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COC'S FREE CONCERT SERIES HIGHLIGHTS CELEBRATED ARTISTS, RISING STARS AND ARTISTIC DIVERSITY IN 2014/2015 SEASON

NEW SUB-SERIES COMMEMORATES FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WARS AND FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

Toronto – The Canadian Opera Company's **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** returns for a ninth season on **September 23, 2014**, boasting a varied roster of established artists and rising stars from around the world in a wide range of art forms. The highly anticipated first performance of the 2014/2015 season introduces the young artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio** in a program of their favourite operatic gems.

The 14/15 season showcases nearly 500 artists in 75 concerts across six series: Vocal, Chamber Music, Piano Virtuoso, Jazz, World Music and Dance. A special feature of this season is a new sub-series to commemorate anniversaries of the First and Second World Wars, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Entitled *A Century of Change: Remembering the World Wars and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, the sub-series includes six concerts and spans the Vocal, Chamber Music and Piano Virtuoso programs. Performances by artists of the **COC Orchestra**, **COC Ensemble Studio** and **The Glenn Gould School**, as well as Canadian pianist **Maxim Bernard**, examine the enduring role of the artist in chronicling and responding to these significant turning points in history.

Additional highlights of the 14/15 season include two world premieres: a new song cycle by celebrated Canadian composer **Marjan Mozetich**, commissioned by the **Canadian Art Song Project** and performed by Canadian mezzo-soprano **Allyson McHardy**; and a new work by emerging American composer **Andy Villemez** written for and performed by young American pianist **Kara Huber**.

The Free Concert Series also welcomes two world-renowned artists to the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre for the first time. In collaboration with the **Toronto Symphony Orchestra**, master pianist **Emanuel Ax** hosts and curates a concert as part of the TSO's **RBC Piano Extravaganza** featuring two of the most exciting young pianists on the international scene today: Russian **Pavel Kolesnikov** and American **Orion Weiss**. In anticipation of the TSO's **New Creations Festival**, Canadian superstar soprano **Barbara Hannigan**, one of Canada's leading performers of new music, presents a captivating program of vocal chamber music.

Other notable first-time performers in the Free Concert Series include acclaimed Canadians, soprano **Jane Archibald** and baritone **Joshua Hopkins**, and Russian mezzo-soprano **Ekaterina Gubanova**, all starring in the COC's mainstage 14/15 season; Icelandic pianist and TV host **Víkingur Ólafsson**, reflecting on his Nordic roots; Juno Award nominees **Amy McConnell** and **William Sperandei** with a tribute to Cole Porter; and one of Canada's leading young jazz vocalists, **Alex Samaras**, in an exploration of the forgotten songs of Broadway.

Following its overwhelming popularity over the last two years, the Free Concert Series' annual **interactive March Break concert** returns in 2015. Featuring artist-educators and artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio**, audience members of all ages can test their operatic chops in a lively concert of favourite operatic arias and sing-along choruses. This season also includes the return of the biennial **Christina and Louis Quilico Awards**, a special presentation where the artists of the **COC's 14/15 Ensemble Studio** compete for cash prizes.

The Free Concert Series brings diverse artistic experiences to 15,000 people annually from September to June in what has become one of Toronto's most vibrant cultural hubs, the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**. Performances take place most Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12 p.m., and some Wednesdays at 12 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. Doors open 30 minutes prior to each performance and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Free Concert Series presents artists of the highest calibre in six varied series running throughout the season:

VOCAL

From operatic classics to newly created works, the Vocal Series showcases internationally acclaimed artists, as well as the stars of tomorrow, in 22 concerts. This season, singers from each of the COC's 14/15 mainstage productions appear in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, including: Canadians, soprano **Jane Archibald** (*Don Giovanni*), soprano **Krisztina Szabó** (*Erwartung*), mezzo-soprano **Lauren Segal** (*Falstaff*), tenor **Colin Ainsworth** (*Falstaff*), baritone **Joshua Hopkins** (*The Barber of Seville*) and bass-baritone **Robert Gleadow** (*Falstaff*, *Madama Butterfly* and *The Barber of Seville*); Russian mezzo-soprano **Ekaterina Gubanova** (*Bluebeard's Castle*); and German mezzo-soprano **Janina Baechle** (*Die Walküre*).

