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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY LAUNCHES LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT COMMISSIONING PROGRAM

Métis mezzo-soprano Rebecca Cuddy named as inaugural artist collaborator

Toronto – In tandem with the company's 2022 digital and in-person programming, the **Canadian Opera Company** is proud to announce a collaborative new approach to land acknowledgment. In commissioning Indigenous artists to co-create a visual land acknowledgement and artist statement together with a COC staff member, 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.

"We hope that when people take in our programming, whether that's in-person or online, they're also able to experience land acknowledgment in a new way – something that engages their senses, allows them to reflect on their own learnings and knowledge, and leave wanting to know more," says **COC General Director Perryn Leech**. "Creating creative pathways of connection lies at the heart of what we do as a performing arts organization; we hope that continued creative collaborations like this one will support the boosting of Indigenous voices so that these stories and realities are shared widely, and into the future."

Métis mezzo-soprano and visual artist **Rebecca Cuddy** is the first artist commissioned to contribute to the program. She is member of the **Circle of Artists**, an advisory body made up of Indigenous artists from across Canada who speak directly to COC decision-makers in helping to shape commitments that will support Indigenous communities.

Her three-dimensional, experiential installation *where the water meets the land* features a sculptural component that showcases her experience with beadwork, as well as an immersive sound element, and will be displayed at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**. In addition, a filmed version of the artwork and accompanying text will precede all COC digital offerings for the remainder of the season.

"The concept of the piece is that no one works alone, no one does anything alone," says **Cuddy**. "So we're highlighting the joy of 'Fire' by composer **Ian Cusson** with beautiful text by American poet **Joy Harjo** of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Composer **Troy Slocum** helped us design the soundscape and I was especially grateful for the mentorship of **Carey Newman** throughout this process; Carey is an incredible multi-disciplinary artist and speaker on the spirit of reconciliation, whose work I have admired for years – it was a privilege to collaborate on this project."

As director of the COC's upcoming [*Fantasma*](#), director/dramaturg **Julie McIsaac** served as inaugural staff collaborator, contributing to the creation and documentation of the installation.

"This has been an unparalleled and enlightening experience," says **McIsaac**. "Through months of emails, phone calls, and walks by the water amidst the birds and the trees, Rebecca shared with me her way of seeing, of creating, and being in the world. Listening to and inviting many voices has been a priority throughout this process; not only was it essential for the COC to source and commit the resources that would enable Rebecca to achieve her vision for this artwork, it was also a wonderful opportunity to welcome many artists and individuals to work with us, whether by contributing to the seen and heard elements of the piece, or by witnessing the creation."

Learn more about the creation process behind this season's artwork and statement [here](#).

For more details on this project and the **Canadian Opera Company's** work in this area, please visit coc.ca/LandAcknowledgement.

ABOUT *where the water meets the land*

A sculpture stands in the windows of the Four Seasons Centre at the corner of Richmond Street West and University Avenue. It is a music stand wrapped in black velveteen with red velvet borders and tied together with white organza ribbon. The velveteen has colourful beadwork which transforms the music stand into a living structure. The beadwork runs up the 'stem' of the stand and blooms across the back.

At the centre of the beadwork is a bright orange blossom, a gesture to the confirmation of mass graves at Residential Schools. At the bottom of the stand is vibrant, sheer blue-green fabric that stretches out in a circle around the stand. Roots made from deer hide protrude from the 'stem' and spread out over the water. As the viewer walks around the sculpture, they witness the water sparkle and shimmer; there are beads nestled into the fabric to mimic the glint of the sun on the water. Perched on the stand is Ian Cusson's composition *Fire* with text by Joy Harjo. The exposed text reads 'I am the continuance of blue sky, I am the throat of the mountains.'

As the viewer circles the sculpture, sounds travel with them: Ian Cusson playing *Fire* on the piano, *Maple Sugar* on the fiddle, various bird calls, water, crickets, and a crackling fire.

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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