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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY LAUNCHES *OPERA ACCESS FOR NEW CANADIANS*

COC JOINS INSTITUTE FOR CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP'S CULTURAL ACCESS PASS

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** is proud to announce the creation of **Opera Access for New Canadians**, a community outreach and engagement initiative to make the COC's BMO Financial Group Student Dress Rehearsals and select performances accessible to new Canadian citizens and newcomers to Canada, including immigrants and refugees. The first phase of **Opera Access for New Canadians** begins this spring with the COC joining the Institute for Canadian Citizenship's Cultural Access Pass (CAP) program, which offers new Canadian citizens one year of complimentary admission to more than 1,200 cultural attractions across the country.

"We are proud of providing a cultural space in this country where people are free to gather, create art and express opinions—freedoms not granted in many places around the world," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "The Opera Access program is a celebration of that freedom and a way for us at the COC to welcome new Canadians to our community and introduce them to our art form."

The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, founder of the ICC, says "this new partnership with the COC provides a unique behind-the-scenes look into Canada's premiere opera company. We are delighted." **Charlie Foran, CEO of the ICC**, explains, "Our Cultural Access Pass has now grown to the point where we can offer CAP members experiences in the performing arts, as well as in cultural institutions and federal and provincial parks."

The ICC will work with the COC to allocate and distribute dress rehearsal tickets to its CAP membership. A maximum of 40 free tickets will be set aside to every COC dress rehearsal as part of the opera company's enrollment in the ICC's CAP program. In addition to attending a dress rehearsal, participants will sit-in on one of the COC's BMO Financial Group Pre-Performance Opera Chats and receive an informal tour of the COC's opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The first COC productions to be accessed through the opera company's involvement in CAP will be *Carmen* and *Maometto II*, in performance at the Four Seasons Centre in April and May 2016.

New citizens who have received their Canadian citizenship within the past year can register for a Cultural Access Pass. The pass is valid for one year from the date of obtaining citizenship. For more information and eligibility requirements, visit www.icc-icc.ca, e-mail cap@icc-icc.ca or call 1-888-359-6998.

The creation of **Opera Access for New Canadians** is the formal implementation of a COC initiative first mentioned by COC General Director Alexander Neef from the stage of the Four Seasons Centre on opening night of the company's presentation of *The Marriage of Figaro* in February 2016. The COC subsequently hosted small groups of Syrian and Ethiopian refugees at performances of *The Marriage of Figaro*, facilitated by the ICC, Lifeline Syria and The Ripple Refugee Project. As **Opera Access for New Canadians** develops, additional partnerships will be announced that allow for increased accessibility to opera dress rehearsals and select performances for newcomers to Canada, including immigrants and refugees.

About the Institute for Canadian Citizenship

The ICC was founded in 2006 by the Rt. Hon. Adrienne Clarkson and John Ralston Saul to welcome new Canadian citizens and foster active citizenship for all Canadians. For more information, visit icc-icc.ca.

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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