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## **CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY ANNOUNCES COMMISSION OF NEW OPERA BY COMPOSER RUFUS WAINWRIGHT AND PLAYWRIGHT DANIEL MACIVOR**

### ***Hadrian* Scheduled for World Premiere in COC's 2018/2019 Season**

**Toronto** – **Alexander Neef**, General Director of the Canadian Opera Company, today released details of the company's new opera commission, *Hadrian*, composed by internationally acclaimed Canadian-American singer, songwriter and composer **Rufus Wainwright** with libretto by award-winning Canadian actor, director and playwright **Daniel MacIvor**. Inspired by the Roman Emperor Hadrian and his love for Antinous, *Hadrian* is currently in development and is scheduled to open the COC's 2018/2019 mainstage season.

Set at the end of the classical era, *Hadrian* tells the story of the Roman Emperor Hadrian and his profound grief at the death of his lover Antinous. Hadrian's relationship with Antinous, a young man in his entourage, was frowned upon by many in his inner circle. In fact, during this period of the most critical changes in religious history – the rise of monotheism in the face of the end of the old pagan deities – Hadrian's love for Antinous was not only discouraged, it was dangerous. When Antinous drowns in the Nile at the height of their love affair, many questions arise about the nature of his death. *Hadrian* offers answers to those questions and in turn raises more questions about self-sacrifice, jealousy, treachery and love itself.

"We began the process of creating a new opera for the Canadian Opera Company several years ago, and I'm very proud to say that we are now at the stage where we can make the news public," says COC General Director **Alexander Neef**. "Bringing a world premiere to the COC's mainstage is a significant undertaking for the company and we're proud to say that all the elements are now in place to make a strong project. Rufus and I have been talking about what *Hadrian* would look like for at least three years now and I'm very excited about the musical and dramatic direction that this piece will take."

*Hadrian* will be **Wainwright**'s second opera. "I'm thrilled to be setting out on this epic journey with the COC and look forward to once again diving into the deep end, a requirement on all fronts in the world of opera," **Wainwright** says.

Of **Wainwright**, **Neef** says, "Rufus has such incredible passion for opera, and he brings a genuine desire to contribute to the art form and the future of opera. That's an especially rare quality and an essential one, in order to create a meaningful piece of art that lives on long after its premiere." **Neef** adds, "Rufus writes very well for the voice, but what has impressed me so much is that he writes with a completely different musical vocabulary for opera than for his other writings. I'm looking forward to seeing how his musical language will translate to *Hadrian*."

“The story of Hadrian and Antinous has long fascinated me,” explains **Rufus Wainwright**, on his enthusiasm for the opera’s subject. “Be it through initially reading Marguerite Yourcenar’s classic novel *Memoirs of Hadrian*, going further afield in investigating the history surrounding his reign – arguably one of the most critical periods in the western time line since it represents the end of the classical era – or most importantly visiting Tivoli, Hadrian’s villa near Rome, which, though crumbling, impressively illustrates the might and vision of an incredible man. He was an Emperor filled with ambition, sensitivity and intelligence and like all big political figures he also had a tormented and brooding dark side. Perfect opera material.”

**Wainwright** adds, “And then there’s Antinous, essentially *the* male equivalent to Helen of Troy – though we know he actually existed and exactly what he looked like. At one point he was neck and neck with Christ in terms of cult status after disappearing in the Nile. Imagine what a different world that would have been if he had lived!”

Of **Daniel MacIvor**, who makes his debut as a librettist with *Hadrian*, **Neef** says, “You can’t have a great opera without a great libretto. Finding a great librettist is critical and I’m delighted that Daniel has joined this project. *Hadrian* will be the first opera he has written, making the occasion of this commission even more momentous. He comes with a fresh perspective on how this opera can take dramatic shape. It’s an exciting pairing. Daniel is as articulate, sharp and passionate about developing this story through words as Rufus is about using music.”

