

2022/2023 ANNUAL REPORT





LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As artists who work in opera, we are telling stories that reflect and shape our place in the world. In doing so, we have a responsibility to recognize the history of this land, and to explore and challenge our relationship to that history.

We are located in Toronto, Ontario, also known as Tkarón:to which in Kanien'kéha means 'the place in the water where the trees are standing.' We recognize, support, and celebrate the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land. It is a privilege for us to be here, on the traditional lands of the confederacies of the Wendat 'People of the Island,' the Anishinaabe 'Original People,' and the Haudenosaunee 'People of the Longhouse.' We acknowledge this land as the home of the Mississaugas of the Credit, 'River of the north, of many mouths.'

Toronto is now an international hub, with many diverse people who call this place home. As a national company we extend our gratitude to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people across Turtle Island, and commit to engaging in respectful co-existence on this land.

There cannot be reconciliation before there is truth. The Canadian Opera Company, through land acknowledgement and ongoing projects, commits to upholding the values and voices of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island. We recognize the historical and continued oppression of lands and cultures, and we witness the ongoing confirmation of mass and unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the sites of Residential Schools across Canada.

We respect the strength of Indigenous Nations in Canada. We commit to listening to Indigenous voices and to focus on learning and healing together through music and stories. We believe in the power of the arts to move us forward in a good way.

*The above statement was created by Rebecca Cuddy and Julie McIsaac, as inaugural participants in the COC's Land Acknowledgement Commissioning Program. We encourage members of our community to experience the installation **where the water meets the land** at coc.ca/LandAcknowledgement or at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts ahead of all our in-person programming at the venue.*

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For complete cast and creative team information, as well as a list of the valued donors, supporters, and committee members who made this season possible, please visit coc.ca/AGM2223.

Previous page: detail of where the water meets the land.

Cover: Ambur Braid in the title role in Salome in the COC’s 2023 production.

A MESSAGE FROM PERRYN



Dearest COC Community,

I could not be prouder of our 2022/2023 season. It is both a joy and an honour to be able to share with you in the Annual Report just some of the many achievements we have experienced together.

22/23 was my first full season of programming as the General Director of the COC and, in chatting with guests at the Four Seasons Centre, I was delighted to learn that so many of them were there to see their very first opera! We have made the opera house a welcoming, inclusive, and exciting place for our communities, and we actually saw a record number of new single-ticket buyers. This is something that I am incredibly passionate about—I want everyone to love this art form as much as we all do—and we are committed to build on this terrific momentum.

From our larger-than-life mainstage to the intimate narrative storytelling work in the Canadian Opera Company Theatre, our last season's diverse slate of programming turned out to be wildly popular with audiences and critics alike. *The Globe and Mail* hailed our *Carmen* as “a party invitation you should accept,” we saw sold-out crowds for *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Tosca*, and our new-to-Toronto *Macbeth* earned us a total of eight Dora Award nominations and three wins for the striking interpretation based on the Shakespeare classic. We capped the season with a sold-out run of our world premiere of *Pomegranate* by Kye Marshall and Amanda Hale—a powerful testament to Canadians’ desire for contemporary opera that is relevant to many of our audiences. This interest in the COC even extended to the digital realm where our video content enjoyed over 2.5 million views across all of our platforms.

In our communities, the COC was proud to partner with a number of organizations and theatre companies throughout the city. Collaborations like Opera Makers, which this season teamed up with Evergreen Brickworks to present an original opera about the importance of the environment, and *Treemonisha*, a bold reimagining from our partners at Volcano Theatre of Scott Joplin’s only surviving opera, helped to share new, important, and meaningful stories in a way that only opera really can.

Of course, our COC members played an immense role in making all of this possible and 22/23 saw a 30% increase in people who joined our passionate donor community. Thank you for being part of the future.

This past year simply could not have come together without you, our audiences, our supporters, our community, and our artistic partners. I wish to thank you all, on behalf of the Canadian Opera Company and for being a part of the ongoing reimagining of what Canadian opera can be.

