

July 25, 2014

To whom it may concern:

I write this letter to warn against and denounce the fraudulent actions of the Mahler Philharmoniker Society and its Salzburg Voice Festival (<http://www.mahlerphilharmoniker.at/> | Laxenburger Strasse 9 A-1100 Vienna, AUSTRIA | +43 (0) 650 366 2650).

Let it be known that in the spring of 2014, I, as a young singer, applied for a position in the Vienna Opera Studio of the aforementioned organization. According to the website, the studio artists would not be compensated for travel expenses, but they would, however, be compensated for their performances with the orchestra, which, according to the organization, should be enough to recuperate the cost of travel.

On May 6, 2014, I received an email notifying me of my acceptance into the Salzburg Voice Festival (no connection to the world-famous Salzburg Festival), to which I had not applied:

Dear Ms. Virella,

Thank you for your application to the Vienna Opera Studio. Upon reviewal of your application materials and supporting documents, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Mahler Philharmonic Society, I am delighted to inform you that you may be granted an Artist-in-Residence position at VOS / Wintersemester 2014/15 upon your successful participation at this summer's 2014 Salzburg Voice Festival and opera master-classes with the Mahler Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Maestro Wolfgang Scheidt at Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, taking place in Vienna from July 12 - 26, 2014.

If you are able to accept this extraordinary opportunity, please inform us by Friday, May 9th 2014, so that I may forward the necessary documents to confirm your participation. If you require a tuition or housing scholarship to take part, please submit a formal letter addressed to the committee at [vienna@mahlerphil.org](mailto:vienna@mahlerphil.org), explaining the reasons of your request for financial aid and the specific amount you need in order to be able to participate.

You may find more information regarding this opportunity at the following link:[http://mahlerphil.org/salzburg\\_voice\\_festival.html](http://mahlerphil.org/salzburg_voice_festival.html)

Yours sincerely,

Frau Mag. Garces  
Mahler Philharmoniker Wien <[office@mahlerphil.org](mailto:office@mahlerphil.org)>

Confused about the mention of this new Salzburg program, I wrote back to inform them that since I had not been aware that applicants needed to participate in the (paid) summer festival in order to be considered for the Opera Studio, I needed to ask for financial help to cover the cost of the summer festival. My email was answered on May 7<sup>th</sup>:

Sehr geehrte Frau Virella,

Vielen Dank für Ihre Nachricht. Da Ihr Antrag rechtzeitig für die heutige Vorstandssitzung eingereicht wurde, freut es uns, Ihnen mitzuteilen, dass der Vorstand das letzte Stipendium an Sie vergeben konnte. Anbei finden Sie das Schreiben des Vorstandskomitees. Sollten Sie dieses Stipendium annehmen wollen, bitten wir Sie bis spätestens Montag, den 12. Mai 2014 das beigefügte Formular unterschrieben an [admission@salzburgvoicefestival.com](mailto:admission@salzburgvoicefestival.com) zurückzusenden.

**Der Vorstand möchte Sie darauf hinweisen, dass Ihre Bewerbung für das VOS dem Niveau des Opernstudios nicht zur Gänze entsprochen hat. Aus diesem Grunde wurden Sie eingeladen, am 2014 SVF und an den Meisterkursen mit Dirigent Wolfgang Scheidt, Assistent von L. Bernstein und H. v. Karajan, teilzunehmen. Diese Teilnahme am SVF ist nicht eine Voraussetzung für die Aufnahme ins VOS, sondern, sollte Ihnen die Möglichkeit geben, sich für das VOS Wintersemester 2014/2015 intensiv vorzubereiten.**

Das Repertoire für die Meisterkurse mit Orchester enthält folgende Rollen für Ihr Fach: Iphigénie aus Iphigénie en Tauride, Idamante aus Idomeneo und Alisa aus Lucia di Lammermoor. Das weitere Repertoire wird mit dem künstlerischen Leiter vereinbart.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen aus Wien,  
Frau Mag. Garces

The email says, in short, that they are happy to let me know that I received the “last scholarship” available, and (bolded) that the committee wanted me to know that my application to the Opera Studio was not exactly at the level needed, so they were inviting me to the SVF in order to take part in “master classes with Maestro Wolfgang Scheidt,” in hopes that my participation would give me the opportunity to be accepted into the winter session of the Opera Studio.

