

NATIONAL CAPITAL

Opera Society

National Capital Opera Competition

October 2025



Winners of the 2025 National Capital Opera Competition

First prize, \$10,000, in memory of Tom McCool: Soprano **Karoline Podolak**Second prize, \$5,000, in honour of Murray Kitts: Countertenor **Nicholas Burns**Third prize, \$3,000, donated by Carole Stelmack: Baritone **Jamal Al Titi**

Three other Finalists were awarded \$1,000 each:

Soprano **Hannah Crawford**Mezzo-soprano **Kcenia Koutorjevski**Mezzo-soprano **Rachael McAuley**

The Finalists



L-r Nicholas Burns, Jamal Al Titi, Karoline Podolak, Rachael McAuley, Kcenia Koutorjevski and Hannah Crawford

A Message from our Honourary Patron Gerald Finley, OC, CBE

18th October 2025

Hello, from the glorious stages of Covent Garden and La Scala, where I have been privileged to rehearse and perform in *Tosca* and *Cosí 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!

Congratulations to the finalists! It must feel a very satisfying result for those hours of dedicated practice, the frank discussions with your loved ones and supporters, and the seemingly outrageous demands made by your teachers and coaches, thinking of how you and your singing can be part of this extraordinary and rewarding profession. Even more than ever, our audiences need music and stories that deal with the emotions and issues of our time, bringing people comfort, healing and hope.

Opera is in a state of flux and you will play a major part in its future. Our singing is delivered from our very depths, and although there is a great deal of expectation to master technical elements of singing, it is really those who reveal their vulnerability who will become our treasured artists of the future. Celebrate the gifts you have been given and share yourself with the audience who want to be touched by your singing story. A big toi-toi-toi for the competition and the future!

The 2025 National Capital Opera Competition Finals

Our 16th competition was a magnificent afternoon of artistry and entertainment. The standard was tremendously high and the six finalists treated us to a varied and engaging programme. Each finalist sang three arias in three different languages. We heard Italian, French, English, Russian and German in arias by 14 different composers from works ranging from the 17th to the 21st century. The afternoon was hosted by esteemed mezzo-soprano and university professor Sandra Graham who introduced each of the finalists along with the pianists.

Hannah Crawford, Soprano Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist



Hannah started us off with an explosion of dramatic sound, wowing us with "Du bist der Lenz" from *Die Walküre* by Richard Wagner. This big voice seems to be made for Wagner. Her three different arias each had their own character and Hannah's second offering, "Tacea la notte placida" from *Il Trovatore* by Giusseppe Verdi revealed some gentler, tender moments. Controlled big notes were juxtaposed with playful moments. In "Il est doux, il est bon" from *Hérodiade* by Jules Massenet, Hannah conveyed Salomé's wistful tenderness and vulnerability. To find out more about Hannah, visit her website at hannahcrawford.ca.

Jamal Al Titi, Baritone Jérôme de los Santos, Pianist



Jamal's three arias also expressed three distinct characters. He began with "Avant de quitter ces lieux" from *Faust* by Charles Gounod, conveying earnestness, moving through tenderness to martial moments and ending with a very long note, communicating firmness and determination. The mood changed with an emotional rendition of "Vy mne pisali... Kogda bï zhizn domashnim krugom" from *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky's music allows for a hint of irony—Onegin lets Tatyana down gently, although we know that despite his apparent compassion, he is a bit of a cad. Jamal voiced this skilfully. He finished with a flourish in a charming rendition of "Largo al factotum" from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Gioachino Rossini. Jamal exhibited all of Figaro's showmanship and engaging affability, blowing kisses to the audience and handling the patter with pizazz. Through his energetic acting Jamal made this his own. To learn more about Jamal, visit his website at baritonejamal.com.

