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COC CELEBRATED RETURN TO THE STAGE WITH SOLD-OUT SHOWS AND REVITALIZED PROGRAMMING IN 2021/2022

Toronto – At the **Canadian Opera Company’s Annual General Meeting** hosted from the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**, the company’s 2021/2022 season was marked by sold-out shows, an **average mainstage attendance capacity of 94%**, and impressive growth in the company’s online community as reported today by **COC Board Chair Jonathan Morgan** and **COC General Director Perry Leech**.

“I couldn’t be more proud of my first season at the COC - a multidimensional team achievement that ultimately challenged and rewarded the artists and our audiences,” said **Leech**. “Amidst continually changing challenges in producing for live audiences, the Canadian Opera Company showcased the vast breadth of opera’s storytelling potential with performances that leapt far beyond the live mainstage experience. In a COC first, we broadcast an unprecedented slate of purpose-produced and free monthly digital concerts and fully staged productions that connected us to viewers across the country and beyond. This specially curated programming, **highlighted by a 60% increase in our online engagement through the year**, certainly kept audiences primed and eager for the company’s triumphant return to the stage in the spring.”

“The feeling in the air at those first shows back was absolutely electric,” continued **Leech**. “And our opera house attendance through the spring certainly reflects how eager Canadians are to have live opera as part of our vibrant local arts and culture landscape.”

Despite ongoing venue closures through the first part of the season, the **Canadian Opera Company** reported a surplus for 21/22, with **COC Board Chair Jonathan Morgan** pointing to the COC’s long-term strategy at work.

“Through continued financial rigor, including significant contributions to the **Canadian Opera Company Foundation**, the company is beginning to see the results of a multi-year plan for post-pandemic recovery,” said **Morgan**. “We are grateful to our government partners whose steadfast support shows a demonstrated commitment to seeing the performing arts not only recover, but thrive. In particular, we must thank the **Government of Canada** and **Government of Ontario, Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport**, as well as the **Department of Canadian Heritage, FedDev Ontario, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Trillium Foundation**, and the **Toronto Arts Council**.”

In addition, the **Canadian Opera Company** continued to see an outpouring of community-driven support for the development of Canadian opera, with **\$9.6 million raised** by the company’s passionate members and audiences. In total, **nearly 3,000 households generously contributed** to the COC in 21/22, with **new donors making up 17%** of that group.

“The actions of our remarkable supporters sent a clear and resounding message through all of last season: music matters,” said **COC Deputy General Director Christie Darville**. “Thanks to contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations, we were not only able to continue to engage our creative community and support their vital craft, we were able to invest in an entirely new way to share performances with more audiences than ever. I want to thank, in particular, so many of our Monumental Campaign donors whose philanthropic leadership played a significant role in the COC’s return to the stage.”

To view the COC’s full **2021/2022 Annual Report**, please visit coc.ca/AGM2022.

DIGITAL PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

In a **Canadian Opera Company** first, the 2021/2022 season featured a year-long slate of **eight full-length digital productions** from September to April. All digital programming was made available for free, via the company's **Free Digital Membership**, and audiences had a full six months to access the videos online.

In total:

- **More than 18,000 hours of performance footage** was viewed
- **135 countries** tuned in
- **More than 10.4 million impressions** were generated

The digital season opened with ***In Concert: Russell Braun and Tamara Wilson***, featuring two of opera's best-loved singers in a program featuring arias and orchestral pieces from Verdi, Puccini, and Wagner, among others. British director **Amy Lane** made her COC directorial debut in October with a digital presentation of ***Gianni Schicchi*** by Giacomo Puccini; thanks to all-new cameras installed throughout the auditorium, the delightful comedy starring British baritone **Roland Wood** and South Korean soprano **Hera Hyesang Park** gave audiences an all-new, up-close perspective of the action on-stage. The series continued with ***Espiral***, a lively concert from **OKAN**, performing selections from their JUNO-winning album of the same name, fusing jazz, folk, and Afro-Cuban rhythms.

November brought a stunning presentation of Mozart's ***Requiem*** in collaboration with **Against the Grain Theatre** that honoured personal and collective grief through music while showcasing a rising generation of opera artists. And the company welcomed the change in seasons with ***In Winter***, a cozy concert presentation featuring selections from Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," classic songbook favourites, and a new commission from composer **Ian Cusson**, "In Winter," setting text from Métis writer **Katherena Vermette**, for soprano, orchestra, and chorus.

This past January, the COC released ***Voices of Mountains***, a multidisciplinary concert experience from mezzo-sopranos **Rebecca Cuddy** and **Marion Newman**, fusing classical and contemporary opera selections with choreography from **Aria Evans** set against some of Toronto's most stunning backdrops.

The spring brought ***In Concert: Jane Archibald***, one of the country's most electric opera voices in a tour-de-force performance of sparkling coloratura arias ranging from Handel to Bernstein. Finally, the digital season closed with ***Bluebeard's Castle*** by Béla Bartók, as presented in a haunting experimental work from director **Atom Egoyan** and featuring bass-baritone **Kyle Ketelsen** and mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó**.

In tandem with the company's Free Digital Membership programming, the COC captured the vibrant, resilient, and inspiring spirit of Toronto through **The Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre: City Sessions, presented by TD Bank Group**. The series of digital sessions provided much-needed performance opportunities to local artists who were then able to share the music and stories that resonated most with them. Performances included renowned Iranian-Canadian instrumentalists **Padideh Ahrarnejad** and **Ali Massoudi**; leading Canadian jazz musicians and multiple JUNO Award winners, **Mike Downes** and **Robi Botos**; and internationally acclaimed pipa virtuoso, **Wen Zhao**.

