas or Luciano Pavarotti, a dancer like Maria Tallchief or Mikhail Baryshnikov, or a director like Franco Zeffirelli or Jean-Pierre Ponnelle? Who influenced you the most?

AGMA and the membership want to read about who inspired you to enter into the world of the performing arts. Please send your stories to Denise@musicalartists.org. We’d love to publish them throughout this wonderful anniversary year.

SAVE THE DATE!
The Southern California Area meeting will be held on Saturday March 26 at 1:00 p.m. President Jimmy Odom will be in attendance. Check your mail in late February for more details and location information.

SAVE THE DATE!
The Chicago/Midwest Area meeting will be held on Saturday, February 27 at 6 p.m. at The Exchequer Restaurant and Pub. Check your mail and email for more details and RSVP information.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Contact information for various programs like the AGMA Relief Fund, Actors Work Program, Union Plus and Career Transition For Dancers can be found under “Important Links” on AGMA’s website, musicalartists.org.

San Diego Opera’s *Turandot* chorus
NEGOTIATIONS, Negotiations, negotiations..........  

The process can surely wear you down if you don’t have an organized approach to planning for the actual meetings across the table from Management.

In the Washington/Baltimore Area, 2010 was a very busy year for negotiations. Successful negotiations took place in two days or less with each of our opera companies: Washington National Opera (WNO), Washington Concert Opera, Florida Grand Opera (FGO) and our newest signatory, Lyric Opera Baltimore, which will have its first season in 2011–2012.

When we say “successful negotiations” we can say with pride that there were wage increases in all of our agreements even in these hardest of economic times. We can cite parity with the orchestra in health benefits for choristers and dancers at WNO, substantial wage increases and first time health coverage for choristers and assistant stage managers at FGO, and a first contract with Lyric Opera Baltimore that begins with quite respectable wages and health benefits for all.

The negotiation process begins early for us. Our AGMA negotiating committees and sub-committees in each of the categories of the bargaining unit (singers, dancers and production staff) start by drafting two lists. The first list is, of course, what hasn’t worked in the past and the second list is the wish list. Surveys are crafted to acquire the input of the entire shop and sent out online, since having the input of an entire shop is critical in deciding where the negotiation committee should focus its efforts. After some in-person meetings, some teleconferenced meetings, some proposal drafting, some proposal trashing, some emails back and forth, some disagreements back and forth, followed by some charts drawn up for comparison, some reviews of other contracts and some consultations with the AGMA staff—et voilà!—we come up with the “first draft” of proposals.

It is important to have this “first draft” quite some time before meeting with Management. Why? So it can be read and discussed again and again, fine-tuned a few times and finally prioritized. Oh, and let’s not forget one of the most essential parts of the process: narrowing the proposals down to fit on less than five sheets of paper. There is a saying that “less is more”. The explanation is obvious. The less you give Management to read, the more you can expect to attract their attention and get them to see what is really important to the membership. So YES, the negotiations across the table can be completed in two days!

There is no magic recipe for successful negotiations, but our membership in the Washington/Baltimore Area is indeed fortunate to have the dedicated volunteers who serve on the negotiating committees, the Area Committee and as delegates who work hard all year long to build collaborative and cooperative relationships with our Managements so negotiations are amicable, respectable and fair to both sides—a WIN-WIN for everyone!

Special thanks go to all who worked so hard in 2010 to maintain our contract gains, increase our wages and benefits, and protect our membership on the job.
AGMA in Opera: Past and Future

by LeRoy Lehr, 5th Vice President, Metropolitan Opera Soloist

As I started thinking about the 75th Anniversary of AGMA's existence, it struck me that I have been an AGMA member for over 50 years, during which I've witnessed a lot of changes, not just within AGMA, but in the opera and concert world in general. For the sake of brevity, I will confine my remarks to opera.

Prior to AGMA's existence, "work rules" consisted primarily of whatever the opera company manager decided they should be. During the early days of my career it was not uncommon for rehearsals to run well past midnight, and I recall one particular Final Dress ending at 2 a.m.—this, on the night before the opening! The predictable result of such practices was that performers were exhausted and often ill by opening night. Now, of course, AGMA signatories are required to abide by work rules intended to prevent situations like the example above, and even non-union opera companies usually adopt similar rules because these rules have become the standard for what is reasonable and practical. Yet, often members are reluctant to speak up to enforce these rules, fearing it might jeopardize his or her career. To those members I would say: Lawrence Tibbett, Jascha Heifetz, Kirsten Flagstad, Rose Bampton and the other founders of AGMA probably didn't endear themselves to management by starting AGMA, but they saw it as their responsibility to their colleagues and to their Art. All of us now benefit from their courage and sense of duty.

