

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Rehearsals underway for VO's first production of the season

Rigoletto

Sensational soprano Simone Osborne stars with
Gordon Hawkins in Verdi's drama of love and revenge

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera kicks off the exciting 2015-2016 season with a thrilling traditional production of Giuseppe Verdi's exciting blockbuster, *Rigoletto*. Rising international superstar soprano **Simone Osborne** returns to Vancouver to sing the innocent Gilda opposite powerful baritone **Gordon Hawkins** in the title role. Acclaimed tenor **Bruce Sledge** will sing the Duke. Sensational melodies, heartbreaking drama and vivid characters make this dark, tender drama of love and revenge irresistible.

Rigoletto will be onstage at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre for 4 performances, September 26 - October 4, 2015.

Vancouver Opera's *Rigoletto*

Saturday, September 26 • 7:30pm
Thursday, October 1 • 7:30pm
Saturday, October 3 • 7:30pm
Sunday, October 4 • 2:00pm matinée

All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, corner of Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C.

Rigoletto will be sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage. Approximate running time: 2 hours and 40 minutes, including 2 intermissions.

Tickets starting at \$50 are available exclusively through the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre: 604-683-0222 or www.vancouveropera.ca. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. Special pricing for groups of 10 or more is available by phone.

Follow Vancouver Opera on Twitter and Facebook for exclusive offers such as VO's Get O.U.T (Opera Under 35) program, with **\$35 tickets for patrons aged under 35**.

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Conducted by	Jonathan Darlington
Directed by	Nancy Hermiston
Rigoletto	Gordon Hawkins
Gilda	Simone Osborne
Duke of Mantua	Bruce Sledge
Sparafucile	Matthew Treviño
Maddalena	Carolyn Sproule
Count Monterone	Cameron McPhail
Matteo Borsa	Marcel d'Entremont *
Countess Ceprano	Eden Tremayne *
Cavaliere Marullo	Zachary Read *
Count Ceprano	Willy Miles Grenzberg
Giovanna	Francesca Corrado *
Herald	Angus Bell
Page	Eden Tremayne *
Associate Conductor / Chorus Director	Leslie Dala
Fight Director	Nicholas Harrison
Lighting Designer	John Webber
Wig Designer	Stacey Butterworth
Musical Preparation	Kinza Tyrrell
Stage Manager	Kate Porter
Assistant Director	Brenna Corner *

* Member of the Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program

The Singers

Baritone **Gordon Hawkins** returns to VO to sing the title role, having thrilled audiences as Scarpia in 2013's *Tosca*. Mr. Hawkins has been critically acclaimed throughout the world for his complex interpretations and luxuriant voice. He is a winner of the Luciano Pavarotti Competition and in 2006 was honoured as the Washington National Opera "Artist of the Year." Mr. Hawkins recently sang the title role in Seattle Opera's *Nabucco*. "Gordon Hawkins is a masterly Nabucco, with convincing acting in a role that requires him to be overbearing, then feeble, then contrite..." declared the *Seattle Times*.

Canadian soprano **Simone Osborne** will sing Gilda. Ms. Osborne delighted VO audiences as Pamina in 2013 *Magic Flute* and as Juliette in 2011's *Roméo et Juliette*; Vancouver opera lovers will eagerly anticipate her heart-rending aria "*Caro nome*". The Metropolitan Opera audition-winner has been praised by the *Georgia Straight* for her "elegant and expressive style, her openness of sound, and her

unaffectedly natural acting." Continues the *Straight*, "She sang no less than exquisitely, hitting every high note...This girl's going places. Watch her."

Tenor **Bruce Sledge** (The Duke) has earned rave reviews for a variety of roles, including praise from *The San Antonio Express-News* for his "silky, almost sensual voice". He has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera as Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and New York City Opera as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, and recently appeared at a recital for the Marilyn Horne Foundation at Carnegie's Weill Hall. Mr. Sledge returns to VO having last appeared in the same role in 2009's production of *Rigoletto*.

Bass **Matthew Treviño** makes his VO debut in the role of Sparafucile. Described as a "bass of rare talent" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) and "simply mesmerizing" (*The Tennessean*), Mr. Treviño is proving to be one of today's most sought-after young basses. This season, he will also sing Leporello in Intermountain Opera's *Don Giovanni*, Colline in Opera Coeur d'Alene's *La bohème* and Ashby in Opera Omaha's *La fanciulla del West*.

