

MANITOBA
• OPERA

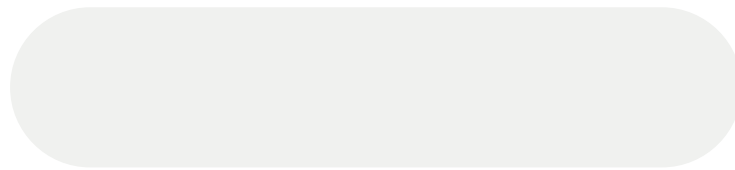


**2023/24
ANNUAL REPORT**



OUR MISSION:

**TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S
LIVES THROUGH THE
GLORY OF OPERA**



Manitoba Opera is located upon, and operates within, Treaty #1 territory, the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Anisiniw, Dakota, and Dene peoples' traditional lands and waters and the Red River Métis Nation homelands.

As water nourishes the land and all it gives us, we also acknowledge that the source of the City of Winnipeg's water is from Shoal Lake, the home and shared territory of Iskatewizaagegan No. 39 Independent Nation and Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

In view of such understandings and acknowledgments, Manitoba Opera remains committed to working in partnership with the Indigenous peoples in the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and collaboration.



Keely McPeck (Marie Serpente), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023.
Photo: R. Tinker

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan

Manitoba Opera's 51st season was a year for firsts: artistically, educationally, and with our community engagement programs.

Artistically, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* was the first Indigenous-led creation on a Canadian opera mainstage, and *Carmen* was the first opera that was both cancelled and returned post-pandemic. In education, we presented the first Opera Storytime video translated into Ojibway. In community engagement, we worked with our first Indigenous Advisory Council and commissioned our first Indigenous beaded artwork.

The season created space to celebrate Métis culture and welcome Indigenous communities into the Concert Hall, while also using traditional repertoire to rebuild audiences. Each production featured three performances and a student-attended dress rehearsal.

The Manitoba Opera-built production and world premiere of the first Indigenous-led opera on a Canadian mainstage, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* opened the season in November.

Sixty-five percent of the 218 cast and crew identified as Indigenous. The production attracted patrons from across the country including Indigenous communities in Northern Manitoba.

We prioritized the inclusion of Indigenous artists, hiring our first Métis stage director to ensure authenticity on stage. We focused on Indigenous leadership throughout the production process, ensuring Indigenous artists felt supported. This involved extra time for "visiting," hiring cultural advisors such as Indigenous language keepers and elders onsite for trauma support.

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North was not just a performance, but

a significant cultural event that extended its impact beyond the stage. The production required meaningful engagement with the Métis community, guided by a 12-member advisory committee that met multiple times from March to October. Production ambassadors Keely McPeck and Camryn Dewar actively engaged Indigenous communities, performing excerpts from the opera at various events, reaching nearly 6,000 people. Métis elders played a crucial role, performing ceremonial duties before performances to honor cultural traditions.

Community workshops and events further enriched the audience's experience. A beading workshop led by Métis artist Claire Johnston,



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North Production Ambassadors Camryn Dewar (l) and Keely McPeek at the Corn Roast at Riel House.



Librettist Dr. Suzanne M. Steele and Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO at the Opening Night Dinner for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Evan Korbut (Louis Riel), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Carmen, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

a Michif cooking event, an evening of learning and dialogue, and the pre-show chats provided additional layers of cultural context. The display of period-accurate outfits provided by Parks Canada added a historical dimension to the opera-going experience.

Additionally, Manitoba Opera commissioned beaded artwork by Claire Johnston, displayed in the lobby, and Liz Barron curated the art exhibit 21st Century Métis: Art, Identity & Innovation, which featured works by Jason Baerg, David Garneau, Amanda Smart, and Claire Johnston, exploring the evolving Métis identity.

Notably, the Manitoba Métis Federation listed *Li Keur* as the second most impactful achievement in advancing the Red River Métis in 2023, only behind recognizing Louis Riel as the first Premier of Manitoba.

