

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Winter 2023

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Hiver 2023

National Capital Opera Competition

Save the Date: 14 October 2023
The 2023 National Capital Opera Competition

After a four-year hiatus, we are thrilled to announce the 2023 National Capital Opera Competition (formerly the Brian Law Opera Competition) which will take place at 2pm on Saturday 14 October 2023 at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, 30 Cleary Avenue, Ottawa.

There are some exciting changes to this year's re-vamped competition. Thanks to some generous donations, we have been able to increase the prize money. This year's first prize will be \$10,000. Second prize will be \$5,000 and third prize \$3,000. All other finalists will receive \$1,000. We shall be accepting applications this year from any young Canadian singers. (The maximum age for women is 30 years and for men 32 years on the day of the competition.)

The deadline for applications will be 30 June 2023. Applicants will provide recent recordings of three opera arias in three different languages. They will provide a statement of aspirations including how they would plan to spend the prize money. The preliminary jury will select up to six finalists.

On the day of the competition, the finalists will again perform three arias in three languages with their own pianists. The selections will be different from those they submitted for the preliminary round. The winners will be selected by a panel of three jurors, professional singers, musicians and educators, who will listen to the finalists, adjudicate and announce their decision at the conclusion of the competition. The event will end with a reception to celebrate the achievements of the finalists. We look forward to a wonderful afternoon.

President's Message

I am excited to report that the preparation for our next opera competition is well underway. Details of the competition are provided in this newsletter and are updated on our website. Thank you to those who have already made contributions.

I am also excited about the planned update to our website, our webmaster, Jim Burgess, along with the help of Lesley Robinson have embarked on this project. Thank you to both for your time.

I am also excited about the return to attending live performances. I attended a concert at the NAC this week which was sold out. It is great to see people out to enjoy live music making. We are fortunate living in the National Capital Region where there is much to see including a few operas this spring.

I continue to explore venues for in-person society meetings. This continues to be harder than I expected.

Lastly, I wish to ask you to renew your membership and to consider making a contribution for the benefit of our next opera competition. Thank you.

I look forward to reengaging at our next in-person meeting.

Mark Robinson

Board of Directors

Mark Robinson - President Murray Kitts - Past President.
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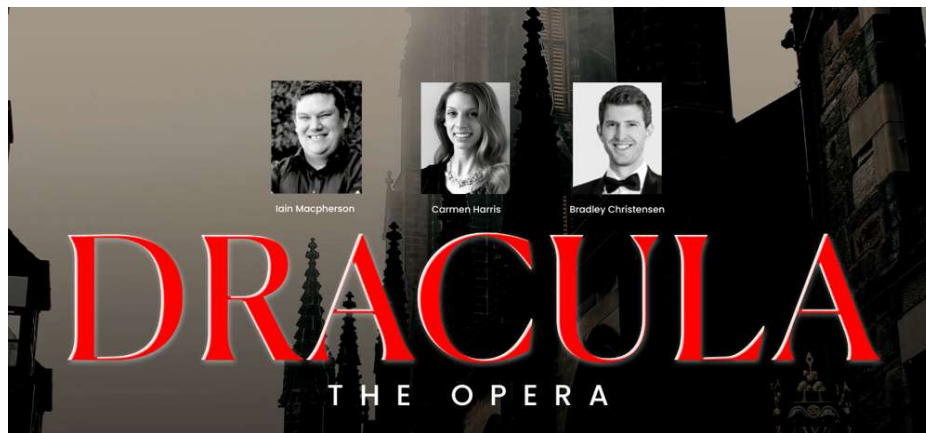
Newsletter Editor and Website Manager

Newsletter: David Williams,
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For information on the National Capital Opera Society, or the National Capital Opera Competition, contact (613) 852-3524 or consult www.ncos.ca

World Premiere of *Dracula* by Andrew Ager

Production by New Opera Lyra Reviewed by Bill Caswell



Over my 40 years of attending opera all over Europe and North America, two stand out: I had been struck particularly by the beauty of *Pearl Fishers* and the novelty of *Magic Flute*. Last night I attended the opera, *Dracula*, and it joins my top three operas. The opera *Frankenstein* by the same composer, Andrew Ager, was difficult for me to appreciate and although I was somewhat wary of the music I was about to experience, I fully intended to support this effort to bring opera to Ottawa (by buying season tickets for all three upcoming events).

