



# NATIONAL CAPITAL *Opera Society*

National Capital Opera Society Newsletter

Spring 2024



## President's Message

Dear Fellow NCOS Member,

I have a few brief announcements:

I wish to announce that Lesley Robinson is the new Newsletter Editor following David Williams retirement. Lesley has been writing articles and assisting David over the past years, so I expect the transition will be straightforward. Lesley, thank you for taking this on amongst all the other things you do for NCOS.

I received a lovely certificate from our MPP, Joel Harden. Joel was pleased to recognize the hard work and dedication of the National Capital Opera Society in honor of 2024 Non Profit Appreciation Week. "Ottawa-Centre is grateful for NCOS's contributions to our community." Congratulations to everyone for each of your contributions to enable this nice recognition.

It is with sadness that I note that one of our board members, Mary Frances Taylor, passed away. Please see the article written by Carole Stelmack. I shall miss Mary Frances and her sparkling personality.

We shall be announcing upcoming events as soon as we can. Standby!

Mark Robinson

President, National Capital Opera Society

## Editor's Note



I look forward to receiving your contributions to the newsletter. Please send any articles, announcements, news items or ideas to me at [mummypiggy@gmail.com](mailto:mummypiggy@gmail.com).

Thank you.

*Lesley*



*I am pleased to recognize the hard work and dedication of the*

***National Capital Opera Society***

*in honour of*

***2024 Non Profit  
Appreciation Week***

*Ottawa-Centre is grateful for your contributions to our  
community!*

February 2024

**Joel Harden, MPP  
Member of Provincial Parliament  
Ottawa Centre**



***Remembering our NCOS Board Member***

***Mary Frances Taylor***

***October 7, 1940 – February 9, 2024***

Mary Frances Taylor was a woman with many diverse talents and interests. She had a career working on pensions for the government, she travelled throughout Europe, and after retirement she obtained a degree in the Classics. Throughout, her family was always foremost in her thoughts and actions. She raised three children and after her grandchildren were born, she spent as much time as possible with all of them, often relating and sharing many of the special moments she enjoyed with them together and individually.

Mary Frances had a profound love of the arts and opera was one of her passions. She volunteered with Opera Lyra Ottawa with enthusiasm and dedication for many years. She also volunteered and joined the boards of other opera and arts organizations including the National Capital Opera Society and Ottawa Chamberfest. As an active member of these boards, she was always ready to participate and fully contribute her time and talents.

I was fortunate to meet Mary Frances when she joined the Board of the Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild. After I had been president of the Guild for a number of years, I was delighted to pass the presidency on to Mary Frances, and she did not disappoint. She served as president of the Guild and a member of the Board of Directors of the company until it ceased operations in October 2015.

Partly because of our great love of opera, Mary Frances and I became good friends. Not only did we work together in the interests of Opera Lyra Ottawa, but we also spent many happy days travelling to enjoy operas in Montreal, Toronto and Glimmerglass. We always ensured there was time for a glass of wine or two! Of course, our trips to Glimmerglass also meant stops at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, so Mary Frances could buy a baseball cap for one of her new grandchildren.

As we aged and illnesses brought new challenges, we were no longer able to travel, but we still enjoyed lunches together and with other close friends who were opera fans and volunteers.

Mary Frances was a remarkable, generous and wonderful person and friend. She significantly touched the lives of many of us and we miss her greatly.

Carole Stelmack



**La Reine-Garçon**  
**Music by Julien Bilodeau and Libretto by Michel Marc Bouchard**  
**World Premier at the Opéra de Montréal**  
Lesley Robinson

CAST

Christine, Queen of Sweden  
Count Karl Gustav  
Countess Ebba Sparre  
Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna  
Count Johan Oxenstierna  
René Descartes  
Marie-Eléonore de Brandebourg  
Assistant of Descartes

Joyce El-Khoury  
Etienne Dupuis  
Pascale Spinney  
Daniel Okulitch  
Isaiah Bell  
Eric Laporte  
Aline Kutan  
Alain Coulombe

Conductor

Jean-Marie Zeitouni



L-r Isaiah Bell, Joyce El-Khoury, Etienne Dupuis and Daniel Okulitch

The world premiere of *La Reine-Garçon* was an exciting event. With a fabulous cast and a thoughtful production, this experience promised abundantly and delivered massively. The subject matter is fascinating: Queen Christina of Sweden came to the throne in 1632 at the tender age of six. As an only child, she was raised as a boy and sole heir to the Swedish crown and is remembered as one of the most learned women of her time. Not only was she learned, but she was fiercely independent in her thinking and extremely unconventional. Christina abdicated, converted to Roman Catholicism, moved to Rome and ended up with the rarest of honours for a woman—she was buried in the Vatican.

