

WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

Washington National Opera and the Trump Kennedy Center

(January 9, 2026) -- Today, the Washington National Opera (WNO) announced its decision to seek an amicable early termination of its affiliation agreement with the Trump Kennedy Center and resume operations as a fully independent nonprofit entity. This decision comes as WNO celebrates its 70th anniversary. To ensure fiscal prudence and fulfill its obligations for a balanced budget, the WNO will reduce its spring season and relocate performances to new venues. This is a decision centered on doing what is best for the WNO going forward after an amicable transition. The Board and management of the company wish the Center well in its own future endeavors including applauding the President and the Center for having secured significant funding, including \$275 million from Congress, for upgrades to the Center.

This return to full independence aligns with the WNO's historical practice of operating independently for the majority of its 70-year existence.

The decision follows changes at the Center. The Center's new business model requires productions to be fully funded in advance—a requirement incompatible with opera operations. Opera companies typically cover only 30-60% of costs through ticket sales, with the remainder from grants and donations that cannot be secured years ahead when productions must be planned.

The model also does not accommodate WNO's artistic mission of balancing popular works with lesser-known operas that serve diverse audiences, as revenue from major productions traditionally subsidizes smaller, innovative works.

Additionally, centralized support services previously provided by the Center have been reduced or eliminated.

The planned separation is intended to be an amicable parting that gives both organizations flexibility to pursue their respective goals. The affiliation was never intended to be permanent. WNO will seek to work collaboratively with the Center to make this change as smooth as possible.

WNO will continue its mission of producing balanced seasons comprised of grand classics, epic works, and innovative new operas, and building the future of American opera through its Cafritz Young Artists program and American Opera Initiative commissioning project. The company will also continue its commitment to community through its youth programs and engagement activities.

Details on new performance venues will be announced in coming weeks.

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