



For Immediate Release

SEATTLE OPERA TO GIVE AUDIENCE MEMBERS A VOTE IN CHOOSING THEIR “WAGNERIAN IDOL”!

**SATURDAY’S INTERNATIONAL WAGNER COMPETITION WILL INCLUDE
AN AUDIENCE-FAVORITE AWARD
IN ADDITION TO TWO FIRST-PLACE PRIZES AWARDED BY JUDGES**

Seattle Opera—dubbed the “Pacific Valhalla” for its dedication to presenting the operas of Richard Wagner—has now opened up its first International Wagner Competition to include the participation of the audience in the judging. As originally planned, a panel of five judges will choose two first-place winners from the eight competing singers. What is new is that the Opera is adding an “Audience-Favorite” award.

Once the singing has concluded and the judges are deliberating, audience members will have the opportunity to go to the lobby to vote for the singer of their choice. After the voting pause has concluded, Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins will return to the stage to announce the winner of the Audience-Favorite award and then the two first-place winners chosen by the judges. The audience favorite will receive a plaque; the two first-place winners, \$15,000 each.

Asked why the Opera was opening up the voting to the audience, Jenkins responded: “We thought it would be fun to have the audience participate, and it adds to the excitement.”

The five judges Jenkins has brought together for the competition all have experience with Wagner operas. They are mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe, who sang Fricka in Seattle Opera’s 2001 and 2005 *Rings*; Dr. Dorothea Glatt, assistant to Wolfgang Wagner (director of the Bayreuth Festival) for 28 years; Sir Peter Jonas, recently retired director of the Bavarian State Opera; tenor and director Peter Kazaras, who sang the role of Loge in Seattle Opera’s 1995, 2001, and 2005 *Ring* productions; and director, author, and translator Stephen Wadsworth, who directed Seattle Opera’s 2001 and 2005 *Rings*.

**Background on the Wagner Competition:
Wagner Singers are Rare and Their Voices Take Longer to Develop**

“Wagner singers have always been rare,” commented Jenkins. “Seattle Opera’s International Wagner Competition provides us an unprecedented opportunity to uncover talent that will carry on a great tradition. Identifying artists with the potential to become great Wagner singers and showcasing their talents will provide opportunities for these singers to be noticed by opera company representatives and coaches from the United States and Europe, many of whom will be in the audience.”

Holding auditions in Vienna, Berlin, London, Paris, Seattle, and New York this past fall, Jenkins heard 43 candidates nominated by U.S. and European general directors, agents, and other established opera professionals. Competing on Saturday night are the eight finalists.

Each finalist will perform two musical selections and be accompanied by a full orchestra led by conductor Asher Fisch. The finalists are soprano Carolyn Betty from Wilmington, Delaware; tenor Jason Collins from Columbia, South Carolina; soprano Dorothy Grandia from Mt. Kisco, New York; tenor Paul McNamara from Dublin, Ireland; soprano Miriam Murphy also from Dublin; baritone James Rutherford from Dulwich, England; tenor Andrew Lindsay Sritheran from Wellington, New Zealand; and bass Carsten Wittmoser from Essen, Germany. The alternate is tenor Philip O’Brien from London, England.

The International Wagner Competition takes place at McCaw Hall, Saturday, August 19, at 7:30 p.m. in between performances of Seattle Opera’s production of Richard Strauss’s opera *Der Rosenkavalier* on August 18 and 20.

Seattle Opera’s International Wagner Competition is made possible by a \$300,000 gift from the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences. The Simonyi grant also supports other education outreach at Seattle Opera. “This gift recognizes Seattle Opera’s unique role in presenting Wagner’s great works and its reputation for attracting the best singers and enthusiastic audiences from around the world,” commented Charles Simonyi.

Biographies of the singers and the judges are available on Seattle Opera’s Web site:

<http://www.seattleopera.org/operas/iwc/>

Seattle Opera's International Wagner Competition

Saturday, August 19, 2006, 7:30 p.m. (The house opens at 7:00 p.m.)

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, Seattle, Washington

Tickets: \$42 to \$52

Call 800-426-1619 or 206-389-7676, or visit www.seattleopera.org

Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera has developed into one of the leading opera companies in the United States. The company, which has been dubbed the "Pacific Valhalla," is recognized internationally for its theatrically compelling and musically accomplished performances, especially of the Wagner operas. 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 three different productions of the *Ring*, in addition to acclaimed productions of all the other major operas in the Wagner canon.

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