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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY PREMIERES BAROQUE OPERA AT ITS BEST WITH HANDEL'S *ARIODANTE*

COC production delivers dream cast for tale of conflict between love and duty

Toronto – The work of George Frideric Handel, a supreme artist of the Baroque era, returns to the Canadian Opera Company stage this fall in the long awaited company premiere of *Ariodante*. This new COC co-production is staged by celebrated theatre and opera director **Richard Jones** with a cast led by two opera stars: British mezzo-soprano **Alice Coote** and Canadian soprano **Jane Archibald**. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts the piece heralded as Baroque opera at its best. *Ariodante* runs for seven performances on **October 16, 19, 22, 25, 27, 29 and November 4, 2016**.

Ariodante is unique from Handel's other compositions, standing out as a simple, romantic and sincere work that expresses a love story free of artifice. Director **Richard Jones**, who staged the critically acclaimed *The Queen of Spades* for the COC in 2002, delivers a production that "gets to the heart of this opera's distinctive melancholia" (*The Telegraph*) in his telling of Handel's tale about the conflict between love and duty as Ariodante and his love Ginevra are brutally separated by the lies of a jealous rival.

Jones envisions a more modern setting for *Ariodante* that plays with the formality of work's 18th-century origins. He sets the melodrama against the backdrop of a remote island village creating the look and feel of a closed-off community that honours the attitudes and social hierarchy of the source material's storyline of Scottish royalty. Sets and costumes are by Olivier Award-winning designer **ULTZ** with the production's striking use of puppetry created by puppetry director/designer **Finn Caldwell** and puppetry designer **Nick Barnes**. *Ariodante* is lit by award-winning opera and theatre lighting designer **Mimi Jordan Sherin** with choreography by **Lucy Burge**.

Handel's operas are distinguished by magnificent musical virtuosity that powerfully and genuinely captures the emotional core of its characters. The COC's **Johannes Debus** makes his Handel debut conducting *Ariodante*, one of the composer's most radiantly beautiful scores, leading a dream cast and the acclaimed COC Orchestra and Chorus.

British mezzo-soprano **Alice Coote**, after delivering stunning turns in the COC's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (2011) and *Hercules* (2014), returns in the trouser role of Ariodante. The wide-ranging expressive music of the hero role is a stirring showcase for the world renowned mezzo's artistry, whose performances are described as "breathtaking in [their] sheer conviction and subtlety of perception" (*The Times*) and her voice as "beautiful, to be sure, but, more importantly, it thrills you to the marrow" (*The Daily Telegraph*).

The equally incomparable Canadian soprano **Jane Archibald** makes her role debut as Ginevra, Ariodante's wronged fiancé. **Archibald** once again brings her "unbelievable mastery of singing, controlled with apparent ease ... combined with a remarkable dramatic presence" (*Le Figaro*, FR) to the COC stage after successive performances delivered to critical and popular acclaim in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (2011), *Semele* (2012), *Don Giovanni* (2015), *Semele* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (2015), and *The Marriage of Figaro* (2016).

Armenian mezzo-soprano **Varduhi Abrahamyan** has been called a "revelation" by the *New York Times* and makes her Canadian debut in the trouser role of Polinesso, the jealous rival of Ariodante. Rising Canadian coloratura

soprano, and COC Ensemble Studio graduate, **Ambur Braid** is Dalinda, Ginevra's maid and Polinesso's unwitting accomplice.

Fellow Ensemble Studio graduate, Canadian tenor **Owen McCausland** is Ariodante's vengeful brother, Lurcanio. Ensemble Studio tenor **Aaron Sheppard** is the courtier Odoardo.

The unattributed libretto for *Ariodante* is based on Antonio Salvi's libretto for the opera *Ginevra, principessa di Scozia*, which drew inspiration from sections of the epic Italian romance poem *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto and, in turn, was the inspiration for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Ariodante* premiered in London on January 8, 1735. While initially successful, *Ariodante* fell into obscurity for almost 200 years until revived in the 1970s and subsequently came to be considered one of Handel's finest operas.

This new production of *Ariodante* is a COC co-production with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Dutch National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. *Ariodante* is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.

The COC performs *Ariodante* at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The COC's 2016/2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the Four Seasons Centre, Canada's first purpose-built opera house, which opened in fall 2006 and has been hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world.

TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Ariodante* range from **\$35 – \$235** and box seats, when available, are **\$350**. Tickets are now on sale, 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.

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, the Hal Jackman 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.

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For more information or to request photography, please contact:

Jennifer Pugsley, Media Relations Manager, tel: 416-306-2303, e-mail: jenniferp@coc.ca