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UNION STRONG: What AGMA Means to Me

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By Katharine Goelder

New York Region Vice President,

MMRC Chair, and Soloist

Welcome to the Winter 2024 issue of *AGMAzine*! I'm honored to introduce this edition, my first as Chair of the Membership and Member Relations Committee (MMRC). The theme of this issue, "Union Strong: What AGMA Means to Me," speaks deeply to me as an AGMA member since 2000, an AGMA Governor since 2019, and a proud soloist who has witnessed firsthand AGMA's rise and the transformative power of collective action.

I've spent the last year and a half serving as New York Region Vice President on AGMA's Board of Governors, and in that time, I've seen our union grow in exciting new ways. As a soloist working across the U.S. and internationally, I've drawn on my experience to help strengthen representation and communication between soloist colleagues and the Union. Now, as MMRC Chair, I look forward to engaging more directly with you, our members, to ensure all your voices are heard.

For me, AGMA is about more than contracts and negotiations; it's about Community—a network of artists from various disciplines and diverse backgrounds who share a commitment to equity, respect, fairness, and the advancement of our industries. AGMA's mission is clear: to protect and empower each and every member.

It's also personal. The Artists and Professional Staff who make up the Union have been my advocates, my educators, my mentors, and my allies throughout my singing career and over these past years as a member of the AGMA Board of Governors. Now, as we welcome our new National Executive Director and look toward the future, I'm excited to be part of a leadership team that continues to champion the needs of our membership.

Thank you to every member who submitted their story to *AGMAzine* this time around. Hearing what the Union means to you fills me with pride and I am so happy that we can continue building a stronger AGMA together!

In solidarity,

Katharine Goelder, MMRC Chair ■

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Message from AGMA President Ned Hanlon



Dear Members,

I'll keep this note short, as you'll see me pop up a few times throughout this issue! It's always a joy to connect with you in *AGMAzine*, and I was particularly excited to contribute to this edition's theme: *Union Strong: What AGMA Means to Me*. Within these pages, I had the honor of drafting a piece on the extensive, six-month search process that led to the appointment of AGMA's new National Executive Director, Jeffrey Boyd. This was a pivotal moment for our union, and I'm

thrilled for you to learn more about the steps we took to find the right leader for AGMA's future.

I also had the pleasure of sitting down with Laura Fries, one of the longtime organizers of the Metropolitan Opera's legendary Bake Sale, which supports the AGMA Relief Fund. It's a testament to the heart and solidarity of our members, showcasing how we lift each other up in times of need.

I've been a proud, dues-paying member of AGMA since singing in *Carmen* at Detroit Opera in 2009. For me, AGMA is a lifeline—both as a working artist and as your president and the strength we are building is making a difference. This year, we've defended artists-worker rights coast to coast – from San Francisco to Dallas to New York. Our fight for justice across the nation has earned AGMA national recognition. AGMA has appeared on prominent stages beyond our usual opera, ballet, and

concert venues this year, even visiting the White House multiple times, and continues to lead in advancing protections for artists nationwide.

From our Board of Governors, Area Chairs, Delegates, and Caucus Leaders, to both longtime and newly joined members, AGMA artists have been at the forefront of these major victories and milestones. Our efforts, backed by AGMA's dedicated and skilled professional staff, continue to drive our union's strength and progress. Thank you for being part of AGMA.

It's a privilege to serve this union and contribute to a collective that empowers and protects us all.

Solidarity Forever!

Ned Hanlon
President ■

Art Submission from Soprano Christine Arand



Soprano Christine Arand graduated from Northwestern University and The Juilliard School. She began her professional career in Europe, creating the leading role of Lise in Philip Glass' *Les Enfants Terribles*, directed by Susan Marshall. She has graciously submitted her artwork to this issue of *AGMAzine*. ■

Announcing AGMA's New National Executive Director

Originally announced on November 25

The AGMA Board of Governors is pleased to announce the appointment of Jeffrey Boyd (he/him/his) as AGMA's new National Executive Director. Boyd, a seasoned labor leader and staunch advocate for workers' rights, brings over 25 years of experience to AGMA, including pivotal roles within national and global unions.

Jeffrey Boyd's career spans decades of labor movement leadership. Most recently, Boyd served as an International Officer for the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tourism, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). In this role, he led campaigns and communications across more than 40 countries, championing the rights of workers in sectors ranging from hospitality to food production. His efforts have included groundbreaking initiatives in workplace democracy, equity, and inclusion rights in authoritarian, developing countries. He has also played a key role in advancing LGBTQIA+ rights within the worldwide labor movement as Chair of the Council of Global Unions LGBTI Coordinating Committee, including leading efforts to promote equality and protections for workers across a network representing over 200 million members worldwide.

A former organizer and director with UNITE HERE, Boyd has managed large teams and budgets, overseen numerous collective bargaining negotiations, and mobilized thousands of union members across the globe. His commitment to worker empowerment, coupled with his lifelong passion for the performing arts, makes him uniquely positioned to help lead AGMA into 2025 and beyond.

"AGMA represents the very best of the performing arts and labor movement—a commitment to both artistic excellence and workers' rights. I am thrilled to unite my two lifelong passions and to work

alongside AGMA leaders, members, staff, and sibling unions to ensure the arts industry lives up to its values," stated incoming National Executive Director Jeffrey Boyd.

"From New York City to Dallas to San Francisco and beyond, I can't imagine a more pivotal time for AGMA than right now. The challenges we face are fueling our determination, sparking our creativity, strengthening our organization, and deepening our unity. Together, we will continue to fight for fair wages, equitable and safe workplaces, and the recognition artists deserve as essential contributors to society," Boyd continued.

Boyd's appointment follows a six-month national search assisted by an executive search firm. The search included candidates from a variety of professional backgrounds, previous experience with unions and the arts, and race, ethnicity, and gender identification. AGMA sought a leader capable of navigating the unique challenges and opportunities facing the Union today. The AGMA Board of Governors unanimously approved the appointment of Boyd at its September 4 Board of Governors Meeting. His official start date is December 1.

"Jeffrey has a proven track record of grassroots organizing, strategically

informed contract campaigns, a commitment to fostering inclusive environments, and member empowerment that directly aligns with our union's mission," said AGMA President Ned Hanlon. "The Board of Governors is confident that Jeffrey's commitment to artist-worker solidarity will strengthen AGMA's position as a leader in both the Labor Movement and the performing arts industry."

