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## **LEGENDARY DIRECTOR PETER SELLARS AND RENOWNED VIDEO ARTIST BILL VIOLA MAKE COC DEBUTS WITH AWE-INSPIRING PRODUCTION OF WAGNER'S *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE***

### **CELEBRATED CANADIAN TENOR BEN HEPPNER MAKES HIGHLY ANTICIPATED RETURN TO COC MAINSTAGE IN A SIGNATURE ROLE**

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company** opens its winter season with one of music history's most influential works, Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The COC's 2013 presentation of *Tristan und Isolde* marks legendary director **Peter Sellars'** company debut and the first time his original, awe-inspiring production has appeared in North America. This multi-sensory experience features video imagery by internationally renowned video artist **Bill Viola**, who "has come up with an image of the scale and scope, grandeur and immensity, and genuine transcendence that Wagner was imagining," says **Sellars**. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**, who conducts his first production of *Tristan und Isolde*, leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus through Wagner's epic masterpiece as well as an acclaimed cast led by celebrated Canadian tenor **Ben Heppner** in a role for which critics have hailed him as "the great Tristan of this generation" (*Associated Press*). Last seen at 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**, and is sung in German with English SURTITLES™.

The COC's *Tristan und Isolde* is the first time **Sellars'** production has been performed by an opera company other than Opéra national de Paris, since its premiere in 2005. The design features a large screen suspended above and behind a somberly lit space, featuring only a square platform for a set piece. Accompanied by video, singers have minimal staging as they project the emotional depth of the piece through their voices.

Renowned theatre, opera and festival director **Peter Sellars** is one of the most innovative and powerful forces in the performing arts in the world, and he makes his COC debut with this production of *Tristan und Isolde*. Following his iconic stagings of *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte* in the 1980s, **Sellars** established a reputation for unique stagings of classic and contemporary operas, and has directed productions for Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glyndebourne Festival, Netherlands Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Salzburg Festival, San Francisco Opera and Metropolitan Opera, among others.

**Bill Viola** is internationally recognized as one of today's leading artists, and has been instrumental in the establishment of video as a vital form of contemporary art. The video imagery he has created for this production provides literal, metaphorical and spiritual complements to the tragic love between Tristan and Isolde.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts his first production of *Tristan und Isolde* when he leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* premiered in 1865 in Munich and is considered to be one of the most revolutionary and influential works in music history due to Wagner's use of tonality, orchestral colour and harmonic suspension. Wagner raised the union of music and drama to new heights with *Tristan und Isolde* with the sheer power and passion of its score.

Based on the tragic medieval tale of two lovers fated to share a forbidden but undying love, *Tristan und Isolde* features two of the most strenuous roles in all of opera. The title characters must sing above a 100-piece orchestra with vocal power and tonal brilliance, and possess the sheer stamina required to sing these roles over four hours of

musical performance. At any given time, there are only a handful of singers in the world who are able to meet all the challenges of these two roles.

The COC's *Tristan und Isolde* marks tenor **Ben Heppner**'s long-awaited return to the company's mainstage, having last appeared in a COC production in 1996's *Pagliacci*. Excelling in some of the repertoire's most challenging roles, **Heppner** is acclaimed worldwide for his beautiful voice, intelligent musicianship and sparkling dramatic sense. In the role of Tristan, he's been praised for his "utter honesty and visceral power" (*New York Times*) and called "the finest Tristan since Vickers" (*Fanfare*). Singing opposite **Heppner** is a German soprano known for her mastery of the Mozart, Strauss and Wagner repertoire, **Melanie Diener**, in her COC debut as Isolde. Cited for her "genuine transcendence" (*The Guardian*) and "beaming, youthful Wagner voice" (*Opera Today*), **Diener** has collaborated with many of the major orchestras and conductors of today, is a frequent performer at the prestigious Bayreuth and Salzburg festivals and has been heard at the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Opéra national de Paris and the Vienna and Berlin state operas, among others.

Sharing the title roles with **Heppner** and **Diener** for two performances (**February 8 and 23**) are German tenor **Michael Baba** and American soprano **Margaret Jane Wray**. **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 voice. He has performed throughout Germany, Austria, the United States and Japan, and recently gave his debut performance as Tristan at Salzburg's Landestheater. **Wray** is an award-winning dramatic soprano known for her interpretations of the works of Richard Wagner, and has performed at the world's major opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Bavarian State Opera, Berlin State Opera, and Opéra national de Paris.

