

For immediate release: November 4, 2015

## **TORONTO'S EMILY D'ANGELO WINS TOP PRIZE AT CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY'S ANNUAL VOCAL COMPETITION**

### ***Centre Stage Shines Spotlight on Canada's Future Opera Stars***

**Toronto** – **Emily D'Angelo** of Toronto took home First Prize (the Chair's Prize) at the Canadian Opera Company's annual Ensemble Studio Competition on November 3, 2015 at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The competition is the feature event of the COC fundraiser *Centre Stage*, a highly anticipated annual celebration of the next generation of opera stars. **D'Angelo** was selected from eight finalists to receive the \$5,000 award, supported annually by the Chair of the COC's Board of Directors. **Lauren Eberwein** of Qualicum Beach, BC won the Second Prize of \$3,000, and **Bruno Roy** of Montreal was awarded the Third Prize of \$1,500. **Emily D'Angelo** was also selected by the audience as the winner of the Audience Choice Award, worth \$1,500.

The vocal fireworks from the competition were just one of several highlights of this year's festivities at the Four Seasons Centre. *Centre Stage* hosts soprano **Karine Boucher** and tenor **Charles Sy**, both past winners of the Ensemble Studio Competition, charmed the audience with their banter, stories of their own competition experience and what it means to join the COC's Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals.

The audience was also treated to surprise musical performances by two of the stars of the COC's current production of Verdi's *La Traviata*: lauded Canadian soprano **Joyce El-Khoury** sang "Song to the Moon" from Dvořák's *Rusalka* and "The Jewel Song" from Gounod's *Faust*, and rising Canadian opera star, Ensemble Studio tenor **Andrew Haji**, sang "The Dream Song" from Massenet's *Manon*. All were accompanied by the internationally acclaimed **COC Orchestra**, conducted by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**, who also opened the evening of celebration with the overture to Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. The **Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario**, was also in attendance at *Centre Stage* and shared a few words from the stage before the competition winners were announced by **COC General Director Alexander Neef**.

"Since its inception in 2011, *Centre Stage* has become one of the most important annual events for the Canadian Opera Company and is quickly gaining a reputation as one of this country's foremost vocal competitions. The reason why is clear after witnessing the performances by these talented singers from across Canada," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "There is an amazing operatic pedigree being cultivated in this country and *Centre Stage* is a celebration of that talent and the potential they have to enrich Canada's artistic future."

The eight finalists were selected from a pool of **120** applicants for the 2016/2017 COC Ensemble Studio. On November 3, the adjudication panel heard each finalist perform two arias accompanied by the COC Orchestra conducted by Debus. The first aria was sung before a private audience of select COC patrons and the second was before the larger *Centre Stage* public audience of 900 patrons. The adjudication panel was comprised of COC General Director **Alexander Neef**, COC Director of Music and Artistic Administration **Roberto Mauro**, Director of the COC Ensemble Studio and Orchestra Academy **Nina Draganić**, and Head of the COC Ensemble Studio **Liz Upchurch**, as well as Canadian soprano and Ensemble Studio Head Vocal Consultant **Wendy Nielsen** – also a graduate of the COC's program.

In addition to competing for the four cash prizes, the finalists are hoping to secure a highly coveted position in the company's 16/17 Ensemble Studio. The 2015 competition showcases the opera talent scouted by the COC from

across the country on its national audition tour and features those artists from the final round of auditions for the prestigious program.

COC artistic staff will confirm the line-up of the 16/17 Ensemble Studio at a later date. The 16/17 Ensemble Studio members will join an illustrious program that, since its inception in 1980, has launched the careers of over 215 Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors, including Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Krisztina Szabó and Lauren Segal.

The Ensemble Studio Competition finalists were generously outfitted by **Hudson's Bay Queen Street Store** for their on-stage role at *Centre Stage*, and have been gifted with their competition attire for use in future performances. The women were gowned in styles from Betsy and Adam, Toni Plus and Xscape with shoes from Adrianna Papell, Clark's, Calvin Klein and Dune. The men were dressed in suits from Calvin Klein and Strellson with shoes from Calvin Klein. This is the third year that the COC has partnered with Hudson's Bay as part of an initiative to help prepare the artists for their professional opera careers.

During the pre-competition cocktail reception, *Centre Stage* guests enjoyed a sumptuous cheese and charcuterie spread by Cheese Boutique and a selection of wines from Peller Estates. *Centre Stage* guests also admired several new Mercedes-Benz vehicles on display in the Four Seasons Centre's Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room.

Following the competition, over 320 *Centre Stage* dinner guests went on to enjoy an elegant formal dinner from the stage of the Four Seasons Centre, styled with set pieces from the COC's acclaimed production of *La Traviata* currently being performed at the opera house. The production's ballroom backdrop was the perfect setting for the lavish *Centre Stage* celebration as guests enjoyed a culinary experience prepared by critically acclaimed chef **David Lee**, a rare opportunity to enjoy his creations outside of dining at Nota Bene where Lee is the executive chef. Among the faces in the crowd were all the competition finalists, notable COC artists, *Centre Stage* hosts soprano **Karine Boucher** and tenor **Charles Sy**, key supporters of the opera company and the Lieutenant Governor, **The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell**.

