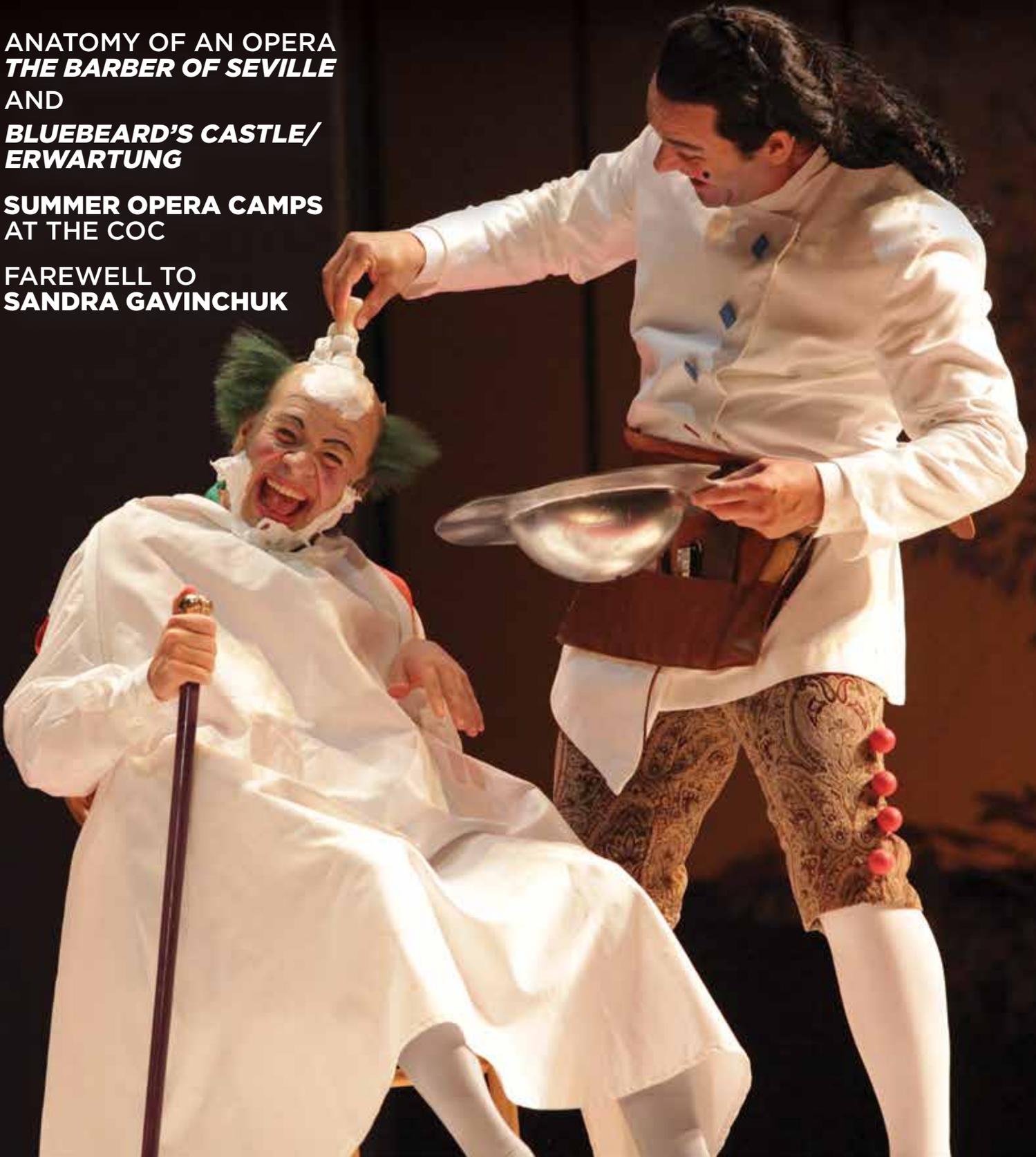


**ANATOMY OF AN OPERA**  
***THE BARBER OF SEVILLE***  
AND  
***BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE/***  
***ERWARTUNG***

**SUMMER OPERA CAMPS**  
AT THE COC

**FAREWELL TO**  
**SANDRA GAVINCHUK**



# A MESSAGE FROM GENERAL DIRECTOR ALEXANDER NEEF SPRING HAS SPRUNG

**In the fall, our new** *Falstaff* brought down the house with every performance, and the perennially beautiful *Madama Butterfly* graced our stage again. In the winter, I was heartened by the amount of discussion our new production of *Don Giovanni* generated (good art never leaves us apathetic!), and every performance of *Die Walküre* was met with rapturous applause, further proof of our company's standing in the opera world as a home to the very best.

In early March, we shared that strength with the wider opera community by bringing our sensational *Semele* to the prestigious Brooklyn Academy of Music. We thrilled New York audiences in much the same way as we did three years ago with *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* and *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* in 1993. This year's return to BAM confirms the COC's reputation as a company devoted to all the adventure and possibilities of operatic theatre in the 21st century.

And there's no better time than this spring to (re)discover the fantastic range of everything opera can be. Our new *Barber of Seville*—in a Day-Glo, eye-popping, madcap production—is a delight, perfect for audiences of all ages, and a wonderful opportunity to introduce your children to the magic



of opera. On another end of the spectrum is our signature double-bill of *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* (which has never been seen on the Four Seasons Centre stage). With ravishing scores and Robert Lepage's extraordinary theatrical magic, *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* will take you on a stunning journey into the interior of the heart and mind.

