

**MINUTES**  
**WAR MEMORIAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**PRESENTORS LIAISON COMMITTEE / SPECIAL MEETING**

**Wednesday, October 12, 2016**

The Presentors Liaison Committee of the Board of Trustees of the War Memorial of San Francisco met at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 12, 2016, in the Trustees' Board Room, War Memorial Opera House, Committee Chair Bechtle presiding.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Chair Bechtle, Trustee Lui, Trustee Moscone, Trustee Shultz, Trustee Wilsey, President Horn,  
*Ex officio*

Non-Committee Trustees Present: Trustee Davis, Trustee Levin, Trustee Myatt, Trustee Walker

Staff Present: Elizabeth Murray, Managing Director; Jennifer Norris, Assistant Managing Director

**REGULAR ITEMS**

**1. Beverages in Opera House and Davies Symphony Auditoriums:**

Chair Bechtle stated there is one item on today's agenda of the Presentors Liaison Committee meeting, a request for consideration of a new policy to allow patrons to bring beverages into the Opera House and Davies Symphony Hall auditoriums.

Chair Bechtle stated that in advance of today's meeting, Committee members received a letter from the San Francisco Symphony, Opera and Ballet, requesting to begin discussion regarding implementation of a new policy to allow patrons to bring covered drinks into the Opera House and Davies Symphony Hall auditoriums. Committee members also received a summary and survey data compiled by Opera America on questions regarding policies permitting food and beverage during performances.

Chair Bechtle said that as this request has emanated from resident licensees, the San Francisco Opera, Symphony and Ballet, she would ask their representatives to comment on the request.

Mathew Shilvock, General Director of the San Francisco Opera, made the following comments:

- i. Recognizing the critical importance of front of house issues and patron servicing, the three resident organizations are working together on patron-related issues in a new way and are also working with Patina and the War Memorial staff to chart strategic ways forward.
- ii. The key goal is to protect the magical experience patrons have in our beautiful buildings, while also ensuring the patron experience is welcoming, patron-centric, and inspires repeat attendance.
- iii. The stakeholders have been meeting for approximately six months to strategize a pilot idea that we believe could have significant impact on our patron satisfaction.

Mr. Shilvock stated the Opera, Symphony and Ballet are here today to seek War Memorial Board permission for an experimental pilot program allowing patrons to bring beverages into the auditoriums during performances. He stated the goal is to improve and enhance the experience of patrons so they will feel more comfortable in attending more performances. He said that patron research, across all three resident performing arts organizations, shows that one of the biggest barriers to a satisfying evening is how patrons utilize the intermission. The combination of a short intermission, insufficient restroom facilities based upon the level of attendance, and overwhelmed, concentrated bar service leads to high levels of dissatisfaction.

Derek Dean, Chief Operating Officer of the San Francisco Symphony, stated that at the Symphony, we have all experienced the reality that a 20-minute intermission does not afford enough time to use the restroom and enjoy a drink. If one manages to purchase a drink at intermission, and are not one of the few fortunate patrons at the front of the line, you have less than five minutes to “enjoy” your drink before returning to your seat in time.

Mr. Dean reported the Symphony recently surveyed over 1,300 current and potential patrons, presenting them with three options to improve the intermission experience:

- Extend intermission to 30 minutes, and perform 10 minutes less music on the program
- Extend intermission to 30 minutes, by extending the evening to 10:15
- Allow them to bring a beverage into the Hall

Mr. Dean reported that extending the intermission, and either reducing/extending concerts, was overwhelmingly rejected, and in fact would drive patrons away. People want short, concise evenings out. On the other hand, the option of bringing beverages into the auditorium rated highly over all constituent groups, including loyal subscribers and the segment of patrons who are 70 years old and older, which demonstrates that bringing drinks into the auditorium is not just something wanted by younger, newer audience members.

