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WORLD PREMIERE OF 21ST-CENTURY CANADIAN OPERA ONE OF MANY FIRSTS IN COC'S 2015/2016 SEASON

Toronto – The world premiere of a new Canadian work was one of the many operatic highlights revealed today at the public launch of the **Canadian Opera Company's 2015/2016** season at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The COC's 65th season is once again comprised entirely of company productions, four of which are new to Toronto audiences, and features the COC's first mainstage world premiere since 1999, COC premieres of opera rarities and the revival of classic masterpieces.

The COC presents Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* in a new company production; the world premiere of Barbara Monk Feldman's *Pyramus and Thisbe* presented with the COC premieres of Claudio Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*; the continuation of the COC's *Ring* operas with the revival of its acclaimed production of Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*; a new COC production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*; the COC premiere of Gioachino Rossini's *Maometto II*; and a revival of the COC production of Georges Bizet's popular opera *Carmen*.

"With the 15/16 season we can explore with our patrons the vitality of opera through the centuries. The new season follows the evolution of opera, from its earliest beginnings with the Monteverdi pieces, to the world premiere of a 21st-century Canadian work," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "This season offers something for everyone while at the same time allowing us as a company to showcase the timelessness of opera as well as moving the art form forward."

The COC continues to bring opera's most exciting emerging and established artists to its stage. Among those making their mainstage debuts with the COC in the 15/16 season are singers **Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker, Charles Castronovo, Leah Crocetto, Emily Fons, Clémentine Margaine, Luca Pisaroni, Christopher Purves, Helene Schneiderman, Ekaterina Siurina, Bruce Sledge, Stefan Vinke** and **Josef Wagner**; directors **Arin Arbus, Claus Guth** and **Joel Ivany**; and designer **Cait O'Connor**.

The opera company also welcomes the return of a number of acclaimed Canadian and international artists including singers **Phillip Addis, Jane Archibald, Russell Braun, Michael Colvin, Elizabeth DeShong, Joyce El-Khoury, Phillip Ens, Christine Goerke, Alan Held, Quinn Kelsey, Doug MacNaughton, Owen McCausland, Zachary Nelson, Simone Osborne, Robert Pomakov, David Pomeroy, Anita Rachvelishvili, Maria Radner, Krisztina Szabó, Russell Thomas, Christian Van Horn, Erin Wall, James Westman**; directors **Christopher Alden, David Alden** and **François Girard**; designers **Michael Levine, Paul Steinberg** and **Terese Wadden**; and conductors **Harry Bicket, Paolo Carignani** and **Marco Guidarini**.

The COC's 15/16 season opens with a new production of Verdi's glorious masterpiece, *La Traviata*. In 1853, *La Traviata* scandalized Venetians with its unsentimental depiction of a courtesan in love, yet the character of Violetta has emerged as one of the most compelling and glamorous heroines in all of opera. Renowned New York theatre director **Arin Arbus**, hailed by the *New York Times* as "the most gifted new director to emerge" in 2009, sets this story of passion and sacrifice in glittering 1850s Paris, evoking the social realities, rhythms and debauchery of a rapidly changing world. Co-produced with Lyric Opera of Chicago and Houston Grand Opera, this *La Traviata* delighted audiences at its Chicago premiere in 2013 with a look and feel that is "both hyper-traditional and, in moments, saucily modern" (*bachtrack.com*). Costumes by noted visual artist and designer **Cait O'Connor** are both decadent and playful, and alongside the giant puppets, Marie-Antoinette-style wigs, gilded angel-wings and a matador, it all befits the excesses of the 19th-century Parisian nightlife that inspired the opera that Verdi would call

“a subject of the times.” Cast as Violetta are two of the most exciting young sopranos on the opera scene today, Russian **Ekaterina Siurina** and Canadian **Joyce El-Khoury** (2013’s *La Bohème*), both praised internationally for their realization of the role’s demanding vocal pyrotechnics as well delivering the dramatic conviction that carries the character through a remarkable emotional arc. In the role of Violetta’s nobleman lover, Alfredo, is one of the finest lyric tenors of his generation, American **Charles Castronovo**, and rising Canadian tenor **Andrew Haji** from the COC’s Ensemble Studio. As Germont, Alfredo’s disapproving father, the COC welcomes the return of two internationally acclaimed baritones: American **Quinn Kelsey** (2014’s *Don Quichotte*, 2011’s *Rigoletto*) and Canadian **James Westman** (2012’s *Die Fledermaus*). Italian conductor **Marco Guidarini**, last with the COC for 2012’s *Il Trovatore*, returns to lead the COC Orchestra and Chorus through an opera that features some of Verdi’s most popular and beautiful music. *La Traviata* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™, and was last performed by the COC in 2007. It returns to the opera company’s mainstage for 11 performances on **October 8, 13, 16, 17, 21, 24, 29, 30, November 1, 4, 6, 2015**.

