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AGMA ***on the Rise***



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The American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO

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Written By

Tim Smith

MMRC Chair,

AGMA Governor,

Chorister

On behalf of MMRC, AGMA is indeed on the rise. This is the theme we have been working with for this issue, and I have to say I am in complete agreement. No, the pandemic is not over—yet with the help of the *AGMA/SDC Return to Stage and Performing Arts Playbook*, AGMA Artists have been able to safely return to work. Our amazing professional staff is in the midst of what we've all dubbed "Bargain Fest", as ~50 of our CBAs across the country are simultaneously up for negotiation. There is strength in numbers, especially when it comes to collective power. And we are growing, welcoming in more Artists whose units have organized and joined AGMA, like the dancers of Ballet Idaho and the Stage Managers of Des Moines Metro Opera.

Representation and visibility matter. AGMA recently completed its first-ever demographic census. We had an impressive and strong completion rate, especially given it was our first time embarking on such an initiative. Members' participation in this historic census will help the Union improve the working lives of all members. The census collected a comprehensive amount of helpful and insightful demographic information that will help AGMA understand the true composition of the Union. The anonymous portion of the census examined important topics such as racism, harassment, and discrimination—including ableism, body shaming, and ageism—so that AGMA can work to find and implement solutions. The census gauged the impact of the pandemic on employment, housing, and dimensions of mental wellness.

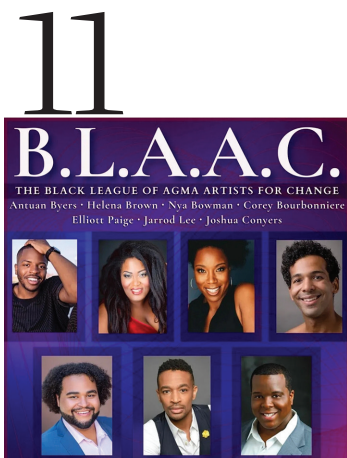
We are pressing hard across the country to not only strengthen (or add) DEI language within each of our contracts,

but we recognize that this is just the start—this is just the floor that we have to build upon. This is the beginning of a long and much-needed conversation that some may find difficult to engage in, but it is for the betterment of all of us to do so. As we say, "Without forceful advocacy and defense of their rights, artists may be vulnerable to exploitation or illegal discrimination."

Internally (like in our Constitution and throughout our website) as well as throughout our contracts and inside our workplaces, we are adopting gender-neutral language. This was important to many of us because much of our everyday language can tend to exclude people, and that is not okay. By embracing gender-inclusive language, we better reflect the many ways in which our members identify. To better understand how AGMA can support Trans and Non-Binary Artists, we are hosting a roundtable. More to come on this, for sure.

As you wander through this issue, please thank our Director of Communications, Alicia Cook. Alicia has curated many important articles that speak to our theme. AGMA members have contributed personal submissions, too and we are very grateful to them—perhaps they will inspire more members to share something in a future issue!

From our members rising in solidarity to support Ukraine, to Katharine Goeldner's wonderful conversation with Hailey McAvoy about disability in opera, to National Organizing Director Griff Braun's piece on the basics of Organizing, to an introduction and glimpse of his vision from our new National Executive Director Sam Wheeler, to President Ray Menard's remarks at the AFL-CIO Convention, I hope you will agree that we are AGMA and that we are indeed on the *rise*!



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President Message



AGMA President Ray Menard

Hello members and friends. When I heard the theme of this issue was going to be *AGMA on the Rise*, I was elated. It couldn't be more true! As you might have read in the last issue (or online), the American Guild of Musical Artists received a direct charter from the AFL-CIO in March 2021 at the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting.

So, what does that mean for us? Well, receiving a direct charter is a distinguished honor for AGMA, as this formal association with the national federation of labor unions signifies that AGMA has earned a spot alongside the other major unions fighting for workers' rights in the entertainment industry and across all sectors of our country. Since obtaining this direct charter, AGMA has been in a much better position to push for the priorities that uniquely affect our members.

Just recently in June, I, alongside AGMA Governor Evelyn Santiago, attended the AFL-CIO Convention as union delegates. The Convention is held every four years and it was the first time since 2005 that AGMA had a delegate presence there. Not only that, AGMA and SDC's work throughout the pandemic was highlighted and I had the distinct honor of speaking. AGMA was introduced by Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) and Executive

Vice President of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). Appelbaum is also a member of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council and presented the Safe Jobs Resolution before I took to the podium.

All this to say is that AGMA is most definitely *on the rise*. Our work has not gone unnoticed among some of the largest labor unions in the country and we are claiming our rightful seat at the table!

I wish to share the remarks I made at the 29th AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention with you all, below:

Hello! I'm Ray Menard, President of the American Guild of Musical Artists. More importantly, I am a proud member of AGMA and have been since 1979. I am thrilled to be here representing AGMA at the first AFL-CIO convention since AGMA received a direct charter. I want to thank the AFL-CIO affiliate unions and their members, President Shuler for her leadership, and RWDSU President Appelbaum.

In March of 2020, AGMA members lost their jobs overnight, myself included, as Production Stage Manager at the Metropolitan Opera. We didn't just lose our primary jobs, but our second and third jobs too, as music teachers, as bartenders and food servers, as dance instructors. Many of us did not qualify for regular unemployment compensation, and the first iteration of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance didn't include a subset of AGMA members until, in a remarkable showing of solidarity, we were able to join forces with 50 other entertainment unions and organizations to successfully demand an amendment to the program.

As we reckoned with the initial fall-out of the pandemic, we quickly realized that we would be among the very last to return to work, and there was no blueprint on how we could return safely. The COVID-19 vaccine was still almost a year away and no government or regulatory board was issuing COVID protocols that

made sense for the performing arts.

We worried that returning to work without adequate, science-based safety protocols would present a profound risk to our health and safety. We could not depend on our signatory companies to take the lead.

And so, we resolved to be our own cavalry and our own rescuers, rather than waiting for help to arrive.

Our strength was that the entire live performance industry was facing the same challenges. In particular, members of the Stage Director and Choreographer Society were in the same boat, often with the same employers.

So a few months into the pandemic, we joined forces. We engaged an expert medical advisory panel to assist with COVID-19 safety planning to ensure that artists were protected in the workplace. Soon after we retained our expert medical panel, we released the first version of the *AGMA/SDC Return to Stage and Performing Arts Playbook*. "The Playbook," as we call it, has been continually updated throughout the pandemic as the course of the virus has changed and the science has shifted. Whether in rehearsal, backstage, or on stage, we now have science-driven guidelines for a safe workplace. The results speak for themselves; while we continue to tackle challenges the vast majority of our members are back to work, productions are going forward, and the shows have gone on, safely.

The Playbook was initially intended as an internal tool for AGMA, SDC, and our signatory companies, but we made it widely available to the public at large in August of 2020 because we knew that the Playbook could help guide others and get their members safely back to work, too.

Over two years later, the Playbook and our additional guidance have proven to be our best tools to get members back to work, prevent the spread of infection, and avoid production cancellations. Once again, AGMA Artists have shown that we

know how to turn times of despair into times of hope.

As my experience has demonstrated the necessity of strong, science-based COVID protocols for all workers, I am

proud to support this resolution. This is the time to recommit to building a better future for all workers, and ensuring that we come out of this pandemic stronger, together.

I wish to thank the AFL-CIO for acknowledging the work that AGMA and SDC have accomplished together during the most trying time in our history. Thank you. ■

National Executive Director Message



National Executive Director Sam Wheeler

A version of this message was shared with members in February 2022

Dear Members and Friends:

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Sam Wheeler, and I became AGMA's National Executive Director on February 1, 2022. Leading up to this appointment, I had been working at AGMA for a little more than two and a half years as Eastern Counsel. I can say without hesitation that it is an honor and a privilege to represent AGMA's membership every day. It is a blessing to wake up each morning and know that no matter the challenges of a given day, I get to spend my time fighting for workers and for the truly exceptional artists who make up AGMA.

I want to thank AGMA's members, the Board of Governors, and the Executive Council for all of the work that they do to make this an amazing union. Many AGMA members know me by now, but for those who do not, I want to tell you a little bit about myself, and how I got here.

I was born in Western Pennsylvania, in coal and steel country, which means I

was raised around unions, which built and solidified the middle class in the region where I grew up. I was raised by two remarkable women, my mother, a 30-year public-school teacher, and my grandmother, a lifelong nurse and healer. I am married to Rachel, the love and light of my life and we just welcomed our daughter, Kara Paige, to the world in October 2021.

I'm a graduate of the College of William and Mary and Harvard Law School. Before law school, I ran political campaigns for a living. There I acquired a love of good work done well, an affinity for caffeine, and my first experience leading an organization and managing a team.

When I went to law school, I didn't know what I wanted to do for a living, but I fell in love with labor law, and I soon found a calling in advocating for unions and working people. After law school, I spent a year at the National Education Association before moving to New York City and going to work at Cohen, Weiss and Simon, LLP. I spent several years at the firm, being trained by the best labor lawyers in the country. It was there, while I was working at Cohen, Weiss and Simon, that I was asked to assist in AGMA's 2018 negotiations with the Metropolitan Opera. That was when I was first introduced to AGMA and its amazing members. Soon after, when I learned that AGMA was looking for another negotiator to join its growing professional staff, I jumped at the chance to come work for the Union. And the rest, as they say, is history.

AGMA has a talented and amazing professional staff that I would put up against any other staff in the labor movement. Our staff is stacked with top union-side

lawyers, tenacious negotiators, knowledgeable and proactive business reps and admins, and talented and creative communications professionals. Some are even former AGMA members and previous members of the Board.

I'm very proud of what I've accomplished in my time here. I've negotiated dozens of CBAs, side letters, safety protocols, waiver requests, and media agreements. I've been asked to lead national initiatives, like the Constitutional Revision, that I believe have strengthened our union. I've provided counsel and input to AGMA's leadership and committees. Most importantly, I've worked with and gotten to know AGMA members, helping them resolve issues that crop up during their daily work and build power, together, to improve their working lives.

In AGMA's current circumstances, there is a lot that is going well. So, part of my job as National Executive Director will be to make sure that things continue to go well while improving in other areas.

Now, I would like to briefly lay out my four main priorities as National Executive Director.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:

Before I get started, I have to thank AGMA's members who advocated tirelessly for AGMA to confront systemic inequality and oppression in our industries.

I should state the obvious: I am a white cis-gendered man, so I will always have unlearning and learning to do. I want you to know that I am an ally and I take seriously the lifelong, ongoing work necessary to be a non-optical ally.

I can promise AGMA members that within my first year I will submit a comprehensive DEI Plan for consideration and approval by the AGMA Board of Governors, encompassing AGMA's hiring practices, training of staff, leadership, and members, and all other aspects of the organization to ensure that AGMA is living its values as a union. I commit to building and retaining a staff that is reflective of our membership because diversity is important for its own sake but also a requirement to do this job well. In order to adequately represent our members, we must be diverse and reflect the diversity of AGMA's membership and I commit to making that a reality.

STRONG CONTRACT NEGOTIATION:

We are still coming out of a difficult period with the pandemic. AGMA has nearly 30 contracts up for negotiation this year. It's imperative that we reverse cuts from COVID-19, advance DEI initiatives, and have a consistent, comprehensive, Board-led process to tackle new issues like streaming and digital media.

I will make sure that our negotiators have the support they need to accomplish this and ensure that we are following best practices, advancing our national bargaining priorities, and advocating for AGMA's priorities across the country.

EXTERNAL ORGANIZING:

AGMA needs to grow. Simply put, AGMA is stronger with more members and more companies. In terms of strengthening our organization financially and in terms of building our collective power, we have an imperative to organize, organize, organize, as many companies and artists as we can.

We also have a moral imperative as well. The pandemic reinforced the dramatic difference between artists with AGMA's protections and artists without. And too often it's the most vulnerable artists—Young Artists, freelance artists, BIPOC and AAPI artists, artists at the smallest companies—that aren't working under an AGMA contract.

We must have a goal of organizing every

single artist in our jurisdiction across the country, to bring the benefits and protection and collective power of this union to everyone we can. It's a goal we likely can't accomplish completely, but it's a horizon line; a destination to aim for knowing that, even if we don't make it all the way, we'll do good work on our journey.

INTERNAL ORGANIZING:

I believe in being a fighting union. It will be my goal to expand our existing delegate training and bring it to the membership at large so that every single one of our members feels responsible for and empowered to stand up for their contract on the job.

Finally, it is imperative that we continue and redouble our efforts to reach out to our soloists, bringing more and more of them solidly into the Union, and making an affirmative case to our members as to how AGMA membership strengthens and benefits them, and demonstrate the power they have when they act together. AGMA soloists make up a significant portion of our membership and are some of our most prominent members. But more importantly, they are exceptional and dedicated artists and people.

To that end, I commit to ensuring soloist representation on all bargaining committees; continuing outreach at the shop level to soloists as they come to shops for gigs; exploring every possible avenue until we find a viable path to health insurance for guest artists; establishing connections with artist managers who represent our soloists so that we can work together to solve big problems; and working with soloists to identify organizing opportunities for both Young Artists and soloists working in non-union companies.

I want to say again what a privilege it is to work for the members of AGMA and for this union. AGMA members are the very best in the world at what they do. Every time I see a performance, I am in complete awe of the talent, dedication, and craft. I'm reminded that in fighting for our members, we aren't just fighting for workers, but for the Arts in America, for a key part of the civic soul of our country. I am even more in awe of who AGMA members are as people, and applaud the

solidarity, energy, and courage you bring to this union.

I promise to work tirelessly for the members of AGMA. I promise that I will listen, truly listen, when issues are brought to my attention. I promise to serve with humility, to ask questions when I don't know an answer, and to ask for help when I need it. I promise to be responsive to feedback and to do what I can to get better at this job each day. I promise to support and uplift our incredible staff and to make sure they feel valued and appreciated in their work. I promise that I will carry joy and good humor with me in my work. I promise to do my very best for the members of this union.

Thank you.

In Solidarity,

Sam Wheeler ■

The Strength of Our Union

By Griff Braun, National Organizing Director



As AGMA's National Organizing Director, my primary focus is on making our union stronger. But what does it mean for a union to be strong? In my view, a strong union is one that has the capacity for direct member action—whose members understand that their power is collective and are always ready to stand with each other. A strong union is also one whose presence in its industries is large enough to affect broad, positive change.

