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LOVE WITH A SENSE OF HUMOUR IN COC'S NEW PRODUCTION OF ROSSINI'S OPERATIC SHOWSTOPPER, *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE*

Toronto – Audiences will discover love has a sense of humour with the Canadian Opera Company's new production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* from the Spanish theatre troupe **Els Comediants**. Scottish-born **Rory Macdonald**, one of Britain's most talented and dynamic young conductors, returns to lead the COC Orchestra, Chorus and a cast of the most exciting young stars in opera today through Rossini's veritable hit parade of a score, filled with showstoppers and sparkling tunes. Sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™, *The Barber of Seville* runs for 13 performances on **April 17, 19, 21, 26, 29, May 2, 7, 9, 13, 15*, 19, 21, 22, 2015** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

The COC's 2014/2015 spring season opens with one of the most popular and well-loved operas in the world. Last presented by the COC in 2008, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* returns in a new COC production, co-produced with Houston Grand Opera, Opéra National de Bordeaux and Opera Australia, conceived by **Els Comediants**. The group came to international prominence in 1992 with the spectacular fire ceremony they designed for the closing of the Barcelona Olympics, and they wowed Toronto in 2011 when they brought their unbridled vitality to the COC's *Cinderella*. In *The Barber of Seville*, the Spaniards take on Rossini's greatest comedy about a barber who helps a nobleman win the woman of his dreams. Cubism-inspired set plays with scale and proportion, while bursts of day-glo colour and innovative lighting conjure a fantasy world hovering between fairytale and vaudeville.

In the role of the wily barber Figaro is one of the definitive singers of his generation: Canadian **Joshua Hopkins** (2013's *La Bohème*). Chosen by *Opera News* as one of 25 artists poised to break out and become a major force in the coming decade, **Hopkins** has been hailed as "an outstanding young baritone with a virile, vigorous yet velvety sound and an immediately evident dramatic authority" (*Globe and Mail*).

Singing opposite **Hopkins** as Count Almaviva, the young suitor that Figaro assists, is American **Alek Shrader**, "possibly one of the most exciting young tenors on the planet" (*Seen and Heard International*). He shares the role with Romanian tenor **Bogdan Mihai**, whose performances across Europe have proclaimed him "a great arrival in the field of Rossinian tenors" (*Il Giornale della musica*).

Two mezzo-sopranos poised on the threshold of international careers bring the character of the young and charming heroine Rosina to life. Italian **Serena Malfi**, called a "joy to watch" (*New York Classical Review*), comes to the COC for the first time on the heels of recent debuts with the Metropolitan Opera and Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. American **Cecelia Hall**, praised for how she "combines sincerity and rich beauty in her singing" (*Chicago Sun Times*), makes her COC debut.

As Bartolo, Rosina's guardian, are Italian-born baritone **Renato Girolami**, a specialist in Rossini operas, and Russian bass **Nikolay Didenko**, acclaimed for his "seemingly effortless, subterranean voice and highly developed sense of character" (*New York Sun*). The singing teacher Basilio is Canadian bass-baritone, and Ensemble Studio graduate, **Robert Gleadow**, who recently delighted COC audiences with his comic-turn as Pistola in *Falstaff*. He shares the role with Turkish bass **Burak Bilgili**, last seen with the COC in 2008, where "his substantial, true buffo account of Basilio's plum aria *La calunnia*...deserved its ovation" (*Globe and Mail*).

Members of the COC's Ensemble Studio round out the cast with bass-baritone **Iain MacNeil** as Almaviva's servant Fiorello, soprano **Aviva Fortunata** as Bartolo's servant Berta and baritone **Clarence Frazer** as the Officer.

Rory Macdonald, lauded as one of the brightest stars of the younger generation of conductors, made his North American debut in 2010 with the COC's *Carmen*. He returns with *The Barber of Seville* to lead the COC Orchestra and Chorus through a score that has delighted audiences the world over for its light-hearted tone, memorable overture, popular melodies and wit.

Els Comediants is led by director **Joan Font**, who works with set and costume designer **Joan Guillén** and lighting designer **Albert Faura** on this production of *The Barber of the Seville*. They are joined by choreographer **Xevi Dorca** and associate director **Tanya Kane-Parry**.

The Barber of Seville is based on Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais' satirical play *Le barbier de Séville*, and premiered in Rome in 1816. It quickly grew popular and Rossini's comic masterpiece is now a mainstay of the operatic repertoire. The characters and melodies of *The Barber of Seville* are familiar to many as the inspiration for numerous television shows and cartoons, most notably the Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd cartoon, "The Rabbit of Seville." The opera's continued celebration in popular culture is a testament to its success and wide appeal.

***ENSEMBLE STUDIO PERFORMANCE OF *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE* ON May 15, 2015**

The exciting young singers of the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio perform the lead roles in their own performance of *The Barber of Seville* on **May 15, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.** This performance is generously underwritten in part by **Roy and Marjorie Linden**. Tickets are accessibly priced at **\$25** or **\$55**.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *The Barber of Seville* range from **\$49 – \$424** 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 **specialty 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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The COC's new production of *The Barber of Seville* is supported in part by the **Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund**

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

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