

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Summer 2023

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Été 20123

President's Report

National Capital Opera Society

Annual General Meeting 2023

Last year was a busy year with progress on all our activities. Preparations for our opera competition are on track for October 14th 2023. We have increased the prize money to a record \$23,000, opened the competition up to all Canadians and it will now be known as the National Capital Opera Competition. As usual we are asking for volunteers to help manage the event.

We continued to meet via zoom with good feedback. We saw Cavalleria rusticana, The Immortal Kaschkey and Il tobarro. Lesley Robinson gave an interesting presentation comparing opera productions.

Zoom has helped us through the pandemic to stay connected. I believe it is time to return to face-toface meetings. However, this has been challenging. I am looking for a venue which is inexpensive, accessible, has parking and where we can watch operas.

David Williams, editor of our newsletter, has done an excellent job in publishing our quarterly newsletter. Live opera has returned and yet we are still below the pre-pandemic level of newsletter contributions. We welcome additional articles. Our thanks go out to David and his contributors.

Jim Burgess, manager of our website, has done an excellent job of updating our website as requested. I appreciate all Jim's time and effort. Jim and I have decided that it is time to upgrade the content management system of our website. After a preliminary investigation, this is no small task and we plan this upgrade for 2024.

The 2022 Financial Report shows that we have money in the bank and no debt. We are in good shape to hold future competitions. The first prize will be named after Tom McCool, following his generous estate gift. The second prize has been sponsored by our past President, Murray Kitts. The third prize has been sponsored by Board Director, Carole Stelmack. Thank you, Murray and Carole, for your generous gifts.

Finally, I wish to thank all our members for their participation and for all their contributions.

Mark Robinson

Magical Production of Don Giovanni at the NAC
By Mark Robinson



Miriam Khalil and Elliott Madore

photo by Curtis Perry

The National Arts Centre Orchestra in collaboration with the Banff Center for Arts and Creativity presented Mozart's Don Giovanni to two sold-out audiences. This was described as an opera-in-concert production. In my mind, it lacked for nothing. It did not matter that there were no costumes and no scenery. It was pure joy! If this is how we can afford opera in Ottawa, then so be it.

I believe that the joint leadership of Alexander Shelley and Joel Ivany were responsible for making this performance accessible to all audiences and for the magical chemistry on the stage. It was great to see a broad cross-section of our community in attendance which is encouraging for the future of opera.

The story was told by a superstar cast of soloists and Ottawa's Ewashko Singers and beautifully accompanied by the world class NAC Orchestra. The modern-day production was full of humor without forgetting about the unacceptability of the Don's behaviour.

A lot of Mozart's beautiful music was cut from the production. This was to keep the story moving forward and shorten the running time in line with today's audience expectations.

As I was leaving, I heard an usher say "Isn't it wonderful to hear opera again in Southam Hall."

NY Times Article: What Opera Singers Gained, and Lost, Performing While Pregnant

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/28/arts/music/women-pregnancy-opera-classical-music.html>

The New York times recently published an interesting article on the challenges and benefits of performing Opera when pregnant. Written by Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim and published on June 28, 2023.

On one hand Sacha Cooke was removed from productions and on the other Kathryn Lewek said "By the second trimester, I felt as if I was performing on steroids. Everything was so easy. High notes just came shooting out of me." Check it out!

A Midsummer Night's Fairy Tale by Lesley Robinson

The uOttawa Opera Ensemble treated us to a wonderful afternoon of celebration of English music and theatre with this delightful compilation of works of Henry Purcell and Benjamin Britten, based on Shakespeare's enchanting tale of love and mischief.

The first half of the programme consisted of excerpts from Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, written nearly a century after Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed. Nevertheless, the play was already a well known classic. Instead of setting the original text to music, Purcell composed music for a series of masques, related only metaphorically to the play, interspersed with scenes using Shakespeare's spoken dialogue. On this occasion, the musical excerpts were performed without the mingled dialogue and the first half of the production, entitled *The Magic and Mischief of the Forest* concentrated on the experience of the human lovers in the forest, who are manipulated by the actions of the fairies, playing out their own domestic intrigue.

