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ALNUS RUBRA, BETULA PAPYRIFERA, ARBOR VITAE!

Kids across B.C. learn to speak the language of trees in *Jack Pine*, a new opera commissioned especially for young people by Vancouver Opera

Vancouver. BC ~ You may never see a poem as lovely as a tree, but you'll never see a tree more bent, more squat, more grim, more weird and ugly than Jack Pine. He's small and stunted, his branches twist and turn. In sunlight he looks mad at you, and in moonlight he's a monster. What can Jack Pine possibly be useful for?

Vancouver Opera brings the delightful story of this tenacious and truly remarkable tree to elementary school gymnasiums and community venues across BC in *Jack Pine*, a brand-new opera commissioned just for children. Sung in English, this magical 45-minute production will transport more than 50,000 young people and their families deep into Canada's vast forests and will introduce them to the beauty, relevance and sheer fun of opera.

Jack Pine is the story of three children who, with the help of an enthusiastic botanist, discover the secrets of the trees that surround them. Together they explore the myths, legends and fascinating facts of Canada's forests, and like Jack Pine, learn something about their own potential along the way.

From February to April 2009, **Vancouver Opera In Schools** (Vancouver Opera's touring program) will present *Jack Pine* to 140 elementary schools throughout Metro Vancouver and beyond. In April 2009, *Jack Pine* will travel to Ottawa to take part in the National Arts Centre's BC Scene showcase event and will be presented in area schools and at the National Arts Centre.

The libretto and music, based on the children's poem and illustrated book of the same name by Canadian author **Christopher Patton**, are created by renowned Canadian indie singer-songwriter **Veda Hille**. Hille's fresh music and libretto will appeal directly to young audiences' sense of wonder and humour.

Children will be charmed by the zany energy and full-throated singing of the talented young cast: tenor **Adam Fisher** (Jackson/Jack Pine), mezzo-soprano **Rose-Ellen Nichols** (Rebecca/Red Pine), soprano **Hiather Darnel-Kadonaga** (Piper/Pitch Pine) and baritone **Michael MacKinnon** (The Botanist/White Pine/The Farmer).

Musical accompaniment is by pianist **Andrea Wood** and the music director is **Kinza Tyrrell**. The touring stage manager is **Rebecca Craster** and the stage director is **Amiel Gladstone**. The set is

designed by **Drew Facey**, based on original illustrations by **Cybele Young**. The costumes are designed by **John Powell**, the Kwak waka wakw First Nation co-designer of the stunning costumes for Vancouver Opera's acclaimed First Nations-inspired 2007 production of *The Magic Flute*.

Vancouver Opera in Schools is the largest touring program of its kind in Canada. In its 36 years, it has enthralled more than 1.5 million elementary school children and their families in communities throughout BC and in Alberta, Washington State and Ottawa.

The Performers

Adam Fisher is a bright young tenor from White Rock, BC. He currently lives in Vancouver and just finished his Bachelor's of Music in Opera Performance at UBC. Adam has delighted audiences in his previous roles, including Alfred and Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*, and Marco in *The Goldoliars*. Adam is touring with Vancouver Opera into the spring of 2009 and looking forward to making children smile every day with the gift of music.

A Master's graduate of the UBC Opera Program, **Rose-Ellen Nichols** has appeared in many productions in both Canada and Europe. These include: *The Merry Widow*, *The Magic Flute*, *Orpheus and the Underworld*, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Rose-Ellen made her European debut in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *Così Fan Tutte*. Most recently she performed in *Suor Angelica*, and *The Old Maid and the Thief*.