Mr. Dean said that in contemplating the idea of bringing beverages into the hall, there were three major concerns:

- Distraction – focus and silence are two essential elements of our art forms – audiences and performers alike need quiet in order to fully experience performances.
- Disturbance – we want to ensure that audience members are respectful of each other and want to ensure that drinking in the auditorium does not become abused during performances.
- Damage – we love our halls, and have a civic obligation to take care of these exquisite structures. We do not wish to introduce a new policy or process that would cause interior or exterior damage to our buildings.

Mr. Dean stated they have investigated the experience of other venues which have allowed beverages in their halls and discovered the following:

- Each venue had the same initial concerns – that allowing patrons to bring beverages into the hall would create noise, distraction, and a mess.
- The venues that moved forward with beverages in their halls found their fears and concerns were not realized. Patrons regulate themselves, demand silence and take care of their empty cups appropriately.
- Increased audience satisfaction shows up in the numbers. Data shows that when venues allow beverages in their respective halls, beverage sales increase anywhere from 20% to well over 100%. These increases would have immediate benefit for Patina and the War Memorial, but long-term benefit also for the resident companies who anticipate increased repeat attendance.

Mr. Dean said that in addition to findings from other venues, we have case studies within our performing arts institutions. He noted that in SoundBox, patrons are allowed to have food and beverages during the performance, and the bar even remains open throughout the concert. Patrons are quiet and focused in SoundBox; the audience regulates itself and stays extremely quiet during the show. We’ve had no issues with damage or mess.

Mr. Shilvock noted that similarly, the Opera allows drinks in the Wilsey Center Atrium Theater for its Opera Lab performances, and audiences there similarly take great care to remain quiet, and do not leave a mess. He added that the Opera’s simulcasts at AT&T Park are also a good example of self-regulation by audiences. Although audiences are welcome to eat and drink and even get up and get beverages during performances, very few do, and you can hear a pin drop during the performances.

Glenn McCoy, Executive Director of the San Francisco Ballet, stated it is a shared belief that this enhancement to the patron experience is essential in order to help satisfy the desires of our respective patron bases, and we recognize our patrons make up a responsible and respectful audience that can be trusted with this new option. Unlike what may take place in a movie theatre where large quantities of soft drinks and food are sold, and there

is no obligation to remove trash, our halls are filled with considerate and gracious patrons who consistently behave in a manner that is appropriate to a performing arts experience.

Mr. McCoy stated that they want to tread carefully and are seeking permission for a six-month pilot program, as described in the following proposal:

Proposal to allow beverages in the performance spaces at Davies Symphony Hall  
and the War Memorial Opera House

- Proposal: Allow San Francisco Symphony, Opera, and Ballet patrons to bring beverages to their seats in covered containers.
- Term: Half-year pilot, effective January 2017 through the conclusion of the resident companies' summer seasons.
- Opt out: organizations may opt-out of the pilot for certain programs at their discretion. Non-resident organizations may opt-out should they so choose.
- Termination: The War Memorial or any of the performing arts organizations may terminate the experiment at any time if we find that it is causing distraction to audiences or performers, or if we find that it is damaging the facilities in any way.
- Monitoring: Patrons will be surveyed on a regular basis in order to determine the impact on their experience. We will use a standardized survey across all organizations. In addition, ushers and custodial staff will be monitored to assess any potential damage to the seats/floors and share any patron feedback. War Memorial and Patina shall monitor beverages sales volume and revenue. We will ask War Memorial Trustees to share their feedback and perception of the pilot as it unfolds.
- Reporting: A report will be submitted to this Committee at the end of each month (assuming that performances take place during that month) describing the impact, both positive and negative, of the pilot. A final report at the end of the pilot will be prepared, shared and discussed with the War Memorial Trustees.

Chair Bechtle opened the floor for Committee members' comments and discussion concerning the proposal of the Opera, Symphony and Ballet.