Where do I start? The opera director from New York has to be lauded. Although there is not much performer movement needed, he made the stage come alive. The stage lighting had been taken care of in a professional manner. The choice of singers was stupendous, with the five lead roles covered artistically fine and the three waifs, not three sopranos, but rather the lovely blend of two sopranos and a mezzo-soprano. The libretto (in English) was informative and kept you clear about the plot. While all the artists were superb, I was particularly impressed with Doreen Taylor-Claxton's Abigail. Dracula himself (Bradley Christensen) was frightening at the outset. Never at any point was the 'goriness' exploited, but rather it was implied. As for the orchestration, the small ensemble was nothing short of superb, directed by Matthew Larkin. The solo violin pieces were stunning and the complement of viola, cello and string bass harmonized beautifully. Pizzicato came in at the most dramatic moments. But most engaging of all was the French horn complement, always at an amazingly appropriate moment. Then for added drama, the thunderous organ of St. Andrew's church filled in the last scene of the last act.

Not surprising the standing ovation at the end was heart-felt and sincere as the full house had been treated to a wonderful experience. It was over all too soon. I met a few friends there afterwards, and checked with them about their response to the performance. It was similarly positive as my own.

Down the road NEW OPERA LYRA will treat us to the combination of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" & "Boris Godunov" (in late January) starring soprano Antonina Ermolenko along with members of NACO. NEW OPERA LYRA's season wrap-up (in mid-June) will be Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* having one of the most beloved arias in all of opera.

Please check these things out at <https://newoperalyra.ca/>

Bizet's *Carmen* on the island of Gozo by Marian Cumming

My recent trip to Malta again happened to coincide with one of Gozo's yearly opera productions, although the first since Covid. This is the third opera I have attended at the Astra Theatre. I had reviewed the other two but it is worth reminding that Gozo (Malta's smaller sister island), which is just 67 sq. km (or 26 sq. mi) in area, boasts not one, but two, opera houses, on opposite sides of the street, within a few metres of each other! The other theatre is the Aurora, although my trips so far have not coincided with any of their productions. This year's offering at the Astra Theatre was Bizet's *Carmen*, sung in French.

The performance I attended was sandwiched between HD broadcasts of *La Boheme* from Covent Garden and the Met's *La Traviata*, both wonderful productions, so it is a bit difficult not to make comparisons! That said, having the four principal singers performing together for the first time, the chorus being a joint one made up of a local and a Sicilian group, coupled with limited rehearsal time, the entire production was very enjoyable as witnessed by an appreciative and enthusiastic sold-out audience. My one criticism would be a lack of passion, and *Carmen* is definitely synonymous with passion!

The sets were made up of pillars surrounding a rotating semi-circle, all made to look like stone structures, on which were projected images relevant to the plot. The costumes were very colourful, multi-layered traditional Spanish dresses, including mantillas for the women and black trousers and white shirt for the men, although the fedoras worn by the men seemed rather out of place. The scene at the bull ring in the last act was particularly joyful when the chorus plus extras, including a number of children, filled the stage wearing bright costumes and waving colourful banners. The finale was just as impressive with the chorus facing away from the audience watching the bullfight projected in the background while the final confrontation was taking place. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra was led by Maestro John Galea. The Artistic Director was Enrico Stinchelli.

