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## **COC'S 2018/2019 SEASON FEATURES WORLD PREMIERE OF RUFUS WAINWRIGHT'S *HADRIAN***

### ***Hadrian* Anchors a Star-Studded Season that Explores the Many Facets of Love**

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company's** 2018/2019 season presents the world premiere of *Hadrian*, a new opera from composer **Rufus Wainwright** and librettist **Daniel MacIvor**, which features the highly anticipated COC debuts of international opera stars **Thomas Hampson** and **Karita Mattila**.

The COC's 68th season offers multi-faceted perspectives on love as a contested ground of the human condition. Being presented along with *Hadrian* in the 18/19 season is a new COC production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*; returning COC productions of Richard Strauss' *Elektra*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Puccini's *La Bohème*; and a new-to-Toronto production of Verdi's *Otello*.

"Opera transforms how we perceive the world and, in our 18/19 season, we're challenging ourselves and our audience to look at a fundamental human experience—love—through an unexpected array of works that has the capacity to reshape how we understand our hearts and minds," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "In undertaking this journey, the COC continues to draw some of the most talented figures in opera, whose exceptional artistry on stage is equally matched by a passionate and committed team behind the scenes. This is nowhere more apparent than in our 18/19 season creative campaign, which features COC staff members from every level of the company representing characters from each opera."

On the world premiere of *Hadrian*, **Neef** adds: "We're deeply invested in the notion that the COC should be a space for Canadian creativity, and the premiere of *Hadrian* marks the third season in a row in which we've featured a Canadian opera as a core part of our programming. I look forward to sharing the world premiere of this sensitively crafted piece with our Toronto audiences, as well as welcoming international opera-goers to experience the strength of Canadian opera in a global context."

In the 18/19 season, the COC welcomes some of the most important opera artists in the world for significant company debuts: **Thomas Hampson, Karita Mattila** and **David Leigh** in *Hadrian*; **Atalla Ayan, Angel Blue, Lucas Meachem, Andrzej Filończyk, Brandon Cedel** and **Önay Köse** in *La Bohème*; **Ben Bliss** and **Johannes Kammler** in *Così fan tutte*; and **Wilhelm Schwinghammer** in *Elektra*.

The COC also welcomes back voices and visionaries of international note, including: **Christine Goerke** in the title role of *Elektra*, with **Erin Wall, Susan Bullock** and **Michael Schade** making their role debuts as Chrysothemis, Klytämnestra and Aegisth, respectively; **Russell Thomas, Gerald Finley** and **Tamara Wilson**, all appearing in a fully staged production of *Otello* for the first time; **Ben Heppner** in the cameo role of Dinarchus in *Hadrian*; **Russell Braun**, making his role debut as Don Alfonso, and **Tracy Dahl** in *Così fan tutte*; and bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner** in his role debut as the title character in *Eugene Onegin*, along with **Joyce El-Khoury, Varduhi Abrahamyan**, and **Joseph Kaiser**. Six renowned stage directors also return to the COC this season: **David Alden, John Caird, Robert Carsen, Atom Egoyan, Peter Hinton**, and **James Robinson**.

## 18/19 SEASON AT-A-GLANCE

### *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Eight Performances: September 30, October 4, 10, 18, 20, 26, 30, November 3, 2018**

**New COC Production (originally created by the Metropolitan Opera)**

**Sung in Russian with English SURTITLES™**

Tchaikovsky's operatic masterpiece, *Eugene Onegin*, opens the COC's 18/19 season. Based on the classic Russian novel-in-verse by Alexander Pushkin, it tells the story of one of opera's—and literature's—most iconic anti-heroes. Eugene Onegin is a worldly and aloof dandy who comes to regret rejecting the reserved and bookish Tatyana, setting the stage for a drama of extraordinary theatrical intimacy.

In this “exhilaratingly unsentimental production” (*Opera News*), pre-eminent Canadian director **Robert Carsen** focuses on the complex human emotions at the opera's heart. The staging evokes an autumnal setting, with sumptuous 19th-century costumes and minimalist set design by renowned Canadian designer **Michael Levine**, punctuated by mismatched chairs and a blanket of fall leaves scattering the stage. **Christine Binder** revives the lighting originally created by **Jean Kalman**.

