



MEDIA RELEASE

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Opera Australia axings a disgrace, says union

Opera Australia is acting unconscionably by axing a quarter of its workforce with no consultation, says the union representing musicians, performers and technical and stage crew.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance is aware that 25% of the permanent workforce at OA will be made redundant. This comes after several days of the company's management refusing to provide any details to employees about possible cuts.

The director of MEAA's Musicians section, Paul Davies, who is representing all union members at OA, said it was understood the cuts would be made to every department of the company, including musicians, chorus performers and technical and staging crew.

He said the workers who would lose their jobs had been targeted by management with no prospect of redeployment or voluntary redundancies.

The decision has been made before any recommendations could have been made by the newly appointed Creative Economy Taskforce which may result in renewed funding for Opera Australia.

Mr Davies said Arts Minister Paul Fletcher should intervene to save jobs by providing additional support to Opera Australia.

"This is a terrible decision by Opera Australia's management and its board," Mr Davies said.

"These workers have been loyal employees of OA for many years and have already taken a temporary pay cut to help the company through the crisis caused by COVID-19.

"Now, at the worst possible time, their loyalty has been repaid with a brutal round of forced redundancies and they find themselves unemployed in the middle of the worst recession since the Second World War.

"Management has shown complete contempt for its workforce, engaging in a sham consultation process and deliberately targeting individual musicians to be sacked.

"This disgraceful behaviour was on show last week when at one presentation given to OA staff, chaired by artistic director Lyndon Teraccini, employees were not permitted to ask questions or comment.

"Questions directed to OA management by the MEAA have not been answered and OA is refusing to consult directly with the union in defiance of the wishes of the majority of staff from all sections of the company.

"The result of all this will be that OA will be diminished in size, its capacity to deliver quality productions and in credibility.

"That this comes in in the middle of a pandemic when the company is in receipt of JobKeeper subsidies that have only yesterday been extended until March 2021 makes it even more unconscionable.

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“Arts Minister Paul Fletcher must act urgently to fast track financial relief to Opera Australia to save jobs and the company’s reputation in the arts community.”

Mr Davies said management had ignored offers by union members to negotiate an agreement over wages and conditions to deal with the difficulties faced by OA.

He said the company was also receiving JobKeeper funding which is intended to keep people employed.

“We urge management to respect its employees resolution to negotiate collectively for a viable and credible solution to the current crisis, to put its artists and skilled workforce at the centre of decision making, and to follow the example set by other major companies such as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, where new arrangements have been struck that balance financial viability with the retention of its most valuable assets, its people.”

Mr Davies said MEAA would provide support and assistance to its members throughout the redundancy process.

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