The role of *Carmen* was sung by Serbian mezzo-soprano Sanja Anastasia who has sung a wide range of leading roles all over Europe, including *Carmen* at the Arena di Verona. She fit the role perfectly, both vocally and in her portrayal of a seductive temptress which was complemented by her good looks. Don Jose was Uruguayan tenor Carlo Ventre, who was solid throughout, with a powerful voice which never sounded strained, hitting high notes effortlessly. He debuted at La Scala at an early age as the Duke in *Rigoletto* and has since gone on to sing in some of the most prestigious houses including the Royal Opera House and the Metropolitan Opera among others. Romanian baritone Serban Vasile sang the role of Escamillo. A solid baritone who has also sung worldwide including Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Metropolitan Opera conducted by James Levine in the 2013-14 season, and Rodrigo in *Don Carlo* the following season under the baton of Yannick Nezet-Seguin. Tea Purtseladze was Michaela. Born in Georgia, she is a relative newcomer to the operatic stage. She has a pleasant, if small voice, is technically sound and shows promise. Minor roles were sung by local artists who also have promising international careers. Of note are three singers, mezzo-soprano Marvic Monreal (Mercedes), soprano Nicola Said (Frasquita) and baritone Charles Buttigieg (Morales), who have all received scholarships to pursue their studies abroad through the Joseph Calleja Foundation. Joseph Calleja, known as the Maltese tenor, made his operatic debut as Macduff at the age of 19 in this very Theatre. His Foundation, which was established in 2013 is aimed at providing financial assistance, encouragement and support to exceptionally talented young persons in the field of performing and visual arts, as well as to talented under-privileged youth.

The Astra Theatre (or Teatru Astra), was inaugurated as a volunteer musical organization in 1968 offering musicals and operetta. In 1978 it ventured into opera and needs to be commended for producing high-quality operas each year ever since. Over the years, highly acclaimed international singers have been engaged, supported by local talent, a practice which has been strongly encouraged by theatre management. I am looking forward to the 2023 production of *Rigoletto*, the opera which started this eagerly anticipated annual tradition 45 years ago.

Back to New York

A Sampling of the New Season at the Met by Lesley Robinson

It had been a long time—the last time we were in New York for opera was the weekend before the Met closed because of COVID19. Our trip to New York in October provided an opportunity to dip into the new season at the Met. We were able to enjoy four productions, two of eighteenth-century compositions and two from the twentieth century. This was a varied and compelling selection.

Medea

The season opened with this magnificent new production by David McVicar of Cherubini's rarely performed *Medea*. (This was a co-production with the Greek National Opera, the Canadian Opera Company and Lyric Opera of Chicago.) For us too it was a fabulous way to return to the Met. The cast was led by the magnificent Sondra Radvanovsky who gave her all in this visceral tale of aching bitterness and toxic revenge. This was an all-in performance. She made me believe that a woman could be capable of such extreme and desperate behaviour. The set was dominated by an enormous slanting mirror which offered views of what was happening on the stage which we could not see from where we were sitting. The design of the set emphasized that Medea is an outsider, shut out from the main action, just as she is emotionally shut out from the world of Jason, her former husband and for most of the opera she is outside the purview of the mirror. The costumes had a lot of metallic colours, turquoise and rust, emphasizing the corrosion that was visible on the set amid crumbling brickwork. All the principal roles were brilliantly sung by tenor Matthew Polenzani as Giasone (Jason of Argonaut fame), soprano Janai Brugger as Glauce, his new bride, Italian bass Michele Pertusi as her father, Creonte, the King and Russian mezzo-soprano Ekaterina Gubanova as Neris, Medea's confidante. Carlo Rizzi conducted.



The magnificent Sondra Radvanovsky acknowledging her ovation following the conclusion of the opera

Back to New York (continued)

Idomeneo

This tried and true production marked the Met debut of Austrian conductor Manfred Honeck. This was a fairly early Mozart opera, written when he was just 24 years old. It was actually his 13th of 23 operas (the first being performed when he was only 11 years old) but it pre-dates all the masterpieces for which Mozart is best known.



L-r: Lombardi, Honeck, Spyres, Fang, Lindsey

Outstanding in this production was the delicate and pure voice of Chinese soprano Ying Fang in the role of Ilia, beloved of Prince Idamante. Mozart's music focuses on the emotions of the characters. The staging is fairly static, emphasizing the isolation of each character in his or her private anguish. The beautiful trio sung by Idomeneo (tenor Michael Spyres), Idamante (mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey) and Ilia emphasizes this, as does the quartet in the final act. Even love brings torment and there is plenty of guilt to go around. Italian soprano Federica Lombardi was a magnificent, jealous woman scorned.

