

# Newsletter • Bulletin

Winter

2004

Hiver

P.O. Box 8347, Main Terminal, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H8 • C.P. 8347, Succursale principale, Ottawa, (Ontario) K1G 3H8

## 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY STARS

by Murray Kitts

There were two stars at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the founding of the National Capital Opera Society.

The first was Maria Knapik who delighted the large audience with a generous program of operatic selections. Her technical skill is very impressive. But more thrilling is her ability to present to the listener a real person in a real situation singing about something that really is important to her. Each number was a mini-performance – and the audience loved it. Maria was assisted at the piano by the excellent Judith Ginsberg and in several of the numbers by flautist Thomas Brawn. The program consisted of the familiar, like the Song to the Moon from Dvorak's *RUSSALKA*, to the unfamiliar, like Mimi's aria from Leoncavallo's *LA BOHÈME*. I'm sure everyone present had a favorite number; I was particularly bowled over by the Siciliana from Verdi's *SICILIAN VESPERS*, which opened the program, and never quite recovered from that experience. Acting as master of ceremonies we were fortunate again to have Dave Stevens now at the NewRO who introduced the operatic numbers and urged those attending to bid on the silent auction, so important for our fund-raising.



The second star of the evening was Bobbi Cain. Let's be honest. Without the dedication and endless work of this seemingly tireless woman the National Capital Opera Society would not still be in

existence today. Despite her struggles with ill health Bobbi has always triumphed and brought the society with her, serving as president of our organization for most of its history. All those who have been contestants for the Brian Law Scholarship, which she instituted, know how indebted they are to her. Of course Bobbi would be the first to acknowledge the help of many people. Sitting right beside her was Gerda Ruckerbauer, one of the longest serving members of the Board and frequent contributor to our galas. Other former di-



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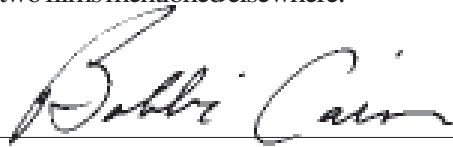
## From the President . . .

Here we are at the beginning of winter and busy preparing for all the festivities we enjoy over the holidays. Don't work too hard and try to have an enjoyable and relaxing time.

What a marvelous time we had as many of us gathered together to celebrate our twentieth anniversary. November 14<sup>th</sup> evening was a joyous night accentuated by a hip of beef in the buffet and by the wonderful singing of our guest soprano, Maria Knapik. Everyone enjoyed her beautiful work as she graced us with sparkling selections from works by Verdi, Puccini, Leoncavello, Moniuszko, Dvorak, Delibes and Lehar. Flautist Thomas Brawn added appropriate highlights, and Judith Ginsburg accompanied. What a fine party we all had!

With such happenings the future appears bright as we forge a path towards a quarter of a century. We have so much to look forward to as we continue our support of young opera artists both in terms of our Brian Law Opera Scholarship and our support of other opera activities such as the Opera Lyra Young Artists Program. My grandson thought that Zeus and his magic grapefruit was most enjoyable and very funny. What a success that presentation was!

To you all – may your holiday season enrich your life and may those of you who love skating and skiing, etc., have a great time. I hope to see you at our two films mentioned elsewhere.



# ATTENTION!!

## ALL NCOS MEMBERS

**It is time to RENEW your membership for 2004!**  
**The NCOS membership year runs from January to December. Please fill in the enclosed form and join us for another year of musical activities!**

### National Capital Opera Society

Board of Directors 2004

#### Executive

President	Bobbi Cain	225-0124
Vice-president	Murray Kitts	830-9827
Secretary	Jean Saldanha	731-2734
Treasurer	Gordon Metcalfe	521-6759

#### Committees

Events	Pat Adamo	729-8518
	Peggy Pflug	1-679-1347
Membership	Jean Saldanha	731-2734
Newsletter	Murray Kitts	830-9827
Publicit	Renate Chartrand	741-3290

#### Members at Large

Dan Leeman 526-9764	Ute Davis 236-3736
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*Opera Alla Pasta — Sunday Afternoon at the Opera*

Note New Date for *THE QUEEN OF SPADES*

February 22, 2004

Tchaikovsky's *THE QUEEN OF SPADES*

Kirov Opera production under Valery Gergiev

April 18, 2004

Verdi's *LA TRAVIATA*

Covent Garden production under Sir Georg Solti

The performance starts at 2.00 P.M. at St. Anthony's Soccer Club Dinner follows.

