

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Townsend Opera appoints Dr. Stuart Sims as Creative Consultant for Opera Remix

Townsend Opera is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Stuart Sims as Creative Consultant for the company's new artistic initiative, Opera Remix. Dr. Sims is the Director of Instrumental Studies at CSU Stanislaus, where he conducts the Wind Ensemble and Orchestra and teaches conducting and instrumental literature. He recently completed a Doctor of Musical Arts at Arizona State University, where he wrote a doctoral thesis titled "Creative Change: Audience Development and Cultural Engagement in the Non-Profit Arts", which provided much of the inspiration behind the Opera Remix initiative. In his role as Creative Consultant, Dr. Sims will work with the Board and Executive leadership of the company to develop and implement projects for the Opera Remix initiative.

Matthew Buckman, Executive Director of Townsend Opera, said: "We are extremely excited to have Stuart working with our company. His research in understanding, and experience experimenting with, engaging the 21st century audience is going to help our company tremendously as we try to engage broader elements in our community. His thesis was instrumental in developing the Opera Remix idea, and his continued involvement in the initiative will ensure our company continues to be creative in how we engage and serve our community."

Steve Collins, President of the Board of Directors, said: "When we invited Stuart to share his Doctoral thesis with the Board, we were very interested in the possibilities in store for our company, so we were really happy when a small part of the grant from The James Irvine Foundation made it possible to engage him on this initiative for an extended period of time."

About Dr. Stuart Sims

Stuart Sims is the Coordinator of Instrumental Studies at California State University, Stanislaus, where he conducts the Wind Ensemble, Chamber Orchestra, teaches courses including conducting and music literature, and manages the instrumental area of the Department of Music. Widely recognized for his work in the standard repertoire, Dr. Sims is also active in the commission and performance of new music and performances of his ensembles have won praise throughout the country from composers whose work he has premiered or championed, including Mason Bates, Bernard Rands, Carter Pann, Joel Puckett, and Jonathan Newman. Ensembles under his direction have performed at regional, state, and national events and also travel widely.

He is in demand as guest conductor and clinician, as Assistant Conductor of the 2010 Music for All Honor Band of America, conducting the 2007 CBDA All-State Concert Band, the 2003 CODA All-State Symphony Orchestra, at the 2003 Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic, and the 2004 California Community College Honor Band. Dr. Sims also frequently serves as guest conductor for regional honor bands and orchestras and at state music conferences, most recently at the 2004, 2005, and 2008 California Band Directors Association annual conferences, and the 2004, 2005, and 2006 CMEA conferences.

Dr. Sims is active in other realms, having founded The Loose Filter Project, an arts think tank whose home on the web, www.loosefilter.com, features podcasts, recordings, and commentary.

Having studied primarily with Gary W. Hill and H. Robert Reynolds, Dr. Sims holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in conducting from Arizona State University, a Master of Music degree in conducting from the University of Michigan, and a Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Louisiana, Lafayette.

About Opera Remix

The 2011/12 season marks the beginning of Opera Remix, a new artistic initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation, which was developed in response to increasing alarming data collected by major research institutions on the cultural participation of Americans for the last 40 years. These studies show a dramatic increase in engagement in the arts, but a dramatic decrease in attendance at the events of arts institutions, particularly among the younger generations. Increasingly, younger generations are not distinguishing between low-brow and high-brow art forms, and are more likely to engage in participatory arts experiences rather than passive arts presentations.

To this end, the Opera Remix initiative explores how we can 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. We will also begin to blur the artificial lines between genres of music, exploring how opera can engage with musical styles of today's world and truly become a 21st century American art form.

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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