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COC PRESENTS *PETER GRIMES* WITH BEN HEPPNER IN SIGNATURE TITLE ROLE

Toronto – Arguably the greatest opera of the 20th century, Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, comes to the **Canadian Opera Company** this fall for seven performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **October 5, 8, 11, 17, 20, 23, 26, 2013**. Recognized worldwide as the finest dramatic tenor before the public today, Canadian **Ben Heppner** returns to the COC in one of his favourite roles as the title character in Britten’s gripping opera about an alienated fisherman and the seaside village he struggles to inhabit. *Peter Grimes* is sung in English with English SURTITLES™.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus through Britten’s evocative score with music that vividly personifies the world of its characters, from the activities of village life to the unrelenting power and loneliness of the sea. The COC’s production of *Peter Grimes*, presented in the centenary of the composer’s birth, marks **Debus**’s conducting debut of Britten’s operatic masterpiece.

This production of *Peter Grimes* is by award-winning Australian director **Neil Armfield**, familiar to Toronto audiences for his past COC productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (2011), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2009) and *Billy Budd* (2001). **Armfield** transports the world of *Peter Grimes* from the 1800s to post-World War II England and concentrates the action within a village hall, focusing our attention on Britten’s psychological revelations of small-town English life.

Armfield’s production gives special attention to one of the non-speaking characters in the opera, Dr. Crabbe. The real George Crabbe was an English poet, surgeon, and clergyman who created the story of Peter Grimes in *The Borough*, the poem from which the opera is adapted. Here, the Dr. Crabbe figure is a silent observer who, as **Armfield** has said in describing his vision, “has conceived these characters, this story, and sits back as their father and watches them perform it, watches as these creations of his mind come to life and act.”

In the title role, Canadian tenor **Ben Heppner** returns to the COC following closely on his acclaimed performance with the company last season in *Tristan und Isolde*. **Heppner**’s *Tristan* cast mate, American bass-baritone **Alan Held**, is Captain Balstrode, one of Grimes’s few friends. Among today’s finest singing actors, **Held** has amazed Toronto audiences and critics alike with his COC performances over the last two seasons in *Salome*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi*.

Recent COC Ensemble Studio alumna, soprano **Ileana Montalbetti**, marks her first return to the COC mainstage in the opera’s leading female role: Ellen Orford, Grimes’s unwavering advocate. Fellow acclaimed Ensemble Studio alumni tenor **Roger Honeywell** and baritone **Peter Barrett** also return to the COC to portray the vengeful fisherman Bob Boles and Grimes’s friend, the apothecary Ned Keene, respectively.

American mezzo-soprano **Jill Grove**, introduced to COC audiences as Amneris in 2010’s *Aida*, is renowned for her distinctive dramatic voice and artistry and returns to the COC as Auntie, the proprietor of the local tavern. Ensemble Studio members soprano **Claire de Sévigné** and mezzo-soprano **Danielle MacMillan**, who makes her COC mainstage debut, are Auntie’s nieces.

Rounding out the cast is acclaimed Canadian bass-baritone **Tom Corbeil** (who also appears as Colline in the COC’s *La Bohème* this fall) as the lawyer **Swallow**, highly sought-after American mezzo-soprano **Nancy Maultsby** in her COC debut as the meddlesome **Mrs. Sedley**, Ensemble Studio tenor **Owen McCausland** as Rev. Horace Adams

and Canadian bass Robert Pomakov as **Hobson**. The non-speaking role of Dr. Crabbe is played by Canadian actor **Thomas Hauff**.

Denni Sayers, a frequent collaborator with **Armfield** who has worked with the COC on several past productions, returns as the revival director. Costumes for the production are by **Tess Schofield** whose designs reflect the life of hardship that would have been experienced in a rural seaside village during wartime. **Ralph Myers** has designed the sets, the framework of which is a village hall. **Myers'** hall design is suggestive of a similar space in Aldeburgh, England, Britten's home village on the coast and an additional source of inspiration for the composition of *Peter Grimes*. Lighting design by **Damien Cooper** further serves to suggest the opera's isolated seaside setting.

Peter Grimes premiered on June 7, 1945, one month after World War II ended in Europe and marked the reopening of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company in London. *Peter Grimes* was an immediate success and established Britten as the pre-eminent British composer of his generation. Britten died on December 4, 1976, in Aldeburgh. He is one of the most performed 20th-century composers of opera from anywhere in the world. The COC last presented *Peter Grimes* in 2003.

This production of *Peter Grimes* comes from Opera Australia, which co-produced the work with Houston Grand Opera and West Australian Opera.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Peter Grimes* are **\$12 – \$365** (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.

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 **\$26** to **\$365** (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 **September 21** at 10 a.m., online at coc.ca, or in person at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Program patrons may opt to pay \$35, whereby their seats are automatically upgraded to the best available on the morning of the performance they are attending. 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 **\$25** and subject to availability, go on sale at 11 a.m. on the morning of each performance at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office. Limit of two tickets per person.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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 other generous donors.

