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NEXT GENERATION OF OPERA STARS TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN SPECIAL PERFORMANCE OF MOZART'S *COSÌ FAN TUTTE*

Toronto – On **Friday, February 7, 2014 at 7:30 p.m.**, 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. They present their own special performance of Mozart's wry romantic comedy, *Così fan tutte*. This production is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™ and all tickets to the Ensemble Studio performance are accessibly priced at **\$25** or **\$55**.

The Ensemble Studio performance of *Così fan tutte* is a rare opportunity for artists of the **Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, to sing the starring roles in a COC mainstage production. For some of the cast in this year's showcase, the February 7 performance takes their careers to the next level as they make their COC mainstage debuts. The singers work with the same creative team as the mainstage cast for *Così fan tutte*. Led by renowned Canadian director **Atom Egoyan**, the Ensemble Studio artists perform with the full **COC Orchestra** and **Chorus**, under the direction of **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**.

In *Così fan tutte*, two young couples become entangled in a fidelity-testing wager. Inspired by the opera's subtitle, *The School for Lovers*, **Egoyan** sets the action in an academy where love is examined, dissected and manipulated to illuminate the characters' struggles with fidelity and temptation. This production is an ideal showcase for the Ensemble Studio's young stars-in-training, from enacting **Egoyan**'s playful staging, full of farce and folly, to performing Mozart's sublime score, which features some of opera's most exquisite music for ensembles and breathtakingly beautiful arias.

Four talented singers share the roles of the opera's two sisters, Fiordiligi and Dorabella, whose devotion is challenged by their fiancés' secret wager. Sopranos **Sasha Djihanian** and **Aviva Fortunata** perform the role of Fiordiligi. **Djihanian** returns to the COC mainstage after being hailed as a "warm and charming presence" (*backtrack*) in the COC's production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. **Fortunata**, whose "exceptional voice" (*La Scena Musicale*) impressed audiences at the 2012 Ensemble Studio Competition, makes her COC mainstage debut. Mezzo-sopranos **Charlotte Burrage** and **Danielle MacMillan** are cast as Dorabella. As third-prize winner of the 2012 Ensemble Studio Competition, **Burrage** possessed a "fine musicality" (*La Scena Musicale*). She takes to the COC mainstage for the first time with this production. **MacMillan** makes her second appearance on the Four Seasons Centre stage after a "standout" (*barczablog*) performance as the Second Niece in the COC's recent *Peter Grimes*.

The roles of the sisters' two suitors also showcase four rising stars. Baritone **Clarence Frazer** is Guglielmo, Fiordiligi's fiancé. A graduate of Calgary Opera's Emerging Artist Program, he returns to the mainstage after his debut in the COC's *La Bohème*. Baritone **Cameron McPhail**, whose "impressive voice" (*barczablog*) was last heard on the COC's mainstage as Schaunard in *La Bohème*, also sings the role of Guglielmo. Tenors **Andrew Haji** and **Owen McCausland** sing the role of Dorabella's suitor, Ferrando. Praised after placing second in the 2012 Ensemble Studio Competition for his "bright, well focused and sweet" voice (*La Scena Musicale*), **Haji** now makes his debut on the Four Seasons Centre stage. **McCausland** was lauded for possessing a "maturity, confidence and conviction extraordinary for a singer at such an early stage in his career" (*Opera Toronto*) after stepping into the title role of the COC's mainstage production of *La clemenza di Tito* for several performances last season. He makes his seventh appearance on the COC mainstage with this role of Ferrando.

Soprano **Claire de Sévigné** brings her "sparkling tone with an endearing stage persona" (*La Scena Musicale*) to the role of the conniving Despina. She last appeared on the mainstage as the First Niece in the COC's *Peter Grimes*. As the wily Don Alfonso, bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner** instigates the fidelity-testing scheme. One of CBC's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30," he won first prize and the Audience Choice Award at the 2012 Ensemble Studio Competition.

The Ensemble Studio performance is part of the mainstage production of *Così fan tutte*, which runs from **January 18 to February 21, 2014** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. This new COC production features set and costume design by **Debra Hanson**, and lighting design by **Michael Walton**.

About the Ensemble Studio

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 180 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Allyson McHardy and Krisztina Szabó.

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They 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.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for the Ensemble Studio performance of *Così fan tutte* are **\$25** and **\$55** 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**, located at 145 Queen St. W., Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Patrons under the age of 30 may purchase all available seats for **\$25**. Opera Under 30 is presented by **TD Bank Group**.

Standing Room tickets are available for **\$12** at 11 a.m. the morning of the performance, in person only at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Limit of two tickets per person. Subject to availability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This performance is dedicated to the memory of former COC General Director **Lotfi Mansouri**.

The COC's new production of *Così fan tutte* is generously underwritten in part by **BMO Financial Group**.

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Members of the COC's 13/14 Ensemble Studio are generously sponsored by Anne and Tony Arrell, Marcia Lewis Brown, Margaret Harriett Cameron and the late Gary Smith, Catherine Fauquier, Peter and Hélène Hunt, Roy and Marjorie Linden, Roger D. Moore, James Nicol and Christine Milne, Brian Wilks and the COVC Jean A. Chalmers Fund.

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

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