The second part of the presentation contained music from Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Britten was particularly enamoured of Purcell's music, so it is fitting for excerpts from these works, separated by nearly 300 years, to be performed together. Part two of the presentation is entitled "Wedding Celebration at the Palace" and contains the wonderful comic play within a play. Britten used Shakespeare's words for the libretto and this section follows the play more closely than Purcell's musical masques do without dialogue.

The singers doubled up on roles and with this size of an ensemble it would be hard to pick out individual performances, so here is the full cast:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Juno/Peaseblossom | Ally Downes |
| Phoebus/Flute (Thisby) | Ian Solomon |
| Helena/Spring | Lauren Reisig |
| Lysander/Summer | Liam McColgan |
| Hermia/Autumn | Gabriela Comeau Gort |
| Demetrius | Matthias MarkGeorge |
| Bottom (Pyramus)/Winter | Philip Lukic |
| Oberon | Amanda Lopez |
| Titania | Neha Natarajan |
| Puck | Cameron Hunter |
| Changeling/Cobweb | Krystal King |
| Songster of the air fairy/Snug (Lion) | Walid Jeddou |
| Night/Mustardseed | Jessica Green |
| Mystery/Moth | Jessy Lindsay |
| Secrecy/Hippolyta | Katie Cruickshank |
| Sleep/Quince (Prologue) | Kyle Simpson |
| Theseus | Oleksii Fishchuk* |
| Snout (Wall) | Tony Bittar* |
| Starveling (Moonshine) | Alexis Poirier* |

* Guest Singer



Delighted cast members join in the applause

Look out for these names in the future. Musical accompaniment was provided by pianist and Musical Director, Judith Ginsburg and direction by Stage Director Kathi Langston. This was overall a joyful and magical afternoon.

OPEROttAWA PERFORMS HANDEL'S MOST BELOVED OPERA "ALCINA"**Review by Charles L. Taylor**

On Sunday afternoon March 5th the soloists, chorus and orchestra of OperaOttawa performed a spectacular presentation of Handel's ALCINA. With a plot that encompasses love triangles, sorcery, magical spells, disguise and intrigue it is no wonder that the audience of over 100 music and opera lovers gave a huge ovation at the conclusion. Despite making many cuts to the recitatives the opera still ran three hours, but the energy of the performers led by OperaOttawa Artistic Director and Conductor Norman E. Brown kept the tension and power to the very end.

Alcina is an opera about love and passion - Bradamante (disguised as Ricciardo) seeking her lover Ruggiero - Alcina casting love spells on Ruggiero seems to be winning - Morgana falls for Ruggiero (not realizing he is really a woman in disguise). Oronte who is besotted with Morgana challenges Ruggiero to a duel. Oberto, who is seeking his father, is caught up in the intrigue, and Handel with clever and very dramatic music conveys the various mood swings and tensions perfectly. The soloists, the chorus and the orchestra delivered Handel's music with convincing musicality.

Erinne-Colleen Laurin as Alcina sang a tour de force interpretation of the role, shifting with the music from a fierce evil sorceress, to a jealous woman, to a conquered Queen, to a defeated lover. As Oronte, tenor Alexander Cappellazzo not only demonstrated great vocal flexibility but displayed great acting in his arias, showing his understanding of his role. Carole Portelance as Bradamante, displayed amazing vocal agility in her arias, with a rich and resonant mezzo voice, showing a range of emotions from jealousy, to anger, to forgiveness. As Oberto, the young lad, Kathleen Radke truly sang up a storm displaying a youthful swagger in movement and singing. Morgan Strickland as Morgana sang with a beautiful tone and ended Act One with a fiery interpretation of "Tornami Vagheggiar" (come back to me, wanderer) which she sings to Ruggiero (Bradamante) who is fleeing the curse of the jealous Alcina. Melisso, the former tutor of Ruggiero, was sung by Norman E. Brown (when not conducting) in a convincing and strong delivery showing his rich timbre of sound and range and excellent use of ornaments. The cast was completed by Marie Lyne Tremblay singing Ruggiero. The soloists were costumed in appropriate attire, and as an ensemble were in top form. The OperaOttawa chorus sang with beautiful blend, strong clear diction and magnificent phrasing. The Opera Ottawa chamber orchestra, conducted with precision and clarity by Norman E. Brown, provided excellent support to the singers, really shone in the overture and the many dance movements (special mention for Baroque flavouring to Gerard Nieuwenhuis for his virtuoso recorder playing and to Jack Hui Litster on percussion). More praise should be given to two members of the orchestra for outstanding obbligato solo playing in arias - Reiko Lokker on violin, and Steven Smith on cello. High praise as well to Frederic Lacroix on piano continuo and Steven E. Smith on cello for excellent playing during the many recitatives. Overall, this was a performance not to have been missed. Certainly the best in opera happening in Ottawa this year.

