

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Concours d'opera Brian Law

2017

Brian Law Opera Competition



Winners of the 2017 Brian Law Opera Competition

\$5,000 1st prize: Soprano **Jennifer Olenic**

\$3,000 2nd prize: Bass-baritone **Joel Allison**

\$1,000 3rd prize: Soprano **Jeanine Williams**

The three other finalists, soprano **Carolyn Beaudoin**, baritone **Ryan Hofman** and mezzo-soprano **Danielle Vaillancourt** were each awarded \$500.

The 2017 Brian Law Opera Competition

by Ute Davis

As far as I am aware the 13th Brian Law Opera Competition brought no bad luck! Instead, a large audience was treated to an excellent evening's entertainment by six talented young finalists. The proceedings were driven smoothly, but at a good pace, by **Laurence Wall**, the well-known voice of CBC Ottawa radio, who is not only skilful but is no novice to musical events. He read a letter of congratulation from our patron, **Gerald Finley**, currently performing in Berlin. This was full of advice and encouragement for the singers and some for the audience.

The judges were then introduced. **Joanne Kolomyjec**, soprano, has enjoyed a distinguished operatic career, performing often in Ottawa as well as throughout Canada and overseas. **Dr. James Wright** is a widely known musicologist and composer and is Dean of Music at Carleton University. We were delighted to welcome back the famous musicologist, radio personality, opera specialist, diction coach and administrator **Richard Turp** to chair the judging panel.

The traditional format was followed, with each candidate singing three arias, one being preceded by recitative. Overall the quality of performance was very high, not only vocal performance but stage presence and acting ability as well. I was also impressed by the five different piano accompanists, most of whom I had not previously heard. The delicately empathic accompaniments by **Julien Leblanc** were particularly pleasing. The three competing singers denied a major prize each gained experience in on-stage competition, exposure to a large Ottawa audience, and a cheque for \$500.

The third prize was won by soprano **Jeanine Williams** who sang "Come scolio" (*Così fan tutte*; Mozart), "Meine Lippen sie küssen so heiß" (*Gliuditta*; Franz Lehar) and "Song to the Moon" (*Rusalka*; Dvorak). Her warm but silvery clear soprano was impressive and her diction in the first two pieces was good. I am not qualified to comment on her Czech but she evidently pleased Ms. **Kolomyjec** who recorded this piece beautifully many years ago. It seems we all have a CD copy of it.

Second prize went to popular Ottawa bass-baritone **Joel Allison** who sang "Se vuol ballare" (*Le nozze di Figaro*; Mozart), "Sincille, diamant"

(*Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; Offenbach) and "Schweig, schweig, damit dich niemand warnt!" (*Der Freischütz*; Carl Maria von Weber). His range of excellent vocal quality was well displayed, although his French diction still needs work.

First prize was most deservedly awarded to **Jennifer Olenic**. Although raised in Ottawa, Jennifer received much of her music education in Georgia, USA. Since her return to Ottawa she has studied with Yoriko Tanno and Luis Comacho and has changed her "Fach" from mezzo to soprano. She sang "dove sono i bei momenti" (*Le nozze di Figaro*; Mozart), "Einsam in trüben Tagen" (*Lohengrin*; Wagner), and "Visi d'arte" (*Tosca*; Puccini). Each showed her smooth and honeyed tone with good diction and excellent control. For me Elsa's aria from *Lohengrin* and the final "Visi d'arte" transmitted so much pathos and emotion that the prize was hers. I had decided she would be our next Canadian Wagnerian specialist when she appeared to confirm my thoughts by telling me post competition that she is going to Germany to improve her German.

Following these performances, **Murray Kitts**, as president of the National Capital Opera Society, read the traditional communication from **Brian Law**, a letter from Christchurch, New Zealand, as witty and outspoken as ever. Brian gave our event his blessing with comments, musical and political, on the present state of affairs "as viewed from the Antipodes".

Richard Turp then announced the competition winners, stressing the value of the event to all participants. **Laurence Wall** brought the proceedings to a conclusion and we adjourned to a tasty buffet provided by the ladies of NCOS and the former Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild. The audience enjoyed an opportunity to meet the competitors and the singers were given a chance to talk to the judges. Southminster United Church was well-filled by a large audience. In this respect the NCOS benefited by the event being part of the "Concerts By The Canal" Series which is admirably run by Music Director **Roland Graham**. This is an advantage of the location but there is the disadvantage of "muddy" acoustics as noted by both singers and audience.

The Finalists



A Message from Gerald Finley

Hello from Berlin!

As Honorary Patron of the National Capital Opera Society, it is my great privilege once again to say “bravo” to the finalists tonight. It is very heartening that there continues to be a supply of young singers who have reached the moment when they share their art for a discerning audience, and the audience can enjoy the accomplishment and pleasure of hearing young voices performing the very best of repertoire.