In addition to the **Christina and Louis Quilico Awards**, artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio** perform in 10 concerts this season, including a program of highlights from Rossini's comic masterpiece *The Barber of Seville*. More young artists to watch for in the Vocal Series include the **University of Toronto's Opera Division** and the **Canadian Children's Opera Company**.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Eighteen richly varied concerts in the Chamber Music Series feature a variety of local and international soloists and ensembles. This season, artists of the **COC Orchestra** return for five concerts, curated by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**, including a special introduction to the **COC Orchestra Academy** performing alongside their COC Orchestra mentors.

Additional highlights include first-time performances by **Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan**, whose traditional and innovative contemporary music breathes new life into Indonesia's musical traditions, and **Fandango Guitar Quartet** with a compelling blend of Latin rhythms and classical arrangements. The series also welcomes young artists from **The Glenn Gould School** and faculty from **Western University's Don Wright Faculty of Music**.

PIANO VIRTUOSO

The Piano Virtuoso Series shines a spotlight on brilliant Canadian and international pianists in 11 concerts. Among this season's highly anticipated concerts are performances by **Maxim Bernard**, **Kara Huber** and **Víkingur Ólafsson**, as well as a performance in the TSO's **RBC Piano Extravaganza**, hosted by **Emanuel Ax** and featuring exciting young pianists **Pavel Kolesnikov** and **Orion Weiss**. Audiences can also look forward to performances by award-winning Swiss pianist and composer **Jean-Sélim Abdelmoula**, 15-year-old Canadian prodigy **Anastasia Rizikov**, and American pianist and harpsichordist **Stephen Hargreaves**.

JAZZ

Some of the most exciting names on the Canadian jazz scene today treat audiences to everything from cutting-edge contemporary to swinging standards, and from sizzling Latin to Indo-Jazz fusion in this season's 10 concerts. Juno Award-winning bassist and composer **Mike Downes** teams up with powerhouse pianist **Robi Botos** and drummer **Larnell Lewis** in a sophisticated hour of original music, while performances by the **Amy McConnell & William Sperandei Quartet** and **Alex Samaras** pay tribute to the enduring legacies of musical theatre giants like Cole Porter and Stephen Sondheim. The series also features a variety of impressive student ensembles from **Humber College** and **McGill University**, led by Canadian jazz icons such as **Hilario Durán**, **Alex Dean**, **Justin Gray** and **Rémi Bolduc**.

WORLD MUSIC

In seven concerts, leading musicians from Canada and around the world take audiences on a global musical journey. Debut performances include acclaimed ensembles such as **Minor Empire**, who combine traditional Turkish music with a unique soundscape of psychedelia, electronica and jazz; and the **Dominic Mancuso Group**, which draws inspiration from Mancuso's southern Italian forefathers.

In two unique cross-cultural collaborations, trumpeter **David Buchbinder** and piano master **Hilario Durán**'s Juno Award-winning group **Odessa/Havana** celebrates their shared Arabic, Roma, Sephardic and North African heritage. Meanwhile, vocalist **Amanda Martinez** blends the sounds of her Mexican and South African roots with elements of flamenco, Mexican folklore and Afro-Cuban rhythms for a must-see holiday performance.

DANCE

The city's most inventive dancers and choreographers redraw the boundaries of the human body in seven dance performances this season. Returning favourites include the renowned **Peggy Baker Dance Projects** with a preview of Baker's new work, *locus plot*; **Canada's Ballet Jörgen**, presenting excerpts from their classical and contemporary ballet repertoire; and **Opera Atelier** with the **Atelier Ballet** in a sneak peek of the opera company's new production of Handel's *Alcina*. International influences are represented by **Ritmo Flamenco Dance and Music Ensemble** and the traditional Indian Kathak dancing of **Bageshree Vaze**, creator of **Raagini Dance**.

For a full calendar of events, please visit coc.ca.

The Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is a focal point of the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room in the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, with its striking glass wall allowing for natural lighting and a view of University Avenue. Linking Rings 3 and 4, the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre provides seating for 100 patrons. Additional seating and standing locations on the walkway and the upper floor are also available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is supported by the Free Concert Series Endowment Fund established in honour of Richard Bradshaw by an anonymous donor.

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 mainstage performance.

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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, Hal Jackman Foundation, W. Garfield Weston Foundation and other generous donors.

Free Concert Series Media Sponsors: **Classical 96.3 FM** and **The WholeNote Magazine**

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 photographs, please contact:

Kristin McKinnon, Assistant Publicist, tel: 416-306-2383, e-mail: kmckinnon@coc.ca

Jennifer Pugsley, Media Relations Manager, tel: 416-306-2303, e-mail: jenniferp@coc.ca