With this in mind, one of the ways we make AGMA stronger is through member engagement and education. Our amazing team of Business Representatives continues to engage new AGMA members through our New Member Orientations, and host Delegate Trainings for new Delegates. In addition to our New and Prospective Member information page on the AGMA website—a fantastic resource for all AGMA members—we have recently created and posted a brand-new Delegate Resource Page, which members can find once they access the MyAGMA portal.

Another way we make AGMA stronger is by letting the world know about the great work our union is doing, which we accomplish in a number of ways, including publishing stories, participating on panels, sharing on social media, and engaging in interviews with the press. We broaden our reach by collaborating and partnering regularly on initiatives with our affiliate unions, either directly or through the

Department for Professional Employees (DPE) and COBUG (Coalition of Broadway Unions and Guilds).

Perhaps the most important way we make our union stronger is by growing—by helping artists unionize their workplaces. I use those words intentionally. The recent success of the Amazon workers on Staten Island reinforces the fact that union organizing is most successful when it is driven by the workers. We—AGMA staff and current members—are here to encourage, support, advise, and guide artists in their journey toward winning their union, but success is ultimately determined by the level of buy-in and solidarity of the workers themselves.

With that in mind, I am thrilled to report that singers, dancers, and stage staff across the country are interested in coming together, forming a union, and joining AGMA! With the win for dancers at Ballet Idaho, the voluntary recognition of Stage Managers at Des Moines Metro Opera, and Artists across the country reaching out AGMA to learn more about union organizing, momentum is building in our industries. We are currently supporting the artists of several important opera, dance, and concert companies in bringing their colleagues together, discussing their working lives, presenting a vision of collective power, and building durable support for unionizing. We are also working with a fantastic and growing group of concert choral singers who have formed an organizing committee and are working with AGMA staff to map the industry, identify potential organizing targets, and connect with and support the singers in those workplaces in organizing.

In May 2022, AGMA hosted two free and public webinars, “Organizing the Opera World” and “Organizing the Dance World.” These webinars were designed for those who have yet to form a union,

so please feel free to share with your non-union friends!

The webinars focused on union organizing—what it is, how it's done, who the decision makers are, and why the opera and dance worlds would be better, safer, and stronger if all artists in the United States unionized and became AGMA artists. Special thanks to Board members Helena Brown, Brian August, Eric Ferring, Daniel Pratt, and Corey Bourbonniere for their participation. A note of thanks also to Sarah Daley-Perdomo, one of AGMA's fantastic delegates at Alvin Ailey, for her participation.

AGMA is on the rise. With recent organizing victories by workers at Amazon, Starbucks, REI, and others, and job actions across the country over the past couple of years, the labor movement is reawakening. With each new organizing conversation, card signing, and election win; each gathering of members in committees, shops, and caucuses; and each successful, member-driven contract negotiation, AGMA asserts its growing strength in the movement. Onward! ■

Visit www.musicalartists.org/organize/ for more information!

The Actors Fund Has Changed its Name

AGMA is pleased to share that as of May 2022, The Actors Fund is now the Entertainment Community Fund. For over 140 years, The Actors Fund has helped everyone who works in the performing arts and entertainment across the country. The new name is designed to be more inclusive and representative of the diverse professions that they serve.

The Entertainment Community Fund is a national human services organization with a history of helping all those who make the performing arts and entertainment possible—whether they work on stage, in front of the camera, or behind the scenes—in theater, film, dance, music, TV, opera and radio. Through programs that focus on the unique health and wellness, career and life, and housing needs of our community, they support a life in the arts, provide a safety net in times of need, and help people maintain stability and find resiliency in a business that is anything but stable.

While the name has changed, the mission remains constant. The Fund exists, as it always has, to be there for all those in our community.

To learn more about the Entertainment Community Fund, please visit entertainmentcommunity.org and follow them on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok at @alifeinthearts. ■

Loan Forgiveness May Be Within Reach

By Met Choristers Brian Anderson, Christina Anderson, and Lianne Coble-Dispensa



Brian Anderson, Christina Anderson, and Lianne Coble-Dispensa

There is a good deal of discussion these days regarding student loan cancellation and forgiveness by the federal government. However, there are programs for student loan forgiveness that have been in place for over a decade that many people in the performing arts world either have no idea existed or have tried to qualify for in the past and failed. Brian and Christina Thomson Anderson were in the latter group.

“The Public Student Loan Forgiveness program seemed too good to be true,” Christina told us, “But as we discovered more about the changes enacted through this new waiver, we realized that we actually qualified for student loan forgiveness. We had been trying to pay off our loans for 20 years. The waiver program was truly a godsend.”

The Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), the federal government’s program targeted at those who work in public service,

has the potential to positively affect the lives of thousands of full-time performing arts employees whose companies qualify as 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organizations. AGMA shared information on this in April.

The PSLF has been in place since 2007, offering some full-time non-profit employees the opportunity to have the remainder of their student loan balances forgiven by the federal government after they have made 120 qualifying payments. The problem was that the parameters were very strict, and very few people ended up qualifying for forgiveness. The Biden administration set out to fix and broaden the program to be more inclusive, and they opened a one-year waiver window for all borrowers to convert their loans to the correct type of loan and to have all past qualifying payments count toward the borrower’s 120 payments necessary for forgiveness. This limited-time waiver window opened on October 6, 2021, and it will close on October 31, 2022.

The changes to the PSLF lifted many restrictions on who qualified for the program, making most non-profit organizations, and all full-time jobs in those organizations, eligible.

In the past, the program was much more restrictive. For example, only certain jobs within the non-profit would qualify, or the non-profit had to perform a particular public service, such as education. Also, under this Limited Waiver program, a qualifying payment is one that was made after October 1, 2007. These can be payments on loans that wouldn’t have originally qualified for PSLF, they can be under any payment plan (not necessarily income-driven), and they don’t necessarily have to have been

made on time, nor do they have to be the full amount every time. Essentially, this Limited Waiver program opens up the possibility for many more AGMA artists to participate in the program and potentially have their loans forgiven.

The current rules under the waiver are as follows:

You must work **full-time** for a qualifying non-profit employer (either governmental or a tax-exempt organization that is neither religious nor political), but now it does not matter what job you hold within the company.

You must have federal Direct Loans. Loans obtained under the old FFEL (Federal Family Education Loan) Program, i.e., Stafford or PLUS loans, do not qualify and must be consolidated into Direct loans before you can apply for forgiveness.

Your Direct loan consolidation must be under an income-driven repayment plan.

You must have made 120 payments on the loans. It does not matter what kind of payments they are, how much you paid, or how often you made the payments.

Loan payments made before October 1, 2007 do not count toward the 120 requisite payments.

“Brian and I discovered the changes to the PSLF program in early October 2021,” Christina told us. “We were actually looking for options to transfer our loans to a private lender to obtain a lower interest rate, a move that would have disqualified us for loan forgiveness. While researching, Brian came across this new waiver, which had just been announced two days before. He called me and told me he thought we now qualified for loan forgiveness. I honestly could not believe it.”

Brian started the process by converting the Anderson’s existing loans to the correct type of loan (the aforementioned Direct Loan) since they had the older Stafford loans, which were discontinued in 2007. Once that was completed, they applied for PSLF.

Initially, they were rejected, as they processed their initial application through the “old” rules, but the mistake was fixed, and their application was processed. “We found out about six weeks later that both of our loans had been forgiven. I have to say, this was a joyful day in our house. I really wanted to spread the word to as many people as possible, as the waiver is only for one year. This program is a game changer for all of us working in non-profits who still have student loans.”

Based on the qualifications, this program would unfortunately not benefit gig workers or freelancers who do contract work for opera and dance companies. However, administrative staff, choristers, stage managers, staff stage directors, and dancers who are considered full-time employees by their companies are some of the many AGMA members who could benefit from this limited-time PSLF waiver.

Brian and Christina recommend applying as soon as possible and being patient. After they submitted their paperwork, it took over five months to hear that their loans had been forgiven. They checked in often and asked questions, but as Christina said, “The number of applications the government has received is astronomical, so these requests will take time.”

We recommend that interested AGMA members visit the Federal Student Aid website to get information about the PSLF program and to determine what type of loan you have. (You will apply to consolidate your loans into Direct loans here also, if needed.) Also, check out www.myfedloan.org to do more research to see if you, and importantly, your arts organization, qualifies for the PSLF Limited Waiver program. (This is also the servicer you will use to apply for PSLF and the income-driven repayment plan.) Important definitions, such as what constitutes a “qualifying employer,” “qualifying employment,” and a “qualifying payment” should be carefully noted. Your loan must be a federal loan: private loans or federal loans which have been refinanced through a private lender do not qualify for the program.

Christina strongly encourages everyone reading this article who thinks they might qualify to check out the program. “The process can take months and months to complete, and there’s a long waiting period where you wonder whether it’ll even work out, but if you start the process by consolidating your student loans into qualifying loans and then applying for the PSLF waiver before October, you give yourself the glimmer of a chance to change your life in a way you never thought would be possible.”

For more information:

FedLoan Servicing: <https://myfedloan.org/>

Federal Student Aid: <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>



AGMA and SDC Announce Partnership

On May 12, AGMA and Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) announced a reciprocal agreement that will build on and strengthen the existing partnership between the two national labor unions.

AGMA members include singers, dancers, and staging staff in opera, ballet and concert dance, and concert choral performance in the United States. SDC Members include professional stage directors and choreographers throughout the United States.

SDC and AMGA first partnered in May 2020, when they jointly engaged an Expert Medical Advisory Panel to create the highly acclaimed *AGMA/SDC Return to Stage and Performing Arts Playbook*, which has been continually updated throughout the pandemic. The partnership between the two unions has become a model for the entertainment industry.

“AGMA and SDC have been working together for quite some time,” said Sam Wheeler, National Executive Director, AGMA. “AGMA and SDC share members, workplaces, and a vital interest in the arts in the United States. This agreement expands our partnership and provides direct benefits of AGMA and SDC’s collaboration to our members. We are so excited to see where this dynamic partnership takes us next.”

The new agreement will solidify the collaborative relationship between the unions and offer members reciprocal exchange benefits. Members in good standing of AGMA and SDC who seek to join the other union will be entitled to a 50% discount on the initiation fee. Admission to membership in AGMA and SDC for any individual member will be subject to the rules and policies of each union that are generally applicable to any prospective member.

“We are delighted to extend our partnership with AGMA and support the members of both unions,” noted Laura

Penn, Executive Director of SDC. “There are currently 40 individuals who are members of both AGMA and SDC. But there are many other SDC Members who work in opera, and hundreds of AGMA members who identify as directors and choreographers. This agreement will help facilitate their movement between opera and theatre jurisdictions, and support directors and choreographers as they explore new artistic opportunities.”

Robert O’Hara will be the first director to take advantage of the reciprocal agreement. He will direct *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* by Pulitzer Prize-winner Anthony Davis at the Metropolitan Opera in 2023 as a co-production between the Met, Detroit Opera, Lyric Opera Chicago, Opera Omaha, and Seattle Opera. The Tony-nominated director of *Slave Play*,

O’Hara is a two-time Obie Award and two-time NAACP Award winner whose work has been seen around the country.

“I am so honored that my first opportunity to direct an opera has coincided with my being the first SDC Member to take advantage of the new SDC/AGMA partnership,” said O’Hara. “SDC has long been my strongest advocate and I look forward to becoming a member of AGMA. I encourage my colleagues to explore this opportunity, which ultimately allows each union to better serve its members.” ■



Disability in Opera:

Katharine Goeldner in Conversation with Young Artist Hailey McAvoy

Recognized as an “excellent performer” (Millbrook Independent), mezzo-soprano Hailey McAvoy is committed to sharing authentic performances, whether she is bringing an operatic character or a poem to life. As a singing artist with mild cerebral palsy, McAvoy’s authenticity includes embracing physical disability in her life onstage and off.

Katharine Goeldner (KG): Hi, Hailey! Thanks for discussing how our industry can better serve our artists with disabilities. So, first question: What do you suggest as the most respectful way to address these fellow artists?

Hailey McAvoy (HM): Thank you for inviting me to share about my experience with disability and opera! I’d like to kick off our conversation with a bit of a disclaimer. People with disabilities are not a monolith. I cannot speak for everyone, but I can share my own experiences and some that I’ve gathered from others!

I personally prefer “singer with a disability.” For me, “disabled singer” puts the emphasis on my disability, while “singer with a disability” keeps the focus on my singing while additionally providing information about my identity. “Differently-abled” or “handi-capable” can come across as condescending and infantilizing, in my opinion, as these shy away from directly referencing disability. Disability is not a taboo whose name mustn’t be spoken—it is an information-giver. Let’s remove the stigma of this word and use it to communicate in order to connect with and support one another.

KG: Hailey, you have cerebral palsy (CP), as you’ve written so openly about on your website. (<https://www.hailey-mcavoy.com/about>) How does it affect your singing?

HM: I would say that my baseline singing

technique (i.e. my experience of support and resonance) is not affected much by CP. Most of the challenges I experience appear when triggered by specific environmental factors in my nervous system or in the space around me. One example: If I suddenly go into “fight, flight, or freeze” mode while performing, sometimes the muscles in my legs will “grab” or engage in a way that gives me a momentary start. It has required mental and physical energy over years of troubleshooting to manage this so that it is not aurally discernible. In other instances, sometimes the nerves I feel in performance cause my legs to shake more violently than able-bodied performers’. If I can have reassuring contact with something outside of myself, I am able to manage this muscle tension. In recital, I occasionally rest my hand on the piano; in an opera, I might take the hand of a colleague, with their consent of course, rest my hand on a set piece, or work with the director to incorporate moments in which I can sit from time to time. There are also performance situations in which this “reassuring contact” can only be found through allowing myself to sit. For example, if I am singing as a soloist with orchestra. Opting to sit for a concert has never produced a negative result in terms of my ability to sing, to resonate, or to be heard. I will continue to choose this option when it serves me because doing so can also open doors for other Artists with chronic illnesses, who are going through medical treatments, or who have sprained their ankle a day before their concert... all of these people might be able to more fully share their voices and dramatic expressions from a chair if we really had permission, without stigma, to do so.

KG: I just did a production of *Salome* with you as *The Page*; you were great, by the way. I know how well you move on stage, but I can imagine directors



who don’t know you would wonder if you’d be able to do their staging. What sort of discussions have you had about this with directors?