There is a vibrant future for opera ahead of us and 2022/2023 is just the beginning!

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Perryn". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Perryn Leech
General Director



WAGNER THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

OCTOBER 7 – 23, 2022

Our first full season of in-person opera since 2019 kicked off with the haunting mystery, bold adventure, and sweeping romance of Wagner’s early masterpiece, *The Flying Dutchman*. Director Christopher Alden’s visually arresting production, inspired by Expressionist cinema and Wagner’s stormy score, and helmed by revival director Marilyn Gronsdal, featured Danish baritone Johan Reuter (The Dutchman) as the condemned sea captain and soprano Marjorie Owens (Senta) as the young woman whose redemptive love promises to free him at last. COC Music Director Johannes Debus conducted once again (*The Flying Dutchman* having been the first opera he led after

joining the company in 2010), with the COC Chorus fully employed as the sailors and townsfolk of a closed, intolerant society—winning acclaim from *Opera Canada* as “the strongest ensemble the production has enjoyed in its hometown history.” This iconic production of Wagner’s thrilling tale delivered “a winning spectacle” (*The Toronto Star*) not soon to be forgotten.

This production was underwritten, in part, by Lisa Balfour Bowen and Family in memory of Walter Bowen and in honour of Alexander Neef.

*“How much more does this Dutchman have to say in 2022?
Quite a lot, as it happens.”* –The Globe and Mail

*“An electric interpretation of Richard Wagner’s early
opera.”* –The Toronto Star

Previous page: detail of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

This page: (l-r) Johan Reuter as the Dutchman and Franz-Josef Selig as Daland in the COC’s 2022 production.

BIZET CARMEN

OCTOBER 14 - NOVEMBER 4, 2022



A devil-may-care cigarette factory worker with unmatched seductive power; garrison soldiers and outlaws; street urchins and a celebrity bullfighter—the cast of perennial fan favourite *Carmen* brought infectious energy to a production described as “a magnificent spectacle...the whole package” (*MyScena*). Audiences were thrilled by the electric climax in Act 4, when hawkers, picadors, toreros, and banderillos paraded through the aisles ahead of Carmen and Escamillo—a stroke of genius from director Joel Ivany. Mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges made her COC debut as the fiery and mercurial Carmen (in alternation with Ensemble Studio graduate Rihab Chaieb), playing her character’s sultry femme fatale and freedom-loving

feminist sides with power and understated elegance. Argentinian tenor Marcelo Puente portrayed Don José’s descent into obsession and jealousy with devastating force, while baritone Lucas Meachem brought the swagger (and some wonderfully humorous touches) as Escamillo. Soprano Joyce El-Khoury won rave reviews as Micaëla, and Ensemble Studio members Alex Hetherington as Mércèdes and Ariane Cossette as Frasquita shone in the Card Scene with dazzling acting and vocals. Jacques Lacombe conducted, sending audiences out of the theatre after each performance still humming Bizet’s unforgettable melodies.

“The Canadian Opera Company’s Carmen is a party invitation you should accept!”

—The Globe and Mail

J’Nai Bridges (on bench) in the title role of Carmen in the COC’s 2022 production.

W. A. MOZART THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

JANUARY 27 – FEBRUARY 18, 2023



Director Claus Guth's darker take on Mozart's upstairs-downstairs comic opera featured a "sublime" (*NEXT Magazine*) ensemble cast, with bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni starring as Figaro, soprano Andrea Carroll as his bride-to-be Susanna, and soprano Lauren Fagan as the jilted Countess. Ensemble Studio graduate bass-baritone Gordon Bintner shone in the role of the philandering Count Almaviva, while the page boy Cherubino was performed with strikingly authentic adolescent awkwardness by mezzo-soprano Emily Fons. Mozart's opera plays on conventions around class, through which—over the course of a single day of cross-dressing, mistaken identities, adultery, bawdy farce, and black humour—the subversive servants deliver a lesson

in love to their superiors. This production introduced the silent, winged character Cherubim (Uli Kirsch) as a manipulating spirit; not least among the physically demanding staging requirements was the moment Bintner sang "Hai già vinta la causa" with Kirsch riding on his shoulders. Mozart's luminous score was energetically conducted by Harry Bicket, who led the COC Orchestra through a pacy performance of some of opera's greatest hits.

