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ALL-CANADIAN CAST IN NEW COC PRODUCTION OF VERDI'S COMIC CLASSIC, *FALSTAFF*, BY MASTER DIRECTOR ROBERT CARSEN

Toronto – The Canadian Opera Company's 2014/2015 season opens with an opera hailed as the crowning achievement of Verdi's career, *Falstaff*. This new company production is led by master director Canadian **Robert Carsen** and COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** with internationally acclaimed Canadian bass-baritone **Gerald Finley** making a long-awaited return to the COC in his role debut as the impoverished, loveable knight, Sir John Falstaff. *Falstaff* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™ and comes to the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts for seven performances on **October 3, 9, 12, 14, 25, 29 and November 1, 2014**.

Based primarily on Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which follows Falstaff's ill-advised seduction attempts and resulting folly, **Carsen's** production of Verdi's *Falstaff* sets the action in a lovingly rendered 1950s England. A new COC co-production with Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Teatro alla Scala; Metropolitan Opera and Dutch National Opera, this *Falstaff* has already delighted audiences in London, Milan, New York and Amsterdam, and has been described as "a wonderful show" (*Telegraph*), "enchanting" (*New York Times*) and "Verdi's masterpiece has rarely seemed so rich or life-affirming" (*Opera News*).

Grammy and Juno Award-winning Canadian bass-baritone **Gerald Finley** is "an opera singer of distinction" (*New York Times*) and one of the leading singers and dramatic interpreters of his generation, having performed at the world's major opera and concert venues in a wide variety of repertoire. Last seen in a COC mainstage production in 1993 for *The Marriage of Figaro*, **Finley** returns to the opera company in a highly anticipated role debut as the irrepressible rogue Falstaff, who clings to his supposedly noble roots, even as he steals, cheats and deceives his way into an ill-advised scheme involving two gentlemen and their wives. **Finley** is at the helm of an all-Canadian cast.

Internationally acclaimed baritone **Russell Braun** (2014's *Roberto Devereux*, 2012's *Il Trovatore* and *Love from Afar*) is Ford, Falstaff's nemesis. The two wives determined to teach Falstaff a lesson are played by two of Canada's leading opera singers: Quebec soprano **Lyne Fortin** sings Alice Ford in her COC debut, and Ensemble Studio graduate, South African-Canadian mezzo-soprano **Lauren Segal** (2012's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, 2011's *Iphigenia in Tauris*) is Meg Page.

Acclaimed contralto **Marie-Nicole Lemieux** (2005's *Rodelinda* and *Tancredi*) returns to the COC as Mistress Quickly. Praised for her vocal richness and skill, **Lemieux** reprises the role she sang to great acclaim in this production's London and Milan presentations.

Rising soprano Ensemble Studio graduate **Simone Osborne** (2014's *A Masked Ball*, 2013's *La Bohème*, 2012's *Gianni Schicchi*, 2011's *Rigoletto* and *The Magic Flute*) is the lovesick Nannetta and tenor **Frédéric Antoun** (2013's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, 2011's *The Magic Flute*) sings Fenton, her amorous suitor. Acclaimed tenor, and Ensemble Studio alumnus, **Michael Colvin** (2014's *Madama Butterfly*, 2013's *Salome*, *Dialogues des Carmélites*) is Dr. Caius. Cast as Falstaff's disreputable companions are distinguished tenor **Colin Ainsworth**, in his COC debut, as Bardolfo, and Ensemble Studio graduate bass **Robert Gleadow** (2014's *Madama Butterfly*, 2014's *Così fan tutte*, 2013's *La clemenza di Tito*, 2012's *Il Trovatore*) as Pistola.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts his first *Falstaff*, taking the COC Orchestra and Chorus through the innate lyricism and artistry of Verdi's score that captures all the joy, wisdom and profound humanity of Shakespeare's comic invention.

Audiences will find themselves fully immersed in the world of post-war England with sets by **Paul Steinberg** and costumes by **Brigitte Reiffenstuel** (2013's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, 2012's *The Tales of Hoffmann*) evoking the time period's aristocratic style as well as glorious gaudy leanings. Lighting design is by **Robert Carsen** and **Peter van Praet**.

About Falstaff

In conceiving the direction for this production, **Robert Carsen** noted how the Elizabethan period in which Shakespeare wrote the play shares many similarities with the second Elizabethan period of post-WWII England. The aristocratic class was waning, while the upwardly mobile business and professional classes surged to a position of great financial strength. In the 1950s, as in the 1590s, English society became acutely aware of social relations among the classes and paid particular attention to money and moral value.

"There were parallels in terms of class struggle and the rise of the middle classes, represented in the opera by the very rich Ford, and the twilight of the aristocracy represented by Sir John who's clinging to his aristocratic roots," says **Carsen**.

Written near the end of Verdi's life, *Falstaff* was the composer's final opera. It premiered at La Scala in 1893 and is a testament to Verdi's expressive music, which represented a bold and new conception of how opera could be composed.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Falstaff* range from **\$12 – \$339** (subject to change), and 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** (145 Queen St. W.)

For more information on **specially 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**.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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.

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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.

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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