



NATIONAL CAPITAL *Opera Society*

National Capital Opera Society Newsletter

Summer 2025



President's Annual Report

As presented at Annual General Meeting, 8 June 2025

Our major accomplishments in 2024 were to upgrade our website and to prepare for our 2025 Competition. I can report that the new website went online at the end of the August 2024, and we have received excellent feedback, and we are on track for our 2025 Competition on October 18, 2025, at 2 PM at Rideau Park United Church in Alta Vista. I wish to thank our Webmaster, Jim Burgess, for his help and support throughout the year and with the transition to the new website.

Thanks to our Editor, Lesley, and other contributors, we have continued our newsletter. We welcome all opera related contributions.

We held face-to-face and Zoom meetings which were well received by a small, passionate but declining attendance. In the future, we will focus our activities on the Competition, the website and the newsletter.

From a Financial standpoint, the society is well positioned.

I wish to thank the Board of Directors and the 26 members for all your contributions to the Society and the Competition.

In summary, we are ready for our 2025 Competition. Please consider renewing your membership and making a donation to support Canadian singers. Thank you.

Mark

Mark Robinson
President, National Capital Opera Society

Peggy Pflug
1934-2025

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of longtime NCOS Board member, Peggy Pflug. We shall remember her enthusiasm, her kindness and her boundless energy. As well as serving on the Board, Peggy headed our Nominating Committee for many years and we are grateful for all her input and dedication.

David and Jonathan
A Story of David the Giant Slayer
At Opera Atelier
Lesley Robinson

David and Jonathan by Marc-Antoine Charpentier was a sumptuous feast for the senses in the hands of Opera Atelier. First performed at a Jesuit College in Paris in 1688, the work was presented as both a “tragédie en musique” and a “tragédie biblique”, with each act alternating with an act from a Latin Play *Saul*, by Father Étienne Chamillard. The presentation of this biblical story was a resounding success and it was performed in other Jesuit colleges during the eighteenth century, but didn’t make it to the North American opera stage until 2005 (in Baltimore.) Now, here it is in Toronto, getting the full Opera Atelier treatment, which works so well for this piece. The fact that it was first presented in conjunction with a play means that there is much less recitative than in many operas of the time, so there is plenty of great music to enjoy, including significant arias for all three of the major characters, David, Jonathan and Saul.

The event was held in the Koerner Hall of the Royal Conservatory of Music, which Atelier has used for some recent productions. Primarily a concert hall, this is a very different space from Atelier’s traditional venue, the Elgin Theatre and consequently it is used differently. The larger space allows for an impression of architectural grandeur and set designer Gerard Gauci takes full advantage of the venue to create the suggestion of the geographical setting of the opera and to evoke the French Baroque designs of the seventeenth century. Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg based the choreography for the production on the dances notated by French dancing masters of the period. The notations were very explicit, including specifications for movement, foot placement and coordination with the music.

The three main characters were portrayed by French baritone David Witczak (Saul) and Canadian singers, tenor Colin Ainsworth (David) and soprano Mireille Asselin (Jonathan). Mr. Ainsworth’s David gave us a full range of conflicting emotions and blended well with Ms. Asselin’s bright voice which beautifully expressed Jonathan’s youthful innocence. The musicians of Tafelmusik along with the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir were expertly conducted by Resident Music Director David Fallis.



Colin Ainsworth and Mireille Asselin



NCOS Event
Brush Up Your Shakespeare
Presented by Lesley Robinson

There are hundreds of operas based on, or inspired by the works of William Shakespeare. I say “inspired by” because some are only very loosely based on Shakespeare. E.g. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (or rather *Le songe d’une nuit d’été*) by Ambroise Thomas, in which the characters include Falstaff, Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare himself. So, as you can tell, it is a weird mixture of historical and fictional characters and has absolutely nothing to do with the plot of the play by the same name. Instead, the convoluted plot might all have been a dream and serves as a vague suggestion of a possible inspiration for the play that Shakespeare wrote.

Many of Shakespeare’s plays have complicated plots with many subplots and, of course, the lengthy texts are essential to understanding the action. In opera, much of the drama is carried in the music and the text is relatively limited. This all contributes to the difficulty of adapting Shakespeare for the opera stage. So let’s compare and contrast some examples of how this was accomplished by a variety of composers.

