

# Lockout deadline at New York's Metropolitan Opera extended

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A new deadline for contract agreements with the major unions at New York City's Metropolitan Opera was set this week. Met general manager Peter Gelb now says that workers will be locked out on August 17 if no agreements have been reached. Meanwhile negotiations between the parties have resumed.

This is the third extension of the lockout deadline, which Gelb first announced in late July, days before the August 1 contract expirations. While it is not possible to forecast the immediate outcome, the postponements point to the possibility that the Met's major unions--including the American Federation of Musicians Local 802, IATSE Local 1 and the American Guild of Musical Artists--may be looking for a way to meet management halfway on its demands for 16 percent cutbacks in pay and benefits for musicians, choristers, stagehands and other employees.

The parties agreed on a federal mediator and then to an independent financial review of the company's fiscal condition. This review is quite different from the demand that the opera company open its books, which the musicians union had demanded in the weeks leading up to the contract expiration. Instead, a Wall Street expert has been conducting his study behind closed doors.

The expert is Eugene Keilin of KPS Capital Partners. He was previously associated with Lazard Freres and Co., and furthermore served as Chairman of the Municipal Assistance Corporation, which was created during the 1975 near-bankruptcy of New York City, and played a key role in the extraction of massive concessions from city employees at that time.

With this pedigree and experience, there is every reason to believe that Keilin, whose review was reportedly completed early this week, will be looking to broker a deal between the union officials and Met

management.

Far from seeking to mobilize popular support against the company's billionaire trustees for whom Gelb speaks, the unions have taken the opposite position, scolding the Met's general manager for airing the issues publicly rather than in behind the scenes negotiations.

The company has already settled with three of its smaller union locals, but 12 others remain, including the stagehands, singers and musicians representing the bulk of the employees responsible for performances at the Met.

The 2014-15 season is scheduled to open on September 22 with a new production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* under the direction of longtime Met conductor James Levine, who made a successful return last year after two years away due to health problems.



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