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## **CELEBRATED CANADIAN DIRECTOR ATOM EGOYAN RETURNS TO THE COC WITH HIS ACCLAIMED PRODUCTION OF RICHARD STRAUSS'S VISCERAL AND SHOCKING OPERA, *SALOME***

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company's** 2013 spring season marks the return of celebrated Canadian director **Atom Egoyan** with his searing, critically acclaimed COC production of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. At the opera's 1905 premiere, 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. In past presentations of this production, in 1996 and 2002, the COC's *Salome* was described as a "brilliant modern day interpretation" (*Classical 96 FM*) that is "marvelously wicked and wickedly marvelous," (*The Globe and Mail*) and "relevant to a 21st-century audience" (*NOW Magazine*). COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts his third opera of the season for the company when he leads the COC Orchestra through Strauss's intoxicating music. Sung in German with English SURTITLES™, *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**.

Adapted from Oscar Wilde's play, the opera recounts the ancient story of Salome, who demands the head of Jochanaan (John the Baptist) in return for performing the Dance of the Seven Veils. Salome lives in a hedonistic royal court, with her perverse and shameless stepfather, Herod, and her imperious mother, Herodias. Salome's desire for the imprisoned Jochanaan is mirrored by a soldier's tortured infatuation for her, and Herod's own lust for his stepdaughter. Consumed by passion, the family is inevitably torn apart by its destructive obsessions.

Renowned Canadian filmmaker (*The Sweet Hereafter, Chloe*) and director **Atom Egoyan** brings some of the original erotic shock value back to Strauss's *Salome*. The setting of the opera is moved from a first-century palace in the Holy Land to a foreboding and abstract environment, stripping away the markers of an affluent environment to focus on the characters themselves. Multi-media elements, such as film and video, as well as shadow puppetry and lighting effects, further serve to heighten the opera's impact and emphasize the perverse natures of Herod, Herodias and Salome.

Acclaimed American set designer **Derek McLane**, projections designer **Phillip Barker**, costume designer **Catherine Zuber**, lighting designer **Michael Whitfield** and choreographer **Serge Bennathan** all return for the revival of the COC's *Salome*. Shadow puppet designer **Clea Minaker** makes her COC debut.

Among the variety of film, video and photographic projections designed by **Barker** for the COC's *Salome* are works by Canadian **Edward Burtynsky**, who, since the 1996 premiere of the production, has achieved international recognition for his large-format photographs. **Burtynsky** is responsible for many of the still images that appear in *Salome*.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts seven of *Salome's* eight performances with COC resident conductor **Derek Bate** taking the podium on May 22. They lead a 106-piece orchestra through a lush and exotic score that seethes with the emotions, neuroses and unspoken drives of the opera's characters.

In Swedish-American soprano **Erika Sunnegårdh**, the COC has a Salome who can meet the role's challenging vocal and physical demands. Since her critically acclaimed operatic debut in 2004 in the role of Turandot at Malmö Opera, **Sunnegårdh** has established herself as not only one of the most versatile and exciting sopranos on the world stage, but also earned a reputation for fearless and emotionally nuanced characterizations, with performances at Bayerische Staatsoper, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Welsh National Opera, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Oper Frankfurt, Metropolitan Opera and Deutsche Oper Berlin, among others. **Sunnegårdh** makes her COC debut in the title role.

Celebrated Canadian tenor **Richard Margison**, last with the COC for 2011's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, makes his role debut as Herod. Hailed for his ringing top notes and spine-tingling power, **Margison** is one of the most critically acclaimed singers on the international stage today. He performs regularly in many of the world's leading opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie and Gran Teatre del Liceu. Cast opposite **Margison**, as Herodias, is one of the world's greatest mezzo-sopranos, **Hanna Schwarz**. She 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 Dohnányi and Leonard Bernstein, and her international career has brought her to San Francisco Opera, Metropolitan Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, Deutsche Oper Berlin and Royal Opera House Covent Garden. The role of Herodias marks **Schwarz**'s COC debut.

Rounding out the impressive cast is a line-up of familiar and new opera stars.

Sharing the role of Jochanaan are two internationally renowned singers: German baritone **Martin Gantner** (April 21, 27, and May 1, 4), in his COC debut, and American bass-baritone **Alan Held** (May 7, 10, 16, 22), whose recent COC performances in *Tristan und Isolde* and the double-bill of *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi* have won him the admiration of Toronto audiences and critics alike.

