



SEATTLE OPERA
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**CONTEMPORARY DANCE LEGEND DONALD BYRD
MAKES HIS SEATTLE OPERA DEBUT
WITH A BAROQUE CLASSIC
AS CHOREOGRAPHER FOR HANDEL'S *JULIUS CAESAR***

Seattle Opera's *Julius Caesar* opens on February 24, 2007 with unique dance elements.

Seattle, WA—Seattle Opera will showcase the cutting edge choreography of Donald Byrd in an unusual setting, when the company's production of Handel's Baroque opera classic *Julius Caesar* (*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*) opens at Marion Oliver McCaw Hall on February 24, 2007. Seattle Opera turned to Byrd, a 2006 Tony Award nominee for *The Color Purple*, to provide the dance elements for the opera, which will include not only dance but dance/fight scenes.

The eighteenth-century opera tells the story of Caesar's conquest of Egypt and its famed queen Cleopatra. Handel's *Julius Caesar* makes its Seattle Opera premiere on February 24 in a production directed by Robin Guarino (who served as the assistant director of the 2001 and 2005 *Ring des Nibelungen* here). Maestro Gary Thor Wedow, a noted Handel specialist, will also make his Seattle Opera debut as conductor for *Julius Caesar*.

Byrd describes his collaboration with Guarino as finding ways to integrate movement throughout the production. "It's not just a set moment of dance, like *Aida* with the triumphal march," said Byrd. "The challenge is to connect the audience in a visceral way to what it means to be human, and to translate that into movement and staging ideas."

Byrd, who is the artistic director of the Spectrum Dance Theater in Seattle, has previously choreographed operas for San Francisco Opera, New York City Opera, and Nederlandse Opera. Byrd's work with Spectrum will be featured in the upcoming "Celebrate Seattle" festival this spring at Pacific Northwest Ballet, and in a new main stage production entitled *Nevermind*, music by Kurt Cobain and Nirvana, at The Moore Theatre in March. In addition Spectrum will collaborate with the 5th Avenue Theatre on their new production of *West Side Story* in May. Prior to his appointment as artistic director of Spectrum, Byrd was the artistic director of DONALD BYRD/THE GROUP, an acclaimed contemporary dance company based in New York until 2002.

Since 1976, Donald Byrd has created more than eighty works for his former company and for Spectrum Dance Theater, as well as for many major modern dance repertory companies including The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Philadelphia Dance Company (Philadanco), Cleo Parker Robinson, and Dallas Black Dance Theater, and for classical companies including Pacific Northwest Ballet, Concordanse (Paris), Aterballetto, MaggioDanza diFirenze, and Oregon Ballet Theater, to name a few.

Three dancers from Spectrum will be onstage at Seattle Opera: Ty Alexander Cheng, Peter de Grasse, and Joel Myers. They were selected during auditions in December. Other local dancers participating in *Julius Caesar* include Philip Borunda, Mo Brady, Bojohn Dicile, Eric Esteb, Rickey Klein, Carl Massey, and Benjamin Meersman.

Julius Caesar runs for eight performances at McCaw Hall: February 24, 25, 28, and March 3, 4, 7, 9, and 10. Tickets start at \$41. For more information, call the Seattle Opera Ticket Office at 206.389.7676 or visit the website www.seattleopera.org. A complete cast list, production information, and performance times are available on the website.

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 opera-goers from four continents, nineteen countries, and forty-nine states.

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