

Singers and Orchestra Unanimously Reject George Steel's
Continued Leadership of City Opera

At a meeting today between City Opera's leadership and the singers and orchestra members represented, respectively, by the American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO and Local 802, AFM, the members of both unions who work for City Opera unanimously told George Steel that they had no confidence in his ability to lead the opera, rejected his plans for an itinerant, free lance, travelling opera company without guaranteed jobs or health insurance, and insisting that NYCO bargain in good faith with the unions before effectuating any plan to leave Lincoln Center. The meeting was attended by 29 singers and production personnel and by 24 orchestra members.

City Opera management continued to refuse to provide any concrete information about where and what it intended to perform, although it did supply the unions with what it called a 'tentative schedule' of its intentions. That tentative schedule included 4 operas and two concerts, (attached) with drastically reduced employment for choristers and musicians.

The rank-and-file performers at the meeting unanimously rejected City Opera's proposed schedule, calling it an insult to the men and women who have given their professional lives to City Opera. Telling Steel that his "fantastical schemes were a formula for continued failure" and that it would be a "disgrace to continue to call the company that Steel envisioned the New York City Opera", the unions insisted that NYCO provide exact details about where at what it intended to try to produce before meaningful bargaining could take place. The Company said it would provide details "in the next few weeks".

Derisive laughter followed Steel's comment that his past season was "fantastic", and comments of disbelief followed when Steel told the group that his programming was directed to pleasing the donors, not the public. Steel continued to argue that widespread calls among opera fans for City Opera to program traditional operas, which actually sold tickets in the past, were misguided and patrons wanted to hear 'new operas'. Although NYCO refused to disclose the locations in which it would perform, its lawyer said "It will be in the City of New York, but not the Bronx, Queens or Staten Island.

The unions told Steel that if City Opera had any actual proposals to make, they should direct them to the Bruce Simon, of the firm Cohen, Weiss and Simon, which is counsel to both AGMA and Local 802, and that the unions would meet with NYCO again once NYCO submitted its proposals and the detailed financial information necessary for the unions to bargain.

The National Labor Relations Board continues its investigation of AGMA's unfair labor practice charges against the Opera and the union's request that the Labor Board seek an injunction to keep City Opera from unilaterally moving away from Lincoln Center.

Alan Gordon, AGMA's National Executive Director, told Steel: "The way you want City Opera to function would destroy the lives of a hundred performers. In that form, City Opera doesn't deserve to exist and if you can't run City Opera as the people's opera, then someone who can should take over."

As the group left, one singer commented: "Steel should be calling his company the Pot Luck Opera".



First row, seated, from left: **Bruce Levine**, counsel, **Alan Gordon**, AGMA NED, **Tino Galiardi**, President, Local 802 AFM, **Bruce Simon**, counsel, **James Odom**, President of AGMA, **Candace Itow**, AGMA Membership Department Supervisor, and **Deborah Allton-Maher**, AGMA Eastern Counsel. Behind them, the ladies and gentlemen of the NYCO/AGMA shop and the NYCO Orchestra