Kcenia Koutorjevski, Mezzo-soprano Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist



Kcenia is a force to be reckoned with. She achieves a compelling presentation of character and situation by acting with her voice, her body and even her eyes. In "Sta nell ircana pietrosa tana" from *Alcina* by George Frideric Handel she exhibited some "masculine" bravado and demonstrated vocal athleticism in this heroic trouser role. In "Va! laisse couler mes larmes" from *Werther* by Jules Massenet we heard the emotion in her rich voice, expressing Charlotte's misery and desperation. "Lyubava's Aria" from *Sadko* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov is another heart-wrenching piece, in which Kcenia displayed Lyubava's thoughts in her face. We felt her pain and resignation, fading into a somewhat stoic end. To learn more, visit kceniakoutorjevski.com.

Karoline Podolak Jérôme de los Santos, Pianist



Karoline began her programme with "Je suis Titania" from *Mignon* by Ambroise Thomas. Her rendition was dramatic and playful. She masterfully inhabited the character of Philine who is rather full of herself and is enjoying it. She is showing off what she can do with her voice and Karoline is every bit as skillful. The mood changed for the second aria, "How full of colour it was" from *Ariella* by Jaap Nico Hamburger. Karoline interpreted this brand new (2023) and consequently little-known piece with a gentle wistfulness. She brought out the character's reflection on grief and loss on the passing of a loved one and on leaving behind her childhood. By contrast, Karoline's Violetta in "Sempre libera" from *La traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi was full of life and effervescence. Her tinkling high notes were an effortless expression of Violetta's contentment in her autonomy, now to be transformed by the unexpected complication of love. For more information on Karoline go to karolinepodolak.com.

Nicholas Burns, Countertenor Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist



Nicholas Burns began his performance with a fun piece, "I'll Sail Upon the Dog-star" from *A Fool's Preferment* by Henry Purcell. He thoroughly inhabited the character, an upright, yet not too bright man, exhibiting plenty of personality and charm and bringing smiles to the faces of the audience. In "O tranquille sommeil" from *Persée* by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Nicholas floated into the opening notes of lines with softness and expressiveness. "Stille amare" from *Tolomeo* by George Frideric Handel gave Nicholas the opportunity to show us best what he can do with his exciting voice. His interpretation was full of soft, reflective emotion. For more about Nicholas visit nicholasburnscountertenor.com.

Rachael McAuley Frédéric Lacroix, Pianist



For each aria Rachael took a quiet moment to get into character before the pianist began and remained with the mood after the music finished. She began with "Werther! Qui m'aurait dit ... ces lettres!" from *Werther* by Jules Massenet. With a warm tone she expressed Charlotte's solitude, her isolation and her hopelessness. In "This Journey" from *Dead Man Walking* by Jake Heggie, Rachael explored the journey to faith, to truth, to self-examination—not only the physical journey for the characters to come together, but the spiritual passage to absolution. Rachael took us on the journey with her. In "Sein wir wieder gut" from *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss Rachael shared a stirring piece of vociferous ardour. Visit Rachael's website at rachaelmcauley.com.

The Pianists



Frédéric Lacroix



Jérôme de los Santos



Photos by Alex Robinson

Dear Fellow NCOS Member:

I hope you were able to attend the 2025 Competition. We had a very special event with beautiful singing, celebrating Canadian talent. I received excellent feedback from the singers, judges, volunteers and attendees. It was such a lovely afternoon that ran flawlessly.

We were able to do this due to contributions from many people and organizations. I wish to thank the singers and the pianists for their beautiful performance, and the six judges who volunteered their time and expertise. We are grateful to New Opera Lyra, our partner in the presentation of the event, who managed front of house and publicity. Thanks to our gracious host and to our photographer who donated their time. We acknowledge the contributions of our many donors and volunteers who made the competition possible. Thank you to the beautiful Rideau Park United Church and, of course, to our honoured Patron.

Mark Robinson

Mark

President, National Capital Opera Society

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Please note the following upcoming events:



IN CONCERT WITH FULL ORCHESTRA 8 PM SATURDAY NOVEMBER 15 3 PM SUNDAY NOVEMBER 16 ST.JOSEPH'S CHURCH 174 RUE WILBROD ST OTTAWA

