

For immediate release: January 31, 2018

Revised: February 1, 2018

## **FOUR YOUNG SINGERS TO JOIN CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY ENSEMBLE STUDIO IN 2018/2019 SEASON**

**Toronto** – The **Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio**, Canada’s premier training program for young opera professionals, welcomes four new artists for the 2018/2019 season: bass-baritone **Joel Allison**, mezzo-soprano **Simona Genga**, and sopranos **Lauren Margison** and **Anna-Sophie Neher**. The four singers join the Ensemble Studio in August 2018 and become part of a program that, since its inception in 1980, has launched the careers of over 230 Canadian singers, opera coaches, mainstage directors and conductors.

This past November, **Genga**, **Allison** and **Neher** were the prize winners at the 2017 Ensemble Studio Competition, a competitive vocal showcase for young artists vying for a spot in the Ensemble Studio program. **Genga** won First Prize and the Audience Choice Award, while **Allison** and **Neher** claimed the second and third prizes, respectively.

“I’m looking forward to welcoming four exceptional young singers to the Ensemble Studio next season,” says **Nina Draganić, Director, COC Academy**. “It’s always a joy to witness the artistic growth of a young artist. With the support of our dedicated team, as well as a variety of guest artists and trainers over the course of the season, I think we can expect great things to come from this talented group.”

Graduating from the Ensemble Studio in May 2018 are sopranos **Danika Lorèn** and **Samantha Pickett**, mezzo-soprano **Megan Quick**, and baritone **Bruno Roy**. Audiences will have the opportunity to see these artists perform before their graduation in upcoming concerts in the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. They will also join the rest of their Ensemble Studio peers for *An Evening with the Ensemble Studio* on **May 25, 2018**, which features music of Purcell and Mozart, performed on the mainstage of Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts with the COC Orchestra led by COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**.

Members of the **Ensemble Studio** receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program, involving understudying and performing mainstage roles, intensive vocal coaching, language and acting studies, and career skills development, as well as participation in masterclasses with internationally renowned opera professionals. In addition, the Ensemble Studio artists give several concert performances each year, participate in COC Education and Outreach initiatives, and perform in the COC’s annual production for families, Opera for Young Audiences. Former members include Ben Heppner, Isabel Bayrakdarian, John Fanning, Wendy Nielsen, Joseph Kaiser, David Pomeroy, Allyson McHardy, and Krisztina Szabó.

Together with the **COC Orchestra Academy** and **Company-in-Residence** program, the **Ensemble Studio** forms the **COC Academy**, a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive post-graduate training unit for opera professionals in Canada. The **COC Academy** aims to foster a vibrant community of Canadian artists and creative professionals—from singers to instrumentalists to administrators—and provide its participants with the skills, experiences and resources to thrive in a global opera environment.

### **ABOUT THE NEW MEMBERS**

#### **Joel Allison – Bass-baritone**

Joel Allison, from Ottawa, is currently finishing his Master of Music in opera performance at the University of Toronto (UofT) under the tutelage of Daniel Taylor and Wendy Nielsen. He has performed with ensembles such as the National Arts Centre Orchestra, National Academy Orchestra, Theatre of Early Music, Saskatoon Symphony, McGill Chamber Orchestra, and Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. His recent credits include Leporello in *Don Giovanni* and the title role in *Imeneo* (UofT Opera); Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* (Stratford Summer Music Festival); Adonis in *Venus and Adonis* (Seventeen Voyces Chamber Choir); Basilio in *The Barber of Seville*

(Saskatoon Opera); Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin* (Opera Muskoka Festival); and Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Brott Music Festival).

### **Simona Genga – Mezzo-soprano**

Simona Genga, from Vaughan, Ontario, won First Prize and the Audience Choice Award at the 2017 Ensemble Studio Competition and is currently pursuing a Master of Music in opera performance at the University of Toronto (UofT). She was also winner of the 2017 Norcop Recital Prize in Song. As a Gerdine Young Artist at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, she appeared in the choruses for *La clemenza di Tito*, *Madama Butterfly* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which she also sang the role of the Cabin Mistress. She returns there this summer to sing Annina in *La Traviata*. Her additional credits include Nettie Fowler in *Carousel* (Chautauqua Voice Festival); Sister Helen in *Dead Man Walking* (Opera NUOVA); La Sciaurata in *Prima Zombie* and Juno in *Orfée aux enfers* (UofT Opera); Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff* and Teacup/Dragonfly/Squirrel in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (UWOpera).

### **Lauren Margison – Soprano**

Toronto-born soprano Lauren Margison is a member of the Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, where her roles have included Clorinda in *La Cenerentola* and Missia in Atelier Lyrique's production of *La Veuve joyeuse*. She was the youngest finalist in the Meistersinger von Nürnberg competition and was also a finalist in the George London Foundation Competition. In the summer of 2017, she sang Micaëla in *Carmen* with the Brott Music Festival, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* with Highlands Opera Studio, and appeared in concert with the PRISMA Festival in Strauss's *Four Last Songs*. She has also been featured by the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, the Toronto Jazz Festival, the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival, the Hannaford Street Silver Band, the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, and the Ottawa Choral Festival Gala.

### **Anna-Sophie Neher – Soprano**

Gatineau, Quebec native Anna-Sophie Neher is currently pursuing her Master of Music degree at McGill University where she has recently won the prestigious Wirth Vocal Prize. She has also studied at Bard College and the Montreal Conservatory. Winner of First Prize at the 2017 OSM Manulife Competition, her operatic credits include Adele in *Die Fledermaus* (Opera McGill); Pamina in *The Magic Flute* (Bard College); Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas* (Montreal Conservatory of Music); and Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Orford Music Festival). She has also appeared as a soloist with Clavecin en Concert, Montreal Bach Festival, Orchestre symphonique de Gatineau, Festival Despax and Festival Lanaudière. Future engagements include Blanche in *Dialogues des Carmélites* with Opera McGill.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**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. For more information on the COC, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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