

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Winter 2024

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Hiver 2024

Highly respected classical music director dies by Chris Lynch

A revered musical director, celebrated for leading some of New Zealand's most cherished orchestras and choirs, has passed away.

The Transitional Cathedral of Christchurch made the announcement of the death of Brian Law. Brian led the Choir from 2003, when he was asked to help out over Christmas. He forgot to stop helping and saw the Cathedral survive earthquakes and only retired after we had moved into the Transitional Cathedral in 2014. He remained a strong supporter of the Cathedral up to his death, critiquing services either in person or by watching live-streams.

A spokesperson for the cathedral said at least two full generations of Cathedral Choristers and a healthy number of back row of the Choir will remember him for his musical brilliance, his humour and, on occasions, the look that could wither anyone at 100 paces. He often commented that the job at the Cathedral was like coming full circle as he was a choral director in Canada in the 1960s..

Born and educated in London, Brian emigrated to Canada at the age of 22 where he was music director of the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, the Ottawa Choral Society, and founding director of the baroque ensemble Thirteen Strings. For 14 years he was organist and Choirmaster at Ottawa's St. Matthew's Anglican Church, where he brought the men's and boys' choir to a standard of excellence comparable to that of British collegiate and cathedral choirs. The Brian Law Opera Scholarship was established to honour his contribution to opera in the National Capital Region.

Brian moved to Christchurch in 1990 and the City's musical landscape expanded, heightened and developed enormously through his work with the City Choir, Southern Opera, and as a frequent guest conductor of the Christchurch Symphony and founding director of Cantores. He conducted highly acclaimed seasons for Canterbury Opera, including Don Giovanni, The Magic Flute, Lucia di Lammermoor, Carmen, Tosca, and The Merry Widow. Nationally, he conducted concerts with NZSO, the National Ballet, NZ Opera and all the regional orchestras. For 10 years he conducted the annual summer Opera in the Park and Starlight concerts in the Auckland Domain.

A memorial service will be held in early in 2024.



President's Message

Dear Fellow National Capital Opera Member:

I wish everyone a safe, happy and joyous 2024.

I am hoping that members are becoming more comfortable with attending face-to-face meetings. To that end, the Board are preparing two. We are planning on a replacement "Opera Alla Pasta" in May (which could be called Opera & a Supper) and in June by popular request "A High C and A High T". Also, we plan to continue our Zoom presentations.

The feedback I received after the Competition was the best ever. I wish to thank everyone who contributed to this wonderful event. The next competition is scheduled for October 18th 2025. 2024 membership fees are now due. The membership renewal form is attached to this Newsletter. Thank you for renewing your membership.

It is with sadness that I announce our Newsletter Editor, David Williams, has decided to resign. David has been the Editor for 18 years. I am grateful for all his contributions and especially his attention to detail when proof reading and for his friendly reminders when the next issue is due. Please join me in thanking David for his 18 years of contributions. We look forward to seeing David at our future meetings. If anyone is interested in the role of Newsletter Editor, please let me know.

Mark Robinson

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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

Operottawa produces a unique and creative and very entertaining *Magic Flute* by C. L. Taylor

On November 26 at First Baptist Church, I had the distinct pleasure to attend a performance of the opera *Magic Flute* produced by OperOttawa. What made this production different was the fact that it was sung by an all-female cast. Yes, you read that correctly. All female singers. In a season of three shows sung by only female singers, OperOttawa has not only given Ottawa audiences excellent entertainment, but has also updated and made the operas more relevant to our current society. In the case of *Magic Flute*, and given an all-female cast, it was a no-brainer to rewrite the dialogue and musical texts, not only changing character names (for example Sarastro became Sarastra, Tamino became Tamina and Papageno became Pipogena), but also removing all references to misogyny and racism. When asked the gender of the dragon and the mythical animal Maestro Brown replied that while Alexis Poirier is male, he actually represents the transition of male attitude from the time of Mozart (the dragon chasing down the female princess) to today (the fuzzy-eared, pink masked, tutu-wearing animal dancing around to the music being played by Tamina) where gender is not as important as respect and dignity.

