



NATIONAL CAPITAL  
*Opera Society*

National Capital Opera Society Newsletter

Spring 2025



President's Message

Dear Fellow NCOS Member:

Our next face-to-face meeting is scheduled for Sunday 8th June at 2 PM.

We plan to watch Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* with Luciano Pavarotti followed by a pasta supper. All for only \$30 per person.

We will meet in the hall of the National Congress of Italian-Canadians which is part of the Marconi Centre at 1026 Baseline Road, Ottawa. There is plenty of parking and the hall is accessible directly from the car park. There are no steps and no elevators.

The meeting will start with a brief Annual General Meeting – a necessary requirement to maintain our charitable status and to elect our officers.

Please reserve a seat by contacting Lesley at [lesley@ncos.ca](mailto:lesley@ncos.ca). I hope you will join us for a lovely afternoon and meal.

We continue to prepare for our 16th Competition on Saturday October 18th at 2 PM. We have announced the competition to Canadian voice schools and universities. A press release was issued, and the application details are on our website.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Competition or joining our Board of Directors, please contact me at [president@ncos.ca](mailto:president@ncos.ca). I would welcome your help.

*Mark*

Mark Robinson  
President, National Capital Opera Society

## Diana Gnarowski



It is with great sadness that we inform members of the death of NCOS Board member Diana Gnarowski. Diana's wonderful sense of humour, infectious laugh and lovely voice always kept a smile on everyone's face and we'll greatly miss her presence at NCOS events.

Thanks to her passion for opera, Diana became an active member of our Board. We greatly appreciate her regular presence, her tremendous generosity and her constant willingness to help. We shall remember her with great affection.

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### New Opera Lyra's Production of *Aleko* Erwin Dreessen <https://erwindreessen.substack.com/>



Photo courtesy of New Opera Lyra

and alto Mary Zborowski as the Old Woman. They sang in Russian; English surtitles were projected on both sides of the Rideau Park United Church space.

*Aleko* is the first of Sergei Rachmaninoff's three completed operas. It was his graduation composition from the Moscow Conservatory in 1892 and is based on a poem, *The Gypsies*, by Alexander Pushkin. He was 19 at the time and wrote it in 17 days.

New Opera Lyra brought this one-act work to the stage in an Ottawa premiere. For this modest company in Ottawa, this was a major production: a 15-member orchestra conducted by Norman E. Brown, the 25-member Ewasko Singers and 17 dancers (including seven children).

Soloists were first-rate: bass Dylan Wright as Aleko, soprano Antonina Ermolenko as Zemfira, tenor Adam Sperry as the young lover, bass Gary Dahl as the Old Man

The colourful dresses of the women dancers of the Kalinka Dance Group were exquisite. For the Friday performance the place was packed.



Photo courtesy of New Opera Lyra

## Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* Marian Cumming

It seems that in the past few years the only time I have been able to attend live opera has coincided with my visits to Malta. Such was the case for a recent production of *Giovanna d'Arco* which took place in Gozo, Malta's sister island, a mere 20-minute ferry ride away. As I mentioned in previous reviews, but worth repeating, Gozo, with an area of 67 square kilometres and a population of just under 40,000, boasts not one, but two opera houses, the Astra and the Aurora, both located on the main street in the capital, Victoria. Each theatre offers a yearly operatic production with other events throughout the year, such as musicals, concerts, exhibitions and pantomimes.

*Giovanna d'Arco* is an early, infrequently produced opera, and had not been heard live on these islands since 1852. It was Verdi's seventh opera, composed in 1845 and sits between *Alzira*, later that year, and *I Due Foscari* in 1844. Although none of the arias is familiar to me, from the overture right through to the end, the music and singing is quintessentially Verdi, featuring all of his bel canto and melodic elements. Temiscole Solera based his libretto on Schiller's drama *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. The story essentially revolves around three main characters, Giovanna, her father Giacomo and Charles VII, King of France. We are all familiar with Joan of Arc as a military leader during the hundred years war, being put on trial and burned at the stake. However, Verdi/Solera, deviated somewhat from history by introducing a father-daughter conflict and a romantic relationship between Giovanna and the King, as well as opting instead for a less tragic ending, in which Giovanna dies after a victorious battle and ascends into Heaven while embracing the French flag.