Finally, if you haven't already, I would like to remind you to please renew your subscription for the 2015/2016 season. It's a strong mix of the familiar, the lesser-known and the brand new, featuring the return of *Carmen* and *Siegfried*; new and beautiful productions of *La Traviata* and *The Marriage of Figaro*; the Canadian premiere of Rossini's *Maometto II*; and a world premiere of a Canadian opera, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, by Barbara Monk Feldman, with two short pieces by Monteverdi.

Exceptional voices, imaginative productions, and all the emotional power of the world's greatest art form—we have plenty to look forward to together! ■

## Prelude

*A gift to our friends*

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**Design:** BT/A

**Contributors:** Claudine Domingue, *Director of Public Relations*; Nikita Gourski, *Development Communications Officer*; Steve Kelley, *Chief Communications Officer*; Claire Morley, *Associate Manager, Editorial*; Gianmarco Segato, *Adult Programs Manager*; Katherine Semcesen, *Associate Director, Education & Outreach*

Photo credits are on page 19.

Front cover: Patrick Carfizzi as Dr. Bartolo and Nathan Gunn as Figaro *The Barber of Seville* (Houston Grand Opera, 2011).  
Photo: Felix Sanchez

All information is correct at time of printing.

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You won't want to miss a second of the magnificent 2015/2016 season and, as a COC subscriber, you won't have to! Remember that COC Premier subscribers always get the best seats at the best prices, enjoy scheduling flexibility with no-fee ticket exchanges, and a host of other exclusive benefits.

And prices start at just \$199 for all six operas next season. That means that you can see a beautiful new production of *La Traviata*, the world premiere of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the remarkable *Siegfried*, and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* in a new-to-Toronto production that was created in Salzburg, the master's home town. The excitement continues with everyone's favourite opera, *Carmen*, and *Maometto II*—a stunning rarity by Rossini. Get it all for less than \$34 per opera!

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# ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: Two Paths to a New Age

by Gianmarco Segato

## BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE/ERWARTUNG

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

### LOOK & LISTEN

Listen to excerpts from these two incredible and innovative works at [coc.ca/LookAndListen](http://coc.ca/LookAndListen).

### EARLY MODERN PIONEERS

Largely self-taught, Viennese composer **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874-1951) made a living in his 20s orchestrating operettas, an unlikely start for someone **who would become one of the most influential and controversial figures in 20th-century music**. His innovative experiments with harmony moved art music away from the late-Romantic lushness of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler towards an atonal sound world that threw over the conventional rules of Western harmony. This break from tradition ultimately led him to invent the “12-tone” technique that dominated “serious” musical composition for a good part of the last century. With his early opera *Erwartung* (1909), Schoenberg extended the boundaries of tonality so far as to become the first composer to overstep them.

Unlike Schoenberg, Hungarian **Béla Bartók** (1881-1945) did not turn his back on contemporaries such as Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy; in fact, early works such as *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) were strongly influenced by their style. In place of outright rejection, **Bartók pushed the boundaries of 20th-century art music by way of his research into the old, forgotten folk melodies of Hungary, Romania and other nations**. This resulted in an alternate way forward for the Western tradition, different but no less compelling than Schoenberg's systematic reinvention.

### SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“It was the end of a lot of empires...”

*Bluebeard's Castle* and *Erwartung* were created during a crucial period of change within Europe. Bartók completed his opera in 1911, just six years before the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. **“It was the end of a lot of empires,” says the production's creator, Robert Lepage, “the end of a lot of Bluebeards who possessed lands and jewellery, but whose money was stained with blood.”** The internationally feted Canadian director singles out the creative and intellectual “effervescence” of the times—it was the era of Sigmund Freud and Franz Kafka which “found its visual expression in the paintings of such Viennese artists as Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele—work that is at once sumptuously decorative and psychologically disturbing.”

The great millennial celebrations held in Budapest in 1896 focused the attention of many Hungarians on their previously neglected indigenous peasant culture. Then in 1903, spurred on by the new anti-Austrian, anti-Hapsburg movement in Hungary, Bartók declared in a letter, “all



ERWARTUNG



BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

my life, in every way I shall serve but one aim: the benefit of the Hungarian nation.” This led him to investigate the influence of peasant culture affecting all of the arts in Hungary at the time, an example of which is the way architect Ödön Lechner infused decorative, Hungarian folk floral motifs into buildings. There was a feeling among young writers, musicians, and artists that they should actively support each other’s modernist leanings to create a new, uniquely Hungarian art style.

### “Unleashing the unconscious...”

Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* is very much a product of the Expressionist movement that swept through all the arts during the early 20th century. Its aim was to **reveal the kind of latent, undreamt-of naked passions and distortions which had been suppressed by societal convention**. Schoenberg’s break from the traditional Western harmonic framework unleashed a similarly “expressionist” sound world, equipped to expose those dangerous emotions that had heretofore remained under wraps.

At the same time, Sigmund Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis championed the interpretation of dreams; of releasing deeply buried childhood memories and hidden desires in order to “cure”

his patients’ mental anxieties. It is telling that Schoenberg’s librettist, the young medical student Marie Pappenheim, based her text on the elliptical, resonant language of patients undergoing psychoanalysis. In fact, musicologists have theorized a possible familial relationship between Marie Pappenheim and Bertha Pappenheim, the real name of “Anna O.,” one of Freud’s famous patients. As a member of the medical community, Marie may well have been familiar with “Anna O.” and certainly, there are similarities between that case and the text of *Erwartung*.