The role of Pamina, princess and daughter of the Queen of the Night, sung by OperOttawa regular Erinne-Colleen Laurin, was sung with beautiful tones and excellent interpretation of the many mood changes as she seeks the love of the heroine Tamina. Her *Ach, ich fuhls*, sung after what seemed like rejection by Tamina, was sung with a calm and heart-breaking legato that conveyed her grief to the audience and showed her beautiful controlled rich tone to full effect. Tamina, the heroine, sung with bravura and a solid gorgeous voice by Kathleen Radke (last heard as Angelica in *Suor Angelica*) maintained the dignity of a princess throughout the opera, adapting her style and vocal colours to suit the context. From the very beginning when we hear her *Zu hilfe*, as she is chased by a dragon, we know that this is definitely a role that could be sung by a woman. Carole Portelance, another long-time regular with OperOttawa (last heard as the Principessa in *Suor Angelica*) sang the role of Sarastra, leader of the kingdom, with dignity and authority, displaying a rich sonorous mezzo-soprano voice perfectly suited for the role, and displaying strong resonant low notes. The comical and fun role of Pipogena, the bird-catcher, was sung by Beverly McArthur displaying a dark rich, yet flexible voice showing the shifts of emotion as Pipogena first arrives happy-go-lucky singing *Die Fogelganger*, then in desperate search for a wife in *Ein Madchen*, to the pseudo suicide scene, and ultimately the duet *Pa..pa..pa* with Papagena sung beautifully by Katie Gratton, in which the love-birds are finally united. Making her more official debut with OperOttawa was Ania Hejnar as the Queen of the Night. Her coloratura singing in her two arias of revenge and vengeance kept the full to capacity audience on the edge of their seats, with its beautiful ringing tones, clarity of notes and captivating dramatic acting. The three Ladies in servitude to the Queen were sung by Grace Quinsey (making her debut with OperOttawa), Isabella Cuminato (also making her debut with OperOttawa) and Pauline van der Roest. They provided, with wonderful harmonic singing and strong rich and round tones, excellent admonishment on behalf of the Queen to Papageno, and were much like a Greek chorus throughout the show, trying their best to persuade Tamina to choose evil over good and join the ranks of the Queen. Monastatas, the traitorous and evil servant, was sung by Silke Schwarz, with just the right edgy quality to

Operottawa produces a unique and creative and very entertaining *Magic Flute* (continued)

best portray the treachery and her lust towards Pamina. The three spirits, the antithesis to the three ladies, were sung by Melanie Anderson, Sherrie Spelchuk and Jean-E Hudson. Representing good, and there to help Tamina in her quest for truth, to save Pamina, and to be match-maker for Pipogena, they sang with a light, crisp and buoyant harmony, with a lovely blend, very much suited to the music Mozart wrote. The Speaker, who first introduces us to the world of Sarastra, was sung by Mary Zborowski with a clear and lovely voice, just solid enough to portray the protector-ess of the holy realm that she was. The guards of the Temple of Sarastra were sung by Mary Zborowski, Patricia Beckett, Colleen Woodhouse and Brenda Haddock., giving a very solid strong vocal line of great beauty. The Priestesses of Sarastra were sung by Sue Postlethwaite and Diane Reid and added additional solid singing to the choruses.

Conductor Norman E. Brown led the OperOttawa Orchestra with a dynamic competency and authority, guiding them, and the singers through the opera, shaping the phrasing and bringing out the best music possible. The tempi choices were totally suited to the music. All too often in *Magic Flute*, conductors will unnecessarily speed through certain sections for dramatic effect, but Brown maintained a respect for what Mozart wrote, knowing that Mozart had already built into the music the sense of speed and the inherent tension by the note values he wrote – no need to speed up. Right from the Overture, which gave the audience a foreshadow of what was to come - the sonorous three fanfares at the very beginning and the Allegro fugal section, Brown showed excellent communication with the orchestra, and a good understanding of the music. Overall, the orchestra, while not the full symphonic size, easily filled the church and supported the singers, all with an excellent blend and precision in their playing. OperOttawa, already renowned for its innovative ideas, used a Recorder instead of a flute in the orchestra, played with elegance and beauty by Gerard Nieuwenhuis. This was mirrored on stage by the fact that Tamina carried a Magic Recorder rather than a flute. The Glockenspiel solos in several of the arias and scenes was played brilliantly by Jack Hui Litster, who is composer-in-residence with OperOttawa, and the composer of the final production of the season – *Gates of Heaven – Requiem for a Life of Peace*.

This was the operatic highlight of the season. Beautiful singing, a great orchestra, And a full to capacity audience who were clearly very appreciative of the show, as evidenced by close to a ten minute standing ovation and roars of approval at the end. Ottawa is fortunate to have OperOttawa. Next in this season is the world premiere *Gates of Heaven: Requiem for a Life of Peace*, written by OperOttawa composer-in-residence Jack Hui Litster on March 10, 2024 at 2:30 pm. See you there!

