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## **CANADA'S NEXT RISING STARS TO JOIN COC'S 2011/2012 ENSEMBLE STUDIO**

**Toronto, Ontario** – Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, the **Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio**, welcomes four new artists for the 2011/2012 season. They join 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 and Krisztina Szabó.

The two new singers are both Ottawa natives: soprano **Mireille Asselin**, fresh from a critically-acclaimed performance in Opera Atelier's *La clemenza di Tito*, and bass-baritone **Philippe Sly**, a 2011 winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Two intern coaches each arrive from renowned music institutions: Barrie, Ontario pianist **Jenna Douglas**, who recently worked with the Oberlin College Conservatory in Ohio, and Toronto pianist **Timothy Cheung**, who has trained at the University of Western Ontario and the Music Academy of the West in California.

Returning for the 11/12 season are eight current members who have established themselves over the past season as the opera stars of tomorrow: **Ambur Braid, Rihab Chaieb, Neil Craighead, Christopher Enns, Adrian Kramer, Ileana Montalbetti, Simone Osborne** and **Jacqueline Woodley**.

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### **2011 ENSEMBLE STUDIO GRADUATES**

COC General Director Alexander Neef extends the company's congratulations to mezzo-soprano **Wallis Giunta**, bass **Michael Uloth** and pianist **Anne Larlee**, who graduate from the Ensemble Studio program at the end of the 2010/2011 season. The two singers each join prestigious programs in the United States this fall: Ms Giunta has been accepted to the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and Mr. Uloth will take up a position in the Seattle Opera Young Artists Program.

Join the departing members for a special farewell concert, *Les Adieux*, on **May 26, 2011 at 12 p.m.**, featuring a program of their favourite arias as part of the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre presented by National Bank.

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### **2011/2012 ENSEMBLE STUDIO APPEARANCES**

The new and returning artists may be seen in the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre when it resumes on **September 20, 2011 at 12 p.m.** with *Meet the Young Artists*. The series runs until June 2012 and features the Ensemble Studio in several recitals of diverse repertoire.

In November 2011, the Ensemble Studio members participate in the COC's annual Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour, providing school-aged audiences throughout Ontario with an introduction to the world of opera. The 11/12 school tour will delight young people with Dean Burry's *Isis and the Seven Scorpions* and a special adaptation of the classic fairy-tale, *Hansel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck.

The 11/12 Ensemble Studio members also sing the lead roles in their own performance of Handel's *Semele* on **May 23, 2012** with the full COC Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of the same creative team as the mainstage cast: Italian conductor **Rinaldo Alessandrini** and director **Zhang Huan**.

COC audiences may look forward to the return of many distinguished Ensemble Studio graduates to the mainstage to sing principal roles in the 11/12 season, including **Joseph Kaiser** (Pylades in *Iphigenia in Tauris*), **Alain Coulombe** (Count Ceprano in *Rigoletto*), **Krisztina Szabó** (The Pilgrim in *Love from Afar*), **Lauren Segal** (The Muse/Nicklausse in *The Tales of Hoffmann*), **Adam Luther** (Gherardo in *Gianni Schicchi*) and **Doug MacNaughton** (Maestro Spinellocchio in *Gianni Schicchi*).

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## ENSEMBLE STUDIO SUMMER PLANS

