

Pittsburgh Opera NEWS RELEASE

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Stephanie Blythe Headlines Pittsburgh Opera's *Samson & Dalila*

WHAT:	<i>Samson & Dalila</i> by Camille Saint-Saëns
WHERE:	The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts
WHEN:	Saturday, October 18 at 7:00 PM Tuesday, October 21 at 7:00 PM Friday, October 24 at 8:00 PM Sunday, October 26 at 2:00 PM
RUN TIME:	2 hours and 45 minutes, including 2 intermissions
LANGUAGE:	Sung in French with English texts projected above the stage.
TICKETS:	Start at \$16. Call (412) 456-6666, visit www.pittsburghopera.org , or purchase in person at the Theater Square box office at 665 Penn Avenue.

Pittsburgh, PA (October 6, 2008) . . . The eyes of the opera world will be on Pittsburgh Opera when mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe makes her eagerly anticipated role debut as the *femme fatale* in *Samson & Dalila* by Camille Saint-Saëns. Samson is the highly regarded tenor Frank Porretta; Metropolitan opera baritone Kim Josephson schemes against him as the High Priest of Dagon, and Harry Dworchak thunders as the despised ruler Abimélech. Music Director Antony Walker leads the sumptuous orchestra and chorus, and Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope bring the talents of Attack Theatre to the captivating *Bacchanale*, Saint-Saëns's famous dance of the Philistines.

General Director Christopher Hahn comments, "This is such an honor for Pittsburgh Opera to have Stephanie Blythe returning for another 'first' in her repertoire—and just six months after her Amneris in *Aida* last spring." Blythe, widely regarded as the world's leading mezzo-soprano was looking for just the right place to make this role debut, and according to Hahn, "We were able to program this opera especially for her." He notes that Blythe is set to make two more important role debuts this season, as the title role in *Orfeo* and Ježibaba in *Rusalka*, both at the Metropolitan Opera. "One of the amazing things about Stephanie is her ability to sing *everything*, from Handel to Wagner, Rossini to Puccini, Monteverdi to Stravinsky."

Hahn continues, “An artist of this caliber must have only the best of colleagues. At Pittsburgh Opera that starts with Music Director Antony Walker, who has worked with Stephanie in *Aida*.” For her Samson, Hahn has cast tenor Frank Porretta, who also makes his role debut with this production. Looking every inch the heroic tenor, Porretta is an imposing figure—and has his own flowing locks, to boot. Porretta replaces tenor Mark Lundberg, who died in August. “Although we would never have wanted it to happen under these tragic circumstances, we’re fortunate have Frank here now,” Hahn added. On an interesting side note, Porretta’s father, Frank Porretta, Jr., sang Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* with Pittsburgh Opera in 1960 alongside Roberta Peters as Rosina and Frank Valentino as Figaro.

- “A force of nature...Ms. Blythe’s voice is tremendous. It pulls a listener to the edge of his seat.” –*New York Times*
- “...an Amneris for the ages...” –*Opera News*

CAST & CONDUCTOR

Dalila, priestess of Dagon	Stephanie Blythe	mezzo-soprano
Samson	Frank Porretta+	tenor
High Priest of Dagon	Kim Josephson+	baritone
Abimélech, satrap of Gaza	Harry Dworchak	bass
An Old Hebrew	Liam Moran*	bass
First Philistine	Dean Kokanos*	tenor
Second Philistine	Jesse Lee Davis	tenor
Philistine Messenger	Carlos Feliciano*	tenor
Conductor	Antony Walker	

+ Pittsburgh Opera debut

* Resident Artist of Pittsburgh Opera

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Stage Director	Stephen Pickover
Set Designer	Peter Dean Beck
Costume Designer	Michael Scott for Washington National Opera
Lighting Designer	Cindy Limauro
Wig & Makeup Designer	James Geier
Choreographers	Michele de la Reza/Peter Kope for Attack Theatre

THE STORY

Camille Saint-Saëns and his librettist, Ferdinand Lemaire, based their opera on the life of Samson as told in the Book of Judges, Chapters 13-16. However, the real meat of the operatic story—the relationship—has been entirely imagined by Saint-Saëns and Lemaire. Like good Hollywood screenwriters, they dispensed with most of the backstory. The opera begins at a crisis point, when Samson steps out from the crowd to fulfill his destiny as leader of the Hebrews, who are utterly downtrodden as slaves of the Philistines. The High Priest of Dagon becomes concerned when Samson's murder of King Abimélech touches off a Hebrew rebellion. He enlists Delilah in a plot to deprive the Hebrews of their leader. (Unlike the Biblical Delilah, the operatic incarnation doesn't betray Samson for money.) Jealous of the hero's secret pact with God and unable to keep Samson as her lover, Delilah is only too happy to bring the Hebrew rebellion to an end by seducing Samson and robbing him of his strength—his magnificent hair. Even though blinded and chained, Samson destroys the Temple of Dagon and puts an end to the wickedness of the Philistines.

