



Francesca Zambello, Artistic Director

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 22, 2017

TIMOTHY O’LEARY NAMED GENERAL DIRECTOR OF WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

(WASHINGTON)—Robert Downing, President of the Washington National Opera (WNO) Board of Trustees, Ellen Berelson, WNO Board Chairman, and Deborah F. Rutter, President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, today announced the appointment of Timothy O’Leary as General Director of Washington National Opera, effective July 1, 2018. O’Leary joins WNO from Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), where he has served as its General Director since 2008. He currently serves as Chairman of the Board of OPERA America, the national service organization for opera.

In his new post, O’Leary will work closely with WNO’s Board of Directors and Artistic Director Francesca Zambello as he provides strategic and operational oversight of the entire company. In collaboration with Zambello, he will ensure that WNO achieves the highest artistic standards in its performances and other work throughout the community. As a member of the Kennedy Center’s senior leadership team he will also explore ways in which WNO can build on its partnership with the Center to serve audiences, the Washington, D.C. community, and the international arts community.

“Timothy’s impressive stewardship of OTSL has been a model of visionary and inspired management of a modern America opera company,” said Robert Downing, President of the WNO Board of Trustees. “His demonstrated success in connecting with local communities and audiences while simultaneously setting the agenda on a national

-more-

stage, also apparent with his chairmanship of Opera America, are a perfect fit with the future strategic direction of the WNO and the Kennedy Center.”

“I have known Timothy for over 20 years, dating back to our time working together at New York City Opera,” said WNO Artistic Director Francesca Zambello. “Since then, I have watched proudly as he has risen as a leader in our industry and marveled at his accomplishments in St. Louis and with Opera America. His patient demeanor, diplomatic skills, and deep expertise of the American opera scene are among the reasons I knew he was the right person for the WNO position. I am thrilled to have him as my leadership partner for the WNO’s future.”

“It is a privilege to join the Washington National Opera and this tremendous team,” said Timothy O’Leary. “I am excited, honored, and deeply grateful to the WNO board, to the Kennedy Center and Deborah Rutter, and to the whole WNO community. I am also absolutely thrilled to collaborate with Francesca Zambello. Francesca is one of the artists I admire most in this world—because of her inspiring, humane, and brilliant work. Thanks to the WNO’s amazing staff, Francesca’s artistic vision, the company’s devoted board, its generous family of supporters, and the invaluable partnership of the Kennedy Center, we have the opportunity to build on the storied WNO past to help shape the future of opera in the 21st century.”

“Timothy’s extraordinary leadership at OTSL has certainly made it one of the most exciting opera companies in America,” commented Deborah F. Rutter, Kennedy Center President. “His vision for opera and audiences in the 21st century is both thoughtful and fearless—not only in how classic or contemporary repertoire is packaged and presented, but also in how it is understood. Timothy possesses a tremendous talent and track record for building community which will serve us well here in the nation’s capital, and particularly at the WNO with an artistic partner the likes of the adventurous Francesca Zambello.”

O’Leary’s appointment follows the departure of Michael Mael, who stepped down in June 2017 after nine years as Executive Director with WNO. The Washington, D.C – based Catherine French Group led the executive search and worked closely with a search committee chaired by Robert Downing and comprising WNO Trustees (including board chair Ellen Berelson), Deborah Rutter, and staff to make this appointment. O’Leary, along with his wife and three children, will relocate to the D.C. area before the start of the 2018–2019 season.

ABOUT TIMOTHY O’LEARY

During O’Leary’s tenure at OTSL, the company has continued to earn acclaim for innovative programming, and has achieved sustained growth in new audiences, earning national recognition for such efforts as its Engagement and Inclusion Task Force and a Young Friends program, which has quadrupled in subscribership from Gen X and Millennial audiences in the past seven years. In 2016, O’Leary received the *St. Louis Business Journal* “Innovation Award” for this work, and OTSL became one of four U.S. opera companies to win a major grant from The Wallace Foundation’s Building Audiences for Sustainability initiative.

OTSL has also achieved new fundraising records under O’Leary’s leadership, doubling the endowment from \$16.5 million in 2008 to more than \$33 million in 2017. Annual contributions have grown by more than 46% during the same period, to exceed \$6 million per year.

Under O’Leary’s leadership, OTSL launched its *New Works, Bold Voices* series, a cycle of world-premiere American operas that embrace diverse influences and tell stories of the modern era. The first opera in the cycle, *Champion*, an “opera in jazz” by Terence Blanchard and Michael Cristofer—presented by WNO in 2017—was co-commissioned with Jazz St. Louis and became the best-selling world premiere in OTSL history. The second opera, *27*, by Ricky Ian Gordon and Royce Vavrek, and *Shalimar the Clown* by Jack Perla and Rajiv Joseph, based on the novel by Salman Rushdie, both garnered critical acclaim.

O’Leary’s training included an apprenticeship with San Francisco Opera’s Merola Program, graduate studies in Theater Management at Columbia University, and a degree in English from Dartmouth College. Prior to his appointment as OTSL General Director, O’Leary was part of the management team at New York City Opera under General and Artistic Director Paul Kellogg; he was also the first Managing Director of New York’s Gotham Chamber Opera, where collaborations included the Lincoln Center Festival and the Spoleto Festival USA. As an assistant stage director, he worked for the New York City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Florida Grand Opera, and others. He has also completed National Arts Strategies’ “Chief Executive Program,” which included training at the business schools of the University of Michigan and Harvard University.

ABOUT WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Washington National Opera (WNO) is one of the leading opera companies in the United States. Under Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, the company presents a diverse season of grand opera—including both classics from the repertory and more contemporary pieces—plus several newly commissioned American works and a variety of special concerts and events. The WNO Orchestra is led by Music Director Philippe Auguin. Founded in 1956 and an affiliate of the Kennedy Center since 2011, WNO has a storied legacy of world premieres, new productions, international tours, live recordings and radio broadcasts, and innovative education and community-engagement programs. Throughout its history, WNO has been led by titans in the opera field, including the legendary Plácido Domingo, who headed the company from 1996 to 2011.

WNO contributes to the future of opera through two signature artist-development programs. The Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, soon to begin its 16th season, has become one of the nation’s most competitive and comprehensive professional training programs for young singers and collaborative pianists. Alumni of the program have won major competitions and gone on to successful careers at major opera houses in the U.S. and abroad. The WNO Opera Institute nurtures the ambitions of high-school-age singers from across the nation during an intensive three-week summer program held at American University in Washington.

Among the company’s most successful recent programs is the 2012 launch of the American Opera Initiative, a comprehensive commissioning program that works to expand the American operatic repertory, to give WNO’s young artists the chance to collaborate with living composers and librettists on new works, and to make American opera more relevant to 21st-century audiences. The most popular of WNO’s community-engagement programs is M&M’S® *Opera in the Outfield*, during which an opera is broadcast live from the Kennedy Center Opera House stage to the high-definition scoreboard at Nationals Park. The company’s other education programs include the *Kids Create Opera* program at local elementary schools, Look-In performances for students in grades 4–8, and the Student Dress Rehearsal Program for

middle and high school students. The company also offers free Opera Insights programs before every performance in the Opera House.

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



#

PRESS CONTACT

Eileen Andrews

ETAndrews@kennedy-center.org

(202) 416-8448

Rachelle Roe

RRoe@kennedy-center.org

(202) 416-8443