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James Robinson named General and Artistic Director of Seattle Opera

**Robinson begins September 4, 2024,
following 16 years at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis**

SEATTLE—**James Robinson** is the next General and Artistic Director of Seattle Opera, and the fifth person to lead the company in its 61-year history. Robinson begins his tenure on September 4, 2024, replacing Christina Scheppelmann, who takes over as General and Artistic Director of Brussels' La Monnaie/De Munt in January 2025 following the completion of her contract with Seattle Opera.

Robinson comes to Seattle from Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), where he has served as Artistic Director since 2008. During his tenure, Robinson transformed OTSL into one of the country's most forward-looking opera festivals, commissioning 11 world premieres and presenting imaginative new productions of core repertoire. Many of these commissions have been recognized for their impact on the industry and produced by houses around the world. These include **Huang Ruo's *An American Soldier***, which was hailed in *The New York Times*' "The Best of Classical Music 2018," and **Terence Blanchard's *Champion*** and ***Fire Shut Up in My Bones***, the latter of which opened the 2021/22 season at the Metropolitan Opera, becoming the first work by a Black composer to appear on that stage.

As a stage director, Robinson has developed a rich portfolio, having directed at least 75 new productions at the world's top theaters and over 30 world premieres. He has also seen success with productions of standard repertoire. Robinson's production of the Gershwins' ***Porgy and Bess*** opened the 2019/20 season at the Metropolitan Opera, and later won a Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording. And

in January 2004, Robinson directed a blockbuster production of Georges Bizet's [**Carmen**](#) at Seattle Opera that sold more tickets than any opera in company history.

"We are thrilled to have a leader of James's caliber join us as General and Artistic Director of Seattle Opera," said **Jonathan Rosoff, chair of the search committee**. "An accomplished stage director and administrator, James is widely recognized as a leading creative force in this industry, and his productions have appeared at many of the world's most respected opera houses. Between his steadfast leadership, his impressive record of innovation, and his deep knowledge of opera, we are confident that James will make an immediate impact at Seattle Opera and lead the company into an exciting and inventive new era."

"I couldn't be more excited to be joining the tremendous staff and board at Seattle Opera," said Robinson. "Seattle is an opera town. It has opera in its DNA, and I am honored to be able to build on that rich tradition. I can't wait to get to work creating art with and for the passionate audiences that have made Seattle Opera into the company it is today."

One secret to Robinson's success has been his community-based approach to programming, which begins at the grass-roots level long before artistic decisions are finalized. Along with former OTSL General Director **Timothy O'Leary**, Robinson spearheaded OTSL's **New Works, Bold Voices** commissioning program, which aimed to tell diverse, modern-day stories in partnership with the local St. Louis community.

"Like politics, all arts are local," said Robinson. "It's vital to include the community in decision-making processes, working with them to identify stories they want to see on stage. This is an area where Seattle Opera has established itself as a leader, and I look forward to continuing this work with communities across the Pacific Northwest."

"Jim Robinson is one of our greatest visionaries—as a director, a commissioner of new work, and a producer," said O'Leary, who now serves as General Director of the Washington National Opera. "He cares deeply that work is not just great artistically, but also resonates with the audience, and many of his commissions have been box office hits, attracting new and diverse audiences."

Robinson's work with companies of all sizes and with a wide range of resources has given him a keen insight into how opera companies can create art in a sustainable manner. During his time at OTSL, Robinson mounted productions of the highest quality while maintaining fiscal responsibility, streamlining the company's workflow

to allow for a more efficient allocation of resources. He also helped foster strong donor relationships that resulted in a \$45-million legacy gift in early 2020, then the largest in the company's history.

That ability to forge relationships has enabled some of Robinson's most prominent artistic collaborations. "I have my opera career due to James Robinson," said **Terence Blanchard**, whom Robinson first approached about commissioning an opera more than twelve years ago. "Jim saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. His capacity to make connections that others can't see has allowed him to create new and exciting work. Having him as the new General and Artistic Director at the Seattle Opera is nothing short of a coup."

When he arrives in September, Robinson will take over Seattle Opera's \$25-million budget, overseeing an annual season that features five mainstage productions and a slate of community programs, classes, and public events. Since its founding in 1963, Seattle Opera has become a cornerstone of the arts economy in the Pacific Northwest, employing more than 800 people in 2023. Recognized as an industry leader in efforts to diversify opera, Seattle Opera developed its [Racial Equity and Social Impact](#) plan in 2019 to guide decision-making at all levels of the organization. Seattle Opera is also a dedicated proponent of new American opera, mounting the world premieres of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* ('23) and the upcoming *Jubilee* ('24), as well as co-productions like *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* ('24), which set a company record for the most single tickets sold to any contemporary opera.

"I am very happy that James will be taking the reins of this wonderful company," said **Christina Schepelmann**. "James has an impressive track record as a stage director and his extensive network will present tremendous opportunities for collaboration. I am sure he will accomplish great things at Seattle Opera, together with this amazing staff and supportive board. Seattle Opera is in good hands."

About Seattle Opera

Established in 1963, Seattle Opera is committed to serving the people of the Pacific Northwest through music, storytelling, and programs for people of all ages. Each year, more than 50,000 people attend the company's performances, and more than 100,000 people are served through school performances, radio broadcasts, and more. The organization brings opera to life in a number of different ways, offering artistic excellence through national and international collaborations. Seattle Opera strives to create an environment where artists, staff, behind-the-scenes workers, and members of the community feel a strong connection to the company, and to the art of opera. Follow Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on Classical KING.

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