



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 14, 2011

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Darlene Ronald (204)255-0508
Dronald84@shaw.ca

CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED SEASON FALLS SHORT AT BOX OFFICE

Manitoba Opera announced yesterday at its Annual General Meeting (AGM), held at the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg, that despite a critically acclaimed season, the company posted an operating deficit of \$100,596 on a budget of \$1,850,630 for the year ending May 31, 2011. This is the first unplanned operating deficit for the company in 11 seasons and is the result of ticket sales not meeting budget for the 2010/11 season.

At \$649,889, box office revenue was significantly lower than the budgeted amount of \$822,779. Though there was a six percent decrease in the number of season subscriptions (2,971 subscribers, down 196 from 2009/10), casual ticket sales for both the season-opening *Divas and Divos* Concert in October and *Tosca* in November were down substantially, resulting in a box office shortfall of \$172,880 at the close of *Tosca*. However, subsequent casual ticket sales were very strong for the final production of the season, *The Magic Flute*, with two of the three performances at near capacity.

Fundraising from sponsorships, individual, foundations, and events increased by 22% over 2009/10 to \$594,155, helping to offset the shortfall in box office revenue.

The accumulated deficit now stands at \$271,956. It had reached \$630,000 in 2001 prior to the company embarking on an extensive rebuilding strategy.

“At Manitoba Opera, we strive to create the best operatic experience possible for the community we serve through programming, education initiatives, and audience development events. I was very pleased with the quality of our work in all these areas in 2010/11, but of course, am disappointed in the financial results,” said Larry Desrochers, General Director and CEO. “We are not alone though. Several opera companies in Canada this season are posting operating deficits, due mainly to shortfalls in ticket sales or fundraising. Each region in the country is different, but generating revenue to pay for the work is the common factor. We’re tremendously grateful to our donors who helped make up for the shortfall in casual ticket sales.”

“There is very strong support for opera to be a vital part of this community’s artistic makeup. That’s been demonstrated through private and corporate donations, grants, sponsorship, participation at special events, and contributions to the Endowment Fund,” added Peter George, Outgoing Chair of the Board of Trustees. “However, this season demonstrates the delicate balance that must be achieved between ticket sales, fundraising, and support from arts councils in order for organizations to be financially successful. With grants flat-lined, particularly from agencies like the Canada Council, there is increased pressure on ticket sales and fundraising.”

2. Manitoba Opera 10/11 AGM Media Release

The 2011/12 Board of Trustees was also announced at the AGM. The trustees are Jennifer Snyder (Chair), Peter George (Past Chair); returning for the second year of a two-year term: Remo De Sordi, Ginny Devine, Elba Haid, Christopher Mainella, Ian Trump, and Robert Vineberg; serving the first year of their second two-year term: Peter Heavysage, Dr. Anthony Iacopino, and Brent Twist; serving the first year of a two-year term: Wayne Benson, Robert Biscontri, Luisa Matheson, and Melanie Sifton. Retiring from the Board of Trustees are Rod Hanley, Heather Shon, and Cindy Stevens.

“I am thrilled to be chair of such an important cultural institution in our community,” commented Jennifer Snyder, who begins her first year as Chair with the 2011/12 season. “Year after year, Manitoba Opera brings artistically acclaimed grand opera to the stage. I look forward to ensuring that tradition continues as my fellow board members, along with staff and the artistic team, work together building on the great foundation that is in place. And I would especially like to welcome our newest members: Wayne Benson, Robert Biscontri, Luisa Matheson, and Melanie Sifton.”

On the stage in 2010/11, Manitoba Opera continued its commitment to Canadian artists by offering exciting performing opportunities to veteran and emerging singers. The season began with the *Divas and Divos* Concert. Under the direction of Tadeusz Biernacki, soloists Pierre-Étienne Bergeron, Joni Henson, Lauren Segal, David Watson, and Jeffrey Springer, accompanied by a magnificent 60-voice Manitoba Opera Chorus and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra delivered a spectacular evening of opera favourites.

