



SEATTLE OPERA
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

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**Seattle Opera Receives First-of-its-Kind \$500,000
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant
in Support of New American Opera: *Amelia***

**Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences
Supports *Amelia* as Production Sponsor**

Seattle—Seattle Opera announced today that the company will receive a \$500,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in support of *Amelia*, a newly commissioned American opera. The grant is a first-of-its-kind initiative designed to provide crucial support for the production of new contemporary opera, enabling *Amelia* to be produced by two other American opera companies following the opera's world premiere in Seattle in May 2010. The Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences will be the production sponsor for *Amelia* with a generous gift of \$300,000. Featuring music by American composer Daron Aric Hagen, an intensely personal libretto by American poet and writer Gardner McFall, and a story by Stephen Wadsworth, *Amelia* is Seattle Opera's first commissioned work during General Director Speight Jenkins' tenure.

“Seattle Opera deeply appreciates this tremendous grant,” said Jenkins. “More important is what this means in the history of opera. If there had not been a second performance of *The Barber of Seville*, *La Traviata*, or *Madama Butterfly*, these works might well have vanished. We want our premiere of *Amelia* to be a huge success, but new operas deserve the chance to be heard and seen by more than one public. The Mellon Foundation, therefore, has made a remarkable gift. By virtually ensuring additional performances, the Foundation has laid out a possible course for future grants and served opera immeasurably.”

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant will be used over a four-year period to support the production and presentation of contemporary opera at Seattle Opera and at two additional American opera companies. Seattle Opera will be sending out details for participation in early July. The grant will provide funding that will underwrite rental and royalty expenses for up to two other companies to present *Amelia*. It will also cover the cost of set and costume modifications undertaken by Seattle Opera to make the opera compatible with multiple companies. A percentage of the grant will fund any necessary score or libretto revisions and will fund audience development materials that can be shared in the various cities. By subsidizing some of the costs of presenting a new work, the grant will help reduce the financial risk during challenging economic times and help establish *Amelia* as an important addition to American opera. Seattle Opera intends to design and implement an overall community strategy and audience development plan that would follow *Amelia* from one city to the next. It is the hope that this groundbreaking collaboration with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will create a new model for opera companies that will encourage the development and performance of contemporary opera.

To encourage this significant new work, the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences, whose mission is “Access to Excellence,” is providing \$300,000 in funding in support of the production.

“It’s important that we continue to encourage the development of new operas to draw new audiences and to provide access to the excellence of the operatic art form,” said Susan Hutchison, Executive Director of the Simonyi Fund.

Maestro Gerard Schwarz will conduct *Amelia*. The opera will be directed by Stephen Wadsworth, who won a Seattle Opera Artist of the Year award for the 2001 *Ring* cycle. Sets will be designed by Obie Award-winning designer Thomas Lynch, the first scenic designer to win Seattle Opera’s Artist of the Year award in 2008 for his work on *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Iphigenie en Tauride*. Broadway favorite Ann Hould-Ward, who won a 1994 Tony Award for *Beauty and the Beast*, will be making her company debut as costume designer for *Amelia*. Lighting design is by Duane Schuler.

Seattle Opera will launch a number of new community-building initiatives surrounding *Amelia*, funded by a previously announced Wallace Foundation Excellence Award. The Wallace grant will focus on the world premiere of *Amelia* to create “Community Connections Through Technology.” Through these new initiatives, Seattle Opera will create collaborative relationships

with community groups and other arts organizations to explore the role of those who serve, and the impact upon their families.

Amelia's title character is a woman in her late thirties who is expecting her first child. Amelia is still traumatized by the death of her father, a Navy pilot lost in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. The opera spans a thirty-year period in both the U.S. and Vietnam, interweaving one woman's emotional journey, the American experience in Vietnam, and elements of the Daedalus and Icarus myth. The opera's emotional arc moves from loss to recuperation, paralysis to flight, ultimately embracing life and the creative force of love and family.

To learn more about Seattle Opera and *Amelia*, visit www.seattleopera.org

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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. 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.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is a private philanthropic institution that makes grants on a selective basis to institutions of higher education, independent libraries, centers for advanced study, museums, art conservation, and performing arts organizations. The Foundation's Performing Arts Program focuses on achieving long-term results by providing multi-year grants to leading organizations in the disciplines of music, theater, dance, and opera. These grants, which are awarded on the basis of artistic merit and leadership in the field, seek to strengthen institutional artistic and administrative capacity; encourage the development and performance of new work; identify and train new generations of arts leaders; reinforce the role of individual artists within institutions; and expand research, learning, and scholarship in the performing arts.

About the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences

The Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences is a \$75 million foundation established by Charles Simonyi in late 2003. Susan Hutchison is the Executive Director of the foundation. The Simonyi Fund is making a difference in the Seattle region and around the world by providing grants to worthy organizations in the arts, sciences, and education. The fundamental goal of the foundation is to provide "access to excellence."