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ALL CANADIAN CAST IN COC'S CANADIAN PREMIERE OF SAARIAHO'S *LOVE FROM AFAR*, ONE OF THE 21ST CENTURY'S GREAT OPERAS

Toronto – This February, the **Canadian Opera Company** presents the Canadian premiere of acclaimed Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's *Love from Afar* (*L'amour de loin*), a haunting and vivid musical creation that has become one of the most performed and successful operas composed of this century. This new COC production is helmed by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** and visionary director **Daniele Finzi Pasca**, and features an all-Canadian cast of voices both familiar and new to the COC stage: baritone **Russell Braun**, soprano **Erin Wall** and mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**. Sung in French with English SURTITLES™, *Love from Afar* runs for eight performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **Feb. 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 14, 18 and 22, 2012**.

Since the opera's premiere in 2000 at the Salzburg Festival, *Love from Afar* has captivated audiences worldwide with performances at Théâtre du Châtelet, Sante Fe Opera, Stadttheater Bern, Finnish National Opera, the Bergen International Festival, English National Opera and Vlaamse Opera. Arguably the greatest opera of the 21st century, it has been praised as a "haunting and resonant work... transfixing and utterly distinguished" by the *New York Times*.

Love from Afar tells the story of a world-weary troubadour from France who carries on a long-distance love affair with a beautiful woman living in Tripoli. Although they never see or speak to each other, their feelings develop and grow through the efforts of an enigmatic Pilgrim, who carries messages of love and yearning between the two. Saariaho drew her inspiration for the work from the life and song texts of Jaufré Rudel, a French prince and troubadour of the 12th century, who often wrote of his obsessive love for an ideal, unattainable woman and whether such a love is best preserved from afar. The resulting work is a melding of medieval musings with the sounds of the modern age.

On the heels of his acclaimed performance in the COC's *Iphigenia in Tauris* last fall, internationally renowned lyric baritone **Russell Braun** returns to the company as the troubadour Jaufré Rudel. **Erin Wall**, one of the most exciting young sopranos on the current operatic scene with recent engagements at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Bayerische Staatsoper, makes her COC debut as Jaufré's faraway desire, Clémence. The mysterious Pilgrim is sung by mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**, who has captivated audiences across North America and Europe since graduating from the COC Ensemble Studio in 2001. She most recently appeared with the COC as Idamante in 2010's *Idomeneo*.

The COC production is presented by **Daniele Finzi Pasca**, best known for his work with Cirque du Soleil's *Corteo* and the creation of the closing ceremonies of the XX Olympic Winter Games in Torino in 2006. In *Love from Afar*, **Finzi Pasca** also serves as lighting designer, working with set designer **Jean Rabasse** and costume designer **Kevin Pollard**. He brings his signature style to a visually arresting new production that uses innovative Cirque-like techniques to extend the range of effects possible on stage. Acrobats gliding through the air, backgrounds of silk and coloured lights, and costumes with seemingly endless silken extensions seductively weave this 12th-century love affair with the 21st century.

Johannes Debus leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus through Saariaho's lushly orchestrated score. The composer has created a rich tapestry of sound using innovative combinations of traditional instrumental sections with electronics. Among the more unusual instruments used in *Love from Afar*'s orchestration are an o-daiko (a Japanese taiko drum), glass and shell chimes, and a synthesizer to trigger electronic soundscape effects.

This production of *Love from Afar* is a COC co-production with English National Opera, where it premiered in July 2009, and Vlaamse Opera, where it made its debut in September 2010.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Love from Afar* are \$12 – \$318 (includes applicable taxes). Tickets are available online at 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 for a New Age

Patrons between the ages of 16 and 29 may purchase \$22 Opera for a New Age tickets as of **Jan. 7, 2012** at 10 a.m., online at coc.ca or in person at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Opera for a New Age 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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.

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.

Mirror of Memory: Chamber and Vocal Music of Kaija Saariaho

On **Jan. 31, 2012** at **12 – 1 p.m.**, the COC's **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** hosts a stunning selection of works by composer **Kaija Saariaho**, presented by **Soundstreams**, an international organization dedicated to new directions in music. In addition to a selection of Saariaho's chamber works, the program features a performance of *Tag des Jahrs* by one of Canada's most illustrious choral ensembles, the **Elmer Iseler Singers**. A leading interpreter of contemporary music, soprano **Carla Huhtanen** offers her rendition of the *Leino Songs*.

Opera 101: Love from Afar

The COC's popular **FREE** discussion series, **Opera 101**, heads to the Duke of York (39 Prince Arthur Ave.) on **Jan. 31, 2012** at **6 p.m.** to put a spotlight on one of the most successful operas composed in the 21st century, *Love from Afar*. The opera's composer, **Kaija Saariaho**, will be present to discuss her musical creation, which tells the story of a medieval French troubadour journeying to meet a beautiful woman he has never seen. Joining Saariaho are soprano **Erin Wall**, who sings Clémence – the woman at the heart of this love story, and mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**, who is the Pilgrim, carrying messages between the two lovers. Host **Brent Bambury** (CBC Radio) moderates the conversation. Audience members are free to ask questions of the guests throughout the event, adding to the lively nature of the conversation.

From the Grammar of Dreams: Vocal Music of Kaija Saariaho

On **Feb. 2, 2012** from **12 – 1 p.m.**, the COC's **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** presents the young artists of the COC **Ensemble Studio** performing selections from the vocal works of **Kaija Saariaho**. The program will be introduced and discussed by the composer herself, and includes Saariaho's riveting mini-drama for two sopranos, *From the Grammar of Dreams*, as well as *Lohn*, a fascinating work for soprano and electronics based on the poetry of Jaufré Rudel, the 12th-century troubadour whose work also inspired Saariaho's opera, *Love from Afar*. The program also features appearances by COC Orchestra members, Concertmaster and violinist **Marie Bérard** and cellist **Olga Laktionova** in performances of *Changing Light* and *Mirage*, respectively.

Opera Exchange: Long Distant Loving: Saariaho's Love from Afar

The COC's renowned **Opera Exchange** series continues on **Feb. 4, 2012** with **Long Distant Loving: Saariaho's Love from Afar** at **9:30 a.m.** in Walter Hall at the University of Toronto's Edward Johnson Building (80 Queen's Park Cres.). Coming together for the occasion are local and international academics and artists who will lead explorations and analysis on the themes and music of composer Kaija Saariaho's *Love from Afar*, a haunting musical creation that has become one of the most successful 21st-century operas. The event includes a display featuring imagery of the COC's production of the opera. 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.).

L'amour à 4

On **Feb. 16, 2012** from **12 – 1 p.m.**, the COC's **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** presents the cast of the COC's production of *Love from Afar*: baritone **Russell Braun**, soprano **Erin Wall** and mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**, with COC **Ensemble Studio** tenor **Christopher Enns**, in a program that celebrates love, life and music. With four-hand piano accompaniment from **Carolyn Maule** and COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**, this concert features Brahms' *Liebeslieder Walzer*, Schumann's *Spanisches Liederspiel* and Canadian composer John Greer's *All Around the Circle*.

Love from Afar Interactive Features on COC Radio

Through COC Radio, visitors to **coc.ca** can find, in one place, a variety of audio and digital features available for downloading and streaming, all aimed at exploring an opera and its background as well as the artists appearing with the COC. Among the resources on *Love from Afar* accessible through COC Radio, 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.

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.

INTERACTIVE LINKS



- 30 -

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