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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA APPOINTS NICOLA LUISOTTI AS MUSIC DIRECTOR BEGINNING IN 2009-10 SEASON

San Francisco, January 9, 2007 – Nicola Luisotti has been appointed music director of San Francisco Opera effective at the start of the 2009-10 season. The appointment was announced today by San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley and Chairman Franklin P. Johnson in the War Memorial Opera House. Maestro Luisotti will conduct a minimum of four productions each season and spend the summer and fall opera periods working with the Company. Before he officially begins his tenure, Luisotti will serve as music director designate, working with the general director, administrative staff, board of directors, orchestra, and chorus to ensure a smooth transition in programming and casting for future seasons. Maestro Luisotti, who made his San Francisco Opera debut with Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in November of 2005, will make his next conducting appearances with San Francisco Opera in the fall of 2008. Luisotti succeeds Donald Runnicles, who will leave his position of music director and principal conductor at the close of the 2008-09 season.

Born and raised in Italy, Nicola Luisotti is a rising star in the opera and symphonic worlds with upcoming debuts at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (*Il Trovatore* and *Madama Butterfly*); Vienna State Opera (*Simon Boccanegra*); and the Teatro Real in Madrid (*Il Trovatore*). He makes his North American symphonic debut in March with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and he is scheduled to conduct both the Berlin Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony in future seasons. Maestro Luisotti recently made his Metropolitan Opera debut with *Tosca*, his Seattle Opera debut with *Macbeth*, and his Los Angeles Opera debut with *Carmen* followed by a return to that company for *Pagliacci*. Recent European successes have included debuts at La Scala (Verdi's *Oberto*), Bavarian State Opera (*Tosca*), Paris Opera (*La Traviata*, followed by new productions of *Otello* and *Madama*

Butterfly), and in Stuttgart (*Il Trovatore* and later *Otello*). He has conducted in most of the major Italian theaters including those of Trieste, Parma, Genoa, Verona, and Naples.

“It was love at first sight with San Francisco Opera and with the city of San Francisco,” said Nicola Luisotti. “I am honored to begin this next chapter of my life with David Gockley and my colleagues at this great opera company.”

“I am thrilled that Nicola Luisotti has accepted our invitation to join San Francisco Opera,” stated David Gockley. “He is the ideal music director for the next stage in the Company’s life—a passionate music maker who is especially experienced in the Italian repertoire. The Company is also very fortunate that Donald Runnicles, our present music director, will continue to have a relationship with San Francisco Opera into the future, conducting a new production of *Peter Grimes* and the completion of the new *Ring* Cycle, which continues into the 2010-11 season.”

“Over these past 15 years with the San Francisco Opera, I have developed a deep love for the Company, the orchestra, the chorus and the city,” commented Donald Runnicles. “With this in mind, I am naturally interested in the person who will carry on after me as the musical leader of this great institution. I am very happy that Nicola Luisotti will follow me as music director and I send him best wishes as he and San Francisco Opera embark upon this next chapter in the Company’s history.”

American Guild of Musical Artists Vice President and San Francisco Opera Chorus member Colby Roberts commented: “Members of the opera chorus are pleased and excited by the announcement that Maestro Luisotti shall be the next music director of San Francisco Opera. We are certain that he will maintain the high musical standards established by Donald Runnicles and feel that his expertise in the Italian repertoire will form a strong foundation for continued musical excellence in this company. Our experience with Luisotti during *La Forza del Destino* showed that he has a real love and understanding of the human voice, and a strong passion for the operatic art form.”

“The Orchestra is pleased to have been included in the search process for a new Music Director,” said San Francisco Opera Orchestra trumpet player and Orchestra Committee Chairman William Holmes. “Maestro Luisotti was at the top of our list of candidates based on the memorable performances of *La Forza del Destino* in 2005. I am delighted that we will have the opportunity to develop our musical relationship, and we look forward to many more exciting performances with Maestro Luisotti.”

Maestro Luisotti is trained as both a singer and a pianist. He began his career as a staff conductor at La Scala, working with Riccardo Muti and Lorin Maazel. In 1999 he became music director of the Teatro Verdi in Salerno; engagements followed in Naples, Parma, Trieste, at the Arena di Verona, and particularly in Genoa, where he appears regularly. Maestro Luisotti made his debut in

Japan with a staged production of *Tosca* at Suntory Hall. He has established growing relationships with the orchestras of Zagreb, Sofia, Genoa, Tokyo's NHK Symphony, Munich's Bavarian Rundfunk Orchestra, and Rome's Santa Cecilia Orchestra.

Nicola Luisotti was born on November 26, 1961 in Viareggio, Italy. He and his wife Rita Simonini are currently restoring a home in Tuscany.

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About San Francisco Opera:

San Francisco Opera is the second largest opera company in North America. Gaetano Merola and Kurt Herbert Adler were the Company's first two general directors. Merola led the Company from its founding in 1923 until his death in 1953; Adler was in charge from 1953 through 1981. Legendary for both their conducting and managerial skills, the two leaders established a formidable institution that is internationally recognized as one of the top opera companies in the world—heralded for its first-rate productions and roster of international opera stars. Originally presented over two weeks, the Company's season now contains approximately seventy-five performances of ten operas between September and July.

David Gockley became San Francisco Opera's sixth general director in January of 2006 after more than three decades at the helm of Houston Grand Opera. Gockley's tenure follows the leadership of Terence McEwen, Lotfi Mansouri, and Pamela Rosenberg. Considered one of the major innovators in American opera, Gockley is passionately dedicated to the premise that opera is a living art form that speaks to a variety of audiences. Committed to broadening and diversifying audiences for San Francisco Opera, Gockley presented the Company's first-ever free live outdoor simulcast, an innovation he pioneered at Houston Grand Opera, during his first months as general director. The May 2006 simulcast of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* drew over 8,000 diverse music lovers and opera newcomers to San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza. Gockley's innovative approach was implemented again in October 2006 when San Francisco Opera reached nearly 15,000 people simultaneously in two different venues with a simulcast of Verdi's *Rigoletto* to Civic Center Plaza and Stanford University's Frost Amphitheater.

Under his leadership, San Francisco Opera is currently preparing to present two world premieres. In the fall of 2007, the Company will present *Appomattox*, commissioned from composer Philip Glass and librettist Christopher Hampton. In the fall of 2008, San Francisco Opera will present the world premiere of composer Stewart Wallace and novelist Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, based on her best-selling novel of the same name. The Company will also present a new production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* (a co-production with Washington National Opera) starting with *Das Rheingold* in 2008 and ending with a full presentation of the cycle in the 2010-11 season. San Francisco Opera's newly appointed artistic adviser Francesca Zambello directs this "American *Ring*" and Donald Runnicles conducts.

Gockley's partner in artistic programming and musical issues is Music Director and Principal Conductor Donald Runnicles, appointed in 1992. Maestro Runnicles will conclude his tenure in the summer of 2009. During his tenure, Runnicles has championed new repertory ranging from the world

premieres of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* (2005) to Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons* (1994), in addition to the spectacular American stage premiere of Olivier Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise* (2002).

San Francisco Opera offers a comprehensive array of acclaimed training programs and performance opportunities for young artists under the auspices of the San Francisco Opera Center and the Merola Opera Program (each a separate institution). Both are led by renowned soprano Sheri Greenawald.

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This press release and related photographs are available on our online press room at www.sfopera.com/press.

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