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MEDIA RELEASE

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Bramwell Tovey and the VSO present Mendelssohn’s great Hymn of Praise
Featuring Elektra Women’s Choir and Chor Leoni

Vancouver BC – Maestro Bramwell Tovey and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra are proud to present Felix Mendelssohn’s extraordinary symphonic cantata, Symphony No. 2, Hymn of Praise, featuring three world-class soloists and two of Vancouver’s most esteemed choral ensembles: Elektra Women’s Choir and Chor Leoni Men’s Choir. FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20 and SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21; 8pm, Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC.

Greatly influenced by Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Mendelssohn’s Hymn of Praise, was commissioned to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. His printed edition of the Bible was held to be not only a major milestone in the Christian faith, but a crucial element of the enlightenment of central-European society as a whole. Appropriately, for this commission, Mendelssohn chose the Bible as the subject matter, and created a work that has been celebrated throughout the centuries for its sublime beauty.

Soloists for these concerts are acclaimed Canadian-Dutch soprano Monica Huisman who has been hailed for a voice that “embodies both flawless technique and dramatic impact” (Opera Canada); Mezzo-soprano Kristin Hoff, a recent graduate of Vancouver Opera’s Yulanda M. Farris Young Artist Program; and Canadian-American tenor Isaiah Bell who has been called a singer with “a varied palette and much eloquence” recently by The Globe and Mail.

Also joining Bramwell Tovey and the VSO on the Chan centre stage are two of Vancouver’s most esteemed and established choirs, Elektra Women’s Choir and Chor Leoni who, along with the Hymn of
Praise, will also be performing Mendelssohn’s Vespergesang, Op. 121: Adspice Domine, and Vier Gesänge by Johannes Brahms.

CONCERT INFORMATION

CLASSICAL TRADITIONS
Mendelssohn’s Great Hymn of Praise
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21
8pm, Chan Centre at UBC

The presentation of this series is made possible, in part, through the generous assistance of the Chan Endowment Fund at the University of British Columbia.

** Bramwell Tovey** conductor
** Monica Huisman** soprano*
** Kristin Hoff** mezzo-soprano*
** Isaiah Bell** tenor*
** Elektra Women’s Choir**

** Brahms** Vier Gesänge*
** Mendelssohn** Vespergesang, Op. 121: Adspice Domine+
** Mendelssohn** Symphony No. 2, Hymn of Praise**+

TICKET INFORMATION:
Tickets: $37-$65 (senior, student, and subscriber discounts available)
Tickets available online at www.vancouversymphony.ca or by calling VSO Customer Service at 604.876.3434

BIOGRAPHIES

Bramwell Tovey, conductor
GRAMMY® and Juno® award-winning conductor/composer Bramwell Tovey was appointed Music Director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in 2000. Under his leadership the VSO has toured to China, Korea, across Canada and the United States. Mr. Tovey is also the Artistic Adviser of the VSO School of Music, a state-of-the-art facility and recital hall which opened in downtown Vancouver in 2011 next to the Orpheum, the VSO’s historic home. His tenure has included complete symphony cycles of Beethoven, Mahler, Brahms as well as the establishment of an annual festival dedicated to contemporary music. In 2018, the VSO’s centenary year, he will become the orchestra’s Music Director Emeritus.

In the 14-15 season Mr. Tovey will make guest appearances with several US orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Kansas City Symphony. In Europe he will perform
with the BBC Philharmonic and the Helsingborgs Symfoniorkester and he will travel to Australia on two separate occasions for engagements with the symphonies of Melbourne and Sydney.

During the 13-14 season Mr. Tovey’s guest appearances included the BBC and Royal Philharmonics, the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia and Cleveland Orchestras, and the Toronto Symphony. In the summer of 2014 he made his debut with the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival.

In 2003 Bramwell Tovey won the Juno® Award for Best Classical Composition for his choral and brass work *Requiem for a Charred Skull*. Commissions include the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, the Toronto Symphony, and Calgary Opera who premiered his first full length opera *The Inventor* in 2011. A recording of the work by the VSO with UBC Opera and the original cast will be issued on the Naxos label in 2014. Earlier in 2014 his trumpet concerto, *Songs of the Paradise Saloon*, was performed by the LA Philharmonic with Alison Balsom as soloist, who will also perform the work with the Philadelphia Orchestra in December 2014.