Magic Flute Photos (photo credit Jacob Sedore)



- 1** 3 Ladies (l to r) Grace Quinsey, Isabella Cuminato, Pauline van der Roest
- 2** 3 Spirits (r to l) Melanie Anderson, Sherrie Spelchuk, Jean-E Hudson
- 3** Pamina, Sarastra and Speaker - Erinne-Colleen Laurin (centre), Carole Portelance (right), Mary Zborowski (left)
- 4** Tamina - Kathleen Radke
- 5** Queen of the Night and Sarastra and Speaker - Ania Hejnar (top), Carole Portelance (Sarastra)(r) and Mary Zborowski (Speaker)(l)

Music As Sanctuary

Matthew Larkin, Custodian for Music at St. Andrews, has established a series of concerts at St. Andrew's Church - each Tuesday from 12:10 to 1:00PM, in the sanctuary. For information, check the web site at <https://www.standrewsottawa.ca/music-as-sanctuary>.

January - May 2024 Performance Schedule

January 16

Francine Nguyen-Savaria, Organ

January 23

Matthew Muggeridge, Countertenor

January 30

Erik Joran, Violin, with Renee Dahn, Viola

February 6

Gertrude Letourneau, Flute,
with Catherine Donkin, Piano

February 13

Ernie Cox and Friends

February 13 at 6:00 PM

Kathleen Radke and Friends
(special Shrove Tuesday concert)

February 20

Maria Gajraj, Organ

February 27

Daniel Ramjattan, Guitar

March 5

Ralitsa Tcholakova, Violin

March 12

TBD

March 19

Adam Sperry, Tenor, with Andrew Ager, Piano

March 26

Susan Brown, Soprano

April 2

Avery Kennedy, Flute

April 9

Norman Brown, Baritone

April 16

Roddy Elias, Guitar

April 23

Carla Klassen, Soprano

April 30

Vincea McClelland Cousté, Guitar

May 7

Durham Schools Concert Band

May 14

Afraaz Adam Alnoor Mulji, Organ

May 21

Susan Toman, Harpsichord

The Mummy – World Premiere at New Opera Lyra**Lesley Robinson**

An opera by Andrew Ager, with a libretto by Andrew Ager, Sheila Ager and Suzanne Bassett

Cast

The Mummy	Dylan Wright	Egyptologist	Iain Mcpherson
Margaret, his wife	Doreen Taylor-Claxton	Laura, their daughter	Irina Medvedeva
Pharaoh Queen	Carmen Harris	Conductor	Matthew Larkin
Director	Mitchell Gillett		

On Halloween weekend we were privileged in Ottawa to enjoy the world premiere of *The Mummy*, the final opera in Andrew Ager's Gothic Trilogy and the opening production of New Opera Lyra's 2023/24 season. With its supernatural themes and haunting atmosphere, this was a fitting follow up to *Frankenstein* (2019) and *Dracula* (2022).

The Mummy is a tale of love and revenge, a cautionary tale of what can go wrong when the long deceased are callously disturbed. Love is eternal, transcending time and place, so a few thousand years is just a blink of an eye in the context of forever. From the first moments, Ager's music captures the atmosphere of the Egyptian setting and the eery aura of the Mummy's tomb. Andrew Ager himself was at the piano and his music felt like an additional protagonist in the story.

Heart-wrenching performances were given by Dylan Wright and Carmen Harris as the Mummy and his queen, particularly in their poignant love duet. The Mummy is simultaneously a figure of pathos and of menace and this irreconcilable paradox is at the heart of the opera. Lighting was by Edward Franko, costumes by Kathryn Racine and props by Mark Shulist. The impressive make up was by Suzanne Bassett and Catherine Simons. Congratulations to all.

Members of the cast and crew of *The Mummy* take their bows

New Opera Lyra 2024



Friday April 19, 2024 7:30 PM

Saturday April 20, 2024 7:30 PM

Southminster United Church

15 Aylmer Ave., Ottawa

Come and see New Opera Lyra's world-premiere of *The Great Gatsby*. Based on the iconic novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Andrew Ager's latest opera tells the story of a man who has everything - except his lost love. His desire to regain his former happiness awakens the unknowable forces of fate, which neither wealth nor power can control...



Saturday June 1, 2024 3:30 PM

Southminster United Church

15 Aylmer Ave., Ottawa

Great opera choruses and favourite arias! Ottawa's Ewashko Singers and New Opera Lyra bring you a glorious afternoon of selections from the best-loved operas of all-time. With new instrumental arrangements by Andrew Ager, chorus and soloists, all under the direction of Ottawa's Laurence Ewashko, our second season closing Gala will be an unforgettable event not to miss.