For **MacIvor**, writing an opera was almost a surprise. “If someone had told me a year ago that I would be writing a libretto, I would not have believed them. But as I investigated the form I began to see how my writing could serve it. The very soul of the libretto is the idea that rigorous economy of language will expose the essential beauty of that language. Initially I was concerned that my lack of knowledge in the form would be a detriment to finding my way, but under the assured tutelage of Alexander and surrounded by the rapturous passion of Rufus for opera, my initiation has been muscular and swift.”

“There is a thrill for me in finding the essential function of the fewest words possible in the telling of a story,” **MacIvor** continues. “And what a story to tell! The deeper I delve into Hadrian’s world and his time, the more parallels I see to how we live today. Are we too facing the end of an era? It does feel that way more and more. And the mystery of why Hadrian’s remarkable love for Antinous – underlined by his bottomless grief – has not been celebrated widely as a model of eros points to a fear of same-sex love that has changed little from his age to ours. I’m honoured to be starting this journey into the world of opera with the COC and inside this powerful and resonant story.”

**Rufus Wainwright** has established himself as one of the most prolific songwriters and male vocalists of his generation. A Grammy-nominated and multi-Juno Award winner, **Wainwright** has carved out his own singular sound in the worlds of pop, opera, theatre, dance and film, and been hailed by Elton John as “the greatest songwriter on the planet.”

**Wainwright**’s much acclaimed first opera, *Prima Donna*, made its world premiere at the Manchester International Festival in July 2009. *Prima Donna* was described as having “inspired touches and disarmingly beautiful passages in this mysterious, stylistically eclectic work,” (*New York Times*), that Wainwright’s “gift as a melodist and an orchestrator are in no doubt” (*The Guardian*), and that *Prima Donna* is a “love song to opera, soaked in the perennial operatic themes of loss, betrayal, delusion and nostalgia, and saturated in the musical styles of opera’s golden age” (*The Times*).

One of Canada's most successful and distinctive playwrights, **Daniel MacIvor**'s work has received critical acclaim around the world. He has written numerous award-winning pieces for theatre including *See Bob Run*, *The Soldier Dreams*, *You Are Here*, *Arigato*, *Tokyo*, and most recently *The Best Brothers*, and his work has been translated into French, Portuguese, Spanish, Czech, German and Japanese. **MacIvor** is the recipient of an Obie Award and a GLAAD Award for his play *In On It*. He also received the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama in 2006 for his collection of plays, *I Still Love You*, and in 2008 he was awarded the Siminovitch Prize for Theatre.

*Hadrian* will be the fifth opera commissioned by the COC that has had its world premiere on the company's mainstage since 1950. The COC's previous mainstage commissions are *The Golden Ass*, 1999 (composer: Randolph Peters; librettist: Robertson Davies); *Mario and the Magician*, 1992 (composer: Harry Somers; librettist: Rod Anderson); *Héloïse and Abélard*, 1973 (composer: Charles Wilson; librettist: Eugene Benson); and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, 1967 (composer: Raymond Pannell; librettist: Ron Hambleton).

The COC was also the world-premiere presenter of *Louis Riel* (composer: Harry Somers; librettist: Mavor Moore in collaboration with Jacques Languirand) in 1967, a work commissioned by the Floyd S. Chalmers Foundation.

For presentations off the mainstage, the COC has commissioned 14 operatic works that have premiered in concert, as part of its school tour initiative or as chamber opera productions featuring members of its young artist training program, the Ensemble Studio.

Information regarding the creative team, as well as casting, design and sponsorship of *Hadrian* will be released as details become available.

### **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 high-resolution publicity images of Rufus Wainwright and Daniel MacIvor, please visit [www.coc.ca/press](http://www.coc.ca/press). The username is **cocpress** and the password is **mediapix**. Click on the hyperlink labelled "Hadrian." Photos of Alexander Neef are also available for download.

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