

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VO closes 2008/2009 season with the opera that shocked the world

**SALOME**

Strauss' astonishing drama of lust and prophecy in Judea

Vancouver, BC ~ A powerhouse cast, a large orchestra and VO's illustrious music director, **Jonathan Darlington** come together for the thrilling conclusion to Vancouver Opera's 2008-2009 season, a vivid and irresistible production of Richard Strauss' **Salome**, the opera that shocked the world.

Opening night is **Saturday, May 2, 2009**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, May 5; Thursday, May 7** and **Saturday, May 9**. 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](http://www.vancouveropera.ca) or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

One of the greatest works of the twentieth century, and as gripping today as it was when it jolted its first audience in 1905, **Salome** is Richard Strauss' thrilling treatment of Oscar Wilde's story of obsession, murder and manipulation under a strange moon. The cast includes sensational Russian soprano **Mlada Khudoley** in the title role, world-renowned bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley as John the Baptist**, the legendary mezzo-soprano **Judith Forst as Herodias**, and New Brunswick-born tenor **John Mac Master as Herod**.

Joining these formidable singers will be a staggering 79 players in the expanded Vancouver Opera Orchestra pit, ready to unleash the startlingly strong tones of Strauss' complicated, opulent music.

The story is famous for the Dance of the Seven Veils, John the Baptist, and of course, his head on a platter. The music is intense, conjuring an eerie atmosphere of madness and violence. The drama is brought to vivid life with an abstract set design that uses shapes of light and shadow to create the sultry, savage Judean night.

## THE CAST

Combining a Wagnerian weight of voice with agility, grace and girlish charm, Russian soprano **Mlada Khudoley** sings the title role of Salome, Herod's manipulative daughter. Ms. Khudoley will be performing the Dance of the Seven Veils without the aid of a stand-in. International Vancouver-based superstar **Judith Forst, OC**, sings Herodias with equal volume, stamina and power, having performed the role with Dallas Opera alongside Ms. Khudoley as Salome in 2008.

**Greer Grimsley**, who possesses one of the world's biggest baritone voices, sings John the Baptist, and Canadian **John Mac Master** Herod. VO continues to bring rising new international talent to Vancouver audiences with the casting of **Sean Panikkar**, debuting on the VO stage as Narraboth.

**Jonathan Darlington** conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra. **Joseph McClain** directs.

Also in the cast are **Chad Louwerse** as the First Nazarene, recently seen as Count Monterone in VO's *Rigoletto*, and **Barbara Towell** as the Page, also last seen in *Rigoletto* as the Page. **Willy Miles-Grenzberg** and **W. David Collins** also return to the VO stage to sing Cappadocian and the Second Soldier, respectively. **Ricardo Gimena**, last seen in VO's *Carmen* as Le Remendado, will sing the Second Nazarene.

**John Arsenault** will sing the First Jew, **Sam Chung** the Second Jew, **Kwangmin Brian Lee** the Third Jew, **James McLennan** the Fourth Jew and **Angus Bell** the Fifth Jew. **Heather Pawsey** will sing the Slave and **Taras Kulish** the First Soldier.

### The Story in Brief

Salome is a Judean princess, step-daughter of King Herod. John the Baptist is the prophet imprisoned for denouncing Herod's depravity. Salome becomes obsessed with John, and when Herod, himself fixated on Salome, asks her to dance for him, Salome demands John's head as her price. Herod, disturbed and terrified, orders Salome's death.

[Read a full synopsis](#)

### Background

Richard Strauss' *Salome* is based on Oscar Wilde's French play of the same name, which in turn borrows the story from the gospels of Matthew and Mark. Strauss saw a German translation of the play performed in Berlin in 1902, having already been sent the script by Anton Linder, an Austrian poet. Linder had written the first few scenes of a verse libretto, but Strauss was not impressed by these and opted instead to write his own, shortening Hedwig Lachmann's German translation by about a third.

The shocking and macabre story was a good match for Strauss' musical complexity. *Salome* employs a system of *leitmotifs* that are each associated with characters and themes in the opera. Symbolic musical colour is also used; for example, a tambourine is heard every time a reference to Salome's dance is made.

The opera was first performed in Dresden on December 9, 1905, but the controversy began even before *Salome* touched the stage. Many of the singers found their parts too difficult at the first read-through, and Marie Wittich, playing Salome, refused to perform the Dance of the Seven Veils: "I won't do it, I'm a respectable woman." And of course, the combination of the Biblical, the erotic and the murderous prompted moralistic objections from many.

*Salome* was a sensational popular success when it was performed at Dresden but had difficulty reaching the stage in other cities. At the Berlin Court Opera, the Kaiser would allow it to be performed only if a Star of Bethlehem was shown in the sky, even though the action of the opera takes place 30 years after the birth of Christ. In London, *Salome* was banned by the Lord Chamberlain's office until 1907. That same year, at its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, there was such an outcry from wealthy patrons that the production was cancelled after the first night. Viennese censors would not allow it to be performed until 1918. The Kaiser even said, "I like this fellow Strauss, but Salome will do him a lot of damage", to which Strauss replied, "The damage enabled me to build my house in Garmisch." Within two years, *Salome* had been performed at 50 other opera houses around the world, and today, remains extremely popular and a prime example of *Succès de scandale*.

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### Full Ticket Information

Single tickets are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at [www.vancouveropera.ca](http://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.

### Learn More

#### **GREER GRIMSLEY PUBLIC MASTERCLASS – “REACHING FOR NEW LOWS”**

Bass baritone Greer Grimsley leads a rare public masterclass / demonstration for lower voices. Mr. Grimsley will work with two up-and-coming young Vancouver singers.

Tuesday, April 14, 7:00-9:00 pm

Alice MacKay Room, Vancouver Public Library, Central Branch

Admission is free. Please arrive early; seating is limited.

Part of VO's *Opera Speaks @ VPL* series of free public events.