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SKYLARK OPERA ANNOUNCES NEW INTERIM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The Stage is Set for a New Beginning

(MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL, Minn.; April 14, 2016) —The Board of Directors of Skylark Opera has announced the appointment of Robert Neu as Interim Artistic Director. Neu replaces Steven Stucki who served as Artistic Director for 27 years and has recently retired.

Skylark Opera was founded in 1980 as Opera St. Paul, becoming North Star Opera in 1986, and has become known for presenting critically acclaimed operas, operettas and musicals in imaginative stagings. It has largely been devoted to showcasing the very best of local talent, including Bradley Greenwald, Christina Baldwin, Jennifer Baldwin Peden and Gary Briggie, as well as bringing to Twin Cities audiences up-and-coming young singers with national and international careers such as Gabriel Preisser, Cecilia Violetta Lopez and Won Whi Choi.

Like many arts organizations, Skylark Opera is facing financial challenges, and recently decided to postpone its 2016 summer season. In appointing Neu, the organization signals a reinvigorated desire to move ahead and re-establish itself as an artistically and financially strong organization. Neu and Managing Director Heather Brands are in the process of repositioning Skylark in order to make its ongoing viability one which the metro area will not lose.

Neu is well-known to Skylark Opera audiences, having directed eight productions for the company in the past eight years. These have included *Naughty Marietta*, *The Merry Widow*, *On the Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *The Fantasticks*, *Candide* and last season's *Putting it Together*. His production of *Don Pasquale* for Skylark was hailed as "a perfect opera production" and "a delight from beginning to end" by local newspaper critics. His production

of *The Fantasticks* was judged “the most well-crafted production that Skylark has offered” and “an unqualified success” by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. In addition, Neu is well-known to Twin Cities theater and opera audiences, having mounted numerous productions for Minnesota Orchestra, Bloomington Civic Theater, Chameleon Theater, Phipps Center for the Arts, Lyric Opera of the North and Minneapolis Fringe Festival. Also active nationally with more than 80 productions to his credit, Neu has presented work in Seattle, Denver, Cincinnati and New York.

“Not only does Bob bring us extensive directing and production experience,” said Ann Spencer of Skylark’s Board of Directors, “but he has also spent his career with non-profit performing arts organizations and therefore brings a wealth of knowledge to us. He has always been a passionate advocate for Skylark Opera and has long been a member of our extended family.” Neu said, “I have always believed in Skylark Opera’s place within the Twin Cities’ arts community and I think its future can be bright and promising. I’m honored the members of the Board have asked me to work with them as Skylark looks toward building on its legacy and securing its future.”

Over the next six months, the management team will engage both artistic and administrative experts in the community to become even more artistically exciting and vibrant as well as fiscally strong. The primary goal will be to provide both audience members and creative talent with theatrical experiences of the highest artistic quality in a wide-ranging repertoire found nowhere else in the Twin Cities.

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Skylark Opera, founded in 1980 as Opera St. Paul, is a cherished institution amongst the robust St. Paul/Minneapolis theater and music community. Nationally known for presenting critically acclaimed operas, operettas and musicals in imaginative stagings, the organization is devoted to employing local talent while providing exceptional and affordable experiences to audiences of all ages.