American tenor **Nathaniel Peake**, a 2010 Metropolitan Opera National Council Winner who makes his COC debut in the COC's 2013 spring production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, sings Narraboth, the captain of the guard. Israeli mezzo-soprano **Maya Lahyani**, praised for her "big, voluptuous sound" and "vigorous stage presence" (*The San Francisco Chronicle*), makes her COC debut as the Page of Herodias.

British tenor **Adrian Thompson**, recently with the COC in 2011's *Nixon in China*, sings the First Jew. Singing the Second, Third and Fourth Jews, respectively, are three graduates of the COC's Ensemble Studio: tenors **Michael Colvin**, **Michael Barrett**, and **Adam Luther**. The Fifth Jew is sung by American bass **Jeremy Milner**, who makes his COC debut. American baritone **Craig Irvin**, recently seen in the COC's 2012 production of *Gianni Schicchi*, sings the First Nazarene. Ensemble Studio tenor **Owen McCausland** is the Second Nazarene. American bass-baritone **Evan Boyer**, who can also be seen this spring in the COC's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, makes his COC debut as the First Soldier. American bass-baritone **Sam Handley** makes his COC debut as the Second Soldier. COC Ensemble Studio members, bass-baritone **Neil Craighhead** and soprano **Claire de Sévigné**, sing the roles of a Cappadocian and a Slave, respectively.

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## TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Salome* 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.

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*Salome* is generously underwritten in part by **Mark and Gail Appel**

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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.

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### **COC ANCILLARY EVENTS AND INFORMATION**

#### **Opera Talks: *Salome***

On **March 28, 2013** at **7 p.m.**, the 2012/2013 season of **Opera Talks** concludes with an engaging chat led by *Opera Canada* editor **Wayne Gooding** on the Canadian Opera Company's upcoming production of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. **Gooding's** talk mixes tantalizing tidbits of opera history with guided listening, images and insider information about this searing production by celebrated Canadian filmmaker and stage director Atom Egoyan. A Q&A session concludes the evening talk. **Opera Talks** is a **FREE** event that takes place at the **North York Central Library Auditorium** (5120 Yonge St.), and is presented by the COC and Toronto's North York Central Library. For more information and to register, please call the Languages, Literature and Fine Arts department at North York Central Library at **416-395-5639**.

#### **"Disc"overing Strauss**

On **April 18, 2013**, from **12 – 1 p.m.**, as part of a **FREE** noon-hour concert presented through the COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, **Stephen R. Clarke**, lecturer and curator of the acclaimed Stratton Estate, offers fascinating insights into early recordings of the art songs of Richard Strauss. Drawing on a rich collection of rare recordings, he will focus on songs for which Strauss himself wrote orchestrations. The lecture features samples from landmark recordings of opera singers, including distinguished artists Julius Patzak, Peter Anders, Elizabeth Harwood, Lauritz Melchior, Elisabeth Schumann, Lotte Lehmann and Heinrich Schlusnus.

#### **A Strauss Serenade**

On **May 7, 2013**, from **12 – 1 p.m.**, as part of a **FREE** noon-hour concert presented through the COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, the COC Orchestra gives a chamber music recital inspired by the COC's production of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. COC Orchestra's wind section performs two early chamber works for 13 players by the great composer: the *Serenade in E-flat Major, Op. 7* and the rarely performed *Suite in B-flat Major, Op. 4*.

### **Opera Connect – *Salome*: Two Perspectives**

**Opera Connect** – a new series of events connecting the public with the artists who create opera – concludes its inaugural season on **May 26, 2013 at 1 p.m.** at the **TIFF Bell Lightbox**, 350 King St. W., with a trans-Atlantic discussion about Richard Strauss’s opera *Salome*. For this **FREE** event, CBC Radio’s **Brent Bambury** interviews celebrated Canadian filmmaker and *Salome* director **Atom Egoyan**, as well as Norwegian stage director **Stefan Herheim**, whose own take on the opera is being mounted by the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet from May 25 to June 23. **Herheim** will participate from Oslo via video-link as the two directors share their individual approaches to this notoriously scandalous work.

### **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.

### **Salome 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 *Salome*, 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.

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### **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](http://coc.ca).

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