One of my concerns is that too often we hear "we're trying to keep opera viable", when that is merely being used as justification for promoting and presenting opera in some novel way just to attract attention, with little regard for whether it serves the opera all that well. I'm not criticizing the idea of making opera popular with the general public, but it is the performers—I include not only singers, dancers and instrumentalists, but also all those who are behind the scenes—who have the greatest vested interest and responsibility in keeping our art form viable. That means we need to be sure the available resources are appropriately invested in the artistic details (including adequate preparation time, etc.) to enable us to do credit to our art form.

I would point out that at one time the majority of opera management came from within the opera ranks. More recently, many have come from outside, with little or no professional opera performance experience and with less than a comprehensive understanding of the intimate details of the craft involved in producing this great but peculiar Art, so it has become even more important for us to take a more active role in seeing to it that things are "done right". AGMA and our sister unions give our opinions a collective and effective voice.

Nobody knows what the performer needs better than the performer, and, at the risk of sounding corny, I believe we are—each one of us—the stewards of our Art, so it is up to us to speak up—as our founders did—when we see things going in a direction which we feel does not serve that Art as it should be served. We are responsible for maintaining the integrity of our Art, and if we do so, we will help keep it viable.

What does the union do for me?

This is a perennial question and here is just one part of the answer: Imagine if every member had to hire his or her own lawyer in order to obtain safe working conditions. Belonging to a union, especially AGMA, provides you with the legal representation to negotiate the collective bargaining agreements under which you work, ensuring that you have the highest standards of wages, working conditions, benefits, health care and much more.

What is AGMA planning to do in this 75th anniversary year?

Several things. Your AGMAzine has been revamped for the celebration, and a new "Members Only" site has been launched. When you pay your annual Basic Dues you will receive a 75th anniversary lapel pin with your membership card. We are also launching an online shop where t-shirts and mugs with the 75th Anniversary logo will be sold; one dollar will go to the Relief Fund for each item purchased: www.printfection.com/AGMA. AGMA's anniversary can also be celebrated each time a contract is negotiated and at the regular Area meetings across the country over the course of this year. Talk to your elected leaders or your Area Representative to set a date for a get-together and then contact Gerry Angel at the National Office to receive a packet containing balloons and decorating ideas. The photos from these events will go on the web and in the next AGMAzine.

What do I hear about a website that only AGMA members can access?

AGMA Staff and the Membership and Member Relations Committee have worked together to bring you a feature of AGMA's website that will provide you with confidential membership services online. You can now easily update your contact information, pay your annual Basic Dues, and find audition notices and all the collective bargaining agreements once you log in. “A Guide to AGMA's New Site for Members” on page 7 will tell you how to get started.

Are there discounts I can get by being an AGMA member?

Discounts for members are regularly published in the AGMAzine and can be found on AGMA's website. Union Plus has many discounts and rebates tailored to our membership and you can subscribe to a free E-Newsletter containing the latest updates and consumer advice (unionplus.org).
On December 15, 2010, the fifth AGMA Relief Fund “Baking for Bucks” event took place in the Metropolitan Opera house in the Ladies’ Chorus and Ladies’ Ballet lounges.

We were honored and grateful to offer—for sale and auction—sumptuous, highly creative, gourmet human and pet treats made by the following generous bakers: soloists David Cangelosi, Raul Melo, Christopher Schaldenbrand, Mark Schowalter, Jeff Wells and Eduardo Valdez; stage manager Terry Ganley; stage director Gina Lapinski; choristers Sandy Bush, Rebecca Carvin, Karen Dixon, Maria Donaldi, Laura Fries, Connie Green, Ellen Lang, David Lowe, Linda Mays, Craig Montgomery, Rose Nenncheck, Anne Nonnenmacher, Stephen Paynter, Deborah Saverance, Dan Weigand, Daniel Clark Smith and Dennis Williams; dancer Christine Mac Millan; extra choristers Sarah Limper and Jane Thorngren; supernumeraries Janna Jensen and Alice Kandell; former Met choristers Kent Cottam and Carolyn Sielski; IATSE Local #764 dressers Tomoko Dunbar, Martine Ogawa and Deb Unger; and professional bakers Paula Liscio and Giovanna Mazzotti.

The whole fund-raising event took place on two dates and included the bake sale, private donations and cash donations made by the in-house and outside vendors who sold their varied and impressive wares. A highlight was the sale of jewelry and accessories from the estate of Metropolitan Opera fan Virginia (Jeanne) J. Alton, donated by her daughter, Deborah Allton-Maher, Eastern Council for AGMA, with all proceeds to be donated to the Relief Fund. This donation is a true living legacy which will benefit generations of AGMA members in need.

