



SEATTLE OPERA  
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

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## **Opera Goes to School:**

### **Seattle Opera Young Artists and local schoolchildren perform *Siegfried and the Ring of Fire***

Seattle—Seattle Opera’s educational *Opera Goes to School* program is kicking off the new year with a new children’s opera: *Siegfried and the Ring of Fire*. During three week-long workshops, Seattle Opera Young Artists, teaching artists, and education department staff will work with students at three different elementary schools to present this new adaptation of Wagner’s *Siegfried* for students, teachers, and parents.

The new opera, created by Seattle Opera’s Education Artistic Administrator Jonathan Dean, condenses the five-hour *Siegfried*—the third opera in Wagner’s epic *Ring des Nibelungen* cycle—into a one-hour English opera. Dean believes the students will be able to relate to this tale. “It’s a hero’s journey,” he said of *Siegfried*. “It’s about a young person growing up and trying to figure out when to be brave, how to deal with fear, and how to find companionship when a loving family isn’t around for support.”

About 60 students perform in each production as singers, actors, and musicians, with the Young Artists performing the roles of Siegfried, Brünnhilde, and the Rhine Daughters, among others. The students spend a few days working with the teaching artists before they are joined by the Young Artists to put the finishing touches on their productions.

Dean also created *Theft of the Gold*, an adaptation of *Das Rheingold* that the *Opera Goes to School* program featured during the past few seasons. He admits there are unique challenges involved when creating children's opera.

"You're juggling three things," he said. "Finding a story that'll be compelling to young audiences; finding music that will be authentically Wagner, but that can be performed by our Young Artists and the students; and creating moments in which the kids can add their talents." To do this, Dean takes music used throughout the *Ring*, and adapts it to be played on piano. He also adds English translations, for more accessible storytelling.

New this year will be the inclusion of dynamic and innovative puppets, designed by puppeteer Brian Kooser, ranging from a small squirrel that Siegfried befriends, to the evil dragon Fafner, which is so big it requires three singers to manipulate the dragon's body. The workshops will be directed by Vanessa Miller, returning for her fifth season with *Opera Goes to School*, with sets and props by Phillip Lienau, costumes by Deborah Skorstad, and movement designed by Gordon Carpenter.

The Young Artists performing in *Siegfried and the Ring of Fire* are tenor Alex Mansoori, baritone Michael Krzankowski, bass Thomas Forde, mezzo-soprano Margaret Gawrysiak, and sopranos Megan Hart and Vira Slywotzky. They will visit Evergreen Elementary in Shoreline, Washington from January 25 to 30; St. Joseph's School in Seattle from February 2 through 6; and Loyal Heights Elementary in Ballard from February 9 through 13.

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### **About Seattle Opera**

SEATTLE OPERA'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES DEDICATES THE 2008/09 SEASON TO SPEIGHT JENKINS IN CELEBRATION OF HIS 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY AS GENERAL DIRECTOR.

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. 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 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, nineteen countries, and forty-nine states.