A talented pianist as well as conductor and composer, he has appeared as soloist with many major orchestras including the New York, Sydney, Melbourne, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, St Louis, Toronto, and Royal Scottish orchestras. In the summer of 2014 he played and conducted Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* at the Hollywood Bowl with the LA Phil and in Saratoga with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He has performed his own *Pictures in the Smoke* with the Melbourne and Helsingborg Symphonies and the Royal Philharmonic.

Maestro Tovey was Music Director of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra from 1989 to 2001 where he founded the WSO’s now celebrated New Music Festival. From 2002-2006 he was Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, leading tours of Europe, the USA, China, and Korea. He opened Luxembourg’s Salle Philharmonie with the world première of Penderecki’s 8th Symphony.

Mr. Tovey is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in London, the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and holds honorary degrees from the universities of British Columbia, Manitoba, Kwantlen and Winnipeg. In 2013 he was appointed an honorary Officer of the Order of Canada for services to music.

In August 2011 he was described by Musical America as “one of the most versatile and charismatic musicians in the world.”

**Monica Huisman, soprano**

Born in Winnipeg, of Dutch descent, Ms. Huisman has been hailed as possessing a soprano voice that ‘embodies both flawless technique and dramatic impact’ (Opera Canada). In 1999, she made her debut at the famous Concertgebouw in Amsterdam in a live broadcast of Riccardo Zandonai’s ‘Francesca da Rimini’. Since then Ms. Huisman has delighted audiences from Amsterdam to Guatemala City with the reputation of her ‘silken’ voice ‘consistently crafting each note into a work of art’ (Winnipeg Free Press). She has soared on the stages of Vancouver Opera, Calgary opera, Edmonton Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, The Netherlands Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Ontario and Saskatoon Opera in productions of La Cenerentola, Carmen, Susannah, Marriage of Figaro, Cosi Fan Tutte, Don Giovanni, Cunning Little Vixen, La Boheme, Magic Flute, Hansel and Gretel and Lakme alongside great Canadian talents like Jean Stilwell, Tracy Dahl, James Westman, David Pomeroy, Russell Braun, John Tessier, Judith Forst, and
Richard Margison. Many of these performances have been broadcasted by CBC Radio on Saturday Afternoon at the Opera.

Equally at home in concert repertoire Ms. Huisman has thrilled audiences with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Guatemala Symphony Orchestra, Hamilton Philharmonic, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Regina Symphony Orchestra, Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra, Concertgebouw Symphony Orkest, Radio-Symphony Orkest and Orchestra London in such works as Strauss' Four Last Songs, Brahms' Requiem, Mahler's 2nd, Haydn's Creation, and Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Recent engagements include a return to the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam featuring Smetana's the Bartered Bride, thrilling audiences with Villa Lobos' Bachianas Brasileiras in RICE International Festival in Rio di Janeiro, leaving the audience 'thirsting for more' (Star Phoenix) in Vaughn Williams Sea Symphony with the Saskatoon Symphony, and singing as though 'in the company of angels' (Winnipeg Free Press) with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in Mahler's 4th Symphony, broadcasted by the CBC. Upcoming engagements Mendellsohn's Lobegesang with the Vancouver Symphony, participating in the VSO's New Music Festival in 2015, Mendellsohn's Elijah with the WSO and Handel's Messiah.

Ms Huisman is also a voice teacher at the Desautel Faculty of Music, University of Manitoba, and is in demand both as an adjudicator and clinician.

Kristin Hoff, mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-Soprano Kristin Hoff debuted at Carnegie Hall singing Elliot Carter's *Syringa* with Maestro James Levine conducting. She has been a soloist with the Boston Pops Symphony Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, among many others.

Kristin's operatic roles include Anna Maurrant, Ottavia, Marcellina, Prinz Orlofsky, Donna Elvira, Mrs. Anderssen, Carmen, the Mezzo-Soprano in Claude Vivier's *Kopernikus*, and Dryade in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Tanglewood with conductor Christoph von Dohnanyi.

Ms. Hoff won the *Prix Lyrique Allemand* at the 2010 Gala Concert of the *Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques du Canada* and was awarded a concert tour in China in the 2014 auditions. She was chosen as a Caramoor Vocal Rising Star for 2012 and sang also as a part of the New York Festival of Song, about which the New York Times referred to Ms. Hoff as a « Mezzo-Soprano whose voice has both body and beauty ».

