

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP LIMITED

MINUTES of the MEETING of the BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
held at 3 Soho Square, London, W.1, at 2.0 p.m.  
on Monday, January 28th, 1957.

PRESENT

President: Lord Harewood

Directors: Mr. J. H. Lawrie (in the Chair)  
Mr. Isador Caplan  
Mr. Anthony Gishford  
Sir Arthur Jarratt (part time)  
Lord Horder  
Mr. Erwin Stein  
Mr. Derek Young

Artistic Director: Mr. Benjamin Britten

Assessor to the Arts Council: Mr. John Denison

In attendance: Mr. Basil Douglas  
Mr. Leslie Periton  
Mr. Harold Wallis  
Miss Maureen Garnham  
Mr. Stephen Reiss

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on November 13th, 1956, were approved and signed.

2. MR. STEPHEN REISS

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Stephen Reiss, the Hon. Secretary of the Aldeburgh Festival, and during the meeting Mr. Reiss accepted the Chairman's invitation to join the Board of Directors, and it was accordingly resolved that Mr. Reiss be appointed a director of the Company.

3. FUTURE POLICY

The Chairman made a statement about the various problems which were facing the Group at the moment. In his opinion the future policy of the Group should be based on the following considerations:--

- (a) Since the last meeting, three members had expressed a willingness to resign from the Company. These were the General Electric Co. Ltd., who had paid the Company £1,000, the amount of its membership guarantee; Messrs. N. M. Rothschild & Son, who had made a permanent interest-free loan of £1,000; and the English Electric Co. Ltd., who were prepared to pay the Company £1,000, but required a suitable indemnity from the directors in respect of their liability for the twelve months following the date of their resignation.
- (b) The Chairman had been in touch with Mr. Allen Sanderson, the English representative of the Gulbenkian Trust, and had received a promise by telephone that morning, subject to confirmation from the Lisbon headquarters of the Trust, of an immediate grant of £4,000 for the purpose of paying the Group's debts as at December 31st, 1956.
- (c) The Chairman had also informed Mr. Sanderson of the scheme to promote a new company of young artists in collaboration with the Ballet Rambert, which should begin its activities in November 1957; negotiations were pending for the lease of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith,

for an experimental period of three months. Mr. Sanderson had indicated that a project of this kind was one that was likely to appeal strongly to the Gulbenkian Trustees, and although an application for an annual grant to the Opera Group would be sympathetically considered, they might view the new scheme with even more favour.

- (d) At a meeting with the Chairman and the General Manager, Mr. Denison had indicated that a sum of approximately £5,000 was being set aside in the Arts Council's estimates for 1957/58 which could be allocated either to the Opera Group (provided their programme of activities in this country for 1957 justified it) or as a contribution to the proposed collaboration with the Ballet Rambert.
- (e) It was the Arts Council's view that the Group's overhead costs were too heavy at present in relation to the number of their engagements in this country.

The Chairman then invited a discussion based on these points, in the course of which the following suggestions were made:-

- (1) That the Opera Group should abandon its activities of exploiting operas and concentrate in future on creating new ones; this could be done by retiring the English Opera Group to Aldeburgh, where it could work in conjunction with, or as part of, the Aldeburgh Festival. As new operas became available, they could be given their first performances at the Aldeburgh Festival, and possibly at other festivals where the expenses could be fully guaranteed.
- (2) That a new Company should be formed for the purpose of implementing the proposed joint venture with the Ballet Rambert, whose Board would include representatives of the English Opera Group and the Ballet Rambert. Mr. Britten felt sure that the Artistic Directors of the Group would give all possible help to the new Company, but in the capacity of Artistic Advisers rather than Directors.
- (3) That in the event of the Group retiring to Aldeburgh, the Board might wish the Company to be reconstituted, in view of the difficulty of exercising the necessary control from London.
- (4) That any change-over should be effected by stages, i.e. that the Group's financial position should be consolidated before proceeding either (a) to transfer to Aldeburgh, or (b) to remain in London, or (c) to form the new Company. In this connection it was pointed out that the Group could maintain its present organisation and fulfil its commitments for the current year without any grant from the Arts Council, provided that the £4,000 grant was received from the Gulbenkian Trust.
- (5) That the Arts Council should be encouraged to allocate its £5,000 grant for 1957/58 to the new venture, on the assumption that the Group could continue for the current year without further subsidy.

After further discussion, it was agreed in principle:-

- (a) To prepare to transfer the Group to Aldeburgh, in a reconstituted form, at the end of 1957.
- (b) To open negotiations with the Gulbenkian Trust for an annual grant, either to the Group or to the new Company.

4. INDEMNITY TO ENGLISH ELECTRIC CO. LTD.

The Board agreed to give an indemnity to the English Electric Co. Ltd. in respect of their continuing liability for the next 12 months, subject to the approval of Sir Arthur Jarratt (who had left the meeting) and Sir Denis Rickett.

5. ROYAL COURT THEATRE CONCERTS

An interim report on the financial progress of the Royal Court Theatre concerts was laid on the table. No further lunchtime concerts were being arranged, and only one further Sunday concert would take place this season.

6. EXCLUSIVITY OF "THE TURN OF THE SCREW"

Mr. Gishford, on behalf of Boosey & Hawkes Ltd., asked the Company to forego its exclusive rights to perform "The Turn of the Screw" after the end of 1957, on the grounds that these rights were prejudicing the future of the opera and depriving the librettist and composer of performing fees. The request was sympathetically received, although it was pointed out that the Group's engagements in Berlin and the United States, at present under discussion, might not mature if the opera were made generally available. Lord Horder's suggestion, that the exclusive right to perform the opera in English should be retained for the full term, was met by Mr. Gishford's assurance that Messrs. Boosey & Hawkes would use their good offices to ensure, so far as they were able, that the Group would not lose any engagements on the American continent. Mr. Gishford's request was therefore agreed.