A particularly special highlight of the *Centre Stage* dinner was a surprise performance by current members of the COC Ensemble Studio of two immensely popular operatic melodies. Sopranos **Karine Boucher** and **Aviva Fortunata** were featured in a charming duet, singing the "Barcarolle" from Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* accompanied by **Hyejin Kwon** on piano. Tenors **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure**, **Andrew Haji**, **Aaron Sheppard** and **Charles Sy** then gave a moving rendition of "Nessun dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot*, with piano accompaniment by **Jennifer Szeto**.

Proceeds from *Centre Stage* on November 3 were raised in support of the COC and will go towards the company's Ensemble Studio.

## **ABOUT THE WINNERS**

### **Emily D'Angelo, First prize/Chair's Prize (\$5,000) and Audience Choice Award (\$1,500)**

Arias performed: "Voi che sapete" from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and "Contro un cor" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*

Mezzo-soprano Emily D'Angelo grew up in Toronto and is in her final year of the bachelor of music in voice at the University of Toronto where she was the 2015 recipient of the Jim and Charlotte Norcop Prize in Song. Operatic credits include Sesto in *Giulio Cesare* (Halifax Summer Opera Festival); Nerone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; Annio in *La clemenza di Tito* (Centre for Opera Studies in Italy); Berta in *The Barber of Seville* (Opera York); and Cherubino in scenes from *The Marriage of Figaro* (UofT Opera). Ms. D'Angelo has participated in young artists programs at the Ravinia Festival, SongFest at Colburn, and Boston University Tanglewood Institute. She made her solo debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2011.

**Lauren Eberwein, Second Prize (\$3,000)**

Arias performed: “Sein wir wieder gut” from Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* and “Parto, parto” from Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*

Qualicum Beach, BC native Lauren Eberwein studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and is a member of Opera Philadelphia’s Emerging Artist Program. Her credits include Baba the Turk in *The Rake’s Progress*, The Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*, Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*, Mère Marie in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*, and Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* (Curtis Opera Theater), as well as Sorrel and Dodo in *Double Exposure* with Opera Philadelphia. She was a featured soloist with the Curtis Baroque Ensemble, and the Curtis and Maryland symphony orchestras. She also began her residency at The Marlboro Music Festival this summer. This season, she appears at Opera Philadelphia as Olivia in *Cold Mountain* and Clairon in *Capriccio*, and makes her Carnegie Hall debut singing Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* with the New York Choral Society.

**Bruno Roy, Third Prize (\$1,500)**

Arias performed: “Bella siccome un angelo” from Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* and “Hai già vinta la causa” from Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*

Montreal-born baritone Bruno Roy is currently studying for his master of music performance at McGill University, where he also received his bachelor’s degree. His recent operatic credits include Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Opera McGill); Matt in *Crush* (Banff Centre); L’Horloge/Le Chat in *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (Opera on the Avalon); Papageno in *The Magic Flute* (Blooming Voce Summer Opera Workshop); Masetto in *Don Giovanni* (FAVA Opera); and Raoul de Gardefeu in *La Vie Parisienne* (Opera Without Fences). In 2016, he appears as John Brooke in *Little Women* and Belcore in *L’elisir d’amore* at Opera McGill.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Platinum Sponsors: **Peter M. Deeb, Mercedes-Benz Canada, RBC Emerging Artists Project**

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Prize Sponsors: **First Prize (Chair’s Prize) – Colleen Sexsmith; Second Prize – ARIAS: Canadian Opera Student Development Fund; Third Prize – Tom C. Logan; Audience Choice Award – Classical 96.3 FM**

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**About the Ensemble Studio Competition**

The Ensemble Studio Competition features singers from the final round of auditions for the COC Ensemble Studio, Canada’s premier training program for young opera professionals, competing for cash prizes ranging in value from

\$1,500 – \$5,000. The competition was launched in 2011 by COC General Director Alexander Neef to showcase the opera talent the COC had scouted from across the country and create a public platform for celebrating the future of opera in Canada.

With the creation of Centre Stage, the COC opened the Ensemble Studio Competition to an audience of over 1,000 opera lovers and interested guests as it moved from the intimate setting of the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre to R. Fraser Elliott Hall. In 2013, the competition finalists were showcased as never before as they performed with an orchestra led by a world-renowned conductor from the mainstage of the COC's opera house.

The annual Ensemble Studio audition process, open only to Canadian citizens and permanent residents, takes COC artistic staff across Canada for preliminary auditions, followed by a final callback audition at the COC's Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre in Toronto. It's from this pool of singers that finalists are selected for the Ensemble Studio Competition.

### **About the COC Ensemble Studio**

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 215 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó.

The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They 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.

**The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, RBC Foundation and The Slight Family Foundation, 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 Canadian Opera Company, please visit its award-winning website, [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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