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COC PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF *PYRAMUS AND THISBE* ALONGSIDE RARELY PERFORMED BAROQUE OPERA CLASSICS

Toronto – The world premiere of a new Canadian opera awaits Canadian Opera Company audiences this fall at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. In a new company production, the COC proudly presents Barbara Monk Feldman’s first opera, *Pyramus and Thisbe* (2010), performed with two early Baroque opera classics, Claudio Monteverdi’s *Lamento d’Arianna* (1608) and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624). *Pyramus and Thisbe* runs for seven performances on **October 20, 23, 25, 28, November 5, 7 (two performances), 2015**.

The COC’s production brings together operas composed 400 years apart, while illustrating the beauty of the human voice and the magic of musical storytelling over the passage of time. “What we’re offering our audience is an opportunity to explore the evolution of opera, from its earliest beginnings with the Monteverdi pieces, which the COC has never performed before, to the sounds of the art form in the 21st century,” says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. “We’re very proud that the COC is the first to perform Barbara’s opera. In *Pyramus and Thisbe*, I think people will feel similarities to operas that have come before, in terms of the mythology of the story and the musical vocabulary, but at the same time recognize the delicacy of what Barbara has created and its utter originality.”

“Although there are other aspects to consider, I am inspired by natural landscape so it makes sense that the music should be premiered in my native country. In nature the quality of the light is always subtly varying, and as a painter friend of mine said, she tries to capture the feeling that something is about to change, and this feeling is what I aim for in the music of *Pyramus and Thisbe*,” says **Barbara Monk Feldman**. “I wanted the music to constantly reach out like a line and intertwine with the interior landscape of each of the characters’ unconscious.”

Barbara Monk Feldman’s *Pyramus and Thisbe* is based on the classic myth of Ovid’s ill-fated lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, who communicate through a crack in the wall that separates them, only for a tragic misunderstanding to occur when they attempt to secretly meet. Monteverdi’s two works were composed just as opera was emerging as an art form and, as with most early operas, their subjects are drawn from mythology and history. *Lamento d’Arianna* tells the tale of Ariadne abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos, while *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* is the story of the Christian knight Tancredi and the Saracen warrior-maiden Clorinda, and how their tragic fates are determined on the battlefields of the Crusades.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra and Chorus through this bold program of music. His musical direction is matched theatrically by internationally acclaimed American director **Christopher Alden**, whose commitment to keeping opera challenging and vital has previously brought to the COC productions of *La clemenza di Tito* (2013), *Die Fledermaus* (2012), *Rigoletto* (2011), and *The Flying Dutchman* (1996, 2000, 2010). **Alden** weaves the Monteverdi and Monk Feldman operas together with Dora Award-winning set designer **Paul Steinberg** (2014’s *Falstaff*) and acclaimed costume designer **Terese Wadden** (2013’s *La clemenza di Tito*, 2012’s *A Florentine Tragedy/Gianni Schicchi*), the trio conceiving a production aesthetic inspired by the complex veils of colour seen in abstract American painter Mark Rothko. Lighting design and choreography are by COC newcomers, **JAX Messenger** and **Tim Claydon**, respectively.

Leading a compelling team of singer-actors assembled for this production is an artist of great vocal versatility and stage prowess: **Krisztina Szabó**. The Canadian mezzo-soprano and COC Ensemble Studio alumna is universally hailed for her supreme musicianship and stagecraft, with critics praising “her rich, dark timbre and fullness of sound” (*Chicago Tribune*) and how she sings “with passion, beauty and power” (*Opera News*) and “full of the spirit

of daring” (*Globe and Mail*). **Szabó** follows up her virtuoso and 2015 Dora Award-nominated performance as the Woman in the COC’s *Erwartung* by starring as Thisbe in **Pyramus and Thisbe**, as well as Arianna and Clorinda in the two Monteverdi operas.

Canadian baritone **Phillip Addis** delighted COC audiences with his double-cast turn as Marcello and Schaunard in 2013’s *La Bohème*. “A star in the making” (*Music OMH*), **Addis** is praised for his creamy, bright, smooth voice as much as for his spell-binding, daring, yet sensitive interpretations. He returns to the COC as **Szabó**’s love interests: Tancredi in ***Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*** and Pyramus in ***Pyramus and Thisbe***.

Since taking on the title role in the COC’s *La clemenza di Tito* in 2012, Ensemble Studio alumnus tenor **Owen McCausland** has continually impressed audiences and critics alike with his voice of “real gold” (*National Post*). He joins **Szabó** and **Addis** as Testa, the narrator, in ***Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda***.

Canadian composer Barbara Monk Feldman is known mostly for her chamber and piano works that have been performed in Asia, Europe and North America. ***Pyramus and Thisbe*** is her only opera. The libretto features excerpts from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, William Faulkner’s *The Long Summer*, St. John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Die Sonette an Orpheus* and Karl Jasper’s *Man in the Modern Age*. ***Pyramus and Thisbe*** is sung primarily in English with sections in German and Latin, all with SURTITLES™.

Claudio Monteverdi is a crucial figure in the history of music, with his work bringing to opera a new era of expressiveness and dramatic possibilities. ***Lamento d’Arianna*** is nine minutes long and all that remains of Monteverdi’s second opera, *L’Arianna*. Rarely performed, it is one of the finest examples of the melodic use of a solo voice with orchestral accompaniment with the power to move an audience to tears. ***Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*** is the composer’s extraordinary dramatic madrigal in which the orchestra and voices are two separate identities resulting in some of opera’s most beautiful soaring melodies. The Monteverdi operas will be sung in Italian with SURTITLES™.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for ***Pyramus and Thisbe*** with ***Lamento d’Arianna*** and ***Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*** 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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