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COC BRINGS BACK “ONE OF THE GREATEST OF ALL NIGHTS AT THE OPERA” WITH ICONIC *BLUEBEARD’S CASTLE/ERWARTUNG*

Toronto – The Canadian Opera Company’s iconic double-bill of Béla Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle* and Arnold Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* returns to the company’s mainstage to close its 2014/2015 season. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts both operas for the first time, leading the COC Orchestra through these visceral and haunting scores, all brought to life in a mind-bending and gravity-defying production by world-renowned Canadian artistic visionary **Robert Lepage**. *Bluebeard’s Castle* is sung in Hungarian and *Erwartung* is sung in German, both with English SURTITLES™, and runs for only seven performances on **May 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 23, 2015** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

Audiences and critics in Toronto, New York, Edinburgh, Melbourne, Hong Kong as well as those in Geneva, Vancouver, Montreal, Edmonton, Cincinnati and Seattle have been dazzled and astounded by the COC’s double-bill production of *Bluebeard’s Castle/Erwartung* since its 1993 premiere. It’s been called “**one of the greatest of all nights at the opera**” (*Globe and Mail*), “**one of the most exciting and inventive pieces of music theatre presented by an opera company anywhere**” (*Financial Post*), “**a stunning artistic vision**” (*Hong Kong Economic Journal*) and “**absolutely remarkable**” (*The Scotsman*).

The 1993 premiere of *Bluebeard’s Castle/Erwartung* by director **Robert Lepage** (2009’s *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*) was a watershed moment for the COC, establishing it as one of the world’s most visionary and compelling opera companies. The COC subsequently garnered worldwide acclaim in presenting this production on the company’s inaugural visits to the Brooklyn Academy of Music (1993), Edinburgh International Festival (1993), Melbourne International Festival (1994) and Hong Kong Arts Festival (1996). *Bluebeard’s Castle/Erwartung* was subsequently revived on the COC’s mainstage during its 1994/1995 and 2001/2002 seasons. It’s now presented for the first time at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

Bartók’s only opera, *Bluebeard’s Castle*, features superstar Canadian bass **John Relyea** as the inscrutable Duke Bluebeard whose castle holds untold secrets. **Relyea** is one of today’s finest basses and has appeared in many of the world’s most celebrated opera houses. He made his highly anticipated COC debut in *The Tales of Hoffmann* in 2012 and returns with his “**menacing, black-toned basso**” (*Chicago Tribune*) in a favourite role for which he has been praised for delivering a “**vivid**” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*) and “**powerful but versatile**” (*Seattle Weekly*) performance.

Russian **Ekaterina Gubanova**, one of the finest mezzo-sopranos in the world, is Bluebeard’s bride, Judith, who unlocks the rooms of her mysterious husband’s castle. A featured soloist at such houses as the Metropolitan Opera; Teatro alla Scala; Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Bayerische Staatsoper; Lyric Opera of Chicago; Teatro Real Madrid; and Gran Teatre del Liceu, **Gubanova** brings her “**large, darkly expressive mezzo**” (*Wall Street Journal*) to the COC for the first time.

Schoenberg’s monodrama, *Erwartung*, about a woman who descends into madness, stars virtuosic Canadian mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó** (2012’s *Love from Afar*, 2010’s *Idomeneo*, 2006’s *Ring Cycle*). A graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio, **Szabó** has become highly sought after in both North America and Europe as an artist of supreme musicianship and stagecraft, with critics praising “**her rich, dark timbre and fullness of sound**” (*Chicago Tribune*) and how she sings “**with passion, beauty and power**” (*Opera News*). **Szabó** makes her role debut as the Woman.

COC Ensemble Studio graduate **François Racine** stages the 2015 revival, based on **Robert Lepage**'s original direction. The production's spectacular and surprising integration of movement, light and theatrical sleight-of-hand, features set and costume design by Canadian **Michael Levine** (2015's *Die Walküre*, 2013's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, 2011's *Rigoletto*, 2006's *Ring Cycle*), lighting design by **Robert Thomson** and media effects by **Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy**.

Symbolic settings replace more conventional, realistic sets of Bluebeard's castle and the forest where The Woman of *Erwartung* wanders. Instead of literal depictions, the lighting and scenery are designed to highlight both operas' emphases on the internal drama of the mind, resulting in stagecraft where "**rarely have subconscious forces been so eloquently embodied on stage in image after image**" (*Globe and Mail*).

Written within two years of each other, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* (1909) and Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1911) broke new musical ground by opening the door for future operatic experimentation. Bartók's score exemplifies a new, uniquely Hungarian music style where Schoenberg's opera was the very first atonal work written for the operatic stage, paving the way for future 20th-century works.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* 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 **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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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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