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Roger Honeywell as Narraboth and Helen Field as Salome in the COC production of *Salome*, 2002. Photo: Michael Cooper



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Anna Christy as Lucia in the English National Opera production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, 2008. Photo: Clive Barda

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Salome: Helen Field as Salome in the Canadian Opera Company production of *Salome*, 2002. Photo: Michael Cooper
Dialogues des Carmélites: Patricia Racette as Madame Lidoine (centre) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, 2007. Photo: Robert Kusel

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The COC presents
Dialogues des Carmélites.
 Isabel Bayrakdarian
 as Blanche de la Force
 in the Lyric Opera of Chicago
 (LOC) production, 2007.
 Photo: Robert Kusel



A DANCE TOWARDS THE LIGHT:

ROBERT CARSEN AND MICHAEL LEVINE DISCUSS DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES

BY CLAIRE MORLEY

Director Robert Carlsen and set designer Michael Levine created their production of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* for the Netherlands Opera in 1997. Since then, it has been performed in numerous cities across the world. Carrying "overwhelming emotional force" (*Chicago Tribune*), this is the first time their production of *Carmélites* will be seen in Toronto, an exciting venture for Carlsen and Levine, both Toronto-born.

According to Carlsen, the unique power of *Dialogues des Carmélites* lies in its ability to "speak to humanity in a very particular way. You don't have to be Catholic to be moved by the sacrifice that these 16

Carmelite nuns made. It's very powerful because of both the spiritual and intellectual quality of the work; these are people who have dedicated their whole lives to their beliefs, and achieve some kind of good through them."

Carlsen and Levine, who have worked together for over 25 years on 26 productions, began their creative process by going directly to the score, paying careful attention to both Georges Bernanos' libretto and Poulenc's masterful setting, which Carlsen argues is in a class of its own. "The quality of Poulenc's writing is so beautiful and very seductive. The orchestration is brilliant,

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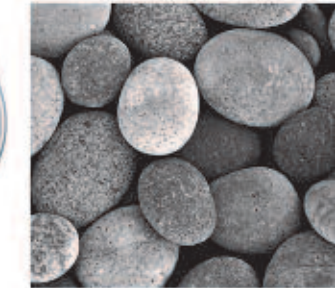
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Robert Carsen



Michael Levine

consisting of strange, electrifying moments, yet the whole work has a genuine and honest sincerity to it. It's a very unusual piece of writing."

The musical climax of the piece is saved for the final scene, in which the nuns sing the famous "Salve Regina" and, one by one, are executed by guillotine until only Blanche is left singing, having finally accepted her faith. Intensely tragic though this ending may be, Carsen felt strongly that Poulenc's score also evoked a sense of something more profound taking place. "The music is remarkable for this ending, and we wanted to try to find a way to deal with what we heard in it, which is both very powerful yet has a sense of something positive happening. You hear this in the music, which is so ravishingly beautiful. So we have treated this not just as a horror story with the guillotine, but in a more stylized way which I call a 'dance towards the light.'"

Levine adds, "When Robert and I work, we always begin with the music and the story, and we try to find a way that will make it come alive for the audience. We take these pieces that were written anywhere from the 17th through to the 20th century and try to present them to an audience today in a way that is both accessible and exciting. That doesn't necessarily mean turning it on its head and setting it in a Laundromat in Chinatown - it doesn't have to be that. For us, it's more about discovering the intention behind the piece."

So much of this intention, Levine argues, is informed by the French Revolution. "We wanted to give the sense and feeling of what it would be like to be an aristocrat with revolution on the doorstep. That is a difficult story to tell and get across to an audience. Quite early, we decided the best way to illustrate that was to have a large group of revolutionaries on stage slowly close in. In order to give some sense of the anxiety within the piece, which is very apparent in the score, the revolutionaries slowly encroach on the aristocrats and nuns. We realized that the way to define these spaces was by using people."

These various senses of space are some of the most powerful aspects of the production. Carsen says, "It's really a space in which the audience has to believe. We use people, not objects, to delineate it, and I decided not to use any scenic elements that would *describe* where you are. I felt very strongly that it was wrong to have any theatricalized religious elements, so there are no crucifixes apart from on the rosary, and no religious scenery - it is all done in a much more abstract way. Religious scenic elements on the stage can very easily go kitsch on you, and I wanted to avoid that."

"I don't think it's possible to do it in a more minimalistic way, and I couldn't think of the work as being anything other than an empty space - like the emptiness of a cell. If you think of a monk or a nun praying



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in a completely undecorated space, you can imagine this 'faith space.'" Levine adds, "As soon as you bring an object into that space, it places great importance on that object. You can define it in other ways - we try to define the emotion of the scene in an empty space defined by the people on stage and the lighting."

Carsen believes that these spaces will be complemented by the aesthetic of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts (FSC). "Apart from Amsterdam, we have never done this production in a really modern opera house," he says, "and the FSC will be an incredible support to this production. Even the production's colour tones are very much in harmony with the hall. And with one of the best casts we've ever had, I think it's going to be very powerful to hear this in that theatre."

Levine adds that he is particularly excited

to bring it to Toronto because of his pride in the production. "It feels good to do something that, after 16 years, is still a very strong piece of work. That is very rare and I'm thrilled to see it finally make its way to Toronto, to one of the best newly designed opera houses in the world, and one that I really love."

Carsen is similarly enthusiastic about bringing it to Toronto audiences. "I think wherever one performs it, it inevitably has an extraordinary impact; Poulenc's personal circumstances while he was writing the work are very much in the DNA of this piece. You feel his personal suffering very poignantly in the opera. I really believe this is Poulenc's masterpiece, and I can't wait for everyone to rediscover it." ■

Claire Morley is the Communications Assistant at the Canadian Opera Company.

FOR FURTHER INSIGHT INTO *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*, PLEASE READ JON KAPLAN'S INTERVIEW WITH ISABEL BAYRAKDARIAN, ADRIANNE PIECZONKA AND JUDITH FORST, AVAILABLE IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF *PRELUDE* ONLINE AT COC.CA/PUBLICATIONS.



A scene from the LOC production, 2007.
Photo: Robert Kusel



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A DANCE TOWARDS THE LIGHT:
Robert Carsen and Michael Levine discuss *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Supernumeraries are, as both Robert Carsen and Michael Levine attest, a crucial part of their production of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, forming the menacing mass of French revolutionaries who are an ever-present threat throughout the opera. Indeed, there are over 100 in this production.

SUPER JIM LUCAS!

Meet Jim Lucas, supernumerary-extraordinaire! Jim has been a “super” with the COC in approximately 60 productions, beginning with *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1990, in which he recalls having to navigate a tricky spiral staircase dressed as a lackey while holding a sword. He remembers his hands trembling with nerves when he shared a scene with the Marschallin, sung by soprano Carol Vaness, but that initial experience got him hooked.

Jim had been a COC subscriber prior to trying his luck as a super, but his love for opera has grown with his experience. “Being part of the COC family, you discover a great understanding about the art form, especially if you’re working with a great director,” he says. “It’s not like you just show up and stand there; you develop your own story and your own character. Opera seems bare and minimal at the beginning, but then you get on stage, in costume, and it all comes together in live performance. Sure, it’s a hobby. But a very rewarding hobby.”



(l - r) Alan Held as Gianni Schicchi and Jim Lucas (as a corpse!) in the COC production of *Gianni Schicchi*, 2012. Photo: Michael Cooper

Congratulations, Jim, on your 23 years with us! The COC is proud to have you as part of the family.

FOR MORE OF JIM’S INTERVIEW, PLEASE GO ONLINE TO OUR BLOG AT COC.CA/PARLANDO.

