

Press Release

## Introducing **CENTRE STAGE: Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio Competition Gala**

*COC Spotlights Canada's Rising Stars with Onstage Competition and Celebration*



**TORONTO, ON September 20, 2013** - On November 26, 2013 the Canadian Opera Company launches its fundraising gala ***Centre Stage*** with a magical evening dedicated to the discovery and celebration of the next generation of opera stars. The festivities culminate in a black tie dinner on the stage of R. Fraser Elliott Hall, the first occasion for COC patrons to do so since the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts opened in 2006.

An event unlike any other in Canada, ***Centre Stage*** features the competitive vocal showcase of the COC's Ensemble Studio Competition with a twist that intensifies the already awe-inspiring display of operatic talent being fostered in this country. For the first time, finalists in the Ensemble Studio Competition now perform from the main stage of the Four Seasons Centre, accompanied by the internationally acclaimed COC Orchestra conducted by COC Music Director Johannes Debus.

"I had been thinking of creating a gala fundraiser for the COC for some time already," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "Seeing how the Ensemble Studio Competition has engaged the community in past years, the timing was right to launch *Centre Stage* and make it the occasion to expand our audience with this much grander showcase of Canada's rising opera talent."

"*Centre Stage* guests have the exclusive opportunity to experience live the vocal talent and artistry required to command a stage and captivate an audience. Whether one is new to opera or a longtime fan, you can't help but want to support the operatic art form after having that kind of transformative moment unfold right in front of you," adds **Neef**. "The young artists we will be seeing on November 26 may someday perform with all the great opera houses, including ours, and *Centre Stage* guests will be able to say, 'I was there when....' Guests will also get to meet these young artists at the gala dinner, and have the chance to toast and support them."

All patrons who attend ***Centre Stage*** will enjoy a cocktail celebration in the Four Seasons Centre's sparkling Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room.

***Centre Stage*** Gala guests will go on to enjoy an elegant formal dinner from the privileged vantage point of the Four Seasons Centre stage, where they'll mingle with competition finalists and winners, notable COC artists and ***Centre Stage*** co-chairs **Trinity Jackman** and **Jonathan Bloomberg**. The uniqueness of the gala evening is further highlighted by the rare opportunity to enjoy the onsite catering stylings of critically acclaimed **Nota Bene Executive Chef David Lee**.



**Tickets**

Tickets to the Ensemble Studio Competition and **Centre Stage** cocktail celebration are \$100. **Centre Stage Gala** tickets, including the black-tie dinner, are \$1,500. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [COCCentrestage.ca](http://COCCentrestage.ca), call COC Ticket Services at 416-363-8231 or go to the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office (145 Queen St. W.).  
**#COCCentrestage**

**Acknowledgements**

Competition Sponsors: RBC Foundation, Peter M. Deeb and the Hal Jackman Foundation.  
Platinum Sponsor: Mercedes-Benz

**Download the Centre Stage Creative:** [Dropbox Link](#)

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**ABOUT the Ensemble Studio Competition**

The Ensemble Studio Competition features singers from the final round of auditions for the COC Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, competing for cash prizes ranging in value from \$1,500 – \$5,000. The competition was launched in 2011 by COC General Director Alexander Neef to showcase the opera talent the COC had scouted from across the country and create a public platform for celebrating the future of opera in Canada.

With the creation of **Centre Stage**, the COC now opens the Ensemble Studio Competition to an audience of over 1,000 opera lovers and interested guests as it moves from the intimate setting of the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre to R. Fraser Elliott Hall. In 2013, the competition finalists are showcased as never before as they perform with an orchestra led by a world-renowned conductor from the mainstage of the COC's opera house.

The annual Ensemble Studio audition process, open only to Canadian citizens and permanent residents, takes COC artistic staff across Canada and into the U.S. for preliminary auditions in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto and New York, followed by a final callback audition at the COC's Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre in Toronto. It's from this pool of singers that finalists are selected for the Ensemble Studio Competition.

The Ensemble Studio Competition is underwritten in part by RBC Foundation, Peter M. Deeb and the Hal Jackman Foundation.

**ABOUT the COC Ensemble Studio**

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 180 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó.

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program, involving understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, language and acting studies, and career skills development, as well as participation in masterclasses with internationally renowned opera professionals.

The COC Ensemble Studio is underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb and The Slight Family Foundation, and is also supported by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage, RBC Foundation, Hal Jackman Foundation, and other generous donors.

**ABOUT the Canadian Opera Company**

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. The COC enjoys a loyal audience support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. Under its leadership team of General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus, the COC is increasingly capturing the opera world's attention. The COC maintains its international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation by creating new productions within its diverse repertoire, collaborating with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracting the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. The COC performs in its own opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects, the Four Seasons Centre opened in 2006, and is also the performance venue for The National Ballet of Canada. For more information on the Canadian Opera Company, please visit its award-winning website, [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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