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COC PREMIERES OPERATIC RARITY, *MAOMETTO II*, WITH SUPERSTAR BASS-BARITONE LUCA PISARONI IN TITLE ROLE

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** closes its 2015/2016 season with the company premiere of Gioachino Rossini’s rarely performed grand *bel canto* opera, *Maometto II*. Superstar Italian bass-baritone **Luca Pisaroni** makes a highly anticipated COC debut in the title role in a new COC production by acclaimed American director **David Alden**, lauded as a “thrilling [piece of] experiential theatre” (*Opera News*). Renowned maestro **Harry Bicket** in the orchestra pit conducts this operatic rarity. *Maometto II* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™ and runs for seven performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **April 29, May 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 14, 2016**.

Rossini’s comic operas – *The Barber of Seville*, *Cinderella* and *The Italian Girl in Algiers* – have long delighted audiences while many of his more serious operatic efforts faded from the repertoire. *Maometto II*, a serious work, disappeared in its original 1820 Naples form until receiving a triumphant return in **David Alden**’s production for Santa Fe Opera in 2012, now produced by the COC.

Maometto II represents an inspired and radical break from the *opera seria* tradition of its time, with expanded orchestration, unusually through-composed music and unpredictably paced drama. The result is a theatrically and musically adventurous work in which Rossini unleashes his full arsenal of vocal fireworks. Leading the COC Orchestra, Chorus and cast through this operatic drama is British conductor **Harry Bicket**, last with the COC for 2014’s *Hercules*, and noted for his interpretation of Baroque and classical repertoire.

This production of *Maometto II* also marks the highly anticipated return of one of the world’s most influential and prolific directors of opera, American **David Alden**, who gave COC audiences a celebrated presentation of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 2013. In *Maometto II*’s historical tale of the great Turkish sultan, Maometto, and his quest to conquer the Holy Roman Empire, **Alden**’s staging explores the work’s enduring relevancies; the most timeless of all being the personal struggles born out of the conflict of war.

Alden, along with sets and costumes by award-winning British designer **Jon Morrell**, has brought the opera’s action forward from its historical 15th-century origins to the time of its creation in 1820. Strikingly coloured, Napoleonic-era, First Empire gowns glow jewel-like against a neoclassical marble colonnade. Surprising *coups de théâtre* are peppered throughout the production, including the sudden emergence of a statue of three galloping horses on which Maometto makes a dramatic exit. Lighting design is by internationally acclaimed **Duane Schuler** with choreography by **David Laera**.

Mastering Rossini’s fearsome vocal demands is Italian bass-baritone **Luca Pisaroni**, lauded as “a chilling and complex Maometto...his dashing stage presence and virile voice exude menacing authority” (*New York Times*) at the time of this production’s 2012 premiere in Santa Fe. One of the most charismatic and versatile singers performing today, **Pisaroni** has captivated audiences from the stages of the world’s leading opera houses, concert halls, and festivals since making his debut in 2001 with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival.

The COC’s presentation of *Maometto II* reunites **Pisaroni** with two exceptional talents from this production’s premiere cast. In the role of the Venetian Governor Erisso is American **Bruce Sledge**, one of the world’s most in-demand *bel canto* tenors, in his COC debut. Recognized as a rising star in the next generation of singers, American soprano **Leah Crocetto** makes her COC debut as Maometto’s forbidden love, Anna.

American mezzo-soprano **Elizabeth DeShong** is the Venetian noble Calbo. After dazzling COC audiences and critics alike in 2014's *Madama Butterfly* and 2011's *Cinderella* with a voice that "combines a contralto opulence with blazing top notes and some of the most staggering coloratura you will ever hear" (*The Guardian*), **DeShong** now makes her role debut in one of *bel canto*'s great, heroic pants roles.

Rounding out the cast are two Canadian tenors on the rise from the COC Ensemble Studio: **Charles Sy** is the Venetian noble Condulmiero and **Aaron Sheppard** is the Muslim noble Selimo.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Maometto II* 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**.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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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