HM: Most of the challenges I face with movement are intensified by unfamiliarity. The chance to practice all of the staging lessens the mobility challenges I might face. I always arrive early to the first rehearsal so I can introduce myself to the conductor and the director, explaining that I have CP and that occasionally I might sit in rehearsal, but nothing is wrong; I’m just doing what I need to do in order to do my best.

When staging rehearsals begin, I say to the director, “Please stage me just as you would anyone else. If anything poses a challenge, I will be sure to let you know after rehearsal.” That way, the director doesn’t have to worry about me and can trust that I will ask for what I need.

In many productions, especially if they are black-box or in smaller theaters without staircases, I don’t need any modifications at all. In bigger theaters, the modifications I need are usually relatively quick fixes. In one production that had a lot of stairs without railings, I was playing the town gossip...and so the director assigned a different “townsperson” to walk me onto the scene at each entrance! This worked in favor of my character—I was able to be gleaned bits of gossip all over the place. Modifications like these seem small, but they make a *big* difference in terms of my own ability to do my job.

In order for any of us, regardless of ability, to bring a character vividly to life, we need to feel safe and welcome on stage. When we are secure in this way, the story doesn't suffer; it thrives.

KG: How could opera companies better accommodate artists with disabilities throughout the already-stressful audition process?

HM: I am so glad you asked because most of the barriers I've faced as an artist with a disability appear in the audition room, rather than in rehearsal or performance. If I'm unfamiliar with an audition room, I may face physical obstacles which can throw me off mentally as well as physically. In spaces that are not accessible for me (e.g. when there are stairs without a railing), I usually have to ask a member of the audition panel for a hand! In an audition, there is such a limited window of time to make an impression, and with something as nuanced as disability, it is difficult to convey the reality of the situation within those confines. Because of the lack of explicit support for artists with disabilities from opera companies, I worry during auditions that my visible disability will take me out of the running for jobs that are more easily imagined by audition panels to be filled by able-bodied singers, despite my resume demonstrating that I can and have fulfilled my job as a performer *many* times.

Companies and Young Artist Programs (YAPs) must include somewhere in their application a space to specify access needs (e.g., I need a hand to go up and down the stairs) or a space as open-ended as, "Is there anything else you'd like us to know." I have personally used this space to share information about my CP, and I think a lot of us with disabilities would find it freeing to be able to speak up about our possible access needs.

I also believe that casting directors, conductors, and stage directors should ultimately trust us to know what we need in terms of our disabilities. Please evaluate us, as everyone, on the basis of our tone, characterization, language, and dramatic capability. Please do not rule us out based on assumption. If you have a question for us about how we might navigate a

performance space, please ask.

KG: Related to my last question. You were on the panel of Opera Mariposa's discussion "Generation NOW: Accessibility in Opera." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tn72P8uiBFs>. One of the points that were brought up was a lack of accessibility info in marketing materials and audition notices. Can you speak more to this?

HM: First of all, it would be helpful if audition and performance venues made mention of the obstacles people with accessibility issues might face in the space. Venues can provide brief descriptions of the space for the benefit of the artists. For example, is it handicap accessible, and if not, how many steps are there? Furthermore, there are many singers who are blind or have visual impairment. Adding image descriptions (IDs) to photos of performance or audition spaces would be helpful, so that they can better visualize the space in which they will be working. Lastly, companies should include artists with disabilities in their statements about welcoming artists of all races, gender identities, sexualities, abilities, etc., in their audition postings.

KG: Such a good point! Our industry is focusing more on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) provisions. Do you feel included in these discussions?

HM: Although I am thrilled about the DEI work that has begun, artists with disabilities have not yet been included in the same way that artists with other historically marginalized communities have been. The *2021 Field-Wide Opera Demographic Report* has just been released, and while I am glad to see work like this being done, the report does not yet include any information about artists/administrators with disabilities.

I don't think we have been neglected in the conversation because of ill-will. I think we have been largely invisible because those artists who have not already felt excluded because of disability may opt to "pass" for being able-bodied, feeling they must do so in order to survive. Companies should consider the reality that artists

with disabilities may well already work/audition with/for them, potentially hiding part of their identity for fear of discrimination. We are here, and we don't want to just be accepted "in spite of" our disabilities; we should be valued for who we are and what we, uniquely, offer.

KG: Anything else you'd like our industry colleagues to know about how to better include Artists with disabilities?

HM: A couple of things come to mind. I have spoken with a singer who is blind. They were told by a casting director, "We wanted to hire you, but we didn't know how to work with your blindness." And on the other hand, I know of a production of *Werther* in which Andrea Bocelli, a visually impaired pop/opera superstar, played the title role. When a company wanted his star power, they were able to accommodate him. Accommodation is possible. I have seen a production of *The Magic Flute* in which the director decided that the Queen of the Night is dramatically effective when sung by an able-bodied singer in a wheelchair. Why not hire an artist with that lived experience instead?

Historically, disability has only been "allowed" to be onstage as a caricature or accessory tied to a moral assumption about the character (i.e. only villains can be disabled). Let's give performers with disabilities the chance to appear on stage as they do in life, with disability free from moral implication. Can it be essential to the performer, and not just an accessory like a fancy wig, that is put onto a character?

Lastly, I long to connect with more people with disabilities who work in opera! I will continue speaking openly about and advocating for artists with disabilities. If you're reading this and it applies to you, I would love to connect with you so that we could support each other. Please feel free to contact me via the contact page at www.haileymcavoy.com. ■

Refresh, Revive, Reunite: Meet the B.L.A.A.C. Slate of the AGMA Board

During the 2021 AGMA Board of Governors election, seven AGMA members ran as the B.L.A.A.C. Slate and won. B.L.A.A.C. is an acronym for Black League of AGMA Artists for Change. The slate includes Corey Bourbonnierre, Nya Bowman, Helena Brown, Antuan Byers, Joshua Conyers, Jarrod Lee, and Elliott Paige.

“With our understanding that Black artists are not monolithic, we’re running as representatives of our current disciplines, regions, and shops and on the collective values of transparency, accountability, education, listening, and recentering to change policies to uplift the most marginalized voices in our union.” - B.L.A.A.C. statement during the AGMA Board of Governors election.

Get to know some of AGMA’s newest elected Governors here.



© Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

Corey Bourbonnierre

Board Seat: Area At-Large; Pennsylvania

Hometown: Woonsocket, RI

Currently: Pittsburgh, PA

AGMA Member Since: 2012

First AGMA Company: Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

I ran for AGMA’s Board of Governors largely due to the work that I was a part of as a facilitator for the AGMA Black Caucus (ABC). I was inspired by my fellow facilitators and the stories that I was hearing from my fellow Black AGMA members in our caucus meetings. There were some things that were born out of the work of ABC that we brought to the Board, including the idea of a census, and the idea of having anti-racism training across the board for

AGMA leadership and membership.

As a queer Black, non-binary dancer, I didn’t quite see myself represented on the Board. With some nudging from my friend Bill Buchanan at the Pittsburgh Opera to run for the new At-Large seat in Pennsylvania, I decided it was time to put my name in the hat, with the hopes to build upon the work that I’d already been doing with ABC, and to be the representation that I was seeking. I was honored to find solidarity with the folk of BLAAC, many of whom I’d met in ABC. Not only did we find common ground in increasing representation for historically marginalized groups, but we were also keen to work on creating an atmosphere of transparency and accountability if elected to the Board. I’m so proud of the work that we’ve already been able to accomplish since being elected, and I’m looking forward to continuing to build on that during my time serving the PA members, and the membership at large.



© Ambe Williams

Nya Bowman

Board Seat: New York Region, Dancer

Hometown and Currently: Lower East Side, New York City & Barcelona, Spain

AGMA Member Since: 2008

First AGMA Company: Washington National Opera

Following George Floyd’s murder, I met, discussed, and listened to many Black Artists, who shared many experiences like my own in dealing with implicit racial bias and racism, which includes racial micro-aggressions, Black hair discrimination, misogyny, “traditional typecasting” and race trauma all due to patterns of white

supremacy culture within the performing arts industry. I really thought after many discussions and sharing with non-Black cohorts too that they would be inspired to implement policy changes that would lead to racial equity and inclusivity within our individual communities that were impactful and not just “good intentions.” Already a member of the AGMA Black Caucus, I chose to join the AGMA Board of Governors to better serve my constituents, me, and the next generation.

I hope to help implement policy changes that are more racially equitable and inclusive with a better sense of belonging to protect the well-being and dignity of Black Artists. Specifically Black women who are often the most marginalized within the industry. This will “trickle down” to protect everyone’s well-being and dignity. One specific goal is that AGMA has specific Antiracism AND Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (they are not the same) policies and procedures that we follow and implement into the CBAs for signatory companies to follow.

I am very grateful to everyone who voted me into office and grateful to serve you all as best that I can. I am interested in hearing from anyone and easy to reach on Instagram @nyabow.



© Melody Smith

Helena Brown

Board Seat: New York Region, Chorister

Hometown and Currently: New York City

AGMA Member Since: 2019

First AGMA Company: The Metropolitan Opera

I joined the Board of Governors because I am not content to accept a status quo of systemic oppression for our most marginalized members (including myself). I want to see more people like me reflected in the upper echelons; we deserve our seats at the table.

We need to be radically honest with ourselves about the lens with which policies and industry culture have been formed and how their applications may be limiting, overly niche, or oppressive. I will intensely focus on aggregating information about our members to help us see how representative we are or aren't and how AGMA can play a role in creating change. As well, I have an interest in examining our policies and bringing my perspective to the table for reform and additions as a BIPOC, Queer woman. My job here is to lift the voices of others, form/ask constructive questions, and spur action.

Give this new iteration of the Board a chance to hear and serve you. Don't be afraid to speak up and push for better working culture as well as conditions. Let us hear you. I guarantee that I'm listening and constantly learning how to be a better steward to my fellow artists.



©Eric Politzer

Antuan Byers

Board Seat: New York Region, Dancer

Hometown: Dallas, Texas

Currently: New York City

AGMA Member Since: 2016

First AGMA Company: The Metropolitan Opera

I joined the AGMA Board of Governors because I felt like voices were missing, and it felt important to pass the mic. As a person who sits at the intersection of many marginalized identities, who is also in community with people with intersecting marginalized identities, I felt that I, and the other members of the B.L.A.A.C. Slate,

could bring a new sense of awareness and perspective that our Board hasn't experienced before.

My goal is to have anti-racism and anti-discrimination language and policies in place for all of our signatory companies. Artistically, AGMA is one of the leading unions. I'd like our commitment to equity to match our commitment to our artistry, as for many of us, they are deeply connected. I'd also like to change the culture within AGMA, and regain the trust of our membership through transparency, honesty, accountability, and listening.



©Arielle Donelson Corrigan

Joshua Conyers

Board Seat: Eastern & Southern Region, Soloist

Hometown: Bronx, NY

Currently: Watertown, MA

AGMA Member Since: 2013

First AGMA Company: Santa Fe Opera

I ran to be a voice for systemic change within AGMA's current structures by implementing DEIA initiatives that strengthen our understanding of the lived experiences of our fellow Artists, including our most underrepresented communities: BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and Young Artists members. I proposed that the Board undergo Antiracism training, while fostering Anti-Discrimination language in all CBA's, urging companies to reflect the racial demographics of our nation, and mandatory anti-sexual harassment training for all AGMA signatories.



©Robert Mercer Jr.

Jarrod Lee

Board Seat: Eastern & Southern Region, Soloist

Hometown: Sylacauga, AL

Currently: Maryland

AGMA Member Since: 2012

First AGMA Company: Lyric Opera of Baltimore

I wanted to assist with the change I wished to see. I enjoy researching information, then sharing that information with my fellow Artists so they can craft their own Artistic trajectory. If I can help untangle a process and make that easy to see in the way a fellow Artist can retain the information, then my work is good.

I want my fellow Artists to gain a higher sense of empathy as it regards inequitable practices in policy which are rooted in personal bias. It is a large goal, but it isn't my job to do it all or everything. It will become everyone's job. The language "that's the way it is" or "that's the way the industry works" does not sit well with me.



©Max Waldman Photography

Elliott Paige

Board Seat: Eastern & Southern Region, Soloist

Hometown: Hampton, Virginia

Currently: Newport News, Virginia

AGMA Member Since: 2016

First AGMA Company: Opera Theatre of Saint Louis

As some may know, within these past few years I have been very busy helping with multiple new music organizations and companies that are fighting for change within the classical music space. What you

may not know, is that I have also been active within AGMA by joining caucuses, attending Board of Governors meetings, and getting educated on the process and history of our union.

Throughout this journey, I have felt immense joy as well as crushing frustration. I have witnessed the beauty of colleagues pitching in to help one another when the going gets tough. However, I have also seen colleagues met with frustration lash out at each other. I'd like to

remind you that we are all in this fight together! We have to work toward change, hope, and new ideas for our industry. I know that this may be uncomfortable for some of my fellow artists who have been used to "the way things are," but it's time to change that phrase to "the way things were." There is no time like the present, and I intend to help change my industry and make it better for future artists. So, I've gotten active by trying to do my part to help establish change!

I plan to do this by being an advocate for equity, intersectionality, and Young Artist issues. Through transparent sharing of ideas, intentional dialogue, and active listening, I plan to use my voice within the AGMA Board of Governors to help refresh, revive, and reunite our union. This includes fiercely advocating for Young Artists, low-income soloists, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists, whose issues are too often overlooked. My long-term goal is board-level systemic change! ■

Business-Savvy Dancer Cecilia Iliesiu

Interview Conducted by Alicia Cook

Cecilia Iliesiu is a soloist at Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) with a 13-year career as a professional ballerina, teacher, and mentor. She has danced notable roles on stages in the United States and internationally, including George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Rubies*; Davis Dawson's *Empire Noir*; Ulysses Dove's *Red Angels* and *Front Porch to Heaven*; William Forsythe's *New Suite*; José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane*; Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Romeo et Juliette*; Marius Petipa's *Giselle*; and Crystal Pite's *Emergence*.

"I started dancing when I was three years old," Iliesiu said. "I was very shy as a child, so dance allowed me a channel to express myself through movement. There never was an 'ah-ha' moment when I saw a show and knew I wanted to be a professional ballerina. My journey in dance has been driven by the interest to learn and discover the craft, my body's limits, and ways of physical expression."

