



Media Contact:

Kimberly White

kimberly@mariandgold.com

San Diego Opera Extends David Bennett's Contract as Joann Clark General Director and CEO Through the 2029–30 Season

(San Diego) August 7, 2025 — [San Diego Opera](#)'s Board of Directors is proud to announce the extension of David Bennett's contract as Joann Clark General Director and CEO for another five years, continuing his tenure through the 2029–30 opera season.

"David's visionary leadership has been transformational for San Diego Opera," said Linda Spuck, President of the Board of Directors. "He's commissioned and brought new, innovative operatic works to San Diego and the field of opera, introduced us to world-class singers, developed outside-the-box programming like our *dētour* series, figured out how to produce and perform during the pandemic—all of this and more while maintaining strong relationships with his staff, the Board of Directors, five labor unions, our audience, and treasured supporters. We are thrilled to announce that David will be with us in San Diego for at least the next five years."

Bennett joined San Diego Opera in 2015, appointed by the Board of Directors in an effort to revitalize the organization. From the outset, Bennett brought a bold vision centered on innovation, inclusion, and community engagement. His early initiatives—such as a citywide Listening Tour, free public performances, and family-friendly operas—demonstrated a commitment to broadening access to opera and reimagining what an opera company can be in the 21st century.

He launched the critically acclaimed *dētour Series* in 2016, a bold programming strand that presents intimate, adventurous works exploring opera's expressive power beyond traditional formats. He conceived of and led "Opera Hack," a competition for theatre makers and technology innovators to advance the production of opera. Under his leadership, San Diego Opera has made a commitment to serving our binational region through its Opera en Español initiative. The company co-produced a filmed

version of Daniel Catán's opera *La hija de Rappaccini* (*Rappaccini's Daughter*), currently in post-production, and produced *El Milagro del Recuerdo* (*The Miracle of Remembering*), a holiday opera performed in Spanish with a hybrid mariachi/symphonic orchestra.

Bennett led the co-commission and co-production of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, an opera by composer Gabriela Lena Frank and librettist Nilo Cruz. The opera had its world premiere in San Diego, and has since been produced at San Francisco Opera (a co-commissioner), Los Angeles Opera, and Opera Omaha, and will be produced in the coming season at Lyric Opera of Chicago and The Metropolitan Opera. Bennett has also taken leadership roles in co-commissioning of other operas, including Nicolás Lell Benavides's *Dolores*, based on the life of labor leader Dolores Huerta, which just received its premiere at West Edge Opera in Oakland, California.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Bennett guided the company through unprecedented challenges with creativity and determination. San Diego Opera was the first professional opera company in the nation to stage performances before a live audience during the shutdown—presenting drive-in productions of *La bohème* and *The Barber of Seville* in the parking lot of San Diego's Pechanga Arena.

In 2022, Bennett led an award-winning rebranding of San Diego Opera, unveiling a new logo and the tagline "Every voice tells a story." This tagline attests to Bennett's commitment to the unique communicative and emotional resonance of the human voice.

During the 2024–25 season, in honor of San Diego Opera's 60th anniversary, Bennett revealed an ambitious five-year strategic plan that puts the organization on a path toward realistic and achievable growth—including innovation in performances, commissioning and developing new operas, re-establishment of a resident artist program, and reimagining audience engagement programs. This plan demonstrates his commitment to preserving San Diego Opera as a producer of world-class opera, developing new audiences, and preparing the organization for a strong and vibrant future.

Before joining San Diego Opera, Bennett held leadership positions at Gotham Chamber Opera and Dance New Amsterdam. While at DNA, he led a \$5.7 million capital campaign for the dance center's new home, significantly elevating the organization's profile in New York's dance community. He also served as a consultant for nonprofit arts organizations with Arts Resources International. Before transitioning to Arts Administration, Bennett enjoyed a successful career as a professional operatic baritone, performing with leading companies and orchestras nationwide. The *Los Angeles Times* noted of Bennett's hire in 2015, "In a surprise that signals an eagerness to take risks and overhaul its conservative image, San Diego Opera has plucked a prominent figure from New York's experimental and avant-garde music scene to be its General Director."

Bennett holds both an M.B.A. and M.A. in Arts Administration from Southern Methodist University and serves on the Board of Directors of OPERA America.

With this contract renewal, San Diego Opera reaffirms its confidence in Bennett's leadership and his bold vision for the future of opera in San Diego.

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ABOUT SAN DIEGO OPERA

Founded in 1965, San Diego Opera has delivered exceptional performances and inspiring educational programs to a wide audience in San Diego for 60 seasons, with a strong focus on community partnerships and the transformative and expressive power of the human voice. With a commitment to innovative storytelling, lifelong learning and engagement, and an awareness of great music's power to bring audiences together, San Diego Opera provides a lasting cultural service to its community. To learn more, please visit www.sdopera.org or follow @sandiegoopera on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).