



NATIONAL CAPITAL *Opera Society*

National Capital Opera Society Newsletter

Summer 2024



President's Annual Report

As presented at Annual General Meeting, 16 June 2024

I am pleased to report that the 2023 Competition was a success and was, as it should be, our greatest accomplishment over the last 12 months. This was our first competition following the pandemic and we took the opportunity to make several important changes. We increased the total prize money to \$21,000. We opened up the competition to all Canadians and we changed the name to the National Capital Opera Competition. Additionally, we received excellent feedback from the singers, the pianists, the judges and the audience. We have already started preparation of the next competition on October 18, 2025.

I am disappointed that it has taken until today to hold our first face-to-face meeting since the pandemic. The largest impediment was finding a new location to meet. Nevertheless, we have continued our Zoom sessions. A small and appreciative group attends.

Thanks to David Williams and Lesley, we have continued our newsletter, although with fewer contributors. We welcome contributions to future issues.

We have embarked on a major project with our Webmaster, Jim Burgess, to upgrade our website. The goals of the new website are to attract new members and to improve communication on our activities. I am pleased to report that the new website should be in place by the end of the summer. From a Financial standpoint, the society is well positioned for the next competition.

Our membership has declined following the pandemic. We now have a total of 30 members. We will continue to work on growing our membership through our activities.

Lastly, the number members of our Board of Directors has also declined over the past year. If anyone is interested in joining the Board, please let me know.

In summary, the primary goal of the society is to hold the competition. The 2023 competition was a success and 2025 planning has started. We have held Zooms, published our newsletter and updated our website and we plan to continue. We will also work on increasing membership and asking for donations to fund our competition.

Mark Robinson



Dmitri Hvorostovsky - Just Remembering

An NCOS Zoom Event presented by Vera-Lee Nelson



Dmitri Hvorostovsky was well beloved by everybody, as evidenced by the heartwarming tributes which followed his premature death. He was born in Krasnoyarsk, the second largest city in Siberia, with a population of over a million and a climate much like ours. In fact, the city is twinned with Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Krasnoyarsk is a cultural and educational centre with a university. His mother was a gynecologist and his father was a professional engineer who were always busy, so Dmitri spent a lot of time with his grandmother who had an alcoholic husband, but nevertheless she was quite good to him. Although his parents were busy, they did get together on the weekends and it was his father who was the music lover who inspired his only child's love of music. Dmitri was playing the piano by the time he was six years old. He was quite talented and people thought he would become an

instrumentalist, but it was at the Krasnoyarsk School of Arts that he discovered that he was really a singer. His first marriage was to a ballerina. They had twins in 1996, but had a really acrimonious divorce. Shortly after that he married again and remained happily married for as long as he lived. The first extract shared was from the "Moscow Nights" concert with Anna Netrebko from Red Square. It is clear from this how much he revelled in his Russian heritage. [Click here](#) for the YouTube playlist of the presentation.

He won first place in two competitions in Russia which encouraged him to enter the Cardiff Singer of the World competition. He won that competition which became known as the "battle of the baritones" because his main competition was from Bryn Terfel. That was when his career took off. The next extract was one of the songs he sang in that competition—"Ombra mai fù" from *Xerxes* by Handel. It was fun to see him with his brown hair at age 26, already so self assured. His career just took off after that win. He debuted in *The Queen of Spades* at the Nice Opera and audiences were really charmed by his cultivated voice and handsome appearance. He was a tall man—over six feet. Next he debuted at La Fenice in Venice and the Lyric Opera in Chicago and was very much in demand everywhere. His presentation was beyond belief and once that hair turned white he had that signature look and he was in demand as a recitalist and on virtually every major stage that there was. His personality was very much in evidence when singing with partners with whom he had a good rapport. A good example of this is the duet from *The Pearl Fishers* which he sang with Jonas Kaufmann. We saw their rapport and Dmitri's natural acting ability.



The next piece we saw was again with Anna Netrebko from Verdi's *Il trovatore*. From this you can see that this man really enjoys what he is doing and his life is his music.

The "Proms", the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts, take place at the Royal Albert Hall in London and go on all summer, ending with the Last Night of the Proms happening in early September. The first half of the last night is a concert and it is an honour to be invited to perform in it. We watched Dmitri singing the Toreador song from *Carmen* at the last night concert in 2006.



