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FINGER LAKES OPERA RECEIVES MAJOR GIFT FOR YOUNG ARTIST PROGRAM

ROCHESTER, NY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2019 - Finger Lakes Opera (FLO) recently received a large gift from Canandaigua resident James Brophy to rename one of its educational initiatives. Effective immediately, the program will be called the Grand Master Mutsuo Tomita Young Artist Program after one of Mr. Brophy's dear friends, who passed away this past March.

The 2019 season marked the second year of FLO's Young Artist Program and featured seven talented young singers who participated in an array of activities, including a July 19th fundraiser concert, the August 3rd performance of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the August 10 extravaganza concert *Opera HITS!*, and as chorus members for the August 9 and 11 productions of *La Bohème*. In addition, these young singers provided community outreach and per the program's focus, participated in workshops that focused on individualized vocal coaching, choreography and audition techniques. FLO is pleased to be able to bring the 2019 Young Artists back for a repeat performance of *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the end of National Opera Week, Sunday, November 3, 2019.

The recent gift will allow FLO to elevate the Young Artist program in several ways:

- FLO will be able to provide more positions for aspiring singers and to expand the current program to include collaborative pianists.
- FLO will be able to provide stipends for all its participants. In its first two years, the Young Artist Program required singers to pay a stipend that partially covered expenses for the program. While FLO was able to provide scholarships to some of its singers, the majority still had to pay to participate.

"One of the things FLO has always taken great pride in is the superior artistic quality that is produced onstage year after year," Executive Director Elizabeth Long explained and went on to say, "This gift will set the foundation for and expansion of the Young Artist Program for years to come."

Marc Scorca, President and CEO of OPERA America said, "We are delighted to learn of the naming of Finger Lakes Opera's training program and the important ways it will be strengthened. The expansion of young artist programs across the country is evidence of opera's vibrancy. Young singers are drawn to the power and passion of opera and New York State is fortunate to be home to several of these programs. The Grand Master Matsuo Tomita Young Artist Program will contribute to the cultural richness of the entire Upstate region and advance our field."

FLO Artistic Director Gerard Floriano voiced his enthusiasm by saying, "We are incredibly grateful to Mr. Brophy for this magnanimous gift. His generous donation affords FLO the unique opportunity to elevate the Young Artist Program to an extraordinary level."

National auditions for the Grand Master Mutsuo Tomita Young Artist Program will be held at the Opera America studios in New York City, as well as in Rochester, New York, with the goal of selecting up to 10 singers and 2 collaborative pianists to participate. The young artists chosen for this opportunity will be featured in various FLO productions, including community outreach, the opera scenes program, the children's opera (to be performed in Canandaigua in the summer of 2020 and in Rochester in the fall of 2020), Opera HITS!, and in main stage productions. The Grand Master Mutsuo Tomita Young Artist Program offers emerging artists a unique opportunity to rehearse and perform alongside many of the most accomplished singers, directors, and musicians from around the world.

Mutsuo Tomita passed away in Buffalo this past March at the age of 84. He was a Grand Master of Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. He began this study under his mother's instruction in Hakodate, Hokkaido, Japan and showed such promise that he was sent to the Tokyo headquarters of the Ohara School to study. In the 1970s, he was sent to the United States to work at the Ohara Center of New York, continuing his studies under its director, Mrs. Hortense Dean, and commencing his own teaching career. Upon Mrs. Dean's retirement, Tomita took over administrative responsibilities and was appointed Director of the Ohara School of Ikebana for North America and the Caribbean. Tomita thrived in New York City, teaching Ikebana classes to all levels of students, on an almost daily schedule. He conducted popular, rigorous biannual and annual seminars for teachers of Ikebana, drawing students from all over the U.S., Canada, and as far away as Kingston, Jamaica. He regularly traveled nationally, establishing 28 Ohara School chapters throughout North America and the Caribbean. Tomita delighted in sharing beauty, nature, friendship, laughter, the opera, and bounteous meals. The Grand Master Mutsuo Tomita Young Artist Program at Finger Lakes Opera is a fitting way to honor his memory.

ABOUT FINGER LAKES OPERA

Wrapping up its seventh season, its third as a 501(c)(3) organization, Finger Lakes Opera is committed to bringing the highest quality performances to the region during the summer season. Renowned singers, designers, and directors come together to create bold new productions of operatic masterpieces, resplendent with spectacular sets, dazzling costumes, and inventive staging, all with the accompaniment of a professional orchestra. Previous productions have included *Tosca*, *La Traviata*, *Carmen*, and *La Bohème*, with an average of over 2000 attendees each year.

For more information about FLO, its educational programs or how to be a Young Artist sponsor, please visit our website at fingerlakesopera.org, or contact Executive Director Elizabeth Long at 585-305-2340 or floexecutivedirector@gmail.com.

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