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WORLD CLASS TALENT AND ARTISTIC DIVERSITY ABOUND IN 2015/2016 SEASON OF COC'S FREE CONCERT SERIES

Toronto – When the **Canadian Opera Company's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** returns for its 2015/2016 season this fall, over 400 artists from diverse artistic backgrounds will share their talents in one of Toronto's most vibrant and intimate cultural hubs. The season begins on **Tuesday, September 22** with a highly anticipated performance by the rising stars of the **COC Ensemble Studio** singing their favourite arias and art songs.

This season's over 70 concerts span a broad spectrum of art forms across six series: Vocal, Chamber Music, Piano Virtuoso, Jazz, World Music and Dance. From opera, art song and intimate chamber pieces to swinging big bands and cross-cultural fusions, the talents of both internationally acclaimed artists and the stars of tomorrow will be on display.

"What we present in the Free Concert Series reflects both this city's amazing cultural and artistic diversity, as well as what you see in the COC's productions on the mainstage: a commitment to compelling performances and artistic excellence," says **Claire Morley**, the COC's new program manager for the Free Concert Series. "We want audiences to rediscover music they may have loved for years through intimate recitals, but the Free Concert Series is also the perfect place to try something new, like modern jazz fused with traditional Indian ragas or an innovative contemporary dance performance. All of these artists have a story to tell."

Morley brings a wealth of experience to the role of program manager, having previously worked in the communications departments of the COC and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, as well as the SweetWater Music Festival in Owen Sound. An accomplished soprano, she is also a member of the acclaimed Elmer Iseler Singers.

Among this season's highlights are two world premieres, for chamber orchestra and piano: **The Glenn Gould School's New Music Ensemble**, under the direction of **Brian Current**, premieres *Strange Luminescence* by Chinese-Canadian composer **Alice Ho**; and rising star American pianist **Kara Huber** presents Pulitzer Prize-nominated composer **David Rakowski's** *Préludes for Piano, Book IX*. **Huber's** program also includes the Canadian premiere of *Bagatelles* by **Douglas Pew**.

Several notable artists and ensembles perform in the Free Concert Series for the first time this season, including: internationally acclaimed opera stars, Georgian mezzo-soprano **Anita Rachvelishvili**, American baritone **Quinn Kelsey**, British baritone **Christopher Purves**, Austrian bass-baritone **Josef Wagner** and French mezzo-soprano **Clémentine Margaine**; Canadian jazz legend **Brian Barlow's** inimitable Big Band; **Autorickshaw**, a cutting-edge group that blends popular and classical Indian music with contemporary jazz, funk and folk; powerhouse blues duo **Diana Braithwaite** and **Chris Whiteley**; and the exuberant young artists of the **Jazz.FM91 Youth Big Band**.

Additional 15/16 highlights include several holiday-themed concerts suitable for all ages. Concerts filled with holiday classics from a *capella* vocal quartet **Cadence** and blues duo **Braithwaite and Whiteley**, as well as the **Brian Barlow Big Band's** rendition of Duke Ellington's jazzy interpretation of *The Nutcracker Suite*, are sure to put audience members in the Christmas spirit. In March, the COC's popular **interactive March Break concert** gives the audience a chance to stretch their operatic vocal cords; while the **Danforth Four's** traditional Irish program is an ideal lead-up to St. Patrick's Day.

The Free Concert Series brings diverse artistic experiences to approximately 15,000 people annually from September to May in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**. Performances take place most Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12 p.m., and some Wednesdays at 12 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. Doors open 30 minutes prior to each performance and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Free Concert Series presents artists of the highest calibre in six series running throughout the season:

VOCAL

The Vocal Series celebrates the glory of the human voice in **20 concerts**. Audience members will have the unique opportunity to get up close and personal with some of the COC's mainstage stars when they sing their favourite arias and art songs in the intimate environment of the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. Artists include both Carmens from the COC's spring production, mezzo-sopranos **Anita Rachvelishvili** and **Clémentine Margaine**; American baritone **Quinn Kelsey** (Germent in *La Traviata*); British baritone **Christopher Purves** (Alberich in *Siegfried*); Austrian bass-baritone **Josef Wagner** (Figaro in *The Marriage of Figaro*); American tenor **Russell Thomas** (Don José in *Carmen*); Canadian soprano **Simone Osborne** (Micaëla in *Carmen*); and Canadian baritone/guitarist **Doug MacNaughton** (Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*).

