



**FROM: Susan Mathieson Mayer,  
Magda Krance ([mkrance@lyricopera.org](mailto:mkrance@lyricopera.org))  
Jack Zimmerman ([jzimmerman@lyricopera.org](mailto:jzimmerman@lyricopera.org))  
LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO  
20 North Wacker Drive  
Chicago, IL 60606  
312-332-2244**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
Tues., Aug. 5, 2008**

**NICOLA RESCIGNO  
May 28, 1916, New York City – August 4, 2008, Viterbo, Italy  
Conductor and Cofounder,  
Lyric Opera of Chicago and The Dallas Opera**

Italian-American conductor Nicola Rescigno, 92, a cofounder of Lyric Opera of Chicago 54 years ago, has died of complications following heart failure in a hospital in Viterbo, Italy (near Rome), after suffering a fall. Rescigno subsequently cofounded The Dallas Opera, where he was artistic director for more than three decades.

“Nicola Rescigno, in collaboration with Carol Fox and Lawrence Kelly, made a huge contribution to musical life in this city with the founding of The Lyric Theatre of Chicago in 1954,” said Lyric Opera General Director William Mason. (The company’s name changed to Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1956.) “He was a remarkable conductor with an impeccable sense of style, who came to the Italian repertoire literally to the manner born. At Lyric, as well at The Dallas Opera and other major companies, he maintained exceptionally high musical standards. He was renowned for his ability to bring out the best in singers, who adored performing with him. All of us at Lyric were very pleased when he accepted our invitation to be a ‘Jubilarian,’ that is, a special honoree for our 50th-anniversary season in 2004-05.”

Rescigno was the son of an Italian father, a professional trumpeter who had resettled in America and who performed in the Metropolitan Opera orchestra. The younger Rescigno had particularly distinguished teachers: the composers Ildebrando Pizzetti and Vittorio Giannini, and the conductor Giorgio Polacco. He made his conducting debut with *La traviata* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1943 with this country's most famous touring opera company of that era, the San Carlo Opera. In 1950 and 1951 he conducted at San Francisco Opera, leading *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Madama Butterfly*. He also served for a time as music director of both Connecticut Opera and Havana Opera before opportunity knocked in Chicago, thanks to Carol Fox and Lawrence V. Kelly.

Rescigno joined Fox, a young singer, and Kelly, a businessman, to found The Lyric Theatre of Chicago. Serving as artistic director and principal conductor, Rescigno was on the podium for the famous "calling-card" performances of *Don Giovanni* in February 1954. During the inaugural season he led 12 performances of seven operas (*Norma*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *La traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Tosca*) and, in 1955, 22 performances of eight operas and three ballets (*I puritani*, *Il trovatore*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Rigoletto*, *Il ballo delle ingrate*, *Il tabarro*, a ballet version of *The Merry Widow*, *Lord Byron's Love Letter*, *Revanche*, *Un ballo in maschera*).

Following Lyric's 1955 season, Rescigno did not return to Lyric until 1974, when he conducted six performances of Donizetti's *La favorita*. He also conducted eight performances of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in 1976, bringing his total Lyric performances to 50. Among the singers with whom he collaborated during his Lyric years were Maria Callas (who made her American debut in the 1954 opening-night *Norma*), Eleanor Steber, Giulietta Simionato, Carlo Bergonzi, Jussi Björling, Giuseppe di Stefano, and Tito Gobbi.

After a dispute in which The Lyric Theatre board of directors sided with Fox, Rescigno and Kelly left Chicago, founding The Dallas Opera in 1957. Again Rescigno took on the duties of artistic director and principal conductor, opening his first season with Callas in a

special concert, followed by *L'italiana in Algeri* starring Giulietta Simionato. He presented the American debuts of such major artists as Joan Sutherland, Magda Olivero, Montserrat Caballé, Teresa Berganza, Plácido Domingo, and Jon Vickers. Among the American premieres led by Rescigno in Dallas were Handel's *Alcina* (with Sutherland) and Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* (with Marilyn Horne), the first staged performance of a Vivaldi opera in America. In 1988 Rescigno conducted the world premiere of a highly praised American opera, Dominick Argento's *The Aspern Papers* with Frederica von Stade and Elisabeth Söderström, which was telecast by PBS.

Following Kelly's death in 1974, Maestro Rescigno was given the title of general director in Dallas. He returned to being exclusively artistic director following the appointment of Plato Karayannis as general director three years later. Rescigno ended his association with The Dallas Opera in early 1990, but continued to accept guest-conducting engagements.

The Metropolitan Opera welcomed Rescigno to its podium for the first time in 1978, when he led the premiere of a new *Don Pasquale* featuring Beverly Sills, which was later telecast. He returned to the Met for *L'elisir d'amore* (including a telecast with Luciano Pavarotti), *L'italiana in Algeri*, and *La traviata*. Rescigno returned to San Francisco Opera in 1984, 34 years after his debut there, to conduct von Stade in *La sonnambula*. In 1986 he led the company's concert starring Caballé and Horne. He appeared widely in Italy and also led performances at Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Zürich Opernhaus, and the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires.

Mo. Rescigno recorded several operatic recitals with Maria Callas, and their 1959 Hamburg concert has been released on DVD. Many live performances by the pair have circulated widely for many years, including legendary performances of *Medea* (Dallas) and *Traviata* (Covent Garden). Among Mo. Rescigno's commercial recordings are excerpts from *Francesca da Rimini* with Magda Olivero and Mario Del Monaco, *Fedora* with the same two singers, *Tosca* with Mirella Freni, Luciano Pavarotti, and Sherrill Milnes, *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Edita Gruberova and Alfredo Kraus, and operatic recitals by sopranos June Anderson and Ruth Ann Swenson.

Mo. Rescigno's survivors include his companion of 40 years, Aldo Marcoaldi; his two sisters, Rita Pignatelli and Dolly Di Napoli (both of New York); and ten nieces and nephews, including Joseph Rescigno, a well-known American opera conductor who is artistic advisor and principal conductor of the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee.

###