Hamlet

Hamlet is a case in point. There are more than 20 characters listed in the dramatis personae, so a certain amount of abbreviation and adaptation is required, even if the version is fairly true to the plot in general.

Australian composer Brett Dean’s version of *Hamlet* premiered at Glyndebourne in 2017. The same production (with some of the same cast members) went to the Met in 2022 with Allan Clayton in the title role. As well as being a great singer, Mr. Clayton is a fabulous actor and his portrayal of Hamlet, the tortured soul is magnificent. The opera’s libretto by Matthew Jocelyn uses about 20% of Shakespeare’s text from the first quarto version of the play published in 1603, which differs in some aspects from the first folio version (1623), generally considered to be the definitive version. It’s thought that this was an unauthorised “bad quarto” version, probably written down by an audience member. Dean said: “Our Hamlet relies heavily on Shakespeare’s verse, if not necessarily on the standard chronology of scenes. The opera concentrates primarily on the domestic drama, exploring the depths of Hamlet’s quest for both understanding and revenge, from the death of his father through to his own demise.”



Allan Clayton as Hamlet

Here is a brief extract from Dean’s *Hamlet*, of the famous soliloquy, “To be or not to be” - the most famous Shakespearean speech of all.

[Allan Clayton - To be or not to be](#)



Simon Keenleyside as Hamlet

Bizarrely, in Ambroise Thomas's operatic version of *Hamlet*, Hamlet himself does not even die at the end, which is unfitting for a Shakespearean tragedy, where the stage is littered with bodies at the denouement. The plot is manipulated, such that English critics totally trashed it at the time of its premiere in 1868. Nevertheless, the music is beautiful, so it is unfortunate that it is not more frequently performed. Interest in it has been revived in the last 40 years or so and it has been performed in North America and Europe including in Toronto, San Francisco, Washington National Opera, the Met, Opera Comique in Paris, La Monnaie in Belgium and this past season at Opera de Montreal, where Sarah Dufresne (who has been making a name for herself at the ROH Covent Garden) stole the show with her magnificent portrayal

of Ophelia, particularly in the mad scene.

Thomas's Hamlet is a baritone, which is unusual for a tragic hero. Here is Simon Keenleyside's performance of the ["To be or not to be" scene](#) from a 2004 recording at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.

Antony and Cleopatra

This is a tragic love story set against the political and military backdrop of the Roman Empire. John Adams wrote his own libretto from Shakespeare and classical sources. This is from the San Francisco Opera World Premiere in 2022 starring Gerald Finley as Antony and Soprano Amina Edris as Cleopatra (incidentally born in Cairo.)

[Adams: Antony and Cleopatra Premiere](#)



Amina Edris and Gerald Finley



Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* is better known. It was famously commissioned as the first performance at the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House in 1966. The libretto was put together by Franco Zeffirelli, using exclusively Shakespeare's text. The opera was a momentous flop with its lavish production by Zeffirelli, so Barber made significant revisions with the help of Gian Carlo Menotti for a new version which was first performed in 1975. This extract is from a more recent (and more racy) production from 1991 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. (It was not debuted in Europe until 2023 in Barcelona.)

[1991 Lyric Opera of Chicago with Richard Cowan and Catherine Malfitano](#)

Otello

Shakespeare's *Othello* has more than one operatic adaptation. A thrilling aspect of Rossini's version is that all the major male parts are tenors (even the villain!) I am going to share with you my favourite duet between Otello (Italian Enea Scala) and Rodrigo (Russian Dmitry Korchak) from the Rossini Opera Festival (an annual event in Pesaro, Rossini's hometown) in 2022. In Rossini's version, Otello's jealousy is sparked against Rodrigo whom he believes to be Desdemona's lover. The extract comes at 1.44.00 into the recording.

[Rossini's Otello, Pesaro 2022](#)



Enea Scala as Rossini's Otello

More well-known and more true to Shakespeare is Verdi's *Otello*. Verdi was a well-known lover of Shakespeare and wrote his famous trio of adaptations: *Otello*, *Macbeth* and *Falstaff*.