Early in his career his Russian persona and voice were noticed and according to the New York Times, Eugene Onegin was the role that he was born to play. The next selection was Dmitri singing in *Eugene Onegin* at the Met with Renee Fleming. This reminds of what an awesome voice this man had with a wonderful range and he obviously liked singing everything he sang. He was also an actor and able to get into the part. At this point he was around the age of 50 and was on the cusp of being a great Russian baritone, but alas it was not to last. He was diagnosed around this time with malignant

brain cancer and from that time on, he performed when he was able, but his balance was badly affected by the brain tumour. Near the end of his life he was invited to sing at the Met Gala, celebrating the 50th anniversary in the house. He wanted to do that very badly. He had been performing in Toronto not long before this and had done quite well, so he was encouraged that he could do it. Since there had been a possibility that he might not be able to make it, nobody knew he was coming. Even the orchestra didn't know until the night before. When he showed up, he did not look all that well, but his voice was as good as ever. To end on a joyful note we can remember that he brought much joy to us and we brought joy to him. The presentation ended with a curtain call from a performance of *Il trovatore* at the Met in September 2015, when the orchestra showered him with white roses.



We are so lucky now that there is such a large discography. There are a lot of recordings of every genre: folk songs, concert songs and opera and thanks to the Met, we have a lot of opera. Hopefully, this will make you want to listen to more of his music.

The Great Gatsby
By Andrew Ager
New Opera Lyra's Second World Premiere of the Season
Lesley Robinson

CAST

Jay Gatsby – Adam Sperry
Daisy Buchanan – Carmen Harris
Jordan Baker – Ania Hejnar
Tom Buchanan – Ryan Hofman
Myrtle Wilson – Jennifer Olenic
George Wilson – Alasdair Campbell

Conductor – Matthew Larkin
Director - Suzanne Bassett

Ager's music is the perfect vehicle for this tale of love and tragedy, at times mysterious, sometimes tender, at intervals dramatic. There were moments of great poignancy, interspersed with instances of humour and even a little melodrama. The cast gave a polished portrayal of the characters negotiating their way in the sometimes trivial, somewhat repressed society in which they live. It was a delight to see some local favourites, including former Brian Law Opera Competition finalists.

Here's a photo compilation of some of the best moments:





Photos courtesy of New Opera Lyra



All About Operatic Revelry

An Interview with Philip Klaassen, Founder of Operatic Revelry

NCOS: What/who is/are Operatic Revelry?

PK: Operatic Revelry takes opera out of the concert hall and into an accessible, 21st century venue - a bar! We aim to shatter the stereotypes of opera while providing space where local, developing artists can perform and audiences can enjoy a pint while hearing some of the best talent Ottawa has to offer. We hope that by bringing opera into a newer environment we can engage with a new audience and show that operatic music, stories and characters can be enjoyed by anybody, regardless of whether you've been to an opera before or not. OR is organized primarily by myself and my friend (and fellow tenor!) Jonathan MacArthur, though we've received a lot of support and ideas from other artists in the city.

NCOS: What was the inspiration for OR?

PK: My main inspiration came after attending Opera Pub in Toronto, put on by Against The Grain Theatre back in 2018. It brought together all of my favorite things - opera, artists, fellow music lovers, and beer! The energy was so electric and fun, but what really got me was the sense of community and I've been dreaming of having a version of that right here in Ottawa ever since.

NCOS: What do you do to put a show together?

PK: Once we have chosen a theme, finding the singers is the easy part - there is so much talent in this city! But since there are no rehearsals prior to the performance, it is important that the singers have a say in their repertoire which allows them to have fun and perform to the best of their ability. Once the repertoire starts rolling in, that's when most of my work begins! I host the event as well by giving brief (and often rather silly) introductions to each piece so that the audience can really come along for the ride.

NCOS: What's in the future for OR?

PK: I hope to be organizing these events for a long time and I'm excited to see where it goes! Our events are proof that opera can be enjoyed by anybody, and I hope that the community we are fostering at our events benefits the rest of the music scene in Ottawa. I truly believe that if we want classical music to continue growing, we must work together. A rising tide raises all boats, as they say.

We have dates booked at the Rainbow Bistro for September, October and December 2024. So stay tuned! You can find Operatic Revelry on Instagram (@operaticrevelry) and on Facebook.