Also in the fall is a presentation of COC premieres in a new company production that unites two early Baroque opera classics with a new Canadian opera: Monteverdi’s *Lamento d’Arianna* (1608) and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624) and the world premiere of Monk Feldman’s *Pyramus and Thisbe* (2010). Monteverdi’s two works were composed just as opera was emerging as an art form and, as with most early operas, their subjects are drawn from mythology and history. *Lamento d’Arianna* tells the tale of Ariadne abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos, while *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* is the story of the Christian knight Tancredi and the Saracen warrior-maiden Clorinda, and how their tragic fates are determined on the battlefields of the Crusades. Canadian composer Barbara Monk Feldman’s *Pyramus and Thisbe* is also based on a classic myth, with the tragic tale of the ill-fated lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, most famously adapted by Shakespeare in his *Romeo and Juliet*. Leading a compelling team of singer-actors assembled for this production is an artist who exemplifies today’s modern singer with her vocal versatility and stage prowess: **Krisztina Szabó**. The Canadian mezzo-soprano and COC Ensemble Studio alumna follows up her virtuosa turn in the COC’s 2012’s *Love from Afar* and her highly anticipated performance in the COC’s upcoming *Erwartung* to play Monteverdi’s Arianna and Clorinda, and Monk Feldman’s Thisbe. Canadian baritone **Phillip Addis** (Marcello/Schaunard in 2013’s *La Bohème*) returns as Pyramus and recent Ensemble Studio graduate, tenor **Owen McCausland**, is Testo, the narrator of *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. Weaving the three operas together is the ever-probing eye of acclaimed director **Christopher Alden** (2013’s *La clemenza di Tito*, 2012’s *Die Fledermaus*, 2011’s *Rigoletto*) who, with set designer **Paul Steinberg** (2014’s *Falstaff*) and costume designer **Terese Wadden** (2012’s *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi*, 2013’s *La clemenza di Tito*), has conceived of a production aesthetic inspired by the works of American painter Mark Rothko. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra through a bold program of music that brings together operas composed 400 years apart while illustrating the beauty of the human voice and the magic of musical storytelling over the passage of time. *Pyramus and Thisbe* with *Lamento d’Arianna* and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* is sung in English and Italian with English SURTITLES™, and runs for seven performances on **October 20, 23, 25, 28, November 5, 7 (two performances), 2015**.

Wagner’s *Siegfried* returns to the COC mainstage for the 15/16 season with the company’s critically acclaimed production by renowned Canadian director **François Girard**. First presented by the COC in 2005, and then in 2006 as part of the COC’s full *Ring Cycle*, this *Siegfried* has been hailed as “a fascinating thing to witness and gorgeous to hear” (*Globe and Mail*) as well as “psychologically rich and mysterious music theatre” (*NOW*). It’s an evocative production, in which **Girard** and Toronto-born designer **Michael Levine** have created a staging that mirrors the emotional landscape found in Wagner’s complex and stirring score. In the third instalment of Wagner’s epic *Ring*, Siegfried, the product of Siegmund and Sieglinde’s union at the end of *Die Walküre*, embarks on a heroic journey that reveals the minds of gods and mortals in a story of greed, fear and self-discovery. German tenor **Stefan Vinke**, one of the finest Siegfrieds in the world, makes his Canadian debut in the title role. Described as “huge of voice, unflagging of stamina, imaginative and energetic on the stage” (*Seattle Times*), **Vinke** is equally matched by the powerhouse American soprano **Christine Goerke**, heralded for her “multi-hued miracle of gale-force power and pinpoint control” (*Musical America*), who returns to the COC as the mighty Valkyrie Brünnhilde after her company debut in 2015’s *Die Walküre*. Austrian **Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker**, considered one of the most sought after and important character tenors on the operatic world stage, makes his Canadian debut as the sly Nibelung-dwarf Mime who raised Siegfried from birth and plans to use the young hero to secure the famed ring for himself.