Boyd's arrival in December comes as an anti-labor, anti-artist administration is about to take hold of the country, placing new pressures on performing artists and unions alike. Boyd's experience as a strategic leader with connections throughout the Labor Movement will be invaluable as AGMA confronts these external challenges head-on, united with our sibling unions.

Boyd speaks a number of languages, including French and Spanish. He earned a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in French, a Master of Philosophy in French, a Master of Arts in French from Yale University, and a Bachelor of Arts in French and Religious Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. ■



Unions Do More Than You Think: How AGMA Fought for Fair Emotional Support Animal Policies

By Brian August, AGMA Staging Staff Vice President



Unions are often thought of as just protecting wages, hours, and breaks, but in reality, they do so much more. As not only a member of AGMA, but also AGMA's Staging Staff Vice President, I've seen firsthand how our union stands up for our members' rights in all kinds of situations. About three weeks before I was set to drive to AGMA signatory company Des Moines Metro Opera (DMMO) this summer, we received an email informing us of changes to their emotional support animal (ESA) policies. For context, DMMO's summer festival takes place on the campus of Simpson College, where we use their theater and, crucially in this case, their housing. DMMO notified us that because Simpson College had instituted new rules for their students, we were now required to comply with them as well.

Here's a quick rundown of the new rules: We were told we had to use a specific form that forced us to waive our HIPAA rights and answer invasive personal medical questions. Additionally, our doctor was required to submit the form directly (not us), after which we would have to participate in a Zoom meeting with a ResLife director to discuss our disability and why we needed an ESA. All this information would then be submitted to a Simpson College housing tribunal, which would conduct another Zoom interview before approving (or denying) our ESA

request. This struck me as not only outlandish but probably illegal!

I immediately contacted the AGMA staff assigned to DMMO and started doing my own research. While I am willing to do whatever is necessary to bring my ESA, Rupert, with me, I am not willing to participate in a process that blatantly violates federal law. It turns out this new procedure was illegal from start to finish—starting with the mandated forms, the types of questions asked, the process itself, and more. AGMA Counsel John Ward quickly provided a comprehensive legal explanation detailing how these rules violated both our rights as members and both federal and state laws. DMMO presented this information to Simpson College, which reversed its decision for DMMO artists. We were then allowed to follow the federally recommended process for emotional support animals, with the illegal fee waived as well!

I am incredibly grateful to be a part of AGMA because we were able to work on this issue with such speed, efficiency, and kindness. Being a part of AGMA means being there for one another in so many ways, and this is just another great example of the Union's value beyond the traditional scope. When in doubt, call AGMA! ■



Transitioning with the Support of My Union

By Claire DiVizio (*they/them*), Soloist



Hello! My name is Claire DiVizio, and I'm a member of the Midwest Area of AGMA. I'm a classically trained singer, and I have been working professionally as a singer, voice teacher, and stage director for over ten years. Originally from Michigan, I now live in Chicago, and I've been a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Chorus since 2016.

I'm also transgender. When I was first hired by the ensemble, I was placed in the Soprano 1 section, where I stayed for six years. But in early 2022, I finally began taking steps to start testosterone. As part of this process, I reached out to my AGMA reps with the Chorus, because I didn't know what this would mean for my employment with the ensemble. I already knew I was planning to take a one-year leave of absence, which was guaranteed by my contract, but I didn't know what would happen after that.

I had a great conversation with Scott Uddenberg, the ensemble union rep, and in addition to offering me his personal support, he assured me that the Union would make sure that the CSOA supported me through this process. I knew at the end of my leave I would have to re-audition with my new voice, and I also knew that most of what I was going to have to do to let my new voice settle was wait for nature to take its course. The process of going through a second vocal puberty is complicated, unpredictable, and highly

individualized, so it's impossible to guarantee conformity to a calendar. When I was preparing for my re-audition a year later, I reached out to Scott again, very worried, because while I was pretty sure I was settling into being a tenor, my voice still wasn't entirely comfortable in a lot of the tenor audition excerpts. He told me to look at the bass excerpts, and if I could sing them, then I should do that instead—the goal was for me to feel like I was representing myself the best I could. After my audition, which went... fine, but not fabulous, he called me on the phone and congratulated me, and said that regardless of what feedback I received, he was going to fight for me. More amazingly, he said that in the last couple months, as they had been preparing for me to return, he had called several AGMA leaders, locally and nationally, to ask for advice and information on how other chapters were supporting singers like me. Apparently, there hadn't ever been any other singers like me in any other union ensembles in the U.S. I was the first one.

As a trans person, and especially a non-binary trans person, I am used to there not being policies in place to support me. Most of the time that means that I have to just “deal with it,” accept that I'm going to be uncomfortable in certain situations, and not expect much. Frankly, that's one of the reasons I have stepped away from seeking much work as a professional soloist (though it is worth noting that most of the work I've had in opera has not been union work). However, as a member of AGMA, the revelation that there wasn't an existing policy to deal with my situation meant that the Union decided that my particular case was going to be used as a blueprint for a new policy to support trans singers in the future. My CSO AGMA reps were true to their word, and after being placed in the bass section in 2023 as a way to reacclimate

to my voice without stress, I had another re-audition in the spring of 2024, after which I was placed in the tenor section, and returned to being a Regular member in good standing.

The process of transition as an adult is already terrifying, and is even more harrowing to consider as a classical singer, but thanks to Scott Uddenberg and AGMA, I was able to navigate this transition within my life and my profession, with the kind of workplace support that everyone deserves. I am proud to be a member of a union, and these last two years have given me a real, personal reason for that pride. ■







Harmonizing Voices On and Off Stage:

Jennifer Wallace Discusses Her Union Activism Journey with Katharine Goeldner

Jennifer Wallace, mezzo-soprano, has been a member of the Los Angeles Opera Chorus since 1986. She has covered 15 roles for the company, sung bit parts in multiple productions, and is currently rehearsing her 141st production with the company. Jennifer serves as AGMA's Western Region Vice President and Chair of the Work Rules and Contracts Committee (WRCC), where her work is pivotal to contract negotiations, improving working conditions, and ensuring fair treatment for AGMA members. Jennifer sat down with New York Region Vice President and MMRC Chair Katharine Goeldner to share her journey into union activism and finding fulfillment in advocating for others.