THE COMPOSER & OPERA

Charles Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was one of the most brilliant people who ever lived. More precocious than Mozart, he began composing at age 3. By age 5, he had fallen in love with *Don Giovanni* and wanted to write operas like Mozart. At 12, he was able to play all 32 of Beethoven's piano sonatas by heart. Saint-Saëns astonished Wagner later in life when he sat down at the piano and played *Tristan und Isolde* from the orchestral score at first sight—and later could play it from memory. Witnessing this, Hans von Bülow called him “the greatest musical mind of our time.” Although he wrote 11 operas, Saint-Saëns labored to elevate French music beyond a fascination with opera and operetta. With the Viennese Classicists (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) as his models, he encouraged his colleagues and pupils to write concert music: sonatas, string quartets, symphonies, and concertos. He also popularized the orchestral tone poem in France.

Saint-Saëns was also a musical journalist, editor and musicologist, and outspoken critic. He mentored many a young French composer. He was one of the first musicians to make a recording and the first major composer to write a film score. Art, literature, science (especially astronomy), philosophy, history, travel and foreign cultures—everything interested him. A biographer noted,

“...during his heyday he blazed like a splendid comet over the cultural scene in France whose salon life he also illuminated with his irrepressible wit, scintillating conversation and *joie de vivre*.”

In spite of Saint-Saëns’s enormous celebrity in his own time, only a handful of his works are known to today’s concert public: *Samson & Dalila*, *The Carnival of the Animals*, the *Danse macabre*, his Piano Concerto #2, and the Symphony #3 (Organ Symphony).

Arduous road to a premiere

It took Camille Saint-Saëns about 16 years from his first sketches for *Samson & Dalila* in 1859 to the premiere in Germany—in German—in 1877. It was not performed in Paris until 1892, even though it was a smash hit throughout Germany. Saint-Saëns, considered by Franz Liszt “the greatest organist in the world,” revered the sacred choral music of Handel, Bach, and his beloved Mozart. He also admired Mendelssohn’s oratorios, so it is not surprising that when he first thought about setting the story to music, he cast it as an oratorio. Ferdinand Lemaire talked him into writing an opera instead.

There are several reasons why *Samson & Dalila* had to wait so long for a premiere: Saint-Saëns was viewed as a pianist and an academic—both fatal in the French opera world. He was also a native composer in a city that loved foreigners. The plot might also be dangerous politically, as Paris was still recovering from the suppressed revolt of the working-class *Communards* that saw 20,000 dead in the capital in 1870. The Hebrews longing for freedom could be interpreted as symbolizing the downtrodden French socialists, just as Verdi’s famous chorus of Hebrews in *Nabucco*, “Va pensiero,” became a rallying cry for Italian unity in the 1850s and ‘60s. And as predicted by the composer himself, the impresarios of the French opera houses felt it was too dangerous to put a Biblical story onstage. Finally, the string of popular and critical successes in foreign theaters changed their minds.

THE PRODUCTION

For this production, Pittsburgh Opera has purchased and enhanced a set originally designed for Opera Memphis by Peter Dean Beck. Its most striking element is an enormous central medallion depicting Dagon, the fish/man god of the Philistines, that dominates the Temple scene in Act III. In the last seconds of the opera, that medallion breaks apart, and massive blocks fall as Samson

rocks the pillars of the temple. The evocative costumes are designed by Michael Scott for Washington National Opera.

Stage Director Stephen Pickover discusses the story

Stephen Pickover, who also directed another ancient epic in last season's *Aida*, sees *Samson & Dalila* as an opportunity for "simple, organic storytelling" at the heart of a very grandiose opera. "It's a very straightforward story," he says. "Delilah is something of a rebel—a very independent woman. She's been 'sleeping with the enemy' all this time and hasn't said anything to the High Priest about it. When she finally does betray Samson, it's only because he has jilted her. It has nothing whatever to do with patriotism. It's purely a case of getting her revenge: "Hell hath no fury..."

