

A FALL TO FEAST ON!

**YOU ASK?
ALEXANDER NEEF ANSWERS!**

**THE YOUNGEST AUDIENCE:
A NEW GENERATION
DISCOVERS OPERA**

**ANATOMY OF AN OPERA
*FALSTAFF***

**RACETTE AND KADUCE
CAPTURING *BUTTERFLY***

**GERALD FINLEY:
COMING HOME**

**MEET THE 2014/2015
ENSEMBLE STUDIO**



A MESSAGE FROM GENERAL DIRECTOR **ALEXANDER NEEF**

Welcome to the 2014/2015 season!



I'm very proud that this season, for the first time in decades, all of the operas will be created in part or wholly by the COC. Once again, the world's finest Canadian and international artists will appear on our stage; artists who are greeted with open arms at all the major opera companies. Some, like Patricia Racette in *Madama Butterfly* and Joshua Hopkins in *The Barber of Seville*, are world-renowned for their roles, while others like Gerald Finley and Christine Goerke are making major role debuts with us. Gerald Finley also leads the all-Canadian cast of *Falstaff* including Russell Braun, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Lyne Fortin, Frédéric Antoun, Colin Ainsworth, and four Ensemble Studio graduates Simone Osborne, Robert Gleadow, Michael Colvin and Lauren Segal. It is an impressive season by any standard.

Off the mainstage, we have some truly special events for you to look forward to as well. Centre Stage, the Ensemble Studio Competition and Gala, returns on November 25. Now in its second year, it's the only public event of its kind in Canada. Tickets are on sale (see page 19), and I

strongly encourage you to join us and get a first look at a new generation of Canadian opera stars as they perform in hopes of joining our famed Ensemble Studio.

Our season announcement last January was such a huge success that we've decided to go even bigger for our 2015/2016 season. Our subscribers are invited to attend the exciting launch celebration, including music and special guests, on January 14, 2015 to see what's in store next year. (And for more of your Frequently Asked Questions answered, see pages 4 and 5.)

Of course, our very popular Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre continues to provide informal and accessible high-quality concerts and events from September to June.

These activities, and so many others, are a perfect way to expand your COC experience. And this year's new Value Priced subscription packages make it easy for subscribers to encourage a friend or family member to enjoy the season, too.

Enjoy the fall with your opera company! ■



Prelude

A gift to our friends

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Part of the kitchen set for *Falstaff*, designed by Paul Steinberg. Photo: COC

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SAVE TIME, SAVE PAPER...

and save the COC mailing and printing costs! View *Prelude* online at coc.ca/Publications. Sign up at coc.ca/Prelude with your Patron Number no later than December 31, 2014 to indicate that you no longer wish to receive a hard copy of *Prelude*. If we do not hear back from you, we will mail your regular issue of *Prelude* in January 2015.

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YOU ASK? ALEXANDER NEEF ANSWERS!



There seems to be a lot of concern these days over opera's future and its financial viability. How do you respond to that?

It's about believing in the art form. Opera hasn't survived 400 years for no reason, and has survived because the pieces have touched on the public's consciousness over and over again throughout the centuries. Operas are not just entertainment. They're funny and heartbreaking and beautiful and suspenseful – all the qualities of great entertainment, but they can also be thought-provoking and difficult and unexpected. Opera transcends, in an extraordinary way, our daily lives and experiences. That's what keeps it interesting and viable. Finding ways to tell these stories over and over again is what keeps companies like the COC going, too.

As long as people love hearing amazing music – sung by incredible and unamplified voices – and enjoy inventive and powerful stagings, opera and the COC will live far into the future. Frankly, no one who saw and heard Sondra Radvanovsky's performance in *Roberto Devereux* last season can possibly think that the art form is in trouble!

What about the people who say they don't need to come to the opera house anymore because they're tempted by inexpensive seats at the local movie theatre?

I certainly understand the appeal of the cinecasts. But, the truth is that when you are sitting in a movie theatre you are not actually watching a live performance – you're watching a *transmission* of a live performance, and that's a very different experience. Anyone who has sat in an opera house and “felt” the music reverberate in their body knows that there is nothing that can compare to that.

So how do you propose to address this issue at the COC?

First of all, as Canada's largest opera company, the COC commits to producing approximately 60 performances each year of the highest quality. This is important because I believe opera, when performed at the highest level, is one of the easiest art forms to embrace: the stories are so human, the music is so immediate, the whole experience is so powerfully direct that when a great company puts all those elements together, the art form is revealed to be completely accessible as opposed to intimidating or out-of-reach.

Of the various other possible issues, the main one for us is cost. If you make opera affordable, it makes it much easier to get people to try it and hopefully make a habit of it. In Europe, where companies are heavily subsidized, people go as a matter of course – it's a natural thing to do on a regular basis and the tickets are reasonably priced. Unfortunately, the North American funding model makes it more difficult to create inexpensive tickets.

We've been very conscious that cost is a potential barrier so we try to cover a whole range of ticketing prices and options. That was also one of the reasons we created the new Value Priced subscriptions this year, and they've proven to be very popular – we've sold over 1,300 so far. Low cost, full-series subscriptions make it easier for someone to justify taking a chance on a new experience. Our next challenge is getting them to keep coming back for more!

Speaking of “more”, we want to see more “big” operas – Strauss, Wagner – and more new operas. When will that happen?

As you know, our return to a six-opera season was partially motivated by a desire to present larger operas on a more regular basis. So, for example, with this season's *Die Walküre*, we embark on a Wagner project that will also see *Siegfried* in 2015/2016 and *Götterdämmerung* in 16/17. We're also building our resources to make the production of *Parsifal* that we embarked on with the Metropolitan Opera and Opéra de Lyon possible in a future season. *Hadrian*, our new commission by Rufus Wainwright and Daniel MacIvor, is scheduled for the 18/19 season. And, as many of you know, we're planning a new production of the Harry Somers' opera, *Louis Riel*, for the country's sesquicentennial celebrations. Between now and 18/19 we will be announcing a couple of other new projects. It's all very exciting.

