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## **THREE RISING OPERA STARS TO JOIN CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY'S 2015/2016 SEASON**

**Toronto** – The Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, welcomes three talented new Canadian artists for the 2015/2016 season. Tenors **Charles Sy** and **Aaron Sheppard** were among the seven finalists featured in the fourth annual Ensemble Studio Competition in November 2014. **Sy** and **Sheppard** were top prize winners at the competitive vocal showcase which was the feature event of the COC's Ensemble Studio Competition Gala, *Centre Stage*, an evening dedicated to the discovery and celebration of the next generation of opera stars. In addition to the two opera singers, the 15/16 Ensemble Studio also welcomes pianist **Hyejin Kwon**.

The three artists will join the Ensemble Studio in August 2015 and become part of an illustrious program that, since its inception in 1980, has launched the careers of over 180 Canadian singers, opera coaches, mainstage directors and conductors, including Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Wendy Nielsen, David Pomeroy, Krisztina Szabó, Simone Osborne, Allyson McHardy, John Fanning, Joseph Kaiser, and Lauren Segal.

Members of the Ensemble Studio 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. In addition, they appear in principal roles in a special Ensemble Studio performance of a COC mainstage production, give several concert performances through the COC's Free Concert Series and perform in the COC's annual Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour.

The new and returning artists of the Ensemble Studio open the 15/16 season of the **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** with *Meet the Young Artists* in September 2015. The series features the members of the Ensemble Studio in several recitals of diverse repertoire over the course of the season. Complete details of the 15/16 Free Concert Series season will be announced later this year.

In November 2015, Ensemble Studio members participate in the COC's annual **Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour**, providing school-aged audiences throughout Ontario with an introduction to the world of opera. Complete details of the 2015 Glencore Ensemble Studio School Tour will be announced in the fall of 2015.

The 15/16 Ensemble Studio members also sing lead roles in their own performance of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* on February 22, 2016, with the COC Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of the same creative team as the mainstage cast: COC Music Director and conductor Johannes Debus, and director Claus Guth. All tickets for this production are accessibly priced at \$25 and \$55.

### **ABOUT THE NEW MEMBERS**

**Charles Sy** – Tenor Charles Sy is the first prize and audience choice award-winner of the COC's 2014 Ensemble Studio Competition. A Toronto native, Sy currently studies at the University of Toronto (UofT), earning a master of music in opera performance. His UofT credits include Mr. Owen in *Postcard from Morocco*, Ralph Rackstraw in *HMS Pinafore*, Mayor Upfold in *Albert Herring*, Alamão in *Pedro Malazarte*, and covering the title role in *Rob Ford: The Opera*. Additional credits include Remendado in *Carmen* (Opera by Request); Lechmere in *Owen Wingrave* (Banff Centre); Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* (Opera NUOVA); Paolo in *The Wings of a Dove* (The COSI Connection); and Basilio and Curzio in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Toronto Summer Opera Workshop). In 2015, he will sing the role of Adolfo in *La Rondine* with Opera Theatre of St. Louis.

**Aaron Sheppard** – Tenor Aaron Sheppard took third place at the COC’s 2014 Ensemble Studio Competition. A native of St. John’s, Newfoundland, Sheppard is currently a member of the Atelier lyrique de l’Opéra de Montréal (OdM). His OdM credits include Hadji in *Lakmé*, Pong in *Turandot*, First Philistine in *Samson et Dalila*, Kronprinz in *Silent Night* and Joe’s Brother in *Dead Man Walking*. Additional roles include Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* and Bonario in *Volpone* (Opera McGill); Pedrillo in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte* (Salzburg Festival Young Singers Project); Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* (Jeunesses Musicales du Canada); the title role in *Albert Herring* and Prince in *Rusalka* (Opera NUOVA); and Brooklyn Boy in *Lillian Alling* (Banff Centre). Sheppard is also a recent winner of the Western Canada Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

