

# SEATTLE OPERA

SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR RELEASE: June 19, 2013**

Press Contacts: Jonathan Dean, Seattle Opera Director of Public Programs and Media  
206.676.5543, [jonathan.dean@seattleopera.org](mailto:jonathan.dean@seattleopera.org)  
Karen Ames, Karen Ames Communications  
415.641.7474, [karen@karenames.com](mailto:karen@karenames.com)  
Caroline Nelson, New Zealand Opera Publicist  
+64 21 244 1299, [caroline@carolinenelson.co.nz](mailto:caroline@carolinenelson.co.nz)  
Visuals Contact: Monte Jacobson, 206.676.5545, [monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org](mailto:monte.jacobson@seattleopera.org)

## **AIDAN LANG APPOINTED SEATTLE OPERA'S THIRD GENERAL DIRECTOR**

**Lang To Become General Director Designate in March 2014;  
Will Work with Speight Jenkins  
in Planned Leadership Transition Through August 2014**

SEATTLE, WA -- **Aidan Lang**, respected in the opera community for positions of leadership with **New Zealand Opera**, **Glyndebourne Opera Festival**, the **Buxton Festival** and **Opera Zuid**, has been named **Seattle Opera's third General Director** effective **September 1, 2014**. Lang succeeds Speight Jenkins, who has led the company for more than three decades. Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary beginning with the August 2013 production of Wagner's *Ring* and culminating with the 2014 International Wagner Competition and 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert and Speight Celebration in August 2014. One of America's leading opera companies, Seattle Opera is recognized internationally for its theatrically compelling and musically accomplished performances, especially the company's interpretations of the works of Richard Wagner with an astonishing 38 cycles of the *Ring* in three different

productions presented since 1975. Called “the leading North American Wagner house” by Joseph Horowitz in *Classical Music in America* and “one of the great Wagner shrines of the world” by the *Wall Street Journal*, the Company has achieved the highest per capita attendance of any major opera company in the United States and draws operagoers from four continents and 50 states.

Announcing the appointment, **John Nesholm**, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, said, “On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the search committee, I want to welcome Aidan Lang to Seattle Opera. All of us are extremely confident that Aidan is the right choice to lead the Company into a new era, building on the incredible artistic successes of predecessors Speight Jenkins and Glynn Ross. Aidan’s exciting combination of artistic, theatrical and business experience, matched with the enormous potential of our company and its people, suggest a very exciting future for Seattle Opera.”

“Seattle is an international city known for both its leading edge technology and world-class arts institutions,” said **Aidan Lang**. “Seattle Opera is one of the world’s most respected opera companies and Speight Jenkins is, quite simply, a legend in our business. I am honored, energized, excited, and definitely humbled by the opportunity to lead the company in this next chapter. I want to thank John Nesholm and Bill Weyerhaeuser and the entire search committee, whose dedication to Seattle Opera was very inspiring to me as I considered this move. In the limited time I have already spent with the company, I sense already a lovely spirit of cooperation and collaboration amongst the staff, artists, chorus, musicians, and Board. I look forward very much to joining the Seattle Opera family.”

“Seattle Opera has been my life for the last thirty years,” said **Speight Jenkins**. “As we head into the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season, my focus will be on the future – working closely with Aidan to transfer leadership of Seattle Opera in a seamless manner. I commend the search committee on their hard work and excellent decision. I embrace and celebrate their choice. I know that Aidan’s breadth and depth of experience, from the artistic to the

business side of leadership, will be an unbeatable combination and an invaluable asset to Seattle Opera going forward.”

Lang will join Seattle Opera as General Director Designate on March 10, 2014, working closely with General Director Speight Jenkins and Executive Director Kelly Tweeddale during the transition period. Speight Jenkins continues as General Director through August 2014 and has created the programming for both the 2013/14 and 2014/15 seasons. Beginning immediately, Lang will be included in planning for the 2015/16 season, working towards his first fully programmed season in 2016/17.