Li Keur served as one important step in Manitoba Opera's journey toward reconciliation.

We fostered community connections to welcome diverse audiences to a traditional Eurocentric art form. Our Opera Access program grew by 300%, offering free or subsidized tickets to mostly Indigenous patrons. More than 44% of attendees were new to Manitoba Opera.

Carmen returned in April 2024, four years after a pandemic-related delay. Rising star mezzo-soprano Ginger Costa-Jackson gave a "smoldering" performance (*The Free Press*) to sold-out audiences. *Carmen* delighted traditional opera enthusiasts while captivating casual ticket buyers. Our focus remained on the opera's exceptional music and drama, while also connecting its themes to contemporary issues, including a panel discussion on intimate partner violence.



Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO with Judith Chambers, Chair, Board of Trustees. Photo: G. Ouskun

However, we have experienced a significant rise in production costs, primarily driven by inflation. The pandemic has exacerbated the gap between ticket revenue and expenses. Our April 2024 production of *Carmen* cost 33% more than just 10 years ago but generated nearly identical ticket revenue. We will need to work with governments and other supporters to ensure we have the necessary resources to continue our important cultural work in the community.

We maintained our commitment to inclusivity by continuing to welcome audiences from remote Manitoban communities to opera performances. A special highlight was the visit from the treble choir of Mantou Sakahigan Kiskinamakewickamik. These students traveled from God's Lake Narrows First Nation to Winnipeg to see *Carmen* and we were able to enhance their experience with a backstage tour, a pizza dinner, and a singing workshop with award-winning Cree mezzo-soprano Rhonda Head.

In 2023/24, Manitoba Opera furthered its reputation as a sector-leading regional opera company in North America. Manitoba Opera's community engagement efforts this season reached more than 11,000 individuals through various events, initiatives, and exhibits. These activities not only expanded the reach of opera but also enriched the cultural fabric of the community. Educational programs played a

"Beyond grateful for the opportunity to work on this World Premiere show!!! Miigwetch."

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

LAURA A. WARREN
Patron



Students at Mary Montgomery School (Virden, MB) use props and costumes to act out scenes from *Hansel and Gretel*. Photo: J. Wood O'Grady

pivotal role, engaging approximately 4,000 students and providing many with their first exposure to this multifaceted art form.

The 2023/24 season also marked the second year of the Student Ambassador Program, a unique initiative by Manitoba Opera offering post-secondary music students an exclusive behind-the-scenes experience. The program allowed students from the University of Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite University to explore careers in arts administration while sharing their passion for opera with their peers and earning compensation.

The 4th annual Digital Emerging Artists Program (DEAP) unfolded over four weeks in August 2023, offering a groundbreaking training experience for four Emerging Artists and one Independent Learner. Conducted virtually via Zoom, DEAP 2023 united artists and faculty from across Canada. Participants benefited from over 600 hours of intensive instruction and professional development, while the program facilitated earning opportunities for 48 artists and arts professionals.

This season marked the fourth year of Manitoba Opera's Building Bridges project, designed to develop strong connections with Indigenous communities in Manitoba. Supported by Opera America's Innovation Grant program, the company continued its work building on the foundation

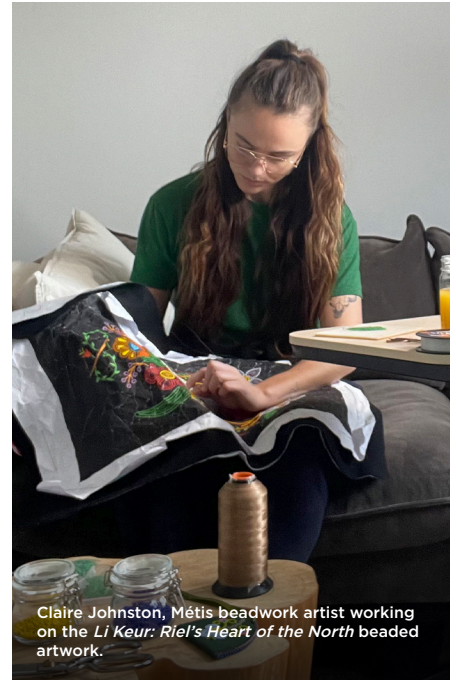
laid by Rhonda Fergues of Spirited Ways Consulting, who served as a consultant for two seasons on the project. In November 2023, Manitoba Opera became a signatory to the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord, committing to four Calls of Action through our 2023/24 season.

