

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Legendary director, humourist, writer and medical expert
Sir Jonathan Miller
directs Vancouver Opera's

LA TRAVIATA

Vancouver, BC ~ This spring, Vancouverites will experience a rare event: Verdi's most popular opera, *La Traviata*, directed by **Sir Jonathan Miller**, one of this century's most beloved humourists and satirists and now one of the world's most imaginative theatre and opera directors. *La Traviata* is on-stage for six performances only, **April 30 – May 12, 2011**, at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

Opening night is **Saturday, April 30, 2011**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, May 3; Thursday, May 5; Saturday, May 7; Tuesday, May 10 and Thursday, May 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.

Sir Jonathan Miller is beloved for the 1960s comedy revue *Beyond the Fringe*, working alongside the brilliantly gifted Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett, and Peter Cook.

Jonathan Miller studied medicine at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he became involved in the famous Cambridge Footlights. He held a research fellowship in the history of medicine at University College, London, and studied neuropsychology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, later becoming a neuropsychology research fellow at Sussex University. He began directing opera and theatre in the 1970s and has since created several noted productions, including *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Laurence Olivier, *Rigoletto* for English National Opera, and several productions for The Metropolitan Opera. This production of *La Traviata*, a co-production with Glimmerglass Opera, was first staged in 2009.

Canadian soprano **Erin Wall** sings Violetta, the Parisian courtesan who leads a life of wild indulgence until she discovers the love of a good man. "The role of Violetta challenges sopranos to reach the highest rung of their range, which many cannot fully approach. Wall scaled those heights with little evidence of strain. Her every note left us giddy with goosebumps," raved the *Arizona Daily Star*. "In three hours, we had connected with Wall on levels that go beyond merely absorbing her as a character. We absorbed her as a presence."

Canadian tenor **David Pomeroy** sings Alfredo. Mr. Pomeroy was last seen on the VO stage as Don José in 2009's box office record-breaking *Carmen*. "He has a beautiful sound and handled the technical challenges of the Flower Song well," declared the *Vancouver Sun*.

Canadian baritone **James Westman** sings Germont, Alfredo's father, a role for which he has already received great acclaim. "Best of the three principals was Canadian baritone James Westman, who sang boldly all night as the elder Germont," raved *Opera News* for his English National Opera debut. Mr. Westman is "one of Canada's most promising opera singers," confirms *The Globe and Mail*, "with a lush, soaring, flexible voice that equips him to be a Verdi and Puccini baritone and therefore heir to some of the most coveted roles in opera." This will be Mr. Westman's VO debut.

Mezzo-soprano **Barbara Towell** sings Flora. Ms Towell was last seen on the VO stage as Clotilde in VO's Golden Anniversary Season production of *Norma*. Tenor **Sam Chung**, last seen on the VO stage in 2009's *Salome*, sings Gastone. Ms. Towell and Mr. Chung both perform regularly with the Vancouver Opera Chorus. Baritone **Benjamin Covey** sings Baron Douphol in his VO debut.

Bass **Giles Tomkins** sings Doctor Grenvil; bass **Stephen Hegedus** sings Marchese d'Obigny; and soprano **Melanie Krueger** sings Annina. This will be the VO debut for all three.

The much admired conductor **Jacques Lacombe**, a frequent VO guest, conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Associate Conductor and Chorus Director).

The Story in Brief

Parisian courtesan Violetta leads a life of wild indulgence until she discovers the love of Alfredo, a true and good-hearted man. When their relationship threatens to disgrace his well-placed family, Alfredo's father privately pressures Violetta to leave, and the couple is torn apart. After bitterness and misunderstanding, they are reunited in forgiveness, but tragically it is too late: Violetta's precarious health fails and Alfredo is left alone.

Sumptuous parties, passionate encounters and intimate scenes of tragic tenderness, together with dramatic and vocal intensity from beginning to end, make this a wonderful opera experience.

Background

La Traviata is based on the play *La dame aux Camélias*, which was in turn adapted from a novel by Alexandre Dumas fils. The opera was originally called *Violetta*, after the main character, but the title was changed to *La Traviata*, Italian for "the wayward woman".

The first performance was on March 6, 1853 at La Fenice opera house in Venice. Soprani Fanny Salvini-Donatelli was cast as the young, tuberculosis-ravaged Violetta: an unfortunate choice, as Salvini-Donatelli was 38 years old and overweight. The audience was not impressed, and like many now-beloved operas, *La Traviata* was considered a failure upon opening. The following day, Verdi wrote what would become a very famous note to a friend: "*La Traviata* last night a failure. My fault or the singers? Time will tell."

Revisions were made over the following two years and the opera was performed again, this time at Teatro San Benedetto, also in Venice. Maria Spezia-Aldighieri was cast as Violetta, to great success. *La Traviata* had its North American premiere in New York in 1856.

Today, *La Traviata* is one of the most famous and loved operas. It serves as the basis for several movies, including 1936's *Camille* with Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor; *Pretty Woman* with Julia Roberts and Richard Gere; and Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*. The instantly recognizable drinking song *Libiamo ne'lieti calici* is the most famous selection from *La Traviata*.

Learn More

Film Screening: Camille

Thursday, April 7, 2011

Doors: 7:00pm • Introduction & Screening: 7:20pm

Vancity Theatre, Vancouver International Film Centre, 1181 Seymour Street

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

In partnership with the Vancity Theatre, Vancouver Opera presents a series of films that explore themes and issues related to the season's operas.

Named one of the top 100 movies ever made by *Time* magazine and based on the same novel and play as Giuseppe Verdi's great opera *La Traviata* (*La dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas, fils), *Camille* is a tragic love story about a courtesan, Marguerite, and her handsome young suitor, Armand, starring Greta Garbo, Robert Taylor, Lionel Barrymore, Henry Daniell, Elizabeth Allan.

Camille will be introduced by national film journalist **Katherine Monk**. Ms. Monk's writing appears in *The National Post*, *The Vancouver Sun* and *Province*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *Calgary Herald* and *Ottawa Citizen* among others. She is also a regular contributor for CBC Radio's *On the Coast* and Global BC's *Early News*.

Opera Speaks @ VPL

Tuesday, April 19, 2011

7:00pm – 9:00pm

Alice Mackay Room, Vancouver Public Library Central Branch

Free admission. Limited seating.

VO presents the latest instalment in its series of engaging discussions

Visit www.vancouveropera.ca for details

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.

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