OperaOttawa has certainly grown in ten years, and looking ahead to its 11th Season the opera lovers in and around Ottawa have much greatness to look forward to - A full season including SUOR ANGELICA (September 17), MAGIC FLUTE (November 26) and a world premiere REQUIEM (by resident composer Hui Litster) (March 10, 2024). All with soloists, chorus and the OperaOttawa Orchestra.

With the demise of Opera Lyra, and then of Pellegrini Opera, OperaOttawa has most definitely stepped up to fill the void. Is it grand opera at the NAC - No. Is it fully staged - No, just semi-staged, often with costumes and props. Are the soloists world class - No. But the soloists are local talent, many of whom have graced the major stages in Canada, and rival soloists in many major companies around. OperaOttawa is still a young company, operating on a small very fragile budget that relies heavily on ticket sales. If you love opera, I encourage you to give your support to OperaOttawa, and play a major role in its continued existence and growth. The future looks bright for opera in Ottawa with such a vibrant company.

Handel's Resurrection at Opera Atelier by Lesley Robinson

Toronto's Opera Atelier made it through pandemic restrictions by virtue of innovation and adaptation. The company complied scrupulously with COVID protocols, protecting both artists and audiences, whilst still managing to find ways to continue to deliver the usual polished and stunning content. In 1708 Handel experienced challenges for the premiere of his work *The Resurrection* because of restrictions on what could be performed during Lent in Rome at the time. Handel's solution was to present his piece as a religious oratorio in a ballroom of a palace instead of in a theatre. Faced with restrictions of a different sort, Opera Atelier moved the performance to Saint Lawrence Hall, where it was filmed for dissemination online.

In April 2023 Opera Atelier's production of *The Resurrection* returned to the live stage at Koerner Hall and the company was able to reassemble all the original cast of the 2020 production. The resurrection of the piece provided all the final joy and triumph of the original subject matter. It was a special thrill to see coArtistic Director Marshall Pynkoski leap to the stage to deliver his customary introduction with all his regular verve and enthusiasm and we knew we were in for a treat, once again fully appreciating the difference between a recorded and a live performance. As the audience, we were part of the experience.

The set differed from what we have come to expect from designer, Gerard Gauci. Instead of the usual sumptuous backdrops, Gauci created a three-dimensional framework for the action to unfold in the unusual setting of a concert hall rather than a theatre. Much of the action involves a debate between good and evil in the forms of the fingerwagging, moralistic Angel, portrayed with playful humour by soprano Carla Huhtanen and the loudmouthed, histrionic Lucifer whose ultimate frustrated defeat is rendered with gusto by the charming bassbaritone Douglas Williams. These two take up positions for their debate at opposing podiums.

Mezzo soprano Allyson McHardy reprised her role of Cleophas from the filmed version and two of Opera Atelier's stalwarts, tenor Colin Ainsworth and soprano Meghan Lindsay (2013 Brian Law Opera Competition winner) returned in the roles of Saint John and Mary Magdalene. Meghan's emotional performance was a show stealer.

Of course, no Opera Atelier production would be complete without the grace and elegance of the Opera Atelier Ballet, choreographed with finesse and aplomb by coArtistic Director Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg and indeed the refined artistry of the musicians of Tafelmusik, conducted by David Fallis.

Opera Atelier is well and truly back live for us to enjoy!



