

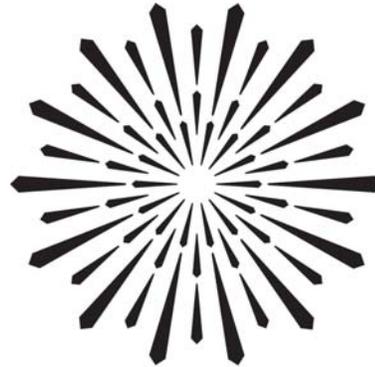


Supernumerary Handbook

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Congratulations! You have joined a prestigious opera company with a reputation for world-class productions featuring the finest international artists. Founded in 1922 by Gaetano Merola, the Company has performed in the War Memorial Opera House since 1932, except for during a brief earthquake retrofit in the 1990s. Until his death in 1953, Merola led the Company to international prominence, and under his leadership, the Company presented the best singers of the day, including Kirsten Flagstad, Lauritz Melchior, Lawrence Tibbett, and Lily Pons. Kurt Herbert Adler succeeded him as General Director, and served until 1981. During his tenure, he introduced many celebrated artists to this country, including Renata Tebaldi, Leonie Rysanek, and Birgit Nilsson. We have had four more General Directors: Terence McEwen (1981–1988), Lotfi Mansouri (1988–2002), Pamela Rosenberg (2001–2005), and David Gockley, who joined the company in 2006.



**SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA**

What Is a Supernumerary?

A Supernumerary, or “Super,” is a nonsinging actor (extra), often called a “spearcarrier,” who typically appears in opera, but who may also perform in ballet and dramatic productions. The San Francisco Opera has a dedicated band of experienced Supers who have established a good reputation with directors and who have a strong sense of community among themselves. Some Supers on the current roster have been supering for decades, and others are just about to tread the boards for the first time.

As a Supernumerary volunteer, you are a valued member of the Company, which consists of many talented artists, including principal singers, a world-famous chorus, dancers, orchestra members, conductors, stage directors, stage managers and their assistants, stagehands, and the technicians and artists responsible for lighting, scenery, props, makeup, wigs, and costumes. Our enthusiasm and cooperation are an important part of the San Francisco Opera’s great spirit. With that in mind, it is essential for us to know our place in the organization and to abide by the good sense, manners, and practices that years of experience have refined and which are outlined in this manual.

The Super Coordinator

The Super Coordinator is a Company staff member who is responsible for casting the Super roles. Our present Super Coordinator is April Busch, whose email is abusch@sfoera.com, and whose phone number is (415) 565-6481.

The Production Super Captain

Most productions will have a Production Super Captain (PSC). The PSC is usually an experienced Super who is familiar with the Company staff, procedures, and policies. The PSC will be **your primary contact** with the production team.

Some of the duties of the PSC include the following:

- Acting as liaison between the Supers and the Company.
- Providing Supers with up-to-date rehearsal and performance schedules.
- Maintaining the sign-in procedure at rehearsals and performances, and reporting absences to stage management.
- Reminding Supers of house rules and procedures, and making sure each Super has access to or a copy of the Super Manual
- Collecting and maintaining emergency contact information for each Super in the show.

Remember, your first contact should always be the PSC, not the Super Coordinator!

The Super Committee

The Super Committee is a group of Supers who have been elected by fellow Supers or appointed by the Company. It acts as a sounding board and represents the Supers as a whole in the eyes of the Company. If you have a question or concern that cannot be resolved by your PSC, you may contact the Committee at supercommittee@spearheadnews.com.

Our Web Site

The Supers maintain a lively Web site, *The Spearhead*, at spearheadnews.com. In addition to news, features, casting updates, rehearsal schedules, photographs, and interviews, it hosts behind-the-scenes and human-interest stories, not to mention great gossip. Drop by at least once a week! If you are in a production, you should check the site **daily** for rehearsal schedule updates.

The Casting Process

The Super Coordinator, working in conjunction with the costume shop and other opera staff, makes the preliminary casting choices for each production.

Afterward, the stage director or his or her assistant director (AD) makes further casting decisions based on the director's artistic vision. In some cases, the director may overrule casting decisions made by the staff. The stage director's decision is final.

