



Concours d'opera Brian Law

2015

Brian Law Opera Competition



## Winners of the 2015 Brian Law Opera Competition

\$5,000 1<sup>st</sup> prize: Soprano **Eliza Johnson**

\$3,000 2<sup>nd</sup> prize: Soprano **Jennifer Mizzi**

\$1,000 3<sup>rd</sup> prize: Bass-baritone **Joel Allison**

Additional 2015 prizes donated by individuals were:

\$1,000 for best male singer: Bass-baritone **Joel Allison**

\$500 Audience Appreciation: Bass-baritone **Joel Allison**

# The 2015 Brian Law Opera Competition

by Ute Davis

What an exciting evening it was! Despite the new location of Southminster United Church on Bank Street and the earlier date of 10th October on Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, the audience for the event was large, knowledgeable and appreciative.

Following opening words from President Murray Kitts, the highly popular Rob Clipperton took over as MC and proceeded to guide the evening in his crisp and pleasing style. He read a letter written to the Opera Society by our Honorary Patron, Gerald Finley, for the occasion. Gerald referred in very moving terms to the birth of his daughter, Rose, two weeks prior to the event and briefly explored the musical perceptions of the very young. He also offered encouraging words to the competitors (see page 8).

The performances by the six finalists were very exciting and touching. One suffers along with the singers who are tense and stressed. Even the best show signs of nervousness. My advice usually is to take part in as many competitions as possible to overcome this tension.

While the three jurors convened, Rob read a letter of warm greetings from Brian Law himself. Now in semi-retirement in rural Oxford, close to Christchurch, New Zealand, Brian writes of his Canadian and his N.Z. experiences in wishing good fortune to the Society and to the competitors (see page 6).

Then the audience became occupied in voting for a "favourite singer" of their own choice, who turned out to be bass-baritone Joel Allison. This was followed by a draw for numerous door prizes donated by Society members.

A few minutes later our distinguished panel of external judges, John Peter (Jeep) Jeffries, Richard Turp and Dr. James Wright returned to the hall. These three accomplished gentlemen (see page 7) took to the stage for Richard Turp to announce the winners:

soprano **Eliza Johnson** (1st prize)

soprano **Jennifer Mizzi** (2nd prize)

bass-baritone **Joel Allison** (3rd prize)

The third prize is a biennial donation from Board member at large, Cavaliere Pasqualina Pat Adamo. In addition Joel received \$1,000 for "best male singer", donated by the Rev. Alan Gallichan, as well as the Audience Appreciation Prize of \$500, donated by Dr. Michael and Mrs. Ute Davis.

The three other finalists were tenor **Tonatiuh Abrego**, soprano **Ania Hejnar**, and baritone **Ryan Hofman**. To help cover their expenses, each of these runners-up received \$250, thanks to Vera Lee Nelson's donation which increased the money available for them.

Mr. Turp stressed that all competitors were winners in having reached the finals and in gaining the opportunity to perform publicly in a competition of this calibre. He also thanked the pianists who accompanied the singers: Thomas Annand, Judith Ginsburg and Frédéric Lacroix.

Finally, we all retired to a reception in the upper rooms of the church building, happy that the high quality of the vocal talent on display was reassurance of the quality of future opera in the Ottawa area.

Congratulations and thanks to everyone who made this year's BLOC such a success: Murray Kitts, Mark and Lesley Robinson, Ute Davis, Vera-Lee Nelson, Jim Burgess, the preliminary round judges and our final round judges. Thanks also to those who donated prizes. Above all I think we should be grateful to 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 accompanists.

Except where specified, all photos are by Klaus S. Some photos have been edited to fit the space available. This special edition newsletter was prepared by our editor, David Williams.

# The Finalists



Johnson

Hejnar

Mizzi

Hofman

Abrego

Allison







## Antipodean Greetings from Brian Law

Tenakotou, Tenakotou, Tenakotou, katoa  
(*Welcome, Welcome, thrice welcome*)

In 1991, when the competition was established and the idea of attaching my name to the mast head was first muted, I remember thinking and protesting that although I felt deeply honoured, I had none of the attributes such a recipient should possess.