The 2023/24 season showcased Manitoba Opera's dedication to artistic innovation, community engagement, and education. Through a diverse array of productions, educational initiatives, and community programs, Manitoba Opera reinforced its role as a cultural cornerstone in the region, bringing the transformative power of opera to a wide and varied audience.

The work we undertake to present great art, engage the community, and offer education programs to students, as well as emerging professionals, would not be possible without the generous support of our individual donors, corporate



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Claire Johnston, Métis beadwork artist working on the *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* beaded artwork.

partners, and investments from all three levels of government. We are grateful for the community coming together to support opera in Manitoba.

In closing, we want to express our profound gratitude to all the Indigenous partners we worked with this season, the artists, language and knowledge keepers, elders, and the Advisory Committee. Our work with you made this a profound and rewarding journey.



Chorus member David Boyes and Kimberley Rampersad, Associate Artistic Director, Shaw Festival at the *Carmen* Opening Night reception. Photo: G. Ouskun

ASSOCIATION
FOR OPERA
IN CANADA
NATIONAL
SUMMIT HELD
IN WINNIPEG
DURING *LI KEUR*

The Association for Opera in Canada (AOC) held its annual National Summit in conjunction with *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Over three days in November, delegates from across Canada convened in Winnipeg to discuss pressing issues facing the sector including leadership in the opera field, boards and governance, and past and current trends in a changing world.

Manitoba Opera supported the summit by assisting with theme and session development, assisting with hosting the national opera auditions, and providing volunteer resources for AOC to manage conference sessions. The summit concluded with delegates attending the second performance of *Li Keur*.



Carmen, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



(l) Paulette Duguay (Mémère) and Charlene Van Beukenhout (Josephine-Marie), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



David Pomeroy (Don José) and Lara Ciekiewicz (Micaëla), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Will Goodon, Manitoba Métis Federation, delivering a welcome address from the stage at the dress rehearsal for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Carmen, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING



David Pomeroy (Don José) and Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

In the 2023/24 season, we were pleased to return to presenting opera on a grand scale, with large ensemble casts made up of world-class local, national, and international artists onstage, the wonderful Manitoba Opera Chorus (with the addition of some welcome newcomers), and the full Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in the pit.

Programming was reflective of current trends in the opera sector in North America, featuring a blend of something new (an exciting and ground-breaking world premiere) and something not-so-new (the long-awaited return of a much beloved audience favourite). Both productions were equally well received by the near-capacity audiences in attendance.

As the effects of the pandemic began to wane, the opportunity to produce this new work, a first-ever Canadian mainstage production of a work created by an Indigenous-led creative team, presented itself in the fall of 2023.

The opera is written in a storytelling style familiar to Indigenous peoples based on the concept of 'visiting,' and features both spoken dialogue and sung sections. Traditional and contemporary Métis fiddle tunes composed by Alex Kusturok are combined with contemporary vocal and orchestral music composed by Neil Weisensel.

Indigenous languages (Southern Michif, French Michif, and Anishinaabemowin) are interwoven

with both French and English to create the narrative. The creation and the production of the opera would not have been possible without the wisdom, knowledge, and support of the translators, language keepers and coaches who worked on the project: Donna Beach, Debra Beach Ducharme, June Bruce, Agathe Chartrand, Jules Chartrand, Lorraine Coutu, Verna de Montigny, Joyce Dumont, Francois Fontaine, Patsy Miller, Andrea Rose, Heather Souter, and Suzanne Zeke.

