



**TOWNSEND OPERA TO HOST COMMUNITY EVENT
'CELEBRATE OUR TOWN'**

Community event will feature a narrative and photographic history of Modesto, historical exhibits by longtime community and business leaders, and a performance of the opera *Our Town* by Ned Rorem

Modesto, California – November 30, 2016

Townsend Opera is excited to announce the company will host a community event around its production of the opera *Our Town* that celebrates the history of Modesto. The event – *Celebrate Our Town* – will feature a narrative and photographic historical perspective of Modesto, displays and oral presentations by community and business leaders, personal accounts of the development of the community and interesting anecdotes from longtime Modesto families.

Embracing the long tradition of storytelling in opera, *Celebrate Our Town* will tell the story of Modesto, providing residents of our community a unique opportunity to explore the place they live, deepen their understanding of our community, and spur interest in civic engagement. Organized in partnership with Doctors Medical Center, The Modesto Bee, The McHenry Museum, McHenry Bowl, Mocse Credit Union and several other community organizations, the exhibit will take place in the lobby of the Gallo Center for the Arts Saturday, January 21 and Sunday, January 22, to coincide with the company's performance of the Ned Rorem's opera *Our Town*, based on the Thornton Wilder play.

Matthew Buckman, General Director of Townsend Opera, said: "I am very excited to offer this opportunity for the residents of our community to engage more deeply in our civic life. There is a wonderful and rich history in Modesto, and new stories are being written every day that make our community a fulfilling place to live. As musical storytellers, I can think of no better way to celebrate and serve our community than creating a platform to tell our own stories."

There will be numerous opportunities for community residents, leaders and businesses to actively participate in telling the story of Modesto, including community web forums, storytelling contests and community photography displays. Townsend Opera continues to welcome potential community partners for this event. Interested parties should contact General Director Matthew Buckman at 209.523.6426 or mbuckman@townsendoperaplayers.com.

This community event is the beginning of a multi-year initiative by Townsend Opera to tell the stories of our community and our region through presentations of main stage operas. Future projects include an exhibit about migrant workers during the performance of the opera *Of Mice and Men* and community events exploring the role of agriculture in the growth of our community during the performance of the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*.

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 Eric 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.

Townsend Opera Contact:
Matthew Buckman
209.523.6426
mbuckman@townsendoperaplayers.com
PO Box 4519
Modesto, CA 95353

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