



FOR RELEASE: May 15, 2008

Press Contacts: Hilda Cullen, 206.676.5543, hilda.cullen@seattleopera.org

Rosemary Jones, 206.676.5559, rosemary.jones@seattleopera.org

Visuals Contact: Monte Jacobson, 206.676.5545, monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org

**Verdi's Grandest Opera *Aida*
Opens Speight Jenkins's 25th Anniversary Season**

Janice Baird Makes Her Seattle Debut as Elektra

Tickets on Sale May 19

\$25 Tickets Available for All Performances

Seattle—Verdi's grandest of grand operas, *Aida*, opens Seattle Opera's 2008/09 season in August. Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins celebrates his 25th Anniversary at Seattle Opera this year and he has called the 2008/09 season one of the most diverse that he has ever programmed. *Aida* is followed by Richard Strauss's brooding drama *Elektra* in October featuring American soprano Janice Baird in the title role.

Single tickets for both productions go on sale May 19. An online presale begins Saturday, May 17, at 9:00 a.m. The eleven performances of Seattle Opera's *Aida* take place on August 2, 3m, 6, 8, 9, 10m, 13, 15, 17m, 22, and 23, 2008 at McCaw Hall. *Elektra* runs for eight performances on October 18, 19m, 22, 25, 26m, 29, 31, and November 1, 2008. Ticket prices for *Aida* and *Elektra* start at \$25.

Not seen here since 1992, *Aida* features a new-to-Seattle design. Set in Egypt at the time of the pharaohs and presented in the classic style, *Aida* will feature lavish sets by Tony-award winner Michael Yeargan (*The Light in the Piazza*), opulent costumes by Peter J. Hall (*I Puritani*), stage direction by Met veteran Robin Guarino (*Julius Caesar*), ballet by Seattle-based choreographer Donald Byrd (*Julius Caesar*), and the Seattle Opera debut of Italian maestro Riccardo Frizza on the podium.

Aida also marks the return of soprano Lisa Daltirus in the title role. Daltirus made her company debut this February as a Puccini heroine, Tosca, earning critical acclaim and prolonged audience applause for her interpretation of the role. Lisa Daltirus sings *Aida* in the Opening Night cast opposite Antonello Palombi as Radames. Palombi made his famed La Scala debut as Radames and was most recently heard here as Canio in *Pagliacci* in the company's highly popular January production. A Seattle Opera audience favorite, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe sings Amneris, the Egyptian princess. Blythe has sung Fricka and the Second Norn in all Seattle *Ring* performances since 2000 (in the 2009 *Ring*, she still sings Fricka, but will switch to the First Norn and add the role of Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*). She has also appeared in Seattle as Carmen and as Isabella in Rossini's *Italiana in Algeri*. This cast will perform on August 2, 6, 9, 13, 17 (matinee), and 23, 2008.

The young Venezuelan soprano Ana Lucrecia García will make her American debut at Seattle Opera as *Aida* on August 3 (matinee), 8, 10 (matinee), 15, and 22, 2008. She received an enthusiastic reception in Madrid in the same role. This cast also includes Rosario La Spina (Rodolfo in the 2007 *La Bohème* at Seattle Opera) as Radames and mezzo-soprano Loretta Bybee (most recently seen in Seattle as Mary in *The Flying Dutchman*) as Amneris.

Two special events will take place at McCaw Hall during the run of *Aida*. As previously announced, tickets are currently on sale for a concert recital with renowned tenor Ben Heppner and Maestro Asher Fisch on piano on August 14 and the eagerly awaited 2008 International Wagner competition on August 16. As with the popular 2006 IWC, a select

group of young singers drawn from around the world will sing Wagner's greatest arias before a full orchestra conducted by Seattle Opera Principal Guest Conductor Fisch. Two \$15,000 prizes will be awarded to the winners of the IWC at the end of the evening. The second International Wagner Competition is once again made possible by a generous contribution from the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences. More about these events can be found at www.seattleopera.org.