For better or worse, the primary criterion for many shows is simply costume size. Don't take casting decisions too personally. If you *are* selected for a part, please do not reject it because you think it does not suit you.

Note that having performed a role in a previous production of an opera is no guarantee that you will have that role in a new production, although it may be offered to you.

Alternates, also known as “covers,” may also be assigned to a production. Alternates will be of the appropriate age, size, and “type” to substitute for the originally cast Supers. **They must attend all rehearsals and performances**, although if all the regular Supers are present before curtain, alternates may be dismissed early. There is no guarantee that an alternate will go on stage during a performance run. However, being an alternate is a valuable way to introduce yourself to the Company and may present an opportunity to step in and “save the show.”

Supers often ask, “How can I get more roles?” The answer is reliability, reliability, and reliability. **Never** be late, and **never** miss a rehearsal or performance unless you have discussed this in advance (for example, when you were offered the part), or, of course, in an emergency. If you want to be “seen,” volunteer for light-walking and come to the “cattle calls,” the Super party, and bake sales. Humility is also a plus. If you are offered a role as an alternate or a part in an opera that you are not fond of or has a “cast of thousands,” it is better to take it and be seen than to sit out a season.

The schedule of casting decision dates will be posted on the “Auditions” section of our Web site. Again, if you cannot commit to *every* rehearsal and performance, it is your ethical responsibility to so inform the Super Coordinator immediately upon receiving an invitation to be in a production. He or she will then decide if that is problematic.

Costume Fitting

After you have been cast in a show, you will be asked to make an appointment for a costume fitting. The appointment will be arranged by the Super Coordinator. It is important to honor your scheduled time, as many people are affected by your attendance. If you must be late or need to reschedule, please call the Super Coordinator at (415) 565-6481. In an emergency, if you are unable to reach the Super Coordinator, you may call the Costume Shop directly (see page 12 for the phone number). The costume shop is located at 170 Ninth Street, between Mission and Howard.

Please only show up when you have an appointment. The staff won’t be able to change their workflow to fit you in if you drop by while you “happen to be in the neighborhood.”

Please note that occasionally the costume shop will not be able to fit you into the costume you have been assigned, perhaps due to an incorrect measurement or change in your weight, in which case, you may have to be replaced.

Schedules

Rehearsals are held in the Opera House, Zellerbach Rehearsal Hall, and other locations around the city. You will be given a preliminary rehearsal schedule with their dates, times, and locations.

It is mandatory that you be present for all rehearsals and performances for which you are called, unless you have been officially excused. Your absence from even one rehearsal may cause production delays while you learn your staging and those around you are restaged. **In case of illness or emergency or if you are running late, please notify your PSC as soon as possible.** His or her phone number and e-mail address will be distributed at the beginning of rehearsals and this contact information will also be posted on the Super Web site. If you cannot reach the PSC, call the Super Coordinator or the Scheduling Department (see page 12 for the phone numbers). Please make the call yourself: do not ask someone else to call on your behalf unless you are absolutely unable to place the call.

The initial rehearsal schedule is often tentative and subject to change, although the performance and dress rehearsal schedule is fixed. **Before you leave each rehearsal or performance, make sure you know when you are called next.** Although the PSC will notify you of rehearsal time changes, it is *your* responsibility to know when you are called.

The most recent rehearsal and performance schedule can be found online on the Super Web site. The password to the members-only section hosting the schedules will be given to you by your PSC. You may bookmark the page for your individual production, and thereafter there will be no need to enter the password.

If you do not have e-mail or access to the Internet, the PSC will contact you by phone.

Rehearsals

Please arrive at least 15 minutes before the posted start of a rehearsal. Rehearsals begin **promptly** at the appointed time. You are expected to be ready to go on stage at the time the rehearsal is called. If you are late, you may put the entire production behind schedule and cost the company money.

Arriving before the call time gives you an opportunity to check in, receive new staging notes and revised schedules, don appropriate rehearsal attire, and so on. Please be sure to turn off any acoustical nuisances such as cell phones, pagers, and watch alarms.

The secret of being on time is to add some "slack" to allow for traffic and for finding parking (see page 11 for tips). We cannot emphasize enough how tardiness not only inconveniences the Company but also definitely counts against you when future casting decisions are made.