Katharine Goeldner (KG): Thanks for talking with me, Jennifer! I'm excited for our fellow members to get to know you better. You joined AGMA in 1986 and have been on the Board of Governors since 2003. What made you want to join the Board?

Jennifer Wallace (JW): I took a few years away from the LA Opera Chorus to pursue other performance work as an opera soloist and in musical theater. In 1998, I landed with my then partner (now husband) in Las Vegas, working as an actor at Star Trek: The Experience. The attraction was operated by a major theme park and working conditions were not always spectacular. There was a lot of favoritism, shifts were often cut short, and schedules were changed with little or no notice. But worse than all that, several employees were injured by malfunctioning equipment and lack of care by management. Many of the actors were dissatisfied and felt strongly that we should unionize. Since the job involved both acting and "ride operations," we fell under the umbrella of the local Teamsters union, and a majority of us signed cards.

KG: How did management react to the workers' decision to form a union?

JW: As you might imagine, management did not give voluntary recognition. While waiting for our NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) election, the theme park sent their union-busting folks to Vegas to try and convince us to vote "no." We won the election, but management's union-busting team got that election thrown out on a technicality. It took several months before we got the second election, but unfortunately many of those who had originally signed cards had left the gig in frustration. While the election was still very close, we were not successful the second time around. One of the actors spearheading the fight to join a union was unjustly fired after filing their own grievance with the NLRB, and I was later asked to testify to

the NLRB on their behalf. They won the grievance and received several months of back pay. I found the entire process both frustrating and fascinating.

This full experience awoke my inner activist, and when I returned to AGMA work in Los Angeles in August 2001, I sought out my colleagues who were already serving on the Board and/or as delegates, and I told them I wanted to learn more. For the first time, I read our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), and I asked lots of questions so I could understand the meaning of and reasoning behind specific clauses. I became fully hooked on contract enforcement when I noticed management had miscalculated a mid-contract wage increase for the Chorus. We didn't have a local AGMA staff member then, so I wrote to Alan Gordon, AGMA's National Executive Director at the time, to explain my findings; he took my complaint and turned it into a grievance, and that resulted in a significant pay increase for the entire chorus. Very soon after that, I was elected to the Board as a Chorister Governor and I haven't looked back since!

KG: Wow, that is some amazing union work! So that's what led you to join the Work Rules and Contracts Committee (WRCC). Tell me more about what WRCC does and what your work as Chair is like.

JW: The Work Rules and Contracts Committee's duties include waivers, grievances, reviewing and recommending proposed contracts, evaluating existing contracts, work rules, health and safety issues, and standards.

I joined WRCC in 2008, became Vice Chair in 2011, and was elected Chair in 2019. Like all the standing committees, personnel for WRCC are elected every two years shortly after the regular Board elections. I've been lucky enough to have been reelected to this committee multiple times, and I'm honored that the other committee members have continued to put their faith in me by electing me Chair three times.

This is how WRCC works: The committee receives an information packet prior to each monthly board meeting, which contains agreements (CBAs, Side Letters, Memorandums of Understanding) with shop votes that have been negotiated by AGMA staff and member negotiating committees, waiver requests from signatories, and Schedule C classifications from AGMA's Opera Repertory Consultant. With early input from the committee, I contact staff members with questions when more specifics are needed. Then the committee meets over Zoom three hours prior to the monthly Board meeting to further discuss each item, using both the hard materials in front of us and, when appropriate, shop votes on each item. When discussions end, the committee votes to approve or deny each item.



Sometimes, a waiver request will have a conditional approval. An example of that might be a waiver request from a signatory to expand the work hours in a day due to some extenuating circumstance — a condition might be added that the company may be permitted to extend those hours, but they would have to pay a higher rate for the time in conflict with the regular CBA rules. During the Board meeting, I present each item with the recommendation from the committee and, after an opportunity for questions and discussion, each item is voted on by the full Board.

KG: You also serve as the Western Region Vice President. What's that been like?

JW: I became the Western Region VP in June 2023, and it's been amazing! One week after beginning my term, I was asked to put together a small group of local Southern California members to meet with Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson, the Chair of the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts), to advocate not only for arts funding, but also to ask that funding be marked to go for performers and performances rather than buildings. I've represented AGMA at other events, including attending the 2024 OPERA America conference and speaking on a panel about unions at the Arts Media and Entertainment Institute Burbank conference. I've also been serving along with the other officers on the search committee for AGMA's new National Executive Director, which has been a fascinating new experience for me.

KG: You've been serving on the Board for 21 years now. That's quite some time. How has the Board changed during that time?

JW: There has been so much change that it's hard to track! AGMA has always been a "member-driven" union, but our members have become more and more involved in recent years, which is very exciting. Members are speaking up about issues in their shops, and through that communication we are seeing

major changes and improvements in our agreements. "We Are AGMA" is more than a slogan—it is reflective of each member's commitment to improving the arts industry for current and future artists.

The biggest two changes I've seen are how the board communicates and meets and the level of involvement of each Board member. When I joined the Board, meetings were held at the National Office in New York City and everyone outside of NYC had to dial in on a conference call. There was no video. We got to know people's voices, but there were no faces to match those voices. Meetings were sometimes difficult for those calling in from great distances—many Board members outside of the room in NYC never said anything beyond acknowledging their presence during roll call in those days, and the Board sometimes felt like we were a rubber stamp for those in charge. While we can all agree that the pandemic and shutdown were horrible times for our lives and careers, they did provide the impetus for us to begin conducting committee and board meetings over Zoom. At last, we could see faces and body language and, most importantly, we found a better way of communicating, which has resulted in greater participation across the Board. As a direct result of this better communication practice, Board meetings became a little longer, but Board members outside of the NYC office started to really feel heard. I'm also pleased to see that today's Board is more diverse and better reflective of the membership at large than it once was. And seeing newer Board members showing up and getting involved gives me a sense of security that the future of the Union is in excellent hands.

KG: Has being a Board member influenced your singing career?

JW: I'm much more aware of things now than when I first began singing. And if something seems off, be it a safety issue or a distressed colleague, I step up to see what kind of assistance I can provide. To be honest, sometimes that makes me a pain in the butt! But my intentions are always for the betterment of our members' working lives.

KG: You've participated in many contract (CBA) negotiations, not just in LA but with other companies as well. What's that been like? What are some recent "wins" you're most proud of?