And there's an extra! The audience is invited to sing along with several of the most familiar choruses. Maestro Ewashko will hold a fun-filled rehearsal shortly before the concert for all who wish to add their voices to this splendid occasion.

University of Ottawa Opera Ensemble

HANSEL AND GRETEL

The School of Music of the University of Ottawa presents an opera based on a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, *Hansel and Gretel* (sung in English) by Engelbert Humperdinck; a wonderful collaboration between the singers of the uOttawa Opera Ensemble and the musicians of the uOttawa Orchestra with the participation of the Chamber Choir of the Ottawa Children's Choir.

Vocal Coach : Judith Ginsburg Stage Director: Dana Fradkin

Conductor: Dinuk Wijeratne Chorus conductor: Robert Filion

Although originally written to appeal to a children's audience, this opera has always captivated audiences of all ages. An opera translated into many languages and appreciated the world over for its folk melodies, it is one of the most performed operas on the planet. Come and see the adventures of Hansel and Gretel, who live in extreme poverty and go off into the forest in search of food. As they get lost, they experience a host of adventures: fantastic creatures, a strange house made of gingerbread, a terrible witch, children who are prisoners and then freed from their magical spell. With their love for each other, their help and their cunning, Hansel and Gretel overcome all obstacles. A musical family entertainment.

To experience this magical moment: there are three performances

Thursday and Friday, February 8 and 9, 2024 at 7 pm

Saturday February 10, 2024 at 2:30 pm

Tickets can be purchased through EventBrite.

University of Toronto Opera

Cendrillon

Charles Perrault's classic story of a lonely "cinder" girl, an unhappy household and a searching prince is given human dimension in this 19th century masterpiece. Massenet's sweeping, lyric score elevates this simple folktale to a compelling narrative of self discovery, a quest for enduring love and the power of goodness.

In French with English Surtitles. March 14, 15, 16, 17, 2024 Location TBA

Mostly Mozart

U of T Opera presents a concert of beloved operatic ensembles by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart augmented by works inspired by the man widely recognized as "one of the greatest composers in the history of Western music".

Walter Hall, Friday April 5, 5:00 pm

An Outstanding Handel Adaptation- Jephtha at Covent Garden

By Lesley Robinson

CAST	Jephtha	Allan Clayton	Iphis	Jennifer France
	Storgè	Alice Coote	Hamor	Cameron Shahbazi
	Zebul	Brindley Sherratt	Angel	Ivo Clark
	Conductor	Laurence Cummings		



L-r: Brindley Sherratt, Alice Coote, Allan Clayton, Jennifer France, Cameron Shahbazi

Not performed on stage since its premiere in 1752 at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, *Jephtha* was the last of Handel's major works and is a curious choice for a stage production. The piece itself is an oratorio, not an opera, so its structure does not readily lend itself to a fully staged dramatization. Thanks to the formulaic framework of the time, even Handel's operas are not easy to stage, with the characters expressing their emotions in arias which are interspersed with recitative to move the action along. Nevertheless, in this production, director Oliver Mears does a marvellous job of presenting the work as a compelling, theatrical piece.

Based on fewer than a dozen biblical verses in the Old Testament Book of Judges, the story of Jephtha's vow to the Almighty to sacrifice the first creature he sees on his return from his victory in battle and its unfortunate consequences (the terrible outcome that he is greeted on his return by his only daughter) is troublesome in itself. In the popularly known version of the story (probably a medieval invention), an angel intervenes to commute the execution of the vow to a sacrifice of Jephtha's daughter to perpetual virginity instead of losing her to human sacrifice. This too is somewhat bizarre, in that it means that the sacrifice instead must come from the daughter, rather than from Jephtha himself, but this is the conclusion that Handel chooses. In the actual biblical version, there is no intervention by an angel, but the young girl asks for a temporary reprieve in order to go to the mountains with her friends to bewail her virginity. Her wish is granted, but when she returns after a couple of months, the sacrifice is indeed carried out. However the story ends, what we witness in Handel's extraordinary music and in Allan Clayton's gut-wrenching performance is the abject misery that Jephtha has brought upon himself. The young girl's ardent fiancé is also an invention which heightens the pathos and facilitates an added element to the happy ending

Jephtha at Covent Garden (continued)

in this production—unwilling to succumb to the pointless sacrifice of their love, they run away together to live happily ever after. Although not exactly the happy ending Handel had in mind, it certainly appeals to a modern audience to see the girl literally throw off the habit that is being forced upon her. It seems that to her, a life of perpetual virginity would be a fate worse than death!

