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QUEEN OF HER OWN HEART: *LA REINE-GARÇON* AT THE COC EXPLORES A REAL-LIFE, TRAILBLAZING MONARCH

Toronto – The first-ever co-commission between the **Canadian Opera Company** and **Opéra de Montréal**, *La Reine-garçon* is a stunning new Canadian-led opera from acclaimed composer **Julien Bilodeau** and award-winning librettist **Michel Marc Bouchard** that dives into the life of one of history’s most fascinating royals. The reign of Sweden’s Queen Christina was fraught, as the nonconformist young monarch was forced her to navigate a course between faith and knowledge, love and duty. *La Reine-garçon* runs for seven performances at the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts** on **January 31, February 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, and 15, 2025**.

A NEW CHAPTER OF OPERATIC STORYTELLING

Queen Christina of Sweden (known in the opera as Christine) lived a remarkably unconventional life. Despite her status as female royalty in the 1600s, her father insisted she be given a prince’s education and upbringing, sparking in Christina a yearning desire for knowledge and personal truth that eventually led to her abdication of the throne.

Her story captured the imagination of Canadian playwright and librettist **Michel Marc Bouchard** whose extensive body of work has earned him the titles of Officer of the Order of Canada and Knight of the Order of Quebec. After writing the play *Christine, la reine-garçon*, **Bouchard** teamed up with Canadian composer **Julien Bilodeau**, to fully explore the complexity of Christina’s life and legacy in opera. **Bilodeau** is an accomplished and celebrated composer whose first opera, *Another Brick in the Wall*, was a genre-pushing collaboration with Roger Waters of Pink Floyd. Together, in *La Reine-garçon*, **Bouchard** and **Bilodeau** have produced a powerful ode to female empowerment and the importance of honouring one’s truth.

“Christine had to renounce her people, her faith, her father, and everything she was to become what she wanted to be,” says **Bouchard**. “It’s a conflict that remains a reality for so many.”

“*La Reine-garçon* reminds us that, hard-won as it still can be, a woman’s free will is precious,” adds **Bilodeau**.

A CELEBRATION OF CANADIAN TALENT

La Reine-garçon features artists and creators from all across the country, placing the very best Canadian talent squarely in the spotlight of the COC’s mainstage. Sharing the role of the rebellious queen are sopranos **Kirsten MacKinnon** and **Kirsten LeBlanc** alongside baritone **Philippe Sly** as Christine’s cousin, and eventual successor, Karl Gustav. Tenor **Isaiah Bell** will recreate the role of the overconfident Swedish statesman Johan Oxenstierna, following his “delightful” (*Opera Canada*) first performances in the role in world premiere at **Opéra de Montréal**; this is a return to the COC for **Bell** who last appeared at the company as Antinous in the world premiere of *Hadrian* by Rufus Wainwright and Daniel MacIvor.

In a COC debut, bass-baritone **Daniel Okulitch** sings the role of Johan’s father and Chancellor of the realm, Axel Oxenstierna; **Ensemble Studio** mezzo-soprano **Queen Hezumuryango** takes on the role of Ebba Sparre, beloved lady-in-waiting to Queen Christine; tenor and Ensemble Studio graduate **Owen McCausland** sings the part of the famed French philosopher and scientist René Descartes, who Christine enlists to enlighten her understanding of the

world; and soprano **Aline Kutan** and bass **Alain Coulombe** round out the cast as Christine's mother, Marie Éléonor, and assistant to René Descartes, respectively.

THE LOOK AND SOUND OF LA REINE-GARÇON

Director **Angela Konrad** has set the opera's storyline amidst the sparse and darkened landscape of a Scandinavian winter in the 17th century. Working with set designer **Anick La Bissonnière**, lighting designer **Éric Champoux**, and projections designer **Alexandre Desjardins**, **Konrad**'s vision transports audiences from snowy forests to heavily wood-paneled courts, acutely devoid of the warmth and vitality the Swedish queen desires. Costume designer **Sébastien Dionne** has incorporated a wealth of furs and rich textiles into characters' wardrobe, including a heavy cape for the queen that suffocates her with its weight, not unlike the social pressures thrust upon her.

