



Chronicle of a Cultural Disaster

Teatro dell'Opera di Roma Capitale
preliminary results of a long term plan of downsizing

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Another law for Opera and Symphony Foundations



- October 7, 2013 a new law (112/13) just for opera and symphony orchestras is enacted by the Italian Culture Ministry. It is the 7th in 7 years. In 2014 the 8th law pops out but the last framework law is dated 1967. In 1996 opera and symphony orchestras became private foundations
- The 112/13 law, in contrast to recent laws, discourages the entry of private sponsors, reduces the autonomy of the foundations and decrees that all music foundations be strictly controlled by the Culture Ministry, by the Ministry of Finance and the Court of Auditors
- Foundations declared to be in economic crises could access a revolving fund of 75 million euro for 2014 for the granting of loans lasting up to a maximum of 30 years



The law states:

- To access the fund, former opera companies in crisis must submit by January 9, 2014 a reorganization plan that operates on all budget items and is able to balance the foundation's assets and its budget within three years
- All foundations that are not able to balance their budgets by the end of 2016 will be forced to a compulsory liquidation
- Reduction of up to 50% of the technical and administrative staff at 31 December 2012
- Rationalization of artistic personnel
- Termination of the effectiveness of additional company agreements in force
- Regarding salaries, the application of the minimum wage

The new Governance



- On December 2013, after the local elections, the changing of the Mayor of Rome and the appointment of an entirely new Board of Trustees, a new Superintendent is elected for the Rome Opera Theater
- He declared immediately that the 2014 budget had 10 mln euro deficit (although the previous management declared the preliminary budget plan for 2014 balanced in June 2013) and thus he began to prepare an industrial plan to comply with the 112 law so to access its national fund



- Three of the five Orchestra's more representative unions questioned the decision but seeing as the management was unwilling to discuss their decision on February 28th, a strike was declared for the first performance of Swan Lake
- The Superintendent decided to put on the show without the Orchestra using an unauthorized recording made during the rehearsal
- SIc CGIL went to court to report anti-union behavior and several months later the Court convicted the Management for this wrong and unprecedented decision regarding use of the recording



- In late spring the industrial plan prepared by the management was presented to the unions
- It was composed of 3 pages: the first page was an introduction, the second and third contained no numbers just a short declaration stating that nobody will be fired (just 64 retirements were planned) and employees' salaries won't change before December 2014
- Two unions (Fistel CISL and Uilcom UIL) declared themselves in favor of the proposed plan, the other two (Sic CGIL and Fials CISAL) declared their dissatisfaction mainly for the insufficient guarantees on occupation and production levels offered by the plan

Starting the fight



- Due to the unwillingness of the governance to agree to the consistency of future occupational levels, the fight started before the beginning of the Opera Summer Season at the Caracalla Baths
- SLC and Fials asked to examine the entire industrial plan that was presented to the Culture Ministry but the management refused again to show it to the workers' representatives



- A strike was declared in July (on Saturday) for the opening of the Season, Madama Butterfly (on Tuesday July 14th)
- The Superintendent nevertheless decided to open the performance to the Public substituting the Orchestra with a Piano and with only half of the Choir on stage
- More than half of the audience left and asked to have their ticket reimbursed



- Another strike was declared for the next performance (July 18th) and even the second performance was staged without Orchestra and Choir but this time with free admission to the audience
- A third (and last) strike was declared for July 26th and this time the performance was cancelled
- On July 30th, at the request of CGIL, a meeting among all the Unions, Management and the Chairman of Culture takes place at City Hall to try to exit the enpasse



- A trilateral agreement is signed on July 31st with the City Government acting as guarantor of the understanding
- The remaining 25 performances of the summer season are performed as scheduled
- On September 18th, after the summer vacation, a referendum among the workers takes place and the agreement previously signed only by CISL and UIL is approved by the majority. CGIL and FIALS don't participate in the vote
- September 21th M° Muti declares that he won't conduct "Aida" for the opening of the next season nor the "The Marriage of Figaro" scheduled for the spring.
- He does not renounce his position of Honorary Conductor for Life however. He never declares that he left because of the strikes



