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TEN SINGERS FROM ACROSS CANADA COMPETE FOR CASH PRIZES AND PLACES IN COC'S ENSEMBLE STUDIO

Toronto – Out of a pool of 146 young, aspiring opera singers from across the country, the **Canadian Opera Company** has selected 10 to compete in the **Second Annual COC Ensemble Studio Competition** on **November 29, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.** in the **Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**. The young singers competing are: bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner** (Regina, Sask.); mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage** (Woodstock, Ont.); soprano **Aviva Fortunata** (Calgary, Alta.); baritone **Clarence Frazer** (Toronto, Ont.); tenor **Andrew Haji** (London, Ont.); mezzo-soprano **Danielle MacMillan** (Toronto, Ont.); bass **Nathan Keoughan** (Charlottetown, P.E.I.); tenor **Michael Marino** (London, Ont.); soprano **Lara Secord-Haid** (Winnipeg, Man.) and soprano **Kelsey Vicary** (Niagara Falls, Ont.).

The 10 finalists were chosen following preliminary auditions in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and New York City. Over the course of the two-hour event on November 29, each finalist will perform two arias showcasing their vocal technique and range before an audience and panel of judges. Select finalists will be invited to join the COC's 2013/2014 Ensemble Studio, with the number of offers to be determined by the judging panel. First, second and third prizes, worth \$5,000, \$3,000 and \$1,500, respectively, will be awarded, in addition to a People's Choice Award, selected by audience vote, worth \$1,500.

"The COC's Ensemble Studio has been the best opera training program in the country since its inception in 1980. Now, with this annual competition, the public can participate in our selection process by witnessing first-hand the talent and commitment these young singers bring to the pursuit of their careers," says COC General Director Alexander Neef. "The Ensemble Studio Competition is more than a final round of auditions for our training program. It's a platform to showcase the incredible emerging operatic talent in this country and an opportunity to glimpse the future of opera in Canada."

COC General Director **Alexander Neef** heads the jurors of the Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition. He is joined by 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**. The judging panel will deliberate on location and announce the competition winners at the event's conclusion.

The Ensemble Studio Competition highlights the finest young opera talent from across Canada. Winning a place in the COC's Ensemble Studio can be these singers' first step towards an international opera career. The audience at the vocal competition will be hearing the singers selected to follow in the footsteps of such renowned Ensemble Studio graduates as Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy and Krisztina Szabó, among many others.

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

The Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition is almost sold-out, with only a limited number of standing-room tickets available. Standing-room rickets are **\$15** and may be purchased online at **coc.ca**, by calling COC Ticket Services at **416-363-8231** or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office**, located at 145 Queen St. W., Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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.

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, Lauren Segal 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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