

STRONGER TOGETHER



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Blue Man Group issues legal threats while top Canadian technician quits, calling Toronto production “an oppressive work environment.”

TORONTO – On the heels of legal threats by Blue Man Group against the theatrical associations and unions leading a boycott of the Toronto production, a senior Canadian technician who recently quit the show because of broken promises and verbal abuse has broken his silence to contradict the New York-based production’s version of how its employees are treated. (His name and background will be provided at personal interviews. See below for arrangements.)

“It was an oppressive work environment,” said the technician, who has never belonged to the stage technician’s union – (IATSE) – in his thirty years in the industry. He contacted IATSE 58 with his story on his own initiative and has agreed to be interviewed and provide pay documentation that calls into question Blue Man Group’s recent public claim that it offers “salaries that typically exceed union norms as well as competitive benefits.”

He says he gave up other work opportunities because Blue Man promised 41 hours of work per week, with a full benefits package. Shortly after he was hired, his hours were reduced and he was told there was no weekly guarantee. He was also informed that his benefits would not begin for several months.

“The broken promises on my pay and benefits were insulting enough. But I have never been so verbally abused and shown such lack of respect for my knowledge and experience as I was [by one director in particular] during my short, unhappy time with Blue Man Group.

“They try to portray themselves as a family but it is not a family I want to be part of. The Canadian stage technicians I worked with were generally unhappy with the pay and conditions but most are young and inexperienced. They are afraid to speak up.”

The revelations came after the New York-based Blue Man Group’s Toronto law firm threatened legal action against the Blue Man Boycott Coalition for certain boycott-related activities. That was followed by a complaint to the Ontario Labour Relations Board asking the board to stop the Canadian Actors’ Equity Association from other boycott-related activities.

“Blue Man Group is being virulently combative at its own expense,” said Susan Wallace, Equity’s Executive Director. “Now is the time for them to make a dramatic gesture of conciliation and sign the same agreement as their theatrical peers.”

“By fully embracing Toronto’s close-knit theatrical community rather than trying to break it up, Blue Man will enjoy a long and prosperous run and eventually become a well-remembered and respected part of our city’s artistic history. It is tragic that they are determined to go in the opposite direction. If they continue to be ill-advised, they will eventually leave Toronto with bitter memories and wasted talent. It doesn’t have to be that way.”

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