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## **CANADIAN PREMIERE, NEW PRODUCTION AND DEBUT APPEARANCES MAKE UP COC'S DOUBLE BILL OF *A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY* AND *GIANNI SCHICCHI***

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company** presents a double bill of witty one-act operas as part of its 2012 spring season with the Canadian premiere of Alexander Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy* and the return of Giacomo Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, last seen with the COC in 1996. The two operas are presented in a new COC production by the legendary soprano-turned-director **Catherine Malfitano** and world-renowned conductor **Sir Andrew Davis**. *A Florentine Tragedy* is sung in German and *Gianni Schicchi* is sung in Italian, both with English SURTITLES™. The double bill of *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi* runs for eight performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **April 26, May 2, 5, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 25, 2012**.

The COC's double bill is one of the rare times that *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Gianni Schicchi* have been paired together. The two works were written just a year apart, with Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy* premiering in Stuttgart in 1917 and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918, and both use Florence as the backdrop for their respective stories of familial turmoil.

**Catherine Malfitano** makes her company debut directing the COC's double bill, an opportunity that marks the first time in **Malfitano**'s illustrious career that she has had the chance to be involved in a production of *A Florentine Tragedy*. **Malfitano** made her debut as stage director in 2005, following a career as America's leading operatic soprano, having portrayed over 70 roles and given more than 1,400 performances at all the major opera houses of the world. As a director, she has staged critically acclaimed productions for Central City Opera Festival, Florida Grand Opera, Washington National Opera, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, English National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The COC's new production uses Florence's breathtaking cityscape as the canvas on which **Malfitano** draws out the themes of class values, morality and excess of riches that underline both operas, with set designs by **Wilson Chin**, costume designs by **Terese Wadden** and lighting designs by **David Martin Jacques**. Inspired by how *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Gianni Schicchi* are linked in time and subject but can feel representative of two very different worlds, **Malfitano**'s concept unites the two operas by having them take place within the same Italian palazzo but physically sets them in different time periods.

**Sir Andrew Davis** makes a highly anticipated return to the opera company to lead the COC Orchestra, having delighted audiences with his conducting debut with the COC in 2011's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. With the double bill, **Davis** takes audiences on a musical journey starting with Zemlinsky's ravishing late-Romantic score that shifts from the dark and sinister to the light and shimmering, and then through Puccini's quick-fire composition, with harmonies and lyrical passages that echo the hilarity and solemnity of the opera's twisted plot.

The Canadian premiere of Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy* is a chance to discover a rare gem of the operatic repertoire. Based on an unfinished Oscar Wilde play, the darkly satiric work tells the tale of a merchant who discovers his wife is having an affair and contains one of opera's most unexpected endings with the murder of the wife's lover and the married couple's passionate reconciliation. **Alan Held**, recognized internationally as one of the leading singing actors today and called "one of America's best bass-baritones" (*Opera News*), makes his COC debut in the lead role of Simone, the cuckolded merchant. German soprano **Gun-Brit Barkmin**, who has won great acclaim for her breathtaking voice and dramatically intense stage presence, makes her COC debut as

Simone's wife, Bianca. German tenor **Michael König**, a regular artist with the opera houses of Frankfurt, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Vienna, Barcelona, Madrid and Paris, makes his COC debut as Guido Bardi, Bianca's lover.

In Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, American bass-baritone **Alan Held** sings the title role. As the street-smart peasant Gianni Schicchi, **Held** is at the heart of this fast-paced comedy inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which a family frantically schemes to benefit their own greed when excluded from a wealthy relative's will. COC Ensemble Studio soprano **Simone Osborne**, who has dazzled audiences and critics alike with her recent COC performances as Gilda in *Rigoletto* and Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, returns to the mainstage as Schicchi's daughter, Lauretta, singing one of opera's best-known arias, "O! mio babbino caro."