JW: I won't sugar-coat it—negotiations can be tough. Few things in life are more difficult than sitting across the table from the people who hire you and asking them for things like improvements to your working conditions and more money. This is something that I can't generalize because every negotiation has its own personality, and as you know, each AGMA signatory has a distinct contract. At their best, negotiations are respectful conversations with the joint goal of achieving what each side feels

they need to create the best workplace and the best product on stage. At their worst, they turn into shouting matches where one side refuses to consider even the most reasonable ask from the other side. I've participated in both types of conversations, and even though I'm admittedly a hothead who can shout with the best of them, I've seen the greatest results from the respectful conversations.

KG: In your opinion, especially from your position as chair of WRCC, what role has AGMA played in advocating for the rights of artists in the opera industry?

JW: It has become so clear, especially over the past five years, that the old paradigm of the way Solo operatic artists are paid is untenable. I mean, in what other profession do you work for 4-8 weeks before receiving any kind of paycheck?! And that doesn't even count the hundreds of hours that each Solo Artist has spent learning and refining their role prior to arrival. AGMA has worked diligently to get some kind of payment into these singers' hands when they arrive for their first rehearsal. Those payments vary by agreement; it might be full per diem or an advance payment of a percentage of their overall contract value. It's not a perfect solution, but I believe that is a great step forward for those artists, and we will continue building on that.

AGMA has also pushed to reduce the number of hours our Staging Staff members are required to work before receiving overtime payments. Until recently, it was common for these artists to work 60 hours or more in a week for only their stated weekly salary. In many opera agreements, this amount has been reduced to anywhere between 48-56 hours. Again, we're not to the level across the board that we'd like to be just yet, but every reduction of hours is a win for our members.

KG: How about for the dance world?

JW: Many of our recent dance agreements have shown gains in wages and job security across the board, but especially for entry-level Dancers, where after years of minimal increases, the wage levels were often simply too low for someone to live on. AGMA has also worked to give Dancers a greater voice in their workplace. Perhaps that's why workers of so many dance companies have recently reached out to AGMA to unionize: a clear union contract makes their workplaces better and safer.



KG: What would you say to members considering running for the Board or Area Committees? Or members thinking of being a delegate or caucus member?

JW: DO IT!! Don't wait until you're "ready," because who's to say when that time comes? One of my favorite quotes comes from Eleanor Roosevelt: "Do something that scares you every day." Running to serve as a delegate is scary; running for the Board is scary; running to join or Chair a committee is scary; being an artist is scary!! But the rewards can be incredible. I've never been very good at advocating for myself, but I find great strength and satisfaction in advocating for others and maybe you will as well. So, if you're considering running for any position, joining a caucus, or being a delegate in AGMA or elsewhere in life, just go for it—you may surprise yourself!

KG: Got any advice for new AGMA members?

JW: Pay attention and get involved. If something doesn't seem right, go to your delegates or other shop leaders and start a conversation. Reach out to your AGMA Staff Representative attached to your company. The more discussion within a shop, the stronger it can become. Who knows, you might just end up changing the world! ■

Marching in Solidarity: Celebrating AGMA's Union Strength

By Lisa Bryce, Soloist



In 2023, I had the privilege of marching with AGMA in the New York Labor Day Parade. It was an exhilarating experience, standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow artists, all united by the values that we represent as the American Guild of Musical Artists. I was excited to meet other AGMA members that day and learn more about the diverse artistic worlds AGMA encompasses. The energy was contagious—everyone marching in solidarity,

unified by our shared commitment to our union. Reflecting back to when I first became an AGMA member, I remember the thrill of starting my career under the protections of an AGMA contract. It felt like the beginning of something big, with that contract serving as a milestone of the success I had worked so hard to achieve. Marching in that parade reignited that sense of unity and purpose. Thank you for that incredible day of solidarity. ■

Reimagining Opera: A Journey Through BIOpera and Beyond

By Sébastien Gueze, Soloist



In recent years, the world of opera has faced numerous challenges, from declining audiences to environmental concerns. As an artist and visionary, I embarked on a mission to revitalize this beloved art form through the concept of BIOpera, detailed in my essay “BIOpera: A Future for Opera?” published by *Symétrie Editions*.

BIOpera proposes a radical rethinking of opera production and presentation, emphasizing sustainability, accessibility, and relevance to contemporary audiences. This vision

has not only influenced my artistic work but has also allowed me to advocate for change at various governmental institutions, pushing for improved conditions for artists and funding for innovative projects.

Through my involvement with the Centre National de la Musique and interministerial programs for future investments, I've been able to support green alternatives in culture. A prime example is the 17h25 project, which manufactures standardized set-fixing elements for a consortium of five major opera houses, including Opéra national de Paris and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence.

My numerous conferences and interventions have led to the development of new imaginaries in the opera world. The pinnacle of these

efforts is the upcoming television project *La Bohème 2050* for French TV. This groundbreaking production adapts the classic opera to contemporary issues, offering new narratives to apprehend the future. Notably, it's the world's first opera production to align with the Paris Agreement targets 25 years in advance, reducing CO2 emissions by 80%.

La Bohème 2050 can be described as a lyrical *Don't Look Up* or an operatic *Black Mirror* (filmed at the Palace of Versailles, with the Royal Opera, for La Belle TV and France TV). Overcoming the challenges of this project, from concept to directing and securing sponsorship, has been the culmination of four years of work since writing my BIOpera essay.

This journey has not only been

about artistic innovation but also about leveraging union power to effect change. As an AGMA member, I've experienced firsthand how collective action can provide stability in uncertain times and drive industry-wide improvements.

The intersection of art, sustainability, and labor rights is at the heart of my work. As we approach important elections, it's crucial to recognize how union involvement and political advocacy can shape the future of performing arts. By engaging with

these issues, we can ensure that opera remains a vibrant, relevant, and sustainable art form for generations to come.

Sébastien GUEZE is a French tenor and stage director of BOHEME 2050. ■

Building Community and Advocacy: My First Year with AGMA

By Randy Ho



I am a new member of AGMA, having joined for my 2024 Santa Fe Opera contract. Through becoming an AGMA member, I have learned and found it refreshing to know that a community of artists and companies can work collaboratively to improve working conditions at performing arts organizations across the country.

