

NEWS RELEASE

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TUOMAS HILTUNEN NAMED GENERAL DIRECTOR OF FORT WORTH OPERA; JOE ILICK NAMED ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Fort Worth, TX - Fort Worth Opera (FWOpera) today announced Tuomas Hiltunen as its new General Director. Joe Illick, currently the company's Music Director, has been named as Artistic Director. Hiltunen joins the Fort Worth Opera from the international Barenboim-Said Foundation where he most recently served as Director of Administration and Management. In this position, Hiltunen was instrumental in significantly growing the Foundation's endowment, advancing its brand, and developing and executing its business plans and strategies.

Born and educated in Finland, Hiltunen began his formal theater training at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Columbia University. In the following years, he became a lecturer at Barnard College and joined Columbia University as the Director of the Finnish Studies Program where he taught Finnish language and culture courses. As a performer, Hiltunen has worked extensively in theater, opera, concerts, television, and film in Finland, England, and the United States. He has performed at the Metropolitan Opera with James Levine, Carnegie Hall with Hannu Lintu, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra with Neeme Järvi, and the New York Philharmonic with Joshua Gersen. He also appeared in the 2009 film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* starring Isla Fisher.

"I am honored to be part of the Fort Worth community and Fort Worth Opera. I would like to thank the association for giving me a chance to lead this fine organization in its mission toward excellence," said Hiltunen. "I am looking forward to sharing thrilling experiences of music and theater with the broader Fort Worth community, and to bringing in new and expanded audiences to share our passion for this ever-changing art form."

Mike Martinez, Chairman of Fort Worth Opera, said, "The Board of Trustees is tremendously excited about the future of Fort Worth Opera. Tuomas is a true leader who will bring his consummate skills to help us achieve financial stability, along with his artistic drive, passion, and the vision to guide Fort Worth Opera through the next decade."

Maestro Illick became FWOpera's Music Director in 2002, having previously served as the Artistic Director of Florida Grand Opera, Lake George Opera and Shreveport Opera. He has also conducted for numerous opera companies, including the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, San Francisco Opera (Merola), Lyric Opera of Kansas City, the Vienna Chamber Opera, the Covent Garden Ensemble of the Royal Opera House (London), Pittsburgh Opera Theater, Santa Fe Symphony, Santa Fe Pro Musica, Performance Santa Fe Orchestra, Miami Symphony, and the Teatro Lirico d'Europa. His opera for all ages, *UnShakeable* was commissioned by the Santa Fe Opera and presented in 2016, and his latest work, *Feel the Tango*, will premiere in Santa Fe this month, alongside two 15-minute operas by Jake Heggie and Mark Adamo.

"The Fort Worth community has been extremely enthusiastic about having great opera since the day I arrived, and I look forward to having our team bring more great opera to Fort Worth," said Illick. "We have plans to reach broader audiences, present exciting new works, and form new collaborations with other arts organizations."

Board President Nelson Claytor said "The combination of Tuomas' and Joe's passion, experience, artistic vision, energy, and commitment to the arts and the Fort Worth community is exactly what we need to achieve the Opera's vision of bringing new audiences to enjoy and love opera for a lifetime."

FORT WORTH OPERA

ABOUT FORT WORTH OPERA: Founded in 1946, Fort Worth Opera is the oldest continually performing opera company in Texas, and one of the 14 oldest opera companies in the United States. The organization has received national attention from critics and audiences alike for its artistic excellence, pioneering spirit, and willingness to take risks. From its first world premiere, *Frau Margot* in 2007, to 2016's critically-acclaimed new work *JFK* -- a co-commission with American Lyric Theater and Opéra de Montréal by creative duo of David T. Little and Royce Vavrek -- FWOpera continues to augment its worldwide reputation as a trailblazing, civically minded arts institution.

Known throughout the operatic world as a champion of new and rarely-performed works, FWOpera has taken a leadership role in engaging audiences beyond the operatic stage, while producing cutting-edge, contemporary operas. Beginning in 2017, FWOpera launched the second phase of its landmark, 10-year Opera of the Americas initiative with *Noches de Ópera (Nights of Opera)*, a groundbreaking campaign which introduces powerful operas, each reflecting the diverse cultures of new American audiences.

The 2018 FWOpera Festival will include a mind-blowing fantasy epic, Wagner's legendary *Das Rheingold*; Astor Piazzolla's tango opera, *María de Buenos Aires*, a surreal, immersive theatrical experience unlike anything in FWOpera's history, and Donizetti's hysterical bel canto comedy *Don Pasquale*, set in the golden age of Hollywood. The Festival will also usher in the sixth year of Fort Worth Opera's critically-acclaimed new works showcase, *Frontiers*.

Fort Worth Opera is sponsored in part by awards from The Arts Council of Fort Worth & Tarrant County, The City of Fort Worth, and the Texas Commission on the Arts. Additional Fort Worth Opera sponsors include: the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Amon G. Carter Foundation; American Airlines; Art & Seek; Crystelle Waggoner Charitable Trust, Bank of America, Trustee; The Pangburn Foundation, J.P. Morgan Chase, Trustee; the Sid W. Richardson Foundation; *Star-Telegram*; and WFAA Channel 8.