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# Festival Opera Begins 20<sup>th</sup> Season With A New Executive Director



After an extensive search, Festival Opera has appointed a new executive director, Sara Nealy, who brings a deep appreciation of opera and a wealth of business development and marketing experience to the position. Only the second person in two decades to occupy the job, Nealy joins Artistic Director Michael Morgan at the acclaimed company as it begins its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

A graduate of Boston University with a degree in Fine Arts, Nealy most recently served as the Executive Director of Livermore Valley Opera, which is also celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> season. During her tenure, LVO increased its individual donations by a remarkable 25%; presented a special performance of the San Francisco Opera Center Adler Fellows at the Bankhead Theater; expanded its audience through

creative promotions such as “Ice Cream & Opera,” a children’s backstage matinee adventure in which they interact with the principals and musicians; began video marketing; secured first-time sponsors Wells Fargo and Sybase and a first-time grant from the Fleishhacker Foundation; and expanded LVO’s outreach efforts from two events to an annual program of community performances; among other successes. In collaboration with Artistic Director Alexander Katsman, the multi-talented Pleasanton resident also wrote and directed LVO’s [\*Night Out\*](#), to be presented at the Firehouse Arts Center in Pleasanton next Saturday, April 16, 2011.

Prior to moving into arts administration, Nealy served in such positions as the Director of Sales and Marketing for Kona Village Resort in Hawaii, Marketing Incentives Manager at AT&T Network Systems in New Jersey, and Executive Meetings and Incentive Planner for Prudential Securities on Wall Street. Her clients as a marketing consultant and major event producer have

included Fortune-500 companies and pacemaker pioneer Earl Bakken's foundation (a client for ten years), the Annenberg Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and Heart-Brain Institute of the Cleveland Clinic, among others.

“Sara is bringing great energy along with her ideas about connecting with our community and broadening our audience. You can feel her enthusiasm about the future of Festival Opera, and I think it will make people want to come along for the ride. This will help us build on the company's high level of artistic achievement,” says Artistic Director Michael Morgan.

Adds Eugene Brancoveanu, a Festival Opera audience favorite who is currently on tour with Michael-Tilson Thomas' *The Thomashevslys*: "Sara Nealy is a very rare gem. She understands how to truly think and create outside of the box. She has not a single cynical cell in her body and makes every experience a memorable one.”

Says Nealy: “I am grateful to Festival Opera for this extraordinary opportunity. In 1987, I had the great fortune to experience the La Scala premiere of Zeffirelli's *Turandot*. That was it! I was hooked for life. And now, to be able to help others discover the sheer power and beauty of opera—with its wit, dimensionality and heart—through a company of this caliber and talent, is quite simply a dream come true.”

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**Photo Credit: Betsy Kershner**

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