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COC PRESENTS OFFENBACH'S FANTASTICAL GOTHIC ROMANCE, *THE TALES OF HOFFMANN*

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company's** 2011/2012 spring season opens with one of the great operatic masterpieces of the 19th century, Jacques Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*. This darkly romantic tale about a tortured artist's failure to find love makes its long-awaited return to the COC stage. **Johannes Debus** conducts the melody-filled score and **Lee Blakeley** directs a production that takes its cues from Gothic-Romantic author E. T. A. Hoffmann's own work. Sung in French with English SURTITLES™, *The Tales of Hoffmann* runs for nine performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **April 10, 14, 18, 21, 27, May 3, 6, 8 and 14, 2012**.

Making his COC debut as Hoffmann, the barfly poet who spins captivating reminiscences of lost loves to his fellow drinkers, is American tenor **Russell Thomas**. Hailed for his "ringing top notes" (*Chicago Sun-Times*), described as "superb" (*New York Times*) and noted for performances "sung with passion" (*The Times*, U.K.), Thomas is one of the most exciting vocal and dramatic talents on the international opera and concert scene today. Also appearing as Hoffmann for two performances (May 3 and 8) is COC Ensemble Studio graduate tenor **David Pomeroy**, whose rich voice has been heard with major opera companies and orchestras across Canada and throughout the United States and Europe. Pomeroy made his 2009 Metropolitan Opera debut in the role of Hoffmann, following his last appearance with the COC in 2009's *Madama Butterfly*.

Acclaimed Canadian bass-baritone **John Relyea**, a regular with the world's most celebrated opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Bayerische Staatsoper and Vienna State Opera, makes his long-awaited COC debut singing Hoffmann's four nemeses: Lindorf, Coppélius, Dr. Miracle and Dapertutto.

A woman is at the heart of each of the stories that Hoffmann tells and the COC has brought together three outstanding sopranos who have amazed audiences and critics the world over. Canadian **Andriana Chuchman**, makes her COC debut as Olympia, the exquisite doll-like girl. Canadian **Erin Wall**, recently in Toronto as Clémence in the COC's acclaimed production of *Love from Afar*, is Antonia, the fragile artist. American **Keri Alkema**, who returns to the opera company in 12/13 as Vitellia in *La clemenza di Tito*, makes her COC debut as Giulietta, the Venetian courtesan.

COC Ensemble Studio graduate mezzo-soprano **Lauren Segal** (2011's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *The Magic Flute* and *Nixon in China*) is Hoffmann's companion Nicklausse and the Muse, and American tenor **Steven Cole** (2009's *Madama Butterfly*) sings the roles of the servants Andrès, Cochenille, Frantz and Pitichinaccio. Ensemble Studio graduate tenor **Michael Barrett** is Spalanzani, Olympia's inventor; Canadian baritone **Gregory Dahl** is double-cast as Antonia's father, Crespel, and Giulietta's other lover, Schlemil; and American bass **Valerian Ruminski** is Luther, owner of the tavern in which Hoffmann drowns his sorrows.

Rounding out the cast is a host of current members of the COC Ensemble Studio: soprano **Ileana Montalbetti** as the voice of Antonia's mother, tenor **Christopher Enns** and bass-baritone **Philippe Sly** as the students Nathanaël and Hermann, respectively, and soprano **Ambur Braid** as the opera singer Stella.

Lee Blakeley makes his COC debut directing *The Tales of Hoffmann* on the heels of acclaimed productions for Santa Fe Opera, Théâtre du Châtelet, Scottish Opera and Wexford Festival Opera. He works with British movement director **Tess Gibbs**, Israeli set designer **Roni Toren**, German costume designer **Brigitte Reiffenstuel** and Sri Lankan lighting designer **Jenny Cane** to create for the COC an almost “Tim Burton-esque” production that suggests both a romanticism and fascination with the macabre of Hoffmann’s fantastical world.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus through a rich and recognizable score that includes the character Olympia’s signature “doll song,” and one of the most famous barcarolles in classical music, a lilting duet about love sung between Nicklausse and Giulietta that evokes the beauty of a Venetian night. Offenbach’s composition is the musical embodiment of the archetypal tortured artist, torn between his search for love and the demands of his creative muse, traveling in tone from the heights of jubilation to the depths of despair, as well as through moments of dreamy melancholia.

The Tales of Hoffmann is Jacques Offenbach’s final opera and represents the culmination of his efforts to be taken seriously as an operatic composer after a successful career as a composer of numerous operettas. Its premiere in 1881 in Paris was considered a triumph, but the opera fell out of favour until a production in 1905 in Berlin. Since then, *The Tales of Hoffmann* has been heralded as Offenbach’s operatic masterpiece.

This production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* comes to the COC from Vlaamse Opera, where it premiered in 2000. *The Tales of Hoffmann* was last performed by the opera company in 1988.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *The Tales of Hoffmann* 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 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** 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Spring Season Supported by the **Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund**

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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.

Opera 101: *The Tales of Hoffmann*

The COC's popular, **FREE** discussion series, **Opera 101**, kicks off the spring season on **April 4, 2012 at 6 p.m.** at the **Duke of Westminster** (77 Adelaide St. W.) with an evening devoted to the COC's production of ***The Tales of Hoffmann***. American tenor **Russell Thomas**, who sings the title role; Canadian bass-baritone **John Relyea**, who sings Hoffmann's four nemeses; and conductor **Johannes Debus** join Opera 101 host **Brent Bambury** (CBC Radio) at the pub for a dynamic discussion about this opera, which follows the tavern-dwelling poet Hoffmann as he spins dark reminiscences of his failed attempts to find love. Though the event is free, reservations are strongly recommended. To make a reservation, contact the Duke of Westminster at **416-368-2761**.

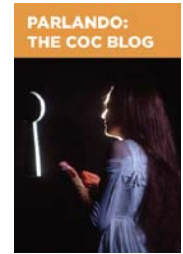
***The Tales of Hoffmann* Interactive Features on COC Radio**

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 for ***The Tales of Hoffmann***, 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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