

Opera star Anna Netrebko files grievance against the Metropolitan Opera

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Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, one of the world's most renowned opera singers, has reportedly filed a grievance against the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The Met Opera, under General Manager Peter Gelb, moved to ban Netrebko in early March following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, claiming she had not done enough to disassociate herself from the Putin regime.

Aside from the crass hypocrisy of the action (the Met has never responded in like manner to any of the bloody, neo-colonial wars prosecuted by the US over the past 30 years), the exclusion of Netrebko sets a sinister precedent. One of America's leading arts institutions has established the principle that it will enforce whatever the government's foreign policy requires, that it is entirely at the disposal of the White House and the Pentagon.

The various claims made by Gelb and the Met Opera as to Netrebko's supposedly close relationship with Putin are a smokescreen, intended to disguise the fact that it is *the Met* that is pursuing a thoroughly reactionary, anti-democratic course of action, joining in the chauvinist, warmongering anti-Russian campaign. The notion that the American arts and entertainment world would "never again" succumb to McCarthyite witch-hunting, as it did wholeheartedly in the 1940s and 1950s, has been disproven at almost the first opportunity.

Netrebko's grievance involves the circumstances of her banning by the Met. She recently asserted, in an interview with *Le Monde*, the French daily paper, that in a conversation with Gelb, she consented to withdraw from a production of Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* this season, but that the Met's general manager added Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlo* in the 2022-2023 season "unilaterally."

According to the *Times*, with the assistance of the

American Guild of Musical Artists, the union representing opera singers, Netrebko "filed a labor grievance against the Met. She is expected to seek more than \$350,000 in compensation."

In regard to Putin and the Ukraine war, Netrebko told *Le Monde*, "The Met was the first to insist that I clarify my position. ... Which I did. But I was also asked to declare myself against Vladimir Putin. I replied that I had a Russian passport, that he was still the president and that I could not say these words publicly. So I refused."

Netrebko added that she and Gelb agreed to terms, but that she was shocked when he suggested in the *New York Times* that she would never return to the Metropolitan Opera.

Gelb, in an interview posted June 30 by VAN magazine, the online weekly devoted to classical music, made a number of revealing comments. Revealing not only in regard to the Met Opera hierarchy and its attitudes, but about the American upper middle class as a whole and its endorsement of the US-NATO proxy war.

When asked if America was at war with Russia, Gelb replied, remarkably, "The Met is, and indirectly, the US is, obviously. We may not say we're at war with them, but we are at war with them." The Met's general manager went on to claim that the Russian invasion was "an action to annihilate a civilization, the whole people of Ukraine. What Putin is determined to do is unlike anything that has ever happened before to my knowledge or experience."

Without in any fashion minimizing the reactionary character of the Russian government's operation in Ukraine, to suggest that the latter is "unlike anything that has ever happened before" is preposterous. Nazi Germany's barbaric war against the USSR, aided by

sections of Ukrainian nationalists, resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of Soviet citizens.

In more recent times, the US government and military's murderous sanctions against and subsequent invasion, mass bombings, occupation and general destruction of Iraq have led to more than a million deaths and the reduction of much of the country to rubble. As the WSWS aptly argued, the Bush administration pursued a policy of "sociocide" in relation to Iraq. The devastation of Afghanistan, Libya and Syria are further monumental crimes. Where was Gelb looking at the time all this was going on?

Based on the supposedly unprecedented character of the Putin regime's actions in Ukraine, Gelb continued, "It seemed to me there was no way that we could do business with Russia." Or with Anna Netrebko. Because, the Met general manager told VAN, "Netrebko is a close personal ally of Putin, both in deed and in mindset—which I know from personal experience, having spoken to her and known her for many, many years—what I was willing to tolerate seemed no longer tolerable." The self-righteous smugness is worth noting.

The *Times* noted in late June that outside the US, Anna Netrebko's "comeback is gaining momentum. Several European institutions that had sought distance from her have recently announced plans to engage her, some as soon as next year." In late May, the newspaper commented, "she sang recitals before enthusiastic crowds in Paris and Milan, where her concert at Teatro alla Scala sold out. Italian news outlets declared it a 'triumph,' writing, 'Anna Netrebko retakes La Scala: flowers and applause after her break for the war.'"

OperaWire reports that the Russian soprano "will return to the Berlin State Opera" in 2023. Company General Director Matthias Schulz explained, following a 40-minute video call with Netrebko, that he "really could see that she suffers under this situation." Schulz added that he didn't think "it was appropriate to ask her to distance herself further from Putin, given the risks she might face as a Russian citizen."

These developments are a blow to the efforts to destroy Netrebko's career in the interests of the US-NATO proxy war. Various factors are probably at work. Nervousness in certain European capitals over the "never-ending" character of the Ukraine conflict. There may as well be growing resistance on more

principled grounds, opposition to the blacklisting of artists. Commercial calculations probably come in somewhere too: Netrebko has a huge following, and the Met's loss may be other opera companies' gain.

Peter Gelb's wife, Ukrainian-Canadian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson, was scheduled to conduct performances of Puccini's *Tosca* featuring Netrebko at the Teatro Colón, the main opera house in Buenos Aires, in November. Wilson has bowed out. The Russian singer will apparently go ahead with her appearance.



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