

Dayton Opera Artistic Director Thomas Bankston to Retire at the Conclusion of His 25th Season with Dayton Opera in June 2021

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DAYTON, OH (February 7, 2020) – The Dayton Performing Arts Alliance (DPAA) has announced today that Thomas Bankston, Artistic Director of Dayton Opera, will retire in June 2021, at the conclusion of the newly announced 2020–2021 Celebrate Season, Dayton Opera’s 60th anniversary season.

“The coming together of three especially celebratory events in the 2020-21 season – Dayton Opera’s 60th anniversary, my 25th season, and the closing of that season with a world premiere opera production, *Finding Wright* – seemed like a fitting time at which to bring to a close my 41 year career in the professional opera business. Dayton Opera has been a huge part of my life and will always hold a special place in my heart. Especially all the wonderful friendships and associations I have made with artists, staff and volunteers that will make my retirement a truly bittersweet one,” said Tom Bankston.

The 2020–2021 season will mark Bankston’s 25th season providing artistic leadership for Dayton Opera, the longest term of artistic leadership in the company’s history. In 1996, he began his work with the company, sharing his wide-ranging knowledge of the field of opera between Dayton Opera and Cincinnati Opera, the company where in 1982 he began his work as an opera administrator. At the start of the 2001–2002 season, he left Cincinnati Opera and assumed the position of Artistic Director for Dayton Opera on a full-time basis, and then was named General & Artistic Director of Dayton Opera in 2004. With the merger of Dayton Opera with the Dayton Ballet and the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra in 2012 to form the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance, he has continued his artistic leadership as Artistic Director for the Dayton Opera over the last eight years.

“Since arriving in Dayton from Cincinnati, Tom has proven to be an impresario extraordinaire,” said Dayton Performing Arts Alliance Board Chairman John Beran. “His ability to identify talent, develop productions, and work collaboratively with our other artistic directors has provided Dayton with performances unmatched for a regional company.”

“One of the great pleasures of my time with the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance has been the opportunity to work with Tom Bankston,” said Dayton Performing Arts Alliance President and CEO Paul Helfrich. “Tom’s knowledge of Opera is encyclopedic, and his instincts for casting and judging voices are phenomenal. I’ve learned a great deal from him, and will always be proud to say I was part of Dayton Opera. Indeed, Tom has built Dayton Opera into something in which the entire community may take great pride, as the company strives for excellence in everything that it does. And that’s all because of the standard Tom has set.”

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Bankston received his Bachelor of Music in voice from Birmingham-Southern College (1974) and his Master of Music in voice from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music (1976), followed by further doctoral studies there (1976-79). He also trained at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He studied voice with renowned teachers Andrew Gainey and Andrew White, vocal coaching with Metropolitan Opera tenor John Alexander, Robert K. Evans and John Spong, and opera with legendary bass Italo Tajo.

Prior to his professional move into the world of arts administration, he sang as an operatic baritone and appeared with such companies as Pittsburgh Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Pittsburgh Chamber Opera Theater and Whitewater Opera. He is also a sought-after adjudicator for vocal competitions throughout the region. In June 2004, he was honored by the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music with its Distinguished Alumnus Award.

"I will definitely miss working with Tom," said Dayton Philharmonic Artistic Director and Conductor Neal Gittleman. "He's been a good friend and a great collaborator, full of imaginative ideas and armed with a rolodex of amazing young singers and brilliant stage directors. Years ago, when I was in grad school, I faced a fork in the road where one way led towards the opera world and the other led to the orchestral world. Thanks to Tom, I was able to bring those divergent paths back together. I'll always be grateful to him for his willingness to entrust a wide range of varied operas to my baton."

"Tom's passion for the opera is steadfast and true," said Dayton Ballet Artistic Director Karen Russo Burke. "His knowledge of the art form is immeasurable. He has been so thoughtful in his inclusion of dance in the opera productions and I am so thankful for that and to be able to have worked next to him. He will be missed dearly by all, but I wish him the best always as he enjoys more time with his beloved Frances."