Acclaimed British baritone **Christopher Purves** makes his COC debut as Mime's brother Alberich, whose theft of the Ringgold set in motion the *Ring Cycle's* epic chain of events. German **Maria Radner** (2009's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*) one of the most exciting contraltos of her generation, returns to the COC as the Earth Goddess, Erda. Acclaimed American bass-baritone **Alan Held** (2013's *Peter Grimes*, *Salome*, *Tristan und Isolde*, 2012's *Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi*), one of the finest singer-actors on the stage today, is Wotan/The Wanderer. Canadian bass **Phillip Ens** (2011's *Rigoletto*) reprises the role as Fafner the dragon, the current possessor of the Rhinegold, which he sang for the COC in 2005 and 2006. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts his first *Siegfried*, leading the COC Orchestra through an electrifying while still deeply intimate score that features some of the greatest music in the whole *Ring Cycle*. *Siegfried* is sung in German with English SURTITLES™ and runs for seven performances on **January 23, 27, 30, February 2, 5, 11, 14, 2016**.

Paired with *Siegfried* is one of the most beautiful and convincing operas about the fluid enchantments, maze-like confusions and bouts of sheer blindness brought on by love: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. This new-to-Toronto COC production was originally built by the Salzburg Festival as the centrepiece of its celebrations for the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Hailed as a "masterpiece" (*Bloomberg News*) and the hit of the 2006 Salzburg Festival—revived repeatedly in years since—this staging is by **Claus Guth**. The acclaimed German director has become renowned for his innovative productions of classic operas and for this *Figaro* he draws visual and thematic inspiration from the films of Ingmar Bergman and the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, while fusing stylized gesture and choreography with Mozart's score to deliver a "shattering, unforgettable" (*The Guardian*) account of the elemental forces of human nature at play in this opera. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** is at the helm of the orchestra pit for the COC's entire winter season as he conducts *The Marriage of Figaro* (in addition to *Siegfried*), leading the COC Orchestra and Chorus through a score described as a testament to Mozart's genius. A sparkling cast has been assembled for this magnificent, witty farce that finds Figaro and Susanna's wedding in jeopardy due to the wandering eye of their employer, the Count, with intrigue and mistaken identities ensnaring everyone in a web of erotic passions. Austrian bass-baritone **Josef Wagner**, who has his Canadian debut with Calgary Opera in January 2015, makes his COC debut in the title role. His love, Susanna, is internationally acclaimed Canadian soprano **Jane Archibald** (2015's *Don Giovanni*, 2012's *Semele*, 2011's *Ariadne auf Naxos*). The Countess is sung by renowned Canadian soprano **Erin Wall** (2012's *Love from Afar*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*), and the role of the Count is sung by acclaimed Canadian baritone **Russell Braun**, who once more graces the COC mainstage after recent star turns in the company's *Don Giovanni*, *Falstaff*, *Il Trovatore* and *Love from Afar*. American mezzo-soprano **Emily Fons** makes her COC debut as Cherubino and acclaimed Canadian tenor **Michael Colvin** (2014's *Falstaff*) is Basilio. Canadian bass **Robert Pomakov** is Bartolo, American mezzo-soprano **Helene Schneiderman** makes her COC debut as Marcellina and Canadian baritone **Doug MacNaughton** is Antonio. *The Marriage of Figaro* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™. Last performed by the COC in 2007, *The Marriage of Figaro* returns for 11 performances on **February 4, 7, 9, 13, 17, 19, 21, 22*, 23, 25, 27, 2016**.

***ENSEMBLE STUDIO PERFORMANCE OF THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO ON FEBRUARY 22, 2016**

The young singers of the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio perform Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* on **February 22, 2016** at 7:30 p.m. on the mainstage. This special performance stars Ensemble Studio members with the full COC Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of *Marriage of Figaro* conductor **Johannes Debus** and director **Claus Guth**. For casting, please visit the COC website at coc.ca. Tickets are accessibly priced at **\$25** and **\$55** per person.

One of the world's most famous operas returns to the COC in spring 2016 with Bizet's *Carmen*. Bringing a fresh look to this masterpiece of lyric theatre is young Canadian director **Joel Ivany**, of Toronto's cutting-edge theatre collective Against the Grain Theatre, in his COC mainstage debut. **Ivany** revives the COC's production, and his new staging has already been hailed as a "visceral treat" (*Vancouver Sun*) offering "a fresh, human take that engages and entertains as much as it provokes" (*Vancouver Straight*) when Vancouver Opera presented the COC production with **Ivany** at its helm in fall 2014. The COC's production is set against the colourful, sunbaked landscape of 1940s Latin America. It follows the tragic love affair between an irresistible seductress and the young soldier who, in the thrall of consuming jealousy, attempts to tame her. Internationally renowned Italian conductor **Paolo Carignani** (2012's *Tosca*) returns to lead the COC Orchestra and Chorus and an exciting cast through the driving passion of Bizet's score. Two mezzo-sopranos making a specialty of the lead role bring *Carmen* to life at