Surely ‘august, dignified, venerable,’ these were the characteristics one would expect in one being given such a singular honour? But ‘august, dignified, venerable’ are epithets that have never, ever, been applied to me by any of my peers or colleagues, and unfortunately, a quarter century later, they still don’t stick. But I am immensely touched and proud, and feel quite unworthy of having this splendid competition named after me.

Since the last competition, two years ago, I have semi-retired. My professional commitments now consist of conducting a few concerts with the Christchurch Symphony each year and occasional concerts in Auckland and other centres. I live on a farm just outside Oxford (no, the other one - a village 50 kms outside of Christchurch, NZ) with a fold of highland cattle and a dog and chickens to trip over. It is the most beautiful countryside and I am very happy and content.

News from Ottawa is rare but I was delighted to see on the TV recently that the TPP trade negotiations have engendered your regional milk farmers to have an animal petting day on Parliament Hill.

Recently the Canadian Maple Leaf has been touted by many of us here, as an example of the perfect national flag. In 1965 the just introduced Maple Leaf flag greeted me on my arrival in Ottawa. Half



Brian Law

a century later New Zealand is at last trying to shake off the symbols of its colonial past with a new flag, the process of choosing which seems decidedly flawed and politically fraught. Eventually, I anticipate, we will have a new flag with a fern at its centre, and I fear with too many colours. However, there is a chance, though, that the naysayers will win and we will continue with the present Union Flag which is virtually impossible to distinguish (without possessing a degree in heraldry) from that of our Australian neighbours! But none of the 5 options we will be voting for can hold a candle to the Maple Leaf. To this day that simple magnificent flag brings a glow of pride to me whenever I see it.

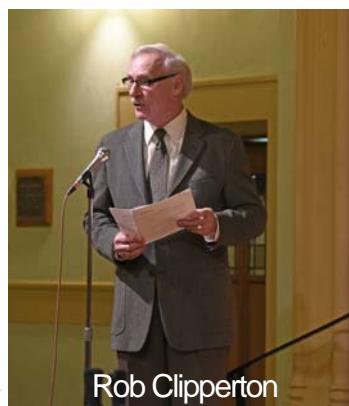
I have watched with enormous admiration over the years as the BLOC has expanded and developed into the very impressive Competition it has now become. My gratitude and admiration to all you National Capital Operatic Society members and opera enthusiasts who support and encourage these young singers as

they begin their exciting, but financially demanding, careers. It is wonderful to see the professional successes of past recipients. Surely tangible proof of the competition’s value and importance.

My congratulations to all of tonight’s finalists. I will watch, unfortunately from afar, the development of your careers with great interest. My very best wishes to my friends and all you loyal enthusiasts and supporters of opera in Ottawa. Ottawa, this most beautiful of Cities, still my spiritual home, and still so very dear to my heart.

With very best wishes.