The role of Giovanna was sung by Georgian soprano Sophie Gordeladze, a talented bel canto soprano with a broad repertoire, specializing in early Verdi roles. She has sung in some of the major European opera houses and is sought after on the concert stage. Tenor Giulio Pelligra hails from Sicily, a lyric tenor with a warm voice and ringing high notes. His career is also based mainly in Europe. This was a sort of homecoming for him as, at the age of 20, he made his stage debut, singing Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Manoel Theatre in Malta. Mongolian baritone Badral Chuluunbaatar possesses a warm, rich voice which blended seamlessly with the other principals and chorus.

The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by John Galea, with the Teatru Astra Opera Chorus in collaboration with the Coro Lirico Siciliano. Under the direction of Enrico Strinchelli, the staging conformed to the historic period, with costumes in rich velvets and elaborate headdresses. Set designs featured pillars, saints and gargoyles, and of course a battlefield. The scenery in Act 2 was particularly effective when the doors of the Cathedral in Reims, where King Charles had just been crowned, opened up to display a large Rose window in the background, not unlike the Reims Cathedral's La Grande Rose, which dates back to the end of the 13th century.

As I was not at all familiar with this opera, a few days ahead of the performance, I decided to listen to a YouTube version featuring Caballe, Domingo and Milnes. I was immediately made aware of the vocal and musical challenges facing the soloists, chorus and orchestra. However, my apprehension was quickly dismissed. In my view, this was one of the best local productions I have attended so far. Principals, singers in supporting roles, chorus, dancers, orchestra, sets and costumes all seemed to come together for a magnificent performance and a very enjoyable evening.



## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Il re pastore (The Shepherd King)*

Marian Cumming



This was another pleasant evening experienced during my latest trip to Malta. This time on the main island at the Teatru Manoel, an absolute gem, in the capital city of Valletta. "The Manoel", as it is often referred to, is named after a Grand Master of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller, Fra António Manoel de Vilhena, who ordered its construction in 1731. It is one of Europe's oldest working theatres, and the oldest in the Commonwealth. The theatre is situated on a narrow street and as most of the city is vehicul-free, except for some major arteries, patrons often spill out onto the street during intermission, to get some fresh air or enjoy a drink at one of the nearby cafes.

Mozart was only 18 years old when he composed *Il Re Pastore* which was commissioned in 1775 by his employer Prince Archbishop of Salzburg Hyeronimus Colloredo to commemorate a visit by Archduke Maximillion, youngest son of Empress Maria Theresa. The opera's librettist is Piero Metastasio. It is in two acts and features just five soloists, with no chorus and is often referred to as *Serenata*.

In a nutshell, the opera tells the story of the King of Macedonia, Alessandro, who having overthrown Stratone, the tyrant of Sidon, plans to find the rightful heir to the throne. He thinks it is Aminta, a humble shepherd. When approached, Aminta is torn between duty and his simple pastoral world, enjoyed with Elisa, a shepherdess. Meanwhile, Tamiri, daughter of the deposed Stratone, is in love with Agerone, but Alessandro demands that Tamiri marry Aminta and ascend to her father's throne, declaring that royal duties must take precedence over love. All four lovers are unhappy with this arrangement and both women plead for Alessandro's mercy. Realizing the potential injustice he was about to inflict, Alessandro relents and allows Aminta to marry Elisa and Tamiri to marry Agenore. Aminta is crowned king of Sidon.

Director, Tommaso Franchin, in collaboration with costume designer, Giovanna Fiorentini and set designer, Fabio Carpene, decided to bring a fresh look to this production. The stage was bare, except for a backdrop depicting a forest in Act 1 and replaced by a celestial one in Act 2. The costumes were fancifully modern, but worked well given the exuberance and energy of all participants. The only props consisted of bunches of white (helium-filled) balloons representing sheep.



The magnificent ceiling of "The Manoel"

The cast was made up of both local and foreign singers, all relatively young and possessing excellent acting and vocal skills, which shone through in the various arias, duets and ensembles.

The title role was written for either soprano or countertenor. This production featured a countertenor, Federico Fiorio, in the role of Aminta. Born in Verona, he appears regularly in theatres throughout Europe featuring works by Handel, Vivaldi, Albinoni and others.

Elisa, a shepherdess and Aminta's love interest, was sung by soprano Catherine Trotman. Following her studies at the Conservatoire national supérieur de Paris, she joined the ensemble of the Wiener Staatsoper. Since then, she has sung in major venues such as the Opéra de Paris and Carnegie Hall in New York, in both opera and concert.

Soprano Claire Debone was cast as Tamiri. She was born in Malta and graduated with an MMus from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. She has since sung in opera and in concert in Europe and the US.

Raffaele Giordani is an Italian tenor who specializes in early and baroque music. He has participated in early music festival, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. His recordings have also won several awards.

