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**Vancouver Opera presents Richard Strauss's
ARIADNE AUF NAXOS**

The force of love meets the love of farce.

Vancouver, B.C. ~ It's irresistible, irrepressible, and irreverent...a delectable comedy and a heroic drama, performed simultaneously! The vocal and theatrical fireworks are not to be missed, in Vancouver Opera's new co-production (with Utah Opera) of Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, running **March 3–10, 2007** at the **Queen Elizabeth Theatre**. Strauss's hugely entertaining opera-within-an-opera blends the high art of melody with sensuality, mockery and mayhem. Its lush and thrilling score delights newcomers and connoisseurs alike.

Opening night is Saturday, March 3, 2007 with subsequent performances **Tuesday, March 6, Thursday, March 8, and Saturday, March 10**. All performances take place at the **Queen Elizabeth Theatre**, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at **7:30 pm**. Tickets ranging in price from **\$29 to \$135** 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.

Some of Strauss's finest writing for the female voice can be found in this opera, and Vancouver Opera has assembled a fine cast, including Canadian coloratura superstar **Tracy Dahl** as Zerbinetta, joined by **Beth Clayton** as the Composer and **Lori Phillips** as Prima Donna/Ariadne. Canadians **Robyn Driedger-Klassen**, **Majorie Poirier** and **Karen Ydenberg** play Naiad, Dryad and Echo.

The men of *Ariadne* are equally impressive. The production features audience favourites **John Mac Master** as the Tenor/Bacchus, **Theodore Baerg** as The Music Master, **Peter Blanchet** as The Dance Master/Brighella, **Taras Kulish** as Truffaldino, and **Michel Corbeil** as Scaramuccio, joined by rapidly rising newcomer **Phillip Addis** as Harlequin. **John Arsenault** sings the role of the officer, **John Conlon** sings the wigmaker, and **Angus Bell** is the lackey. **Nicholas Harrison** plays the non-singing role of Major-domo.

Vancouver Opera Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra. Stage direction is by **David Gately**, and scenic design is by red-hot New York opera and theatre designer **Robin Vest**. Lighting is adapted by **Heidi McDonald**, and costumes are by **Susan Memmott-Allred**. *Ariadne auf Naxos* is performed in German with English SurTitles™ projected above the stage.

THE SINGERS

Tracy Dahl (Zerbinetta) has been described by *The Vancouver Sun* as "a bright bird of her species". Her outstanding coloratura soprano has taken her to the Metropolitan Opera, the San Francisco Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Washington Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Music Center Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, the Châtelet in Paris, to name a few. She was last seen in Vancouver Opera's production of *Der Rosenkavalier* as Sophie.

Soprano **Lori Phillips** (Prima Donna/Ariadne) returns to Vancouver following her powerful performances as Amelia in 2005's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. Since that time, she has sung the title role of *Turandot* in New York, Memphis and Nashville and has participated in Seattle Opera's *Ring Cycle* as Gerhilde, among many other credits. Upcoming, she'll sing Lady Macbeth with Arizona Opera.

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Mezzo soprano **Beth Clayton's** (the Composer) extensive repertoire ranges from frequent collaborations with today's leading composers to major roles of the Baroque period. Ms. Clayton made a sensational VO début as Octavian in 2004's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Her collaborations have included work with composers John Adams, Thomas Ades and Carlisle Floyd; directors Peter Sellars and Christopher Alden; and conductors Donald Runnicles, Seiji Ozawa, and Kurt Masur.

Vancouver audiences will remember dramatic tenor **John Mac Master's** vivid appearances in *The Flying Dutchman* and *Elektra*. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Canio in *I Pagliacci*, and will return to Vancouver Opera next season to sing the role.

Baritone **Theodore Baerg** (The Music Master) began his career in 1974 and has travelled to operatic stages all over the world. Recent appearances in Vancouver have included *Of Mice and Men* and *Madama Butterfly*. He is a faculty member at the University of Western Ontario.

Tenor **Peter Blanchet** (Dance Master/Brighella) has gained a reputation as one of the most gifted character tenors in the opera world. Critics consistently single him out for his unique talent as both a singer and as an actor. Vancouver Opera audiences have seen him recently in *Turandot*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Canadian tenor **Michel Corbeil** (Scaramuccio) has sung in Vancouver Opera's productions of *The Magic Flute* (2007 and 2001), *Turandot*, *La fanciulla del West*, and *Madama Butterfly*. A resident of Montreal, his recent credits include Pong in *Turandot* and Monostatos with Calgary Opera and Goro in *Madama Butterfly* with Kentucky Opera.

Bass-baritone **Taras Kulish** (Truffaldino) was last seen in Vancouver as the King in *Aïda*. An alumnus of the Vancouver Opera Touring Ensemble, he currently resides in Montreal, where he divides his time between his active career as a singer and as Artistic Director of the Green Mountain Opera Festival in Vermont.

Rising young Canadian baritone **Phillip Addis** has sung with numerous companies, including L'Opéra de Montréal, Pacific Opera Victoria, Edmonton Opera, and Cincinnati Opera. He makes his VO début in the role of Harlequin.

A Saskatchewan native, soprano **Robyn Driedger-Klassen** (Naiad) has been seen on many Canadian opera stages, Robyn's operatic roles span from Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*) to Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*).

Soprano **Karen Ydenberg** (Echo) is a former member of the Canadian Opera Company Studio Ensemble and the Vancouver Opera Ensemble. She recently appeared as First Lady in VO's recent production of *The Magic Flute*.

Recent mezzo-soprano discovery **Majorie Poirier** makes her Vancouver Opera début in the role of Dryad. Ms. Poirier initially auditioned for the VO Chorus and so impressed the artistic staff that she was offered the role.