This production was underwritten, in part, by Lisa Balfour Bowen and Family in memory of Walter Bowen and in honour of Alexander Neef.

"I was blown away by this performance!"

—Jean Stilwell, Morning Show Host, New Classical FM

(l-r) Uli Kirsch as Cherubim and Luca Pisaroni as Figaro in the COC's 2023 production.

R. STRAUSS SALOME

FEBRUARY 3 - 24, 2023



Our production of Richard Strauss' biblical masterpiece presented audiences with a fresh take on an old story, shining a spotlight on the young princess Salome as the product of a degenerate and cruel upbringing. Directed by Academy Award-nominated Atom Egoyan, this winter's *Salome* starred Ensemble Studio graduate soprano Ambur Braid showcasing incredible vocal range in the title role, with tenor Michael Schade as Herod and soprano Karita Mattila as Herodias. Baritone Michael Kupfer-Radecky appeared as Jochanaan, whose electric encounter with Salome sparks an

infatuation that sets both characters hurtling on a grisly course of destruction. A particular highlight was the infamous Dance of the Seven Veils, reimaged here through Egoyan's video projections and shadow artistry designed by Clea Minaker. Strauss' explosive score, led by Johannes Debus from the orchestra pit, surged from lush Romanticism to unsettling dissonance and back again. Erotic and macabre, this was a nuanced *Salome*: a production rich with symbolism and psychological drama that provoked uncomfortable questions about power, exploitation, and voyeuristic obsession.

“Atom Egoyan’s Canadian Opera Company production of Salome is not to be missed.” –The Globe and Mail

“COC’s Salome delivers an all-out assault on the senses!”
–NEXT Magazine

This page: A scene from the COC’s 2023 production of Salome. Next page: A scene from the COC’s 2023 production of Macbeth.

VERDI MACBETH

APRIL 28 - MAY 20, 2023



The COC's new production from Sir David McVicar, starring audience favourite Quinn Kelsey in the baritone role of Macbeth, was the must-see opera event of the season. Sopranos Alexandrina Pendatchanska and Tracy Cantin shared the role of Lady Macbeth, with Ensemble Studio graduate and tenor Matthew Cairns making his debut as Macduff in Verdi's thrilling adaptation of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. Internationally acclaimed conductor Speranza Scappucci led the COC Orchestra with a dynamic sense for the drama built into Verdi's score, while the women of the COC Chorus won accolades for their

chilling performance and flawless choreography as the witches. Grimly haunting artistic production by set designer John Macfarlane and costume designer Moritz Junge set a gothic tone laced with ominous foreboding, setting the stage quite literally for an intensely compelling examination of ambition, greed, paranoia, and violence.

A new Canadian Opera Company co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago

“The COC has piled onstage a world-class cast of singers, and there isn’t a weak link in the bunch.”

—The Globe and Mail

“Many thanks for a thrilling night at the opera—the performance of Macbeth was outstanding.”

—Audience Member

PUCCINI TOSCA

MAY 5 - 27, 2023



Arguably the most operatic of operas, featuring the passions and betrayals of an opera singer, her lover, and a sadistic police chief, *Tosca*'s plot unfolds with compelling urgency over the course of a single day. The drama surges from scenes of celebration and tenderness to wanton displays of corruption, torture, and imprisonment—not to mention three unforgettable deaths. From the incomparable theatre of Scarpia's "Te Deum" at the end of Act I, to the opera's shocking conclusion, director Paul Curran's *Tosca* brought audiences a political thriller like no other. Rising Irish

soprano Sinéad Campbell-Wallace in the title role (shared with American soprano Keri Alkema) was by turns lovable, jealous, and fiery. Italian tenor Stefano La Colla as Cavaradossi summoned enthusiastic applause with his performance of one of Puccini's show-stopping arias "E lucevan le stelle," while British baritone Roland Wood as the vile Baron Scarpia was suitably sinister though refined of voice and manner. Making his COC debut, Italian maestro Giuliano Carella conducted Puccini's lush score with bright grandeur—a winning conclusion to an exceptional mainstage year.

