

For immediate release: Oct. 25, 2011

COC'S XSTRATA ENSEMBLE STUDIO SCHOOL TOUR RETURNS TO DELIGHT AND ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS ONTARIO

Toronto – The Canadian Opera Company's Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour embarks on a sold-out tour this fall, visiting elementary schools across Ontario from **Oct. 31 to Nov. 26, 2011**, with *Isis and the Seven Scorpions*, by critically acclaimed Canadian composer **Dean Burry**; and *Hansel and Gretel*, a specially adapted version of **Engelbert Humperdinck's** classic fairytale opera. The **2011 Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour** features 59 performances of the two child-friendly productions, reaching over 15,000 students from kindergarten to grade six.

As part of a special opera residency in Sudbury and Timmins this year, the **Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour** will offer introductory workshops to schools receiving a performance of *Isis and the Seven Scorpions*. Elementary school children will take part in Introduction to Opera workshops led by the opera's composer **Dean Burry**, and high school students will take part in Introduction to Directing workshops led by the production's director **Ashlie Corcoran**. The Northern Ontario Regional Arts Conference will also feature a professional development workshop for educators on how to use opera in the classroom, led by Corcoran.

For more than 30 years the COC's renowned school tour has brought opera to local schools and communities across Ontario, in the last four years adding northern Ontario to the list of destinations with performances in Sudbury and Timmins. In 2010, the tour travelled further north than ever before to the Inuit communities of Salluit and Kangiqsujaq in the Nunavik region of northern Québec. The touring productions display the talents of singers from the **COC Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Adapted for a younger audience, the 50-minute long productions of *Isis and the Seven Scorpions* and *Hansel and Gretel* are sung in English and conclude with a post-show question-and-answer period with members of the cast and crew.

Xstrata, a major global diversified mining group, is the Title Sponsor of the school tour. "We are extremely pleased at how well the Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour has been received by communities across Ontario, including those in which we live and work," says Ian Pearce, Chief Executive of Xstrata Nickel. "We are especially delighted to see the program at Sudbury and Timmins include an expanded curriculum for children and their teachers alike."

"Opera is accessible to everyone and that's never more obvious than when our touring productions go into schools and allow young people to have their own experience with the art form, some for the very first time," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "Xstrata's support of the tour, especially through making the workshops in Sudbury and Timmins possible, is essential to the COC's efforts to reach out to the community and inspire young people about the performing arts."

Isis and the Seven Scorpions by Dean Burry

Commissioned by the COC for the school tour in 2006, *Isis and the Seven Scorpions* was written specifically for elementary school-age audiences. Set in the midst of an Egyptian sandstorm, this opera follows the adventures of Professor Hornsby and his students. When Professor Hornsby is stung by a poisonous scorpion, his students must find the cure hidden in ancient hieroglyphics in the Lost Temple of Isis. In an effort to save their professor, the students use Isis's ancient wisdom and learn the power of forgiveness.

Creative Team

Director: Ashlie Corcoran
Music Director: Timothy Cheung
Set & Costume Designer: Brent Krysa

Professor Hornsby/Set: Christopher Enns
Sally Smith/Isis: Jacqueline Woodley
David Sands/Osiris/ Scorpions: Jon-Paul Décosse
Molly Brown/Nephtys/Tahamet: Lindsay Barrett

Hansel and Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck

Written by German composer Engelbert Humperdinck in 1890, *Hansel and Gretel* was last performed as part of the school tour in 2006. This version of *Hansel and Gretel* is an adaptation of the original full-length opera, based on the classic fairytale by the Brothers Grimm. Widely known for its timeless appeal to audiences young and old, *Hansel and Gretel* follows the two siblings through their adventures in the woods and dangerous dealings with an evil witch. The school tour version of *Hansel and Gretel* contains amusing characters and enchanting music that will have young audiences spellbound.

Creative Team

Director: Joel Ivany
Music Director: Jenna Douglas
Set & Costume Designer: Brent Krysa

Hansel: Rihab Chaieb
Gretel: Lisa DiMaria
Gertrude, Mother to Hansel and Gretel: Ambur Braid
Father/Sandman: Philippe Sly/Neil Craighead
Witch: Michael Barrett

A complete 2011 Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour schedule is available upon request. The COC welcomes media coverage of school performances. Photographers and writers must advise the COC's Media Relations team 48 hours before the performance of their attendance at the in-school presentation. The COC must advise the school before any media can attend. This is a legal requirement.

The COC Ensemble Studio 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 supported by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage, RBC Foundation and other generous donors.

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 2011/2012 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 COC, visit its award-winning website, coc.ca.

- 30 -

For more information or to request photographs of the school tour productions, please contact:

Victoria Miller, Public Relations, tel: 416-306-2383, e-mail: victoriam@coc.ca
Jennifer Pugsley, Media Relations Manager, tel: 416-306-2303, e-mail: jenniferp@coc.ca