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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Opera Omaha announces an Expanded 2011-2012 Season.

Opera Omaha is pleased to announce their “4G Season” for 2011-2012. This will be the 54<sup>th</sup> year that Opera Omaha has brought world-class opera to the Omaha Metro area. Collaboration, expanded offerings, and beloved professional singers will be the hallmark of what will prove to be a very exciting year for the company.

Jane Hill, Opera Omaha Interim Executive Director, says that this new season is “driven by multiple factors”, including:

1. A desire to reach out to new segments of the community, make them aware of our existence and motivate them to add Opera Omaha to their entertainment options.
2. The necessity to “live within our means.” Opera will always depend on generous supporters to produce this complex art form with its heavy reliance on hundreds of talented and skillful people – and we must show supporters that we use those donated resources wisely.
3. A focus on Opera Omaha’s “core mission” as a producer of high-quality opera.
4. An awareness that our patrons need easy ways to purchase tickets, compelling reasons to do so, and the very best customer service.
5. A continuing commitment to excellence.

The “4G Season” stands for Great Stories, Great Voices, Great Music, and Great Entertainment. Offerings for the year will be a concert celebration of the great works of opera (*This is Opera!*), a classic production for families and children (Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*), a rarely produced opera for “aficionados” and newcomers alike

(Rossini's *The Marriage Contract*), and a Gilbert and Sullivan masterpiece (*The Mikado*).

Always an innovator in city-wide collaboration, Opera Omaha is pleased to announce that Tim Schmad, President of the Omaha Community Playhouse, and the Board of Directors of the Omaha Community Playhouse has agreed to "loan" Jim Othuse, Omaha Community Playhouse Scenic Designer, to Opera Omaha for a brand new production of *Hansel and Gretel*. Othuse will bring his creative production designs to the Rose Theater in November. Leading up to the public performances, the Opera will be offering student performances for area school children to see the opera.

*This is Opera!*, an opening concert celebration, kicks off the 2011-2012 season in October for one performance only at the Orpheum Theater in downtown Omaha. The cast features some of the best singers from Opera Omaha's rich history, including Elizabeth Blancke-Biggs (*Tosca, Aida*), Arnold Rawls (*Turandot, Wakonda's Dream, Aida*), and Kevin Short (*Turandot, The Abduction from the Seraglio, Aida*). Highlights of the concert, sung in their original languages with projected English translations, will include favorite selections from *Carmen, Turandot, Aida, Hansel and Gretel, The Mikado*, and other beloved operas. James de Blasis, who directed the company's *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Beverly Sills at the inaugural performance of the Grand Reopening of the Orpheum Theater, will return to direct this concert. James de Blasis, former General Director of Cincinnati Opera is a legendary opera director with credits all over the United States. Mark Flint, internationally renowned conductor, will conduct the Omaha Symphony. The Opera Omaha Chorus will also be featured in the show. Hal France will emcee the evening, taking the audience through the twists and turns of the stories behind the extraordinary music.

Details about the entire season follow.

### **THIS IS OPERA! Season Opening Concert**

Saturday, October 15, 7:30 PM

The Orpheum Theatre

Sung in original languages with projected English translations.

What a way to launch the 54th Season! A potpourri of the most beloved selections from 400 years of opera. Emcee Hal France sets the scenes for the extraordinary music. Great singers return for this one night extravaganza. Find out why opera is called "the Olympics of the voice!" With favorite selections from *Carmen, Turandot, Aida* and more – including preview highlights from *The Mikado* and *Hansel & Gretel*. James de Blasis, former General Director of Cincinnati Opera, returns to Opera Omaha to direct. Mark Flint conducts the Omaha Symphony. Featuring: Arnold Rawls, tenor; Kevin Short, bass; Elizabeth Blancke-Biggs, soprano and The Opera Omaha Chorus.

### **Hansel & Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck**

Friday, November 11, 7:30 pm

Saturday November 12, 1pm and 3pm

Sunday, November 13, 1pm and 3pm

The Rose Theater

Sung in English with projected translations in Spanish.

