

NEWS RELEASE

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Minnesota Opera President and CEO Kevin Smith to retire

MINNEAPOLIS, MN – Minnesota Opera announced today that Kevin Smith is retiring as president and chief executive officer, a position he has held since 1986. He will stay on into the next opera season until a successor is in place.

“I love this organization – the people, the mission, the art form and the artistic process. However, as I approach my 30th season with the company and my 60th birthday, I am simply ready for a change in my professional life. I don’t know what this change will bring, but I’m excited to find out. Minnesota Opera has never been stronger artistically and financially, which makes this an excellent time to transition to new leadership that will take the Opera to the next level of accomplishment,” Smith said.

Smith, 59, joined the company in 1981 as production stage manager and rose to the leadership post five years later. During his tenure Minnesota Opera joined the ranks of America’s top opera companies, achieving national and international stature. Minnesota Opera achieved phenomenal growth throughout Smith’s tenure: the number of productions has risen from three to five, the annual budget has grown from \$1.5 million to \$9 million, attendance has more than doubled, and net assets have grown from (\$36,000) in 1986 to \$28,750,000 as of June 30, 2009.

“Kevin will be a hard act to follow.” said Minnesota Opera board chair Sidney Emery, Jr. “Under his steadfast leadership, the company has risen to become a nationally applauded producer of both traditional bel canto opera along with highly celebrated new works. His contributions to the performing arts community, both locally and nationally have been superb.”

Smith’s other achievements include the 1991 creation of Minnesota Opera Center in the Minneapolis Warehouse District, which houses the company’s offices, costume and scene shops and rehearsal facilities. He was instrumental in establishing the Arts Partnership, a

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collaboration of Minnesota Opera, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, The Schubert Club and the Ordway and for the optimum use of the Ordway. Throughout his career, Smith has been active in statewide arts advocacy, serving on the board of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and as a member of Vote YES Minnesota, the steering committee for the campaign for voter approval of the Minnesota “Legacy” constitutional amendment.

Smith served as board chair of the national service organization OPERA America from 1997 to 2001, and he was instrumental in establishing Opera America’s European counterpart, Opera Europa. He currently serves on Opera America’s board of directors.

The Opera’s Board of Directors has retained Spencer Stuart to conduct an international search for Smith’s successor. Gus Blanchard, director emeritus and former board chair, has been appointed chair of the search committee.

Minnesota Opera’s mission is to produce opera and opera education programs
at the highest artistic level that inspire and entertain our audiences
and enrich the cultural life of our community.

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