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## **COC MUSIC DIRECTOR JOHANNES DEBUS TO CONDUCT *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE***

### **CONDUCTING AND CAST CHANGES TO COC'S WINTER PRODUCTIONS OF *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*, *LA CLEMENZA DI TITO* AND SPRING PRODUCTION OF *SALOME***

**Toronto – Canadian Opera Company Music Director Johannes Debus** conducts his first *Tristan und Isolde* when he leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus this winter in the company's production of Wagner's epic masterpiece. He replaces Jiří Bělohlávek, who has regrettably withdrawn due to health reasons.

"Jiří Bělohlávek is one of the foremost conductors in the world and I regret that he will not be making his COC debut at this time. When my appointment to the COC was announced in 2008, Jiří was one of the first people to contact me about coming to work with the company, and he has an open invitation to conduct one of our productions in the future," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "I am very grateful to Johannes for agreeing to take over for Jiří, especially on such short notice. *Tristan und Isolde* is one of the most revolutionary and influential works in music history and it is the rare conductor who can command the piece with the necessary skill and musicianship. I look forward to watching Johannes lead his first *Tristan* on the COC's opening night in January."

"*Tristan und Isolde* is a work that has been an incredibly important part of my musical life, both personally and professionally. It's an opera that I have always wanted to conduct, and to have the opportunity to do so now is an enormous privilege. I can't think of a better place to make my debut conducting this major work than with my home company," says **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**. "While this opportunity came unexpectedly, I wouldn't dare conduct *Tristan und Isolde* on such short notice if I didn't have the amazing forces of the COC, particularly our incredible orchestra, supporting me."

This season with the COC, in addition to *Tristan und Isolde*, Debus conducts the spring productions of *Salome* by Richard Strauss and *Dialogues des Carmélites* by Francis Poulenc. He most recently conducted the COC's fall production of *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss II.

The COC also announces that German tenor **Michael Baba** will sing Tristan for two performance in the company's production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, replacing Burkhard Fritz who has withdrawn from the role. **Baba** shares the title role with world renowned Canadian tenor Ben Heppner.

**Baba** makes his COC debut as Tristan. His wide operatic repertoire, ranging from Mozart to Wagner, has created a great deal of demand for his tenor voice. He has performed throughout Germany, Austria, the United States and Japan. **Baba** recently gave his debut performance as Tristan at Salzburg's Landestheater.

Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is one of music history's most influential works, raising the union of music and drama to new heights with the sheer power and passion of its score. Last presented by the COC in 1987, *Tristan und Isolde* returns for seven performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **January 29, February 2, 8, 14, 17, 20 and 23, 2013**.

Running in repertory at the COC with *Tristan und Isolde* is Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*. Replacing Johannes Debus, who was to have conducted the company's production, is Israeli conductor **Daniel Cohen**.

At the age of 28, **Cohen** is one of today's most talented young conductors and a rising star in both the concert and operatic arenas. Since his debut at the age of 19, he has conducted the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester and Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the Kammerphilharmonie Graz, the European Union Chamber Orchestra and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. At Israeli Opera, he has conducted Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and Verdi's *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto*. He recently conducted at the Festival della Valle d'Itria and opened the operatic season of the Teatro Lirico di Cagliari with a new production of Massenet's *Don Quichotte*. He is currently chief conductor of the Jersey Chamber Orchestra, music director of the Eden Sinfonia in London, and artistic director of the Gropius Ensemble. He is also the permanent guest conductor of the Israel Chamber Orchestra, a position he has held since 2010.

Containing some of opera's most sublime music, *La clemenza di Tito* is Mozart's final opera. It was last performed by the COC in 1991 and runs for nine performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **February 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19 and 22, 2013**. This includes the special Ensemble Studio performance of *La clemenza di Tito*, featuring the young artists of the COC's training program for young opera professionals, on February 6.

There is an additional casting change as it relates to the COC's upcoming production of Strauss's *Salome*.

One of the most outstanding singers on the world stage today, German mezzo-soprano **Hanna Schwarz** will now sing Herodias, Salome's mother, in the COC's *Salome* this spring. She replaces Julia Juon who has withdrawn from the role.

**Schwarz** is a world renowned concert and opera singer, and the role of Herodias marks her COC debut. Schwarz has sung under the batons of classical music's greatest conductors, including Sir Simon Rattle, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Lorin Maazel, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Christoph von Dohnanyi and Leonard Bernstein. Her international career has brought her to San Francisco Opera, Metropolitan Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin and Royal Opera House Covent Garden, as well as regular appearances with the Salzburg and Bayreuth festivals.

At the 1905 premiere of *Salome*, the audience and critics were shocked by its subject matter and erotic themes; *Salome*'s world of voyeurism and sexual abuse still elicits an equally visceral response today. Last performed by the COC in 2002, *Salome* runs for eight performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **April 21, 27, May 1, 4, 7, 10, 16 and 22, 2013**.

The COC's production of *Tristan und Isolde* has been generously underwritten by **Lisa Balfour Bowen and Walter M. Bowen; Cecily and Robert Bradshaw; Philip Deck and Kimberley Bozak; Donald O'Born; Tim and Frances Price; Colleen Sexsmith; Sandra L. Simpson; and Ryerson and Michele Symons**.

*Tristan und Isolde* Production Sponsor: **BMO Financial Group**

The COC's production of *Salome* has been generously underwritten in part by **Mark and Gail Appel**

### **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 COC, visit its award-winning website, coc.ca.