

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Innovative murals and provocative posters confront
the issue of bullying, in preparation for**

The WORLD PREMIERE production of

STICKBOY

A revolutionary new opera

Composed by Neil Weisensel • Libretto by Shane Koyczan

Vancouver, BC ~ Four of Vancouver's most prominent mural artists are provoking thought and discussion on the issues of bullying with powerful outdoor paintings on construction hoardings and exterior walls of buildings in Vancouver. The murals are part of an awareness campaign leading up to Vancouver Opera's world-premiere production of **Stickboy**, a revolutionary new opera composed by **Neil Weisensel** with libretto by world-renowned spoken-word artist **Shane Koyczan**.

VO, in collaboration with marketing communications agency DDB Canada Vancouver, has commissioned **Nick Gregson, Carson Ting, Ben Tour** and **Ola Volo** to create the murals on construction hoardings on the Downtown Eastside and the Cambie corridor, and on the exterior walls of two eastside buildings. The four artists were invited to respond to the story of the opera, and were asked to interpret the "monster" that lives inside the opera's central character, a young and sensitive boy who reacts violently to repeated acts of bullying over a prolonged period of time.

Work begins Thursday October 9, 2014 on three of the four murals. The mural by **Ben Tour** has been completed. They can be viewed while in progress and after completion until the end of the run of **Stickboy** on November 7, 2014, at:

Hooding at 101 East Hastings Street (corner of Columbia Street), Vancouver – **Nick Gregson**

Exterior of 1000 Parker Street, Vancouver – **Carson Ting**

Exterior of Bomber Brewing, 1488 Adanac Street (corner of McLean Drive), Vancouver – **Ben Tour**

Hooding at 3106 Cambie Street (corner of West 15th Avenue), Vancouver – **Ola Volo**

View and create online

Sketches and drawings of their work, along with the work of other artists who have been invited to create smaller-scale works, can be viewed at www.stickboyopera.ca. Visitors may post comments, tell their own stories about bullying, and contribute their own works of art.

Provocative Posters

The awareness campaign developed with DDB Canada Vancouver also includes a series of **provocative posters** located in three Canada Line stations, which use confrontational statements to inspire reflection and empathy for those who are bullied, as well as to build awareness of the world-premiere production of **Stickboy**.

The posters at Vancouver City Centre, Yaletown/Roundhouse and Broadway/City Hall confront passersby with aggressive statements that amount to bullying. Each statement is followed by a tagline telling the reader that they have just been bullied for 30 seconds; imagine what it feels like to be bullied for years.

“The issues of bullying, and more broadly of how we treat those who are ‘different’ from us, are profoundly important to our community and to the world,” says **James W. Wright**, Vancouver Opera’s General Director. “We believe that the mural artists, and others who contribute their work online, will bring additional depth and a variety of voices to the discussion of the issues that the opera so eloquently raises.” Added Wright, “We hope that the posters, too, provoke reflection and discussion, for they are meant to illustrate, with force and immediacy, that bullying occurs everywhere and touches everyone.”

Stickboy: The Opera

This beautiful, courageous and visually stunning opera explores the inner life of an overweight young boy transformed by bullying. On the playground, in school hallways, and most profoundly in his own mind, the 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.

Stickboy opens October 23, 2014 for twelve performances at the **Vancouver Playhouse Theatre**, corner of Dunsmuir and Hamilton Streets, through November 7, 2014.

Tickets are available exclusively through the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre: 604-683-0222** or www.vancouveropera.ca. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted.

Stickboy performance schedule

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, call 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 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 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

Musical Dramaturge / Conductor
Libretto Dramaturge / stage director

Drew Facey
Itai Erdal

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 his wife and daughter Miracle.

Biographical information and background on all the cast and creative team is available on the Vancouver Opera website, www.vancouveropera.ca.

Affordable opera tickets for young audiences

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.

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.

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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*.

Stickboy has been made possible, in large part, through support from the Province of British Columbia.

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Community Partner: Vancouver Foundation

Production Patron: Martha Lou Henley • Leading Production Sponsor: Fulmer Capital Partners

Production Sponsor: YVR Airport Authority

The *Stickboy* Community Engagement Series is sponsored by Bruce & Lis Welch

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The McLean Foundation

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