Reservations required: 225-0124

## 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

(continued from Page 1)

rectors present were Marjorie Clegg, who served as president for two years, Helen Morgan, Lois Harper, and David and Shelagh Williams. All the present directors assisted including treasurer Gordon Metcalfe, attending to money matters, and Renate Chartrand and Jean Saldanha looking after the silent auction. Special thanks to Nora Patsouris for her contribution. Dan Leeman had been there all day helping Bobbi. I think Bobbi's proudest moment came when her grandson, Wesley, presented flowers to the artists.

So that was it – some wonderful music, excellent food and a little nostalgia for some of us. A great way to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



Photos by Klaus Siemsen

## Rossini Mass at St. Mathew's

Rossini's Petite messe solennelle was performed at St. Mathew's Anglican Church on the evening of December 7, 2003. It proved to be a special night! Rossini gained fame as an opera composer but he might be equally famous for abruptly "retiring" when he had reached the pinnacle of his success and was unquestionably the dominant figure in the opera world. He composed no other operatic works after he completed *WILLIAM TELL*, (his 39<sup>th</sup> opera) in 1829. He was 37 at the time. He lived the life of leisure until his death some 40 years later and, although he did compose a number of musical pieces, none were operas. The most noted of his post-operatic compositions were religious in nature and his supreme achievement among these later works is the *PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE*. It was composed when he was 71 years old. It has been said that it is neither "little" nor "solemn" nor particularly liturgical. However, it is a Mass and it definitely is Rossini as it contains some of the most melodious music that only Rossini could write. In fact, he seemed incapable of writing anything that did not abound with beautiful melodies.

The *PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE* was originally composed for 12 voices, two pianos and harmonium. Rossini later orchestrated the work and it has been performed in many variations through the years. At St. Mathew's the accompaniment was provided by a piano and an organ. This worked very well. Rather than 12 voices a choir and four soloists supplied the vocals. The University of Ottawa Choir was superb as were the soloists. The soloists were Maria Knapik, soprano; Julie Nesrallah, mezzo soprano; Pascal Charbonneau, tenor and Luc Lalonde, baritone. The whole ensemble was expertly directed by Laurence Ewashko. The overwhelmingly enthusiastic reaction of the capacity audience matched the mood of the piece itself. It was a joyous success.

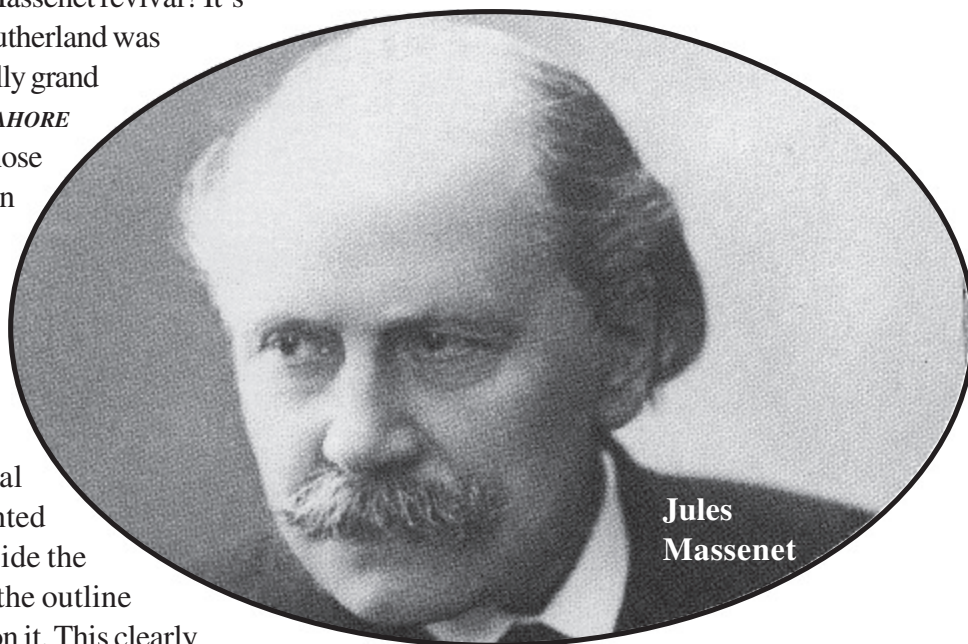
What made this evening particularly special was the fact that all four soloists were former participants in the Brian Law Opera Competition sponsored by NCOS. Here was proof of how valuable all our efforts raising money and holding competitions have been in fostering the careers of talented singers.