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

This production was a Met debut for Canadian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson and for Russian soprano Svetlana Sozdateleva in the leading role. Although based on an 1865 novella, it seemed fitting for Shostakovich's 1934 opera to be set in the harsh Soviet period—Stalin was known not to have liked it and this led to a denunciation of Shostakovich's music and the banning of the opera until 1961.



L-r: Nikolai Schukoff, John Relyea, Keri-Lynn Wilson, Chorus Master Donald Palumbo, Svetlana Sozdateleva and Brandon Jovanovich

(Stalin died in 1953.) Just as in the nineteenth century, criminals continued to be exiled to the harsh conditions of Siberia during the Soviet period, so the banishment in Act 4 continues to make sense in a twentieth century setting.

The orchestration is very interesting with the inclusion of a bassoon, two harps and unusual percussion. The music is incongruous, sometimes like the soundtrack of a cartoon and there is lots of humour in the music, for example the trombones in the sex scene. There was a brass band on stage for the funeral scene and some highly inappropriate-

Back to New York (continued)

ly jaunty singing from the priest following Boris's death. The orchestra carries the mood, towards the end letting out a primeval wail along with Katerina's misery. At the end what troubles her most is Sergei's eventual disdain for her. She almost regrets the boring life she left behind. The set comprises an imaginative use of space. Initially many closed doors surround Katerina, painted like the free blue sky that is closed off for her. There is a window in the set, initially painted as a religious icon, then it becomes the bedroom window (she slides down on a satin sheet slide). During the wedding scene the window opens to a view of a white picket fence. Later it is just boarded up, signifying that there is no future for them now. There is a cartoon-like atmosphere throughout with bright colours. There are dancers dressed as brides, dancing with vacuum cleaners and later the dancers, both men and women, are dressed as bloody brides. The cartoon-like Soviet police are hilarious, with superhero t-shirts under their uniforms and reading superhero comics. There is an enormous cartoon fist emblazoned with the word "zap". The murdered husband's body in the trunk of his car is crushed by an enormous wrecking ball which turns into a disco ball for the wedding scene, in which the priest leads a conga line, bottle of vodka in hand. Ms. Sozdateleva is joined by an international cast featuring American tenor Brandon Jovanovich as her lover Sergei, Austrian tenor Nikolai Schukoff as her ill-fated husband and Canadian bass-baritone John Relyea as his boorish father.

Peter Grimes

This production of Britten's masterpiece is extraordinarily atmospheric. The set represents the rustic wooden buildings of the drab town of the setting in a bleak and isolated part of the country. Doors and windows in the set open and shut to reveal the characters at different levels. The opera deals with the insensitivity of the mob. The gossips have decided Grimes's guilt and there is no changing their attitude. The constant whisperings and chattering of the gossips are heard in the part of the chorus. There is pettiness, humour and lightheartedness, although there is no humour for Grimes. Grimes himself is a complex character. Whatever his guilt or innocence in the matters he

is hounded
givable crime
mental state
does not for-
Clayton por-
his perfor-
he risks being
tortured soul.
ly. Ellen Or-
Car, may seek
doesn't really
ludes are
rise and fall
by projections
against the



The brilliant Allan Clayton as Peter Grimes

for, he is guilty of the unfor-
of domestic violence. His
might explain his actions but
give them and tenor Allan
trays him brilliantly. After
mance as Hamlet last season,
typecast as the crazed and
Yet he portrays this brilliant-
ford, sung by soprano Nicole
the good in him, but she
find it. The musical inter-
evocative of the relentless
of the tides - accompanied
of the waves crashing
set.

Music as Sanctuary - St. Andrews Church

Matthew Larkin, Custodian for Music at St. Andrews, established a series of Tuesday lunch-time concerts at the Church. These have taken place from September to mid-December and have included a variety of performers. Four of the concerts featured individual singers - tenor Adam Sperry, countertenor Ian Sabourin, soprano Maghan McPhee and vocalist Rebecca Noelle. These were all excellent and you can listen to their performances on the St. Andrews web site (<https://www.standrewsottawa.ca/music-as-sanctuary>). After a holiday season break the concerts have restarted and will continue until mid-June. Details will be given on the web site on a monthly basis - check mid-month for the next months concerts.