- October 2nd the Board decides to outsource the entire Orchestra and Choir (180 members) in order to face the 3,4 mln missing to balance the 2015 budget and opens a procedure of collective layoff (L. 223/91) to be concluded within 75 days
- The management wishes for the creation of a new external cooperative among the musicians to hire part time starting January 2015
- Nearly the totality of the national *media* are in favor of the decision and a harsh smear campaign, mainly based on lies, begins against the musicians
- The Culture Ministry, the Mayor and the Superintendent declare to the mass media that this was the only possible solution to avoid the Theater's shutdown

Union Action and Solidarity



- The unions finally recover their unity against the mass dismissal and formally declare the decision to apply the collective layoff law (223) as illegal
- Subsequently, during the meetings to avoid the firing, a tremendous mobilization starts in Italy as well as overseas
- An online petition in solidarity with the musicians is initiated and collects almost 30.000 signatures in 45 days
- Head by FIM, musicians, unions and associations from all over the world join the battle
- Thousands of solidarity letters fill up the post boxes of the Ministry, Mayor and Superintendent

Searching for an agreement



- The unions ask to retire the layoff as a precondition to start the negotiation
- The management refuses. After two weeks it asks the 180 musicians, in order to possibly step back from the decision, to cut their salaries by 3,4 mln in two years



- An important national demonstration organized by CGIL, CISL, UIL and FIALS in favor of Rome Opera musicians takes place in Rome November 10th and gathers workers from all the country as well as national and foreign televisions to cover the event. Politicians join the demonstration as well as FIM's General Secretary



The Possible Solution



- November 17th, during the night, an agreement is finally signed and November 25th it is approved by 97% of the workers plenum
- The collective layoff is retired in the same day by the Board and the collective procedure is declared closed
- None of the performances scheduled in this period are cancelled

Summary of the Agreement



- The final agreement was reached after 9 meetings between the management and the workers' representatives
- At the end of the negotiation the reduction to face was 1,5 mln instead of 3,4 and it was a common decision to share it among all the workers, not just the musicians
- The reduction didn't affect the basic salary but only 3 bonuses (plus 2 exclusively from the Orchestra) related to the second level contract and it will be effective just for the next two years (end Dec 2016)
- Meanwhile, if the Theater will be able to balance the budget starting next year all the extra revenues will be redistributed among the workers in order to cover the previous reduction



- The agreement will temporarily freeze 4% of the annual salary totally
- The remaining 1,9 mln comes from a mix of reduction of expenses (other than labor cost), overtime recovery plan and enhancement of income from extra production
- It is important to underline that the agreement also creates a joint committee management/union to monitor, every 3 months, the economical trend in order to decide together the necessary corrections needed
- The committee will also analyze how to save money by reusing set design and stage costumes and suggestions on better programming

Carissimi Amici e Colleghi,

The Orchestra and Chorus of Rome Opera Theater would like to sincerely thank you for being so close to their 180 musicians as they faced the insane decision made by the Board to outsource the entire Orchestra and Chorus.

Now that this nightmare is definitely over, it is clearer how serious the threat was and that the dismissal of the full time musicians was a long term plan whose creator sat in the main room of the Culture Ministry. It was a political decision taken by many politicians across the entire political spectrum.

It was immensely important for us to be aware that musicians from all over the world were taking a position against this decision and the awareness of their vicinity gave us the additional strength needed to win, day by day, this very difficult battle.

Presently we still have economic problems to solve, and workers are asked to pay for wrong managerial decisions, but now that we have regained our full time positions our perspective has completely changed.

International solidarity proved to be a decisive factor in fighting this "new" decision making approach of not considering quality as the most important aspect of professional musical expression.

In conclusion, the list of the orchestras and associations which sent us solidarity letters is so long that we can't respond to all of them individually, but we hope that this letter could be an imaginary embrace to each and all.

Best wishes to all of you

December 1, 2014

L'Orchestra e il Coro del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma Capitale