Iliesiu received 10 years of ballet training at The School of American Ballet and holds a bachelor's degree in Communications and Media Studies from Fordham University. She currently resides in Seattle, WA, USA. She joined AGMA in 2015 and served as an AGMA Delegate from 2018 until 2021. In addition to dance, she has honed her content creation and

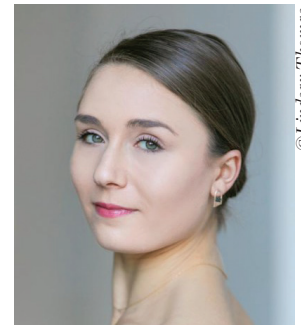
marketing skills in both non-profits and small business spaces.

With over a decade of teaching experience at The School of American Ballet, PNB School, CC&Co Dance Complex, and Ballet 5:8, she continues to teach masterclasses and mentor students around the world. She has become a leader in the ballet education field, establishing the PNB School Mentorship Program for pre-professional and advanced students, and co-founding Global Ballet Teachers, which offers online classes and courses for over 300 ballet teachers in Nigeria, Mexico, Ghana, and 40 other countries.

"I started finding myself in leadership-type positions after I became an AGMA delegate," she explained. "I found my voice in meetings with company management and realized that I could influence change and represent my colleagues effectively with the knowledge I gained from being in dance my whole life, along with my college education. Now, I am known as the PNB dancer who gets things done by talking to leadership about how to make the best work environment!"

It is clear that Iliesiu believes there is great value in acquiring skills outside of her comfort zone and nurturing hobbies that may not directly benefit her career as a professional dancer.

"I am a huge advocate for developing



© Lindsay Thomas

skills outside of the studio and theater to help shape who you are as an artist," she said. "Everyone has unique interests, hobbies, skills, and passions. For me, ballet happens to be that most intense fire, but we shouldn't have to suppress everything just to be a dancer. Being an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community can enhance the stories you tell on stage, or being a part-time barista can help you see what the world is like outside of dance, to gain another perspective."

"I can't begin to tell you how exploring skills outside of dance has shaped my life," she continued. "From working on social media campaigns with my fellow dancer Elizabeth Murphy for her leotard business, to interning as a business strategist at a marketing agency in Seattle, to working on non-profit projects, I have gone into each project knowing I won't be the expert in the room, but I will share my



unique perspective and learn a lot along the way!”

Having been bitten by the business bug, Iliesiu has founded two companies: Ballet Life Coach and Global Ballet Teachers.

Inspired after helping PNB’s Professional Division and summer course students with their resumés and cover letters in 2021, **Ballet Life Coach** officially launched in December 2021 and is currently the only company that offers templates and guides for ballet company auditions. Users can download the documents and handle the process themselves or schedule a consultation with Iliesiu to review their materials. Visit: BalletLifeCoach.com

“There is no other business out there to help pre-professional dancers get their business side ready for auditions,” she stated, proudly. “I’ve been through company auditions and now mentor pre-professional dancers through the PNBs Mentorship Program [a program started during early quarantine in March 2020 with fellow PNB dancer Amanda Morgan]. I remembered how little guidance I received for the Company audition process, and I want to change that for this new generation of future pro dancers.”

The initiative to develop **Global Ballet Teachers** began with an Instagram message in May 2020 asking for guidance on training ballet teachers in Nigeria. The very next month, Global Ballet Teachers launched by offering weekly ballet classes for the teachers in Nigeria over Zoom and

engaging in direct conversations with them about the educational resources they needed.

“Once I connected with these teachers in Nigeria, I realized the need for free teacher training that meets the teachers where they are,” she recalled. “Barriers to many teacher trainings are that they are time-consuming, expensive, and usually require travel, making them inaccessible to many teachers around the world.”

“We had Artists like Wendy Whelan, Craig Hall, Tim Lynch, and other incredible teachers lead these classes,” she added, noting that a list of international volunteer faculty and Zoom recordings of all classes are available online.

Since its beginning, Global Ballet Teachers has offered numerous live ballet-related classes and conversations on Zoom, as well as its first Level 1 Beginner Ballet Syllabus online course to 30 teachers in seven countries (US, Russia, Nigeria, Ghana, UK, Sierra Leone, and Uganda).

“Offering online classes, chats, and courses created by teachers *for* teachers around the world is incredible. Global Ballet Teachers is offering a platform for teachers to learn from each other,” she said.

In April 2022, the Organization launched a Music for Ballet Class certificate course for teachers, via Google Classrooms. The course was created by Andrew Holdsworth, a UK-based pianist who produced all the music for the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)

curriculum. And they are developing a Pre-Ballet Certificate Course, among other courses.

“We want to continue to build a vibrant community of teachers and develop our resources so teachers can continue to learn new skills from each other,” she stated. “I have traveled to Nigeria to work with ballet teachers in Lagos, to share knowledge and create community among the teachers here. All of this is beyond what I could have dreamed when I started teaching online in May 2020.”

While in Nigeria, as part of Global Ballet Teachers, Iliesiu performed at Society of the Performing Arts in Nigeria (SPAN) Graduation Gala, led a five-day Ballet Teacher Workshop, and taught ballerinas in the SPAN academy, ages 3-10.

“Every moment with the dance community in Nigeria was so memorable,” she shared. “I danced two ballet variations (adaptations of *Nutcracker* and *Emeralds*) alongside the talented dancers of SPAN. It was an honor to share the stage with them.”



©Angela Sterling

“I had never created or led a workshop, so the idea of running a five-day workshop for ballet teachers in a country I knew little about was daunting,” she continued. “In reflecting, I had the absolute best time. I focused on beginner and intermediate ballet levels. I led the teachers through a class I created, then we talked about it, then I empowered them to create their own combinations/choreography and

give feedback to each other. I learned so much about the culture of ballet in Nigeria and what they all want to do collectively to promote proper ballet training in their country. Teachers attended from various regions in Nigeria (some with days of travel) and Ghana to join the workshop. The hunger to learn inspired me to never stop sharing what I know and connecting teachers to learn from each other!”

One of Iliesiu’s fondest memories of her time there was distributing the donations

sent to her from eight dance-wear companies. She was able to give out 369 leotards, 29 skirts, 16 tights, seven boys’ tights, and eight leggings by Body Wrappers, Jule Dancewear, Jo + Jax, Brown Girls Do Ballet, Chameleon Activewear, Lucky Leo, Barreto Dancewear, and Peace Love Leo.

“The reactions on the teachers’ faces were priceless, and hearing what a difference the items will make to their students made the joy greater,” she recalled with a smile.

Iliesiu is doing all she can to mentor the next generation of dancers, both here in the States and all over the world. She understands the positive ripple effect paying it forward creates and hopes her role in movement helps shape the dance world for the better.

Keep up with Cecilia Iliesiu on Instagram at @cctutu. Follow Global Ballet Teachers at @global.ballet.teachers and Ballet Life Coach at @balletlifecoach. ■

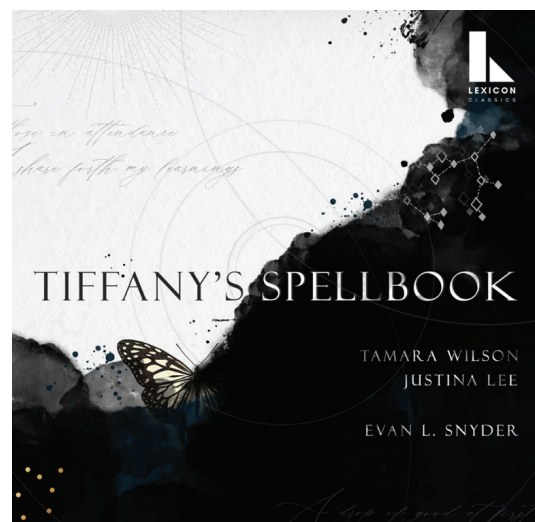
Lexicon Classics: A Label is Born

The pandemic shined a light on many things in our lives, from deep disparities and injustice to hope and common purpose. Whether we were in an urban city center or escaped to the mountains, we all were forced to slow down and take stock of ourselves and the lives we had built. This time for self-reflection allowed us the space to really consider if we were happy and fulfilled or if we had simply been going around the hamster wheel. We were allowed the space to feel empowered to make choices that could realize futures we had only dreamt about. It is from amidst this self-reflection and reflection on our industry that inspiration struck.

Many of our members know of Emitha LLC. They are a company providing several services including stunning headshots, gorgeous website design, digital distribution/licensing help, and audio/video production services. During her time as a singer, Emitha President and CEO, Gillian Riesen, was

a proud AGMA member and now loves bringing the vision of our Union Artists to reality. During the pandemic, Gillian and the team at Emitha started exploring a new avenue where they saw a need: an independent classical label for artists, by artists, which would provide access to the recording industry for all, not just the chosen few. After many conversations and brainstorming, *Lexicon Classics* was born.

Planning, recording, and releasing an album can be a daunting task. Beyond the artistic skills that form the foundation of any musical venture, an album requires months of extra-musical work leading up to its release. *Lexicon Classics* endeavors to make this process not only enjoyable, but inspiring for Artists. We are uniquely situated to help our artists in this way because, beyond specializing in the usual roles of a record label (release, distribution, placement, etc.), we offer unparalleled services at every other step of the





album production process.

Through our relationship with our parent company, Emitha LLC, we assist our artists with album concept, recording, mixing, mastering, producing, artwork, printing, pressing, and more. By creating all the album's components in-house, not only do we save valuable time and money, but we are also able to guarantee our artists the greatest degree of artistic control over their own projects, assisted by our expert guidance. This process guarantees results of the highest quality: albums that are meaningful reflections of our talented artists and the incredible work that they do.

Though we love and passionately produce physical albums with beautiful artwork (photos attached below), liner notes, and packaging, we believe our job is to continue to welcome the advances in technology and distribution the modern world brings. We know that there is so much new music (and music yet to be made!) that needs a permanent home in the recording canon, and artists with diverse backgrounds and points of view whose voices must be heard and supported to move our field into the future. *Lexicon* fervently champions these efforts through the artists and projects with whom we partner.

What the *Lexicon* team realized is that a modern company needs a modern vision. This begins from learning from the past, embracing the present, and imagining what the future could hold. At *Lexicon*, we know that classical music audiences are growing, and they're growing where most music lives: online, in the digital sphere. With our immensely popular playlists and effective online marketing and promotion strategies, our artists directly benefit from the cultivated audience of over 175,000 active listeners, with another several million active listeners in our partnerships with other labels and curators online. Our artists had over 5 million streams from 2020-2021 and those numbers continue to grow at a rapid pace.

Lexicon officially opened its doors in January and already has five releases planned in its first year, including AGMA member and Grammy award-winning soprano Tamara Wilson's world premiere release by Evan L. Snyder on April

22, *Tiffany's Spellbook*. *Lexicon*'s first release on January 28, *Lament*, featured baritone and AGMA member Sidney Outlaw and pianist Warren Jones, which reached #2 on Billboard's Traditional Classical Album list. Future album releases include an all-Puerto Rican song album, *Al menos cantos*, with Laura Virella, and an album featuring all original transcriptions for classical piano, *Past is Prologue*, by Chris Reynolds, including opera, K-Pop, and jazz standards. An announcement about an album of unrecorded Haydn chamber music is forthcoming.

Lexicon believes in fostering deep relationships with our artists and nurturing a collaborative vision that allows us to capture the essence of an artist every step of the way. We hope you'll enjoy our artists' beautiful work, and if we can help you explore making your album idea a reality, don't hesitate in reaching out to us!

<https://www.lexiconclassics.com>

Musically,
The *Lexicon Classics* Team
Gillian Riesen, President/CEO
Eric Ferring, Project Curator
John Riesen, Digital Promotion
Jonathan Estabrooks, Producer ■



Re-introducing the AGMA Delegate Portal

In late March 2022, AGMA was happy to re-introduce the AGMA DELEGATE PORTAL. The portal has been completely revamped. *This portal requires MyAGMA access.*

AGMA Delegates are a vital part of the Union's presence in the workplace—acting as leaders, organizers, communicators, and resources for all AGMA Artists. AGMA Delegates help make sure our signatory employers are providing a safe and mutually respectful environment and that the hard-won protections of the collective bargaining agreement are followed. AGMA Delegates act as a liaison between the Artists and the management of the company, ensuring productive

and respectful working relationships. AGMA Delegates work to bring all shop members together and help create a shared sense of identity as union members.

This new resource hub for AGMA Delegates is a comprehensive collection of AGMA and general union information. AGMA encourages all members to check out these resources.

TO ACCESS THE PAGE:

- 1) Log in to MyAGMA
- 2) From the MyAGMA menu dropdown, select “Delegate Portal” ■

I Will Forever Draw My Strength from Underneath

By Kevin Ray Johnson, Actor/Supernumerary

I am an actor that has had the privilege of performing in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* by Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons, directed by James Robinson and Camille A. Brown at the Metropolitan Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. The productions starred Will Liverman at the helm along with Latonia Moore, Angel Blue, Ryan Speedo Green, Chauncey Packer, Brittany Renee, Chris Kenney; the list of #BlackExcellence truly goes on.

To say being a part of this has completely revamped my confidence is truly an understatement. Based on Charles M. Blow's widely acclaimed memoir of the same title about his traumatic youth in Louisiana, this opera tackles subjects such as Black Trauma and mental health, which are subjects that are very near and dear to me. It is done in such a tasteful and tactful manner. You don't really see stories like this, and I cannot express how important it is to tell stories like these. It honestly reminded me that I am not alone when it comes to certain things I have dealt with in my life. I had the chance to work with people I will call my friends and family for the rest of my life. I got to be one of the first people to take a bow on the Met stage following the Pandemic shutdown. That is a moment I will remember for the rest of my life. From the Met to the Lyric, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* is truly an opera I hope to come back to many times in the future.

From James' and Camille's flawless vision of this story, to Will Liverman's beyond powerful performance, to Latonia Moore, Angel Blue, and Brittany Renee sucking you in with every single note they sing. To Chris' portrayal of a role you despise but off-stage can put a smile on your face with his many dad jokes. To working with a longtime friend in Chaz'men Williams-Ali



after not seeing each other for years and it truly only felt like the next day, to Chauncey having a smile that can make you smile. To Jarrod, Rocky, Taiwan, Rebecca, Aaron, and the many other beautiful Chorus members who always check-in on you with their selfless beautiful energy that can truly turn your day around even when you are in the lowest of lows. To Camille A. Brown and the amazing, beautiful dancers she assembled changing the opera landscape forever with what you can (and at this point should) present on the opera stage, to seeing Walter Russell III perform and you think to yourself “*The future is now and it is shining bright.*” To my actor brothers for life, to Flo. So, to everyone who is/was associated with *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, I just want to say: thank you for everything! #OurRootsRunDeep #WeTheOnes ■

Teresa "Tess" Reichlen's Swan Song

Interview Conducted by Alicia Cook

"Dance class was always my favorite part of the day. My first couple of schools were just small studios in strip malls, next to grocery stores, but I loved them," reminisced Teresa Reichlen, who grew up in Virginia. "When I was 10, I started going away for summers to study at ballet intensives, and I think it was around that time that my parents realized that I was very talented. I just wanted to dance as much as possible, but that was when we all started taking my training more seriously."

