



FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

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FPA Town Hall
Deborah Voigt Introduces Peter Gelb
Thursday, May 31, 2012, 6:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
The Pierre Hotel, 2 East 61st Street at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY

Featuring:

Deborah Voigt

MS. DEBORAH VOIGT: Thank you very much. It is my great pleasure to be here today to introduce my friend and colleague and boss, the General Manager of The Metropolitan Opera, Peter Gelb. Thank you.

I have been singing at The Met since the early 1990's. Over the years I have portrayed and Ethiopian princess, a Trojan prophetess, a mythical empress without a shadow, a vengeful Irish princess, a jealous opera diva, a gun totting saloon owner and many other unforgettable roles. I have made some calculations, the character's I've portrayed have come to tragic ends on The Met stage precisely seventy-seven times. For dramatic sopranos most operas don't have happy endings. But, by far, the biggest challenge of my twenty year career at The Met, has been singing the role of Brunhilde, the Valkyrie goddess in The Met's groundbreaking new production of Wagner's Ring Cycle. Conceived by Peter and the director Robert Lepage.

Taking on this incredibly demanding role in a highly publicized new staging at The Metropolitan Opera has been daunting to say the least. But one of the main reasons I was able to stick it out despite the enormous hurdles and challenges that seemed to crop up at every turn was the support and encouragement of Peter Gelb.

Peter loves artists. I suppose this makes sense considering his great uncle was a legendary violinist, Jascha Heifetz, and his famous parents, Arthur and Barbara Gelb, who are with us tonight, wrote the definitive biography of Eugene O'Neill.

Peter has been surrounded by artists since childhood, including during his teenage stint as an usher at The Met. And the result has been that today he is our advocate, someone who can soothe frayed nerves, provide well-timed nuggets of encouragement, make astute career suggestions and even cajole some of us into getting onto the infamous Ring machine.

So it's fitting that Peter is being honored tonight for his extraordinary contribution to public diplomacy. I can tell you, managing the whims of opera divas, yours truly excepted of course, requires unparalleled diplomatic skills. Of course, that's only one aspect of Peter's job as the leader of the world's biggest arts organization.

Since taking over as General Manager in 2006 Peter has launched a series of bold initiatives to revitalize opera. Under Peter's watch, The Met has brought in the greatest contemporary stage directors. He has expanded the repertoire with new works and by introducing neglected masterpieces. He has made The Met more accessible by showing the season opening gala on giant screens in Times Square and launching a wildly successful rush tickets program.

He has reconnected The Met to the modern visual art world with a new in house gallery and art banners on the façade of The Met. He has forged collaborations with Julliard, Lincoln Center Theater, The Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum. He has even created a twenty-four hour Metropolitan Opera radio and a Met contact app for the iPad. But perhaps, the most pioneering and successful of Peter's new initiatives has been The Met, Live in HD, the company's series live performance transmissions to movie theaters around the world.

When it launched in 2006 it was a bold experiment. Today, more than three million tickets per season are sold to The Met's Live in HD presentations which are now seen in fifty-four countries on six continents, we're still waiting to secure Antarctica. The Met's live HD transmissions have become a staple of operatic joy for audiences from Brooklyn to Moscow.

As a frequent host of these broadcasts I am often approached in cities all over the world by audience members who have thrilled to live performances from The Met. In short, The Met, under Peter Gelb's leadership, has changed the face of opera. Now, it is my distinct pleasure to introduce grand opera's agent for change, Peter Gelb.