

**RYAN MURRAY NAMED SEMI-FINALIST FOR THE
ERNST BACON MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF AMERICAN MUSIC**

Mr. Murray's performance of the opera *Dead Man Walking* with Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera recognized as a top performance of American opera in 2016

Modesto, California – September 14, 2016

Townsend Opera Music Director Ryan Murray has been named a semi-finalist for The American Prize: Ernst Bacon Memorial Prize for the Performance of American Music for his performance of the opera *Dead Man Walking* with Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera in May 2016.

Selected from performances of American music from around the world, candidates for this prestigious award are widely recognized for the quality of their work and their commitment to the performance of American music.

Matthew Buckman, General Director of Townsend Opera, said: "I am extremely proud of Ryan for this superb accomplishment. We are very privileged to work with such a wonderful and talented colleague, and it is fantastic to see his work being recognized nationally, as well as for our company to be recognized for the quality of the work we're putting on the stage. We wish Ryan the best of luck with the remaining rounds of the competition."



Mr. Murray is quickly becoming one of the leading young conductors of his generation, widely recognized in the United States for his interpretation of both the standard repertoire and new American opera. Mr. Murray was the winner of the 2014 Ansbacher Fellowship for Young Conductors, and spent the summer of 2014 in residence with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival.

In addition to his duties as Music Director of Townsend Opera, Mr. Murray serves as Music Director of Fresno Grand Opera, Associate Music Director of the Modesto Symphony Orchestra, Resident Conductor of the Grass Valley Music Festival and Music Director of the Stanislaus State Symphony Orchestra.

About the Ernst Bacon Memorial Prize

The American Prize: Ernst Bacon Memorial Award for the Performance of American Music recognizes and rewards the best performances of American music by orchestras and choruses worldwide. Ernst Bacon (1898-1990) was one of that pioneering generation of composers who, along with Thomson, Copland, Harris and others, found a voice for American music. Winner of a Pulitzer Scholarship and no fewer than three Guggenheim Fellowships, Ernst Bacon set out to create compositions that expressed the vitality and affirmative spirit of our country. The American Prize is an annual award in the memory of Ernst Bacon, recognizing the finest performances of American orchestral music worldwide.

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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