She began her dance training then, at the Russell School of Ballet with Thomas and Illona Russell, Mary Rogers, and Margaret McGarry and studied at the summer program of the School of American Ballet (SAB), the official school of New York City Ballet. She entered SAB full-time in the fall of the same year, moving to New York as a teenager.

Flash forward and Teresa, also known as "Tess," joined the New York City Ballet (NYCB) in 2001 and was promoted to soloist in 2005 and principal dancer in 2009. In early 2022, she retired from professional dance after two decades with NYCB. Reichlen also retired from the AGMA Board of Governors, where she served AGMA members as Third Vice President.

"After 20 years dancing with NYCB I was getting a little restless and was really looking for experiences to expand my skill sets beyond just being a dancer," she said. "I did a fellowship at SAB, took continuing education classes for performing arts management through NYU, and joining the AGMA Board of Governors seemed like another great learning opportunity. Plus, I had always been searching for ways to help improve dancers' lives and this leadership opportunity within my union seemed like a perfect way to help myself and others at once."

What is the legacy of Reichlen? Well, *The New York Times* once praised her



©Reichlen's Instagram

in an article, calling her a "rarity." In a review, Reichlin's portrayal of Odette in *Swan Lake* was said to be "the purest, the most human." In addition to Odette, Reichlen's repertoire with the New York City Ballet includes *Apollo* (Polyhymnia), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Titania, Hippolyta), *The Nutcracker* (Sugarplum Fairy, Dewdrop, Coffee, Flowers), *Orpheus* (Eurydice), and *The Sleeping Beauty* (Lilac Fairy, Carabosse, Diamond). Created roles include *Bal de Couture*, *Clearing Dawn*,

years that if the right job opportunity came up that I would feel ready to move on to a new career, so while I still really enjoyed dancing, I was thirsty for new challenges," she said. "The pandemic also gave me the first break from dance that I have ever had, and it let me know that I would be okay without dance in my life."

That next opportunity presented itself and Reichlen is now Gallery Director at SHRINE, her husband's art gallery in New York City that specializes in outsider and self-taught art, art brut and contemporary art.

It has been said in the press that Reichlen decided to leave NYCB at the height of her career. But she knows the timing was right. A career change was not the only life milestone Reichlen embraced in the last few years. Her family grew by one during the pandemic: she and her husband welcomed a baby boy they named Ozzie.

"I think the biggest change was a shift in priorities which was a major factor in my decision to retire," she said, of motherhood. "I really need a predictable work



©Paul Kolnik

Teresa Reichlen in "Swan Lake"

Common Ground, *Everywhere We Go*, *Luce Nascosta*, *Plainspoken*, and *Year of the Rabbit*.

Reichlen officially retired on February 19, 2022, but the decision was not made overnight.

"I had had the feeling for a couple of

schedule, unlike a dancer's schedule of sporadic rehearsals and evening performances. I don't want to miss these special first years of his life when so much is happening."

Reichlen is acutely aware that she

was fortunate to have a proper send-off from the dance world, and a last season. Throughout the pandemic, dancers, especially ones that retired during 2020-2021, did not get to experience their final bow due to the pandemic shuttering productions.

“Swan Song” is a popular phrase in both dance and pop culture that is used for a final “go” at something. Ironically, Reichlen’s final performance was dancing the role of Odette in George Balanchine’s one-act *Swan Lake*.

“I would have to say my whole last season gave me a real sense of closure, not just the final show,” she said. “It was the first time in my life that I really felt like I deserved some celebration and I let myself

take it all in and didn’t try to deflect it as I often do.”

“In a way I was so fortunate because I was given a little preview of what life after dance would look like from the pandemic, so I was able to go into my last season without any hesitation or fear of what it would feel like after the fact,” she continued. “I do realize how lucky I was to be able to choose to retire and not have a final performance canceled like so many. I made my decision with a very short timeline, so unlike normal “retirement” performances where the dancer chooses the entire program, I just chose a pre-programmed ballet. I decided on *Swan Lake* because it is so iconic and a role that I really cherished dancing over the years.”

When asked how she thinks the dance world has changed since she was a child in those small strip mall studios, she said, “I think that the dance world has definitely changed for the better in the last 20 years. The necessary seismic shift in the world is slowly also changing the dance world as well. We have a long way to go, but there have been lots of great strides made to better support diversity and inclusion as well as dancers’ wellbeing, both physical and mental.”

At the time of this interview, Reichlen was a few months into retirement and beginning her new career as Gallery Director.

“I am loving it so far!” ■

Artists Support Ukraine

As of the date of this publication, attacks on Ukraine continue, with key locations under intense bombardment from Russian forces. On February 24, AGMA released the following statement:

AGMA stands in heartbroken solidarity with our family, friends, and colleagues, and all those impacted by the violence in Ukraine.

As a union, AGMA is founded on the principles of democracy, freedom, and hope. We believe in using collective power for good. We believe most people want to leave the world better than they found it. We believe that beauty, art, and fellowship will prevail, even when confronted with calculated and ruthless destruction.

In the face of tragedy and injustice, we turn to that which our members have devoted their creative lives to: art. Art that helps us understand all facets of what it means to be human, including days like today. As many AGMA members have sung on stages across the world:

“What shall I, a wretch, say then?
To which protector shall I appeal
When even the just man is barely safe?”

-Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem

We beg for safety to return to all in harm’s way. Let compassion, unity, and peace prevail. End the violence and senseless suffering.

AGMA Artists, Two Major Opera Houses Hold Benefit Concerts for Ukraine in April

Chicago, IL

By Pam Williams, Chorister, LOSA Outreach Coordinator

Lyric Opera Stage Artists (LOSA) was honored to be a part of the benefit concert “We Stand with Ukraine” alongside our Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra colleagues and members of the Ukrainian music community. The concert was held on April 9, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral in Ukrainian Village in Chicago. Funds raised from the concert will fund expenses of newly arriving Ukrainian refugee children to attend the school at St. Nicholas and also medical and humanitarian aid in Ukraine.

The concert was organized by the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art; Kyiv Committee of Chicago Sister Cities International;

and St. Nicholas Cathedral School. Other artist organizers include Preman Tilson of the Lyric Orchestra and Khrystyna Musiy of the Ukrainian choral community. I worked directly with Khrystyna to organize the choral pieces and soloists from LOSA for the concert.

Khrystyna Musiy learned about LOSA through some mutual singer friends and then contacted me to coordinate with LOSA for the evening. Knowing that many of our friends from the Lyric Orchestra had already committed to being part of this concert made offering our voices all the sweeter. At the concert, LOSA joined forces with local Ukrainian singers and the Orchestra also joined forces with Ukrainian orchestra musicians for a 40-voice choir and large orchestra.

In attendance for this concert were Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Cardinal Blase Cupich of the Chicago Archdiocese.

As the first notes of the concert began, we knew that this was a sacred evening. The concert began and ended with the Ukrainian National Anthem and was interspersed with Ukrainian sung prayers and solemn orchestral pieces. Several LOSA members were invited to sing solos throughout the evening and their beautiful and heartfelt singing brought a reverence to the concert. I'm so grateful for the generosity of Emma Sorenson, Hoss Brock, Nicolai Janitzky, Diana Stoic, and Jessye Wright in offering their voices to the program, along with other members of LOSA who performed in the chorus. (Amanda



Collage courtesy of LOSA

Court, Mike Cavalieri, Christine Ebeling, Desiree Hassler, Corinne Wallace-Crane, and myself.) Special thanks goes to LOSA member Nicolai Janitzky for his assistance with Ukrainian pronunciation and his very moving solo rendition of the Ukrainian song "Looking at the Sky" with harpist Ellie Kirk.

We all felt the power of music and its

ability to heal, comfort, and express our pain in this tragic and difficult time, for Ukraine and the world. As LOSA members, we felt so honored to be a part of bringing our voices to this benefit concert. We hope that our music brought a glimmer of hope and light to an otherwise dark time.

New York, NY

By Meredith Woodend and Rachele Schmiede, Choristers at the Metropolitan Opera

On February 24, 2022, the unthinkable occurred. Vladimir Putin ordered Russian forces to attack the people of Ukraine. As we watched the attack unfold over television and online news outlets, we wondered how this could be happening and if there was any way we could help.

The management of the Metropolitan Opera also found the plight of the Ukrainian people deeply concerning and asked if we would volunteer to sing the Ukrainian national anthem prior to the opening night performance of *Don Carlos*. The response was a resounding "yes!" This moment became even more impactful as Ukrainian bass-baritone Vladyslav Buialskyi, a soloist in

the cast, met us in List Hall to teach us the proper pronunciation of his country's beloved national anthem. It was a poignant moment that was felt throughout the room.

The following week, Met management proposed the idea of the full company coming together, with a few selected soloists, to perform a program lead by the incomparable Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The proceeds would go directly to benefit the people of Ukraine. This concert was to take place on the company's collective day off and all were ready to jump in to do their part to make this fundraising concert a resounding success.

The program on February 28 included:

- *National Anthem of Ukraine* with Vladyslav Buialskyi, bass-baritone
- *Prayer for Ukraine* by Valentin Silvestrov
- *Adagio for Strings* by Samuel Barber

- *Va, pensiero* from Verdi's *Nabucco*
- *Four Last Songs* by Richard Strauss with Lise Davidsen, soprano
- Finale from *Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Op. 125* with Elza van den Heever, soprano, Jamie Barton, mezzo-soprano, Piotr Beczala, tenor, and Ryan Speedo Green, bass-baritone

The Concert for Ukraine, as titled by the Met, was a truly special evening in which the Met Opera family came together to perform for an audience who wanted to make a difference in the lives of the Ukrainian people. In attendance were Ukrainian ambassadors which made the evening even more special.

Claire Kuttler, extra chorister at the Met said this about the event: "Participating in the Concert for Ukraine was simply an honor. To be able to raise funds for relief efforts and to let the people of Ukraine know how deeply we feel for them during this time of suffering and how incredible their collective bravery and resolve has been throughout this time is humbling and sacred."

Full-time chorister Danielle Walker shared a meaningful quote on her Instagram page that summed up how we were feeling: "Can a mere song change people's minds? I doubt that it is so. But a song can infiltrate your heart and the heart may change your mind." - Elvis Costello"

In preparation for this momentous event, members of the Chorus began to express a need to find a way to help in addition to what the Met had planned. Met Chorus Artists, Inc., the nonprofit arm of the chorus, investigated some reputable charities that are funneling aid and supplies directly to Ukraine. MCA offered a way to collect the funds and distribute them

immediately to the charity that was voted upon by the Chorus. The charity selected was Doctors Without Borders, an organization that has boots on the ground not only in the refugee camps that border Ukraine, but also inside the country.

As I am writing this in April 2022, the people of Ukraine are still under attack. Many nations are searching for ways to come to their aid to stop this invasion. I am sure many will echo the sentiment that we hope this war will finally come to an end and peace will be restored. Since *The Concert for Ukraine*, we have seen numerous shops and fellow musicians performing in benefit concerts. We encourage all AGMA members to continue to offer support through performance, donations, or in any way that helps the people of Ukraine. Our collective work is making a difference. ■



Andy Garcia's Last Dance

By Andres Garcia, Board member and Dancer, and Alicia Cook, Director of Communications

AGMA Officer and dancer Andres “Andy” Garcia announced in April that he would be retiring from the Boston Ballet following the conclusion of the season. He was elected and joined the AGMA Board of Governors in 2017, representing the New England Area, and will continue to serve the AGMA community as fifth vice president of the Board.

“I joined the Board as an extension of my service as an AGMA delegate for Boston Ballet. My passion for artist advocacy and the broader labor movement was growing when I was approached by the former Associate Executive Director of AGMA and Eastern Counsel who informed me that it had been several years since the artists of the New England area had been represented at the Board level,” said Garcia. “I felt that I had a duty to represent the artists of the New England Area nationally and to bridge the divide between the local delegates and national AGMA leadership. This sense of duty and commitment to AGMA artists is what continues to drive me in my service as a member of AGMA leadership—a role I hold with tremendous honor and pride.”

Garcia began his training at Ballet Austin in Texas before enrolling in the Professional Division Program of Pacific Northwest Ballet School in Seattle, Washington. Garcia attended summer programs at Boston Ballet School, School of American Ballet, and Pacific Northwest Ballet School and was selected to attend Canada’s National Ballet School summer program in 2011 as an exchange student.

He joined Boston Ballet II in 2012 and became a Company dancer in 2014. In 2014, Garcia was also invited to the Summer Professional Dance program at the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity where he performed in George Balanchine’s *Divertimento No.15*, Toer van Schayk’s *Seventh Symphony*, and

Christopher Wheeldon’s *Carousel* (*A Dance*).

Hear from Andy below, in his own words:

“After 9 seasons, this season will be my last with the Boston Ballet and as a professional dancer. It’s been the pleasure and privilege of a lifetime to dance with such talented, generous artists. Artists I’m lucky enough to call friends and chosen family—bonded through this unique and powerful experience.

The final years of my career have not been easy. Two ACL tears (and subsequent surgeries), pandemic shutdowns,



©Photo by William Forsythe

and other injuries have made it difficult to do what I love, and I have reached a place where my mind, body, and heart are ready to move on.

Through the highs and lows, I’ve been encouraged and supported by some of the kindest and most compassionate and loving people on Earth. I’ve danced ballets that have changed me and have had the honor of working with one of my idols, William Forsythe. I’ve received an education that has led to two degrees from Northeastern University. And I’ve fought to leave a legacy that makes the art form

that I love a little better for future generations of dancers. It’s been everything I could have asked for, and for that, I am so incredibly grateful.

To all who I’ve met on this journey—old friends and new—thank you for accepting, supporting, encouraging, inspiring, and laughing with me all these years.

I’m so grateful to have this last dance.”