IN MEMORIAM

The COC would like to note the passing of John Bertram, who, for many years, was one of our most experienced and accomplished supers. As the harassed maitre d’ in *La Bohème*, a role he played many times, the drunken doctor in *Peter Grimes* or a lowly servant in *Fidelio*, he was always a favourite of COC stage managers and directors. Like many of our supers, John had a career outside opera, but loved to be on stage and part of the show. He will be missed by many in the opera world and we acknowledge him for his many hours of hard work, talent and dedication on our stage.

John Bertram in the COC production of *Peter Grimes*, 2003.



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DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES: OPERA BACKGROUND



The premiere of *Dialogues des Carmélites* took place at La Scala, Milan in January 1957, and was performed in Italian. The original French version premiered that same year at the Opéra national de Paris.

Widely considered to be Poulenc's greatest masterpiece, the evolution of *Dialogues des Carmélites* is a unique one, fueled by numerous, very personal recollections, adaptations and interpretations of the actual story of an order of Carmelite nuns. It was first recollected by Mère

Marie, a Carmelite nun from the monastery at Compiègne (in northern France) who survived the French Revolution and recalled the events in her memoirs. It wasn't until the early 1930s that Gertrud von le Fort, a German novelist who had recently converted to Catholicism, read these memoirs and was inspired to write *Die Letzte am Schafott* (*The Song at the Scaffold*). It was von le Fort who created the character of Blanche de la Force, the novel and opera's protagonist, going so far as to bestow her own name on Blanche.

Von le Fort's novel was eventually adapted into a film script by Georges Bernanos, which also served as the opera's libretto. Bernanos, who was dying while adapting the script, gave his own age to the dying Prioress, calling 59 a "good age to die."

Poulenc set about composing the work based on Bernanos' script in 1953, after receiving a commission from La Scala. Tragically, Poulenc's personal life was deeply painful throughout the entire composition process. His lover was dying, and just as Poulenc was finishing the work, passed away. As writer/director Jeremy Sams points out in *The New Penguin Opera Guide*, *Dialogues des Carmélites* "is an opera about terror. Personal terror played against state terror:"

This terror permeates the entire opera, whether it be simmering just beneath the surface in the form of the ever-encroaching revolutionaries; or in the Old Prioress's scene, where her faith is called into question; or perhaps, most powerfully, in the final scene of the opera when fear is subdued by faith.

Top: Francis Poulenc, 1960.
Photo: John Jonas Gruen

Isabel Bayrakdarian as Blanche de la Force in the LOC production, 2007.
Photo: Robert Kusel



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DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES

by Francis Poulenc

Opera in Three Acts. Text from the drama by Georges Bernanos,
adapted with the authorization of Emmet Lavery. From a story by Gertrud von Le Fort
and a scenario by Rev. Bruckberger and Philippe Agostini.

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First performance: Teatro alla Scala, Milan, January 26, 1957

Production originally created by Nederlandse Opera

Last performed by the COC in 1997

May 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 2013

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THE CAST

(in order of vocal appearance)

Marquis de la Force	Jean-François Lapointe
Chevalier de la Force	Frédéric Antoun
Blanche de la Force	Isabel Bayrakdarian ^{^*}
Thierry	Doug MacNaughton [^]
Madame de Croissy (First Prioress)	Judith Forst ^{**}
Sister Constance of St. Denis	Hélène Guilmette
Mother Marie of the Incarnation	Irina Mishura
Monsieur Javelinot	Doug MacNaughton [^]
Madame Lidoine (Second Prioress)	Adrienne Pieczonka ^{***}
Chaplain	Michael Colvin [^]
Sister Mathilde	Rihab Chaieb ^{****}
First Commissioner	Christopher Enns [†]
Second Commissioner	Evan Boyer
Mother Jeanne	Megan Latham
Officer	Cameron McPhail ^{†*****}
Une Voix	Claire de Sévigné [^]
Jailer	Peter Barrett ^{^*****}
Conductor:	Johannes Debus
Director:	Robert Carsen
Associate Director:	Didier Kersten
Set Designer:	Michael Levine
Costume Designer:	Falk Bauer
Choreographer:	Philippe Giraudeau
Original Lighting Designer:	Jean Kalman
Lighting Design Re-created by:	Cor van den Brink
Chorus Master:	Sandra Horst [^]
Stage Manager:	Stephanie Marrs
SURTITLES™ Producer:	Gunta Dreifelds

Performance time is approximately three hours, including one 25-minute intermission.

Dialogues des Carmélites has been generously underwritten in part by Tim and Frances Price.

With additional support from: Cecily and Robert Bradshaw, Nani and Austin Beutel,
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Don McQueen and Trina McQueen O.C., Sue Mortimer, Colleen Sexsmith, Dr. Noëlle Grace and
The Shohet Family, Samara Walbohm and Joe Shlesinger, Rosemary Speirs, Anonymous.

Johannes Debus is generously sponsored by Anne and Tony Arrell.

Robert Carsen is generously sponsored by an anonymous donor.

^{*}Isabel Bayrakdarian's performance is generously sponsored by Robert Sherrin.

^{**}Judith Forst's performance is generously sponsored by Marjorie and Roy Linden.

^{***}Adrienne Pieczonka's performance is generously sponsored by Jack Whiteside.

^{****}Rihab Chaieb's performance is generously sponsored by Katalin Schäfer.

^{*****}Cameron McPhail's performance is generously sponsored by Sue Mortimer.

^{*****}Peter Barrett's performance is generously sponsored by Carol Swallow.

[†] Current member of the COC Ensemble Studio

[^] Graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio

Program information is correct at time of printing. All casting is subject to change.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Thematically speaking, *Dialogues des Carmélites* is an atypical opera: there's nothing less theatrical, in fact, than the existential question at the heart of Bernanos' and Poulenc's text. While the typical operatic model deals with love and death, *eros* and *thanatos*, these themes are examined here in a much more abstract manner than is usual in an opera.

Dialogue is at the centre of the dramaturgical material: all the characters talk to each other, but often without really communicating; and this merits deeper examination. The dramatic thrust of the scenes comes from the dynamic of the meeting of the characters. At times they pass by each other without noticing, at other times they clash and collide, and most rarely they manage to connect entirely.

The events exposed in the opera are based on historic events from the French Revolution. However, the leading character, Blanche de la Force, is actually an invention of Gertrud von Le Fort, who in 1931 wrote the novel *The Last to the Scaffold* on which the opera is based. Blanche is a shy and insecure girl, blocked by her fear of the world and of its violence. Her eventual acceptance of suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom, and her understanding of the significance of human detachment from worldliness, make her character ethical and

the formation of her religious soul more authentic. Everyone, beyond any distinctions of culture and religion, can relate to the opera's unusual ideological message.

From the beginning of the project (in Amsterdam in 1997), Michael Levine and I tried to respect the spirit of the original Bernanos film-script in conceiving an abstract space in which scene changes would not interrupt the dramatic flow. At the same time I wanted to avoid the use of stereotypical scenic elements. If, for example, you bring a big wooden cross onto the stage, you introduce hypertheatricality and take the freedom away from the viewer. The audience should be able to participate with absolute freedom, to fill the scenic spaces with their own internal images. If we fill the stage with descriptive visual material, we inhibit, or even block the emotional engagement of the audience. In this particular opera I think this would be wrong, not only from an aesthetic and poetic point of view, but above all because hyperrealism would be in conflict with Poulenc's theatre, which explores abstraction, elevation, and the raising of the personal to the level of the universal.

Robert Carsen

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SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Paris. The home of the Marquis de la Force
The Chevalier de la Force fears for the safety of his sister, Blanche, whose carriage has been seen surrounded by an angry mob. Blanche arrives home safely, but informs her worried father, the Marquis, that she has decided to become a Carmelite nun. The outside world is a frightening place in which she can no longer live.