In composing the opera, **Bilodeau** says he was inspired by various elements in the libretto that include "the fierce and stifled tension that inhabits Christine... the delicate, furtive, luminous fluidity of the Northern Lights" and "the almost animalistic cry of the *kulning* (ancestral Scandinavian women's chant)." Guiding the renowned **COC Orchestra** through this varied and textured score is **COC Music Director Johannes Debus**, with **Price Family Chorus Master Sandra Horst** leading the COC's award-winning **COC Chorus**.

La Reine-garçon is sung in French and presented by the COC with English SURTITLES™.

La Reine-garçon is a co-commission and co-production of the **Canadian Opera Company** and **Opéra de Montréal**.

EXPLORING LA REINE-GARÇON WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

On **Saturday, January 18, 2025**, experience a day of thoughtful and engaging discussions with *La Reine-garçon: Philosophy, Gender, Opera* hosted at **Innis Town Hall at the University of Toronto**.

The full-day symposium will explore how this boundary-pushing opera is grounded in Cartesian philosophy and contemporary theories of gender and performance. Participants can look forward to panels on Queen Christine and René Descartes, on the representation of Queen Christine in the arts, on gender and opera, and on the creation of this exciting Canadian co-commission.

Admission is completely free with registration; further details can be found at: uoft.me/LRG

A SPECIAL OFFER FOR WINTER OPERA TICKET-BUYERS

In a special partnership with **Uber Canada**, guests of our winter season operas are eligible to redeem up to 50% off their Premium Uber rides, max discount \$20 per trip, to and from the **Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts**, making it easier than ever to experience the unique thrill of live opera. Details, along with a discount code, will be emailed to winter ticket-buyers in reminder notifications for their performance.

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Christine

Karl Gustav

Johan Oxenstierna

Axel Oxenstierna

Kirsten MacKinnon,

Kirsten LeBlanc (Feb. 7)

Philippe Sly

Isaiah Bell

Daniel Okulitch

Ebba Sparre
René Descartes
Marie Éléonor
Assistant to Descartes
Chant Kulning

Queen Hezumuryango
Owen McCausland
Aline Kutan
Alain Coulombe
Anne-Marie Beaudette

Composer
Librettist
Conductor
Assistant Conductor
Price Family Chorus Master
Director
Assistant Director
Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Projection Designer
Resident Fight & Intimacy Coordinator
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Apprentice Stage Manager
Head Coach
Repetiteur
Ensemble Studio Coach

Julien Bilodeau
Michel-Marc Bouchard
Johannes Debus
Derek Bate
Sandra Horst
Angela Konrad
Thomas Lussier
Anick La Bissonnière
Sébastien Dionne
Éric Champoux
Alexandre Desjardins
Siobhan Richardson
Stephanie Marrs
Lesley Abarquez
Michael Lewandowski
Tanvi Vyas
Francis Perron
Rachael Kerr
Brian Cho

With the COC Orchestra and Chorus

TICKET INFORMATION

Regularly priced tickets for *La Reine-garçon* start at **\$45 for adults**, with **\$28 tickets available for guests between the ages of 16 and 29** through the COC's **Opera Under 30** program. Tickets can be purchased online at **coc.ca** or by calling the Four Seasons Centre Box Office at **416-363-8231**. For more information on booking **student groups, standing room, and rush tickets**, as well as other specially priced tickets available to **young people under the age of 15**, please visit **coc.ca**.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Major Cultural Event 2025: Pride Toronto

Sandra Horst and the **COC Chorus** are generously underwritten by **Tim & Frances Price**.

The **COC Orchestra** is generously sponsored by **The Schulich Foundation** and **W. Bruce C. Bailey**.

Thank you to the entire COC community, including our [COC Board of Directors](#), our [Corporate Sponsors and Foundation Supporters](#), [generous public funders](#), [union partners](#), and — most critically — [our audience](#). Your inspiring support ensures that opera flourishes, uniting global audiences and paving the way for a vibrant future.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. General Director David C. Ferguson joined the company in 2024, forming a leadership team with Music Director Johannes Debus and Deputy General Director Christie Darville. The COC enjoys a loyal audience, including a dedicated base of subscribers, and has an international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation. Its diverse repertoire includes new commissions and productions, local and international collaborations with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracts the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. The company is an incubator for the future of the art form, nurturing Canada's new wave of opera performers and creators with customized training and support. The COC's purpose-built opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, is hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. For more information, visit coc.ca.

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For more information, please contact:

Avril Sequeira, Vice-President of Communications, email: avrils@coc.ca

Davin Leivonen-Fok, Communications Coordinator, email: davinlf@coc.ca