"The Sunday afternoon performance of Tosca was riveting! It was blood-tinglingly realistic in every way[:] Thank you COC, and all the great artists sharing their talents with us!"

—Audience Member

"Tosca and Macbeth were absolutely spectacular. What a wonderful way to end the first full post-pandemic season. Really looking forward to 23/24." —Audience Member

KYE MARSHALL/AMANDA HALE POMEGRANATE

JUNE 2 - 4, 2023



We closed our season with a sold-out run of *Pomegranate*—composer Kye Marshall and librettist Amanda Hale’s tale of transcendent love that transported audiences from ancient Pompeii to a Toronto lesbian bar in the aftermath of the infamous 1981 Bathhouse raids. During a fateful trip to Pompeii’s ruins, teenagers Suzie and Cass are transported back in time to 79 AD, where a priestess vows to protect the two lovers (renamed Suli and Cassia) against a Roman centurion and the impending eruption of Vesuvius. Later, in Toronto, the couple are confronted with homophobia and an impossible ultimatum—throwing into question their hopes of a future together. Incorporating musical styles ranging from classical

to blues, ballads, bossa nova, and the avant garde, the opera featured Adanya Dunn as Suli/Suzie and Danielle Buonaiuto as Cassia/Cass, both in their COC debuts. Directed by Jennifer Tarver, *Pomegranate* was presented at the boundary-breaking Canadian Opera Company Theatre, a dedicated space for original, contemporary works with an eye to building community connection and amplifying new voices and perspectives.

A new Canadian Opera Company co-production with Vancouver Opera

“An ambitious work that underlines themes of identity, acceptance and the role of community.” —The Globe and Mail

Previous page: (l-r) Stefano La Colla as Cavaradossi and Sinéad Campbell-Wallace as Tosca in the COC’s 2023 production. This page: a scene from the COC’s 2023 world premiere production of Pomegranate.

INVESTING IN EMERGING ARTISTS

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's leading artist development program for emerging Canadian opera singers and musicians. New members are chosen through a national audition process culminating in the Ensemble Studio Competition, the feature event of the COC's annual fundraising gala, Centre Stage.

Over the course of an individually tailored, multi-year program, Ensemble Studio members receive intensive vocal coaching; language, movement, and acting training; as well as private masterclasses with renowned opera professionals. They also compete in major international competitions and earn performance opportunities with organizations ranging from the National Arts Centre and Toronto Symphony Orchestra to European opera companies. Ensemble singers perform and understudy COC mainstage roles, while Ensemble pianists participate in the preparation of mainstage productions—with many going on to internationally acclaimed careers after graduating.

In the past season, our Ensemble Studio members clocked:

- 639** hours of music coaching
- 266** hours of language (Italian, Czech, German, and French) and diction training
- 189** hours of performance kinetics coaching on breathing and movement
- 181** hours of voice lessons
- 105** hours of professional development (including auditions, career coaching, goal settings, headshots, hair/makeup/costume consultations, networking, and tax and finance seminars)
- 66** hours of dramatic coaching
- 22** hours of creative living sessions
- 19** hours of mainstage sessions and professional recordings

2022/2023 ENSEMBLE STUDIO

Pictured below, from left to right:

Ariane Cossette, soprano

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY ANNE & TONY ARRELL

Jonah Spungin, baritone

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY CATHERINE FAUQUIER

Vladimir Soloviev, pianist

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MARJORIE & ROY LINDEN, AND BRIAN WILKS

