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THE *Solo* SESSIONS



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Manitoba Opera is a non-profit arts organization dedicated to changing people's lives through the glory of opera.

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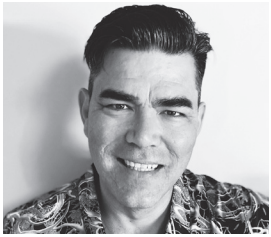
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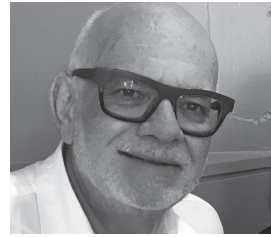
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Message from the Chair, Board of Trustees

Welcome to The Solo Sessions, our final “mainstage” event of the season. This is also my final message to you as Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Thank you, first and foremost, for the trust and confidence you placed in me as chair over the past four years. The time spent has been one of the highlights of my career path. It has been an honour and a pleasure leading and representing Manitoba Opera and our community.

As I think back on the past four years, I’m filled with gratitude toward all those I have met and worked with in my role as chair. I have had available to me three previous board chairs, Peter George, Jennifer Snyder, and Robert Vineberg, all of whom laid strong foundations for the organization. In addition, a stable consortium of board members with years of experience from various sectors enhanced and assisted me in further reinforcing Manitoba Opera.

In my capacity as chair, I encountered opera governance colleagues from across Canada and the U.S., remarkable artists who have performed here, and the superlative individuals working in the MO office. I have crossed paths with so many wonderful, generous, and talented people.

For the last 20 years we have all been fortunate beneficiaries of the exceptional leadership of Larry Desrochers as General Director & CEO. His stellar reputation has attracted world-class talent both on the stage and behind the scenes. Working closely with Larry made the hard times easier and the successes more sweet. He brings levity and optimism to any situation and inspired all around him to bring their very best.

We have accomplished so much: producing first-rate productions, debuting new artists, launching the Gail Asper Award, and retiring the



debt are just a few highlights of my tenure. One of the memories that touched me most came when the pandemic began last March.

Manitoba Opera was in the middle of rehearsals for our new production of *Carmen*. Despite the uncertainty, fear, and strain of that moment, the decision was made to cancel the opera and to pay all the performers in full. This set a precedent and an example for other opera companies across Canada. The letters and notes from the performers that I received on behalf of the Board and Management were heartfelt. The artists were so grateful.

Leadership is really about teamwork, and we have an excellent team at Manitoba Opera. My fellow board members work together diligently to advance the company, our dedicated staff create inspiring programming, and our volunteers give freely of their time. None of this could be possible without the generosity of our donors, sponsors, and public funders.

Though my term as chair is ending, I’m not going far. My next quest is to build Manitoba Opera’s endowment fund to sustain the company and ensure it is a vital musical force for years to come.

It has been an honour and pleasure to serve as your chair. I look forward to seeing you at an opening very soon.

Warmest regards,

Elba Haid
CHAIR



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Message from the **General Director & CEO**

Music is like a vaccine for the soul – a little injection and you're immune to whatever has you down. Over the past year, we've been giving booster shots of music through our online programming of concerts, education initiatives, community engagement activities, and virtual dinners. By doing so, we hope we've helped to get you through these past months.

Our latest musical antidote, *The Solo Sessions*, features five Manitoba vocalists recorded live on stage at the Centennial Concert Hall. Filmed by award-winning Winnipeg filmmaker Deco Dawson, these videos give us the opportunity to do something we don't normally do – celebrate a variety of musical genres. The wonderful artists presented in this series perform selections from opera, art song, folk music, musical theatre, and even a little soul – a virtual variety pack of “pick-me-ups.”

Normally, opera celebrates the unamplified voice – the power of a beautiful voice with the ability to cut through a full orchestra in full flight. Live performance, for us, is an ephemeral experience – you experience it in the moment and then it's gone. You make your way to the Concert Hall, settle into a seat, and let the opera sweep over you. While you get to see the whole stage picture, there are no close-ups.