Brian

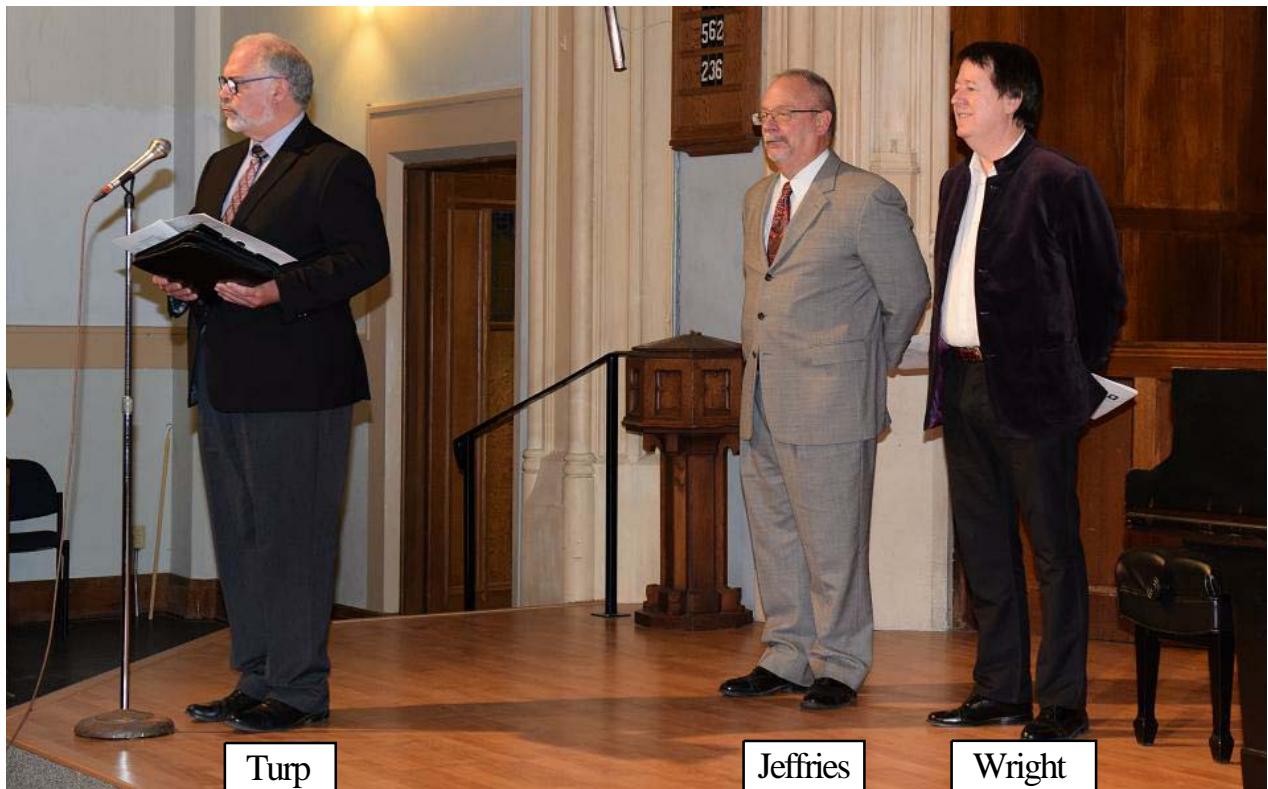


Rob Clipperton

Born and educated in England, Brian Law migrated to Canada in 1965, where he was central to the musical life of Ottawa for over a quarter of a century. He was Music Director of The Ottawa Choral Society, The Ottawa Symphony Orchestra and the chamber orchestra, Thirteen Strings. At his farewell concert he was awarded the freedom of the City and the Brian Law Opera Scholarship was established in his honour. While in Canada, he quickly established and extended his reputation for excellence with the Choir of St Matthew's Church in Ottawa. It was soon acknowledged as the finest men and boys' choir in Canada.

In 1991 Brian moved to New Zealand to become Music Director of the Christchurch City Choir. In his new home he rapidly assumed a similar significant artistic role. He regularly conducted for the Christchurch Symphony and conducted many performances for Canterbury Opera. He will conduct Southern Opera's production of *Carmen* in October. He has recorded with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and the Auckland Philharmonia and has conducted both of these orchestras for seasons for the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

*Photo and information on Brian Law courtesy of Christchurch Cathedral, NZ*



## The Judges

**Richard Turp**, an expert Musicologist, has produced various musical programs for Bravo Television and was a highly entertaining panel member of CBC's *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera*. For a decade he worked in Europe as an operatic tenor and also appeared with his father in l'Opéra de Montréal's production of Verdi's *Macbeth* in 1983. Mr. Turp has lectured widely for l'Opéra de Montréal and the Montréal Symphony Orchestra. He is a collaborator with Opera Canada, Opera Now and the Opera Canada Awards Gala, the "Rubies". He teaches vocal literature at UQAM and l'Université de Montréal as well as French vocal diction at McGill University to opera singers. He is the artistic director of the Lachine Music Festival.

**John Peter (Jeep) Jeffries** was appointed as General Director of Opera Lyra in June 2012. He served as Executive Director of Tulsa Opera from 2008 to 2011 and as Executive Director of Opera Grand Rapids, in Michi-

gan, from 2001 to 2008. He has also held positions with Opera Idaho, Portland Opera, the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto from 1989 to 1996, and with the Florida Grand Opera in Miami from 1984 to 1989. He has also worked with the Boston Opera, the Lake George Opera Festival, and several tours by Opera New England.