### FORMED BY THE TEXT

“It was simultaneously my first stage and my first vocal work”

The story of *Bluebeard’s Castle* originated in Charles Perrault’s fairy tale as adapted by Belgian playwright and poet Maurice Maeterlinck in his libretto for Paul Dukas’ opera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. Like Bartók, librettist Béla Balázs’ aim was to create a specifically Hungarian style of drama: “I wanted to depict a modern soul in the primary colours of folk-song.” To this end, he looked to the folk balladry of Transylvania, writing the entire libretto in eight-syllable lines. Any potential monotony was alleviated by



BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

## NEW SOUNDWORLDS

“We can only know folk melodies through direct contact with peasants”

Previous to Bartók’s rediscovery of his homeland’s treasury of authentic melodies, the Hungarian classical “nationalist” style had been dominated by folk-like popular songs which were in fact corruptions of truly indigenous music. Bartók did not simply incorporate the original folk materials verbatim however; instead, he used them as models to intensify rhythms; to expand his tonal palette and, ultimately, to explore the new dissonances that came to define his music. His “melodies” are entirely his own.

Bartók’s skill in allowing the text to determine the flow of his music, resulting in his so-called “*parlando rubato*” style (a sort of “flexible speech-rhythm”).

### “The Onomatopoeia of the Emotions”

Far from being a professional writer like Balázs, Schoenberg’s Pappenheim had only previously published verse under a pseudonym and was full of doubts about her ability to write a conventional opera libretto. It was precisely this lack of polish that Schoenberg desired, encouraging him to invent new musical structures which themselves appeared to have arisen from the subconscious. Pappenheim’s familiarity with psychological and psychoanalytical thought yielded precisely the kind of fragmentary, seemingly illogical text that was appropriate for Schoenberg’s correspondingly athenatic, atonal music.

As close as Bartók was to his national heritage, he was by no means insulated from other contemporary trends in European art music. Especially influential was Claude Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) with its free, *parlando* style that reinforced lessons learned from folk music. Richard Strauss’s great tone poems taught Bartók how **a large orchestra might be used to inspire visual and dramatic effects. The most famous example of this effect in *Bluebeard’s Castle* is the awesome eruption of dense, loud orchestral sound when Judith opens the castle’s fifth door**, symbolizing her husband’s kingdom. Bartók knit together his Hungarian and European influences into a cohesive, personal style which remains unique in the history of Western music.

### “The Seismographic Recording of Traumatic Shocks”

While Bartók was practically working in a vacuum to invent a modern language for opera in Hungary, Schoenberg very much saw himself as carrying on the great Austro-German tradition of innovation in classical music. In fact, he felt he had achieved in modern times something similar to what Brahms, Mozart and Wagner had done in previous eras.

*Erwartung*’s complex score is particularly challenging due to its “in-between” status—Schoenberg wrote it after he had abandoned tonality (c. 1909) but before devising the 12-tone system (early 1920s). German philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno famously analyzed the score, identifying its tensions as lying between hallucination (the solo “Woman” character’s false fear in the present) and faulty memory (her false security in the past). **The Woman’s extreme uncertainty is conveyed by a fragmentary score that almost never settles on the type of repeated theme or motif that could potentially offer definitive answers.**

It is worth pointing out that despite Schoenberg’s iconoclast status, his musical subconscious was nevertheless steeped in traditional, German harmonic



ERWARTUNG

language (Richard Strauss was an early supporter, though he later abandoned the young Austrian). Without these latent tonal forces, the shocking gestural language of *Erwartung* would not have had the same revolutionary effect.

Bartók's and Schoenberg's respective approaches to the early 20th-century modernist reinvention of opera couldn't have been more different. Schoenberg sought coherence by, as he put it, "composing with 12 tones related only to each other," essentially creating the closed musical system on which much of the remaining 20th century's "serious" art music would be based. In contrast, Bartók's assimilation of folk idioms reinforced a social, historical bond that firmly connected him to past society as he simultaneously looked to the future.

## TRANSLATED TO THE STAGE AND PUTTING THE COC ON THE MAP



Robert Lepage

Québec City native Robert Lepage is indisputably one of the most original theatre artists Canada has ever produced. His highly innovative, original works, as well as his stagings of classic and contemporary plays and operas, are celebrated the world over. His 1993 COC production of *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* was in fact his first foray into opera.

Its spectacular success launched him on a trajectory that culminated in a new production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* for the Metropolitan Opera in 2012. His long-awaited return to the COC came 16 years after the Bartók/Schoenberg double bill with 2009's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* which, like its predecessor, toured the world, bringing its home company even more international acclaim.

**Lepage's groundbreaking production of *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* was a watershed moment for the COC, establishing it as one of the world's most visionary and compelling opera companies.**

Its spectacular and surprising integration of movement, light and

theatrical sleight-of-hand subsequently garnered worldwide acclaim as it toured New York, Edinburgh, Melbourne and Hong Kong. This spring, Toronto audiences will hear the stunning sonic effects of these two revolutionary scores for the first time in the acoustic splendour of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

## "It was a real celebration of the neurotic, a celebration of the 'anti'"

Set and costume designer Michael Levine draws inspiration for his visuals from the social and artistic *Zeitgeist* of the period of composition. He cites Austrian painter Gustav Klimt's richly gilded canvases as a reference for the huge gold frame that surrounds the proscenium and points to the sombre, unnerving works of his Norwegian contemporary, Edvard Munch, as inspiration for his stage design. *Bluebeard's castle* itself is an enclosed box with a forced interior perspective, its fourth "wall" left open to the voyeuristic audience. Each door that Judith opens is larger than the last, as she grows closer to uncovering the truth of *Bluebeard's* past.

