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For Further Information  
Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing  
204-255-0508; dronald84@shaw.ca

**Manitoba Opera Closes 2021/22 Season  
with launch of  
The Solo Sessions Video Series**

***A Cinematic Showcase of Manitoba Talent***

Manitoba Opera closes the 2021/22 Season with a five-episode cinematic series celebrating the breadth of Manitoba's musical talent. From Mozart to Marvin Gaye, The Solo Sessions presents a virtual buffet of musical treats from opera, musical theatre, art song, folk, and popular music interpreted by five exciting singers and talented musicians. The videos are available to view anytime on Vimeo on Demand for \$31.50 (just \$6.30 per episode!) beginning June 1 at 1pm CDT. Go to [mbopera.ca](http://mbopera.ca) for more information.

The series, designed and directed by award-winning Winnipeg filmmaker Deco Dawson, was recently shot on the stage of the company's mainstage production venue, the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg. Featured vocalists are **Lisa Bell, Lizzy Hoyt, Aaron Hutton, James McLennan, and Stephanie Sy.**

"The Solo Sessions was a unique opportunity for Manitoba Opera to bring together a wide range of exciting Winnipeg artists and present them in a very different way from our normal productions or concerts," commented Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO. "The singers' distinctive musical styles combined with director Deco Dawson's insight and vision has resulted in a series that is fresh, eclectic, and features performances that merge beautiful singing with music video, film, and theatre. With video on demand viewing, we will provide programming for our existing patrons, but also hope to reach new audiences as well."

## 2. MB Opera launches *The Solo Sessions*

This is the first time that Manitoba Opera has collaborated with the filmmaker who has worked in both theatre and film for nearly two decades. Dawson's 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)*. *The New York Times* described his latest work on Broadway as "jaw dropping."

"The occasion to work with so many exceptionally talented, top-tier artists on the vast and empty stage of the Concert Hall and to be given carte blanche to design, direct, and edit 20 live musical performance numbers was nothing short of an incredible offer. I jumped at the opportunity," explains director Deco Dawson. "We merged film, theatre, music video, and live performance to create something alive on screen, while at the same time honoring the performances."

Stephanie Sy, one of the featured vocalists, relished the experience: "Deco was incredibly open to allowing me the freedom to express myself in any way that I saw fit for each piece. He was very careful and thoughtful in his vision and design, and every song was elevated both in mood and tone. I felt very supported by him and the entire crew, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience!"

The series was produced by Linda Nelson and Norm Lussier of YaYo Productions.

## THE ARTISTS

### EPISODE 1

#### **Vocalist: 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.

#### **Pianist: 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. She teaches voice and piano at the University of Manitoba; has a demanding performance schedule; and 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.

### 3. MB Opera launches *The Solo Sessions*

#### EPISODE 2

**Vocalist: Lizzy Hoyt**

Few vocalists are able 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. She is also an internationally recognized songwriter, singer, and multi-instrumentalist in the genres of Celtic and folk.

**Pianist: Lisa Rumpel (see above)**

#### EPISODE 3

**Vocalist: James McLennan**

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.

**Piano: 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. An extremely versatile pianist, she has performed extensively with singers, instrumentalists, and chamber ensembles, and is equally comfortable in traditional and contemporary idioms.

Dr. Loewen 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).

#### EPISODE 4

**Vocalist: Stephanie Sy**

Stephanie Sy is an actor, aspiring director, and writer. Her career began on stage, predominantly in musical theatre and she has worked across Canada and the US. She has appeared in a number of movies and television shows for companies including Hallmark, Sony Pictures, Universal Pictures, and the CBC. Locally she has worked on the stages of the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, Rainbow Stage, and Prairie Theatre Centre.

#### 4. MB Opera launches *The Solo Sessions*

##### **Piano: Seanne Buenafe**

Sixteen-year-old Seanne Buenafe is a passionate pianist. A frequent performer at the Winnipeg Music Festival, he was awarded best instrumentalist in 2016 and 2017. Buenafe also won the John Melnyk trophy for best performance of a piano concerto in 2019 and 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.

##### **EPISODE 5**

##### **Vocalist: 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. Recently, she received her first ACTRA nomination for best outstanding female performance in a feature film for her role in the movie debut (*Stand!*) of the musical *Strike!*

##### **Musicians: Carlin Lemon, piano, Julian Bradford, bass, Rob Siwik, drums**

Carlin Lemon is an accomplished piano and keyboard player. He has 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. Currently he is the owner and director of the Big City All Star Band and a music producer at Lemonfresh Studios.

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