**Spring Fever by
Operatic Revelry**
No Rehearsal. No Worries. No regrets!

Lesley Robinson

In an unexpected venue and in a spontaneous atmosphere, Operatic Revelry brought opera out of the stuffy opera house and into the diverse community with its Spring Fever show on April 24th. For a modest \$10 entry fee, bistro goers were treated to an evening of springtime operatic repertoire. Eight young local singers: Philip Klaassen, Mark Wilkinson, Sydney Clarke, Jonathan MacArthur, Tina Alexander-Luna, Ania Hejnar, Lauren Reisig and Corey Arnold put together a joyful and fairly impromptu (planned, but not rehearsed) programme of opera arias to accompaniment by pianist Aude Urbancic. You may recognise some of the names as previous Brian Law Opera Competition finalists and singers with local companies.



Host Philip Klaassen

In host Philip Klaassen's introductions, he asked the audience how many of them had been to the opera and how many had not. There were a surprising number of attendees who had never enjoyed any performances formally in an opera house, yet there was a universal atmosphere of enthusiasm and appreciation for the performers and their presentations. What a simple and delightful way to bring opera to new generations and to new audiences.

Three setlists of performances were interspersed with intermissions, providing plentiful opportunities for trips to the bar for refills on the refreshments. The setlists included arias by Leoncavallo, Massenet, Gilbert and Sullivan, Donizetti, Britten, Bernstein, Delibes, Meyerbeer, Finzi, Puccini and Gounod, so there were pieces in a variety of languages and plenty of fun stuff in English for the audience to enjoy. The loose theme of all the selections was springtime, much of it lighthearted and all of it warmly appreciated by listeners and by singers alike. The overall atmosphere was of celebratory conviviality.



Ania Hejnar



Corey Arnold with pianist Aude Urbancic

Photos by John-Finnigan Lin



Bards and Bohemians **More Operatic Revelry**

Operatic Revelry held another event on June 26th. This was “Bards and Bohemians”, an evening of poetic merriment. The smiles say it all:



The cast of “Bards and Bohemians”

Photo by Curtis Perry

Oldies, but Goodies **Musings on *La Traviata* at Opera de Montreal**

Lesley Robinson

Sometimes the release of a new season's schedule will elicit a tiny bit of disenchantment when we see that the upcoming offerings include some of opera's "greatest hits". This may be because we yearn to experience something new and exciting. Nevertheless, there's a reason why these operas remain in the repertoire year after year and why we see them over and over again. They are musically fabulous, dramatically spectacular and speak to the heart of the human condition. When it comes to *La Traviata* this is all true. Verdi's music evokes every bit of pathos, exhilaration, joy and heartache that we could wish for and Opera de Montreal's recent production provided a powerful expression of all of this.

The creation of new productions of the oldies, but goodies can be a challenge. From each new production we hope to see something new in familiar material, to feel something we haven't felt before and to go away with new insights. One way to achieve this is by updating the setting. The original material on which the opera is based (the play *La Dame aux Camélias* by a very young Alexandre Dumas, fils) was first published in 1848 and Verdi's opera was first performed in 1853. Montreal's production is set in the Paris of the 1920s, with Violetta as a successful jazz singer, enjoying her fame and notoriety in the frivolous society of the day and contrasting sharply with the stiff mores of the older Germont, who remains faithful to the expectations of a bygone era. The single basic set serves as the framework for the party venues, for the country retreat of the lovers and for Violetta's boudoir.

Another important reason for including the oldies, but goodies is in building the audience. It satisfies the traditionalists and more significantly brings in newcomers to opera. It is the familiar repertoire that enters the popular consciousness – who has not heard the famous drinking song of Act I? It is especially gratifying to see that Opera de Montreal offers discounts to young opera goers.

Performances were top-notch and I must give special mention to how delightful it was to watch NCOC finalist Angelo Moretti who sang, danced and acted his heart out as Alfredo's friend Gastone. Young Canadian conductor Jordan de Souza gave an enthralling performance. I was mesmerised, just watching his expressive left hand.

Thanks to Opera de Montreal for a magnificent evening of operatic delight.