The role of Delilah has the most beautiful and impressive music and gets most of the audience's attention. According to Pickover, though, the growth of Samson's character is the real story behind the opera. "Saint-Saëns did a masterful job of setting up the story in the first scene. We see the despair of the Hebrews and how important Samson is in inspiring them to victory. Without Samson they are powerless and blind, but he inspires them to find their God-given strength and courage. But Samson really doesn't get it. All this is so easy for him. He's never had a moment in his life when he wasn't strong and powerful. And that's why the opening of the third act is so devastating."

The third act shows Samson blinded, shorn, and chained to an enormous millwheel. Pickover continues, "Samson is like Superman on Kryptonite. It's the first time in his life that he has no strength, no power. He's blind. Until this moment Samson has never understood how his people have been suffering in their darkness and despair. He becomes very humble, and for the first time he really comprehends his purpose in life—and how deeply he has failed his people. It amazes me how Saint-Saëns captures these emotional moments so beautifully and truthfully. I think people will be surprised to find out what an amazing emotional experience they get in this opera."

Working with Attack Theatre on the dances

Stephen Pickover finds working with Peter Kope and Michele de la Reza, the artistic directors of Attack Theatre, "incredibly easy." "Basically we shared our ideas," he says. "Having worked with them and seen their incredible choreography in *Aida*, we didn't have to talk too much. The

main thing we wanted to do is integrate the dancers into the scene, so that the dances aren't just set pieces. You'll see the dancers onstage the whole time with the chorus in both scenes. They're fully integrated into the action." What can we expect from the famous *Bacchanale*? "Well, there's no nudity," he says, "but it is a bacchanal."

RELATED EVENTS

*The 54th annual Diamond Horseshoe Celebration on Opening Night (Saturday, October 18) consists of **An Evening in Three Acts.***

Act 1 – Cocktails and dinner at the Hilton Hotel Ballroom at 4:00 PM; tickets start at \$350.

Act 2 – Samson & Dalila at 7:00 PM (opera tickets purchased through box office).

Act 3 – OperaBLAST! Following the performance, dance the night away at the afterparty featuring hors d'oeuvres, extravagant desserts, cocktails, live band, and silent auction; tickets \$60 per person. Event begins at 10:00 PM.

Events may be purchased singly or as a package at www.pittsburghopera.org.

“Opera Up Close” with Antony Walker

*Saturday, October 11 at 12:45 PM at Pittsburgh Opera in the Strip
2425 Liberty Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15222*

Music Director Antony Walker gives an in-depth musical tour of *Samson & Dalila*, followed by a panel discussion led by General Director Christopher Hahn. Free and open to the public. No reservations necessary. Call 412-281-0912 for details.

*Come early for Brown Bag Opera at noon.

Pittsburgh Opera Preview on WQED-FM (89.3)

Saturday, October 13 at 1:30 PM and Friday, October 17 at 7:00 PM

* Please note new schedule for the 2008-2009 season*

An in-depth introduction to the singers, music and production of *Samson & Dalila* with host Stephen Baum. http://www.wqed.org/fm/programs_pop.php

Free Pre-Opera Talks

One hour before every performance, Benedum Center.

Join “Opera Lady” Beth Parker and General Director Christopher Hahn for a lively behind-the-scenes introduction to *Samson & Dalila*. Free of charge to all ticket holders. No reservations necessary.

Meet the Artists!

Immediately following the *Tuesday, October 21* performance, the audience is invited to join Artistic Director Christopher Hahn and members of the cast for coffee and conversation in the lower lobby of the Benedum Center (free).

Black & Gold Night on October 24

To kick off the opera season in true Pittsburgh style, Pittsburgh Opera celebrates the city's favorite strongmen, the Steelers, with Black & Gold Night at the Friday, October 24 performance. Audience members are invited to join the fun by wearing their Steelers gear or

black and gold attire. Bill Hillgrove, voice of the Steelers, will give the pre-show announcement, and audience members will receive Steelers beads to show their home team spirit.

