

New York's Metropolitan Opera cancels broadcasts of *The Death of Klinghoffer*

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Bowing to Zionist pressure, New York City's Metropolitan Opera announced this week that it was canceling plans to broadcast John Adams's well-known 1991 opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*. The opera house still plans to go ahead with eight live staged performances beginning on November 15, but the high-definition video transmission to 2,000 theatres worldwide, along with a worldwide radio broadcast scheduled for February 28, 2015, are being scrapped. The audience for this co-production with the English National Opera, first staged in 2012 in London, will be reduced from potentially several million to around 20,000.

The Death of Klinghoffer is based on the 1985 hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship by Palestinian terrorists, during which an elderly disabled American Jewish tourist, Leon Klinghoffer, was brutally killed and thrown overboard.

The opera, with a libretto by Alice Goodman and music by John Adams, premiered in 1991 and became the immediate target of vitriolic denunciations for its alleged anti-Semitism and support for terrorism.

The work is guilty, not of anti-Semitism, but of departing from the official Zionist propaganda line, and that of the most rabid right-wing sections of the Israeli political establishment and its global supporters, especially in the US.

Leading the latest attacks on the opera were Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) under its longtime national director, Abraham Foxman. The ADL is a prominent part of the Zionist lobby, continuously on the lookout for any political or cultural events that offend the sensibilities of the Israeli regime and its patrons, Gentile as well as Jewish. Foxman's selective outrage at anti-Semitism was prominently displayed about 10 years ago, when

the ADL gave a Distinguished Statesman Award to Italian leader Silvio Berlusconi soon after he brazenly defended fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

The ADL has worked closely over the years with Klinghoffer's two daughters, who have waged a long campaign against the opera on the spurious grounds that it "romanticizes" Palestinian terrorists.

Adams is well known for a number of operas on topical and historical themes, including *Nixon in China* (1987), based on the US President's trip in 1972, and *Doctor Atomic* (2005), inspired by J. Robert Oppenheimer and his work on the development and testing of the first atomic bomb in the waning months of the Second World War. These works, though not without serious flaws, are characterized by a rejection of narrow nationalism and chauvinism, as well as a conscientiousness on historical matters.

The composer denounced the Met's decision. "My opera accords great dignity to the memory of Leon and Marilyn Klinghoffer, and it roundly condemns his brutal murder," Adams insisted. "It acknowledges the dreams and the grievances of not only the Israeli but also the Palestinian people, and in no form condones or promotes violence, terrorism or anti-Semitism."

Librettist Alice Goodman declared, as reported in the *Guardian*, "There is nothing anti-Semitic in *Klinghoffer* apart from one aria which is sung by an anti-Semitic character and is clearly flagged as such. The simulcasts from the Met are watched and loved by all kinds of people who couldn't possibly get to a live performance. The notion that this can be watched live [in New York] but not in a cinema is bizarre and foolish, and I regret it."

Peter Gelb, general manager of the Met, issued a statement that tried to have it both ways and only demonstrated duplicity and cowardice in the face of the

Zionist lobby. “I’m convinced the opera is not anti-Semitic,” said Gelb. “But I’ve also become convinced that there is genuine concern in the international Jewish community that the live transmission of *The Death of Klinghoffer* would be inappropriate at this time of rising anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe.”

Gelb did not try to explain why the broadcast of a work that is *not* anti-Semitic would *encourage* anti-Semitism. His aim was to appease both those in the opera audience outraged by this example of self-censorship, and the Zionists and right wing who seek to equate the Palestinians’ struggle with terrorism, many of whom are among the opera company’s largest donors.

John Adams’s most recent opera, *Doctor Atomic*, was a mostly effective musical and dramatic exploration of the dawn of the Atomic Age. *The Death of Klinghoffer* was judged by some critics to be less effective when it first premiered. With the exception of a staging by the Saint Louis Opera Company last year, *Klinghoffer* has been ignored in the US until the Met scheduled it. This fall’s production in New York will be reviewed by the WSWS—unless it too falls victim to the campaign that has already claimed the plans for worldwide broadcast.



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