



ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE

Chorus Representative

15th February 2016

Harry Brunjes, Chairman of the Board
Cressida Pollack, Chief Executive
English National Opera

(By hand)

Dear Mr Brunjes and Ms Pollack

The Chorus of the Royal Opera House wishes to express its deep concern at the proposed cuts and changes to English National Opera, in particular, the full time Chorus.

A permanent Chorus is the backbone of any opera house, the most versatile commodity available to it. There is no free-lance, part time group of singers in the world that could compare with a chorus such as at ENO or ROH. Any opera company which needs to increase its output as a company, is likely to reduce rehearsal times in order to accommodate the number of productions. The busier you are and the more money you need to save, the more it becomes essential to work with the same group of people with vast experience not only with the musical and dramatic material, but with each other. Only that way can the demand on rehearsal time be contained and such capacity can only be found in a permanent chorus.

The cost of an ever-changing roster of free-lance performers is financially unviable and impossible to budget for in the long term. A new costume or expensive alteration for every singer for every production; a new pair of shoes, wig and set of makeup. More music rehearsals for those unfamiliar with the material. Time wasted with a disparate group of free-lancers, trying to establish a coherent working approach, or to find a vocal blend and settled dynamic, is all money down the drain.

You may deduce from our response, that we have interpreted your cut-backs as an intention to eventually do without a full-time chorus altogether. Without explicitly stating so, the figures you have produced suggest precisely that. The salary decrease of at least 25% and the dramatic change in working practice are such that members of your chorus would not, in many cases, be able to sustain their current circumstances. To suggest that these performers would be able to continue to support themselves in the capital and fill unused



months with other contracts, is at best naive, and at worst exposes a substantial lack of knowledge of the current climate.

Once these extreme measures are put in place, they will be irreversible. Years of training and experience lost. Performances are the raison d'etre of any opera company; therefore it follows that the performers should be the last port of call for cuts. The ROH chorus know this situation all too well, and managed to negotiate successfully, some 20 years ago, to keep the chorus full-time and at the core of the present company.

You have an opportunity to make your company once again the greatest in the world for Opera performed in English. Don't disable the very essence of what makes that possible. Don't expect to fill your auditorium if you present your visitors with a part-time, inexperienced company. ENO deserves better, and so does its loyal audience.

We urge you to find alternative solutions to the financial difficulties that are plaguing the company. Your chorus can help you, listen to its voice. It has been the bond that has kept the company together for years. It might just be the thing that saves it.

With respect

Members of the Royal Opera Chorus

Covent Garden

