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FOUR RISING STARS TO JOIN CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY'S 2014/2015 ENSEMBLE STUDIO

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, welcomes four talented new Canadian artists for the 2014/2015 season. Soprano **Karine Boucher**, tenor **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure** and bass-baritone **Iain MacNeil** were among the nine finalists featured in the third annual Ensemble Studio Competition in November 2013. **Boucher, Fortier-Lazure** and **MacNeil** were top prize winners at the competitive vocal showcase which was the feature event of the COC's inaugural Ensemble Studio Competition Gala, *Centre Stage*, an evening dedicated to the discovery and celebration of the next generation of opera stars. In addition to the three opera singers, the 14/15 Ensemble Studio welcomes pianist **Jennifer Szeto**.

The four artists join the Ensemble Studio in August 2014 and become part of an illustrious program that, since its inception in 1980, has launched the careers of over 180 Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors, including Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Ben Heppner, Joseph Kaiser, Allyson McHardy, Wendy Nielsen, Simone Osborne, David Pomeroy, 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. In addition, they appear in principal roles in a special Ensemble Studio performance of a COC mainstage production, give several concert performances through the COC's Free Concert Series and perform in the COC's annual Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour, which introduces young audiences throughout Ontario to the world of opera and the performing arts.

All the new and returning artists of the Ensemble Studio open the 14/15 season of the **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** with *Meet the Young Artists* in September 2014. The series runs from September 2014 to June 2015 and features the members of the Ensemble Studio in several recitals of diverse repertoire over the course of the season. Complete details of the 14/15 Free Concert Series season will be announced later this year.

In November 2014, Ensemble Studio members participate in the COC's annual **Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour**, providing school-aged audiences throughout Ontario with an introduction to the world of opera. Complete details of the **2014 Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour** will be announced in the fall of 2014.

The 14/15 Ensemble Studio members also sing the lead roles in their own performance of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* on **May 15, 2015** with the COC Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of the same creative team as the mainstage cast: COC Music Director and conductor **Johannes Debus** and production team **Els Comediants**. All tickets for this performance are accessibly priced at \$25 and \$55.

ABOUT THE NEW MEMBERS

Karine Boucher – Soprano Karine Boucher is the first prize and audience-choice award winner of the COC's 2013 Ensemble Studio Competition. Born in Québec City, Boucher is a current member of the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal. She received her master's degree and bachelor's degree in opera performance from the Québec Conservatory. In 2011 she was a regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and is a grant recipient of the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation. Credits include Annina in *La Traviata*, Inez in *Il Trovatore* and Kätchen in *Werther* (Opéra de Montréal); Miss Pinkerton in *The Old Maid and the Thief* and Micaëla in *Carmen* (Atelier lyrique); and Damon in *Acis and Galatea* (Arte Musica). In 2014, Boucher will sing the role of Mimì in the Jeunesses Musicales tour of *La Bohème*.

Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure – Tenor Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure won second prize at the COC's 2013 Ensemble Studio Competition. Originally from Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, he is pursuing a master's degree in classical singing at the University of Montreal, where he also completed his bachelor's degree. Fortier-Lazure has participated in young artist training programs with the National Arts Centre, Centre d'Arts Orford and Académie Internationale d'été Nice. Credits include Pélleas in *Pélleas et Mélisande* (Nova Scotia Opera Company and Atelier d'Opéra, University of Montreal); Chevalier de la Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Atelier d'Opéra); Beppe in *Pagliacci* (Opera Lyra Ottawa – Silver Cast); Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Don Curzio/Don Basilio in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Mr. Gobineau in *The Medium* (University of Ottawa Opera Productions); and Guard in *Manon* and Prince of Persia in *Turandot* (Opera Lyra Ottawa).

