

For immediate release: April 15, 2015

## **CANADA'S RISING OPERA STARS STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT FOR SPECIAL PERFORMANCE OF *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE***

**Toronto** – The stage is set for opera's next generation of stars to shine, when the young artists of the **Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio** take on Rossini's comic masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*. This special performance takes place at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts** on **May 15, 2015**, with all tickets accessibly priced at **\$25 or \$55**. This new COC production is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.

The Ensemble Studio performance is a once-a-year opportunity for artists of the **Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, to sing the starring roles in a COC mainstage production. It's an important step in the young singers' careers, with most making role debuts or even appearing in an operatic production on the Four Seasons Centre stage for the first time. This year, the singers work with the same creative team as the mainstage cast for *The Barber of Seville*, in a new COC production from acclaimed Spanish theatre troupe **Els Comediants**. Led by director **Joan Font**, the Ensemble Studio artists perform with the full **COC Orchestra** and **Chorus**, under the direction of Scottish-born conductor **Rory Macdonald**.

In what is widely regarded as opera's greatest comedy, hilarity ensues as Figaro, the barber of Seville, assists a lovesick nobleman win the woman of his dreams. In this production, the Cubism-inspired set plays with scale and proportion, while bursts of Day-Glo colour and innovative lighting conjure a fantasy world hovering between fairy tale and vaudeville.

Hailed as "a singer to watch" (*Musical Toronto*) with "plenty of power" (*Opera Ramblings*), baritone **Clarence Frazer** sings the title role of the wily barber Figaro. Recently, he appeared as Prince Yamadori in the COC's fall production of *Madama Butterfly* and Guglielmo in the 2014 Ensemble Studio performance of *Così fan tutte*. He also appears with the mainstage cast of *The Barber of Seville* as the Officer.

Tenors **Andrew Haji** and **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure** share the role of Count Almaviva, the young nobleman seeking Figaro's help. **Haji** has been praised for his "terrific lyric tenor" (*La Scena Musicale*), and in September 2014 won the Grand Prix, the Press Prize and the Junior Jury Prize at the Netherlands's prestigious 's-Hertogenbosch International Vocal Competition. Named one of CBC's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30" in 2014, **Fortier-Lazure** makes his COC mainstage debut.

Mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage** is the opera's charming young heroine, Rosina. After making her mainstage debut in 2014's Ensemble Studio performance of *Così fan tutte* as Dorabella, *PaulaCitron.com* described her as "blessed with a seductive lyric voice of great clarity of tone, overlying hearty expression." In winter 2015, she sang the role of Grimgerde in the COC's production of *Die Walküre*.

Praised for his "gorgeous sound" (*Schmopera*), bass-baritone **Iain MacNeil** is Rosina's guardian Bartolo. Two COC Ensemble Studio Competition First Prize and Audience Choice Award winners, bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner** and soprano **Karine Boucher**, sing the roles of the singing teacher Basilio and Bartolo's servant Berta, respectively. **Bintner** has been praised for his "firm technique, remarkable musicality, abundant theatrical flair and a princely stage presence" (*Musical Toronto*), while **Boucher** has been called a "very gifted singer" with a "knockout stage presence" (*Musical Toronto*).

The Ensemble Studio performance is part of the mainstage production of *The Barber of Seville*, which runs from **April 17 to May 22, 2015** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The production team behind this new COC production is **Els Comediants**, with direction by **Joan Font**, set and costumes by **Joan Guillén**, and lighting design by **Albert Faura**.

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## ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE STUDIO

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 180 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Allyson McHardy and Krisztina Szabó.

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program, involving understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, language and acting studies, and career skills development, as well as participation in masterclasses with internationally renowned opera professionals.

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## TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for the Ensemble Studio performance of *The Barber of Seville* are \$25 and \$55 per person and are available online at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca), by calling **COC Ticket Services at 416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office**, located at 145 Queen St. W., Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Standing Room tickets are available for \$12 at 11 a.m. the morning of the performance, in person only at the **Four Seasons Centre Box Office**. Limit of two tickets per person. Subject to availability.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, The Slight Family Foundation and RBC 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, Hal Jackman Foundation, W. Garfield Weston Foundation and other generous donors.**

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## 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](http://coc.ca).

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

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