

NATIONAL CAPITAL

Opera Society and

NEW
OPERA
LYRA
LIFE ON STAGE

Present

The 16th National Capital Opera Competition

Gerald Finley OC, CBE, Honourary Patron

**Jamal Al Titi
Nicholas Burns
Hannah Crawford
Kcena Koutorjevski
Rachael McAuley
Karoline Podolak**

Host: Sandra Graham

18 October 2025
Rideau Park United Church, 2203 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa

The Finalists



Canadian-Belarusian baritone **Jamal Al Titi** has received multiple awards and has performed in Canada, the Netherlands and Germany. He has appeared with Banff, Brott, Highlands Opera, and joined the Atelier lyrique of the Opéra de Montréal in 2024. A University of Toronto graduate, he is passionate about opera and early music.



Possessing “a thrilling voice” (Olyrix) that “caresses the ear with its velvet” (Le Devoir), Canadian countertenor **Nicholas Burns** is “a major talent on the rise” (Ludwig Van Toronto). A multi-award winner of Carnegie Hall’s New York Oratorio Society Competition, Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques, and Edmonton Opera’s Rumbold Vocal Prize, Burns has performed with leading ensembles on both sides of the Atlantic, including Les Arts Florissants, L’Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Tafelmusik, Bulgarian National Opera, Early Music Vancouver, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.



Hannah Crawford is a Toronto-based Soprano and recent Rebanks Fellow. A prizewinner in major competitions, including the COC Centre Stage and the Met Opera Laffont. Recently, she has made her role debut as Helmwig with Edmonton Opera. Hannah studies with Elizabeth McDonald and is known for her powerful, expressive voice.



Kcenia Koutorjevski is a Russian-Canadian mezzo-soprano praised for her “rich vocal tones.” She has performed roles including Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) and Julius Caesar (*Giulio Cesare*) and is a recent graduate of UofT’s Opera Program. She is the recipient of several awards and is passionate about accessible, community-driven opera!



Mezzo-soprano **Rachael McAuley** is originally from Ottawa and now lives on Canada’s west coast. After being named a district winner in the 2024 MET Competition, Rachael has performed with the VSO, the Banff Centre, and recently made her main stage debut with Edmonton Opera as Rossweisse in *Die Walküre*.



Karoline Podolak has sung leading roles with major opera houses, is a grand prize winner of competitions in New York, France, and Canada, and has received Poland’s Bronze Cross of Merit for her international impact in opera. She has completed young artist programs at the Canadian Opera Company and Opéra de Montréal.

The Competition

Welcome to the **2025 National Capital Opera Competition** which promises to be an outstanding afternoon of artistry and entertainment. The competition is open to young Canadian singers who are focusing on a performing career in opera.

Earlier this year notices went out to music faculties across the country in search of eligible applicants. This year we received many excellent applications and the task of our three preliminary judges—**John Avey, Cara Gilbertson and Sandra Graham**—was indeed a challenging one.

In this afternoon's competition each finalist will perform three arias in three different languages with piano accompaniment. Our three final judges—**Joel Harder, Joanne Kolomyjec and Maghan McPhee** (lead adjudicator)—will then deliberate during an intermission prior to announcing the results. For the judges' and pianists' bios and further information, please see our website: www.ncos.ca

This year, the finalists are competing for \$21,000 in prizes:

First prize: \$10,000, in memory of **Tom McCool**
Second prize: \$5,000, in honour of **Murray Kitts**
Third prize: \$3,000, donated by **Carole Stelmack**
Other finalists will each receive \$1000

Following the competition, please join us at a reception to celebrate and congratulate the finalists.

Today's

Hannah Crawford, Soprano
Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist

“Du bist der Lenz” from *Die Walküre*, Richard Wagner
Sieglinde sings to Siegmund, her twin brother. They have grown up separately and have met as strangers who are destined to be together.

“Tacea la notte placida” from *Il Trovatore*, Giuseppe Verdi
In the peaceful moonlit night, Leonora sings about her love for the mysterious troubadour who has entered her life.

“Il est doux, il est bon” from *Hérodiade*, Jules Massenet
Salomé is looking for the prophet Jean with whom she has found comfort when alone, abandoned by her mother.

Jamal Al Titi, Baritone
Jérôme de los Santos, Pianist

“Avant de quitter ces lieux” from *Faust*, Charles Gounod
Valentin, a soldier and Marguerite's brother, prays for his sister's safety as he leaves for war.

“Vy mne pisali... Kogda bi zhizn domashnim krugom” from *Eugene Onegin*, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Onegin responds in person to Tatyana's letter. He tells her that marriage to him would be torture for her. He is unworthy of her love and can only offer her brotherly affection.

“Largo al factotum” from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Gioachino Rossini
The charming Figaro introduces himself as a skilful barber and jack-of-all-trades.

Kcenia Koutorjevski, Mezzo-soprano
Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist

“Sta nell'irca pietrosa tana” from *Alcina*, George Frideric Handel
Ruggiero, the hero sings of the tiger and the hunter as he prepares to defeat Alcina.

“Va! laisse couler mes larmes” from *Werther*, Jules Massenet
Charlotte cannot be consoled. Her tears flow and her heart is broken.

“Lyubava's Aria” from *Sadko* Rimsky-Korsakov
Lyubava longs for her husband, who has left their home in Novogorod to seek his fortune and concludes that he no longer loves her.

Programme

Karoline Podolak, Soprano
Jérôme de los Santos, Pianist

“Je suis Titania” from *Mignon*, Ambroise Thomas

Philine (Mignon’s rival for Wilhelm’s love) is an actress who sings of her role as Titania (in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.)

