



SEATTLE OPERA
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

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**Stephanie Blythe and François Racine
Named
Seattle Opera Artists of the Year**

**Seattle Opera Honors Marion Oliver McCaw with Seattle Opera Chairman's
Award**

Seattle Opera Board Announced for 2009/10

Seattle—On Tuesday, July 14, during Seattle Opera's Annual Meeting at McCaw Hall, General Director Speight Jenkins announced that the company's 2008/09 Artists of the Year awards went to mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe for performing the role of Amneris in Verdi's *Aida* in August 2008, and to François Racine for his stage direction of Seattle Opera's double bill of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with Schoenberg's *Erwartung* in February and March, 2009.

"In my opinion, Stephanie Blythe is one of the world's greatest singers," said Jenkins. "She has appeared here in many different styles, all brilliantly. Her loyalty and dedication to Seattle Opera means more than I can possibly say."

"I am delighted that François Racine was selected as director, even though Robert Lepage originated the production," Jenkins continued. "The success of the double bill here was made possible by Racine's brilliant work with our three singers."

Stephanie Blythe, one of the most highly respected artists of her generation, won critical and audience acclaim for her performance of the role of Amneris in Seattle Opera's August 2008 production of *Aida*. Blythe has sung the roles of Fricka and the Second Norn in all Seattle *Ring* performances since 2000. She will be singing these roles along with the role of Waltraute in Seattle Opera's *Ring* cycle this August. Other roles at Seattle Opera include the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, and Isabella in Rossini's *Italiana in Algeri*. In 2010 she returns to Seattle Opera as Dame Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff*.

François Racine made his Seattle Opera debut with *Bluebeard's Castle* and *Erwartung* in February and March 2009. He has also recreated Robert Lepage's staging for this production at the Hong Kong Arts and Melbourne festivals, and in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Cincinnati, Québec, and Montréal, since the production's inception at Canadian Opera Company in 1993. Racine has staged productions for all of the major opera companies in Canada, where his credits have included Verdi's *Macbeth* at Opéra de Montréal, and the Canadian Opera Company's productions of Verdi's *Traviata* and Bizet's *Carmen*. He is an award-winning playwright and also the founder and artistic director of Montreal Opera Lab, an acting training center for opera singers.

In 1991, Seattle Opera's Artist of the Year award was created to honor the individual singer, conductor, director, or designer who had made the most significant contribution to the success of the season. At the conclusion of the 2003/04 season, Seattle Opera began honoring two Artists of the Year for the season: one a conductor, director, or designer; the other a singer. Participating in the selection process of Seattle Opera's Artists of the Year are members of Seattle Opera's Board of Trustees, Diamond Level and Platinum Circle donors, and staff, as well as selected members of the local press. This is the company's eighteenth annual selection of Artist of the Year.

John Nesholm, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, announced during the meeting that a Seattle Opera Chairman's Award will be presented to Marion Oliver McCaw (at a later date), in honor of her leadership, generosity, and championship of Seattle Opera. The Chairman's Award was created in 2008 to recognize and honor those who have given exceptional support to Seattle Opera. The unique glass and copper award was designed and hand-crafted by Seattle Opera's Scenic Studios. Mrs. McCaw is an opera enthusiast, founding member of the Seattle Opera Board, and a lifetime champion of the arts in the Northwest. Through a \$20 million naming gift from the

four McCaw brothers—Bruce, Craig, John, and Keith—Marion Oliver McCaw Hall was named in honor of their mother.

“Marion McCaw has expressed her love for opera in her extraordinary support and enthusiasm for what we do in every possible way,” said General Director Speight Jenkins. “She rarely misses a performance and always has interesting comments to make. Her contributions have been among the most vital in the history of Seattle Opera.”

At the Annual Meeting, the 2009/10 Board of Trustees was announced. It was also announced that Seattle Opera expects to achieve a balanced budget for the 2008/09 season.

