

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Monday, June 29, 2026

**Washington National Opera Launches
National Friends of Washington National Opera
With Live Virtual Forum on July 14**

(Washington, D.C.)—Washington National Opera announces the formation of the **National Friends of Washington National Opera**. The National Friends was created to build on the groundswell of support WNO has received since the end of its affiliation with the Kennedy Center. It will connect and inform supporters from around the world who have interest in maintaining cultural institutions in the nation's capital. A regular schedule of live virtual and in-person forums and monthly podcast-style video interviews with WNO artists and other thought-leaders will connect, inform, and inspire supporters from across the nation.

The National Friends is chaired by **Marc A. Scorca**, who was recently appointed President Emeritus of OPERA America after serving as President/CEO of the national umbrella organization for 35 years, and who also recently joined WNO's board of trustees. Scorca will host the inaugural live virtual **WNO National Friends Forum on July 14, 2026 at 1 p.m. ET**, along with WNO General Director **Timothy O'Leary** and Artistic Director **Francesca Zambello**, to share more about the initiative and the company's progress. *To join National Friends and receive an invitation to this event, visit WashNatOpera.org/National-Friends.*

Since January 9, 2026, when WNO began its new chapter of independence, more than 1,700 donors from across the country have made contributions large and small. This spontaneous generosity enabled the company to complete its 2025-26 season in three different venues, begin rebuilding its staff, and mount a gala that reached its financial goal. An undiminished 2026-27 season of 7 productions performed across 5 venues has been announced while legal action is underway to recover WNO's financial assets, including donor-restricted endowment funds given to WNO, currently being withheld by the Kennedy Center. These milestones mark the beginning of a multi-year effort to affirm the company's creative freedom and institutional independence.

Prominent artists, professionals, and philanthropists from around the country have already stepped forward as WNO National Friends. (See the 'First Fifty Friends' listed below.) A more complete list of initial participants will be announced at the first WNO National Friends Forum on July 14. The National Friends will include advocates from around the country who support the mission and artists of Washington National Opera. The goal is to build a movement of supporters from all 50 states and every U.S. territory who stand with WNO and who will be recognized on the company's website.

"We believe the National Friends will become a powerful force to galvanize supporters near and far who believe that our nation's capital should benefit from a vibrant cultural life, enriched by an opera company of international standing. It is an honor to have Marc's leadership in this critical effort to sustain Washington National Opera's mission," commented O'Leary. "There is no one who understands

more deeply what it takes for an opera company to thrive, or who is more committed to the role of the arts in civic society.”

“From my 50 years working in opera, I know that a successful opera company is built on a broad base of support,” explained Scorca. “We want to win the endorsement of artists, administrators, patrons, and arts lovers from across the country in this effort to protect the creative freedom and institutional independence of the Washington National Opera and ensure a rich cultural life in the nation’s capital.”

“Washington National Opera’s phenomenal 2025–2026 season was a testament to the strength of this company. Artists, staff, donors, and audiences came together to facilitate the extraordinary transition to new venues while sustaining a season of artistic excellence across the region,” said Andy Pharoah, Board President of Washington National Opera. “With an exciting slate of new productions and opera’s biggest stars ahead, WNO enters its next chapter with momentum and optimism. Sustaining that future for the next 70 years will require continued investment and support from WNO friends across the country.”

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Media Contact:

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Complete Event Details

National Friends of Washington National Opera

WNO National Friends Forum

Tuesday, July 14, 2026 at 1 p.m. ET

To join National Friends and receive an invitation to this event, visit WashNatOpera.org/National-Friends.

National Friends of Washington National Opera: Inaugural List

California Christopher Koelsch Robert Nelson and Van Broughton Ramsey Matthew Shilvock Eva and Marc Stern Florida Ruth and Rick Harper Richard Russell Maryland Marin Alsop Denyce Graves Michael Mael Massachusetts Michele Kessler Susie Trees Michigan Wayne S. Brown Minnesota Patricia Mitchell Missouri Spencer and Phoebe Burke Andrew Jorgensen Mont and Karen Levy Noémi Neidorff	Nebraska Carol and David Domina Allison Swenson Roger Weitz New Mexico Kathleen Flanagan Paul and Lynne Horpedahl Charles MacKay New York Joe Alvarez Jamie Bernstein Sarah Billingham Solomon Mark Campbell Betsy and Ed Cohen Kristin Cowdin Matthew Epstein Susan Feder Peter Gelb and Keri-Lynn Wilson Jane Gullong Michael Heaston Jamelah Rimawi Kelley Rourke Thomas Simpson Ted Snowdon and Duffy Violante Denise Sobel and Jake Weiss Michael Young Ann Ziff	North Carolina Ryan and Tonya McKinny Pennsylvania David Devan Eric Owens Texas Khor Dastoor and BenJoaquin Gouverneur Virginia Lee Anne Myslewski Washington J'Nai Bridges John Nesholm James Robinson Washington, D.C. Catherine French
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About Washington National Opera

(WNO) is one of the world's leading opera companies. Led by General Director Timothy O'Leary, Artistic Director Francesca Zambello, and Music Director Robert Spano, WNO presents a wide-ranging repertory spanning beloved classics, contemporary works, and newly commissioned operas, collaborating with many of opera's greatest luminaries, including Christine Goerke, Denyce Graves, Renée Fleming, J'Nai Bridges, and Ryan McKinny. Founded in 1956, WNO celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2026, a year that also marks its return to operating as a fully independent company. Recent seasons featured acclaimed productions of *Aida*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and a landmark *Turandot* with a newly commissioned ending by Christopher Tin and Susan Soon He Stanton. WNO's legacy includes Zambello's internationally celebrated Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle, the D.C. premiere of Jeanine Tesori's *Blue* and *Grounded*—a WNO co-commission—and the world premiere of Philip Glass' revised *Appomattox*.

WNO is also internationally recognized for its education and community engagement initiatives, including the American Opera Initiative, the Cafritz Young Artist Program, the WNO Opera Institute, and Opera in the Outfield, which advance its mission to make opera vital, accessible, and artistically ambitious in the nation's capital. Beyond the main stage, WNO artists bring opera into the community through initiatives such as workshops with incarcerated youth at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center, educational programs at the Library of Congress exploring themes from the season's repertory, and performances and musical events in venues throughout the Washington region.