The young cast of *Eugene Onegin* features Canadian and international singers currently making waves on the world's foremost opera stages. Bass-baritone **Gordon Bintner**, a graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio, makes his role debut as Eugene Onegin. He is joined by Canadian soprano **Joyce El-Khoury** as Tatyana, Onegin's unrequited love; Armenian mezzo-soprano **Varduhi Abrahamyan** as Olga, Tatyana's sister; Canadian tenor **Joseph Kaiser** as Lensky, Olga's fiancé; and Moldovan bass **Oleg Tsibulko** as Prince Gremin, Tatyana's devoted husband.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** conducts Tchaikovsky's rich and romantic score which is noted for its emotional sincerity and simplicity, a radical departure from grand operatic conventions of the time.

### *Hadrian* by Rufus Wainwright with libretto by Daniel MacIvor

**Seven Performances: October 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 2018**

**COC World Premiere**

**Sung in English and Latin with English SURTITLES™**

Commissioned by the COC in 2013, *Hadrian* is composed by internationally acclaimed Canadian-American singer, songwriter and composer **Rufus Wainwright**, with a libretto by award-winning Canadian actor, director and playwright **Daniel MacIvor**. A poetic meditation on the ways that love overturns worlds both political and personal, *Hadrian*'s premiere marks a milestone moment for the company as the first COC-commissioned world premiere to be presented on the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts stage.

The opera examines the aging Roman Emperor's profound grief at the loss of his lover, Antinous, a charismatic young man in his entourage who achieved cult-like status after his death. When Antinous drowns in the Nile at the height of their love affair, many questions arise about the nature of his death.

On composing *Hadrian*, **Wainwright** says:

“*Hadrian* was the first opera I wanted to compose. When I first discovered Hadrian, I was instantly struck with the idea of transforming this historical subject into operatic form. Both its intimate nature and wild grandeur seemed perfectly suited for what opera does best: creating a hyper-illustration of the dark inner lives of people up against formidable outer circumstances while at the same time musically careening through the jagged and surreal dimensions of what lies in between. No other theatrical form truly refracts life into myriad vibrantly bright colors as much as opera does, and the tale of Hadrian, arguably Rome's greatest ruler, is a diamond perfectly cut for such a task.”

**MacIvor** adds:

“Over the past three years, having delved deeper and deeper into Hadrian's world and his time, the more resonance I feel with his story and our world today. Hadrian presided over the end of an era where faith and religion and

power were so intertwined that each was unrecognizable from the other, and, even more central to Hadrian's story, his remarkable devotion to Antinous brought tragedy and treachery to the empire due to a fear of same-sex love. As they say, the more things change... It is my hope that *Hadrian* will speak to the danger of the politics of faith, will help to illuminate a history that feels increasingly more current, and will hold up the remarkable relationship between Hadrian and Antinous as a timeless model of love."

The COC has assembled a cast of the world's greatest opera stars to originate the principal roles in *Hadrian*: American baritone **Thomas Hampson** is the title character, with Finnish soprano **Karita Mattila** portraying Plotina, wife of the emperor Trajan and a great supporter of Hadrian. Canadian-American tenor **Isaiah Bell**, a rising star in the opera world, portrays Hadrian's lover, Antinous. Legendary Canadian tenor **Ben Heppner** comes out of retirement to make a cameo appearance as Dinarchus. The cast also features American bass **David Leigh** as Turbo, head of Hadrian's military who perceives a threat in the love between the Emperor and Antinous, and soprano **Ambur Braid**, a graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio, as Hadrian's wife Sabina.

The production reunites the all-Canadian creative team behind the COC's ground-breaking 2017 production of *Louis Riel*, led by **Peter Hinton**, one of Canada's most acclaimed and inventive directors. His team includes set designer **Michael Gianfrancesco**, costume designer **Gillian Gallow** and lighting designer **Bonnie Beecher**.

*Hadrian* is **Wainwright**'s second opera, following 2009's *Prima Donna*, and features his signature melodic vocal lines. COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra through the lush and flowing romantic score.

### *Elektra* by Richard Strauss

**Eight Performances: January 26, 31, February 6, 10, 12, 16, 22, 2019**

**COC Revival**

**Sung in German with English SURTITLES™**

Richard Strauss' twisted psycho-drama of family dysfunction, *Elektra*, returns to the COC with star soprano **Christine Goerke** making a highly anticipated return to the Four Seasons Centre stage in the title role. The one-act opera is a musically modernist re-telling of a key episode in Greek mythology: Elektra's lust for revenge as she obsesses over punishing her mother, Klytämnestra, who murdered her father years earlier with the aid of her paramour, Aegisth.

Joining **Goerke** in *Elektra*'s all-star cast is Canadian soprano **Erin Wall** as Elektra's sister, Chrysothemis; British dramatic soprano **Susan Bullock** as Klytämnestra; German bass **Wilhelm Schwinghammer** as her brother Orest; and Canadian tenor **Michael Schade** as her mother's lover and conspirator, Aegisth.