A "TRIUMPHANT RETURN" TO THE OPERA HOUSE

After more than two years of performance disruption, the return of live opera at the Four Seasons Centre was a high watermark for the organization in 21/22. In-person productions were greeted with extraordinary critical acclaim and public support, reflected in an **average attendance capacity of 94%** and multiple sold-out performances.

La Traviata by Giuseppe Verdi marked the COC debut of one of the most exciting up-and-coming voices, soprano **Amina Edris** as Violetta, whose performance earned her a 2022 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Individual Performance. With renowned tenor **Matthew Polenzani** as Alfredo and direction from

acclaimed theatre director **Arin Arbus**, the production drew rave reviews with *The Globe and Mail* lauding it as “a joy to see on stage.”

Artists of the COC’s career-launching **Ensemble Studio**, featured prominently in *The Magic Flute* with a number of current and graduate members well-represented among the cast for Mozart’s whimsical and colourful comedy: soprano **Anna-Sophie Neher**, bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner**, and soprano **Midori Marsh**, among several others, while visiting Norwegian soprano **Caroline Wettergreen** thrilled audiences as the Queen of the Night.

OPERA OF ALL SCALES

The freshly rebranded **Canadian Opera Company Theatre (COCT)** featured two bold productions in 21/22, underscoring the company’s commitment to opera of all scales, especially new creations that boost local voices, reflect current shared experiences, and push the boundaries of operatic storytelling.

In a world premiere presentation by former COC Composer-in-Residence **Ian Cusson** and acclaimed playwright **Colleen Murphy**, *Fantasma* explored themes of death, compassion, and the courage to insist on being heard in a haunting contemporary ghost story the *Toronto Star* praised for its balance of “broad humour with tender pathos, [and] beauty with tragedy.”

Continuing the COC’s mission to amplify diverse voices in opera, the COCT also hosted *The Queen In Me* to round out the 2021/2022 season. Created by and starring **Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野** (they/them), the opera was a Dora Award-nominated work of radical honesty and vulnerability, exploring the many ways that race, gender, and sexuality are often policed in the opera industry through the lens of the iconic queen from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, AND NEW INITIATIVES

At the start of the year, the COC proudly announced a collaborative new initiative and approach to land acknowledgment: **The Land Acknowledgement Commissioning Program**. Working alongside Indigenous artists to co-create a visual land acknowledgement and artist statement, the program invites each participant to bring their own personal perspectives and relationships to the work, as well as reflections on the cultural moment and the COC’s artistic season. In 21/22, Métis mezzo-soprano **Rebecca Cuddy** was named inaugural artist collaborator alongside *Fantasma* director and dramaturg **Julie McIsaac** who contributed to the creation and documentation of the installation as inaugural staff collaborator. Together, the pair created *where the water meets the land*, a three-dimensional and interactive artistic work that remains prominently on display at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts as well as the Canadian Opera Company Theatre, for all in-person audiences to interact with and explore.

In another new initiative announced in 2022, the COC launched the **Showcase Series**, exploring the beauty of cultural identity, language, and storytelling through music. In May, specially curated programming celebrated Asian Heritage Month with five events that ranged in focus from Chinese calligraphy, Japanese Taiko drumming, Malaysian choral music, and more. Throughout each season, additional **Showcase Series** programming will feature artists and creatives from the African and Caribbean as well as Latin American diasporas and, in doing so, continuing to champion both culturally responsive and engaging learning opportunities.

This past season the COC’s Community Partnerships & Programs (CPP) team partnered with a number of local organizations, including **St. James Town Community Arts**, **Alexander Mackenzie High School**, **DANI** (Developing and Nurturing Independence), **Montgomery’s Inn**, **Nelson High School**, **Claude Watson Secondary Arts Program**, **Inquiring Minds Montessori**, and **SISTEMA Toronto** to provide music programming to more than 341 young people through hands-on activities that explored every element of opera, from storytelling and composition, to performance and design.

21/22 programming included:

- Summer Opera Camps, conducted digitally in 2021 to foster continued creativity amid closures
- Opera Makers, a co-collaborative program adapted to the needs of each organization
- Classroom Creatives and Creative Intensive, guiding participants through specific knowledge of music creation
- Youth Opera Lab, an interactive workshop focused on stage direction with COC Opera Teaching Artist and Assistant Director of *Gianni Schicchi*, Anna Theodosakis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BMO Financial Group: Season Sponsor

Thank you to the entire COC community, including our [COC Board of Directors](#), our [Corporate Sponsors and Foundation Supporters](#), [generous public funders](#), [union partners](#), and — most critically — [our audience](#). Your inspiring support ensures that opera flourishes, uniting global audiences and paving the way for a vibrant future.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. General Director Perryn Leech joined the company in 2021, forming a leadership team with Music Director Johannes Debus and Deputy General Director Christie Darville. The COC enjoys a loyal audience, including a dedicated base of subscribers, and has an international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation. Its diverse repertoire includes new commissions and productions, local and international collaborations with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracts the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. The COC Academy is an incubator for the future of the art form, nurturing Canada's new wave of opera creators with customized training and support. The COC performs in its own opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. For more information, visit coc.ca.

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