

# SEATTLE OPERA

SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR RELEASE:** October 2, 2013

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## **Successful 2012/13 Season Achieves Balanced Budget, Eliminates Deficit**

### **Nuccia Focile and Asher Fisch Named Seattle Opera Artists of the Year**

Seattle—On Tuesday, September 24, at Seattle Opera’s Annual Meeting at McCaw Hall, the company announced that it achieved a balanced budget for the 2012/13 season and eliminated the deficit from the 2011/12 season. The 12/13 season included productions of *Turandot*, *Fidelio*, *La Cenerentola*, *La bohème*, and a double-bill of *La voix humaine* and *Suor Angelica*. An audit, concluded in September, totaled the actual expense budget for the 12/13 season at just over \$20.2 million. Revenues were sufficient to balance these expenses and retire the \$758,000 accumulated deficit.

“When it became clear that Seattle Opera would post a deficit in 2012,” says Board President William T. Weyerhaeuser, “the Board of Trustees announced several changes to company operations in the interests of ensuring that Seattle Opera would be in good standing when its third General Director was announced. Thanks to generous contributions from our community, including a challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and diligent planning and plenty of hard work and sacrifices by staff and artists, Speight Jenkins will indeed deliver a strong company to Aidan Lang. The deficit is retired, the budget is balanced, and the art is extraordinary. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I’d like to thank everyone who has made this season such a success for Seattle Opera.”

In recent seasons Seattle Opera has emphasized innovation, efficiency, and partnership while more than doubling the scale of its education and community engagement programs and the number of people these programs serve. (These programs reached 53,846 people in 2012/13, up from 22,147 in 2011/12.) The positive financial results of the past season can be credited to such changes, as well as growth in Seattle Opera's capacity for fundraising. But the company has also made sacrifices: it has reduced numbers of productions and performances, implemented salary cuts, furloughs, and fee reductions, eliminated staff positions, and put its much-lauded Young Artists Program on hiatus. As Seattle Opera prepares for a smooth leadership transition in 2014, from outgoing General Director Speight Jenkins to the incoming Aidan Lang, the company will continue to pursue sustainability so that a healthy Seattle Opera, now entering its second half-century, continues to benefit the community.

Seattle Opera's production of Wagner's *Ring* this summer was a resounding artistic and financial success. Opera lovers from all over the world enjoyed performances described by many as Seattle Opera's strongest presentation yet of the epic. Earned and contributed revenues for the 2013 *Ring* Festival totaled \$11.2 million, which covered the costs of presenting three complete *Ring* cycles along with symposia, events, and free community activities. It was a strong beginning to the 2013/14 season, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season of Seattle Opera and the final season led by Speight Jenkins.

### **Artists of the Year**

Also announced at Tuesday's meeting: the company's 2012/13 Artists of the Year awards went to **Nuccia Focile** for singing the Woman in *La voix humaine* in May 2013, and to **Asher Fisch**, for conducting of *Turandot* in August 2012. Maestro Fisch also conducted *Fidelio* in October 2012.

"The choice of Nuccia Focile delights me not only because of her bravura performance as the sole character in the Poulenc opera, but also because she has created so many remarkable characters at Seattle Opera over the years," said Speight Jenkins, General Director of Seattle Opera. "She is a rare artist."

Focile made her Seattle Opera debut in 2002, as Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*. She has returned to the company as Mimì, Iphigénie in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Nedda, and Violetta. *The Seattle Times* called her "tour-de-force" performance in *La voix humaine* "appealing and harrowing...by turns beseeching, despairing, and momentarily furious, Focile makes the audience indignantly sympathetic—and also appalled at her neurotic clinging, especially when she grovels to her callous lover (telling him "I know this is more painful for you than for me"). Her clear, expressive voice packs an emotional punch."

"Asher Fisch has given us so many great performances," said Jenkins. "It is remarkable that the public saluted his first performance in the Italian repertory in Seattle, which is a great testimonial to his expertise as a conductor."

Fisch's leadership of the musical forces in Seattle Opera's 2013 *Ring* earned him rock-star ovations from the audience and rave reviews from critics such as Thomas May, who wrote "Fisch coaxed the most ear-catching collections of sounds and color from this orchestra that I've ever heard in their *Ring* playing." He has conducted Wagner's *Parsifal*, *Lohengrin*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and now the *Ring* for Seattle Opera; last season he conducted both *Turandot* and *Fidelio*. Fisch also won Seattle Opera's Artist of the Year Award in 2006, for conducting *Der Rosenkavalier*.

In 1991, Seattle Opera's Artist of the Year award was created to honor the individual singer, conductor, director, or designer who had made the most significant contribution to the success of the season. At the conclusion of the 2003/04 season, Seattle Opera began honoring two Artists of the Year for each season: one a conductor, director, or designer; the other a singer.

Participating in the selection process of Seattle Opera's Artists of the Year are members of Seattle Opera's Board of Trustees, Annual Fund donors of \$75 and more, and staff, as well as selected members of the local press. This is the company's twenty-fourth annual selection of Artist of the Year.

