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CONTRACT FOR GENERAL DIRECTOR & CEO LARRY DESROCHERS EXTENDED TO 2026

Elba Haid, Outgoing Chair of the Board of Trustees for Manitoba Opera (MO), announced today that the company has renewed the contract for Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, for another five years - expiring May 31, 2026. Desrochers has been at the helm of Manitoba's only full-time professional opera company since 2000. He is currently Canada's longest-serving general director and one of the longest-serving general directors in North America.

"As chair of the board these past five seasons, it has been my deepest pleasure to have worked with Larry on so many important initiatives for the company. His unfailing leadership and collaborative spirit have resulted in a vibrant opera company for this community. The strides we have made would not have been possible without him," commented Haid. "And as we lay the groundwork for the launch of an endowment campaign, the leadership stability that we will continue to have with Larry at the helm will most certainly factor into the community's response."

During his tenure, Desrochers instituted strong governance practices for the board, increased staff, professionalized administrative practices, and increased fundraising. Following a long period of fiscal challenges for Manitoba Opera, he posted 12 consecutive balanced budgets, a feat not previously achieved in the company's history. Recently, he led a successful campaign to eliminate the decades-old debt. He has enhanced the company's artistic integrity, developed local and Canadian artists, and fostered community relevance through new educational and civic practice programs.

His own creative output has resulted in some of the most important work that Manitoba Opera has undertaken, including the commission of MO's first new opera, *Transit of Venus* in 2007, for which he served as dramaturg and director. His ground-breaking production of *Fidelio* connected the opera's themes of oppression to stories of real-life political prisoners and to local refugees. *La Liberte* called *Fidelio* "perhaps the most important opera in the history of the company." *Opera Canada* recently chose *Fidelio* as MO's opera of the decade.

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“The Board of Trustees is absolutely thrilled to renew Larry’s contract,” added Judith Chambers, Incoming Chair. “He is a highly respected cultural leader locally, nationally, and on the opera front, internationally. Larry has provided exceptional leadership for Manitoba Opera these past two decades. As we come out of the pandemic and into the company’s 50th anniversary next season, it has never been more reassuring for and important to the board and the community to have continuity in our leadership.”

His dedication to community engagement programs won Manitoba Opera an invitation to the inaugural Civic Practice Group of Opera America - a national think tank on developing best practices for opera companies to connect to their communities. With the support of a two-year Opera America Innovation Grant, MO’s latest initiative will help to develop meaningful, respectful relationships with Manitoba’s Indigenous community. With Desrochers’ guidance, MO’s community engagement efforts have redefined Manitoba Opera’s relationship to the community.

In response to the pandemic, Desrochers launched the Digital Emerging Artist Program in the summer of 2020, a national program to help emerging opera artists adapt their skills to the creation of online content. Four artists, selected from across the country, received more than 80 workshop sessions to enhance their skills as interpreters and creators during the program’s inaugural year.

“I am honored to serve Manitoba Opera for another five years,” said Desrochers. “There is still a lot of work to do to get through the remainder of the pandemic and return to full-scale live productions. We also have the 50th anniversary season approaching and exciting plans to build up our endowment fund, create new works, revisit masterpieces, and expand our community engagement and education programs. The pandemic is also bringing about changes in how we do business and relate to the community. I hope my years of experience will help guide the company through all that lays ahead.”

BIOGRAPHY: LARRY DESROCHERS

Born and raised in Manitoba, Larry Desrochers has committed his nearly 40-year career to advancing the arts in Manitoba. His work spans the disciplines of theatre, film, events and opera as an artist and administrator.

Desrochers graduated in 1984 from the University of Winnipeg, with a B.A. in theatre. He started his career at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre while still studying at the U of W. In 1985, he served as an Apprentice Director, was hired as an Associate Director in 1986 and became as Associate Artistic Director in 1989. He founded the Winnipeg Fringe Festival in 1988 and directed his first professional production at the age of 26. In 1989, Desrochers was the first Manitoban to direct a production on the mainstage since Len Cariou. He also produced and directed the Opening Ceremonies of the 1999 Pan Am Games.

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The U of W honoured him with a Distinguished Alumni Award in 2000, and he received Opera America's Distinguished Service Award in 2010. He received a Lifetime Honorary Membership from the Winnipeg Film Group in 2011 and is the 2012 recipient of the Winnipeg Arts Council's Making a Difference Award in recognition of his service to the local arts community.