
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE January 10, 2011
CONTACT Selina Rajani, 604-331-4824
srajani@vancouveropera.ca

Stellar all-Canadian cast rehearsing the Vancouver Opera premiere of

LA CLEMENZA DI TITO

Mozart's magnificent final opera

Vancouver, BC ~ A dream cast of Canada's leading Mozart specialists are deep in rehearsals for the Vancouver Opera premiere of *La Clemenza di Tito*, Mozart's beautiful dramatic opera of political and romantic intrigue. Composed in mere weeks near the end of Mozart's life, and featuring some of the most glorious music ever written for the female voice, this complex and elegant opera asks whether it is better to rule through power or compassion.

Opening night is **Saturday, February 5, 2011**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, February 8; Thursday, February 10; and Saturday, February 12**. All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at 7:30pm. Tickets are available exclusively at the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

The Singers

New Brunswick soprano **Wendy Nielsen** sings Vitellia, the jilted and vengeful admirer of Emperor Titus. Ms. Nielsen has sung with the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic and opera companies and symphonies in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Budapest, Krakow, as well as in several Canadian cities. She is known as "one of Canada's finest dramatic sopranos" (*The Calgary Herald*) with a voice that is "powerful beyond belief, her dramatic cries of pain [reaching] right into the audience's hearts". This will be Ms. Nielsen's VO debut.

Toronto-based Hungarian-Canadian mezzo-soprano **Krisztina Szabó** sings the male role of Sesto - Titus's confidant and Vitellia's lover. Ms. Szabó has appeared in CBC's Opening Night in concert with the Canadian Opera Company and performs frequently throughout Europe, the United States and Canada. She has appeared with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Chicago Opera Theatre, L'Opéra National du Rhin and the San Antonio Symphony. "Mezzo-soprano Krisztina Szabó sang with

passion, beauty and power. In an unusual move, even the orchestra joined in the huge ovation" raved *Opera News* of her 2010 *Idamante (Idomeneo)*.

Singing the role of Titus is Juno Award-winning Canadian tenor **John Tessier**. Mr. Tessier has been praised for his "elegant legato and easy reach to the money notes" (*Globe and Mail*). His repertoire includes a wide range of operatic roles and concert pieces, and he has sung at the English National Opera, the Royal Opera House, and The Metropolitan Opera as well as with several Canadian opera companies. Mr. Tessier was last seen on the VO stage in 2008 in the highly-acclaimed *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, and "just seems to get better and better," declares the *Globe and Mail*. "His light lyric tenor is crystal clear, and he goes for his high notes aggressively, taking them full throttle and managing to inject manly drama."

Canadian mezzo-soprano **Norine Burgess**, last seen as Maddalena in VO's 2009 *Rigoletto*, sings Annio, Sesto's friend and the lover of Sesto's sister, Servilia. She has been praised for her bright, elegant and lambent-toned voice and has performed in opera houses and with leading orchestras throughout North America and around the world.

Canadian bass-baritone **Thomas Goerz** sings the prefect Publio. He has been acclaimed for his "flexible voice which easily navigate[s] the runs and rumblings... Goerz's authority is a pleasure to experience and his ability to sound out over brass and tympani was thrilling." (*Kitchener-Waterloo Record*). Mr. Goerz was last seen on the VO stage creating the roles of Constable Wyman, Sergei and the mysterious Jozéf in the world premiere of *Lillian Alling*.

Kathleen Brett sings Servilia, having delighted audiences with her performance at VO's Golden Anniversary Concert & Gala and remembered for her most recent VO stage role of Blanche in 2005's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. Ms. Brett is cherished by audiences in North America and Europe not only for the beauty of her tone and stylistic instinct but also for her natural stage presence and dramatic skill. "Like honey, Brett's voice is natural, sweet and never goes bad. It's a welcome addition to any musical cup of tea, be it a Verdi aria or a symphonic suite from *The Lord of the Rings*." (*Edmonton Journal*).

