

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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There's a bully in all of us.

STICKBOY

WORLD PREMIERE

Opens October 23

Composed by Neil Weisensel • Libretto by world-renowned spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan

Vancouver, BC ~ The cultural event of the fall season hits Vancouver on October 23: the world premiere of Vancouver Opera's revolutionary new opera, **Stickboy**, composed by **Neil Weisensel** with libretto by world-renowned spoken-word artist **Shane Koyczan**. This beautiful, courageous and visually stunning opera explores the inner life of a young boy transformed by bullying.

Stickboy will be onstage at the **Vancouver Playhouse**, corner of Dunsmuir and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, BC from Thursday, October 23 through Friday, November 7, 2014:

Thursday, October 23 • 7:30pm

Friday, October 24 • 7:30pm

Saturday, October 25 • 7:30pm

Tuesday, October 28 • 7:30pm

Wednesday, October 29 • Student matinée only. For information, contact the VO Ticket Centre at 604-683-0222

Thursday, October 30 • 7:30pm

Saturday, November 1 • 1:30pm matinée

Saturday, November 1 • 7:30pm

Tuesday, November 4 • 7:30pm

Wednesday, November 5 • 2:00pm matinée

Thursday, November 6 • 7:30pm

Friday, November 7 • 7:30pm

Tickets are available exclusively through the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre: 604-683-0222** or www.vancouveropera.ca.

Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. Follow @vancouveropera on Twitter (#stickboyopera) or Vancouver Opera on Facebook for the latest news and behind-the-scenes content on the creation of *Stickboy*, and for exclusive offers such as VO's Get OUT (Opera Under 35) program, with a limited number of \$35 tickets for patrons aged under 35, and a limited number of \$19 tickets for patrons under 19.

Tickets for the October 29 student matinée are available only to secondary school groups by arrangement with VO. For information, call the VO Ticket Centre 604-683-0222.

Parent Advisory: Some content might not be suitable for younger audiences. The production includes coarse language and the depiction of violence.

The story, in brief

On the playground, in school hallways, and most profoundly in his own mind, an overweight boy is shunned, bullied, and cruelly provoked. Supported by the love of his grandmother, he finds courage through his vivid imagination, but that courage mutates, expressing itself with the violence that he himself has endured. Scarred and wary, the boy survives to face an uncertain future. Bravely autobiographical, beautifully poetic, visually innovative and musically memorable, *Stickboy* confronts a society struggling with its own fear and insecurity – a society that seeks conformity and uniformity at the expense of those who are different.

The Production

Designed for the Vancouver Playhouse stage, *Stickboy* will offer audiences a deeply personal and emotionally moving experience. The production includes 13 singers accompanied by 11 members of the Vancouver Opera Orchestra. Immersive, commanding animations by Vancouver creative studio **Giant Ant** will combine with a set that evokes a violent and broken world, designed by multiple-Jessie-Award winner **Drew Facey**. Costumes will be designed by **Carmen Alatorre**, lighting will be created by **Itai Erdal** and the video designer is **Jamie Nesbitt**.

The conductor and musical dramaturge is **Leslie Dala**, Vancouver Opera's Chorus Director and Associate Conductor of the Vancouver Opera Orchestra. The director and dramaturge is **Rachel Peake**, recipient of the Ray Michal Award for Outstanding Body of Work by an Emerging Director.

Creative Team and Cast

Leslie Dala
Rachel Peake
Drew Facey
Itai Erdal

Musical Dramaturge / Conductor
Libretto Dramaturge / stage director
Set Designer
Lighting Designer

Carmen Alatorre
Jamie Nesbitt
Giant Ant

Costume Designer
Video Design
Animation

Willy Miles-Grenzberg
Sunny Shams
Megan Latham
Alan Macdonald
Heather Pawsey

Old Man, Principal (Act I), Grandpa, Gym Teacher
Boy
Grandmother
Janitor, Chris, Jeff, Dick
Secretary, Teacher (Act II), Principal (Act III)

Melanie Krueger
Melody Courage
Barbara Towell
Heather Molloy
Frédéric Robert
Kwangmin Brian Lee
DJ Calhoun
Peter Alexander

Student, Valedictorian
Student
Student, Teacher (Act I)
Student, Alyssa
Student
Student
Student, Curtis
Student, Halian

Non-singing roles:

Scott Augustine
Vincent Forcier

Student
Student

Background on the librettist and the composer

Internationally recognized spoken-word artist, author and *Stickboy* librettist **Shane Koyczan** has emerged in a new wave of 21st century poetry that dares to belong to the people and speaks directly to them in their own voice. In 2013, Mr. Koyczan collaborated with Giant Ant and more than 80 animators to create the anti-bullying viral video success *To This Day*, which has had more than 14 million YouTube views. Mr. Koyczan performed a customized version of *To This Day*, called “For the Bullied and the Beautiful” at the 2013 International TED Conference in Long Beach, California.