Even prior to 2024, I was searching for community. During the pandemic, there was a complete pause in our industry. Most people lost work, and companies completely fell apart. As a younger singer, I knew that I needed guidance and felt that my path in this career might be at stake with all that was going on. During that time, I was lucky to find newly formed online communities and organizations made by artists for artists. These virtual spaces helped bring more positivity and growth opportunities to young singers like me. A couple of examples are the Online Opera Initiative on Facebook and [Dandelion Opera Institute](#). While it was difficult, this emergence of artist-led

organizations played a key part in creating new work for people who may have lost work and allowed young opera singers the chance to continue improving their craft.

All that to say, for the future of opera in America, we as a community must support each other to continue doing what we love. Opera is one of the most collaborative art forms, as it is not just one person who makes a show but a community of people who work together to create it: the stagehands, costumes, props, set designers, lighting designers, performers, fight/intimacy coordinators, directors, and so many others. Supporting each other in today's performing arts landscape is imperative to continue the advancement and preservation of the Arts in America. When artists support one another, we can continue fostering collaboration, resource sharing, and collective advocacy, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and vibrant arts community.

In this first year since joining AGMA, I have felt so much support, primarily through discovering the various caucuses within the Union and the opportunity to gain mentorship as I advance through my career. So far, I've loved my experience as a member of AGMA and have felt so supported by the Union throughout my time.

I've already become more involved in Union activity. I joined the new AGMA Asian American and Pacific Islander

(AAPI) Caucus and am becoming more and more passionate about workers' rights. This includes ensuring that Artists are being paid for their work and limiting how long they must work before overtime kicks in. As a singer currently participating in Young Artist Programs, I'm aware of the limits of using my voice, especially when schedules get busy. While I understand that it's up to each of us to decide when to mark during rehearsals, it can be challenging in a program where the pressure is unnecessarily high and we're expected to deliver major performances throughout the contract period.

Currently, I am serving on the Opera Colorado negotiation committee as we work toward a first contract at the company. Negotiations always come with their own challenges but are also rewarding. With Opera Colorado negotiations, we are currently drafting the artist side of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) before we send it off to company management. The most difficult part so far has been reminding myself that this is a negotiation, which comes with having to make compromises on both sides. While there are many things we can ask for in this first CBA, I continue to reflect on what "middle ground" I am okay with while working with my committee colleagues. I look forward to collaborating with my home company to improve working conditions and continue helping

them create incredible art.

Being a part of AGMA has allowed me to see more of the business aspects of our industry. Hearing the stories from my colleagues at Opera Colorado, I see how tirelessly each artist works to strive for artistic greatness while also fighting to receive proper support from their workplaces. I've adopted this way of thinking when it comes to my creative practice, as I am trying to advocate more for myself, knowing that if I need support or

resources, I have a group of people I can rely on to shine a light on why a situation may be a certain way.

Joining something new for the first time can sometimes feel overwhelming, and the excitement of landing that first gig can sometimes make us overlook certain issues. If I could go back in time, I would have loved to know more about reading and drafting a CBA, especially as each of them is slightly different. Now I know how much work goes into them. My

advice to new AGMA members is to make sure to read your contracts well. A lot of people are around to help, from your shop delegates to your AGMA staff representatives. Feel free to ask if you need clarification or are just curious about a section. The AGMA network can always point you in the right direction or give you the right resources. We are the Union, and the Union is here to help and support you as you develop through our marathon of a career. ■

AGMA President Ned Hanlon Shares the Process of Finding the Union's New National Executive Director

By Ned Hanlon, AGMA President and Chorister



Members of AGMA's Executive Council after they selected Jeffrey Boyd.

From late February 2024 until the beginning of September, the AGMA Board of Governors was engaged in a process to find a new National Executive Director for our union. When the Board approved a plan for this search back on February 26, we resolved to move through the process with intention and patience – to make sure that we took the time we needed to find the best candidate for the job. I'm proud and happy to report on the successful conclusion of that process.

At the meeting in February, when the

search was approved, the Board took several actions. The Executive Council was directed to “oversee, manage, and direct the search for a new National Executive Director.” This included appointing a Search Committee, retaining a search firm, and considering candidates to bring a recommendation for a new N.E.D. to the Board. At that meeting, the Board also promoted Allison Beck, who had already done so much wonderful work for AGMA as a negotiator and as counsel, to serve in the role of Interim National Executive

Director during the search.

The Executive Council immediately got to work, meeting and appointing our ten AGMA officers – the President, Secretary/Treasurer, and the eight Vice-Presidents – to form a Search Committee and retaining search firm Stanton Chase to conduct a national search. However, before we could start interviewing candidates, it was vital to determine what AGMA's priorities were for a new National Executive Director. To that end, we conducted stakeholder interviews of board members and staff to identify key priorities for the role. These interviews produced a document over thirty pages long, which was used to develop a recruitment profile and create our Key Selection Criteria to guide us throughout the process. That criteria specified a leader who was:

Dynamic, empathetic, inspiring, and empowering. Proven manager/leader/culture builder (operations, finance, human resources, IDEA). Demonstrated and extensive staff management and budget oversight experience. Emotional maturity. Excellent insight. Can “connect the dots” and understand how management and outreach can uplift an organization.

A strong facilitator and empowering/collaborative strategic planner with vision. Not afraid to be a change-maker, nor afraid of change management. Able to think “outside the box”. Excellent organizer with the ability to unify and build solidarity (internally and externally). Adept, facile and forward-thinking with emerging technologies, tools, and platforms.

Substantial labor experience. Demonstrated experience negotiating/overseeing collective bargaining agreements and contract enforcement. Knowledge of labor law is key. Prior entertainment/media industry experience a plus.

Superior, proactive communicator (internally and externally). Excellent ability to build relationships (internally, externally, and nationally). Will build strong networks in the industry and legislatively through participation in industry/labor events. Passion for the arts/performers/the industry and the creation of experiences that inform, inspire and captivate.

A listener. Accessible. Transparent, self-aware, and accountable. Naturally collaborative. Team-oriented. Calm and level-headed. Identifies and develops talent. Will foster a culture of inclusion, belonging, accessibility, dignity, and safety. A uniting, present leader.

Once we knew what we were looking for, Stanton Chase reached out to over 150 individuals, resulting in interviews with 14 potential candidates. From these, the Search Committee was presented with nine candidates, and we conducted first-round interviews with eight of them in June and July. It was a dynamic and exciting group, representing a variety of professional backgrounds and previous experience with unions and the arts across a range of racial, ethnic, and gender identifications.

