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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Tuesday, January 6, 2009

**Finnish bass-baritone Juha Uusitalo withdraws from
Lyric Opera of Chicago's presentation of
TRISTAN UND ISOLDE Jan. 27– Feb. 28
due to recovery from surgery;
Jason Stearns to portray Kurwenal first 4 performances
and Greer Grimsley to assume role for final 5 performances**

Finnish bass-baritone **Juha Uusitalo** has withdrawn from all performances in Lyric Opera of Chicago's presentation of *Tristan und Isolde* Jan. 27-Feb. 28 due to recent surgery, Lyric's general director William Mason announced today.

In December Uusitalo underwent surgery in Zurich to have a small cyst removed from his head, described as "a necessary procedure which went well and without complication" by his manager, Shirley Thomson of IMG Artists. "On the advice of his doctors, Mr. Uusitalo will now take six weeks recuperation time before resuming his professional commitments. For this reason he has regrettably been forced to cancel his scheduled debut at Lyric Opera of Chicago as Kurwenal in Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*."

American baritone **Jason Stearns** will replace Uusitalo as Kurwenal for the first four performances, Jan. 27, 31, Feb. 4, and 8. American bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley** will portray Kurwenal for the final five performances Feb. 12, 16, 20, 24, and 28.

"We extend best wishes for Mr. Uusitalo's recovery," said Mason, adding that "we are fortunate to have available on short notice Mr. Stearns and Mr. Grimsley, two singers of extremely high caliber."

Jason Stearns will make his role debut and company debut as Kurwenal (Tristan's devoted servant and friend) Jan. 27-Feb. 8. Last summer the baritone debuted at Finland's renowned Savonlinna Festival as Wagner's Dutchman, having previously appeared in Leipzig (Herald/*Lohengrin*) and Gelsenkirchen (Count/*Il trovatore*, European debut, new production). Earlier this season, on less than an hour's notice, he scored a great success as Barnaba/*La Gioconda* at the Metropolitan Opera. Last season he portrayed Don Carlo/*Ernani* with Opera Boston and Veit/Ullmann's *Der zebrochene Krug* at Los Angeles Opera (where he previously sang Biterolf/*Tannhäuser*, the Foreman/*Jenůfa*, and the title role/*Noye's Fludde*). Stearns has

also appeared with Boston's Chorus Pro Musica (*Pagliacci*) and the major companies of Miami (*Samson et Dalila*) and his hometown, Washington, DC (*Boris Godunov*, *Le Cid*, *Otello*, Wolf-Ferrari's *Sly*). Stearns first attracted attention winning the first annual Chester Ludgin American Verdi Baritone Competition. He has recorded John Corigliano's *Symphony No. 1: Of Rage and Remembrance* with the National Symphony Orchestra (Grammy winner, 1997). Upcoming engagements include *Pagliacci* student matinees at Lyric Opera; *Rigoletto*, Metropolitan Opera; and *La fanciulla del West*, Den Norske Opera (Oslo).

"I was in the Army for 21 years," says Stearns, "and Kurwenal seems rather militaristic to me, especially in Act One. You sense a march feeling in his music, and he's also very duty-bound. When Tristan dies, Kurwenal doesn't really want to live anymore. I think he forces death on himself – he wants to die with his leader." Stearns was initially encouraged to explore the Wagner repertoire by the late legendary Thomas Stewart: "He and his wife, Evelyn Lear, became close friends. During Tom's last year, we worked on Amfortas, Wotan, and Kurwenal."

Greer Grimsley will make his Lyric Opera debut as Kurwenal (Feb. 12-28), a character he has previously portrayed at the Metropolitan Opera and in Mexico City (role debut), Prague, Copenhagen, and Seattle: "Often he's played as just a servant, but he's really a mentor and teacher to Tristan and, in Act Three, a caregiver for him," says the bass-baritone." There's a huge bond between them. Vocally you have a fairly easy time in Act One, but in Act Three you start out with incredibly beautiful music, which reminds me of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*."

Among Grimsley's many other successes in Wagner are Wotan (Venice and, in his role debut, Seattle *Ring* cycle), the Dutchman (Berlin, Bologna), Amfortas (Met), and Telramund (Met, Copenhagen, Seattle). He is widely celebrated as Jochanaan/*Salome* (eight major houses, including the Met, Berlin, and Santa Fe): "Exploring *Heldenbariton* roles didn't solidify in my thinking until I did my first Jochanaan. It was a matter of building up to this repertoire, gaining stamina and maturity." Prior to arriving at Lyric, Grimsley portrayed Puccini's Scarpia in San Diego, having previously sung that role at the Metropolitan Opera, Pittsburgh, Seattle, and Minneapolis. Earlier this season he was heard at Opera Company of Philadelphia as Pizarro/*Fidelio*, which he had performed with Scottish Opera, the New York Philharmonic, and the St. Louis Symphony. Escamillo/*Carmen* has brought Grimsley to 11 prestigious venues, including the Met, Madrid, Bregenz, and Geneva. His repertoire extends from Mozart (*Don Giovanni*, Basel) to Verdi (*Macbeth*, Vancouver), Bartok (*Bluebeard's Castle*, Montreal), and Britten (*Peter Grimes*, Met debut, and *Billy Budd*, Pittsburgh). Also this season he returns to Vancouver Opera for *Salome* and to Seattle Opera for the *Ring* cycle.

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE / Richard Wagner (in German with projected English translations)

9 performances beginning at 6:00 p.m., except for matinee at 1:00 p.m.

Jan. 27, 31, Feb. 4, 8 (mat.), 12, 16, 20, 24, 28.

The crowning achievement of German romantic opera, *Tristan und Isolde* (first heard in 1859) presents one of the most stirring and overwhelming love stories the world has ever known. In its sheer ecstasy, this opera's breathtaking love duet remains incomparable in the entire operatic repertoire. In a duel, the knight Tristan (tenor **Clifton Forbis**) has killed the fiancé of the Irish princess Isolde (soprano **Deborah Voigt**). Tristan is assigned the task of escorting Isolde from Ireland to Cornwall, where she is to marry his aged uncle King Marke (bass **Stephen Milling**, debut). Accompanying the knight is his devoted friend and servant, Kurwenal (baritone **Jason Stearns**, debut, Jan. 24-Feb. 8/ bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley**, debut, Feb. 12-28). During the voyage, Isolde orders her maid Brangäne (mezzo-soprano **Petra Lang**, debut) to prepare a death

potion for herself and Tristan, but Brangäne substitutes a love potion. That action triggers a series of events (the lovers' passionate tryst, their discovery by Marke, the mortal wounding of Tristan, his agonized delirium) and a final scene of magnificent dramatic power and spiritual transfiguration.

The conductor is **Sir Andrew Davis**, with stage direction by **José María Condemi**, and sets and costumes designed by **David Hockney**. The lighting designer is **Duane Schuler**.

This production of *Tristan und Isolde* was originally created for Los Angeles Opera. The Lyric Opera presentation is generously made possible by **Mrs. A. Watson Armour, Julie and Roger Baskes**, an **Anonymous Donor**, and **Howard A. Stotler**.

Tickets are available for all performances of this legendary love story. For reservations and further information about the production, go to www.lyricopera.org or call 312-332-2244, ext. 5600.

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