

SCOTT ETHIER

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Testimony to The CUNY Board of Trustees, May 8, 2023

My name is Scott Ethier. I'm a freelance musician and composer here in New York City, and for the last twelve years I've taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Music Program here at LaGuardia Community College.

I'm late to this hearing because for the past few hours I've been downstairs with some of our LaGuardia students in a classroom filled with pianos. The class I was teaching this evening is one of my favorites.

When we started our semester, most of the students in my class had never played a musical instrument. Most of my students never had access to musical training as children. And today, as they are holding down full-time jobs and raising families, most of my students have imagined that their chance to pursue a career in music had long since passed them by.

But tonight, not eight weeks after we met for the first time, my students are playing piano and reading music with pride and self-confidence. They have taken their first steps towards being the performers, the songwriters, the producers, and the music educators who enrich the cultural life of New York City.

They walked into the class as college students, but they will walk out as musicians because CUNY was here to provide them with that opportunity.

I'd like to tell you about another class, very much like the one I just described, filled with students who thought a life of music was beyond their grasp.

But days before we were supposed to begin, this class was cancelled: cancelled because austerity was more important than opportunity. The silhouettes you see all around you - these are the students from whom that opportunity was taken away.

Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia set the standard for a life of public service in New York City. In 1943 Mayor LaGuardia did something that today would be unthinkable today: he founded an opera company, New York City Opera - "The People's Opera."

He founded an opera company because he understood that the people of New York are more than units of economic productivity. They are human beings with souls that must be nourished, and it is the duty of government to ensure that art is accessible to all.

If Mayor LaGuardia could start an opera company in the darkest days of World War II, I call on CUNY's Board of Trustees not to give in to austerity, but to fight for an abundantly funded CUNY.

Sincerely,

Scott Ethier
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