

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Building up to Vancouver Opera's deliciously dark
SWEENEY TODD
New large-scale production directed by Kim Collier opens April 25**

Vancouver, BC ~ A massive 12,000-pound moving steel platform – and the Vancouver Opera Orchestra – will dominate the Queen Elizabeth theatre stage for VO's innovative new production of Stephen Sondheim's **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street**, opening April 25, 2015 for only 6 performances through May 3.

The raised platform, or “bridge”, conceived as part of the show's design by director **Kim Collier** and scenic designer **Robert Gardiner**, is in the final phase of construction at Great Northern Way Scene Shop. It was formed using two 44-foot steel I-beams, structural steel and decking. It sits on 32 wheels and will be powered by two hydraulic motors.

There will be two stage-hands on board to drive the monstrous set piece, which will serve as many locations in the *Sweeney Todd* story, including Sweeney's barbershop, with its pivoting chair that ejects his victims down a chute. The bridge will rotate and move up and down the stage deck.

Maestro Jonathan Darlington and the 26-piece VO Orchestra will be in full view on stage, and some of the action – including the baking of pies – will spill over to floor level at the front of the theatre, where the orchestra pit usually sits. Three rows of seats will be removed from the front of the auditorium to accommodate this innovative staging.

Rehearsals of *Sweeney Todd* are in full swing, featuring a stellar international cast.

The sensational bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley**, renowned for his operatic roles in works by Verdi and Wagner, returns to VO for the first time since he sang John the Baptist in *Salome*, in 2009, to make his role debut as the demon barber. He is joined by his real-life wife, acclaimed mezzo-soprano **Loretta Bybee**, as Mrs. Lovett. Award-winning theatre director **Kim Collier**, who recently helmed the Arts Club Theatre's **St. Joan**, has conceived the new production and directs the action.

Vancouver Opera's **Sweeney Todd**

Saturday, April 25 • 7:30pm

Sunday, April 26 • 2:00pm matinée

Thursday, April 30 • 7:30pm

Friday, May 1 • 7:30pm

Saturday, May 2 • 7:30pm

Sunday, May 3 • 2:00pm matinée

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

Sweeney Todd will be sung in English with lyrics projected above the stage. Approximate running time: 2 hours 45 minutes (including one intermission)

Tickets 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	Kim Collier
Movement by	Wendy Gorling
Sweeney Todd / Benjamin Barker	Greer Grimsley
Mrs. Nellie Lovett	Luretta Bybee
Anthony Hope	Rocco Rupolo *
Johanna	Caitlin Wood *
Tobias Ragg	Pascal Charbonneau
Judge Turpin	Doug MacNaughton
Beggar Woman	Karen Ydenberg
Adolfo Pirelli / Danny O'Higgins	David Curry
Beadle Bamford	Michael Barrett
Jonas Fogg	Zachary Read *

Chorus Director / Associate Conductor	Leslie Dala
Scenic Design	Robert Gardiner
Additional Scenic Design and Properties Design	Drew Facey
Costume Design	Nancy Bryant
Lighting Design	Alan Brodie
Sound Design	Brian Linds
Graphic Design	Annie Mack
Wig Designer	Stacey Butterworth
Musical Preparation	Kinza Tyrrell
Stage Manager	Theresa Tsang
Fight Director	Nicholas Harrison
Assistant Director	Brenna Corner *
Mrs. Lovett / Beggar Woman Understudy	Laurelle Jade Froese *

* Member of the Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program

The role of Sweeney Todd will be sung by New Orleans-based bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley**, internationally recognized as an outstanding singing actor and one of the most prominent Wagnerian singers of our day. Continuing his reign as a leading interpreter of the god Wotan, he recently sang the role for the Metropolitan Opera's Ring Cycle in Robert Lepage's landmark production. Having performed the role of Jochanaan in *Salome* with San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and with Vancouver Opera in 2009, Mr. Grimsley will be making his Dallas Opera debut in that role this season. VO's *Sweeney Todd* will mark his long-awaited debut as the sadistically demonic barber.

Mezzo-soprano **Luretta Bybee** will sing Mrs. Lovett. Ms. Bybee has proven to be an artist of remarkable range and versatility in her performances throughout the world. International recognition came early in her career when she sang the title role in the world tour of Peter Brook's *La tragédie de Carmen*. Bizet's heroine has since figured prominently in Ms. Bybee's career success: she has performed the role for more than 25 opera companies throughout the world. A sought-after educator, clinician, and competition judge, she took on the directorship of New England Conservatory's Opera Studies program in 2010, in partnership with Artistic Advisor Stephen Lord. Professor Bybee also serves on the voice faculty at Loyola University's College of Music and Fine Arts in New Orleans. This will be Ms. Bybee's Vancouver Opera debut.