The bake sale and vendor sales would never have occurred without the advance preparations of Laura Fries, Deborah Saverance, Maria Donaldi, Deborah Cole, Carole Wright and the generosity of Metropolitan Opera Management and House Management. On the day of the bake sale, Jane Thorngren, Sandy Bush, Karen Dixon, Ellen Lang, Charlotte Philley, Joule D’Adara and Enid TurnBull joined the advance team and miraculously provided trouble-shooting skills and Herculean labor needed to “put on the show.”

On behalf of the AGMA Relief Fund, I want to thank all who participated in donating over $4,000 to continue the Relief Fund’s vital service to our colleagues.

Administrative Services Only, Inc. (ASO) is the administrator for the AGMA Health Fund Plan B. On their claim form it says, “The fiscal year ends on August 31; claims for each fiscal year (September–August period) must be received by the following February 28 for processing.”

This means that any receipts you have from last year (September 1, 2009 through August 31, 2010) need to be submitted to ASO by February 28, 2011 or they will not be processed. You can get your account information and claim forms at www.asonet.com or you can call ASO directly at (866) 263-1185.

When your employer is required to make AGMA Health Plan B contributions for you, those contributions are part of your compensation. Using the contributions made for you is the same as cashing your paycheck. Gather your receipts today!
2010 Holiday Message from Nedda Casei

Dear Colleagues, Friends, Artists:

A voice echoing to you from the past as we arrive at AGMA's approaching 75th Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Our name from the letterhead says it all—an Emergency Relief Fund to help our colleagues in times of need and stress. Who of us has not been there, or seen someone we considered a good friend go through the hazards of daily living—today more than ever? Sudden illness, a misstep, a casualty, can bring a contract to a halt with rent, groceries, medical bills staring us in the face, depression and desperation sometimes closely following.

Twenty-five years ago celebrating our 50th Golden Anniversary as president of AGMA and chair of the Relief Fund, we started our campaign for The Million Dollar Reserve to keep the helping hand readily available for our members. These past few years of ups and downs have squeezed our fund, though it has remained consistently available to our membership. We are about to enter our 75th year, a great celebration of many accomplishments. Such luminaries as Lawrence Tibbett, Alma Gluck, Jascha Heifitz, Kirsten Flagstad, John McCormack, Andrés Segovia, George Gershwin were among the many illustrious names who had the vision to create the American Guild of Musical Artists, and soon thereafter the relief fund . . . a legendary list. Our more recent historical leaders have included Jerome Hines and Cornell MacNeil. But it is all of us working together, backing one another, sometimes under serious pressure which has given greatness to this Guild craftsmen of old formed to maintain standards for mutual aid and protection. This will be the year of diamonds. Let this be a crowning moment of sharing among colleagues. WE NEED YOUR HELPING HANDS.

Wishing you love and joy at this celebratory time of year. Let us remember to add our own helping hands to the needs of singers, dancers, actors, directors, and stage personnel, those who trod upon the classical stages of the United States, creating beauty and inspiration.

With love,

Nedda Casei
AGMA President (1983-1993)
Chair of the AGMA Emergency Relief Fund (1983-1994)
Metropolitan Opera (1964-1985)
Visiting Professor of Voice Japan and internationally

AGMA RELIEF FUND DONATION FORM, PLEASE SEND TO:
Susan Davison, c/o AGMA Relief Fund; 1430 Broadway, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10018; (800) 543-2462
Make checks payable to the AGMA Relief Fund

My contribution to the AGMA Relief Fund is (contributions $25 and over may be charged to your Visa or MasterCard):

$500 _____  $100 _____  $50 _____  $25 _____  $15 _____  Other ______

Card #: __________ - __________ - __________ - __________ Exp. Date: ____ / ____  Bank V Code: ______ (last 3 digits on back of card)

Name: __________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________
E-mail: __________________________________________

In memory of: _________________________________________  In honor of: ______________________________________

Name of person to receive acknowledgment letter: __________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________________________________

☐ Check this box if you do not want to be listed in AGMA publications
Celebrate AGMA’s 75th anniversary! You know you want it—your very own AGMA 75th Anniversary coffee mug, or t-shirt, or water bottle! We now have an online store that sells shirts, mugs, and other fun items with AGMA’s snazzy new 75th anniversary logo on it. Whether you need another dance shirt or just want to share the celebration with family and friends, you can find new AGMA memorabilia for sale at AGMA’s online store: http://www.printfection.com/agma. One dollar of the purchase of each item is a direct donation to the AGMA Relief Fund.

75th Anniversary Promotional Materials

MMRC has put together promotional materials to be used at Area Meetings and contract “wrap” parties to help celebrate the 75th Anniversary of AGMA. Included will be balloons with the anniversary logo and a template for a poster or banner that can be displayed at your event. Contact the National Office to receive a packet of materials for your meeting.