Lepage describes *Erwartung* as very "dark; a work of despair; **Schoenberg doesn't give any keys or clues to this piece. It's very erratic—a sort of Freudian voyage.**" He highlights these Freudian aspects by placing part of the opera in a psychiatric ward where the sole character, "The Woman," is straightjacketed and flooded by memories as she recounts the events of her search for her lover.

Tropes, which might seem borrowed from a Jean Cocteau film, inspire many of Lepage's directorial touches including a psychoanalyst with notepad; extended body parts; a treeless stage and an exaggeratedly angled wall from which human figures emerge at unnatural angles. Acrobats play key roles in both pieces, filling in some of the ambiguous narrative and psychological gaps left open to interpretation by the operas' creators. ■



ERWARTUNG

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"We were made aware of the breadth of the orchestra's talent, the depth of Debus's comprehension of Wagner and the height of achievement that could be reached within the superlative acoustics of this superlative performance space."

*Toronto Star*

"A performance alive with striking details."

*New York Times*



"Many companies boast of recruiting neophyte directors as a way to shake up the art form. Alas, a lot of trendy, clueless productions have resulted. But the Chinese artist Zhang Huan's production of Handel's *Semele*, which opened at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Wednesday night, is not one of them. This playful, colorful staging, which comes from the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto, is saturated with Buddhist imagery; elements of Asian theater, including puppets; and, believe it or not, a pair of sumo wrestlers."

*The New York Times*

"As a stage set, [the temple] is impressive and versatile, with a monumental quality that sets off the beautiful costumes by Han Feng."

*New York Classical Review*

## A COMPANY

Our artistic vision continues to be equal to the profoundly international horizons of the opera industry itself, a fact brilliantly demonstrated in early March when we took our genre-bending production of Handel's *Semele*, directed by renowned Chinese visual artist Zhang Huan, to the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

In order to realize the immense potential of this touring opportunity, the Canadian Opera Company required major added support from our community of philanthropists.



# NYC COC'S SEMELE!



“Soprano Jane Archibald sings the title role with insouciant glee, her voice shimmying up into the high register and scattering notes like confetti.”

*New York Magazine*



“This production’s arrival in New York is the cornerstone opera offering of BAM’s spring season, and a chance for this city to hear this excellent Toronto-based company in a rare American visit.”

*Superconductor*

“Graced with excellent voices, good acting, and masterfully sensitive work from Christopher Moulds conducting the fine orchestra, the Canadian Opera Company production is a very welcome highlight of BAM’s season.”

*BlogCritics.com*

## IN GLOBAL DEMAND

**We salute the individuals at right for heeding the call and making this tour possible.**

In late February, generous tour supporters gathered at Toronto’s Nota Bene restaurant with members of *Semele*’s cast for a celebratory dinner, and a few weeks later joined the artists in New York City for opening night at BAM. The next day the group reconvened for lunch at the famed Gramercy Tavern with Alexander Neef and *Semele*’s outstanding artists, including Jane Archibald (*Semele*), Colin Ainsworth (*Jupiter*), and Kyle Ketelsen (*Cadmus/Somnus*).

### THANK YOU

Walter M. and Lisa Balfour Bowen  
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The COC Tour to BAM has been generously supported by



# WORKING HARD



# PLAYING HARD



**1, 2, 4** On January 14, the COC's 2015/2016 season was unveiled to about 1,200 COC subscribers, who were treated to live performances by the COC Orchestra and guest soloists, video previews and interviews, and a Q&A with host Brent Bambury, COC General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus. **3.** Canadian composer Barbara Monk Feldman at the COC's 15/16 season launch. Ms. Monk Feldman's *Pyramus and Thisbe* makes its world premiere in October 2015. **5.** The cast and creative team of *Don Giovanni* were all smiles at the opening night party. **6.** (l-r) Johan Reuter, Christine Goerke, Janina Baechle, Dimitry Ivaschenko and Atom Egoyan celebrate the triumphant opening of *Die Walküre*. **7.** (l-r) Bass-baritone Kyle Ketelsen, COC General Director Alexander Neef and baritone Russell Braun attended an exclusive Ensemble Circle post-performance cast party for *Don Giovanni* at Drake 150. Photo: Dave Cox. **8.** Triple (piano) threat! Pianists Emanuel Ax (centre), Pavel Kolesnikov (left) and Orion Weiss (right) following Pavel and Orion's performance as part of the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. Photo: Loie Fallis. **9.** COC Music Director Johannes Debus and his partner, violinist Elissa Lee, welcomed their first baby Noah, photographed with proud big brother Jonah. Photo courtesy of Johannes and Elissa. **10.** Sumo wrestler Byamba Ulambayar recently appeared in the video for One Direction's *Steal My Girl*. At the COC's opening night party for *Semele* at BAM (see pages 8 and 9), he nearly made off with associate director Allison Grant! Photo: Gene Wu. **11.** Also celebrating the opening of *Semele* at BAM were associate director/choreographer Su Jie, counter-tenor Lawrence Zazzo (Athamas), contralto Hilary Summers (Ino/Juno), soprano Jane Archibald (Semele), tenor Colin Ainsworth (Jupiter), Lady Linda Wong Davies of the KT Wong Foundation and director Zhang Huan. Photo: Gene Wu

# REGISTRATION OPEN FOR SUMMER OPERA CAMPS

The COC's one-week arts camps feature daily sessions in healthy singing techniques, composition, acting, movement and characterization, and set, props and/or costume design. Working alongside professional artists—including composer Chris Thornborrow, director and choreographer Jen Johnson, and designer Sonja Rainey—young people take control of the opera creation and storytelling process. Each week is tailored to the needs of a specific age group and participants will either present an adaptation of a popular opera or write their own stories and music. Camps culminate in performances for families and friends on Friday afternoons.

**All sessions take place at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts (145 Queen St. W., Toronto) from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Final performances take place on Fridays from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.**



<b>LITTLE COMPANY</b>	entering Grades 1 to 3	July 27 to 31, 2015
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**\$300/week.** Register today at [coc.ca/Camps](http://coc.ca/Camps)!

### HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT CAMPS?

Contact the COC's Children and Youth Programs Co-ordinator at **416-306-2307** or [education@coc.ca](mailto:education@coc.ca).

Photos: COC

# SET FOR SEVILLE

On May 15, COC Ensemble Studio members perform Rossini's comic masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*, on stage at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

Read their insights into how they prepare to tackle one of operas most famous and fun works!



**Gordon Bintner (Don Basilio):**

It has been a great pleasure preparing for this role. This is my first Rossini opera. The music is wonderful, the text rich, and the style incredibly catchy. One of my primary goals in preparing for this role has been to investigate Rossini's incredibly detailed script, whilst striving for textual specificity and clarity within the drama; one always informing the other. I am very much looking forward to this production. I am excited to share the stage with my colleagues, and to bring this comedic masterpiece to life!

flirt with a tenor and come out alive! There is a reason Warner Bros. chose to create a theatrical cartoon short entitled "Rabbit of Seville." I'm ready to get silly, fall in love and sing a lot of notes!



**Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure (Count Almaviva):**

I am extremely excited to tackle Count Almaviva. This will be my first time performing this role, and, in fact, Rossini. *The Barber of Seville* is for me a great challenge, not only vocally (holy moly, notes!), but also dramatically. The Count is so interesting to me—at times he is very serious, and in other moments, absolutely hilarious. What a great way for me to learn this role alongside seasoned artists and an incredible team!

alongside an immensely talented cast. I am the barber of Seville—make way Toronto!

**Andrew Haji (Count Almaviva):**

I am having a blast putting together the role of Count Almaviva. *The Barber of Seville* is one of the most comical operas in the repertoire, and that makes it a lot of fun to work on. The ensembles are a particular highlight—sometimes there are half a dozen people singing different things on the stage at breakneck speed, and the absurdity of it all makes it so enjoyable to do and to watch. There are a lot of vocal acrobatics in the show and that, for me, is both a challenge and incredibly fun!



**Karine Boucher (Berta):**

Learning the role of Berta is so fun. While the role is relatively small, she plays an important part. In a way, she is the voice of the audience, watching and commenting on the story as it unfolds. I'm so excited to bring my personal interpretation: I have to find the little "je ne sais quoi" about her in the short time that Rossini gives her to sing. She may not be as essential as Figaro or Rosina, but a chocolate sundae isn't complete without the cherry!



**Clarence Frazer (Figaro):**

The first time I ever heard Figaro's famous aria ("Largo al factotum") was while watching *Mrs. Doubtfire* when it was sung by Robin Williams. This memory reminds me of the relevance and popularity this opera's music still has today. It is definitely a change in character for me; it's a baritone role who isn't evil or doesn't get his heart broken, but rather is loved by all, can do no wrong and sings a million glorious notes! I can't wait to bring Figaro to life

**Iain MacNeil (Doctor Bartolo):**

The role of Bartolo is a fast and furious frenzy, both musically and dramatically. He spits out words at warp speed and makes every note count. In order to make this work, my preparation has to be slow and methodical to ensure that the frenzy doesn't have a negative effect on the voice. I'm enjoying this challenge immensely and looking forward to having a blast on stage with my fabulous colleagues.



**Charlotte Burrage (Rosina):**

The hero gets the girl and everyone lives happily ever after. Mezzos rarely

The Ensemble Studio performance of *The Barber of Seville* is generously underwritten in part by Roy and Marjorie Linden

# ANATOMY OF AN OPERA

by Nikita Gourski

## THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

**“The most beautiful opera buffa in existence”** Giuseppe Verdi

Hard to imagine higher praise. But when it comes to Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* (1816), superlatives seem our only option. Nothing else will do when describing the funniest, best paced, and yes, most beautiful comic opera in history.



### OPERA BUFFA AND THE BEL CANTO ERA

Though Rossini wrote operas of all kinds, he is primarily known today for his mastery of *opera buffa*, an immensely popular genre that was geared to entertain all social classes (as opposed to just the aristocracy) with fast-paced action, comic situations, and hummable tunes. *Bel canto* means “beautiful singing” and denotes the highly exhibitionist, virtuosic singing style practiced at the time (both in serious and comic works). While *bel canto* operas followed fairly fixed structures and conventions—detractors sometimes label them “mechanical” and “formulaic”—Rossini nonetheless found dramatically compelling, stunningly beautiful, and inventive ways to deploy these formal structures. In *Barber* he even uses the conventions self-reflexively in order to critique them, as when the young lovers fail to elope and are

caught because they are delayed by a necessary romantic interlude.

