



SEATTLE OPERA
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

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A NEW HOME FOR SEATTLE OPERA:

Seattle City Council approves Seattle Opera/Seattle Center Lease agreement for Mercer Arena

Seattle—Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins announced today that the Seattle City Council has approved a lease agreement between Seattle Opera and Seattle Center that will transform the aging Mercer Arena into a new home for Seattle Opera.

The lease agreement will allow Seattle Opera to house all of its operations—administrative, rehearsal, educational, technical support, costume and scenic studios space—under one roof at the Mercer Arena site, with a wall adjoining Marion Oliver McCaw Hall. Under the agreement, Seattle Opera has proposed to invest approximately \$40 million in capital improvements to renovate or replace the 80-year-old facility that has been inactive since 2003. The company intends to create a cornerstone facility for the Seattle Center Theater District that will add vibrancy to the Mercer Street corridor, and to pursue a sustainable design that will have a positive impact on Seattle Center and the surrounding Queen Anne community.

“I can’t think of a better place for Seattle Opera to make its home than Seattle Center,” said Seattle Opera Executive Director Kelly Tweeddale. “For decades, we have

transformed empty stages into spectacular places. Seattle Opera looks forward to doing just that with Mercer Arena.”

Seattle Opera and Seattle Center have had a long-standing partnership, beginning with the opening of the World’s Fair in 1962 when the soon-to-be first general director of Seattle Opera, Glynn Ross, staged a locally produced *Aida* in the then new Opera House. Since then, the company has flourished under the direction of Speight Jenkins, drawing the highest per capita opera attendance in the country, and becoming an international destination for many of its productions, including *The Ring*. Seattle Opera’s growing activities (which include one of the largest arts education outreach programs in the state), soon outgrew its Seattle Center rehearsal and administrative locations, forcing the company in 1991 to move off-site and operate in three different locations: Seattle Center, South Lake Union, and Renton. This project gives Seattle Opera the opportunity to return home, bringing its creative capital to the heart of the city’s cultural gathering place: Seattle Center.

“We are more than grateful to Seattle Center, the Council, and to Mayor Nickels for providing us with the opportunity to build our new home in the perfect place,” said Jenkins. “It is a thrilling prospect to everyone connected with Seattle Opera.”

The next steps will be the planning and design process to determine the best use of the Mercer Arena site, and raising the necessary capital.

“Our Board of Trustees and other important friends of Seattle Opera have all expressed great enthusiasm for this project, which bodes well for its success,” said John Nesholm, Chairman of Seattle Opera’s Board of Trustees.

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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.