The most satisfying kind of historical fiction explores the psychological motivations of the characters and this piece fulfills that requirement. It deals with the circumstances surrounding the abdication—Christina's

decision not to marry and produce heirs, her unconventional style of dress and individualistic lifestyle were all considered scandalous. Christina's mother, Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg, was consumed by grief on the death of her husband and lived in a perpetual state of mourning. She was excluded from the regency government during Christina's period of minority and was considered quite mad towards the end of her life. Aline Kutan's portrayal of the dowager queen was quite remarkable.

The opera provided the audience with quite a challenge. I wanted to look in three directions at once—the action on stage, the surtitles (it was important to know what was being said) and the orchestra. The orchestration was complex and unusual, echoing the unconventional Christina herself. There were three percussionists moving around a whole host of conventional and not so conventional instruments, such as whistles and bows scraping against the bars of the xylophone. There was also a bass trombone and unusual bass wind instruments—bassoon and clarinet. Offstage we heard the haunting sound of "kulning", an ancient Swedish herding call. This was heard at moments throughout the opera and it felt as though it represented the soul of Sweden.

Joyce El-Khoury's performance as Christina was enthralling and it was a great pleasure to see both her and the magnificent Etienne Dupuis's return to the Montreal stage. Isaiah Bell was funny as the vain (and sexist) suitor, coming on as a prancing stag to woo her with his entourage of stags (with smaller antlers!) Karl Gustav was portrayed as a manly soldier, yet at moments seemed somewhat sappy in his declarations of love. I heard Mr. Dupuis's voice described as a "beast". It is clear that the character considers the needs of the Swedish people. Thus, it is fitting that Christina proclaims him as her heir and the opera ends with a glorious crescendo of liberation.



## Highlights from Previous Finalists presented by Mark Robinson



On January 17 Mark Robinson presented a selection of arias from previous Brian Law Opera Competition finalists. The singers were presented in chronological order (of the year they competed). Countertenor [Daniel Taylor](#) was a finalist in the first competition in 1993. The selection was "Ombra mai fu" from *Serse* by Handel, performed at the Music and Beyond Festival in Ottawa two years ago. Daniel currently teaches at the University of Toronto. He is a conductor as well as a singer and has been one of the most successful of our finalists.

Mezzo-soprano [Julie Nesrallah](#) won the competition in 1997. In the video Julie performs the "Danse Bohème" from *Carmen* by Bizet with Greg Hawco and the Urban Orchestra. Julie has a successful broadcasting career with the CBC. She performs "Carmen on Tap" and a variety of recitals at venues around the country.







Six years later (2003) Baritone [Joshua Hopkins](#) was the competition winner. In the video he sings "Avant de quitter ces lieux" in the Washington National Opera's *Faust* at the Kennedy Center. Joshua has an excellent international career, frequently singing at the Met. In 2024 he will be singing in Chicago in *Cenerentola*, Toronto in *Don Pasquale* and in the UK at Garsington Opera in Verdi's *King for a Day*.

Soprano [Joyce El-Khoury](#) won the competition in 2005. The selection we watched on Zoom was from a 2014 gala performance at the Lincoln Center. Joyce sang the passionate St. Sulpice Duet from Massenet's *Manon* with Michael Fabiano as Des Grieux who attempts to reject her, but his resistance is overcome. Joyce has a very successful singing career. She performed in Montreal as *Madama Butterfly* last year and again this February in *La Reine-Garçon*, a new opera by Julien Bilodeau. Following that she will be singing in *Simon Boccanegra* in Helsinki and *Tosca* in Tokyo.



Soprano [Yannick Muriel Noah](#) was the competition winner in 2007. She has relocated to Germany where she has a busy opera career. This beautiful quartet, from the Theater Bonn in 2014, is "Mir ist so wunderbar" from Beethoven's *Fidelio*. This year she will sing the role of Salome in Bremen and Fata Morgana in Prokofiev's *L'amour des trois oranges* in Bonn.



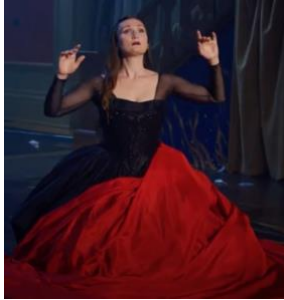
Two years later in 2009, bass-baritone [Philippe Sly](#) won the competition with mezzo-soprano Wallis Giunta in second place. Philippe is based in Montreal with a successful international career, frequently singing at the Paris Opera. In this extract he sings the famous catalog aria as Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Paris Opera. His 2024 engagements include *The Exterminating Angel* by Thomas Adès, again in Paris and *Figaro* at the Wiener Staatsoper.

[Wallis Giunta](#) has relocated to Europe where she has a fine operatic career. On her calendar for 2024 are:

- *Così fan tutte* in Lausanne
- A Valentine's Playlist at the NAC
- *The Seven Deadly Sins* by Kurt Weill in Frankfurt
- *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* by John Adams at the Vienna Volksoper

The selection for our Zoom event was something totally different: Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, recorded in 2021 at Opera North in the UK.





[Meghan Lindsay](#) won the competition in 2013. She has been singing regularly with Toronto's Opera Atelier. She recently moved to Gatineau and has been teaching at Carleton University. She will be singing again in April with Atelier in a pastiche called *All Is Love*. The excerpt chosen is from Handel's *La resurrezione*. Meghan sings the role of Mary Magdalene with the Tafelmusik orchestra.

[Ellen McAteer](#) was the competition winner in 2019. Currently residing in Toronto, Ellen performs in recitals. The chosen selection is from the Toronto Bach Festival: "Ich esse mit Freuden".



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## **Operottawa Presents World Premiere of Gates Of Heaven: Requiem For A Life Of Peace**

C.L. Taylor

In the final show of its 11<sup>th</sup> Season, OperOttawa presented a new work, worthy of keeping in the choral repertoire for years to come: *Gates of Heaven: Requiem for a Life of Peace*.

The programme began with the *Exsultate Jubilate* by Mozart, sung with great beauty and vocal agility by soprano Ania Hejnar. Hejnar displayed great fluidity in her coloratura runs and cadenzas, all with a bright ringing tone.

The main work on the programme was the world premiere of *Gates of Heaven: Requiem for a Life of Peace* by Ottawa composer Jack Hui Litster. This was Litster's third commissioned piece for OperOttawa. The music incorporated various combinations of the all-female chorus, ranging from full chorus (Introitus, Gloria and In Paradisum) to solo (Pie Jesu), duet (Sanctus and Benedictus) plus quartet and quintet ensembles. The Requiem honours the lives of 14 Canadian women leaders. Short biographies of these women were read by Special Guest Narrator Lori Marchand.

This was the third production of an all-female season by OperOttawa. The opening singing was a tidal wave of gorgeous harmonic sound. The duet Sanctus and Benedictus, sung by soprano Morgan Strickland and mezzo-soprano Carole Portelance, was performed with dignity and reverence. The Pie Jesu, sung by soprano Erinne-Colleen Laurin was sung with passion and beauty of tone. In various sections of the Requiem, we heard a haunting Celtic melody, which became a solo, sung by soprano Kathleen Radke. This theme was brought back one last time in the Coda.

The orchestra, led by Norman E. Brown, Founding Artistic Director of OperOttawa, was in fine form, playing with precision to reflect each varying movement in the Requiem. The performers received a well-deserved standing ovation by a large and most appreciative audience.



A standing ovation for the chorus and orchestra of OperOttawa

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## **The Met in HD – AT HOME**

Vera-Lee Nelson

This season, the Met in HD performances were opened to people who lived a distance from a theatre showing the live performance. I live in a small town, Almonte, part of Mississippi Mills. I am a widow and have to drive alone, a fair distance, and drive home in the dark in the dead of winter. Sometimes kind friends offer to take me with them, but generally I have to find my own companion and make my own way into the city, park and get into the theatre with my companion, whoever it might be. It did not take me too long to think about the at home possibility!

