

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT Selina Rajani, 604-331-4824
srajani@vancouveropera.ca

EXCITEMENT BUILDS FOR VO'S BRAND-NEW
BARBER OF SEVILLE

Larger-than-life new production sets the action on a movie backlot in 1940s Seville

Vancouver, BC ~ Less than two weeks remain until opening night of a *Barber of Seville* unlike any seen before. Vancouver Opera's larger-than-life production, set on a 1940s Seville movie backlot employs stunning new costumes, inventive staging, a brand-new set and plenty of surprises along the way.

This spectacular new *Barber* is on stage for five performances only, March 17 - 25, 2012 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. 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). Family Packs with special rates for children 18 years old and under are also available; see complete ticket information below.

The Singers

A fresh, vivacious cast weaves together slapstick fun and tender moments into Rossini's manic and witty masterpiece.

Singing the clever Figaro will be Canadian baritone **Joshua Hopkins**. "He was an authoritative barber who sang with robust sounds and had both vocal and stage tricks up his sleeve," praised *Opera Today* of his 2010 role debut with Arizona Opera. Mr. Hopkins was the winner of the 2006 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award and the Verbier Festival Academy's 2008 Prix d'Honneur. 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." The *Los Angeles Times* has noted her ability to "stop a listener cold with her coffee-with-cream voice," and the *Boston Globe* has admired her "stunning good looks (think a young Vivien Leigh)...she was utterly glorious." Ms. Eddy's repertoire includes a number of roles, by composers from Adamo to Wagner.

Texas-born tenor **René Barbera** sings Almaviva 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*). Mr. Barbera was a favourite of crowds and critics alike in his performance of Ernesto in Chicago's 2011 *Don Pasquale*, praised as a "true bel canto tenor" with a "bright, clarion tone... eliciting a boisterous response from a packed house." (*Chicago Classical Review*).

Bass-baritone **Thomas Hammons**, last seen on the VO stage as Henry Kissinger 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" reports the *Globe and Mail*. He is a "master of the opera buffa style", reports *Opera News*. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* agrees, declaring he "has every oafish nuance of Dr. Bartolo under his skin and in his sonorous bass-baritone. Hammons' comic timing was ideal and his grasp of brisk vocal patterns complete."

Thomas Goerz, also a bass-baritone, sings Basilio, 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). "This is a *Don Pasquale*, this is a *Dr. Bartolo*. It's all there and he has a secure coloratura...he was absolutely sparkling, plus it's an exciting voice and a big voice."

Mezzo-soprano **Barbara Towell** sings Berta. Originally from Thunder Bay, Ontario, Ms. Towell appeared as Flora in VO's *La Traviata* in 2011.

Baritone, and Hamilton, Ontario native **Michael Nyby** sings Fiorello. Mr. Nyby was last seen on the VO stage as Morales in the 2009's box office record-breaking *Carmen*.

Bass-baritone **Angus Bell**, last seen on the VO stage as Fifth Jew in 2009's *Salome*, appears as Ambrogio. Baritone **Willy Miles-Grenzberg** sings the Sergeant and last sang with VO as Messenger in 2011's *La Traviata*.

This brand-new production is conceived and directed by **Dennis Garnhum**, artistic director of Theatre Calgary. Mr. Garnhum has worked with almost every major theatre company in Canada, and spent three years in New York City, where he worked on the development of the Tony Kushner/Maurice Sendak opera *Brundibar*. He also conceived a one night celebration of Stephen Sondheim at Harbourfront's World Stage, with the musical theatre legend in attendance. Mr. Garnhum will soon be directing *Pride and Prejudice* with the National Arts Centre.

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." Mr. Tweten has conducted at the Canadian Opera Company, Houston Grand Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra, where he serves as Assistant Conductor.

The story, in brief

Count Almaviva 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, Almaviva 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 *Almaviva, 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 esteemed predecessor, 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.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets 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.

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VO's 2011-2012 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp