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## **LA TRAVIATA, ONE OF OPERA'S GREATEST ROMANCES, OPENS CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY SEASON**

**Toronto** – The Canadian Opera Company opens its 2015/2016 season with a work of dazzling beauty, Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*. This operatic classic returns to the COC stage in a lush new production for 11 performances at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts on **October 8, 13, 16, 17, 21, 24, 29, 30, November 1, 4, 6, 2015**.

*La Traviata* is one of opera's greatest romances but it scandalized Venetians at its 1853 premiere with its unsentimental depiction of a Parisian courtesan in love. A year later, *La Traviata* was restaged and triumphed, quickly growing in popularity. It remains one of the most performed operas in the world.

Renowned New York theatre director **Arin Arbus**, hailed by the *New York Times* in 2009 as “the most gifted new director to emerge,” sets Verdi's story of passion and sacrifice in glittering 1850s Paris, evoking the social realities, rhythms and debauchery of a rapidly changing world. Co-produced with Lyric Opera of Chicago and Houston Grand Opera, this *La Traviata* delighted audiences at its Chicago premiere in 2013 with a look and feel that is “both hyper-traditional and, in moments, saucily modern” (*bachtrack.com*).

**Arbus's** creation balances the intimacy of Verdi's delicate love story with the playfulness and decadence of the 19th-century Parisian nightlife that inspired the opera that Verdi called “a subject of the times.” The lavish costumes are by noted visual artist and designer **Cait O'Connor**, set against the uncluttered backdrop of set designer **Riccardo Hernandez** with atmospheric lighting by **Marcus Doshi** and choreography by **Austin McCormick**. Projection designs are by **Christopher Ash**.

Irresistible melodies and elegant harmonies make the score of *La Traviata* one of Verdi's most emotional operas. Leading the COC Orchestra and Chorus through this musical masterpiece is internationally renowned Italian conductor **Marco Guidarini**, last with the COC for 2012's *Il Trovatore*.

*La Traviata's* doomed courtesan, Violetta, has emerged over time as one of the most compelling and glamorous heroines in all of opera. Russian **Ekaterina Siurina**, one of the leading singers of her generation and as celebrated for her sparkling soprano as her charming stage presence, makes her Canadian and role debut in a part known for its demanding vocal pyrotechnics and complex character arc. She shares this beloved role with equally lauded Canadian soprano **Joyce El-Khoury**, one of today's leading Violettas, last heard at the COC in *La Bohème* in 2013.

In the role of Violetta's nobleman lover, Alfredo, is one of the finest lyric tenors of his generation, internationally acclaimed American **Charles Castronovo** in his Canadian debut. He shares the role with “the powerful and nimble voice” (*Opera News*) of COC Ensemble Studio tenor **Andrew Haji**. As Germont, Alfredo's disapproving father, is “incomparable” American baritone **Quinn Kelsey**, as proclaimed by *The Guardian*. **Kelsey** mesmerized COC audiences and critics in 2014's *Don Quichotte* and 2011's *Rigoletto*, and now brings his “strong, musical voice... [to make] a formidable Germont” (*New York Times*). Canadian baritone **James Westman**, last with the COC in 2012's *Die Fledermaus*, brings his “dramatic range and superb vocal control... [and] keen sense of theatric expression” (*Opera News*) to the role of Germont for three performances. **Westman** also sings Baron Douphol, Alfredo's rival, for the other eight shows in *La Traviata's* scheduled run.

South African-Canadian mezzo-soprano and Ensemble Studio alumna **Lauren Segal**, “alluring, sexy, her voice rich in nuance” (*Opera Magazine*), returns to the COC as Violetta's friend, Flora. Canadian bass-baritone **Thomas**

**Goerz** sings Baron Douphol for three performances and Ensemble Studio alumni bass **Robert Gleadow** and bass-baritone **Neil Craighead** share the role of Dr. Grenvil. Rounding out the cast are current members of the company's Ensemble Studio: bass-baritone **Iain MacNeil** is the Marquis d'Obigny; tenor **Charles Sy** is Alfredo's friend, Gastone; soprano **Karine Boucher** is Violetta's maid, Annina; and tenor **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure** is Violetta's servant, Giuseppe. Baritone **Jan Vaculik** is a Messenger.

*La Traviata* is based on the French play *La dame aux Camélias* (1852) by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, which the author adapted for the stage from his own best-selling novel of the same name. Dumas had fallen in love with a famous Parisian courtesan named Marie Duplessis, who served as the model for the tragic heroine of Dumas' novel and subsequently Verdi's opera.

Dumas' play attracted Verdi's attention because it offered a new and invigorating Realism. In this story, morality did not necessarily triumph; the scale was intimate and personal by focusing on people's private lives; and the characters and situations were recognizably contemporary, speaking to all manner of issues that were relevant to, and vigorously debated by, the public in mid-1800s Europe. Verdi originally set his opera in contemporary times, something rarely done, but he ran afoul of censors and theatre managers who demanded that the time period of *La Traviata* be pushed into the distant past to dilute the work's shocking social critique.

*La Traviata* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™, and was last performed by the COC in 2007.

### **TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets for *La Traviata* range from \$50 – \$435 and are available online at [coc.ca](http://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](http://coc.ca).

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*La Traviata* is generously underwritten in part by David Roffey and Karen Walsh, and BMO Financial Group.

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**The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb 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 through the Department of Canadian Heritage, RBC Foundation, Hal Jackman Foundation, W. Garfield Weston 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](http://coc.ca).

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