In 2009 the Victoria Symphony premiered *Stickboy* composer **Neil Weisensel**'s original works and arrangements, including "I Feel a Change Today", composed with his wife, Rachel Landrecht, for 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. His previous work includes six operas and six orchestral works, as well as music for film, television and animations. Mr. Weisensel lives in Winnipeg with wife and his daughter Miracle.

Background on the Creative Team

Leslie Dala, Vancouver Opera's Associate Conductor and Chorus Director, is the musical dramaturge and conductor of *Stickboy*. Mr. Dala is also the Music Director of the Vancouver Bach Choir and Music Director of the Vancouver Academy of Music Symphony Orchestra. He has worked at the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Canadian Opera Company, the Santa Fe Opera and l'Opéra National du Rhin and is a frequent guest conductor with the UBC Opera Ensemble and Soundstreams Canada. He has conducted in China, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Taiwan and the US and has recorded works of Harry Somers for the Centrediscs label.

Award-winning stage director **Rachel Peake** is the libretto dramaturge for *Stickboy* and will also direct the world premiere. Ms. Peake's recent directorial credits include *cool beans* for Solo Collective Theatre, *Kayak* for Alley Theatre, *The Little Sweep* for the Belfry Theatre/Pacific Opera Victoria and *Revolution* for Gros Morne Summer Music. In 2012 she received the Ray Michal Award for Outstanding Body of Work by an Emerging Director and the Jessie Richardson Award for Outstanding Direction for *Le portrait Gooble* (Théâtre la Seizième). Ms. Peake was the co-Artistic Director of Solo Collective Theatre from 2008-2013 and is currently taking part in the Neil Munro Directing Internship at the Shaw Festival.

The *Stickboy* sets will be designed by **Drew Facey**. A graduate of Studio 58, Mr. Facey has been designing sets and costumes for the past eight years. Recent highlights include: *Penelope* and *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Rumble), *Elizabeth Rex*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Bard on the Beach), *Other Desert Cities* and *The Unplugging* (Arts Club), *Broken Sex Doll* (Virtual Stage), *Educating Rita* and *Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Western Canada) and *Delicious Lies and Chickens* (Chemainus). He designed the Vancouver Opera In Schools productions *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel* (sets & costumes) and *Jack Pine* (sets). Mr. Facey has been nominated for 21 Jessie Awards for outstanding design and has won nine.

Lighting will be designed by **Itai Erdal**. Mr. Erdal has designed lighting for more than 200 shows at the Stratford Festival, the National Arts Centre, the Vancouver Playhouse, the Arts Club Theatre, Bard on the Beach, Citadel, Factory, Tarragon, Theatre Passe Muraille, Electric Company and Theatre Replacement. He received the Jack King award in 2005, a Dora Mavor Moore award in 2007, the Dublin Fringe Design award in 2008, Jessie Richardson awards in 2003, 2009 and 2011, the Victoria's Critics' Choice Spotlight award in 2012 and a Guthrie Award in 2013. Mr. Erdal's one-man show *How to Disappear Completely* (The Chop, directed by James Long) won the best director award at Summerworks Festival and was nominated for Jessie Richardson and Dora Mavor Moore awards. It has toured to Seattle, Victoria, Toronto, Stratford, Portland, Whitehorse and Halifax, and continues to tour nationally and internationally. Itai Erdal is the artistic director of The Elbow Theatre in Vancouver and a member of Associated Designers of Canada.

Carmen Alatorre will design the costumes. Originally from Mexico City, Ms. Alatorre earned her MFA degree in Theatre Design at the University of British Columbia and has worked as a theatre designer in Vancouver since 2006. Some of her local recent design credits include *Terminus* with Pi Theatre, *The King and I* with Gateway Theatre, *Head over Heels* with The Caravan Farm Theatre and *Armstrong's War* and *Driving Miss Daisy* with the Arts Club Theatre.

Visuals for **Stickboy** are designed and animated by Vancouver's **Giant Ant**. Giant Ant is an award-winning storytelling studio founded by Jay Grandin and Leah Nelson and together with their team they develop and produce content for live and digital platforms, and television. Giant Ant is a young team with shared ideals: to put love in their work, to take risks, and to be part of a studio where everyone has a voice. They are artists, writers, designers, animators, editors, cinematographers, and musicians. Video storytelling is a unique language that they speak fluently, through film, animation, music and sound. They partner with brands to translate their stories into compelling, sharable and beautiful content.

The video designer is **Jamie Nesbitt**. Mr. Nesbitt designs across North America and Europe for such companies as The Canadian Stage, NAC, Soulpepper, Theatre Calgary, Palazzo Circus (Berlin), Calgary Stampede Grandstand Show, Bard on the Beach, Arts Club, Charlottetown Festival, Electric Company, Kidd Pivot (Germany/Canada), Pacific Opera, Company 14 (New York) Vancouver Opera, Why Not, Neptune, The Belfry, Old Trout Puppet Workshop, Actors Repertory Company, Cahoots, PTE, Touchstone, Pi Theatre, Theatre Network, Company 14, Birdland Theatre, Rumble Productions, Green Thumb Theatre, Yukon Arts Centre, and many more. A graduate of Studio 58, he is the recipient of seven Jessie Richardson Award Nominations and one Jessie Richardson Award, the 2008 Mayor Arts award, the 2007 Sam Payne award, and the 2006 Earl Klein Memorial Scholarship.