Four candidates advanced to the second round, where their interviews were recorded and shared with the Executive Council (EC) to ensure an informed decision-making process. Following this, the EC invited three candidates to participate

in hybrid meetings.

Following the completion of these interviews, after a thorough and robust discussion, the EC reached a consensus to recommend Jeffrey Boyd as the best candidate – the one who most exemplified AGMA’s values and our Key Selection Criteria. We were proud to make this recommendation to the Board of Governors on September 4. After consideration, the Board unanimously approved Mr. Boyd as the next National Executive Director of AGMA.

Three months later, as of December 1, our new National Executive Director is now on the job! I want to thank the Executive Council and our indomitable Interim National Executive Director, Allison Beck, for the care and time that they put into this search. It was a process that taught us much about ourselves and our union, and I am so excited that the result was a candidate like Jeffrey Boyd, who will help lead this union forward for years to come. ■

The Dream Begins

By Liz Piccoli, Dancer

I’d like to submit a photo of my collage art, which I created at the Woodstock School of Art. Recently, I became a mother to a beautiful baby boy. My delivery had complications due to elevated blood pressure, and I ultimately opted for a C-section. The doctor later told me it was the right decision because my son’s umbilical cord had a knot that could have caused brain damage during a natural delivery. In hindsight, I feel like this piece of art was trying to tell me something, as I made it just a few weeks before giving birth.

Now, the dream has begun. I can’t wait to teach my son how to dance through life. ■







Updates to the MyAGMA Portal

Back in September, AGMA officially transitioned to a comprehensive Membership Database System called UnionWare. With this change came a brand new experience to the MyAGMA portal, one that's more efficient and user-friendly.

Members' current MyAGMA login credentials (username and password) will work seamlessly with the upgraded portal. As always, you can find the login button on the AGMA website homepage. If you previously bookmarked the old portal, please be aware that the link may no longer be valid. The best way to log in the first time is to visit the website directly.

If you can't remember your username or password, you can click "Forgot your username?" or "Forgot your password?" on the login page.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to navigate this system change. We're confident that the new MyAGMA Portal will make managing accounts easier than ever. Email any issues to membership@musicalartists.org. ■



AGMA President Ned Hanlon Named to *City & State New York's* 2024 Arts & Culture Power 100



This Fall, AGMA proudly announced that President Ned Hanlon was named to *City & State New York's* 2024 Arts & Culture Power 100 list. According to the website, "*City & State's* inaugural Arts & Culture Power 100 highlights these leaders in New York, based less on the caliber of collections and exhibits or sellout shows and more on the interplay with local and state

government, policy advocacy as well as civic and community engagement."

President Hanlon came in at number 87 and appears to be the only labor leader on this list.

Reflecting on the honor, President Hanlon stated on social media, "This is a testament to the work that AGMA Artists have done to ensure that our voices are heard both in the workplace and throughout the performing arts community. We are speaking up and people are taking note! Our union continues to increase its visibility and reach as we strive to fulfill our mission to stand together in solidarity as part of a larger labor movement, pushing toward a brighter, equal, and just future for all Artists and workers."

AGMA congratulates President Hanlon on this achievement! ■

AGMA Has a New Website!

Members might have noticed that AGMA's website looks totally different! On October 28, we launched our newly-designed site with a fresh look and some exciting new features.

Want some quick highlights? A new accessibility plug-in ensures a better user experience for all members and brings the website in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The homepage has an expanded news section to help you stay up-to-date without having to click around too much. Oh, and don't forget to press play on the video in the header—it's a must-watch!

We want to give special thanks to AGMA's Membership and Member Relations Committee, Director of Communications Alicia Cook, Director of Operations Joe Conceison, and web design company Freshy for all their hard work and creativity.

We hope everyone enjoys exploring the new site!

P.S. We are always updating the site, so feel free to send us photos you own the rights to—you might just see yourself featured on the website! Send to: communications@musicalartists.org. ■

Updates to AGMA's "Contact Your AGMA Staff Representative" Webpage



musicalartists.org/contact-your-agma-staff-representative/ ↗

AGMA's professional staff serves as a direct line of communication and support for AGMA members. To assist members every step of the way, AGMA's counsel, senior negotiators, and business representatives are assigned to specific signatory companies. They work with members to negotiate and enforce collective bargaining agreements and protect members' rights. And, of course, they are available to answer any questions.

Given recent updates to AGMA's professional staff, we recommend that members revisit AGMA's "Contact Your AGMA Staff Representative" webpage to familiarize themselves with their primary point(s) of contact. ■



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 [Entertainment Community 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 such as 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, such as car rental and hotels, education opportunities (they have their own scholarship!), and more. We encourage you to sign up for email alerts from Union Plus in order to receive Union Plus newsletters.



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 allows 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 log in 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.

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 National Executive Director. These reports are kept in strict confidence. After your report is received, you will be contacted regarding resources for support and the next steps to take. If your case involves criminal allegations, please call 911 immediately and report it to law enforcement.

Hurricane Resources

Numerous states have been tragically affected by Hurricanes Milton and Helene. AGMA [published a webpage](#) with essential resources, including emergency services, shelters, financial assistance, and ways to help in recovery efforts across impacted states.■

Some of AGMA's Most Helpful Webpages

In October 2024, AGMA unveiled a newly redesigned website, featuring a fresh look and updated pages throughout!

Contact Your AGMA Staff Rep—Published on April 2022 and revised as needed

www.musicalartists.org/contact-your-agma-staff-representative/

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.

Auditions and Job Postings Webpage—Revised regularly

www.musicalartists.org/auditions/

We remain committed to sharing auditions and relevant job postings with our members on our website.

The audition and job listings webpage was completely redesigned in May 2021. We continue to remind all AGMA signatory companies to send us any upcoming postings to help make sure that thousands of AGMA Artists are aware of job listings and auditions in a timely manner.

I.D.E.A. Job Posting Resource Page—Published February 2023 and revised regularly

www.musicalartists.org/idea-job-posting-resource-page/

Accessibility and inclusion should be top of mind for job posters throughout every step of the hiring process. In an effort to share hiring opportunities in a broader range of outlets to increase the number of applicants often underrepresented in AGMA-represented positions and roles, AGMA has recently published this Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (I.D.E.A.) Job Posting Resource Page.