# MAGNIFICENT MASSENET

by Murray Kitts

Could we be in the midst of a new Massenet revival? It's been quite a few years that Joan Sutherland was featured in some of Massenet's really grand operas à la Meyerbeer like *LE ROI DE LAHORE* and *ESCLARMONDE*. But these are operas whose effectiveness depends to a large extent on elaborate stagings and huge casts – not the type of opera that producers are looking for these days.

It was a great treat for me to see my first performance of *THAÏS* recently in Montreal, a company première. The co-production by the Opéra de Montréal and Opera Theater of Saint Louis presented a simple, yet very effective, staging. Inside the proscenium arch was another arch, like the outline of a giant eye, with hieroglyphs imposed on it. This clearly established the setting and remained the frame for all 3 acts of the opera. To indicate changes in scene, even changes in mood and intensity of feeling, lighting of all sorts of colours and combinations appeared on the backdrop. Rarely has a lighting designer been able to make such an enormous contribution to a theatrical performance as Guy Simard did in this production.



Jules  
Massenet

The playing of the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal under Bernard Labadie did full justice to Massenet's beautiful score; the famous "Meditation" being given a superb performance. I always find the chorus in Montreal a little small but, as usual, they performed quite well.

In a way this is a two singer opera; however, the supporting cast was quite good. Hélène Guilmette and Ariana Chris were particularly charming as the two slave girls. Paul Charles Clarke handled the tenor rôle of Nicias quite well. The only disappointment was Gregory Atkinson as Palémon.

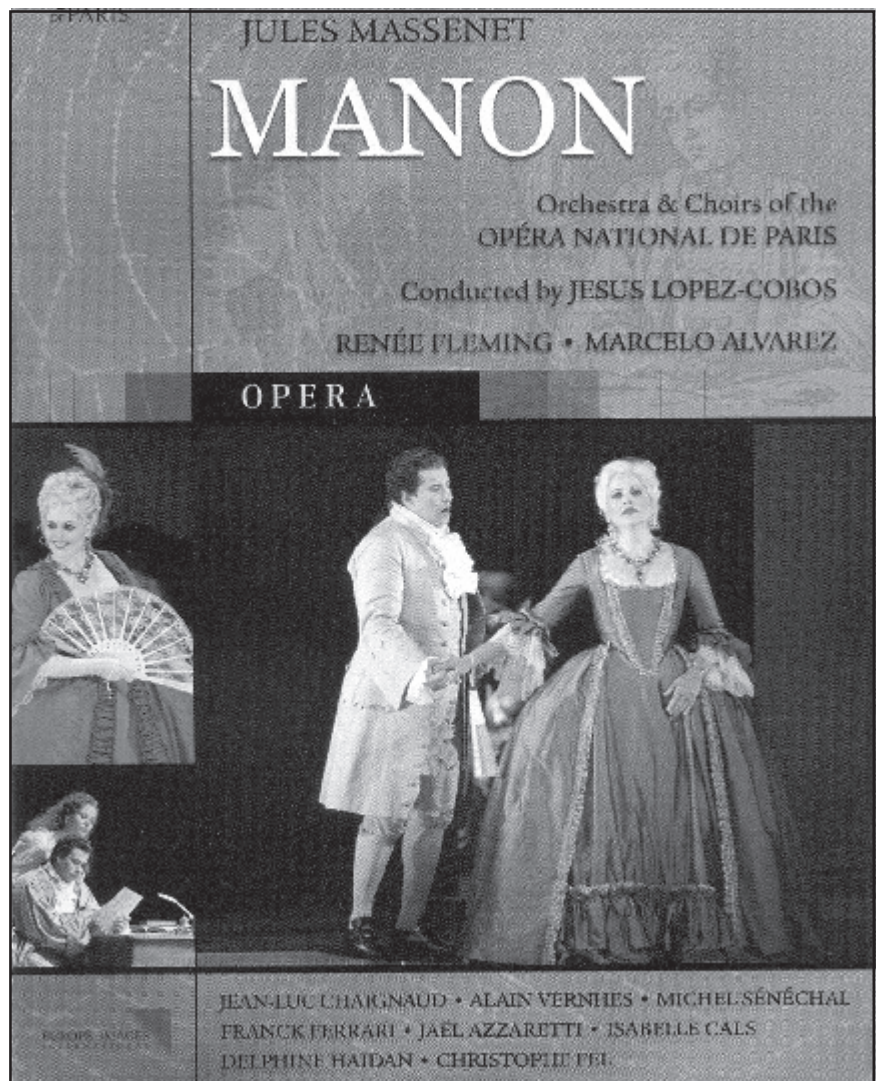
This brings us to the two principals. Having seen and heard Gaetan Laperrière in a number of quite demanding parts I was anticipating a well-sung, rather stogy performance as Athanaël and in this I was not disappointed. Lyne Fortin is an excellent singer and actress but somehow only at times did her characterization really take hold. Perhaps I'm just too used to the recordings of superstars like Beverly Sills and Sherrill Milnes and more recently René Fleming and Thomas Hampson to give these performers on stage a fair hearing.

