

For immediate release: October 29, 2014

COC MAKES RETURN VISIT THIS SPRING TO PRESTIGIOUS BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC WITH *SEMELE*

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** is proud to be invited to present the U.S. premiere of **Zhang Huan**'s theatrically transcendent production of Handel's *Semele* at the world-renowned Brooklyn Academy of Music in March 2015. The COC's presentation of *Semele* at BAM is directed by **Zhang** with distinguished British conductor and Baroque opera expert **Christopher Moulds** leading the critically acclaimed COC Orchestra and COC Chorus. *Semele* is scheduled at the **Howard Gilman Opera House** (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn, NY) for four performances only – **March 4, 6, 8 and 10, 2015**.

"We're very proud to be invited to bring this production of *Semele* to BAM. It represented new territory for the company on multiple levels: the opera had never before been performed by the COC, and the production itself asked us to push the artistic boundaries of the art form and show its infinite possibilities," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "It's an honour to be asked to present this work on the global stage that BAM represents, especially when it comes so soon after our last visit in 2011 with our production of *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*."

The COC's 2015 tour to BAM marks the opera company's third visit to the illustrious multi-arts centre that, for more than 150 years, has been a home for adventurous artists, audiences and ideas – engaging both global and local communities. The COC's prior invitations to BAM were also to perform two equally ground-breaking productions: in 2011 with *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* and, in 1993, with a double bill of *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung*, both directed by Canadian visionary Robert Lepage.

This production of *Semele* offers up a provocatively playful staging directed by famed Chinese visual and performance artist **Zhang Huan**. His daring East-meets-West production blends the Greek myth of Semele with the contemporary true story of an ill-fated Chinese love triangle – all set within the walls of an actual 450-year-old Ming Dynasty temple, which weighs 17 tons and is transformed into an altar, a palace, a crematory, and heaven. With appearances by debaucherous Buddhist monks, a giant inflatable puppet and an overtly aroused donkey, **Zhang** layers cultural taboos and ribald humour with classical compositions, creating a bold and contemporary fable.

The story, of what is Handel's most sensuous opera, focuses on Semele, a princess and mistress of the god Jupiter, who wishes her lover to grant her immortality. Semele's ambition and vanity, however, ultimately lead to her undoing.

Internationally renowned Canadian singer **Jane Archibald** reprises the role of Semele, which she sang with the COC in 2012, for this production's U.S. premiere. Both abroad and at home, **Archibald** has dazzled audiences and critics alike with her vocal dexterity and dramatic presence. Her 2012 performance was met with overwhelming praise. The *Globe and Mail* described her as "possibly the best coloratura soprano of her generation" and the *Toronto Star* proclaimed "Jane Archibald is alone worth the price of a ticket. She is spectacular in the title role."

Archibald leads an esteemed cast of new and familiar faces to the COC. Canadian tenor **Colin Ainsworth** is the god Jupiter, and Welsh contralto **Hilary Summers** makes her COC debut portraying both Jupiter's jealous wife, Juno, and Ino, Semele's sister. Canadian soprano **Katherine Whyte** returns to reprise the role of Juno's messenger, Iris. American bass-baritone **Kyle Ketelsen** portrays Semele's father, Cadmus, and the god of sleep, Somnus. American countertenor **Lawrence Zazzo** is Semele's jilted suitor, Athamas.

Han Feng, sought-after for her fashion as well as costume and exhibition designs, plays with **Zhang**'s concept to create a fusion of Chinese theatre and European Baroque in the costumes enhanced by the magical lighting design originally conceived by **Wolfgang Göbbel**, and recreated by **Willem Laarman**.

Christopher Moulds makes his COC debut conducting Handel's Baroque masterpiece. An experienced and versatile conductor, **Moulds** is considered an expert in classical and Baroque operas and appears with the premier houses and orchestras of Europe.

This production of *Semele* had its North American premiere with the COC in spring 2012. It was the first opportunity for audiences to experience **Zhang**'s production outside Brussels, Belgium, where it premiered in 2009, and Beijing, where in 2010 it was China's first major staging of a Baroque opera.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Semele* and BAM's 2015 Winter/Spring season engagements go on sale December 8, 2014 (December 1, 2014 for Friends of BAM). To purchase tickets online visit BAM.org or contact BAM Ticket Services at 718-636-4100.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The tour of *Semele* is made possible, in part, by the Ontario Arts Council.

The COC's *Semele* is a co-production of Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels and KT Wong Foundation.

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.

- 30 -

For more information or to request production photographs, please contact:
Jennifer Pugsley, Media Relations Manager, tel: 416-306-2303, e-mail: jenniferp@coc.ca