

## **COC's Centre Stage Supports and Showcases Young Opera Talent**

*Canada's Newest Opera Stars Compete on World Stage on November 3*

**TORONTO, October 6, 2015** — On November 3, 2015, the [Canadian Opera Company](#) presents its largest fundraiser of the season, the return of the wildly successful [Centre Stage: Ensemble Studio Competition](#). This annual event is once again poised to dazzle 1,000 opera lovers in a one-night-only operatic extravaganza held at the acclaimed Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

Centre Stage shines a spotlight on Canada's future opera stars through a fierce vocal competition featuring the young singers being considered for a privileged spot in the COC's distinguished training program, the Ensemble Studio. Hosting Centre Stage this year are, for the first time, the competition's previous winners: soprano **Karine Boucher** and tenor **Charles Sy**, both current members of the COC Ensemble Studio. These two rising opera talents will oversee the evening's vocal fireworks, with performances given by each finalist as well as a surprise musical guest, before patrons continue the festivities with a lavish dinner by celebrated Nota Bene Executive Chef David Lee on the stage of Canada's first-purpose built opera house.

Centre Stage competitors represent the best of Canada's promising opera talent, handpicked from cross-country auditions for the COC Ensemble Studio, currently underway. The Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals and has nurtured and fostered the careers of over 215 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors since the program's founding in 1980. Former members of the COC Ensemble Studio include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó. All funds raised through Centre Stage directly benefit this distinguished program.

"Centre Stage is a great night for celebrating Canadian artists," says **Centre Stage host, and 2013 competition winner, soprano Karine Boucher**. "I remember when I sang at Centre Stage in 2013 I had a feeling of being a part of something bigger, something special that makes the soul feel great."

**Centre Stage co-host, and 2014 competition winner, tenor Charles Sy** has this sage advice for the young artists following in his and Boucher's footsteps, "Acknowledge that all you can do is give what you can in that particular moment and trust that it's enough."

The finalists take to the stage of the Four Seasons Centre on November 3, accompanied by the full COC Orchestra conducted by distinguished COC Music Director Johannes Debus. Each singer will perform an aria of their choosing and be evaluated on their stage presence as well as vocal range and technique by the COC's esteemed panel of judges. First, second and third place winners will come away from the competitive vocal showcase with cash prizes

of \$5,000, \$3,000, and \$1,500, respectively. The audience will also have the opportunity to cast a vote and select the winner of the Audience Choice Award, valued at \$1,500.

"We bring the most talented young opera singers in the country to the Four Seasons Centre for Centre Stage. It's a showcase of an incredible richness of young Canadian vocal talent that you won't find anywhere else, and that's what makes Centre Stage so special," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "I am thrilled by the growth of the competition. Now in its third year as a gala fundraiser, Centre Stage has become a highly-anticipated highlight of the fall season for our patrons. Regardless of one's familiarity with the art form, Centre Stage offers an exhilarating night at the opera.

The competition is followed by an intimate on-stage dinner with cuisine specially designed and sourced for the evening by David Lee, the critically acclaimed executive chef of Toronto's Nota Bene restaurant. The COC also continues its partnership with Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to dress Centre Stage finalists for their on-stage debuts in captivating, contemporary concert attire. The evening is presided over by co-chairs Helen Burstyn and Tim Loftsgard.

Tickets to Centre Stage are \$100 for the cocktail reception and vocal competition. On-stage dinner tickets start at \$1,500. Tickets are available online at [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca), by calling 416-363-8231, or in person at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office, located at 145 Queen St. W., Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Visit [COCCentreStage.ca](http://COCCentreStage.ca) for more information. Specially priced \$35 tickets are also available for patrons between the ages of 16 and 29 through Opera Under 30 sponsored by TD Bank Group.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Platinum Sponsors: Mercedes-Benz Canada, Peter M. Deeb, RBC Emerging Artists Project

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### **ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE STUDIO COMPETITION**

The Ensemble Studio Competition features singers from the final round of auditions for the COC Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals, competing for cash prizes ranging in value from \$1,500 – \$5,000. The competition was launched in 2011 by COC General Director Alexander Neef to showcase the opera talent the COC had scouted from across the country and create a public platform for celebrating the future of opera in Canada. With the creation of Centre Stage in 2013, the COC introduced the Ensemble Studio Competition to an audience of over 1,000 opera lovers and interested guests. The competition showcases finalists like never before as they perform from the mainstage of the COC's world-renown opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, accompanied by the acclaimed COC Orchestra led by COC Music Director Johannes Debus. The annual Ensemble Studio audition process, open only to Canadian citizens and permanent residents, takes COC artistic staff across Canada and into the U.S. for preliminary auditions in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto and New York, followed by a final callback audition at the COC's Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre in Toronto. It's from

this pool of singers that finalists are selected for the Ensemble Studio Competition. .

## **ABOUT THE COC ENSEMBLE STUDIO**

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 215 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó. The members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program, involving understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, language and acting studies, and career skills development, as well as participation in masterclasses with internationally renowned opera professionals.

## **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 Canadian Opera Company, please visit its award-winning website, [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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