Trustee Shultz asked Managing Director Beth Murray to give her opinion on the matter as it relates to maintenance of the buildings. Ms. Murray stated she had the same initial reaction that many of the Trustees have had that beverages in the auditorium may result in spills and possibly damage to seats/flooring. She said staff has done a great deal of research with the International Association of Venue Managers and the trend for performing arts facilities is definitely moving towards allowing beverages during performances. She said that feedback from facilities which do allow beverages in the auditorium indicates that while these venues had similar custodial and maintenance concerns, those concerns were not realized. Ms. Murray stated her opinion that a trial period would be worthy.

Trustee Walker said his concern is that if we start a pilot program and realize it is not the right program for us at this time, it will be hard to stop. He stated that the evidence discussed so far is pretty anecdotal, and we do not have any hard data to show that allowing beverages in the auditorium will increase attendance or revenues. He said he feels this is a step too far at this time based upon the one consumer satisfaction survey we have received.

Trustee Myatt stated that the Marines Memorial Theatre has incorporated beverages in the auditorium and it has worked well and has increased beverage revenues. He said the beverage cost to patrons includes the cost of the plastic cup with lid. Trustee Myatt stated they have experienced no problems with resulting noise or spills from beverages in the auditorium and it has most definitely improved the patron experience.

Trustee Levin, referring to remarks made to the Trustees by departing Opera General Director David Gockley at the July meeting, said the Trustees must be open minded to changes that will support the well-being of the Performing Arts Center licensees.

Trustee Wilsey stated that each of the Opera, Symphony and Ballet, as well as other cultural institutions, are experiencing problems with bringing in and maintaining audiences. She said the Trustees must work with our licensees on finding new ways to compete for audiences in order to keep these cultural institutions alive and well. She stated her support for a pilot program.

Trustee Davis said that any pilot program must be accompanied by plans for proper staffing of beverage services and monitoring of the program's successes or failures. She added that allowing beverages in the auditorium may not be appropriate for all programs – such as children's programs. Mr. McCoy commented that the Ballet feels beverages in the auditorium would not be appropriate for the Ballet's *Nutcracker* performances.

There was discussion concerning the actual covered cup to be used for the pilot program. Staff provided samples of two covered cups and there was discussion concerning the cost of the cup and if the cup would create additional recycling volume. It was agreed that staff would return to the Committee with the cup/lid proposed for the pilot program.

Brian Crowell, General Manager of Patina at the War Memorial and Performing Arts Center, stated it has been Patina's experience at other venues that allowing beverages in the auditorium is important to meeting patrons' expectations and improving the patron experience. He stated the venues which allow beverages in the auditorium have not experienced negative custodial or maintenance issues and have experienced significant impact on sales and revenues. Mr. Crowell stated that in anticipation of increased sales volume during a potential pilot program, Patina would review additional points of service and/or increased staff at existing points of service. In response to an inquiry from President Horn, Mr. Crowell stated that none of the Los Angeles Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Disney Hall, or the Met in New York currently allow beverages in the auditoriums, however, there are on-going discussions on the question.

Following discussion, a motion was made by Trustee Shultz and seconded by Trustee Wilsey, to approve the request of the San Francisco Opera, Symphony and Ballet to conduct a six-month pilot program beginning in January 2017 of allowing beverages in covered containers in the auditoriums of the Opera House and Davies Symphony Hall subject to the Presentors Liaison Committee reviewing and approving the covered cup to be used, the Committee's review of staffing and set-up plans, and the monitoring, reporting and termination provisions set forth in the Opera/Symphony/Ballet proposal.

Following further discussion, the following recommendation was unanimously adopted:

**RECOMMENDED,** By the Presentors Liaison Committee of the War Memorial Board of Trustees that the request of the San Francisco Opera, Symphony and Ballet to conduct a six-month pilot program to allow covered beverages in the Opera House and Davies Symphony Hall auditoriums effective January 2017 be approved subject to the Presentors Liaison Committee's subsequent review and approval of the covered cup to be used, staffing and set-up plans, and the monitoring, reporting and termination provisions set forth in the Opera/Symphony/Ballet proposal

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chair Bechtle adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.

Jennifer E. Norris  
Executive Secretary