The performances of the principal singers in this production were all spectacular. Allan Clayton might be typecast as the tortured soul, following his recent performances as Hamlet and Peter Grimes. In fact, he is perfect for the role of Jephtha, giving the performance his all and ending the evening totally drained. Having followed his career recently on Instagram, I was thrilled to see young Canadian countertenor Cameron Shahbazi in person. As well as the singing, the acting was superb. Thanks to the stage direction and the acting, the solo arias felt like conversations. This played a phenomenal part in dealing with the challenge of dramatising an oratorio.

The set, designed by Simon Lima Holdsworth, consisted of giant stone walls, engraved with biblical verses which were moved around to create spaces for the action to unfold. The costumes by Iлона Karas were important in setting the mood. The Israelites were dressed in monochromatic, puritanical clothing, whereas we were given brief glimpses of the enemy Ammonites, dressed in colourful, eighteenth-century garb, cavorting in debauchery. In the final scene, the chorus took up positions along the aisles of the auditorium, giving the feeling that they were all around the audience.

This was a magnificent production of a stupendous work. Bravo to the cast and crew and to the creative energy of the Royal Opera House.



The Royal Opera House Covent Garden

Love Conquers All - A Happy Ending at Opera Atelier

Lesley Robinson



Artists of the Atelier Ballet celebrate love in the grand finale of *Orpheus and Eurydice*

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice does not traditionally conclude with a happy ending, but Gluck's opera allows Amore (Amour in the French version) to intervene to bring Eurydice back to life and reunite the lovers. Opera Atelier's production ends with a joyful flourish, which leaves the audience with aching facial muscles from all the smiling and sore hands from the applause!

The opera, initially entitled *Orfeo ed Euridice* with an Italian libretto, was premiered in Vienna in 1762. The role of Orfeo was sung by an alto castrato. 12 years later Gluck re-worked the opera with a French libretto for Parisian audiences and *Orphée et Eurydice* premiered in Paris with the role of Orphée sung by a high tenor. In modern productions Orpheus is often sung by a female contralto or mezzo-soprano, but Opera Atelier opts for the 1774 version, with Colin Ainsworth in the lead male role, Ottawa native, soprano Mireille Asselin as Eurydice and soprano Anna-Julia David debuting with OA as Amour.

The happy ending is the perfect showcase for the magnificent Atelier Ballet, choreographed as usual by Co-Artistic Director Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg and the opera ends with a superb flourish of music and dance among the sumptuous sets of Gerard Gauci. This was a jubilant end to a delightful evening.

New Season, New Conductor
Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at Opéra de Montréal

Lesley Robinson



Musicologist Perre Vachon (left) interviews Conductor Nicolas Ellis

Opéra de Montréal began its season with a dazzling presentation of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. The sparkle was generated by the combination of the genius of Mozart and the enthusiasm and dynamism of the remarkable young conductor, Nicolas Ellis, making his Opéra de Montréal debut. We were treated to a preview of the performance when Pierre Vachon interviewed Mr. Ellis as part of his pre-opera talk. He spoke with such fervour about Mozart's brilliance in general and this piece in particular, that it was inevitably going to be a special night, from the very first notes of the overture.

Nicolas Ellis is already making a name for himself as Artistic Director, Conductor and Founder of the Orchestre de L'Agora as well as through his collaboration with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Orchestre Métropolitain. He has also served as Principal Guest Conductor of Les Violons du Roy. He has been involved through the Orchestre de L'Agora in collaborations with Opéra de Montréal to produce opera projects at unusual venues. This kind of innovation shows how opera is alive and well in Montreal and bodes well for a future of cutting-edge ingenuity for the art form. During his pre-performance interview he spoke passionately about Mozart's music. He finds it electrifying and says it has "champagne bubbles".

The Marriage of Figaro (continued)

The production had a classic eighteenth century setting and the set had a few quirky features with lots of doors to open and shut for entrances and exits. The cast contributed greatly to the evening's ebullience. Croatian baritone Leon Košavić and Canadian soprano Andrea Núñez performed with energy and charm as Figaro and Susanna and Canadian soprano Kirsten MacKinnon was a touching and dignified Countess. Worthy of mention are the three young artists from the Atelier Lyrique who rounded out the youthful cast: Matthew Li as Antonio, Emma Fekete as Barbarina and 2023 National Capital Opera Competition prizewinner Angelo Moretti as Don Basilio and Don Curzio.



L-r: Hugo Laporte, (Count Almaviva), Nicolas Ellis, Andrea Núñez, Leon Košavić and Kirsten MacKinnon

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