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For Immediate Release

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New York's notorious discothèque culture inspires University Opera's fall production of Massenet's "Thaïs"

Madison, WI – Inspired by New York's 1970s licentious discothèque culture, University Opera's premiere of Jules Massenet's "Thaïs" examines issues of the sacred and profane. Sung in French with projected English surtitles, the opera will be given three performances—Friday, October 30 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, November 1 at 3:00 p.m., and Tuesday, November 3 at 7:30 p.m. All performances will take place at the Carol Rennebohm Auditorium in Music Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus.

The production is generously supported by the Ann Crow Fund for Voice and Opera and is the first of the 2009-10 season that concludes in April 2010 with Donizetti's "Maria Stuarda." This is the first staging of "Thaïs" during director William Farlow's extensive career. Referring to the production's dualistic nature, Farlow said, "'Thaïs' is a tale of two extremes – religious fanaticism and hedonism. Religion is offered up as an antidote for the ills of society, but in reality proves to be a far greater poison."

Written for the famed American soprano Sybil Sanderson, Jules Massenet's "Thaïs" is a cautionary tale of the zealous monk Athanaël's conversion of the infamous courtesan Thaïs. Amid an atmosphere of sexual depravity, Athanaël battles for the soul of Thaïs only to jeopardize his own.

William Farlow directs a cast of undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Music, with the **UW Symphony Orchestra** under the direction of **James Smith**. The title role is shared by **Emily Birsan** (October 30 and November 3) and **Kristin D. Schwecke** (November 1). Other roles are performed by **Justin Niehoff Smith** (Athanaël), **Anders Tobiason** (Palémon), **Ryan P. McEldowney** (Nicias), **Anna Danielle Slate** (Crobyle), **Emily Campbell** (Myrtale) and **Leigh Akin** (Albine).

Production staff includes costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, set designer **Angelina Paoli**, vocal coach **Bill Lutes** and chorus master **Susan Goeres**. The English surtitles are by **Christine Seitz**.

Tickets are \$20.00 for the general public, \$18.00 for senior citizens and \$10.00 for UW-Madison students, available in advance through the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office at (608) 265-ARTS, Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. and Saturdays, 12:00–5:00 p.m. Tickets are also available at the Vilas Hall Box Office from Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., and after 5:30 p.m. on University Theatre performance evenings. Because shows often sell out, advance purchase is recommended. If unsold tickets remain, they may be purchased at the door beginning one hour before the performance. The Carol Rennebohm Auditorium is located in Music Hall, at the foot of Bascom Hill on Park Street.

University Opera is a cultural service of the School of Music at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Its mission is to promote professional training and practical performing experience for student singers, conductors and pianists and, when possible, provide opportunities for student designers, actors and dancers. University Opera gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ann Crow Fund for Voice and Opera for making this production possible. For more information, please contact Justin Niehoff Smith at jnsmith5@wisc.edu or (415) 359-6325. Or visit the School of Music's web site at music.wisc.edu.

UNIVERSITY OPERA STAFF

William Farlow, *Director* **Mimmi Fulmer**, *Associate Director*

James Smith, *Music Director/Conductor* **Bill Lutes**, *Vocal Coach and Musical Preparation*

Susan Goeres, *Chorus Master*

Justin Niehoff Smith, *Marketing and Operations Manager*

Richard Mumford, *Director of Public Relations and Concert Manager, School of Music*