



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
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LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH
THE FIRST FULL-SCALE INDIGENOUS-LED OPERA
ON A CANADIAN OPERA MAINSTAGE
RUNS NOVEMBER 18, 22, 24

Underwritten by BMO

The world premiere of Manitoba Opera's *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* (pronounced **lee cur**), the first full-scale Indigenous-led opera presented on a Canadian opera mainstage will kick off the 2023/24 Season with three performances at the Centennial Concert Hall (Winnipeg) Saturday, November 18 (7:30 pm), Wednesday, November 22 (7 pm), and Friday, November 24 (7:30 pm). Tickets are on sale now at mbopera.ca or by calling 204-944-8824.

This cross-cultural collaboration is a celebration of Métis women, language, and culture, conceptualized by Métis poet and librettist **Dr. Suzanne M. Steele**, and is co-composed by Métis composer/fiddler **Alex Kusturok** and composer **Neil Weisensel**. Weisensel will also conduct.

This full-scale production features 11 vocal soloists, spoken roles, both adult and children's choruses made up primarily of Indigenous community members, fiddlers, dancers, a guitarist, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Spoken & Sung in Five Languages

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North will be spoken and sung in five languages: Southern-Michif, French-Michif, Anishinaabemowin, French, and English, with English translations projected above the stage.

The opera's text was developed with Indigenous language keepers who have continued to be involved with the project. *Li Keur* brings these languages, which have survived decades of attempted erasure, back to the centre stage of the continent.

Story Concept/Background

This opera re-places the Michif peoples and the kinship webs of the founding nationals at the central continent, to the centre of the big stage while simultaneously redefining operatic form through an Indigenous world view of story.

2. *MB Opera Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North Nov. 18, 22, 24, 2023*

In this historical, mystic opera, 21st century Joséphine-Marie, through a grandmother's story, is transported to 1870s Montana where she encounters an ancestor, the sharpshooter Josette who is a runaway travelling with Riel and the last buffalo brigades. Josette falls in love with the young, passionate, Louis Riel, in disguise and on the run from assassins.

The pair confront jealousy, destiny, deprivation, and torment wrought by shape-shifting Black Geese of Fate, but are comforted by ghost choruses of ancestors, the bison brigades, and the women of their peoples, as they try to salvage a nation and save themselves from total destruction in the burning heart of the continent of the 1870s.

Métis Culture on the Mainstage

Li Keur places Métis culture, a founding culture of our province, on Manitoba Opera's mainstage. The Red River jig, which features prominently in the score, along with other traditional and contemporary Métis music by Kusturok, is for the Métis peoples, not only a national anthem, it is a prayer, a celebration, and a compass with which the Michif find their way home. Red River music, born of a specific place and rooted in a specific culture, continue to thrive and with *Li Keur* this music is celebrated through the power of Métis fiddle, dance, language, and through the operatic voice.

The Artists

Principal Cast (in alphabetical order)

JOSETTE La GRANDE	Rebecca Cuddy*
MÉMÈRE	Paulette Duguay*
La ROCHE	Nolan Kehler*
LOUIS RIEL/ROBIDEAU	Evan Korbut*
BLACK GOOSE #1	Michelle Lafferty*
ROSE/MARGUERITE	Julie Lumsden*
JACQUES La CROSSE/THE ENGLISHMAN	James McLennan
MARIE SERPENTE	Keely McPeek*
BLACK GOOSE #2	Scott Rumble*
JOSEPHINE-MARIE/NARRATOR	Charlene Van Buekenhout*
PIERRE La GRANDE	David Watson
DANCERS	Yvonne Chartrand*
	Danielle Enblom*
	Modeste McKenzie*
	Élise Page*
	Ryan Richard*
	Jera Wolfe
MUSICIANS	Alex Kusturok (fiddle)*
	Melissa St. Goddard (fiddle)*
	Jordan McConnell (guitar)*

3. *MB Opera* Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, Nov. 18, 22, 24, 2023

Choreographer	Yvonne Chartrand
Fight Director	Jacqueline Loewen
Set and Projection design	T. Erin Gruber*
Costume design	Deanna Finnman*
Costume design cultural consultant	Evan Ducharme*
Lighting design	Scott Henderson

*Manitoba Opera debut

The Creative Team

Dr. Suzanne M. Steele *Librettist/Storyteller*

Suzanne Steele is an award-winning poet, installation artist, scholar, editor, and writer. She is a librettist (opera architect) and co-founder, with Drs. Monique Giroux and Michelle Porter, of the Red River Jig Network project (www.redriverjig.com).

Dr. Steele has a PhD from Exeter University (UK), an MLIS from UWO, and a BMus (voice) from UBC. Her war requiem (with composer Jeff Ryan), *Afghanistan: Requiem for a Generation*, will be released commercially in 2023. This work is based on her experience as a Canadian war artist with the First Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2008-10) Afghanistan.

Alex Kusturok *Co-Composer/Fiddler*

Métis composer and writer, Alex Kusturok, has composed, recorded, and performed widely. A third-generation fiddler, he is the son of the three-time Grand Masters Fiddle Championship, Patti Kusturok, and is known for his fiery, dynamic style of fiddling and footwork.

Neil Weisensel *Co-Composer/Conductor*

Neil Weisensel is a veteran opera composer; his background is white settler with French/German ancestry. His eight acclaimed operas have been performed over 240 times across Canada and the United States. In 2014, Vancouver Opera premiered his anti-bullying opera *Stickboy*. Weisensel has won grants and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, Opera America, and the Canada Council. He holds degrees in composition and performance from the University of Manitoba and University of British Columbia.

Simon Miron *Director*

The production will be led by Winnipeg multi-disciplinary artist Simon Miron, a Francophone Métis who will be making his Manitoba Opera debut as director. Simon has worked on 80 productions across Canada and the UK including dozens of new works.

Librettist & Composers' Comments

Suzanne Steele

"With *Li Keur*, I am trying to reconnect so much of that which was lost to my Gaudry, Fayant, Morin, DuCharmes, David, Beauchamps, and Desjardins families, and for so many other Michif families, and that is, each other," explains Dr. Steele. "Sometime around the 1870s, our vibrant, intact, and prosperous families and communities were cast, scattered like windflowers across the prairies into a century and a half of hard times. And so, in a way through this work, I try to emulate the Anishinaabe keeper of the medicines, Marie Serpente (named in part for an ancestor of mine), who in this opera — as all our women for centuries and millennia — sews together the violence of men not once, but twice — that is, the violence of the historic. But importantly, I am also trying, as all Indigenous women continue to, sew together our cultures, our webs of family, and from the sometimes ugly in this world, make something beautiful. In this, through words and story, I have tried to bead some of our world for us to share and enjoy together once again and to shine a light on who we are."

Alex Kusturok

"It's such an honour to be a part of something so powerful," commented Alex Kusturok, composer and Métis fiddler. "Something like this hasn't been done before for the Métis culture, and I'm humbled to have a small part in it. I look forward to seeing what comes from this, and I'm beyond excited to be working with a group of amazing people."

Neil Weisensel

"Working on *Li Keur, Riel's Heart of the North* has been nothing short of a transformational project for me since I started work on it in 2017," said composer Neil Weisensel. "Researching and composing this piece has changed how I work, how I teach, and how I see the world. Inspired by Suzanne Steele's powerful and poetic libretto and blessed to be able to collaborate with fellow composer Alex Kusturok, I feel like we have succeeded in creating a unique and entertaining story for Manitoba Opera's mainstage."

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***LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH* SUPPORTERS & SPONSORS**

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