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CONTACT: Joyce Linehan (617) 282-2510

**OPERA BOSTON, BEIJING MUSIC FESTIVAL CO-COMMISSION *MADAME WHITE SNAKE*,  
A NEW OPERA BASED ON ANCIENT CHINESE LEGEND**

**NEW WORK WILL HAVE WORLD PREMIERE IN BOSTON DURING 2009/2010 SEASON  
BEFORE TRAVELING TO BEIJING IN OCTOBER 2010**

**Zhou Long, composer; Cerise Lim Jacobs, creator and librettist**

(BOSTON – May 14, 2008) At a press conference today Opera Boston General Director Carole Charnow announced the company's first-ever commissioned work in its 2009/2010 season with the world premiere of *Madame White Snake*, a new opera based on a beloved ancient Chinese legend, by composer Zhou Long and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs. The work is co-commissioned with the Beijing Music Festival in an historic partnership between a Chinese performing arts organization and an American opera company. The world premiere is presented by State Street Corporation.

*Madame White Snake* will have four performances (February 24 through March 2, 2010) at the Cutler Majestic Theatre in Boston and two performances in Beijing in October, 2010. Opera Boston Music Director Gil Rose will conduct, Robert Woodruff will direct, soprano Ying Huang will sing the title role, and male soprano Michael Maniaci will sing the role of Little Green.

"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-ever collaboration between the Beijing Music Festival and an American opera company. The production will also mark the first time Opera Boston has taken a production to another country."

**Cerise Lim Jacobs**, *Madame White Snake's* Chinese-American librettist, is the inspired 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 the University of Pittsburgh and her law degree from Harvard Law School. Now retired from her practice as a trial attorney, Cerise has returned to writing. *Madame White Snake* is her first opera libretto. She now lives in Brookline, Massachusetts.

**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, stating, "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."

**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 Theatre. 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 ranging 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. Ms. 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*. She starred in the Metropolitan Opera's first simulcast into movie theaters throughout the world.

Acclaimed as "one of the greatest singers of his generation" (Toronto *Globe and Mail*), **Michael Maniaci** has been praised for his rare, thrilling voice and sensational stage presence. Mr. 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*, Anthony Tommasini stated in *The New York Times*, "The amazing male soprano Michael Maniaci [is] headed for a major career."

**Gil Rose** is recognized as one of a new generation of American conductors shaping the future of classical music. His orchestral and operatic performances and recordings have been recognized by critics and fans alike. In 1996, Gil Rose founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), the leading professional orchestra in the country dedicated exclusively to performing and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Under his leadership, BMOP's unique programming and high performance standards have attracted critical acclaim and earned the orchestra eight ASCAP awards for adventurous programming as well as John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music. Since 2003, Mr. Rose has also served as Music Director of Opera Boston.

*Madame White Snake* is set in Hangzhou, a sister city to Boston. The Mayor's Office of Arts, Tourism and Special Events is working closely with Opera Boston to highlight this sister city connection as planning moves forward for the world premiere.

*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, at the Broken Bridge on the West Lake in Hangzhou, and marries him. So widely celebrated is their love that a curious Abbot investigates. He sees through her human form to the snake. 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 he confronts her husband. Not surprisingly, disaster strikes. Madame White Snake is betrayed by her husband and in the moment of betrayal, she is tragically transformed back into a snake.

In its long journey through the centuries, this simple myth has become an icon in the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. The deadly white snake demon gives up her immortal existence to assume human form in the pursuit of the most human of all emotions – love. She holds love dearly for one moment; and then love is lost forever.

“We are pleased to be able to present this marquee opera to Boston audiences,” said George Russell, executive vice president and head of Community Affairs at State Street Corporation. “As a global company with offices throughout the Asia-Pacific region including Hangzhou, China; State Street is proud to partner with Opera Boston on this important new work that showcases Chinese culture and artistic heritage.”

Planning has begun to bring *Madame White Snake* to several Asian cities following the Chinese premiere in Beijing.

#### **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 an occasional chamber opera festival, a popular informal cabaret series and an extensive educational program in Boston-area schools.

#### **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.

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