

PRESS RELEASE
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ARIZONA OPERA ORCHESTRA MUSICIANS ASSOCIATION FILES UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICE CHARGES AGAINST ARIZONA OPERA ADMINISTRATION

Phoenix, AZ – Earlier this week, the Arizona Opera Orchestra Musicians Association (AZOOMA) filed unfair labor practice (ULP) charges against the Arizona Opera administration. The charges were filed with the National Labor Relations Board for violations of the federal National Labor Relations Act.

“After months of stonewalling and delays in providing information needed to bargain effectively, and following their illegal activities that undermined the musician's elected bargaining committee, we had no alternative but to file the ULP charges,” said Nathan Mitchell, AZOOMA Negotiating Committee Chair and member of the Arizona Opera Orchestra horn section. “We are working as hard as we can to find a solution that will work for the financial *and artistic* sustainability of the Opera.”

The Arizona Opera Orchestra is made up of musicians primarily from Phoenix, with a number of musicians hailing from Tucson, Flagstaff and out of state. Performances and rehearsals require travel to both Phoenix and Tucson. Official negotiations between the Arizona Opera and Arizona Opera Orchestra began in June.

Arizona Opera Orchestra musicians are paid “per service” (services include both rehearsals and performances). Over the past five years, elimination of services has resulted in a pay cut of 25%. Since the 2006/07 season, services have been cut from 64 to 48 services. The current proposal would extend performance hours by 30 minutes while compensation per service is proposed to stay flat (more work for the same pay).

Additional proposed cuts to the Orchestra include cutting travel reimbursement by 60%, slashing meal per diems by 75%, and expecting Orchestra members to pay 50% of lodging expenses. These expenses have been covered by the Opera in the past.

“With Arizona Opera’s current proposal, for a weekend of rehearsals or performances away from home, musicians will end up spending as much as two-thirds of their income for the weekend to cover the costs of food, transportation and lodging – with some ending up with as little as \$31 in their pocket. It’s just not realistic,” said Cindy Baker, AZOOMA Negotiating Committee member and Arizona Opera Orchestra Principal Second Violinist.

Also in the proposal are cuts to the auditioning process, eliminating audition committee compensation and reimbursement for travel expenses. Auditions are typically held in Phoenix and the audition committee often includes musicians from Tucson and Flagstaff.

“These musicians would be hard-pressed to attend the audition and donate an entire day of travel and audition time with no compensation for time or travel. This would have a direct effect on the artistic product,” said Mitchell.

The next meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, September 23.

“We’re willing to make sacrifices now in order to help get Arizona Opera healthy,” said Baker. “We are interested in the success and solvency of Arizona Opera, which we consider our artistic home. But we are

concerned that without a commitment from the administration to return to current levels in the future; it will not be sustainable for these musicians to continue in this role.”

The Arizona Opera started in Tucson in 1971, expanding into Phoenix five years later. Since then, the performers onstage have been backed by the Arizona Opera’s orchestra. The Arizona Opera Orchestra is a cohesive group of musicians that have developed a distinctive sound through decades of performing together.

In 2000, the Arizona Opera Orchestra Musicians Association (AZOOMA) was formed and is made up of 52 musicians primarily from Phoenix with 22 musicians hailing from Tucson, Flagstaff, and out of the state. On average, AZOOMA members have been performing with the company for over ten years.

Although not full-time, AZOOMA is fully professional. Musicians in the Arizona Opera Orchestra rely on Arizona Opera performances to supplement incomes pieced together from freelancing and teaching. For more information about AZOOMA, please visit www.azooma.org.

For press interviews, please contact: Cindy Baker, 602-903-1032, press@azooma.org

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MORE ABOUT ARIZONA OPERA ORCHESTRA: Founded in 1971 in Tucson, AZ, the Arizona Opera is a professional opera company, which produces fully staged opera performances, concerts, and education and outreach programs reaching over 35,000 schoolchildren and adults annually. The Arizona Opera has grown to become one of the few companies in the United States to serve multiple cities.

Throughout its history, Arizona Opera has been committed to producing operas of the highest quality, attracting the finest world talent and showcasing local artists. In 1998, General Director David Speers set a plan in motion to nurture and expand the artistic excellence of the company with innovative sets, costumes, lighting – and the engagement of talented musicians and an “in-house” orchestra with an expanded rehearsal schedule.

In 2000, Arizona Opera took another step appointing Maestro Cal Stewart Kellogg as its first Principal Conductor. This established the largest and most professional group of musicians in the organization’s history – the Arizona Opera Orchestra. That same year the Arizona Opera Orchestra Musicians Association was formed:

- To offer entertaining, live music performed at the highest artistic level
- To promote and support our musician colleagues
- To raise awareness and reach out to the community in support of the Arizona Opera and its programs

This dedicated Orchestra and principal conductor for the Arizona Opera made a strong artistic commitment to the cultural life of Phoenix and Tucson. The community responded with record subscription sales, increased single ticket sales, sold out productions and enthusiastic crucial acclaim.

Since the arrival of Maestro Joel Revzen in 2003, the company and the orchestra have continued to grow and thrive. His broad experience and association with the world-famous Metropolitan Opera have been a boon to the company.

The Arizona Opera Orchestra consists of members of symphony orchestras from Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, and out of state, as well as music faculty from local universities.