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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY MAKES HEADLINES IN NEW YORK WITH PROVOCATIVELY PLAYFUL PRODUCTION OF *SEMELE*

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** is making headlines in New York on the occasion of its recent tour to the world-renowned Brooklyn Academy of Music. The COC’s theatrically transcendent production of Handel’s *Semele*, created by famed Chinese visual and performance artist **Zhang Huan**, was previewed in the early days of its New York residency by the *Toronto Star* as “looking like an opera we can be proud that Toronto brought to the Big Apple.” It went on to open on March 4 to popular and critical acclaim with *Superconductor* lauding the occasion as “a chance for this city to hear this excellent Toronto-based company in a rare American visit.”

The *New York Times* has nothing but praise for “this playful, colorful staging.” Maestro Christopher Moulds was singled out for conducting “the orchestra with winning vitality and feeling for the style,” and Canadian soprano Jane Archibald was admired for how she “brings a bright, technically agile and appealing voice to a demanding role.” Also applauded was “able, earnest” American countertenor Lawrence Zazzo as Athamus, American bass-baritone Kyle Ketelsen’s “vocally formidable Cadmus, the king of Thebes, the “dramatically resonant touch” of Welsh contralto Hilary Summers as Ino and Juno, “the sweet soprano” of Canadian Katherine Whyte as Iris, Juno’s willing messenger, and the “affecting” choice to eliminate the final chorus of the opera and hum “The Internationale.”

Zhang’s directorial vision and boldness has been equally hailed by critics. *New York Classical Review* says he “pushes *Semele* into a shape that is far more personal and unique than usually found on the stage, and his ambition is uneven yet fascinating” and “the production births a question, a rare and stimulating experience at the opera.” For *New York Magazine*’s *Vulture*, the COC’s presentation of *Semele* offers a “weird seductiveness,” and *Out Magazine* remarks how the production “is sure to raise a few eyebrows — and to command respect,” with *Flavorpill Media* noting that Zhang’s “Eastern embellishments transform this production into a balancing act between opera and performance art” and his *Semele* “is a true attempt at updating the age-old practice of opera into an innovative theatrical experience.”

The production’s musical achievements have been met with unabashed enthusiasm. In addition to the acclaim from the *New York Times*, *Vulture* says Archibald “sings the title role with insouciant glee, her voice shimmying up into the high register and scattering notes like confetti,” Summers has a “plush, iridescent alto,” and “conductor Christopher Moulds keeps all the opera’s wheels spinning and the pistons churning with aplomb....” *Seen and Heard International* was particularly taken with Canadian tenor Colin Ainsworth and found his “voice exceptionally warm and sweet, giving a positive spin to the role of Jupiter.” *Bachtrack.com* lauded Moulds for “an ideally paced, well played, energetic performance” and “the magnificent, vocally agile Jane Archibald in the title role, with her arias full of wild roulades, endless breaths and exciting (interpolated) high notes.” Ainsworth’s portrayal of the god Jupiter was called “smoothly sung,” Summers was complimented on her “marvelous, booming low notes, and cutting high ones,” Whyte described as “simply lovely” and Ketelsen called “excellent.”

Zhang Huan’s 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 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 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* is a co-production of Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels and KT Wong Foundation. It had its North American premiere with the COC in spring 2012. *Semele* opened at BAM on March 4, 2015, and continues its engagement at the **Howard Gilman Opera House** through to **March 10, 2015**. For more information on this production and its U.S. premiere, visit coc.ca and bam.org.

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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.

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