

OPERA COMPOSER RICKY IAN GORDON TO VISIT MODESTO ON SEPTEMBER 24

The internationally-acclaimed composer will participate in a workshop with the composers and poets in the *Music & Verse Program* and perform at the season-opening gala

Modesto, California – August 23, 2016

Townsend Opera is pleased to announce that Ricky Ian Gordon, the internationally-recognized composer of the critically-acclaimed opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, will visit Modesto on Saturday, September 24, 2016. While in Modesto, he will lead a workshop with composition students and poets participating in Townsend Opera's *Music & Verse Program*. He will also perform a selection of his music with soprano Carrie Hennessey at the Season-Opening Gala that evening.

At the Season-Opening Gala, Carrie Hennessey will give a cabaret style performance of Mr. Gordon's music with the composer accompanying her at the keyboard. Mr. Gordon will then spend the rest of the evening celebrating the opening of the 2016/17 season with Townsend Opera patrons.



The workshop will take place on the campus of Stanislaus State on Saturday, September 24 at 2:00 pm. It will feature performances of the original works written by the composers and poets who participated in the *Music & Verse Program* last season. Mr. Gordon and Music Director Ryan Murray will give each composer/poet team feedback on their works. The workshop is open to the public, and there is no cost to attend.

Townsend Opera will perform Ricky Ian Gordon's opera *The Grapes of Wrath* in January 2018.

Mr. Gordon's visit is made possible by a grant from The James Irvine Foundation.

About Ricky Ian Gordon

Ricky Ian Gordon is one of the leading composers of opera in the United States, and is currently working on a new opera commissioned from him by The Metropolitan Opera in New York. Mr. Gordon started his career as a prominent song and cabaret composer, and his songs have been performed and recorded by such internationally renowned singers as Renee Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Nathan Gunn, Kelli O'Hara, Audra McDonald, Kristin Chenoweth, Frederica Von Stade, and the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, among many others.

Ricky Ian Gordon is the composer of the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, based on the famous Steinbeck novel. He has been commissioned to write new operas by The Metropolitan Opera in New York, Houston Grand Opera, The Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Opera Philadelphia and Minnesota Opera.

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 \$1.3 billion in grants to more than 3,500 nonprofit organizations throughout California. With about \$1.8 billion in assets, the Foundation made grants of \$69 million in 2013 for the people of California.

About Townsend Opera

Townsend Opera has thrived artistically under the leadership of Matthew Buckman, named the company's first Executive Director in February 2008 and General Director since July 2012, and Ryan Murray, Principal Conductor in July 2008 and Music Director since July 2013. The company has significantly increased its role in the community by establishing ground-breaking partnerships with CSU Stanislaus and the Modesto Junior College, which allows students to participate actively in the artistic activities of the company and expanding the company's mission of providing performance opportunities for the members of its community. A new artistic partnership has brought the resident singers of San Francisco Opera to Modesto to perform with the company on a regular basis, giving residents of Modesto and the surrounding region the opportunity to hear some of the best singers in the country in a live performance.

A new artistic initiative called Opera Remix was launched in the 2011/12 season to reconnect opera with the 21st century. Since that time, many events have explored new modes of presentation and performance styles to great success, with attendance at these events surpassing past opera events. The philosophies behind the Opera Remix initiative have been implemented throughout the organization, including updating the standard repertoire to take place in modern times, performing new or little performed American opera, bringing patrons behind the scenes like never before, and breaking down the traditional social barriers commonly found in opera. This work culminated in the world premiere of an African American folk opera in May 2014.

Townsend Opera was founded in 1983 by Modesto native Erik Buck Townsend, a graduate of Modesto High School, who had a successful international career as an opera singer. Buck Townsend worked tirelessly to lead the company for 25 years, often directing, conducting, or singing in performances, building sets, and organizing costumes. After being diagnosed with cancer in 2007, Buck and then-Board 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 worked 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 company moved to the larger Mary Stuart Rogers Theater at the Gallo Center for the Arts, 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 unprecedented increase in artistic quality during a sustained period of economic difficulty.

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