COC ANCILLARY EVENTS AND INFORMATION

Star Talks: Ben Heppner at the Appel Salon – September 25, 2013

On **September 25, 2013**, the **Canadian Opera Company's Opera Connect** program begins its 2013/2014 season by teaming up with the **Toronto Reference Library** for **Star Talks: Ben Heppner at the Appel Salon**. Taking place at the **Toronto Reference Library** (789 Yonge St.) from **7 – 8:15 p.m.**, internationally celebrated Canadian tenor **Ben Heppner** discusses his global career and his hotly anticipated appearance at the COC this October in the title role of *Peter Grimes*, a 20th-century masterpiece by English composer Benjamin Britten. The event is **FREE** and tickets can be booked starting **August 28, 2013** by registering at www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/appelsalon.

Peter Grimes and Britten's Communities: From 1945 England to Toronto Today – October 4, 2013

The **Canadian Opera Company's** renowned **Opera Exchange** series begins its 2013/2014 season on **October 4, 2013** with an exploration of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, arguably the greatest opera of the 20th century. Taking place at the **Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre** (227 Front St. E.) from **7:30 – 9:30 p.m.**, this multi-disciplinary event features stimulating presentations from **Allan Hepburn** (James McGill Professor of 20th-Century Literature at McGill University) and **Stephen Ralls** and **Bruce Ubukata** (Toronto's Aldeburgh Connection), tenor **Lawrence Wilford** performing a selection of Britten songs, and a panel discussion including **Denni Sayers**, revival director of the COC's *Peter Grimes* production. Tickets for the first instalment in the 2013/2014 Opera Exchange series are **\$20 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 Box Office** (145 Queen St. W.) Discounts are available for university students and faculty. The COC's Opera Exchange series is presented in collaboration with the Munk School for Global Affairs.

Poetic Echoes: A Britten Celebration – October 9, 2013

On **October 9, 2013**, the COC's **Free Concert Series** features artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio** in a musical celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of composer Benjamin Britten with a selection of the composer's most enchanting songs and song cycles, including *The Poet's Echo*, *A Charm of Lullabies*, *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* and excerpts from the *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*. The one-hour vocal concert, *Poetic Echoes: A Britten Celebration*, is presented in the **Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre** (145 Queen St. W.) at **12 p.m.** Admission to the concert is on a first-come, first-served basis. Concertgoers are encouraged to arrive early as late seating is not available.

Opera Talks – Peter Grimes – October 10, 2013

On **October 10, 2013** at **7 p.m.** at Toronto's **North York Central Library** (5120 Yonge St.), the **Canadian Opera Company's** 2013/2014 season of **Opera Talks** opens with an engaging chat led by *Opera Canada* editor **Wayne Gooding** on Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Gooding's talk mixes tantalizing tidbits of opera history with guided listening, production images and insider information – all exploring what is arguably the best opera of the 20th century. A Q&A session concludes the evening talk. A **FREE** and interactive series of dynamic chats on the art of opera, **Opera Talks** is presented by the COC in partnership with *Opera Canada* magazine and Toronto's North York Central Library. For more information and to register, please call the Languages, Literature and Fine Arts department at North York Central Library at **416-395-5639**.

An Afternoon of English Song – October 22, 2013

On **October 22, 2013** four artists of the COC Ensemble Studio (**Claire de Sévigné**, soprano; **Danielle MacMillan**, mezzo-soprano; **Owen McCausland**, tenor; and **Gordon Bintner**, bass-baritone) pay tribute to composer Benjamin Britten and his native England in a rich and varied program of English song in a one-hour concert presented through the COC's **Free Concert Series**. Performed in the **Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre** (145 Queen St. W.), *An Afternoon of English Song* takes place at **12 p.m.** and is presented as part of the centenary celebrations in honour of Britten's birth. Admission to the concert is on a first-come, first-served basis. Concertgoers are encouraged to arrive early as late seating is not available.

Britten @ 100 – October 30, 2013

Artists of the **COC Orchestra** continue the Benjamin Britten centenary celebrations on **October 30, 2013** with a one-hour chamber music concert featuring two of the composer's most compelling chamber works: the rarely heard *Phantasy Quartet*, an early piece showcasing Britten's fondness for the oboe, and the powerful and emotionally charged *String Quartet No. 2 in C Major*. **Britten @ 100** takes place at **12 p.m.** in the **Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre**. Admission to the concert is on a first-come, first-served basis. Concertgoers are encouraged to arrive early as late seating is not available.

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.

Peter Grimes 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 streaming, all aimed at exploring an opera and its background as well as the artists appearing with the COC. Among the resources on **Peter Grimes**, visitors will find episodes of *The Big COC Podcast*, hosted by the COC's Gianmarco Segato, which feature discussions with opera enthusiasts and experts as well as interviews with members of the production's cast and creative team. COC Radio podcasts are also available for free download through iTunes.

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.

- 30 -

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

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