Maltese tenor Nico Darmanin studied law in Malta before winning a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music in London. He performs regularly in Europe and has appeared on the concert stage in both the US and Canada.

Giulio Prandi conducted the talented Arianna Art Ensemble whose focus is on the interpretation of early music using original instruments.

I think it is safe to say that both cast and audience thoroughly enjoyed this spirited and innovative production of one of Mozart's early and, sadly, rarely performed operas.

## **Verdi's Requiem** **Marian Cumming**

Still in Malta on my latest visit, I attended an excellent rendition of Verdi's Requiem to a packed house. This was held at the Mediterranean Conference Centre (MCC) in Valletta. The building was built as a hospital in the 16th century by the Order of St. John, and it was known as the Sacra Infermeria or the Holy Infirmary and had a capacity to accommodate up to 2,500 patients. It was one of the leading hospitals in Europe until the 18th century and remained in use until 1920. Since 1979, after extensive renovations, the building has been used as an arts venue as well as host to many national and international conferences, as the name implies.

Verdi composed the original version of the Requiem in 1874 which made its debut at the Church of San Marco in Milan. Its second performance took place three days later at the Teatro alla Scala to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of his friend, Alessandro Manzoni, best known for his romantic novel "I promessi sposi". Both were conducted by Verdi himself. The revised version was performed in 1875 at London's Royal Albert Hall with Verdi again on the podium.

In my opinion this Requiem contains some of the most beautiful sacred music ever written, from the Requiem and the Dies irae, featuring all four soloists and two choruses, to the closing Libera me for soprano and chorus. I have attended many live performances of this work and listened to several recordings, and this was one of the best.

The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Pier Giorgio Morandi, together with Rome's Coro dell'Accademis Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Chorus Master Andrea Secchi) and the much smaller Kor Malta (Chorus Master Riccardo Bianchi). Soloists included the following: Anna Pirozzi, who is recognized as one of today's leading Italian dramatic sopranos; Maltese Mezzo-soprano Marvic Monreal, a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London, who performs regularly in Europe in opera as well as in

concert; Maltese tenor Alan Sciberras, who has sung in opera productions in both Italy and Malta and Swedish bass-baritone John Lundgren, who has performed major operatic works in leading opera houses worldwide.

To quote a local reviewer: "Verdi takes us through the whole gamut of emotions ... this was an inspired and inspiring performance". I couldn't agree more!

A Postscript: Both mezzo soprano Marvic Monreal and tenor Alan Sciberras were scholars who benefitted from the financial support of the BOV Joseph Calleja Foundation. Their scholarships enabled them to pursue their studies abroad.

Joseph Calleja, better known as The Maltese Tenor, established the BOV Joseph Calleja Foundation in 2013. This was the result of his dream and vision to share his own personal experience and good fortune with promising young artists. The Foundation is run by a committed group of volunteers who are heavily involved in not only its administration but in providing moral support to the many scholars it assists. Since its formation it has given a total of 146 scholar awards and has raised close to €1.9M. The Foundation has two key programmes, "Gifted Youth" and "Vulnerable child". The latter is directed towards helping underprivileged children with unique artistic or musical talents. The "Gifted Youth" programme supports young talented individuals in voice, music, dance and other disciplines. Many are attending colleges, universities and conservatories across Europe and the US, which enables them to benefit from world class coaching in their quest to maximise their potential in their chosen fields. Several graduates, as the two mentioned above, have gone on to enjoy successful musical careers both at home and abroad.

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## **A Visit to Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires** **Lesley Robinson**

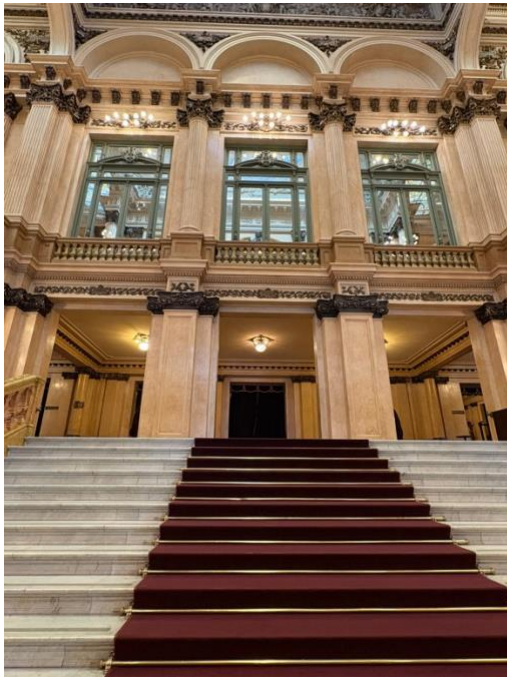


On our recent trip to South America, we were not lucky enough to attend any opera as such, but we did have the opportunity to take a tour of the renowned Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Since it is generally considered to be one of the ten best opera houses in the world, Argentinians are rightly proud of this cultural gem, with its brilliant acoustics and 3000 seat capacity.