Is there anything else that you can tell us about the future?

I like to plan several seasons in a kind of arc by looking at cycles of operas, composers, or themes because they give audiences a really well-rounded opera experience over time. For example, besides the three big Wagners, we're two-thirds of the way through a Mozart/Da Ponte cycle with *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni*, and we've completed two-thirds of the Donizetti Tudor cycle with *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*. So you can expect that we've got a *Marriage of Figaro* and *Anna Bolena* for future seasons.

Also, some of our co-productions are already public knowledge even though we haven't announced them as part of a specific season yet: *Norma* (San Francisco, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Gran Teatre del Liceu – Barcelona); *La Traviata* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera) *Arabella* (Santa Fe, Minnesota); and *Ariodante* (Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and Dutch National Opera).

But the best way to find out more about our immediate future is to come to our Season Launch celebration at the Four Seasons Centre on January 14! ■

ONCE AGAIN, SUBSCRIBERS WILL BE THE FIRST TO DISCOVER OUR THRILLING 2015/2016 LINE-UP AT THE SEASON LAUNCH ON JANUARY 14, 2015. WATCH FOR YOUR INVITATION!

THE YOUNGEST AUDIENCE MEMBERS

A NEW GENERATION
DISCOVERS OPERA

Vanessa Smith

Think that opera is only for adults? Think again! Last year, over 1,900 students attended the BMO Financial Group Student Dress Rehearsals, and a whole new generation was introduced to the joy of opera. At only \$15 per ticket for students (including tickets at orchestra level!), dress rehearsals are a low-cost way to give students a new and unique experience.

Over the last 14 years, teacher Johanna Landert-Taylor has brought over 500 students to dress rehearsals!

High school music teacher Nan Devitt-Trembley has been bringing her students to dress rehearsals for five years. “They love dressing up – they love the theatre itself. The fact that they are doing something that *seems* a little arcane, a little bit ‘elite’ appeals to them,” she says. Teacher Johanna

Landert-Taylor agrees – her students have been coming for

almost 15 years. “For some, it was a big first to even go downtown – so imagine going to the opera!” she says. “I bring the students to show them that opera is for everyone, to take away the notion that it is for rich, old people.”

In addition to the exciting “night out” factor, students really get into discussions about



what they’ve seen. “They absolutely love the music and the storylines, and the sets are also hotly discussed. They are highly excited and noisy after the show – we are always the last to leave the theatre lobby,” says Devitt-Trembley. Landert-Taylor’s students really come to “appreciate different parts of the opera...the music, the staging, the acting, [and] the conducting.” Christina Kramer, a Slavic Linguistics professor at the University of Toronto, also brings her students to dress rehearsals. “I think many would say that their favourite part is meeting up during intermission and at the end of the opera, when we compare notes...there’s a lot to talk about and these students talk!” These conversations stay with the students long after the opera is done. “The productions are complex; there is always much to discuss,” says Kramer. Devitt-Trembley says her students are still talking about our productions of *Aida* and *Rigoletto* – almost five years later!

The COC’s comprehensive Study Guides make it easy to continue operatic discussions in the classroom, as well as prep the students for the opera beforehand. “They are a terrific resource,” says Kramer. “When I announce the operas I always attach links to the guides. The better prepared students are, particularly younger students, the easier it is for them to enjoy the opera, and knowledge of what to expect in terms of music, story, costume, etc. gives them a scaffolding to discuss afterwards.”

Hopefully, these experiences are creating opera lovers – for life. According to Devitt-Trembley, “I always worry the students might get a bit bored, lose their ability to pay attention, but they invariably get totally hooked, emotionally involved, and carried away by the beauty and the lyricism.”

Dress rehearsals for the 2014/2015 season are filling up fast! Contact Group Sales at 416-306-2356 to book seats for your students today! ■



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Developing new audiences, providing a greater understanding of opera, and creating new productions is smart business.

BMO Financial Group is proud to sponsor the Canadian Opera Company's Student Performances, Pre-Performance Opera Chats, and this season's production of *Falstaff*.





He Who Laughs Last **LAUGHS BEST!** Verdi's **FALSTAFF**

Over the course of his prodigious career, **Giuseppe Verdi** gravitated toward tragic subjects: love, death, vengeance. Yet in the twilight of his years, he set his extraordinary talents loose on comedy, a genre he had attempted only once before, and without success. But this time, in 1893, Verdi gave the world a lush, sunny, and life-affirming work that many consider his crowning achievement. “In writing

- **Falstaff,**” he claimed, “I haven’t thought
- about either theatres or singers. I have
- written for myself and my own pleasure.”
-
- **“IT MUST SEEM VERY VERY EASY”**

The storyline of *Falstaff* comes primarily from Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Verdi’s librettist Arrigo Boito made smart cuts to the five-act source, and weaved in passages from *Henry IV*, Parts I and II (the plays in which Falstaff was first introduced in all his charm and gluttonous richness). Boito saw his task as having to “squeeze all the juice from that Shakespearean orange without letting any of the useless pips fall into the glass... It is very very difficult and it must seem very very easy.”

FROM 1590 TO 1950

Acclaimed **Canadian director Robert Carsen** sets our production in England during the 1950s, the so-called second Elizabethan period. An important factor for Carsen was that *Falstaff* explores a moment when the aristocracy is losing its traditional power, while the upwardly mobile *nouveaux riches* surge ahead in financial strength and influence. In the 1950s, as in the Elizabethan period of Shakespeare, English society was witnessing this changing power dynamic and becoming hyperaware of the markers of class, as well as the complicated ways in which notions of rank were tied up with money and moral value. The post-WWII period thus offers an ideal background for staging the shenanigans of a pot-bellied lecher who clings to his supposedly noble roots, even as he steals, cheats and deceives his way throughout the entire opera.