**Hyejin Kwon** – Praised as a “fine stand-in for an orchestra” by the *Washington Post*, pianist Hyejin Kwon, hails from Seoul, South Korea. Kwon began studying piano at age four, made her first public debut at age seven and her orchestra debut at age 11. She moved to the United States at age 15 to attend the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. She won the MTNA Concerto competition in 2004 and was also featured on Interlochen Public Radio. Kwon graduated from the Peabody Institute of Music of the Johns Hopkins University in 2009, with her Bachelor’s degree in Piano Performance, and in 2011, with her Master’s degree in Vocal Accompanying. She also served as the pianist for the Johns Hopkins Medical Institute Choral Society from 2008 to 2011, then as their musical director from 2011 to 2012, before joining Lyric Opera Baltimore as their répétiteur and the Repertory Theater of Washington as the music director. Kwon moved to Canada in the fall of 2012, and has been actively working as a pianist, coach, répétiteur, and a music instructor. She is currently completing an operatic répétiteur diploma program with University of Toronto Opera.

#### **2014/2015 ENSEMBLE STUDIO GRADUATES**

COC General Director Alexander Neef extends the company’s congratulations to mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage**, baritone **Clarence Frazer** and tenor **Owen McCausland**, who graduate from the Ensemble Studio program at the end of the 2014/2015 season. Before leaving the program, these young artists can be heard in several performances during the remainder of the 14/15 season.

On the COC mainstage, **Charlotte Burrage** sings the role of Grimgerde in *Die Walküre* and **Clarence Frazer** is an Officer in *The Barber of Seville*. The Ensemble Studio performance of the COC’s mainstage production of *The Barber of Seville* takes place on **May 15, 2015**. In this special presentation of Rossini’s delightful comedy, **Charlotte Burrage** is Rosina and **Clarence Frazer** is Figaro.

The graduating artists can also be heard in performance through the COC’s **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. On **March 26, 2015 at 12 p.m.**, **Burrage** and **McCausland** perform Janáček’s intensely dramatic song cycle, *The Diary of One who Disappeared*. On **May 20, 2015 at 12 p.m.**, **Burrage**, **Frazer** and **McCausland** come together for a special farewell performance, *Les Adieux*.

#### **OTHER 2014/2015 ENSEMBLE STUDIO PERFORMANCES**

The spotlight shines on the rising stars of the COC Ensemble Studio when they take to the mainstage of the Four Seasons Centre on **May 15, 2015**, in a presentation of their own special performance of Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, conducted by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** and directed by the production team of **Els Comediantes**. Tickets are accessibly priced at **\$25** and **\$55**, and available online at **coc.ca**, by calling COC Ticket Services at 416-363-8231, or in person at the Four Seasons Centre Box Office, located at 145 Queen St. W.

Ensemble Studio members also perform in six more recitals during the 14/15 Free Concert Series season in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

- **January 22, 2015 at 12 p.m.:** *Songs of Love and War* – Artists of the Ensemble Studio present a program of music commemorating both world wars and the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- **February 9, 2015, from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.:** In this special presentation, artists of the Ensemble Studio compete in the 6th edition of the Christina and Louis Quilico Awards, which will be presented at the end of the evening.

- **February 19, 2015 at 12 p.m.:** *Collaborations* – singers from the young artist programs of the Canadian Opera Company and l’Opéra de Montréal join forces in a program of arias and ensembles.
- **March 19, 2015 at 12 p.m.:** *Opera Interactive* – a lively interactive March Break concert featuring favourite operatic arias and sing-along choruses.
- **April 9, 2015 at 12 p.m.:** *Poetic Love* – Ensemble Studio tenor Andrew Haji and bass-baritone Gordon Bintner tackle two of the towering masterpieces of the German Lied repertoire: Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* and Schubert’s *Schwanengesang*.
- **April 28, 2015, 12 p.m.:** *The Futile Precaution* – The young artists of the Ensemble Studio present highlights from one of the most beloved and sparkling work in the operatic repertoire: *The Barber of Seville*.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Ensemble Studio performance of *The Barber of Seville* is generously underwritten by **Roy and Marjorie Linden**.

**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. For more information on the COC, visit its award-winning website, coc.ca.

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