the COC. Georgian **Anita Rachvelishvili** (2014's *Don Quichotte*, 2010's *Carmen*) has been hailed for her "smoldering, earthy sexuality" (*New York Times*) in the role at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and Deutsche Oper Berlin; and French mezzo **Clémentine Margaine** brings a "passion and menace" (*Opera News*) to the role that has made her *Carmen* a hit in Rome and Berlin. As *Carmen*'s jealous lover, Don José, the COC welcomes the return of two tenors: American **Russell Thomas** (2012's *The Tales of Hoffmann*), one of the most exciting vocal and dramatic talents on the international opera and concert scene, and Canadian **David Pomeroy** (2012's *Die Fledermaus*, 2009's *Madama Butterfly*), internationally acclaimed for his rich voice. Heard in the role of the toreador Escamillo are the powerful voices of American bass-baritone **Christian Van Horn** (2013's *La Bohème*, 2012's *Tosca*) and American baritone **Zachary Nelson** (2015's *Don Giovanni*). Sharing the role of the peasant girl Micaëla is Canadian soprano, and COC Ensemble Studio alumna, **Simone Osborne** and emerging opera talent, Ensemble Studio soprano **Karine Boucher**. *Carmen* is sung in French with English SURTITLES™ and was last performed by the COC in 2010. *Carmen* returns to the company's mainstage for 13 performances on **April 12, 17, 20, 23, 28, 30, May 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 2016**.

Closing the 15/16 season is the COC premiere of Rossini's rarely performed grand *bel canto* opera **Maometto II**, featuring superstar Italian bass-baritone **Luca Pisaroni** in his highly anticipated COC debut. Rossini unleashes his full arsenal of vocal fireworks in the historical tale of the great Turkish Sultan, Maometto, and his quest to conquer the Holy Roman Empire. **Maometto II** disappeared in its original 1820 Naples form until its triumphant return at Santa Fe Opera in 2012. There, it was lauded as a "thrilling [piece of] experiential theatre" (*Opera News*) and now comes to the COC in the same production by acclaimed American director **David Alden** (2013's *Lucia di Lammermoor*). **Alden**, along with sets and costumes by award-winning British designer **Jon Morrell**, has brought the opera's action forward from its historical 15th-century origins to the time of its creation in 1820. Strikingly-coloured, Napoleonic era, First Empire gowns glow jewel-like against a neoclassical marble colonnade and surprising *coups de théâtre* are peppered throughout the production, including the sudden emergence of a statue of three galloping horses on which Maometto makes a dramatic exit. Mastering Rossini's fearsome vocal demands is **Luca Pisaroni** as "a chilling and complex Maometto. His dashing stage presence and virile voice exude menacing authority" (*New York Times*). American mezzo-soprano **Elizabeth DeShong** (2014's *Madama Butterfly*, 2011's *La Cenerentola*) is a COC favourite and returns as the Venetian noble Calbo, one of *bel canto*'s great, heroic pants roles. Rising star American soprano **Leah Crocetto** makes her COC debut as Maometto's forbidden love, Anna. In the role of the Venetian Governor Erisso is American **Bruce Sledge**, one of the world's most in-demand *tenori di grazia*. Renowned as an opera and concert conductor, **Harry Bicket** is especially noted for his interpretation of baroque and classical repertoire. Last with the COC for 2014's *Hercules*, **Bicket** makes a welcome return to the podium to lead the COC Orchestra and Chorus in the company premiere of this exciting operatic rarity. **Maometto II** is sung in with English SURTITLES™ and runs for seven performances on **April 29, May 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 14, 2016**.

All repertoire, dates, pricing, productions and casting are subject to change without notice. For more complete casting and creative team information, please see the production pages at coc.ca.

TICKET INFORMATION

Now on sale, subscriptions to the six mainstage productions for the COC's 15/16 season range from **\$199 to \$2,086**, and may be purchased online at coc.ca, by calling **416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre Box Office**, 145 Queen St. W., Toronto. **Special value pricing is available on most levels of the Four Seasons Centre, including the Orchestra, Grand Ring box, and Ring 3 levels.** Prices include HST. Special pricing is also available for seniors and children in all subscription series.

Single tickets to all of the COC's 15/16 season productions are available to the public as of August 24, 2015. Single tickets prices range from **\$47 to \$355** (includes applicable taxes). Tickets are available online at coc.ca, by calling **416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre Box Office**, located at 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.

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 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, canadianopera.ca.

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