In October, Seattle audiences will have a chance to hear the company's new Brünnhilde, Janice Baird, as Elektra in the Opening Night cast. Most recently seen as Isolde at the Metropolitan Opera, Baird has sung Brünnhilde and Wagner's other heroines throughout Europe. The American soprano frequently appears in such Richard Strauss roles as Salome, Elektra, and the Dyer's Wife in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Also making their Seattle Opera debuts in this production are German soprano Irmgard Vilsmaier as Chrysothemis and British mezzo-soprano Rosalind Plowright as Klytemnestra. Vilsmaier has sung Strauss and Wagner roles throughout Europe and sang Waltraute and the Second Norn at the Bayreuth Festival in 2003 and 2004. Plowright's long career includes appearances at Royal Opera Covent Garden, Teatro alla Scala, Metropolitan Opera, Vienna State Opera, La Fenice, San Francisco Opera, and English National Opera. As an actress, Plowright's roles include Grace Vosper in the BBC series *House of Elliott* and the Opera Diva in the musical comedy *Two's A Crowd*. Canadian tenor Richard Margison also returns to Seattle Opera in the Opening Night cast as Aegisthus. Previously seen at Seattle Opera as Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Dick Johnson in Puccini's *Fanciulla del West*, Margison's many roles at the Met include Pollione in Bellini's *Norma*, Faust in Boito's *Mefistofele*, Radames in Verdi's *Aida*, Calaf in Puccini's *Turandot*, and Bacchus in Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Also making their debuts at Seattle Opera during *Elektra* are Jayne Casselman and Carolyn Betty. American soprano Casselman sings the title role on October 19 (matinee), 26 (matinee), and 31. She has appeared as the Wagner heroines Brünnhilde in the *Ring*, Isolde in *Tristan and Isolde*, and Kundry in *Parsifal* in opera houses throughout Germany and her recent Strauss roles include Elektra, Ariadne, and Salome. Betty was

named a finalist in the 2006 International Wagner Competition and has performed with Pittsburgh Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, among others. Betty makes her debut at Seattle Opera as Chrysothemis in the Sunday/Friday cast. Also appearing on October 19 (matinee), 26 (matinee), and 31 are mezzo-soprano Luretta Bybee (Amneris in *Aida*) as Klytemnestra and tenor Thomas Harper (Mime in Seattle Opera's most recent *Rings*) as Aegisthus.

Lawrence Renes makes his Seattle Opera debut for *Elektra*. This dynamic young conductor has conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and the Minnesota, Seattle, Houston, Detroit and St. Louis Symphonies. In 2007, he conducted the U.S. premiere of Tan Dun's *Tea* with Sante Fe Opera, appeared at the Aspen Music Festival, and returned to Netherlands Opera for the European premiere of John Adams' *Dr. Atomic* (he conducts the UK premiere of *Dr. Atomic* in 2009). Two-time Seattle Opera Artist of the Year recipient Chris Alexander directs. New costumes for the 2008 *Elektra* are designed by Melanie Burgess, sets (previously seen in 1996) are by Wolfram Skalicki, and lighting design will be done by Marcus Doshi.

Single tickets for *Aida* and *Elektra* start at \$25 and are available through www.seattleopera.org on May 17 or by calling 206.389.7676 or 800.426.1619 on May 19.

Tickets for the Heppner/Fisch recital and the 2008 International Wagner Competition range from \$45 to \$65 for each event and are currently available. Tickets for these August events can be purchased now through www.seattleopera.org or by calling 206.389.7676 or 800.426.1619

Please note that the following artists' lists for Aida and Elektra replace all previously published or announced cast lists. Further information about the 2008/09 season can be found at www.seattleopera.org.