The Carmelite convent

Sister Blanche is interviewed by the old Prioress, who tells her that as a member of the Carmelite order, God will test her weakness, not her strength.

Accepted into the order, Sister Blanche meets another young novice, Sister Constance, who has a premonition that they will die together some day.

The old Prioress is dying. She tells Mother Marie that she worries about Blanche, the newest of their order. Sister Blanche is brought to the Prioress for instruction, but the suffering Prioress instead describes her delirious vision of the desecration of their chapel. Declaring that God has forsaken their order, the Prioress dies in agony in front of Blanche.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

The Carmelite convent

While kneeling in vigil over the body of the old Prioress, Sister Blanche becomes frightened and runs away. She is scolded and then forgiven by Mother Marie.

Sister Constance remarks to Sister Blanche that the death of the Prioress was surprisingly painful and difficult for one so strong and pious. Perhaps her struggle might now make it possible for a person less secure in faith to experience an easier death.

Madame Lidoine is chosen as the new Prioress, and she advises the nuns that their future is uncertain.

Blanche's brother attempts to persuade her to return to the safety of the family home but Blanche refuses.

At mass, the Father Confessor says that he must go into hiding. Two officials of the Revolutionary Government arrive with a decree that the convent will be disbanded.

ACT III

The Carmelite convent

Mother Marie suggests that all the nuns should take the vow of martyrdom rather than dissolve their order. A secret vote is taken, but there is one dissenting ballot. Sister Constance quickly claims that the opposing vote was hers, but asks to change her decision so that the proposal can be unanimously accepted. Overcome by fear, Blanche flees.

The nuns are told they may live as free citizens, as long as they agree to abandon the rituals of their religion and do not attempt to practice them either in public or in private.

Paris. The home of the Marquis de la Force
Mother Marie has found Blanche, who is now living disguised as a servant in the ruins of her family home. Her father has been executed by revolutionaries who have taken over the house. Mother Marie urges Blanche to return to her sisters, but she refuses.

In prison

Arrested and in prison, the nuns are comforted by the Prioress. A guard reads the decree that sentences them all to death.

In the street

Mother Marie tells the Father Confessor of her guilt at not sharing with her sisters the act of martyrdom which she initiated.

At the scaffold

The nuns are brought to the place where they are to be guillotined. Blanche appears. Calm and serene, she joins her friend Constance and the other sisters to share in their martyrdom.

MUSIC STAFF

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Anne Larlee

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Monsieur Javelinot Rayanne Dupuis

Michael Barrett

Madame Lidoine (Second Prioress) Michael Barrett
Chaplain Adam Luther

Neil Craighead

First Commissioner Michael Barrett
Adam Luther

Sonya Gosse

Second Commissioner Neil Craighead
Mother Jeanne Sonya Gosse

Officer Neil Craighead

Jailer Cameron McPhail

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



FRÉDÉRIC ANTOUN

Chevalier de la Force

French-Canadian tenor Frédéric Antoun last appeared at the COC as Tamino in *The Magic Flute*. Recent appearances

include Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Montreal); Chevalier de la Force (Nice); Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Toulouse, Valencia, London and Nantes); Tamino (Avignon); Achille in *Iphigénie en Aulide* (Amsterdam); Le Prince Charmant in *Cendrillon* (Brussels); Laërte in *Hamlet* (Vienna); Caliban in *The Tempest* (Quebec); Gérald in *Lakmé* (Montpellier); and, Lindoro in *L'italiana in Algeri* (Marseille). Upcoming engagements include Renaud in *Armide* (Amsterdam); Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* and Gérald (Opéra Comique); Tonio in *La fille du régiment* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden); Elvino in *La sonnambula* (Montpellier); Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* (Marseille); and, Nadir in *Les pêcheurs de perles* (Nantes).



PETER BARRETT

Jailer

Canadian baritone and Ensemble Studio graduate Peter Barrett last appeared with the COC as Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus*. Other

COC roles include Harlequin in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*, Lieutenant Colonel Denisov and General Rayevsky in *War and Peace*, Šapkin in *From the House of the Dead*, Le Dancaire in *Carmen*, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Nick in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Sid in *Albert Herring* and Baritone 1 in *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*. Opera credits include Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* (Met), the King in *Transformations* (Wexford Festival), Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

(Opera Lyra Ottawa), the Shepherd in *Daphne* (Pacific Opera Victoria) and Marcello (Minnesota Opera).



ISABEL BAYRAKDARIAN

Blanche de la Force

Juno Award-winning Canadian soprano and Ensemble Studio graduate Isabel Bayrakdarian last appeared with the COC

as Euridice in *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Previous COC credits include Pamina (*The Magic Flute*), Ilia (*Idomeneo*), Mélisande (*Pelléas et Mélisande*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) and Rosina (*The Barber of Seville*). Other appearances include Ilia (Opéra national de Paris); the title role in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Maggio Musicale Florence and Saito Kinen Festival, Japan); Leila in *Les pêcheurs des perles* (Minnesota Opera); the title role in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona); the title role in *Marie Galante* (Opéra Français de New York); Teresa in *Benvenuto Cellini*, Catherine in *A View from the Bridge* and Pamina (Met); and, Blanche (Lyric Opera of Chicago).



EVAN BOYER

Second Commissioner

American bass Evan Boyer completes his tenure at the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center this season. He

has appeared this season at Lyric Opera as Pietro in *Simon Boccanegra*, Hans Schwarz in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Count Ceprano in *Rigoletto* and, previously, as Luther in *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Mitukha in *Boris Godunov*, Lakaï in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, and the King in *Aida*. He made his U.K. debut as Sarastro (Garsington Opera) and has

performed Créon in *Médée* and Oreste in *Giasone* (Chicago Opera Theater). Mr. Boyer also appears as the First Soldier in *Salome* with the COC.



RIHAB CHAIEB

Sister Mathilde

Tunisian-born mezzo-soprano Rihab Chaieb, a COC Ensemble Studio member, recently appeared as Sesto in

La clemenza di Tito (Ensemble). COC credits include Inez in *Il Trovatore*, La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*, Ino/Juno in *Semele* (Ensemble), Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*, Second Secretary to Mao in *Nixon in China*, the Third Lady in *The Magic Flute* (Ensemble) and the French Mother in *Death in Venice*. She recently performed in Kaija Saariaho's *From the Grammar of Dreams* (Washington, D.C.) and attended the Steans Institute at the Ravinia Festival. Upcoming engagements include Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* (San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program). Ms Chaieb is a Canada Council for the Arts grant recipient.



MICHAEL COLVIN

Chaplain

An Ensemble Studio graduate, tenor Michael Colvin's COC appearances include Idomeneo/Arbace (*Idomeneo*), Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Grimoaldo (*Rodelinda*), Count Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Lindoro (*L'italiana in Algeri*) and Argirio (*Tancredi*).

Other roles include Bob Boles in *Peter Grimes* (BBC Proms, Opera de Oviedo and English National Opera/ENO); Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw* (ENO); Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Minnesota Opera); and, Don Ottavio (Chicago Opera Theater). Upcoming

engagements include Mayor Upfold in *Albert Herring* (Vancouver Opera) and, Bob Boles in *Peter Grimes* with both the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Jurowski and L'Accademia di Santa Cecilia under Pappano. This spring with the COC Mr. Colvin also appears as the Second Jew in *Salome*.



CLAIRE De SÉVIGNÉ

Une Voix

Soprano Claire de Sévigné, a native of Montreal, is a member of the COC Ensemble Studio. She recently

appeared with the COC as Servilia in *La clemenza di Tito* (Ensemble) and as Ida in *Die Fledermaus*. Ms de Sévigné received her master's degree in opera from the University of Toronto. Recent appearances include the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Flaminia in *Il mondo della luna*, Cunegonde in *Candide* (UofT) and Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* (Thirteen Strings Orchestra). This summer she will perform the Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* (Music Academy of the West). This spring with the COC Ms de Sévigné also appears as a Slave in *Salome*.