L-r James Westman as Germont, Conductor Jordan de Souza, Talise Trevigne as Violetta and Antoine Bélanger as Alfredo



For Your Calendar

Summer Festivals:



Glimmerglass Festival 2024, Cooperstown New York [Click here](#) for details



The Pirates of Penzance



Pagliacci

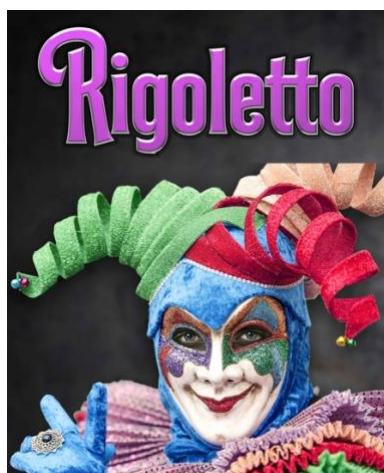
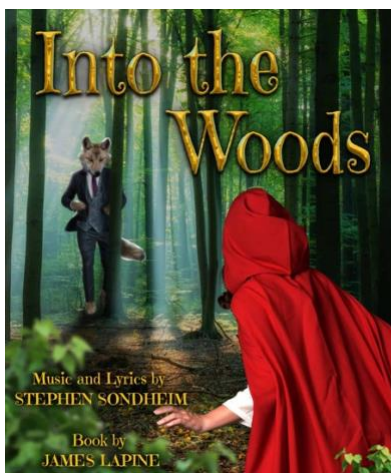
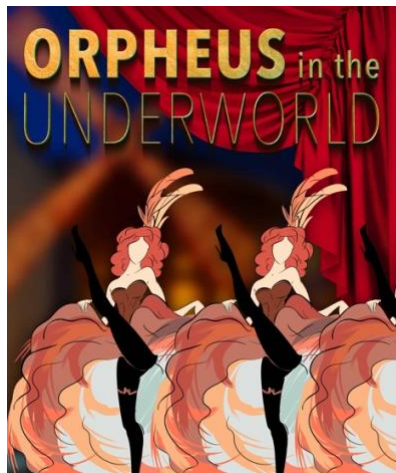


La Calisto



Elizabeth Cree

Opera North, Lebanon New Hampshire—Summerfest 2024 [Click here](#) for details.



2024/25 Seasons



PRESENTS

A VIRTUAL SMORGASBORD OF OPERA DELIGHTS

An afternoon of arias, duets, trios, chorus, and much, much more

Sunday, 22 September at 2:30 pm
First Baptist Church (Laurier @ Elgin)

COME FOR THE MUSIC. STAY FOR THE TREATS!

Under the artistic guidance of Norman E. Brown, OperOttawa offers a taste of the sweet and the savoury, not only with the selections of music, but also at the intermission during which our audience may enjoy special treats and coffee/tea.

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND. OPEROTTAWA'S SILENT AUCTION!

There will also be a SILENT AUCTION taking place. Items up for bid include **tickets** to Canadian Opera Company, Opera de Montreal, Chamberfest, Great Canadian Theatre Company, OperOttawa's Messiah, National Arts Centre – Indigenous Theatre, Atlantic Voices, New Opera Lyra, Caelis Academy, Ottawa Pops Orchestra; as well as **singing lessons** from many of the soloists in the show, and more...

EXCERPTS FROM 17 OPERAS – ALL IN ONE AFTERNOON!

TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM CAST MEMBERS, EVENTBRITE OR AT THE DOOR.

ADULTS: \$25, STUDENTS UNDER 18: \$10

EVENTBRITE: [Click here for tickets](#)

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IS WHEEL CHAIR / WALKER ACCESSIBLE

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Norman E. Brown – norman_e_brown@rogers.com



The Barber of Seville



Hamlet



L'Enfant et les Sortilèges



La Bohème



Toronto

[Click here](#) for details.



**OPERA 24
ATELIER 25**

Toronto

[Click here](#) for details.

Handel's Acis and Galatea

October 24–27, 2024

Charpentier's David and Jonathan

April 9–13, 2025



Live in cinemas worldwide. [Click here](#) for more information

2024-25 Season

Les Contes d'Hoffmann

1 pm, 5 October 2024

Grounded

1 pm, 19 October 2024

Tosca

1 pm, 23 November 2024

Aida

12:30 pm, 25 January 2025

Fidelio

1 pm, 15 March 2025

Le Nozze di Figaro

1 pm, 26 April 2025

Salome

1 pm, 17 May 2025

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

1pm, 31 May 2025

NCOS Board of Directors

President/Treasurer Mark Robinson

Board members: Colleen Arseneau
Francesca Fiasche
Helen Glover
Diana Gnarowski
Vera-Lee Nelson
Lesley Robinson
Carole Stelmack

Newsletter: Lesley Robinson

Webmaster: Jim Burgess