

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE October 4, 2010  
CONTACT Selina Rajani, 604-331-4824  
[srajani@vancouveropera.ca](mailto:srajani@vancouveropera.ca)

Excitement builds for VO's brand-new opera

**LILLIAN ALLING**

**WORLD PREMIERE JUST TWO WEEKS AWAY!**

**Vancouver, BC ~ Excitement is building for the world premiere of VO's brand-new commissioned opera, *Lillian Alling*.** Created by Canada's foremost opera-creation team, composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell, this fresh, sweeping story of one woman's remarkable trek across North America opens VO's 2010-2011 season.

Ten days of rehearsal with principal singers recently took place on the newly built set at the Banff Centre for the Arts. This week the cast moved into a rehearsal hall in downtown Vancouver to put the finishing touches on this brand-new opera before presenting it for the first time to the world in just two weeks. Forty chorus members are also rehearsing, and next week, the 60-piece Vancouver Opera Orchestra attacks John Estacio's orchestral score.

Opening night is **Saturday, October 16, 2010**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, October 19, Thursday, October 21** and **Saturday, October 23**. All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at 7:30pm. Tickets starting at \$29 are available exclusively at the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at [www.vancouveropera.ca](http://www.vancouveropera.ca) or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

John Estacio's stirring score evokes a range of places, cultures and eras as Lillian's story takes us from bustling Ellis Island to the west coast of BC in the 1920s. Dazzling projections and a striking multi-level set are at the forefront of opera stagecraft. World-renowned singers – including the outstanding Canadian mezzo-soprano **Judith Forst, OC, OBC**, bring this true legend to life.

"Lillian's quest is fueled by passion and determination and carried out with fierce independence in a time in which such a journey would be unthinkable for most people," says **James W. Wright**, General Director of Vancouver Opera. "This world premiere is brought to the stage through the artistry and determination of a stellar team of opera creators. *Lillian Alling* is a new Canadian opera, a work by Canadians, about this challenging and inspiring land and the hardy people who have shaped its history."

To hear clips from *Lillian Alling*, see behind-the-scenes video, and read the *Lillian Alling* Opera Manga, visit [www.vancouveropera.ca](http://www.vancouveropera.ca). You can gain access to special extra content through VO's "QR codes", seen on posters around Vancouver in the weeks leading up to the world premiere.

### Details on the artists

The opera features four major characters: Lillian Alling, telegraph man Scotty MacDonald, and the present-day characters Irene and her son Jimmy.

Québécoise soprano **Frédérique Vézina** creates the title role. Praised for her "dark mahogany tone" (*The Globe and Mail*), Ms. Vézina has been a First Prize winner at the Concours International de Chant and a finalist at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She returns to VO for the first time since her moving performances as Mimí in 2008's *La Bohème*.

International Vancouver-based superstar **Judith Forst, OC, OBC** creates the role of Irene. Ms. Forst's long and illustrious career includes regular performances with The Metropolitan Opera and the Canadian Opera Company. She has been called "one of the few truly world-class coloratura mezzo-sopranos on the operatic stage" (*COC Magazine*). Ms. Forst is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a recipient of the Order of British Columbia and was last seen in Vancouver in VO's 2009 production of *Salome*.

**Roger Honeywell** returns to Vancouver Opera to create the role of Jimmy. The Toronto-based tenor "with the right kind of heroic mettle to his voice" (*Opera Now*) returns to Vancouver Opera for this world premiere, having last sung here in 2008's *La Bohème*.

Baritone **Aaron St.Clair Nicholson**, last seen on the VO stage earlier this year as Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, creates the role of Scotty MacDonald. The Abbotsford-based Mr. Nicholson is noted for the dramatic integrity he brings to his performances. He has been highly praised for his signature role, Papageno, which he recently sang at The Metropolitan Opera.

Bass-baritone **Thomas Goerz** (also seen last year in *The Marriage of Figaro*, as Dr. Bartolo) creates the roles of Constable Wyman, Sergei and the mysterious Jozéf. Tenor **Colin Ainsworth** creates the roles of Bobby, Kristian and Billy; baritone **Gregory Dahl** sings Sam and Karl; **Calvin Powell** sings Charlie and The Drifter.

Conducting the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Chorus Director) will be Québécois conductor **Jacques Lacombe**. Mr. Lacombe is the Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and of the Orchestre Symphonique de Trois-Rivières. He last appeared in Vancouver to conduct VO's 2008 *La bohème*.

The stage director and dramaturge is **Kelly Robinson**, Director of the Opera as Theatre Program and Director of Theatre Arts at the Banff Centre. He has worked extensively with Mr. Estacio and Mr. Murrell on their other collaborations, *Filumena* and *Frobisher* and has directed four productions for Vancouver Opera.

### The Story, in brief

In 1927, young Lillian Alling arrives in New York City from Russia in desperate search of a man named Jozéf. Penniless, she walks across North America and into the wilds of northwestern BC, following Jozéf's elusive path. During her brave trek, she is embraced by a Norwegian farming community, incarcerated in Oakalla Prison Farm near Vancouver, and loved by Scotty, a lineman along BC's Telegraph Trail. A final cathartic confrontation with Jozéf on the banks of the Skeena River reveals a shocking truth and brings Lillian face to face with destiny.

### Background

In the early 1920s, a young woman named Lillian Alling arrived on the east coast of North America. Part of the post-war crush of immigrants from Europe, she joined the hordes of people processed through Ellis Island seeking prosperity, a new world, or just a fresh start in America. Alling is reported to have been searching for someone, though exact details of who and why remain murky.

With no money for transportation, Alling began her search on foot. Over the next three years, she was spotted, walking, in Fargo, North Dakota and Atlin, British Columbia. By 1927, she had crossed the continental U.S., alone – almost 4,000 km, on foot, with only the clothes on her back and a lead pipe for protection.

She spent the winter on the coast, part of it in Oakalla Prison Farm. Some say she was imprisoned for vagrancy. Others claim the local constable put her in jail because he was concerned she would try to head north during the bitter winter months. When spring arrived, Alling was off again, and was seen numerous times on the difficult Telegraph Trail – the only land route between Quesnel and Hazelton. There were rumours of love with a linesman, and tantalizing glimpses of her in northern BC.

After that, nothing more was ever heard from Alling. She disappeared into the mountains, surviving only in rare news clippings and local legend.

Vancouver Opera's new opera is based on Lillian's remarkable story. Created by Canada's foremost opera-creation team, **John Estacio** and **John Murrell**, with dramaturge and stage director **Kelly Robinson**, and set and costume designer **Sue LePage**. The idea for *Lillian Alling* was conceived three years ago as a commission by Vancouver Opera. Since then a number of workshops were undertaken to develop the idea into a full-scale opera with over two hours of music, 8 principal singers, a chorus

of 40, a 60-piece orchestra and more than 175 costumes created solely for this world premiere. This opera is an undertaking as large and as exciting as Lillian's journey.

This opera is an undertaking as large and as exciting as Lillian's journey.

### Full Ticket Information

Single tickets are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at [www.vancouveropera.ca](http://www.vancouveropera.ca), or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted.

**Groups:** For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

-30-

This production is generously sponsored by Teck.  
Vancouver Opera's 2010-2011 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp.