

For immediate release: October 30, 2023

CRITICAL ACCLAIM AND EXCITING NEW WORKS MARK CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY'S 2022/2023 SEASON

Toronto – The **Canadian Opera Company's** first full season following the pandemic was highlighted by award-winning mainstage operas, expanded community programming, and the sold-out run of a contemporary world premiere as reported yesterday by **COC Board Chair Jonathan Morgan** and **COC General Director Perryn Leech** at the company's Annual General Meeting hosted from the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**.

"I am so proud of the quality and range of opera that the COC was able to offer in 2022/2023," said **Leech**. "The artistic excellence of our mainstage operas received critical acclaim and blew away our audiences. From our multi-award-winning production of *Macbeth* and the sold-out world premiere of *Pomegranate*, the company brilliantly showcased the capacity of opera to uplift, to entertain, and to deeply move; the performing arts are all about finding connection points and capturing the human experience and it's clear that audiences found that in their experiences with the COC this past season."

"As General Director, a personal priority of mine is to nurture the art form in our communities, see it flourish and grow and become an everyday part of Canadians' cultural diet," continued **Leech**. "The range of productions and concerts across all scales and mediums is a key part of making opera a relevant and vital part of everyday life. The power of the human voice to tell stories, old and new, is as vibrant, spine tingling, and thrilling as it ever has been. This season has reinforced that like no other."

"The COC was thrilled to return to a full year of imaginative and innovative productions," said **Morgan**. "However, during this same time period, the financial world around us and the expenses of staging an art form as complex as opera have also changed significantly, leading to a deficit of approximately half a million dollars in our 2022/2023 season. We always knew that full economic recovery, for the entire performing arts sector, would not necessarily take a linear path and so the company remains firmly focused on the foundations of its long-term plan: financial rigor, the development of our audience base, and the cultivation of a new generation of philanthropic supporters."

"I also want to extend a warm welcome to 10 new COC Board members for 2023/2024," continued **Morgan**. "In looking to secure a bright and meaningful future for Canadian opera, the COC understands that executive leadership that embraces a diversity of perspectives is integral to our success. Over the last season, the company has been committed to strengthening our board with the addition of several new directors from an array of sectors and specialities. I am pleased to share that our newest members are not only highly accomplished leaders in their field, they are passionate about supporting our forward-looking vision for this art form, and I look forward to seeing the season ahead unfold with their involvement."

To view the COC's full **2022/2023 Annual Report**, please visit coc.ca/AGM2023.

MAINSTAGE SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

The **Canadian Opera Company's** 2022/2023 season kicked off with the haunting mystery and sweeping romance of Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*. Baritone **Johan Reuter** and soprano **Marjorie Owens** starred in the signature COC production featuring a massive, tilting set design that brought audiences right into the tumultuous world of spirits lost at sea. For **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**, leading the COC

Orchestra through the early Wagner masterpiece marked a full-circle moment, having first conducted the opera in his first season with the company in 2010.

Next, the COC welcomed the return of director **Joel Ivany**'s colourful and always entertaining production of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. With the opera's infectious melodies and fiery drama, and featuring two dazzling mezzo-sopranos in the title role, **J'Nai Bridges** and **Rihab Chaieb**, an **Ensemble Studio** alumna now enjoying an international career, it was little wonder *The Globe and Mail* hailed it "a party invitation you should accept."

The winter season delivered *The Marriage of Figaro* by Wolfgang A. Mozart, in an acclaimed **Claus Guth** production that took a subversive swipe at aristocracy in a dark and artful take on the comic opera. Critics and audiences alike were wowed by the stellar ensemble, featuring **Ensemble Studio** alumnus **Gordon Bintner** as the Count, bass-baritone **Luca Pisaroni** as Figaro, and the COC debut of two spectacular sopranos, **Andrea Carroll** and **Lauren Fagan**, as Susannah and the Countess.

Richard Strauss' *Salome* also returned to the COC in a provocative staging helmed by Academy Award nominee **Atom Egoyan**. The biblical shocker "deliver[ed] an all-out assault on the senses," as described by *NEXT Magazine*. **Ensemble Studio** alumna and COC favourite **Ambur Braid** starred as the vengeful spurned princess, opposite baritone **Michael-Kupfer Radecky**, with both simultaneously taking part in the filming of **Egoyan**'s latest silver screen feature, *Seven Veils*, based on his decades-long work with the COC on the opera *Salome*.

Springtime in Toronto brought with it "a perfect pairing of director and opera" (*The Globe and Mail*), Verdi's *Macbeth*, as led by the visionary **Sir David McVicar**. Baritone **Quinn Kelsey** shook the house in the title role, with sopranos **Alexandrina Pendatchanska** and **Tracy Cantin** sharing the role of Lady Macbeth, opposite rising Ensemble Studio graduate **Matthew Cairns** as Macduff. The must-see opera event of the season ended up leading the Opera Division of the 43rd Annual Dora Mavor Moore Awards, with eight nominations and three wins for Music Direction, Design, and Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble.

Finally, passion, betrayal, and a good measure of danger had audiences on the edge of their seats for *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini. **Giuliano Carella** made a COC debut, conducting an endless parade of hit arias including the thunderous Act 1 closer "Te Deum," soprano showcase "Vissi d'arte," and mournful "E lucevan le stelle."