Tenor **Rocco Rupolo** will sing Anthony Hope. Mr. Rupolo completed the Opera Diploma Program at the University of Toronto. Mr. Rupolo recently performed the roles of Capitaine Silvio / Pasquin /

Docteur Miracle in a performance of Bizet's opera *Le Docteur Miracle* with Vancouver Opera's Yulanda M. Faris Young Artists Program. He understudied the role of Don Ottavio in VO's 2014 production of *Don Giovanni*, performed the role of Le Remendado in VO's 2014 production of *Carmen* and understudied the role of Alfred in VO's most recent production, *Die Fledermaus*.

Johanna will be sung by soprano **Caitlin Wood**. Ms. Wood graduated from the University of Toronto with a Masters in Operatic Performance under the tutelage of Mary Morrison. Her past roles have included Mabel (*The Pirates of Penzance*) and Patience (*Patience*) with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Winnipeg; Despina (*Così fan tutte*) and Nannetta (*Falstaff*) with Opera NUOVA; and Johanna (*Sweeney Todd*) with Dry Cold Productions. She recently was a winner in the Western Canada District Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition. Ms. Wood was the 2012-2013 recipient of the Richard Bradshaw Graduate Fellowship in Opera. She appeared as the gypsy Frasquita in VO's 2014 production of *Carmen* and understudied Adele in VO's most recent production, *Die Fledermaus*.

Canadian tenor **Pascal Charbonneau** will sing Tobias Ragg. Mr. Charbonneau studied at McGill University in Montreal followed by advanced studies at the Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He was awarded the Oratorio/Lied prize at the 2004 Julian Gayarre International Singing Competition. His recent engagements include David in *David et Jonathas* at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the Edinburgh International Festival, Opéra Comique and the Brooklyn Academy of Music; Acis in *Acis and Galatea* in Venice (La Fenice) and Aix-en-Provence and several more. He has sung Tobias at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris and with Münchner Rundfunkorchester. This will be Mr. Charbonneau's Vancouver Opera début.

Baritone **Doug MacNaughton** will sing Judge Turpin. Mr. MacNaughton began his singing career at the age of 20, when he made his operatic debut with Edmonton Opera. Since then, he has gone on to sing throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. He is at home in opera, operetta, musical theatre and concert work, and he is known as much for the versatility of his acting as for his singing. Mr. MacNaughton's last VO appearance was a 2005 concert performance of *Der Freischütz*.

Soprano **Karen Ydenberg** sings the Beggar Woman. Ms. Ydenberg last performed with Vancouver Opera in 2009's *Carmen* and has sung with several Canadian opera companies. She is co-creator of the Classical Comedy Duo Leave It to Diva, which has created and performed several staged concerts at the Festival Vancouver, Vancouver Fringe Festival and the Nelson Summer Songfest.

Tenor **David Curry** will sing Adolfo Pirelli and Danny O'Higgins. Mr. Curry's recent engagements include Kudriash in *Katya Kabanova* at Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires, and the title role in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* for Bergen National Opera, Norway. Mr. Curry trained at the University of Western Ontario, the Royal Academy of Music, London Royal Schools Opera, Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio with scholarships from The Countess of Munster Musical Trust, The D'Oyly

Carte Trust and The Friends of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. This will be Mr. Curry's Vancouver Opera début.

Tenor **Michael Barrett** sings Beadle Bamford. Born in Newfoundland, Mr. Barrett is a former member of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio and has sung in Toronto, Edmonton and in Newfoundland. He regularly appears with the Aldeburgh Connection and made his Vancouver Opera début in 2013's *The Magic Flute*.

Baritone and Nova Scotia native **Zachary Read** will sing Jonas Fogg. Mr. Read recently returned from New York, where he competed as a Semi-Finalist in the Lotte Lenya Competition, a program of The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. Mr. Read completed his Masters in Operatic Performance at the University of Toronto under the guidance of Patrick Raftery, where he sang Creon in *Antigone*, an opera project by four University of Toronto composers. Before his studies in Toronto, Mr. Read sang Guglielmo in the Accademia Europea dell'Opera production of *Così fan tutte* in Pistoia, Italy. He appeared as Moralès in VO's 2014 production of *Carmen* and as Ivan in VO's most recent production, *Die Fledermaus*.

