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ACCLAIMED CANADIAN DIRECTOR ROBERT CARSEN BRINGS *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*, ONE OF OPERA'S GREAT THEATRICAL ACHIEVEMENTS, TO THE COC

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** closes its 2012/2013 season with a production of Francis Poulenc's operatic masterpiece, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, described by *Variety* as "subtle, yet gut-wrenching." Internationally renowned Canadian director **Robert Carsen** returns to the COC for a third consecutive season to direct a cast of 161 performers, led by three Canadian opera stars: **Isabel Bayrakdarian**, **Adrienne Pieczonka** and **Judith Forst**. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** makes his fourth conducting appearance of the 12/13 season leading his first *Dialogues des Carmélites*. He conducts the COC Orchestra and Chorus through what is considered to be Poulenc's most haunting score and a work that contains one of opera's most devastating and unforgettable final scenes. *Dialogues des Carmélites* is sung in French with English SURTITLES™. Last performed by the COC in 1997, the opera returns to the company for eight performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **May 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25, 2013**.

After his triumphant return to the COC with *Orfeo ed Euridice*, proclaimed by the *Globe and Mail* as "This is why we go to the opera," and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, for which the *Toronto Sun* said Carsen's "genius seems to know no bounds," **Robert Carsen** now brings to a hometown audience his signature streamlined but high-impact approach to *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Created for Nederlandse Opera in 1997, **Carsen's** acclaimed production comes to Toronto after being seen at some of the world's great opera houses, including La Scala and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Its set design is by acclaimed Canadian designer **Michael Levine**, last with the COC for 2011's *Rigoletto*, lighting design is by **Jean Kalman**, the costume design evoking late 18th-century France is by **Falk Bauer**, and choreography is by **Philippe Giraudeau**, who was last with the COC for 2011's *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

Dialogues des Carmélites' music sets the tone for the story of an order of Carmelite nuns caught up in the terror of the French Revolution. **Carsen's** direction in *Dialogues des Carmélites* focuses on the psychological states of the characters, using a minimalist approach that allows for a seamless flow from one scene to another. The mob of revolutionaries, consisting of over 100 supernumeraries, is used with simple but tremendous impact to represent the political unrest of France. The result is a work that "pierces the heart" (*Chicago Tribune*) and has been described as "inventive and primally affecting . . . confirming the status of *Dialogues* as one of twentieth-century opera's great theatrical achievements" (*Opera News*).

A largely Canadian cast of internationally renowned singers as well as rising stars has been assembled for the COC's production. At the helm of the mostly female cast is soprano **Isabel Bayrakdarian**, soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka** and mezzo-soprano **Judith Forst**.

Soprano **Isabel Bayrakdarian** delighted audiences and critics alike with recent COC performances in 2011's *The Magic Flute* and *Orfeo ed Euridice*. She returns as the young aristocrat Blanche, who attempts to escape the turmoil of the Revolution by joining the Carmelite order. **Bayrakdarian's** Blanche has been described as "a formidable dramatic creation, glowingly sung and poignantly nuanced," by *Opera News*. Soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka**, last with the COC in 2012 with a "luminous performance" (*Globe and Mail*) as Tosca, has been hailed for her "impeccably pure and iridescent voice" (*Financial Times*). She returns to make her role debut as Madame Lidoine, the new prioress. Recognized as one of Canada's most distinguished artists, with a legendary career of performances across North America and Europe with many of the world's most prestigious companies, **Judith Forst** was last with the COC in 2002's *The Queen of Spades*. She returns as Madame de Croissy, the prioress of the convent, a role she has sung to great acclaim, with her performance called a "tour de force" by the *Vancouver Sun*.

Canadian soprano **Hélène Guilmette**, a rising star who has distinguished herself in opera, concert and recital performances across Europe and in Quebec, makes her COC debut as Sister Constance. Russian mezzo-soprano **Irina Mishura**, a frequent performer at the Metropolitan Opera and well-known to audiences throughout North America and Europe, returns to the COC following her past star turns in 2009's *Rusalka* and 2005's *Il Trovatore* to sing Mother Marie. Canadian mezzo-soprano **Megan Latham**, last with the COC in 2011's *Rigoletto*, returns to bring her "clear and honey-coloured voice" (*Opera Canada*) to the role of the aged nun, Mother Jeanne. COC Ensemble Studio mezzo-soprano **Rihab Chaieb**, who has gained critical and popular attention in the Ensemble Studio performances of *La clemenza di Tito* and *Semele*, rounds out the order of Carmelite nuns as Sister Mathilde.

