

TOSCA ALBERT HERRING DON GIOVANNI DON CARLO

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VANCOUVER OPERA ANNOUNCES NEW COMPOSER FOR STICKBOY

NEIL WEISENSEL

TO CREATE MUSIC FOR NEW OPERA FROM AWARD-WINNING SPOKEN WORD POET SHANE KOYCZAN
WORLD PREMIERE SLATED FOR FALL 2014

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera is pleased to announce a new composer for its latest commissioned opera, *Stickboy*. **Neil Weisensel** will create the music for this innovative work, based on the bullying experiences of internationally-recognized Canadian spoken word poet Shane Koyczan. The previously-announced composer, Jordan Nobles has had to withdraw for personal reasons.

Neil Weisensel is one of the most frequently-performed and prolific opera composers in Canada. His six operas (*Gisela in her Bathtub*, *City Workers in Love*, *The Bachelor Farmers of the Apocalypse*, *Merry Christmas Stephen Leacock*, *The Master's Stroke* and *Secret Service* - four of which were written with librettist/director Michael Cavanagh) have together seen 115 performances across Canada. He has also composed and arranged music for feature films, stage works, documentaries, and animation.

"I am really pleased to be working with Neil on this project," comments **James W. Wright**, General Director of Vancouver Opera. "I have followed his work for nearly fifteen years, am aware of his fine reputation as a composer, and I'm very happy we have finally found the right project for him and Vancouver Opera."

In 2009 the Victoria Symphony premiered Mr. Weisensel's original works and arrangements, including *I Feel a Change Today*, co-composed with his wife, Rachel Landrecht, for former U.S. President Bill Clinton and the Clinton Foundation. Mr. Weisensel also performed solo piano at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. His music has been performed for Al Gore and Justin Trudeau, and his big band collaboration with superstar Michael Bublé earned him a Genie nomination. Mr. Weisensel lives in Winnipeg with wife Rachel and daughter Miracle.

Stickboy will have its world premiere in October and November 2014 at the Vancouver Playhouse. It will be part of Vancouver Opera's 2014-2015 subscription season; tickets will also be available to the general public.

Aimed at audiences of all ages, and drawing upon Mr. Koyczan's own experiences with bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, the 80-minute opera will be based on *Stickboy*, Mr. Koyczan's acclaimed 2008 novel in verse.

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After its premiere an adapted version will be developed for touring to schools and community venues in Metro Vancouver and beyond as part of the Vancouver Opera In Schools program.

This will be Vancouver Opera's second commission for Mr. Koyczan. At the initiative of Manjy and David Sidoo, Mr. Koyczan wrote and performed a poem at the company's gala fundraiser, *Overture*, in 2012.

Workshops for *Stickboy* began in September 2013 and will continue later in January 2014. Follow @vancouveropera on Twitter (#Stickboyopera) or Vancouver Opera on Facebook for the latest news and behind-the-scenes content on the creation of *Stickboy*. **Leslie Dala**, Vancouver Opera's Associate Conductor and Chorus Director will be the musical dramaturge; award-winning stage director **Rachel Peake** is the libretto dramaturge and will direct the production. Sets and costumes will be designed by **Drew Facey**. Animation design will be by **Giant Ant Media**.

Mr. Koyczan was catapulted into the international spotlight when he performed his poem *We Are More* at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics opening ceremonies. In 2013, Mr. Koyczan collaborated with animators and illustrators to create *To This Day*, an animated short about bullying that was released at the TED Conference. The video left attendees in tears and has since gone viral with almost 12 million views.

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