Queen Hezumuryango, mezzo-soprano

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY ANNE & TONY ARRELL

Alex Hetherington, mezzo-soprano

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY PATRICIA & FRANK MILLS

Midori Marsh, soprano

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MARCIA LEWIS BROWN

Charlotte Siegel, soprano

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY JOY LEVINE

Alex Halliday, bass-baritone

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY BLANCHE CARRAGHER/ARIAS: CANADIAN OPERA STUDENT DEVELOPMENT FUND

Brian Cho, pianist

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MARJORIE & ROY LINDEN, AND BRIAN WILKS



FREE CONCERT SERIES

IN THE RICHARD BRADSHAW AMPHITHEATRE

PRESENTED BY  **TD READY
COMMITMENT**

The Free Concert Series has become one of the city's cultural treasures, presenting approximately 70 concerts annually, featuring vocal, instrumental, jazz, and dance performances from September to May in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. This year, over 9,000 audience members attended our concerts, including 38 school and community groups. Eight monthly digital concerts (City Sessions) were shared online, expanding the program's reach even further.

The series featured 325 artists over the course of the year. Performers included Roland Wood; Ballet Jörgen; prizewinners from The Glenn Gould School 2023 Chamber Music Competition; Opera Atelier; the Toronto Consort; and Against the Grain Theatre; Ballet Creole; Persian, Chinese and Carnatic ensembles; DanceWorks and Peggy Baker Dance Projects; and members of the COC Ensemble Studio.





Previous page: Payadora Tango Ensemble.

This page (clockwise from top left): Indigenous Enterprise; Schulich Jazz; Alex Hetherington; Schulich Jazz.



AMPLIFYING VOICES: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRAMS

“It’s not us going into their neighbourhoods and telling them this is what an opera is. It’s the community, schools and kids who are the ones creating the story.”

—Makenzie Morgan, Director of Community Partnerships and Programs

Throughout the year, our partnerships with schools and community groups continued to give children and young people a behind-the-scenes look at the world of opera while empowering them to tell their own stories.

Our Summer Music Camps welcomed students from Grade 1-12 for a week of creative exploration, play, and performance, while our Summer Opera Intensive, catering to advanced post-secondary singers, offered tuition-free training of the highest quality to artists hoping to pursue professional careers. Throughout our season, Opera Lab presented dynamic workshops for young adults, offering interactive learning opportunities on everything from swordplay to props and the art of the aria!

Our Opera Makers program is designed to amplify the stories of young people from underserved communities, and this year we worked with six schools to introduce students to all of the elements of operatic performance (Kapapamahchakwew - Wandering Spirit School, Heydon Park Secondary School, Claude Watson, Enquiring Minds Montessori, Forest Hill Junior and Senior PS and Runnymede Collegiate Institute), as well as Regent Park’s Youth Enrichment Academy with Building Roots. In June, a group of 15 students in Grades 6-9 from across the city presented a magical performance at the Evergreen Brickworks of *Nature’s Perspective*: a student-directed and performed production shepherded by COC Teaching Artists Roydon Tse, Meredith Wolting, and Isabella Fassler.





Our Showcase Series, championing artists from the Asian, African and Caribbean, and Latin American diasporas, enchanted audiences in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. Featured artists included Alhelí Pimienta and the members of the Venuti String Quartet; members from the dance teams at Araguacu Latin Dance Company; Aaron Manswell; The Nathaniel Dett Chorale; Korean fusion band Haneum, and Babel Ensemble.

Previous page: performers at Summer Music Camps. This page (top): Baraka Dancing at the COC's Showcase Series; (below): performers of Nature's Persepective at Evegreen Brickworks.



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GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

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

OPERATING SUPPORT



ENSEMBLE STUDIO AND ENDOWMENT SUPPORT



SPECIAL PROJECT FUNDING

For many programs and special initiatives undertaken each year by the Canadian Opera Company, we gratefully acknowledge project funding from:

Department of Canadian Heritage

Employment and Social Development Canada

Ontario Arts Council

SEASON BY NUMBERS

This season, the COC engaged **662 artists**, including **332 Canadian artists**, who put in **1,025 rehearsal hours** to bring audiences world-class performances.

Our production teams were kept busy supplying this season's productions with **1,842 props**, **821 costumes**, and **182 wigs**!

