

**ALISON MORITZ TO DIRECT *OUR TOWN***

The winner of the 2015 OPERA America Director-Designer Showcase will direct the January 2017 production of Ned Rorem's *Our Town* for Townsend Opera

**Modesto, California – September 27, 2016**

Townsend Opera is excited to announce that Alison Moritz, winner of the 2015 OPERA America Director-Designer Showcase, will direct the upcoming production of Ned Rorem's *Our Town*. Ms. Moritz has recently worked directing operas at Seattle Opera, Austin Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Minnesota Opera and The Atlanta Opera.

Ms. Moritz has developed a strong reputation for her work directing American opera, and her projects in the 2016/17 season include Pulitzer-Prize winning composer Kevin Puts' *The Manchurian Candidate*, Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* and Philip Glass' *Hydrogen Jukebox*.

Matthew Buckman, General Director of Townsend Opera, said: "I am extremely pleased that we are able to work with Alison on this opera. She is one of the most exciting young opera directors in the United States, and our conversations about this piece were incredibly rewarding. She has made a name for herself for creating beautiful and accessible productions of great American operas, and I can't wait to see what she does with this wonderful work of art."



*Our Town* will be performed at the Gallo Center for the Arts January 21-22, 2017.

**About Alison Moritz**

Stage Director Alison Moritz's recent productions have been lauded as "about as gorgeous and accessible as any opera anywhere" (The Commercial Appeal), and her work has been praised for its "incredible economy of resources, lean production design, and eye for jest and banter" by The Orlando Examiner. Alison's upcoming projects include a full season directing new productions of American opera; including *The Manchurian Candidate* (Austin Opera), *Candide* (Orlando Philharmonic), *The Tender Land* (Crane School of Music), *Our Town* (Townsend Opera, Fresno Grand Opera), and *Hydrogen Jukebox* (Tri-Cities Opera).

Recent directing projects include *Die Zauberflöte* (Opera Memphis, Orlando Philharmonic) and *The Hobbit* (Tulsa Opera). Along with the design collective The Libertine Committee, Alison was named one of the 2015 winners of the OPERA America Director-Designer Showcase for her team's concept proposal for *The Cradle Will Rock*. A "rising young star on the contemporary American opera scene" (89.5 Tulsa), Alison also recently received the SDCF Kurt Weill Fellowship for 2015-2016.

Previously, Alison served as the Resident Assistant Director at both the Minnesota Opera and The Atlanta Opera. Her professional credits include engagements with Seattle Opera, Opera Theatre of St.

Louis, Wolf Trap Opera, Central City Opera, and Chautauqua Opera. As a teacher and guest director, Alison has taught at Eastman School of Music (Interim Faculty, 2012-2013), Maryland Opera Studio (2016), and for Steven Blier and Caramoor's Vocal Rising Stars program (2016).

Alison continues both her acting training and administrative interests and has worked and trained with companies such as the SITI Company of New York City, OPERA America, Geva Theatre Center, Third Rail Projects, Nautilus Music Theater, and Shakespeare Festival St. Louis. She holds a B.A. in Music and Art History from Washington University in St. Louis and an M.M. from Eastman School of Music.

### **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.

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