



**For Release: May 16, 2006**

## **ArtsFund Honors Seattle Opera Director Speight Jenkins With “Outstanding Achievement in Arts” Award**

Seattle—At the eighteenth annual “Celebration of the Arts” luncheon today, ArtsFund honored Seattle Opera’s general director, Speight Jenkins, with its “Outstanding Achievement in the Arts” award.

The luncheon was attended by approximately 1,000 Northwest business, civic, and arts leaders. Past recipients of the “Outstanding Achievement” award have included playwright August Wilson, glass artist Dale Chihuly, painter Jacob Lawrence, and Pacific Northwest Ballet’s artistic directors Kent Stowell and Francia Russell. Founded in 1969, ArtsFund is a united fund for the arts in King and Pierce Counties, Washington that grants approximately \$2.5 million annually to more than 70 King and Pierce County nonprofit arts groups including Seattle Opera.

“We get the best of the best to come to Seattle because of Speight—because of his faithfulness to the artform, his extraordinarily high artistic standards, and for the way in which cast members are treated by him and by the entire company. One director commented to me that Seattle Opera is the Gold Standard among opera companies in the way people are treated while they are here,” said John F. Nesholm, chairman of Seattle Opera’s Board of Trustees, during the presentation of the award to Jenkins.

Among Jenkins’ many achievements over the past 23 years at the head of Seattle Opera, Artsfund noted his two new productions of Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen* as well as new productions of all of Wagner’s major operas, the role debuts of many important singers early in their careers, his willingness to recruit talent from other arts to create memorable productions (see below for highlights), and the launching of the Young Artists Program to develop new singers.

At the recent Opera America Conference in Seattle, the president of that organization called “Speight the Wagnerian Rock Star Impresario. But he is much more than that; he is our artistic conscience, our teacher, our leader and our exemplar,” said Nesholm in conclusion.

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Jenkins became the General Director of Seattle Opera in 1983. His contract was extended in 2003 for another ten years, and he is currently working on several new projects for the company. In August, he will present the first International Wagner Competition (designed to encourage and develop new singers for the Wagner canon) and a revival of Seattle Opera's popular production of Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*. Further highlights of his career can be found below.

The "Celebration of the Arts" luncheon was sponsored by Comcast and featured a keynote address by University of Washington President Mark Emmert. At the event, ArtsFund also saluted Sam and Gladys Rubinstein with a Lifetime Dedication to the Arts award.

## **Highlights of Jenkins' Career at Seattle Opera**

### **2006**

In August, presents the first International Wagner Competition at McCaw Hall in Seattle. Eight finalists, selected by Jenkins' audition tour of the United States, Canada, and Europe, will vie for one of two \$15,000 prizes to be awarded and for the opportunity to be considered for major roles in company productions.

Presents American soprano Carol Vaness in her role debut as the Marschallin in a revival of the 1997 production of *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Brought famed British director Jonathan Miller to Seattle Opera for the first time to direct Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Presented a new production of Verdi's *Macbeth* in May, featuring the Seattle debut of Italian conductor Nicola Luisotti.

### **2005**

Received the Anton Seidl Award from the Wagner Society of New York in acknowledgment for his "new and stimulating productions of all the canonical Wagner music dramas" as well as his work on the *Ring* (Jenkins is the first company director to receive this award, which had been previously given to James Levine, Birgit Nilsson, John Vickers, and James Morris).

In August, opened a sold-out *Ring*, marking the 30th anniversary of Seattle Opera's first presentation of the complete cycle.

### **2004**

Began the calendar year with a new production of Bizet's *Carmen*, which broke all previous Seattle Opera box office records and sold out 13 performances. Continued the 2003/2004 season with a critically acclaimed new production of Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* and ended the season with a production of Puccini's *Fanciulla del West* featuring the return of Andrea Gruber to Seattle Opera as Minnie.

In November, the 2005 *Ring* tickets sold out and a waiting list was established.

### **2003**

Celebrated his 20th anniversary as general director of Seattle Opera and, in August 2003, produced the first opera in the new Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, a new Rochaix/Israel production of Wagner's *Parsifal*.

In October, presented a revised version of Marvin David Levy's *Mourning Becomes Electra* in a new production built by Seattle Opera (co-produced with New York City Opera) and directed by Intiman Theatre's artistic director Bart Sher. This marked the opera debut of Sher, who will make his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2006.

### **2002**

Made transition to Seattle Opera's temporary performance space, Mercer Arts Arena, and commissioned three new productions specifically designed for the space: *Salome* (directed by Seattle Rep artistic director Sharon Ott), *Norma*, and *Fidelio*. Brought back to Seattle Opera sopranos Christine Goerke to sing her first Norma and Jane Eaglen to sing her first Fidelio, and introduced contralto Ewa Podle[ to Seattle Opera audiences in her company debut as Adalgisa.