### **A Record of Artistic Leadership**

Lang has served as **General Director of New Zealand Opera** since 2006 with a goal of ensuring that every production is theatrically stimulating and musically ambitious. Working collaboratively is a top priority for Lang, and during his tenure New Zealand Opera implemented a series of collaborations with such companies as Glyndebourne, Opera North, and Welsh National Opera, bringing exciting productions from directors Nikolaus Lehnhoff (*Jenůfa*), Tim Albery (*Macbeth*), and Christopher Alden (*Turandot*) to New Zealand. In addition to bringing productions in, Lang made it a priority to develop the capacity to build productions in the country, establishing New Zealand’s first-ever opera production workshop. This achievement has resulted in international co-productions with Scottish Opera (*L’italiana in Algeri*), Victorian Opera (*Serse*), and this year’s *Der Fliegende Holländer* with Opera Queensland in Australia. Future international co-productions are also underway with Cape Town Opera, West Australian Opera, Opera Queensland, State Opera of South Australia, and Victorian Opera. Lang’s collaborative approach has also reaped significant rewards in the business area. With the expansion of the company’s reach to include Christchurch, in addition to its performing centers in Auckland and Wellington, Lang has rebranded New Zealand Opera as a truly national company, one that serves the entire country. The Company’s success over the past few years has been noticed, and the partnership Lang spearheaded with Creative

New Zealand (the country's national arts development agency) resulted in significant increases to its core grant funding, securing long-term financial stability for the company.

Prior to leading New Zealand Opera, Aidan Lang held artistic leadership positions at **Buxton Festival, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Glyndebourne Touring Opera, and Opera Zuid** in the Netherlands. Concurrent with these leadership positions, Lang was a sought after freelance director working around the world. Among other productions, he directed the **first Brazilian production of Wagner's *Ring*** at the historic Teatro Amazonas in Manaus. Other noted productions include *Le Comte Ory* (Welsh National Opera), Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (Lisbon), *The Turn of the Screw* (Salzburg) and the British premieres of *The Magic Fountain* by Frederick Delius (Scottish Opera) and *Cornet Christoph Rilke's Song of Love and Death* by Siegfried Matthus (Glyndebourne). As Artistic Director of the Buxton Festival, Lang expanded the Festival to include Baroque and contemporary music, tripled its audience attendance, and delivered significant operating surpluses in each year. He was a key part of the triumvirate senior management team at Glyndebourne, where he held dual positions for nine years. He succeeded in developing a unique identity for Glyndebourne Touring Opera, distinct from the larger Glyndebourne Festival, and continuing the company's tradition of nurturing young singers. Concurrent with his positions at Glyndebourne, he was appointed the inaugural Artistic Director of Opera Zuid, a newly created touring company based in the Netherlands. During his leadership, Opera Zuid's impact and the quality of its work were such that the company received national funding and is now a permanent fixture of operatic life in the Netherlands. Born in 1957 in the UK, Lang is a graduate of The Tiffin School and the University of Birmingham. He will relocate to Seattle with his wife of 23 years, the former soprano Linda Kitchen, and their 16-year-old daughter, Eleanor. In addition to his operatic leadership skills and international directing experience, Lang is an accomplished musician, having studied clarinet since the age of 8.

### **The Search Process**

Seattle Opera Chairman John F. Nesholm expressed his gratitude to the members of the search committee and to the Seattle Opera Board and staff for their dedication throughout

the process. Beginning in 2011, the committee conducted extensive interviews with representatives of the many groups that comprise the Seattle Opera community, including donors, artists, collective bargaining groups, staff, civic leaders, and leaders within the opera business. Once the field was narrowed to just a few highly qualified individuals, each candidate visited Seattle for several days of meetings and interviews. According to Mr. Nesholm, 42 candidates from seven countries were considered for the position.

###

### **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 50 states.