THE STORY

The Prologue

At the house of a rich Viennese man, musicians, singers, actors, carpenters, and stage hands are preparing for the first performance of a serious opera which has been specially commissioned by the owner of the house to entertain his guests.

There is consternation when the Major-domo confirms that, after the opera, there will be a Harlequinade entertainment; moreover the two shows must not overrun their allotted span of time. Worse is to come, as a little later the Major-domo returns to inform the two troupes that his master has changed his mind: now both entertainments will be played simultaneously.

The composer of the serious opera improvises an aria which he intends for the tenor and languishes at the idea of his masterpiece being combined with a common dancing show. He tries to explain to Zerbinetta, the comedy troupe's leader, that Ariadne prefers death to the embraces of any man other than her beloved, and proving unsuccessful in this, he indulges in a duet with Zerbinetta in which he comes perilously close to declaring that he loves her. Both tenor and prima donna throw tiny tantrums, after which the composer declares his conviction in the power of music, the most sacred of the arts.

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The Opera

After an interval, the curtain rises on the opera itself, watched by the owner of the house and his guests. The setting, which is seen only from its reversed side in the Prologue, is now seen from the front. Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos, is asleep, watched by Naiad, Dryad and Echo. These creatures express sympathy with Ariadne's sorrow, to which, however, they have become accustomed with the passage of time. Speaking as if in a dream, Ariadne resolves to await the arrival of Hermes, messenger of death. She takes no notice when the Harlequinade quartet and Zerbinetta comment on her distress and try to think of a means to comfort her. Not even a determined effort by Harlequin to cure her of her madness can stop her for long.

The four comedians make another attempt to cheer up the melancholy Ariadne, but their dancing and singing have not the slightest effect, even when they are joined by the sprightly Zerbinetta. Eventually, Zerbinetta bids them leave her to see what she can do on her own. Zerbinetta appeals to Ariadne, telling her she is not the first to be abandoned by her lover, and will not be the last. Zerbinetta expounds her own fickle philosophy, revealing details of her amorous career. She is pursued by the four comedians, each of whom seems amorously inclined. Zerbinetta encourages and eludes them all, until only Scaramuccio, Brighella, and Truffaldino are left. Much to their annoyance, Zerbinetta is immediately heard conversing tenderly with the Harlequin, whom they had thought safely out of the way. They rush to see what they can do about it.

No sooner are they gone than the three attendant nymphs return to the stage, full of the sight they have just seen. A youthful god is coming, Bacchus, fresh from the embraces of Circe, but eager for a new adventure. They call to Ariadne, who emerges from the cave in time to hear Bacchus calling for Circe. The nymphs beg him to continue singing, and Ariadne hails him as the longed for messenger of death. In the arms of Bacchus, Ariadne finds consolation and Zerbinetta pops in to comment that all has turned out exactly as she would have expected.

BACKGROUND

Ariadne auf Naxos has been called an "underappreciated delight of an opera." Its music is ravishing, its comic elements charming, and its plot amusing. But Strauss's incredible score, combined with the wit and intelligence of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's libretto, brilliantly confronts the seriousness of the composer's art with the demands of patrons and popular entertainment, attempting to reconcile the two with a droll intelligence that appreciates both perspectives. With three bravura soprano roles and orchestrations full of texture and colour, there is much for lovers of both music and theatre in this seldom-produced gem.

Ariadne examines many questions that were central to artistic life in pre-WWI Vienna. At that time, as now, there was a sense of values being lost, of society decaying, and artists were looking for ways to react. Contradictory positions are taken by the Composer and Zerbinetta, with each camp having its advocates within the opera. ("This experience poisons my soul and kills my genius forever," says the Composer when he hears the comedy troupe will be performing on the same stage as his beloved music; "It will be no mean feat to make the audience laugh again when they have first been bored for so long," says Zerbinetta, disparaging the Composer's ability to hold an audience.). The questions being asked are surprisingly contemporary: As an artist, does working in the popular art of the present moment make for art that is truly modern, yet lasting? Or does hearkening back to a set of standards established long ago cause art to calcify and become irrelevant? Such questions are equally pertinent today as "high art" battles "low art" and issues of who foots the bill for art of any kind are being examined. The opera reconciles the two, displaying the poignant side of the zany characters and the comic side of the serious characters to show that the two can live side by side, complementing each other and in fact creating the potential for each to transform into something new and greater.

FULL TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets from \$29 to \$135 (plus service charges) are available ONLY from the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, (located at 835 Cambie Street, 2nd floor, Monday-Friday 9 am-8 pm, Saturday 9 am-5 pm), online at **www.vancouveropera.ca** or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. DISCOUNTS: For groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

OPERA SPEAKS @ VPL – FREE PUBLIC FORUM

Singing Strauss

Vancouver Public Library Main Branch, Alice MacKay Room

Monday, February 12, 7:30-9:30 pm

Get charged up for VO's new co-production of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Join VO's Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** as he leads an exploration of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* in a rare public masterclass. Sopranos **Robyn Driedger-Klassen** and **Karen Ydenberg** join Maestro Darlington and pianist **Leslie Dala** for this fascinating evening of music and poetry. *Opera Speaks @ VPL is sponsored by channel m Multivision Television.*

ARIADNE AUF NAXOS PREVIEW at UBC ROBSON SQUARE

STRAUSS AND THE SOPRANO

UBC Robson Square | March 3, 10 am-4 pm

Our special guest is the renowned pianist, **Rena Sharon**, director of the Vancouver International Song Institute (VISI) who, with vocal examples, enlightens us on Strauss Lieder. Choose the all-day exploration of the topic, or come only in the afternoon for a lively discussion. Cost: \$75 (all day, includes a catered lunch and coffee break) or \$25 (afternoon only) Call UBC Continuing Studies 604-822-1444.

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