A SOLD-OUT CONTEMPORARY OPERA PREMIERE

The company closed its 2022/2023 season with the world premiere and sold-out run of *Pomegranate* by composer **Kye Marshall** and librettist **Amanda Hale**. The time-shifting, contemporary love story whisked audiences from ancient Pompeii to a Toronto lesbian bar in the aftermath of the infamous 1981 Bathhouse raids, with the couple at the heart of the story ultimately faced with an impossible choice. **Adanya Dunn** and **Danielle Buonaiuto** starred as young lovers Suli/Suzie and Cassia/Cass, with **Jennifer Tarver** directing an innovative staging that saw the **Canadian Opera Company Theatre (COCT)** seamlessly transition from 79 AD to modern day.

Pomegranate also featured soprano **Teiya Kasahara 笠原 貞野** (they/them) who, just last season, created and performed in the world premiere of *The Queen In Me* at the COCT. In reflecting on the goals and potential of the community-rooted performance venue, they said, "I love this space...it brings together many different types of people from industries that are also adjacent to opera. And so I feel like a lot of creativity can happen here. And it's a place where I feel like opera is expanding the genre, where new Canadian works are eventually going to enter the canon."

A THRILLING NEW INDIGENOUS-LED COMMISSION

On September 30, 2023, the **Canadian Opera Company (COC)** and **National Arts Centre (NAC)** officially announced the co-commissioning of *Empire of Wild*, an imaginative and enthralling new mainstage opera from composer **Ian Cusson** and librettist **Cherie Dimaline**. The contemporary opera will be based on **Dimaline's** 2019 national best-seller of the same name and centres the Georgian Bay Métis community at the heart of its story, with plans for Indigenous artists to helm the creative process.

“Empire of Wild embodies years of community-rooted work that the Canadian Opera Company has been doing through regular discourse with its Circle of Artists, and marks a tangible response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s [94 Calls to Action](#),” said **COC General Director Perryn Leech** at the announcement. “With this commission, we’re continuing our commitment to Indigenous representation by bringing a collaborative focus to the creation of opera that reflects a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences. We are proud to support the artistic leadership of some of Canada’s most prominent Indigenous directors, designers, composers, and stage crew.”

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, Presented by TD Bank Group has become one of the city’s cultural treasures, presenting nearly **70 concerts** in 2022/2023. The popular public programming runs from September to May, and features a range of vocal, instrumental, jazz, and dance performances with over 325 artists showcased during the 22/23 season, including: **Roland Wood; Ballet Jörgen**; prizewinners from **The Glenn Gould Studio 2023 Chamber Music Competition**; **Opera Atelier**; the **Toronto Consort** and **Against the Grain Theatre**; **Ballet Creole**; **Persian**, Chinese and Carnatic ensembles; **DanceWorks** and **Peggy Baker Dance Projects**; and members of the **COC Ensemble Studio**. **Over 9,000 audience members** attended one of the **Free Concert Series** performances last season, including **38 school and community groups**.

Looking beyond the company’s downtown opera house, **eight additional concerts were recorded** and shared online under the banner of City Sessions, extending the Free Concert Series’ reach to music lovers across the country and beyond. On March 22, in recognition of World Water Day, the COC released *noondaadiwag*, a special concert recorded in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre from Anishinaabe-irish artist **Olivia Shortt** in collaboration with Canadian duo **Orbit (Aliayta Foon-Dancoes and Isidora Nojkovic)** and soprano **Alexandra Smither**. The concert featured the thought-provoking piece, “bagaskaadagaazii” (meaning “s/he wades splashing through water”), highlighting the vital importance of safe, clean drinking water on Indigenous reserves across Canada.

Following its launch in spring of 2022, the COC’s **Showcase Series** continued to engage, mentor, and amplify the voices of artists from across Asian, African and Caribbean, and Latin American diasporas, with four month-long programming series featuring artists such as **Alhelí Pimienta** and the members of the **Venuti String Quartet**; members from the dance teams at **Araguacu Latin Dance Company**; **Aaron Manswell**; **The Nathaniel Dett Chorale**; Korean fusion band **Haneum**, and **Babel Ensemble**.

In complement to the fully staged operas on the COC’s mainstage, the company’s **Opera Lab** program offered dynamic workshops all season long for young adults, bringing participants behind-the-scenes to meet with members of mainstage creative teams for unique opera-themed learning opportunities that ranged from exploring the art of the aria to a lively swordplay session for *Macbeth*!

Through its fully customizable **Opera Makers** program, the COC also partnered with a number of local schools and community groups in its ongoing mission to empower young people from underserved communities to share their own perspectives and lived experiences through creative exploration and storytelling. This past season, COC teaching artists and collaborators worked with **Kapapamahchakwew - Wandering Spirit School**, **Heydon Park Secondary School**, **Runnymede Collegiate Institute**, **Claude Watson**, **Enquiring Minds Montessori**, **Forest Hill Junior and Senior Public School**, as well as Regent Park’s **Youth Enrichment Academy** with **Building Roots** to introduce students to the endless creative and expressive possibilities the art form has to offer.

To round out the spring, **COC Teaching Artists Roydon Tse, Meredith Wolting, and Isabella Fassler** led a special partnership with the **Evergreen Brickworks**. Neurodiverse students from across the city, in Grades 6-9, were given the opportunity to conceptualize, direct, and perform a work of their own creation; the result was *Nature’s Perspective*, an original opera exploring themes of environmental stewardship and humanity’s relationship with planet Earth.

Finally in July, the COC's **Summer Music Camps** welcomed participants for a week of creative exploration and performance, with four varied tiers of programming created for students from Grade 1-12. For advanced post-secondary singers hoping to pursue a professional career in opera, the company hosted its **Summer Opera Intensive** in August, offering a full week of tuition-free training with industry leaders that culminated in a final showcase performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BMO Financial Group: Season Sponsor

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 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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