

For immediate release: August 22, 2018

## **STARS COLLIDE IN WORLD PREMIERE OF RUFUS WAINWRIGHT'S *HADRIAN* AT THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY**

### **Epic, historical gay love story attracts all-star cast**

**Toronto** – On **October 13, 2018**, the **Canadian Opera Company** presents the highly anticipated world premiere of *Hadrian* by composer **Rufus Wainwright** and librettist **Daniel MacIvor**. The opera recounts the epic love story of Roman Emperor Hadrian and his young lover, Antinous. Erased by history, their story is reclaimed for the 21st century by its creators in a star-studded production from renowned Canadian director **Peter Hinton**. *Hadrian* runs for seven performances on **October 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 2018**.

"*Hadrian* highlights the incredible connective potential of live opera for this moment in time," says **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. "As a production that features bold Canadian artistry, multimedia storytelling, and extensive interdisciplinary collaboration, *Hadrian* is a fully immersive experience that provokes discussion and reflects on the timelessness of love, in all its shapes and forms. The COC is proud to support the creation of new and fearless operatic endeavors and looks forward to sharing *Hadrian* with our audiences."

The opera explores the life of the aging and ailing Roman emperor, Hadrian, as matters of the heart stubbornly eclipse pressing matters of the state. Hadrian remains steeped in grief, unable to move past the death of charismatic Antinous at the height of their all-consuming relationship. Time and memory bleed into love and loss as Hadrian is given a unique opportunity to discover just how Antinous met his untimely end.

*Hadrian* features a formidable cast of international talent, including two opera legends making highly anticipated company debuts: American baritone **Thomas Hampson** in the title role and Finnish soprano **Karita Mattila** as the former empress Plotina. With a "repertoire of more than 80 roles on the globe's greatest stages, **Hampson** is one of the living few with Pavarotti-like legend status" (*Sydney Morning Herald*), while **Mattila** brings the "rich nuance of her vocal sound" (*The Guardian*) to her role as Trajan's wife and one of Hadrian's great supporters. Rising Canadian-American tenor **Isaiah Bell** sings Antinous; his "smooth sound" (*The Globe and Mail*) breathes life into the lover that forever changed the Roman Empire. Soprano **Ambur Braid**, is Hadrian's wife Sabina; the COC Ensemble Studio graduate was recently praised by *The New York Times* for her "gleaming sound." American bass **David Leigh** brings his "beautiful, youthful tone" (*Opera Today*) to Turbo, head of Hadrian's military. And legendary Canadian tenor **Ben Heppner** comes out of performance retirement to make a cameo appearance as Dinarchus.

Composer **Rufus Wainwright** has long drawn inspiration from the Romantic tradition of grand opera, a passion that led to his first operatic work, *Prima Donna*, in 2009. For the internationally acclaimed Canadian-American singer-songwriter, translating Hadrian's story into a score that reflected the complexity of his state and circumstance was a true labour of love: "My *Hadrian*... is a surreal romp through time and space, mixing true occurrences with complete fabrication in order to illustrate a vivid 'creative snapshot' of what the end of the Classical era may have felt like." In penning the libretto, award-winning playwright **Daniel MacIvor** steps into new creative territory; the Canadian theatre veteran says his work on this opera carries a weight that is deeply personal: "As a gay man, not to have known Hadrian's story felt like I had been robbed of something, of a historical figure that somehow validated my love."

*Hadrian* marks the second COC production for the powerhouse creative team behind 2017's *Louis Riel*: celebrated set designer **Michael Gianfrancesco**, costume designer **Gillian Gallow**, and lighting designer **Bonnie Beecher**, all led by boundary-pushing Canadian director **Peter Hinton**. Joining the team for *Hadrian* is projection designer **Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy** (the COC's *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung*) and choreographer **Denise Clark**.

COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** leads the **COC Orchestra** through *Hadrian*'s lush and flowing romantic score. The **COC Chorus** is led by Price Family Chorus Master **Sandra Horst**.

The world premiere of *Hadrian* marks the first COC-commissioned opera to premiere on the Four Seasons Centre Stage. The COC's previous commissions are: *The Golden Ass* (1999), *Mario and the Magician* (1992), *Héloïse and Abélard* (1973), and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1967). The company has also commissioned a new work by Ana Sokolović, scheduled for a future season, and was the world premiere presenter of *Louis Riel* in 1967 (a work commissioned by the Floyd S. Chalmers Foundation) and Barbara Monk Feldman's *Pyramus and Thisbe* in 2015.

*Hadrian* is sung in English and Latin and presented by the COC with English SURTITLES™.

\*\*\*Additional information about the production concept behind *Hadrian*, its music, and a series of public education and outreach events will be forthcoming in separate press materials issued in the coming weeks.

## CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

<b>Hadrian</b>	Thomas Hampson
<b>Plotina</b>	Karita Mattila
<b>Trajan</b>	Roger Honeywell
<b>Turbo</b>	David Leigh
<b>Sabina</b>	Ambur Braid
<b>Antinous</b>	Isaiah Bell
<b>Hermogenes</b>	Gregory Dahl
<b>Lavia</b>	Anna-Sophie Neher
<b>Fabius</b>	John Mac Master
<b>Nervous Senator</b>	Thomas Glenn
<b>Sycophantic Senator</b>	Samuel Chan
<b>Superior Senator</b>	Joel Allison
<b>Dinarchus</b>	Ben Heppner
<b>Conductor</b>	Johannes Debus
<b>Director</b>	Peter Hinton
<b>Set Designer</b>	Michael Gianfrancesco
<b>Costume Designer</b>	Gillian Gallow
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	Bonnie Beecher
<b>Projection Designer</b>	Laurie Shawn-Borzovoy
<b>Choreographer</b>	Denise Clark
<b>Dramaturg</b>	Cori Ellison
<b>Price Family Chorus Master</b>	Sandra Horst

## TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets for *Hadrian* range from **\$35 – \$250** with Grand Ring seats available at **\$290** and **\$350**. Tickets are on sale August 27, available online at [coc.ca](http://coc.ca), by calling **416-363-8231**, or in person at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts Box Office** (145 Queen St. W.). For more information on **specialty priced tickets** available

to **young people under the age of 15, standing room, Opera Under 30** presented by **TD Bank Group, student groups and rush seating**, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**BMO Financial Group:** Season Sponsor

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**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 COC, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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