I then received the attached award notice, which includes the following excerpt:

We are pleased to inform you that you were granted 100% of housing scholarship to take part at the 2014 Salzburg Voice Festival as follows:

Source	Amount
100% Housing Scholarship SVF 2014	
Hotel**** (15 Nights)	1249.00 - EUR
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	1249.00 - EUR

\*This scholarship housing includes full accommodation in Austria in a four star partner hotel of the Mahler Philharmonic Society or equivalent,

This scholarship only covers the 100% of your stay in both Salzburg and Vienna from July 12 – 27 2014, and not the tuition fee, travelling, meals, transportation, health insurance and any other personal expenses, which the Salzburg Voice Festival is not responsible for, as you agreed upon signing the on-line application form.

Having been living out of a suitcase for two and a half years between NYC, Berlin and Vienna, I wrote to the committee and told them I could certainly find free or much cheaper housing for myself, and asked that the scholarship would be put towards the tuition. Two weeks later, on May 21, 2014, I finally received a response in which they agreed to my request.

Upon my arrival to the “opening gala” in Salzburg, I was greeted by no one. No registration, no welcoming table, nothing. The instrumentalists who played that night were excellent. That bode well. The head singer, however, who (on the website) claims to be a descendant of Mahler (an impossibility, since Mahler had 2 daughters and did not pass on his last name) as well as a polyglot who speaks 16 languages (which she does not), turned out to be a girl with whom I went to school in NYC (Manhattan School of Music), who sounded just like she did over seven years ago as a very young student. This was the person, we learned later on, in charge of coaching people in numerous languages, and in charge of giving voice lessons.

Also on the voice lesson faculty we had her boyfriend, Jonathan Floril, who is a pianist (not a singer) who claims he taught at the Juilliard School, which he didn't, and worked at the Metropolitan Opera, which he also didn't.

For clarity's sake, I would like to point out that I do not challenge the notion that Mr. Floril played for voice lessons which took place at the Juilliard School or coached singers who may have ended up at the Met's YAP. However, let it be noted that when I went to MSM, my teacher (Edith Bers) was the head of the voice department at Juilliard – that doesn't mean I studied at Juilliard. I later took voice lessons with Stephen Smith, some of which were at the Juilliard building – that doesn't mean I went to Juilliard. I also taught French diction at the Peabody Conservatory as the TA for Thomas Grubb – that doesn't mean I worked at Peabody as a diction coach. I was a diction, theory and ear-training tutor at MSM – that doesn't mean I taught at MSM. I have coached with several coaches from the Metropolitan Opera – that doesn't mean I worked or trained at the Met. And, like Ms. Mahler, I too have sung in over 15 languages – which neither makes me a polyglot nor does it mean that I speak any of them (5 of which I actually do, at different levels).

Then the discoveries started unveiling themselves one by one, little by little:

- The singers were put on a German class that was neither a language class nor a diction class. The person hired for the class is a very nice Austrian young woman whose first language is, of course, German. She had absolutely no knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet and no awareness of the rules of or mechanics for proper pronunciation. There goes the diction part. She also had insufficient English knowledge to conduct the class in English, and at least half of the students didn't speak German. She was unable to translate, unable to explain and unable to correct.
- The singers that were housed through the program were staying at the Augarten Palais, the residence of the Vienna Boys Choir. I found out from them that they were paying 20 EUR per night, or 280 EUR for two weeks. This is where they wanted me to stay with my 1249 EUR scholarship. This Palais, by the way, I later heard was being used by the Mahler Philharmoniker for free, because Dirigent Scheidt has a connection with the Vienna Boys Choir, in which case they would be charging people for something that does not cost them a dime.
- These singers were promised housing that included internet. The internet never came.
- The program ran with a complete and total lack of organization to the point that:
  - Singers would be told of “performances” on the day of.
  - Concert times changed up until the very minute when a concert was supposed to be starting.
  - Mandatory repertoire was revealed upon the singers' arrival to any given performance.