Since joining Boston Ballet in 2014, Garcia has performed in Sir Frederick Ashton’s *Cinderella*, George Balanchine’s *Chaconne*, *Theme and Variations*, *Coppélia*, *Kammermusik No. 2*, and *Jewels*; Val Caniparoli’s *Lady of the Camellias*, Florence Clerc’s *La Bayadère*, John Cranko’s *Onegin*, Jorma Elo’s *Lost by Last*, *C to C* (Close to Chuck), and *Ruth’s Dance*; William Forsythe’s *Artifact 2017*, *Pas/Parts*, *Playlist (EP)*, *Blake Works I*; Harald Lander’s *Études*, Ivan Liška’s *Le Corsaire*; Jos Martinez’s *Resonance*, Léonide Massine’s *Gaîté Parisienne*; John Neumeier’s *Third Symphony of Gustav Mahler*; Mikko Nissinen’s *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*; Marius Petipa’s *The Sleeping Beauty*; Jerome Robbins’ *Glass Pieces* and *Fanfare*; Yury Yanowsky’s *Smoke and Mirrors*; and Lila York’s *Celts*.

Keep up with Andy on Instagram: @__andy_garcia ■

AGMA Choristers of the Los Angeles Opera Celebrate Major Milestone

By Aleta Braxton, AGMA Board member and Chorister

March 2022 marked 150+ productions with LA Opera! It is a great honor and pleasure to announce this milestone with three of my awesome colleagues and good friends, who lent their own words to the special moment.



"*Otello* was my first official LA Opera show. It was so exciting to be part of that first opening night! I really loved the challenge of learning and memorizing *Nixon in China*, *Peter Grimes*, *Akhnaten*, and *Satyagraha*. I appreciate directors who give the Chorus a lot to do, but the best part has been getting to sing glorious music with incredible singers and friends.

Who wouldn't love this job?" - Chorister Natalie Beck



"My first show was *Otello* with the 'official' Los Angeles Opera. I loved all the productions really, but stand outs were the Philip Glass operas and also *Moby Dick*." - Chorister Mark Beasom

Addition from Aleta Braxton: "We also had a blast performing in productions with Mark's wife Samela and their dancing daughters Andrea and Deanna!"

"Although I most enjoyed singing the Verdi operas as opposed to those of most



other composers, I enjoyed performing in pieces where I could grab hold of, create and portray a character rather than just being another member of the chorus. This included having opportunities to be more physical on stage, such as the *Moby Dick* production, where I got to climb up masts and rigging, climbed and slid down walls, or productions like the *Romeo and Juliet* where I had the opportunity to do quite a bit of dance in the production as well as sing." - Chorister Mark David Miller

Editor's Note: as of this writing on May 9, 2022, Aleta has reached 160 productions with LA Opera. ■



An Interview with The Rogue Ballerina Georgina Pazcoguín

Interview Conducted by Alicia Cook

Longtime AGMA dancer Georgina Pazcoguín is here to disrupt the status quo. She is co-founder of *Final Bow for Yellowface*, an author, and the first female AAPI soloist at New York City Ballet.

Pazcoguín's many NYCB credits include Anita in *West Side Story*. Her extensive repertory of George Balanchine works include lead roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3*. Her Broadway Credits include Ivy in 2014 Revival of *On The Town*. Georgina originated the role of Victoria the White Cat in the first revival of *Cats* on Broadway, choreographed by Andy Blankenbuehler in 2016.



Ms. Pazcoguín was a recipient of the Mae L. Wien Award for Outstanding Promise in 2002. She is a two-time Chita Rivera Award nominee for outstanding dancer. She is the recipient of The 2019 Outstanding Filipinos in America Courage of Conviction Award.

Alicia Cook, AGMA's Director of Communications, chatted with Georgina about her career, *Final Bow for Yellowface*, book, and recent award from Lincoln Center.

Alicia Cook (AC): Thanks for taking the time to talk! Let's start at the

beginning. What is your earliest memory of being drawn to dance? I read that you began training at age four.

Georgina Pazcoguín (GP): Oh, wow. I think the story is I was born in split! Growing up I was very much influenced by the artists I watched on MTV and VH1. Being one of six children, my younger siblings and I were always putting on dancing skits at home after dinner.

AC: Love it. We must know! Why do people refer to you as "The Rogue Ballerina?" What does that moniker mean to you?

GP: I'm not your typical ballerina. Not only am I a multicultural woman of Asian/Italian American heritage, but I am also very outspoken and tend to shatter your ideas of what you thought a ballerina could be. With the word "rogue," I'm flipping its connotation on its head. I'm saying it's great to be different. It's great to take the attributes that people think make you different in a "bad way" and spin them into gold, making you uniquely singular.

AC: Thank you for sharing that. I hope others adopt that outlook! You've performed on both ballet stages and on Broadway. How do the experiences differ, as a professional dancer? Do you have a preference?

PG: I'm so lucky to call both communities my home. Honestly, my experience on Broadway has changed my standards on what it feels like to be respected as an adult and artist on every spoke of the creative wheel that gets a Broadway show up and running. In the ballet world it can feel so segregated being a dancer from the rest of the parts of the machine. And while I don't feel like the division of the various sectors of a ballet company are done with

malice, I do think it is time for us to reevaluate the power dynamics we have always just accepted as the norm.

AC: Do you have an all-time favorite production that you've been a part of?

PG: I really loved being a part of the original cast of *Russian Seasons* by Alexei Ratmanský. It's so special to have created something that has lasted the test of time and breathes a life of its own. I'd be remiss if I did not mention how special it was to be part of the loving process of bringing *Sweet Gwen Suite* to stage this past fall for dance. To be seen as your own artist whilst also being able to honor another iconic female dancer and working with an almost all female team creatively was magical. I owe a dept of gratitude to Nicole Fosse and Linda Haberman for entrusting me with Gwen's star. And many thanks to New York City Center for giving us an amazing platform to share this tribute.

AC: The importance of "self" and maintaining your own identity seems important to you. You are the co-founder of *Final Bow for Yellowface*, which is committed to eliminating outdated and offensive stereotypes of Asians (Yellowface) on stages. Your co-founder is arts administrator and educator Phil Chan. How did this all get off the ground? How did you and Phil first connect?

PG: Phil and I disagree on how and when we connected. I remember a summer course; he remembers reconnecting at a dance gig I was performing at and he was managing in Pennsylvania. As per usual, Phil and I came up with the name *Final Bow for Yellowface* on a phone call mixed with bad dad jokes and riffing off each other. The initiative was created first. Phil's book [of the same name] came second. It's really wonderfully written.

AC: I hope readers check out the book! I read that *Final Bow for Yellowface* began with a “simple pledge” in 2017. What was the strategy behind that? Did you achieve your goal?

PG: The strategy then and now is to engage with our community. To get others to acknowledge something that needed to end and hold each other accountable for honoring our pledge to change.

AC: You definitely started out strong, given that almost every major American ballet company signed the pledge! That’s amazing. Have you seen actual, tangible change in the industry since they acknowledged the pledge?

PG: Oh yes, change has absolutely occurred not only on American soil but this conversation has gone global with combined effort. But I do think, as a culture, including both opera and dance, we still have a long way to go.

AC: Can you share more about that?

PG: I keep reiterating that this is a commitment to a lifestyle change. The issues are not solved just by checking off boxes, making diversity hires, or making adjustments to offensive costuming and choreography. No, the conversation is ever evolving and it’s humbling and frustrating to experience how much time real change can take.

AC: I noticed the *Nutcracker* has its own menu item on the yellowface(dot)org website...

PG: I believe *Nutcracker* is a gateway ballet. Every company large and small and most non balletomanes know of the *Nutcracker*. It also possibly has the best potential to be a teaching tool for the marvel of diversity for our young children. Presenting *Nutcracker* from a global lens—giving care to honestly and correctly portray heritage onstage—as opposed to continuing its white Eurocentric narrative and presentation of ethnicity, seemed the most powerful first step for the initiative.

AC: Before I knew anything about ballet, I knew the name *Nutcracker*.

PG: But Phil and I have moved way

beyond the *Nutcracker*. We are so happy to have inspired change in this ballet and witness its trickledown effect, but now it’s time for us, as a community, to apply this same global lens to Balanchine ballets, other full lengths and beyond.

AC: The movement’s growth since 2017 is impressive.

PG: We are really happy to announce Gold Standard Arts as the parent foundation that will now umbrella Final Bow. We want to support AAPI voices in all areas of the arts.

AC: Amazing! Congratulations. Since *Final Bow for Yellowface*, we’ve seen other arts organizations pop up in support of AAPI artists, like the Asian Opera Alliance.

PG: Yes. We are working with Asian Opera Alliance as they get established. The message of Final Bow is applicable in so many other areas of art, not just dance; we are thrilled others are stepping up and taking action in their own fields and want to support that.

AC: You recently were honored at the Kennedy Center, as *Final Bow for Yellowface* was named a Next 50 Arts Leader by the Kennedy Center. Congratulations! For those who might not know, the Kennedy Center Next 50 identifies 50 leaders and organizations that, through sustained excellence of artistic, educational, athletic, or multi-disciplinary work, uplift society and move us toward a more inspired, inclusive, and compassionate world. Tell us about what this award means to you!

PG: Well, it’s truly lovely to be acknowledged with such wonderful company. And it’s fast tracked the plan for Gold Standard Arts because it has become more and more apparent that there is a need for a service organization that connects AAPI creatives.

AC: So. You’re a fulltime dancer, groundbreaking advocate, and author of *Swan Dive: The Making of a Rogue Ballerina*. That’s some resume. Did you always set out to release a book?

PG: Not in the slightest. But as I

unpacked a lot in my life through the various events of recent years, I became compelled to share my story and my voice. I will continue to tell my stories.



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AC: What do you do to protect your wellness and mental health in a hectic, sometimes scary, world?

PG: Sun and water. Alone time to recharge.

AC: What do you hope the future of the professional dance world will look like?

PG: I want ballet to survive well into future generations. We have a long way to go toward ensuring that.

AGMA members are encouraged to check out Swan Dive: The Making of a Rogue Ballerina by Georgina and Pazcoguín and Final Bow for Yellowface by Phil Chan. A lot of what was discussed during this interview are answered in much more depth in those books.

Keep up with Georgina at Pazcoguín.com and on Instagram @Georgina_Pazcoguín. ■

AGMA Caucuses

AGMA encourages and embraces participation at the member level. Various member groups have organized and formed official AGMA Caucuses to help bring to light areas of concern that a particular constituent group might have. Current AGMA Caucuses include the AGMA Black Caucus (ABC), the AGMA Dancers Caucus, the AGMA Opera and Concert Choristers Caucus (OCCC), and the AGMA Staging Staff Caucus.

Since their formations, the Caucus leaders of each group have provided wonderful resources for their AGMA categories. They've organized several beneficial evenings, holding social hours and meetings on bargaining priorities and past seasons; moderating panels (including two focused on intimacy direction and Black dancers in the industry); welcoming expert guest speakers; and hosting presentations on union organizing, delegate training, vocal health, DEI, technology, financial planning, taxes, and recaps on previous seasons.

And this is only a sampling of all the AGMA Caucuses have contributed to their union! All AGMA members in good standing are welcome to join a meeting within their AGMA category.

To become involved, email: Staging Staff Caucus: stagingstaffcaucus@musicalartists.org; Opera and Concert Choristers Caucus: OCCC@musicalartists.org; Dancers Caucus: dancerscaucus@musicalartists.org; Black Caucus: blackcaucus@musicalartists.org ■

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Art

By Patricia Portillo, AGMA Board Member, Chorister

Portrait of David Portillo's dog Ruthie



Portrait of Christine Goerke



Follow the Artist on Instagram: @ragingdovearts

Meet the New Executive Director of the AGMA Retirement Plan and Health Fund

By Alicia Cook

**Introducing the
New Executive Director of
the AGMA Retirement Plan
and Health Fund**



Rhonda Murray

Following a comprehensive search, Rhonda Murray has been named Executive Director of the AGMA Retirement Plan and Health Fund.

Murray has a proven track record of over 20 years of experience successfully managing health and welfare benefit programs for both non-profit and for-profit organizations. She is a graduate of AMP (Administrators Masters Program).

"I'm looking forward to cultivating the Funds' relationship

with both AGMA members and its signatory companies, and to strengthening their knowledge of their benefits," shared Murray, whose official start date was May 2.

Prior to the Funds, she worked for the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) Local 1957 as their Fund Administrator. Before that, Murray worked at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) for 14 years as a Benefits Manager.

"Rhonda's impressive background includes experience working with new members and with a union membership that is constantly changing," said Sam Wheeler, National Executive Director at AGMA. "Given the composition of AGMA's membership, she is an excellent fit, and was the obvious choice. AGMA looks forward to working closely with Rhonda."

In her free time, Rhonda can be found enjoying outdoor activities or trying out new recipes with her friends and family.

The AGMA Fund Office is a separate entity from AGMA, with its own staff and Trustees. Please reach out at 212-765-3664 or info@agmaretirement-health.org with any questions. ■

IN MEMORIAM

Darius Barnes, *Dancer*

Teresa Berganza, *Soloist*

James Billings, *Soloist*

Brenda Box-Bristol, *Chorister*

Barbara Brandt (Aurora), *Soloist*

Stephen Brown, *Stage Manager*

Barbara Bystrom, *Chorister*

Howard B. Chadwick Jr., *Soloist*

Florencio Cora, *Actor*

Maria Ewing, *Soloist*

Howard Hensel, *Soloist*

José Hernández, *Soloist*

Jonathan David Honore, *Chorister*

Sally Ann Howes, *Soloist*

G. Jan Jones, *Chorister*

Yuriko Kikuchi, *Dancer*

Carol Kirkpatrick, *Soloist*

Randolph Locke, *Soloist*

Donald Mahler, *Dancer*

Barbara Maier Gustern, *Soloist*

Fernando Mancillas, *Chorister*

Mary Meyers, *Soloist*

Lawrence Montgomery, *Chorister*

Sheila Nadler, *Soloist*

Salvador Novoa, *Soloist*

Roger Ohlsen, *Chorister*

Stephen O'Mara, *Soloist*

Abe Polakoff, *Soloist*

Calvin Remsberg, *Director*

Teresa (Terry) Robinson, *Chorister*

Rafael Rojas, *Soloist*

Albert Sherman, *Director*

Stephen Sondheim, *composer
and lyricist**

Samuel E. Sorrow, *Chorister*

Paul Sorvino, *Soloist*

Larry Storch, *Soloist*

Marjorie Tallchief, *Dancer*

William Tredway, *Chorister*

Kenneth von Heidecke, *Dancer/
Choreographer*

Rebecca Whitlow, *Chorister*

Tamara Whitty, *Chorister*

**Indicates a distinguished individual
in a related profession*

AGMA Staff Updates

In addition to Sam Wheeler becoming AGMA's National Executive Director, since December 2021, AGMA has welcomed several new faces to the professional staff. In case you missed it, here is an AGMA staff update, that includes promotion and retirement news, and new staff announcements.



