

TOSCA ALBERT HERRING DON GIOVANNI DON CARLO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE August 13, 2013
CONTACT Selina Rajani, 604-331-4824
srajani@vancouveropera.ca

VANCOUVER OPERA COMMISSIONS
ANTI-BULLYING OPERA
FROM AWARD-WINNING SPOKEN WORD POET

SHANE KOYCZAN

World Premiere slated for Fall 2014

Vancouver, BC ~ Vancouver Opera has commissioned internationally-recognized Canadian spoken word poet and performer **Shane Koyczan** to create the libretto for a new opera whose theme – bullying – is a central issue in our community, in communities across the country and around the world.

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.

Stickboy (working title) will have its world premiere in October 2014 at the Vancouver Playhouse. It will be an option for subscribers to Vancouver Opera's 2014-2015 season; tickets will also be available to the general public. 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.

"I first approached Shane about this project in December and was so pleased when he enthusiastically agreed to work with us," comments **James Wright**, General Director of Vancouver Opera. "Capturing the raw emotion and creativity of *Stickboy* will be an exciting challenge. I'm looking forward to the creative process and eager to see this work translated to the stage, with the emotional power that contemporary opera will bring to this moving story."

"I have been looking for a project to challenge me in the way this one has already from the outset," says Mr. Koyczan. "Vancouver Opera has shown a tremendous amount of faith in my ability and I plan to deliver a passionate and honest story. I am deeply honoured to collaborate with these talented

TOSCA ALBERT HERRING DON GIOVANNI DON CARLO

artists."

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.

Libretto and music workshops for *Stickboy* will begin in mid-September 2013. Follow @vancouveropera 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** will be the stage dramaturge.

The music will be written by Vancouver-based composer **Jordan Nobles**. Known for creating music filled with an "unearthly beauty" (*Mondomagazine*) that makes listeners want to "close (their) eyes and transcend into a cloud of music" (*Discorder Magazine*), Jordan Nobles has emerged as one of Canada's finest composers. Mr. Nobles first collaborated with Mr. Koyczan on "We Were Here", which premiered in 2009 at the Firehall Arts Centre, presented by the Cultch.

"Besides the awesome challenge of composing an opera, what really excites me about this project is working with Shane Koyczan again," comments Mr. Nobles. "When we did "We Were Here" I was amazed by the power of Shane's words to move audiences to laughter and tears in quick succession. That project was also ground-breaking for me because working with a spoken word artist of Shane's calibre allowed me to reach a vastly different audience - people who might never have considered attending a classical music concert but who were uplifted and inspired by the new sounds that underscored Shane's words. I think it really opened a lot of ears and a lot of minds."

Recently, Mr. Nobles's piece *Simulacrum* was nominated as 'Classical Composition of the Year' at the 2012 Western Canadian Music Awards. His piece *Lux Antiqua* has won the Sacra/Profana International Composition Competition and has been chosen from among numerous entries to be performed in Wrocław, Poland at the International Society for Contemporary Music's 2014 World Music Days. He was named the 2009 Emerging Artist in music by the City of Vancouver's Mayor's Arts Award and is a member of the Canadian League of Composers and an Associate of the Canadian Music Centre.

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

TOSCA ALBERT HERRING DON GIOVANNI DON CARLO

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 more than 10 million views.

Vancouver Opera has a long history of exploring meaningful issues and themes through opera. For more than 40 years, Vancouver Opera In Schools (VOIS), Vancouver Opera's touring program, has introduced the power and beauty of opera to school children and their families across B.C. and beyond. More than 1,600,000 children have enjoyed specially adapted short operas in their school gymnasiums, auditoriums and community venues.

For the 2005-2006 school year, VO commissioned ***Naomi's Road***, a touching, instructive opera, set during World War II and based on the book by Joy Kogawa. *Naomi's Road* was remounted for touring this past season. In 2009, VOIS presented a new commissioned opera, ***Jack Pine***, by renowned local musician Veda Hille, based on the environmentally-themed children's book of the same name by award-winning Salt Spring Island poet, Christopher Patton.

For more than a decade, VO has been a leader in community engagement, through public events in communities in Metro Vancouver. The company has produced public forums on topics ranging from the plight of women during wartime (***Aida***) to the place of faith in politics (***Dialogues of the Carmelites***) to the boundaries of comedy (***Rigoletto***). For the 2010 Canadian premiere of ***Nixon in China***, an extensive series of events was produced, including events with Alexandre Trudeau, Margaret MacMillan and former U.S. Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte.

-30-

VO's 2013-2014 Season is generously sponsored by Goldcorp

Commissioning support for *Stickboy* has already been garnered from:

Beech Foundation

The CKNW Orphans' Fund

The Diamond Foundation

The Edith Lando Charitable Foundation

The Hamber Foundation

The McLean Foundation