

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Townsend Opera has been awarded a \$50,000 grant from The James Irvine Foundation for Opera Remix, its new artistic initiative

Townsend Opera is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a \$50,000 grant over two years to fund Opera Remix, its new artistic initiative beginning in the 2011/12 season. The Opera Remix initiative begins on Friday, September 30 with the 2011/12 season-opening event *Opera Remix: Musical Worlds Collide at The State*, a musical event at The State Theater in downtown Modesto that will bring together the best tunes in all of classic rock and opera in a rock concert setting, all arranged for a rock orchestra and performed by opera singers. The event will begin and end with a street party with food, drinks, a DJ mixing opera and classic rock, and opportunities to socialize with the performers at the event.

“*Opera Remix: Musical Worlds Collide at The State* is going to be a really fun event,” said Matthew Buckman, Executive Director of Townsend Opera. “We took a long look at data from major studies regarding how people experience the world in the 21st century, and decided that we were going to take our art form to the people, where they like to go, and in settings in which they are comfortable, instead of insisting that people be educated to be able to understand and appreciate our art form. People will be able to eat, drink, party, socialize, and experience some of the best music the world has to offer.”

Matthew Buckman, Executive Director of Townsend Opera, also said: “I believe very deeply that opera is something all people can enjoy, but over many generations it has developed a reputation for being inaccessible, stuffy, and outdated. With Opera Remix we are taking the first step in bringing our art form closer to the world in which it currently exists. Funding from The James Irvine Foundation for this project further validates that our artistic initiative has the potential to enhance opera’s accessibility in our community.”

The Opera Remix initiative will feature several artistic and outreach events each season, all with the goal of taking opera to the people of greater Stanislaus County in places they already go, in settings in which they are comfortable, and to bring the art form into the 21st century by experimenting how it can blend with the musical styles of today’s world.

Funding from The James Irvine Foundation will be used to pay for the artistic costs of the season-opening Opera Remix events in 2011 and 2012, as well as the development of a new website dedicated entirely to the Opera Remix initiative.

About The James Irvine Foundation

The James Irvine Foundation is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California to participate in a vibrant, successful and inclusive society. The Foundation’s grantmaking focuses on three program areas: Arts, California Democracy, and Youth. Since 1937 the Foundation has provided over \$1 billion in grants to more than 3,000 nonprofit organizations throughout California. With \$1.5 billion in assets, the Foundation made grants of \$65 million in 2010 for the people of California.

About Townsend Opera

Townsend Opera just concluded its 28th 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 ground-breaking 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.

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