On the other hand, recording artists – especially on film – gives the music a completely different feel. The camera is your guide; it can take you close to the action, give you a different vantage point, or create a mood that opens up the music. At its best, it makes you feel like you are on stage with the artist. And as you'll see, each episode has its own feel specifically suited to the vocalists and the pieces they are performing.

I hope that we'll be back on stage soon, but in the meantime, please be sure to check out each episode as it is released – you'll boost your dopamine, lower your cortisol, and ease your mind. If you take your medicine in small doses, you'll feel better for a longer period of time.

Sincerely,

Larry Desrochers
GENERAL DIRECTOR & CEO



EPISODE 1

"Love Is My Reason"

Written by Ivor Novello
(From *Perchance to Dream*)

"We'll Gather Lilacs"

Written by Ivor Novello
(From *Perchance to Dream*)

"I'll Follow My Secret Heart"

Written by Noël Coward
(From *Conversation Piece*)

"Let My Song Fill Your Heart"

Written by Ernest Charles



PROGRAM NOTES

This program is heavily rooted in theatre, dance, and the musical-play genre. Over the years, I have sung plenty of musical theatre and operetta selections. From early on in my singing career, I have been influenced by dance and theatre music and have found the English musical-play genre very attractive. The musical-play essentially became a transitional genre that connects the traditional operetta and the musical theatre genre that emerged in the twentieth century.

Two pieces on my program come from the musical-play *Perchance to Dream* by Ivor Novello. His heart-filled song "We'll Gather Lilacs" may be a familiar tune, and certainly takes on a new meaning these days while people are feeling so distant from one another. The second Novello piece, "Love Is My Reason for Living," is a committed and impassioned love song. *Perchance to Dream* opened in London in 1945, two years after *Oklahoma*, a very different offshoot of the musical-play genre, debuted in New York in 1943.

"I'll Follow My Secret Heart" by Noël Coward comes from his hyper-romantic musical-play (and total flop) called *Conversation Piece* which debuted in London in 1934. Thank goodness this piece survived at least! And finally, "Let My Song Fill Your Heart" is a beautiful stand-alone song written by American composer Ernest Charles in 1936.

With a few of the tunes on my program, you will no doubt sway along to the lilt of the Viennese waltz-like melodies. I love these songs because of the nostalgic feelings they offer an audience, and so I hope they stir your senses and offer something familiar deep in your heart.

The Artists

AARON HUTTON

Award-winning tenor Aaron Hutton is a versatile performer with a resume ranging from Baroque to contemporary musical theatre. Having been recognized as "a golden tenor" (*Opera Canada*) and "a shining star displaying supreme confidence" (*Winnipeg Free Press*), he continues to make a name for himself across the prairies as a sought-after crossover vocalist. Being no stranger to the local arts scene, Aaron Hutton has performed in leading and featured ensemble roles with some of Winnipeg's premier theatre companies such as Rainbow Stage, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg Jewish Theatre, and Manitoba Theatre for Young People.

In recent years, his recognition as a recital and concert performer in Manitoba has led to numerous

engagements with many of the province's leading orchestral and chamber ensembles such as the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Canzona, the Brandon Chamber Players, Manitoba Opera, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra on many occasions.

Select performances include tenor soloist in *Israel in Egypt* (Canzona/MCO), concert productions of *Guys and Dolls*, *A Chorus Line*, and *South Pacific* (Rainbow Stage/WSO); tenor soloist in Mozart's *Requiem*, *Carmina Burana*, and *Send in the Clowns: The Music of Stephen Sondheim* (WSO); Schubert's *Mass in E-flat Major*, Mendelssohn's *Second Symphony: Lobgesang*, and Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* (Winnipeg Philharmonic/WSO); and the tenor soloist in Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* (Canzona).

Aaron Hutton's career has taken him across the prairies for engagements with the Globe Theatre in Regina, the Regina Symphony Orchestra, and tours throughout Alberta.