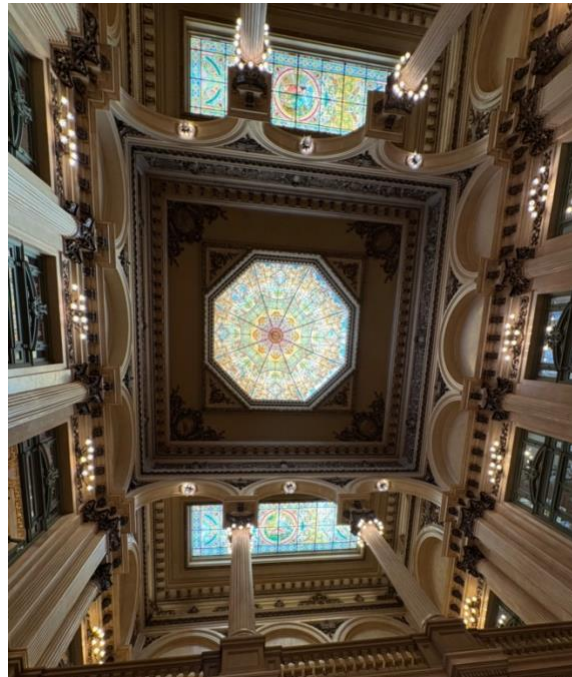
The current building replaced an earlier nineteenth-century opera house and took 20 years to be ready to open in 1908 (due to the unfortunate deaths of various architects and financiers.) The grand lobby and staircase boast Italian marble, with French art nouveau stained glass in the ceiling. The hall at the top of the grand staircase is lined with busts of late, great opera composers including Bellini, Bizet,

Gounod, Mozart, Rossini, Verdi and Wagner. (Puccini is notably absent because he was still alive and kicking when the gallery was put together!)

The opera house finally opened in 1908 with a production of Verdi's *Aida*, coincidentally this season's opening production.



Grand marble staircase



Stained glass ceiling



The splendid Golden Hall is one of the most beautiful salons in the city. The hall was inspired by the Palace of Versailles and is adorned with 22 carat gold leaf decorations. It is a lavish venue for receptions, private and corporate events and chamber concerts.

Ticket prices in the opera house range from \$20 to \$200 US and are hard to come by. \$80 million was spent for an extensive restoration of the building which took four years and was completed in 2010.

Teatro Colon's excellent acoustics are explained by the horseshoe shape of the auditorium, its soft furnishings, carpeted flooring and plenty of wood. The boxes next to the stage are not for sale because they are reserved for dignitaries. The country's President may also use the official box located opposite the stage. There are also hidden boxes, known as "widows' boxes", reserved for people in mourning who did not wish to be seen galivanting at the opera house at times of sorrow. The floor of the pit can be raised for concerts and lowered for opera and ballet. The stage itself is of immense proportions—30 metres high, 30 metres wide and 30 metres deep.



The Golden Hall



Opulent décor in the Golden Hall







**Co-production Between  
OperOttawa  
and Opera-by-Request (Toronto)**

Once again, OperOttawa will present an opera in co-production with Opera-by-Request of Toronto. The opera is one, not commonly performed in Canada, *Der Freischütz*.

The cast features many well-known local singers including DILLON PARMER, WHITNEY SLOAN, KATHLEEN RADKE, LEE CARTER, NORMAN E. BROWN, MADOX TERRELL, MARY ZBOROWSKI, MELANIE ANDERSON, KATIE GRATTON

and RODNEY WILLIAMSON, as well as the OperOttawa Chorus, all accompanied by Founder of Opera-by-Request, WILLIAM SHOOKHOFF.

The show will take place on Sunday April 27th at 2:30 pm at First Baptist Church. Tickets are available from the cast, from Eventbrite, at the door or by contacting OperOttawa at [OperOttawa222@gmail.com](mailto:OperOttawa222@gmail.com) <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/1031989828357?aff=oddtcreator>



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**2024-25 Season**

***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**

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