

Singer Plácido Domingo's forced departure from New York's Metropolitan Opera

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Celebrated singer Plácido Domingo withdrew from the Metropolitan Opera's production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* on Tuesday and indicated that he was ending his 51-year-long association with the New York City opera house.

Domingo's action came in response to two Associated Press articles, in August and September, in which 20 women, 18 of them anonymously, accused the opera star of inappropriate behavior.

In a statement, Domingo said, "While I strongly dispute recent allegations made about me, and I am concerned about a climate in which people are condemned without due process, upon reflection, I believe that my appearance in this production of *Macbeth* would distract from the hard work of my colleagues both on stage and behind the scenes. As a result, I have asked to withdraw and I thank the leadership of the Met for graciously granting my request."

The Metropolitan Opera attempted to withstand the pressure generated by the AP articles, along with various European opera companies, on the grounds that nothing had been proven against Domingo and investigations were ongoing. It has been pointed out by numerous sources that Domingo is still a major revenue producer for the Met and other opera houses at age 78.

As recently as last Saturday, according to National Public Radio, Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager, held a meeting with the company's chorus and orchestra to explain why he had not suspended or investigated Domingo. According to individuals present, Gelb told the meeting that the various women had made allegations of sexual misconduct only to the AP and not to other credible news outlets as well. Gelb indicated that the AP's reporting lacked "corroboration."

He also pointed to the fact that the women who spoke to the AP did so anonymously, which, according to the NPR account, Gelb believed "lessens the veracity of their allegations." When one Met employee commented that two of the accusers had come forward by name, singers Patricia Wulf and Angela Turner Wilson, Gelb noted that a makeup artist, present during the alleged incident involving Wilson, had no memory of the episode.

In its account, the *New York Times* noted that "one member of the chorus expressed support for Mr. Gelb's approach, several people who attended said. But all the other speakers were critical."

Following Saturday's meeting, the Met issued a statement explaining that "because there was currently no corroborated evidence against Mr. Domingo the Met believed that the fair and correct thing to do was to wait until the investigations by LA

Opera and AGMA [American Guild of Musical Artists, the opera performers' union] had taken place. He [Gelb] explained that if corroborated evidence is made public either through the investigations or other means, the Met would take prompt action."

Of course, no new corroborated evidence *was* made public between Saturday and Tuesday. However, the media and the #MeToo forces had once more swung into action.

Various news reports surfaced claiming that Met staff members were "livid" about Gelb's position and "furious that the New York company is continuing its association with Domingo." After the fact, the *New York Times* asserted there had been "a growing outcry" within the company. There were rumors that protests would be staged on the opening night of *Macbeth*.

State Senator Brad Hoylman, a Democrat, whose district includes Lincoln Center (the home of the Metropolitan Opera), ignorantly intervened, arguing on Twitter that "Plácido Domingo should be removed from the show—and if he isn't, the director of the Met [Gelb] should be removed too." Why should anyone listen to the threats of this Democratic Party hack?

In any event, almost inevitably, the Metropolitan Opera capitulated. Its statement suggested that Domingo had been forced out: "The Metropolitan Opera confirms that Plácido Domingo has agreed to withdraw from all future performances at the Met, effective immediately. The Met and Mr. Domingo are in agreement that he needed to step down."

So, the career of Plácido Domingo at the Met, one of the most extraordinary relationships in the history of opera, ends in this sordid, wretched manner.

The September 7 Associated Press piece about Domingo, by Jocelyn Gecker and Jocelyn Noveck, is even shoddier and more dishonest than the August 13 article by Gecker alone. In the first AP story, Gecker claimed that she had spoken to nine accusers, but only recounted seven stories. She said seven of the alleged victims spoke of Domingo having damaged their careers, but reported on only four or five of such allegations.

This time around, it took two authors to come up with the figure of 11 women having come forward since the August 13 item, but, for all intents and purposes, only one, Angela Turner Wilson, is actually referred to in any concrete detail. We are simply meant to take the AP's word for it that Domingo is a serial sexual abuser.

Gecker and Noveck write: "Wilson was the only new accuser to speak to the AP on the record. The others requested anonymity because they still work in the industry and said they feared

recriminations in a world long dominated by Domingo and other powerful men.”

This is how the authors dispose of the other 10 accusations: “One established soprano said she feared not only for herself but for her husband, who also works in opera. Others spoke of wanting to protect an art form that is struggling to remain relevant in the US. And some said vocal support for Domingo in Europe—and skepticism of the women’s accusations—has made them more fearful of coming forward publicly.”