The opera consists of scenes set in contemporary times as well as historical scenes set in southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and northern Montana during the 1870s. At the heart of the story is a visit between a young contemporary

PRODUCTION:

LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, we were approached by Winnipeg composer Neil Weisensel with a newly written opera entitled *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. The story and libretto of the opera were conceived and written by Vancouver-based Red River Métis historian and scholar, Dr. Suzanne M. Steele, and it was co-composed with Métis fiddler Alex Kusturok.



Dr. Suzanne M. Steele (centre) addressing the cast and creative team at the workshop for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, August 2023. Photo: G. Ouskun



Stage management team at the Opening Night post-show reception for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. (l-r) Heather Lee Brereton, Kathryn Ball, Robert Pel, Tia Morann. Photo: G. Ouskun

Métis woman, Joséphine-Marie (Charlene Van Buekenhout, Winnipeg) and her grandmother, Mémère (Paulette Duguay, Winnipeg). Through their conversation, the audience is transported back in time and introduced to the historical figure of Louis Riel (Evan Korbut, Toronto), as well as three women who would play pivotal roles in Riel's life: Marie Serpente, an Anishinaabeg knowledge keeper (Keely McPeek, Winnipeg), Josette La Grande, a Métis sharpshooter (Rebecca Cuddy, Toronto), and Marguerite, the young woman who would become Riel's wife (Julie Lumsden, Winnipeg). Additional historical characters include Riel's friend, La Roche (Nolan Kehler, Winnipeg), Josette's father, Pierre La Grande (David Watson, Winnipeg), and An Englishman (James McLennan, Winnipeg). Throughout the narrative, Riel is confronted and challenged by two mystic and supernatural characters, the Black Geese of Fate (Michelle

Lafferty, Calgary and Scott Rumble, Woodstock, ON). As the story progresses, the audience witnesses Joséphine-Marie come to embrace her Métis heritage through a renewed appreciation of the independence and fortitude of the Métis peoples and their kinship at *li keur* (the heart) of the continent.

Winnipeg Métis and two-spirit director Simon Miron was the stage director. Co-composer and Winnipegger Neil Weisensel led the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, with Vancouver-born Monica Chen as assistant conductor. Alberta-based co-composer and fiddler, Alex Kusturok, appeared onstage alongside fiddler, Melissa St. Goddard (Portage la Prairie), and guitarist Jordan McConnell (Winnipeg). Under Alex's guidance, this trio led the orchestra in some sections of the opera.

Vancouver-based Métis choreographer Yvonne Chartrand worked

with a cast of local, national, and international dancers: Danielle Enblom, Modeste McKenzie, Élie Page, Ryan Richard, and Jera Wolfe. Winnipeg's Jacqueline Loewen was the fight director. Winnipeg-based Métis musicians and educators Steve Denby (adults) and Jennifer Engbrecht (children) were the chorus directors. The adult and children's choruses themselves were made up primarily of volunteers from the local Métis and First Nations community, some of whom were appearing onstage in a production for the very first time. The dedication and hard work of this group of newcomers is noteworthy.

The creative team was supported by two Edmonton-based designers: T. Erin Gruber (sets/projections) and Deanna Finnman (costumes), as well as Winnipeg's own Scott Henderson (lighting). Their work would not have been possible without the creative assistance and guidance from Evan Ducharme (costume design cultural consultant), Samay Arcentales Cajas (assistant projection designer), Monica Chen (assistant conductor), Corinna Wolf (visual artist), and Gregory Scofield (historian and archivist).

PRODUCTION:

CARMEN

After having been cancelled in the spring of 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic, Bizet's *Carmen* was finally produced in the spring of 2024.

