

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE (10.11.07)

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Pittsburgh Opera Announces a Bold New Home

Pittsburgh, PA . . .General Director Mark Weinstein announced today that the company is purchasing the Westinghouse Building at 2425 Liberty Avenue in the Strip District, and will be moving in the Spring of 2008. "We're delighted that after a full citywide search and with tremendous leadership from our board, we have located an excellent facility that we can call home. The new space significantly increases the Opera's rehearsal facilities and adds a performance space, as well as providing operational savings while enhancing the company's assets."

According to Artistic Director Christopher Hahn, "Nationally, only a small number of opera companies own their own homes. Any producing company such as ours needs flexibility and space, and we have managed without much for years, but now our new rehearsal facilities will mean that we can effectively control our own artistic destiny. Nothing improves the quality and impact of a production more than the amount of advance rehearsal time we get in a space that simulates the stage."

According to Weinstein, "This building allows us to have two major rehearsal/performance spaces. One space will be roughly twice the size of our current rehearsal space at the Benedum, which will allow a tripling of the time we have to rehearse our mainstage production on the actual production sets. The other new performance space will be larger than the part of the Benedum stage

the audience sees at a performance. Pittsburgh Opera will have the largest rehearsal space of any performing arts group in Pittsburgh.”

Board President John Traina underlined how the new home relates to the board’s strategic plan, “The Board of Trustees identified two major areas of focus for the company’s future: growing our audience and strengthening our financial base. Happily the two are intimately related with our new home which becomes a lynchpin in our strategy.”

Background

The company moved to its current space in 1998, and through a collaboration with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, was able to lease at far below market rates. But as all good things must come to an end, the lease expires in 2008 and the company must vacate by April 30th. The Pittsburgh Opera building (801 Penn Avenue) will be torn down to make room for RiverParc, a multiphase \$500 million commercial and housing development of the Cultural Trust.

The Pittsburgh Opera’s “Bold New Home Campaign” goal is \$8 million which will provide funds for purchase and renovations, and create a new operating reserve. According to Weinstein, approximately \$3.5 million has been pledged in the two months since the campaign began, led by almost \$1 million from the Opera’s Board of Directors. “We have an extremely generous board. They are excited about our new home and the possibilities it presents.”

With the help of Oxford Development, over 300 possible buildings within the City of Pittsburgh limits were screened down to twenty. Final and best offers were solicited for those which met all the defined criteria and had annual

operating expenses within the projected budget. According to Weinstein, “If we rented the same amount of space we currently have somewhere else, our operating costs would easily double or triple. The great news about this project is that by purchasing our building, we triple our space without adding any new burden to the annual budget and we increase our net assets substantially from \$20 million to \$28 million.”

According to Hahn, “Another terrific aspect of our new space is that we are moving into a piece of Pittsburgh local history. The Westinghouse factory was built to manufacture the air brake which revolutionized the railroad industry that was so important to Pittsburgh’s manufacturing dominance. The building has been beautifully preserved—even the original safe is in full working order. Everyone in Pittsburgh knows how vibrant the Strip District is with restaurants and lofts springing up everywhere. We are lucky to move into this space before prices escalate, as they surely will.”

For more information, please contact the Pittsburgh Opera at 412-281-0912.

Pittsburgh Opera, celebrating 69 years of opera in southwestern Pennsylvania, is a member of OPERA America, the national organization for opera companies, and the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. Pittsburgh Opera’s performances are supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, and Allegheny Regional Asset District. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and WQED-FM are season media sponsors.

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