Soprano **Hiather Darnel-Kadonaga** was born in Calgary and graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in opera at UBC. After training with Elizabeth Johnson at Mount Royal College, she completed a diploma in voice performance, followed by a degree studying with Marisa Gaetanne. Hiather has performed Adina from *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Pamina from *Die Zauberflöte*, the soprano aria "Zerfließes mein Herze" from a staged version of St. John's *Passion*, Gianetta from *Gondoliers*, and the exciting role of Musetta in *La Bohème*. Hiather has had the pleasure of working with Robert Tweeten, conductor with Sante Fe Young Artist Program, Czech conductor Norbert Baxa, Prague State Opera Director Martin Otava, Vancouver Opera Conductor Les Dala, and many more.

Baritone **Michael MacKinnon** was born in Scotland and moved to Vancouver after high school. Growing up, he played the drums in several rock bands and was also active in the local theatre scene. Since moving to Vancouver, he has worked regularly with various bands as a drummer, vocalist and writer in many different styles, including punk, folk, rock, blues and soul. While working towards a Bachelor of Music degree at UBC, he appeared in many productions with UBC Opera Ensemble directed by Nancy Hermiston, including a lead role as Don Alhambra in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*. Michael has performed with the University Singers Choir in large works such as Verdi's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *9th Symphony* and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*; this last with the VSO at the Orpheum Theater. He has also sung with the Vancouver Opera Chorus in their recent productions of *Fidelio* and *Eugene Onegin*. *Jack Pine* is his professional solo debut.

Veda Hille was born in 1968 in Vancouver. She started playing piano when she was 6. Her family moved around a lot, from the city to the country and back again. Veda ran around in the woods and the streets, practiced piano, read books, used her Junior Scientist Microscope, and thought that maybe she would be a psychiatrist. First she played classical music, then pop music, and a few years of jazz. Veda started writing songs in 1990 and it became quickly obvious that she would not be a psychiatrist.

Veda put out an indie cassette in 1992, started touring Canada, and began a long relationship with the Canadian modern dance scene. In 1994 she released her first CD, and has released an album roughly every 18 months since then. Veda plays piano and tenor guitar, dabbles in banjo, accordion, and Pro Tools, and has a new love affair going on with a Nord electro keyboard and a handful of Casios. Veda is a member of two bands: Duplex! (rock music for kids) and The Fits (vaudeville duets). Her new album, *This Riot Life*, was released in early 2008. Veda is the in-house composer for Theatre Replacement and has performed with the CBC Radio Orchestra, is writing for the Leaky Heaven Circus, and recently completed a new choral piece for the Winnipeg New Music Festival. Stay tuned, because as Veda frequently admits in her music and her life, no-body knows what is going to happen next.

Stage Director **Amiel Gladstone** is a director and playwright. He has developed world premieres with companies across the province and the country including Alberta Theatre Projects, the Belfry Theatre, Caravan Farm Theatre, Firehall, the Guild in Whitehorse, the National Arts Centre, Rumble Productions, Solo Collective, Touchstone Theatre, Theatre Replacement, Theatre SKAM, Western Edge Theatre and Langara College's Studio 58. He is part of the Vancouver Opera's Assistant Directors Residency program for which he was Assistant Director for both *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*.

Stage Manager **Rebecca Craster** has worked with Vancouver Opera for four years. She toured with *The Barber of Barkerville* last year and was assistant stage manager for three mainstage seasons at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Other credits include the Firehall Arts Centre, the Arts Club, the Canadian Opera Company and five seasons with Bard on the Beach. She is a graduate of the theatre production program at York University.

Music Director **Kinza Tyrrell's** musical education has been extensive, taking her across Canada and to Europe, earning her a Doctorate in piano and vocal coaching. She is a multiple prize winner, most recently the Bösendorfer Prize at the International Belvedere Opera Competition in Vienna. For the past few years she has been on the music faculty at the Canadian Opera Company as well as Assistant Conductor and Repetiteur at Opera Nuova and the Opera As Theatre program at the Banff Centre. This summer, she has been invited to Italy to join the COSI opera program in Sulmona. Currently, Dr. Tyrrell is Principle Repetiteur at Vancouver Opera and Music Director of the VOIS program.