Singing Maddalena, Canadian mezzo-soprano **Carolyn Sproule** also makes her VO debut. Ms. Sproule is a native of Montréal and a graduate of The Juilliard School and Rice University. She furthered her training with residencies at The Banff Centre, Aspen Opera Theatre, Merola Opera Program, Wolf Trap Opera (Filene Young Artist), and the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Recently, she completed a season with The Metropolitan Opera, during which she made her debut as the Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* and covered the roles of The Palestinian Woman in *The Death of Klinghoffer*, Javotte in *Manon*, and Lola in *Cavalleria rusticana*.

Winner of the 2014 George London Competition, Canadian baritone **Cameron McPhail** makes his VO debut as Count Monterone. Mr. McPhail is a past member of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble where his roles included Schaunard in *La bohème*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, and Silvano in *Un ballo in maschera*. A recipient of awards and scholarships from the Vancouver Women's Musical Society, the David Spencer Endowment and the Manitoba Arts Council, he holds both an Artist Diploma in Voice and a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from the University of British Columbia.

Ontario baritone **Willy Miles-Grenzberg** will sing Count Ceprano; Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program soprano participant **Eden Tremayne** makes her VO mainstage debut as Countess Ceprano and Page. Rounding out the cast are Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program participants **Zachary Read** (baritone) as Marullo, **Marcel d'Entremont** (tenor) as Borsa and **Francesca Corrado** (mezzo-soprano) as Giovanna. Bass-baritone **Angus Bell** will sing the Herald.

VO's Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** returns to the podium to conduct (**Leslie Dala**, Associate Conductor / Chorus Director).

The stage director is **Nancy Hermiston**. Ms. Hermiston's performing career took her throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. Since then, she has held numerous appointments as voice teacher and stage director. In 1995, she joined the University of British Columbia's School of Music as Head of the Voice and Opera Division, where she established the UBC Opera Ensemble.

The Story in Brief

Rigoletto is a jester in the court of a womanizing Duke. Gilda is his beloved daughter. When Rigoletto's jokes go too far, he becomes the subject of an angry Count's curse. Gilda is secretly wooed by the Duke and kidnapped by his courtiers. Gilda reveals that the Duke seduced her and Rigoletto swears revenge. He hires a hitman, but the plan goes wrong and Gilda pays the price with her life.

Read a full synopsis at www.vancouveropera.ca.

Background

Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* is based on Victor Hugo's play, *Le roi s'amuse*, which opened in Paris on November 22, 1832. The reception was poor, to say the least: audience reaction ranged from icy silence to hoots of laughter, and the authorities shut it down after its first performance, citing immoral themes. Verdi never had the chance to see it on stage.

But Verdi was thrilled by the play, describing it as "great, immense, and it includes a character who is one of the greatest creations that theatre of all nations and all times can boast." Nothing since *Macbeth* had had such an effect on him. In 1850, as Verdi was about to sign a contract with Teatro La Fenice in Venice, he broached the subject of an operatic *Le roi* to librettist Francesco Maria Piave, with whom he had written the opera *Ernani* in 1844.

Ernani, also based on a Hugo play, had enjoyed great success, but the first draft of Piave's libretto for *Le roi s'amuse* appalled the Venetian censors. They were shocked that Verdi and Piave had squandered their talents on a subject of "such repellant immorality and obscene triviality" and immediately forbade its performance in Venice.

Piave had to rewrite the libretto twice before it satisfied both Verdi and the censors. Paris was rewritten as Mantua; the King became a Duke. Even the title went through multiple revisions. But through it all, Verdi fought to have the substance of the drama remain.

Opera of the time dictated that virtue be portrayed as beautiful and evil as ugly. Verdi's *Rigoletto* was much more complex: the misshapen jester is vengeful and repellent, but he is also the embodiment of selfless paternal love. Gilda is sweet and pure, but she condones her seducer's treachery by forgiving him. The characters are contradictory and complicated.

Rigoletto premiered at La Fenice on March 11, 1851. "The composer or his librettist have been gripped by a posthumous affection for the satanic school already out of fashion," attacked the *Gazetta di Venezia*, "They have sought the ideal in the deformed, the horrible...We cannot praise these tastes." Outside of Venice, censors permitted only alternative versions of the opera: *Viscardello*, *Lionello*, *Clara di Perth*. Some of these included a different ending, with Gilda surviving at the end of the opera.

Within ten years *Rigoletto* had been staged in over 250 opera houses, and it remains one of the most-performed operas in the world. Its variety, profundity and brave originality have made it impervious to critics and censors.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets 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 10 or more, call 604-683-0222.

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