On the Met website there is a defined place to click to access the at home program. [Click here](#) for the link. A ticket is \$26.50 Once you have paid, it would seem to be the computer which figures out the parameters of the distance. Close to the time of the show, an email is sent out with the Zoom address for the performance. And away we go. Fortunately, my computer screen is quite large and I could pull my comfy heated massage chair up to about four feet from the screen. A quick trip to the loo (no line), getting my large (free) drink and my chips in place and I was ready to go to the Opera.

It opened exactly as in the theatre, with shots of the matinee patrons arriving and carried on from there. The colour was brilliant and the music was as good as I could get from my computer. I am resolved to get a feed from the computer to my TV (65" at least) before the next performance though. Another bonus keeps the performance available on demand for seven days, to watch as often as you wish.

This is not a review of the performance; what can one say about *Carmen*? Certainly familiar music and a creative interpretation made my experience really positive and I will certainly do it again. Especially on a snowy or icy day, it will be a treat to curl up in my heated chair, sipping my free cappuccino and immerse myself in a New York (Lincoln Centre) state of mind.



## **Choral Evensong to celebrate the life and music of Brian Law** **Christchurch, New Zealand**

Lesley Robinson

On a recent visit to Christchurch, New Zealand we were privileged to meet the Cathedral Administrator and Verger, Chris Oldham who knew Brian Law well. NCOS knew Brian for his years in Ottawa and our opera competition bore his name for many years. Since leaving Ottawa he had served as Director of Music at the cathedral in Christchurch.

Christchurch suffered a devastating series of earthquakes and the quake of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 caused the most damage, when the cathedral's tower and steeple collapsed. The entire building was devastated and the project to rebuild it will take many years to complete. In the meantime, a transitional cathedral has been built in order for the cathedral to continue to function. The Transitional Cathedral is also known as the Cardboard Cathedral and it is actually largely built of cardboard. When the cathedral operations were transferred to the Transitional Cathedral, Brian Law decided not to retire as planned at that time, but to stay on to help ease the transition for the choir.

Chris Oldham told us that Brian had been adamant that there would be no memorial service held for him at the cathedral and in order to comply strictly with his wishes, the Service of Choral Evensong held on 17<sup>th</sup> March was dedicated to a celebration of the life and music of Brian Law. The cathedral livestreams its services and it is possible to watch the Choral Evensong of 17<sup>th</sup> March by [clicking here](#).



Inside the Transitional Cathedral



Look out for dates of future NCOS events in your inbox. Upcoming events include Zoom presentations and “High C and High Tea”.

Our next Zoom presentation will be:

**Dmitri Hvorostovsky - Just Remembering**

Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm  
Presented by Vera-Lee Nelson

[Click here](#) for the Zoom meeting link.



**The Great Gatsby**

A new opera by Andrew Ager

**April 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm**



New Opera Lyra will be staging the world premiere of Ager’s new work, based on the 1925 American novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It is the story of Jay Gatsby, the mysterious multi-millionaire—the man who has everything... except the great love of his life. Adam Sperry sings the role of Gatsby with Carmen Harris as Daisy. Matthew Larkin conducts a chamber orchestra featuring players from the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

**Opera Gala**

**June 1<sup>st</sup> at 3:30 pm**



New Opera Lyra teams up with the Ewashko singers to present a glorious end of season gala, featuring both chorus and soloists in selections from the best-loved operas of all time.

**MESSIAH-MESSIE**  
by/par Handel

Soloists/solistes:  
Morgan Strickland, soprano  
Erinne-Colleen Laurin, soprano  
Kathleen Radke, soprano  
Carole Portelance, mezzo  
Beverly McArthur, mezzo  
Adam Sperry, tenor  
Jean-Sébastien Kennedy, bass

OperOttawa Chorus/Chœur  
& Orchestra/Orchestre  
Norman F. Brown, conductor/Dirigeant

OperOttawa

Advance Tickets  
Billets à l'avance  
Adult \$50 Student \$25  
At the Door/À la porte  
Adult \$60 Student \$30  
Under 10 Free  
Sous 10 Gratuit

Available from cast,  
Eventbrite , at the door  
Disponible de la distribution,  
Eventbrite ou à la porte

**Sunday November 24, 2024**  
**Dimanche le 24 novembre 2024**  
First Baptist Church (Elgin & Laurier) at/à 2:30 pm

### NCOS Board of Directors

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