



Canadian Children's Opera Company

Ann Cooper Gay, Executive Artistic Director

227 Front St E Toronto, ON M5A 1E8

www.canadianchildrensopera.com

(416) 366-0467



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF ALICE

ANN COOPER GAY AND THE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S OPERA COMPANY PRESENT

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

***BY DR. ERROL GAY (COMPOSER) AND
MICHAEL PATRICK ALBANO (LIBRETTIST)***

Toronto, Harbourfront Centre Theatre (April 2015) – Ann Cooper Gay (Executive Artistic Director) and the [Canadian Children's Opera Company \(CCOC\)](http://www.canadianchildrensopera.com) will be debuting their new children's opera, *Alice in Wonderland*, by [Dr. Errol Gay](#) (composer) and [Michael Patrick Albano](#) (librettist), celebrating the 150th anniversary since the story's first publication. The production will run from **May 7 to May 10, 2015**, at the **Harbourfront Centre Theatre, Harbourfront Centre**. Four public performances will take place at the **Harbourfront Centre Theatre, Harbourfront Centre, May 7– May 10, 2015**. School previews will run from **May 7- May 8, 2015**.

As part of the 150th anniversary of the beloved tale by Lewis Carroll of what lies down the rabbit hole, this new children's opera by the accomplished and ingenious composer, **Dr. Errol Gay**, and the witty and imaginative librettist, **Michael Patrick Albano**, brings the adventures of Alice and the White Rabbit to life through the beautiful and enthralling voices of the children, ages 3-21. Nominated for a *2014 Dora Mavor Moore Award*, this creative duo spins new life into Alice through their unique combination of melody and wit.

Along with renowned tenor [Benôit Boutet](#) as the "White Rabbit," the enchanting voices of the children will be accompanied by a professional chamber orchestra, conducted by the brilliant and charismatic CCOC Executive Artistic Director, [Ann Cooper Gay](#). Stage direction is by Michael Patrick Albano (librettist).

Commissioned and produced by the captivating **150-voice Canadian Children's Opera Company**, *Alice in Wonderland* is a musical extravaganza of Lewis Carroll's most famous heroine.

Of special interest, after 15 years of transforming the CCOC into the musical entity that is today, Ann Cooper Gay is retiring. Not to be missed, this will be the most electrifying and heartfelt performance of CCOC history!

Approximately 60 minutes in length, this exhilarating original show is suitable for audiences of all ages, and is sure to inspire.

Dates and times are as follows:

School Performances:

Thursday, May 7, 2015 - 10:00 am and 1:00 pm

Friday, May 8, 2015 - 10:00 am

Public Performances:

*Friday, May 8, 2015 - 7:30 pm (Opening Night)

Saturday, May 9, 2015 - 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm

Sunday, May 10, 2015 – 2:00 pm

Tickets: \$35/adult; \$20/senior; and \$15 for student/child.

For ticket information, contact Harbourfront Centre Box Office: 416-973-4000 or info@harbourfrontcentre.com

Music Director/ Executive Artistic Director: Ann Cooper Gay (Executive Artistic Director)

Composer: Errol Gay

Librettist, Stage Director: Michael Patrick Albano

Costume Designer: Lisa Magill

Props Designer: Michèle Morgan

Set Designer: Jim Wilson

Lighting Designer: Gavin McDonald

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

“LULLABIES” - CD RELEASE

In late **April 2015**, Ann Cooper Gay and the CCOC will release *Lullabies*, a 17-track CD of lullabies that will be gifted to new mothers and their babies at Toronto hospitals. This recording will feature the CCOC children, singing lullabies from around the world in *English, German, Arabic, Welsh, French, Yiddish, Lakota (First Nations), Zulu, Italian, Chinese, Greek and Spanish*. Ann wanted to include songs from as many cultures as possible to reflect diversity in Canada and throughout the world, and to teach children about inclusiveness and kindness. Music is the universal language; it has no discrimination and is invaluable. In these unsettling times, rebuilding our world to teach children tolerance and empathy is of the utmost importance.

THE RETIREMENT OF ANN COOPER GAY – 15 YEARS OF HISTORY!

Hand-picked in 2000 by the late **Richard Bradshaw**, Ann Cooper Gay, the Executive Artistic Director, educator and former soloist with the Canadian Opera Company (COC), has transformed the Company into the dramatic and musical entity that it is today. Ann has made the chorus accessible to all talented children between the ages of 3-21 years, regardless of socio-economic background. Her enthusiasm, knowledge and love of music, learning and children are infectious. She has dedicated most of her life to the betterment of children’s music education. In 1998 Ann Cooper Gay won the *Woman of Distinction Award*.

As strong supporters and advocates of children and education, we invite you to help us thank and honour our wonderful and selfless Executive Artistic Director, Ann Cooper Gay, who is retiring after 15 years of transforming the CCOC into the musical entity that it is today.