- Classes were held at the Augarten Palais, but there were not enough keys for everyone to be able to come in, and no one to open the door. This resulted in numerous lost lessons and skipped rehearsals where singers were left at the door for over half an hour waiting for someone to come out. Keep in mind that singers came from all over the world and had no local phones and no access to internet.
- No audience was ever present at any of the concerts, and one concert was even cancelled after all the singers had been waiting outside of the venue for an hour because the organizers failed to make proper arrangements and the building was locked.
- Singers were told we would participate in the LEO SLEZAK SINGING COMPETITION ([http://www.mahlerphilharmoniker.at/leo\\_slezak.html](http://www.mahlerphilharmoniker.at/leo_slezak.html)), for which the application fee would be waived. We were told that a preliminary round had been held in our absence and no one had advanced, so the semifinals would include just people from the program. Because the repertoire was limited and the organizers did not want to repeat pieces, each singer was assigned what they would be allowed to sing, allowing for a competition of arias against Lied. The panel of judges was NOT PRESENT at the semi-finals. Three of them were involved in a rehearsal in Vienna while the competition was in Salzburg, one of them was the one playing the piano at the competition, and two were in the audience. We later learned from the maestro (one of the ones who were in Vienna rehearsing) that he had not been asked to be in the panel.
- When the orchestra finally showed up, singers were excited that the master classes that their contract promised would begin. Each of these young singers was promised three master classes with the orchestra and the maestro. No one – not a single singer from the program – sang even once with the orchestra under the maestro’s baton.
- A few of us did sing for orchestral rehearsals with conducting students. Students?, you say – so did the singers.
- Yes, we found out the orchestra was there to be conducted by master-class-participant conductors that had come to learn from the maestro – the orchestra was not there for us to perform.
- The conductors had been promised (by contract) they would work with a professional orchestra and singers, which is why the student singers were mostly not allowed to sing. As an orchestra, also, they got a pick up orchestra that had never played together.
- When the conductors arrived, they too encountered the lack of keys to the building and the lack of internet. Mr. Floril told them that the Society had made arrangements for them to go 100 meters to the Residenz Hotel and use the wifi at the lobby there. He provided them with a password. When the conductors showed up at the hotel and, out of courtesy, let the reception desk know who they were, the hotel asked them to leave, for they had never heard of the Mahler Philharmoniker, and they had no permission to be there.
- The orchestra. The orchestra is a pick up orchestra from musicians from all over Europe, who were promised payment and travel reimbursement, which they have still not received. Rumor has it that these people have come from all over because over the past 2 years, the instrumentalists in Vienna have learned about this organization and no one local will play for them.
- The website promises the singers professional audio and video recordings for free. Last year’s participants are still waiting for said recordings. This year, the only event that has been recorded was the opening gala with Ms. Mahler and the rest of the staff. The closing concert (if not cancelled) will also mainly feature Ms. Mahler and the rest of the staff, and a few paid “ringers” who are also waiting on payment. Two thirds of the SVF participants were given chorus parts yesterday night to learn for tomorrow’s concert as their only participation. Three of us got small parts in ensembles.

All in all, taking into consideration what the master class conductors paid and what the SVF singers paid (everyone with a different secret arrangement that does not match information others received), we estimate the Mahler Philharmoniker had an income of around 50K Euro. Based on the information of what orchestra members were expecting to receive for their services, the Society agreed to pay around 20K Euro for the orchestra (which they have yet to see). The other 30K Euro are not accounted for. Perhaps it was used for the renting of this one venue of this final concert, as other venues were either free or locked.

Certainly, the money did not go to a single pianist to accompany acting classes; it did not go to a single qualified language or diction coach. Most singers did not get more than 3 voice lessons total, and the majority of the teachers were not qualified to teach voice. The money did not go to the various occasions in which they "invited" us to a drink or to dinner or called a cab for us to take somewhere, for every time, each of us had to pay for the food, the drink and the cab.

We have also found discrepancies in the bank account numbers we each were given to make our payments.

