



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 9, 2014

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Virginia Opera Announces Gala 40th Anniversary 2014-2015 Season

NORFOLK & RICHMOND, Va. (January 9, 2014) –

In recognition of its landmark 40th Anniversary Season, Virginia Opera is proud to present a season of the very *Best of the Best* – showcasing powerful selections from its acclaimed dynamic range of staged vocal repertory. From Broadway musicals to operettas and fully staged Operas – both traditional and new from all around the globe – Virginia Opera audiences have always experienced only the highest quality performances on our stages and helped us earn the honor of being named The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The First of Firsts tradition continues when Virginia Opera opens the 40th Anniversary Season with a knockout musical sensation, the East Coast premiere of a new production of Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*. Imprisoned on a trumped-up charge by a lecherous judge who covets his wife, *Sweeney Todd* is a masterpiece of drama and dark comedy – winning 8 Tony Awards including Best Musical – and is often considered Sondheim's most operatic work. Originally scheduled to be performed as an option at the end of the previous season, Virginia Opera held this production over to open the 40th Anniversary Season because of its ground-breaking aspects that are sure to make it a memorable, pioneering musical event on our stages and appropriate opening to the Season. Broadway musicals began being produced by Virginia Opera many years ago as a way of attracting new audiences while adding diversity for our loyal patrons; all of whom have really enjoyed the unforgettable productions of *West Side Story*, *Carousel*, *Oklahoma!* and many more over the years. *Sweeney Todd* will capitalize on this long-standing tradition and offer audiences, both old and new, a riveting production. Conducted by Virginia Opera's own Adam Turner, who follows conducting successes on our stages with *The Mikado* (2011-2012) and *Camelot* and *Carousel* (2012-2013) and exemplifies the significant resident talent that Virginia Opera consistently provides to the community, Turner's conducting credits include Ash Lawn Opera, Central City Opera and Seattle Opera, to name just a few. Virginia Opera is proud to welcome a legendary production team including Director Ron Daniels, who co-wrote the stage adaptation that inspired the musical. The team will certainly provide a potent blend of high tension, high drama and musical brilliance; perfect to open such an epic season.

Over the years Virginia Opera has produced dazzling productions of Gilbert & Sullivan's works that have won Virginia Opera high praise, most recently with *The Mikado*. *The Washington Post* acclaimed *The Mikado* as "rollickingly funny, energetic and cheerful." Virginia Opera's reputation for the highest quality Savoy Opera productions will reach new heights with an impressive traditional presentation of the first internationally recognized success won by Gilbert & Sullivan –

their extravaganza of merriment, *H.M.S. Pinafore!* The captain's daughter falls for a lowly sailor then sets out to overturn conventional order to win her man through the power of love – imagine that! *H.M.S. Pinafore* will be conducted by Virginia Opera Resident Conductor Adam Turner and will introduce renowned Director Nicola Bowie, making her Virginia Opera debut, to our audiences as she brings her bountiful talents in both directing and choreography to our company. This production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* will exemplify what we now recognize as modern musical theatre and earns an honored place in the 40th Anniversary Season.

With a steamy combination of biblical themes, erotic overtones and murder, Richard Strauss' *Salome* shocked opera audiences when it appeared in 1905. Virginia Opera's upcoming *Salome* will be performed in German, and is a premiere example of the lush musical sound of the early 20th century opera composition. Featuring the alluring Dance of the Seven Veils, scandalous to Victorian audiences, today we are seized by the gripping final scene as Salome sinks to the murky depths of corruption. Co-produced with Portland Opera in Oregon, the captivating Kelly Cae Hogan will star as Salome, whom audiences will recall from her huge Virginia Opera success as Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2012-2013) as well as Hanna Glawari (the title role) in *The Merry Widow* (1998-1999). Conductor Ari Pelto, known to Virginia Opera audiences for his bravura performances of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2012-2013), will return for *Salome*. Maestro Pelto garnered praise from *The Washington Post* "Conductor Ari Pelto had his forces reveling as playfully in the bluesy drama of New Orleans funk as in the psychological tension-building of movie-score sophistication," and his return as part of the 40th Anniversary Season showcases the numerous recent major conductor successes on Virginia Opera stages. Returning Director Stephen Lawless brings dramatic life to this intense addition to the 40th Anniversary Season; *Salome* is an epic journey into the macabre – all set to the spellbinding music of Richard Strauss.