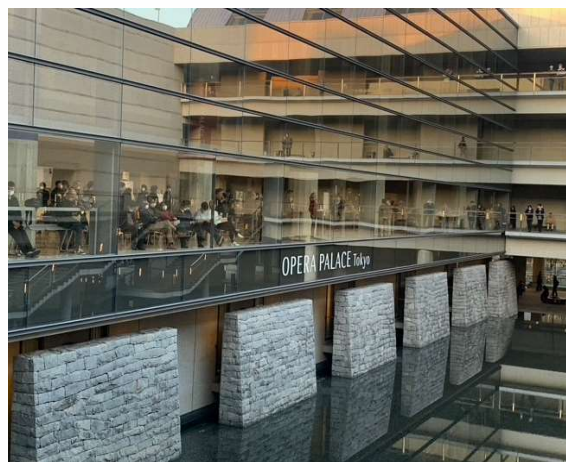
Carla Huhtanen Allyson McHardy Meghan Lindsay Colin Ainsworth Douglas Williams

Wagner in Tokyo by Lesley Robinson

Tannhäuser by Richard Wagner New National Theatre, Tokyo

CAST

Hermann: TSUMAYA Hidekazu (Bass)
 Tannhäuser: Stephen GOULD (American Tenor)
 Wolfram von Eschenbach: David STOUT (British Baritone)
 Walther von der Vogelweide: SUZUKI (Tenor)
 Biterolf: AOYAMA Takashi (Bassbaritone)
 Heinrich der Schreiber: IMAO Shigeru (Tenor)
 Reinmar von Zweter: GOTO Kazuma (Bass)
 Elisabeth: Sabina CVILAK (Slovenian Soprano)
 Venus: Eglė ŠIDLAUSKAITĖ (Lithuanian Mezzosoprano)
 A young shepherd: MAEKAWA Yoriko
 Four noble pages: WADA Shihori, KOMIYAMA Yukiko,
 HANAFUSA Eriko, NAGASAWA Miki
 Chorus: New National Theatre Chorus
 Ballet: Tokyo City Ballet
 Orchestra: Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alejo PÉREZ



When we knew we were going to be in Tokyo for a few days, we decided we had to find out what was on at the opera house. It turned out that there was a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* scheduled for when we would be there. We wondered what a Japanese performance of Wagner would be like, although some of the principal singers were European and, thankfully, the surtitles were in English as well as Japanese!

We found the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall and had to be redirected to the Opera Palace, housed in the New National Theatre, Tokyo all rather confusing, but close enough together that we were able to pick up our tickets and find our seats in time for curtain up. Interestingly, along with the usual announcements to silence cell phones etc., we were warned of the inclusion in the COVID protocol of the prohibition against shouts of bravo or cheering.

This was a revival of a 2007/2008 production by German director HansPeter Lehmann, with sets and costumes designed by his compatriot Olaf Zombeck. Setting and staging a Wagner opera always offers challenges and with a plot focusing on the conflict between sensual and spiritual love, set in mediaeval times, *Tannhäuser* is a case in point. In this production, the setting seems timeless and ethereal, with lighting and colours used to emphasize the contrast between the 14th century home of the German Minnesingers and "Venusberg", the mythical, subterranean domain of Venus, visited by Tannhäuser... and it works as well as can be expected. The singers and orchestra were well worthy of the prohibited shouts of enthusiasm and we had to make do with polite, yet enthusiastic applause. The title role was sung by heldentenor Stephen Gould. A heldentenor is a tenor voice with a dark timbre, particularly suited to Wagnerian repertoire. Sabina Cvilak, Elisabeth, has sung dramatic roles both in the USA and in Europe. Lithuanian mezzosoprano Eglė Šidlauskaitė sang Venus, and the versatile British baritone David Stout was Wolfram. The Tokyo Symphony Orchestra was ably conducted by Alejo Pérez whose varied repertoire spans the centuries and includes Handel and Mozart as well as Wagner.



Stephen Gould takes his bow as Tannhäuser

New Opera Lyra Announces 23/24 Season

New Opera Lyra was founded in 2022 to produce new, classic and contemporary opera, newly orchestrated by Andrew Ager, fully staged in the heart of Ottawa, featuring rising and established artists from Ottawa and beyond. The co-artistic directors are Suzanne Bassett and Andrew Ager.