Please sign in as soon as you arrive. The sign-in sheet is posted on the Supers' call-board in the Opera House and in a prominent place at out-of-House rehearsals (or is with the PSC). This is the only way for staff to know that you are present. These sheets are also used to tabulate your stipend. If you do not sign in, the Company does not know that you have made your call time. In that case, it is likely that an alternate will be put on stage in your place. Announcements and other useful information will also be posted on the call-board.

You will receive a name tag that you are required to wear during the rehearsals. This helps stage management and other staff to identify you and your role quickly.

Waiting around is an inevitable part of Supering. You will eventually go on stage, no matter how long it seems to take to get there. Be aware that your time in rehearsal will be used as efficiently as possible; however, operatic productions are complicated, and you may have to wait for your turn to shine. Bring along a book, magazine, iPod, knitting, or other quiet amusements for those stretches. Under no circumstances are you to leave the area unless you have been officially dismissed or the Company is on an announced break.

Always wait where stage personnel can easily locate you, and stay within hearing distance of the stage managers while the rehearsal is in progress. Respond promptly to your "places" call. Stay in your entrance or preset position until given further instruction. Do not wander off. Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs) are responsible for making sure everyone is in the right place and ready to go. If you have a problem and must leave the stage area after you are in place, please inform the ASM.

During Opera House rehearsals, the stage managers may ask you to sit in the auditorium. Do not use the bridge across the orchestra pit: please use the door into the lobby from the stage-left hallway. When you are in the auditorium, sit on the right side of the house in the orchestra section on the first floor so that you may be easily found.

No food or beverages are allowed in the auditorium. No costumes are allowed in the auditorium. No one in body makeup is allowed in the auditorium. Please leave your belongings in the auditorium or dressing rooms, not backstage, where they may be confused with props. Please do not bring valuables with you.

Do not pick up or disturb props that are not assigned to you, and never remove a prop from the stage area. For your safety, clear the backstage area as quickly and quietly as possible before a set change or large exit of chorus or Supers.

Please be quiet during rehearsals. A rehearsal is a working session and those involved in the production must have quiet in order to work. The cumulative sound of many people talking or even whispering makes it very difficult for stage management to work effectively, and may disturb fellow performers.

Being on Stage

Hard to believe as it may be, the opera is really not about *you*. Never stand or cross in front of a principal or chorister unless directed to do so, and don't try to attract undue attention ("pull focus") in any way.

From a dramatic standpoint, *there is no audience*. It doesn't exist. What happens on stage between characters is everything. As a courtesy to your fellow performers, stay in character at all times, whether or not you are facing the audience.

If something untoward happens, such as was the case when the apple fell off of William Tells' son's head *before* the historic arrow was shot, the best reaction is to do what your *character* would do and simply fix it, which on that occasion was for a nearby soldier to pick up the apple and pop it back onto the unfortunate son's head. At other times, an action might be too distracting, and one must ignore the situation. Use your judgment.

There is a natural amount of improvisation in live theater, so expect *slight* variations from performance to performance. For instance, a chorister may stand in "your" spot, and it may be best for you just to stand near it. However, if it is absolutely critical that you be exactly at your assigned location, for reasons of prop placement or set and actor movement, a polite whisper may fix the problem.

It is also good to know what the dramatic action is in your scene—you should read the libretto, or at least a synopsis of the opera, as it will inform your character. This is particularly important if you are asked to react to the action or dialogue.

The Dressing Room

On performance and costumed rehearsal days, go directly to your assigned dressing room as soon as you have signed in. You will have an assigned dressing table space with your name taped onto the mirror at your station. There will also be a "costume plot" with a list of the scenes you are in and a complete list of your costume inventory.

Please try not to bring things of value with you to the Opera House. San Francisco Opera cannot be responsible for lost or stolen items. Lockers in the hallways outside the dressing rooms labeled "Super" are provided for your use on a first-come-first-served basis. You will supply your own padlock. Bring a combination lock, because there will be no secure place to stash a key while you are on stage. Please do not leave items in the lockers overnight.