A host of new and familiar faces to the COC are cast as the grieving and greedy family members of the deceased relative, Buoso Donati. American mezzo-soprano **Barbara Dever**, in demand throughout the world for her dramatic operatic and concert repertoire, and last with the COC for 2010's *The Flying Dutchman*, returns as Zita, Buoso's cousin. In the role of Rinuccio, Lauretta's love and Zita's nephew, is American tenor **René Barbera** in his COC debut; a young artist on the rise, Barbera was awarded a First Prize for Opera at Operalia 2011, the Plácido Domingo World Opera Competition, and is a 2008 winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Ensemble Studio graduate tenor **Adam Luther**, last heard in the COC's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*, both in Toronto and on tour in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, is Gherardo, Buoso's nephew, and German soprano **Gun-Brit Barkmin** follows her performance in *A Florentine Tragedy* by singing the role of Nella, Gherardo's wife. Young American bass-baritone **Craig Irvine** makes his COC debut as Betto di Signa, Buoso's brother-in-law. Italian bass **Donato DiStefano** (2011's *La Cenerentola*) is Simone, Buoso's cousin, Ensemble Studio graduate baritone **Peter McGillivray** (2008's *War and Peace* and 2006's *Faust*) is Marco, Simone's son, and Ensemble Studio soprano **Rihab Chaieb** (2011's *La Cenerentola*) is La Ciesca, Marco's wife.

Rounding out the cast is COC favourite, and Ensemble Studio graduate, baritone **Doug MacNaughton** as Maestro Spinelloccio, Ensemble Studio bass-baritone **Philippe Sly** as Ser Amantio di Nicolao, Ensemble Studio bass-baritone **Neil Craighhead** as Pinellino and American bass **Valerian Ruminski** (Luther in 2012's *The Tales of Hoffmann*) as Guccio.

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### **TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets for *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi* are **\$12 – \$318** (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 **\$22.50** to **\$107.50** (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 **March 31, 2012** at 10 a.m., online at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca) or in person at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. 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.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The COC's double bill production of *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Gianni Schicchi* has been generously underwritten in part by **Riki Turofsky** and **Charles Petersen**.

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**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.**

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## **COC ANCILLARY EVENTS AND INFORMATION**

### **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.

### **Opera 101: Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi**

The COC's popular, **FREE** discussion series, **Opera 101**, puts the spotlight on the company's brand new production of two dark and witty one-act operas: Alexander Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy* and Giacomo Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* on **April 18, 2012 at 6 p.m.** at the **Duke of Westminster** (77 Adelaide St. W.). **Opera 101** host Brent Bambury (CBC Radio) welcomes conductor **Sir Andrew Davis** and COC Ensemble Studio soprano **Simone Osborne** – the love interest in *Gianni Schicchi* – for a discussion about the double bill. Audience members are welcome to ask questions throughout the event, adding to the lively nature of the conversation. Though the event is free, reservations are strongly recommended. To make a reservation, contact the Duke of Westminster at **416-368-2761**.

### **Opera Exchange: A Wilde Time – Zemlinsky's A Florentine Tragedy**

The COC's renowned **Opera Exchange** series continues on **April 22, 2012** with **A Wilde Time: Zemlinsky's A Florentine Tragedy** at **10 a.m.** at **Walter Hall** in the **University of Toronto's Edward Johnson Building** (80 Queen's Park Cres.). Coming together for the occasion are local and international academics who lead multi-disciplinary explorations and analysis on the themes and music of Alexander Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy*, a one-act opera based on Oscar Wilde's unfinished play and set to a ravishing late-Romantic score. The event concludes with an insightful conversation with *A Florentine Tragedy*'s director **Catherine Malfitano**, led by Wayne Gooding, editor of *Opera Canada*. Tickets for the Opera Exchange lecture are **\$23** 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**, (145 Queen St. W.).

### **A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi Interactive Features on COC Radio**

Through COC Radio, visitors to [coc.ca](http://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 *A Florentine Tragedy* and *Gianni Schicchi*, visitors will find a podcast series sponsored by Decca: The Opera Label. Hosted by the COC's Gianna Wichelow and Gianmarco Segato, the podcasts explore the opera and its background, and feature interviews with singers and members of the creative team.

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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 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](http://coc.ca).

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### **INTERACTIVE LINKS**



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