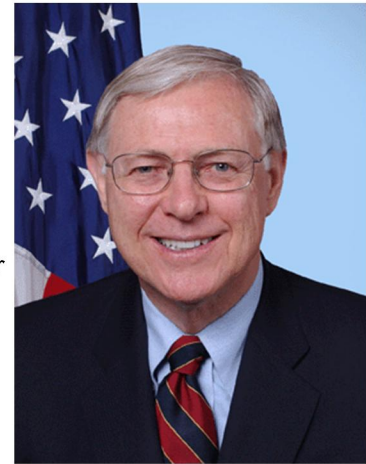


County wants to change pitch of opera festival
Composer's anti-Semitism at issue

By Troy Anderson
Staff Writer

Concerned about a citywide opera festival next year that will honor composer Richard Wagner, whose musical legacy has been tarnished by his anti-Semitic writings, county Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich is asking the Los Angeles Opera to broaden the event to feature other musicians.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote Tuesday on Antonovich's nonbinding motion.



Michael D. Antonovich

"To specifically honor and glorify the man whose music and racist anti-Semitic writings inspired Hitler and became the defacto soundtrack for the Holocaust in a countywide festival is an affront to those who have suffered or have been impacted by the horrors of Adolf Hitler's National Socialistic Worker Party," Antonovich wrote to LA Opera Chairman Marc Stern.

To provide balance at the 2010 Ring Festival, Antonovich called on LA Opera officials to re-evaluate and rearrange the festival's programming to eliminate the focus on Wagner and incorporate other composers such as Mozart, Puccini, Verdi, Schubert, Schumann, Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn and others.

In response, Plácido Domingo, the LA Opera's general director, said he and his colleagues believe the festival is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of the city's "world-class cultural offerings, centered on a genuine cultural milestone: the first complete Ring cycle ever presented in Los Angeles."

"Opera, and especially the Ring, invites exactly this sort of intensive analysis and discussion, and the festival will provide many different forums for gaining insights into the past and exploring moral issues," Domingo said in a prepared statement.

"The arts are important precisely because they offer so much more than entertainment, and have profound influences on politics and history, while reflecting the times in which they were created."

Domingo said he was proud the LA Opera recently presented operas by composers who were affected by the Nazi regime through the "Recovered Voices" project.

The Wagner festival, planned for April 15 to June 30, 2010, is expected to draw thousands of people from around the world to a variety of exhibitions, performances, symposiums and special events.

The centerpiece will be Wagner's epic four-opera cycle.

Some Jewish leaders argue it is possible to separate the artistry from the artist's beliefs and note the festival will hold seminars discussing Wagner's anti-Semitic ideas. But others have protested the festival, saying Wagner was one of the "architects of the Holocaust."

"(Holocaust survivors) associate the music with Adolf Hitler, who delivered heated speeches which were amplified over it," said Los Angeles-based opera critic Carie Delmar, the daughter of an opera singer who fled Nazi Germany. "Many victims of Nazi persecution still recall hearing Wagner's music when members of their families were hauled off to concentration camps, and even worse, gas chambers."