

# First Kravis' "Riverdance"

## Show canceled in labor fight

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WEST PALM BEACH — By JANE MUSGRAVE and SONJA ISGER

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**Riverdance:** [Event details](#)

WEST PALM BEACH - Tonight's performance of Riverdance at the Kravis Center tonight has been cancelled but center officials are hopeful they can get around union problems and salvage the remainder of the Irish dance show's planned six-day run.

Brian Bixler, a spokesman for the performing arts hall, said negotiations are ongoing in hopes that the show will go on as planned Wednesday through Sunday. Ticket-holders for tonight's performance will be offered refunds or tickets to one of the hoped-for shows.

The fate of the show was in doubt throughout the day as members of the local International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians and Allied Crafts circled the building with signs accusing the center of being "law-breakers." They arrived at the center shortly before 7 a.m., when they knew fellow union members from out-of-state would be arriving to set up the show.

Jamie Gormley, a head carpenter who brought the show down from it's last stop in Raleigh, N.C., wouldn't give the go-ahead to unload the four tractor trailers so crews, hired by the center, could begin setting up for the performance.

"It's my livelihood; it's what I do. I don't want to jeopardize my job or my career but I feel strongly about not crossing the picket line," said Gormely of Durango, Colo.

Alan Glassman, business manager for Local 500, said the union doesn't want to disappoint theater-goers.

"We've never stopped a team from going to work," he said. "But we're tired of it."

Since 2000, the union has been trying to persuade Kravis Center officials to negotiate a contract. Instead, they locked the union out.

The lock-out continued even after the National Labor Relations Board last fall upheld the union's claims, ordered the center to re-instate six full-time workers, negotiate a contract with the union and pay union members what could be as much as \$2 million in lost wages. The board's decision came five years after an administrative law judge ruled that center members had negotiated in bad faith and ordered them to reinstate the union.

Glassman said union members will remain outside the building until Judith Mitchell, center executive director, agrees to allow his workers back in the building. While the union wants a continuing contract, they are willing to work Riverdance and then resume contract talks.

Bixler said center officials wouldn't meet with union leaders. The Kravis Center appealed the most recent decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C.

"We have our stance and we want to let the legal process to run its course," he said.

A decision is not expected for at least six months, said attorney Matthew Mierzwa, who represents the local union.

The workers said the lock-out has cost them each as much as \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually. Although they work other shows in the center, such as those produced by Ballet Florida, the Palm Beach Opera or other nationally-produced acts, they aren't used in Kravis-produced shows.

Riverdance, which premiered in 1995 in Dublin, Ireland, and is slated to play eight farewell performances this week, marks the Kravis Center's entry into the business of Broadway show production. Such shows were produced by a national company that used union labor.

That's why, Glassman said, the union is drawing a line in the sand. If it doesn't force the center to negotiate, workers will be hit even harder in the pocketbook next season when they will be denied work on Kravis-produced Broadway shows.

"We're not going away," said Terry McKenzie, a stagehand from West Palm Beach. "We decided to fight for our jobs."

Barbara Black, a longtime union member from Jupiter who handles wardrobe, said the center's stance is both inexplicable and unconscionable.

"This is union busting at its best," she said, looking at West Palm Beach police officers who were blocking the sidewalk in front of the building. "It's just corporate greed."

**WEST PALM BEACH** — Tonight's 8 p.m. performance at the Kravis Center by the Irish folk dance group, Riverdance, has been canceled because of a labor dispute with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, the performing arts center has announced.

# Picketing makes 'Riverdance' miss a step at Kravis, but show back on

By [JANE MUSGRAVE](#)

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WEST PALM BEACH — More than 1,000 people who planned to attend the rollicking Irish show *Riverdance* at the Kravis Center Tuesday night were disappointed when union trouble forced officials to cancel a show for the first time in the hall's history.

But it won't happen again tonight.



In what labor officials said was a huge victory for their cause, the owner of the show canceled its contract with the Kravis Center and agreed to put on the performance using union workers for the remainder of the five-day run.

