

Placido Domingo resigns from LA Opera, as #MeToo campaign continues

By Fred Mazelis
4 October 2019

As the ongoing attack on famed opera star Placido Domingo continued, the multi-talented 78-year-old announced that he is resigning from the Los Angeles Opera, the company that he helped found and that he has led for the last 16 years. Domingo is not only among the most famous, but also without question the most versatile and durable operatic performer of the past century. He began as a tenor, transitioned to baritone roles later in his career, is also a well-known conductor, and has been the leader of both the LA and Washington Operas.

The MeToo-style campaign against Domingo surfaced in August in an Associated Press article detailing claims that he had sexually harassed numerous opera singers over the years. A total of 20 accusers were mentioned, but only two were named. The charges were generally vague and fell far short of anything like sexual assault or victimization. Domingo was accused of inappropriate displays of affection, such as “unwanted touching, persistent requests for private get-togethers and late night phone calls,” according to the AP.

The LA Opera announced it would investigate the charges, but without further ado several major engagements in the US were canceled, including dates with the San Francisco Opera, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Dallas Opera. The Metropolitan Opera in New York City, where Domingo was scheduled to perform in a run of Verdi’s *Macbeth* opening on September 25, at first said it would await the outcome of the investigation, but capitulated in the face of the ongoing campaign. Last week Domingo announced that he was withdrawing from *Macbeth* and all future performances at the company, where he debuted more than 51 years ago.

After the announcement of his departure from Los

Angeles, Domingo issued a dignified statement to the *New York Times*: “I hold Los Angeles Opera very dearly to my heart and count my work to create and build it as among my most important legacies. However, recent accusations that have been made against me in the press have created an atmosphere in which my ability to serve this company that I so love has been compromised.”

“While I will continue to work to clear my name,” he added, “I have decided that it is in the best interests of LA Opera for me to resign as its general director and withdraw from my future scheduled performances at this time.”

In the course of his extraordinary and unprecedented career, Domingo has appeared in more than 4,000 performances around the world. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as a 27-year-old tenor alongside the legendary Italian soprano Renata Tebaldi. Domingo has also conducted more than 500 performances. After more than 40 years as a tenor, he undertook baritone roles beginning in 2009 and sang successfully as a baritone not merely occasionally, but regularly and to wide acclaim over the next decade, even as he nears the age of 80. This is an unprecedented achievement.

The list of artists he has worked with stretches from cellist Pablo Casals, well over half a century ago, to soprano Joan Sutherland, and all the major operatic conductors and singers up to the present day. Domingo became even more world-famous as one of The Three Tenors, which he formed in 1990 alongside the late Luciano Pavarotti and Jose Carreras. The world of opera was also brought to wider audiences through a number of successful films in which he was featured, including *Carmen*, *La Traviata* and *Otello*.

With the withdrawals and cancellations of the past

several weeks, Domingo has no further appearances scheduled in the US. Barring a sudden shift, his American career may be at an end. This is the equivalent of blacklisting, a punishment without any criminal act, and an enormous loss for those who love live performance of opera in North America.

For the present, however, there have been no cancellations of Domingo's appearances at all in Europe. In fact, after the account of the allegations and Domingo's denial of harassment, the singer received a standing ovation when he performed in the Austrian city of Salzburg. Domingo's calendar for the next year includes performances in Zurich, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Cologne, Madrid, Valencia, Milan's La Scala and London. He will sing *Nabucco*, *Macbeth*, *La Traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo*, five of Verdi's masterpieces, in which Domingo has invented his second career, as a baritone.

While the neo-Victorian witch-hunting associated with the MeToo campaign continues, and is particularly virulent in the US, Domingo is not without his defenders. Last week, Spanish tenor Jose Carreras stated in a press interview that in all the decades he has known him, "I have never seen Domingo act in an incorrect way." Other well-known figures who have come to Domingo's defense include soprano Anna Netrebko, with whom he had been scheduled to perform *Macbeth* in the current New York production, as well as retired mezzo-soprano Teresa Berganza and current opera stars Sonya Yoncheva and Javier Camarena.

As the WSWs declared previously, even if the charges against Domingo are true, they do not rise to anywhere near the level that would warrant the media campaign to destroy his career and tarnish his legacy. The LA Opera said that its investigation of the charges would continue, but it is extremely unlikely that anything will surface that remotely justifies the sensational coverage and attacks on him. The "womanizing" that is alleged is being turned into a crime in the service of the most reactionary aims.

The charges are all the more dubious because Domingo is beloved by audiences and musicians everywhere. He is well-known for his unselfishness, his collegiality and his ability to encourage his colleagues to perform at their very best. Domingo is known for his warmth expressed toward staff on every level.

The two related elements of the current hysteria over sexual harassment and "inappropriate" behavior bear repeating: Sections of the upper middle class, disoriented by economic insecurity, rising class tensions and the explosive political crisis, are losing their heads, so to speak. Their disorientation is encouraged by the professional promoters of such "movements" as MeToo, which is being used to scapegoat figures like Placido Domingo and divert attention from the fundamental issues in cultural life and society as a whole.

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