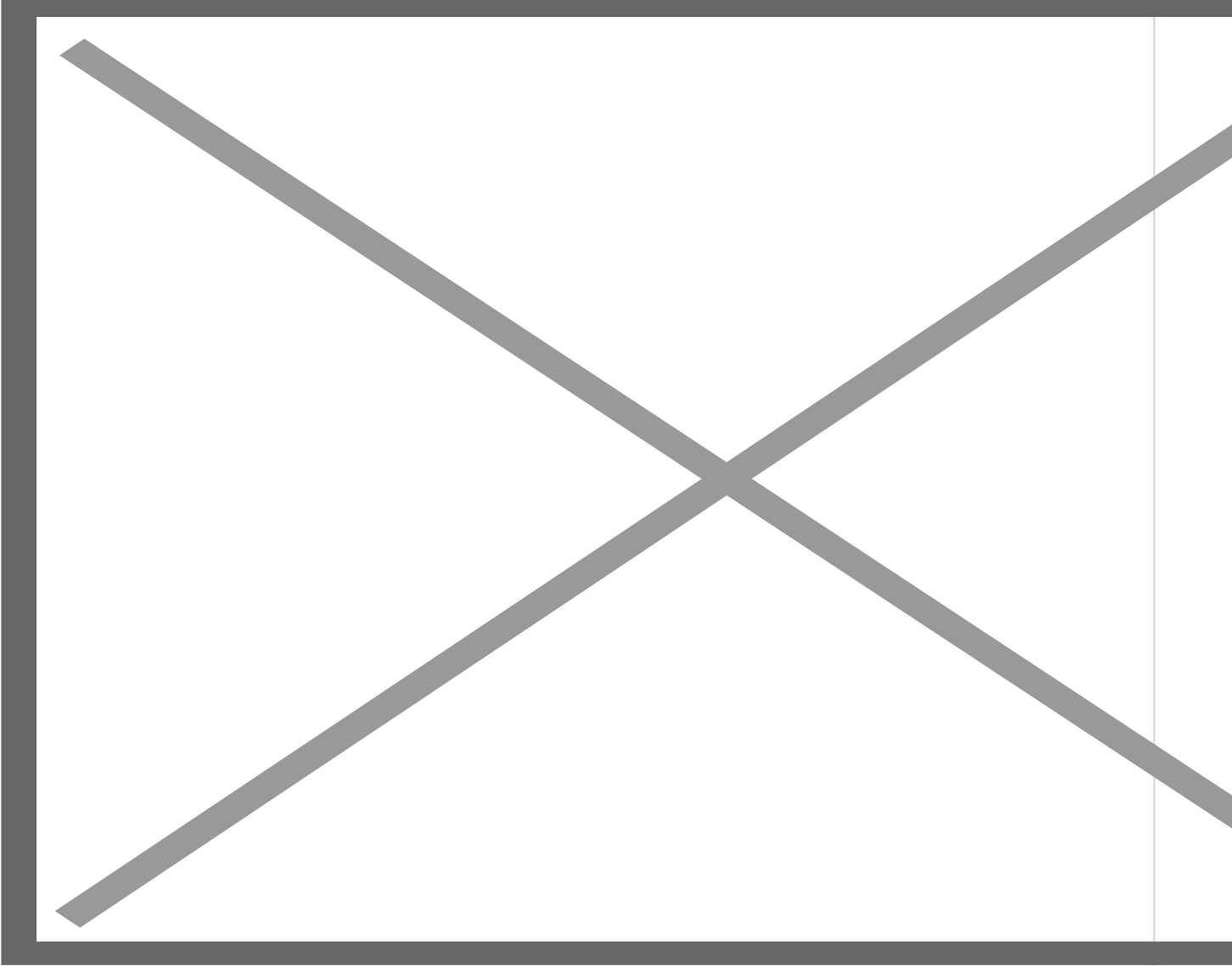


U.S. soprano Angel Blue slams blackface, pulls out of Italian opera

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Angel Blue wrote on social media that she couldn't 'in good conscience associate myself with an institution which continues this practice' [File: Jason DeCrow/AP Photo]

New York, July 17 (RHC)-- Soprano Angel Blue says she will not perform in an opera in Italy this month because blackface was used in the staging of a different work earlier on the same stage.

The U.S. singer posted a note on her Instagram page saying she will be bowing out of "La Traviata" at Verona's Arena this month because the theatre recently mounted another Giuseppe Verdi opera, Aida, that had performers in blackface.

She blasted such use of "archaic" theatrical practices as "offensive, humiliating, and outright racist." Angel Blue, however, was still listed on the Arena's website on Saturday as singing the role of Violetta in "La Traviata" on July 22nd and 30th.

The theatre said it was hoping that Blue, who is Black, would accept an invitation to meet with Arena officials in a "dialogue" about the issue. The Arena, in a statement Friday, said it had "no reason nor intent whatsoever to offend and disturb anyone's sensibility."

For decades, U.S. civil rights organisations have publicly condemned blackface — in which white performers blacken their faces — as dehumanizing Blacks by introducing and reinforcing racial stereotypes.

The Arena earlier this year mounted performances of Aida, based on a 2002 staging of the opera classic by Italian director Franco Zeffirelli who died in 2019. That staging uses blackface.

"Dear Friends, Family, and Opera Lovers," began the soprano's Instagram post. "I have come to the unfortunate conclusion that I will not be singing La Traviata at Arena di Verona this summer as planned."

Referring to Arena's decision to use blackface makeup in Aida, the singer wrote: "Let me be perfectly clear: the use of blackface under any circumstances, artistic or otherwise, is a deeply misguided practice based on archaic theatrical traditions which have no place in modern society. It is offensive, humiliating and outright racist."

She wrote that she could not "in good conscience associate myself with an institution which continues this practice".

The theatre's statement said, "Angel Blue knowingly committed herself to sing at the Arena" even though the "characteristics" of the 2002 Zeffirelli staging were "well known." Still, the theatre stressed its hope that her protest would ultimately improve understanding between cultures, as well as educate Italian audiences.

"Every country has different roots, and their cultural and social structures developed along different historical and cultural paths," said the statement by the Arena of Verona Foundation. "Common convictions have often been reached only after years of dialogue and mutual understanding."

The Arena statement stressed dialogue, "in effort to understand others' point of view, in respect of consciously assumed artistic obligations." "Contraposition, judgments, labeling, lack of dialogue only feed the culture of contrasts, which we totally reject," said the statement, appealing for cooperation "to avoid divisions."

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