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## **CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY ANNOUNCES COMMISSION OF NEW OPERA BY COMPOSER ANA SOKOLOVIĆ AND PLAYWRIGHT MICHEL MARC BOUCHARD**

**Toronto** – **Alexander Neef**, General Director of the Canadian Opera Company, announced today the commission of a new opera for its mainstage by one of Canada’s most important composers, **Ana Sokolović**. Titled ***La Reine-Garçon***, the libretto is by Quebec playwright **Michel Marc Bouchard** and based on his play of the same name. Inspired by Queen Christina of Sweden who ruled the country in the 17th century before abdicating her throne at the age of 27, ***La Reine-Garçon*** is currently in development and is scheduled to have its world premiere in the COC’s 2019/2020 season.

Sweden’s Queen Christina (1626-1689) sought to make her country the most sophisticated in Europe. She was an enigmatic, flamboyant and unpredictable individual with a passion for philosophy and the arts, leading an unconventional lifestyle by adopting masculine dress and behaviour. She was also obsessed with celibacy, which encouraged other royals in their romantic pursuit of her. Her personal aspirations and her unconventional sexuality, however, put her at profound odds with her court and her country. As the daughter of a Protestant champion in the Thirty Years’ War, Christina ultimately caused a great scandal when she abdicated her throne and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1654. ***La Reine-Garçon*** focuses on the visit of French philosopher René Descartes to the Swedish court, while Christina, newly in love with the Countess Ebba Sparre and under pressure from male pretenders, calls into question everything that defines what she has been to date.

“I am very proud to announce today a new opera commission by the Canadian Opera Company. Ana is one of Canada’s greatest composers and Michel Marc is one of this country’s greatest playwrights, and we take great pride as a company to have brought them together to create this new Canadian opera,” says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. “I have long been an admirer of Ana’s work, especially her opera *Svadba-Wedding*, and have thought for a while that she was ready for a mainstage opera, and Michel Marc’s *La Reine-Garçon* is one of the best new plays that I’ve read. The subject of Christine of Sweden is one of Shakespearean proportion with universal relevance. I think it will make a fantastic opera, especially in the hands of Ana and Michel Marc.”

For the Serbian-born, Montreal-based **Ana Sokolović**, ***La Reine-Garçon*** allows the composer to chart new musical territory. “After writing three chamber operas for Queen of Puddings Music Theatre, I am back to Toronto for this amazing new project: a mainstage opera for soloists, chorus and full orchestra. For this important step in my artistic career, I am honoured to receive such an important Canadian opera commission, and working closely with one of the greatest Canadian authors, Michel Marc Bouchard, is a huge privilege for me,” says **Sokolović**. “As a woman and as an artist, I am particularly touched by this story about the Swedish Queen Christina. She was an inspiring woman ahead of her time.”

***La Reine-Garçon*** is Michel Marc Bouchard’s second libretto. “The story of Christina of Sweden has taken me on a long journey, one that started with cinema and theatre and now continues with opera. *La Reine-Garçon* is my second adventure in the world of opera after *Les Feluettes (Lilies)* for l’Opéra de Montréal, which will be produced in 2016. Fascinating, demanding, oversized, it is a great world to explore,” says **Bouchard**. “It is an unexpected gift to have one of the most prestigious opera houses in North America ask me to write the libretto for *La Reine-Garçon* and to work with Ana Sokolović, whose own works are so compelling, inspiring and modern. Ana and I now enter the intimate alcoves of creation to offer you this new opera.”

