



SEATTLE OPERA
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

FOR RELEASE: December 21, 2009

Press Contacts: Hilda Cullen, 206.676.5543, hilda.cullen@seattleopera.org
Sara Sorden, 206.676.5559, sara.sorden@seattleopera.org

Visuals Contact: Monte Jacobson, 206.676.5545, monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org

IN MEMORIAM: PERRY LORENZO

Seattle—Seattle Opera’s General Director Speight Jenkins announced today that Perry Lorenzo, an internationally acclaimed speaker on opera and for almost twenty years Director of Education at Seattle Opera, passed away on December 19. He fought a valiant fight against lung cancer for the past seven months. He was 51.

Dedicated to introducing everyone to opera, Lorenzo lectured widely both here and abroad. He took a fledgling Education program at Seattle Opera and expanded it exponentially, drawing to him a devoted core of speakers and discussing opera in many forums. He worked with students in many communities all over the state as well as in the Seattle area. At Woodinville High School, for example, he was well known as the “Opera Guy.”

Under his leadership Seattle Opera instituted a system of preparing the 700 high school students who attend each of the Opera’s dress rehearsals. When the Opera received a grant to bring opera to students in the kindergarten-to-sixth-grades, Perry wrote and produced a 75-minute adaptation of Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, which is available on CD. His lectures on the *Ring* are also on CD.

Perry had long advocated a Young Artists Program at Seattle Opera, and in 1998 this program began with him as the director. He wanted the program to be performance-oriented, and he was always present at the auditions for the ten to twelve young professionals who have come into the program every year. He encouraged the program’s expansion and its annual full-scale production in Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue. He was very proud that over 40 percent of Seattle Opera Young Artists are now making a living singing, including such major Metropolitan and La Scala artists as Lawrence Brownlee, Brandon Jovanovich, Sarah Coburn, and Mary Elizabeth Williams.

Perhaps his most important speech was not specifically on opera. He was scheduled to speak at Seattle’s Downtown Rotary on September 12, 2001. He scrapped his planned remarks and spoke on the value of art

in even the worst of times, bringing the whole audience to its feet. He made his first trip to Europe in 1994, and in later summers spoke at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth. From New York to San Francisco—and in many cities in between—he spoke on the *Ring* (every Seattle Opera performance of which he had attended from 1975 until he became ill), other Wagner operas, and on other opera and symphonic subjects. No speaker on opera was ever more popular or converted more people to opera. He had the knack of speaking to everyone, the lifetime opera lover as well as the neophyte. His final line in his opera lectures was always the same: “It’s a romantic story, fabulous music, and one swell night in the theater.”

A very devout Catholic, he wrote on religious matters as well as operatic. His dedication to Catholicism and his ability to introduce his religion into his lectures became a hallmark of his work. He was a great advocate of Pope Benedict and had read all of his published works. At St. James Cathedral he was very active as a parishioner and teacher. He advocated ecumenism and frequently moderated panels with members of all faiths. He also gave many popular and very well-attended lecture courses at Seattle University.

Born in Hawaii and raised in Bellingham, Washington, Lorenzo graduated from Gonzaga University in Spokane. After spending a short time in the Catholic Seminary there, he decided to become a teacher. For ten years he taught at Kennedy High School in Burien prior to coming to Seattle Opera, in 1992.

He is survived by his partner, Paul Hearn, and his father, Robert Lorenzo. A funeral service will take place on December 30 at 2:00 p.m. at St. James Cathedral. Seattle Opera will hold a celebration of Perry Lorenzo’s life on January 9, 2010, at 3:00 p.m. in the auditorium of Marion Oliver McCaw Hall in Seattle. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be directed to Seattle Opera’s *Perry Lorenzo Fund for In-School Education*, or to St. James Cathedral.

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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 38 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 operagoers from four continents and fifty states.