

CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

gets raves at Edinburgh International Festival

Absolutely unmissable." "Stroke of genius." "The hottest ticket in town—beg, borrow or steal one." "An invention of blinding genius in its creation and presentation." Those were some of the accolades received by the Canadian Opera Company (COC) of Toronto, Ontario, for its double bill of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex with Symphony of Psalms*, presented at the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland in August 2002.

One of the world's premier arts events, the Edinburgh Festival attracts performers of the highest calibre and audiences from around the world. Canada's national opera company, the COC made its European debut at the festival in 1993, with support from DFAIT. There it presented Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. Its efforts garnered two awards worth a total of £50,000: the 1993 Critics' Award for Music and the Scotsman-Hamada Trust Festival Prize in the categories of both music and drama.

That first European trip defined the COC as one of the world's most visionary and compelling producers of opera, a company that combines theatrical and musical excellence. According to a British reviewer in August 2002, the COC's debut was still being talked about nine years after the event, and its return production had an impact that was "no less shattering."

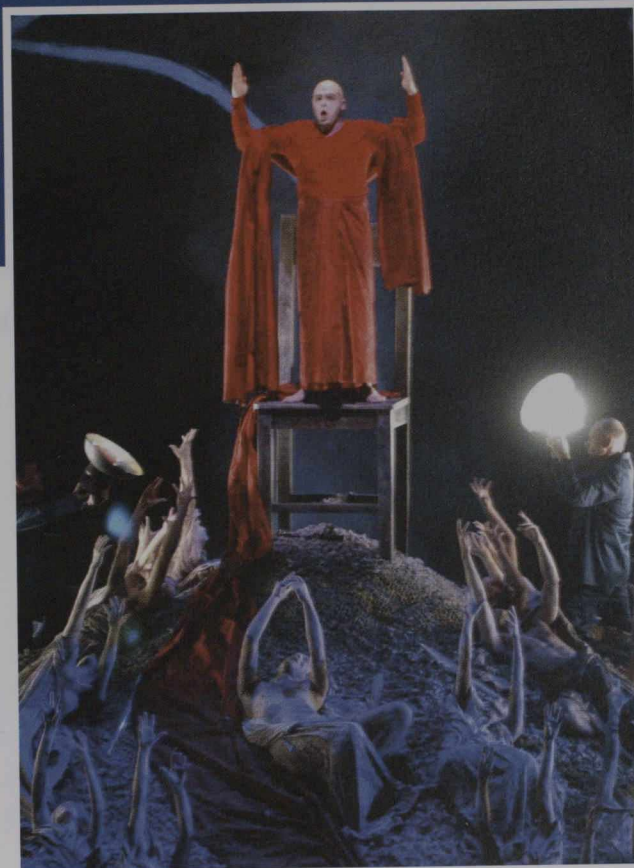
After 1993 the company had had to turn down two subsequent invitations to Edinburgh. But with financial support from DFAIT and the Canada Council for the Arts, in 2002 it was at last able to attend the festival. It was a challenge to transport overseas a company of 167 soloists, chorus members, orchestra musicians, dancers, crew and production staff, along with three sea containers of set pieces and props weighing over two tonnes. London-based staff at the Canadian High Commission and Canada House assisted with the logistics. They also provided

administrative help and marketing support, and hosted a reception for the company.

Oedipus Rex with Symphony of Psalms was directed by François Girard and conducted by Richard Bradshaw. Featured were Canadian tenor Michael Schade, Polish contralto Ewa Podleś and Canadian actor Colm Feore in a speaking part. The production enthralled the audience with its imagery. One reviewer urged "all theatre, opera and music lovers to get to Edinburgh's Playhouse tonight or tomorrow to experience one of the most extraordinary visual and dramatic encounters imagined for and realized upon the stage."

Founded over 50 years ago, the COC is the largest producer of opera in Canada and the sixth-largest in North America. Every year the company presents six fully staged productions at Toronto's Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts. It has toured in the United States, Europe, Australia and Hong Kong.

DFAIT's Arts and Cultural Industries Promotion Division has also supported the COC's Ensemble Studio, Canada's pre-eminent training program for young singers, directors and coaches. In 2001, a DFAIT travel grant assisted the Ensemble Studio to travel to the Netherlands to perform with De Nederlandse Opera. World-recognized alumni of the program include Ben Heppner, Kimberly Barber, John Fanning, Sally Dibblee, and new international sensations James Westman and Isabel Bayrakdarian. 🍁



photos: Douglas Robertson

Michael Schade as Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex with Symphony of Psalms*, performed by the Canadian Opera Company in Edinburgh in August 2002