Featuring some of this country’s most established and talented artists, Manitoba Opera then presented an all-Canadian production of the Puccini tragedy, *Tosca*, in November. Making her MO debut in the title role, Wendy Nielsen gave a stellar performance, as did the other members of this talented cast: Richard Margison, Gaétan Laperrière, and Peter Strummer. MO’s Music Advisor and Principal Conductor, Tyrone Paterson conducted the WSO, and Val Kuinka made her MO debut as stage director.

The season concluded with the much-anticipated production of Mozart’s delightful comedy, *The Magic Flute* in April. Eighteen of the 23-member cast and creative team for this production were Manitoban and included Phillip Ens, Andriana Chuchman, Hugh Russell, Lara Ciekiewicz, PJ Buchan, Gregory Atkinson, Naomi Forman, Sarah Halmarson, Marcia Whitehead, Carson Milberg, Anton Sokalski, and Torbjörn Thomson. These artists were joined by Michel Corbeil, Julia Kogan, and Bruce Sledge. Michael Cavanagh staged a very funny production, and Tad Biernacki conducted the WSO.

Providing an engaging array of educational and informative programming aimed at enhancing the opera experience for patrons of all ages, continues to be a major initiative of the company. A diverse selection of programs was presented throughout the 2010/11 season from a human rights panel discussion at the University of Winnipeg with panelists including human rights champion, Lloyd Axworthy, to a presentation on art at the time of *Tosca* by Winnipeg Art Gallery’s Chief Curator, Helen Portland-Delacretaz, and guided tours of the Legislative Building which uncovered the fascinating connections between the architecture, Freemasonry and Mozart.

3. Manitoba Opera 10/11 AGM Media Release

In 2010/11, 2,809 students attended the dress rehearsals of *Tosca* and *The Magic Flute*. Generally attended by schools from Winnipeg and nearby communities, almost a third of the students who attended *The Magic Flute* were from 23 schools outside the city, some as far away as Dauphin, Oak Lake, and Moose Lake.

UNVEIL THE 2011/12 SEASON

Manitoba Opera's 2011/12 season, the company's 39th, will feature two operas not performed here in over a generation: the sensual and haunting, ***Salome* by Richard Strauss, November 19, 22, and 25, 2011**, and the delightful comedy, ***The Daughter of the Regiment* by Gaetano Donizetti, April 21, 24, and 27, 2012**, both at the Centennial Concert Hall. The 2011/12 season will also include the company's first presentation of a baroque opera, ***Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell**, as an in concert co-presentation with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra at Westminster United Church, **February 7 and 8, 2012**.

Salome, based on Oscar Wilde's play of the same name, was last presented by Manitoba Opera in 1989 and is considered to be one of the greatest operas of the 20th century. With its lush orchestral score, dramatic singing, and complex characterizations, it is a shocking interpretation of the famous biblical story. (Sung in German with projected English translations.)

Based on the love story from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the English baroque tragic masterpiece, *Dido and Aeneas* features magnificent music, potent drama, and remarkable intensity. This semi-staged work will feature the Theatre of Early Music Ensemble under the direction of Daniel Taylor. (Sung in English.)

Last presented by Manitoba Opera in 1991, *The Daughter of the Regiment* (*La Fille du Régiment*) is a laugh-filled, toe-tapping opera complete with music that's both witty and spectacular. "*Daughter*" features Tonio's famous aria "Ah! Mes amis" with its nine thrilling high C's! (Sung in French with English dialogue and projected English translations.)

Purchasing Tickets

Season subscriptions are currently on sale. Casual tickets go on sale in late September. Subscription inquiries can be directed to the Manitoba Opera Box Office by phone: 957-7842; online: www.manitobaopera.mb.ca; or in person: Box Office, lower level, Centennial Concert Hall (9:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday).

Season Brochures

Contact: 957-7842 or email mblais@manitobaopera.mb.ca. Download the brochure at www.manitobaopera.mb.ca.