As a final honor during the 2008/09 Season—which the Board of Trustees had dedicated to Speight Jenkins in celebration of his 25th Anniversary as General Director—a long-time supporter stepped up anonymously with a \$500,000 challenge gift at the 25th Anniversary Gala held in Jenkins’ honor on April 25, 2009. The gift—presented as a dollar-for-dollar challenge—was meant to honor Jenkins’ 25 years and to assure Jenkins’ creative vision can continue to flourish during his tenure. The challenge has been fully met by 761 of Jenkins’ generous fans and supporters, for a total of \$1 million raised in his honor.

Short Biographies of 2008/09 Artists of the Year Stephanie Blythe and François Racine

Stephanie Blythe

Mezzo-Soprano

Stephanie Blythe, one of the most highly respected artists of her generation, has sung Fricka and the Second Norn in all Seattle *Ring* performances since 2000, and she will be singing these roles along with the role of Waltraute in Seattle Opera’s *Ring* cycle this August. Other roles at Seattle Opera include the title role in Bizet’s *Carmen*, Isabella in Rossini’s *Italiana in Algeri*, and Amneris in Verdi’s *Aida*. Blythe debuted at the Met as the Voice in Wagner’s *Parsifal* during her first season in the company’s Lindemann Young Artists Development Program. Her many roles there have included Cornelia in Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*, Jocasta in Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*, Baba the Turk in Stravinsky’s *Rake’s Progress*, Mère Marie in Poulenc’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Eduige in Handel’s *Rodelinda*, and three roles in Puccini’s *Trittico*: Frugola, La Zia Principessa, and Zita. Her roles abroad include Cornelia and Auntie in Britten’s *Peter Grimes* in Paris and Ino/Juno in Handel’s *Semele* and Azucena in Verdi’s *Trovatore* at Covent Garden. She recently sang Ježibaba in Dvorák’s *Rusalka* and Orfeo in Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Met, and she returns to the company in November to reprise her roles in *Il Trittico*. Blythe was named *Musical America’s* Vocalist of the Year for 2009; her other awards include the 2007 *Opera News* Award and the 1999

Richard Tucker Award. In 2010 she returns to Seattle Opera as Dame Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff*, a role she has performed at Paris Opéra, Royal Opera Covent Garden, and the Metropolitan Opera.

François Racine

Stage Director

François Racine has staged productions for all of the major opera companies in Canada, where his credits have included Verdi's *Macbeth* at Opéra de Montréal, and the Canadian Opera Company's productions of Verdi's *Traviata* and Bizet's *Carmen*. Racine made his Seattle Opera debut with *Bluebeard's Castle* and *Erwartung* in February and March, 2009. The two works were originally directed by Robert Lepage for the Canadian Opera Company. Since the production's inception in 1993, Racine has recreated Lepage's staging of the double bill at the Hong Kong Arts and Melbourne festivals, and in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Cincinnati, Quebec, and Montreal. Racine is a regular guest professor at the Conservatory of Music of Montreal, and at McGill University where he has directed many productions, including the acclaimed Canadian production of Harry Somers' *Louis Riel*. He is an award-winning playwright and also the founder and artistic director of Montreal Opera Lab, an acting training center for opera singers.

**Seattle Opera 2009/10 Board of Trustees
Announced at Annual Meeting**

At Seattle Opera's Annual Meeting, the 2009/2010 Board of Trustees was announced.

Seattle Opera 2009/2010 Board of Trustees

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* Indicates new Board member
** On leave of absence

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About Seattle Opera

Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. The company is recognized internationally for its theatrically compelling and musically accomplished performances, especially the Opera's interpretations of the works of Richard Wagner. Seattle Opera's Wagner tradition began under the leadership of the company's founding general director, Glynn Ross, and has continued since 1983 under General Director Speight Jenkins. Since 1975, Seattle Opera has presented 35 cycles of the *Ring* (three different productions), in addition to acclaimed productions of all the other major operas in the Wagner canon. Seattle Opera has achieved the highest per capita attendance of any major opera company in the United States, and draws operagoers from four continents, 22 countries, and 50 states.

7-14-09/HC