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Opera Theatre of St. Louis selects new general director from Washington National Opera

By Sarah Bryan Miller St. Louis Post-Dispatch Apr 6, 2018



Andrew Jorgensen, the next general director of Opera Theatre of St. Louis (Photo by Cassidy DuHon)

Opera Theatre of St. Louis has announced that Andrew Jorgensen will be the fourth general director in the company's 43-year history.

Jorgensen, currently the interim executive director and director of artistic planning and operations at Washington National Opera, will take up his duties July 1 at OTSL.

He succeeds departing general director Timothy O’Leary.

Jorgensen, 34, follows in the tradition of youthful general directors at OTSL; both O’Leary (who will become general director at WNO) and Charles MacKay (who will retire as general director of the Santa Fe Opera this year) were 33 when they joined the company.

Raised in Haddonfield, N.J., Jorgensen earned his undergraduate degree at Harvard University and an MBA from New York University. After two years with the vocal division of Columbia Artists Management, he spent five seasons on the artistic staff of the Metropolitan Opera.

Jorgensen was selected by OTSL after an international search.

“He’s very articulate, extremely personable, passionate about the art form and passionate about Opera Theatre,” having attended regularly since 2013, said board chairman Noémi Neidorff. Jorgensen was largely responsible for bringing OTSL’s production of Terence Blanchard’s “Champion” to the Kennedy Center last year.

Noting that the 15-member search committee agreed on him unanimously (“It was a no-brainer”), she added: “He has it all. He has the personality; he’s young, so he will be perfect to attract the new, young generation, the future audience for opera. He’s very approachable, and that’s critical for us.”

Jorgensen’s experiences on his annual visits attracted him to the job.

“I loved the culture of the festival. I loved that warm and engaging sense of welcome. I loved discovering exciting young singers, and I loved stories and productions that were really at the cutting edge of what opera can be all about.”

He declined to discuss specific agenda items, saying that he needs to get to know the company and its constituencies. What won't change, he said, is the emphasis on nurturing young singers, commissioning new works and working with the community.

For O'Leary, there's irony; he was looking forward to working with Jorgensen at WNO. He praised Jorgensen's "artistically brilliant mind" and leadership abilities.

"Running an opera company is just a fascinatingly, wonderfully complex job," O'Leary said. "It requires not just depth, but true breadth, a person who can understand the big picture and work with people of all kinds with great emotional intelligence. These are all qualities that Andrew has in spades."

"He brings a youthful enthusiasm and a pioneer spirit," said music director emeritus Stephen Lord. "He's been around opera for a long time now, and he knows a lot of the key players. That can be of benefit to the company."



Timothy O'Leary. Photo by Ken Howard

Artistic director James Robinson, who worked with Jorgensen on "Champion" at WNO, agreed. "He's a real up-and-comer — a rising star."

Marc A. Scorca, president and CEO of Opera America, praised the selection. "Andrew is one of the brightest, most energetic, promising leaders rising in the opera field today."

Noting that Jorgensen's operatic experience included an emphasis on contemporary works "resonates directly with the core commitment of Opera Theatre" in supporting new work, he said. "It is really important to have someone who understands standards that are held as high as possible relative to the resources available and that there will be, in the general director's seat, an artistic striver."

Jorgensen is married to Mark Stuart-Smith, an executive search consultant. They and their Tibetan terrier, Aria, will relocate to St. Louis this summer; as foodies, they're looking forward to exploring the culinary scene.

Most of all, he said, he's looking forward to "partnering with all of these different constituencies who make our work possible, everyone who makes the experience of Opera Theatre special. I believe very passionately in it, and I'm very excited about joining that team."

Sarah Bryan Miller

Sarah Bryan Miller is the classical music critic for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; she has also written on a variety of other topics.