**LOOK & LISTEN**  To hear guided excerpts, visit [coc.ca/LookAndListen](http://coc.ca/LookAndListen).

### HOW TO WRITE AN OPERA IN TWO WEEKS

In the early 1800s, the business of opera production moved at stunning speeds. **Rossini claimed that he composed *The Barber of Seville* in 13 days, never leaving the house where he was lodging—“If I had gone to visit my barber for a shave, I wouldn’t have had time to finish,”** he later told a friend. Composers of the era were pragmatic about finding ways to expedite their work. Self-borrowing, for example, was a standard practice, and Rossini frequently reused material from his back catalogue for a current assignment. Indeed, *Barber* features passages from five previous Rossini operas. Yet his genius managed to transcend this system of churning

manufacture: “You may say things about Rossini and they may be true regarding the borrowings [...], the speed of composition and so forth, but I confess that I cannot help believing *The Barber of Seville* for abundance of ideas, for verve, [and] for truth of declamation the most beautiful *opera buffa* in existence,” wrote Giuseppe Verdi, the great Italian composer whose fame and significance would eclipse Rossini’s in the latter half of the 19th century.

### ALMAVIVA THEN BARBER

*Barber* is based on a stage play by the French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais (whose Figaro trilogy is a satirical take-down of aristocratic privilege and also includes *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Guilty Mother*). Rossini’s was not the first *Barber* opera; in fact an earlier version by the composer Giovanni Paisiello was considered a cornerstone of the

opera buffa repertoire at that point. So much so, that the 24-year-old Rossini decided to write a diplomatic note to the elder artist, assuring him that this new version was not intended as an affront to the original. Rossini even presented his opera under the title *Almaviva*, only changing it to *The Barber of Seville* after Paisiello's death.

## A LEGENDARY FAILURE

According to some sources, the opening night of *Barber* was doomed before a single note was played; a clique of ardent Paisiello supporters bought up entire sections of the theatre, intent on booing the opera vociferously and ensuring a debacle. But the performance itself was marred by an almost comical profusion of problems: a guitar string broke in the opening scene; a singer tripped over an errant trapdoor and delivered his most important aria with a bleeding nose; a cat dashed onto the stage and got tangled up in the soprano's skirt. "All the whistlers in Italy seemed to have given themselves a rendezvous for this performance," one eyewitness reported. Though opening night was a disaster, the second performance was a great success, and Rossini's *Barber* has been in the repertoire ever since.

## COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE ROOTS

Rossini's opera owes much to the Italian tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, the street theatre of improvised comedy that developed familiar stock characters and plots, and featured physical comedy prominently. The production team pays homage to these theatrical roots with costumes that reference traditional *commedia dell'arte* tropes, as well as plenty of slapstick to complement the organized chaos and mounting mayhem of the plot.

## FREE-WHEELING PRODUCTION

This production has been praised for "imaginatively renewing a canonic work" (*Opera News*) and the team of Els Comediants—a Spanish theatre collective that has been creating multi-disciplinary performances for

over 40 years—accomplish this free-wheeling *Barber* by combining carnival and circus traditions along with puppetry, dance, acrobatics, pantomime, and *commedia dell'arte* practice.



## MINIMAL, EXPRESSIVE SET DESIGN

The vibrant and colourful set designs are partly inspired by Picasso's Cubist aesthetic and the visual language of constructive sculpture, or art that is made by putting things together from different sources. The giant guitar that Almaviva stands on for his serenade during Act I is an example, referencing similar constructions by Picasso. Many elements of the set design also have a multifunctional, open-ended quality as objects take on different forms. The giant pink piano, for example, becomes a writing desk, a banquet table, and a boudoir over the course of the opera.

## PLAYING WITH PERCEPTION

Doors at crooked angles, exaggerated hairdos, and outsized props all contribute to a cartoon-like disruption of scale and proportion. The fabric walls allow for shadow play and effects that mimic cinematic cutaways and montage, notably during the famous "Largo al factotum" aria, in which Figaro details his many tasks and responsibilities while we simultaneously witness silhouetted figures performing those errands. ■





## LIFE AT A GLANCE

### Early Years

Gioachino Rossini was born in 1792 in Pesaro, a seaport town on the Adriatic coast of northern Italy. Growing up with musician parents—his mother a soprano; his father a horn and trumpet player—he was immersed from a young age in the bustling, often chaotic world of Italian opera houses, in which a new work might be commissioned, composed, rehearsed, and performed within the span of only a few weeks. By his early teens he was already a polished musician, studying at the conservatory in Bologna, and composing original works, including opera.

### Early Triumphs

The COC presents another of Rossini's serious operas, *Maometto II*, in 2015/16.

Success came early. His first professional opera was staged by a theatre in Venice when he was only 18. By age 20, he was recognized internationally as a major talent, with two important hits in the same year, one comic (*L'Italiana in Algeri*, *The Italian Girl in Algiers*), one serious (*Tancredi*). There was an exuberant richness, an endless inventiveness in Rossini's melodies and vocal writing that soon made him the most celebrated, bankable, and popular composer in the world, whether he was working on a serious theme of military heroes and royalty, or on a comic subject about a wily barber. "There is no man who has been more frequently the subject

of conversation, from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, than [Rossini]. His glory already knows no other bounds than those of civilization itself, and yet he is barely 32," wrote the French novelist Stendhal in his account of the composer's blistering rise to the apex of European opera.

### Early Retirement

Yet most remarkably, at the very height of his powers, Rossini went into retirement. There is perhaps no other example in history of an artist being so young, so famous, so completely in command of his craft, and enjoying such favourable critical opinion, yet deciding to walk away. There were several reasons, of course: Rossini was exhausted from writing some 40 operas in 19 years; he was depressed by his mother's recent death; he had physical problems besides; there were signs of change coming, both politically and within the art form that he might not have cared to entertain or adjust his style to suit. Yet even with all these explanations, the totality of Rossini's departure from opera astonishes. He lived for another 40 years or so but never wrote another opera—a fallow period longer than Mozart's lifespan.