Marc A. Scorca, President and CEO of Opera America, the national service organization promoting the creation, presentation, and enjoyment of opera in the U.S., offered these words: "Tom Bankston has been one of opera's guiding leaders for decades. He has been unfailingly devoted to producing opera at the highest possible level of quality and representing our art form in Dayton and the surrounding region. He has been an exceptionally gracious colleague throughout his career and will be missed."

25 artistic highlights from the Bankston tenure:

- First Dayton Opera production – *La Bohème*, October 1996
- *The Elixir of Love* – January/February 1998 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *Faust*, February/March 1998 – 1st DO production conducted by Neal Gittleman
- *Così fan tutte* – January 1999 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *Aida*, March 2003 – 1st DO production in the Schuster Center
- First *Star Gala*, May 2003 – Introduction of recitals by renowned opera artists bringing an impressive list of artists to Dayton including: Denyce Graves ('03), Deborah Voigt ('04), Ruth Ann Swenson ('07), Angela Brown ('08), James Morris ('09), Lawrence Brownlee ('10), Marcello Giordani ('12), Stephanie Blythe ('13), Ryan Speedo Green ('19), Angel Blue ('20)
- *Little Women* (Adamo), April 2005 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *Madame Butterfly*, October 2006 - Innovative production designed by renowned artist Jun Kaneko
- *Macbeth*, January 2008 – Dayton Opera premiere
- *Porgy and Bess*, October 2010 – Opening of the 50th Anniversary Season
- *Fidelio*, January 2011 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- 50th Anniversary: *Star Gala*, May 2011
- *The Tragedy of Carmen* (Brook/Bizet), May 2012 – Dayton Opera Premiere of Peter Brook adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen*
- *The Glory of Wagner* (complete Act I of *Die Walküre*), February 2013
- Producing director of first DPAA Season Opening Spectacular "Boito to Bernstein", September 2013; Producing director for Season Opening Spectacular 2013 - 2019
- *Aida*, May 2014 – featuring the Dayton Ballet full company, Karen Russo Burke, choreographer

- *Dead Man Walking* (Heggie), February/March 2015 – Dayton Opera Premiere; Sister Helen Prejean in attendance; UD collaboration
- *Otello*, February 2016 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *The Book Collector* (Sung), World Premiere, and *Carmina Burana*, May 2016 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, February, 2017 – Dayton Opera Premiere, first company built full production set
- *The Consul* (Menotti), October 2017 – Dayton Opera Premiere
- *Turandot*, May 2018
- *Salome*, May 2019
- *Going for Baroque*, April 2020 – First Baroque Opera at Dayton Opera
- *Finding Wright*, April 2021 – World Premiere

In retirement, Bankston plans to remain in the Dayton area and will pursue active community volunteerism as well as travel with his wife of 46 years, Frances Golson Bankston.

A committee of DPAA board members and others from the community has been formed to identify Bankston's successor.

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About the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance

The Dayton Performing Arts Alliance was formed in July 2012 as the result of a groundbreaking and innovative merger between the Dayton Ballet, the Dayton Opera, and the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. Together, they are the largest performing arts organization in the community, offering a tremendous variety of performance and education programs and setting a new standard for artistic excellence. Dayton Performing Arts Alliance performances are made possible in part by Montgomery County and Culture Works, the single largest source of community funds for the arts and culture in the Miami Valley. The Dayton Performing Arts Alliance also receives partial funding from the Ohio Arts Council, a state agency created to foster and encourage the development of the arts and to preserve Ohio's cultural heritage. Funding from the Ohio Arts Council is an investment of state tax dollars that promotes economic growth, educational excellence, and cultural enrichment for all Ohio residents. In 2013, The Dayton Performing Arts Alliance was thrilled to be one of five performing arts organizations in the country selected to receive a three-year "Music Alive" grant from New Music USA and the League of American Orchestras. The Dayton Performing Arts Alliance is the proud recipient of a 2017-2018 Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Dayton Performing Arts Alliance

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