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## With Contract's Help, Carnegie Crew Draws Big Pay

By [DANIEL J. WAKIN](#)

Some of the highest-paid people at [Carnegie Hall](#) will never have their names on the big posters outside or sit in its executive suites or stand next to famous conductors. They are members of Carnegie's permanent stage crew, the self-effacing men in dark suits who glide out to tote a podium, shift a music stand and make sure that concerts start on time, or at all.

The men — Dennis O'Connell, properties manager; James Csollany, carpenter; John Goodson and John Cardinale, electricians; and Kenneth Beltrone, carpenter — were identified on Carnegie's tax return for the 2007-8 season as being the hall's leading five earners after its top executive, Clive Gillinson. Their annual compensation ranged from Mr. O'Connell's \$422,599 (with an additional \$107,445 in benefits and deferred compensation) to Mr. Goodson's \$327,257 (with \$76,459 in benefits and deferred compensation), the return showed.

Famous soloists can earn that much in a matter of days or weeks, given recital fees that go anywhere from \$20,000 to \$60,000, classical music managers say. But the vast majority of artists on Carnegie's stages earn far less. In fact, many musicians toiling in the trenches have to lay out their own money to rent the main auditorium or Carnegie's smaller halls, Zankel and Weill. The Carnegie stagehand salaries outstrip compensation at [Lincoln Center](#) and elsewhere. At a time of belt-tightening at Carnegie, they stand out in greater relief.

The average stagehand annual salary and benefits package at Avery Fisher and Alice Tully halls is \$290,000, said Eileen McMahon, a spokeswoman for Lincoln Center. At the [Metropolitan Opera](#) stagehands rarely figure in the top-earning echelons, although the properties master, James Blumenfeld, was listed as earning \$334,000 two seasons ago, said Peter Clark, a Met spokesman. He said the money included a payout of built-

up vacation time.

The stagehands, whose craft is often passed down through generations, benefit from a powerful union, Local 1 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, one of the city's oldest organized labor bodies. A Local 1 stagehand strike in 2007 closed most Broadway shows for 19 days. On Broadway stagehands earn a minimum of \$1,225 to \$1,600 a week on a long-running show, although those numbers don't apply to Carnegie Hall stagehands, who have a separate contract. The Carnegie stagehands benefit from a generous agreement that has evolved over decades at one of the busiest halls in the country. They are paid fixed performance fees for the shows they work, along with hourly rates for work connected with the shows. After 40 hours a week, they receive overtime at one-and-a-half, double or triple time. The tax returns list their average work week at 80 hours. Their compensation includes vacation pay (few take much time off) and a large amount connected to recordings made in the hall.

"It's pretty amazing what the total comes out to be," said Lois Gray, a professor emeritus at [Cornell University's](#) School of Industrial and Labor Relations and an expert on labor relations in the arts and entertainment industries. "But it reflects bargaining power and one's economic position. You don't pass moral judgments on these things. Baseball players are scarce, and talent is scarce."

While substitute sopranos and solo violinists can easily be found, the show cannot go on without the men in the suits.

"They can't be replaced in the short run," Ms. Gray said. "In the long run they can be replaced. None of these entertainment venues is willing to wait for the long run."

The power of the stagehands is palpable in the nervousness shown by people in the industry when talking about them. Carnegie officials declined to provide details about the contract; the stagehands and Local 1 officials declined to be interviewed for this article.

"The last thing I want to do is upset the people at Carnegie Hall," said Kelly Hall-Tompkins, a violinist who played a recital at Weill earlier this month. "I'd like to have a lifelong relationship with them."

Ms. Hall-Tompkins said she begrudged the stagehands nothing. "Musicians should be so lucky to have a strong

union like that," she said.

Carnegie declined to say what portion of its \$70 million budget (down from \$84.5 million two seasons ago) was devoted to stagehand costs, and it is not clear how much those costs contribute to, say, a \$154 top-price ticket for a [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#) concert next week.

Renters of the hall's main Stern auditorium and the smaller Zankel Hall are generally charged extra for the stagehands, depending on the needs; the minimum charge for stage labor at Weill Recital Hall is \$540 per performance. In rent alone, outside presenters can pay from \$1,475 at Weill on a weekday afternoon to \$15,600 for a weekend evening at Stern.

Ellen Hamilton, president and founder of the Florida International Piano Competition, recently rented Weill for a competition recital and paid the labor minimum. "It did seem high to me," she said. "I don't know if that's because we're in Florida, and that's New York."

Stagehand costs for a concert with orchestra and chorus in Carnegie's main hall average around \$7,000 to \$8,000, said Peter Tiboris, a conductor and the general director of Mid-America Productions, a major producer of concerts at Carnegie Hall.

The stagehands, who have all worked at Carnegie for more than two decades, practically live in the hall, it is said, often arriving at 8 a.m. and leaving after midnight. Why so much overtime? It is available, and the stagehands simply choose to take it, said Mr. Gillinson, also Carnegie's executive and artistic director, who is the only staff member listed as earning more than the stagehands. His salary and benefits were \$946,581, according to the tax return for the 2007-8 season, relatively modest compared to those of other New York arts titans.

Carnegie chooses to keep on only five permanent stagehands, Mr. Gillinson said, hiring others part time, because the number and nature of productions cannot be predicted from year to year. He also said that it would be no less expensive to hire other stagehands to fill in the overtime hours.

"The reality is, this is money you've got to pay to get the job done anyway," he said. The stagehands, Mr.

Gillinson pointed out, have huge and varied jobs to carry out, far more so than at halls like the Met or Avery Fisher, where the fare is more predictable. They must set up and dismantle configurations for daytime rehearsals and evening performances on all three stages for 800 events a season, sometimes seven days a week. They must move pianos, unload instruments from trucks, set up and adjust sound equipment, move risers for orchestras, keep an eye on maintenance throughout the building, fix seats, remember different orchestral seatings and even keep in mind what kind of podium a conductor prefers.

“I never had a problem with what they make,” said James D. Nomikos, a former operations director at Carnegie who was their supervisor. “They sacrifice their family life, their time. By the time their careers are over, they’re broken, with all that lifting.”

Mr. Nomikos said the main reason to let the stagehands pile on the overtime was to provide continuity during the day. It makes no sense to have one set of workers set up for a morning rehearsal and a different set do it at the evening performance.

“You don’t get one dancer doing the rehearsal,” he said, “and one dancer doing the performing.”

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