NOL will start the season on Halloween weekend with the world premiere of *The Mummy*, by NOL composer-in-residence Andrew Ager. The third opera of "The Gothic Trilogy." This spine-chilling production is sure to bring a satisfying thrill. (October 27 & 28 2023, 7:30pm)

NOL will follow in the first frosty month of winter, on December 10, 2023 at 4:00pm with Ager's delightful *Scrooge's Christmas*. Premiered in 2019 and already produced abroad, this story of everyone's favourite curmudgeon is not to be missed.

Spring brings a timeless tale of love, greed and deceit. On April 19 and 20, 2024 NOL will present Puccini's comic *Gianni Schicchi*, featuring not only one of the most famous solos in all opera, but also one of its most entertaining scoundrels.

NOL will conclude the season on June 1, 2024 at 3:30pm by celebrating the vocal arts! Under the direction of esteemed conductor Laurence Ewashko, NOL, along with Ottawa's Ewashko Singers, will present an afternoon of beloved opera choruses (and some audience sing-a-longs!) and solos by outstanding rising young artists.

Mark your calendars now and ticket information will be available in August on the NOL website: www.newoperalyra.ca along with additional details of these productions. NOL's *Dracula*, was a sell-out, so buy your tickets early.

The Future of Opera in Ottawa

Despite the lack of an established, large-scale opera company in the nation's capital, opera in Ottawa is alive and well and coming to a venue near you.

The **National Capital Opera Competition** is drawing talent from around Canada. The young singers who will be selected as finalists for the 2023 Competition will perform at 2pm on Saturday, 14 October 2023 at the First Unitarian Congregation, 30 Cleary Avenue, Ottawa. Watch for announcements of the finalists in the coming months. The competition is an important way of engaging Ottawans in the future of opera.

Ottawa is home to an exciting new opera company—**New Opera Lyra**. (See above)

OperOttawa (Artistic Director Norman E. Brown) is celebrating its tenth anniversary. The company has specialized in producing operas and oratorios of the Baroque period, as well as commissioning new works. The company's Composer-in-Residence is Jack Hui Litster, whose third opera is promised for the coming season.

The **National Arts Centre Orchestra** recently collaborated with the **Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity** and Ottawa's **Ewashko Singers** to bring an energetic, sell-out, concert performance of *Don Giovanni* to the stage of Southam Hall at the NAC. Collaborations such as this can bring succor to opera-starved audiences in the capital. We look forward to more like this in the future. While they were in town, the **Banff Centre** also teamed up with **Ottawa Chamberfest** to present an "Opera Pub", described as an improvised, wild night which can serve as an introduction to opera for the uninitiated and as a fun new experience for opera "vets". This kind of innovation is exactly what we need in Ottawa. It expands the audience for opera and leaves them wanting more.

Gorgeous Ottawa Butterfly Lights up the Montreal Stage
***Madama Butterfly* at the Opéra de Montréal**
Lesley Robinson

2005 Brian Law Opera Competition winner, Ottawa's Joyce El-Khoury starred close to home in Opéra de Montréal's recent production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, with a mostly Canadian cast. The production was a traditional one with a little twist: Cio-Cio-San's son appears as an older boy with his adoptive mother who explains his mother's story to him. Both observe from the side as the story unfolds. Kate Pinkerton has such a small role in the drama; this approach gave us the opportunity to see her in a more sympathetic light.

Joyce El-Khoury's portrayal of Butterfly was sensitive and heartfelt, her voice full of the conflicting emotions of hope, optimism, yearning, all encompassed in a heart-wrenching rendition of "Un bel dì" and finally, betrayal and despair. American tenor Matthew White made a dashing Pinkerton. Mr. White has been making a name for himself in leading roles both in Europe and North America in operas such as *Carmen*, *La bohème*, *La traviata*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *Rigoletto*. The supporting roles of Sharpless and Suzuki were performed adroitly by baritone Hugo Laporte and mezzo-soprano Lauren Segal.

This was a completely in-house production with sets and costumes by Opéra de Montréal. The Orchestre Métropolitain and the chorus of Opéra de Montréal were overseen by visiting Spanish conductor Pedro Halffter.



(L-r) Lauren Segal, Matthew White, conductor Pedro Halffter, Joyce El-Khoury and Hugo Laporte