American director **James Robinson** (*The Elixir of Love*, 2017; *Nixon in China*, 2011) revives this psychologically complex production, last presented at the COC in 2007. Set designer **Derek McLane**, costume designer **Anita Stewart** and lighting designer **Thomas C. Hase** create a nightmarish world with expressionist design elements influenced by Francis Bacon, Edvard Munch and Robert Motherwell.

Strauss' emotionally charged score is a showcase for the **COC Orchestra**, conducted by Music Director **Johannes Debus**.

### *Così fan tutte* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**Nine performances: February 5, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 2019**

**COC Revival**

**Sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™**

*Così fan tutte*, Mozart's wry comedy about fidelity and temptation, returns to the COC in a production by Canadian stage and screen director **Atom Egoyan**, which was hailed for capturing "the complex spirit of its original creators" (*Globe and Mail*). In Mozart's final collaboration with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, two sisters become entangled in a wager set by their fiancés to test their faithfulness.

First presented by the COC in 2014, the production takes its inspiration from the opera's subtitle, *The School for Lovers*, and sets the action in an academy where love is examined, dissected and manipulated. Set and costume designer **Debra Hanson** plays on the theme of experimentation, creating larger-than-life set pieces that dominate the space, including a large curio cabinet, giant pinned butterflies, and a replica of Frida Kahlo's doubly-conscious self-portrait, *Las Dos Fridas*. Lighting design is by **Michael Walton**.

Two rising Canadian stars reunite as the opera's two sisters, after appearing together in the COC's recent production of *The Magic Flute*: soprano **Kirsten MacKinnon** as Fiordiligi and recent Ensemble Studio graduate, mezzo-soprano **Emily D'Angelo** as Dorabella. They are joined by two notable Canadian veterans of the COC stage: baritone **Russell Braun** as the wager's instigator, Don Alfonso, and soprano **Tracy Dahl** as Despina, reprising her role from the COC's 2014 presentation. American tenor **Ben Bliss** and German baritone **Johannes Kammler** make their COC debuts as the sisters' fiancés, Ferrando and Guglielmo, respectively.

Internationally acclaimed conductor **Bernard Labadie** returns to lead the COC Orchestra through what is often described as Mozart's most perfect score, featuring stunning ensembles and arias.

### **La Bohème by Giacomo Puccini**

**Eleven Performances: April 17, 26, 28, May 2, 4, 5, 7, 11 (two performances), 17, 22, 2019**

**COC Co-production with Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera**

**Sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™**

*La Bohème*, one of opera's greatest love stories, comes back to the Four Seasons Centre stage in a revival of the COC's popular 2014 production from Tony Award-winning director **John Caird**. Puccini's heartbreaking tale of young bohemians in 19th-century Paris has captured the cultural imagination since its premiere in 1896 and has gone on to inspire numerous adaptations, most notably the hit Broadway musical, *Rent*.

Olivier Award-winning and Tony Award-nominated set and costume designer **David Farley** takes inspiration from France's Belle Époque to visually capture the main characters' energetic and absolute commitment to their artistic vocation: the set design is conceived as a collage of canvases by the painter Marcello, framing the action within the opera's Parisian locales. Lighting design is by **Michael James Clark**.

A mix of Canadian and international rising stars comprise the cast of young Bohemians: American soprano **Angel Blue** makes her COC debut as the doomed Mimì, sharing the role with Lebanese-Canadian soprano, and Ensemble Studio graduate, **Miriam Khalil**; Brazilian tenor **Atalla Ayan** and American tenor **Joshua Guerrero** sing the role of her love, Rodolfo; Canadian sopranos **Andriana Chuchman** and **Danika Lorèn**, a graduating member of COC Ensemble Studio, share the role of the lively Musetta; American baritone **Lucas Meachem** and Polish baritone **Andrzej Filończyk** alternate as Marcello; and American bass-baritone **Brandon Cedel** and Turkish bass **Önay Köse** share the role of the philosopher, Colline.

Conductor **Paolo Carignani** (2012's *Tosca* and 2016's *Carmen*) leads the COC Orchestra through Puccini's sweeping score and memorable melodies, most notably Mimì and Rodolfo's heartbreaking love duets.

### **Otello by Giuseppe Verdi**

**Eight Performances: April 27, 30, May 3, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 2019**

**A COC rental of a co-production between English National Opera, Royal Swedish Opera and Teatro Real Madrid**

**Sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™**

The COC closes its season with Verdi's *Otello*, one of the most dramatically intense operas ever composed. In adapting Shakespeare's famous tragedy, Verdi created a compelling psychological portrait of the title character, a Moorish general whose fatal flaw of jealousy is exploited by the conniving Iago, leading to his downfall. **Johannes Debus** leads the COC Orchestra through Verdi's most daring and complex orchestration.