This production is generously sponsored by the H. J. Heinz Company Foundation

Pittsburgh Opera's **2008-2009 season sponsors** include:
PNC Foundation (Opening Night Sponsor)
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Links:

Pittsburgh Opera www.pittsburghopera.org

Stephanie Blythe <http://www.opus3artists.com/artists/stephanie-blythe>

Frank Porretta <http://www.frankporretta.com/Bio.html>

Antony Walker <http://www.antonywalker.com/>

Attack Theatre <http://attacktheatre.com/buildex.html>

Pittsburgh Opera, now celebrating its 70th season, is one of America's leading opera companies. It offers a range of programs, from main-stage productions to free community concerts to intimate cabarets. Pittsburgh Opera's internationally renowned resident artist program is among the country's top five training centers for rising opera stars. Each year, more than 20,000 students, families, and educators participate in Pittsburgh Opera educational events. The company's newly designed administrative and rehearsal space is housed in a 140-year-old air brake factory in the city's Strip District.

CAST & PRODUCTION BIOS

STEPHANIE BLYTHE - DALILA

Mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe is considered to be one of the most highly respected artists of her generation. *Opera News* dubbed her appearance here in *Aida* last spring "an Amneris for the ages." This season Ms. Blythe adds two new roles to her repertoire in addition to Dalila: the title role in *Orfeo* and Ježibaba in *Rusalka* at the Metropolitan Opera. She also returns to the Arizona Opera for *The Mikado* and appears in concert with Washington Concert Opera led by Antony Walker, and the Collegiate Chorale. She has appeared in the great opera houses of the world including the Metropolitan Opera, Seattle Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, and the Opéra National de Paris. Her many roles include the title roles in *Carmen*, *La grande duchesse de Gerolstein*, *Tancredi*, *Mignon*, and *Giulio Cesare*; Frugola, Principessa, and Zita/*Il Trittico*, Baba the Turk/*The Rake's Progress*, Jocasta/*Oedipus Rex*, Mère Marie in *Dialogues des Carmélites*; Isabella/*L'italiana in Algeri*, Fricka/*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, Azucena/*Il trovatore*, Ulrica/*Un ballo in maschera*, Mistress Quickly/*Falstaff*, and Juno/*Semele*. Last season she returned to the Metropolitan Opera as Ulrica and Fricka. Ms. Blythe has appeared with many of the world's finest orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra (in Boston and in Tanglewood), Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Opera Orchestra of New York, Minnesota Orchestra, Halle Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the Ensemble Orchestre de Paris. Ms. Blythe's most recent solo recordings include a collection of pieces by Mahler, Brahms, and Wagner and an album of Handel and Bach arias, all released on the Virgin Classics label. Ms. Blythe was the winner of the 1999 Richard Tucker Award and the 2007 Opera News Award.

FRANK PORRETTA - SAMSON

Making his Pittsburgh Opera debut, Frank Porretta has gained international recognition as an important lirico spinto tenor with appearances in leading theaters including the Berlin State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Hamburg State Opera, SemperOper Dresden, Bavarian State Opera, Opéra national de Paris (Bastille), Teatro Real in Madrid, Teatro Regio di Torino, the Australian Opera, and many others. He has also been heard in North America at Seattle Opera, Baltimore Opera, San Diego Opera, and Opera Pacific. Porretta's repertoire includes some of the most demanding roles in the tenor literature including Don Alvaro/*La forza del destino*, Radamès/*Aida*, the title role in Verdi's *Otello*, Turiddu and Canio in *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci*, Dick Johnson/*La fanciulla del West*, and Calaf/*Turandot*. Last season Porretta made his debut with Seattle Opera in *Tosca*. He returned to the Berlin State Opera for *Aida* and made his debut at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo in his first performances of Luigi/*Il tabarro*. Porretta also returned to Essen in *Forza* and *Turandot*. He began this season with his debut in Budapest as Calaf, sings his first Pollione/*Norma* at Baltimore Opera, and returns to the Berlin State Opera as Calaf. Future engagements also include his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in the same role. Frank Porretta is the son of two noted American opera singers, Frank Porretta, Jr. and Roberta Palmer. His father, a lyric tenor, sang Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* with Pittsburgh Opera in 1960 with Roberta Peters as Rosina and Frank Valentino as Figaro.