"I think we more than achieved what we wanted to achieve," said union leader Alan Glassman, who led about 40 workers on a daylong picket outside the Kravis Center. "This is a complete surprise."

It was also a far cry from the way the day began. Police threatened local members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians and Allied Crafts with arrest for picketing without a permit. No arrests were made, but police later ordered nearby parking meters bagged, forcing picketers to move their cars.

Carrying signs calling Kravis officials "law-breakers," union members arrived at the center shortly before 7 a.m., when they knew fellow union members from out of state would be arriving to set up the show, which runs through Sunday.

Jamie Gormley, a head union carpenter who brought the show down from its previous stop in Raleigh, N.C., wouldn't give the go-ahead to unload the four trailers so that crews the Kravis Center hired could begin setting up.

"It's my livelihood; it's what I do," Gormley said. "I don't want to jeopardize my job or my career, but I feel strongly about not crossing the picket line."

The trailers containing costumes, lights, rigging, the set - everything needed to put on the show - remained shuttered all day, finally forcing Kravis officials to announce that the 8 p.m. show was canceled.

Later, in a release titled "The Show Will Go On," Abhann Productions, the Dublin-based producer of the show, announced it would put on the remaining seven performances.

"This is a big coup for us," Glassman said.

About 40 union workers will set up the show today and about a dozen will work throughout the week.

Brian Bixler, a spokesman for the Kravis Center, said officials were satisfied with the outcome. Other than the potential lost revenue from 1,100 tickets sold for Tuesday night's show, the contract change was a financial wash, he said. An estimated \$600,000 in ticket sales would have been lost if the show's entire run had been canceled.

The picketing Tuesday was the culmination of a nearly eight-year battle between the union and center officials.

Since 2000, the union has been trying to persuade Kravis Center officials to renegotiate the contract it has had since the hall opened in 1992. Instead, negotiations broke down and center officials locked out the union.

The lockout continued even after the National Labor Relations Board last fall upheld the union's claims that the center hadn't bargained in good faith. It ordered the center to reinstate six full-time workers, negotiate a contract with the union and pay union members what could be as much as \$2 million in lost wages.

The board's decision came five years after an administrative law judge issued a similar ruling.

Kravis officials have declined to say what caused negotiations to break down. Workers say it isn't money.

"It's about control," said Russell Barron of North Palm Beach, who works as a head electrician.

"They wanted us to do things outside of our craft," said Terry McKenzie of West Palm Beach, a stagehand. "They don't like the fact that we had rules that they couldn't violate."

Bixler declined to detail the center's dispute with the union. The Kravis appealed the most recent decision to the federal appeals court in Washington.

"We have our stance and we want to let the legal process to run its course," he said.

A decision is not expected for at least six months, said attorney Matthew Mierzwa, who represents the union.

Union workers said the lockout has cost them each as much as \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually. Although they work other shows in the center, such as those produced by Ballet Florida, the Palm Beach Opera or nationally produced acts, they aren't hired for Kravis-produced shows.

The fact that the Kravis allows others to use union labor shows it is not anti-union, Bixler said. However, since negotiations broke down, the center has hired its own staff and has to protect those employees, he said.

*Riverdance* was to be presented by the Kravis Center, using its own workers. Most worrisome for the union was a recent Kravis announcement that it plans to produce its own Broadway series instead of using an outside promoter that hires union workers.

That's why the union was drawing a line in the sand, Glassman said. Workers will be hit even harder in the pocketbook next season when they will be denied work on Kravis-produced Broadway shows.

Union members promised that the battle isn't over. Another picket could greet crews when they try to unload another Kravis-produced show.

"We're not going away," McKenzie said. "We decided to fight for our jobs."

Signs on the Kravis marquee Tuesday evening alerted ticket-holders to the canceled show. They will be offered refunds or tickets to one of the remaining shows.

*Staff writer Hector Florin contributed to this story.*