CHRISTOPHER ENNS

First Commissioner

Canadian tenor and COC Ensemble Studio member Christopher Enns last appeared with the company as Tito

in *La clemenza di Tito* (Ensemble). Other COC roles include Nathanaël in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Scaramuccio in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, an American/Glass Maker/Strolling Player in *Death in Venice*, and Tamino in *The Magic Flute* (Ensemble). He holds a bachelor of vocal performance (University of Manitoba), and a diploma in operatic

performance (UofT). Other credits include the title role in *Candide*, Ecclitico in *Il mondo della luna* and Gonzalve in *L'heure espagnole* (UofT's Opera Division); Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* (Highlands Opera Studio); and, Gastone in *La Traviata* (Saskatoon Opera).



JUDITH FORST

Madame de Croissy (First Prioress)

Canadian mezzo-soprano Judith Forst's many roles with the COC include Pamphilea/Antiope in

The Golden Ass, Jocasta in *Oedipus Rex*, Kostelnička in *Jenůfa*, Marie in *Wozzeck*, Giovanna in *Anna Bolena*, Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and the title roles in *Carmen* and *La Cenerentola*. Her numerous credits includes Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* and the Countess in *Pique Dame* (Houston Grand Opera/HGO); world premieres of *Lillian Alling* (Vancouver Opera) and *The Inventor* (Calgary Opera/CO) and Sousa's *Liaisons dangereuses* (San Francisco Opera, Washington Opera); Canadian premiere of *Dead Man Walking* (CO); Kostelnička (Met, Prague National Opera); Herodias in *Salome* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Dallas Opera, Vancouver Opera, Opéra de Montreal, Manitoba Opera); and, *The Rape of Lucretia* (HGO). Miss Forst is an Officer of the Order of Canada.



HÉLÈNE GUILMETTE

Sister Constance of St. Denis

Canadian soprano Hélène Guilmette is making her COC debut. Her credits include Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* and Sophie in *Werther* (Brussels); Mélisande in *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* and Amour in *Orphée et Eurydice* (Paris Opera); Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Lille, Paris, Montpellier and Montreal); Constance in

Dialogues des Carmélites (Munich and Nice); Thérèse in *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (Lyon); and, Eurydice in *Orphée et Eurydice* (Nantes). Upcoming projects include Héro in *Béatrice et Bénédict* (Glyndebourne); Laoula in *L'étoile* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden and Amsterdam); Blanche in *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Ilia in *Idomeneo* (Lyon); Sophie (Paris Opera); Clarice in *Il mondo della luna* (Monte-Carlo); and, Thérèse (BBC Symphony).



JEAN-FRANÇOIS LAPOINTE

Marquis de la Force

Québec native and baritone Jean-François Lapointe last appeared at the COC as Pelléas in

Pelléas et Mélisande. Performing in major opera houses throughout the world, his roles include Pelléas, Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Danilo in *Die lustige Witwe*, Albert in *Werther*, Valentin in *Faust*, Conte Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Escamillo in *Carmen* and Raimbaud in *Le comte Ory*, among others. Future engagements include Massenet's *Cléopâtre*, *Moïse et Pharaon* and *Falstaff* in Marseille; *La Favorite* in Monte Carlo; *Alceste*, *Werther* and *Faust* with Paris Opera; Golaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande* with Nantes Opera; and, the title role in *Guillaume Tell* in Geneva.



MEGAN LATHAM

Mother Jeanne

Canadian mezzo-soprano Megan Latham recently appeared with the COC as Giovanna in *Rigoletto* and, previously, as the

Third Secretary to Mao in *Nixon in China*, Marcellina in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Florence Pike in the Ensemble Studio production of *Albert Herring*. She performed Eduige in *Rodelinda* with Pacific Opera Victoria, Marcellina for Vancouver Opera and was

featured in *The Sound of Music* at the Princess of Wales Theatre. Concert appearances include the Regina Symphony, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Abbotsford Symphony and the Aldeburgh Connection. She was the 2003 winner of the Marilyn Horne Foundation Song Competition which resulted in her recital debut at Carnegie Hall.



DOUG MacNAUGHTON
Thierry/Monsieur Javelinot

Originally from Brandon, Manitoba, Ensemble Studio graduate and baritone Doug

MacNaughton's COC credits include Maestro Spinelloccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), the Lackey (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Elviro (*Xerxes*) and the Philosopher (*The Golden Ass*), among others. He recently performed the roles of Luther, Crespel and Schlemil in *Les contes d'Hoffmann* with Edmonton Opera. Other performances include multiple roles in John Beckwith's *Crazy to Kill* (Toronto Masque Theatre); and, Ben Hubbard in *Regina* and Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* (Pacific Opera Victoria), as well as oratorio, concert and musical theatre engagements. An accomplished guitarist, he commissions Canadian composers to write songs for baritone and guitar, which he sings and plays in his *21st Century Troubadour* concerts.



CAMERON McPHAIL
Officer

Brandon, Manitoba native and baritone Cameron McPhail is a COC Ensemble Studio member making his

mainstage debut. Recent credits include Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress* (Music Academy of the West); Ford in *Falstaff* and the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *Gianni Schicchi* (UBC Opera);

Tarquinius in *The Rape of Lucretia*, Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Riccardo in *I Puritani* and George in *Of Mice and Men* (Yale Opera Studio); Mercutio in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and Ford (Opera NUOVA); Conte Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Opera on the Avalon); and, Schaunard in *La Bohème* (Highlands Opera Studio).



IRINA MISHURA
Mother Marie of the Incarnation

Russian-born mezzo-soprano Irina Mishura has appeared at the COC as Ježibaba in *Rusalka*

and Azucena in *Il Trovatore* in 1999 (Dora Mavor Moore Award) and 2005. Recent performances include Herodias in *Salome* (San Francisco Opera, Teatro Real Madrid, Maggio Musicale in Florence and Royal Opera House Covent Garden/ROH); *Il Trittico* (ROH); and, Azucena (Barcelona, New Orleans and Teatro Regio). Other credits include Klytämnestra in *Elektra* (Washington Opera); *Andrea Chénier* (Gran Teatre del Liceu); *Aida* (Opera Bilbao and Deutsche Oper Berlin); *Il Trovatore* (Madrid); and, *Samson et Dalila*, *Aida*, *Andrea Chénier*, *Boris Godunov*, *Carmen*, *La Gioconda*, *Luisa Miller*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Carlo*, and *Il Trovatore* at the Met. Upcoming engagements include Amneris in *Aida*.



ADRIANNE PIECZONKA
Madame Lidoine (Second Prioress)

Canadian soprano Adrienne Pieczonka returns after starring in last season's *Tosca*.

Other COC roles include Prima Donna/Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Leonore in *Fidelio*, Elisabeth in *Don Carlos*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* (Dora Award) and

Mimi in *La Bohème*. She appears regularly at the Met, Vienna Staatsoper, La Scala and with the Paris, Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt and Los Angeles operas, as well as at the Salzburg, Bayreuth, and Munich festivals. Future engagements take her to Aix-en-Provence, Royal Opera House Covent Garden and a return to the COC as Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera*. Award-winning recordings include *Adrienne Pieczonka sings Puccini* (Juno Award) and *Lohengrin* (Hänssler Classic - *BBC Music Magazine* Disc of the Year/2010 Opera Award). Ms Pieczonka is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal and was named *Kammersängerin* by the Austrian government.