While AGMA Signatory Companies should not limit their hiring opportunity postings to the outlets listed here, they are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the resources on this list and use them to expand their reach when circulating their audition listings and job postings!

The page is public and can be found under the MEMBER-SHIP tab on AGMA's website.

New and Prospective Member Resource Page

www.musicalartists.org/new-member-information/

This resource page will jumpstart the AGMA experience for first-time members or those thinking of joining. The important information compiled here will also come in handy for current and even longtime members.

The New and Prospective Member Resource Page is a

one-stop shop that houses information on the Union, what it means to be an AGMA member, how to apply, how dues help create collective power, who the elected leadership and staff are, and more. This page now replaces paper packets and will be updated whenever needed.

We recommend that all members bookmark the New and Prospective Member Resource Page in their browsers for easy reference at all times. If you know anyone who is curious about AGMA and wants to learn more about the union, please share the URL with them, too!

ORGANIZE! Webpage—Published February 2023 and Revised Regularly

www.musicalartists.org/organize/

Our "ORGANIZE!" webpage is designed to help Artists learn more about joining AGMA and organizing their workplaces. The nationwide wave of union organizing continues as dancers, singers, and staging staff across the country vote overwhelmingly in favor of unionizing with AGMA. What an exhilarating time it has been for the Union! It is becoming more and more apparent to performing artists that standing together and speaking with one voice is the way to ensure safe, equitable, and viable careers in their industries. You can find our "ORGANIZE!" webpage right on the main menu of our website.

Contract Summaries for AGMA Opera Soloists (Principal Artists)—MyAGMA login required—Published February 2022 and revised as needed

These contract "reference sheets" give basic information about collectively bargained provisions applicable to AGMA Opera Soloists (Principal Artists) at AGMA signatory opera companies. These reference sheets were created to ensure that AGMA Opera Soloists have quick access to the basic terms and conditions of employment as they travel from company to company.

To access the page, members must first log into their MyAGMA account.

This page is actively updated as new contracts are negotiated, so there is a chance the summary might be out of date. To confirm, members are encouraged to reach out to their AGMA rep! ■

How the Met Opera Chorus's Bake Sale Raises Funds and Spirits: A Conversation Between Ned Hanlon and Laura Fries

On Tuesday, November 26, the Metropolitan Opera Chorus held a bake sale for the AGMA Relief Fund. It was a huge success, with some beautiful showstopper bakes up for auction. As always, none of this could have happened without the volunteers who organized the event, or the amazing bakers who provided the tasty treats. Special thanks also go to former AGMA President Linda Mays, who secured a \$2,000 matching grant for the event.

AGMA President and Met Opera Chorister Ned Hanlon sat down with one of the volunteers, Met Opera Chorister Laura Fries, to talk about her involvement in this grassroots initiative for this important fund. AGMAzine also wants to shout out Andrea Coleman, Anne Nonnemacher, Chelsea Shephard, and Rachele Schmiede.

Ned Hanlon (NH): Hi, Laura, thank you so much for chatting. I know you've worked on the AGMA Relief Fund Bake Sale for as long as we've sung together in the Chorus. How long have you been doing it?

Laura Fries (LF): I believe that it would be about 20 years, although it's hard to say exactly how long. April Haines and I used to spearhead the Met Opera Chorus Holiday Vendor Sale, which we did from at least the 2000-01 season, even though it preceded us by several years. We requested a donation from each vendor to benefit the AGMA Relief Fund. We started including a baker about two or three years in. One year, our usual pro bakers weren't available, so we decided to try doing the baking ourselves within the Chorus. That way, all of the proceeds would go to the AGMA Relief Fund. Eventually, we instituted a silent auction for some of the most stunning and delicious items, which boosted our receipts dramatically for the day.

NH: That's wonderful! I'm curious, after all this time, why do you continue to help organize this annual Bake Sale?

LF: First of all, it's a lot of fun!! We have lots of fantastic bakers in our Chorus and it's always so exciting to see what gets dropped off every year! It's great to give our hard-working colleagues a chance to switch their focus from our difficult and exhausting chorus job and do something different. I love to see them show off their family heirloom recipes and creative baking chops. It's a helpful event, too, because we found that it was most successful a day or two before Thanksgiving. People love to buy homemade baked goods for their Thanksgiving dinners, whether they're hosting or guesting.

The second reason is that it brings people together. We need the Chorus to participate both by baking and working at the event. We bring in some Extra Chorus and retiree volunteers, depending on what coverage we need that day. Even some dressers have baked for us! We have had the pleasure of having AGMA staff

volunteers and extended Chorus family members helping out. Also, the entire opera house loves to come down and shop with us. It brings people who work in our giant workplace to our work area that we would normally never see or meet under normal circumstances. It definitely takes a village to make it so successful!

The third, and maybe most important, reason is that we have the privilege of helping others in AGMA when they need support. We are very lucky to have the relatively secure jobs that we have, and we are glad to be able to lend a hand when we can. To be able to do something that makes such a profound difference all over the country right there in my own workplace makes it even more attractive and satisfying.

NH: Can you talk more about why you think it is important for people to support the AGMA Relief Fund?

LF: We have been able to provide north of six figures over the 20+ years we have been doing it. You never know when you



L to R: Danielle Walker, Linda Mays, and Chelsea Shephard.

might need the help yourself and would want others to show their support. It certainly provides a sense of pride and accomplishment to be able to make such a difference for AGMA members all over the country when they need it most. Anyone who can support this valuable and necessary fund does a great service to those suffering from a sudden financial hardship. It can be the only way to keep

your lights on, feed your family, or perhaps even keep your home.

NH: Thank you so much for your support of the AGMA Relief Fund! Anything else you think is important to say about the Fund or anything else?

