

TOSCA ALBERT HERRING DON GIOVANNI DON CARLO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE November 19, 2013
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Less than two weeks until opening night! Benjamin Britten's delightful satire

ALBERT HERRING

bursts onto the Queen Elizabeth Stage with colourful costumes, devastating satire and hummable tunes

Vancouver, BC ~ Effervescent, intoxicating, and just a little daft, Vancouver Opera's colourful production of *Albert Herring* bursts onto the Queen Elizabeth Theatre Stage in less than two weeks. Benjamin Britten's fast-paced, clever and hummable opera, directed by Glynis Leyshon, transports audiences to the 1950s in a riot of scrumptious costumes, devastating satire, and charming slapstick.

Albert Herring is onstage for four performances only. Opening night is **Saturday, November 30, 2013**, with subsequent performances **Thursday, December 5; Saturday, December 7 at 7:30pm** and a matinee performance on **Sunday, December 8 at 2:00pm**. All performances are at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. Tickets are available exclusively through the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone at 604-683-0222. See complete ticket information below. This production of *Albert Herring* is a co-production with Pacific Opera Victoria.

THE CAST

Soprano **Sally Dibblee** returns to VO as Lady Billows, the interfering autocrat in charge of the May Day festival where the "Queen of the May" will be crowned. Ms. Dibblee was last seen on the VO stage as Pat Nixon in Vancouver Opera's 2010 Canadian premiere of *Nixon in China*. "Soprano Sally Dibblee is a perfect Pat, all stand-by-her-man propriety while being exposed to an unimaginable world of revolutionary women" declared the *Georgia Straight* for that performance.

Tenor **Lawrence Wiliford** – an internationally recognized Britten specialist - makes his VO debut as Albert Herring, the hapless young man crowned as King of the May when no ladies of suitable character can be found for the honour. "[Mr. Wiliford] brings muscular innocence to the role, a working-class kid with a tender heart and a hidden inner-life. Wiliford is able to stretch from stubborn (when defying his mother, or trying to) to loneliness and frustration...During scenes in which Albert is drunk, Wiliford expertly balances his vocal

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demands with graceful slapstick movement," raved *Monday Magazine* for Mr. Wiliford's performance at Pacific Opera Victoria earlier this year.

Baritone **Aaron Durand** and mezzo-soprano **Sylvia Szadovszki** sing Sid and Nancy, the mischievous couple responsible for spiking Albert's lemonade with a generous amount of rum. Mr. Durand last appeared on the VO stage recently as Sciarrone in *Tosca*. Ms. Szadovszki sang a delightful Papagena in VO's acclaimed First Nations-infused *The Magic Flute* last season.

Mezzo-soprano **Susan Platts** sings Florence Pike, know-it-all housekeeper to Lady Billows. "Her voice is startlingly attractive from top to bottom, with a sure and strong upper register descending like honey to the yeasty depths of a contralto. A voice like this - there are not many - is such a pleasure to hear...radiantly persuasive..." raves *The Washington Post*.

Soprano **Melanie Krueger** sings schoolteacher Miss Wordsworth. Ms. Krueger sang Isabel in VO's 2012 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, and previous to that sang Annina in 2011's *La Traviata*. Mezzo-soprano **Rebecca Hass** sings Mrs. Herring, Albert's mother. Ms. Hass last appeared on the VO stage as the Third Secretary in 2010's *Nixon in China*.

Baritone **Peter McGillivray** sings Mr. Gedge, the vicar. "Peter McGillivray was both mellifluous and unctuous, as the vicar" raved *Review Vancouver* of his performance at Pacific Opera Victoria earlier this year. Mr. McGillivray has just released his debut album, *Summer Schemes*. Tenor **Michael Colvin** sings Mr. Upfold, the Mayor. Mr. Colvin returns to Vancouver Opera after almost a decade, having enchanted audiences as Belmonte in 2004's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. "Michael Colvin, as the romantic lead Belmonte, was assured and luminous in his solo work, and an excellent partner for soprano Aline Kutan as Konstanze..." declared the *Vancouver Sun*. Bass **Giles Tomkins** sings Superintendent Budd. Mr. Tomkins delighted VO audiences as the Sergeant of Police in 2012's *The Pirates of Penzance*, and sang the role of Dr. Grenvil in 2011's *La Traviata*.