Aaron obtained his Bachelor of Music and Masters of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Manitoba Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music. He is an alumnus of both the Banff Centre and the Opera Nuova Training Intensive.

Stay connected at aaronhutton.com and [@amjhutton](https://www.instagram.com/amjhutton).

LISA RUMPEL

Praised for her "fierce artistry" and "poetic" pianism, Winnipeg-based collaborative pianist and coach Lisa Rumpel is an active member of Manitoba's artistic scene. In addition to her work at the University of Manitoba as a staff vocal coach and pianist, Lisa has an extensive freelance career which has included performances with Manitoba Opera, Flipside Opera & Art Song Collective, The Little Opera Company, Manitoba Underground Opera, Nuit Blanche, Living Room Live, Music at the Millennium, Red Haus Live, Music 'N' Mavens, and the Skywalk Concert Series. She has had the opportunity to work and perform with many of Manitoba's

leading operatic vocalists including Tracy Dahl, Lara Ciekiewicz, James McLennan, Andriana Chuchman, and Andrea Lett.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Lisa has performed in virtual projects with Manitoba Opera (Opera in the Garden, The Solo Sessions), The Little Opera Company (I Need Opera...and Dance!) Nuit Blanche (6 Pianos), and the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition finals with soprano Jayne Hammond.

Alongside her demanding performance schedule, Lisa volunteers in an administrative and board capacity with Flipside Opera

& Art Song Collective, Living Room Live, and The Little Opera Company, fulfilling her love of creating programming, connecting with performers, discovering repertoire, and connecting audiences to classical music.



***"Art thou troubled?
Music will calm thee"***

~ George Frideric Handel

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wonderful opportunity to
profile the amazing talents of
our Manitoba artists during
these challenging times!**

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EPISODE 2

"Beau soir"

Written by Claude Debussy

"Mandoline"

Written by Gabriel Fauré
(From *Cinq Mélodies de Venise - Op. 58*)

"Laudamus te"

Written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(From *Mass in C Minor - KV 427*)

"The Snows They Melt the Soonest"

Trad. (British)



PROGRAM NOTES

It is spring! February and March are what I consider the 'army-crawl' months to arrive at warmer weather and my garden! I wanted to pick music that lifts our spirits this time of year.

To start, I love French melodies: the poetry, the sensuous connection with the outdoors, and the way it transports you to another place. Set in the rosy glow of sunset, "Beau Soir" (Debussy) connects us with charm of being alive. "Mandoline" (Faure) sets to music a Watteau painting of a picnic. It captures the outdoors, the elegance, the characters, their "shooting-the-breeze," etc. It is a charming piece and one of my favourites!

I included some music from my folk career since it's very much a part of what I do as an artist. Manitoba Opera encouraged us to include different genres of music for this project, so I chose to include a beautiful traditional song.

Finally, "Laudamus te" from Mozart's *Mass in C minor* is a bucket-list piece for me! I hope to sing the whole work some day. Without fail, this music makes me happy both when I sing it, and when I hear it. In my opinion, it is joy perfectly written into music!

LIZZY HOYT

Few vocalists authentically cross genres at the highest level and maintain professional careers in both areas, but Lizzy Hoyt is one of them. Praised by *Opera Canada* for both her dramatic depth as a singing actress and for her keen comedic gifts, she is a classical mezzo-soprano performing in operas, concerts, and recitals.

An internationally recognized songwriter, singer, and multi-instrumentalist in the genres of Celtic and folk, she has won and been nominated for numerous awards

The Artists

including Canadian Folk Music Awards, Western Canadian Music Awards, International Acoustic Music Awards, and Independent Music Awards.

A Manitoba Opera 2020 Digital Emerging Artist Program participant, Lizzy's recent opera performances include Julia Child in Hoiby's *Bon Appetit* (Little Opera Company) and Dido in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Manitoba Underground Opera). Passionate about classical song repertoire, she has performed with Concordia

Symphony Orchestra, Symphony of the Kootenays, and Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra.