Over the years, **Sokolović** has earned a steady stream of commissions and awards. Her works include orchestral, vocal, chamber, operatic and theatrical pieces. From 1995 to 1998, she was a three-time recipient of the SOCAN Foundation Award for Young Composers. In the 1999 edition of the CBC Young Composers Competition, she won the grand prize along with first prize in the chamber music category. In 2005, she won the Joseph S. Stauffer Prize presented by the Canada Council for the Arts, and in 2007 the Conseil québécois de la musique awarded her the Prix Opus for composer of the year. In 2008, she won the Jan V. Matejcek Award presented by SOCAN; in 2012, she was a repeat winner of the same award. In 2009, she won the prestigious National Arts Centre Award, which included commissions, residencies and teaching positions over a five-year period. In the summer of 2012, her opera *Svadba-Wedding*, commissioned and produced by the Queen of Puddings Music Theatre, received six nominations for the Dora Mavor Moore Awards and won for Outstanding New Musical/Opera. The opera then went on tour in Canada and Europe until 2013. *Svadba-Wedding* is next scheduled to be performed in summer 2015 at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence in France.

**Bouchard** has written more than 20 plays, which are translated into many languages and performed worldwide, with six adapted for film. Various productions, most notably *Lilies or the Revival of a Romantic Drama*, *The Tale of Teeka*, *The Orphan Muses*, *The Coronation Voyage*, *Down Dangerous Passes Road*, *The Madonna Painter* and *Tom at the Farm*, have garnered Dora Mavor Moore and Chalmers Awards (Toronto), the National Arts Centre Award, the Betty Mitchell Award (Calgary), the prix du Journal de Montréal, Primo Arte Candoni (Italy), the prix SACD (France), the Lambda Literary Award (New York) and many international critics' awards. Bouchard has received three nominations for the Governor General's Award for literature, including for *Christine, la reine-garçon*, produced at the Stratford Festival in 2014. *Tom à la ferme*, adapted for screen by Xavier Dolan, won the International critics award at the Venice Mostra 2012, and *Tom at the farm* will be presented at Buddies in Bad Times in Toronto in spring 2015. Bouchard is currently working on *The Divine*, which will be presented at the Shaw Festival in 2015, then produced in Montréal as *La Divine Illusion*. The film *The Girl King*, based on the life of Queen Christian of Sweden and written by Bouchard and directed by Mika Kaurismäki, is scheduled for release in 2015. Bouchard's first opera, based on *Lilies*, will premiere in 2016 with l'Opéra de Montréal. Bouchard is an Officer of the Order of Canada and Knight of the National Order of Quebec.

***La Reine-Garçon*** will be the sixth opera commissioned by the COC that has had its world premiere on the company's mainstage since 1950. The COC's previous mainstage commissions are *Hadrian*, to premiere in 2018/2019 (composer: Rufus Wainwright; librettist: Daniel MacIvor); *The Golden Ass*, 1999 (composer: Randolph Peters; librettist: Robertson Davies); *Mario and the Magician*, 1992 (composer: Harry Somers; librettist: Rod Anderson); *Héloïse and Abélard*, 1973 (composer: Charles Wilson; librettist: Eugene Benson); and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, 1967 (composer: Raymond Pannell; librettist: Ron Hambleton).

The COC is also the presenter of operatic world premieres. As part of the 15/16 season, the opera company presents the world premiere of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (composer and librettist: Barbara Monk Feldman). It also presented the world premiere of *Louis Riel* (composer: Harry Somers; librettist: Mavor Moore in collaboration with Jacques Languirand) in 1967, a work commissioned by the Floyd S. Chalmers Foundation, which it will revive in a new production for the COC's 2016/2017 season.

For presentations off the mainstage, the COC has commissioned 14 operatic works that have premiered in concert, as part of its school tour initiative or as chamber opera productions featuring members of its young artist training program, the Ensemble Studio.

***La Reine-Garçon*** will be sung in French. Information regarding the opera's creative team as well as casting, design and sponsorship will be released as details become available.

## **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, [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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For high-resolution publicity images of Ana Sokolović and Michel Marc Bouchard, please visit [coc.ca/press](http://coc.ca/press). The username is **cocpress** and the password is **mediapix**. Click on the hyperlink labelled "La Reine-Garçon."

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