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REGINA'S GORDON BINTNER WINS TOP PRIZES AT COC'S SECOND ANNUAL ENSEMBLE STUDIO COMPETITION

Toronto – Bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner** of Regina took home first prize at the **Canadian Opera Company's Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition** on November 29, 2012, at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. **Bintner** was selected from 10 finalists to receive the **\$5,000** award. Tenor **Andrew Haji** of London, Ont., won the second prize of **\$3,000**, and mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage** of Woodstock, Ont., was awarded the third prize of **\$1,500**. In addition, **Bintner** was selected by the audience as the winner of the **People's Choice Award**, worth **\$1,500**.

The 10 finalists from across Canada were selected from 146 singers in preliminary auditions in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and New York. Each finalist performed two arias with piano accompaniment in front of a sold-out audience in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre, and an adjudication panel comprised of COC General Director **Alexander Neef**, COC Artistic Administrator **Roberto Mauro**, COC Music Administrator **Sandra Gavinchuk**, Head of the COC Ensemble Studio **Liz Upchurch**, and Canadian soprano, singing teacher and Ensemble Studio alumna **Wendy Nielsen**.

"Last night we saw the incredible richness of vocal talent that this country has to offer, with all 10 singers delivering an incredible package of skill and technique, quality of sound and captivating stage presence. It was difficult for the judges to narrow the results down to just three winners," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "I look forward to seeing how the careers of all the finalists will unfold, as well as welcoming some of the voices heard last night to our Ensemble Studio program next season."

In addition to the four cash prizes, the finalists were competing for highly coveted positions in the **2013/2014 COC Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. The 2012 competition marked the second time in the Ensemble Studio's 32-year-history that the final auditions for the program were held in front of a public audience.

Taking into account the performances at the **Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition**, COC artistic staff will now finalize the lineup of the 13/14 Ensemble Studio. The full lineup will be announced at a later date. The 13/14 Ensemble Studio members will be joining an illustrious program that, since its inception in 1980, has launched the careers of over 150 Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors, including Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, David Pomeroy, Joseph Kaiser, Allyson McHardy and Krisztina Szabó.

The Canadian Opera Company is grateful to the following for their sponsorship support of the Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition: Laurie and Fareed Ali, Earlaine Collins, Ninalee Craig, Marjorie and Roy Linden, Sandra L. Simpson, Colleen Sexsmith, ARIAS: Canadian Opera Student Development Fund, Tom C. Logan, Classical 96.3 FM, Eva Innes and David Medhurst, Sylvia M. McPhee and Brian Wilks.

The COC Ensemble Studio Competition is presented in part by RBC Foundation, Hal Jackman Foundation and MEDCAN.

The annual Ensemble Studio audition process is only open to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants.

About the Winners

GORDON BINTNER, First Prize (\$5,000) and People's Choice Award (\$1,500)

Arias performed: "Non più andrai" from *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mozart) and "Sibilar gli angui d'Aletto" from *Rinaldo* (Handel)

A native of Regina, Saskatchewan, Gordon Bintner is currently pursuing a master of music degree in opera and voice at McGill University's Schulich School of Music. Credits include the title roles in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Opera NUOVA and *Don Giovanni* with Opera McGill; his European debut as Colline in *La Bohème* with Angers Nantes Opéra; and, after winning the grand prize in the OSM Standard Life Competition, his debut with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. This season Mr. Bintner's appearances include Nardo in Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* with San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program and Lescaut in Massenet's *Manon* with Opéra de Montréal.

ANDREW HAJI, Second Prize (\$3,000)

Arias performed: "Quanto è bella" from *L'elisir d'amore* (Donizetti) and "Un'aura amorosa" from *Così fan tutte* (Mozart)

Originally from London, Ontario, Andrew Haji is currently pursuing a master of music degree at the University of Toronto's Opera School. At UofT his credits include Cecco in Haydn's *Il mondo della luna*, Vanderdendur/Ragotski in Bernstein's *Candide*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Lacouf/Reporter from Paris in Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and most recently the title role in *Rob Ford: The Opera* as well as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*. Other roles include Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and Don Ottavio (Centre for Opera Studies in Italy) and Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* (Accademia Europea dell'Opera).

CHARLOTTE BURRAGE, Third Place (\$1,500)

Arias performed: "Vois sous l'archet fremissant" from *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Offenbach) and Composer's Aria from *Ariadne auf Naxos* (R. Strauss)

Originally from Woodstock, Ontario, Charlotte Burrage holds a master of music in voice performance from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of the opera diploma program at University of British Columbia (UBC). Credits include Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* (Vancouver Opera in Schools); Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* (Banff Centre's Opera as Theatre, Jeunesses Musicales); and, La Zia Principessa in *Suor Angelica* and the title role in Massenet's *Cendrillon* (UBC). Ms Burrage performed with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Arnie Roth and was the alto soloist in the Bach *Magnificat BWV 243* (UBC).

About the COC Ensemble Studio

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and are important ambassadors for the company. Since its inception in 1980, over 150 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, David Pomeroy, Joseph Kaiser, Allyson McHardy and Krisztina Szabó.

Members of the Ensemble Studio 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. The Ensemble Studio is also supported by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage, RBC 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 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 COC, visit its award-winning website, coc.ca.

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