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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY NAMES PERRYNN LEECH AS INCOMING GENERAL DIRECTOR

Leech to officially start in new role as COC leader on March 1, 2021

Toronto – After a year-long, international search, the **Canadian Opera Company** has named **Perryn Leech** its next General Director. **Leech** officially begins his position on **March 1, 2021**, with current **COC General Director Alexander Neef** continuing as company leader throughout the transition period.

“I am delighted to welcome Perryn to the Canadian Opera Company,” says **Jonathan Morgan, Chair of the COC Board of Directors**. “Perryn’s proven leadership made him a natural choice for this role: his commitment to artistic excellence, in addition to his creative thinking and tenacity, has led to award-winning programming and an admirable reputation as a leader who brings people together. On behalf of the COC Board, our staff, and audiences, I offer him our sincerest congratulations.”

Leech is currently the Managing Director of **Houston Grand Opera (HGO)**, having joined the internationally acclaimed opera house in 2007, and was appointed Managing Director in 2011. During his tenure, he successfully led **HGO** through the devastating impact of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, rallying performers, patrons, supporters, and the wider community in an uplifting, city-wide effort to create an alternate performance venue, appropriately named the “Resilience Theater.”

In addition to balancing **HGO** financially, **Leech** has brought a collaborative and inclusive approach to increasing opera access points. In recent years, he has championed low-cost ticketing programs for students and new audiences in Houston and helped develop deeper creative relationships and partnerships with diverse communities.

“Perryn’s values closely mirror our own, particularly when it comes to breaking down barriers,” says **Colleen Sexsmith, Chair of the COC Succession Committee**. “The committee was struck by his passion for sharing the art form with others and his enthusiasm for bringing more opera out of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts and into our neighbourhoods. Out of a long-list of more than 100 potential candidates from all around the world, Perryn stood apart for his vision of a more accessible COC, and I am most pleased to extend him a warm welcome to our organization.”

“I am so excited to be joining the Canadian Opera Company at this time of great challenge, but also great opportunity for opera,” says **Leech**. “Throughout the search process it was clear that the board is fully engaged in the evolution and growth of this brilliant company. The COC is already highly respected on the world stage and I am eager to get started with the outstanding group of creative talents that make up this wonderful company.”

The **COC Succession Committee** was assembled in the fall of 2019, following the appointment of **COC General Director Alexander Neef** to lead Opéra national de Paris in 2021. Over the next four months, **Leech** will work closely with **Neef**, as well as the COC’s executive management team led by **Christie Darville, COC Deputy General Director and Executive Director, Philanthropy and Audiences**.

“Perryn holds a unique understanding of the full spectrum of the performing arts industry,” says **Neef**. “His comprehensive experience will be a tremendous asset to the Canadian Opera Company’s artistic, community, and development goals, and I look forward to seeing him start in the role.”

“Our entire team is glad to have Perryn join our COC community,” adds **Darville**. “The COC is like family, and I know that he will be given full support throughout the transition period for a successful new beginning in Toronto.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The COC Succession Committee comprises:

Colleen Sexsmith, Chair of the COC Succession Committee

Nora Aufreiter, Member of the COC Board of Directors

Paul Bernards, Treasurer of the COC Board of Directors

Marcia Lewis Brown, Member of the COC Board of Directors and Sistema Toronto Board of Directors

Jonathan Morgan, Chair of the COC Board of Directors

Adrienne Pieczonka, Canadian soprano and Member of the COC Life Trustees Council

Richard Phillips, Former Chair of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors

ABOUT PERRYN LEECH

Born in Brighton, England, Perryn Leech has dedicated more than 35 years to the performing arts industry, starting at the Glyndebourne Festival and then as a freelance lighting technician and Head of Lighting at the Edinburgh International Festival, before moving to English National Opera, and then served as Technical Director at Welsh National Opera. Since 2011, Leech has served as the Managing Director of Houston Grand Opera (HGO), one of the largest and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. Leech initially joined HGO in 2007 and served as the technical and production director and then the chief operating officer before being appointed to the role of Managing Director. HGO has built a reputation for commissioning new opera, with 67 world premieres to date, and has received a Tony Award, two Grammy Awards, and three Emmy Awards – the only opera company in the world to win all three honours.

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 including a dedicated base of subscribers. Under its leadership team of General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus, the company 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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