

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



## CALGARY OPERA ANNOUNCES A STAR – STUDDED LINE UP AND NEW PROGRAMS TO CELEBRATE ITS 48<sup>th</sup> SEASON ON A GRAND SCALE

*Romance, drama and fun-filled season featuring three never-before-seen versions of much-loved operas goes on sale March 27, 2019*

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March 27, 2018 (Calgary, Alberta) – Following a season of change and transition, Calgary Opera announced a fresh and innovative line-up of productions, programs and packages that will form their 2019-20 season today. This season, the company's 48<sup>th</sup>, includes three main stage opera productions at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium and a series of smaller performances at other venues across the city.

“After a tumultuous few years, I truly believe that 2019-20 will be Calgary Opera’s best season yet,” says Jackie Pyke, Calgary Opera’s board chair. “Building on the company’s 48 year legacy and the strengths of its new senior leadership team of Artistic Director, **Bramwell Tovey**, and Managing Director and CEO, **Heather Kitchen**, we’re delighted to announce not just a season of incredible productions starring a phenomenal line-up of Canadian and international artists, but also exciting new programs designed to invite people to discover the enduring beauty of opera and deliver exceptional live experiences that have audiences eager to return.”

The main stage season begins in November with a never-before-seen in Calgary version of Giacomo Puccini’s enduringly popular tale of love and loss, *La Bohème*, which inspired the popular Broadway musical *Rent*. Acclaimed Canadian director and Calgary native, **Brenna Corner** will direct an ensemble cast starring Lebanese-Canadian soprano **Miriam Khalil** as Mimi and French-Canadian tenor **Antoine Bélanger** as Rodolfo. The story follows the lives of a group of young artists as they scrape by on the bohemian fringes of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris and the opera has earned a place in the top 10 most performed operas for its heartbreakingly beautiful music and poignant storyline. Italian-born conductor **Jonathan Brandani** joins the production as maestro. *La Bohème* runs **November 9, 13 and 15, 2019** at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium.

The season’s second main stage production will see award-winning director **Nicholas Muni** unleash a display of fiery emotion on the Jubilee stage with Vincenzo Bellini’s bel canto masterpiece, *Norma*. Calgary-born Canadian soprano **Aviva Fortunata** is set to ignite the stage in the title role, one made famous by the legendary diva Maria Callas. American tenor **Chad Shelton** makes his Calgary Opera debut as her lover, Pollione. Set in Roman occupied Gaul (France) around 50 BC, *Norma* is a passionate drama about a complex love triangle centred around the powerful title character’s struggle to reconcile her calling as a high priestess, the demands of motherhood, and a secret love affair with a Roman enemy whose attentions have turned to someone new. Conducted by **Alice Farnham**, *Norma* runs **February 1, 5 and 7, 2020**.

Capping off the main stage series is a wildly visual and technically complex new European production of Richard Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos* playing **April 25, 29 and May 1, 2020** at the

Jubilee Auditorium. Directed by **Laurence Dale**, conducted by **Gordon Gerrard** and featuring set and costume designs by **Gary McCann**, this production is certain to dazzle even the most frequent opera-goer. Former Calgary Opera Emerging Artist and *The Bachelor* contestant-turned-fashion blogger **Sharleen Joynt** will portray the burlesque troupe leader Zerbinetta, while American sopranos **Renée Rapier** and **Rebecca Nash** take on the roles of The Composer and Ariadne/The Prima Donna, respectively. The season's lone comedy, the story explores the absurd antics that transpire when burlesque frivolity is forced to mesh with high art when a dinner party at a wealthy man's house goes off the rails.

Beyond the main stage series, the company is also reprising its *Christmas at the Opera* production of Gian Carlo Menotti's family-friendly *Amahl and the Night Visitors* from **December 6-8, 2019**. This year, the piece will be presented alongside a selection of seasonal carols at the Mamdani Opera Centre. Then, in the spring, in honour of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of French composer Hector Berlioz's death, the company will present a staged-concert version of *Béatrice et Bénédict*, a playful battle of wits inspired by Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. The show will also be presented **March 25-28, 2020** at the Mamdani Opera Centre and feature the 8 members of the company's Emerging Artist Development Program, which is now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year.

Of the season, Artistic Director Bramwell Tovey says, "While I didn't have the pleasure of selecting the programming that will appear on our stages this season, I couldn't be happier to be here in Calgary to present the season alongside our wonderful staff and season artists, and also to share in it with Calgary's exceptional community of music lovers. It's a decidedly different approach to a season than we've typically adopted at Calgary Opera, but one that we think will thrill opera-goers whether this is their first or their fiftieth visit."

Notably, the 2019-20 season features a different format from Calgary Opera's usual programming model and is one that is well-suited for people experiencing the opera for the first time. Curated to gradually introduce people to the art of opera, it starts with a well-loved, time-tested crowd-pleaser, moves on to a recognizable bel canto showpiece, and introduces just a bit of challenge at the end with a lesser-known comedy with an epically entertaining new presentation.

"At a time when a variety of entertainment options are available on-demand and at our fingertips, we recognize that Calgary Opera isn't just competing with other live performing arts for people's time and entertainment dollars," says Managing Director & CEO Heather Kitchen. "To continue to connect with our local audience we know that we need to provide them with even more innovative programming and better value to create an invitation compelling enough to choose to spend their evening out with us."

To accomplish this, the company has undertaken a series of data and feedback gathering activities to help identify guests' expectations of live performing arts experiences, gauge trends in ticketing and monitor shifting needs as audience demographics change. As a result of the feedback gathered over the current season, the company is unveiling new programs to help reduce barriers to accessing live, local arts programming and make what can, at times, be an impersonal experience more consumer-centric.

"We've heard what our guests have been telling us and are focusing on three major areas of improvement," continues Kitchen.

The first is making the experience of parking at the Jubilee Auditorium easier for subscribers with an option to pre-pay for parking, eliminating the need to stand in line at outdoor self-serve payment machines in cold weather.

Secondly, starting with *La Bohème* Calgary Opera will now be allowing beverages to be consumed in the theatre, provided they are in plastic containers.

And perhaps the largest new initiative for the season is the creation of the **Calgary Opera Discovery Pass**, which allows first-time subscribers who aren't picky about their seats to experience a full season of the company's main stage series for just \$165 – up to a 70% savings over regular ticket prices.

“We know that with the local economy being what it is, first-time buyers don't want to take big risks on unfamiliar experiences, even if they're very appealing to them,” says Kitchen. “The new Discovery Pass was created especially with these guests in mind. It guarantees them seats in the first balcony or better and gives them time over the course of three performances to test-drive the opera-going experience and discover how to make it work best for them before committing to a full-fledged subscription.”

Traditional subscriptions and the new Discovery Pass are available starting today, both online at [calgaryopera.com](http://calgaryopera.com) or by calling the Calgary Opera Box Office at 403-262-7286. Current season subscribers have until **May 15, 2019** to renew their subscriptions or request seat changes for the 2019-20 season before seats are released to new subscribers and subscribers requesting seat changes. Single tickets for the 2019-20 season go on sale **June 1, 2019**.

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Season images including illustrations, head shots, and production photos available [HERE](#).

### About Calgary Opera

Founded in 1972, Calgary Opera is one of Canada's leading professional opera companies. For 48 years the not-for-profit arts company has made a name for itself nationally and internationally for its commitment to the development of Canadian talent and the creation of new opera works, including six world premieres. Through education and community outreach, Calgary Opera fosters a love of music and theatre in young people and provides opportunities for young artists to develop skills for successful professional careers in the performing arts industry.

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