*The Barber of Seville* is generously underwritten by the Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation

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# FAREWELL TO SANDY!

By Claire Morley

*After nearly 40 years at the COC, Music Administrator Sandra (Sandy) Gavinchuk bids farewell to us when she retires in June 2015. Throughout her career, her warmth and expertise—both as a COC Chorus soprano and as a key member of the COC administration team—have profoundly touched the lives of her fellow colleagues and countless young opera singers.*

Sandy first came to the COC in 1977 when she joined the COC Chorus after a scholarship brought her to the University of Toronto Opera School. “From there,” she says, “things just morphed. I finished opera school and started doing smaller roles across Canada. But then I questioned if that’s what I really wanted to be doing for the rest of my life, so from there I transitioned into administration.”

Sandy got a contract position at the COC’s Harbourfront Summer Festival and also worked part-time at Opera Hamilton before accepting a full-time offer as Company Manager at the COC. Since then, her roles at the company have included Scheduling Manager and Associate Artistic Administrator. In 2003, Sandy became the company’s Music Administrator, which involves overseeing contracts and budgets for the orchestra, chorus, Ensemble Studio, library, and archives, hiring music staff as well as trainers for the Ensemble Studio, and sitting on the panel when it comes to mainstage auditions here in Toronto.

But her heart really lies with the COC’s training program, the Ensemble Studio, and its young singers. “We build a program



“Any place is only as good as the people that are in it. We have some pretty spectacular people working here.

Not-for-profit is hard because so many people come out of school and are interested in the big bucks. Nobody talks about passion—and the people who work here have that in abundance.”

That passion will certainly not be dimmed by retirement. A few days after she bids the COC farewell, Sandy and her husband will spend a few weeks in Italy, where Sandy plans on taking cooking classes in Siena and Sorrento. In the fall, she will enroll in food and nutrition courses at George Brown College and Ryerson University. “I have my Haute Cuisine certificate from George Brown, and I found that experience

very stimulating. I want to get my hands back in that direction, and I’m very interested in how food and nutrition factors into the aging population.”

As dearly as she’ll be missed by her COC family, we all wish Sandy a hearty *Toi Toi Toi* in her retirement! ■

**“I am incredibly grateful to Sandy for her many years of devoted service to the COC Ensemble Studio, the COC Chorus, the COC Orchestra and indeed the whole company. When I joined the COC in 2008, Sandy’s loyalty and her readiness to share the institutional memory of her long history with the company made it much easier for me to settle in my new role as General Director.”**

*Alexander Neef*

for each of them, because of course each singer is different and you cannot train them the same way,” she explains. “For singers, the body is the instrument. It is shaped by and reflects how they are as people, what their experiences in life are, how emotionally sensitive they are. All of this affects how they learn and grow and we must be very cognizant of their needs in order to help them along the way. It’s very rewarding and I love them dearly.”

Besides seeing the day-to-day development of these young singers, Sandy has also seen the company grow over the decades. “I’ve now worked with four general directors and have seen a lot of growth. I am so pleased that we finally have a spectacular home at the Four Seasons Centre. Our job now is to keep the next generation engaged and entertained, and Alexander and Johannes are the next generation—it’s proof that opera is alive and well.”



From performer to administrator, Sandy’s career at the COC has been marked by a great passion for opera. She’s pictured above at auditions with the COC’s artistic administrator Roberto Mauro, and below (bottom centre) in the COC’s *Candide* (1985).



# SPRING 2015

APRIL 2015		
Wed 1	5:30 p.m.	Canadian Children's Opera Company; Ann Cooper Gay, conductor*
Thu 2	12 p.m.	Artists of The Glenn Gould School*
Tue 7	12 p.m.	Alice Gi-Young Hwang, piano*
Thu 9	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Ensemble Studio*
Tue 14	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Orchestra*
Tue 14	7 p.m.	Opera Talks: Wayne Gooding on <i>The Barber of Seville</i> , North York Central Library
Wed 15	12 p.m.	Peggy Baker Dance Projects*
Thu 16	6 p.m.	Fine Wine Auction
Fri 17	7:30 p.m.	<b><i>The Barber of Seville</i> Opening Performance</b>
Sun 19	2 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Tue 21	12 p.m.	Raagini Dance; Bageshree Vaze, artistic director*
Tue 21	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Thu 23	12 p.m.	Erik Lawrence, piano*
Tue 28	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Ensemble Studio*
Wed 29	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Thu 30	12 p.m.	Stephen Hargreaves, harpsichord*

JUNE 2015		
Tue 2	12 p.m.	Véronique Mathieu, violin; Stephanie Chua, piano*
Wed 3	12 p.m.	Cadence Vocal Quartet*

\*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.

