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VANCOUVER OPERA ANNOUNCES CANADIAN PREMIÈRE OF JOHN ADAMS' *NIXON IN CHINA* New VO production will open in March 2010

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera will present the Canadian première of John Adams' opera *Nixon in China* in March, 2010 as part of its 50th anniversary season. Esteemed Toronto-based stage director **Michael Cavanagh** will direct a new VO production designed by the gifted American scenic designer **Erhard Rom**.

Nixon in China was written during the period 1985 to 1987 and is considered by many to be a modern masterpiece. Composed by **John Adams** to a libretto by poet and scholar **Alice Goodman**, the opera tells the story of U.S. President Richard Nixon's momentous trip to China in 1972, when he met Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong and opened the political door to the Far East.

The drama features four other major figures: First Lady Pat Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, and Chairman Mao's wife, Madame Mao (Jiang Qing). Three "secretaries to Mao" and a large chorus, who play, variously, soldiers, peasants and Communist Party workers, complete the formidable singing forces.

In announcing the production, VO's general director, **James W. Wright**, said, "We are thrilled to be presenting the Canadian premiere of *Nixon in China*. This is an important work that deservedly holds a place alongside the greatest operas of the 20th century. I believe that Vancouver audiences of all ages and all levels of opera-going experience will appreciate this work and connect with it on many levels. Adams' modern score for 55 players holds great emotional power and will move audiences deeply. The libretto is poetic, richly evocative of the period, and revealing of the characters' inner lives. In its fascinating character studies and in the drama of the story, *Nixon in China* holds profound cultural and political significance for Canadian audiences, and especially here in Vancouver, where the effects – and the symbolic significance – of Nixon's historic visit continue to resonate."

Vancouver Opera is assembling a superb creative team and singers. Casting confirmed for the production include baritone **Robert Orth** as Richard Nixon, soprano **Sally Dibblee** as Pat Nixon, and soprano **Tracy Dahl** as Madame Mao. Sally Dibblee and Tracy Dahl are well known to Canadian audiences. Robert Orth is a highly respected American singer whose vivid, detailed portrayal of Richard Nixon has been cheered in leading opera houses. *Opera News*, in describing a performance, said, "The supremely talented Robert Orth captured Nixon's high-strung, self-satisfied character with beautiful command of the physical and poetic language of the role..."

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About the Composer & Librettist

John Adams was born in 1947 in East Concord, New Hampshire. He grew up in a musical family listening to jazz, folk and classical music. He trained at Harvard during the turbulent 1960s and later settled in San Francisco, where, during the 1970s, he absorbed its atmosphere of experimentalism. Influenced by composers such as John Cage and Steve Reich, Adams found his own musical voice with orchestral and choral works written during his tenure as composer in residence with the San Francisco Symphony from 1982 to 1985. *Nixon in China*, his first opera, established his international stature as one of North America's most significant composers. Adams has since written the celebrated operas *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) and *Doctor Atomic* (2005), among many other large- and small-scale works. John Adams won the Pulitzer Prize in 2003. He currently resides in Berkeley, California.

Alice Goodman was born in Minnesota in 1958 and attended Harvard University and Cambridge University. At Harvard, she was a classmate of avant-garde stage director Peter Sellars, who later enlisted her to write the libretto – her first – for *Nixon in China*. She subsequently wrote the libretto for *The Death of Klinghoffer*. These two works are increasingly being compared to the greatest libretti in the English language. Born into a Reform Jewish family, she later converted to Christianity, was ordained as an Anglican minister, and continued to study philosophy and theology. Goodman currently serves as chaplain of Trinity College, Cambridge.

About the Creative Team

Michael Cavanagh is one of Canada's leading stage directors. He has served as Artistic Director of Edmonton Opera and has directed several Vancouver Opera productions, most recently the critically acclaimed *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. In his early planning notes for the production of *Nixon in China*, Cavanagh writes, "John Adams' opera illuminates this historic venture beautifully. It parallels the trip in the sense that it starts out full of promise but, in the end, bewilderment and exhaustion prevail...Our production will reinforce these themes: how vast the gulf between two cultures can be, how some people can find a connection across any such gulf, and how a challenge so overwhelming can distort reality for others."

Erhard Rom is one of the most sought-after scenic designers in North America. He has created more than 100 designs, including productions for Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Cleveland Opera, and Minnesota Opera. In 2007, two of his designs were featured in the Prague Quadrennial, the pre-eminent scenographic exhibition in the world. Originally from Seattle, Erhard Rom resides in the Washington, DC area.