What lies ahead for these young performers? Certainly, there is a challenging world out there, with strange political and social upheavals in many parts of the world. The world of live opera itself is being transformed from an art form which was once a preserve of musicians and voice lovers, into one which is being merged with technology and directorial visions beyond what many audience members could dare to imagine, and sometimes can hardly comprehend. It is trying to cope with the reduction of music being offered in schools and the instant availability of many “historic” performances on the Internet and through ‘on demand’ transmissions. What chance do the young ones have in all this?

My hope for the performers tonight is that they remember that the singing voice is a conveyor of the soul. The freedom and spontaneity of the sound is what you will spend your entire

life perfecting, so that the music flows from you like the purest water, nourishing those lucky audience souls who have given up their precious time to hear you, live. Whatever your strengths and weaknesses, sharing your deepest and most tender emotion through singing is the greatest blessing you can offer. You can make people forget their life issues with your beautiful sound, and transport them.

Take every opportunity to sing, and perform live. It will teach you more than anything you will learn in the studio.

And to the audience, please keep up your support of these young ones by attending live singing events wherever they may be, you will invest more than you may realise and the dividends for the opera world will be great. Know that even us hardened professionals want to see you at live performances – the best sound in the best acoustics can never be relayed. You are already experiencing the next generation live, and for that, I am very grateful.

I am very proud to report that my own “next generation of singing”, at two years old, is already beginning to sing in tune, and diction is immaculate, particularly in *Baa, baa black sheep!*

Have a wonderful evening!



