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Contact: Emily Doyle Moore | media@santafeopera.org | 505-986-5908

The Santa Fe Opera Announces Five New Appointments to The Santa Fe Opera Orchestra

Santa Fe, NM — The Santa Fe Opera is delighted to announce the appointment of five musicians joining the **Santa Fe Opera Orchestra** in the 2020 Season. The appointments are the result of highly competitive auditions which occurred on-site in August 2019. In addition to a new Concertmaster, **Steven Moeckel**, four other positions have also been filled: **Margot Schwartz**, Assistant principal second violin; **Jennifer Best Takeda**, Section violin; **Alistair Eng**, Assistant principal cello; and **Rachel Blumenthal**, Second flute/piccolo. A record-topping 276 applications were received for the various positions; these were then winnowed to a select number of invitations for audition.

Santa Fe Opera General Director **Robert K. Meya** shares, “It is with great excitement that we welcome this infusion of new talent. The quality of playing heard throughout the audition process has never been better. The musicians selected are of the highest caliber, ensuring that we not only retain the level of excellence our audiences have come to know, but that together we will reach ever-new heights of artistry.”

Of the Concertmaster appointment, Santa Fe Opera Music Director **Harry Bicket** writes, “I believe that Steven will be a worthy successor in the long line of distinguished SFO Concertmasters, and that he has all the qualities necessary to lead the orchestra forward on the next stage of its journey.” He adds, “I have been hugely helped in making this decision by the feedback provided by the members of the Orchestra, as well as by the work put in by two years’ of Orchestra Committees, the selection committee, Principals of the Orchestra and key members of the Santa Fe Opera staff. I am looking forward to an extraordinarily exciting artistic programme ahead.”

Concertmaster **Steven Moeckel** also serves as the Concertmaster of the Phoenix Symphony and has appeared as a soloist with the Phoenix Symphony, Sunriver Music Festival, Xiamen Philharmonic, Phoenix Chamber Orchestra, and Breckenridge Music Festival, among others. He is a graduate of Indiana University and Salzburg’s Hochschule Mozarteum.

Assistant principal second violin **Margot Schwartz** plays in the first violin section with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, the Peninsula Music Festival and the Bellingham Festival of Music. She has also

performed with the National Symphony Orchestra and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. She is a graduate of Yale School of Music and Northwestern University.

Section violin **Jennifer Best Takeda** serves as Assistant concertmaster of the Sarasota Orchestra and presently performs with the Sarasota Piano Quartet, EnsembleNewSRQ, Opera Tampa, St. Petersburg Opera and the Florida Orchestra. She is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and North Carolina School of the Arts.

Assistant principal cello **Alistair Eng** is the Associate principal cello of the Canadian Opera Company and also holds a position with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. He has performed with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the National Ballet of Canada, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra. He is a graduate of the New England Conservatory, The Banff Centre, Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary, and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.

Second flute/piccolo **Rachel Blumenthal** is Principal flute of the Sarasota Opera and has held positions with Des Moines Symphony Orchestra and Battle Creek Symphony Orchestra. She has also performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Grant Park Orchestra and the Chicago Philharmonic. She is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

About The Santa Fe Opera Orchestra

The Santa Fe Opera Orchestra is recognized internationally for the quality of its playing in a wide-ranging and demanding repertoire. Recent performance highlights include a special debut concert with soprano superstar **Renée Fleming** featuring *Letters from Georgia* and Strauss' *Four Last Songs* led by Music Director Harry Bicket, and the world premiere of *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, for which the orchestra and company received a **Grammy**-award for Best Opera Recording. Its members come from leading orchestras around the country. Many are active recitalists, chamber musicians and recording artists.

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The mission of the Santa Fe Opera is to advance the operatic art form by presenting ensemble performances of the highest quality in a unique setting with a varied repertoire of new, rarely performed, and standard works; to ensure the excellence of opera's future through apprentice programs for singers, technicians, and arts administrators; and to foster an understanding and appreciation of opera among a diverse public.

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