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## **COC PRESENTS VERDI'S *A MASKED BALL* WITH FAMED CANADIAN SOPRANO ADRIANNE PIECZONKA IN LEAD ROLE**

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company** presents Verdi's opera of forbidden passion amid political turmoil, *A Masked Ball* (*Un ballo in maschera*). Sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™, *A Masked Ball* comes to the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts for eight performances on **February 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 20, 22, 2014**.

Internationally renowned Canadian soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka** and American tenor **Dimitri Pittas** make their role debuts as the opera's two lovers, Amelia and Riccardo, embroiled in romantic and political intrigue beyond their control. They lead an all-star cast directed by the renowned directing team of **Jossi Wieler** and **Sergio Morabito**, who make their Canadian debut. Returning to the COC to provide the musical direction and lead the company's internationally acclaimed orchestra and chorus through Verdi's thrilling score is **Stephen Lord**, one of only four conductors recently named by *Opera News* as being among the 25 most powerful names in U.S. opera.

At the heart of *A Masked Ball* is a bittersweet story of a passionate and impossible love. This production from the Berlin Staatsoper sets the action of *A Masked Ball* in an imagined America of the last few decades. It reveals a layer of political and historical relevance within the plot by drawing on mythological and iconic moments in American culture with its undertones of Kennedy-era tensions, assassinations and power plays.

A regular on the world's stages of New York, London, Paris, Milan, Berlin, Vienna, Bayreuth and Salzburg, Canada's great soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka** sings Amelia. This winter, Toronto audiences are the first to experience **Pieczonka** in a role she says is more dramatic than any other Verdi role she has sung to date. Tenor **Dimitri Pittas** follows up his recent star-turns in the COC's *La Bohème* and *Rigoletto* by returning to sing Riccardo. **Pittas** has appeared with leading opera houses throughout North America and Europe, including the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna State Opera and Royal Opera House Covent Garden.

Acclaimed Russian mezzo-soprano **Elena Manistina** is Ulrica, the fortune-teller who prophecies Riccardo's assassination. **Manistina** has appeared on the stages of Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Washington National Opera, Opéra National de Paris, Teatro Municipale de Santiago and the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and returns to the COC after a recent Dora Award-winning performance as Azucena in *Il Trovatore*.

Rising star British baritone **Roland Wood** makes his Canadian debut in the role of Amelia's husband, Renato. The young singer is a favourite featured artist with the De Nationale Reisopera, Scottish Opera and English National Opera. Ensemble Studio graduate soprano **Simone Osborne**, the inaugural winner of the Maureen Forrester Award Tour by Jeunesses Musicales Canada, is Riccardo's page, Oscar. Osborne returns to the COC after recently appearing as Musetta in *La Bohème*.

Rounding out the cast is outstanding Canadian baritone **Gregory Dahl**, as the sailor Silvano. As the co-conspirators in the plot to kill Riccardo are two rising young basses: American **Evan Boyer** as Samuel and Italian **Giovanni Battista Parodi** (COC debut) as Tom. The role of the Magistrate is sung by COC favourite tenor **John Krieter**. Ensemble Studio tenor **Owen McCausland** is the Servant of Amelia.

**Wieler** and **Morabito** are well known for immersing themselves in an opera's score and closely following the link between its music and words to arrive at a production concept. Called "unashamedly entertaining" by *Bloomberg News*, this production of *A Masked Ball* ranges over the panoply of modern America – from the heightened Kennedy-era politics of the 1960s to the red carpet pageantry of awards shows in the new millennium – to create a composite, theatrical reality. As **Wieler** and **Morabito**'s work is rarely seen in North America, the COC's presentation of their *A Masked Ball* is a special opportunity to discover the opera in which Verdi went to the USA.

Striking period sets and costumes by **Barbara Ehnes** and **Anja Rabes**, respectively, evoke the television series *Mad Men*, full of the colour, optimism and vitality of the early 1960s, along with the occasional more contemporary detail. Lighting design is by **Olaf Freese**.

### **About A Masked Ball**

Not unlike the opera's plot itself, political machinations have played a huge role in the history of *A Masked Ball*. The libretto's original story was inspired by the 1792 assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden; however Verdi was forced to change the opera's setting from Sweden to 17th-century Boston, with a governor instead of a king, to appease censors' fears of real-life assassination plots of European monarchs.

After all the trouble Verdi had experienced with the censors, other opera companies took various liberties with the setting of *A Masked Ball*. Two years after the opera's premiere in Rome in 1859, *A Masked Ball* was staged in Paris with Florence as its setting. Later that same year, in London, the setting was shifted to Naples. Verdi and his opera are proof that his theme of "love in a dangerous time" is both a universal truth and historically fluid.

*A Masked Ball* is one of Verdi's most popular operas, as well one of the most popular in the operatic repertory. The opera was last performed at the COC in 2003.

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### **TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets for *A Masked Ball* are **\$12 – \$332** (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.

For more information on **specialty priced tickets** available to **young people under the age of 15, standing room, Opera Under 30** presented by **TD Bank Group, student groups** and **rush seating**, visit **coc.ca**.

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Presenting Sponsor of SURTITLES™: **Sun Life Financial**

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**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.

**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 and the Hal Jackman Foundation, and other generous donors.**

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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 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](http://coc.ca).

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