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**Metropolitan Opera Orchestra musicians look to ASI Audio 3DME System for hearing protection**

New York, NY, January 25, 2023 — An August 2021 collective bargaining agreement between the Met and Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians, the union representing the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, included a groundbreaking hearing preservation provision. It's common knowledge that rock and roll performers have suffered severe hearing loss after being subjected to excessive volume levels on stage from backline amplification and monitor speakers. But a professional classical musician in the U.K. suffered career-ending hearing damage in 2012 during the Royal Opera House’s rehearsal of Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries.” In the subsequent court case, it was revealed that the brass section sitting directly behind him had generated sound pressure levels of over 135 dB SPL. For comparison, metal band Manowar holds the Guinness World Record for the loudest live performance for a 1984 show that measured 130 dB SPL.

“The fact that I can now have hearing protection at just the touch of a button is totally a game changer for me,” remarks Stephanie C. Mortimore, Principal Piccolo with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the largest performing arts organization in the United States. Mortimore, who is Chair of the Orchestra Committee as of September 2022, was part of the team that negotiated the new union contract for the Met’s musicians. She chose the ASI Audio x Sensaphonics 3DME Music Enhancement IEM Systems to provide both hearing protection and to improve her performance by tailoring her monitoring environment. The Active Ambient earphones in ASI Audio’s 3DME system feature embedded binaural microphones that are paired with a bodypack housing dual mic preamps, allowing musicians to blend the ambient sounds of the orchestra surrounding them with a monitor signal where such is employed. The bodypack also includes a headphone amp, earphone and monitor I/O and DSP for signal processing. The user controls the system’s seven-band stereo EQ, limiter threshold and level via a free ASI Audio App loaded on any iOS or Android portable device.

“We were able to get the Met to commit to providing audiology visits and custom earplugs for every year of the contract for every musician covered by the four-year contract,” she says of the agreement’s hearing preservation provisions. “In addition, if it’s recommended by an audiologist, we can get a 3DME or similar device for the life of the contract. I don’t think any other orchestra in this country has anything so comprehensive.” As a bonus result of the new union agreement, audiences can now hear Mortimore and the orchestra not only at the Met, at Carnegie Hall and on tour, but also at a newly established chamber music series at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall.

The 3DME system allows the user to blend the embedded mics with a feed from a monitor mixer. As acoustic orchestras playing live have no need for a monitor mix, Mortimore typically uses her 3DME system on productions where circumstances such as the layout of the Met’s 83-piece orchestra necessitates hearing protection. For example, she says, for the Met’s production of “Elektra” by Richard Strauss, which ran through April 2022, “I was seated with my right ear about half a foot from the tympani. There was a plexiglass shield in between us but it ended right around the top of my ear, so there was spill over. I was able to tune my right ear to minus 24 dB and my left ear to minus 10 dB. So I could still hear myself, but I was protected.”

But “Elektra” also has its quieter moments, she continues. “I had some delicate moments where I really needed to hear the fullness of my sound and how I was fitting in. Then, I could just tap the button and be right back to open-room sound and really be able to hear where I was.”

“Hearing protection is extremely important to me as it is the foundation of my career and art,” echoes Jeffrey Irving, a freelance percussionist and timpanist in New York City working regularly in the orchestral theater (his resume lists over a dozen shows on Broadway – including *Wicked* and *Frozen*) and chamber music idioms, including frequent performances with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Irving also chose the the ASI Audio 3DME system when exercising the union-negotiated hearing protection benefit. “I have used other hearing protection (including custom earplugs) in the past, but I always had a problem with frequencies cutting out especially when I was playing anything with a lot of high frequencies, like triangle or cymbals or glockenspiel. I just had a really hard time hearing the timbre of the sounds I was making. Also, as a percussionist, we're usually in the back of the orchestra. I often had a hard time hearing the conductor, so I was constantly having to take my earplugs in and out. Because of the 3DME’s ambient earphones, those problems are solved while my hearing is still protected.”

For the Met’s performance of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, the orchestra was in the pit, Mortimore says, and when she used the ASI Audio system to protect both ears equally she discovered an additional benefit. “The biggest part of my job is playing in tune, and I find that occasionally the 3DME helps me to hear better. Somehow, when the sound is coming directly into my ears, I’m able to hone in on where I need to be in the pitch center more than I can when I’m not wearing them. I feel like the 3DME provides some sort of separation of sound for me so that I can identify different instruments more easily.”

Because the 3DME offers that ability to focus on her own instrument and those around her, Mortimore says, she will often wear the earphones even when she doesn’t strictly need them for protection. “I feel like it just puts the sound of my instrument more in my ear and allows me to hear others in a way that I can identify where I need to be,” she says. “It enhances my sound and my awareness of where I fit into the orchestra.”

For more information, visit:

American Federation of Musicians: [www.afm.org](http://www.afm.org)

ASI Audio: [www.ASIaudio.com](http://www.asiaudio.com)

Metropolitan Opera: [www.metopera.org](http://www.metopera.org)

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Photo file 1: MetropolitanOperaOrchestra\_and\_Choir.jpg

Photo caption 1: Stemming from an August 2021 collective bargaining agreement between the Met and the Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra musicians now have access to hearing protection.

Photo file 2: Stephanie\_Latimore.jpg

Photo caption 2: Stephanie Mortimore, Principal Piccolo with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, who participated in the collective bargaining resulting in a provision for hearing protection for Met musicians, selected the ASI Audio 3DME IEM system for hearing protection, and adds that the system “enhances my sound and my awareness of where I fit into the orchestra.”

Photo file 3: Jeffrey-Irving.jpg

Photo caption 3: Jeffrey Irving, a freelance percussionist and timpanist who frequently performs with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra relies on the ASI Audio 3DME system, which has the requisite audiologists’ recommendations to qualify under AFM negotiated hearing protection benefits – for enhancement of his ability to hear both the conductor and the timbre of percussion instruments that produce high frequency sounds while protecting his hearing.

Photo file 4: MetropolitanOperaHouse.jpg

Photo caption 4: The Metropolitan Opera House in New York City

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**ABOUT ASI AUDIO**

Founded in 2019 by the team of hearing health advocate Dr. Michael Santucci Au.D. of Sensaphonics and Think-A-Move, Ltd. (developers of innovative speech recognition products for high-volume environments), ASI Audio x Sensaphonics has combined patented technologies and market insights to create 3DME Music Enhancement, a fundamentally different approach to in-ear monitoring and hearing protection. 3DME combines Active Ambient technology and personalized sound quality via the intuitive ASI Audio app, creating a system equally useful for amplified and acoustic monitoring for musicians and concertgoers alike. Web: [www.ASIaudio.com](http://www.asiaudio.com).