Wigs and Makeup

Makeup and dress calls are usually designated at least ninety minutes before you are expected to appear on stage, which is most often at curtain time. Supers are called early so that the Wig and Makeup Departments can prepare

them before they take care of the Chorus. The Company staff and your fellow performers depend on you to be on time. If you are late, you create a backlog for the makeup and wig artists while they are rushing to get all of the Supers, chorus members, and ballet dancers ready for their entrances. It is not only selfish to be late for your call, but it will also directly affect what is seen on stage—which is our ultimate product. **Do not try to adjust your call time to suit your schedule.**

If a Super does not make it to the theater **in time for his or her makeup-and-dress call**, an alternate may go on stage for them, at the discretion of Stage Management. Wig, Makeup, and Wardrobe will wait until 30 minutes before your call before putting the alternate in your place, or tell the AD that you are absent. Again, if you know you are running late, call your PSC. Due to sanitation issues, once an alternate has put on a costume, the original Super cannot get into that costume. The alternate will go on.

Wig and makeup requirements are different for each show. Usually, each Super will apply his or her own makeup base using an individually assigned makeup kit. The base makeup and sponge provided by the Makeup Department will be clearly labeled with your name and left in your dressing station drawer. After every application, wash out the sponge with soap and squeeze it dry. Do *not* leave it sealed in the plastic bag—that encourages the growth of mildew. Just leave the bag open.

For hygienic reasons, do not share your base with anyone else. If you run out, notify the makeup staff, who will supply you with more. You will generally apply your base makeup **before** dressing in costume, although you should check with your dresser first.

Proceed to the makeup room as soon as your base is dry. Wait in line until a makeup artist calls you. The artist will know exactly what the makeup requirements are for the show.

Once the makeup has been applied, do not attempt to alter it. If something is wrong (e.g., your makeup is running because of sweat, or your mustache is falling off), go directly to Wigs and Makeup—do not try to repair it yourself.

The Wig and Makeup Departments have rather stringent health and safety guidelines. They are instructed to sanitize their hands after working on each client. Also, they are instructed to notify their supervisor immediately should a client appear to have health problems, which include open wounds or sores, conjunctivitis and other contagious diseases, intoxication, and lack of personal hygiene evidenced by body odor, dirty hair, head lice, etc. Please see the PSC, the Super Coordinator, or the Head of Wigs and Makeup if you have any such problems and discuss how they may be resolved.

If a wig or facial hair is to be worn with your costume, a notice will be taped onto the mirror at your dressing station. If you see such a notice with your name on it, go to the wig room and ask if your hair needs to be applied before or after you are in costume, and then proceed accordingly. If you are wearing

your own hair and/or facial hair, do not cut or shave it during the production run without first checking with the Wig Master.

As soon as you have made your final appearance on stage, go directly to the Wig Department to have your wig or facial hair removed. **Never attempt to remove your own wig or facial hair without assistance from the Wig staff.** The products are fragile and expensive.

Costumes

The Wardrobe Department is in charge of the costumes after they come to the Opera House. Dressers will be in the dressing room at the appointed call time to help you put on your costume. **Never put on your costume without a dresser present.** If you have a quick-change during the performance, dressers will assist you.

Your costume must be worn as assigned. A Wardrobe or Costume Supervisor must approve any proposed changes. No personal adornment, such as jewelry, body piercings, watches, and nail polish, should be visible while you are in costume. Glasses must not be worn on stage without the approval of the director. Dressers and makeup artists are experienced in hiding tattoos and unremovable jewelry. Please give them advance warning and the time to work their magic.

Please wear suitable undergarments for all fittings, rehearsals, and performances.

The costumes you wear are hand-crafted and very expensive. While in costume, please do not eat, smoke, or drink **any** beverage—even plain water can stain silk. If you want to eat or drink during a break, please wear one of the robes provided by the company to cover your costume, or if there is time, remove the costume's outer layers (but you still must wear a robe). Some Supers bring their own robes to wear between stage calls.

Be aware that your costume might become wrinkled or soiled if you sit in it while waiting to go on. This will make you look bad on stage. Ask the wardrobe staff for tips on how to sit in a costume in the least detrimental way. If your costume needs to be repaired, please inform your dresser before leaving the theater.