Based on a novella by Prosper Mérimée, and with a French libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, the opera tells the story of the downfall of Don José (David Pomeroy, St John's, NFLD), a young soldier who is seduced by the fiery and free-spirited cigarette factory worker, Carmen (Ginger Costa Jackson, Wyoming, US). José abandons his childhood sweetheart, Micaëla (Lara Ciekiewicz, Winnipeg), and deserts from his military duties to join forces with a band of smugglers including Frasquita



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

(Lara Secord Haid, Winnipeg/Germany), Mercédès (Barbara King, Calgary), Le Remendado (Jacques Arsenault, Charlottetown, PEI), and Le Dancaïre (Johnathon Kirby, Toronto). Ultimately, their relationship becomes fraught as Carmen loses interest in José and Don José becomes increasingly obsessed with Carmen. When Carmen eventually chooses the bullfighter Escamillo (Daniel Okulitch, Ottawa/Calgary/Germany) over Don José, the former soldier stabs her to death.

Originally slated to direct the production in 2020, Edmonton's Brian Deedrick returned as stage director. Manitoba Opera's Music Advisor and Principal Conductor, Tyrone Paterson returned to lead the members of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Winnipeg-based choreographer Brenda Gorlick, and fight director Jacqueline Loewen, assisted in the staging of the action. Assistant Music Director and Chorus Master, Tadeusz Biernacki prepared the adult chorus while Carolyn Boyes was responsible for the children's chorus. Eve Legault (Ottawa) was

the assistant conductor and made an invaluable contribution behind the scenes as a French language dialogue coach.

Originally set in Spain in the early 19th century, our production (a rental from Edmonton Opera), with a set design by Camellia Koo and costumes by Deanna Finnman, was updated to the era of the Spanish civil war. Longtime Winnipeg-based lighting designer, Hugh Conacher, made his Manitoba Opera debut with this production.

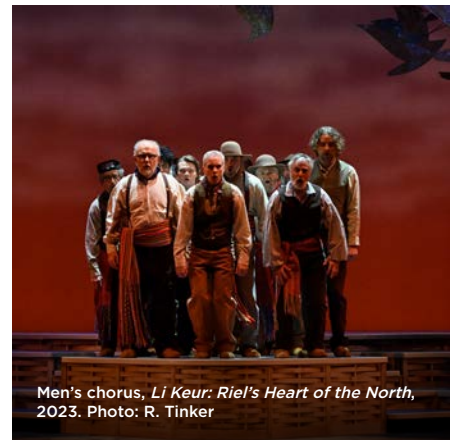
Throughout its history, Manitoba Opera has proudly developed relationships with many of North America's finest artists. Moving forward, we will continue to offer exciting opportunities to both established and emerging artists. Manitoba Opera's Production Department will continue to strive to create and maintain an environment where these artists can do their best work. Manitoba Opera remains honored to present these artists to the community, and to continue to tell remarkable stories - told through beautiful music - to life.



Ryan Richard, Black Geese dancer and Paulette Duguay (Mémère), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

“It was a spectacular, first-class international production!”
Carmen

FLAVIA FABIO FERNANDEZ
 MO Board of Trustees



Men's chorus, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Carmen cast, chorus, and crew members at the Opening Night post-show reception. Photo: G. Ouskun



David Pomeroy (Don José) and Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH ANNOUNCED AT 2023/24 SEASON MEDIA CONFERENCE

A special media conference was held to announce that the company would be presenting *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* as part of our 2023/24 Season. As the first Indigenous-led opera presented on a Canadian opera mainstage, this was a significant moment for both Manitoba Opera and the Canadian opera sector, in terms of our reconciliation journey and history.

The event was held April 14, 2023, on the Centennial Concert Hall's Piano Nobile. Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, was emcee, with Board of Trustees Chair Judith Chambers and Secretary Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas (video pre-record) speaking on behalf of the company.