She is currently in the early stages of planning her fifth album and her debut classical recording. Set to release in 2022, it is a collection of baroque music centred on the theme of betrayal.

www.lizzyhoyt.com

LISA RUMPEL

Praised for her "fierce artistry" and "poetic" pianism, Winnipeg-based collaborative pianist and coach Lisa Rumpel is an active member of Manitoba's artistic scene. In addition to her work at the University of Manitoba as a staff vocal coach and pianist, Lisa has an extensive freelance career which has included performances with Manitoba Opera, Flipside Opera & Art Song Collective, The Little Opera Company, Manitoba Underground Opera, Nuit Blanche, Living Room Live, Music at the Millennium, Red Haus Live, Music 'N' Mavens, and the Skywalk Concert Series. She has had the opportunity to work and perform with many of Manitoba's

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EPISODE 3

Banalités: No. 4 "Voyage à Paris"

Written by Francis Poulenc

Banalités: No. 2 "Hôtel"

Written by Francis Poulenc

"Train"

Written by Jocelyn Morlock
(From *Perchance to Dream*)

"Aria of the Worm"

Written by John Corigliano
(From *The Ghosts of Versailles*)

PROGRAM NOTES

These songs evoke feelings of longing, a sense of life interrupted and the power of resilience - sentiments many of us have experienced during the pandemic.

"Voyage à Paris" is an ode to escapism and a salute to that most romantic of cities, Paris. The music careens between exuberance and melancholy, its carnival-like waltz rhythms giving way to mournful dissonances.

In "Hôtel" Poulenc conjures a dreamy atmosphere weighed down by apathy and procrastination; a hazy moment of self-indulgence framed by wisps of cigarette smoke.

"Train" is an early work by Manitoba-born composer (and my long-time friend) Jocelyn Morlock, with text by Alan Ashton. Set against the backdrop of a remote northern train platform, the singer reminisces over a crumbling relationship, as the piano depicts express trains speeding by and evokes stark images of the autumn landscape.

Finally, "Aria of the Worm" is from John Corigliano's 1991 opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*. In this show-stopping number, the conniving villain Bégearss dismisses the animal kingdom's more noble beasts in favour of the lowly worm. Often overlooked or even reviled, the worm is nevertheless one of the most persistent and enduring creatures ever to crawl the earth. Living proof that the smallest of organisms can swiftly thwart the best of humankind's intentions.



The Artists

JAMES McLENNAN

Born and raised in Winnipeg, James McLennan has performed on opera and concert stages across Canada in a career spanning two decades. He most recently appeared with Manitoba Opera as Little Bat in *Susannah*. Prior to the COVID-19 shutdowns, his calendar included a return to Pacific Opera Victoria as Remendado in *Carmen*; a debut with Opera on the Avalon as the Electrician in *Powder Her Face* and as Georgie in *Ours*; appearances with Manitoba Opera as the Beadle in *Sweeney Todd* and Spoletta in *Tosca*; and a performance of

Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Recent season credits include Gastone in *La Traviata* with Pacific Opera Victoria and Edmonton Opera; Handel's *Messiah* with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra; and the Warden in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* with Dry Cold Productions. Credits for the 2017/18 season included Goro in *Madama Butterfly* at Manitoba Opera and Luther Billis in *South Pacific* for Calgary Opera. That season also saw him at Edmonton Opera in the critically

acclaimed production of *Les Feluettes* as Jean Bilodeau, a role he originated for the world premiere at Montreal Opera in 2016.

James is an alumnus of Brandon University and UBC, and he has been a voice instructor at U of M's Desautels Faculty of Music since 2017. He is also a certified French-to-English translator and a board member of the Association of Translators, Interpreters and Terminologists of Manitoba.

LAURA LOEWEN

Praised for expressivity, virtuosity, and committed playing, Canadian collaborative pianist Laura Loewen has appeared in concerts throughout North America and in Europe, Asia, and South America.

