NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman Announces Recipients of the 2011 NEA Opera Honors

June 24, 2011

Washington, D.C. – NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman announced the recipients of the 2011 NEA Opera Honors at a meeting of the National Council on the Arts, the NEA’s advisory body on Friday, June 24, 2011. Now in its fourth year, the NEA Opera Honors is the highest award our nation bestows in opera.

This year’s honorees are:

John Conklin, stage designer
   Born in Hartford, Connecticut and lives in New York City

Speight Jenkins, general director
   Born in Dallas, Texas and lives in Seattle, Washington

Risë Stevens, mezzo soprano
   Born in Bronx, NY and lives in New York, NY

Robert Ward, composer
   Born in Cleveland, Ohio and lives in Durham, North Carolina

Opera America is the planning and production partner for this year’s awards ceremony and also will create personalized video tributes for each honoree.

"These artists represent the highest level of artistic mastery and we are proud to recognize their achievements," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. "Through their contributions, we have been challenged, enlightened, and charmed, and we thank them for devoting their careers to expanding and supporting their art forms."

NEA Director of Music & Opera Wayne Brown said, "These four individuals have contributed significantly to opera in the United States, lending their talents and commitment to enhancing what we see, hear, feel, and think about opera."

John Conklin’s conceptual design style has had an enormous influence. He is one of the principal figures in American stage design, both for opera and for theater, and his set and costume designs are seen in opera houses, theaters, and ballet companies around the world. Concurrent with his work as a stage designer, Conklin has taught many aspiring designers through his courses in design for stage and film at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.

Speight Jenkins is recognized nationally as a leading authority on opera and an accomplished arts administrator. Appointed general director of the Seattle Opera in 1983, he strengthened and expanded the company as a Wagner center in the United States. Jenkins also is known for his prolific writing about opera through reviews and articles.

Mezzo-soprano Risë Stevens virtually owned many of the great mezzo roles such as Gluck’s Orpheus and Saint-Saën’s Delilah. She appeared at the Metropolitan Opera in the title role of Bizet’s Carmen 124 times. But many more fell in love with Stevens through her frequent radio appearances and through the films The Chocolate Soldier (1941) with Nelson Eddy and Going My Way (1944) with Bing Crosby.

Robert Ward is admired for his career as an American composer. A respected conductor, administrator, and publishing executive, Ward is equally admired as an academic, having served as chancellor of the North Carolina School for the Arts and as music professor at Duke University. Among his compositions are eight operas—including The Crucible, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize—seven symphonies, three concerti, two cantata, and songs for solo voice with
accompaniment.

Full profiles of the 2011 NEA Opera Honors recipients are located on the NEA’s website.

High resolution photos are available: please call 202-682-5570.

The NEA Opera Honors were announced in conjunction with the announcement of the NEA National Heritage Fellowships and NEA Jazz Master Awards recipients. Please go to arts.gov for the list of these recipients.

The 2011 NEA Opera Honorees will be celebrated in an awards ceremony and concert in Washington, DC at the Sidney Harman Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, October 27. Admission is free but requires tickets which will be available in September 2011.

These four honorees each will receive a one-time award of $25,000 in recognition of their significant lifetime contributions to opera in the United States. NEA Opera Honors recipients are nominated by the public and chosen by an NEA-convened panel of opera experts. Past NEA Opera Honorees are John Adams, Martina Arroyo, Frank Corsaro, David, DiChiera, Carlisle Floyd, Richard Gaddes, Philip Glass, Marilyn Horne, James Levine, Lotfi Mansouri, Leontyne Price, Eve Queler, and Julius Rudel.

Please see the biographies of the five 2010 NEA Opera Honors recipients.

Additional information can be found in the NEA Opera Honors section of the NEA web site. High resolution photos are available: please call 202-682-5570.

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