JOHANNES DEBUS
Conductor

COC Music Director Johannes Debus recently conducted the company's *Tristan und Isolde*. Other COC credits include *Die*

Fledermaus, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, *Love from Afar*, *Rigoletto* and, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, *The Nightingale* and *Other Short Fables*. This past January Mr. Debus made his Toronto Symphony Orchestra debut with an all-Mozart program. Last year he made his Cleveland Orchestra debut with *A Night at the Opera* at the Blossom Festival. In 2010 he made his Tanglewood Festival debut conducting *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and subsequently appeared with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Debus recently conducted *Elektra* and *The Rake's Progress* at Staatsoper unter den Linden in Berlin, and appeared at the Spoleto Festival, Bayerische Staatsoper, Opéra Festival de Québec and the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera. This spring at the COC he also conducts *Salome*.



ROBERT CARSEN
Director

Canadian theatre/opera director Robert Carsen last appeared with the COC for *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Other COC

credits include *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Mario and the Magician*. He recently directed new productions of *Die Zauberflöte* in Baden-Baden, *L'amour des trois oranges* in Berlin, *Falstaff* for Royal Opera House Covent Garden and *Don Giovanni* for La Scala. Other credits include *The Turn of the Screw* for Theater an der Wien (direction and design); *Rinaldo* for Glyndebourne Festival; *Eugene Onegin* and *Mefistofele* at the Met; *Der Rosenkavalier* at Salzburg Festival; *La Traviata* for the reopening of La Fenice; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Aix-en-Provence Festival; *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Munich; *Tannhäuser*, *Capriccio*, *Les Boréades*, *Rusalka*, *Alcina* and *Les contes d'Hoffmann* for the Paris Opera; and, the *Ring Cycle* in Cologne, Venice and Shanghai.



MICHAEL LEVINE
Set Designer

Canadian Michael Levine's previous work at the COC includes designing *Rigoletto*, the

Ring Cycle, *Oedipus Rex* with *Symphony of Psalms* and *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung*, as well as directing *Das Rheingold*. Credits include *The Magic Flute* (Festspielhaus Baden-Baden), *Parsifal* (Opéra national de Lyon, Met); *Don Giovanni* (La Scala); *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden); *The Magic Flute*, *A Dog's Heart* and *Carmen* (Nederlandse Opera); *The Magic Flute* (Hungarian National Opera); *Rigoletto* (Teatro Real Madrid); *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Glyndebourne); *Madama Butterfly* (Met); *Candide* (Théâtre

du Châtelet, La Scala, English National Opera); and, Shaw Festival, Canadian Stage and The National Ballet of Canada.

Mr. Levine has won a Gemini and two Dora Awards, Paris Critics' Prize, Edinburgh Festival Drama and Music Award and is a Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in France.



FALK BAUER

Costume Designer

German costume designer Falk Bauer is making his COC debut. Working internationally in both theatre and opera, his credits include the *Ring Cycle* with Paris Opera; *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Bayerische Staatsoper, Deutsche Oper Berlin and Opéra national de Lyon; *Tosca* with Nederlandse Opera; *Tristan und Isolde* and *Nabucco* with Wiener Staatsoper; *Der Rosenkavalier* with Cologne Opera; *Die Liebe der Danae* and *Mitridate* at the Salzburg Festival; and, *Penthesilea* and *Die Fledermaus* with Dresden's Semperoper.



PHILIPPE GIRAudeau

Choreographer

French choreographer Philippe Giraudeau last worked with the COC on *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Mr. Giraudeau has choreographed for Robert Carsen, Tim Albery, Richard Jones, Anthony MacDonald, Stephen Langridge, John Fuljames and Daniel Kramer on productions including *Semele*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Kát'a Kabanová*, *Alcina*, *Rusalka*, *La Traviata*, *La Damnation de Faust*, *Les Troyens*, *Salome*, *La Bohème*, *Aida*, *Wonderful Town*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Rinaldo*, *L'amour des trois oranges* and *Don Giovanni* for companies including English National Opera, Met, Nederlandse Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Glyndebourne

Festival, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opéra Bastille, La Scala, and Teatro La Fenice.



JEAN KALMAN

Original Lighting Designer

French lighting designer Jean Kalman works worldwide as a lighting designer for theatre and opera. Recent credits include *The Magic Flute* (English National Opera and Nederlandse Opera/DNO), *The Low Road* (Royal Court Theatre), *Médée* (Théâtre des Champs Élysées), *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (La Scala) and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (Met). He works regularly at the Royal Court Theatre (London), DNO and the Met, as well as opera houses and theatres throughout Europe, Japan and North America. In 1991 he received the Lawrence Olivier Award for Best Lighting for *Richard III* and *White Chameleon* (National Theatre, London) and, in 2004, the Evening Standard Award for Best Lighting for *Festen* (Almeida Theatre/West End).



COR Van Den BRINK

Lighting Design Re-creator

Dutch lighting designer Cor van den Brink, who is making his COC debut, works in opera, dance, and theatre. At Nederlandse Opera (DNO), he is responsible for implementing the lighting plans for directors including Robert Wilson, Peter Stein and Pierre Audi. He designed the lighting for *Aida* for the Amsterdam Music Theatre's anniversary weekend, as well as the Dutch National Ballet's program *New Moves*. For the Music Theatre's educational exhibition space, he developed a system that shows the effect of colour on costumes. Abroad, he has lit various DNO productions, including *Tamerlano* (Bayerische Staatsoper) and

La Bohème (Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, Valencia). Recent credits include the revival of DNO's *Ring Cycle* with Pierre Audi.



SANDRA HORST

Chorus Master

Sandra Horst's recent COC credits include *La clemenza di Tito*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Il Trovatore* and *Die Fledermaus*. She also conducted Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims* for the COC. Director of musical studies at the University of Toronto's Opera Division, she recently conducted Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. Ms Horst has served as chorus master for Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Edmonton Opera; a judge for the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions; and, music staff of the Juilliard Opera Center, Chautauqua Institution, Boston Lyric Opera, and Banff Centre for the Arts. She was one of the 100 Alumni of Achievement honoured by Wilfrid Laurier University. This spring Ms Horst is also chorus master for *Lucia di Lammermoor*.



JORDAN De SOUZA

Assistant Conductor

Canadian Jordan de Souza, an active conductor and keyboardist in all disciplines of classical music, is making his COC debut. Based in Montreal, he is the artistic director and principal conductor of the Ottawa Choral Society, conductor and course lecturer at McGill University, and conductor at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul. Recent conducting highlights include Bach's *St. John Passion*, *St. Matthew Passion*, *Christmas Oratorio*, and *Mass in B Minor*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4*, Berg's *Violin Concerto*, and Orff's *Carmina Burana*. At the age of 19, Mr. de Souza earned the Fellowship degree from the Royal Canadian College of Organists. He is broadcast

regularly on the CBC and throughout the European Broadcasting Union.



DIDIER KERSTEN

Associate Director

French director Didier Kersten is making his COC debut. After almost 20 years as a performer, he made his opera directing debut in 2000 with *Der fliegende Holländer* at Opéra de Massy, followed by the French premiere of Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* with Opéra de Montpellier. He has assisted Robert Carsen reviving *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *Kát'a Kabanová*, *Tosca* and *Mitridate*. In addition he has also assisted Laurent Pelly, Pierre Audi, Jean-Claude Auvray and Rolando Villazón, among others, for productions at La Scala, Wiener Staatsoper, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Paris's Opéra Bastille, Nederlandse Opera, La Monnaie (Brussels), Opéra national de Lyon, Lyric Opera of Chicago and other major international opera houses.



JOEL IVANY

Assistant Director

Stage director Joel Ivany was previously with the COC as assistant director for *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *La Bohème*. He last worked with Robert Carsen at Deutsche Oper Berlin on *L'amour des trois oranges*. Mr. Ivany recently directed a new production of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* with Edmonton Opera; revived Minnesota Opera's *Nabucco*; and, as founder and artistic director of Against the Grain Theatre in Toronto, directed *The Turn of the Screw*. He was a finalist and winner in the European Opera-Directing Prize for his concept of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* and also won a critics choice award for his new libretto to Puccini's *La Bohème* with Opera Columbus.



