

For immediate release: February 9, 2018

CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY GENERAL DIRECTOR ALEXANDER NEEF APPOINTED ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF SANTA FE OPERA

Newly created seasonal role in Santa Fe to complement Neef's COC portfolio

Toronto – Today, Canadian Opera Company General Director **Alexander Neef** was named Artistic Director of Santa Fe Opera by incoming SFO General Director Robert K. Meya, effective October 1, 2018. The announcement followed Meya's own appointment this morning by the SFO Board of Directors, along with English conductor Harry Bicket as Music Director. **Neef** will continue in his position as COC General Director, in addition to this new seasonal role.

Reporting to SFO's General Director, and in collaboration with the Music Director, the Artistic Director will ensure the highest possible standard of excellence in every aspect of SFO's artistic operations. SFO is known for its critically acclaimed summer seasons, apprentice programs for singers and theatre technicians, and year-round education programs. The company enjoys a strong relationship with the COC, having recently collaborated on productions of Richard Strauss' *Arabella* (2017) and Rossini's *Maometto II* (2016).

"Santa Fe Opera is one of the most renowned cultural organizations in North America and I am thrilled to join its team," says **COC General Director and Santa Fe Opera Artistic Director Designate Alexander Neef**. "The COC and Santa Fe both share an uncompromising commitment to artistic excellence, as evidenced by the successful co-productions we've mounted together in recent years. I look forward to working with Robert Meya and Harry Bicket as we explore the infinite possibilities of opera in the 21st century."

"The Canadian Opera Company congratulates our General Director Alexander Neef on his additional appointment as Artistic Director of Santa Fe Opera," says **COC Board Chair Justin Linden**. "Alexander's track record and international reputation of success is a testament to his devotion to the world of opera. We are proud of all that he has accomplished with us and look forward to his ongoing work and achievements with the COC and Santa Fe Opera."

"Repeatedly during our search for a new General Director, we were advised to pursue Alexander Neef," says **President of Santa Fe Opera Susan G. Marineau**. "We understood that Alexander had just signed a long-term contract at the COC, so we had no hope of bringing him to Santa Fe until Robert Meya, our General Director Designate, proposed to us that Alexander might be able to do both jobs."

Adds **Marineau**: "Santa Fe Opera's Board is grateful to the COC Board of Directors for allowing Alexander Neef to become our Artistic Director, while remaining the General Director of the COC. We believe this will be a rich pairing that will benefit both companies. With the addition of Harry Bicket assuming the role of Music Director in Santa Fe, we are confident they will create beautiful music together."

"I am beyond thrilled to be working together with Alexander Neef as our Artistic Director. Of all the points of view in the opera world today, Alexander's is one of the most well-informed and thoroughly considered," says **Santa Fe Opera General Director Designate Robert K. Meya**. "Together with Harry Bicket as our Music Director, we will have one of the strongest teams in the industry and will be well-equipped to build upon Santa Fe Opera's legacy of artistic excellence."

About Alexander Neef

Alexander Neef, appointed General Director of the Canadian Opera Company in June 2008, has worked with some of the most prestigious arts organizations in the world. His career as an artistic administrator has taken him from the Salzburg Festival to the RuhrTriennale in Germany, Opéra national de Paris and New York City Opera, to leading the COC, Canada's largest opera company and one of the most important in North America.

The Head of Casting for Opéra national de Paris from 2004 to 2008, **Neef** was one of Gerard Mortier's closest collaborators and was instrumental in the production of over 80 operas. In addition to his role at Opéra national de Paris, in 2007, **Neef** joined Gerard Mortier as Mortier prepared for his tenure at New York City Opera. Previously, **Neef** was a member of the artistic administration at the RuhrTriennale, a three-year, multi-disciplinary festival in the Ruhr region of Germany where he was responsible for opera, theatre, and dance productions, as well as concerts and events. Prior to his tenure at the RuhrTriennale, he spent two seasons at the Salzburg Festival as a production manager with the artistic administration.

In his current position, he has transformed the COC into one of the most significant opera producers in the world today, attracting world-class singers for high-profile role debuts; gathering some of the most important conductors, directors, and designers for creative projects; and cultivating strong relationships throughout North America and Europe with co-producers such as the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, Royal Opera House in London, Teatro Real Madrid, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and many others.

It was under his leadership that the company returned to the world-renowned Brooklyn Academy of Music for the first time since 1993 with its spectacular production of Robert Lepage's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* in 2011. The COC made a swift return to BAM in 2015 to present the U.S. premiere of Zhang Huan's theatrically transcendent production of Handel's *Semele*.

It's also under **Neef**'s direction that the COC delivered the world premiere presentation of Canadian composer Barbara Monk Feldman's *Pyramus and Thisbe* in 2015. The last world premiere at the COC took place in 1999. Subsequent world premieres scheduled to date include the COC-commissioned projects of *Hadrian*, composed by Rufus Wainwright with a libretto by Daniel MacIvor, in 2018/2019, and a work by Ana Sokolović slated for a future season.

Neef's many credits for the company also include increasing the public profile and professional development opportunities of the COC's Ensemble Studio program, a training program for young opera professionals. In 2010, an Ensemble Studio performance of a COC mainstage production was introduced as part of the annual season and in 2011, an annual Ensemble Studio Competition was launched, inviting the public to be part of the singers' professional journeys by opening the final round of auditions for the Ensemble Studio to an audience.

In 2017, **Neef**'s tenure as COC General Director was extended through to the 2025/2026 season.

About Santa Fe Opera

The mission of Santa Fe Opera is to advance the operatic art form by presenting ensemble performances of the highest quality in a unique setting with a varied repertoire of new, rarely performed, and standard works; to ensure the excellence of opera's future through apprentice programs for singers, technicians, and arts administrators; and to foster and enrich an understanding and appreciation of opera among a diverse public.

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 COC, visit coc.ca.

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