OPERation Kids and Outreach: Of particular interest is Ms. Cooper Gay's establishment of the CCOC's outreach program, [OPERation KIDS](#), which goes into public schools to teach children about opera. *OPERation KIDS* introduces participants to the magical world of opera. Everyone is welcome, regardless of experience, knowledge or ability and each workshop includes an introduction to acting, singing, prop-making, costumes, writing scripts, creating sets and stage management. Through this program, Ann has ensured that the CCOC is accessible to all children.

As part of our Community Outreach Program, **OPERation KIDS**, we have extended invitations to various community programs and individuals, including a women's shelter, to preview our **Final Dress Rehearsal on Wednesday, May 6, 2015, at 7:00 pm.**

The Bursary Program: Through her development of the *Bursary Program*, Ann has ensured that the CCOC is accessible to children of all varied socioeconomic backgrounds, introducing them to opera and other forms of music, including jazz, folk, cabaret, classical and world music. These are children who would otherwise have never been able to experience and participate in these art forms. Ann has made music and opera relevant again, and changed the course of many young lives. If anyone is deserving of the *Order of Canada*, the *Order of Ontario*, the *Premier's Award for Teaching Excellence*, the *Governor-General's Performing Arts Award*, a *Special Mayoral Award* and a *Key to the City*, it is Ann Cooper Gay. Originally from Texas, Ann became a Canadian citizen in 2007 and she is a magnificent example of how an individual can build and strengthen relationship bonds between countries.

It is important for the public to be acquainted with how unique Ann is as a mentor, and to witness her extraordinary gift in nurturing young talent. We need your support to continue Ann Cooper Gay's vision for the future of this remarkable non-profit organization, to ensure that outstanding musical and dramatic education are always accessible to young people.

"The joy is that kids can do anything that adults can do – You just need to believe in them and hold them to a high standard.".....Ann Cooper Gay, CBC Radio, June 2012

ABOUT THE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S OPERA COMPANY

The ***Canadian Children's Opera Company*** is a world-class ensemble that introduces the magic of opera to children and youth through professional musical and dramatic education, and the performance of established and newly commissioned operatic and choral repertoire. Founded over 47 years ago by **Ruby Mercer** and **Lloyd Bradshaw**, *The Canadian Children's Opera Company (CCOC)* was formed to provide a permanent children's choir for the *Canadian Opera Company*. The Chorus was modeled after a similar children's choir in Europe that Ruby Mercer, soprano, writer and broadcaster for the CBC, had the pleasure of witnessing at a concert in Europe. At the time, there were no permanent trained children's choruses readily available in Canada for the *Canadian Opera Company* to use when needed, and so the choir was formed. It was and still is the only permanent children's opera chorus in North America that regularly commissions and produces new operas for children, to be performed by children.

In addition to performing with the COC, the children have performed with a wide variety of professionals, including *The Tenors* (formerly *The Canadian Tenors*) and the *Toronto Symphony Orchestra*. Ann and the children have also just completed recordings for the new *The Tenors* soon-to-be released CD.

Other projects include recent collaborations with the former *Lieutenant Governor General, The Honourable David Onley* and his wife Ruth Ann Onley, including participating in a recording of "*People of the Maple Leaf*," lyrics by The Honourable David Onley.

In 2012, the CCOC opera, *Laura's Cow: The Legend of Laura Secord* debuted as part of the opening of *Luminato 2012* and went on to be nominated for the *2012 Dora Mavor Moore Awards* (Errol Gay, composer, Michael Patrick Albano, librettist). As part of the opening of *Luminato 2009*, the CCOC performed in R. Murray Schafer's *Dora Mavor Moore Award* winning opera, *The Children's Crusade*.

CCOC ALUMNI: Many past CCOC members have launched successful professional careers. Some CCOC alumni include, **Alana Bridgewater** ("*Killer Queen*", *We Will Rock You*), **Jamie McKnight** (recently "*Scarecrow*" in the *Wizard of Oz*, and founding member of the Canadian Tenors), **Karina Gauvin** (world-renowned soprano and *JUNO Award Winner*), **Laura Bertrand** (actress), and **Katie Stelmanis** (*Austra*).

CONTINUED SUPPORT OF CHILDREN IN THE ARTS

As a non-profit organization, the only children's opera company of its kind in Canada, and our direct historic link to the CBC, it is vital that the work that Ann has done and is doing for the CCOC, the children and Canadian music be able to continue and receive the proper recognition it deserves. In light of the recent government cutbacks, this would be an excellent opportunity to help support and remind the public of how essential it is to continue to foster Canadian music and young talent.

This would also be a great opportunity for you to show your support for the education of children in the arts. We sincerely hope that you will be able to attend and help us continue to enrich our children through music and ensure that the legacy of Ruby Mercer, Ann Cooper Gay and the Canadian Children's Opera Company lives on in Canadian history.