Few tenors can handle the vocal challenges of the title role but in **Russell Thomas** (*Norma* and *Carmen*, 2016) the COC has found a tenor who can meet the role's immense demands. With the COC's *Otello*, he sings the role for the first time in a fully staged production.

**Thomas** is equally matched by distinguished Canadian baritone **Gerald Finley**, returning to the COC after his widely praised performance in 2014's *Falstaff*, as Iago. Soprano **Tamara Wilson**, heralded by *The New York Times* as "a young American who sings Verdi with a passion that surpasses stereotype," is *Otello*'s wife, Desdemona.

Hailed as "flawless" (*The Independent*) when first presented at English National Opera in 2014, director **David Alden** reunites with set and costume designer **Jon Morrell** (2016's *Maometto II*) for this production and moves the setting to a crumbling Mediterranean garrison in the early 20th century. In keeping with the spirit of Verdi's original creation, the production focuses on *Otello*'s inner psychology rather than the external influences of the society around him.

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All repertoire, dates, pricing, productions and casting are subject to change without notice. For more complete casting and creative team information, please see the production pages at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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### **2018/2019 SEASON CREATIVE CAMPAIGN**

Recognizing the inter-disciplinary and collaborative nature of opera, the COC's 18/19 creative campaign features 10 members of the company's administrative, production, and front of house teams. These individuals—and dozens more like them—make vital contributions to the larger project of operatic theatre, but usually remain behind the scenes. Their participation in the 18/19 campaign speaks to the extraordinary and dedicated community of professionals involved in sustaining the work of the COC.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Opera</b>
Bryna Berezowska	Children, Youth and Family Programs Manager	<i>Elektra</i>
Alfred Caron	Director, Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts	<i>Otello</i>
Autumn Coppaway	Assistant Technical Director	<i>Così fan tutte</i>
Dorian Cox	Program Manager, Free Concert Series	<i>Eugene Onegin</i>
Gerry Egan	Assistant to Scheduling and Events	<i>Hadrian</i>
Shawn Molko	Event Staff	<i>Hadrian</i>
Francesca Perez	Senior Development Officer, Partnerships	<i>Così fan tutte</i>
Dave Samuels	Security Supervisor	<i>Otello</i>
Victor Widjaja	Senior Development Officer, Friends of the COC	<i>La Bohème</i>
Madelyn Wilkinson	School Programs Manager	<i>La Bohème</i>

## ACCESS THE SEASON

### General Public

**Subscriptions** to the 18/19 season are available now and may be purchased online at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca), by calling **416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre Box Office**, 145 Queen St. W., Toronto.

**Single tickets** to all six mainstage operas are available to the public as of **August 27, 2018**.

### Programs for Young People

**Opera Under 30 presented by TD Bank** offers patrons under the age of 30 specially priced tickets to mainstage performances.

**Opera Club** is the COC's membership program for young professionals, which provides opportunities to attend performances, special events and socialize with like-minded arts lovers.

### Special Initiatives

**Opera Access for New Canadians** is a partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship that provides access to the COC's mainstage operas and special events for refugees and newcomers to Canada.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This production of *Così fan tutte* was originally made possible in part by **Philip Deck & Kimberley Bozak**, and **BMO Financial Group**.

This production of *Elektra* was originally made possible in part by **Hampton Securities**.

This production of *La Bohème* was originally made possible by **Jerry and Geraldine Heffernan**.

**The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, Marjorie and Roy Linden, Sheila K. Piercey, RBC Foundation and The Slight Family Foundation, is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals and provides advanced instruction, hands-on experience, and career development opportunities. The Ensemble Studio is also supported by the Government of Canada, the Hal Jackman Foundation and other generous donors.**

## 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 support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. Under its leadership team of General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus, the COC is increasingly capturing the opera world's attention. The COC maintains its international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation by creating new productions within its diverse repertoire, collaborating with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracting the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. 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. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects, the Four Seasons Centre opened in 2006. For more information on the Canadian Opera Company, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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For more information or to request production photography, please contact:

Kristin McKinnon, Publicist, tel: 416-306-2383, e-mail: [kmckinnon@coc.ca](mailto:kmckinnon@coc.ca)

Mischa Jackson, Public Relations Assistant, tel : 416-306-2330, e-mail : [mischaj@coc.ca](mailto:mischaj@coc.ca)