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MONTREAL'S SASHA DJIHANIAN WINS INAUGURAL COC ENSEMBLE STUDIO COMPETITION

Toronto – Soprano **Sasha Djihanian**, a native of Montreal, claimed the top prize last night at the inaugural **Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio Competition** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, selected from 10 finalists to receive the **\$5,000** award. Soprano **Claire de Sévigné**, also from Montreal, won the second prize of **\$3,000** and tenor **Owen McCausland** from Saint John, New Brunswick was awarded the third prize of **\$1,500**. In addition, Sudbury soprano **Lindsay Barrett** was selected by the audience as the winner of the **Audience Choice Award**, worth **\$1,500**.

The 10 finalists from across Canada were selected from over 160 singers in preliminary auditions in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and New York. Each finalist performed two arias with piano accompaniment in front of a live audience and an adjudicator panel comprised of COC General Director **Alexander Neef**, Music Administrator **Sandra Gavinchuk**, Head of the Ensemble Studio **Liz Upchurch**, and guest judges *Opera Canada* editor **Wayne Gooding**, and Canadian soprano, voice teacher, and Ensemble Studio alumna **Wendy Nielsen**.

“The audience at last night’s competition was treated to an exclusive preview of the exceptionally bright future of Canadian operatic talent,” says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. “All of the finalists tonight demonstrated remarkable skill, and the prize winners impressed the judges and tonight’s audience with their technique and rich tone, as well their intelligent and emotional delivery. Following all of these young artists’ careers is going to be a pleasure for me personally and for our audiences as well.”

In addition to the four cash prizes, the finalists were competing for highly coveted positions in the **2012/2013 COC Ensemble Studio**, Canada’s premier training program for young opera professionals. The competition marked the first time in COC history that the final auditions for the Ensemble Studio were held in front of a public audience. Taking into account the performances at last night’s Ensemble Studio Competition, COC artistic staff will now finalize the lineup of the 12/13 Ensemble Studio. The full lineup will be announced in the new year. The 12/13 Ensemble Studio members will be joining 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, David Pomeroy, Joseph Kaiser, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó.

The Canadian Opera Company is grateful to the following for their support of the inaugural Ensemble Studio Competition: Laurie & Fared Ali, Earlane Collins, Ninalee Craig, George & Kathy Dembroski, Marjorie & Roy Linden, Sandra L. Simpson, The Stratton Trust, Colleen Sexsmith, Trina & Don McQueen, Jo Lander, Sue Mortimer, Brian Wilks and an anonymous donor.

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

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

About the Winners

SASHA DJIHANIAN, \$5,000 winner

Arias performed: “Je dis que rien ne m’épouvante” from *Carmen* (Bizet), “Deh vieni, non tardar” from *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mozart)

Sasha Djihanian was born in Montreal and is a graduate of the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal with honours of First Prize and Great Distinction. She is a Jacqueline Desmarais Grant Holder, winner of the Third Prize at the Czech and Slovak International Competition, and Second Prize at the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition. Ms Djihanian was a national finalist in the 2011 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, a semi-finalist in the 2011 Queen Elisabeth Competition and a finalist in the 2011 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. Upcoming performances include Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* and Micaëla in *Carmen* at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari, Italy with Lorin Maazel conducting.

CLAIRE DE SÉVIGNÉ, \$3,000 winner

Arias performed: “Ah! Douce enfant” from *Cendrillon* (Massenet), “Da tempeste” from *Giulio Cesare* (Handel)

Soprano Claire de Sévigné, a native of Montreal, received her master's degree in opera from the University of Toronto and a bachelor's degree from McGill University, with additional training at the Aspen Opera Program, Tafelmusik Institute, the Centre for Opera Studies in Italy, Institut Canadien d'Art Vocal, Brevard Opera and Opera NUOVA. Recent appearances include the title role in a workshop of *The Enslavement and Liberation of Oksana G* with Tapestry New Opera; Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Flaminia in *Il mondo della luna*, and Cunegonde in *Candide* at UofT. This season she will perform the role of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* with Thirteen Strings Orchestra.

OWEN MCCAUSLAND, \$1,500 winner

Arias performed: “Questa o quella” from *Rigoletto* (Verdi), “Une furtiva lagrima” from *L’elisir d’amore* (Donizetti)

Tenor Owen McCausland, born and raised in Saint John, New Brunswick, is a multi-year winner at the New Brunswick Competitive Festival of Music. He is currently working towards completing a bachelor of arts in music with Dalhousie University. Mr. McCausland recently performed the role of Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* at the Centre for Opera Studies in Italy. Other operatic credits include Don Juan in *Don Quichotte* (Opera Nova Scotia), Spoletta in *Tosca* (Maritime Concert Opera) as well as Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas* and Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* (Dalhousie Opera).

LINDSAY BARRETT, Audience Choice Award winner, \$1,500

Arias performed: “Sempre libera” from *La Traviata* (Verdi), “Chi il bel sogno” from *La Rondine* (Puccini)

Soprano Lindsay Barrett, a native of Sudbury, Ontario, graduated from the University of Toronto's Opera School receiving the Tecumseh Sherman Rogers Graduating Scholarship. She recently appeared in *Isis and the Seven Scorpions* with the COC's Xstrata Ensemble Studio School Tour. Other credits include Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin* with Off Centre Music; Violetta in *La Traviata* with Saskatoon Opera; Laetitia in Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*, and Fanny in Rossini's *La Cambiale di Matrimonio* with Highlands Opera Studio; Cunegonde in *Candide* and Flaminia in Haydn's *Il mondo della luna* with UofT; and, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with conductor David Briskin and the UofT Orchestra.

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 Earleine 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.

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