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**OPERA BOSTON PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF *MADAME WHITE SNAKE*,
AN OPERA BASED ON ANCIENT CHINESE LEGEND
FEB. 26—MARCH 2, 2010**

**WORK CO-COMMISSIONED BY OPERA BOSTON AND BEIJING MUSIC FESTIVAL ARTS
FOUNDATION**

Zhou Long, composer; Cerise Lim Jacobs, librettist

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(BOSTON – updated Jan. 28, 2010) Opera Boston presents the company's first commissioned work- the world premiere of *Madame White Snake*, an opera by composer Zhou Long and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs, based on a beloved ancient Chinese legend. The project was conceived by Brookline, Mass. residents Charles Jacobs and Cerise Lim Jacobs. Co-commissioned with the Beijing Music Festival Arts Foundation (BMF), it is the first world premiere by the BMF and an American company. *Madame White Snake* will have three performances - Feb. 26 at 7: 30 p.m., Feb. 28 at 3 p.m., and March 2 at 7:30 p.m. - at the Cutler Majestic Theatre in Boston (219 Tremont St.). *Madame White Snake* will be sung in English with English and Chinese titles. All performances feature a free talk one hour before curtain, and the Sunday matinee will be followed by an artist talkback. Tickets are \$29-\$132 through Telecharge.com, by phone at 800-233-3123, or in person at the Cutler Majestic Theatre box office.

Madame White Snake is one of just four world premieres by U.S. opera companies in the 2009-10 season. Opera Boston Music Director Gil Rose conducts. Robert Woodruff directs. Soprano Ying Huang sings the title role, and male soprano Michael Maniaci sings the role of Xiao Qing. Scenic and costume design are by David Zinn. Projections and video design are by Peter Nigrini. Lighting design is by Mark Barton. Also featured is the Premier Choir of the Boston Children's Chorus, under the direction of Anthony Trecek-King. Making their Opera Boston debut, the Premier Choir is an elite group of 12-18 year-olds with a high level of musical skill.

The orchestration for *Madame White Snake* features both Western and traditional Chinese instruments. The *erhu*, a two-stringed instrument played with a bow, is colloquially called the Chinese fiddle. Wang Guowei will play the erhu. A New York-based musician, he is among the most well-known players of the instrument in the United States. The orchestration also includes two traditional flutes, to be played by Hong Wang - the bamboo flute and the *xun*, a wind instrument made of clay that is similar to the ocarina.

Wang is a renowned multi-instrumentalist and co-founder of Melody of China, a professional San Francisco ensemble that performs Chinese classical, folk, and contemporary music.

Madame White Snake, a classical transformation myth, is the story of a powerful white snake demon who transforms into a beautiful woman to experience love. She meets her true love, Xu Xian (sung by tenor **Peter Tantsits**), at the Broken Bridge on the West Lake in Hangzhou, and marries him. So widely celebrated is their love that a curious Abbot (bass **Dong-Jian Gong**) investigates. He sees through her human form to the snake within. When the Abbot learns that Madame White Snake is pregnant, he is horrified by what he considers a violation of all of the traditional taboos of race and religion, the divine and the profane. He decides to intervene and confronts her husband. Madame White Snake is betrayed by her husband and in the moment of betrayal, she is tragically transformed back into a snake.

After the Boston premiere, *Madame White Snake* travels to China to close the Beijing Music Festival in October 2010. Planning has begun to bring *Madame White Snake* to other Asian cities following Beijing. The Asian premiere in Beijing is the first by an American opera company in China since San Francisco's Western Opera Company in 1987. *Madame White Snake* is set in Hangzhou, a sister city to Boston. Mayor Thomas M. Menino and The Mayor's Office of Arts, Tourism and Special Events are working closely with Opera Boston and the Friends of Madame White Snake, a 501c3 corporation, to celebrate this sister city relationship. The Friends of Madame White Snake are hosting a six-member delegation from Hangzhou, an important site for Boston companies with a presence in China, as their guests at the gala premiere performance.

"We are very proud to announce this major opera commission and multi-cultural production, *Madame White Snake* by Zhou Long and Cerise Lim Jacobs," said Charnow. "This project marks many historic firsts- Opera Boston's first major commission, our first collaboration with an international music organization and, perhaps most significantly, the first collaboration between the Beijing Music Festival and an American opera company. This project marks the first time that an Opera Boston production will be presented internationally."

Zhou Long, *Madame White Snake*'s renowned Chinese-American composer, was recently cited by the *New York Times* as one of the leading Chinese composers, charged with "injecting a new vitality into the American classical music scene." In 2003, the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded Zhou Long its Academy Award in Music, recognizing lifetime achievement, saying, "unlike many composers of today working between cultures, Zhou Long has found a plausible, rigorous, and legitimate way of consolidating compositional methods and techniques that allow him to express brilliantly both his experiences as a composer of Western music and his considerable knowledge of his native China. In [his music], Zhou Long displays a stunning (quasi-tactile) orchestral imagination that dramatically

demonstrates his skill of embedding elements of the two cultures in a consistent, seamless, and original musical language.”

Cerise Lim Jacobs, *Madame White Snake*'s Chinese-American librettist, is the creative force behind this pioneering adaptation of the 1,000 year old Chinese legend. She was born in colonial Singapore into a traditional Chinese family. She received her degree in creative writing from University of Pittsburgh and her law degree from Harvard Law School. Now retired from her practice as a trial attorney, she has returned to writing. *Madame White Snake* is her first opera libretto. She lives in Brookline, Mass.

