

## MATTHEW BUCKMAN STEPS DOWN AS GENERAL DIRECTOR

He has led Townsend Opera since February 2008, and is currently leading the partnership between the only two opera companies between the greater San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles areas

**Modesto, California – February 21, 2017**

Townsend Opera regrets to announce that Matthew Buckman is stepping down as General Director of both Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera, effective at the end of the month. In a letter to the Board of Directors and the community, he cited the personal strain of commuting weekly to Modesto and Fresno from his home in Sacramento as the reason for his departure. At the request of the Board of Directors of both companies, Mr. Buckman has been appointed as a formal advisor to Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera, and will assist the new leadership of both companies for the foreseeable future.



The Townsend Opera Board of Directors, along with its counterparts at Fresno Grand Opera, have worked with Matthew Buckman for the past eight months on developing succession plans for all key leadership positions in both companies. Per that succession plan, Music Director Ryan Murray will assume the role of Artistic Director of both Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera, and Charla Lawson, currently serving as Artistic Administrator, has been promoted to the role of Managing Director. Fresno Grand Opera has also appointed a Managing Director, and the successful partnership between the two companies, now in its third year, will continue.

Matthew Buckman, departing General Director of Townsend Opera, said:

“As some in our community know, I’ve been engaged to be married since November 2015. This past summer, my fiancée and I began merging our lives together, and I moved my home to Sacramento, where she has lived her entire life. Since then, I have been commuting each week to Modesto and Fresno to continue our work together to bring opera to our communities.

With each passing month, this has been harder and harder to maintain, and I have reached a point where it is no longer personally sustainable. Unfortunately, as much as I value the work we continue to do, the physical and geographical demands of my work have taken precious time and energy from our life together, and I am no longer able to sacrifice our life together to continue in this role.”

John Mangelos, President of the Board of Directors, said: “We are very sad to see Matt leave his role with the Company. What he has accomplished in his nine years leading Townsend Opera goes far beyond what anyone ever thought was possible with opera in Modesto, and we will be forever grateful for his commitment, energy and enthusiasm for the arts in our community. Modesto can celebrate one of the finest regional opera companies in the state because of Matt, and we thank him for that.”

Mr. Buckman will be present at the Cabaret concert this Friday evening at Deva Cafe, after which he will end his day-to-day responsibilities at the Company.

### **About Matthew Buckman**

Matthew Buckman has been the General Director of Townsend Opera and Fresno Grand Opera, where he leads a full creative and management partnership between the two companies. He became the first Executive Director of Townsend Opera in 2008 at the age of twenty-six, and has served as General Director since 2011. He was appointed General Director of Fresno Grand Opera in December 2014. Recognized nationally for his innovative programming and commitment to engaging new audiences, Matthew serves on the Board of Directors of Opera America, the national service organization for the opera industry, and is a contributor to The Loose Filter Project, an arts think tank focused on creating wider cultural engagement for concert music and musicians.

He has led a major revitalization of Townsend Opera during his tenure by significantly improving artistic standards, developing successful partnerships with regional arts organizations, streamlining operations, moving to a larger theater and developing progressive and creative artistic programs. In 2011 Matthew developed and implemented the Opera Remix Initiative, an artistic initiative designed to engage 21st century American audiences. With experimentation at its heart, Opera Remix features events in non-traditional venues that target specific new audiences through combining opera with other art forms that have a wider following in 21st century American culture.

### **About Townsend Opera**

Townsend Opera has thrived artistically under the leadership of General Director Matthew Buckman and Music Director Ryan Murray. Since both joined the Company together in 2008, there has been a dramatic increase in artistic quality, numerous new initiatives in audience development, and many community partnerships that have broadened the reach of the Company. Townsend Opera has since gone on to present numerous regional premieres of American opera, and is regarded as one of the leading opera companies in the state of California.

Townsend Opera is now in its third season of a groundbreaking partnership with Fresno Grand Opera that has the two companies co-producing each season for performances in both communities. With the appointment of Matthew Buckman and Ryan Murray as the leadership team of Fresno Grand Opera in December 2014, the two companies commenced with a full artistic and management partnership that has changed the opera landscape in the California's Central Valley and garnered national attention from the opera industry. Together, the two companies represent the only active opera company in California outside of the San Francisco Bay Area and the greater Los Angeles area.

As its artistic profile has expanded, the Company has been fortunate to welcome to our community some of the greatest artists and personalities in the field, including legendary composers Jake Heggie (*Dead Man Walking*) and Ricky Ian Gordon (*The Grapes of Wrath*), death penalty reform advocate and author Sister Helen Prejean, singers like Leah Crocetto and Irene Roberts, who are now gracing the stages of the finest opera houses in the world, and some of the leading stage directors working today. The growth of the Company and the quality of its work was acknowledged by the appointment of General Director Matthew Buckman to the Board of Directors of Opera America, the national service organization for the opera field.

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 to secure the Company's place in the community.

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