

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Townsend Opera extends contract of Artistic Director through the 2011/12 season

Townsend Opera is pleased to announce that it has extended the contract of Artistic Director Dr. Joseph Wiggett through the 2011/12 season. Dr. Wiggett joined the company in January 2009 as only the second Artistic Director in the company's 29 year history.

Matthew Buckman, Executive Director of Townsend Opera, said: "We are pleased to have Joe continue in his role with the company. He has been instrumental in the company reaching new artistic heights in the past two seasons, and I look forward to working with him to continue the company's growth into one of the top opera companies in California."

Dr. Wiggett oversees programming and casting for the company, and will direct its productions of *The Mikado* and *Carmen* this coming season.

About Dr. Joseph Wiggett

Dr. Joseph Wiggett is the former Director of the School of Fine and Performing Arts, Musical Director of Opera Workshop and currently an Associate Professor of Voice at California State University, Stanislaus where he maintains an extremely active Applied Voice studio in addition to his teaching duties in Vocal Pedagogy, Lyric Diction and Vocal Literature. In December 2009, after directing the November 2008 Townsend Opera production of *Pagliacci*, he joined the company as Artistic Director, and as such has helped establish a new partnership between Townsend Opera and CSU Stanislaus. He has recently directed productions of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, and Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

As a past member of the Juilliard Opera Center, the Lyric Opera of Chicago Center for American Artists, and the Prague Mozart Academy, he has performed over three dozen operatic roles and brings a wealth of hands-on experience to the studio and stage. He has given recitals throughout the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet Union and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including three Birgit Nilsson prizes, as well as two grants from the Puccini Foundation.

As a contest singer, Dr. Wiggett has ranked among the finest in the country and has taken first place honors in such prestigious competitions as the Metropolitan Opera New England Regional Auditions, the Chicago Union Civic and Arts Leagues Competition, the Center for Contemporary Opera International Competition - held in New York City, and he is the only three-time winner of the Lillian Nordica Prize.

Among his major debuts are roles with the New York City Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, a solo recital in the Carnegie Hall Weill Recital Series, and his Lincoln Center debut at Alice Tully Hall as the baritone soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana*. As a concert performer, Dr. Wiggett has appeared with numerous orchestras including the Manhattan, Boulder, Modesto, Bangor, Portland, Milwaukee and Colorado Symphonies. He holds degrees in Music Education from the University of Maine, a Masters Degree in Performance from the Manhattan School of Music and a Doctorate in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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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