

UNDER EMBARGO until 5 p.m. EST, October 27, 2014

COC SEASON NOTED FOR ARTISTIC TRIUMPHS, HIGH ATTENDANCE AND FUNDRAISING GROWTH DESPITE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Toronto – Today at the Canadian Opera Company’s Annual General Meeting, the company reported on its artistic highlights, impressive endowment growth, growing attendance and subscription figures, and a general financial overview of the 2013/2014 season.

“Last season the Canadian Opera Company saw tremendous growth, while also managing a challenging financial environment,” said COC Board President Tony Arrell. “Over its long history, the COC has never achieved such acclaim, attracted such talent and engaged such strong community support as what we saw last year. The COC has an exceptional leader in Alexander Neef and the Board feels the company gets stronger each year under his direction.”

In reviewing the COC’s 13/14 fiscal year, the company recorded an impressive average attendance of 94% (an increase by 4% over last season), and combined fundraising revenue of \$12.6 million (net). This includes over \$3 million towards the endowment of the Canadian Opera Foundation, which has seen significant growth in the past six years, increasing in size from \$18.8 million in 2008 to \$34 million in assets in 2014. The company also posted an expected revenue shortfall of \$952,000.

“The season’s financial challenges were not unexpected, and we realized early on that, financially, it would be the most difficult season in recent history,” continued Arrell. “We are grateful for the support from our Foundation that allowed us to finance the transition to the new operating model over the past few years. We are committed to balancing our budget on an annual basis and continue to make significant adjustment on our operating model to ensure that outcome.”

Due to the long-term nature of artistic programming and scheduling, the COC has used the last few years to evaluate and implement substantial changes to its operating model in order to respond to gradual annual declines in ticket sales. The 2014/2015 season sees some of these measures planned years ago now taking effect. The return to a six-opera season with approximately the same number of performances as the former seven-opera model will allow the company to eliminate roughly half of its operating deficit. As well, new ticket marketing and pricing strategies have already built up the company’s subscriber base and will allow the company to reach higher capacity levels throughout the season.

“The artistic standard we have reached in our productions is now showing up in subscription demand,” said COC General Director Alexander Neef. “Subscriptions for the 14/15 season are very strong with almost 2,000 new subscribers. In fact, overall, we have had more new subscribers this season than we have had in over three years. This is good news for the future and we intend to continue to build on it, while remaining vigilant to ensure we meet our breakeven budget commitments.”

The COC’s operating expenses for the 13/14 season were \$41,464,000 with revenues of \$38,529,000, including a regularly budgeted grant of \$1 million from the opera company’s Foundation, which comes from earnings on endowment funds. Additional grants of almost \$2 million came from Foundation funds: approximately \$800,000 from a special cash reserve created from the COC’s prior operating surpluses, and \$1.2 million from unrestricted accumulated earnings that did not encroach upon endowment capital. These expenses and revenues are a consolidated presentation of the financial results of the COC and its controlled affiliate, the Canadian Opera House Corporation, a charitable organization that owns and operates the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

Box office revenue represented 25% of total operating revenues for the 13/14 season, with fundraising accounting for 24%. Other income was generated from the Four Seasons Centre by tenant and parking fees, event and third-party rental revenue as well as general space and production rentals, representing 20%. Public support from all three levels of government accounted for 15%. The amortization of deferred capital contributions represented 9% and the remaining 7% came from the Canadian Opera Foundation (as noted above).

The COC recorded 68,682 subscription tickets and 38,066 single tickets, generating net ticket revenue of \$9.7 million. A total of 111,421 patrons attended the 58 performances of the company's seven mainstage productions last season at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts: Puccini's *La Bohème*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Verdi's *A Masked Ball*, Handel's *Hercules*, Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* and Massenet's *Don Quichotte*.

"The 13/14 season was an artistic high point, and presented a full range of operatic repertoire historically, musically and stylistically," said Neef. "From a performance point of view we featured perhaps the most star-studded line-up of artists ever seen on the COC stage. I am also very proud that we were able to present four new productions and three company premieres in 13/14."

"Our fundraising efforts have been essential to building our base of supporters, and we are fortunate to have very loyal patrons, who take their devotion and commitment to us very seriously," added Neef.

Of the \$12.6 million in total fundraising revenue (combined net operating and endowment) for the COC in 13/14, approximately 83% – \$10.4 million – came from individuals in support of the COC's mainstage productions and artists, as well as transition and endowment funding, training, and education and outreach programs. Support for the artists of the COC's Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, was particularly strong with all 11 members of the 13/14 season fully underwritten through artist sponsorships – the first time in the program's 34-year history. Special events accounted for 3% of the COC's fundraising efforts for 13/14, which expanded to include the company's flagship gala – *Centre Stage: Ensemble Studio Competition Gala* – and raised more than \$300,000 in its inaugural year.

A crucial source of funding has proven to be a matching endowment program developed by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Endowment Incentives component. Private contributions with these government funds brought the company's annual endowment contribution to \$3.7 million over the last season.

The COC received 16 Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations in six categories for its artists and productions in the 13/14 season, and won four awards: Outstanding Production of an Opera (*Roberto Devereux*); Outstanding Performance, Female, in an Opera (Sondra Radvanovsky – *Roberto Devereux*); Outstanding Performance, Male, in an Opera (Alan Held – *Peter Grimes*); and, Outstanding Performance, Ensemble, in an Opera (COC Chorus – *Peter Grimes*).

In 13/14, the COC expanded the scale of its Ensemble Studio Competition with the creation of *Centre Stage*, a much grander platform for celebrating the future of opera in Canada. For the first time in the history of the Ensemble Studio, auditioning singers performed from the stage of R. Fraser Elliott Hall at the Four Seasons Centre, accompanied by the COC Orchestra under Music Director Johannes Debus. Selected from an audition pool of 155 singers, nine finalists performed before an audience of 800 patrons on November 26, 2013. Four prizes valued at \$11,000 in total were awarded, and three singers were ultimately selected to join the COC's illustrious Ensemble Studio program in the 14/15 season.

In January 2014, the COC also launched the COC Orchestra Academy, a new initiative building on the company's commitment to training opera artists. Developed in collaboration with The Glenn Gould School at the Royal Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, the COC Orchestra Academy is a mentorship program led by Johannes Debus. This past year, three students were paired with veteran COC Orchestra players, allowing the younger musicians to observe, learn and play with a world-class orchestra within the setting of presenting an opera production.

The COC continued its efforts off the mainstage to making opera and the performing arts as accessible as possible. In total 40,046 adults, youths and families engaged with opera in 13/14 through the COC's 20 education and outreach programs.

The COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre also hosted approximately 15,000 people of all ages at its 79 concerts in 13/14. The Free Concert Series' programming spans classical, jazz, world music and contemporary dance and last season featured five world premieres and five Canadian premieres, showcased 404 artists and presented 27 works by Canadian composers.

The COC's 14/15 season began on October 3, 2014, with a new production of Verdi's *Falstaff* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. The season continues in the winter with a new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the return of the COC's production of Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The season concludes in the spring with Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and the double bill of the seminal Robert Lepage production of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Schoenberg's *Erwartung*.

About the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio

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.

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. For more information on the COC, visit its award-winning website, coc.ca.

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