CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

MEDIA RELEASE

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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY SET TO *WOW* YOUNG AUDIENCES WITH MODERN-DAY OPERA FAIRY TALE

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company** presents the Cinderella story with a magical middle school twist, when ***WOW Factor: A Cinderella Story*** premieres at the Imperial Oil Opera Theatre with four public performances on **December 1 and 2, 2018**. With a musical adaptation by **Stéphane Mayer**, of the COC's Ensemble Studio, and a new English libretto by Against the Grain Theatre's **Joel Ivany**, this family-friendly opera brings Rossini's *La Cenerentola* into the 21st century.

When the hit singing show *WOW Factor* arrives at Cindy's school, students jump at the chance to compete for the top prize – especially with pop sensation Lil' Charm rumoured to make an appearance. Shy Cindy dreams of sharing her talents with the world but her friends become mean girls when she steps into the spotlight. Driven by her desire to sing, and with a bit of help from a reluctant pop star and his sidekick, Cindy overcomes her fears to find her own unique voice.

Commissioned by the COC, ***WOW Factor*** is presented through the company's **Opera for Young Audiences** program, which aims to engage a new generation of opera lovers with accessible and entertaining productions created just for children and youth. Tickets to the public performances are **free for children under 12** (to a maximum of two free children's tickets for each adult ticket sold), making the experience even more accessible to young people. Audience members can also get into the operatic spirit with free hands-on activities related to the opera's themes that take place one hour before each performance.

WOW Factor stars current and former artists of the **COC Ensemble Studio**, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. The performance is 50 minutes in length and sung in English. It is suitable for children ages 5 – 12 years old and each performance ends with a 10-minute Q&A session with cast and crew.

New this year, the performance at 11 a.m. on **Sunday, December 2** will be a "relaxed performance," geared towards those who may benefit from a more relaxed sensory experience. The opera itself remains unchanged, but lighting may be adjusted to brighten the theatre and there will be a more casual attitude towards noise and movement in the audience. Families will also be provided with a designated relief area if they need a break from the performance. Additional support, including a visual story of the entire experience, will be available to help families prepare for their visit to the opera.

"We want young people to be able to form a connection with opera, whether they're familiar with the art form or experiencing it for the very first time," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "With Opera for Young Audiences, and *WOW Factor* in particular, we hope to remove some of the barriers associated with accessing high-quality opera and encourage a lifelong appreciation of the art form."

Director **Anna Theodosakis** leads a production team that includes set and costume designer **James Bolton** and lighting designer **Siobhan Sleath**. With colourful sets and costumes described by **Theodosakis** as "Instagram-worthy," this production takes inspiration from popular video games, reality singing shows and YouTube sensations.

Four performances of ***WOW Factor***, taking place on **November 28 and 29**, are designated for student audiences. School groups attending these performances at the Imperial Oil Opera Theatre are also offered a complimentary in-school workshop, led by a COC artist-educator who will explore the opera's themes and help deepen students' understanding of the art form.

Cast and Creative Team

Cindy: Simona Genga
L'il Charm: Charles Sy*
Tiny Dan: Samuel Chan
Mr. Magnifico: Joel Allison
Chloe: Anna-Sophie Neher
Tisbe: Simone McIntosh
Phoebe: Lauren Eberwein
Principal Fée: Lauren Margison

Director: Anna Theodosakis
Music Directors: Rachael Kerr/Stéphane Mayer
Set and Costume Designer: James Bolton
Lighting Designer: Siobhan Sleath

***** Graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio

The artists of the COC Ensemble Studio are generously sponsored by **COVC Jean A. Chalmers Fund, David & Kristin Ferguson, Joy Levine, Marjorie & Roy Linden, June Shaw, The Stratton Trust, Janet Stubbs, and Brian Wilks.**

Ticket Information

All performances take place in the **Imperial Oil Opera Theatre** at the **Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre** (227 Front St. E.). **Tickets are FREE for children under 12** (maximum of two free children's tickets for each adult ticket sold). Tickets for adults are **$40** and additional children's tickets are **$10** each. To purchase tickets, visit **coc.ca**, call COC Ticket Services at **416-363-8231**, or visit the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office** (145 Queen St. W.).

About the COC Ensemble Studio

The COC Ensemble Studio is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Since the inception of the program in 1980, over 220 young professional Canadian singers, opera coaches, stage directors and conductors have acquired their first major professional operatic experience through the Ensemble Studio. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, Allyson McHardy, David Pomeroy, Lauren Segal and Krisztina Szabó.

Members of the Ensemble Studio are the COC's resident artists and important ambassadors for the company. They receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program, involving understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, language and acting studies, and career skills development, as well as participation in masterclasses with internationally renowned opera professionals.

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. The COC enjoys a loyal audience support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. Under its leadership team of General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus, the COC is increasingly capturing the opera world's attention. The COC maintains its international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation by creating new productions within its diverse repertoire, collaborating with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracting the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. 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. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects, the Four Seasons Centre opened in 2006. For more information on the Canadian Opera Company, visit coc.ca.

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