Technical staff at the Opera House are union members. Due to stringent union contract requirements backed up by potential fines for infringement, all performers should proceed to their dressing room *immediately* following their final stage appearance and change out of their costume. Do not linger backstage for photos or conversation. There are no exceptions to this rule! Violations will result in the opera company receiving substantial overtime penalties and your dismissal from the Super roster.

After removing your costume, hang it in the space designated by the Wardrobe Department.

Food

There is no food service backstage, although there are a few vending machines and volunteers often provide light snacks during performances. You are strongly advised to bring your own dinner and/or snack. You can use the microwave oven in the kitchen off the “canteen” (break area). You are permitted to eat only in the canteen—but never in costume without a robe!

During chorus rehearsals, union rules mandate breaks, which last 10 minutes each hour. During principal rehearsals, company policy is to provide a 15-minute break every three hours, or five minutes per hour. Plan to eat your meals accordingly.

During performances and dress rehearsals, all intermissions are observed, and they last at least twenty minutes. If after you sign in when you arrive at the house, have your makeup done, but don't put on your costume, you will magically find that you have an entire hour before your first call, which is an excellent time for a meal.

Another way to keep yourself well fed is to arrive much earlier than your call and eat dinner at a local restaurant. A great list of local spots can be found on the San Francisco Symphony Web site, at sfsymphony.org.

Supplies

Bring food and eating utensils, a good makeup remover (Noxema works well), shoe insoles or knee- and elbow-pads (if required), and a washcloth if you wish to ensure that you have one at every performance. If you arrive at the House wearing nice clothes, bring something to change into, as theater makeup easily stains fabric.

There are showers in the dressing rooms, and the Company provides towels and washcloths, but bring your own toiletries.

Supers often bring books, magazines, crossword puzzles, work, knitting, and other quiet time-passing devices.

Cameras are quite welcome, provided you follow the rules described below. Supers are by and large hams and love to see pictures of themselves. If you take photographs, make copies for your fellow Supers!

Photographs

Photographs are great souvenirs, and Supers collect them like baseball cards. However, please observe common sense while taking photographs.

- Do not take photographs in the communal dressing rooms.
- Do not take photographs backstage, immediately *under* the stage during a performance, or in the wings. Light from a flash will be visible to the audience. Even if you turn off your flash, there are issues of intellectual property and privacy at work.

- Never disturb a principal artist in his or her dressing room to request a photo. Although not on stage, a singer may be vocalizing, studying a role, or simply relaxing. Do not impose on their personal time or space. Also, do not snap photos as a singer is rushing on or off stage. An appointed representative from the Super Committee will coordinate a single “photo op” with each artist during a run. The photo session schedule will be posted on the Super call-board.
- Do not interfere with the artists and dressers during quick costume changes, which sometimes occur in hallways or other unusual locations.
- If you wish to take photos in your costume, please do so before your final appearance on stage. After you have appeared on stage, you are expected to immediately return to the dressing area to have your wig removed and to get out of costume. Post-performance photo sessions interfere with the Wig and Wardrobe Departments’ schedule.
- Opening and closing nights are generally not good times for photographs. On opening night, the artists are often anxious, and staff are making last-minute preparations. On closing night, the sets and costumes are packed up and transported as soon as the performance is over.
- Respect the privacy of your fellow Supers and all of the other artists and employees: ask permission before taking photographs. Candid and secret photos are not welcome.
- Professional photography sessions occur from time to time backstage and in other parts of the House. This does not mean that you can join the professional photographers in these situations.
- Photographs are never permitted during a rehearsal, whether on stage or in a rehearsal hall.*
- Audio or video recording rehearsals and performances is absolutely prohibited.

Interaction with Principal Singers and Others

You are not to speak to the principals, other than to perhaps voice a polite “Good evening” or a quiet “Toi! Toi! Toi!” on opening night (that’s opera-speak for “good luck”). Some principals are quite friendly and may initiate a conversation, which is fine, but don’t expect or instigate one or join in on one between singers. Remember, they are *working*. Even if a singer is silent, he or she may be going over the music, getting into character, or resting. If there is a really good noninvasive reason to get in touch with a principal (for example, to request that your program be signed), discuss it with his or her dresser when he or she is sitting outside the principal’s dressing room, and the dresser will speak to the artist.