Griff Braun

Griff Braun (he/him) joined AGMA's professional staff as a negotiator in 2014 and was promoted to Director of Organizing and Outreach in 2019. In 2022, his title was changed to National Organizing Director.

Prior to joining AGMA's staff, Braun had a successful career as a professional dancer – including as a company member of American Ballet Theatre and the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, and as a guest artist with the San Francisco Ballet, Washington National Opera, and others. In addition to performing at major venues across the United States and Canada, he toured extensively internationally as well.

Throughout Braun's career as an Artist, he was an active AGMA member and leader, serving as a union delegate and participating as both a member and the Chair of several negotiating committees, with both ABT and the Met. Braun was the recipient of the Richard Porter Leach Fellowship at SUNY Empire State College, where he completed a BA in both dance and American History while still performing. He also received a Graduate Certificate in Labor Relations in 2017 from the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

As an AGMA staff member, Braun has

served as the lead negotiator in bargaining with numerous signatory companies, led multiple new organizing campaigns, and expanded AGMA's capacity for member engagement. He also serves or has served as the AGMA staff liaison to the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, the Coalition of Broadway Unions and Guilds (COBUG), and Dance Artists National Collective (DANC).



Joe Conceison

Joe Conceison (he/him) joined the AGMA staff in May of 2019 as Executive Assistant to the National Executive Director. Soon after, the role of Operations Manager was created in 2021 to better encompass everything he contributes to AGMA. In 2022, he was promoted to Director of Operations. He also serves as AGMA's in-house graphic designer, with many of his graphics seen across AGMA's social media channels and in the AGMA Newsletter.

Conceison is a graduate of New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, where he received a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance-Music Theatre. As a musical theater performer, he had the opportunity to work on regional productions, workshops, and premieres of new works.

After traveling the country on the national tour of *Fame the Musical*, Conceison returned to New York and discovered a passion for artistic administration. Prior to AGMA, he held multiple administration positions, including Interim Program Administrator for

New York University Steinhardt's Vocal Performance program, and later as a Managerial Associate with IMG Artists.



Susan Davison

After 27 years at AGMA, Susan Davison (she/her) retired in September 2021. An integral part of the administrative staff for nearly three decades, Susan held a number of positions at the Union, beginning in 1994 as the Executive Assistant to the National Executive Director, a role she held until 2019. She was also the Board of Governors Assistant and handled many day-to-day admin tasks that kept the Union running smoothly. She ultimately became AGMA's Visa Consultant and served as the liaison between AGMA, the AGMA Relief Fund, and the Entertainment Community Fund (previously The Actors Fund).

AGMA extends its warmest gratitude to Susan and thanks her for her devoted service to AGMA over the years. Susan is now enjoying her retirement at the Jersey Shore.



Bricanna Frye

Bricanna Frye (she/her) joined AGMA in August 2021 as one of its New York Business Representatives. She is originally

from North Carolina (bred, not born) but has lived in Ohio, DC, and now New York City.

Before joining AGMA, Frye worked as a Paralegal at Mehri & Skalet, PLLC, a civil rights law firm. While there, she primarily worked on cases related to gender, racial, and disability discrimination in the workplace. She gained a plethora of experiences there, from supporting individual severance negotiations and fighting for pregnant workers to assisting in filming an NFL documentary.

She spent nearly five years working in non-profit operations at the National Abortion Federation Hotline. It was there where she discovered her passion for labor unions, having participated in creating and negotiating the organization's first collective bargaining agreement. She is both pro-choice and pro-collective action.

She graduated with a BA in Economics from Oberlin College & Conservatory, where she gained an appreciation for the arts. After college, she traded in West African drumming for kickboxing and never looked back. Also, after four years of German, she professes to only be at a beginner level. While empathy was a learned trait, her humor is naturally self-deprecating.



Annie Hollister

Annie Hollister (she/her) joined the American Guild of Musical Artists as Eastern Counsel in March 2022. The proud daughter of an IATSE member, Hollister was born and raised in New York City and, in a previous life, trained as a classical singer.

She comes to AGMA from the Honors Program at the United States Department of Labor (DOL), where she was involved in drafting and litigating regulations for the protection and empowerment of American workers. Prior to joining DOL, she clerked for the Hon. Marsha S. Berzon

on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Hollister graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Law School, where she was Developments in the Law Chair of the *Harvard Law Review*. While in law school, Hollister was an active organizer with the Harvard Graduate Students Union-UAW and spent a summer at the union-side labor law firm Altshuler Berzon.



©Tim Coburn

Joshua Hong

Joshua Hong (he/him) brings both his experience as an opera singer and many years of demonstrated union leadership to the AGMA staff as Mid-Atlantic Business Representative. He joined the team in August 2021.

In his 17-year career, he has performed with multiple AGMA signatories such as Opera Pacific, Washington National Opera, and Wolf Trap Opera. As an AGMA delegate, a member in multiple negotiation committees, an elected leader in the Washington-Baltimore Area Committee, and most recently as the Area Chair, he has a history of member engagement and communication and has experience in the negotiation of multiple contracts, side letters, and waivers.

He joins AGMA's professional staff with a passion and commitment to the work of making meaningful impacts in the lives of artists, and with a collaborative problem-solving mindset to foster more productive and effective relationships with both AGMA members and signatories.



©Francisco Estevez Photography

Tracy Jones

On February 1, Tracy Jones (she/her) was promoted to Western Executive, following the retirement of AGMA's Western Counsel Hope Singer.

"I am honored to be taking this exciting next step in my career with AGMA. It has been a privilege to support the incredible members of this union over the past several years in my role as Western Business Representative," said Jones. "As I transition into my new role as Western Executive, I look forward to advocating on behalf of all AGMA Artists and hope to amplify their voices as we continue to pursue better pay, benefits, and healthy and safe work environments for all."

Jones joined AGMA as a member in 2013. For the eight seasons she performed with Colorado Ballet, she represented her fellow artists as a delegate and participated in several successful negotiations. She was also a member of AGMA's Board of Governors and served on the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC). It was through these experiences that she found a passion for advocating for artists in the workplace.

During her time as a dancer, Jones also continued her studies at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations where she obtained her certification in Labor Studies in 2018. In addition, she holds a professional license as a Notary Public in the state of Colorado and speaks both English and Spanish.

Jones began her work for AGMA as a consultant in 2019. She retired from the stage in March 2020 and joined the senior staff shortly thereafter as Western Business Representative.

"AGMA is fortunate to have the knowledge, talent, and expertise of Tracy Jones with us. She knows firsthand what it is like to be a professional in the performing arts

and has worked directly with Hope Singer for years. We are ecstatic to have her continue at AGMA as Western Executive,” said Sam Wheeler, National Executive Director.



Wendy LaManque

Wendy LaManque (she/her) joined AGMA as Eastern Counsel in 2019. In February 2022, she was promoted to Eastern Counsel and Director of Organizational Compliance.

Prior to her time at AGMA, LaManque worked as an attorney at Cohen, Weiss and Simon LLP for six years where she represented labor unions and employees across multiple industries, including airline pilots, maintenance workers, letter carriers, nurses, and entertainment industry professionals.

LaManque received her bachelor's degree from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) and is a graduate of Brooklyn Law School. During her time at Brooklyn Law School, she served as a legal intern to the NYC Office of Collective Bargaining, Region 29 of the National Labor Relations Board, AFTRA (now SAG-AFTRA), Actors' Equity Association, and the Communications Workers of America District 1 legal department as a Peggy Browning Fund Fellow.

LaManque has been quoted in numerous entertainment industry publications, and her writing published in the *New York State Bar Association Labor & Employment Law Journal* and the *Syracuse Law Review*. She has been a guest speaker and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) presenter on panels and webinars for the AFL-CIO Union Lawyers Alliance, the New York State Bar Association, the Peggy Browning Fund Summer Fellowship Series, and Cornell University's ILR Labor

Roundtable. In 2020, she received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Brooklyn Law School's Labor and Employment Law Association.



Kate Maxted

Western Business Representative Kate Maxted (she/her) is originally from Durango, Colorado, and connected with the Arts early on, starting dance classes at age three. She joined AGMA's staff in September 2021.

She pursued her passion for dance during her high school years at Walnut Hill School for the Performing Arts in Massachusetts and then accepted a trainee position at The Joffrey Ballet in Chicago. She went on to dance with Colorado Ballet, Ballet San Antonio, and Ballet Idaho, culminating in over a decade of professional performance experience. She was promoted to the rank of Soloist during her time at both Ballet San Antonio and Ballet Idaho and was lauded for her musicality, precision, and stage presence.

Throughout her career, Maxted danced leading roles in ballets ranging from *The Sleeping Beauty* to George Balanchine's *Rubies*. While dancing professionally, she also earned her BA in Arts Management from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and interned at the San Antonio Symphony and the McNay Art Museum. Maxted retired from performing professionally in 2021.

Maxted has utilized her education and background to advocate for her fellow artists in the workplace, gaining firsthand experience as both a non-union Dancer Representative and a union organizer. Outside of the Arts, she has also worked as a legal assistant, research associate, and project manager, most recently at MAPS PBC, an organization devoted

to researching alternative mental health treatments.

She enjoys hiking, playing piano, volunteering, and spending time with her family, partner, and their two dogs.



Anna Peabody

Anna Peabody (she/her) joined AGMA's Professional Staff as Western Business Representative in February 2022.

Originally from Pasadena, Maryland, Peabody connected with the Arts early on, starting dance classes at age three. She spent her high school years at the Baltimore School for the Arts in Maryland and her summers studying at the Boston Ballet and Chautauqua Institution. Following high school, Peabody began studying ballet at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Ballet with an Outside Field in Elementary Education.

Before graduating, she began working with BalletX in Philadelphia, PA, where she performed nationally at The Joyce Theater in New York and the Vail International Dance Festival in Colorado. In the Fall of 2019, she began working with the Nevada Ballet Theater (NBT) in Las Vegas, where she was part of the organizing effort and discovered her passion for advocating for artists while working with AGMA as a Delegate.

She retired from performing professionally in 2021 and began working as a member of AmeriCorps VISTA with the Salt Lake City Office of the Mayor. During her time with the Mayor's Office, she helped develop the early stages of a city program focused on community activation and revitalization.



Patrick Shelton

Patrick Shelton (he/him) has joined AGMA's professional staff as one of the New York Business Representatives. Originally from Long Island, and after many years living in Boston and Chicago, he is happy to return home.

Shelton attended New England Conservatory and Roosevelt University and has worked as a Young Artist and Operatic Soloist. He has performed with AGMA and non-AGMA signatories, and served on the AGMA Board of Governors and the last AGMA Chautauqua Opera Negotiating Committee. In addition, he has served as the meeting facilitator for Soloist Coalition Young Artists (SCYA), organizing Young Artists, through the pandemic, as well as providing support and educational opportunities during this difficult period. After transitioning away from singing professionally, he has spent the last two years working in the recruiting space for a tech startup as a Team Lead.

As a New York Business Representative, Shelton will often be working alongside Eastern Counsel Annie Hollister on a number of initiatives, including several contract negotiations. His first official day at AGMA was July 5. He is excited to bring his lifelong passion for the labor movement, administrative skills, and experience in the Arts to this position. With a commitment to a more equitable and progressive industry, Patrick looks forward to serving AGMA's membership.



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Hope Singer

After over 40 years of practicing both public sector and private sector union-side labor law, Hope J. Singer has retired. Singer joined AGMA in 2018 as its Western Counsel. AGMA extends its gratitude to Singer for her years of service to the Union.

"Leaving AGMA is bittersweet for me," said Singer. "I have truly enjoyed my time here, largely due to the wonderful team and the amazing members."

Hope brought a wealth of experience to her role as Western Counsel, ensuring that AGMA continued to forcefully advocate on behalf of AGMA Artists in opera, dance, and choral fields. She negotiated and administered collective bargaining agreements at a number of AGMA signatory companies including San Diego Opera, Ballet West, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Seattle Opera, Arizona Opera, and Santa Fe Opera.

"Hope is a true believer in unions and workers' rights," said Sam Wheeler, National Executive Director. "Over the last several years, AGMA has benefited from Hope's knowledge, judgment, and good humor. I enjoyed working alongside Hope as part of AGMA's professional staff. Hope, we wish you nothing but happiness and relaxation as you begin this next chapter."

Singer's last day at AGMA was January 31, but she returned on a part-time basis to lead AGMA's negotiations with LA Opera. She established a career that earned her a reputation for being a tenacious negotiator and steadfast union-side advocate prior to joining AGMA.

Taking over for Singer is AGMA's Western Business Representative Tracy Jones. Jones is former AGMA Governor and delegate, and a retired dancer with the Colorado Ballet. She began consulting for AGMA in 2019 and became a full-time

member of AGMA's professional staff in 2020. Since then, she has worked closely with Singer and the Artists of the signatory companies they represented together.



©Photography by Aaron Minerbrook

Regina Vorria

Regina Vorria (she/her) has worked as a nonprofit performing arts Producer for over 10 years and joined AGMA in September 2021 as the Visa Consultant. She supports performing artists while facilitating international cultural mobility and exchange.

In her previous roles, Vorria has worked at acclaimed university performing arts presenting programs, such as PEAK Performances at Montclair State University, and with internationally renowned artists, including playwright and director Richard Maxwell.

She has produced and toured global productions in North and South America, Europe, and Africa, including venues and festivals such as Festival d'Automne, Festival TransAmériques, Théâtre Garonne, Onassis Cultural Center, The Kitchen, Abrons Arts Center, Walker Art Center, Wexner Center for the Arts, and On the Boards.

She holds an MFA in Theatre Management & Producing from Columbia University.

As your direct line to your union, members of AGMA's professional staff are here to assist you every step of the way. A staff representative has been assigned to each AGMA signatory company and works with the members to negotiate and enforce the collective bargaining agreement and protect members' rights. For general information or questions, you can also reach out to membership@musicalartists.org. ■

In the Heights with Dancer Mia Li

Interview Conducted by Alicia Cook

Mia Li, a native of Taiwan, is a long-time AGMA dancer who landed her first “big screen” role in one of 2021’s most anticipated movies. Ms. Li was invited to be part of the dance crew in the widely popular musical *In the Heights* by Lin-Manuel Miranda. The movie premiered in the summer of 2021 in theaters and on HBOMax.