The stage director is the internationally acclaimed **Chas Rader-Shieber**. "Rader-Shieber is a talent to watch, given his brilliant, economical illumination of Metastasio's text, which focused on character revelation like a psychological thriller. In fact, the opera flowed like the dialogue of a play," raved the *Globe and Mail* of his direction of Santa Fe Opera's 2002 *La Clemenza di Tito*.

VO Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Associate Conductor and Chorus Director). Maestro Darlington will also provide the *continuo* on forte-piano from the orchestra pit, along with VO Orchestra Principal Cellist Ariel Barnes.

The Story in Brief

Roman Emperor Titus's compassionate nature is severely tested when Vitellia, daughter of the deposed emperor, conspires to have Titus assassinated because he has passed her over as his wife. When the plot fails and the assassin is charged, Titus does not waver from his principles, even when Vitellia, now his intended bride, confesses to the crime.

Mozart's striking portrait of a great ruler who finds power in mercy rather than revenge is a model for modern times. Composed in the last months of Mozart's life, *La Clemenza di Tito* (The Clemency of Titus) contains some of his most glorious music for the female voice, along with dazzling ensembles and stirring choruses.

Read a full synopsis, listen to a podcast and explore VO's Opera Manga at www.vancouveropera.ca.

Background

La Clemenza di Tito was composed in July 1791, the final year of Mozart's life. King Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor, was about to be crowned King of Bohemia. A new opera was needed to celebrate the coronation – which was just two months away.

With just a few weeks in which to create an entire brand-new opera, impresario Domenico Guardasoni set about finding a text and composer. Luckily, he had a libretto to fall back on: *La Clemenza di Tito*, written about 50 years earlier by Pietro Metastasio. And as for a composer, he approached Antonio Salieri. Salieri was too busy and thus declined the commission, so Guardasoni went to W.A. Mozart, who was already in the process of writing *The Magic Flute*. Mozart accepted with no hesitation – perhaps due to the sizable fee Guardasoni offered.

Mozart often used female singers in 'trouser-roles' to portray young male characters (like Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*). However, for the very first performance of *La Clemenza di Tito*, Guardasoni engaged a famous soprano castrato for the role of Sesto, Domenico Bedini. These days, Sesto and Annio are sung by mezzo-soprano women. Thus, *La Clemenza di Tito* is performed by a predominantly female cast, the combination of voices creating a beautiful and unique texture.

Learn More

Film Screening: *Amadeus*

Thursday, January 13, 2011

Doors: 6:30pm • Introduction & Screening: 7:00pm

Vancity Theatre, Vancouver International Film Centre, 1181 Seymour Street

\$11/\$9 senior or student (includes \$2 Vancity Film Centre membership)

Based on Peter Shaffer's hit play, this satirical and delightful film explores the rivalry between two composers in the court Emperor Joseph II: official royal composer Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham) and W.A. Mozart (Tom Hulce). *Amadeus* was the winner of eight Oscars, include awards for Best Director, Best Actor, Best Screenplay, and Best Picture.

Seating is limited. This special event continues a series of co-presentations between Vancouver Opera and the Vancity Theatre.

Opera Speaks @ VPL – The Qualities of Leadership: What do we want in our politicians and community leaders?

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

7:00pm – 9:00pm

Alice Mackay Room, Vancouver Public Library Central Branch

Free admission. Limited seating.

What makes a great leader? What qualities do we want in those who govern us and lead us?

Compassion and generosity, or hard-nosed efficiency?

Vancouver Opera examines these questions in conjunction with their production of W.A. Mozart's magnificent last opera *La Clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*), where a strong leader finds power in mercy rather than revenge. Join a distinguished panel of leaders and thinkers to explore the future of leadership in our communities and country! Panelists include political scientist Michael Byers and Brenda Eaton, Chair of both BC Housing and the Dalai Lama Centre for Peace and Education.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets from \$29 are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at 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 the Vancouver Opera Guild.
Vancouver Opera's 2010-2011 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp.