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## **SIX RISING OPERA STARS TO JOIN CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY'S 2013/2014 ENSEMBLE STUDIO**

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, welcomes six outstanding new Canadian artists for the 2013/2014 season. Bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner**, mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage**, soprano **Aviva Fortunata**, baritone **Clarence Frazer**, tenor **Andrew Haji** and mezzo-soprano **Danielle MacMillan** were among the 10 finalists who competed for the highly coveted Ensemble Studio positions at the Second Annual Ensemble Studio Competition in November 2012. **Bintner, Haji** and **Burrage** were top prize winners at the 2012 competition with **Bintner** securing the first-place and audience-choice awards, **Haji** receiving second-place honours and **Burrage** taking the third-place award.

The six singers join the Ensemble Studio in August 2013 and become part of 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, Wendy Nielsen, David Pomeroy, Joseph Kaiser, Lauren Segal, Krisztina Szabó and Allyson McHardy.

These new members of the Ensemble Studio join four returning artists for the 13/14 season: soprano **Sasha Djihanian**, soprano **Claire de Sévigné**, tenor **Owen McCausland** and baritone **Cameron McPhail**.

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. In addition, they appear in principal roles in a special Ensemble Studio performance of a COC mainstage production, give several concert performances through the COC's Free Concert Series and perform in the COC's annual Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour, which introduces young audiences throughout Ontario to the world of opera and the performing arts.

All 10 of the new and returning artists of the Ensemble Studio open the 13/14 season of the **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** with *Meet the Young Artists* in September 2013. The series runs from September 2013 to June 2014 and features the members of the Ensemble Studio in several recitals of diverse repertoire over the course of the season. Watch for complete details of the 13/14 Free Concert Series season to be announced later this year.

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### **ABOUT THE NEW MEMBERS**

#### **GORDON BINTNER**

A native of Regina, 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 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.

#### **CHARLOTTE BURRAGE**

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). 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).

#### **AVIVA FORTUNATA**

Calgary native Aviva Fortunata holds an advanced certificate in opera performance from the University of Toronto. This past summer with the Merola Opera Program in San Francisco she sang the role of the Lady with a Cake Box in Dominick Argento's *Postcard from Morocco*. Other credits include Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* (Concert Opera Group, Centre for Opera Studies in Italy, University of Toronto), Poulenc's *Gloria* (Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra) as well as singing at Jack Layton's state funeral. Fortunata was the 2012 Norcop Prize in Song Recital winner and was awarded a judges' commendation in the Mildred Miller International Voice Competition (Opera Theater of Pittsburgh).

#### **CLARENCE FRAZER**

Mississauga, Ontario native Clarence Frazer completed his musical studies at the University of Western Ontario. As a current member of Calgary Opera's Emerging Artist Program, he performed the role of Re di Scozia in *Ariodante* and this season performs Count Gil in *Il segreto di Susanna* and Ramiro in *L'heure espagnole*. Other roles include Pinellino in *Gianni Schicchi*, Daggoo in *Moby-Dick*, Alcindoro in *La Bohème* (Calgary Opera) and Sid in *Albert Herring* (Opera NUOVA). Upcoming roles include Dottore Grenvil in *La Traviata* and Ford in *Falstaff* (Calgary Opera). Frazer won the inaugural Lois Marshall Voice Competition and was a finalist in Palm Beach Opera's International Voice Competition.

#### **ANDREW HAJI**

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). Haji's upcoming performances include an appearance with the Aldeburgh Connection, singing the role of Lionel in von Flotow's *Martha* at UofT and joining the Music Academy of the West this summer to sing the role of Tamino in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

#### **DANIELLE MacMILLAN**

Born in Toronto, Danielle MacMillan holds a bachelor of fine arts, with honours, in classical vocal performance from York University, with additional training at the International Vocal Arts Institute in Montreal, Istituzione Teatro Lirico Sperimentale di Spoleto in Italy and The Glenn Gould School (GGs) of The Royal Conservatory of Music. Roles include Rose in *Lakmé* (Opera by Request); Diana in Cavalli's *La Calisto*, Véronique in Bizet's *Le docteur Miracle* and the Cabaret Singer in Weil's *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (GGs); and, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* (York University).

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### **2012/2013 ENSEMBLE STUDIO GRADUATES**

COC General Director **Alexander Neef** extends the company's congratulations to soprano **Mireille Asselin**, soprano **Ambur Braid**, mezzo-soprano **Rihab Chaieb**, pianist **Timothy Cheung**, bass-baritone **Neil Craighead**, pianist **Jenna Douglas** and tenor **Christopher Enns**, who graduate from the Ensemble Studio program at the end of the 2012/2013 season. Before leaving the program, these young artists can be heard in several performances in the remainder of the 12/13 season.

On the COC mainstage this February, **Mireille Asselin** sings Servilia in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*, in a production described as "modern music theater you mustn't miss" (*Chicago Tribune*) and featuring some of opera's most sublime music on **February 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19 and 22, 2013**. In the special Ensemble Studio performance of *La clemenza di Tito*, taking place February 6, 2013, audiences can see **Ambur Braid** as Vitellia, **Rihab Chaieb** as Sesto and **Christopher Enns** as the Emperor Tito.

**Rihab Chaieb** appears in the COC's Robert Carsen-directed production of *Dialogues des Carmélites* this spring. **Chaieb** is Soeur Mathilde in Francis Poulenc's shattering masterpiece about an order of Carmelite nuns caught up in the turmoil and terror of the French Revolution, conducted by COC Music Director Johannes Debus on **May 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25, 2013**.

On **May 23, 2013 at 12 p.m.** as part of the **COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre**, join all seven graduating artists in a special farewell concert, *Les Adieux*. The singers and pianists will perform a program of music featuring their favourite art songs and arias.

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## **OTHER 2012/2013 ENSEMBLE STUDIO PERFORMANCES**

During the winter season, 12/13 Ensemble Studio members understudy and rehearse with the mainstage cast of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* under the director of conductor **Daniel Cohen** and director **Christopher Alden**. On **February 6, 2013**, the young artists sing the lead roles in their own mainstage performance of *La clemenza di Tito* with the COC Orchestra and Chorus at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. Tickets are accessibly priced at \$25 and \$55.

Ensemble Studio members also perform in four more recitals during the 12/13 Free Concert Series season in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

- On **February 14, 2013 at 12 p.m.**: *Vive l'amour!*, a musical celebration of love featuring some of opera's most romantic arias and ensembles.
  - On **February 21, 2013 at 12 p.m.**: *Of Love and Longing: Songs of Richard Strauss*, a program of arias and art songs by composer Richard Strauss.
  - On **May 2, 2013 at 12 p.m.**: *Sérénade Française*, a program of French arias and art songs.
  - On **May 13, 2013, from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.**: Artists of the Ensemble Studio compete in the Christina and Louis Quillico Awards.
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### **About the COC Ensemble Studio**

The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb and The Slight Family Foundation, is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals and provides advanced instruction, hands-on experience, and career development opportunities. 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](http://coc.ca).

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