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## **FINALISTS FROM ACROSS CANADA COME TO TORONTO FOR INAUGURAL COC ENSEMBLE STUDIO COMPETITION**

**Toronto** – Following auditions in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and New York City attended by **Canadian Opera Company** administrators, 10 out of a pool of over 160 young, aspiring opera singers have been selected to compete in the final auditions at the inaugural **COC Ensemble Studio Competition**. For the first time in the history of the COC, the final auditions for singers seeking to join the Ensemble Studio training program will be made public as a vocal competition. In addition to an offer of a coveted position in the 2012/2013 Ensemble Studio, the singers will be competing for one of four cash prizes. A limited number of tickets priced at **\$30** are now on sale for the **COC Ensemble Studio Competition**, which takes place on **Nov. 28, 2011** at **5:30 p.m.** in the **Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**.

Ten finalists will perform in front of an audience and a panel of judges, comprised of COC General Director **Alexander Neef**, Music Administrator **Sandra Gavinchuk**, Head of the Ensemble Studio **Liz Upchurch**, *Opera Canada* editor **Wayne Gooding**, and Canadian soprano, opera coach, and Ensemble Studio alumna **Wendy Nielsen**. Over the course of the two-hour competition, each finalist will perform two arias showcasing their vocal technique and range. The judging panel will deliberate on location and announce the competition winners at the conclusion of the evening's event.

Select finalists will be invited to join the 12/13 Ensemble Studio, with the number of offers to be determined by the judging panel. First, second and third prizes, worth **\$5,000**, **\$3,000**, and **\$1,500**, respectively, will be awarded, in addition to a **People's Choice Award**, selected by audience vote, worth **\$1,500**.

The Ensemble Studio Competition highlights the finest young talent from across the country. Winning a place in what is Canada's premier training program for opera professionals can be these singers' first step towards an international opera career. The audience at the vocal competition will be hearing the singers selected to follow in the footsteps of such renowned Ensemble Studio graduates as Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Joseph Kaiser, and John Fanning, among many others.

The finalists are:

§ <b>Lindsay Barrett</b> (Sudbury, ON)	§ <b>David Gibbons</b> (Red Deer, AB)
§ <b>Claire de Sevigne</b> (Montreal, QC)	§ <b>Danielle MacMillan</b> (Toronto, ON)
§ <b>Sasha Djihanian</b> (Montreal, QC)	§ <b>Owen McCausland</b> (Saint John, NB)
§ <b>Rachel Fenlon</b> (Victoria, BC)	§ <b>Laura McLean</b> (New Glasgow, NS)
§ <b>Aviva Fortunata Wilks</b> (Calgary, AB)	§ <b>Cameron McPhail</b> (Brandon, MB)

“The quantity and quality of young opera talent in Canada is staggering, and the finalists in this year's competition are truly some of the best emerging artists from across the country,” says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**, “The members of the Ensemble Studio are the opera stars of tomorrow and, through the COC Ensemble Studio Competition, the public is given the exciting opportunity to be a part of these singers' professional journeys from the very beginning.”

Tickets are **\$30** and are available for purchase 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.

The Ensemble Studio audition process is open only to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants.

The young artists of the COC Ensemble Studio Competition are generously sponsored by Laurie & Fared Ali, Earlane Collins, Ninalee Craig, George & Kathy Dembroski, Marjorie & Roy Linden, Trina & Don McQueen, Sue Mortimer in memory of Clive Bennett Mortimer, Colleen Sexsmith, Sandra L. Simpson, Mr. Brian Wilks and two anonymous donors.

The COC Ensemble Studio Competition is presented in part by RBC Foundation and the Hal Jackman Foundation

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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.

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, Slight 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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