

For immediate release: March 2, 2023

FOUR NEW ARTISTS TO JOIN 2023/2024 ENSEMBLE STUDIO

Toronto – The **COC Ensemble Studio** welcomes four rising artists starting in the company’s 2023/2024 season: soprano **Karoline Podolak**, tenor **Wesley Harrison**, baritone **Korin Thomas-Smith**, and pianist **Mattia Senesi**. The four officially join the highly specialized development program for Canadian opera professionals this August, alongside returning sopranos **Ariane Cossette** and **Charlotte Siegel**, mezzo-sopranos **Alex Hetherington** and **Queen Hezumuryango**, and pianist **Brian Cho**.

This past November, **Podolak**, **Harrison**, and **Thomas-Smith** placed as finalists at the **2022 Centre Stage: Ensemble Studio Competition**, a competitive vocal showcase for young artists from all over Canada. **Podolak** took home First Prize and the Audience Choice Award that evening, while **Harrison** tied for second prize.

“The Canadian Opera Company has a long-standing commitment to recognizing and nurturing young artist development,” says **COC General Director Perryn Leech**. “For decades now, the Ensemble Studio has helped prepare generations of Canadian opera artists and then watch them launch major international careers. We are thrilled to see Karoline, Wesley, Korin, and Mattia join this exceptional program – I look forward to seeing everything they get from the experience. Opera’s future is in exciting young hands.”

Artists of the **Ensemble Studio** receive a blend of intensive coaching and practical experience through a highly tailored multi-year program that includes understudying and performing mainstage roles. In addition to rigorous training from some of the industry’s best vocal, language, movement, and acting coaches, artists work directly with **General Director Perryn Leech**, **Music Director Johannes Debus**, **Director of Artistic Planning Roberto Mauro**, **Director of the Ensemble Studio Dorian Cox**, and **Liz Upchuch**, **Head of Music, Ensemble Studio** in receiving tailored mentorship and career guidance, as well as artist intensives with internationally acclaimed visiting artists.

“The immersive experience that young artists get through the Ensemble Studio is incomparable and invaluable,” says **Cox**. “They’re immediately connected to all areas of this incredible company and are given the support to reach their own unique aspirations. You can see from the impressive list of Ensemble Studio alumni that this holistic and individualized approach sets them up for a lifetime of success.”

At the end of this season, four **Ensemble Studio** members will mark the end of their time in the transformative program: soprano **Midori Marsh**, bass-baritone **Alex Halliday**, baritone **Jonah Spungin**, and pianist **Vladimir Soloviev**. All four artists were prominently featured in the company’s 22/23 mainstage programming, and will perform a final farewell concert as part of the **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre Presented by TD Bank Group**.

Auditions for the **2024/2025 Ensemble Studio** will open this spring and the next **COC Ensemble Studio Competition** is scheduled for **October 26, 2023**, with full details to follow at a later date.

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

ABOUT THE INCOMING ENSEMBLE ARTISTS

Karoline Podolak holds a master's degree from the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Poland. She had her operatic debut at Silesian Opera House as Zuzia in Moniuszko's *Verbum Nobile*, and Adele in Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*. She most recently sang Violetta in *La Traviata* at the National Opera and Ballet of Bulgaria. In 2021, Podolak won the Toronto-Buffalo District at the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and was a Region Final Encouragement Winner.

Wesley Harrison is from Windsor, Ontario and currently based in Montreal, Quebec. Having completed his bachelor's in voice performance at Wilfrid Laurier University and his master's in opera and voice performance at McGill University, Harrison has been focused on exploring and refining his voice as well as his expressive abilities. He recently had the opportunity to perform as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and debut roles in collaboration with Montreal-based composers.

Korin Thomas-Smith holds a Master of Music in Opera and a bachelor's in voice performance from the University of Toronto. Thomas-Smith currently studies at Yale University in the Master of Musical Arts program, and is a past participant of the Ravinia Steans Music Festival, the Music Academy of the West, the Rebanks Family Fellowship, and International Performance Residency. In 2021, he was named one of CBC Music's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30."

Mattia Senesi holds a bachelor's degree from the Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali Rinaldo Franci in Siena and master's degree in piano from the Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali Pietro Mascagni in Livorno. Senesi has won a number of international competitions, both as a soloist and in chamber music ensembles. He's currently completing his doctorate in collaborative piano at the University of Montreal where he served as collaborative pianist for *Projet Nouvel Opéra* and for the university's L'École LUMI.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Season Sponsor: BMO Financial Group

The COC Ensemble Studio is Underwritten By:

The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation, with major support from Anne & Tony Arrell, Marjorie & Roy Linden, The MacNeill Family Foundation, Wendy J. Thompson, The Azrieli Foundation, RBC Foundation, The Slight Family Foundation, and Stingray, and additional support from ARIAS: Canadian Opera Student Development Fund, Marcia Lewis Brown, Catherine Fauquier, George & Irene Hamilton, Patrick and Barbara Keenan Foundation, Joy Levine, Patricia & Frank Mills, and Brian Wilks.

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 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.

To access the COC's Media Gallery for high-res photography, please visit: coc.ca/press

Username: cocpress | **Login:** mediapix

For more information, please contact:

Avril Sequeira, Director of Public Relations, email: avrils@coc.ca

Davin Leivonen-Fok, Communications Coordinator, email: davinlf@coc.ca