STEPHANIE MARRS
Stage Manager

Stephanie Marrs, with the COC since 1991, recently stage managed *Il Trovatore*. Other COC credits include: *The Tales*

of *Hoffmann*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Death in Venice*, *The Magic Flute*, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Idomeneo*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Rusalka*, *Don Giovanni*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Elektra*, *Siegfried* (complete *Ring Cycle*), *Norma*, *Rodelinda*, *Tancredi*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Rigoletto*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. She has stage managed for Nightwood Theatre, Crow's Theatre, Opera York, Opera Atelier and Canadian Children's Opera Company. Ms Marrs has assistant stage managed for the COC on numerous shows and has been involved with Opéra national de Lyon, Edmonton

Opera, Canadian Stage, Luminato Festival, Just for Laughs Toronto Festival and the C.O.S.I. program in Sulmona, Italy.

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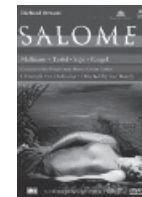
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DVD *Salome* Director Luc Bondy's Covent Garden production stars Catherine Malfitano in a sexy and frightening performance. Her voice encompasses the extremes of lyricism and power demanded by this touchstone of the dramatic soprano repertoire. Bryn Terfel is simply one of the best John the Baptists on disc - his singing and acting of the half-mad prophet are scarily accurate! **\$25.75 including tax**

Carsen's *Dialogues des Carmélites* on DVD



DVD *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Arthaus. The COC's current Robert Carsen production is seen in its 2004 staging at Milan's Teatro alla Scala with Riccardo Muti conducting. Dagmar Schellenberger sings a moving Blanche, while two singers who have figured prominently in past COC seasons, Gwynne Geyer and Barbara Dever, sing the key roles of Madame Lidoine and Mother Marie respectively. **\$44.50 including tax**

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BASS CLARINET

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Elizabeth Gowen

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HORN

Joan Watson, *Principal*
Janet Anderson
Bardhyl Gjevori
Gary Pattison

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Robert Grim, *Principal*
Valerie Cowie*
Robert Weymouth

TROMBONE

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A scene from the COC's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*, 2009. Photo: Michael Cooper

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Ambur Braid as Vitellia and Rihab Chaieb (kneeling) as Sesto in the COC Ensemble Studio performance of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2013. Photo: Michael Cooper

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A scene from the COC's *Gianni Schicchi*, 2012. Photo: Michael Cooper

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Michael Cooper: *Official photographer*

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The COC presents *Lucia di Lammermoor*.
Anna Christy as Lucia (centre) in a scene from the
English National Opera (ENO) production, 2008.
Photo: Clive Barda



BEL CANTO AT ITS BEST

DAVID ALDEN DISCUSSES LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

BY SUZANNE VANSTONE

Gothic romance. Scottish wildness. Early-Victorian repression. Director David Alden showcases his riveting production of Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the COC this spring. Based on Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the opera follows a young girl's descent into madness. Lucia is embroiled in a conflict between her brother, Enrico and her lover, Edgardo. Barely a woman, she is treated as a mere possession, and those who should have her best interests at heart are the same culprits who gradually chip away at her fragility.

Internationally renowned director David Alden is excited about mounting this production in Toronto and directing in our opera house for the first time. "*Lucia* is amazing - it's one of the very strongest pieces in the *bel canto* repertoire. This production is set in the early-Victorian period, where society was very strong, rigid, hierarchical and patriarchal. Obviously underneath those rigid codes and societal structures there was passion and love and madness which burst through these very strong repressions. That's what this opera is all about.



David Alden Photo: Dario Acosta

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Anna Christy as Lucia in the ENO production, 2008.
Photo: Clive Barda



“Implicit in this work is the terrible buildup of tension on Lucia – the slow hammering away of a girl who is really just a child. She is totally isolated with her brother, and there is almost an Edgar Allan Poe sense of an incestuous brother-sister relationship which is close and passionate, but turns violent and explodes into madness.”

Alden says that madness was often the climax of operas from that period, but to not mistake madness and florid cadenzas as superficial. He says that the stereotypical view of Donizetti operas, especially *Lucia*, as purely *bel canto* vehicles for the “canary” of the day is somewhat outdated. Certainly the music exploits the beauty and flexibility of what the human voice can accomplish, but he maintains that *Lucia* is a very well written piece of drama and there is nothing frivolous or amusing about the madness. “Donizetti was a storyteller and Donizetti was a theatre person – the dramaturgy is very tight.

“I have always taken the musical aspect of this opera very seriously. There are no cuts in the production. *Lucia* has been abused over the decades, the structure of it not taken seriously. Obviously there is a certain freedom in the *bel canto* music which is part of the tradition, but we are getting back to the basics.” He says the overall structure of this piece is brilliant. The tension keeps mounting, first with Enrico, who then turns it upon his sister and the manipulation becomes more desperate and extreme. Alden says, “The final eruption into the mad scene is justly famous because it’s incredibly well timed. It’s very shocking but it’s also deeply satisfying. The audience is released into this other dimension, the way Lucia is released into another corner of her mind.” ■

Suzanne Vanstone is Senior Communications
Manager, Editorial at the Canadian Opera Company.

FOR FURTHER INSIGHT INTO *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR*, PLEASE READ GIANMARCO SEGATO'S INTERVIEW WITH SOPRANO ANNA CHRISTY, AVAILABLE IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF *PRELUDE* ONLINE AT COC.CA/PUBLICATIONS.

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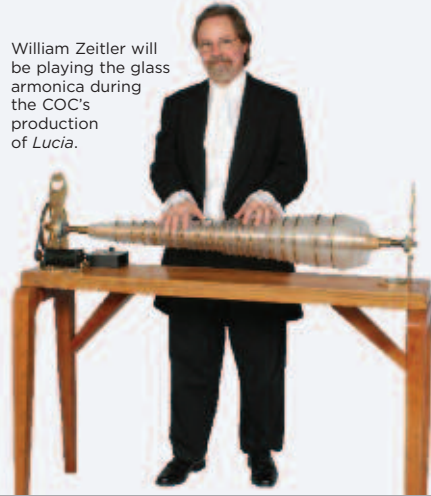
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THE GLASS ARMONICA

Donizetti originally composed the mad scene aria for glass armonica accompaniment, which provides a delicate, other-worldly sound, mimicking Lucia's tenuous grasp on reality. However, after a dispute with the glass armonica player before the premiere, Donizetti rewrote the part for flute. A flute is still traditionally used, but patrons are in for a rare treat as the COC will employ the glass armonica as originally written. Director David Alden says, "It was often thought to be impractical, a romantic idea on paper - not the case. It's an extraordinary instrument and creates an amazing soundscape in the mad scene which is very unusual and deeply disturbing."



William Zeitler will be playing the glass armonica during the COC's production of *Lucia*.



Barry Banks as Edgardo and Anna Christy as Lucia in the ENO production, 2008. Photo: Clive Barda

AN UNEXPECTED INSPIRATION

While looking for inspiration for this production, set designer Charles Edwards happened to visit a rather famous large manor house in England known as Normansfield. It had been owned by John Langdon Down, a doctor in the 19th century who studied and classified a condition that later became known as Down's Syndrome. Down lived in this manor but also turned it into an asylum for people living with the syndrome. Interestingly, this Victorian manor also housed a theatre which is still functional to this day. It was this combination of a theatre and an asylum that appealed to Alden and they based the *Lucia* set on it. "We have imagined it more in a state of neglect and decay," says Alden, "a Victorian relic of an old house."

FOR FURTHER INSIGHTS INTO THE GLASS ARMONICA, WILLIAM ZEITLER AND THE SET FOR *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR*, PLEASE VISIT OUR BLOG AT COC.CA/PARLANDO.