To close this stunning season of stylistic highlights, Virginia Opera will co-produce with Des Moines Metro Opera a brand new, glittering and glamorous traditional staging of *La Traviata* directed by Virginia Opera audience favorite, Lilian Groag, who stunned audiences last Spring with a vibrant and stylish *Marriage of Figaro* – Ms. Groag has worked with Virginia Opera for over 20 years and the tradition continues with this brand-new *La Traviata*. Conducted by Andrew Bisantz, in his Virginia Opera debut, this exciting American conductor enjoys a significant opera career and continues the Virginia Opera tradition of presenting major new talent. Starring Elizabeth Caballero as Violetta (leading lady) and Rolando Sanz as Alfredo (leading man), audiences will recall Ms. Caballero in her acclaimed performances as Alice Ford in *Falstaff* (2012-2013). Both of these proven stars illustrate the continuing tradition of Virginia Opera of bringing the best talent to Virginia by showcasing them on our stages – much like heralded Virginia Opera alums Ashley Putnam and Diana Soviero. A classic Italian opera composed by one of the masters of the art form – Giuseppe Verdi – *La Traviata* is the most performed opera in the world today and remains an audience favorite on our stages since the inaugural season when it was first performed in 1975. Set in decadent mid-1800's Paris, the story tells of a lovely courtesan who falls in love with a man she cannot have.

Sweeney Todd will be performed in English with English Supertitles at Norfolk's Harrison Opera House September 26, 28 & 30, 2014, at Richmond's CenterStage October 3 & 5, 2014 and George Mason University Center for the Arts October 11 & 12, 2014.

H.M.S. Pinafore will be performed in English with English Supertitles at Norfolk's Harrison Opera House on November 7, 9 & 11, 2014, Virginia Beach's Sandler Center for the Arts on November 14 & 15, 2014 at Richmond's CenterStage November 21 & 23, 2014 and George Mason University Center for the Arts December 5 & 6, 2014.

Salome will be performed in German with English Supertitles at Norfolk's Harrison Opera House January 30, February 1 & 3, 2015, at Richmond's CenterStage February 6 & 8, 2015 and George Mason University Center for the Arts February 14 & 15, 2015.

La Traviata will be performed in Italian with English Supertitles at Norfolk's Harrison Opera House on March 13, 15 & 17, 2015, performances dates at Richmond's CenterStage, George Mason University Center for the Arts, and Virginia Beach's Sandler Center for the Arts are yet to be finalized.

Subscription Tickets for the 40th Anniversary Season are currently on sale starting as low as \$59 and come with many enticing discounts and benefits made available only to Virginia Opera Subscribers. Call today for the very best seats and plan to be in the audience when the curtain goes up on this legendary season of artistic highlights showcasing the first 40 years of Virginia opera.

Contact Director of Marketing & Communications, Maggi George at 757-627-9545 ext. 3316, or via e-mail at Maggi.George@vaopera.org for more information.

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About Virginia Opera

Virginia Opera Association, Inc., currently in its 39th year of operation, is known and respected nationwide for the identification and presentation of the finest young artists, for the musical and dramatic integrity of its productions, and for the ingenuity and variety of its education and outreach programs. Mainstage performances in three markets across the Commonwealth reach nearly 60,000 attendees annually. In March of 1994, by unanimous vote of the Virginia General Assembly, Virginia Opera was named The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia in recognition of the organization's contribution to the state as well as to the world of opera. For tickets and information visit www.vaopera.org or call 1.866.OPERA.VA.