An opening prayer was given by Paulette Duguay, president of l'Union national métisse Saint-Joseph. Ms. Duguay also relayed how important this work was to the Métis community in Manitoba.

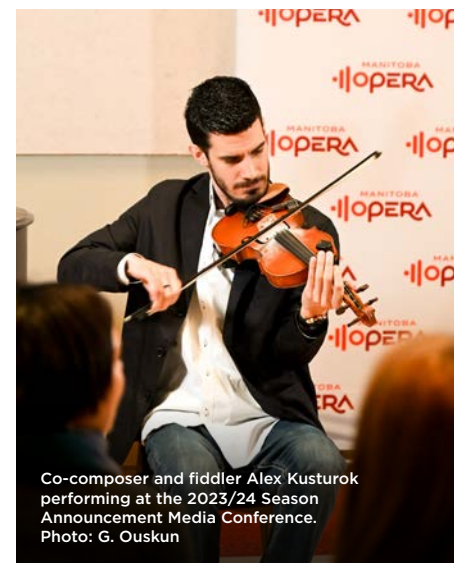
Nicole Stonyk, representing librettist Dr. Suzanne M. Steele who was unable to attend due to ill health, and co-composers Neil Weisensel and Alex Kusturok spoke on behalf of the creative team and Kristen Kennedy, Regional Vice President, Winnipeg, BMO, underwriters of the production, spoke of the over a decade-long partnership that BMO has with MO and the importance of supporting this work with a ground-breaking contribution.

Invited guests and members of the media were treated to an excerpt from the opera, "The Mending of Violence" aria sung by soprano Keely McPeek (Marie Serpente in the production). She was accompanied on piano by musician and co-composer Neil Weisensel. Awarding-winning fiddler and co-composer of the work, Alex Kusturok, also performed.

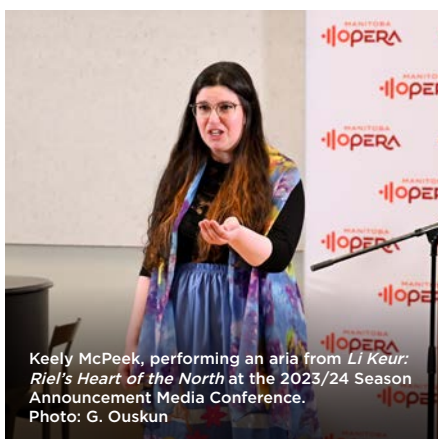
Feast, an Indigenous-owned caterer, provided light refreshments.



Paulette Duguay, president, l'Union national métisse Saint-Joseph, speaking at the 2023/24 Season Announcement Media Conference. Photo: G. Ouskun



Co-composer and fiddler Alex Kusturok performing at the 2023/24 Season Announcement Media Conference. Photo: G. Ouskun



Keely McPeek, performing an aria from *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* at the 2023/24 Season Announcement Media Conference. Photo: G. Ouskun



Li Keur Advisory Committee members and Elders (l) Agathe Chartrand, Lorraine Coutu, June Bruce with co-composer and conductor Neil Weisensel, Paulette Duguay, president of l'Union national métisse Saint-Joseph and co-composer and fiddler Alex Kusturok at the 2023/24 Season Announcement Media Conference. Photo: G. Ouskun

2023/24 SEASON



Li Keur

RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH

LIBRETTO BY SUZANNE STEELE | CO-COMPOSED BY ALEX KUSTUROK AND NEIL WEISENSEL

NOVEMBER 18, 22, 24 | 2023

Sung in Southern Michif, French-Michif,
Anishinaabemowin, French, and English

UNDERWRITTEN by **BMO** 



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023
Photo: R. Tinker

“...a love letter to the Métis nation, as well as a joyous celebration of its women and culture...a fascinating showcase for Indigenous heritage languages, with its cast of 11 principals and adult/children choruses seamlessly slipping among five languages...”