Iain MacNeil – Bass-baritone Iain MacNeil took third prize at the COC's 2013 Ensemble Studio Competition. A native of Brockville, Ontario, MacNeil is currently completing an opera diploma at the University of Toronto and received a bachelor of music degree from Dalhousie University. Credits include Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Don Giovanni in scenes from *Don Giovanni* and Dulcamara in scenes from *L'elisir d'amore* (Centre for Opera Studies in Italy); Bobby in Kurt Weill's *Mahagonny-Songspiel*, Sweeney Todd in *Sweeney Todd*, Brewer in *Comedy on the Bridge* and Tom/John in *The Face on the Barroom Floor* (Dalhousie Opera Workshop). In 2013, he participated in the Young Singers Project at the Salzburg Festival.

Jennifer Szeto – Calgary-born Jennifer Szeto is a graduate of McGill University, and is currently an apprentice pianist/coach with Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal. She recently served as staff pianist at the Institut Canadien d'Art Vocal in Montreal, an apprentice pianist/coach at a St.-Andrews-by-the-Sea opera workshop in New Brunswick, and staff pianist at the Cowtown Opera Summer Academy in Calgary. In 2012, she was an Emerging Artist with the Green Mountain Opera Festival in Vermont and, in Toronto, played for the Metro Youth Opera's production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. For Opera McGill, she served as répétiteur for Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Puccini's *La Bohème*. Other recent engagements include presenting one-act operas in English at the 2012 Halifax Summer Opera Workshop. In 2011 she attended the prestigious Franz Schubert Institute in Austria and served as music director for the Metro Youth Opera Company's production of *Così fan tutte*.

2013/2014 ENSEMBLE STUDIO GRADUATES

COC General Director **Alexander Neef** extends the company's congratulations to soprano **Sasha Djihanian**, soprano **Claire de Sévigné**, baritone **Cameron McPhail** and pianist **Michael Shannon**, who graduate from the Ensemble Studio program at the end of the 2013/2014 season. Before leaving the program, these young artists can be heard in several performances during the remainder of the 13/14 season.

The Ensemble Studio performance of the COC's mainstage production of *Così fan tutte* takes place on **February 7, 2014**. In this special presentation of Mozart's wry romantic comedy, **Sasha Djihanian** is Fiordiligi, **Claire de Sévigné** is the conniving Despina. **Cameron McPhail** sings the role of Guglielmo.

On **May 20, 2014 at 12 p.m.**, as part of the **COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre**, join the graduating artists in a special farewell concert, *Les Adieux*. The singers and pianists will perform a program of music featuring their favourite art songs and arias.

Other opportunities to see the graduating artists on the COC mainstage include **Djihanian** as Pedro in *Don Quichotte*.

OTHER 2013/2014 ENSEMBLE STUDIO PERFORMANCES

The spotlight shines on the rising stars of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio when they take to the mainstage of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **February 7, 2014**, and present their own special performance of Mozart's wry romantic comedy, *Così fan tutte*, directed by **Atom Egoyan** and conducted by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**. Tickets are accessibly priced at \$25 and \$55, and 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, located at 145 Queen St. W.

Ensemble Studio members also perform in five more recitals during the 13/14 Free Concert Series season in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

- **January 28, 2014 at 12 p.m.:** *The School for Lovers: Highlights from Così fan tutte* – highlights from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.
- **February 20, 2014 at 12 p.m.:** *Collaborations* – singers from the young artist programs of the Canadian Opera Company and l'Opéra de Montréal join forces in a program of arias and ensembles.
- **March 13, 2014 at 12 p.m.:** *Opera Interactive* – a lively interactive concert featuring favourite operatic arias and sing-along choruses.
- **April 3, 2014 at 12 p.m.:** *Love Song Waltzes* – a celebration of love, life and music in a performance of Brahms' tour-de-force for four voices and two pianos: *Liebeslieder Walzer* (Love Song Waltzes).
- **May 15, 2014 at 12 p.m.:** *War and Peace: Handel, Bach, Albinoni* – an exploration of the themes of war and peace through some of the most exquisite chamber works and arias of the Baroque era.

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The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb and The Slight Family Foundation, 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 also supported by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage, RBC Foundation, the Hal Jackman Foundation and other generous donors.

About the Canadian Opera Company

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. The COC enjoys a loyal audience support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. 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 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.

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