**2001** Presented the new Wadsworth/Lynch/Pakledinaz/Kaczorowski *Ring*, conducted by Franz Vote, which won a 2001 EDDY (Entertainment Design award). Mike Silverman of Associated Press called this production: "a *Ring* of extraordinary beauty and theatrical vibrancy," and Joseph Horowitz in the *London Times Literary Supplement* wrote that Jenkins' "version of the great *Nibelungen* cycle reaffirms his company's stature as North America's preeminent Wagner house."

### **2000**

Presented *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* from the new *Ring* production, which earned such praise as "it shows every sign of being a winner" from *Wall Street Journal* reviewer Heidi Waleson. *Seattle Times* named Jenkins one of the 150 most influential people "who shaped the character and course of Seattle and King County history."

### **1999**

Presented a new production of the rarely performed (in the U.S.) German masterpiece *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber. Also presented the American opera *Vanessa* by Samuel Barber. Presented the company's first concert at Benaroya Hall, which featured soprano Jane Eaglen with conductor Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony in an all-Wagner benefit for the 2001 *Ring*.

### **1998**

Presented a landmark new production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, directed by Francesca Zambello and designed by Alison Chitty, with tenor Ben Heppner and soprano Jane Eaglen singing the roles for the first time in their careers. It was hailed by the *New York Times* as "a *Tristan und Isolde* for a new century."

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*Opera News* praised “Jenkins’ knack for assembling productions that combine theatrical flair with emotional communication.”

Presented a new opera, Daniel Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*, in a co-production with Houston Grand Opera and Los Angeles Opera (also the first opera ever sung in Spanish at Seattle Opera).

### **1997**

Presented a new production of Richard Strauss’s *Rosenkavalier* directed by Dieter Kaegi and conducted by Gerard Schwarz, with sets and costumes by Bruno Schwengl (this production will be seen again in August 2006). This production served as the U.S. opera debut of Angelika Kirchschrager.

### **1996**

Presented Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier*, featuring tenor Ben Heppner’s first performance in the title role.

### **1995**

Acknowledged by the *Seattle Times* as one of the “Top Achievers of 1995.” Produced fourth and final presentation of Rochaix/Israel/Sullivan *Ring*. Announced the team of Wadsworth, Lynch, Pakledinaz, and Kaczorowski for 2001 *Ring*.

### **1994**

Brought tenor Ben Heppner back to Seattle to sing the title role in *Lohengrin* in a production directed by Stephen Wadsworth and lauded as “visually striking, musically rewarding” (*Opera News*).

### **1993**

Presented a new production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* with sets designed by glass artist Dale Chihuly. Parts of the sets have been featured in the Smithsonian Institution and Seattle Art Museum retrospectives of Chihuly’s work.

### **1990**

Produced Prokofiev’s *War and Peace*, heralded by the press as “the crown jewel of the 1990 Goodwill Games.” The production was the most complete version of the opera presented in the United States at that time. *War and Peace* featured the U.S. debuts of many Russian singers from the Bolshoi and Kirov Theaters as well as American singers.

### **1989**

Presented a new production of Wagner’s *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which included the Seattle Opera debut of Canadian tenor Ben Heppner singing his first Walther and Helen Donath’s first Eva.

### **1988**

Produced Gluck’s *Orphée et Eurydice*, directed by Stephen Wadsworth and choreographed by Mark

Morris. *The London Financial Times* proclaimed, “America’s main tribute [to Gluck in the bicentenary year of his death] was a thoughtful, moving, and beautiful presentation of *Orphée* by the Seattle Opera.”

### 1986

Presented Seattle Opera’s second version of Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen*, the Israel/Rochaix/Sullivan production. Peter G. Davis reported in *New York Magazine*, “The responsible impresario is Speight Jenkins . . . give him credit for making a brave dream come true.”

### 1984

For his first new production at Seattle Opera, Jenkins presented Moore’s *Ballad of Baby Doe*. *The Seattle Times* announced: “If this production is any indication, the Jenkins era promises to give Seattle Opera some banner years.” Also presented his first new Wagner production, *Tannhäuser*.

### 1983

Appointed General Director of Seattle Opera.

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Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera has developed into 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. In 2006, Seattle Opera presents its first International Wagner Competition, made possible by the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences.

Seattle Opera is grateful to the following organizations for their steadfast major institutional support: 4Culture, ArtsFund, The Boeing Company, Classical KING FM 98.1, Charles E. Stuart Charitable Foundation, The James and Sherry Raisbeck Singers’ Endowment, Kreielsheimer Foundation, Microsoft Corporation, National Endowment for the Arts, Nesholm Family Foundation, PONCHO, City Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs (City of Seattle), Seattle Opera Guild, Sherman Clay Pianos, and Washington State Arts Commission.

5/6/06 rlj