

EXHIBIT 27

Washington National Opera Is Leaving the Kennedy Center

The opera, which has performed at the arts center since 1971, was concerned about declines in attendance and donations during President Trump's second term.

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By Adam Nagourney

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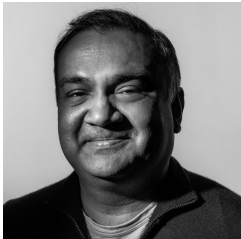
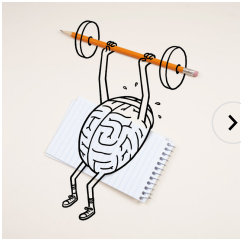
The Washington National Opera decided on Friday to move its performances out of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, abandoning the hall where it has played since 1971 in perhaps the largest artistic rebuke yet to President Trump's campaign to remake the Kennedy Center in his image.

The opera company is seeking to sever its ties with the Kennedy Center after a tumultuous year in which both groups have faced cancellations by artists, empty seats and the retrenchment of donors protesting Mr. Trump's intervention. Within weeks of beginning his second term, the president named himself chairman of the center and installed a political ally, Richard Grenell, as its executive director, while filling its board with supporters.

A resolution to leave was approved by the opera's board of trustees on Friday. The opera said in a statement that it would "seek an amicable early termination of its affiliation agreement with the Kennedy Center and resume operations as a fully independent nonprofit entity."

The resolution calls for the opera to move its performances out of the Kennedy Center's 2,364-seat Opera House as soon as possible and to reduce the number of performances as a cost-saving measure. Opera officials said that new sites in Washington have been lined up but that no leases have been signed. They declined to name those venues.

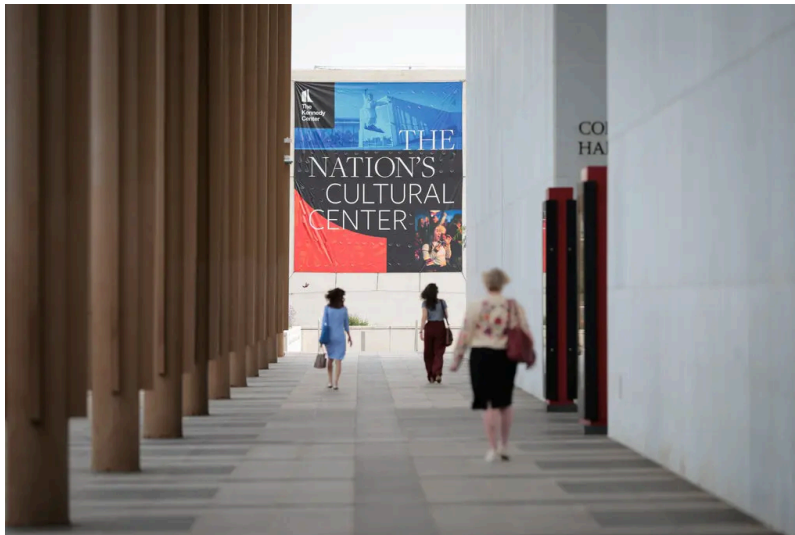
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The officials said details about the new schedule would be announced shortly. The Kennedy Center's website currently lists the opera's lineup of spring performances, including Scott Joplin's "Treemonisha" and "West Side Story" as well as its upcoming gala, but a separate website has been set up.

The resolution also calls for the opera to begin negotiations with the Kennedy Center about ending an affiliation agreement that has bound the cultural institutions since it was signed in 2011, when the opera was facing financial challenges.

The opera declined to release a copy of the resolution, which was approved by the 37-member board during a virtual meeting on Friday. But details of its contents were provided to The New York Times by officials involved in the deliberations.



Francesca Zambello, the opera's artistic director, said she was "deeply saddened to leave the Kennedy Center." Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images

Under Mr. Grenell, the Kennedy Center has been aggressive in trying to discredit artists who have canceled commitments with the center. But on Friday, Roma Daravi, a spokeswoman, said the center agreed that the time had come to end this relationship.

"After careful consideration, we have made the difficult decision to part ways with the W.N.O. due to a financially challenging relationship," she said. "We believe this represents the best path forward for both organizations and enables us to make responsible choices that support the financial stability and long-term future of the Trump Kennedy Center."

In a social media post that has since been deleted, Mr. Grenell said that ending the arrangement would give the Kennedy Center the flexibility to bring in operas from around the world. "Having an exclusive Opera was just not financially smart," he wrote. "And our patrons clearly wanted a refresh."

Opera leaders said the decision to leave was in response to a drop in attendance and a decline in donor contributions during the president's second term, as well as an escalating number of artists who have refused to appear at the Kennedy Center since Mr. Trump's name was added to the building last month. (The authority of the board to overrule Congress and rename the center, which was created in 1971 in tribute to John F. Kennedy, is disputed, and The Times has continued to refer to its legal name.)

