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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## MINNESOTA OPERA NAMES LANI WILLIS VICE PRESIDENT, ADVANCEMENT

**Having previously worked at Minnesota Opera for 16 years, Willis returns to the organization after engagements at the Minnesota Zoo and Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners.**

**MINNEAPOLIS (January 7, 2021)** – Minnesota Opera is pleased to announce the appointment of Lani Willis in the role of Vice President, Advancement effective February 15, 2021.

As Vice President, Advancement, Willis will oversee the development, marketing, communications and patron services departments in achieving the revenue goals of the organization. In addition, the Vice President, Advancement will work to create long-term strategies for expanding Minnesota Opera's audience base, creating greater impact in the community and deepening patron relationships in alignment with the organization's anti-racist and anti-oppressive priorities while continuing to broaden the brand and reputation of the organization across the state and throughout the opera industry.

Willis is currently the Advancement Director at Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners and has been with the organization since 2017. At Interfaith, Willis leads the fundraising and marketing and communications teams and their efforts to raise awareness and funds that create mission impact, in addition to serving on the organization's Diversity and Inclusion Group. Before joining Interfaith, Willis served as the Marketing and Communications Director at Minnesota Zoo, where she repositioned the Zoo's brand as a conservation-based organization and achieved an 8% growth in attendance over two years. During her 16-year tenure at Minnesota Opera, Willis served on the senior leadership team as the Senior Director of Marketing and Communications, achieving a 14-season high in ticket sales for a total of 38% growth over seven years in addition to creating partnerships with academic, media and cultural institutions and founding Tempo, the Opera's young professional's group, to build the next generation of operagoers.

In addition, Willis has been active with several community organizations, having served in leadership roles with the Plymouth Civic League, Sunset Hill PTSA, OPERA America, Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies and the Minneapolis Arts Commission. She's been invited to speak by OPERA America, the Wallace Foundation and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. A native of Plymouth, Minnesota, Willis received her bachelor's degree in music from Luther College and her master's degree in flute performance from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

"In this time of pandemic, cultural unrest and political division, I am inspired by Minnesota Opera's commitment to becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization centered around creating inclusive spaces of healing, inspiration and joy for all," Willis said. "I'm thrilled to be returning to the organization, joining a team that is doing this creative and important work through opera."



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“We are incredibly excited to welcome back Lani Willis to Minnesota Opera in this crucial role within the company,” said Minnesota Opera President and General Director Ryan Taylor. “With more than two decades of nonprofit leadership experience driving successful local and national marketing, communications and development strategies, Lani will lead a fantastic team tasked with deepening relationships with those in our community and shaping the future of the organization.”

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Minnesota Opera changes lives by bringing together artists, audiences and community, advancing the art of opera for today and for future generations.