MAY 2015		
Sat 2	4:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Wed 6	7:30 p.m.	<b><i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i> Opening Performance</b>
Thu 7	12 p.m.	Kara Huber, piano*
Thu 7	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Fri 8	7:30 p.m.	<i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i>
Sat 9	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Sun 10	2 p.m.	<i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i>
Tue 12	12 p.m.	Strings of the COC Orchestra*
Tue 12	7:30 p.m.	<i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i>
Wed 13	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Thu 14	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Orchestra*
Thu 14	7:30 p.m.	<i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i>
Fri 15	7:30 p.m.	<b><i>The Barber of Seville</i> Ensemble Studio Performance</b>
Sat 16	4:30 p.m.	<i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i>
Tue 19	12 p.m.	Ekaterina Gubanova, mezzo-soprano; Rachel Andrist, piano*
Tue 19	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Wed 20	12 p.m.	Artists of the COC Ensemble Studio
Thu 21	12 p.m.	Krisztina Szabó, mezzo-soprano; Christopher Mokrzewski, piano*
Thu 21	7:30 p.m.	<i>The Barber of Seville</i>
Fri 22	7:30 p.m.	<b><i>The Barber of Seville</i> Closing Performance</b>
Sat 23	7:30 p.m.	<b><i>Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung</i> Closing Performance</b>
Tue 26	12 p.m.	Alejandro Vela, piano*
Thu 28	12 p.m.	Toronto Summer Music Festival*

# Operatours

The COC is happy to report that all Operatours for the 2014/2015 season are **SOLD OUT**. Many calls have been received from people who were disappointed that they could not join one of these tours. If these tours appeal to you, please e-mail David Stanley-Porter at [operatours@golden.net](mailto:operatours@golden.net) now to request tour information as it becomes available later in the year. You could also mention if there is any special destination you would like to travel to for opera—London, Paris, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, New York and Chicago have always been popular with tour members. We look forward to hearing from you!

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The Canadian Opera Company gratefully acknowledges the generous support through operating grants from these government agencies and departments:



**Photo credits:** **Page 2:** COC General Director Alexander Neef. Photo: bohuang.ca; **Page 3, clockwise from top left:** Marina Rebeka as Violetta in *La Traviata* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, 2013). Photo: Todd Rosenberg; Christian Franz as Siegfried in *Siegfried* (COC, 2005). Photo: Michael Cooper; (l-r) Uli Kirsch as Cherubim, Franz-Josef Selig as Bartolo and Malin Christensson as Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Salzburg Festival, 2011). Photo: Monika Rittershaus; Luca Pisoni as Maometto II in *Maometto II* (Santa Fe Opera, 2012). Photo: Ken Howard; (centre photo) Rinat Shaham as Carmen and Alain Coulombe as Zuniga in *Carmen* (COC, 2010). Photo: Michael Cooper; **Page 4:** (top) Sara Fulgoni as Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle*; (bottom, l-r) Nina Warren as The Woman, Pamela Sue Johnson as the Mistress and Noam Markus as the Lover in *Erwartung* (COC, 2001). Photos: Michael Cooper; **Page 5:** Malgorzata Walewska as Judith and John Relyea as Bluebeard (Seattle Opera, 2009). Photo: Rozarii Lynch; **Page 6:** (top) Peter Fried as Bluebeard and Sara Fulgoni as Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle*; (bottom) Nina Warren as The Woman and Noam Markus as the Lover in *Erwartung* (COC, 2001). Photos: Michael Cooper; **Page 7:** Robert Lepage. Photo: Julie Perreault; Mark Johnson as the Psychiatrist and Nina Warren as The Woman in *Erwartung* (COC, 2001). Photo: Michael Cooper; **Page 8:** Johannes Debus leads the COC Orchestra. Photo: Michael Cooper; **Page 9:** (top) Jane Archibald as Semele and Colin Ainsworth as Jupiter in *Semele*; (right) Jane Archibald as Semele; (bottom) A scene from *Semele* (COC at BAM, 2015). Photos: Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos; (middle) *Semele* cast and creative team at BAM. Photo: Gene Wu; **Page 12:** Photos: COC; **Page 14:** *The Barber of Seville* (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez; **Page 15:** (top) *The Barber of Seville* (Opéra National de Bordeaux, 2012). Photo: Guillaume Bonnaud; (bottom, l-r) Patrick Carfizzi as Dr. Bartolo and Kyle Ketelsen as Don Basilio (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez; **Page 16:** *The Barber of Seville* (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez; **Page 17:** (top) Sandra Gavinchuk. Photo: Veronika Roux; (middle) Sandra Gavinchuk and Roberto Mauro. Photo: Jeff Higgins Photography; (bottom) A scene from *Candide* (COC, 1985). Photo: Robert C. Ragsdale. Back cover: John Relyea. Photo: Shirley Suarez.

# Coda with John Relyea

If I'd never become a singer, I would have been a *Firefighter*

Favourite TV show: *Walking Dead*

Favourite movie: *Shawshank Redemption*

Favourite Toronto spot: *TIFF Bell Lightbox*

Favourite dinner: *Steak!*

Favourite snack: *Salt & Vinegar Kettle Chips*

Shiraz, Scotch, or Stout? *Yes please!*

Besides singing, I also play *guitar*

Gibson or Stratocaster? *Stratocaster*

Eric Clapton or Jimi Hendrix? *Hendrix !!*

When I have a day off, I *Play video games online with my sons*

My carry-on essentials are *Saline spray, water, lozenges, and something to knock me out for the flight!*

On my piano, you'll find *usually a couple opera scores that I am trying to learn at the same time, and a pile of piano music my son is practicing!*

My current favourite song on my iPod is *Slow Motion, by David Gray*

The quality I most admire in a friend is *Honesty.*

Beatles or Stones? *Very difficult to answer - Beatles to relax Stones when I'm feeling gritty.*

After *Bluebeard's Castle*, I *Will make my role debut as King Phillip II in Don Carlo in the Escorial!*

Favourite workout: *Usually just throwing a bunch of heavy weights around.*



# Prelude

*A gift to our friends*

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Canadian Opera Company  
227 Front St. E., Toronto, ON, Canada M5A 1E8  
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