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

The stage director is **Kim Collier**. Ms. Collier is co-founder of the Electric Company Theatre and has been its Artistic Director for the past 13 years. She has co-authored seven of the company's original plays and has directed such productions as *Tear the Curtain!*, *The Score*, *The One That Got Away*, *The Fall*, *Studies in Motion*, and a live film version of Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*. Her co-directing credits with Electric Company include *Brilliant!*, *The Wake*, *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*, *Flop*, and *At Home With Dick and Jane*. Ms. Collier's productions have toured nationally and internationally. In 2004 she directed and led the creation of Storyeum, a 22 million dollar professional theatrical exploration of BC's history for Historical Xperiences and made her film directorial début in 2005 with the feature length adaptation of *The Score*. She is the recipient of the Outstanding Alumni Award from Langara College and the Vancouver Mayor's Arts Award for Performing Arts, and in November 2010 was awarded the prestigious Siminovitch Prize in Theatre for directing, a \$100,000 award which she shared with protégé director Anita Rochon.

THE STORY, IN BRIEF

Anthony, a young sailor has just arrived home and befriended a man called Sweeney Todd. Sweeney, a barber by trade, has recently been released from jail, where he was sent by a judge who lusted after Sweeney's daughter. The barber has a score to settle, and with the help of pie maker Mrs. Lovett, he

will stop at nothing to avenge his loss. Using his razor to dispatch unlucky customers and shuttling the bodies down to Mrs. Lovett's meat pie shop, Sweeney bides his time, waiting for the moment the judge sits in his chair for a shave.

Winner of countless awards, **Sweeney Todd** is darkly comical and endlessly entertaining. The indelible cast of characters and the evocatively grimy setting combine with Sondheim's unmatched lyrics and complex orchestral score for a rich theatrical and musical experience.

BACKGROUND

For generations, scholars and historians have debated the existence of the Demon Barber. *Sweeney Todd's* first known appearance in print was in an 1846 "penny dreadful," a type of horror tale of the era published in serial form, *The People's Periodical*. The razor-wielding barber who turned his victims into meat pies was a secondary character in the short story *The String of Pearls: A Romance*, written by Thomas Prest. With its bloody killing spree, ghoulish villain and macabre recipe for disposing of the evidence, *The String of Pearls* was perfect fodder for the Victorian imagination.

George Dibdin Pitt, a hack playwright of the time who commonly purloined other people's ideas, immediately dramatized Prest's story for the stage. Retitling it *The String of Pearls: The Fiend of Fleet Street*, Pitt advertised his production one year later as "Founded on Fact." The play, set in the reign of George II (the late 18th century), debuted on March 1, 1847, at the Hoxton Theatre, a London "bloodbath" - a theatre specializing in sensational melodramas.

Ever since, speculation has raged about whether the Demon Barber was man or myth. There are no clear answers. But there were certainly enough bits and pieces of real-life horror floating around at the time, reported in "The Old Bailey" section of the London Times, as well as other daily newspapers. The public had an enormous appetite for all things gruesome and devoured local news accounts of wicked deeds and nefarious crimes. And because news commonly traveled by word of mouth (much of the population was still illiterate), stories of shocking criminal exploits passed from person to person (with probable embellishment along the way) and were asserted to be "true fact." To add to the confusion, many penny dreadfuls were fictionalized accounts of real crimes. And Thomas Prest, the writer who first set down Sweeney Todd's name in print, was known to hunt regularly through newspapers for his story ideas.

About *Sweeney Todd*

Sweeney Todd premiered on Broadway at the Uris Theatre on March 1, 1979 and closed on June 29, 1980 after 557 performances and 19 previews. The original production was directed by Hal Prince and choreographed by Larry Fuller. Len Cariou created the title role, with Angela Lansbury as Mrs. Lovett.

The production was nominated for nine Tony Awards, winning eight including Best Musical. Dorothy Loudon and George Hearn replaced Lansbury and Cariou on March 4, 1980.

The first London production opened on July 2 of the same year at the West End's Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Denis Quilley and Sheila Hancock starred. The production ran for 157 performances and received mixed reviews, but won the Olivier Award for Best New Musical in 1980 before closing on November 14, 1980.

About Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim was born in New York in 1930, and is widely acknowledged as the most innovative, most influential and most important composer and lyricist in modern Broadway history.

For more than 50 years he has set an unsurpassed standard of brilliance and artistic integrity in the musical theatre. His accolades include an Academy Award, eight Tony Awards (more than any other composer) including the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre, multiple Grammy Awards, multiple Drama Desk awards and a Pulitzer Prize.

He has written the music and lyrics for *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday In The Park With George* (1984), *Into The Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1991), *Passion* (1994) and *Bounce* (2003) which later became *Road Show* (2008), as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *Do I Hear A Waltz?* (1965), and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973).

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About Vancouver Opera

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SWEENEY TODD
The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
A Musical Thriller
Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim | Book by Hugh Wheeler

From an Adaptation by Christopher Bond
Originally Directed on Broadway by Harold Prince
Orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick
Originally Produced on Broadway by Richard Barr
Charles Woodward, Robert Fryer, Mary Lean Johnson, Martin Richards
in Association with Dean and Judy Manos

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