Dedicated to sharing her passion for ensemble playing and coaching, she is a professor of Collaborative Piano and the Vocal Coach at the University of Manitoba's Desautels Faculty of Music and was recently named the Associate Dean (undergraduate).

Dr. Loewen is a founding faculty artist of VISI (Vancouver International Song Institute)

and is a long-time member of the faculty of Opera NUOVA in Edmonton, Alberta. An extremely versatile pianist, she has performed extensively with singers, instrumentalists, and chamber ensembles, and is equally comfortable in traditional and contemporary idioms.

She is a member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists. Dr. Loewen holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts degree in Accompanying/Coaching from the University of Minnesota, where she was a fellowship student of Margo Garrett and Karl Paulnack.



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Lisa Bell, vocals, Carlin Lemon, piano, Julian Bradford, bass, and Rob Siwik, drums.

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EPISODE 4

"No One Else"

Written by Dave Malloy
(From *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*)

"Little Voice"

Written by Sara Bareilles
(From *Little Voice* - Apple TV)

"What Baking Can Do"

Written by Sara Bareilles
(From *Waitress*)

"When It All Falls Down"

Written by Christopher Curtis
(From *Chaplin - The Musical*)

PROGRAM NOTES

I wanted my selections to have variety in tempo, circumstance, style and story. I also wanted each of these songs to be extremely fun to sing and perform. All of these pieces are filled with story, have lyrics and music that I connect to, and are beautifully written and composed.

I also took into consideration the fact that my musical accompaniment was only piano. When I'm choosing songs to sing, usually the selection is based on what instrument(s) I'm singing with. Often, some songs just can't be given justice with a single instrumental accompaniment.

I am so grateful to Seanne for supporting me and enhancing my selections!



STEPHANIE SY

Stephanie Sy (she/her) is an actor, aspiring director, and writer. She was born and raised on Treaty 1 Territory, Winnipeg. Her career began on stage, predominantly in musical theatre and she has worked across Canada and the U.S.

Selected theatre credits include the first national tour of *We Will Rock You, Next to Normal* (Mirvish/Musical Stage Company/Dora Mavor Moore Award Nominee); *Vietgone* (RMTC); Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Rainbow Stage); Disney's *A Little Mermaid* (Globe Theatre); world premieres of

The Artists

Prairie Nurse (Blyth Festival), *A History of Breathing* (Persephone), *Prom Queen* (Segal Centre), and *Post-Democracy* (PTE); and the upcoming *Bad Parent* by Ins Choi (PTE/Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre).

Since 2016, Stephanie has transitioned her focus to film and television with credits including *Seance* (Shudder), *Nobody* (Universal Pictures), *Burden of Truth* (CBC), Ann Rule's *A House on Fire, Always and Forever Christmas* (LifeTime); *Nikola Tesla and the End of the World* (CBC Gem); *Welcome*

to Sudden Death, Fractured (Netflix); *Tales from the Hood 3, Tales from the Loop* (Amazon Prime); *A Christmas Mission* (CTV Drama Channel); *Sweet Autumn, Amazing Winter Romance* (Hallmark); *Breakthrough* (Sony Pictures); *Perfect Match* (Super Channel); *Colour of Scar Tissue* (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network); and *Ruthless Souls* (ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival).

SEANNE BUENAFE

Sixteen-year-old Seanne Buenafe is excited to be a part of The Solo Sessions. Seanne is passionate about everything music - especially the piano.

A frequent performer at the Winnipeg Music Festival, Seanne was awarded best instrumentalist in 2016 and 2017. He also won the John Melnyk Trophy for best performance of a piano concerto in 2019. Seanne has received the gold medal from the Royal Conservatory of Music for the highest mark for a piano exam in Manitoba for three consecutive years. In 2019, he was the recipient

of the Manitoba Registered Music Teachers Association Scholarship in Advanced Piano. Seanne has just completed his ARCT Diploma in piano performance with First Class Honours.

