

Tenor Placido Domingo, defending his character and reputation, retracts “apologies” for alleged sexual harassment

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29 September 2020

Legendary operatic tenor Placido Domingo told an interviewer for Spanish television last Saturday that his apologies last February for alleged sexual misconduct had been taken out of context, and that he was not guilty of abuse or mistreatment.

“It was not a *mea culpa*. My apology was published by an American newspaper along with false accusations that do not appear in the official report,” said Domingo, referring to an investigation that had been conducted by the Los Angeles Opera, explaining that his attempt “to clear up the misunderstanding the next day” was fruitless amidst the resulting publicity.

“I have never abused anyone,” the tenor continued. He added, “I think I was wrong to keep silent” on the allegations. “That silence has cost me dearly and has hurt me a lot, not only in my career but also in my life.

“I have changed,” said Domingo, who was hospitalized last spring with the coronavirus. “Confinement and having suffered the COVID have made me reconsider. The time I spent in isolation, the fragility and solitude, made me see that I had to clarify things. I discovered a renewed strength, a will to live and carry on.”

When Domingo speaks of “renewed strength” he is clearly indicating a determination to recover from consequences to his reputation of the media-fueled campaign that used mostly anonymous charges to effectively end his career in the US. The attacks have had less effect in Europe. The tenor appeared in Berlin, just before the pandemic, and was greeted with thunderous applause. He is scheduled to bid farewell to the Vienna State Opera next January, in the same month that will mark his 80th birthday. As reported on *Opera Wire*, VSO Director Bogdan Roscic called the

charges against the singer “dubious, anonymous and abstract,” adding, “I have not found anything in the whole discussion, and I am not the only one, that justifies the prohibition of working with Domingo.”

Domingo has not only had a career that is unprecedented in its length and quality; he has also enjoyed a reputation for collegiality, warmth and support for his colleagues. The singer told his Spanish interviewer that he hopes he will be remembered “for the emotion [he has] given the public, I have given myself with all my heart in what I have done, I hope I am remembered for who I really am.” It should be noted that Domingo’s latest interview has not yet been reported by a single media source in the United States.

In a related development, the *New York Times* last week reported some of the details of the 2019 settlement between the Metropolitan Opera and James Levine, who was fired after 40 years as musical director of the company. The Met agreed to pay the unusually large sum of \$3.5 million to Levine, rather than defend itself in court against his lawsuit charging defamation and breach of contract. The size of the settlement, which had remained secret because of a confidentiality agreement until the newspaper disclosed its terms, “casts doubt on the strength of the company’s case had it gone to trial,” in the words of the *Times* report.

This report sheds light on what was taking place behind the scenes, as the #MeToo hysteria exploded in the media. Levine, who has never publicly discussed his sexuality, apparently decided to fight back energetically against the witchhunt, centering on charges that he had sexually abused “vulnerable artists in the early stages of their careers.” According to the report, the conductor was “eager to question witnesses

and ask the Met lawyers about other sexual improprieties over the years and the degree to which they had been tolerated.”

In other words, Levine, whose sexual proclivities were not exactly a secret within the company, was intent on exposing the hypocrisy of Met management: how it sought to curry favor with fanatical supporters of #MeToo, while also using the opportunity to rid itself of the highly paid conductor, who had suffered serious bouts of ill health in recent years.

Levine, while bound by the confidentiality clause of the settlement, has, like Domingo, also insisted that he never assaulted or harassed anyone. For his entire career at the Met, he was known as someone whose orchestra worshipped him, as well as a collaborator without peer among singers. He transformed the opera orchestra into one of the most acclaimed ensembles in the world. According to the latest report, he is planning, at the age of 77, to resume his career, and has an engagement scheduled for next January in Florence, Italy.

The news reports on both Domingo and Levine indirectly call attention to the fact that the #MeToo campaign, as the WSWS has recently pointed out, has rather suddenly disappeared from the mainstream media. This has much to do with the campaign of Joe Biden for the presidency. It should also be noted that there is growing uneasiness and even anger within the population, as the significance of the attacks on due process and other basic democratic rights begins to sink in.

The WSWS has insisted from the very beginning of the latest sexual witchhunt that it shared much in common with earlier outbursts of puritanism and attempts to whip up public sentiment against perceived misconduct. This was almost always closely connected with political reaction.

Through much of the 20th century in the US, this sort of hysteria went hand in hand with right-wing anticommunism. Charlie Chaplin was perhaps the most famous but by no means the only example of those victimized by the morality police. It is not accidental that Senator Joseph McCarthy devoted a large portion of his anticommunist crusade in the mid-20th century to the alleged danger of homosexuals in government, giving rise to the so-called Lavender Scare, part of the Red Scare of that period.

Today the political motives are slightly different but no less significant, even if they are often hidden behind the cloak of opposition to sexual harassment. The politics of the individual victims are not the main issue. Identity politics has been weaponized for broader political purposes. It has been used to advance the careers of thin layers of the upper middle class, but also and most importantly as a means of diverting attention from the burning political issues of inequality and the growing dangers of war and dictatorship.

Racial and gender divisions have been stoked in order to build up a middle-class constituency for the Democratic Party, while democratic rights have been tossed aside and the groundwork has been laid for authoritarianism and war. Countless figures like Domingo and Levine have fallen victim, their sexual peccadilloes detailed in the media, collateral damage in this campaign. A blacklist as ruthless as that of the McCarthy period in Hollywood has been used to end careers that have lasted 50 years or more. One can only wonder why the name of Leonard Bernstein, who died almost exactly 30 years ago, has not yet been invoked by the witchhunters of today.

The fundamental political and ideological motives behind the frenzy that has been whipped up against “sexual misconduct” have little to do with what is offered up for public consumption. The hysteria has been regulated and manipulated for definite political motives, in direct response to the growing social, political and economic crisis. Its ultimate aim is to derail and confuse the emerging mass movement of the working class.



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