



ARTISTIC PARTNERSHIP ENDED; JOINT SPRING PRODUCTION CANCELLED

Modesto, California – March 7, 2017

Townsend Opera announces the ending of their artistic partnership with Fresno Grand Opera. The partnership began in the 2014/15 Season and allowed Townsend Opera to share its productions with additional communities in the greater Central Valley. Following the departure of the General Manager, and after meeting with the Fresno Grand Opera Board of Directors, Townsend Opera was recently made aware that Fresno Grand Opera has been experiencing significant financial difficulties. Townsend Opera's new leadership team felt that the partnership was no longer allowing them to effectively serve the Modesto community, and both companies have agreed to end the partnership.

Ryan Murray, newly appointed Artist Director, said of the change: "This provides the opportunity for Townsend Opera to take a step back and look at our programming and decide what is the best way for us to serve and engage the Modesto community. By foregoing our upcoming spring show, we will be able to shift our production schedule so that moving forward, we can begin each season with a full mainstage production at the Gallo Center in the fall."

Without a producing partner Townsend Opera is forced to cancel *Of Mice and Men*. Charla Lawson, Managing Director said: "All other planned events for this season will be occurring and Townsend Opera will begin next season with an opera in September at the Gallo Center for the Arts. Details about the upcoming season will be announced before the end of March. Anyone who has tickets for the Spring production of the season will be contacted by Townsend Opera."

The community is welcomed to reach out to the leadership of Townsend Opera to provide input and to learn more about the future direction of the company. The Townsend Opera office is open daily from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm and is located in Downtown Modesto.

About Townsend Opera

Townsend Opera was founded in 1983 by Modesto native Erik 'Buck' Townsend. A graduate of Modesto High School, Townsend had a successful international career as an opera singer and 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, Townsend 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. In February 2008 the board appointed Matthew Buckman as the company's first Executive Director and Ryan Murray as Music Director. Both worked with Buck until his passing in September 2008 to secure the Company's place in the community. After Buckman stepped down in February 2017 Townsend Opera has appointed Ryan Murray as Artistic Director and Charla Jeanne Lawson as Managing Director.

As its artistic profile has expanded over the past decade, 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*), author and advocate Sister Helen Prejean, singers like Leah Crocetto and Irene Roberts, and some of the leading stage directors working today.

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