Luis
Camacho

Jennifer
Olenic



Jennifer Olenic with pianist/coach Luis Camacho
and teacher Yoriko Tanno



Jennifer Olenic with NCOS President
Murray Kitts



Thomas Annand

Joel Allison



**Maxime
Dubé-Malenfant**

**Jeanine
Williams**



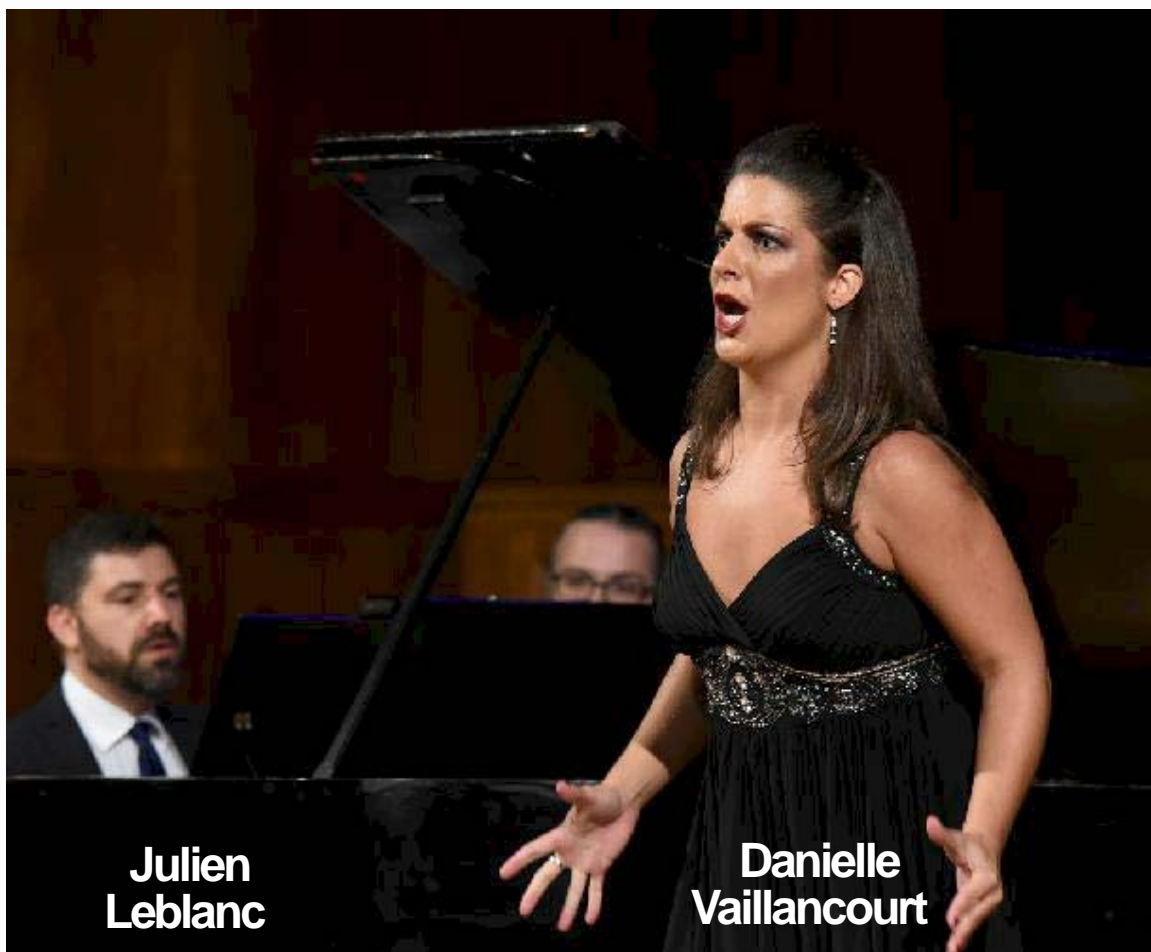
**Julien
Leblanc**

**Carolyn
Beaudoin**



**Andrew
Ager**

**Ryan
Hofman**



**Julien
Leblanc**

**Danielle
Vaillancourt**

The Judges



**James
Wright**

**Joanne
Kolomyjec**



**Richard
Turp**

Antipodean Greetings from Brian Law

Tena koto, Tena koto, Tena koto katoa.. I thought Lawrence should have a go at it, Rob mastered it Eventually.

After many years of suffering through these missals, a few of you may recall that this is our formal Maori greeting, "Thrice welcome to you all". This is not to be confused with the Haka - a quite different beast. Canadians, not being a fanatical rugby nation, perhaps you don't know what a haka is? Well don't look to me for an explanation. After over a quarter century living in New Zealand and watching the All Blacks play all their rugby matches, each game preceded by a haka. It still confuses me. It fills me with terror and giggles in equal measure.

So you have a new Prime Minister Trudeau! Fantastic. I have a vivid memory of Justin on Canada Day in 1977. At the traditional ceremony on Parliament Hill, against all protocol, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had chosen not to sit on the stage with the dignitaries, but on the ground in the crowds with Justin and Sacha. After the ceremony, at the inebriatedly boring *de rigueur* reception in the West Block, I was chatting to him (he was a great supporter of the arts and I'd got to meet him on many occasions) when he suddenly said "Let's get out of here" and, whisking his boys and an embarrassed me out through the kitchen door, he jumped into his awaiting open topped Mercedes 280 SL and drove us round the corner to the fun fare set up in Major's Hill Park. (The world and security was very different 40 years ago!). There he proceeded to leap onto one of the trampolines and give a demonstration of outrageous somersaults and back flips to the surprise and delight of the adoring crowds (Trudeaumania was alive and well).

I remember Justin and Sacha being completely inured and oblivious to the gawking onlookers, and, for that matter, to their father's ostentatious and perilous cavorting and bouncing over their heads. I'm sure it was experiences such as this that has given Justin the *sang froid* to meet and deal with your new neighbour to the south. It was Pierre who once observed "living next to America is like being in bed with an elephant, you're terrified it's going to roll over". I wonder what he would say now?

I watch with envy and admiration as the NAC morphs into the re-faceted and newly polished jewel of the City. Here in Christchurch, 6 years after the earthquakes, the new city is beginning to take some shape. We are apparently a third of the way through the rebuild and some form and design is emerging. Buildings are now going up, where as for the last few years they have been coming down. The City Fathers have at last decided to restore the Town Hall – the City's acoustically splendid concert hall and to rebuild the cathedral to its original design. To me these decisions seem somewhat devoid of imagination. I'm not convinced that trying to precisely reconstruct such iconic buildings is ever really successful, but we shall see..... in a decade or so.

I am so impressed with the ongoing success of the BLOC. The professional triumphs of past winners proves time and time again its great value and importance.

I have enormous admiration for the dedication and energy that so many of you devote to the development and success of this remarkable competition. I am humbled and honoured to have my name still on the masthead. I do think though, that maybe you should think about replacing my name. The Gerald Finley Opera Competition, for example, would have much more kudos and relevance for young contemporary singers. This letter serves to let you know I would be most understanding and supportive of such a change if on reflection you thought it a progressive move. My ego will not be dented! You could put "Formerly the Brian Law Opera" in small type at the bottom of the page.

My congratulations to the winner and the finalists. I will, from afar, follow with great interest the careers of these young singers, (isn't Philippe Sly doing splendidly!) as they progress into the challenging world of opera.

My very best wishes to all you loyal enthusiasts and supporters of opera in Ottawa. Ottawa, this most beautiful of Cities, still my spiritual home and still very dear to my heart.

Congratulations and thanks to everyone who made this year's BLOC such a success: Murray Kitts, Mark and Lesley Robinson, Michael and Ute Davis, Vera-Lee Nelson, Jim Burgess, the preliminary round judges and our final round judges. Thanks also to those who donated prizes and to the ladies of NCOS and the former Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild for the buffet. Special thanks to Southminster United Church Music Director Roland Graham who encouraged us to be part of the "Concerts By The Canal" Series and to Laurence Wall who MC'd the evening's activities.

Above all we should thank the singers who have worked so hard to achieve such high standards with the help and inspiration of their teachers and vocal coaches, as well as their excellent pianists.

All photos are by Klaus S. Some photos have been edited to fit the space available. This special edition newsletter was prepared by NCOS newsletter editor David Williams.