



MEDIA RELEASE

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Workers rally to save Opera Australia

Workers from Opera Australia will today stage a musical performance before calling on the Minister for the Arts, Paul Fletcher, to step in to save jobs from a company restructure forced upon it by COVID-19.

Opera Australia has proposed to axe over 25% of its permanent workforce, and terminate the contracts of many others.

Management has also signaled it wants to tear up the enterprise agreements which regulate pay and conditions for musicians, choral performers, technicians, stage hands, wigs and wardrobes, props manufacturing and set construction at Opera Australia.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says Mr Fletcher must bring forward financial support to prevent a world-class opera company becoming a shell of itself.

“With a quarter of Opera Australia’s singers, technicians and orchestra musicians facing the sack, with an Opera House that will be unable to hold opera performances because there just won’t be a company able to do it anymore, we ask: what will it take to get the federal and state Arts Ministers to act?” said the director of MEAA’s Musicians section, Paul Davies.

“New South Wales has \$50 million of financial support for the arts on the table, and the Federal Minister has authorised even more money to help companies like Opera Australia get through this pandemic and the deepest recession in almost a century. So where is it? Show us the money.

“How is it that Opera Australia is intent on sacking huge numbers of its employees as well as terminating the contracts of just as many, when there is meant to be money to save these jobs and protect this hugely important, world-class company?

“Why is it that these workers are set to be sacked, while they are receiving JobKeeper and have agreed to cut their own salaries in half for the last six months?

“What is the purpose of JobKeeper and arts relief funding if it isn’t to keep these jobs, to save this company and avoid the destruction of a national treasure?”

Mr Davies said MEAA has offered to negotiate an Emergency Measures agreement with Opera Australia that would moderate wages and conditions over the period it takes to transition to some form of ‘COVID normal’ production environment.

“We have reached similar agreements with other iconic arts companies. Arts workers understand the financial reality of the recession and want to put their energies into saving the institutions they work for.

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“They want to see artistic excellence and all forms of creative activity thrive because they know that’s what keeps societies going, especially in tough times like these.

“There are no creative arts without these workers. Who will make the halls of the Sydney Opera House reverberate if not those who sing, who make music, and who bring these productions to life behind the stage?

“What message are we sending our children and future generations when we decide to jettison these workers and let these companies die?

“What will it take to get Governments to step up and spend the money they say is there? What are they hiding?”

More information: Paul Davies, director, MEAA Musicians: 0404 090 838 or paul.davies@meaa.org