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CONTACT: Lana Sadowski, Director of Marketing Hampton Roads

P.O. BOX 2580 • NORFOLK, VA 23501

PHONE: 757.627.9545 X 3316

EMAIL: LANA.SADOWSKI@VAOPERA.ORG

Chesapeake Native Court Watson Designs Epic Production of *Samson and Delilah*

Norfolk, Richmond, Fairfax, Virginia (August 2, 2017) New York City based Set and Costume Designer, Court Watson, takes on the intoxicating stage and costume design of Virginia Opera's opening production of Camille Saint-Saëns', *Samson and Delilah*. Watson is a native of Chesapeake, Virginia, and Graduate of the Governor's School for the Arts and Virginia Commonwealth University. Watson founded his company Sehnsucht, Incorporated, in 2012. With Watson as lead designer, Sehnsucht designs scenery and costumes for themed and family entertainment as well as opera, musicals, ballet, and plays.

Court Watson discovered theater when he was nine, and auditioned for the Hurrah Players production of *Pinocchio*. "As a kid, I performed with them onstage at Chrysler Hall, the Wells Theatre, the now-gone Pavilion, Willet Hall, and countless Christmas, Neptune Festival, and Azalea Festival parades." Hugh Copeland, Founder and Artistic Director of Hurrah Players said, "Court has had a special passion about theatre since he was a small boy. He worked with us until he went to college and he always had a vision or idea to share. Sometimes, he knew things happening in the world of theater before I did." Copeland said. "Watson is not only a talented artist but a loyal and fantastic individual." Copeland also commented that he knew Court would do something grand in theater because of his immense passion, dedication, commitment and preparedness for "all things theater."

Watson made his professional debut as a performer with Virginia Musical Theatre, back when they were still called Commonwealth Musical Stage in a production of *Oliver!* He also performed in their production of *The Music Man* and according to Watson "entertained himself backstage waiting for his entrances by building miniature dioramas of the set design."

Watson attended Governor's School for the Arts as the very first four-year design/tech student in the theater department, and was the class valedictorian in 1999. Two years ago, he returned to Governor's School to undertake a special guest workshop in costume design. "It was a huge success. Our students were very impressed with his knowledge, his sphere of experiences, and his teaching. It was a great joy to have alumni of his caliber return home to teach!" stated Deborah Thorpe, Assistant Director/Foundation Director at Governor's School for the Arts. Having the Hurrah Players, Governor's School, Virginia Stage Company and Virginia Opera in the Hampton Roads area, Court assumed every city had as much of a vital arts scene as Hampton Roads. "I was surprised when I got to college at Virginia Commonwealth University and realized that I had seen much more theater than my classmates from around the state".

Watson spent four summers at *The Lost Colony* in Manteo, North Carolina, working alongside six-time Tony Award-winning costume designer William Ivey Long, "I am so proud of all that Court Watson has accomplished during his career as a set and costume designer, and I am honored to have been able to help foster his talent at a young age during the four summers he worked in the costume shop at *The Lost Colony*."

Watson saw his first Virginia Opera production as a junior at Western Branch High School while in third-year French classes. It was the Opera's production of *L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love)*. "Designing for

Virginia Opera is a homecoming of sorts, and it's a THRILL to collaborate with one of the best directors working in the world of opera right now, Paul Curran. Curran is a creative genius. It's quite a coup for Virginia Opera to have him. And it's exciting to tackle *Samson & Delilah*, which will be performed in its company debut to open the 2017-2018 season. Our take on the show feels epic, sexy, dangerous, romantic, intoxicating and energetic. I think it will be well-received", said Watson.

Watson has been an Assistant Designer on numerous Broadway shows, including *Guys & Dolls*, *Grease!*, *Lestat*, *Little Women*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *Cry*Baby*, *South Pacific*, *Mauritius*, and *High Fidelity* working with Paul Tazewell, Derek McLane, Catherine Zuber and Anna Louizos. He has been a Guest Designer on ABC's *All My Children* and *One Life to Live*.

Russell Allen, President and CEO of Virginia Opera, sums up Watson's upcoming professional return to Hampton Roads by stating, "It has always been a part of Virginia Opera's DNA to nurture and develop talent from the Commonwealth. It is exciting to then be able to bring back to Virginia Opera talented artists, such as Court, that have gone on from Virginia to excel internationally and now make such an impact in the performing arts."

Watson holds an MFA from New York University and a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. He is a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829.

Samson and Delilah will be performed in French with English supertitles. Performances feature a free 30-minute pre-opera discussion by Virginia Opera's Dr. Glenn "Dr. Opera" Winters. Tickets start at just \$20 and are available at vaopera.org or by calling 866.673.7282. *Samson and Delilah* opens Friday, September 29, 2017 at the Harrison Opera House in Norfolk, Va., followed by additional performances in Fairfax and Richmond as follows:

Harrison Opera House
Norfolk, VA
Sept. 29, Oct. 1 & 3, 2017
866.673.7282
VAOPERA.ORG

GMU's Center for the Arts
Fairfax, VA
Oct. 7 & 8, 2017
888.945.2468
VAOPERA.ORG or tickets.com

Dominion Arts Center
Richmond, VA
Oct. 13 & 15, 2017
800.514.3849
ETIX.COM

Student Tickets

Virginia Opera will offer a special Student Night @the Opera performance of *Samson and Delilah* in Norfolk, Va. on Wednesday, September 27, 2017 at 7 pm. Student Night @ the Opera allows students and chaperones to experience the power of live opera, with unparalleled access at reduced ticket prices, in order to broaden appreciation for cultural arts in our community. Visit vaopera.org for more details about Student Night @the Opera and how to purchase tickets.

About Virginia Opera

Virginia Opera Association, Inc., performs at the Edythe C. and Stanley L. Harrison Opera House in Norfolk, Virginia, the Dominion Arts Center in Richmond, Virginia and The Center for the Arts at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Now in its 43rd season, the company is known and respected nationwide for the identification and presentation of the finest young artists, for the musical and dramatic integrity of its productions, and for the ingenuity and variety of its education and outreach programs. Mainstage performances across the Commonwealth reach nearly 50,000 attendees annually. In March of 1994, by unanimous vote of the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Opera was named *The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia* in recognition of the organization's contribution to the state as well as to the world of opera. For more information, visit vaopera.org or call 866.673.7282.