

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Effervescent melodies and witty fun combine in Vancouver Opera's irresistible

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

Inventive new production sets the action in a 1940s-era Spanish movie backlot

Vancouver, BC ~ Effervescent arias, mistaken identities and irresistible shenanigans come together in Vancouver Opera's *The Barber of Seville*, on stage for five hilarious performances only, March 17 - 25, 2012 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

Rossini's special brand of fun is heightened in this clever new production – conceived and directed by Dennis Garnhum, Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary – that sets the action on a movie backlot in Seville in the 1940s. Rosina is the starlet, Bartolo is the slimy studio owner, Almaviva is the star-struck nobleman, and Figaro is the studio hairstylist with a flair for mischief. Audiences will recognize many of the famous tunes that pervade pop culture, including Figaro's timeless self-congratulatory *tour-de-force* "Largo al factotum".

Opening night is **Saturday, March 17, 2012** with subsequent performances **Tuesday, March 20, Thursday, March 22, Saturday, March 24** and a **matinee performance on Sunday, March 25**. The matinee will begin at 1:30pm and evening performances will begin at the usual time of 7:30pm.

All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. Tickets are available exclusively through the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre (sponsored by Mission Hill Family Estate), online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

Baritone **Joshua Hopkins** sings the inimitable Figaro. Winner of the 2006 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award and the Verbier Festival Academy's 2008 Prix d'Honneur, Mr. Hopkins has been praised for his "virile, vigorous yet velvety sound and an immediately evident dramatic authority" (*Globe and Mail*). This will be Mr. Hopkins's VO debut.

Mezzo-soprano **Sandra Piques Eddy** sings Rosina. Last seen on the VO stage in 2008's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, she was praised by the *Georgia Straight*: "Blessed with physical beauty and a luxurious

voice that nailed the many low notes of Isabella's role, Eddy, cracking a whip at times, was completely believable as a woman who could tame a mob of testosterone-rich men with a single glance."

Texas-born tenor **René Barbera** sings Almoviva in his Vancouver Opera debut. Mr. Barbera recently won the top prize in all three categories of the 2011 Operalia Competition, founded by Plácido Domingo. He is also a Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition winner (2008) and has been noted for his "thrilling voice, rich in what the Italians call *squillo*, the ringing, trumpet-like sound that so excites the ear" (*St. Louis Today*).

Bass-baritone **Thomas Hammons**, last seen on the VO stage in 2010's Canadian premiere of *Nixon in China*, sings Bartolo. Mr. Hammons "was physically and psychologically convincing: sly and dangerous on the one hand, stooge on the other" reported the *Globe and Mail*.

Thomas Goerz, also a bass-baritone, sings Basilio, Bartolo's right-hand man (and music coach AND studio photographer). "Thomas Goerz [has]...an absolutely wonderful Rossini bass voice. His phrasing was fantastic and he just rolled up and down the scale with a secure coloratura." (*Classical 96FM*). Mr. Goerz's most recent VO appearance was as Publio in last season's *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Robert Tweten conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Associate Conductor and Chorus Director). Mr. Tweten last appeared with VO for 2007's *Tosca*. "Conductor Robert Tweten gets nothing but beautiful playing from the Vancouver Opera Orchestra," praised the *Vancouver Sun*. *Review Vancouver* agreed: "Another star of the evening was the orchestra, with Maestro Robert Tweten...teasing out white-heat playing from the pit."

The story, in brief

Count Almoviva is in love with Rosina - but so is Rosina's buffoonish employer, Bartolo. With the help of the barber Figaro, several clever disguises, and some well-timed trickery, Almoviva wins Rosina over and the happy couple are set to be married.

Read a full synopsis at www.vancouveropera.ca.

Background

Based on a comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais, Rossini's *Barber of Seville* premiered in Rome in February 1816 under the title *Almoviva, or The Futile Precaution*. The premiere was a disastrous failure, with the audience booing and jeering throughout the performance. It is now recognized that many in that audience were supporters of Rossini's rival, Giovanni Paisiello, who had himself already composed an opera based on the same play. (Paisiello's opera was called *The Barber of Seville*, hence the different title at the time for Rossini's.) The second performance was a roaring success, and *Barber* is now considered one of the greatest masterpieces of opera.

Themes from *The Barber of Seville* have been used in pop culture several times, most notably in cartoons. A 1944 Woody Woodpecker cartoon of the same name parodies the opera, as does a 1949 Bugs Bunny cartoon entitled *The Rabbit of Seville*. More recently, selections from the opera were sung by Prince Poppycock on *America's Got Talent*.

The aria *Largo al factotum* is perhaps the most well-known from the opera. It is one of the most difficult baritone arias to perform, with triplets in 6/8 meter, a very fast *allegro vivace* tempo and tongue-twisting lines. It has become a *pièce de résistance* that allows a baritone to show off his skills.

Learn More

Opera Speaks @ VPL: What's So Funny About Comedy? Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Vancouver Public Library Central Branch, Alice MacKay room
7:00 -9:00pm

Free admission • Limited seating

Leading up to Vancouver Opera's production of Gioachino Rossini's very funny *The Barber of Seville*, we will explore comedy in its many forms: standup, improv, political satire and impressions, even music! The amazing lineup of funny people includes standup comic (and "beard painter") **Graham Clark**; veteran actor and physical comedy guru **Peter Anderson**; **Double Exposure** (Bob Robertson and Linda Cullen), a team of **Theatresports** improvisers (who will create a musical right before your eyes), and more.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets starting at \$35 (plus handling fee) are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre (sponsored by Mission Hill Family Estate), 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. Family Packs are also available for the March 25th matinee: with the purchase of two regular-priced adult tickets, additional tickets for children aged 18 and under can be purchased for \$35 each. Contact the VO Ticket Centre for more information.