

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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He rejects her. She demands his head.

VO's 2008/2009 season finale is Richard Strauss' shocking drama of lust and prophecy in  
Judea  
**SALOME**

Vancouver, BC ~ With an expanded orchestra, a world-famous powerhouse cast, and the gripping, powerful music of Richard Strauss, VO's final – and biggest – production of 2008/2009 promises to be this season's most explosive experience yet!

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.

*Salome*, the thrilling story of obsession, murder and manipulation under a strange moon, is brought to vivid life under the baton of VO's illustrious music director **Jonathan Darlington**, as he leads 79 players – 20 more than for a typical Verdi or Puccini opera - in the expanded Vancouver Opera Orchestra pit, ready to unleash the startlingly strong tones of Strauss' complex, opulent music.

This production of *Salome* will feature sensational Russian soprano **Mlada Khudoley**'s tenth turn in the title role. Singing alongside her as John the Baptist will be one of the biggest baritone voices on stage today, **Greer Grimsley**. Together, these gifted singers – and brilliant actors – will move audiences with the strength and raw emotion befitting Strauss' intense, eerie opera of madness, violence and obsession. This is a rare treat for those who like their opera strong!

### The Singers

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 step-daughter, with "a voice that meld[s] girlish sweetness and laserlike projection" (*Washington Post*). Her recent appearances include Lisa in *Pique Dame* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* with Mariinsky Theatre, and Abagaille in *Nabucco* with Opernhaus Graz. Ms. Khudoley will be performing the erotic Dance of the Seven Veils without the aid of a stand-in; the dance is choreographed by Calgary-based performer and teacher **Denise Clarke**, whose innovative and provocative work with One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre over 26 years is much admired throughout Canada.

American bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley** sings John the Baptist. Mr. Grimsley has gained international recognition as an outstanding singing actor: "the power of his voice is such that the audience can literally

feel his crescendos in their chests and the shaking of the floor in his lower register," raved the *Westender* about Mr. Grimsley's last Vancouver appearance in VO's *Macbeth* (2006); "His international reputation as a first-class singer and actor is well earned." He is one of the world's leading interpreters of Wagnerian repertoire and has impressed audiences as Wotan in *The Ring Cycle* in Seattle and Venice. His recent appearances include Scarpia in *Tosca* with San Diego Opera, Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Don Pizarro in *Fidelio* with Portland Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia and Opera Nacional de Sao Carlos (Portugal). Mr. Grimsley will soon be singing Wotan in *The Ring Cycle* with Seattle Opera, and Jokanaan in *Salome* with San Francisco Opera.

International Vancouver-based superstar **Judith Forst, OC, OBC**, sings Herodias, having performed the role with Dallas Opera, alongside Ms. Khudoley as Salome, in 2008. Ms. Forst is one of the world's best-known and versatile coloratura mezzo-sopranos. Her upcoming engagements include Kabanicha in *Kat'a Kabanova* with Lyric Opera of Chicago and Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* with Houston Grand Opera.

Canadian **John Mac Master** (Herod) astonished audiences with his very moving portrayal of Canio in *I Pagliacci* with Glimmerglass Opera and, in 2007, with VO. "A Canadian tenor with a huge, powerful voice, he summoned every bit of the pathos and violence that the role demands," raved the *New York Times*. Since then, he has been in demand internationally for the dramatic tenor repertoire. Mr. Mac Master's recent appearances include Florestan in *Fidelio* with the London Symphony Orchestra and Tristan in *Tristan und Isolde* at The Metropolitan Opera in New York. He is also resident artist with New York's AmorArtis Orchestra and Choir.

VO continues to bring rising new international talent to Vancouver audiences with the casting of **Sean Panikkar**, debuting on the VO stage as Narraboth. A recent graduate of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship, Mr. Panikkar has been praised for his "surpassing musicality and passion, commanding self-confidence and gorgeous expression." (*San Francisco Classical Voice*). Mr. Panikkar's recent and upcoming appearances include Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with The Metropolitan Opera, Count Almaviva in *The Ghosts of Versailles* with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and Jim Casey in *The Grapes of Wrath* with Pittsburgh Opera.

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 at [www.vancouveropera.ca](http://www.vancouveropera.ca).

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## 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*.

## 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.