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CONTACT Marelle Reid, 709-746-4936 | marelle@operaontheavalon.com

**Opera on the Avalon to receive \$425,000 from Minister of
Heritage and Languages for its new commission
'Ours' scheduled for debut in OOTA's 2016 season**

ST. JOHN'S, NL (June 23, 2015) — The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages recently announced a grant of \$425,000 in support of 'Ours,' a new commissioned opera for Opera on the Avalon, about the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, written by Juno Award-winning composer John Estacio and playwright Robert Chafe, Artistic Director of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland. This new commission is slated for its world premiere in St. John's on July 1, 2016, marking the 100th anniversary of the battle of Beaumont-Hamel, and as part of Opera on the Avalon's 2016 festival season.

In a letter of announcement regarding the grant, the Honourable Shelly Glover, P.C., M.P., said, ***"In expending this contribution, I am confident that you and your organization will encourage Canadians to instill pride in Canada's heritage by giving Canadians the opportunity to share our experiences, our stories, our myths, and our symbols."***

Opera on the Avalon's Artistic Director, Cheryl Hickman, said, ***"We are delighted by, and very grateful for, this support from the ministry of heritage and languages. The Battle of Beaumont-Hamel is of great importance at this time in history and in our community. This newly commissioned work will offer a chance for audiences to learn about our history during WWI through the power and beauty of opera. In 2016, our vision is to create a piece of art that will be a legacy for all Canadians, to help us honour the memories of those past and to serve as an inspiration for our future."***

The story of *Ours*:

Rather than a retelling of the event itself, *Ours* tracks the social, political, and emotional aftermath of the battle of Beaumont-Hamel through the story of Thomas Nangle. Nangle was posted as chaplain to the Newfoundland Regiment shortly after Beaumont-Hamel and served out the rest of the war with "ours." Following the war, he was made Newfoundland's representative on the Imperial War Graves Commission, where he lead efforts to exhume, identify, and properly bury the remains of much of the lost regiment across Europe. Nangle almost single-handedly raised the money and fostered the political will to establish the existing five war memorial sites across Europe, including our much prized site of Beaumont-Hamel, as well as the Newfoundland National War Memorial on Duckworth and Water Streets here in St. John's.

"Newfoundland and Labrador is steeped in history and Opera on the Avalon is dedicated to transforming that history into art. The commission of Ours is our aim to make art accessible and relevant to as many Canadians as possible while at the same time showcasing and developing the talents of innovative Canadian artists. We believe that opera has a role to play in the cultural fabric of our province, our region, and our country," said Hickman.

A recipient of the National Arts Centre Award for Composers, John Estacio has served as composer in residence for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, the Calgary Opera, and Pro Coro Canada. His residencies have yielded numerous orchestral works. Ours will be Estacio's fourth opera and the first for Chafe.

Of Estacio and Chafe, Hickman said, **"OOTA is very excited to showcase the work and collaboration of two award-winning Canadian artists, composer John Esatcio and playwright Robert Chafe. Both have consistently demonstrated their ability to create new works with universal themes, compelling stories, and exhilarating experiences."**

One of Canada's most successful playwrights, Robert Chafe's work has received critical acclaim across the country. He has written numerous pieces for theatre, including *Tempting Providence*, *Emile's Dream*, *Fear of Flight*, *Afterimage*, and *Butler's Marsh*. Chafe is the recipient of the Governor General's Award for *Afterimage*. His work, *Oil and Water*, about the USS Truxton disaster and survivor Lanier Phillips, premiered in a sold-out run in February 2011 in St. John's, and continues to tour across Canada.

About Opera on the Avalon:

Based in St. John's, Opera on the Avalon is Atlantic Canada's only professional opera company. Led by Artistic Director Cheryl Hickman, the company offers emerging artists the opportunity to explore new and established repertoire alongside distinguished artists.

Information regarding the creative team, as well as casting and design of *Ours* will be released as details become available.

The commission is generously sponsored by the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, The Canadian Council for the Arts, Heritage Canada, the City of St. John's, Telus, the Patten Family Foundation, Cox & Palmer, and Marco.