Background on the Cast

Tenor **Sunny Shams** will sing the role of the Boy. Hailing from Sidney, BC, and coming from musical roots as a jazz pianist and singer, Mr. Shams has sung around the province and in the Czech Republic. He has twice been a district winner at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in Seattle and has twice received honorable mentions. Mr. Shams has recently sung with the Victoria Symphony, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, UBC Opera, at Festival Opéra de Saint-Eustache, Montréal, and with Bard on the Beach. He recently returned from Madrid, Spain after spending two months working with coaches from the Teatro Real, participating in the Montserrat Caballé competition and masterclasses.

Megan Latham will sing the Grandmother. Raised in Abbotsford, BC, the mezzo-soprano has been recognized for her opera, oratorio, and recital performances. She has worked with distinguished conductors including Harry Bicket, Will Crutchfield, Richard Bradshaw, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, David Agler, Jeanne Lamon and Agnes Grossman. Ms. Latham has sung several times with the Canadian

Opera Company, most recently as Giovanna in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Voice of the Mother in *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*, Mère Jeanne in *Les dialogues des Carmélites* and Herodias (cover) in *Salome*. She performed the role of Mrs. Grose in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* with Against the Grain Theatre and was heard in concert at the Bayfield Festival of Song. In the fall of 2012, she performed with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Other recent highlights include the Rhombus media production of Alexina Louie's *Politics is Cruel: An Opera*, Verdi's *Requiem* with the Regina Symphony, and Secretary to Chairman Mao in the Canadian Opera Company's *Nixon in China*.

Baritone **Willy Miles-Grenzberg** will sing several roles: the Old Man, Principal (Act I), Grandpa and the Gym Teacher. Mr. Miles-Grenzberg has performed across Canada and the US with the Canadian Opera Company, Vancouver Opera, the Elmer Iseler Singers, and many other ensembles. He appears regularly with Vancouver Opera, performing both chorus and solo roles, and is an accomplished singer/songwriter. Mr. Miles-Grenzberg has a degree in vocal performance and guitar from Wilfrid Laurier University.

Soprano **Heather Pawsey** will sing the Secretary, Teacher and Principal (Act III). Acclaimed for her "stylistic versatility, flexibility, clarity, range" (*Halifax Chronicle Herald*) and "gorgeous operatic power" (*Vancouver Sun*), Ms. Pawsey's career encompasses opera, oratorio, chamber, symphonic and contemporary music. First-prize winner of the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition, in 2009, she was named an ambassador of the Canadian Music Centre – one of only 50 performers and conductors so honoured "who have played exceptional roles in shaping the Canadian music scene and raising the profile of Canadian music". Equally at home in 18th and 19th century repertoire, she is particularly skilled in the music of our time, with a number of world premieres to her credit, and in a broad spectrum of the world's languages.

The roles of the Janitor, Chris, Jeff and Dick will be sung by baritone **Alan Macdonald**. Originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Mr. Macdonald has previously sung with Vancouver Opera In Schools. An alumnus of UBC (MMus, Opera), his recent performances include Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), *Side by Side by Sondheim* and Danillo (*Die Lustige Witwe*), performed with both the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and UBC Opera. Also an active teacher, Mr. Macdonald's positions have included music director of productions with both the Montreal Musical Theatre Academy and Festival by the Marsh (Sackville, NB), as well as the music director of Thrash! a co-production between the Montreal Musical Theatre Academy and Ubom! Obutsha (Grahamstown, SA) performed at the National Arts Festival of South Africa in 2008. He is an alumnus of the Banff Centre's Opera as Theatre Program as well as Vancouver Opera's Young Artist Coaching Intensive and Pre-Professional Internship Programs.

Affordable opera tickets

U-19

NEW! For the first time ever, VO is making available a limited number of \$19 seats at each public performance of *Stickboy* for people under the age of 19. They are available now from the VO Ticket Centre, 604-683-0222. (Not available online.)

Get OUT (Opera Under 35)

VO continues its popular Get OUT! (Opera Under 35) Program: a limited number of selected \$35 seats will be available to people age 19-34 for all public performances. These are available now, exclusively by phone 604-683-0222 or in person at the VO Ticket Centre, 1945 McLean Drive, Vancouver. (No online sales for *Stickboy* Get OUT tickets.) **Get OUT is supported by a gift from TD.**

U-19 and Get OUT tickets must be picked up at the VO Ticket Centre or at the theatre. Valid photo I.D. is required.

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VO's 2014-2015 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp.

Primary Print Sponsor for the 2014-2015 season is the *Vancouver Sun*.

National Print Sponsor for *Stickboy* is *The Globe and Mail*.

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Continued...

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