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ECO-CONSCIOUS OPERA *SECOND NATURE* RECEIVES CANADIAN PREMIERE WITH COC'S ENSEMBLE STUDIO SCHOOL TOUR

Rising star composer Matthew Aucoin's opera to reach 10,000 young people across Ontario

Toronto – This fall, *Second Nature*, a thought-provoking opera with an environmental message, receives its Canadian premiere with the Canadian Opera Company's **Ensemble Studio School Tour**. Nearly 10,000 young people will experience live opera in their own communities when the touring production visits schools across Ontario from **November 10 to December 4, 2016**, and is presented in one public performance taking place on **November 27** in Toronto.

Second Nature has been hailed as “entertaining yet thoughtful” with an “absorbing and inventive” score (*Chicago Tribune*). The inspirational work is the creation of award-winning American composer, pianist and poet **Matthew Aucoin**, who has been called “the next Leonard Bernstein” (*Wall Street Journal*) and “Opera’s Great 25-Year-Old Hope” (*New York Times*).

“In 2016, it’s easy to believe everything’s available to us with the click of a mouse—but opera reminds us that the human voice needs to be experienced in person, in all its primal beauty,” says composer **Matthew Aucoin**. “So I’m thrilled that my chamber opera *Second Nature* will be travelling around Ontario, and that kids will hear the COC’s extraordinary young singers up-close and personal!”

Set in a post-apocalyptic, dystopian future where humans have retreated from nature because of the deteriorating environment, *Second Nature* is about two curious and courageous pre-teens who decide to leave the safety of their artificial habitat and work to heal the planet. Dora Award-winning duo, director **Ashlie Corcoran** and designer **Camellia Koo**, bring the futuristic, zoo-like enclosure of *Second Nature*’s “Habitat” to life, and the opera is performed by the rising stars of the **COC Ensemble Studio**, Canada’s premier training program for young opera professionals.

“For 50 years, the **Ensemble Studio School Tour** has introduced countless students to the power of opera and live performance,” says **Katherine Semcesen**, the COC’s Associate Director, Education and Outreach. “At its heart, opera is about telling compelling stories that resonate with audiences. With Aucoin’s *Second Nature*, we’ve found an opera that showcases the operatic art form at its best, through a story that shares an important environmental message relevant for today’s youth.”

Aucoin adds: “I hope that the kids enjoy the opera, and that they’re moved by the amazing work the COC’s singers are doing. But I also hope that *Second Nature* inspires them to think about what our species is doing to the environment, and what our world might look like in a hundred years if we stay on the course we’re on today.”

Leading up to the in-school opera experience, the COC offers free workshops to each school for up to 40 student leaders in grades 6, 7, and 8. Led by artist educator **Bryna Berezowska**, each workshop teaches students about the basics of opera as an art form, and they are introduced to the plot, characters, and themes of *Second Nature*. The participants then become their school’s Opera Ambassadors and present what they’ve learned to their peers in advance of the performance.

In addition to travelling to elementary and middle schools across the province, a public performance of *Second Nature* takes place on **Sunday, November 27** at the **Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre** in Toronto. Before the performance, families can participate in fun, hands-on activities related to the opera. Tickets are **\$10 for children under the age of 15** and **\$15 for adults**. They may be purchased by calling COC Ticket Services at **416-363-8231** or visiting coc.ca/OperaForFamilies.

Created specifically for young audiences, *Second Nature* is sung in English and is approximately 50 minutes in length. A 10-minute question-and-answer period with the cast and crew follows every performance. It is ideal for students in grades 4 to 8.

Cast and Creative Team of *Second Nature*

Director: Ashlie Corcoran

Music Directors: Hyejin Kwon and Stéphane Mayer

Set and Costume Designer: Camellia Koo

Stage Manager: Michael Lewandowski

Jake: Aaron Sheppard/Charles Sy

Lydia: Emily D'Angelo/Lauren Eberwein

Elizabeth: Betty Allison/Danika Lorèn

David/Bonobo: Iain MacNeil/Bruno Roy

Elder Constance: Samantha Pickett/Megan Quick

About Matthew Aucoin

Matthew Aucoin is an American composer, conductor, writer, and pianist. In 2016, he became Artist-in-Residence at Los Angeles Opera, a position created for him that fuses his work as a composer and conductor. Each season Aucoin will conduct at LA Opera, including the world premiere of his own new work, commissioned by LA Opera for the 2018/2019 season. Recently, he conducted the premiere of his opera, *Crossing*, at Boston's American Repertory Theater. He is currently working on a new opera for the Metropolitan Opera/Lincoln Center Theater's New Works program.

The COC welcomes media coverage of school performances. Photographers and writers must advise the COC's media relations team 48 hours before the performance of their attendance at the in-school presentation. The COC must advise the school before any media can attend. This is a legal requirement.

Acknowledgements

The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, Marjorie and Roy Linden, 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, the Hal Jackman Foundation and other generous donors.

The 2016 Ensemble Studio School Tour is booked through the COC's arts education and touring partner, **Prologue to the Performing Arts**. The COC is a founding partner of Prologue, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this season.

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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