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FOUR RISING ARTISTS TO JOIN COC'S ENSEMBLE STUDIO FOR 2022/2023 SEASON

Toronto – The **COC Ensemble Studio** welcomes four new artists for the company's 2022/2023 season: soprano **Ariane Cossette**, mezzo-sopranos **Queen Hezumuryango** and **Alex Hetherington**, and pianist **Brian Cho**. The four officially join the highly specialized development program for Canadian opera professionals this August, alongside returning sopranos **Charlotte Siegel** and **Midori Marsh**, baritone **Jonah Spungin**, bass-baritone **Alex Halliday**, and pianist **Vladimir Soloviev**.

In addition to gaining invaluable performance experience on the mainstage, which always has been a foundational pillar of the **Ensemble Studio**, artists will also work directly with **COC General Director Perryn Leech**, **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**, and **Director of Artistic Planning Roberto Mauro**, in receiving tailored mentorship and career guidance, alongside training from some of the industry's best vocal, language, movement, and acting coaches, as well as masterclasses with internationally acclaimed visiting artists.

"The term 'emerging' is often applied to the young artists of this program, but I cannot stress enough the incredible talent of these incoming artists," says **Leech**. "By giving opportunities on our mainstage, in recital, and across all company work, we're not only better able to provide the real-life experience every artist requires to grow and flourish in this industry, we're also proudly presenting the next generation of Canadian opera talent to our audiences throughout each and every season."

Ariane Cossette hails from Trois-Rivières, Quebec and holds a bachelor's degree from Conservatoire de musique de Montréal and a master's degree from Université de Montréal. As a concert soloist, she has performed with *Choeurs Éternels* in France and, on stage, her credits include Micaëla in *La tragédie de Carmen* (Université de Montréal) and Selene in *Endymion's Dream* (COSA Canada).

Queen Hezumuryango's experience and passion for music spans a variety of styles, including opera, recital, and musical theatre. Originally from Burundi, her credits to date include Tisbe in *La Cenerentola* (Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance), Carmen in *La tragédie de Carmen* (Atelier d'opéra à l'Université de Montréal), and Third Wood Sprite in *Rusalka* (Toronto Summer Opera Workshop). Recently, she began a doctorate in vocal performance at l'Université de Montréal, with a thesis exploring the contribution of Black composers to classical music.

Alex Hetherington of Toronto is currently completing a Masters of Opera Performance at the University of Toronto. Her recent engagements include performances as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, the title role in *La tragédie de Carmen* (UofT Opera), as well as The House in Tapestry Opera's cast recording of *Rocking Horse Winner*. As a composer with an interest in musicology, she is currently completing a research-creation project examining art song performance practice through the lens of modern gender theory.

Brian Cho grew up in London, Ontario, where he completed his Bachelor of Musical Arts and Masters in Collaborative Piano at Western University and has since participated in the Orford Summer Music Academy and the Accademia Europea Dell'Opera. In addition to being an accomplished concert pianist and music director, **Cho** is the co-founder and head coach of Can of Soup Collective, a non-profit organization dedicated to making opera accessible and relatable to wider audiences.

“More than ever, we’re looking to take a holistic approach to artist development,” says **Roberto Mauro**. “With each member of the Ensemble Studio, we’re considering their pathway to this career, their personal goals and priorities, and seeking out how we can best support their individual journey in a way that sets them up for long-term success.”

Auditions for the 22/23 **Ensemble Studio** kicked off with a round of video submissions in the fall of 2021 that led to live, follow-up auditions from 70 singers in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal. After initial delays due to changing COVID-19 conditions, eight finalists were invited to the COC in March to participate in working sessions and vocal coachings that culminated in a final round of auditions. This year’s finalists were: soprano **Sydney Baedke**, soprano **Ariane Cossette**, soprano **Hannah Crawford**, mezzo-soprano **Alex Hetherington**, mezzo-soprano **Queen Hezumuryango**, tenor **Elias Theocharidis**, baritone **Alex Mathews**, and baritone **Mikelis Rogers**.

The final auditions were adjudicated by **COC General Director Perryn Leech** along with key members of the COC’s artistic and music staff: **Johannes Debus (Music Director)**, **Roberto Mauro (Director, Artistic Planning)**, **Dorian Cox (Director, Ensemble Studio)**, **Liz Upchurch (Head of the Ensemble Studio)**, and **Wendy Nielsen (Head Vocal Consultant)**.

“The level of applicants we saw from across Canada was extraordinarily high, a fact that is especially impressive given that many were only able to sing from their living rooms for most of the two years leading up to these auditions,” says **Dorian Cox**. “We are also so proud of our graduating artists for their ongoing success through an industry still in recovery, and will be eagerly watching as they lead the way to a new era of live opera!”

At the end of the 2021/2022 season, four **Ensemble Studio** members will mark the end of their time in the program: soprano **Jamie Groote**, tenor **Matthew Cairns**, bass-baritone **Vartan Gabrielian**, and pianist **Frances Thielmann**. All four were prominently featured in the company’s 2021/2022 digital and in-person offerings, with exciting new professional opportunities ahead: **Thielmann** has been named Head Coach at Edmonton Opera, **Gabrielian** will debut with Vancouver Opera, **Groote** will make her debut with Manitoba Opera, and **Cairns** has been accepted into Metropolitan Opera’s Lindemann Young Artist Development Program starting in the 2022/2023 season. All three singers will return to the COC mainstage in the upcoming season.

The **COC Ensemble Studio Competition** will return for live audiences on **November 3, 2022**, with full details to follow at a later date.

For more information on the **Ensemble Studio** and its artists, please visit coc.ca/Ensemble.

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ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE STUDIO

Ensemble Studio members receive a unique blend of advanced training and practical career experience. The highly tailored, multi-year program involves understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, as well as detailed language, movement, and acting studies. Participants attend intimate masterclasses and lessons with renowned opera professionals, and are also provided with holistic training that includes industry-specific business skills as well as financial and career counselling.

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 company is an incubator for the future of the art form, nurturing Canada's new wave of opera performers and creators with customized training and support. The COC's purpose-built opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, is hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. For more information, visit coc.ca.

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