FLYING HOUSE
PRODUCTIONS

Home of Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus

December 20, 2013

Dear members of the deaf community, patrons, and community at large:

It was brought to our attention via Facebook on December 11, 2013 that there are concerns among members of the deaf community regarding ASL Interpreting taking place at our performances. We regret that any members of our community may have felt unwelcome or underserved at our performances, whether because they are deaf or for any other reason. As an organization driven by a vision for a world that accepts *all* of its citizens, it deeply saddens me to learn that some members of our community may have felt excluded, ignored, or disrespected in any way.

While I can't speak to an ongoing history of these concerns being raised, I do value learning of them now. We are absolutely committed to serving the needs of all people in our community the best way we can, and welcome your support in helping us do so.

In brief, we have been privileged to work with Kevin Gallagher, who has been an interpreter with our organization for over 30 years, as well as with other esteemed organizations. Mr. Gallagher first approached the Chorus leadership shortly after Seattle Men's Chorus was formed in 1979, with the express desire to provide ASL Interpreting for our audiences. Both Mr. Gallagher and the organization have long been dedicated to providing this important service at *every one* of our performances, not just for a select few performances or when interpreters are requested by the community.

In the time this issue was brought to my attention last week, I have taken immediate action, with a goal to fully understand the concerns, the history of these concerns being raised to our organization, and how we can best address these concerns moving forward. To address best practices, particularly within a performing arts environment, I have consulted with individuals who I know to be qualified ASL experts. I have also had conversations with individuals affiliated with the deaf community, including deaf patrons who regularly attend our concerts, to listen to a spectrum of needs and responses, furthering our understanding. While most have praised our dedication as an organization to offering accessible performances with interpreters, this current concern highlights a need to expand those services.

For our final Holiday concert on December 22 we will provide CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) for our patrons. We will continue to work with Mr. Gallagher and provide him with ASL coaching and continuing education, including moving toward certification, to improve his skills and ASL accuracy in order to better serve the entire deaf community. We will also explore other viable options under the guidance of ASL experts.

319 12th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122-5504
P 206.323.0750 **F** 206.323.9425
FlyingHouse.org
SeattleMensChorus.org
SeattleWomensChorus.org

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We would like to invite all members of the deaf community to attend performances where Mr. Gallagher is interpreting, so they have the opportunity to provide us with constructive feedback; feedback that continues to provide us with a greater understanding of both the weaknesses and strengths as we chart immediate and long-term solutions that fully address the needs of everyone within the community.

I warmly invite members of the community to discuss this further, if they so choose. Please contact me at (206) 323-0750 x 208 or at franks@flyinghouse.org to schedule a time to meet. We're committed to resolving this, and speaking directly with members of the community can only help advance our mutual understanding and endeavors in meeting the needs of the community.

Our mission as an organization is to entertain, enlighten, unify and heal our audience and members, using the power of words and music to recognize the value of gay and straight people and their relationships. Furthermore, our vision is for a world that accepts and values its gay and lesbian citizens, and essentially *all* its citizens. We are continually searching for ways that we can increase our accessibility to all persons, and we want to work together with the community to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



Frank Stilwagner
Executive Director

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