



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Townsend Opera Announces the 2012 Kristina Townsend Memorial Vocal Competition

Townsend Opera is pleased to announce that the Kristina Townsend Memorial Vocal Competition will be held on Saturday, February 25, 2012, at the Snider Recital Hall on the campus of California State University Stanislaus in Turlock, CA. The competition will be judged by Matthew Buckman, Executive Director of Townsend Opera; Dr. Joseph Wiggett, Artistic Director of Townsend Opera; and Ryan Murray, Principal Conductor of Townsend Opera.

There are four age categories for the competition, with a cash prize for the winner of each category; \$500 for the 22-25 year old category, \$300 for the 20-21 year old category, \$200 for the 18-19 year old category, and \$100 for the 15-17 year old category. Each winner will be required to sing at the Opera League Luncheon on Saturday, March 17, 2012 at 12:00 p.m.

Participants must be prepared to sing three selections in at least two different languages that demonstrate contrasting styles. An accompanist will be provided, or participants may bring their own accompanist if they prefer. There is a \$10 entry fee for the audition. Auditions will be scheduled as available. Special time requests will be considered, but are not guaranteed.

Applications for entry are available at the Townsend Opera Business Office (1214 Eleventh Street, Modesto), the CSU Stanislaus Department of Music (1 University Circle, Turlock), Gottschalk's Music (129 Burney, Modesto), and the Modesto Junior College Department of Music (435 College Avenue, Modesto).

The annual vocal competition honors the memory of Kristina Townsend, daughter of founder Erik Buck Townsend, who passed away of leukemia days before her thirteenth birthday.

About Townsend Opera

Townsend Opera is in the middle of its 29th season of presenting opera and musical theater productions to the greater Modesto community and Stanislaus County. The company was founded in 1983 by Modesto native Eric Buck Townsend, a graduate of Modesto High School, who had a successful international career as an opera singer. In 1982, Buck returned to Modesto with the goal of bring opera to his home town. After organizing a first performance, they gathered a group of potential patrons at their home, and that group gathered funding for the company's first season.

Buck Townsend worked tirelessly to lead the company for 25 years, often directing, conducting, or singing in performances, building sets, and organizing costumes. He was part of the group that led the charge to have a world-class performing arts venue in Modesto, and worked to make that a possibility for our community. After being diagnosed with cancer in 2007, Buck and then-President Carl Bengston led an initiative to establish second-generation leadership to ensure the company would continue

beyond his lifetime and thrive in its new home at the Gallo Center for the Arts. Matthew Buckman became the company's first Executive Director in February 2008, and work with Buck until his passing in September 2008 to establish a long-term strategic plan that has led to new artistic achievements for the company.

The opera has thrived artistically under the leadership of Ryan Murray, Principal Conductor since July 2008, Joseph Wiggett, Artistic Director since January 2009, and Jennifer Grover, Chorus master since July 2010. The company has dramatically increased its role in the community by establishing groundbreaking partnerships with the CSU Stanislaus Department of Music and the Modesto Junior College vocal division. Both colleges participate actively in the artistic activities of the company, expanding the company's mission of providing performance opportunities for the members of its community. A new artistic partnership with San Francisco Opera has given residents of Modesto and the surrounding region the unique opportunity to hear some of the best singers in the country in a live performance.

The company moved to the larger Mary Stuart Rogers Theater at the Gallo Center for the Arts, and completed overhauled its production cycle, marking the last step of a complete redesign of the company's business model. This transition resulted in a 32% growth in audience in the 2010/11 season, and provided cost savings that have made possible an increase in artistic quality.

Opera Remix, a new artistic initiative launched in the summer of 2011 and funded by the James Irvine Foundation, was designed to reconnect opera with today's world. It's first event, *Opera Remix: Musical Worlds Collide at The State*, featured the best of opera and classic rock, all performed by opera singers and written for a 15-piece rock orchestra. The event was attended by over 550 people, which nearly tripled the ten-year average audience at the event it replaced. There will be several more Opera Remix events in the coming seasons, and the philosophies behind Opera Remix are being implemented throughout the company.

Contact:

Matthew Buckman

209.523.6426

mbuckman@townsendoperaplayers.com

605 H Street

Modesto, CA 95354

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