In a heated meeting earlier today, in which all of the singers, most of the conductors and some of the orchestra members got into a room to make a formal public complaint before maestro Scheidt, Ms. Mahler and Mr. Floril, Mr Scheidt expressed his surprise at the unbelievable lack of organization and obvious mismanagement on the part of Mr. Floril and Ms. Mahler. The maestro claimed not to have been involved in any of the planning, contract writing nor promises made. With no apology from Floril and Mahler nor any resolution, the artists are currently at a standstill. Even the paid ringers are reconsidering their participation in a concert, for their contracts had not allowed for recordings to be made. The master class participants, however, both conductors and singers, are looking into options to take legal action.

I stand in solidarity and am proud of a group of young singing and conducting musicians who have dared raise their voices in the face of injustice, regardless of the almost crippling fear of risking a career by burning bridges. Enough is enough.



Laura Virella  
Mezzo-soprano

**Correction:** An earlier version of this letter mentioned Ms. Marlies Nageler as a "manager" associated with the organization. It has now come to light that Ms. Nageler was hired as a freelancer to work 10 hours a week on Public Relations. She and Mr. Floril had numerous arguments about the title misrepresentation that he insisted on publishing on the website. She was asked to work from home and uninvited to rehearsals and events. It all points to Nageler being kept separate from others in order to hide Jonathan Floril and Therese Mahler's scheming.

**Note:** An earlier version of this letter contained the names of co-signers from the SVF. For legal clarity, we have decided that each artist pursue his/her own claim.



## MAHLER PHILHARMONIKER

MPHIL ARTISTS | ORCHESTER | FESTSPIELE | WETTBEWERBE | OPERNSTUDIO | KUNSTGALERIE | MPHIL RECORDS

Vienna, May 7th 2014

Dear Ms. Laura Virella,

Congratulations from the Board & Committee of the Mahler Philharmoniker's Scholarship Fund on your admission to the 2014 Salzburg Voice Festival, taking place from July 12 - 26, 2014. It is indeed an honor to be admitted to such prestigious festival that is highly regarded and admits only the most exceptionally talented singers worldwide.

The decision of your application for financial aid was based on the following:

- Written petition for financial aid
- On-line application form & supporting materials
- Final score of your prescreening audition given by the 2014 SVF's prescreening jury

We have completed our review of your application for a scholarship by following the process described above. We are pleased to inform you that you were granted 100% of housing scholarship to take part at the 2014 Salzburg Voice Festival as follows:

Source	Amount
100% Housing Scholarship SVF 2014	
Hotel**** (15 Nights)	1249.00 - EUR
	-----
	1249.00 - EUR

\*This housing scholarship includes full accommodation in Austria in a four star partner hotel of the Mahler Philharmonic Society or equivalent.

This scholarship only covers the 100% of your stay in both Salzburg and Vienna from July 12 - 27 2014, and not the tuition fee, travelling, meals, transportation, health insurance and any other personal expenses, which the Salzburg Voice Festival is not responsible for, as you agreed upon signing the on-line application form.

Every year, the Scholarship Committee of the Mahler Philharmonic Society is proud to grant full scholarships based solely on merit to outstanding prospective SVF participants to support the careers of promising singers, while granting them the extraordinary opportunity to perform with the Mahler Philharmonic Orchestra and offering them an intensive curriculum that includes not only daily individual vocal training, but also performances, German language, diction and acting classes, as well as concerts and master-classes with emeritus faculty from the Vienna Opera Studio and Artists-in-Residence of the Mahler Philharmonic Society. Besides, prospective SVF participants are given the opportunity to win cash prizes and professional engagements at the Il Leo Slezak International Singing Competition., while performing at the Great Hall of the Leopoldskron Palace in Salzburg and the Royal Opera House in Vienna.

Again, our warmest congratulations on your acceptance. I wish you joy and success while being a featured festival singer. If you have any questions, please email us at [vienna@mahlerphil.org](mailto:vienna@mahlerphil.org).

Sincerely yours,

Jonathan Floril  
Executive Board Member - Mahler Philharmoniker Wien

*"Das Wichtigste in der Musik steht nicht in den Noten."*  
GUSTAV MAHLER