MUSIC



Falstaff is almost entirely through-composed. With practically none of the discernible set-pieces (arias, for example) which were the building blocks of Italian opera up until that point, *Falstaff* races along with a remarkable continuity of form. The music responds with quicksilver sensitivity to the language of Boito’s libretto and makes rapid melodic shifts in lockstep with the imagery and tone of the text. **Listen to guided excerpts at coc.ca/COCRadio.**



FROM THE MAESTRO

“*Falstaff* is, in a way, the sum and summary of life. And it offers this incredible wisdom through humour. Humour as the human condition, as something we cannot practically live without. It’s really one of the true masterpieces of all time.”
Conductor Johannes Debus.



THIS FALSTAFF GETS AROUND

The new COC co-production is a collaboration with Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; Teatro alla Scala; Metropolitan Opera and Dutch National Opera. It was also broadcast in cinemas around the world as part of the Met's HD series. And when La Scala took it on tour to Japan in 2013, some backstage crew left their mark on the back of Falstaff's bed.

COSTUMES

From tweeds and "hunting pinks" to glamorous dresses with pinched waists and big skirts, the costumes by designer Brigitte Reiffenstuel have been hailed for their sumptuous period look and historical detail.



PERPETUAL FEAST

Because Falstaff is a man of large appetites, Robert Carsen has integrated food and drink into every scene. With so many dishes and drinks to cart out, it's no wonder that this production has one of the largest props crews in the history of the company. Even Harry the horse will be munching on oats during his brief appearance in Act III.



For more on star Gerald Finley, see page 16.

Falstaff plays for seven performances, from October 3 to November 1.

Falstaff is generously underwritten in part by

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SET DESIGN

Falstaff takes place in several locations around the London suburb of Windsor, some of which include:



The Garter Inn, where Falstaff keeps court, is rendered as a country hotel, with oak-paneled walls that recall the smoking room of a gentleman's club.



A posh hotel restaurant serves as the location for the hatching of the women's revenge plot.



Ford's home features a giant, sprawling kitchen with brightly coloured cupboards and the latest in 1950s gadgetry and appliances.

PATRICIA RACETTE AND KELLY KADUCE: CAPTURING BUTTERFLY

By Gianmarco Segato

From first love to last breath, it all happens far too quickly for Cio-Cio San, Puccini's beloved heroine. Brian Macdonald returns to direct the COC's acclaimed production which features exquisite set and costume designs by Susan Benson and atmospheric lighting by Michael Whitfield.

This fall, COC audiences have a unique opportunity to experience the artistry of two singing actresses who would most assuredly top the list for any opera company casting *Madama Butterfly* today. Both happen to be American and both are lauded as much for their intense dramatic commitment as for their vocal prowess.

Patricia Racette is today's leading Puccini soprano, a fixture at the Metropolitan Opera where she has virtually owned Puccini's heroines for the past two decades, appearing there as Tosca, Mimì and Musetta in *La Bohème*, as well as all three female leads in his triple bill, *Il Trittico* – a feat rarely taken on by one singer alone. Her calling card though, is the marathon role of Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, a portrayal unforgettably showcased in the 2009 HD transmission from the Met (now available on DVD) seen on 1,000 screens in 42 countries. This was in Anthony Minghella's critically praised production which famously incorporates Japanese Bunraku puppetry, most prominently

for the character of Sorrow, Cio-Cio San's son. On the subject of being exposed at such close scrutiny to millions of viewers, Racette is unabashedly enthusiastic: "I am the kind of artist who loves the idea that people are able to see up close what I'm doing. I try to infuse every moment with great detail... so I love to know that that is all being captured."



Racette's profound commitment to dramatic truth has been repeatedly singled out in her performances, especially as Cio-Cio San. *Opera News* deemed her 2012 Butterfly in

“I am Cio-Cio San – it’s not like I’m trying to portray that for the audience – I am that person.”

Seattle to be “quite simply revelatory... one of the most beautiful interpretations in memory.” By happenstance, Seattle Opera presented Racette in this beloved COC production by Brian Macdonald which showcases her Toronto debut alongside Italian tenor Stefano Secco who was also her Pinkerton in Seattle. The soprano's recent June 2014 Butterfly at San Francisco Opera was hailed as “both graceful and deeply tragic at a level that can be too easy to gloss over” (*SF Chronicle*). As Racette explains, she achieves this depth of immersion by really trying to “put myself in the position of the character. I am her; I am Cio-Cio San – it's not like I'm trying to portray that for the audience – I am that person.”

However, the path to achieving this type of deep connection with a role is not always straightforward. Of Butterfly, Racette admits, “I'm going to be honest – it's almost as though I don't see myself in her. But what I see is someone I admire – I see qualities in this female which I find unique and interesting – how incredibly feminine and yet so incredibly strong she is and I'm fascinated with how [these traits] are layered in her. I approach my interpretation of Cio-Cio San with great reverence and try to inhabit who I think that person is.”

In addition to her dramatic gifts, Racette's powerful, glinting soprano is ideal for the Puccini repertoire. David Gockley, general director of the San Francisco Opera, was one of her early champions and continues to showcase her at his company frequently. Speaking of the vocal qualities required of a Puccini soprano he believes the "voice has to combine warmth and cutting power. It has to get over a big orchestra and still convey vulnerability. Pat offers [that] complete package. She's really a phenomenon." Cio-Cio San is a notoriously long, demanding role and while recognizing its huge challenges are "not to be taken lightly – it's an exercise in stamina both vocally and physically," for Racette, it is "in a way ideal for me vocally because I have a voice that likes to run. I feel sometimes more fresh at the end of the evening than I do at the beginning. My voice likes to be taken out on the highway and just let go!"