Canadian baritone **Jean-François Lapointe** makes a long-awaited return to the COC as Blanche's father, the Marquis de la Force. Last with the COC in 2000 as Pelléas in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, **Lapointe** has earned critical praise for performances in Paris, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Vienna, Zurich, Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon, Glasgow, Hamburg, Berlin, and Los Angeles. Canadian tenor **Frédéric Antoun**, last with COC as Tamino in the 2011 production of *The Magic Flute* and becoming a much sought-after performer in North America, is the Chevalier de la Force, his son. A roster of notable Ensemble Studio graduates round out the cast: baritone **Doug MacNaughton** is Thierry, the footman, and Monsieur Javelinot, the doctor; tenor **Michael Colvin** is the Chaplain; tenor **Adam Luther** is the First Commissioner; and baritone **Peter Barrett** is the Jailer. American bass-baritone **Evan Boyer** is the Second Commissioner and Ensemble Studio baritone **Cameron McPhail** is an Officer. Une Voix, an off stage voice that calls out to Blanche, is Ensemble Studio soprano **Claire de Sévigné**.

Francis Poulenc's early career was marked by a hedonistic enthusiasm that he attributed to his maternal Parisian ancestry. It was the rediscovery of his Catholic faith later in life that brought a more spiritual tone to his work. Poulenc composed *Dialogues des Carmélites*, his second opera, between 1953 and 1956, and suffered a nervous breakdown during the years of its composition, reportedly because he empathized so deeply with the nuns' plight. His great love of the human voice and a desire to stage texts that were compelling in their literary and poetic qualities created a work that leaves one undeniably moved by the nuns' profound strength and tragic end.

Dialogues des Carmélites, in an Italian-language version, premiered in Milan in 1957, followed by French- and English-language versions that same year in Paris and San Francisco. Many productions of the work quickly followed with the opera receiving wide praise for its eloquent and lyrical style as well as subtle and intricate tone.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Dialogues des Carmélites* are **\$12 – \$325** (includes applicable taxes). Tickets are available online at coc.ca, by calling **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.

Standing Room

Sixty **\$12** Standing Room tickets are available at 11 a.m. the morning of each performance, in person only at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Limit of two tickets per person. Subject to availability.

Young People

Special young people's tickets are priced from **\$23 to \$110** (includes applicable taxes). These ticket prices apply to those who are 15 years of age or under, accompanied by and sitting next to an adult.

Opera Under 30

Patrons between the ages of 16 and 29 may purchase **\$22** Opera Under 30 tickets as of **April 6, 2013** at 10 a.m., online at coc.ca, or in person at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Program patrons may opt to pay \$35, whereby their seats are automatically upgraded to the best available on the morning of the performance they are attending. Opera Under 30 is presented by **TD Bank Group**.

Student Group Tickets

Student group tickets are **\$25** per student and may be purchased by calling **416-306-2356**.

Rush Seats

Rush seats, starting at \$22 and subject to availability, go on sale at 11 a.m. on the morning of each performance at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Limit of two tickets per person.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With additional support from **Cecily and Robert Bradshaw, Nani and Austin Beutel, Walter M. and Lisa Balfour Bowen, Michael and Linda Hutcheon, Judy and Wilmot Matthews, Don McQueen and Trina McQueen O.C., Sue Mortimer, Dr. Noëlle Grace and The Shohet Family, Samara Walbohm and Joe Shlesinger, Rosemary Speirs and Anonymous**.

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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.

COC ANCILLARY EVENTS AND INFORMATION

Opera Exchange – Singing from the Scaffold: *Dialogues des Carmélites*

On **May 11, 2013**, from **9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**, the Canadian Opera Company's renowned **Opera Exchange** series concludes its 2012/2013 season with an exploration of Francis Poulenc's haunting masterpiece, *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The multi-disciplinary event features stimulating presentations from **Steven Huebner** (McGill University musicologist), **Dominique Deslandres** (Université de Montréal professor of history), and **Michael and Linda Hutcheon** (University of Toronto professors of medicine and literature, respectively) providing historical background and cultural context to Poulenc's opera about an order of Carmelite nuns caught up in the terror of the French Revolution. The event also includes an exploration of Francis Poulenc's vocal music with a performance from COC Ensemble Studio soprano **Sasha Djihanian** and Head of the Ensemble Studio **Liz Upchurch** at the piano. The half-day event takes place in Walter Hall at the University of Toronto's Edward Johnson Building (80 Queen's Park Cres.). Tickets are **\$20** per person and are available 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. A limited number of tickets can also be purchased at Walter Hall on the morning of May 11. Discounts are available for university students and faculty.

BMO Financial Group Pre-Performance Opera Chats

Free to ticket holders, the COC offers 20-minute introductions to the opera and its themes in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts 45 minutes prior to every performance.

Dialogues des Carmélites Interactive Features on COC Radio

Through COC Radio, visitors to **coc.ca** can find, in one place, a variety of audio and digital features available for streaming, all aimed at exploring an opera and its background as well as the artists appearing with the COC. Among the resources on *Dialogues des Carmélites*, visitors will find episodes of *The Big COC Podcast*, hosted by the COC's Gianmarco Segato, which feature discussions with opera enthusiasts and experts as well as interviews with members of the production's cast and creative team. COC Radio podcasts are also available for free download through iTunes.

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.

- 30 -

For more information or to request production photographs, please contact:
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