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COC'S FREE CONCERT SERIES CONNECTS AUDIENCES WITH CITY'S ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Toronto – The Canadian Opera Company's acclaimed **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** returns for its 2017/2018 season on **September 26, 2017**. Over 400 artists from Canada and around the world, from headlining stars to emerging young talent, celebrate Toronto's rich artistic and cultural diversity in 76 concerts. In the season's first performance, the rising stars of the **COC Ensemble Studio** introduce themselves with their favourite arias.

"The range and diversity of programming and artists represented this season is extraordinary," says **Dorian Cox**, Program Manager, Free Concert Series. "Our offering of the best up-and-coming local artists and some of the biggest stars on the international stage provides something for everyone to connect with—entirely for free—in the heart of Toronto."

Making highly anticipated returns to the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre are three of today's greatest Canadian sopranos: **Jane Archibald** (the COC's inaugural Artist-in-Residence); **Sondra Radvanovsky** (singing the title role in the COC's *Anna Bolena*); and **Erin Wall** (singing the title role in *Arabella*). COC mainstage stars making their Free Concert Series debuts include soprano **Keri Alkema** (Giovanna Seymour in *Anna Bolena*), contralto **Meredith Arwady** (Death in *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*), and tenor **Joshua Guerrero** (the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*), in his Canadian debut.

Artists also appearing for the first time in the Free Concert Series include tenor and composer **Jeremy Dutcher**, in a performance that blends the tuneful melodies of his Wolastoq (Maliseet) First Nation roots with his own compositions; Italian pianist **Luca Buratto**, 2015 Prize Laureate of the prestigious Honens International Piano Competition; rising star Greek clarinetist and conductor **Dionysis Grammenos** (assistant conductor for the COC's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*), in a performance with **Ensemble Made in Canada**; and award-winning, London-based violinist **Benjamin Baker** and his duo partner, Hungarian pianist **Daniel Lehardt**.

Additional season highlights combine innovation and tradition with exceptional artistry. Two performances explore the many facets of Arabic music: **Al Qahwa Ensemble**, newly formed by Juno Award-nominated artist **Maryem Tollar**, presents Arabic music with a contemporary twist; and the **Canadian Arabic Orchestra** connects audiences with classical Arabic music while celebrating the freedom and diversity of Canada's cultural landscape. The **Vesuvius Ensemble**'s holiday program of Italian Christmas folk songs uses Baroque-era string instruments, while **Kaha:Wi Dance Theatre** presents original contemporary works drawing from Indigenous dance traditions.

The 17/18 season also features **two world premieres** by Canadian composers. **HAVEN Trio** presents Toronto-based composer and music director Kieren MacMillan's *Three Portraits*, a dramatic setting of poems by Dana Gioia, the current Poet Laureate of California. Led by artistic director **Brian Current**, **The Glenn Gould School's New Music Ensemble** performs a new composition by Christopher Mayo that explores the works of iconoclast filmmaker, Arthur Lipsett.

Some of the city's most respected performing arts companies return to the Free Concert Series this season, including the **Toronto Symphony Orchestra's New Creations Festival**, **Opera Atelier** and **Atelier Ballet**, **Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra**, **Esprit Orchestra**, **Canada's Ballet Jörgen** and Canadian dance icon **Peggy Baker**. Indie opera company **Against the Grain Theatre**, the COC's Company-in-Residence, also returns to put their signature twist on music by Handel.

COC artists appear in 26 concerts in the 17/18 season. Thirteen concerts feature artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio**, including one that honours the indomitable spirit of the athletes of the **2017 Invictus Games**, who are all injured, ill, and wounded active-duty and veteran service members. Several Ensemble Studio alumni also return to the Free Concert Series: internationally acclaimed mezzo-soprano **Kristzina Szabó**, as well as recent graduates, sopranos **Claire de Sévigné** and **Simone Osborne**, tenor **Owen McCausland** and bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner**. Seven concerts highlight artists of the **COC Orchestra**, including a showcase for the young musicians of the **COC Orchestra Academy**, alongside their COC Orchestra mentors and artists of the Ensemble Studio.

In addition to the COC's own young artists, the Free Concert Series is a platform for Toronto's brightest young talents and future stars. Among the artists featured this season from **The Glenn Gould School** are piano four-hands virtuosi **Charissa Vandikas** and **Linda Ruan**, who form the award-winning **La Fiammata Duo**. Young artists spanning a variety of genres display their prodigious talent as soloists and as part of ensembles from the **Schulich School at McGill University**, **University of Toronto**, **Humber College**, the **Royal Conservatory of Music**, the **National Youth Orchestra of Canada**, the **JAZZ.FM Youth Big Band**, and the **Canadian Children's Opera 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 for up to 130 patrons.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Free Concert Series is made possible in part by the **J.P. Bickell Foundation**.

BMO Financial Group: Season Sponsor

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.

Free Concert Series Media Sponsors: **The New Classical 96.3 FM** and **The WholeNote Magazine**

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 coc.ca.

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For more information or photographs, please contact:

Kristin McKinnon, Publicist, tel: 416-306-2383, e-mail: kmckinnon@coc.ca

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