"I am deeply saddened to leave the Kennedy Center," Francesca Zambello, who has been the opera's artistic director for 14 years, said in a statement. "I have been proud to be affiliated with a national monument to the human spirit, a place that has long served as an inviting home for our ever-growing family of artists and opera lovers."

In its statement, the opera appeared to take pains to be conciliatory, not naming Mr. Trump or Mr. Grenell.

"The board and management of the company wish the center well in its own future endeavors including recognizing the center for having secured significant funding, including \$275 million from Congress, for upgrades to the center," the statement said.

The affiliation agreement was first negotiated when Barack Obama was president, setting a framework for the organizations to work cooperatively in hiring the opera company's general director (currently Timothy O'Leary) and artistic director, as well as to make decisions on its programming. The Kennedy Center also leases space to the opera company for storage, offices and rehearsals.

Among the most difficult issues that need to be resolved is the future of the opera's \$30 million endowment, which has already become a matter of dispute. The opera contends that the affiliation agreement makes clear that both entities control the fund, the result of a history of donations from opera supporters in Washington.

Officials with the opera said they would move all performances out of the center, regardless of whether its formal ties are ended. They asserted that taking their shows to other venues would free the company of programming and personnel entanglements with the Kennedy Center.

Several artists, including Béla Fleck and Stephen Schwartz, have withdrawn from events at the Kennedy Center since President Trump's name was added to the facade. Nathan Howard/Reuters

The Washington National Opera was established in 1957, with an inaugural performance of Mozart's "The Abduction From the Seraglio" at George Washington University. With a few exceptions — it performed at Constitution Hall while its home on the Potomac was being renovated — it has been performing at the Kennedy Center since the building opened.

The opera has provided a stage to some of the most prominent performers of the generation, including Plácido Domingo (who also served as its artistic director), Anna Netrebko, Denyce Graves and Renée Fleming. It has staged warhorses like "Carmen" and a new production of the "Ring" cycle in 2016, which was directed by Ms. Zambello. It also created the American Opera Initiative to showcase young composers.

"The Washington National Opera is one of our most prominent companies," said Marc A. Scorca, the president emeritus of Opera America, a service organization for opera companies. "It has presented a mix of work from our inherited repertoire and new works from a wonderful young artists program."

Matthew Shilvock, the general director of the San Francisco Opera, said the Washington National Opera played "a vital role in expressing the national consciousness on the operatic stage."

Since early in his second term, Mr. Trump has sought to put his imprint on traditionally nonpartisan Washington institutions like the Smithsonian. His appointment of Mr. Grenell came with a clear message that the president wanted changes at the Kennedy Center.

“Ric shares my Vision for a GOLDEN AGE of American Arts and Culture, and will be overseeing the daily operations of the Center. NO MORE DRAG SHOWS, OR OTHER ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA,” the president said then in a social media post.

Before long, the center ordered the National Symphony Orchestra to open all concerts with the national anthem (Mr. Grenell took the baton and conducted one of them) and hired a dance director who had complained to Mr. Grenell about “radical leftist ideologies in ballet.”

The Washington National Opera performed “Come Home: A Celebration of Return,” inspired by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, at the Kennedy Center in 2021. Kenny Holston for The New York Times

Officials with the Washington National Opera noted that operas often advance strong political and moral points of views — whether they were written two centuries or two years ago — and that they were worried they would be blocked from performing operas that did not follow Mr. Grenell’s edicts. Among its programming this season is Robert Ward’s “The Crucible,” based on the Arthur Miller play that explored the waves of paranoia overtaking a small town during the Salem witch trials of the 17th century.

In addition, Mr. Grenell said he wanted all productions at the Kennedy Center to be revenue neutral, taking in as much money in ticket sales and contributions as they cost to mount. Operas are expensive to produce and are typically not revenue neutral.

The opera company, in its statement, said the Kennedy Center’s requirement that productions be fully funded in advance was “incompatible with opera operations.” Ticket sales, it said, cover between 30 percent and 60 percent of costs, with the rest coming from grants and donations.

Ms. Zambello publicly raised the possibility of leaving the Kennedy Center in an interview with The Guardian in November, saying that the Trump administration's policies had "shattered" the confidence of donors and resulted in a 40 percent drop in ticket revenues. "If we cannot raise enough money, or sell enough tickets in there, we have to consider other options," she said at the time.

After her remarks produced an uproar, Ms. Zambello and other leaders of the opera reaffirmed their intention to stay. But since then, she and other opera officials said, the situation has only grown worse.

Béla Fleck, the celebrated banjoist, recently announced he was pulling out of performances with the National Symphony Orchestra, and the "Wicked" composer Stephen Schwartz said he would not host the opera's gala. Both said that appearing at the Kennedy Center had become a political statement.

Adam Nagourney is the classical music and dance correspondent for The New York Times.

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