Sharing the role of Cio-Cio San with Racette this fall is fellow American, Kelly Kaduce who, like her compatriot, counts the Japanese geisha as her calling card. However, Kaduce's journey with the role didn't begin in the expected way: "When I sang my first *Butterfly* [at Minnesota Opera in 2004] I was quite young for the role – the general consensus is that you should wait until you're older. I really took a risk. I went and sought out a lot of advice and basically everyone said 'No!' But I'm a little headstrong so decided to do it. The biggest factor for me was that Colin Graham was the director; he was so well-known; had spent a large part of his life in Japan and knew a lot about the culture. I felt that if I took this opportunity to sing *Butterfly* with him, I would really learn a lot about Japanese gesture; about kneeling and how to hold the fan; about how men versus women bow... I loved that man to death... my husband and I ended up naming our son after him."

Unlike Racette, who admits that her "acting skills have come experientially," Kaduce pursued acting more pointedly, auditing drama classes at college and doing plenty of independent reading of her own. "It's my favourite aspect about opera. I love singing, I love all kinds of music and I love acting but specifically with opera it's the combination of those. When I first starting singing, it was the one element that I really wanted to focus on." Kaduce's thespian skills have not gone unnoticed – her tour-de-force last summer as Nedda in Opera Theatre of St. Louis's *Pagliacci* prompted *Opera News* to proclaim "it is just possible that Ms. Kaduce is the finest actress on the operatic stage today. There was



no millisecond of her completely thought-out performance that was not informed by innovative business and deeply internalized motivation. [She] combined physical comedy worthy of Lucille Ball, dramatic detailing worthy of Meryl Streep, and sultry beauty worthy of Angelina Jolie. And she sings, too!"

When it comes to the vocal side of her art, Kaduce refreshingly bucks the trend of opera singers who profess never to listen to opera, especially when preparing roles: "One of my favourite joys is hearing singers. I've probably listened to every *Butterfly* recording out there – I'm sure I either own it or have heard it. It's a tricky thing...it's very important that you sing with your own individual voice because that's why you study for so long and that's what technique is all about. But there are so many great ideas that you can steal from other people! I wish I sang as well as Renata Scotto or Renata Tebaldi but there are certainly elements of their performances that I have borrowed – as long as my voice will naturally do them. I'm thinking also of Pat Racette...I've seen performances of hers that I find incredibly inspiring...she'll do something unusual that the majority of singers wouldn't and it pushes me to try even more new things. That's what I love about going to see and listen to live opera!" ■

Madama Butterfly plays for 12 performances, from October 10 to 31.

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Production originally made possible by John A. Cook



Watch videos and listen to musical excerpts at coc.ca/COCRADIO.



WORKING HARD



PLAYING HARD



1. COC General Director Alexander Neef works on his J-stroke while Music Director Johannes Debus snaps a selfie canoeing on Moraine Lake in Banff National Park. 2. Alexander Neef's summer travels included a visit in Napa, California, with his long-time mentor and friend, Evamaria Wieser. 3. No one can resist the adorable Sammy, who charmed Alexander and Johannes when they visited Banff to see *#UncleJohn*, directed by Sammy's dad, Joel Ivany. 4. (l-r) Soprano Sasha Djihanian, baritone Cameron McPhail and pianist/coach Michael Shannon, who recently graduated from the COC Ensemble Studio, sing one of their final concerts to COC donors. 5. (l-r) COC Ensemble Studio bass-baritone Gordon Bintner, renowned tenor Neil Shicoff and Head of the Ensemble Studio Liz Upchurch after a summer coaching. 6-7. (left) Superstar soprano Sondra Radvanovsky hams it up during a costume fitting, and (right) three months later, holds her 2014 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Performance, Opera Division, which she won for her portrayal as Queen Elizabeth I in *Roberto Devereux*. 8. (l-r) Former COC Board Member Sue Mortimer, legendary bass Ferruccio Furlanetto and COC Board Member Marcia Lewis Brown after Furlanetto's opening night performance in *Don Quichotte*. 9. COC General Director Alexander Neef and director Peter Sellars following the opening of *Hercules* which, according to *NOW Magazine*, was "first-class Handel given a thrilling, inventive staging by a fine cast and director." 10. (l-r) COC General Director Alexander Neef, director Robert Carsen and bass-baritone Gerald Finley at the COC's concept discussion for *Falstaff*. 11. Participants in the COC's Youth Opera Lab with COC Property Builder Wulf and their hand-made masks. 12. Baritone Quinn Kelsey and the four-legged friends he made while singing the role of Sancho Panza in *Don Quichotte*. 13. The cast of *Hercules* celebrate after a triumphant opening night. 14. (l-r) Actor David Bradley (*Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones*), COC Principal Viola Keith Hamm, Ensemble graduate mezzo-soprano Rihab Chaieb, COC Board Member Kris Vikmanis and tenor Richard Croft celebrate the premiere of the COC's *Hercules*.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Members of Our Community Who Make Extraordinary Contributions in Support of the COC's Artistic Projects

Because opera draws on so many artistic disciplines, it opens up a multitude of options for our supporters to explore and engage with.

For example, after only a few outings to the opera, Bruce Bailey fell in love with the range, colour and expressivity of the COC Orchestra. An art dealer and philanthropically minded man about town, Bailey wanted to learn more about what the group of musicians needed to continue their success. From conversations with Music Director Johannes Debus it soon became apparent that an orchestra of this calibre should have its own celesta, a keyboard instrument invented in 1886 and known for an ethereal heavenly sound, most famously showcased in "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" in Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. Though the COC had rented a celesta for years when needed, it was never a part of our permanent arsenal. Almost immediately, however, Bailey changed that by making a very generous donation to fill that missing instrumental spot. An overjoyed Maestro Debus noted that though the celesta is usually in the background it is integral to "those moments when her silvery shimmer gives the overall sound its little extra something, its delicate icing." (You'll be able to hear the new member of the orchestral family for yourself later this season in the double-bill production of *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung*.)

Moving from one talented group of musicians to another, opera wouldn't be what it is without the immense emotional impact of its choral singers. Few choruses in



When philanthropist Bruce Bailey learned the COC Orchestra did not have its own celesta, he promptly donated funds for the purchase of one.