- Saskatoon-born soprano **Ileana Montalbetti** was hailed by the *Toronto Star* as “ready for a great career. Period.” This summer Ms Montalbetti sings a principal role with Saskatoon Opera, competes in the Stella Maris Vocal Competition, and attends the prestigious Ravinia Festival in Illinois.
- Vancouver native soprano **Simone Osborne** uniformly dazzled critics this season as Pamina in the COC's production of *The Magic Flute*. She attends the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara over the summer months to work on upcoming roles with legendary singer and mentor Marilyn Horne.
- Terrace, British Columbia soprano **Ambur Braid**, who gave a “characterful and spontaneous” performance (*NOW Magazine*) in the COC's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, travels to Italy for a language intensive, and also attends noted soprano Wendy Nielsen's New Brunswick vocal program.
- Port Elgin, Ontario soprano **Jacqueline Woodley**, praised for sounding “deceptively like a young Dawn Upshaw” (*La Scena Musicale*), debuts with Queen of Puddings Music Theatre in June, and is engaged over July and August for performances with the Sharon Festival and a recording with the Capriccio Ensemble.
- Tunisian-born, Montreal-raised mezzo-soprano **Rihab Chaieb** inspired young audiences as Cinderella on the Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour to the northern reaches of Nunavik, QC. This summer she studies privately with esteemed pedagogue Marlena Malas at the Chautauqua Institute in New York state.
- Morris, Manitoba tenor **Christopher Enns** was lauded by the *National Post* for his “fresh and appealing voice” in the role of Tamino in the Ensemble Studio production of *The Magic Flute*. Mr. Enns returns to Manitoba for the summer months to engage in private study in preparation for his 11/12 roles.
- Guelph, Ontario native **Adrian Kramer** recently won kudos for his “lively, ingratiating stage persona” (*La Scena Musicale*) in the Ensemble Studio production of *The Magic Flute*. In July and August he studies privately at the Chautauqua Institute and with baritone Timothy Noble at the Highlands Opera Studio.
- South African-born, Calgary-raised bass-baritone **Neil Craighead** travelled to New York in 2011 to perform in the critically-hailed production of *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. He has been accepted to the COSI summer program in Sulmona, Italy to sing roles in *Don Giovanni*.

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## About the Ensemble Studio

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and are important ambassadors for the company. Since its inception in 1980, over 150 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, David Pomeroy, Joseph Kaiser, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó.

Chosen through a national audition process open only to Canadian citizens, 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.

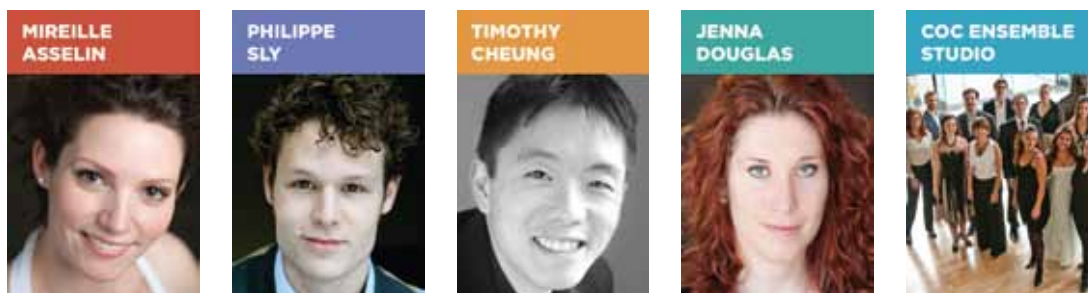
The Ensemble Studio is generously supported by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage, ARIAS (The Canadian Student Opera Development Fund), in loving memory of Mr. George R. Bishop, from his family & friends, John A. Cook Young Artist Development Fund, in honour of Earlane Collins, in honour of Ninalee Craig, Estate of Horst Dantz and Don Quick, Michael & Lora Gibbens, Ethel Harris, Audrey S. Hellyer Charitable Foundation, Peter & Hélène Hunt, Patrick & Barbara Keenan, Hal Jackman Fund at the Ontario Arts Foundation, Jo Lander, Ruby Mercer Fund, George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation, Roger D. Moore Ensemble Studio Endowment Fund, RBC Foundation, Katalin Schäfer, in honour of Colleen Sexsmith, Slaight Family, John Stratton Trust, William & Phyllis Waters, and an anonymous donor.

### **About the Canadian Opera Company**

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the five largest in North America. The COC enjoys a loyal audience support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. The COC celebrates its 62nd anniversary during the 11/12 season. 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 and 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 Canadian Opera Company, please visit its award-winning website, [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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## **INTERACTIVE LINKS**



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