In some ways the staging by Renaud Doucet did not help the principals. For example, there was so much stage action at the entrance of *Thaïs* that it spoiled the im-



pression she should have made. There was so much groping going on that one wondered whether the monk and the courtesan would wind up the only straight heterosexual couple in Alexandria. Athanaël covers his monk's robes with a garment but leaves exposed a large cross on his chest. This rather removes the surprise when he reveals himself as a monk to Thaïs. Distractions like these subtract from the enjoyment of individual performances. Still the final scene was most moving – opera at its best.

A new DVD from TDK presents *MANON* in a new production recorded in June 2001 at the Opéra Bastille, Paris. I'm happy to report that this production relies mainly on lighting, with a minimum of sets, to present the numerous scenes in the opera. Nothing distracts from the performances of the two principals. Of course Renée Fleming does not look like a sixteen year old – but who cares. She is beautiful and charming and sings like an angel. The Chevalier des Grieux is sung by the new tenor sensation Marcelo Alvarez who seems to be ideal for the part. The supporting cast is excellent, especially the veteran Michel Sénéchal as Guillot de Montfortaine. The Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra National de Paris are conducted splendidly by Jesus Lopez-Cobos. I'm sure that this will be a popular favorite and will encourage other productions like it.



There are many operas by Massenet that I would love to see – the wonderful comedies *CENDRILLON* and *CHÉRUBIN*, the heroic *LE CID*, the great *DON QUICHOTTE*, and the “miracle play” *LE JONGLEUR DE NOTRE-DAME*. All of these have excellent recordings but to be able to see them would be a much greater experience. I expect the next current DVD of a Massenet opera will be the one that is currently being sung at the Met – *WERTHER*. My hope is that these performances will bring a new enthusiasm for Massenet's lesser-known operas.

Incidentally, in doing some research on Massenet on the internet I discovered that the chorus called “Les Disciples de Massenet” are still giving concerts and have a proud history of performing with outstanding musicians and orchestras. Going back almost to my childhood days listening to the CBC I remember that the performance of “O Canada” by this choir was the most stirring I have ever heard.

