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**OPERA ON THE AVALON ANNOUNCES COMMISSION OF NEW OPERA BY
COMPOSER JOHN ESTACIO AND PLAYWRIGHT ROBERT CHAFE
Ours Scheduled for Debut in OOTA's 2016 Season**

ST. JOHN'S, NL (May 21, 2014) — **Cheryl Hickman**, artistic director of Opera on the Avalon (OOTA) has today released details of the company's first opera commission, ***Ours***, composed by JUNO nominated Canadian composer **John Estacio** with libretto by Governor General Award-winning playwright **Robert Chafe**. Based on the history of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment with a focus on the Battle of Beaumont Hamel, ***Ours*** will enter into the production stage in 2015 and is scheduled to debut in OOTA's 2016 season to coincide with the 100 year anniversary of the battle of Beaumont Hamel.

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

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. "It is with great pleasure that I embark on the creation of a new opera with librettist **Robert Chafe**. For over a decade, I've enjoyed telling Canadian stories on the opera stage and I am honoured to have the opportunity to tell a story that is of great significance to Newfoundland's rich history. Newfoundland's musical culture is abundant and so to me it is fitting that music play a central role in the telling of the story of Beaumont Hamel. ***Ours*** will be an intimate and personal opera about individuals whose lives were indelibly affected by this battle. Through music and story telling, I hope to honour the sacrifices made by thousands and celebrate the land they loved and called home," said **Estacio**.

Ours will be **Robert Chafe's** first opera. One of Canada's most successful playwrights, **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*. *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 Canada.

"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. Newfoundland

and Labrador is a place 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**.

SYNOPSIS

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. He 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. His hard work didn't come without personal cost though, and following his establishment of the parks, Nangle, disillusioned, left the priesthood and moved to Rhodesia, South Africa, where he married, had children and eventually died in 1972. Though his legacy stands in stone and marble on two continents, his name, one of such unparalleled importance in the history of Newfoundland both during and after the Great War, has all but been lost to popular knowledge.

Ours charts the history of Nangle and of Newfoundland through his attempts to sign up for the regiment at the start of the war, his eventual posting, the time he spent on the front, his wounding at the hands of a sniper, the hard work of finding the lost regiment in the mud fields of France after the war, his establishment of the memorial parks, and his eventual heartbreaking departure from Newfoundland.

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.

This commission is generously sponsored by the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, The Canada Council for the Arts, Telus, the Patten Family Foundation, Cox & Palmer, and Marco.