COC supporters Tim and Frances Price had always been impressed by the chorus but they decided to take a more active role in their support by making an extraordinary commitment of \$1.5 million towards underwriting Sandra Horst and the chorus singers. It is a remarkable gift that speaks to the essential role of the chorus in our mainstage presentations and ensures that their outstanding work continues to flourish.

Opera can do amazing things with the choral arrangement of many voices, but the solo voice is the art form's essential centre. For Sue Mortimer, a phenomenal supporter of the COC in so many ways (Golden Circle member, former COC Board of Directors member), the chance to sponsor Canadian superstar bass-baritone Gerald Finley aligned with her long-held admiration and support of Finley's career, which she has been following since its beginning. Sue has heard him perform in Europe, but the fact that he returns to the COC this fall for the first time in over 20 years makes this sponsorship, and reunion on home soil, an especially significant event.

We thank Bruce Bailey, Tim and Frances Price, and Sue Mortimer, for supporting the creation of great opera at the COC and salute them for celebrating the aspects of the creative process that inspire them. ■



COC chorus master Sandra Horst (Centre) with Tim and Frances Price, whose remarkable support of Horst and the COC Chorus ensure the future of this internationally acclaimed ensemble.



Sue Mortimer is generously sponsoring Gerald Finley's performance in *Falstaff* and she visited the bass-baritone (in his body suit) during rehearsals this fall.

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GERALD FINLEY: COMING HOME

By Claire Morley

Bass-baritone Gerald Finley may live in the U.K., but he hasn't forgotten his Canadian roots. This fall, he returns to his home country in what he calls a "dream scenario," making his role debut as Falstaff alongside an all-Canadian cast.

Born in Montreal and raised in Ottawa, Gerald Finley is one of the most sought-after singers working today. He is renowned for his interpretations of Mozart roles (notably Don Giovanni, and the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*) as well as appearances in contemporary operas including John Adams' *Doctor Atomic* and *Nixon in China*, Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Anna Nicole*, and Kaija Saariaho's *Love from Afar*.

Before he became a fixture on all the major opera stages of the world, Finley started his musical career as a choir boy at St. Matthew's Anglican Church in Ottawa. Not only were the rigors of the Anglican choral tradition instilled in him there, but the door to numerous other musical opportunities was opened. "We got to be involved in a lot of different projects," he says. "We sang youth choir parts with the Ottawa Choral Society and National Arts Centre Orchestra, but we were also called if a kids' chorus was needed for a tour of Opéra de Québec. I learned oratorio repertoire but also opera. I covered Second and Third Boy in *The Magic Flute*, and we performed with chamber groups and orchestras. It was quite a unique position to be in." Finley continued his choral pursuits as an older teen when he sang in the Ontario Youth Choir, which would prove to be a key part of his musical development – there he met Sir David Willcocks, one of the most in-demand choral conductors in England. After hearing Finley sing, Willcocks offered him a position at the prestigious Royal College of Music (RCM) in London.

London Calling

Finley didn't think twice. He moved to London and studied at the RCM for a year. But choral, not operatic, pursuits were still very much top of mind, so he auditioned for a place



in the King's College Choir at Cambridge University and got in. He stayed at Cambridge for three years, studying language and theology, but at the end of his studies, found himself faced with a major decision – pursue his choral career (he was offered a place in the illustrious ensemble, The King's Singers), or try to make it as a soloist. "I figured I'd had enough of the choral world – I thought it couldn't really get any better than King's! So I went back to the RCM and did their post-graduate opera program."

From there, Finley joined the chorus of the Glyndebourne Festival, and within a year was landing small roles in both their summer and touring festivals. "I sang Papageno which allowed me to get an agent, and also won the John Christie Award, which gives young singers a bit of money to help them further their careers. But at that particular moment, when I was 29 or 30, my voice wasn't as strong as some of my colleagues and I had to ask myself what was going on." Finley looked to his "living hero," bass Samuel Ramey, for inspiration. "I asked my agent if Sam's teacher, Armen Boyajian, would take me on as a student." His agent made a call, and Finley used his prize money to fly to New York to meet with Boyajian. "I pretty much camped on my cousin's floor in New York for about 10 days before Armen would even open the door!" he recalls. "He was very busy and obviously a very popular teacher, so he wanted to find out just how much I really wanted to stay. I exhausted every penny of that prize money, scraping through 10 days in New York. Finally, on the day before I was supposed to leave, he agreed to meet me."

Chocolate brownies, Captain von Trapp, and Poirot! Find out what turns Gerry's crank in this fall's edition of *Coda*, found on the back cover.

Finley spent over two years working with Boyajian, travelling between London and New York. “He saved my voice. He made me train like an American football player – very strong exercises. He really got me to breathe in a more ‘baritone’ sound.” From there Finley started landing regular roles in the U.K. and Europe, where Figaro, Papageno and Guglielmo became his “ticket for five years.”

From the Don to Sir John

In more recent years, Count Almaviva and Don Giovanni have become mainstays of Finley’s schedule, but he also began making headlines for his stirring portrayals in contemporary roles by John Adams, Kaija Saariaho and Mark-Anthony Turnage – Verdi was not a composer with whom Finley was strongly associated. “Once you get into a particular groove, when people see you’re successful in Mozart or in a contemporary role, they tend to think of you in that regard,” he says. “I’ve come to Verdi relatively late in my career, but behind the scenes, this whole time, I’ve been trying to focus on making sure my voice is in as best a shape as possible because I’ve always loved and been inspired by the style required to sing Verdi. The wonderful thing about Falstaff is the huge variety of vocal style and versatility of singing [in the role]. There are pompous moments, grandiose moments as well as light, tumbling ones; there is a huge character palette that lies within Falstaff, and I think that’s why people love to do it! And if you’re a singer like me who has spent his whole life exploring a wide range of vocal colours and investigation, it’s a fantastic role – hopefully I can bring all of that experience to the table.”

