British MPs and Ukrainian backers of proxy war urge Royal Opera House to cancel engagements

Russian soprano Anna Netrebko facing continued blacklisting threat

Fred Mazelis
15 August 2025

In a continuation of the ongoing campaign to blacklist the Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, a group of British MPs, both Tory and Labour, has joined with more than 50 Ukrainian writers and artists who support the proxy war against Russia, sending a letter to the *Guardian* newspaper urging the Royal Ballet and Opera to cancel Netrebko's forthcoming appearances at the Royal Opera House. Other signers of the letter include Bernard-Henri Lévy, the right-wing French writer and "public intellectual."

The attempt to ostracize Netrebko and to sabotage her singing career began immediately after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Netrebko criticized the reactionary invasion, issuing two statements within a week. She expressed sorrow over the suffering caused by the war, and called for its end.

For Peter Gelb, the managing director of New York's Metropolitan Opera, this was not enough. He pointed to her past association with Vladimir Putin and arrogantly demanded that she denounce Putin by name. He fired the soprano immediately, and she has appeared only once in the United States since then, with the small but well-regarded Palm Beach Opera in Florida last winter. She has also not been back to Russia since that time.

Netrebko is past 50 but still at the peak of her vocal powers. She has been able to continue her career thanks to many engagements in Europe, including at the main opera houses in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and Milan. She has been engaged by the Zurich Opera for the coming season and is scheduled to appear in London in Puccini's *Tosca* next month, as well as the Italian composer's final work, *Turandot*, several months later.

It is these London appearances which now hang in the balance. The letter labels Netrebko, who is now a citizen of Austria and has not set foot in Russia in the past 3 and ½ years, "a longtime symbol of cultural propaganda for a regime that is responsible for serious war crimes." The many war crimes of the United States and other imperialist powers are of course not mentioned.

The *Guardian*, which has strenuously supported the longstanding warmongering campaign against Russia as well as the ensuing proxy war in Ukraine, eagerly highlights the call to cancel Netrebko's appearances and adds its own sinister features. For instance, the report includes a 17-year-old photo of Netrebko next to Putin. A second photo shows Putin, Netrebko and several other figures, including musical luminaries, at an opera gala at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg—from 12 years ago. This is meant to prove that Netrebko is Putin's supporter and a "symbol" of war crimes.

In fact, it should be noted that over two years ago an arbitrator awarded Netrebko more than $200,000 for breach of contract at the Met. At that time, referring to the past history of Netrebko and Putin, he stated, "there is no doubt that [Netrebko] was a Putin supporter, as she had a right to be."

Gelb of the Met Opera has been in the forefront of the campaign of defamation and blacklisting of Netrebko. His vendetta against the soprano is of course connected to the bipartisan US support for the proxy war in Ukraine, which began after years of provocations, especially the 2014 coup that overthrew the elected pro-

© World Socialist Web Site

Moscow government in Kiev.

Gelb's particular venom against Netrebko, however, is also linked to the political activity and musical career of his wife. Keri-Lynn Wilson is a Ukrainian-Canadian conductor who formed a new symphonic ensemble immediately after the 2022 invasion, calling it the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra. The performances of this orchestra have at least as much political as musical content. The Orchestra explains, on its website, that it is "a collaboration between the Metropolitan Opera, the Polish National Opera and the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture." The ensemble even boasts that its "honorary patron" is "Ukraine's First Lady, Olena Zelenska." Through his wife, Mr. Gelb has turned the Metropolitan Opera into a virtual subsidiary of the Ukrainian regime and its war effort.

It is clear that Gelb and his supporters will be satisfied only if Netrebko lends her voice and worldwide fame to the proxy war, changing her position of opposition to the war to one of full-throated support for the alliance of the Ukrainian regime with imperialism.

The treatment of Anna Netrebko calls to mind the cases of world-famous filmmakers Roman Polanski and Woody Allen, who have both been blacklisted in the US. In their different ways, all of these artists have run afoul of what the capitalist ruling elite has decreed as permissible behavior.

In a related development concerning the blacklisting of the Russian soprano, Netrebko's lawyer this week filed a supplemental complaint in her ongoing lawsuit against the Met Opera and Peter Gelb. The suit was originally filed two years ago, and charged discrimination, defamation and breach of contract.

The lawsuit has slowly proceeded in US federal court, slowed down by various procedural motions and revised complaints. The judge hearing the case, Analisa Torres, narrowed its grounds in a ruling last year, but has recently reinstated certain causes of action. In the latest development, Netrebko's lawyer, Julie Ulmet, as reported on the OperaWire website, sent a letter to the judge stating that Netrebko "seeks the Court's leave to file a supplemental complaint in order to defend herself from their [Peter Gelb] ongoing attacks and harassment."

This is apparently a reference to allegations made by Gelb that Netrebko had "certain conversations with the Kremlin." Ulmet described this as "a brand new assertion which Gelb is alleged to have recently fabricated."

The soprano's manager, Miguel Esteban, issued his own statement indicating the obsessive nature of Gelb's campaign to harm Netrebko's career and even her safety. His statement referred to Netrebko's "request to file a supplemental complaint raising new allegations of defamation by defendant Peter Gelb made during a recent media blitz in Ukraine and Austria. The draft complaint demonstrated why the defamatory statements were retaliatory in nature, posed a threat to Anna Netrebko's safety, and served to dissuade other employees of the Metropolitan Opera from acting against the institution."

A trial date has not yet been set in the lawsuit. There have also been no further announcements of appearances by Anna Netrebko in the United States.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site