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**OPERA America Explores A “New World”:
Seattle Opera Hosts National Conference, May 3-7**

**New Metropolitan Opera General Director Peter Gelb Is Keynote Speaker
“Connectivity” Is Theme for South American, Canadian, U.S. Attendees
*New Works Sampler Takes Place Downtown at Seattle Public Library***

SEATTLE, WA – Capturing the attention and devotion of new audiences in new ways is the subject when **500 opera professionals from around the world meet in Seattle this week**. They are coming to the Emerald City **to take part in OPERA America’s annual conference, May 3-7**.

“Opera needs to find new ways to make connections with audiences in a time of ever-increasing entertainment choices,” said Marc A. Scorca, OPERA America President and CEO. “To do that, we need new strategies, new ideas, and closer collaboration between all our members. This meeting is a chance to do all three.”

Seattle Opera is hosting the event. “We are delighted to be back in Seattle for an OPERA America conference,” said Scorca. “Our last conference in Seattle took place in 1994, in association with the North American debut of Jane Eaglen. Miss Eaglen joins us in 2006 as a guest speaker along with other opera leaders from across the country and around the world who will work together to shape the future of the art form and the field.”

The timing of *Opera Conference 2006*, held at the Westin Seattle hotel at 1900 Fifth Avenue, allows attendees to see Seattle Opera’s new production of Verdi’s *Macbeth*, opening at Marion Oliver McCaw Hall on May 6.

Besides star-laden panels—including Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins’ panel “**The Fundamental Connection**,” which features soprano Jane Eaglen, composer Daron Hagen, and baritone Gordon Hawkins (who sings *Macbeth*)—the OPERA America conference will offer seminars on administrative topics such as compensation structures, multicultural communications, and long-range leadership skills, and breakout sessions dealing with making connections across arts management disciplines.

Peter Gelb, newly appointed General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, will be the conference’s keynote speaker at its **opening on Thursday, May 4, from 9-10 a.m. in the Westin’s Grand Ballroom I**. Gelb’s vision for the Metropolitan Opera includes a host of innovations, from launching a commissioning program with Lincoln Center Theater and inaugurating digital high-definition transmissions to movie theaters, to increasing its commitment to contemporary music. He’ll join OPERA America Board Chair Charles MacKay, President/CEO Marc A. Scorca, and Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins in setting the stage for *Opera Conference 2006*.

The conference will also focus on the development of new works that are key to stimulating a new audience. Once as popular as castor oil, new American operas have found appreciative audiences nationwide. Recently, Anne Midgette wrote in the *New York Times*:

No one told audiences at Mark Adamo's *Little Women* that they weren't supposed to like contemporary opera: The work has been staged by 40 different companies since its premiere at the Houston Grand Opera in 1998. Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* has been performed around the United States and Europe. Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner* (with a libretto by Toni Morrison, based on her novel *Beloved*) played to sold-out houses in Detroit, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia.

Seattle Opera presented a revision of Heggie's *End of the Affair* last fall, and Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins, a fan of John Adams' *Dr. Atomic* (which had its premiere in 2005 at San Francisco Opera), has made no secret of his desire to bring the production to Seattle.

"New works and bold new stagings of the repertory are breathing new life into opera," says Jenkins. "It's an exciting time for the art form, and an important one. I'm looking forward to learning new best practices and understanding new roles for technology in opera, on and off the stage."

The conference will feature sessions at many of Seattle's trendsetting cultural venues. An arts marketing discussion will take place at the Seattle Art Museum; there will be a top-to-bottom tour of McCaw Hall; and the Rem Koolhaas-designed Central Library will be the cutting-edge stage for sneak peeks at the future of opera. The attendees will see a preview of new compositions from noon to 2:30, Friday, May 5, at the *New Works Sampler* session. (Tickets are already sold out.) Artists from Portland Opera, Tacoma Opera, and Vancouver Opera will perform excerpts from works in progress and recent premieres by OPERA America member companies.

Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins' panel "The Fundamental Connection" is on Thursday, May 4, at 10:30 a.m. at the Westin Hotel. (Journalists who plan to attend that panel or the opening session should contact Tina Ryker or Brian Chapman.)

For more information on *Opera Conference 2006*,

visit www.operaamerica.org/conference.

For more information about Seattle Opera's new *Macbeth*, please visit www.seattleopera.org.

Supporters of *Opera Conference 2006*

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Seattle Opera, founded in 1963, has developed into one of the leading opera companies in the United States. The company is recognized nationally and internationally for its theatrically compelling and musically accomplished performances, especially of Wagner's four-opera masterpiece, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In August 2006, Seattle Opera presents its first International Wagner Competition.

Seattle Opera's new production of Verdi's *Macbeth*, which opens May 6, is designed by Robert Israel (designer of the company's second *Ring* production) and directed by Bernard Uzan.