The first concert of 2023 on January 10th presented music of Ottawa composer Andrew Ager with tenor Adam Sperry, violinist Adam Nelson and Andrew Ager at the piano. The concert opened with the *Dracula Suite* for violin and piano - featuring Ager's adaptation of four themes from his opera *Dracula* (The Castle, The Wraiths, Mina's Love, Dracula's Melancholy). Then Adam Sperry gave us three Shakespeare Songs (Blow, blow, thou winter wind; It was a lover and his lass; Let not my love be called idolatory). This was followed by *The Old Castle* - an Ager arrangement for piano and violin from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The concert finished with Adam Sperry singing three Folksong arrangements (Scarborough Fair, Barrack Street, Farewell to Nova Scotia) followed by Firenze, an aria from *Gianni Schicchi*.

The second concert on January 17th featured Eva Hassel (voice and violin) and Matthew Larkin (piano). This was somewhat unusual in that it consisted of short bible readings followed by an appropriate hymn which the audience sang with Eva. Appropriate music was played by Matthew and Eva.

The third concert featured Matthew Larkin on the organ playing a variety of chorales by Durufle, Bach, Messiaen, Peters and Mendelssohn.

The January 31st concert will feature two Canticles of Benjamin Britten performed by four singers, Kathleen Radke, Ian Sabourin, Kerry Bursey, Aliasdair Campbel, and Matthew Larkin.

Handel's Oratorio *Solomon*

The Caelis Academy Ensemble and the Ottawa Baroque Consort will perform *Solomon* at St. Andrews Church, Ottawa on Sunday February 19th at 2:00 p.m. The singers will be countertenor Ian Sabourin (Solomon), soprano Kathleen Radke (Solomon's Queen), soprano Bronwyn Thies-Thompson (Sheba's Queen), tenor Adam Sperry (Zadok), and bass William Kraushaar (A Levite). Matthew Larkin will direct.

Tickets available from eventbrite.

OperOttawa

OperOttawa presents two operas at the First Baptist Church, Ottawa

Handel's *ALCINA* Sunday March 5, 2023 at 2:30 pm

Starring: Erinne-Colleen Laurin as Alcina; Morgan Strickland as Morgana;

Carole Portelance as Bradamante; Marie Lyne Tremblay as Ruggiero;

Kathleen Radke as Oberto; Alexander Cappellazzo as Oronte;

Norman E. Brown as Melisso.

Orchestra and chorus

Cimarosa's *IL MATRIMONIO SEGRETO* Sunday May 7, 2023 at 2:30 pm

Starring: Stéphanie Brassard as Carolina; Kathleen Radke as Elisetta;

Danielle Vaillancourt as Fidalma; Alexander Cappellazzo as Paolino;

Norman E. Brown as Geronimo; John Holland as Count Robinson;

With Frederic Lacroix - piano

Tickets available through the cast, EventBrite, and at the door

University of Ottawa OPERA ENSEMBLE

A Midsummer Night's Fairy Tale - a collage of Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*

and Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Friday, March 24, 7:30 pm; Saturday, March 25, 4:00 pm

Huguette Labelle Hall, Tabaret 550 Cumberland Street, Ottawa

stage direction: Kathi Langston; musical direction: Judith Ginsburg

SINGERS: Gabriela Comeau Gort, Katie Cruickshank, Ally Downes, Jessica Green, Cameron Hunter, Walid Jeddou, Krystal King, Jessy Lindsay, Amanda Lopez, Philip Lukic, Matthias Mark-George, Liam McColgan, Neha Natarajan, Lauren Reising, Kyle Simpson, Ian Soloman

Tickets can be purchased through EventBrite.

NCOS Membership Form

Renewal _____

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Membership is for the calendar year.

Amount

Membership - \$15 per person, Student - No charge
Members receive our quarterly newsletter by email.

\$ _____

I wish to make a tax-deductible donation to the Society, including for the National Capital Opera Competition. The Society greatly appreciates any and all donations.

A receipt for income tax purposes will be provided for donations of \$50 or more.

\$ _____

I wish to receive the quarterly newsletter by regular mail at \$20.
(This sum covers black and white printing and mailing.)

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Total \$ _____

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