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## **COC'S FREE CONCERT SERIES CELEBRATES MILESTONE 1000TH CONCERT IN 2018/2019 SEASON**

**“A cornucopia of culture...And it’s all mind-blowingly free.” – *Toronto Star***

**Toronto** – The city’s best all-access cultural programming returns this fall when the Canadian Opera Company’s **Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre** kicks off its 13th season on **September 25, 2018**. Over 400 emerging and established artists, spanning a broad spectrum of artistic and cultural traditions, will perform in 72 concerts from September to May.

This season includes a major milestone: the 1000th concert on **February 19, 2019**. The landmark event will be celebrated with a performance by British soprano **Susan Bullock**, Klytämnestra in the COC’s winter production of *Elektra*, accompanied by pianist and Head of the COC Ensemble Studio, **Liz Upchurch**. Their electrifying program of Strauss, Duparc, and Wagner recalls the COC’s inaugural year at the Four Seasons Centre in 2006 – and the Free Concert Series’ first season – when **Bullock** sang Brünnhilde in *The Ring Cycle*.

“Since its inception in 2006, the Free Concert Series has presented a staggering array of artists from different disciplines,” says **Free Concert Series Program Manager Dorian Cox**. “As we celebrate 1000 concerts and beyond this season, this is an opportunity to reflect on an accomplished legacy and to look ahead with renewed vigor and optimism to the exhilarating range of performances in our future.”

The 18/19 season also features **two world premieres**. **Ian Cusson**, a Canadian composer and pianist of Métis and French-Canadian descent, performs his new song cycle *Le Récital des Anges*, based on the poems of Émile Nelligan and sung by Canadian mezzo-soprano **Marjorie Maltais**. In the spring, the **Canadian Art Song Project (CASP)** returns with a new song cycle by Canadian composer **Dean Burry**, entitled *Seas Variations*, with text by renowned poet E.J. Pratt; it will be performed by tenor **Michael Colvin** and pianist/CASP Co-Artistic Director **Steven Philcox**, both graduates of the COC Ensemble Studio.

Another highlight is the Free Concert Series debut of the genre-defying, Cree-Canadian playwright and composer **Tomson Highway**. Named “one of the 100 most important people in Canadian history” (*Macleans*’s), he joins forces with Peruvian-Canadian cabaret singer **Patricia Cano** and jazz saxophonist **Marcus Ali** to perform a selection of his own original compositions.

Several performances celebrate the ingenuity of boundary-pushing women. From Sufi devotional love songs to rousing Thracian dance music, cross-cultural quartet **Turkwaz** merges the diverse traditions of its four members. Acclaimed Odawa First Nation composer, performer, and teacher **Barbara Croall** showcases her own compositions for voice and pipigwan (an Anishinaabe cedar flute). **Muse 9 Productions** (the brainchild of Canadian director **Anna Theodosakis** and pianist/COC Ensemble Studio graduate **Hyejin Kwon**) presents its first project, based on the life of Virginia Woolf and featuring performances by four women that represent various artistic mediums including dance and music. **Musique 3 Femmes** highlights the winners of its inaugural prize for emerging female composers and

librettists in Canada. And **Kaha:wi Dance Theatre** presents an interdisciplinary work led by a powerhouse team of international Indigenous female collaborators.

Several acclaimed artists from the COC's mainstage season will make their Free Concert Series debuts this season including: Moldovan bass **Oleg Tsibulko** (Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin*), American mezzo-soprano **Helene Schneiderman** (Madame Larina in *Eugene Onegin*), American soprano **Angel Blue** (Mimi in *La Bohème*), and Canadian soprano **Andriana Chuchman** (Musetta in *La Bohème*). Returning favourites include German-Canadian tenor **Michael Schade** (Aegisth in *Elektra*) and Lebanese-Canadian soprano and Ensemble Studio graduate, **Miriam Khalil** (Mimi in *La Bohème*).

Twelve concerts feature the **COC Academy**, a first-of-its-kind training program for young opera professionals; this includes the season-opening concert on **September 25**, a first introduction to the talented emerging artists of this season's **Ensemble Studio**, and the biennial **Christina and Louis Quilico Awards** on **February 11**. Instrumentalists of the **COC Orchestra Academy** will explore the evolution of recitative and aria through the ages with members of the Ensemble Studio. As well, Toronto's most buzzworthy young opera company, and the COC's company-in-residence, **Against the Grain Theatre**, returns with another inventive program.

Additional season highlights include a special Chinese New Year concert by the **Toronto Chinese Orchestra Chamber Players**, led by renowned erhu player **Patty Chan**; a moving tribute to persecuted Jewish composers by violinist **Atis Bankas** and pianist **Constance Beckmann** to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht; two- and four-hand piano works performed by **Jean-Michel Dubé** and **Rosemarie Duval-Laplante** in a recital dedicated to Canadian pianist/composer André Mathieu; and a rousing joint performance by members of the **COC and National Ballet of Canada orchestras**.

A number of Free Concert Series favourites make welcome returns in 18/19: **Adi Braun, Ballet Creole, Canada's Ballet Jörgen, Métis Fiddler Quartet, Micah Barnes, Nagata Sachu, Payadora Tango Ensemble, Peggy Baker Dance Projects, Rosebud String Quartet**, and the **Toronto Summer Music Festival**, as well as exuberant young talent from **The Glenn Gould School, Humber College, the Schulich School of Music at McGill University, the University of Toronto, and The Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy for Young Artists**.

**For a full calendar of events, please visit [coc.ca/FreeConcerts](http://coc.ca/FreeConcerts).**

The Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is a focal point of the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room in the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, with a striking glass wall that allows for natural lighting and a view of University Avenue. Linking Rings 3 and 4, the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre provides seating for 100 patrons. Additional seating and standing locations on the walkway and the upper floor are also available for up to 130 patrons.

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#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**The Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre is supported by the Free Concert Series Endowment Fund established in honour of Richard Bradshaw by an anonymous donor.**

**BMO Financial Group: Season Sponsor**

**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.

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**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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