

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vancouver Opera to perform opera favourites at celebratory concert

June 2 performance will honour retiring General Director James W. Wright

Vancouver, BC ~ On June 2, 2016, four of Canada's pre-eminent singers will join the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Music Director **Jonathan Darlington**, in "BraVO! A Vancouver Opera Concert" – a celebratory concert of opera excerpts honouring VO's General Director **James W. Wright**, who is retiring June 30th after 17 years at the head of the company.

Soprano **Tracy Dahl**, mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**, tenor **John Tessier** and bass-baritone **Daniel Okulitch** will sing opera excerpts by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Bizet, Johann and Richard Strauss, John Estacio, and Ramona Luengen.

The VO Orchestra will play selections by Johann Strauss and Pietro Mascagni and will accompany the VO Chorus in the stirring "Va, pensiero" from Verdi's *Nabucco* and the "Humming Chorus" from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

The sparkling concert, generously sponsored in part by **Martha Lou Henley, C.M.**, will be presented on **Thursday, June 2, 2016 at 7:00 pm at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre**, Georgia & Hamilton Streets, Vancouver BC.

Tickets from \$25 are on sale now and are available exclusively through the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, 604-683-0222 or online at www.vancouveropera.ca.

"As VO's leader for 17 years, Jim Wright has made a huge contribution to the evolution of the company and to the art form, and he has produced consistently exciting opera for our city," said **Pascal Spothelfer**, Chair of the VO Board of Directors. "His bold initiatives in community engagement and education, together with his extraordinary gifts as a producer, have led to memorable productions, opera commissions and programs that have touched thousands of lives throughout B.C., and beyond. This special concert will be a fitting and heartfelt acknowledgement of his contributions and an entertaining celebration of opera."

To further honour Wright, VO's Foundation has established a special fund, the James W. Wright Creativity Fund, which is dedicated to supporting new works and innovation in all aspects of opera production in the years to come. Foundation Board Chair **Bruce Munro Wright** said, "Jim really poured his heart into the company's commissioning of new works and into truly innovative collaborations; their success both individually and as a body of work is a testament to his vision of a company that connects deeply with its community and seeks to bring an inventive spirit to everything it produces."

We and the community will welcome with deep appreciation every contribution, large or small, to this fund.”

Anyone can contribute to the James W. Wright Creativity Fund when they purchase their tickets to the June 2 concert, or at any time, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by calling the VO Ticket Centre, 604-683-0222.

James Wright's career spans nearly four decades. Before taking the helm of Vancouver Opera, he was general director of Opera Carolina and Anchorage Opera. At VO, Wright led the commissioning of two new operas for the main stage: *Lillian Alling*, by John Estacio and John Murrell; and *Stickboy*, by Neil Weisensel and Shane Koyczan, based on Koyczan's book in verse about bullying. He also commissioned two operas for young audiences: *Naomi's Road*, by Ramona Luengen and Ann Hodges, based on the book by Joy Kogawa about the Japanese Internment; and the environmentally-themed *Jack Pine*, by Veda Hille, based on the book by Christopher Patton.

Wright envisioned and led a ground-breaking West Coast First Nations-inspired version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, which was created after a three-year collaboration with First Nations artists and educators. During his tenure, among many other accomplishments, VO presented the company premiere of a highly lauded new production of John Adams's *Nixon In China* and the Canadian premiere of Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*.

In 2002, Wright initiated industry-leading community engagement programs, which continue today and which demonstrate the relevancy of opera to contemporary British Columbians through public forums, panel discussions, performances and other activities in diverse venues throughout the Lower Mainland including the Downtown Eastside.

Wright has served two terms on the board of directors of OPERA America, the international service organization for opera; two terms (including Chair) on the board of Opera.ca, the voice of professional opera in Canada; and one term on the national board of Imagine Canada. He is a past member of The Vancouver Foundation's Advisory Panel for Arts and Culture and a past member of the Vancouver City Planning Commission. He has also served as a panelist for the Canada Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts in the US. Mr. Wright is a 2008 graduate of the Institute of Corporate Directors - Directors Education Program.