KIM JOSEPHSON – THE HIGH PRIEST OF DAGON

Hailed as one of opera's most versatile baritones, Kim Josephson is a regular guest of leading opera companies, including the Metropolitan Opera where, since 1991, he has performed more than 230 performances of 24 roles including the title role in *Rigoletto*, Germont/*La traviata*, Enrico/*Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Belcore/*L'elisir d'amore*, to name a few. This is his debut appearance with Pittsburgh Opera. He has also appeared at Lyric Opera of Chicago, most notably as Eddie Carbone in the world premiere of William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge* and as Rigoletto, Germont, Sharpless/*Madama Butterfly*, and Marcello/*La bohème*. Elsewhere in the US, he has appeared with the Seattle Opera as Rigoletto, Rance/*La fanciulla del West*, Minnesota Opera as Scarpia/*Tosca*, Houston Grand Opera, Baltimore Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Connecticut Opera, the Spoleto Festival, U.S.A., Sarasota Opera, and Tulsa Opera. In Canada, he has appeared with Vancouver Opera and Opera Hamilton. In Europe, he has appeared on the stage of Vienna State Opera as the Count di Luna/*Il trovatore*, Germont, Enrico, Belcore, and Marcello. He has also performed in Japan on tour with the Metropolitan Opera. Notable upcoming appearances include Washington National Opera for Eddie Carbone, a return to the Cincinnati Opera as Renato, and a debut with the Fort Worth Opera in the title role of *Falstaff*. Mr. Josephson's interpretation of Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge* is available on CD from New World Records. He has also appeared in four television broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera, available on video recording: *La fanciulla del West*, *Arabella*, *Carmen*, and *Billy Budd*.

HARRY DWORCHAK - ABIMÉLECH

Dramatic bass-baritone Harry Dworchak returns to Pittsburgh Opera, having appeared previously as Raimondo/*Lucia di Lammermoor*, Ramfis/*Aida*, Daland/*The Flying Dutchman*, and most recently as Basilio/*The Barber of Seville* in 1991. Notable theaters with whom Mr. Dworchak has appeared include the Metropolitan Opera as the Geisterbote/*Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Monterone/*Rigoletto*, Waldner/*Arabella*, Ferrando/*Il trovatore*, Raimondo/*Lucia*, Timur/*Turandot*, and in *Billy Budd* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*; Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich as Scarpia/*Tosca*; Timur, Ferrando, the King in *Aida*, Don Alfonso/*Così fan tutte*,

Geisterbote/*Die Frau Ohne Schatten* for Washington Opera; Palm Beach Opera, and Frankfurt Opera in the title role of *Der fliegende Holländer*, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Don Pizarro/*Fidelio*, Covent Garden as Scarpia; L'Opéra Nationale de Paris (Bastille) as Banquo/*Macbeth* and for *Khovanshchina*, Zurich Opera as Ferrando; Teatro Liceo in Barcelona as Raimondo; Vienna Volksoper as Oroveso in *Norma*; Montreal Opera and Opera Pacific as Scarpia; Austin Lyric Opera as Jochanaan/*Salome*; New Orleans Opera as Alberich in *Siegfried*; Welsh National Opera as Oroveso in *Norma*; New York City Opera as Scarpia; the title role in Massenet's *Don Quichotte*; and Escamillo in *Carmen*. He has also performed Wotan and The Wanderer in a new production of Wagner's *Ring* at Stadttheater Augsburg. Harry Dworchak is a native of Hershey, Pennsylvania, and received his musical training at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. He is a recipient of the prestigious Richard Tucker Award.

LIAM MORAN – AN OLD HEBREW

Liam Moran made his debut last season as a first-year resident artist with Pittsburgh Opera as The Bonze/*Madama Butterfly*, appearing subsequently as Dulcamara/*The Elixir of Love* Behind the Curtain, the Immigration Officer/*Flight*, the King/*Aida*, and Capellio/*The Capulets & the Montagues* Student Matinee. His upcoming engagements include the title role in *Don Pasquale*, Colline/*La bohème*, and Mustafà/*The Italian Girl in Algiers* Behind the Curtain for Pittsburgh Opera. Last summer he returned to Wolf Trap Opera for Melisso/*Alcina*, Truffaldino/*Ariadne auf Naxos*, and excerpts from *Fidelio*. His previous roles there include Zuniga/*Carmen*, the Speaker/*The Magic Flute*, and Siroco/*L'étoile*. He has also performed with Florida Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Glimmerglass Opera, San Francisco Opera's Merola Program, and Opera Omaha. His concert work ranges from Monteverdi to Penderecki, and he has been featured with the National Symphony, Washington Concert Opera, the Palm Beach Symphony, the New World Symphony's "Concerts in Context" series, Los Angeles' Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, and several recital series. A prize winner in the Florida Grand Opera Competition and Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions/New England region, Mr. Moran completed his studies at McGill University in Montreal and the Yale School of Music.

