

news

2013 – 2014 Season

release



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CONTACT Doug Tuck, Director of Marketing
604-331-4823
dtuck@vancouveropera.ca

Selina Rajani, Associate Director - Communications
604-331-4824
srajani@vancouveropera.ca

Vancouver Opera to receive \$500,000 from Province of B.C.
for its new anti-bullying opera *Stickboy*

Vancouver, B.C. ~ The Province of B.C. today announced a grant of \$500,000 in support of *Stickboy*, VO's new commissioned opera about bullying, by composer Neil Weisensel and internationally celebrated B.C. spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan, slated for its world premiere in October 2014.

In making the announcement, Premier Christy Clark said, "Bullying is never okay. It's not a rite of passage. We're working every day to find ways to end it for good, and that starts with getting people to share their experiences and ideas –and no one has expressed the lasting pain it causes quite as beautifully as Shane Koyczan."

VO's General Director **James W. Wright**, said, "We are delighted by, and very grateful for, this support from the Province of B.C. Bullying is an issue of profound importance in our lives and in our communities. The creation of this new opera is very dear to our hearts, and is at the heart of our mission to connect broadly and deeply with British Columbians through the power and beauty of opera. We are gratified that the Province of B.C. recognizes the real potential for opera to engage audiences, both young and old, in meaningful ways about issues that matter to them."

Stickboy is aimed at audiences of all ages and draws upon Mr. Koyczan's own experiences with bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator. The 80-minute opera is based on *Stickboy*, Mr. Koyczan's acclaimed 2008 novel in verse.

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The Story of *Stickboy*, 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.

Stickboy will have its world premiere on October 23, 2014 at the Vancouver Playhouse. It will run for a total of 12 performances. It will be part of Vancouver Opera's 2014-2015 subscription season; tickets will also be available to the general public beginning July 1, 2014.

After its premiere, beginning in the spring of 2015, *Stickboy* will tour to selected venues in B.C. An adapted version, specially designed for younger audiences, will be developed for touring to B.C. schools, beginning in the fall of 2015, as part of the Vancouver Opera In Schools program.

Workshops for *Stickboy* began in September 2013, continued in January 2014, and will resume in May, 2014. **Leslie Dala**, Vancouver Opera's Associate Conductor and Chorus Director, is the musical dramaturge; award-winning stage director **Rachel Peake** is the libretto dramaturge and will direct the production. Sets and costumes will be designed by **Drew Facey**. Animation design will be by Vancouver's **Giant Ant Media**.

Follow @vancouveropera on Twitter (#Stickboyopera) or Vancouver Opera on Facebook for the latest news and behind-the-scenes content on the creation of *Stickboy*.

Background on the librettist and the composer

Shane 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 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 almost 12 million views.

In 2009 the Victoria Symphony premiered **Neil Weisensel's** original works and arrangements, including *I Feel a Change Today*, co-composed with his wife, Rachel Landrecht, for former U.S. President 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. Mr. Weisensel lives in Winnipeg with wife Rachel and daughter Miracle.