Our online presence continued to grow, with **30,332,455** digital impressions and **2,632,463** video views.

We welcomed **845 new donors**, bringing the total number of members to **3,424**, which represents a 30% increase in the size of our passionate philanthropic community:

35% of our returning annual donors have increased their membership commitment this season!

We saw a record number of new single ticket buyers: **more than 20,000 individual audience members!**

Thank you to our artists, audiences, and generous community for your vital support of the company's vision!



A scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (COC, 2023)

For complete cast and creative team information, as well as a list of the valued donors, supporters, and committee members who made this season possible, please visit coc.ca/AGM2223.

PHOTO & IMAGE CREDITS

COVER: photo: Michael Cooper. **PAGE 2:** photo: COC. **PAGE 4:** detail of Four Seasons Centre, photo: COC; Perryn Leech, photo: Gaetz Photography. **PAGES 5 to 11:** photos: Michael Cooper. **PAGE 13:** photo: Gaetz Photography. **PAGES 14 & 15:** photos: Karen E. Reeves. **PAGE 16:** photo: Karen E. Reeves. **PAGE 17:** top: photo: Stelth Ng; bottom: photo: COC. **PAGE 19:** photo: Michael Cooper. **PAGE 20:** photo: Dahlia Katz. **PAGE 21:** photo: COC. **BACK COVER:** photo: Michael Cooper.

ADVANCING THE ARTFORM: SCOTT JOPLIN'S *TREEMONISHA*

“Ravishingly reborn... this extraordinary production makes the case for the King of Ragtime’s long-forgotten opera.”

— The Toronto Star

The COC was proud to be an associate producer for the world premiere of *Scott Joplin’s Treemonisha – A Musical Reimagining*, a production presented by TO Live and Luminato Festival Toronto and produced by Volcano, in association with the Canadian Opera Company, Soupepper, and Moveable Beast.

Appearing at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts during Luminato, *Scott Joplin’s Treemonisha* featured a revised plot by Leah-Simone Bowen, and a new libretto by Bowen and Cheryl L. Davis. *The New York Times* described their reworking as “adroitly matched to the original rhythms and melodies...[punctuating] a richer plot than Joplin’s, as well as a more precise and moving parable of needless divisions between people with so much in common,” in a production that “feels ready to be seen more widely.”

Joplin’s original piano vocal score was ingeniously adapted and orchestrated by Jessie Montgomery and Jannina Norpoth. Fusing European classical music with the sounds of ragtime, folk, and gospel, *Scott Joplin’s Treemonisha* tells the story of a young Black woman who, in discovering the truth of her past and overcoming enormous personal loss, discovers her power to unify and lead her community towards a new future.

As an associate producer, the COC made its spaces available to the creative team to host workshops and rehearsals for the project. This support is part of the COC’s commitment to encouraging a flourishing opera scene in Toronto and to advancing the use of the Canadian Opera Company Theatre as a dedicated space for the development and presentation of works that diversify the canon.

A scene from Scott Joplin’s Treemonisha, 2023



OPERA HOUSE GROUND-BREAKING ANNIVERSARY

On the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking for this remarkable venue, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our community of artists and audiences. Here's to many more glorious years!

The groundbreaking on April 11, 2003



Since our historic groundbreaking on April 11, 2003, the Canadian Opera Company's Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts has welcomed more than 2.6 million audience members, hosted 51 world premieres and commissioned works, and presented nearly 1,100 free performances through the COC's Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre presented by TD Bank as part of the building's civic engagement mandate.

Several major cultural institutions and performing arts organizations have been

tenants here, led by the COC and The National Ballet of Canada, while 348 third-party organizations have rented the space for events, performances, and community events—making the Four Seasons Centre a critical industry and audience hub.

Canada's first and only purpose-built opera house has become a destination for the most exciting and visionary artists, and a beacon for relevant, enriching, and thoughtful arts programming in our city and the country.

(l-r) Danielle Buonaiuto as Cassia and Adanya Dunn as Suli in the COC's world premiere production of Pomegranate.

coc.ca