Pittsburgh Opera Center Resident Artists **Dean Kokanos** (First Philistine) and **Carlos Feliciano** (Philistine Messenger) and Pittsburgh Opera chorister **Jesse Lee Davis** (Second Philistine) round out the cast. Tenors **Kokanos** and **Feliciano** are both in their second season with Pittsburgh Opera and will share the role of Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* in the Pittsburgh Opera Center production later this season.

ANTONY WALKER - MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

Maestro Antony Walker begins his third season as Pittsburgh Opera's Music Director and Conductor. As Artistic Director of Washington Concert Opera since 2003, Maestro Walker has championed under-performed works, such as *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *Stiffelio*, *Roberto Devereux*, *La donna del lago*, *Esclarmonde*, and Rossini's *Otello*. As Co-Artistic Director of Pinchgut Opera in Australia, he has conducted baroque works including *Dardanus*, *L'Orfeo*, and *Idomeneo* with the Orchestra of the Antipodes on period instruments. Since his debut in 1991, this exciting and prolific conductor has led companies in Europe, the United States, and Australia. His conducting schedule has included engagements with Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Australia, Welsh National Opera, Minnesota Opera, New York City Opera, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Cincinnati Opera, Hawaii Opera Theater, Arizona Opera, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, Sydney Opera House Orchestra, Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Barossa Festival Orchestra, the BBC National

Orchestra of Wales, and with the Pittsburgh Opera Center and Chatham Baroque for Monteverdi's *Ulysses* in 2004. Maestro Walker has recorded 26 CDs and DVDs of the works of Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart, Orff, Fauré, Puccini, Verdi, Purcell, Handel, Bach, and others. His CD collaboration with Teddy Tahu Rhodes garnered the ARIA award for Best Classical Music Album of 2004, and his DVD of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto won the international DVD Association Award for Music Excellence for 2005. Releases of additional works including Handel's *Semele*, Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Rameau's *Dardanus*, and Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* have won high praise in reviews. Deeply committed to contemporary music, he has conducted many premieres of significant international compositions in his native Australia, among them Arvo Pärt's St. John Passion, Poulenc's *Figure humaine*, Iannis Xenakis's *Idmen A and B*, and more than 70 premieres of new Australian works.

STEPHEN PICKOVER – STAGE DIRECTOR

Stephen Pickover made his Pittsburgh Opera debut last season with *Aida*. He has directed numerous operas, musicals, and plays both in the US and abroad. He is the current recipient of a Morris Fund Artist-in-Residence grant for his libretto adapted from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, in collaboration with composer Nathan Matthews. Pickover has directed with the Teatro Regio in Turin Italy, Los Angeles Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Montreal, Minnesota and San Francisco Symphonies, and is frequently a guest stage director at the Metropolitan Opera, where his repertoire includes *Faust*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Norma*, *Susannah*, *Moses und Aron*, *Tannhäuser*, *Die Fledermaus*, *The Markopoulos Case*, *Billy Budd*, *Peter Grimes*, *Arabella*, *Fedora*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Rusalka*, *Fidelio*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Kat'a Kabanova*, *Aida*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Carmen*, *Salome*, and *Khovanschina*. Pickover has a passion for developing new work and was the Artistic/Resident Director of New York's Riverside Opera Ensemble, where he conceived and directed *Where or When*, a new Rodgers and Hart Off-Broadway revue and the world premiere of Patrick Byers's opera *Incident at San Bajo*, *Iolanta*, *Man with a Load of Mischief*. He also developed and directed the new musical *Street Sense* by Migdalia Cruz and Linda Eisenstein at the Cleveland Public Theatre and was the Artistic Director of Struthers Library Theatre in Pennsylvania where he directed *Evita*, *The Sound of Music*, *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Oklahoma*, *The Boyfriend*, *Camelot*, *The Music Man*, and *The Fantasticks*. He is currently Artistic Director of Prometheus Arts and is developing an indie rock opera by Pittsburgh native Matt Gallaway and Saturnine, based on Proust.