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LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR: OPERA BACKGROUND



Unlike a lot of artists, Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti (1797 - 1848) achieved enormous success in his lifetime. He had already composed over 30 operas between 1816 and 1830, but it was with *Anna Bolena* (1830) that he gained international fame. *L'elisir d'amore* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* followed quickly and they both remain two of the most-performed operas in the repertoire.

Sir Walter Scott's popular novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* was the basis for *Lucia* and fed Europe's fascination for Scotland at that time. In fact, three librettos already existed before Donizetti composed his own take on the tragedy.

Lucia di Lammermoor premiered on September 26, 1835, in Naples. It was an immediate success with critics and audiences alike. Rossini and Bellini had passed the torch and Donizetti was now the king of Italian opera. He wrote of his success with *Lucia*: "...at the risk of sounding immodest... *Lucia*... judging by the applause and compliments I received, pleased the audience very much. Every number was listened to in religious silence and then hailed with spontaneous cheers."

Even before Donizetti's composition, madness had become a popular artistic subject. It is a curious and sad fact that, at the time, certain behaviours exhibited by young women were often attributed to madness. Anything from wilfulness and melancholia, to independence and sexuality might be identified as examples of the weaker natures and minds of women in the 19th century. Consequently, lunatic asylums during this time were mainly populated by women.



Lucia di Lammermoor possesses one of the most famous mad scenes in all of opera portraying Lucia's unravelling in a most poignant and terrifying way. Famed interpreters of the challenging title role include Maria Callas and Joan Sutherland. This spring the COC is thrilled to welcome American soprano Anna Christy (seen above). This production, from English National Opera, was created specifically for her and she has sung the role to great acclaim.

Top: Etching by anonymous artist of Gaetano Donizetti, circa 1835

Above: Anna Christy as Lucia in the ENO production, 2008.
Photo: Clive Barda

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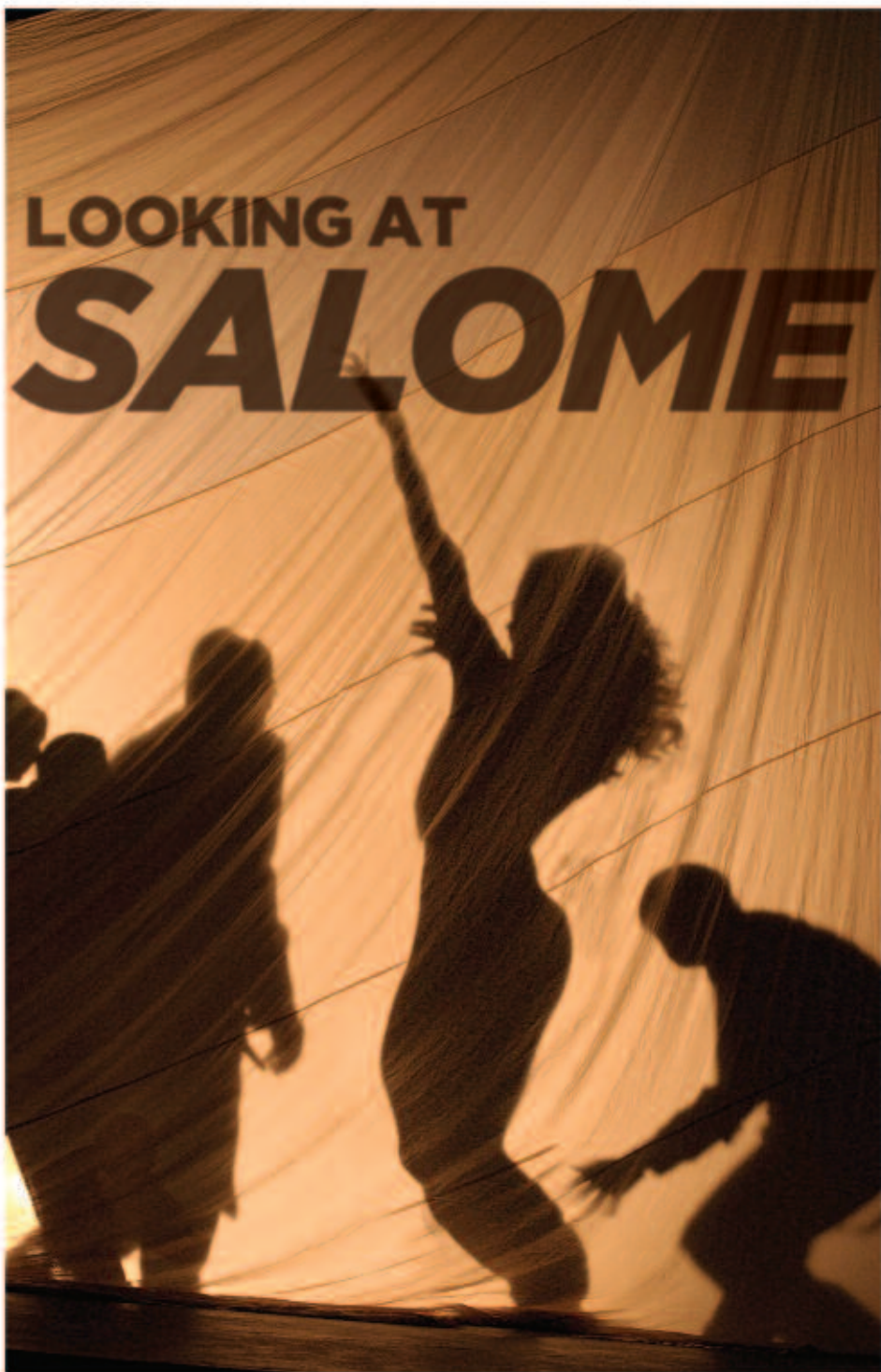
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LOOKING AT SALOME



Opposite: Dancer Carolyn Woods.
Below: A scene from the
COC's *Salome*, 2002.
Photos: Michael Cooper

BY NIKITA GOURSKI

In 1994, Canadian film director Atom Egoyan won international recognition for his film *Exotica*, a provocative meditation on erotic obsession and psychological trauma explored through the relationship of a nightclub dancer and her male client.

Shortly after *Exotica*'s release, the Canadian Opera Company approached Egoyan with an offer to direct an opera, a story so thematically saturated with voyeurism it seemed ideal for the young filmmaker's sensibility: Richard Strauss's *Salome*.

Unveiled in 1996, Egoyan's production simultaneously recognized the deeply disturbing matter of the opera – a work that has inflamed scandal since its 1905 world premiere – while offering a fresh reading responsive to our contemporary culture. Rather than a first-century palace in Judea, Egoyan set the action in an abstract and foreboding environment, something between a spa and a sanatorium. Derek McLane's set design is built around a diagonal plane tilted at a dangerously steep angle, with Jochanaan (John the Baptist) imprisoned underneath the floorboards instead of the subterranean cistern in which he's traditionally kept.

Egoyan's approach focused on the complex circuitry of voyeurism, made explicit in the libretto, and followed it to its disconcerting psychological depths. From the first lines of the opera – “How beautiful the Princess

Salome is tonight,” repeated obsessively by the young Syrian Narraboth – the process of looking is established as a dominant psychological theme in *Salome*. Characters are compulsively observing others, or else being looked at themselves, held visually as objects within a matrix of frustrated desire. “The Page is obsessed with Narraboth, who doesn't return her gaze; Narraboth is obsessed with Salome, who doesn't return his gaze; and Salome is obsessed with Jochanaan, who doesn't return her gaze,” Egoyan says, describing the opera's gridiron pattern of erotic fixation.

