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Media Contact: Tamara Vallejos, Director of Marketing & Audience Development
303.778.0214 | tvallejos@operacolorado.org

Opera Colorado Closes 2017-18 Season with Verdi's Shakespearean Comedy *Falstaff*

**Verdi's masterful final opera returns to Opera Colorado
for the first time in 30 years**

**Performances run May 5-13, 2018, at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House
at the Denver Performing Arts Complex**

DENVER—Opera Colorado winds down its 35th season in May with a **new, traditional production** of Verdi's final opera, and one of only two comedies the revered composer ever wrote: the delightful, **Shakespeare-inspired *Falstaff***. The production **opens Saturday, May 5**, at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House with additional performances on **May 8, 11, and 13**.

It's the **first time in nearly 30 years** the company has presented this masterful work, based on one of the Bard's most memorable characters: the famously rotund and lovably oafish knight Falstaff, from *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In this operatic take, Falstaff—in his typically bumbling fashion—attempts to seduce two wealthy (and married) women, but is hilariously exposed for a fool.

"What do I *not* love about Falstaff?" asks **Icelandic baritone Olafur Sigurdarson**, who makes his **Opera Colorado debut** in the role.

"He is a character larger than life, and has this endless lust for living and for joy. At the top of the opera, he's fallen on hard times, he has no money, his companions are drunk, and he himself is drunk most of the time. He can't even pay the bills at the inn where he's drinking. He's overweight and scruffy. But when he looks in the mirror? My god, he loves himself!"

Sigurdarson cites *Falstaff* as one of his all-time favorite operas, and it shows: the title role has become one of his calling cards, and his performances are routinely praised—most recently

following his North American debut with Opera Omaha this past February. “Olafur Sigurdarson gave an energetic, hilarious performance of the ‘fat’ Falstaff,” said *Opera News* in its review. “Sigurdarson’s characterization was full of well-timed comedic bits...[and] bravado and machismo.”

But it takes more than a simple jokester to perform any of the roles in *Falstaff*. Indeed, what makes this such a gem of a comic opera is that it’s both brimming with laughs and all the glorious music one would expect from Verdi, who completed the work at the age of 80 and had a lifetime of unparalleled experience from which to draw.

“It’s a very long role, so vocally it’s very demanding,” says Sigurdarson of his character. “There might even be a danger to neglect the vocal part of it, because Falstaff is so much fun and he’s always fooling around. But it’s a real serious sing for me, and for any Verdi baritone. It’s a very challenging role, and you need to dig out all the different colors in the voice that you can find.”

Falstaff is also a true ensemble opera, and requires a skilled cast from top to bottom. The performers assembled for Opera Colorado’s production are certainly up for the challenge of this sophisticated and vocally demanding work.

“Casting this piece was something we spent a lot of time on, because getting the perfect group together is crucial for making this a successful show,” says **Opera Colorado Music Director Ari Pelto**, who conducts these performances of *Falstaff*. “I feel we’ve put together the most extraordinary group, with each performer being a great singer, a great actor, and a great colleague, which is necessary for getting the right chemistry for this ensemble. To now be in the rehearsal studio with everybody is just thrilling.”

In addition to Sigurdarson, *Falstaff* features the Opera Colorado debuts of **sopranos Cynthia Clayton (Alice Ford) and Susannah Biller (Nannetta)**, and **tenors Alex Mansoori (Dr. Caius) and Mingjie Lei (Fenton)**. The cast also includes several voices familiar to Opera Colorado audiences: **mezzo-soprano Sandra Piques Eddy (Meg Page)**, who in 2014 sang the title role in *Carmen*; **mezzo-soprano Dana Beth Miller (Mistress Quickly)**, from past productions of *Rigoletto* and *Rusalka*; and **baritone Marco Nisticò (Ford)**, from the 2015 production of *Aida*. Rounding out the cast are **bass-baritone Andrew Hiers (Pistola)** and **tenor Nathan Ward (Bardolfo)**, both current members of Opera Colorado’s Young Artist Program, and most recently seen in January’s world premiere production of *Steal a Pencil for Me*.

Directing this production is international stage director David Edwards, who, like Sigurdarson, makes his Opera Colorado debut and has a deep appreciation for *Falstaff*.

“It’s a miraculous score that encourages us to look at ourselves, our vanities and our follies, and, by not taking ourselves too seriously, view life in perspective,” says Edwards. “In a perfect ending to his career, Verdi celebrates something that his long life had made clear to him.”

Tickets start at just \$25 for Verdi’s *Falstaff*, opening Saturday, May 5, and running through Sunday, May 13.

For tickets and information, visit <http://operacolorado.org> or call the Opera Colorado Box Office at 303.468.2030.

Verdi's *Falstaff*

Composed by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Arrigo Boito

May 5, 8, 11, and 13, 2018

Ellie Caulkins Opera House at the Denver Performing Arts Complex

Cast (In Order of Vocal Appearance)

Alex Mansoori*	Dr. Caius
Olafur Sigurdarson*	Sir John Falstaff
Nathan Ward^	Bardolfo
Andrew Hiers^	Pistola
Sandra Piques Eddy	Meg Page
Cynthia Clayton*	Alice Ford
Dana Beth Miller	Mistress Quickly
Susannah Biller*	Nannetta
Mingjie Lei*	Fenton
Marco Nisticò	Ford

Opera Colorado Orchestra

Opera Colorado Chorus

Ari Pelto	Conductor
David Edwards*	Stage Director
Stephen D. Mazzeno	Scenic Design
Lucas Krech	Lighting Design
Ronell Oliveri	Wig and Makeup Design
Sahar Nouri	Chorus Master
Clair Rutter	Costume Design

Costumes originally designed for and created by the Santa Fe Opera

**Company Debut*

^ Opera Colorado Young Artist

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ABOUT OPERA COLORADO

Opera Colorado celebrates its 35th anniversary during the 2017-2018 season, having served as a cornerstone of Denver's cultural community since 1981. In addition to its mainstage performances at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House each season, Opera Colorado affirms its commitment to the future of the art form by annually presenting new works; with its nationally recognized Young Artist Program that trains the next generation of opera performers; and by each year reaching more than 38,000 students and adults through its many education and community engagement programs throughout the Rocky Mountain region. The 2017-2018 season features Puccini's *La Bohème* and Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, and the world premiere of *Steal a Pencil for Me* by composer Gerald Cohen and librettist Deborah Brevoort at the Wolf Theatre at the Mizel Arts and Culture Center at the JCC. For more information, visit www.operacolorado.org.