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## OPEN LETTER

Tuesday, July 18, 2017

**To: Massey Hall and  
Roy Thomson Hall  
Corporation Board of  
Governors:**

The Honourable  
Elizabeth Dowdeswell  
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Dear Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Oc, Oont. and the Board of Governors at The Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall Corporation,

As Honorary Patron of The Corporation of Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall as well as a representative of Canada, I felt compelled to address you, along with the Board of Governors at Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall Corporation directly. As you may be aware, Roy Thomson Hall has invited Valery Gergiev, a world renowned Russian conductor and known supporter of the Putin Regime including current “anti-gay” legislations in Russia, to perform on November 10, 2017.

As a member of the LGBTQI2S community and the Executive Director of Egale Canada, I write to you to express the collective concern from our community that a figure like Gergiev – one who has been protested internationally in metropolises such as New York, London and more – has been invited to perform in Toronto by the Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall Corporation. This is especially significant given the current and worsening situation for the LGBTQI2S community in Russia as well as the tremendous amount of media and controversy currently surrounding this topic. I need not remind you that there are significant LGBTQI2S and other human rights abuses taking place under the Putin Regime.

It is our duty as people and especially as Canadians to uphold a standard of human rights within our communities and act as an example to countries around the world. By providing accommodation to Valery Gergiev, knowing the values he upholds and represents, the Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall Corporation will be sending a message to the community in Toronto and Canada that it supports art at the cost of human rights for all. It would be contradictory to support, host or advertise the performances of an artist, or anyone for that matter who agrees with the collective persecution, torture and imprisonment of the LGBTQI2S community.

In the past, performers who have visited Canada under similar circumstances have seen their shows cancelled due to community outrage. One recent example was the case of Ukrainian born Pianist, Valentina Lisitsa who was prevented from performing at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2015 after protests broke out bringing light to Lisitsa’s support for the Russian minority in the Ukraine – which was also a question of human rights at the time and remains to stand.

The fact that Roy Thomson Hall has invited Gergiev, a supporter of the oppression of human rights, is especially troubling for our community given that the Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall Corporation is a non-profit and as such receives significant funding from the Canadian Government – including recent funding from the Ontario Music Fund as well as The Ministry of Heritage through the Canadian Cultural Spaces Fund.

Egale works to improve the lives of LGBTQI2S people in Canada and to enhance the global response to LGBTQI2S issues. Egale will achieve this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education and community engagement.

Égale travaille à améliorer la vie des personnes LGBTQ+ en éclairant l’élaboration des politiques publiques, en inspirant le changement culturel et en promouvant les droits de la personne et l’inclusion grâce à la recherche, à l’éducation et à la mobilisation communautaire.



**Facts about Valery Gergiev and the situation facing the LGBTQI2S community in Russia:**

- In September 2013, Valery Gergiev commented on Russia's Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill 2013 stating, "In Russia we do everything we can to protect children from pedophiles. This law is not about homosexuality, it targets pedophilia."
- Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill 2013 as well as Russia's recent treatment of LGBTQI2S people has been condemned by groups such as ILGA and Amnesty International for the way it equates homosexuality with pedophilia, restricts freedom of expression, and has already resulted in countless anti-gay attacks on LGBTQI2S citizens in Russia.
- This is the first time that the ECtHR has made a ruling in relation to the federal law which bans public statements in relation to 'sexual minorities'. By six votes to one, the ECtHR held that there had been a violation of Article 10 (freedom of expression) and a violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 10.
- In March 2014, Valery Gergiev signed an open letter published on the Russian Federation's Ministry of Culture website "declaring adamant support for the position of the Russian President toward Ukraine and Crimea". Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the military invasion and annexation of Crimea violates at several international treaties and has been condemned by governments around the world, including the Government of Canada.

It is our hope that in reading this letter you will reassess the value associated with hosting a figure such as Gergiev. It is our view that Valery Gergiev's invitation to perform should be suspended with immediate effect until he officially withdraws his support for the current government in Russia and fully explains his position on the Anti-Homosexual Propaganda Bill.

Should Gergiev decide not to contend, his employment should be terminated as he is not an appropriate person to perform at any venue that receives support from the Canadian government. Gergiev supports discriminatory legislation which goes against Canadian values of equality and diversity, and he supports Russian military action which the Government of Canada fully condemns.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Kennedy". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Helen Kennedy  
Executive Director, Egale Canada