Auditions are scheduled April through June of every year. Contact the CCOC, at: 416-366-0467 or email info@canadianchildrensopera.com or visit our website: www.canadianchildrensopera.com

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Marilyn at (416) 606-8404 or canadianchildrensopera.pr@gmail.com. You can also contact Ken Hall, CCOC manager, at (416) 366-0467 ext 223 (416) 669-5364, (cell) or ken@canadianchildrensopera.com or Ann Cooper Gay, Executive Artistic Director, at ann@canadianchildrensopera.com

Below, please find some links to some YouTube videos and reviews, including a link to an old CBC archival video by Ruby Mercer:

LINKS TO SAMPLE VIDEOS AND REVIEWS

1. Canadian Children's Opera Company sing Donizetti Servants' Chorus in Deutschlandsberg
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxHfHZHWBw4>
2. CBC Archival Footage – 1979 – CCOC and Ruby Mercer
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/Arts+and+Entertainment/Music/ID/1474626091/>
3. Video Clip - CBC TV- June 7, 2012 - *reference to Laura Secord*
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Arts+and+Entertainment/ID/2243346732/?page=30>
4. Audio Clip - CBC Radio - June 7, 2012
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2012/06/07/luminato-1812.html>
5. *Lullabies* CD – (Excerpts):

Cante Waste
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJIPm2g0rF8>

Brezairola (Soun Soun)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cafXBADKXtk>

Far Over the Misty Mountains (The Hobbit)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD18_eL5Ljl
6. The Canadian Tenors with Canadian Children's Opera Company - *O Viens Emmanuel (O Come Emmanuel)*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHT0GyrV-Cc>
7. The Canadian Tenors with Canadian Children's Opera Company – *Silent Night*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmmVsTCOBel>
8. The Musical Mind #9: Soloists from the Canadian Children's Opera Company
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLQVrPt6Ytk&feature=share>
9. Toronto Star - John Terauds - June 5, 2012
<http://www.musicaltoronto.org/2012/06/05/preview-lauras-cow-a-witty-charming-new-stage-arrival-from-the-canadian-childrens-opera-company/>
10. NOW Magazine Review – June 8, 2012
<http://www.nowtoronto.com/daily/stage/story.cfm?content=187166>
11. *I Could Have Danced All Night" from My Fair Lady* – (members of the CCOC Youth Chorus)
https://www.youe.comtub/watch?v=pupznWXJ_2l

BIOGRAPHIES

Ann Cooper Gay (Conductor/Executive Artistic Director)

Ann Cooper Gay is an accomplished conductor, opera singer, pianist, organist, and flutist, well known in the artistic community for her extraordinary enthusiasm, energy, and consistently high level of artistic achievement. During her tenure, which began in July 2000, Ms. Cooper Gay has formed a *Youth Chorus* and a *Butterfly Chorus*, produced three CDs, including the 2007 Juno-nominated *A Midwinter Night's Dream*, commissioned seven operas, including the Dora-nominated *Laura's Cow*, and led three European tours. In addition, she established the outreach programs, **OPERAtion Kids** and the **Bursary Program**, ensuring that music is accessible to children of all socio-economic backgrounds. Before joining the CCOC, Ann was Conductor of the University of Toronto Women's Chorus, Associate Conductor of the Hart House Orchestra, and string/orchestra instructor for the Toronto Board of Education. She founded the Children's Choir at the RCM and the award-winning High Park Choirs of Toronto, and was honoured by the Toronto YWCA as a "Woman of Distinction." She was a soprano soloist with the Canadian Opera Company, touring North America. Ann sang Sara Riel on the Centrediscs recording of Harry Somers' *Louis Riel*.

Errol Gay (Composer)

Errol Gay has served as conductor and chorus master with the Canadian Opera Company, guest conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and other leading Canadian Orchestras, Assistant Musical Director of the Charlottetown Festival, Co-Conductor of the High Park Choirs of Toronto, Music Advisor/Conductor of the Hart House Orchestra, Adjunct Associate Professor of Conducting at the University of Toronto, and Music Director of Orchestra Toronto. He also served 24 years as Associate Principal Librarian of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Previous operas with Michael Patrick Albano include *A Dickens of a Christmas* (2005) and *Laura's Cow: The Legend of Laura Secord* (2012), both also for the CCOC.

Errol Gay has been Music Director of orchestras in New York, Texas and North Carolina and has been a studio and orchestra trombonist and pianist in Vancouver and Toronto, as well as holding professorial positions at several American universities.

Michael Patrick Albano (Librettist/Stage Director)

Michael Patrick Albano is the resident stage director of the Opera training programme at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. There he has staged over thirty operas, including Canadian premières of Debussy's *L'Enfant Prodigue*, Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan* and the Toronto premiere of Offenbach's *Barbe-Bleue*. He has guest directed at the New York City Opera, the Canadian Opera Company, Opera Kentucky, Opera Hamilton, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, L'Opéra de Montréal and the Opera Festival of New Jersey. Mr. Albano's previous libretti for children's operas include *A Dickens of a Christmas* and *Laura's Cow* for the CCOC. Works for adults include *Gianni* and *Loss of Eden*. He has served for many seasons as resident dramaturge for the *Tapestry New Opera Works* composer/librettist lab. He has penned many libretti for the *U of T Opera Student Composer Collective*, including *Rob Ford: The Opera*, which were subsequently developed presented as a part of the U of T New Music Festival.