

For immediate release: March 7, 2016

## **A SEDUCTIVE SPRING AT CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY WITH BIZET'S WORLD FAMOUS OPERA, *CARMEN***

**Toronto** – Returning to the Canadian Opera Company stage this spring is one of the world's most famous operas, Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. Canadian director **Joel Ivany**, of Toronto's cutting-edge collective Against the Grain Theatre, brings a fresh look to this masterpiece of lyric theatre when it comes to the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. Italian conductor **Paolo Carignani** is at the helm of Bizet's passionate score. *Carmen* was last presented by the COC in 2010 and returns to the Four Seasons Centre for 13 performances on **April 12, 17, 20, 23, 28, 30, May 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 2016**. *Carmen* is sung in French with English SURTITLES™.

*Carmen* is a highly charged melodrama about an irresistible gypsy, Carmen, and her seduction of a young soldier. At the time of the opera's premiere in Paris in 1875, it was condemned in the press as too immoral to be staged; *Carmen* marked the first time in opera that a female character could flout morality and still remain the heroine of the work. It is now consistently ranked as one of the most produced operas in the world.

Internationally renowned conductor **Paolo Carignani**, last in the COC's orchestra pit for *Tosca* in 2012, returns to lead the COC Orchestra, Chorus and an exciting cast through a tantalizing score of popular melodies. From Carmen's alluring teasing in "Habanera" and the swaggering machismo of Escamillo's "Toreador Song" to the desperate pleading of Don José's "Flower Song" and Micaëla's innocence and quiet strength in the aria "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante," the music drives the drama and action of *Carmen* forward and lays bare the deep well of emotions at play between Bizet's characters. The end result leaves no question as to the opera's universal appeal.

**Joel Ivany** makes his COC mainstage directing debut in this revival of the COC's production of *Carmen*, which premiered in 2005 and was last presented in 2010. He brings to the work a fresh new staging already hailed as a "visceral treat" (*Vancouver Sun*) offering a "human take that engages and entertains as much as it provokes" (*Vancouver Straight*) when Vancouver Opera presented the COC production in fall 2014 with **Ivany** directing. His staging is set against the colourful, sunbaked landscape of 1940s Latin America with sets and costumes designed by **Michael Yeargan** and **François St-Aubin**, respectively. New to the production's 2016 revival are two up-and-coming, innovative Toronto-based artists who frequently collaborate with **Ivany**: lighting designer **Jason Hand** and set and costume design co-ordinator **Camellia Koo**, making their COC mainstage debuts.

Two mezzo-sopranos making a specialty of the lead role bring Carmen to life at the COC: Georgian **Anita Rachvelishvili** (April 12, 17, 23, 30, May 4, 6, 13) and France's **Clémentine Margaine** (April 20, 28, May 8, 10, 12, 15). **Rachvelishvili** returns to the COC after 2014's *Don Quichotte* and 2010's *Carmen* to bring her "smoldering, earthy sexuality" (*New York Times*) once more to the Four Seasons Centre. Internationally renowned, she has sung Carmen at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Seattle Opera, San Francisco Opera and Royal Opera House Covent Garden, among others. **Margaine** has been hailed "a dream voice for the passionate but mercurial Gypsy" (*Dallas Morning News*), singing Carmen with Dallas Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma and Washington National Opera. After her Canadian debut with the COC, she goes on to sing Carmen in future seasons at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Opera Bastille in Paris.

As Carmen's jealous lover, Don José, the COC welcomes the return of two tenors: American **Russell Thomas** and Ensemble Studio graduate **David Pomeroy**. One of the most exciting vocal and dramatic talents on the international opera and concert scene, described as "nothing short of sensational" (*The Telegraph*), **Thomas** follows up his star turn in the COC's 2012 production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* with a role debut performance as

the young soldier who attempts to tame Carmen. **Pomeroy** returns to the COC after recent performances in 2012's *Die Fledermaus* and 2009's *Madama Butterfly*. He's been called a "magnetic" Don José by *Belgian Operaguide*, his voice "fresh...with a particularly gratifying bloom" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), reaching "the demanding high notes with smooth ease...totally compelling as a ruined man" (*Winnipeg Free Press*).

In the role of the toreador Escamillo are the powerful voices of American bass-baritone **Christian Van Horn** and American baritone **Zachary Nelson**. They make welcome returns to the COC after recent company outings: **Van Horn** for his performances in 2013's *La Bohème* and 2012's *Tosca*, and **Nelson** for 2015's *Don Giovanni*.

Sharing the role of the peasant girl Micaëla are two standout Canadian sopranos. COC Ensemble Studio graduate **Simone Osborne** returns to the COC, after 2014's *Falstaff*, on the heels of a 14-city U.S. concert tour with the Metropolitan Opera's Rising Stars Concert Series. **Osborne** is joined by emerging opera talent, Ensemble Studio soprano **Karine Boucher**, whose "gorgeous, womanly voice" (*Schmopera*) recently sang Susanna in the Ensemble Studio performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Rounding out the cast are former and current members of the COC Ensemble Studio. Bass **Alain Coulombe** is Zuniga, Don José's captain, and baritone **Peter Barrett** sings the role of Moralès, an officer under Zuniga's command. Mezzo-soprano **Charlotte Burrage** and soprano **Sasha Djihanian** are Carmen's gypsy friends Mercédès and Frasquita. Ensemble Studio bass-baritone **Iain MacNeil** and Ensemble Studio tenor **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure** are the smugglers, Le Dancaïre and Le Remendado.

### **TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets for *Carmen* range from **\$50 – \$435** and are available online at **coc.ca**, by calling **416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office** (145 Queen St. W.). For more information on **specialty 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**.

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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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