Kristin recently performed Ana Sokolovic's “Love Songs” with the Festival de Lanaudière, the Kitchener Open Ears Festival, and in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. She will perform this one-woman opera at the Musée des beaux-arts in Montreal in April 2015.

Ms. Hoff is a recent 1st prize-winner in the NYCO Mozart Vocal Competition. Recently she appeared in recital with *Music Niagara*, the Vancouver Island Chamber Music Festival, the Qualicum Beach concert series, the Silk Purse concert series, among others. In September 2013, Kristin joined Vancouver Opera as a resident young artist and performed the role of Tebaldo in Don Carlo and covered Eboli, Nancy, Mum and Donna Elvira for Vancouver Opera’s main-stage season. Kristin recently debuted with the
Vancouver Island Symphony Orchestra and the Palm Court Light Orchestra. Kristin will also perform Messiaen’s *Harawi* at the Chapelle Historique du Bon-Pasteur this spring.

**Isaiah Bell, tenor**

Canadian-American tenor Isaiah Bell is catching the attention of the public and his peers for his musicianship, unique vocal colour and creativity. He appeared last season as a soloist in concert under Kent Nagano (L’enfance du Christ with l’Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal), Yannick Nézet-Séguin (Beethoven’s Mass in C and Choral Fantasy with l’Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal) and Ivars Taurins (Messiah with the Winnipeg Symphony). The Opéra de Montréal Atelier Lyrique alumnus sang Ernesto (Don Pasquale – Saskatoon Opera), Ferrando (Così fan tutte – Jeunesses Musicales Canada tour of Québec and Ontario) and Nanki-Poo (The Mikado – Winter Opera St. Louis), and finished up the season with Walton’s Façade and Satie songs at Salle Bourgie presented by l’Orchestre symphonique de Montréal. In the summer of 2013, he sang the roles of John and Angel 3 in the American premiere of George Benjamin’s Written on Skin, in a performance conducted by the composer at the Tanglewood Festival. Also at Tanglewood, he starred as the Madwoman in Britten’s Curlew River (directed by Mark Morris) and received rave notices in the New York Times.

Highlights of the 2013-2014 season include Bach’s Mass in B Minor with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, Britten’s Serenade for Horn and Tenor with the Vancouver Island Symphony and Messiah for Toronto’s Amadeus Choir, the Victoria Symphony and a version staged by Against the Grain Theatre in Toronto. Orchestra London audiences will hear him in Mozart’s Requiem and he will be the Evangelist in Bach’s Matthäus Passion for Winnipeg’s Canzona Choir.

He is also an active performer of song literature; last season’s Winterreise with Stephen Ralls followed the Canadian premiere of Alec Roth’s song cycle Seven Elements (Music and Beyond Festival, 2012) at an event hosted by the cycle’s librettist, A Suitable Boy author Vikram Seth. Previously he premiered a song cycle of his own poetry and music, On This Day, as part of Montreal’s Journées d’Arts Sacrés du Plateau, and gave a recital of Satie songs in St. John’s, Newfoundland for broadcast on CBC Radio 2 In Concert. In 2009, in addition to winning first place in voice at the National Music Festival, he received the festival’s Jan Simons Song Interpretation Award for Schumann’s Liederkreis, op. 39.

Mr. Bell has gained particular recognition singing the works of Britten and Bach. His Madwoman (Britten’s Curlew River at City Opera Vancouver) was described as “breathtaking... he sustained an intensity of emotion which never toppled into hysteria” (Review Vancouver), “sung with depth and inspiration” (Opera Canada) and “[sung] fervently with a varied palette and much eloquence” (The Globe and Mail).

He is also the composer and librettist of four operas and a number of song cycles. Isaiah Bell was a member of the Emerging Artist Program of the Calgary Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria’s Young Artists Program, Atelier Lyrique de L’Opéra de Montréal, attended the Universitât Mozarteum in Salzburg and holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Victoria.
Elektra Women's Choir

With a mandate to inspire and lead in the choral art form through excellence in performance and through the creation, exploration and celebration of women’s repertoire, Vancouver’s renowned Elektra Women’s Choir has taken a leadership role in the international classical women’s choir movement.

The choir is known for its adventurous programming, seeking out music written specifically for women and frequently commissioning new works. Its appearances include performances at the distinguished National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association (February 2003 and March 1997), including memorable New York performances at Carnegie Hall, Riverside Church, and Avery Fisher Hall. Elektra was honoured to represent Canada at the Fourth World Symposium on Choral Music in Sydney, Australia (August 1996).