AIDA

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni
In Italian with English Captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall
11 Performances: August 2, 3m, 6, 8, 9, 10m, 13, 15, 17m, 22, and 23, 2008

Tickets: \$25-\$172, 206.389.7676 or www.seattleopera.org

Approximate Running Time: 3 hours including one intermission
Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m.; matinees begin at 2:00 p.m.

Premiere: Cairo, Opera House, December 24, 1871
Previous Seattle Opera Presentations: 1968, 1976, 1980, 1992

Artists

Aida: Lisa Daltirus/Ana Lucrecia García†*
Radames: Antonello Palombi/Rosario La Spina*
Amneris: Stephanie Blythe/Luretta Bybee*
Amonasro: Charles Taylor†/Richard Paul Fink*
Ramfis: Luiz-Ottavio Faria/Carsten Wittmoser†*
The King of Egypt: Joseph Rawley
High Priestess: Priti Gandhi
A Messenger: Karl Marx Reyes

Conductor: Riccardo Frizza†
Stage Director: Robin Guarino
Set Designer: Michael Yeargan
Costume Designer: Peter J. Hall
Lighting Designer: Robert Wierzel
Choreographer: Donald E. Byrd
English Captions: Jonathan Dean

Sets: San Diego Opera
Costumes: Dallas Opera

* On August 3, 8, 10, 15, and 22, 2008 only

†Company Debut

Carsten Wittmoser was a finalist in the 2006 International Wagner Competition. Joseph Rawley is a former Seattle Opera Young Artist.

ELEKTRA

Music by Richard Strauss
 Libretto by Hugo von Hoffmansthal
 In German with English Captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall
 8 Performances: October 18, 19m, 22, 25, 26m, 29, 31, and November 1, 2008

Approximate Running Time: 1 hour, 40 minutes with no intermission
 Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$25-\$165, 206.389.7676 or www.seattleopera.org

Premiere: Dresden, Hofoper, January 1909
 Previous Seattle Opera Productions: March 1984, March 1996

Artists

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Elektra: | Janice Baird†/Jayne Casselman†* |
| Chrysothemis: | Irmgard Vilsmaier†/Carolyn Betty†* |
| Klytemnestra: | Rosalind Plowright†/Luretta Bybee* |
| Aegisthus: | Richard Margison/Thomas Harper |
| Orestes: | Alfred Walker† |
| Orestes's Guardian: | Byron Ellis |
| Young Servant: | Simeon Esper |
| Old Servant: | Peter Lindskoog† |
| Overseer: | Mary McLaughlin |
| First Maid: | Cynthia Jansen† |
| Second Maid: | Sarah Mattox |
| Third Maid: | Melissa Parks |
| Fourth Maid: | Emily Clubb |
| Fifth Maid: | Eleanor Stallcop-Horrox |
| Trainbearer: | Dana Johnson |
| Confidante: | Kimberly Giordano† |

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Conductor: | Lawrence Renes† |
| Stage Director: | Chris Alexander |
| Set Designer: | Wolfram Skalicki |
| Costume Designer: | Melanie Burgess† |
| Lighting Designer: | Marcus Doshi† |
| English Captions: | Jonathan Dean |

Scenery: Seattle Opera (originally created for Canadian Opera Company)
 Costumes: Seattle Opera

*On October 19, 26, and 31, 2008 only †Company Debut

Carolyn Betty was a finalist in the 2006 International Wagner Competition but did not perform on the night of the competition.

Stephanie Blythe's and Janice Baird's performances are made possible by generous financial support from the James and Sherry Raisbeck Lead Singers' Fund.

Aida's production sponsors are the Kreielsheimer Endowment Fund and PONCHO.

Microsoft Corporation and The Boeing Company are Seattle Opera's 2008/09 Season Sponsor.

Seattle Opera's Board of Trustees dedicates the 2008/09 season to Speight Jenkins in celebration of his 25th Anniversary as General Director.

###

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. 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 opera-goers from four continents and fifty states.