Domingo’s inappropriate behavior allegedly included “unwanted touching, persistent requests for private get-togethers, late-night phone calls and sudden attempts to kiss them on the lips.”

Wilson claims that Domingo “grabbed her bare breast” before a performance in 1999. The authors write, “She said that after he grabbed her breast, she cried out in pain and asked the makeup person, ‘Did you see that?’ Reached by the AP, the makeup artist said he did not recall the incident and did not want to comment further on the record.”

The AP went on: “Though she won the company’s prestigious Artist of the Year award that season, in 2000, she said the Washington Opera never again hired her, which she attributes to her interactions with Domingo ... Her career lasted another decade before she switched mainly to teaching. She sang three seasons at the New York City Opera and at other venues around the country, including the Dallas Opera and Boston Lyric Opera.”

So Wilson’s career disappointments were all Domingo’s fault? Was he responsible for her failure to achieve great success in the opera world over the next 10 years? There is not the slightest effort to substantiate this serious and even slanderous allegation.

Moreover, damningly, in a 2006 interview with the *Kansas City Star*, Wilson described her “big opera moment” as “Singing ‘Le Cid’ at Washington Opera with Plácido Domingo: ‘It’s like standing next to a force of nature.’” This was the *very production* during which Wilson claims that Domingo molested her. She told the Associated Press for its September 7 article, “What woman would ever want him to grab their breast? And it hurt,” she said. “Then I had to go on stage and act like I was in love with him.”

To fail to report such an incident, to seethe inwardly for years, such things are entirely possible—but to describe one’s supposed assailant of a few years earlier as “a force of nature” and to boast that performing with him had been the “big ... moment” of one’s professional life, how is such a thing to be explained? Either Wilson was the worst hypocrite and an utter toady to Domingo’s celebrity status—or she is making up or exaggerating the incident.

And this is the only woman willing to give her name to the intrepid journalists from the Associated Press in their recent attack.

How shameful this is! How much of this is the product of subjectivism, jealousy, resentment, professional setbacks, all of it projected onto Domingo?

We can sympathize with the singer’s spokeswoman, Nancy Seltzer, who issued this statement: “The ongoing campaign by the AP to denigrate Plácido Domingo is not only inaccurate but unethical. These new claims are riddled with inconsistencies and, as with the first story, in many ways, simply incorrect. Due to an ongoing investigation, we will not comment on specifics, but we

strongly dispute the misleading picture that the AP is attempting to paint of Mr. Domingo.”

The American media, the various feminist witch-hunters, the human zeros of the Democratic Party, like Hoylman, none of them could care less whether the allegations against Domingo are actually true, as long as their political agenda advances.

When it is all boiled down, Domingo is accused of “womanizing,” which is now considered unsuitable, if not criminal conduct. We are not in a position to confirm or deny this characterization of the opera star’s activity, but let’s assume the claim is true.

First, as we have previously noted, such behavior is not precisely unknown in the film, theater and opera world. Human beings are thrown together in these fields for relatively short periods of time, under intense, heightened circumstances and often under conditions where they are encouraged, by the nature of the work, to express themselves to one another in strong emotions. Promiscuity, if it be called that, is something of an occupational hazard.

Second, we have it on the good authority of various European commentators that women threw themselves at Domingo for years in great numbers. Again, this is not unheard of. The Victorian image of the poor, defenseless female under assault from the male beast is demeaning to both genders.

The American upper-middle class in particular is coming apart at the seams. Under the combined impact of growing economic uncertainty, the danger of a mass movement from below, the defeat of Hillary Clinton in 2016 and the machinations of the fascistic Trump administration, the hysteria about “Russian interference” and the general disintegration of American democracy, these people are losing their heads. They are all too easily manipulated into believing, or pretending to believe, that whether a popular opera star might have been guilty of “getting too close, hugging, kissing, touching and being physically affectionate” is one of the burning questions of our time.

On one of the articles discussing Domingo’s departure from the Metropolitan Opera, a commentator appended this observation: “Having worked on recordings with PD [Plácido Domingo] for many years in the studio in the eighties, nineties and early 2000 years, I can only say that he always behaved impeccably, was always collegial, was always totally prepared, was always totally professional and charming—and always delivered musical results at the very highest level. It is a tragedy that his career now probably ends this way. Very sad.”

Yes, very sad.



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