To get at the heart of all this looking, Egoyan's production makes use of surveillance equipment, as well as projected film and video images. The guards, for example, become camera-wielding soldiers, whose official “watching” is less about patrolling the perimeter and more about deploying modern technology to direct a collective gaze onto objects of sensual interest: usually Salome. In fact, before we ever see the teenaged princess onstage in the flesh, we encounter a filmed image of her in a series of unsettling shots set in a spa's mud baths.

Similarly, when Jochanaan berates members of Salome's family from offstage, a large video screen positioned behind the singers shows a live feed of his mouth in close-up. The disembodied projection anticipates Salome's fetishistic dissecting



Left: Roger Honeywell as Narraboth and Helen Field as Salome; right: Helen Field as Salome, COC, 2002. Photos: Michael Cooper

of Jochanaan's body parts – skin, hair, mouth – into isolated objects of lust, but it also prefigures the actual, physical decapitation of the prophet. Incorporating film projection in this context elaborates the thread of continuity that runs between the predatory look and the act of unimaginable violence.

In this opera, looking is never benevolent. From *Salome's* opening remarks about the lascivious gaze of her stepfather Herod – “those mole’s eyes... under his quivering eyelids” that look at her “like that” – to the Page warning Narraboth that it’s “very dangerous to look at a human face in such a way,” the desiring gaze has a throbbing underside that threatens to devour and consume.

Nowhere is this truer than the opera’s narrative pivot: the Dance of the Seven Veils. Egoyan’s innovative account gives a dramatic weight and clarity to *Salome's* psychology that few interpretations could rival. On a screen created by the billowing skirts of the princess, who is lifted on a swing high up into the rafters, we see “home movies” of the young *Salome*. In these moments, she is a girl in a world of paper dolls, living through childhood. But we also catch silhouetted glimpses of a disturbing act committed in the shadows, possibly in the near past, but maybe right now: she is being raped by a gang of men. We realize that *Salome's* stepfather Herod

oversees the entire sexual atrocity, watching it and thereby giving it licence.

“[Violence] doesn’t come out of nowhere,” Egoyan observes, “and we’ve seen that with abused victims: there is a repetition of the way that they have been treated.” Using the dance to chronicle a history of terrifying acts makes *Salome's* subsequent demand for Jochanaan’s head psychologically credible and dramatically focused. Instead of showing the prototypical *femme fatale* – “an unbridled sexuality that leads to ruin,” as Egoyan says – the production depicts an “abused, traumatized character.”

The results carry a sobering impact. Egoyan’s production issues a challenge: it asks us to treat seriously – and understand – how anyone, including a young girl, could instigate such horrific violence. ■

Nikita Gourski is Development Communications Officer at the Canadian Opera Company.

FOR FURTHER INSIGHT INTO *SALOME*, PLEASE READ SUZANNE VANSTONE’S INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ATOM EGOYAN AND SHADOW DESIGNER/PERFORMER CLEA MINAKER, AVAILABLE IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF *PRELUDE* ONLINE AT COC.CA/PUBLICATIONS.

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SALOME: OPERA BACKGROUND

The story of Salome derives from the Bible, appearing in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The episode concerns an unnamed young princess who dances for King Herod and asks for the head of John the Baptist in exchange.



This brief, almost skeletal story has captivated artists through the ages. Painters, sculptors, writers, composers, as well as choreographers, filmmakers and contemporary pop musicians have taken slightly different approaches to the raw material of the story, adding nuance and subtleties to the primary characters, and reinterpreting the action through aesthetic and cultural notions of their time.

One of the most enduring literary interpretations of Salome is Oscar Wilde's play, *Salomé*. Written in French, Wilde's treatment employed deliberately ornate phrasing and layered repetitions that achieved music-like effects.

The play also featured open-ended stage directions for Salome to perform a Dance of the Seven Veils. The fact that the play – and the libretto on which it was based – gave no explicit direction for enacting the dance, opened this decisive moment in the play/opera to any number of possibilities in performance.

After *Salomé* was finished in 1892, the play was banned in England by the Lord Chamberlain's office (as part of a prohibition on any representations of biblical scenes). It was not staged publicly until an 1896 production was mounted in Paris to little fanfare or success. Shortly after the turn of the century however, *Salomé* became a massive hit in Europe.



Before he reached his 40s, Richard Strauss had already established himself as one of his generation's pre-eminent musical minds. Although a prominent conductor and acclaimed composer of orchestral music, operatic success had nonetheless eluded him. But in 1902 Strauss attended a Berlin performance of Wilde's *Salomé*, staged by a young and highly original theatre director named Max Reinhardt. Strauss became convinced that the play was ideal for adaptation as an opera.

When Strauss first played the finished score for his father, the elder Strauss remarked that the music had "ants in its pants." The singers engaged for the premiere were similarly horrified at the demands placed on them by the score, which pushed the limits of dissonance and flirted with atonality. The leading soprano refused to appear in the Dance of the Seven Veils, reportedly saying, "I won't do it, I'm a decent woman." Nonetheless when *Salome* premiered on December 9, 1905, in Dresden, it received an astonishing 38 curtain calls.

Top: Oscar Wilde, circa 1882.
Photo: Napoleon Sarony

Left: "The Stomach Dance" drawing by Aubrey Beardsley for Wilde's play *Salomé*, 1893



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Video still by Bill Viola for Opéra national de Paris' production of *Tristan und Isolde*, 2004/2005. Photo: Kira Perov



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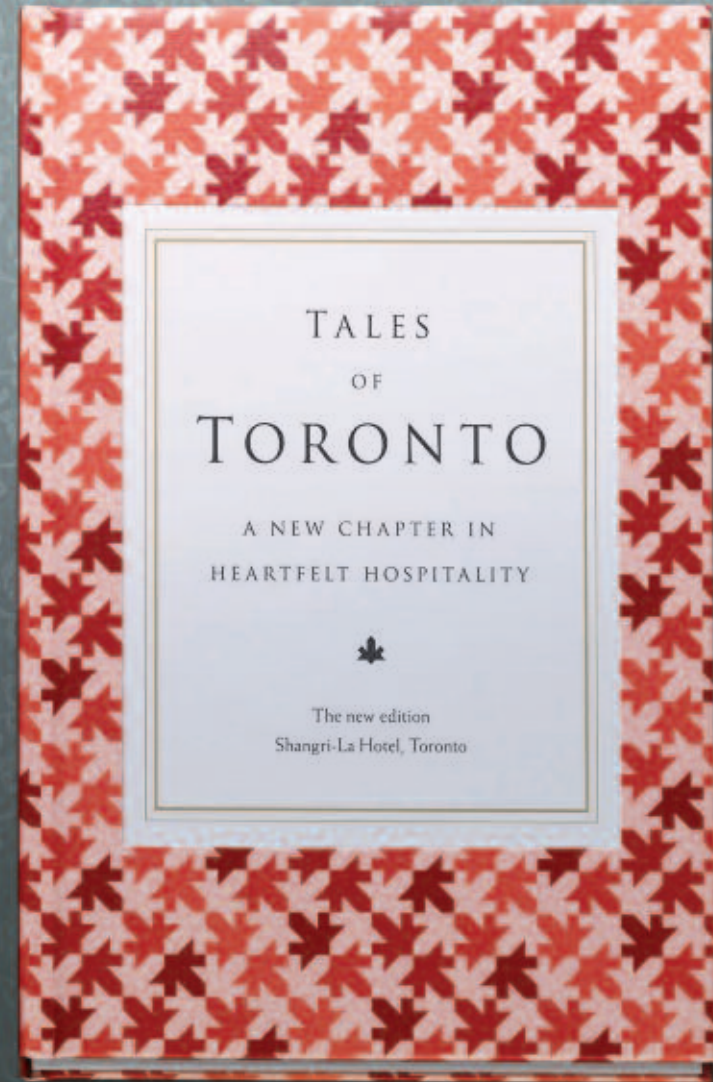
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