LOTFI MANSOURI
1929–2013
San Francisco Opera's Former General Director and
Internationally Renowned Opera Stage Director

SAN FRANCISCO, (August 30, 2013)—Lotfi Mansouri, San Francisco Opera's distinguished fourth general director and one of the world's leading opera stage directors, has passed away earlier this evening after a brief illness with pancreatic cancer at his San Francisco home surrounded by family. Mansouri, an exuberant and passionate advocate of opera as "the greatest art form ever created," was age 84. He is survived by his wife Marjorie (Midge), their daughter Dr. Shireen Mansouri and son-in-law Shawn Delaney.

San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley stated, "I had the pleasure and honor to know Lotfi for forty-eight years, as teacher, director, colleague and friend. His larger-than-life personality, broad sense of humor and boundless enthusiasm for his work endeared him to everyone. His knowledge of the repertoire and stagecraft were daunting, and it benefitted every organization he was associated with. While he adored Midge and Shireen in his immediate family, Lotfi was a nurturing father to his many 'operatic children' around the world. All of us will miss him dearly."

Born in 1929 in Tehran, Iran, Lotfollah Mansouri left his native country to study medicine at UCLA, but music won out. "I'm a believer in kismet," Mansouri often said. "We are in the hands of destiny. Secondary things we can control, yes, but the most important events are not in our hands." According to Canadian writer Aviva Layton: "Certainly events have borne out this belief of Lotfi's. Kismet has ruled his life since the moment of birth when he was pronounced dead and thrown into a bucket of ice. An alert nurse noticed that the baby was moving and saved his life. Because of this incident, his grandmother named him 'Lotfollah'—*kindness of God*."

From 1960 to 1966, Mansouri served as resident stage director of the Zurich Opera under his early mentor Dr. Herbert Graf. For the next decade he served as head stage director at the Geneva Opera, while also directing productions at leading opera houses in Europe and the United States, including San Francisco Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Philadelphia, San Diego Opera, the Dallas Opera, both the Metropolitan and New York City Opera companies, Milan's La Scala, Kirov Opera, Sydney's Australian Opera, and London's Royal Opera, Covent Garden. During his career, Mansouri worked with virtually all of the greatest stars of his generation and forged lasting relationships with many of them, in particular Joan Sutherland, Marilyn Horne and conductor Richard Bonynge. By contrast, Mansouri was equally at home with such good Hollywood friends as Carol Burnett, Rosemary Clooney and designer Bob Mackie.

In 1976, Mansouri became general director of the Canadian Opera Company, where he directed thirty new productions, twelve of them Canadian premieres, including Berg's *Lulu* and Britten's *Death in Venice*. In 1983, he revolutionized opera by projecting supertitles— translated lyrics projected above a stage—at a performance of *Elektra*. While this experiment took hold slowly, it has now been embraced worldwide by opera companies looking to provide their audiences with instant accessibility.

Mansouri moved on to the San Francisco Opera in 1988 where he became the Company's fourth general director, a position he held until 2001. Under Mansouri's leadership, San Francisco Opera established the Pacific Visions program to commission new works and to perform little-known ones. The project led to some of the most compelling operas of our time, including Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*, André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer,* Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk,* and Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*. His many honors include the title of *Chevalier* of France's *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* and a 2009 lifetime achievement award from the National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors.

Mansouri made his San Francisco Opera debut in the 1963 season directing productions of *Dialogues des Carmélites, Die Walküre*, *La Sonnambula, La Traviata, Mefistofele,* and *Samson et Dalila.* He directed more than seventy-five productions with the Company, and during his tenure as general director numerous artists made their U.S. operatic debuts and six productions were recorded for telecast and videocassette (*Mefistofele*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Capriccio*, *Turandot*, *The Dangerous Liaisons,* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Mansouri's 1979 production of *La Gioconda* was the Company's first to receive a live international telecast. Under his direction, San Francisco Opera made its first commercial recordings: *Hérodiade*, *Orphée et Eurydice*, *Harvey Milk*, *A Streetcar Named Desire,* and *Dead Man Walking*. He established the historic exchange with the Kirov Opera that resulted in productions of *War and Peace,* which featured the American opera debut of conductor Valery Gergiev; *Boris Godunov*; *The Fiery Angel*; *Ruslan and Lyudmila,* featuring the U.S. opera debut of soprano Anna Netrebko; *Eugene Onegin;* and *Betrothal in a Monastery.*

Among his greatest accomplishments at San Francisco Opera, Mansouri led the Company through the after effects of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake with performances at the Masonic Auditorium before the War Memorial Opera House reopened some ten days later. Additionally, Mansouri with then-San Francisco Opera Board President William Godward, managed the difficult transition through the closure and seismic renovation of the Opera House in 1996-97, presenting innovative productions at the nearby venues of Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, Golden Gate Theatre, and Orpheum Theatre which included a highly successful "Broadway Style" presentation of *La Bohéme*. In 1999, he was honored with a gala concert

for more than a decade of leadership and thirty-seven years of artistic collaboration, and in 2001 he was awarded the prestigious San Francisco Opera Medal—the Company's highest honor awarded to an artistic professional.

One of his greatest pleasures was to serve as Master of Ceremonies for San Francisco Opera's annual Opera in the Park concert, the highly popular al fresco opera concerts at Golden Gate Park. In particular, a beaming Mansouri enjoyed his role of bringing a tray of champagne to the on-stage singing stars for the rousing concert finale, the popular Verdi drinking song from *La Traviata*, "Libiamo ne' lieti calici."

Mansouri's association with the film industry includes his own starring role in Frank Borzage's 1956 film *The Day I Met Caruso*; followed later as director of the opera sequences for the 1981 MGM movie *Yes Giorgio* starring Luciano Pavarotti, and the 1987 movie *Moonstruck* starring Cher and Nicholas Cage.

Mansouri is the author of *Lotfi Mansouri: An Operatic Journey*; *Lotfi Mansouri: An Operatic Life*; and *True Tales from the Mad, Mad, Mad World of Opera.*

San Francisco Opera was formally established in 1923 by the Company's first general director Gaetano Merola. Kurt Herbert Adler was appointed artistic director beginning 1953-57 and then general director 1957-81. Terence A. McEwen was general director from 1981-88, succeeded by Lotfi Mansouri in 1988-2001. Pamela Rosenberg assumed the position in 2001-05, followed by David Gockley in 2006, San Francisco Opera's current general director.

In October 2009, a bas-relief of Lotfi Mansouri's likeness was ceremoniously installed in the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House main foyer. The accompanying plaque features a quote that accurately summarizes his genuine and joyful enthusiasm for the art form: "Opera is the greatest artistic banquet created by the human mind with something for every taste."

In lieu of flowers, the Mansouri family requests that donations be made to San Francisco's Merola Opera Program at www.merola.org and/or to Canadian Opera Company's COC Ensemble Studio at www.coc.ca. Plans for a memorial celebration will be announced at a later date.

For more information about Lotfi Mansouri, please visit sfopera.com.

# # #

For further press information or to obtain photographs, please visit sfopera.com/press or contact:

San Francisco Opera Communications –
Jon Finck (415) 565-6472 / *jfinck@sfopera.com*
Julia Inouye (415) 565-6430 / *jinouye@sfopera.com*
Robin Freeman (415) 565-6451 / *rfreeman@sfopera.com*
Gelane Pearson (415) 565-6470 / *gpearson@sfopera.com*

National Press Representation –
Shuman Associates (212) 315-1300 / *shumanpr@shumanassociates.net*