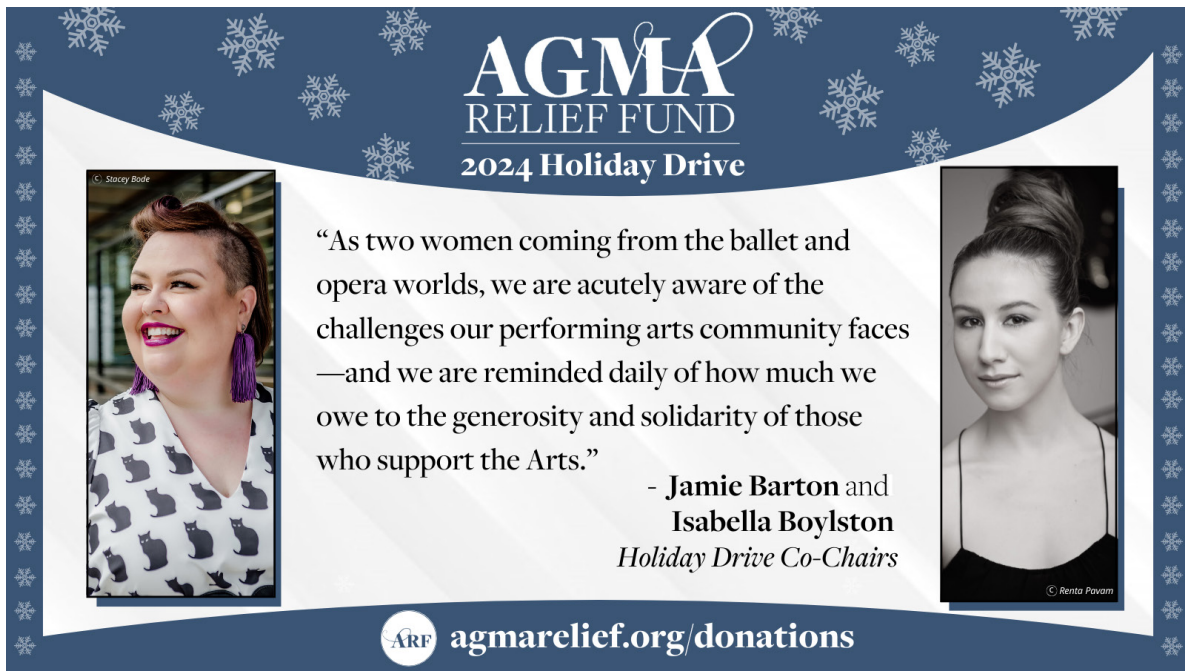
LF: It has been a lot of work to put the Bake Sale events together every year. At the end of the day, it's the cooperation

and positive outcome that makes it all worth the effort. There are a lot of very generous, caring people that step up to the challenge and make it a success every time, sometimes against some steep odds. We are very proud of all who have participated in sending out caring support. I personally would love to see other AGMA groups adopt this event and make it a national event. ■



2024 AGMA Relief Fund Holiday Drive

Message from Co-Chairs Jamie Barton and Isabella Boylston



Dear Friends and Supporters of the Performing Arts,

Greetings from Jamie and Isabella! Throughout our careers, we've performed on stages worldwide, alongside remarkable artists at every stage of their journeys. Time and again, we've been moved by our community's resilience, the solidarity of artists in times of need, and the generosity of those who champion the Arts.

This year, as proud Co-Chairs of the AGMA Relief Fund Holiday Drive, we invite you to join us in supporting a cause dear to our hearts and vital to our AGMA community.

The holiday season is a time for reflection, gratitude, and giving. As two women coming from the ballet and opera worlds, we are acutely aware of the challenges our performing arts community faces—and we are reminded daily of how much we owe to the generosity and solidarity of those who support the Arts.

The AGMA Relief Fund offers emergency assistance to AGMA Artists in need, serving as a crucial lifeline in these increasingly uncertain times for the Arts. Financial hardship can arise without warning – a canceled contract, an injury and unexpected medical expense, a personal tragedy, or a global crisis can leave an artist suddenly struggling to make ends meet. For emerging artists and apprentices, these challenges are especially daunting, often threatening to derail a career before it even has the chance to begin. When artists struggle, it's often those from marginalized communities who suffer most, facing systemic inequities that make already difficult circumstances even harder to overcome.

The AGMA Relief Fund is a backstop- a foundation of support behind us. It offers stability as we navigate instability. The AGMA Relief Fund doesn't just provide financial assistance—it also offers hope. It tells us when we face a crisis, "You're not alone. Your community has your back." In an often unforgiving profession, that message can make all the difference.

This holiday season, we invite you to join us in supporting the AGMA Relief Fund. A donation, no matter the size, can help an

artist pay their rent, cover a medical bill, or put food on the table. It can be the difference between staying in the industry and leaving it behind.

Let’s come together to ensure that the artists who bring so much beauty and meaning into our lives can continue singing, dancing, teaching, and tirelessly working behind the scenes to bring productions to life. Let’s show them that their work—and their well-being—matters deeply to us. Whether you contribute through a tax-deductible donation or by helping us spread the word, your support makes a meaningful difference, and we are deeply grateful.

Visit AGMARelief.org to make your donation today.

With gratitude and hope, and in solidarity,

Jamie Barton and Isabella Boylston
Co-Chairs, AGMA Relief Fund Holiday Drive

Policies of the AGMA Board of Governors

Since Fall 2020, the policies of the AGMA Board of Governors have been available on the AGMA website. All AGMA members in good standing have the ability to review these policies by accessing the MyAGMA Portal.

Since the last issue of *AGMAzine*, three policies have been approved:

- Facilitate New Organizing and Incentivize Membership (October)
- 3. Revised Conflict of Interest Policy (November) ■

- 1. Policy on General Counsel (August)
- 2. Updated AGMA Policy on Reduced Initiation Fees to

IN MEMORIAM

Lucine Amara, *Soloist*

Lando Bartolini, *Soloist*

Maria Benitez, *Dancer*

Marvellee Cariaga, *Soloist*

Paul Combs, *Chorister*

Dominic Cossa, *Soloist*

Sandra Darling, *Soloist*

Sir Andrew Davis, *Conductor**

Diane Higginbotham, *Chorister*

Jan Holland, *Stage Manager*

Martha Howe, *Soloist*

Judith Jamison, *Dancer*

Benjamin Luxon, *Soloist*

Michaela Mabinty DePrince, *Dancer*

Gayle McKinney-Griffith, *Dancer*

Maurita Phillips-Thornburgh, *Chorister*

Aimée Puentes, *Soloist*

John "Snuffy" Shulick, *Chorister*

David Smith-Larsen, *Soloist*

Margaret Tynes, *Soloist*

Sean C. Viator, *Dancer*

**Indicates a distinguished individual in a related profession*