Her journey to becoming a professional dancer began at a young age. Her introduction to dance actually came at the orders of a doctor.

“When I was young, my health was not very good,” she said. “My doctor suggested that I take some dance classes to improve my body resistance and reduce the chance of getting sick. So, when my mother took me to my first class, I fell in love with dance.”

Safe to say, dance was her best medicine. Ms. Li received her training at The Boston Conservatory with a full scholarship, double majoring in ballet and modern dance. An AGMA member since 2005, she has performed with Ballet Hispanico, and has been at the Metropolitan Opera since 2013.

Her career and professional network eventually led her to the silver screen.

Ms. Li received a call from Ebony Williams, a choreographer she knew, who was the associate choreographer on *In the Heights*.

“I remember being very surprised when she called me that day,” Ms. Li recollected. “We hadn’t been in touch for a long time. At first, we were just chatting; then she mentioned the movie and asked me if I was interested in being part of the movie.”

She prepared for her role on the dance team in the same disciplined way she approaches her stage performances. She arrived on time for every warmup and rehearsal, set time aside to practice on her own, developed a warmup routine, made sure she got a good night’s sleep, and practiced her relaxation techniques to cope with stage fright.

Rehearsal lasted a number of weeks, and she filmed her numbers in three days. She even had the opportunity to meet Lin-Manuel Miranda on set.

She was part of a small and elite dance crew, and they bonded right away.

“Everyone on the team was very talented, and each dancer had a different dance style,” she said. “Some dancers’ backgrounds included modern, contemporary, hip hop, and salsa dance. I rarely get a chance to see all dancers from all different genres come together like we did on set and it was a real eye-opening experience.”

Ms. Li’s knowledge of dance expands past the stage and movie set. Since 2003, she has been appointed guest faculty for the Chinese Folk Art Workshop in Boston, as well as teaching at the



©Jamy Hsu

Ballet Hispanico School and other studios in New York. At one point, she was a faculty member for the Barbados Dance Project.

“The Chinese folk workshop is like a home to me. Although I live in the United States, I can really feel the warmth of my hometown,” she shared. “I have choreographed Chinese dances through the years, around seven to nine dance pieces per year. The studio has two different classes based on age and performs between 15-20 times a year.”

“I love when students embrace and cherish their heritage, while spreading awareness of their beautiful culture with others,” she added.

Ms. Li’s passion for dance is evident, and she would consider doing another movie, should the opportunity present itself. Her commitment to her art is profound, but she balances her life well and likes to watch movies, cook, and meet up with friends. She does not take being a professional dancer for granted, and understands it is a privilege to make a living through dance.

“New York City, being the epicenter of many performance centers and arts programs, has helped many professionals in the dance world to realize their dreams by helping them socially, economically, and professionally,” she noted, adding that she emulates the “pay it forward” method in places that may not offer that same access. “For years I have been a volunteer dance instructor in different parts of the world, including Barbados, where dancing is considered a luxury hobby and only for the elite. I hope the future of professional dance holds the key to not only inspire dancers from all around the world, but also give each and every person who wants to pursue dance the access and opportunity to do so.”

Keep up with Mia Li on Instagram @mia_li_dance.

AGMA Resources

The AGMA Relief Fund

AGMA members can apply for emergency assistance from the [AGMA Relief Fund](#).

The Entertainment Community Fund

As an AGMA member, you are able to access The Fund's broad spectrum of [programs, workshops, and other online resources](#).

The Fund has built offerings spanning from personalized health insurance counseling and other social services to career counseling, employment training, and job development. Their calendar of webinars covers topics like mental health, mindfulness, finance, and career management, with specific gatherings for members of the LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and AAPI communities. All of their offerings support the unique, essential needs of all who work in entertainment and the performing arts.

Union Plus

Union Plus offers Hardship Help, discounts on a number of things like car rental and hotels, free education opportunities, and more. We encourage you to sign-up for email alerts from Union Plus in order to receive Union Plus newsletters.

AGMA's COVID-19 Resource Page

The [COVID-19 resource page](#) on AGMA's website, which contains important information about other assistance, breaking news, and resources available for Artists throughout the pandemic.

AGMA Health and Retirement Funds Portal

Announced in fall 2021, the AGMA Fund Office member portal is live and available at [portal.agmaretirement-health.org](#). This portal is set up to allow members to view employer contributions and eligibility directly. Initially, the portal shows contributions to the AGMA Retirement Plan; additional updates will allow members to see contributions and eligibility for the AGMA Health Fund.

Members who have provided their electronic consent should have received an introductory email. If you are experiencing a problem with the link in that email, please simply enter the portal address ([portal.agmaretirement-health.org](#)) and then provide the temporary user ID and login from the email. To sign up for the portal and to provide your electronic consent, please complete and return the [electronic consent form](#) to info@agma-funds.org and they will have the system generate your new login information.

New and Prospective Member Resource Page

For first-time members or those thinking of joining, this resource

AGMA's Anti-Sexual Harassment or Discrimination Resources

If you have personally experienced or witnessed harassment or discrimination of any kind, please know you are not alone. You can alert AGMA by reporting claims to reporting@musicalartists.org. All reports go directly to AGMA's Eastern Counsel and Director of Organizational Compliance Wendy LaManque and National Executive Director Sam Wheeler. These reports are kept in strict confidence. After your report is received, you will be contacted regarding resources for support and next steps. If your case involves criminal allegations, please call 911 immediately and report it to law enforcement.

Contact Your AGMA Staff Rep

As your direct line to your union, members of AGMA's professional staff are here to assist you every step of the way. A staff representative has been assigned to each AGMA signatory company to work with the members to negotiate and enforce the collective bargaining agreement and protect members' rights. For general information or questions, you can also reach out to membership@musicalartists.org.

Policies of the AGMA Board of Governors

Since Fall 2020, the policies of the AGMA Board of Governors have been readily available on the AGMA website. All AGMA members in good standing have the ability to access these policies (MyAGMA login required). Once a member has entered their MyAGMA credentials, they will see the MyAGMA dropdown menu appear. From that dropdown menu, select "Policies and Procedures" then "Policies of the AGMA Board of Governors."

Since the last issue of *AGMAzine*, one new policy has been approved: *AGMA Caucus/Working Group Speaker Fees Policy*.

AGMA Notice and Agency Fee Objection Policy

This notice and policy were developed to comply with applicable legal requirements. It will be published annually by AGMA. A copy also will be provided to individuals who are about to become subject to an AGMA collective bargaining agreement that includes a union security clause and to AGMA members who resign from AGMA membership.

Individuals who are AGMA members enjoy a number of benefits available to members only. These benefits include 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.

You have the right to decide to not be an AGMA member. If you make that decision, you forfeit the right to enjoy AGMA member-only benefits, including all of those listed above.

All individuals working under a collective bargaining agreement between AGMA and an opera, ballet, dance programming, concert, or other company producing operatic music, dance, concerts, or other types of productions containing a union security clause (referred to hereafter as an AGMA collective bargaining agreement) are required, as a condition of continued employment, to pay dues and initiation fees to AGMA. Any individuals covered by an AGMA collective bargaining agreement who elect not to be AGMA members nevertheless remain obligated, under the union security clause, to pay an agency fee to AGMA equal to regular AGMA dues and initiation fees, subject to a possible reduction as set forth below.

Each year, AGMA's auditors will prepare a report that verifies the breakdown of AGMA expenditures, by major categories of expenditures, between those that are devoted to "representational" activities and those that arguably are devoted to "non-representational" activities (the Audit Report). Representational expenditures include those for: 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; union governance meetings; and union administration, litigation, publications, and professional services relating to any of the above. Arguably non-representational expenditures are those for: community service and charitable contributions; lobbying; legislative efforts and political activities; members-only benefits; external organizing; and litigation which is not germane to collective bargaining, contract administration or grievance adjustment or advancement of the employment-related interests of AGMA-represented employees. The most recent Audit Report indicated that

approximately 97.46% of AGMA's expenditures were devoted to representational activities.

A non-member has the right to object to financially contributing to AGMA's expenditures for non-representational activities. Any non-member who wishes to make such an objection must submit an objection between December 1 through December 31 (the Annual Objection Period) to the AGMA Membership Department Supervisor, P.O. Box 908, New York, New York 10108. All objections must contain the objector's current home or mailing address. Non-members who submit an objection within the Annual Objection Period will have their agency fees (and, if applicable, initiation fees) reduced for the 12 months beginning January 1 and running through December 31 to reflect only the portion of AGMA expenditures spent on representational activities. Individuals who have not previously been subject to an AGMA collective bargaining agreement with a union security clause and who decide to not become AGMA members, and AGMA members who resign their membership, will have thirty days from receipt of a copy of the AGMA notice and agency fee objection policy to submit an objection, and if they do submit a timely objection, their agency fees will be reduced for the balance of that calendar year. Non-members desiring to retain "objector" status must renew their objections during each Annual Objection Period.

The most recent Audit Report will be provided to non-members who submitted timely objections. Timely objectors have the option of challenging AGMA's verified calculation of the reduced agency fees/initiation fees before an impartial arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association. In the event of such a challenge, a portion of the fees charged to such challengers 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 fees they are charged.

Before anyone decides to become an objector, we would hope they would take into consideration that without the concerted political activity of the union movement many of the most important legislation that protects and benefits working women and men—such as the Social Security Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, minimum wage laws and the Occupational Safety and Health Act—would never have been enacted. The role of organized labor remains even more vital today. In our opinion, not only activities characterized as "representational," but also community service, legislative activity, lobbying, political activities, external organizing, 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 that benefit all working people in the United States. We hope you will decide to be part of this important effort. ■

AGMA Relief Fund



© Erin Baiano

Each December, the AGMA Relief Fund announces an honorary chair for its annual Holiday Drive. Past recent chairs include Renée Fleming. AGMA dancer Sara Mearns has become an unbelievable advocate for the AGMA Relief Fund. We once again thank Ms. Mearns, honorary chair of December 2021's Holiday Drive, for this stunning and touching appeal letter she penned just as she was returning to the stage as the Sugar Plum Fairy in George Balanchine's *the Nutcracker*®.

The AGMA Relief Fund keeps the appeal letter up until the next honorary chair is selected, so Ms. Mearns letter is still available at agmarelief.org. Since the last issue of *AGMAzine* was published in November 2021, we wish to highlight the letter here as well.

My name is Sara Mearns, and I am a Principal Dancer with the New York City Ballet. I have been with NYCB since 2003. As a proud AGMA member and supporter of the AGMA Relief Fund, I write to you as I return to stage as the Sugar Plum Fairy in George Balanchine's *the Nutcracker*®!

"Tis the season!" as they say, and even the most "bah humbug" of minds tend to reflect during this time of year. And a shiver goes up my spine when I think back to where we were this time last year, in 2020. My livelihood was taken from me one cold day in March 2020. I know I am not alone. AGMA Artists—from dancers

to singers to staging staff—saw layoffs, furloughs, and our bank accounts dwindle. We saw our scheduled performance and freelance gigs disappear. We were the first to lose our jobs, the last to be included in any funding assistance, and the last to return to our careers.

Now, I know I am one of the lucky ones who didn't have to leave their home behind and who was able to return to work. But trust me when I tell you that the Performing Arts Industry is far from out of the woods, and many of your favorite Artists are still struggling to make ends meet, even as we witness the slow and steady reopening of our companies and theatres.

The AGMA Relief Fund is designed for times like these. Since 1945, the AGMA Relief Fund has helped eligible AGMA Artists in times of critical crises, all thanks to the generosity of donors. Please join me this holiday season to contribute what you can and make a tax-deductible donation to the AGMA Relief Fund.

The AGMA Relief Fund is a 501(c)3 charitable organization that is 100% dependent on donations in order to confidentially provide both financial and other temporary emergency relief to AGMA members who meet the Fund's qualifying criteria. Since the onset of the pandemic, more AGMA Artists have applied for assistance through the AGMA Relief Fund than ever before.

Thanks to devoted donors, the AGMA Relief Fund was prepared to jump into action during the most unimaginable time of our lives! In addition to emergency funds, The Actors Fund administers the AGMA Relief Fund nationally and provides comprehensive services and programs to AGMA members, including social services, mental health resources, and career counseling. Thanks to these resources provided by the AGMA Relief Fund, many Artists were able to stay afloat both financially and mentally.

The fact is that the Arts and Artists still

need support as we enter 2022.

It feels a bit odd to ask for financial support, especially after the last 21 months. Plus, it's difficult for me to write this appeal knowing that anyone this reaches may be in need themselves.

Think back to the most challenging months of the pandemic. What brought you peace? For so many of us, it was art: streaming our favorite shows and movies, listening to an insightful podcast, reading, creating, or watching a live-streamed performance. I have received countless messages from ballet enthusiasts about watching New York City Ballet online whenever they could! Performing Artists have always known this, but the last two years have let everyone in on the secret: art heals us, comforts us, and helps us make sense of our lives.

For art to exist, Artists need to exist. Supporters can help Artists through the AGMA Relief Fund. For more information, please visit agmarelief.org/donations/.

Did you know that the Sugar Plum Fairy symbolizes hope and childhood dreams in the ballet? Every AGMA Artist was once a child who only dreamed of performing at the professional level. **Would you please help ensure the next generation of Artists can achieve the same dream?**

From the bottom of my Sugar Plum heart, I thank you in advance!

Sara Mearns AGMA Relief Fund
2021 Holiday Drive Chair ■

RESOURCES FOR AGMA MEMBERS

New and Prospective Members

musicalartists.org/new-member-information

The AGMA Relief Fund

agmarelief.org

The Entertainment Community Fund administers the AGMA Relief Fund.

Union Plus

unionplus.org

Union Plus exists to improve the quality of life for union members.

Organize!

musicalartists.org/organize

This page is designed to help Artists learn more about unionizing.

AGMA Retirement Plan and Health Fund

agmafunds.org

212-765-3664

Entertainment Community Fund

entertainmentcommunity.org

The Entertainment Community Fund fosters stability and resiliency, and provides resources to performing arts professionals.

Actors Federal Credit Union

212-869-8926

Member Services:

mervices@actorsfcu.com

Lending Services:

lservices@actorsfcu.com