Five performances will be offered for this opera based on a 19<sup>th</sup>-century German fairy tale, Opera Omaha's adaptation is less "grim" than the Brothers Grimm version. The spunky children of a poor broom-maker still get lost in the woods, where they encounter a magical cottage of sweets and its elderly occupant. But this "witch" is more comic than evil and the clever brother and sister soon turn danger into delights.

The opera premiered in December, 1893, and was called "a masterpiece of the highest quality." Combining Wagnerian techniques and traditional German folk songs, *Hänsel und Gretel* was an instant and overwhelming success. One-hour long, this new version is true to Humperdinck's music, but suitable for children 6 or older. J. Gawf, Opera Omaha Resident Music Director will conduct, Henry MacCarthy will direct, and James Othuse will design this brand new production.

### **THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT by Gioacchino Rossini**

Friday, February 17, 7:30 pm

Saturday, February 18, 7:30 pm

Sunday, February 19, 2 pm

The Jewel Box Theatre in downtown Omaha's Scottish Rite Center,

Sung in English

One of opera's most prolific and acclaimed composers Rossini is famous for the popular *William Tell Overture*. His *Barber of Seville* has kept audiences humming and laughing for 200 years. Now discover this one-act masterpiece at one of three performances.

It's 1810 and the merchant, Mill, attempts to marry his daughter Fanny to Slook, a business associate from Canada. To close the deal, the Canadian fur-trader visits the Mill summer home, on the Adriatic Coast near Venice. Hilarity erupts. Clever servants and passionate young lovers soon de-rail the marriage plans. This short comic opera features the favorite stock characters of its era: a beautiful heroine, a penniless lover, a bossy father, an amorous braggart and two clever servants who know what's really going on. Add beautiful voices and a charming orchestra and you have a musical treat for lovers young and old. The Opera Omaha Guild will also be offering special add-ons before each performance, including Cocktails & Canapes on Friday, A Lover's Feast on Saturday, and a Sweetheart Brunch on Sunday.

J. Gawf, Opera Omaha Resident Music Director conducts members of the Omaha Symphony with stage direction by Garnett Bruce, Opera Omaha's Artistic Adviser and Principal Stage Director.

## **THE MIKADO by Gilbert & Sullivan**

Friday, April 13, 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 15, 2 pm

The Orpheum Theater

Sung in English

Finishing out the season with two performances at the Orpheum Theater, Opera Omaha presents the Gilbert and Sullivan classic, *The Mikado*.

The minstrel, Nanki-Poo, wanders into the Japanese village of Titi-Pu, where Ko-Ko, the timorous Lord High Executioner must perform one execution per day or he'll lose his job and his own head. Nanki-Poo is a great candidate, since his sweetheart Yum-Yum is betrothed to another. Plenty of romantic complications arise and must ultimately be untangled by The Mikado, exalted ruler. The comic opera's setting in Japan gave Gilbert license to freely satirize British institutions. The opera also draws on Victorian notions of the Far East, following the beginning of trade between the two island empires. Gilbert and Sullivan introduced innovations that directly influenced the development of musical theatre through the 20th century. In 2009, a contemporary critic wrote, "The appeal of G&S's special blend of charm, silliness and gentle satire seems immune to fashion." Stewart Robertson, former Artistic Director of Opera Omaha, returns to conduct the Omaha Symphony and The Opera Omaha Chorus. Dorothy Danner, director of many previous productions, will direct.

Information on how to become a season ticket holder will be released during the April *Madama Butterfly* performances at the Orpheum. Call Ticket Omaha at 402-345-0606 for information about receiving a brochure highlighting the entire season.

### ***About Opera Omaha***

***Opera Omaha***, the only professional opera company in Nebraska, began in 1958 as the Omaha Civic Opera Society, a volunteer association, and with tremendous community support became fully professional by 1970. Opera Omaha produces a season of original mainstage productions, presented at the historic Orpheum Theater, and smaller productions and musical events throughout the community. Opera Omaha is internationally known for its productions of eight world premieres and four American premieres of classical masterpieces, and is highly regarded regionally for an extensive education and outreach program that annually reaches as many as 15,000 people from elementary school through adulthood.

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