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Seattle Opera Announces International Wagner Competition

**Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences Awards Seattle Opera
\$300,000 for the New Wagner Competition
And for Seattle Opera's School Production: *Theft of the Gold***

Seattle—Wednesday, August 10, 2005, at Seattle Opera's luncheon for the *Ring* press, General Director Speight Jenkins announced the creation of the Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition. Since 1975, with the presentation of its first *Ring* cycle, Seattle Opera has built an international reputation for being the leading presenter of the Wagner repertoire in the United States. This Wagner tradition began under the leadership of the company's Founding General Director Glynn Ross and has continued under the leadership of General Director Speight Jenkins. (During the Jenkins administration, Seattle Opera has completed the daunting artistic feat of presenting not only two original productions of Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* but original productions of all ten of Wagner's major operas.) The Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition, as an extension of Seattle Opera's commitment to Wagner, has been established to identify and recognize opera singers who demonstrate clear promise of an important career in the Wagner repertoire.

Telling the audience that there was more good news, Jenkins made a second announcement: The Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences is awarding a grant of \$300,000 to Seattle Opera for the Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition and for Seattle Opera's elementary school opera project, *Theft of the Gold: The Ring Begins*, a new education project that just got underway last season (see information below).

Charles Simonyi, a guest at the luncheon, expressed the reasons for this significant grant. "This gift recognizes Seattle Opera's unique role in presenting Wagner's great works and its reputation for attracting the best singers and enthusiastic audiences from around the world," Simonyi said. "In addition, our gift embraces the mission of the foundation: Access to Excellence. The Seattle Opera represents excellence in every way."

Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition The Competition

Participation in the Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition, which is by nomination only, is open to singers worldwide. Preliminary rounds of the competition will be held in London, continental Western

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Europe, New York, and Seattle. Speight Jenkins and members of an advisory panel will select six finalists and two alternates for the final competition. The final competition will be a full-orchestra concert at McCaw Hall on August 19, 2006, during the run of Seattle Opera's summer presentations of Richard Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*. Tickets are scheduled to go on sale January 16, 2006. The two winners of the competition will each receive an unrestricted cash grant of \$15,000.

Preliminary Round

Candidates of proven ability may be nominated by agents, general directors, and other established professionals in the field of opera. Nominations will be reviewed in advance of the preliminary rounds. Nominees should have had professional training and performance experience, with appropriate preparation for the Wagner repertory. It is assumed that nominees will be between the ages of 25 and 40 years old. Nominees should prepare two arias in the original language from the Wagner repertory. Finalists, who will appear in the August competition concert, will be announced by the end of the calendar year 2005.

In discussing the particulars of the competition, Jenkins emphasized the significance of this project: "The IWC marks a new step in Seattle Opera's commitment to Wagner. Major, exciting young singers are our future, and I feel the competition will help us pinpoint the great Wagner singers of tomorrow."

School Production of *Theft of the Gold: The Ring Begins*

Theft of the Gold: The Ring Begins is a student-involving, in-school opera program based on the first opera in Wagner's *Ring*, *Das Rheingold*. Jonathan Dean, of the Opera's Education Department, created a one-hour version of the opera that keeps the spirit of Wagner's original while allowing grade-schoolers to follow the story easily—and to participate in the opera itself. With support from the Simonyi Fund, Seattle Opera will present the opera at eight schools during the 2005/06 school year. With the guidance of teaching artists, students will learn to use music and song in storytelling, make their own costumes, design set pieces and props, and play instruments they create themselves. In this project, children work alongside Seattle Opera's Young Artists (all professional opera singers), who sing the principal roles in the opera, and with members of Seattle Opera's education and production teams.

The program's curriculum, which incorporates language arts, music, and civics, is ideally suited to the Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences' commitment to access to and excellence in the arts.

Commenting on the significance of the Simonyi gift, Administrative Director Kelly Tweeddale said: "The genius of the Simonyi gift is that it embraces Seattle Opera's commitment to the Wagner repertoire on several levels. First, it recognizes the need to develop and discover the Wagner voices of the future; second, it brings the repertoire into the classroom to captivate what may be the audiences of the future, and finally it recognizes the unique and authentic role that Seattle Opera has played in keeping the Wagner canon alive."

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Founded in 1963, Seattle Opera has developed into 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 presentation of the works of Richard Wagner.

Seattle Opera gratefully acknowledges the support of the following for the *Ring*: Marion O. McCaw Garrison, Craig and Joan Watjen, Bagley Wright Family Foundation, 4Culture, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington State Arts Commission, John Graham Foundation, Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, City of Seattle, Carol Franc Buck Foundation, Dilettante Chocolates, Town & Country Chrysler/Jeep

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