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**Media Contact**  
Carlotta Soares  
Director of Marketing,  
Communications & PR  
csoares@azopera.org  
d: 602.218.7341  
m: 602.421.0846

**Arizona Opera Launches Its New Year on a High Note**  
*Specter extends term as President and General Director;  
Large Gift Establishes an Endowment; A Match is Made in Tucson*

PHOENIX (August 27, 2018) –[Arizona Opera](http://www.azopera.org) is launching its new fiscal year with exciting news: The contract extension of its president and general director, the launch of a new endowment and success in meeting a Tucson donor's challenge.

Arizona Opera's board of directors is pleased to announce a four-year contract extension of Joseph Specter as president and general director of the company through July 2022. Board Chair John Johnson said, "Joe has brought enormous energy and vision to the company." Johnson continued, "He has worked tirelessly with board and staff in reshaping the artistic path of the company since his arrival in 2016. We are thrilled about the chapter ahead and about the enthusiasm in the community that we are continuing to build together under Joe's leadership."

"We have charted an exciting path for the future of Arizona Opera, and my family and I am committed to doing our part in contributing to arts and culture and quality of life in this great state," said Joe Specter, president and general director of Arizona Opera. "Thanks to the collaborative work of the board, staff and community, we believe our new artistic program allows us to move forward with an increased focus on serving Arizona as fully as possible with this incredibly special art form. I'm proud to be continuing my partnership with Arizona Opera."

A long time supporter of Arizona Opera, Roma Wittcoff has generously provided a \$1 million gift to establish a new endowment for the company. An Arizona Opera board member since 2009 and a founding board member of Opera Theater of St. Louis, Wittcoff inherited her love of music through family influences and childhood studies. "I believe in Arizona Opera and its strategic direction," said Wittcoff. "Establishing a new endowment and having it managed by the Arizona Community Foundation means we are building a plan for the long term."

Arizona Opera's vice chair and a former CFO at the Arizona Community Foundation, Sharon Landis added: "Having worked at the Foundation for 10 years, I can attest to the integrity of the institution and the opportunity it provides Arizona Opera, both now and for years to come."

Joining the generosity of the Phoenix community is the family of Esther Alcorn, a resident of Tucson, Arizona, who died last fall. Alcorn's family initiated a dollar-for-dollar challenge match of \$75,000, designed to help Arizona Opera build new and increased support in its original home city. Arizona Opera

is pleased to announce that the challenge has been met, raising more than \$163,000 for the company in six months. Funds were raised from 136 households, 43 of which were first-time donors to Arizona Opera. Johnson, also a resident of Tucson, expressed his appreciation to the community, “We are grateful for Esther’s devotion, and that of her family, in helping us deepen Arizona Opera’s connection with Tucson. Arizona Opera is committed to serving our whole state, and most especially our company’s birthplace.”

Joe Alcorn, reflecting on his mother’s love of opera, said “Our family wanted to give back to the community in a way that would have pleased our mom and helped to support this art form she loved so much. But her fondest hope I’m sure would have been to see the community of Tucson, her friends and neighbors of 63 years, keep the ball rolling.”

In addition to presenting a full season of opera in Tucson, Arizona Opera’s education program reaches nearly 20,000 students through OperaTunity in-school programs and Student Night at The Opera. The schools in this southern Arizona city have embraced opera in such a positive manner that all available OperaTunity reservations for Tucson schools were sold out in the 2017/18 season — a first in the company’s history.

Arizona Opera is extremely grateful to the community and their overarching support for this new chapter in the company’s artistic direction. Thoughtful engagement, coupled with the loyalty of donors and patrons, has empowered Arizona Opera to increase its artistic vibrancy and expand its programming for the benefit of people across Arizona.

### **About Arizona Opera**

Arizona Opera, now in its 47th Season, produces fully-staged operas, concerts and collaborative programs throughout the state of Arizona each season. It’s among only a handful of companies in the U.S. that regularly performs in more than one city. Arizona Opera elevates the transformative power of storytelling through music, cultivating community and strengthening a state and people as adventurous and diverse as the place they call home. Since its inaugural year in 1971, Arizona Opera has produced more than 175 fully-staged operas and concerts. The company’s artistic history is rich with a blend of operas with traditional repertoire featuring baroque, bel canto, verismo works, turn-of-the-century masterpieces, operettas and American operas.

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