VO's Associate Conductor and Chorus Director **Leslie Dala** will lead the VO Orchestra. "As spectacle, it's immaculate. As music, under the direction of conductor Leslie Dala, it's impeccably played," raved the *Georgia Straight* for Mr. Dala's work on 2013's *The Magic Flute*. Mr. Dala also conducted that season's *La bohème*. "Conductor Leslie Dala mines the score's emotional heart, and the conversational-yet-melodic duets for the two pairs of lovers merit a pocket full of hankies," declared *Where Vancouver*.

Glynis Leyshon will direct. Ms. Leyshon is one of Canada's most respected opera and theatre directors. In addition to a long relationship with Pacific Opera Victoria, she has served as Head of the Opera as Theatre Programme at The Banff Centre, Artistic Director of the Belfry Theatre in Victoria, and Artistic Director of the Playhouse Theatre Company in Vancouver. Ms. Leyshon last worked with Vancouver Opera as director of

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2009's *Rigoletto*, presenting an innovative, imaginative treatment with bold visuals that twinned beautifully with Verdi's dark, tender drama of love and revenge.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

The busybodies of the Loxford May Day committee cannot find a virtuous female to be Queen of the May, so they name as King the over-protected grocer's son, Albert Herring. Following an extravagant crowning ceremony, at which Albert gets tipsy on rum-spiked lemonade, he decides to cut his mother's apron strings and venture into the sensual world he sees others enjoying. After a frantic search by the entire town, Albert reappears, having enjoyed a night of debauchery. Depending on your point of view, he has been either ruined or saved.

This brilliant comedy by England's greatest opera composer is a fast-paced, witty, and devastatingly satirical portrayal of the quaint characters of a closed-in community. Employing a cleverly constituted chamber orchestra, Britten uses his prodigious powers of melodic invention and parody to explore society's attitudes toward an odd but innocent individual.

BACKGROUND

Composer, conductor and pianist Benjamin Britten was born in 1913 in Suffolk, on the east coast of England. He composed a number of works, including orchestral and chamber pieces, but is best known for his operas and his compositions the *War Requiem* and *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. 2013 marks Britten's 100th birthday.

In total, Britten wrote 15 operas, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Billy Budd*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice*, but he catapulted to international fame in 1945 with his second opera, *Peter Grimes*. It, as with many of Britten's operas, deals with the theme of outsiders in society, and of the repressive attitudes with which they come into conflict

Britten displayed musical gifts from an early age. After graduation from the Royal College of Music in London, he wrote scores for documentary films for the GPO Film Unit, a subdivision of the UK General Post Office. There, he met the poet W.H. Auden, who became a strong influence on Britten's personal life, encouraging him to explore new ideas in art and politics and to come to terms with his homosexuality. Auden was unapologetically promiscuous - very much in contrast to Britten's sexual repression.

In 1937, Britten met tenor Peter Pears. The two quickly became close, with Pears becoming a musical inspiration for Britten. Within weeks of their meeting, Britten had composed a work for him, based on an Emily Brönte poem. In 1939 the two sailed to New York, hoping to escape the rumblings of war. They returned to England in 1942.

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Albert Herring was composed between 1946 and 1947. The libretto, by Eric Crozier, was based on the Guy de Maupassant short story, *Le Rosier de Madame Husson*. It premiered at the Glyndebourne Festival in June 1947 and was intensely disliked by the owner and founder of the festival, who is reported to have greeted audiences with the words "this isn't our kind of thing, you know." Almost 40 years later, the festival's 1985 production of *Albert Herring* was one of the most successful the opera has ever had.

If *Peter Grimes* showed the tragic aspects of life, *Albert Herring* showed its comic side. In it, Britten parodies moral hypocrisy, village fêtes, mayors, vicars, schoolmarmes and policemen. Its successful translation in several European countries has broadened the opera's appeal.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets for *Albert Herring* are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at 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.

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