Coming Home

When Finley arrived in Toronto in late August to begin rehearsals for *Falstaff*, he was joined by an all-Canadian cast who had come coming in from all parts of the world.

As Finley says, “I’ve encountered everyone in the cast in my travels, so this feels like a grand family reunion! Singing with your fellow countrymen in a place that is essentially home can only be a joyous occasion. Working with Robert Carsen is wonderful, and singing with Russell [Braun] is a dream because we haven’t really been able to get into a situation where we could sing together properly. I met Marie-Nicole [Lemieux] in Rome a couple years ago singing *William Tell* and it’s lovely to see what an amazing artist she is. With *Falstaff*, I’m really just part of a wonderful team – it’s a dream situation for me! And the COC is in such vital shape – it’s so vibrant. That is very special; I’m so excited to be back and join the party.” ■



Catch a behind-the-scenes look at Gerald Finley preparing for *Falstaff* in our Inside Opera videos at coc.ca/COCRADIO

Falstaff plays for seven performances, from October 3 to November 1.

For more insight into the COC’s new production of *Falstaff*, read *Anatomy of an Opera* on page 8

Gerald Finley’s performance is generously sponsored by Sue Mortimer

Falstaff is generously underwritten in part by

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The voyage to *Falstaff*

Preparing for a role debut like Falstaff is a major challenge to any artist. First there’s the learning of the role. Then Gerry took part in a photo shoot with us in London (with COC mascot Bearitone Bear). He couldn’t be present at our season announcement but Gerry tweeted a picture of himself channelling Falstaff. Also in London he was fitted for a fat suit and neck prosthetics to give him the generous proportions of his character. Second from right you see the result of the photo shoot, and Gerry in rehearsal with director Robert Carsen in Toronto in early September.



OH, THE PLACES THEY'LL GO!

COC Ensemble Studio 2014/2015

By Jennifer Pugsley



Celebrated Canadian singer and composer Rufus Wainwright was the guest host of Centre Stage 2013 and gave a surprise performance of his own during the deliberation process to the delight of the audience. Above, Wainwright congratulates all the finalists. Below, the three winners pose with General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus who led the COC Orchestra for all the performances of this unforgettable evening.

Dr. Seuss's charming tale, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, conjures up a whimsical but very appropriate image of what it means to be a member of the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio. Four new artists join the ranks of this illustrious training program in the 2014/2015 season: soprano Karine Boucher, tenor Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure, bass-baritone Iain MacNeil and pianist/coach Jennifer Szeto.

Since the program's inception in 1980, over 180 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Some of the finest operatic talent to call Canada home are counted as its graduates, tenor Ben Heppner among the most legendary.

For Boucher, Fortier-Lazure and MacNeil, that history and feeling of anticipation of what lies ahead is without a doubt top of mind when thinking of what's to come. The three singers were the top prize winners *Centre Stage* last November, the COC's annual gala and thrilling vocal showcase of audition finalists for the Ensemble Studio, and are eager to take in every opportunity the company's training program has to offer.

"I'm most excited about the learning opportunities I will have while in the Studio," says Fortier-Lazure. "Having the chance to perform alongside some of the best international singers, musicians and conductors, and learning from their rehearsals and performances is simply a dream for me."

MacNeil is equally in awe and looking forward to "working with and learning from the faculty [of the Ensemble Studio] and the artists involved in the season." The last few years alone have connected Ensemble artists with some of opera's most exciting and influential names for masterclasses and talkback sessions: baritones Gerald Finley, Russell Braun, and Sir Thomas Allen; tenor Neil Shicoff; mezzo-soprano Judith Forst; soprano Erika Sunnegårdh; conductor Carlo Rizzi; the Metropolitan Opera's Executive Director of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, Brian Zeger; Vice President at Columbia Artists Management William G. Guerri; and impresario and artist manager Matthew Epstein, to name but a few.



For Boucher, joining the Ensemble Studio is indeed about “taking all the tools the COC will give me to reach my goals.” But it’s also about finding ways to recreate a moment she experienced so intensely during Centre Stage last fall.

“At the competition I could feel this energy passing through the orchestra members to Maestro Debus to me and out to the audience. The result was so powerful that I, and everyone else there, had the feeling of being a part of something bigger, something special that makes the soul feel great.”

Boucher, Fortier-Lazure, MacNeil and Szeto join the program’s returning members soprano Aviva Fortunata, mezzo-soprano Charlotte Burrage, tenors Andrew Haji and Owen McCausland, baritone Clarence Frazer and bass-baritone Gordon Bintner. As part of the blend of advanced study and practical experience offered through the Ensemble Studio, audiences have many opportunities through the year to see each of these artists in performance, on stage at the Four Seasons Centre or in concerts as part of the COC’s Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, and witness these future opera stars on the rise. ■

MEET THE 2014/2015 ENSEMBLE



GORDON BINTNER
BASS-BARITONE



KARINE BOUCHER
SOPRANO



CHARLOTTE BURRAGE
MEZZO-SOPRANO



**JEAN-PHILIPPE
FORTIER-LAZURE**
TENOR



AVIVA FORTUNATA
SOPRANO



CLARENCE FRAZER
BARITONE



ANDREW HAJI
TENOR



IAIN MACNEIL
BASS-BARITONE



OWEN McCAUSLAND
TENOR



JENNIFER SZETO
INTERN COACH

CENTRE STAGE TAKES PLACES ON NOVEMBER 25, 2014
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Join us for the second installment of *Centre Stage: Ensemble Studio Competition Gala*.

Tickets to the competition and cocktail celebration are \$100.