# Who Is Donna Leon? by Tom McCool

If somebody were taking a poll and asked me who was the most intriguing person in opera, I would cast my vote not for Fleming, Heppner, Pavarotti or one of those famous personalities, but for Donna Leon. So, who is Donna Leon? She is the impresario of an opera company in Venice, **II Complesso Barocco**, that stages obscure Baroque operas. She is particularly partial to the works of Handel. Now anyone who manages an opera company knows that balancing the books is a near impossible task. What if you were staging not *Carmen* or *La Bohème* but obscure Baroque operas? However, the opera company has enjoyed success in Venice. But it is in Germany and German-speaking countries where **II Complesso Barocco** has experienced tremendous popularity. In addition to her management responsibilities Ms. Leon has also written a libretto for a comic opera that was so promising that it influenced the legendary German mezzo-soprano, Brigitte Fassbaender, to come out of retirement to sing one of the roles and to direct the opera. The opera, *Dona Gallino*, was a great success when it was staged in Innsbruck. Despite the popularity of the productions, and increasing CD sales, finances have remained a challenge for the company. Consequently, it not surprising that Ms. Leon has other jobs that allow her to indulge her passion for opera.

Donna Leon is a teacher, an English literature professor, whose specialty is 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists. She teaches for the University of Maryland Extension Department in Italy, which serves the military and their families stationed at the large N. A.T. O. base at Aviano and the U.S. military base at Vincenza. Both are near Venice. Ms. Leon, a New Jersey native, has taught in places such as Switzerland, Iran, China and Saudi Arabia. But Venice is the place where she has found a home. She has been there for over 20 years and, now as the owner of a recently purchased Venetian apartment, will probably never leave. This is true even though she has to climb 62 steps to reach her front door. Her passion for Venice is as apparent as her love of opera and literature.

More importantly, especially in terms of income, Donna Leon is also the writer of murder mysteries. This aspect of her career came about entirely by accident. One evening in 1990 at *La Fenice*, the fabled opera house in Venice, Ms. Leon and a friend were discussing their mutual dislike of a famous conductor. The decision was made to “kill him off”. Although she refuses to identify him, he was a brilliant, arrogant maestro with a reputation as a serial womanizer and a background that resulted in him being suspected as a Nazi sympathizer. He also happened to be the most renowned conductor of his time. Guess

who! He became the victim in Leon’s first book, *Death at La Fenice*, when he was poisoned during an intermission of *La Traviata* in a performance that he was conducting. Since that time she has written 12 more murder mysteries, one a year. Not surprisingly, opera seeps into many of the plots. All take place in Venice and all feature Commisario Guido Brunetti. Brunetti, although he has a necessary hard edge, is undoubtedly the most likeable of detectives. He is a very human down-to-earth family man with a wife and two teenage children who live in a Venetian apartment that can be reached by climbing 62 steps. His wife, the feisty Paolo, is a university literature professor who enjoys nothing more than having the time to read a Henry James novel. This also happens to be one of Ms. Leon’s abiding pleasures.

Not unexpectedly for someone who writes about murder, corruption and other assorted forms of mayhem Ms. Leon has a definite dark outlook on life. It has been said of her in reference to her connection with Venice: “She came, she stayed and then she started killing people.” Although she claims that she knows little about crime she does write with surprising authority. What makes this even more ironic is that Venice is a relatively crime-free city. Except in Leon’s novels! Perhaps her opera background explains this.

A most appealing aspect of these novels is the cast of minor characters who appear in most of the books. Although they do not play a major part in any one book they give a sense of continuity to the series. Best of all is the description of the domestic dynamics of Brunetti’s family. Also of interest is Brunetti’s strained relationship with his blockheaded superior, Signor Patta, and his much more congenial rapport with Patta’s secretary, the captivating Signorina Elletra.

Donna Leon’s books have been spectacularly successful. They have been translated into more than 20 languages. (Oddly, Italian is not one of those.) The books are most popular in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Many of the titles have been made into specials for German television. In the United States, where she has just recently acquired a publisher, she has a devoted and growing following that delights in the practice of reading the next title in manuscript before it is published. Many have already read the 13th title (*Doctored Evidence*) which is not scheduled for publication until later this year.

All 12 of Ms. Leon’s published books are available at the Ottawa Public Library. Even if you don’t like murder mysteries, you could like these. For sure, you will like Commisario Guido Brunetti. Furthermore, there is a wealth of information on Donna Leon and her books on the Internet.

# SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE OPERA

## TEXACO-METROPOLITAN OPERA RADIO BROADCAST SEASON 2004 SCHEDULE



<a href="#">January 10</a>	Jules Massenet	<b>Werther</b>	1:30
<a href="#">January 17</a>	Franz Lehár	<b>The Merry Widow</b>	1:30
<a href="#">January 24</a>	Giacomo Puccini	<b>Madama Butterfly</b>	1:30
<a href="#">January 31</a>	Modest Mussorgsky	<b>Boris Godunov</b>	1:00
<a href="#">February 7</a>	Giuseppe Verdi	<b>Rigoletto</b>	1:30
<a href="#">February 14</a>	Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	<b>The Queen of Spades</b>	1:30
<a href="#">February 21</a>	Igor Stravinsky	<b>Stravinsky</b>	
	Le Sacre du Printemps	Le Rossignol	Oedipus Rex 1:30
<a href="#">February 28</a>	Gioachino Rossini	<b>L'Italiana in Algeri</b>	1:30
<a href="#">March 6</a>	Giuseppe Verdi	<b>La Traviata</b>	1:30
<a href="#">March 13</a>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	<b>Don Giovanni</b>	1:30
<a href="#">March 20</a>	Richard Wagner	<b>Das Rheingold</b>	1:30
<a href="#">March 27</a>	Richard Strauss	<b>Salome</b>	1:30
<a href="#">April 3</a>	Richard Wagner	<b>Die Walküre</b>	12:30
<a href="#">April 10</a>	Giuseppe Verdi	<b>Nabucco</b>	1:30
<a href="#">April 17</a>	Richard Wagner	<b>Siegfried</b>	12:00
<a href="#">April 24</a>	Richard Wagner	<b>Götterdämmerung</b>	12:00

## Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

### Definitely the Opera

January 20 Mozart's *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*

February 10 Puccini's *TURANDOT*

March 9 Strauss' *DER ROSENKAVALIER*

### Opera Insights

March 16 Verdi's *Rigoletto*

All performances begin at 7 pm at the National Library

Additional Information: [www.operalyra.ca](http://www.operalyra.ca)

# Opera Within Reach

## OTTAWA

### National Arts Centre

THOMAS HAMPSON Feb 15

SUSAN GRAHAM Feb 18 & 19

THE CREATION March 10 & 11

Information: 947-7000 [www.nac-cna.ca](http://www.nac-cna.ca)

### Opera Lyra Ottawa

Black & White Opera Soirée Feb 17, 2001

RIGOLETTO April 13, 15, 17 & 20

Information: 233-9200 [www.operalyra.ca](http://www.operalyra.ca)

### CentrepoinTE Theatre

### Orpheus Society

JOHNNY BELINDA FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 1-9

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN JUNE 4 - 12

Information: 727-6650 [www.orpheus-theatre.on.ca](http://www.orpheus-theatre.on.ca)

### Savoy Society

THE MIKADO April 12-20

Information: 825-5855 [www.savoyociety.org](http://www.savoyociety.org)

## MONTREAL

### L'Opéra de Montréal

LA BOHEME by Puccini

Jan 31 Feb 5, 7, 9, 11, & 14

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE by Bartok &

ERWARTUNG by Schoenberg

March 13, 18, 29, 24, & 27

THE MERRY WIDOW by Lehar

May 29 June 3, 5, 7, 9 & 12

Information: 1-514-985-2258 [www.operademontreal.com](http://www.operademontreal.com)

## TORONTO

### Canadian Opera Company

FALSTAFF by Verdi

Jan 22, 25, 27, 30 Feb 4 & 7

TURANDOT by Puccini

Jan 21, 24, 29 Feb 1, 3 & 6

RIGOLETTO by Verdi

April 7, 10, 13, 16, 18, 22 & 24

DIE WALKURE by Wagner

April 4, 8, 14, 17, 20 & 23

Information: 1-800-250-4653 [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca)

### Royal Opera Canada

The Magic Flute by Mozart

February, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26 & 28

March 2, 4, 6, 11 & 13

The Mikado by Gilbert & Sullivan

March 9, 19 & 11

Information: 1-866-322-0456 [www.royaloperacanada.com](http://www.royaloperacanada.com)