As performing is a huge part of his life, Seanne is hoping to give his first formal recital this year in a public venue. He intends to complete his Licentiate in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music before leaving for university in the fall of 2022 where he plans to pursue a music degree.

Seanne would like to express a special thank you to his teacher, Jacqueline Ryz, for her inspiring guidance throughout his musical success these past years.





EPISODE 5

PROGRAM NOTES

"Stand" is an inspiring song of strength and resilience, beautiful written by Danny Schur. I had the honour of being the first person to present it to the world through a character named Emma in *Stand!* the movie. It is a piece that will surely "stand" the test of time for its universal themes of perseverance, unity, and acknowledging that we all have the power for change.

"At Last" is almost fairy tale-like and captures everything one feels when they meet "the one." This is one of my favourites to sing, especially at weddings when love is in the air and the swinging melody sweeps you away in the clouds... at least for a moment.

"What's Going On" is a beautiful song that always makes me stop and think about what's going on in the world, and how we as people can do better. It questions issues that many couldn't put a voice to at the time, and reminds us that war is not the answer...love is.

"Stand"

Written by Danny Schur
Arrangement by Carlin Lemon
(From *Strike!* / *Stand!*)

"At Last"

Written by Mack Gordon
and Harry Warren

"What's Going On"

Written by Al Cleveland,
Renaldo Benson, and Marvin Gaye

LISA BELL

As a versatile and accomplished vocalist/actress, Lisa Bell has had the opportunity to perform for audiences across Canada. She has performed in numerous professional film and theatrical productions and successfully sang her way to become a top 20 finalist on Canadian Idol.

Lisa is a featured vocalist for the Ron Paley Big Band and Big City All Star Band. Most recently, she was nominated for an ACTRA award for best outstanding female performance in a feature film for her role in the movie debut (*Stand!*) of the musical *Strike!*

Other credits include *Falcon Beach* (CTV), *Hairspray* (Mirvish), *Crowns* (RMCT), *Rent* (Rainbow Stage), *Avenue Q* (WJT), *Mary Poppins* (Rainbow Stage), and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Rainbow Stage).

CARLIN LEMON

Carlin Lemon is an accomplished piano and keyboard player, having toured the world as music director, musician, and front-of-the-house engineer with various award-winning bands spanning 12 countries, numerous concerts, festivals, TV appearances, talk shows and albums.

He is best known for his meticulous synthesizer programming and sampling skills, and his ability to play numerous parts simultaneously.

Today he spends most of his time as owner and director of the Big City All Star Band and as a music producer at Lemonfresh Studios.



JULIAN BRADFORD, BASS

ROB SIWIK, DRUMS

BE SURE NOT TO MISS THIS!

"I Will Survive"

Written by Freddie Perren and Dino Fekaris

"I Will Survive" is one of those songs that immediately empowers you from the opening line. "At first I was afraid, I was petrified" is precisely how someone feels when they see no other way out. But then they slowly realize...wait a minute...I'm pretty bad ass!!

Go to mbopera.ca/solosessions to hear this selection free of charge.





DIRECTOR

Deco
DAWSON

Deco Dawson is a passionately dynamic filmmaker from Winnipeg. His 15 short films have garnered numerous

awards worldwide including a two-time win of the Best Short Film Award from the Toronto International Film Festival for his films *Keep a Modest Head* and *FILM(dzama)*.

In addition to his film work, Deco works regularly as a video projection designer across Canada and in the U.S., creating highly inspired, immersive, theatrical worlds with multiple projectors, forced perspective, and live camera feeds.

Deco Dawson's unique cinematic-come-theatrical

style always permeates the productions, adding a level of mesmerizing awe to the stage; the *New York Times* describing his latest work on Broadway as "Jaw Dropping." Most recently, Deco completed his first feature film entitled *DIASPORA* which is awaiting a 2021 release.

Thank you to Manitoba Opera for the invitation to share in this remarkable journey.

www.decodawson.com

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