Gala tickets, which include a black-tie dinner, are \$1,500.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit coc.ca, call 416-363-8231
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THE OPERA SHOP

FEATURED RECORDINGS THIS FALL 2014



MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Sony Masterworks. Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus, Patrick Summers, conductor. Patricia Racette, Maria Zifchak, Marcello Giordani and Dwayne Croft. \$38 including tax. This 2009

Metropolitan Opera HD transmission features our own Cio-Cio San, Patricia Racette, in a portrayal that is "quite simply revelatory... one of the most beautiful interpretations in memory."



FALSTAFF

Deutsche Grammophon. The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus, James Levine, conductor. Paul Plishka, Mirella Freni, Marilyn Horne and Barbara Bonney. \$25.75 including tax.

This acclaimed Metropolitan Opera production by Franco Zeffirelli is conducted with warmth and brio by James Levine. The superb ensemble cast features Paul Plishka in the title role; Mirella Freni is a delightful Alice and, early in their careers, Susan Graham and Barbara Bonney charm as Meg and Nannetta. Marilyn Horne takes a comic turn as Mistress Quickly.

2014 FALL COLLECTION

In celebration of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, the Opera Shop will be carrying handmade origami butterfly brooches and folding fan greeting cards made of marbled paper by **Robert Wu**. Each butterfly is individually made with vibrant paper.

The Opera Shop is excited to welcome back **ZSISKA** and their stunning new fall collection. Inspired by the short blooming period of the Japanese cherry Sakura, Zsiska's Hanami line symbolizes the impermanence of life.

In addition to **Alice Chik's** new semi-precious stone jewellery is the return of her best-selling Swarovski pearl earrings. We will also be carrying a collection of beautiful Baltic amber jewellery from **Amberlink**.

The Opera Shop will be having a very special one-day trunk show this fall with jeweller **Nancy Ciccone** and hatmaker **Rene Falcon** on Sunday October 19th at 2 p.m.!

TRUNK SHOWS

Sunday October 19th, 2 p.m.

Nancy Ciccone, Jeweller & **Rene Falcon**, Hatmaker

Saturday October 25th, 4:30 p.m. **Alice Chik**, Jeweller



The Opera Shop is located on the main floor of the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room, open before, during and (sometimes) after all performances. Shop for more online at coc.ca!

The Opera Shop is a project of the Canadian Opera Company, in partnership with L'Atelier Grigorian and Decca - The Opera Label. All proceeds support the Canadian Opera Company.



OPERA FOR LAUGHS: VERDI'S *FALSTAFF* AND THE STAGING OF COMEDY

Saturday, September 27, 2014, 1 to 4 p.m.

Celebrate the COC's new production of Verdi's rollicking comedy, *Falstaff*, with specialist speakers from around the world, performers from the UofT Opera and director Robert Carsen.

The Opera Exchange is presented
in partnership with:

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Directors Take the Stage: Debating Regieoper
Saturday, January 17, 2015, 1 to 4 p.m.

Join our panel of directors, critics, scholars and performers for an engaging exploration of the often-controversial topic of "Director's Opera." Guests include Russell Braun, star of the COC's new *Don Giovanni*, staged by dynamic young director, Dmitri Tcherniakov.



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Join Dr. David Stanley-Porter on these thoughtfully planned tours and explore the ever-exciting world of opera and classical music in historic and new opera houses and concert halls throughout North America and Europe. Book today!

NEW YORK: March 1 – 5, 2015

The Metropolitan Opera

ROSSINI *La donna del lago*

c. Michele Mariotti, d. Paul Curran, with Joyce DiDonato, Daniela Barcellona and Juan Diego Flórez

MOZART *Don Giovanni*

c. Alan Gilbert, d. Michael Grandage, with Elza van den Heever, Emma Bell, Dmitry Korchak, Peter Mattei and Luca Pisaroni

BIZET *Carmen*

c. Louis Langrée, d. Richard Eyre, with Elĭna Garanĉa and Jonas Kaufmann

Accommodation at the Hotel Lucerne

POLAND: May 2015

Discover the beauty and history of Poland by visiting the major opera houses of cities like Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań and Wrocław, with travel by private coach. Attend performances and enjoy extensive sightseeing in and around cities renowned for their music and culture.

Full details, including locations, operas and concert repertoire, to be announced in early fall 2014. Stay tuned!

PARIS: June 12 – 21, 2015

Opéra Bastille

MOZART *Die Zauberflöte*

d. Robert Carsen

CHAUSSON *Le roi Arthus*

n.p. with Sophie Koch and Thomas Hampson

BEETHOVEN

c. Philippe Jordan, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano
Fantasia in C Minor for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra, Op. 80
Symphony No. 9, Op. 125

Palais Garnier

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Opéra Royal du Château de Versailles

VINCI *Catone in Utica*

n.p. with Max Emanuel Cenčić

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Pianists: Lars Vogt, Andrés Schiff and Paul Lewis

c. conductor d. director n.p. new production

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FALL-WINTER 2014/2015

SEPTEMBER 2014

Tue	23	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Ensemble Studio*
Thu	25	12 p.m.	Payadora Tango Ensemble*
Sat	27	1 p.m.	The Opera Exchange: Opera for Laughs: Verdi's <i>Falstaff</i> , UofT, Walter Hall
Sat	27	6:30 p.m.	Culture Days: <i>Falstaff</i> Rehearsal, Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts
Tue	30	12 p.m.	Michael Shand Trio*