* Exceptions have occasionally been made after obtaining permission from the Stage Manager and the director (or AD) of the production, and informing the Super Coordinator. The purpose of the photographs has been for a *Spearhead* feature, not for individual personal use. Additionally, short on-stage pre-performance or intermission photo sessions may be similarly arranged through the PSC, who will obtain requisite permissions.

Similar guidelines should also apply to **all** those working the show—stage hands, wigs-and-makeup folks, singers in lesser roles, etc. These professionals are working, and should not be disturbed.

Identification Badges

Each Super in a current production will be issued an identification badge, which expires at the end of the season. Be prepared to show this badge to the stage door security personnel upon entering the opera house or rehearsal space. Keep this badge with you at all times, except when you are in costume. If you lose your badge, you will be charged \$10 to replace it.

A Super who is not in a current show and does not have a current ID badge will need to sign in as a Visitor at the stage door for access to bake sales or other events. **Old ID badges will not be honored at the door and the Committee asks that Supers not try to use old badges to gain entrance.**

No Visitors

It is company policy that visitors, children, and pets are **not permitted** at rehearsals or backstage during performances, except during Bake Sales, when visitors may be directed *to the canteen only*. See the Super Web site (spearheadnews.com) for information about Bake Sales.

Dress Rehearsal Passes

Generally, each Super may invite two guests to the final dress rehearsal of the opera in which they appear (some operas' final dress rehearsals are closed at the director's discretion). This is a privilege, not a right. Please do not abuse it by asking to invite additional people. Do not come to a dress rehearsal unless you are using a light-walking or other volunteer credit. It is not fair to those individuals who have earned the right to attend these special rehearsals. If you would like to volunteer as a light-walker or in some other capacity, see the Super Coordinator.

Being a Super in one production does *not* entitle you to come backstage during a performance or rehearsal of any other production!!

Personal Safety in the Civic Center Area

NOTE: Under review with the Super Committee.

Parking

NOTE: Under review with the Super Committee.

Supers may not park in any opera staff parking lots.

Parking is available in commercial garages or lots or on the street in the neighborhood. Many on-street parking spaces have a 1- or 2-hour time limit until 6 P.M., except on Sundays. **Read the signs and the meters carefully.** If you are called for a long rehearsal during the day (other than Sunday), you may have to park a good distance away from your rehearsal space and walk. Leave enough time before your dress or rehearsal call to park and walk. Most Supers have an early call time, which is to our benefit because it is easier to find parking before the opera and symphony audiences join the search for good spots.

A good guide to public parking and transportation can be found on the San Francisco Symphony's Web site, at sfsymphony.org. Click on "How to Prepare," and then "Hall Information," and then "Directions," and then "Davies Symphony Hall."

The *best* options are to walk, take public transportation, or carpool. Ask your fellow Supers or your PSC about carpooling.

Insurance and Emergency Contact Information

San Francisco Opera is concerned about your health and safety while you volunteer your services. For your benefit, the Company provides an insurance policy that acts as a secondary policy to your own Medical Plan in case of an accident or injury that is attributed to your service with San Francisco Opera. This plan may act as a primary plan if you do not have a Medical Plan of your own.

You will be asked to complete an emergency contact sheet. This information is strictly confidential, for use in a medical emergency only.

Reimbursement

Supers receive a stipend of \$5 per staging rehearsal and \$10 per dress call. Stipend checks are distributed at the final performance.

Important Phone Numbers

To reach the San Francisco Opera on dress rehearsal and performance days, first contact the **Production Super Captain (PSC)**. Failing that, call the Super Coordinator. If she is not available, you may call the Scheduling Department, the switchboard, and the security guard station, in that order.

- SFO Super Coordinator: April Busch: (415) 565-6481
- SFO Scheduling Department: (415) 565-6479
- SFO Costume Shop: (415) 551-6300
- SFO Switchboard (Mon–Friday, 9 am–6 pm): (415) 861-4008
- SFO Security Guard Station (last resort!) (415) 557-6238

Revised by Paul Szczesiul and Mike Harvey

Edited by Mark Burstein and Lynn Meinhardt

Approved by the Super Committee, September 2006