PETER DEAN BECK – SET DESIGNER

Peter Dean Beck has designed scenery and/or lighting for over 250 productions around the country. Among his opera credits are *Falstaff*, *Turandot*, *Manon*, *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo et Juliette* for such companies as Atlanta Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Virginia Opera, and Chautauqua Opera. He has designed productions of *Andrea Chenier*, *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Macbeth*, *Elektra*, and *Tristan and Isolde* for Hawaii Opera Theatre, where he has been principal designer for 24 seasons. He has also been designing opera productions for the University of Colorado for 14 seasons. His other musical theater credits include *West Side Story*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Candide*, *The King and I*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He designed *The Indigo Girls Project* for Atlanta Ballet and *Nutcracker* for Ballet Hawaii. He recently did a double bill of *Le Rossignol* and *Cavalleria rusticana* for Sakai City Opera in Japan.

CINDY LIMAURO – LIGHTING DESIGNER

Cindy Limauro's lighting designs have been seen nationally and internationally in opera, theater, and dance. Past productions with Pittsburgh Opera include *Aida*, *The Magic Flute*, *Tosca*, *Fidelio*, *Carmen*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Recent Pittsburgh designs include the world premiere of *Henry*, *The Shaughraun*, *Henry IV*, *The Dead*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *Travesties* for Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre; *Summer and Smoke* and the world premiere of *Just Above My Head* for Opera Theater of Pittsburgh; and several productions for Dance Alloy. Other productions include *The Threepenny Opera* and the world premiere of Pasatieri's *The Three Sisters* for Opera Columbus, *Mister Roberts* starring Martin Sheen for Burt Reynolds's Jupiter Theater, the world premiere of *Dracula II Musical* and *Nunsense* in Rome, and productions for the Pittsburgh Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Maryland Ballet, City Theatre, Columbus Light Opera, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Barter Theatre, and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Her lighting design work was recently displayed in the international World Stage Design Exhibit in Toronto. She heads the lighting design program at Carnegie Mellon School of Drama.

JAMES GEIER - WIG AND MAKEUP DESIGNER

Mr. Geier returns to Pittsburgh Opera for a sixth season after recently completing his fifth season at Cincinnati Opera. He formerly worked as a staff makeup artist and wigmaker for a decade with San Francisco Opera and, more recently, as resident wig and makeup designer for Florida Grand Opera. Mr. Geier is a graduate of the Theatre Arts Department at Brandeis University and completed apprenticeships with both the San Francisco and Santa Fe Operas. He has worked for several film companies, including Lucasfilms Ltd., as well as an impressive number of opera, ballet, and theatre companies. His credits include the Denver Center Theatre Company, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, Cincinnati Ballet, Spoleto Festival USA, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Baltimore Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Seattle Opera, Tulsa Opera, Ft. Worth Opera, Omaha Opera, Portland Opera, the Bolshoi Ballet, Kirov Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre.

PETER KOPE & MICHELE DE LA REZA – CHOREOGRAPHERS

As co-founders of Attack Theatre, Peter and Michele have toured extensively throughout the United States, Europe and Asia, choreographing and performing works for the Avignon Festival (France), Indonesia Arts Festival, Monaco Danes Forum, Spoleto Festival USA, the 7th Next Wave Dance Festival (Japan) and the Broadway production of *Squonk*. With Pittsburgh Opera they have worked on operas including *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, *Carmen*, *Billy Budd*, and *Dead Man Walking*. Attack Theatre performs throughout Pittsburgh including the New Hazlett Theater, Heinz Hall with the Pittsburgh Symphony, in galleries with the Carnegie and Andy Warhol Museums, and in their home studios in Pittsburgh's East End. Peter and Michele are the recipients of PA Council on the Arts fellowships, the Harry Schwalb Excellence in the Arts Award, Hardie Arts Educator of the Year Award, named one of "25 to Watch" in 2007 by Dance Magazine, and one of Pittsburgh's Top 50 Cultural Powerbrokers by the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. Peter and Michele are acclaimed master teachers in schools and universities, coordinated the curriculum development for CAPA Performing Arts High School, and are faculty members at Carnegie Mellon University where Attack Theatre is Dance Company in Residence for the School of Music. Peter and Michele were founding company members of NYC-based PerksDanceMusicTheatre, leading dancers with Dance Alloy, and Peter performed with Jacob's Pillow's Men Dancers: The Ted Shawn Legacy and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. Michele received her BFA from the Juilliard School and a Masters of Science in Developmental Movement from the University of Pittsburgh. ###