Robert Woodruff is an internationally acclaimed director of theater and opera who has served as either director or associate artist with some of the country's most significant crucibles of innovation in the field of performance, including the Eureka Theater, the Mark Taper Forum, the New York Shakespeare Festival, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and the American Repertory Theater. He frequently collaborates with such artists as Rinde Eckert, Philip Glass, Charles Mee, and Sam Shepard and is among the foremost international directors of Shakespeare and Brecht. Woodruff's work has been seen in festivals in Edinburgh, Spoleto, Sydney, Jerusalem, and Brooklyn.

Since her sensational debut as Cio-Cio San in Frédéric Mitterrand's film *Madama Butterfly*, Chinese soprano **Ying Huang** has generated an extraordinary level of critical acclaim. Her performances as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Despina in *Così fan tutte* and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* have been seen in opera houses from the New York City Opera and Santa Fe Opera to opera companies in Asia, Europe and Latin America. Notable among Ying Huang's many achievements is her creation of the role of Du Liniang in Tan Dun's *Peony Pavilion*, her operatic debut as Nannetta in a new production of Verdi's *Falstaff* at Cologne Opera, and Mozart's Coronation Mass with the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York and Tokyo. Huang made her Metropolitan Opera debut during the 2006-2007 season in the role of Pamina in the new English language version of *The Magic Flute*, which was the Metropolitan Opera's first HD simulcast into movie theaters throughout the world.

Acclaimed as “one of the greatest singers of his generation” (*Globe and Mail*), **Michael Maniaci** has been praised for his rare, thrilling voice and sensational stage presence. Maniaci “possesses a remarkable voice that marries trumpeting high notes with a warm and supple middle voice and secure bottom” (*Washington Post*). He is lauded for “his natural male soprano [that] is probably the closest thing on earth to the sound of the castrati of long ago, and he uses it with a finesse that's rare among singers so young” (*Globe and Mail*). Following his overwhelming success as Tirinto in Glimmerglass Opera's production of Handel's *Imeneo*, *The New York Times* wrote, “The amazing male soprano Michael Maniaci [is] headed for a major career.”

Scenic and Costume Designer **David Zinn** makes his Opera Boston debut with this production. Zinn is one of America's most sought-after theatrical designers and has extensive experience collaborating with Robert Woodruff at the American Repertory Theater as set and costume designer for productions of *Orpheus X*, *Island of Slaves*, and *Highway Ulysses*. He designs for opera, Broadway (*Xanadu*, *A Tale of Two Cities*), Off-Broadway, and nationally important regional theater companies. Recent opera credits include Handel's *Tamerlano* at Los Angeles Opera, Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* at San Francisco Opera, and *Don Giovanni* at Santa Fe Opera. Zinn is the recipient of the 2008 Obie Award for sustained achievement.

Madame White Snake is Opera Boston's first production to feature extensive video projections. Projections and video designer **Peter Nigrini** makes his company debut with this production. His video designs include Jean Genet's *Elle* produced as the inaugural production of The Art Party starring Alan Cumming, the world premiere of Charles Wuorinen's adaptation of the Salman Rushdie novella *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *Blind Date* with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, and *Angels in America*, an opera by Peter Eötvös, both for the Fort Worth Opera. This past season on Broadway he designed *Fela!*, a new musical conceived and directed by Bill T. Jones as well as *9 to 5: The Musical*. He also collaborated with Robert Woodruff on *Notes from Underground* at the Yale Repertory Theatre.

Lighting Designer **Mark Barton** makes his Opera Boston debut. Barton's work in theatre and opera has been seen at Pittsburgh Opera, New York Theatre Workshop, The Hangar Theatre and Lincoln Center, where he co-designed Peter Sellars' *The Tristan Project* in 2007. Recently, he worked with director Hal Brooks and playwright Will Eno on the world premieres of *Thom Pain: Based on Nothing* and *The Flu Season* (Rude Mechanicals). Other collaborations with Brooks include *Intimate Apparel* (Southern Rep, New Orleans) and *Valparaiso* (Rude Mechanicals).

About Opera Boston

Opera Boston is Boston's most innovative opera company. Founded in 1980, the company has presented more than 70 operas, including 34 regional and two world premieres. In addition to its critically acclaimed, award-winning mainstage productions, Opera Boston offers a range of programs, including a chamber opera festival, a popular cabaret series and an educational program in Boston-area schools. For more information about Opera Boston, visit www.operaboston.org.

About Beijing Music Festival

The Beijing Music Festival's (BMF) mission is to promote the musical life in Beijing by organizing annual festivals and providing musical performances by artists of the highest caliber. The month-long Festival has been held every year since the fall of 1998, presenting 30 world-class performances each season. World renowned artists such as Jose Carreras, Valery Gergiev, Fou Ts'ong, Simon Rattle, Christoph Eschenbach, Lang Lang, Jian Wang and Yo-Yo Ma have all performed at the Festival. The Festival

features a wide variety of music, including opera, symphonic and chamber music, musicals, and jazz performances. What makes the Beijing Music Festival unique among other international music festivals is its spirit of encouraging both western and Chinese contemporary music. The Festival has premiered the works of western contemporary composers Krzysztof Penderecki, Philip Glass, John Corigliano and others in China, as well as the works of Chinese contemporary composers such as Chen Qigang, Tan Dun and Guo Wenjing. Endorsed by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and the Beijing Municipal Government, BMF has become one of the grandest and most recognized annual cultural events in Asia and has attracted artists and audiences from all over the world. For more information about Beijing Music Festival, visit www.bimfa.org.

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