“How full of colour it was” from *Ariella*, Jaap Nico Hamburger

Ariella reflects on the passage of the seasons, from the joyful renewal of spring to the stillness of winter. The aria can also be interpreted as a reflection on grief and finality: the loss of someone dear, or the fading of childhood.

“Sempre libera” from *La traviata*, Giuseppe Verdi

Having heard Alfredo’s declaration of love, Violetta is torn between love, the tragedy of her illness and the joie de vivre of her free life in Paris.

Nicholas Burns, Countertenor
Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist

“I’ll Sail Upon the Dog-star” from *A Fool’s Preferment*, Henry Purcell

A noble, but dim, man is *very* excited to go sailing...

“Ô tranquille sommeil” from *Persée*, Jean-Baptiste Lully

Mecure, the God of boundaries, commerce, communication, eloquence, financial gain, and travelers, is putting a sleeping spell over the evil Méduse and the Gorgons, so that the hero, Persée will be able to slay her.

“Stille amare” from *Tolomeo*, George Frideric Handel

Tolomeo, the deposed King of Egypt, feels he has been betrayed by everyone in his life, and in this aria, he is convinced by Elisa (the sister of his rival) to drink poison to end his hardships.

Rachael McAuley, Mezzo-soprano
Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist

"Werther! Qui m'aurait dit ... ces lettres!" from *Werther*, Jules Massenet

Charlotte is at home alone on Christmas Eve, rereading the letters that she has received from Werther.

“This Journey” from *Dead Man Walking*, Jake Heggie

Sister Helen has received a letter from a condemned man who is seeking spiritual guidance. She reflects on what this means for her own faith and asks Jesus for help.

“Sein wir wieder gut” from *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Richard Strauss

The composer ponders poetry, art and music—music is sacred!

Celebrating Past Finalists



Julie Nesrallah



Daniel Taylor



Joshua Hopkins



Shannon Mercer



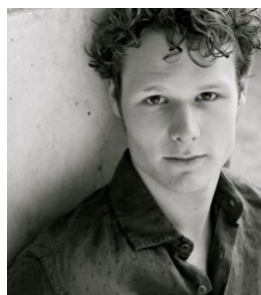
Joyce El-Khoury



Yannick-Muriel Noah



Wallis Giunta



Philippe Sly



Meghan Lindsay



Ellen McAteer



Ariane Cossette

Donors and Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following donors whose generosity has helped make this year's competition possible:

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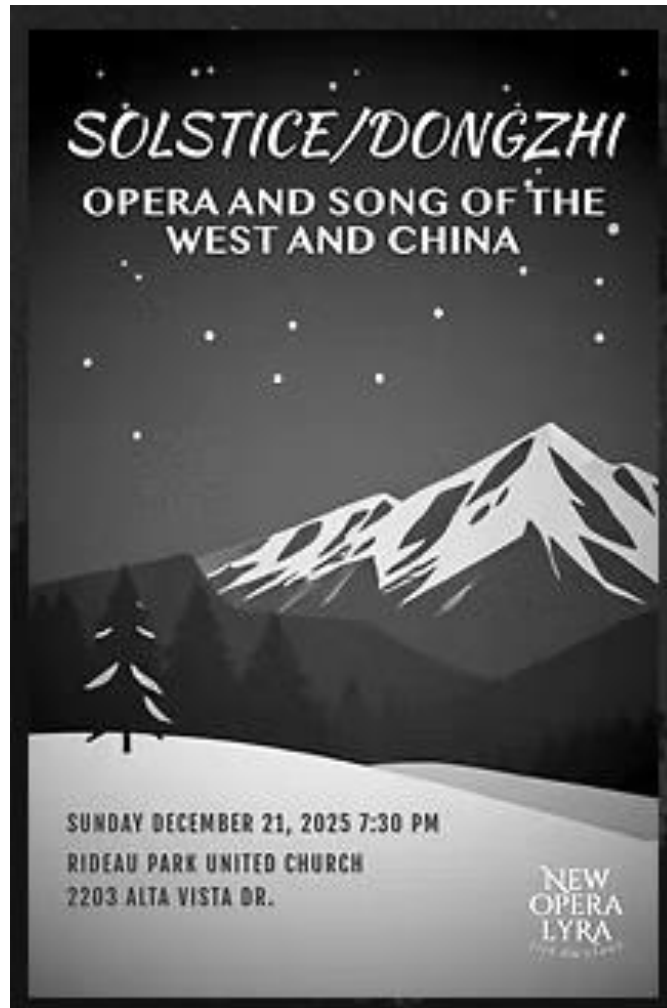
The National Capital Opera Society and New Opera Lyra gratefully acknowledges the help of all those who have kindly provided inspiration and assistance for this event and most importantly the generous gift of their time:

Gerald Finley
Preliminary jurors: John Avey, Cara Gilbertson and Sandra Graham
Our final jurors: Joel Harder, Joanne Kolomyjec and Maghan McPhee
Alex Robinson
Rideau Park United Church
Ashbury College
And all our marvelous volunteers

A word from our Honourary Patron **Gerald Finley OC CBE**

Hello, from the glorious stages of Covent Garden and La Scala, where I have been privileged to rehearse and perform in Tosca and Così fan tutte in recent weeks. It is a great honour to be Patron of the National Capital Opera Society, that wonderfully dedicated team of opera enthusiasts who keep the excitement and pleasure of opera alive. Thanks to you all for being devoted fans and audience members!

Gerald Finley



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