Here is a duet between Otello (Gregory Kunde and Alberto Gazale (Baritone) Iago. Incidentally, in November 2012 Kunde made an unexpected, successful debut as Verdi's *Otello* in Venice, becoming possibly the first tenor able to sing both Rossini's and Verdi's version in the same year.

[Gregory Kunde \(Otello\) and Alberto Gazale \(Iago\)](#)

Romeo and Juliet

I Capuletti e I Montecchi – Bellini

Bellini's main source was an 1818 Italian play, rather than Shakespeare, which accounts for the differences in the story. (Shakespeare also had multiple sources although we think of Shakespeare's play as the definitive source.) In Bellini's version the two families are rival political factions and Tybalt is Juliet's betrothed rather than her cousin. It is Juliet's brother who has been killed by Romeo. The tragic end is essentially the same. Romeo thinks Juliet is dead, so he takes poison. She wakes up too late and dies with him, unable to live without him.

In Bellini's version, Romeo is a trouser role and in a production available on DVD (recorded at the Festival della Valle d'Itria in Martina Franca, Italy) the roles are taken by two sopranos – Patrizia Ciofi as Juliet and Clara Polito as Romeo. With a delicateness in her voice, Patrizia Ciofi makes a particularly lovely Juliet.

Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* - I saved the best till last. Here are Juan Diego Florez as Romeo with Aida Garafulina as Juliet in a sizzling performance in 2017 at the Wiener Staatsoper, conducted by Placido Domingo. Gounod's version is true to Shakespeare's. The duet, "Nuit d'hyménée" is at 35.26 into the video.

[Romeo et Juliette 2017, Vienna](#)



Aida Garafulina and Juan Diego Florez—the perfect Romeo and Juliet



2025 Festival

Tosca
The House on Mango Street

Sunday in The Park with George
The Rake's Progress

For more information [Click here](#)

NATIONAL CAPITAL
Opera Competition

National Capital Opera Competition Finals

**2pm
18 October 2025**

**At the Rideau Park United Church
2203 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa**

2025/26 Seasons

OPÉRA
DE MONTRÉAL

Don Giovanni

Jenůfa

Clown(s)

Carmen

[Click here for details](#)



Toronto

Roméo et Juliette

Orfeo ed Euridice

Rigoletto

The Barber of Seville

Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung

Werther

[Click here for details](#)

OPERA
ATELIER

Toronto

The Magic Flute

Pelléas et Mélisande

[Click here for details](#)



2025-2026

First Baptist Church

Sunday September 21, 2025 at 2:30 pm

GALA CONCERT

MORGAN STRICKLAND, KATHLEEN RADKE,
ERINNE-COLLEEN LAURIN, BEVERLY
MCARTHUR, PAULINE VAN DER ROEST,
DANNY LECLERC, GRAYSON NESBITT,
ALASDAIR CAMPBELL

JUDITH GINSBURG, pianist

With the OperOttawa Chorus

Sunday November 23, 2025 at 2:30 pm

GIULIO CESARE

George Frederic Handel

Libretto Nicola Francesco Haym

Conductor: Norman E. Brown

IAN SABOURIN, ANIA HEJNAR,
CAROLE PORTELANCE, BEVERLY
MCARTHUR, ALASDAIR CAMPBELL

With the OperOttawa Orchestra and Chorus

Sunday March 8, 2026 at 2:30 pm

DON GIOVANNI

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto Lorenzo da Ponte

Conductor: Norman E. Brown

DYLAN WRIGHT, JOHN HOLLAND,
ERINNE-COLLEEN LAURIN, KATHLEEN
RADKE, DANNY LECLERC, GRACE
QUINSEY, MADOX TERRELL, STEVEN
HENRIKSON

With the OperOttawa Orchestra and Chorus

Sunday May 10, 2026 at 2:30 pm

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS TRIBUTE

MARC DJOKIC, violin
MATTHEW LARKIN, organ
FRÉDÉRIC LACROIX, pianist

With cameo by ANIA HEJNAR
as Ursula Vaughan Williams

Tickets: Eventbrite, Cast, At the door

Info: OperOttawa222@gmail.com

NCOS Board of Directors

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