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Vancouver Opera announces
“Behind Bars: Prisoners of Conscience in the 21st Century”

A series of events leading to Beethoven's *Fidelio*

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera continues its highly successful community engagement program with *Behind Bars: Prisoners of Conscience in the 21st Century*, a series of four engrossing events leading to VO's compelling contemporary March, 2008 production of Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Led by respected experts and performers, *Behind Bars* will unflinchingly examine the plight of political prisoners around the world and will explore the relationship between art and the struggle for social justice.

UBC President **Stephen J. Toope**, political scientist and author **Michael Byers**, UBC Law professor **Michelle LeBaron** and **Felix Culpa** Theatre Company are among the participants in the series, which begins February 26 and concludes March 17, 2008.

Full event information is listed below and is also available at www.vancouveropera.ca.

VO's production of *Fidelio* – March 22, 25, 27 and 29, 2008 – is conceived and staged by esteemed veteran Serbian opera director **Dejan Miladinovic**. Set in a clandestine prison in Eastern Europe at the height of the Cold War, *Fidelio* tells the dramatic story of Florestan, a political prisoner who is being starved to death in a dark dungeon, the victim of the corrupt governor. His wife, Leonore, alone in believing him to be alive, disguises herself as a young man (“Fidelio”) and gets hired by the jailer. With courage and deep compassion, Leonore stands up to the governor, frees Florestan, and liberates the entire prison.

Vancouver Opera's Community Engagement Program

For six years, Vancouver Opera has been presenting extraordinary community-wide events that engage audiences in exploring the issues and themes inherent in the operas that the company produces. Thousands of people have attended lectures, performances, and thirty installments of its award-winning *Opera Speaks @ VPL* free public forums, the most recent of which, before *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, drew an overflow crowd of more than 300.

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BEHIND BARS EVENTS:

The Arts and Social Transformation: an evening of exploration and creativity

Tuesday, February 26, 2008, 7:00 - 9:00 pm. Admission is free.

Michelle LeBaron and Carrie MacLeod, facilitators

Vancouver Museum (Joyce Walley Learning Centre) 1100 Chestnut Street, Vancouver

In this interactive, participatory evening, using *Fidelio* as the point of departure, you will discover together how, individually and collectively, each of us can effect social change. And you'll explore the crucial role that the Arts play in bridging cultural differences. **Michelle LeBaron** is Professor of Law and Director of the UBC Program on Dispute Resolution. She recently co-edited the book "Conflict Across Cultures". **Carrie MacLeod** is a PhD. candidate at the European Graduate School in Switzerland and the creative director of the CRANE research initiative (Conflict Resolution, Arts and iNtercultural Experience).

Voices of Liberty

Friday, March 7, 2008, 7:00 pm

Christ Church Cathedral, 690 Burrard Street, Vancouver

Felix Culpa theatre company presents readings of works by political prisoners and victims of torture. This is a fundraiser for the BC Civil Liberties Association.

Tickets and information: www.felixculpa.bc.ca.

"Political Prisoners in the 21st Century" – an Opera Speaks @ VPL public forum

Wednesday, March 12, 2008, 7:30 - 9:30 pm. Admission is free.

Alice MacKay Room, Vancouver Public Library, Central Branch

A panel of passionate experts will explore the plight of prisoners of conscience around the world, the roles and responsibilities of governments and individuals, and prospects for change in the future. Presenters will include Professor **Michael Byers**, Canadian Research Chair in International Law and Politics at UBC; **Micheal Vonn**, Policy Director at the BC Civil Liberties Association; and writer, scholar and activist **Derek Evans**, whose extensive world-wide experience includes six years as Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Opera Speaks @ VPL is sponsored by channel m Multivision Television.

Special Lecture: Political Prisoners and the "Disappeared"

Professor Stephen J. Toope, President and Vice Chancellor, UBC

Monday, March 17, 2008, 7:00 pm. Admission is free.

Vancouver Academy of Music, 1270 Chestnut Street, Vancouver

Professor Toope is an esteemed scholar of international law who represented Western Europe and North America on the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, from 2002 to 2007. Professor Toope's academic interests include public international law, legal theory, human rights, international dispute resolution, and family law.