**Dr. James Wright** serves as Professor of Music and Supervisor of Performance Studies in Carleton University's School for Studies in Art & Culture. His scholarly contributions include two award-winning books on the life and work of Arnold Schoenberg, and a forthcoming monograph on the life and work of Eldon Rathburn, the prolific Canadian film composer. James Wright is also widely known as a composer whose vocal works have been commissioned, performed and recorded by soloists and ensembles throughout North America and Europe.

## A Message from Gerald Finley

I am very honoured as patron of the National Capital Opera Society to celebrate a wonderful line up of young aspiring singers in the most extraordinary of art forms. As well, on this Thanksgiving Weekend, it certainly is a privilege for me to share with you the good fortune that has befallen me in the past month.

My wife and I have been blessed by the birth of a daughter, who will be five weeks old on the day this is read out to you. I have loved being a singer from an early age, but the blessings of adulthood seem to include the miracle of new life and the responsibility to nurture it.

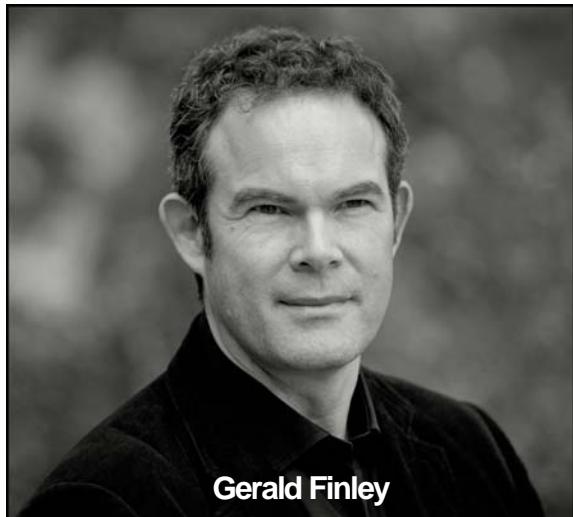
It is my sincere wish that my little Rose will grow up to hear the art of singing still flourishing, encouraged by competitions such as this one. It is a remarkable art; the nurture of inner emotion, translated through physical, mental and athletic management to produce a sound that communicates the stirrings of the soul in all its torments and delights. Believe me when I say we are all born to sing. The efficiency with which my tiny Rose can produce sound that touches her mother's and father's hearts is one of nature's miracles. While we might not yet applaud that sound, I can tell you that it is to that fundamental which all great singers should aspire. Pure need, effortless use of full diaphragm energy, focused on the resonators, so that the only response is to scoop her up and cuddle her. No, perhaps great singers should avoid that effect. A valid response is to counter offer her a soothing lullaby or a hummed tune as a source of calm and security.

Like the beating of the mother's heart, an easy rhythm and simple melody can calm our wildest fears.

I would like to encourage the competitors, like a sports psychologist: Believe you can do it, love the art with everything you have, strive beyond yourself to search for better ears to guide you, seek excellence in all things. There may be tonight a single person who is a bit further along the road at the moment in that search. It is right to celebrate that circumstance. The others should be encouraged in that you are here at all. The audience will appreciate that you have turned up and you need them for guidance.

George London, the great Canadian bass-baritone, famously said "Luck is simply being prepared for opportunity". Be more ready than your colleagues for that opportunity! Dame Eva Turner stared me in the face when she was 95 and said "You won't get anywhere without application and dedication" (I hope Rob will put on a booming and defiant tone at this quote!) You can hear it in her recordings of Turandot (say both 't's!). You cannot imagine a human voice capable of such power, radiance and sheer will. I hope my Rose will experience live classical singing throughout her life.

I give thanks for many things this weekend, but I do not forget that everyone here tonight celebrates the unamplified voice in all its glory. Have a wonderful evening!



Gerald Finley

Photo Credit: Sim Canetty-Clarke



Murray Kitts