

Dear Fellow Members!

Hereby I would like to present the background of the current conflict, based on the events, happened within the ballet ensemble.

A virgin stray, accidentally finding themselves on the 3rd floor might feel like the tristful Sir John (Johnny Maize) finally embracing his love Iluska tight, in the Land of the Fairies, after the longest rambling ever.

By all means, the Unions thought - considering all the information and experiences they got - that this wonderland could still do with a bit of refurbishment and repair here and there, so that the Hungarian National Ballet's present might become much more humane, and therefore an example for the future's generations to follow.

Therefore, with the active participation of the Opera's HR leader and legal adviser, we have held keen, extensive negotiations laced with debates even, so Tamás and us could finalise all of the terms and conditions so that this imaginary wonderland on the 3rd floor could become reality.

It was a great pleasure for me, that this meeting at the ballet director's office, on a nice spring day was closed in full harmony and mutual understanding, with great satisfaction of everyone, waving the virtual palm branch. At the signing of the Collateral Agreement, even the Prime Minister's favourite General Manager could feel relieved and noted, that the terms regarding the ballet artists turned out just fine, and brought us the end of a cold war lasting for a decade. We found out soon enough that the satisfaction presented by the "above" was only a show of deception.

In the autumn, Tamás unexpectedly reported, that nearly hundred members of the ensemble voluntarily and without any pressure, suddenly became aware just within a few hours, that with the explanation of the rules of rehearsing in rooms, stated in the Act of Performing Arts (Act XCIX of 2008, on the support and special employment rules of performing arts organizations, Further ACT XCIX.) Oszkár and I – the two handful union rascals – showed a disfigured picture of the ballet ensemble to the leaders of the Opera, with bad intensions. (One shift of non- stage rehearsal takes maximum of 3 hours for each member of the ensemble, in case of a dress rehearsal it is the duration time of the entire show.)

The ballet director - who is a naïve debutante, barely knowing the ballet ensemble - without questions, accepted this explanation. So he accepted all the claims of the Unions, based on their readings. (The infallible General Manager also fall victim to our malicious intrigues and moves – so as he commented). So using the inexperienced leadership's innocence, the agreement was hard on the ensemble, and manifested an even worse Collateral Agreement at the end.

As result of our "criminal activities", in the past four and half month following the signing of the Collateral Agreement, the outcry of the ensemble caused such epic waves, that nearly hundred

members of the 3rd floor grabbed their keyboards instantly, and demanded that the daily “slavery” shall happen as it was used to, before all this happened. Meaning, that the period of usual morning routine from the signing in, till late afternoon or evening signing out, including the practice that is not even a paid part of the shifts, should be accounted and paid as one full shift altogether. So that the plenty of performances (or gigs) could just go on without any mental resting and recovery.

The will of the ensemble was interpreted to me by Tamás, also been briefed about the ensemble who have risen as the sailors of the Bounty, and demanded resolution (as for the earnest General Manager). As a result, we signed the suspicious agreement in September with good intentions - those turned out to be invalid, therefore annulled for many reasons on many levels.

I deeply regret this action after learning the facts and experiencing the events further on, I felt like the dog who just lost his tail. I am still in agony because of my wrong decision ever since, I am in agony because an artist whom I adored and respected, who's words I've never questioned, desecrated my trust, or so to say : betrayed me.

You may ask :Why?

Because Tamás forgot to open the box of truth for nearly 40 members of the ensemble at the meeting in November, that took place despite of the malicious movements to avoid it.

Because few or rather many of those emails mentioned before, were written only after smoothly forced by the employer, having group meetings and suggestions with Tamás, even been helped out with exact wording and drafting if needed. On those September days, smart psycho terror loaded the 3rd floor, so is understandable that those self-destructive emails caused by existential fear been sent abruptly. Than these emails could be used as evidence to annul the one rehearsal – one shift condition of Act XCIX. The objective of this was nothing less but to re-legitimate the endlessly unlawful and cruel practice to hurt the many artists involved. By the way, it was easy as Sunday morning, to catch the General Manager speaking of the “riot”... On the meeting held with only the ballet ensemble and no leaders, we found out that there was nothing even close to the so-called riot or any kind of revolution. There is hardly anyone on 3rd floor who even dares to express an opinion.

It is stated in Act XCIX, that members of the ballet ensemble can be obligated to work a maximum of 33,5 shifts a month, signing up fully voluntarily; instead of the 28 shifts that are mandatory a month.

There is no clue, when will the 2 hours a day practice time, outside the work environment counting as working hours will be provided. Probably never.

No one who dares to take upon their rights can count on having equal opportunities. The dancers claiming their rights can face serious consequences. They get no parts. If you have your own will, you can go and find employment with McDonalds. More than this, those who have fixed term contracts cannot hope for an extension or new contract at all. So that is why they just keep quiet and obey - that can look like as an obvious proof of consent; from the point of the employer. The only acceptable or rather expected behaviour is obeying, nodding without questions.

There were openly condemning, humiliating and untruthful comments about the Unions and their elected officials, by the so called “top leaders” of the Opera house, starting with the General Manager, despite the fact that the GM himself clearly declared the opposite, by signing the Collateral Agreement including the phrase: “The OPERA ACKNOWLEDGES, FAVOURS and SUPPORTS the Unions, in their work of representing and protecting the artists during their lawful employment due to the articles of Act XCIX of 2008”.

Other than this, the Ballet Director openly encourages everyone to discharge themselves from the Unions. Just because we spoke up against the unlawful, disgraceful treatment against the employees that wouldn't be possible in many famous ensembles, also we spoke up about the email storm that was designed to deceive and betray Oszkár and myself. Even more, we spoke up about the Collateral Agreement signed in April, that was meant to protect and support the entire ballet ensemble, created side by side and in full agreement with the Ballet Director – or so as we thought back then.

We found out very soon that neither the Ballet Director nor the General Manager are really into using and practicing the terms and conditions as were supposed to be. As Alexander, the Great once said: “It is wrong if man rule instead of the law, because man is ruled by the passions of the soul”.

In the Opera, it is practice to publish all official materials and brochures in English as well, except the Collateral Agreement that is available only in Hungarian. In addition, the incriminated agreement was only published online in English after November, to be available for the foreign members of the ensemble, who mainly speak this language. Therefore, the email storm back in September, written in English, rising against the ruling of the Collateral Agreement regarding the ballet ensemble, can be called the 8th wonder of the Universe.

I sadly realised that the Ballet Director is only willing to act under the strict control of the General Manager, always fulfilling his expectations. The fact that this can cost lives or that great, talented artist's careers can be ruined forever, hardly interests those who chant loudly how much they live and die for the Ybl-Palace.

I still full heartedly hope that my words will guide the leadership to meet their conscience. That they acknowledge and admit that the ruling of lawful employment should be kept and complied at all times, no matter what. Even in case, it goes against personal interests.

The moral of the law rules over all, the articles of law help many to stop these unbearable circumstances once and for all, to get reason and see sense instead of being cross with each other pointlessly, and rather go on with discussions based on merits, and gaining back the trust.

Budapest, 21st December, 2024

Balázs Péter Bárány