

Former Chorister, Clifford D. Thomson, Bequeaths \$1.1 Million to Washington National Opera

The generous gift will help advance WNO’s artistic, education, and community engagement programs

(WASHINGTON)—Washington National Opera (WNO) is grateful to announce the receipt of an unexpected \$1.1 million donation from Clifford D. Thomson, a member of the Washington National Opera Chorus for 30 years. Thomson passed away May 6, 2016 in Naples, Florida, but his estate gift was just recently made known to the company. From 1975 to 2006, Thomson, a native Washingtonian, performed hundreds of times in more than 75 Washington National Opera productions. His first performance was in Verdi’s *Otello* while his last appearance was in Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore*. To commemorate his generous gift, Thomson’s name will be etched on the marble walls of the Kennedy Center’s Hall of Nations.

“We are deeply moved to receive this extraordinary and unexpected gift,” remarks Timothy O’Leary, WNO’s general director. “This contribution is all the more meaningful coming from a member of WNO’s artistic family. Many WNO company members fondly remember Mr. Thomson’s sense of humor, his deep love of opera—especially Puccini—and the joy he brought to our productions. We are so grateful for his generosity, which will help us create productions of beauty and meaning on the Kennedy Center Opera House stage for generations to come.”

“Besides being a wonderful singer, Cliff Thomson cut a fine figure and wore our costumes easily and well for many, many seasons,” remembers Marsha LeBoeuf, WNO’s costume director.

“Costume fittings with Cliff were our reward for surviving long work days. Always having a joke or a funny story to tell, he made us laugh so hard we forgot how tired we were. He was also notorious for divining ways to sneak out of costume quickly at the end of a show, making it a game to see how much of his own clothing he could leave on under his costume (without being detected) so he could exit the parking lot before the audience left the Kennedy Center.”

“Cliff was a long-time and much-loved chorister at WNO. Beneath his charming exterior was a very dedicated professional. He drove great distances from his home in Virginia for rehearsals and performances. I never once heard him complain in all the years we worked together,” adds Steven Gathman, WNO’s chorus master. “We all loved his wicked sense of humor and admired his tireless work ethic. Cliff loved to sing. He had a deep and abiding knowledge and understanding of beautiful music and was very respectful to those who helped create it. He was always the bright paisley shirt in a sea of tan khaki—simply irreplaceable.”

An [obituary](#) about Mr. Thomson’s life ran in his local paper, *Loudoun Now*, on June 14, 2016.

ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. Under the leadership of newly appointed General Director Timothy O’Leary and world-renowned Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, the company presents a diverse repertory of grand opera across three main venues of the Kennedy Center. From classic operas to more contemporary pieces, WNO has a record of more than 100 new productions in its history and 28 commissioned American works as part of its American Opera Initiative. With a commitment toward youth, WNO contributes to the future of opera through two signature artist-development programs: The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program is one of the nation’s most competitive and comprehensive professional training programs for young singers and collaborative pianists, while the WNO Opera Institute nurtures the ambitions of high-school-age singers from across the nation. Each season, the company also offers a variety of special concerts, youth operas, and events, as well as community engagement and educational programs.

Discover [Washington National Opera](#) on social media:



FUNDING CREDITS

Major support for WNO is provided by Jacqueline Badger Mars.

David M. Rubenstein is the Presenting Underwriter of WNO.

WNO acknowledges the longstanding generosity of Life Chairman Mrs. Eugene B. Casey.

WNO’s Presenting Sponsor
General Dynamics

#

PRESS CONTACT

Sabrina Skacan
(202) 416-8453
smskacan@kennedy-center.org