OCTOBER 2014

Thu	2	12 p.m.	Artists of the UofT Opera*
Fri	3	12:15 p.m. & 1:15 p.m.	Opera Connect: <i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Fri	3	7:30 p.m.	Falstaff Opening Performance
Tue	7	12 p.m.	Colin Ainsworth, tenor; Stephen Ralls, piano*
Thu	9	12 p.m.	Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure, tenor; Iain MacNeil, bass-baritone*
Thu	9	7:30 p.m.	<i>Falstaff</i>
Fri	10	7:30 p.m.	Madama Butterfly Opening Performance
Sat	11	4:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Sun	12	2 p.m.	<i>Falstaff</i>
Tue	14	12 p.m.	Artists of Opera Atelier and Atelier Ballet; Co-artistic director Marshall Pynkoski*
Tue	14	7:30 p.m.	<i>Falstaff</i>
Wed	15	12 p.m.	Anastasia Rizikov, piano*
Wed	15	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Thu	16	9 p.m.	<i>Operanation: Light Up The Night</i>
Sat	18	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Sun	19	2 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Tue	21	12 p.m.	Vincent Boilard, oboe; Olivier Hébert-Bouchard, piano*
Tue	21	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Wed	22	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Thu	23	12 p.m.	Lauren Segal, mezzo-soprano; Roberto Gleadow, bass-baritone; Sandra Horst, piano*
Fri	24	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Sat	25	4:30 p.m.	<i>Falstaff</i>
Sun	26	2 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Tue	28	12 p.m.	Vikingur Ólafsson, piano*
Tue	28	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Wed	29	7:30 p.m.	<i>Falstaff</i>
Thu	30	12 p.m.	Winds of the COC Orchestra*
Thu	30	7:30 p.m.	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Fri	31	7:30 p.m.	Madama Butterfly Closing Performance

NOVEMBER 2014

Sat	1	7:30 p.m.	Falstaff Closing Performance
Tue	4	12 p.m.	Marina Thibeault, viola; Michel-Alexandre Broekaert, piano*
Wed	5	5:30 p.m.	David Buchbinder's Odessa/Havana*
Thu	6	12 p.m.	Maxim Bernard, piano*
Tue	11	12 p.m.	Elinor Frey, cello*
Wed	12	12 p.m.	Dominic Mancuso Group*
Tue	18	12 p.m.	Susan Hoepfner, flute; Beverley Johnston, percussion*
Wed	19	7 p.m.	Opera Talks: <i>Don Giovanni</i> North York Central Library
Thu	20	12 p.m.	Artists of The Glenn Gould School*
Tue	25	6:30 p.m.	<i>Centre Stage</i> : Ensemble Studio Competition Gala
Wed	26	12 p.m.	Jean-Sélim Abdelmoula, piano*

DECEMBER 2014

Tue	2	12 p.m.	Canada's Ballet Jörgen*
Wed	3	5:30 p.m.	Mike Downes, composer and bass; Robi Botos, piano; Larnell Lewis, drums*
Thu	4	12 p.m.	Rossina Grieco, piano*
Tue	9	12 p.m.	Artists of The Glenn Gould School New Music Ensemble; Brian Current, conductor*
Wed	10	12 p.m.	Humber's Alex Dean Saxophone Quartet*
Tue	16	5:30 p.m.	Daniela Nardi's Espresso Manifesto*
Thu	18	12 p.m.	Amanda Martinez Quartet*

JANUARY 2015

Tue	6	12 p.m.	Newton Moraes Dance Theatre*
Wed	7	5:30 p.m.	Amy McConnell & William Sperendai Quartet*
Thu	8	12 p.m.	Ritmo Flamenco Dance and Music Ensemble*
Tue	13	12 p.m.	Victor Fournelle-Blain, violin; Philip Chiu, piano*
Thu	15	12 p.m.	McGill Honours Jazz Combo; Rémi Bolduc, director/saxophone*
Sat	17	1 p.m.	The Opera Exchange: Directors Take the Stage: Debating <i>Regieoper</i> , UofT, Walter Hall
Tue	20	12 p.m.	Justin Gray's Indo-Jazz Collective*
Tue	22	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Ensemble Studio*
Sat	24	4:30 p.m.	Don Giovanni Opening Performance
Tue	27	12 p.m.	Canadian Art Song Project*
Tue	27	7 p.m.	Opera Talks: <i>Die Walküre</i> North York Central Library
Tue	27	7:30 p.m.	<i>Don Giovanni</i>
Thu	29	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Orchestra Academy*
Fri	30	7:30 p.m.	<i>Don Giovanni</i>
Sat	31	7 p.m.	Die Walküre Opening Performance

*These performances are part of the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, supported by the Free Concert Series Endowment Fund, established in honour of Richard Bradshaw by an anonymous donor.

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Coda ^{with} Gerald Finley

Favourite movie: *The Incredibles*

If I were a soprano, I'd love singing the role of *Countess in Figaro*

My dream role I'd love to sing one day *Scarpia; Captain von Trapp*

If I'd never become a singer, I would have been *a vet or a travel agent*

On my piano you'll find *piles of new music sent to me by composers*

Sophia Loren or Scarlett Johansson? *Juliette Binoche*

Scotch, Guinness or Barolo? *a gorgeous Sassacaia*

Beatles or Stones? *Leonard Cohen and Rick Astley*

Favourite city: *Home: Ottawa! Away: Salzburg*

Star Wars or Star Trek? *Planet Earth with Sir David Attenborough*

When I have an afternoon off, I wander through *YouTube listening to great singing*

Fischer-Dieskau or Gobbi? *a perfect blend of both; John Charles Thomas*

My typical coffee order is *Chai Tea latte*

The opera character I most resemble is *Don Giovanni; Hans Sachs!*

My biggest fear is *resembling Don Giovanni; losing those I love*

My carry-on essentials are *noise-reducing headphones; iPod; sheet music; water, water, phone, water, Weekend Financial Times*

My guilty pleasure is *chocolate brownie after a performance; Candy Crush*

The last piece of music I heard on my iPod was *Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau singing a Schubert recital from Hohenems 1986*

Cats or Dogs? *yes! plus rabbits, lizards, guinea pigs, terrapins (all in my dreams...)*

Favourite literary hero/heroine: *Agatha Christie's "Poirot"*

The quality I most admire in a friend is *tolerance of my lifestyle, reconnecting with enthusiasm after a long period of non-communication!*



Busy bass-baritone Gerald Finley raised funds for Help Musicians UK by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro this summer with his two sons, Daniel and Steven!

Prelude

A gift to our friends

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