Additional vocal highlights include internationally acclaimed Canadian bass **Robert Pomakov** with the renowned **Gryphon Trio**, as well the return of the **Canadian Art Song Project** with a new song cycle by **Erik Ross**, performed by soprano and COC Ensemble Studio graduate **Ambur Braid**. **Arraymusic** celebrates women composers and the female voice with a program featuring compositions by two acclaimed female composers: Canadian **Barbara Monk Feldman** (whose opera *Pyramus and Thisbe* receives its world premiere on the COC mainstage this fall) and American **Linda Catlin Smith**.

Opera's future stars also shine in several concerts featuring artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio**, including a performance by the company's very own "Four Tenors:" **Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure**, **Andrew Haji**, **Aaron Sheppard** and **Charles Sy**.

CHAMBER MUSIC

The great masterpieces, alongside cutting-edge contemporary works, are showcased in the Chamber Music Series' **17 concerts** this season. Highlights include the return of **Trio Arkel**, led by COC Concertmaster **Marie Bérard**; **The National Ballet of Canada Brass Quintet**; members of **Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra**; **Toronto Symphony Orchestra** principal cellist **Joseph Johnson**; and the **Afiara Quartet** with guitarist **Graham Campbell**.

The 15/16 chamber music season also features five concerts by artists of the renowned **COC Orchestra**, including a special performance introducing the young musicians of the **COC Orchestra Academy**. Emerging talent is also highlighted in concerts by ensembles from **The Glenn Gould School**, including the **GGs New Music Ensemble**.

PIANO VIRTUOSO

Pianists from Canada and around the world explore a richly varied repertoire in the Piano Virtuoso Series' **10 concerts**. Contemporary music dominates in concerts from American pianist **Kara Huber**, whose program features both a world and Canadian premiere, and Canadian pianist/composer **John Kameel Farah**, who uses piano, synthesizer and computer to combine elements of early music, contemporary classical, Arabic music and forms of electronic dance music in his works. Classical masterworks are highlighted in performances by Canadian **Linda Ippolito**, as well as rising young stars such as **Erik Lawrence**, **Tussah Heera**, **Charissa Vandikas**, **Charles Richard-Hamelin**, **Alexander Seredenko** and **Rossina Grieco**.

JAZZ

The Jazz Series features **11 performances** from jazz icons and newcomers alike, ranging from swinging standards to innovative contemporary works. Returning to the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is singer/pianist **Elizabeth Shepherd**, hailed as one of the jazz world's most alluring and imaginative artists, as well as one of Canada's most inventive young trios, **Myriad3**. Ensembles from **Humber College** and **McGill University's Schulich School of Music** showcase the next generation of jazz talent.

WORLD MUSIC

The World Music Series' **six performances** celebrate the rich musical traditions of cultures around the world. Explore the rhythms of the Caribbean through contemporary jazz sextet **Kalabash's** blend of Reggae, Son, Salsa, Calypso, Soca, Rapso and Zouk. Audiences can also take a musical journey to Ireland with the **Danforth Four's** toe-tapping traditional tunes, or to India with **Monsoon's** fresh and innovative approach to Indo-Jazz fusion.

DANCE

The **seven performances** in the Dance Series showcase some of the city's most inventive dancers and choreographers, drawing from a variety of cultural and dance traditions. Highlights include a preview of artistic producer **Danielle Baskerville** and choreographer **D.A. Hoskins's** new work that draws on the loss of the late Canadian actress Jackie Burroughs, as well as a sneak peek of **Canada's Ballet Jörgen's** new production of *Sleeping Beauty*. Iconic Canadian choreographer **Peggy Baker** makes a much-anticipated return to the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre with her company.

For a full calendar of events, please visit coc.ca/FreeConcerts.

The Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is a focal point of the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room in the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, with its striking glass wall allowing for natural lighting and a view of University Avenue. Linking Rings 3 and 4, the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre provides seating for 100 patrons. Additional seating and standing locations on the walkway and the upper floor are also available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, RBC Foundation 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 and the Hal Jackman Foundation.

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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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