

Russian soprano Anna Netrebko to make first US appearance in six years

Palm Beach Opera announces an engagement for next February

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World-famous Russian soprano Anna Netrebko will be making her first singing appearance in the United States in six years when she appears next February at a gala benefit for the Palm Beach Opera in Florida.

The engagement was announced several weeks ago. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Netrebko has faced blacklisting in the US, a vendetta spearheaded by the New York Metropolitan Opera under its general manager Peter Gelb. Before that, she was prevented from appearing because of the COVID pandemic.

Even though Netrebko denounced the invasion, lost all engagements in Russia and has not been back to the country since 2022, Gelb, who is married to Ukrainian-Canadian conductor Kerry-Anne Wilson, has demanded that she denounce Vladimir Putin by name. He has also suggested that she had to apologize for her previous appearances alongside the Russian leader.

The Met general manager called the Palm Beach engagement an “unfortunate decision,” labeling Netrebko’s actions a “disingenuous effort to distance herself from the war effort.” In fact, what Gelb is arrogantly demanding is that Netrebko take sides unreservedly with the imperialist proxy war against Russia.

When the Palm Beach Opera engagement was first announced about a month ago, that opera’s general director told the Associated Press, “Arts organizations should not be involved in politics. In our opinion our mission is to connect people to explore what’s universal in our humanity...” James Barbato added that Netrebko had spoken out against the war “at great personal cost.”

The Palm Beach Opera is a relatively small company,

but is located in a very wealthy part of Florida and undoubtedly has a big share of multimillionaires among its subscribers. The list of singers who have appeared at previous galas is a long and impressive one, including Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, Bryn Terfel and Renee Fleming, and, among a younger group of operatic stars, Piotr Beczala, Isabel Leonard and Nadine Sierra, these last three making their appearances in the last three years. Netrebko, clearly looking forward to making her long-awaited return to the US, said at the time the date was announced, “It means a lot to me to be joining the remarkable list of illustrious singers that have participated in this celebration over the last decades.”

Despite the US boycott, Netrebko’s career has continued with few if any interruptions in Europe. As the WSWWS has previously pointed out, there is a certain history of greater resistance to political blacklisting on that continent. The soprano, who is 52 years old and whose peak performances will probably not last for more than another decade, has recently appeared at the Vienna State Opera, the Paris Opera, the Berlin Staatsoper under den Linden and the famous La Scala opera house in Milan. Her performances everywhere have been acclaimed by critics and audiences alike.

Netrebko recently appeared at a concert in Linz, Austria, which went ahead despite calls for its cancellation. The Ukrainian ambassador to Austria said that Netrebko’s appearance would be a “slap in the face of all Ukrainians who have become victims of Russian aggression” and noted that “a boycott of Anna Netrebko would be a just response from the free world to Russian aggression.”

The organizer of the concert, while condemning

“Russian aggression,” said,

There will undoubtedly be five top-class singers on stage—from different backgrounds and with different personal stories. These artists were hired because of their extraordinary abilities as singers, not because of their (political) orientation. Together they form a musical unity that will hopefully touch many people. Suspending the planned concert would silence this power of music.

The concert, a celebration of Italian operatic master Giacomo Puccini, went ahead as scheduled on August 23.

Meanwhile, in another development, Netrebko’s lawsuit against the Metropolitan Opera, filed one year ago, was significantly narrowed in scope by a ruling issued by US District Judge Analisa Nadine Torres. The judge dismissed the soprano’s claims of defamation, breach of contract, and discrimination based on nationality. However, she did rule that Netrebko’s “claim of gender discrimination crosses the line from merely possible to plausible.”

Judge Torres referred to Netrebko’s allegations that other Russian singers, including Ildar Abdrazakov, Evgeny Nikitin and Alexey Markov, had not been dismissed by the Met. Netrebko claims, as reported by the OperaWire website, that “she was specifically targeted as a woman because the Met wanted to make an example out of its ‘reigning prima donna’” to most visibly show its commitment to Ukraine.

In reaction to the ruling, the Met issued a statement saying it was pleased that three of the four claims were completely dismissed. Netrebko’s manager, Miguel Esteban, declared,

It is normal for a court to narrow the issues during litigation, but the court recognizes that the facts as alleged show that the Met wronged Anna Netrebko and that there is an important case before it. Anna Netrebko remains fully committed to pursuing this complaint, to vindicating her rights, to restoring her

reputation and to demonstrating that the Metropolitan Opera and Peter Gelb treated her unlawfully.

Netrebko has already won one legal battle against the Met. Last year an arbitrator ruled that the company owed her more than \$200,000 for 13 canceled performances, including in Verdi’s *Don Carlo* and *La Forza del Destino*, as well as in Giordano’s *Andrea Chenier*.

The WWSWS exposed the real character of the Met Opera’s punishment of Anna Netrebko more than two years ago. We stated:

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.

Gelb needs no prompting from the warmongers in Washington. He said recently that Netrebko was barred from the Met, unless and until she returned to give a benefit concert for the Ukraine war effort! In response, Netrebko’s manager declared that the soprano would be glad to return to the Met, but only after Peter Gelb has departed his post.



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