Matching this acclaimed principal cast is an equally strong and renowned supporting roster of singers. German bass **Franz-Josef Selig** has established himself on the international arena as one of the world's most sought-after basses. He makes his COC debut as King Marke of Cornwall, the man betrayed by Tristan and Isolde's love affair. The role of Isolde's maid, Brangäne, is sung by Greek-American mezzo-soprano **Daveda Karanas**, winner of the 2008 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and hailed for her "capacious power" and "a voice lustrous and exciting" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). American bass-baritone **Alan Held**, a "commanding figure both vocally and dramatically" (*Globe and Mail*) and who was noted as "on his own is worth the price of admission" (*Toronto Star*) for his star turn in the COC's double-bill production of *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi* last spring, returns as Tristan's servant, Kurwenal. American bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny**, praised for his "elegant and articulate" vocalism (*OC Register*) and powerful voice that "drips with gold" (*Opera News*), is the courtier Melot. Rising young artists and Ensemble Studio graduates bass **Robert Gleadow** and tenor **Adam Luther** return as the Steersman and Shepherd, respectively. The role of the Sailor is sung by Ensemble Studio tenor **Owen McCausland**.

The COC's *Tristan und Isolde* is a production from Opéra national de Paris. Tony-Award winning designer the late **Martin Pakledinaz** created the costumes. **James F. Ingalls**, who has worked extensively in theatre, opera and ballet and frequently with **Sellars**, designed the lighting.

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## TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Tristan und Isolde* are **\$12 – \$390** (includes applicable taxes). Tickets are available online at [coc.ca](http://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 **January 19, 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 tickets are automatically upgraded to the best available the morning of the performance they are attending. Opera Under 30 is presented by TD Bank Group.

### **Student Group Tickets**

Student group tickets are **\$22** 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**

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

**Bill Viola** is generously sponsored by **Cecily and Robert Bradshaw.**

**Ben Heppner** is generously sponsored by **Ryerson and Michele Symons.**

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

Presenting Sponsor of SURTITLES™: **Sun Life Financial.**

Official Automotive Sponsor of the COC at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts:  
**Jaguar Land Rover Canada.**

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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 Connect: Bram & Bluma Appel Salon Star Talk: Peter Sellars in Conversation with Richard Ouzounian**

The Canadian Opera Company's Opera Connect – a new series of events connecting the public with the artists who create opera – teams up with the **Toronto Reference Library** to present the **Bram & Bluma Appel Salon Star Talk: Peter Sellars in Conversation with Richard Ouzounian** on **January 28, 2013** at **7 p.m.** at the **Toronto Reference Library** (789 Yonge St.). Renowned stage director Peter Sellars discusses his innovative body of work, including the hotly anticipated recreation of his Opéra national de Paris production of Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the COC this winter. *Toronto Star* theatre critic Richard Ouzounian conducts the interview. **Opera Connect: Bram & Bluma Appel Salon Star Talk: Peter Sellars in Conversation with Richard Ouzounian** is a FREE event. Tickets can be booked in advance starting December 31, 2012 by registering at [www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/appelsalon](http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/appelsalon).

### **Opera Exchange - Wagner and Adaptation: Tristan und Isolde**

The **Canadian Opera Company's** renowned **Opera Exchange** series continues on **February 2, 2013 at 9 a.m.** with an exploration of one of music history's most influential works, Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Taking place at the University of Toronto's Edward Johnson Building (80 Queen's Park Cres.), the event features an exclusive chat between UofT Professor of English and Comparative Literature **Dr. Linda Hutcheon** and soprano **Margaret Jane Wray** (Isolde in the COC's *Tristan und Isolde*), as well as a performance by COC Ensemble Studio graduate **Christopher Mokrzewski** of Wagner's famous *Liebsteod*, transcribed for piano by Franz Liszt. The COC's **Opera Exchange** series is presented in collaboration with the Munk School for Global Affairs and the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto. 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 the door on the morning of the event. 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.

### **Tristan und Isolde 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 *Tristan und Isolde*, visitors will find a podcast series sponsored by Decca: The Opera Label. Hosted by the COC's Gianmarco Segato, the podcasts explore the opera and its background, featuring 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**.

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