Recent engagements include organising and performing in Welcome the World: A Choral Gala, as part of the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad, hosting Tapestry International festival of women’s choirs in 2009, which featured choirs from Japan, the United States, and BC, and, in 2007, being an invited guest of Festival 500: Sharing the Voices in St. Johns, Newfoundland, where they gave seven performances.

In 2010 the choir once again took first place in the “Equal Voices - Women” category of the National Competition for Canadian Amateur Choirs. Prior to 2009, the choir was awarded first prize for women’s choirs in four consecutive rounds of the biennial CBC National Choral Competition, as well as several major prizes for contemporary music performance.

Ongoing outreach programs are a priority for Elektra: Mira Youth Mentorship (annually), Composer Reading Sessions (every 2 years), Conductor Mentorship Program (every 2 to 3 years), and a Women’s Singing workshop (every 2 years) ensure that Elektra’s music and activities are accessible to all. Each Christmas Elektra welcomes a local children’s choir to sing alongside Elektra and in their own solo spotlight. Elektra participates enthusiastically in shared projects with other arts organizations such as the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, MusicFest Vancouver, and Chor Leoni Men’s Choir.

Elektra has commissioned nearly 60 compositions and arrangements in its 24-year history. The choir has become a valued resource for conductors the world over looking to program the best of Canadian and international repertoire for treble voices. On its website, Elektra houses a permanent repertoire resource featuring all 400 works programmed by the choir to date, over 160 of which have been recorded and are available for sale on iTunes and CD Baby.

Elektra has ten CDs available. Its first CD, Elektra Women's Choir (1992) was nominated for a JUNO award. Chez Nous: Christmas with Elektra was released in December 2010 and features favourite selections from the choir’s popular annual concerts of the same name, as well the re-release of their 1997 recording of Benjamin Britten’s A Ceremony of Carols with harpist Rita Costanzi. The choir’s CDs are available through CD Baby and iTunes and are in constant demand locally, nationally, and internationally. Elektra is frequently heard on CBC radio broadcasts and on NPR in the United States.
The choir was founded in 1987 by co-conductors Morna Edmundson and Diane Loomer, C.M. In 2009 Morna Edmundson was appointed Artistic Director and Diane Loomer, CM, became Conductor Emerita. The choir is honoured to work with an outstanding accompanist, Dr. Stephen Smith.

Chor Leoni
Known internationally and loved locally, Chor Leoni Men’s Choir is recognized as one of the vanguard male vocal ensembles in North America. With stylistic grace and an adventurous spirit, Vancouver’s Singing Lions have enriched and transformed people’s lives through singing for over twenty years. Chor Leoni performs in many languages and styles and genres, always aiming to communicate, engage, and entertain.

The ensemble has been honoured with many awards at the national and international level including five 1st place awards in the CBC National Radio Competition for Amateur Choirs. In July 2012, Chor Leoni won a dozen awards at the 51st Concorso Internazionale di Canto Corale “Seghizzi” (Italy), including 1st place trophies in the 19th and 20th Century categories, two Audience Favourite awards, and second place in the competition’s overall Grand Prix.

Chor Leoni prides itself on its musical ambassadorship for Vancouver and Canada and has performed at major music festivals and concert venues across Canada and the United States. Internationally, the choir has shared its music in Italy, Croatia, Bosnia, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Chor Leoni has been a champion of new music and has commissioned hundreds of pieces for male choir, ranging from pop and folksong arrangements to modern works. The ensemble has commissioned works by notable composers such as Robert Sund, Stephen Chatman, Bruce Sled, Malcolm Forsyth, Jocelyn Morlock, R. Murray Schafer, Bob Chilcott, Steven Smith, and Peter Togni among others.

Believing in the transformative power of male singing, Chor Leoni annually engages young male singers in two successful education programs. PROMYS (PROgram for Mentoring Young Singers) invites some of the most talented male singers from the Lower Mainland to join with Chor Leoni in rehearsals and performances and MYVoice (Mobilizing Young men’s Voices) provides an opportunity for teenage boys to come together in all-male choirs to find their changed voices, develop their confidence, and nurture their interest and commitment to music and culture.

Chor Leoni was founded in 1992 by Diane Loomer C.M. and is currently conducted by Erick Lichte.

For media inquires or questions please contact the VSO’s PR Associate, Caroline Márkos at 604.684.9100 x266 or email at caroline@vancouversymphony.ca