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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY WELCOMES FIVE PLAYERS TO 2016 COC ORCHESTRA ACADEMY

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company Orchestra Academy** returns for its third year on January 6, 2016, welcoming five student musicians to its annual three-week intensive training program. New to the **2016 Orchestra Academy** are additional public performances with the COC Orchestra and opera singers from the COC, and masterclasses and private sessions with opera singers, production personnel and visiting music staff.

Led by **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**, and developed in collaboration with The Glenn Gould School at the Royal Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Music, the **COC Orchestra Academy** offers its student musicians professional insight and experience in their pursuit of a career in an opera orchestra.

The five student players who join the **Academy** this year were selected from a pool of 12 musicians who auditioned in October 2015 for **Debus**, COC Orchestra Academy Director **Nina Draganic** and members of the **COC Orchestra**: GGS cellist **Drew Comstock**, GGS violinist **Hua-Chu Huang**, GGS violinist **Yada Lee**, GGS bassist **Doug Ohashi** and UofT violist **Meagan Turner**.

In joining the **COC Orchestra Academy**, these five student musicians will be mentored by players from the orchestra. The COC Orchestra mentors for 2016 are violinists **Marie Bérard** and **Anne Armstrong** (Hua-Chu Huang); violinist **James Aylesworth** (Yada Lee), violist **Keith Hamm** (Meagan Turner), cellist **Paul Widner** (Drew Comstock); and bassist **Alan Molitz** (Doug Ohashi).

As part of the **Academy** experience, students are featured in multiple public performances. This year those appearances include playing with the COC Orchestra at the company’s 2016/2017 season launch event on January 13 and a recital in the COC’s **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** on January 21, performing Fauré’s *La bonne chanson* with COC Ensemble Studio tenor **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure** and Mendelssohn’s *Octet* with their COC Orchestra mentors. **Academy** students also join the COC Orchestra in the pit of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on January 23 for opening night of the COC’s winter production of Wagner’s *Siegfried*, playing one of the most complex and stirring scores in the operatic canon.

“It’s wonderful to see how we’ve grown the COC Orchestra Academy since it began in 2014. Every year we build it up just a little more, moving from strength to strength,” says **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**. “This year we’ve added the season launch event to the program and we’ve been fortunate enough to have interest from great artists like Christine Goerke and Russell Braun on how they can get involved with the Orchestra Academy. These experiences, at such an early point in these musicians’ careers, are the opportunities of a lifetime.”

In addition to performing at the COC’s annual season launch event for the first time, other new opportunities introduced for the **2016 Academy** include: a concert performance with a member of the COC Ensemble Studio; private sessions with opera singers performing on the mainstage as well as with production personnel; and coachings/masterclasses with singers from the mainstage and visiting music staff. Among the opera singers who will be working with the **2016 Academy** musicians are superstar American soprano **Christine Goerke**, who stars in *Siegfried*, and internationally acclaimed Canadian baritone **Russell Braun**, featured in the COC’s winter production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Academy students are exposed to all aspects of playing as part of an opera orchestra. They experience how an operatic performance comes together, how to prepare their part of a score, and the development and improvement of an orchestra over the course of rehearsals and performances. Additional opportunities include:

- studying rehearsal and performance etiquette, as well as developing the awareness, co-ordination, reaction, flexibility and listening skills required to play in an opera orchestra
- learning endurance techniques and how to focus for long periods of time
- gaining an understanding of sound production, articulation and blending as well as tuning within the orchestra, the section and with the singers, and the subtleties of balancing sound intensity
- studying different styles and levels of expressiveness in musicianship

The **COC Orchestra Academy** is an extra-curricular program that launched in January 2014 as a pilot program with the intention of growing the initiative to include more students and members of the COC Orchestra. There is no official credit attached to the students' participation. Members of the COC Orchestra participate in the **COC Orchestra Academy** voluntarily.

2016 COC Orchestra Academy Members

Cellist **Drew Comstock** began cello lessons at the age of four. He completed his undergraduate studies at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Yeesun Kim, and recently finished his Master of Music at McGill University where he worked with Brian Manker. He has performed in masterclasses for Ralph Kirshbaum, Phillippe Muller, Laurence Lesser, and Raphael Pidoux. As a chamber musician, he has worked with members of the Takács, Alban Berg, and Miró string quartets. He has also performed with Boston's critically acclaimed Discovery Ensemble, the North Carolina Symphony, and the McGill Chamber Orchestra. Comstock is currently pursuing an artist diploma at The Glenn Gould School under Desmond Hoebig and Andrés Díaz.

Violinist **Hua-Chu Huang** was born in Taiwan and moved to Canada in 2007. Since starting the violin at age nine, he has won numerous prizes from national competitions in Taiwan, the Nova Scotia Youth Orchestra Concerto competition, and recently placed silver in the 2015 Canadian Music Competition. Huang has performed as a featured soloist in the Dalhousie Concerto Night as well as with the Chebucto Symphony Orchestra and Symphony Nova Scotia. He studied with Philippe Djokic at Dalhousie University, where he received his bachelor's degree in violin performance. Huang is currently pursuing an artist diploma under Paul Kantor and Barry Shiffman at The Glenn Gould School.

Violinist **Yada Lee** has won numerous competitions and awards. She has performed concerti with Mannes Orchestra at Alice Tully Hall, New York, as well as with orchestras in Thailand and around the world. She has been a member of Verbier Festival Orchestra and Bangkok Symphony Orchestra and has served as concertmaster and principal for both Oberlin and Mannes orchestras. Lee holds a master's degree from Mannes School of Music and a bachelor's degree in violin performance from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She is currently at The Glenn Gould School, studying with Paul Kantor, Barry Shiffman, Laurie Smukler and David Bowlin.

Bassist **Doug Ohashi** is currently completing the final year of his artist diploma at The Glenn Gould School, studying with Jeffrey Beecher, principal bassist of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Ohashi aspires to perform in a professional orchestra and has participated in several training programs to serve that goal, including the National Youth Orchestra of Canada and Orford Academy. He is a recipient of the James Craig Opera Orchestra Award.

Praised for her imagination and musical instinct, Toronto-based violist **Meagan Turner** recently completed her undergraduate studies as a scholarship student at the University of Toronto. Turner has held principal positions with numerous orchestras and performed in masterclasses for renowned artists including Henning Kraggerud, Atar Arad, and the Brentano and Belcea quartets. In addition to her studies at UofT, Turner has studied chamber music with the St. Lawrence, Cecilia, and New Orford quartets and will continue her orchestral training at the New York String Orchestra Seminar this December. Turner is currently pursuing an advanced certificate in performance at UofT, in the studio of Eric Nowlin.

Acknowledgements

The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, RBC Foundation 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, the Hal Jackman 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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