### **Board of Trustees News**

Seattle Opera's 2013/14 Board of Trustees also held its annual election at the Annual Meeting. Newly elected Seattle Opera Board Trustees include James Melhorn, Matthew Segal, and Susanne Wakefield.

### **Biographies of 2012/13 Artists of the Year**

**Soprano Nuccia Focile** made her Seattle Opera debut as Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin* in 2002. She returned for Mimi in *La bohème* (2007), Iphigénie in *Iphigénie en Tauride* (2007), Nedda in *Pagliacci* (2008), Violetta in *La traviata* (2009), and the Woman in *La voix humaine* (2013). Other important roles for Focile include Susanna, Donna Elvira, Despina, Musetta, Cio-Cio San, Lauretta, Liù, Jenůfa, Kat'a Kabanova, and Antonia (*Tales of Hoffmann*). She has appeared at many of the world's leading opera houses including Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Metropolitan Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, La Scala, Paris Opera, Welsh National Opera, Philadelphia Opera, Hamburg Staatsoper, Teatro Massimo Palermo, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, La Fenice, Seattle Opera, Opera New Zealand, Opera de Monte Carlo as well as at the Saito Kinen Festival. After winning the 1986 International Pavarotti Competition, she made many concert appearances with the famous tenor.

**Maestro Asher Fisch** made his Seattle Opera debut conducting *Parsifal* in the opening performance of McCaw Hall in 2003, and returned for *Lohengrin* (2004), *Der Rosenkavalier* (for which he won Artist of the Year in 2006), *Der Fliegende Holländer* (2007), *Tristan und Isolde* (2010), *Turandot* (2012), *Fidelio* (2012), and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (2013). He has formerly served as Music Director of Israeli Opera (1998-2008) and the Wiener Volksoper (1995-2000). He recently conducted *Parsifal* at the Metropolitan Opera, *Rigoletto* at Dresden Semperoper, *Don Carlo* at Bayerische Staatsoper, *The Merry Widow* at Opéra National de Paris, and *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci* at Wiener Staatsoper. He is a regular guest at European opera houses, including Berlin Staatsoper, Vienna Staatsoper, Teatro alla Scala, Paris Opera, Dresden Semperoper, and Royal Opera Covent Garden, among others. In the US, he has conducted at LA Opera, the Met, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Houston Grand Opera. Among the North American symphony orchestras, Fisch has conducted those of Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Seattle, Houston, Toronto, and Montreal. In Europe, he has conducted the Munich Symphony, the Berlin Philharmonic, Dresdner Staatskapelle, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Orchestre National de France, among others. He is the newly named Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of West Australian Symphony Orchestra in Perth.

### **Seattle Opera 2013/2014 Board of Trustees**

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### **Biographies of Newly Elected Trustees**

**James Melhorn** is a retired executive from EMA, Inc. The company and its subsidiaries provide residential living, assisted living, and comprehensive nursing service to senior citizens. Sixteen hundred people live in EMA facilities. The aging association is affiliated with the American Association of Homes for the Aging, a national organization of which Jim has served as a member of the House of Delegates since 1987. Jim oversaw the operations of 12 subsidiary corporations. He has been recognized in the field of gerontology for his longtime advocacy for the needs of the elderly. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Philosophy (1964), a Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary (1967), and has performed additional graduate work at North Texas State University. He received an honorary degree from McDaniels College, and received the Proxmire Award from McDaniels College for individuals who have shown leadership roles in the fight against Alzheimer's. Jim and his wife Lora recently moved to the Skyline Community in Seattle.

**Matthew Segal** is a founding partner of Pacifica Law Group. His practice focuses on litigation, counseling and dispute resolution for public and private clients. His experience spans appellate and trial court levels, federal and state constitutional law, municipal law, insurance coverage, land use, public records, and media and privacy issues. Prior to the founding of Pacifica Law Group, he was a partner at the law firm of K&L Gates, and an associate at its predecessor firm Preston Gates & Ellis. Matt has served on the Board of Directors of the ACLU of Washington, and has been commended by the Washington State Bar Association for his pro bono legal work. Matt earned his J.D. from Seattle University School of Law, in 1999, summa cum laude. He was a Presidential Law Scholar and Lead Article Editor for the Seattle University Law Review. He earned his B.A. in history from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1993.

**Susanne Wakefield** was a high school counselor for 29 years until retirement in 2001. She is the author of *Unfocused Kids—Helping Students to Focus on their Education and Career Plans—A Resource for Educators* (2004). She is a former president of the Washington School Counselor Association and the Washington Career Development Association. She also taught in the Career Development Certificate Program at the University of Washington, where she earned her Global Career Development Certification. Suzy has a lifelong love for opera. Her grandmother, Ruth Lapham Lloyd, took her to the Met when she was very young.

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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. Regionally vital, with robust education and community engagement programs, 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.