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News Release

Mozart's Requiem offers a grand finale to Mercury's 16th Season

(Houston, TX) April 27, 2017: Artistic Director **Antoine Plante** and Mercury present **Mozart's Requiem**, on Saturday, May 13 at 8 PM at the Wortham Center's Cullen Theater for the 2016-2017 season finale. A must-see for any music lover, Mozart's final composition is a profoundly moving work, brimming with drama, hopefulness and redemption. Audiences will experience this unforgettable masterpiece on period instruments. Joining Mercury are vocalists Yulia Van Doren (soprano), Sarah Mesko (alto), Aaron Sheehan (tenor) and Stephen Hegedus (bass), along with select members of the Houston Symphony Chorus under the direction of Betsy Cook Weber. The evening also includes Henry Purcell's Funeral Music for Queen Mary. Major support for this concert comes from Haynes & Boone, LLP; The Albert & Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation; Houston Arts Alliance; Houston First; and the Houston Endowment, Inc. To purchase tickets or for more information visit www.mercuryhouston.org or call **713.533.0080**.

Young Russian-American **soprano Yulia Van Doren** has been hailed by Opera Magazine as "A star-to-be" following her Lincoln Center debut. Van Doren's debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra was acclaimed as a "revelation... a ravishing lyric voice and an ease with vocal ornamentation that turned her into an enchanted songbird" (Toronto Star) and the Cleveland Plain Dealer praised her as an artist of "melting poignancy." A dedicated interpreter of repertoire off the beaten path, career highlights include creating the lead female role in the world premiere of Shostakovich's *Orango* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, directed by Peter Sellars and released on Deutsche Grammophon; two Grammy®-nominated opera recordings with the Boston Early Music Festival; the modern revival of Monsigny's opera *Le roi et le fermier* at Opera de Versailles, Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center (recorded for Naxos); and a tour of Handel's *Orlando* with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra to the Mostly Mozart, Ravinia and Tanglewood festivals. Van Doren's 2016-2017 season features appearances with the Toronto Symphony, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Mark Morris Dance Group, Milwaukee and Charlotte Symphonies, and Arion Baroque Orchestra.

Praised by The Washington Post for her "consistently beautiful sound," American **mezzo-soprano Sarah Mesko** is rapidly gaining attention for her rich tone and musicality. As a member of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Mesko's appearances with Washington National Opera include Alisa in David Alden's production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and a striking role debut as Dorabella in the Emerging Artist performances of *Così fan tutte*. She made her debut in *Madama Butterfly* in 2011, conducted by

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Plácido Domingo in a Young Artist performance, first as Kate Pinkerton and then as Suzuki – a highly acclaimed appearance for which The Washington Post remembered her as “the best part of the performance.” In 2009, Mesko was a national finalist of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and she is among a rare number of singers who have won the Richard F. Gold Career Grant more than once: at Washington National Opera (2011), and at Central City Opera (2009). A native of Hot Springs, Arkansas, Mesko holds a Master of Music in vocal performance from Rice University and a Bachelor of Music in vocal and flute performance from the University of Arkansas.

Tenor Aaron Sheehan enjoys a reputation as a first-rate interpreter of the works of Bach, Handel and Mozart. Regularly performing in the United States, South America, and Europe, he has performed at Tanglewood, the Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Washington National Cathedral, the Early Music Festivals of Boston (BEMF), San Francisco, Vancouver, Washington DC, Carmel, Regensburg Tage Alter Musik, and with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, American Bach Soloists, Handel and Haydn Society, Boston Baroque, Tafelmusik, North Carolina Symphony, New York Collegium, Charlotte Symphony and Pacific Music Works. Sheehan's roles with the Boston Early Music Festival include L'Amour and Apollon in Lully's *Psyché*, Actéon in Charpentier's *Actéon*, Orfeo in *Orfeo*, Eurimaco in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, Acis in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Liberto/Soldato in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* as well as the title role in their Grammy Award® winning recording of Charpentier's opera *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*. He has also performed leading roles in operas by Cavalli, Handel, Weill, and Satie.

A prize-winner in the New York Oratorio Society competition, **bass-baritone Stephen Hegedus's** 2016-2017 season includes Mozart's *Requiem* (Mercury in Houston and Seattle Symphony, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (Florida Orchestra), Bach's Weihnachts-Oratorium (I Musici de Montréal), Masetto in *Don Giovanni* (Opera de Montréal), Weill's *Sieben Todsünden* (Toronto Symphony), Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* (Edmonton Opera), and Creon in *Medée* (Opera Atelier /Versailles). Praised in the Chicago Sun as “a superb narrator with a strong and attractive voice” (Brahms' *Requiem* at Grant Park), career highlights include *Messiah* (Houston, San Antonio, National Arts Centre, Minnesota, Toronto and Seattle), Bach's Mass in B Minor (Carnegie Hall), the title role in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (Teatro Municipal de Santiago), Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (Vancouver Opera), Bach's *Matthäus Passion* (Vancouver Bach Choir) and Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* (Montreal Symphony). Hegedus holds a Masters of Music (University of Toronto) and is a graduate of Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal.

Dr. Betsy Cook Weber is Director of the Houston Symphony Chorus and Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music. She is also highly active internationally as a conductor, clinician, adjudicator, and lecturer. In the summer of 2013, Weber became the 13th person and 1st woman to receive the Texas Choral Director Association's coveted Texas Choirmaster Award. Under Weber's leadership, The Moores School Concert Chorale has established a reputation as one of the world's finest collegiate choirs. She has prepared singers for Da Camera and Ars Lyrica, and is also routinely called upon to prepare singers for touring shows, including

Josh Groban, NBC's Clash of the Choirs, Telemundo's Latin Grammy's, and Star Wars in Concert. Educated at the University of North Texas, Westminster Choir College (Princeton, NJ) and the University of Houston, Weber served seven years as Assistant and, later, Associate Director of the Houston Symphony Chorus, helping prepare major works for renowned conductors including Robert Shaw, Christoph Eschenbach, Roger Wagner, Nicholas McKegan, and Christopher Seaman. Weber collaborated previously with Mercury on a complete performance of Handel's *Messiah* in December 2015 and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in May 2016.

ABOUT MERCURY

Founded in 2000, Mercury has a mission to *serve the community by celebrating the power of music, Baroque and beyond, teaching, sharing and performing with passion, intimacy and excellence.* The orchestra offers performances of a broad repertoire of music on period instruments and has garnered critical acclaim around the world through innovative and accessible performances, domestic and international tours, and groundbreaking music education programs.

What makes a Mercury performance unique?

Mercury musicians perform on period instruments similar in style and sound to those used by composers of the Baroque, Classical, and early Romantic periods. Differences between modern and period instruments can be seen in the string section where players use gut rather than steel strings and often utilize a Baroque bow that is shorter and more curved than a modern bow. Brass instruments have no valves and are more modest in shape than their modern equivalents, and the timpani drums utilize leather skins rather than synthetic heads. Perhaps the most recognizable differences can be seen in the woodwind section; these instruments have less keys and are actually crafted from wood as opposed to metal or plastic like many modern instruments. Mercury chooses to perform with period instruments to create a distinctive and exciting sound, true to the composer's intent. Mercury musicians also perform standing to better express the passion and vitality of the music. All of this provides a singular listening experience for our audience.

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