THE FREE PRESS



(l) Paulette Duguay (Mémère) and Charlene Van Buekenhout (Josephine-Marie), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023*. Photo: R. Tinker

*Manitoba Opera debut

PRINCIPAL CAST (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

JOSETTE LA GRANDE	Rebecca Cuddy*
MÈMÈRE	Paulette Duguay*
LA ROCHE	Nolan Kehler*
LOUIS RIEL/ BAPTISTE ROBIDEAU	Evan Korbit*
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
BLACK GEESE DANCERS	
Yvonne Chartrand*	Élise Page*
Danielle Enblom*	Ryan Richard*
Modeste McKenzie*	Jera Wolfe
MUSICIANS	
Alex Kusturok*, fiddle	Melissa St. Goddard*, fiddle
Jordan McConnell*, guitar	

CONDUCTOR	Neil Weisensel*
DIRECTOR	Simon Miron*
CHOREOGRAPHER	Yvonne Chartrand
FIGHT DIRECTOR	Jacqueline Loewen
SET & PROJECTION DESIGN	T. Erin Gruber*
COSTUME DESIGN	Deanna Finnman*
COSTUME DESIGN CULTURAL CONSULTANT	Evan Ducharme*
LIGHTING DESIGN	Scott Henderson
STAGE MANAGER	Robert Pel
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	Kathryn Ball Heather Lee Brereton

**TRANSLATORS, LANGUAGE
KEEPERS, & COACHES**

Donna Beach	Verna de Montigny
Debra Beach Ducharme	Joyce Dumont
June Bruce	François Fontaine
Agathe Chartrand	Patsy Millar
Jules Chartrand	Andrea Rose
Lorraine Coutu	Suzanne Zeke

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra musician listing on page 13.



Evan Korbit (Louis Riel), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023.
Photo: R. Tinker



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS

ADULTS

René Beaulieu	Michal Kowalik
David Boyes	Richard Lambert
Janine Brémault-Bamford	Don Larsen
Alyx Buhler	Rebecca Lee
Cheryl-Anne Carr	Katrina Lengsavath
Chris Caslake	Kenton McPeek
Danielle Chammartin Kirpluk	Emily Meadows
Marie Christian	Emily Myers
Edward Cloud	René Perrault
Camryn Dewar	Diane Sabourin
Max Fingerote	Raymond Sokalski
Erik Gillespie	Jonathan Stitt
Marlon Goolcharan	Nicole Stonyk
Evan Hawkins	Paul Sullivan
Micheline Hay	Lola Whonnock
Steven A. Howes	Chelsey Young

CHILDREN

Amy Bouchard
Alice Coates
Finn Deck
Glecy Mae Dimagmaliw
Andrea Fernández-Couto
Rebeca Fernández-Couto
Sofia Fernández-Couto
Sam Fuller
Aurélia James
Evangeline James
Eve Kirpluk
Violet Kirpluk
Brynlea Lussier
Finley McPhillips
Curtis Meadows
Zianna Romance
Zina Alexis Ruis

SUPERNUMERARIES

Tyler Moody
Barney Morin



Members of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION	Sheldon Johnson
AUDIO ENGINEER (<i>Dialogue</i>)	John Bent Jr.
FIREARMS SAFETY CO-ORDINATOR	Dave Brown
PROJECTED TITLES CUEING	Cary Denby
ASSISTANT PROJECTIONS DESIGNER	Samay Arcentales Cajas
APPRENTICE STAGE DIRECTOR	Rayna Masterton
APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER	Tia Morann

MUSIC STAFF

ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR	Monica Chen*
ADULT CHORUS DIRECTOR	Steve Denby*
CHILDREN'S CHORUS DIRECTOR	Jennifer Engbrecht*
RÉPÉTITEUR	Tadeusz Biernacki
CHORUS REHEARSAL PIANISTS	Cary Denby Megan Duftrat Celoris Miller
MUSIC PREPARATION BY	Greg Hamilton Music Service

SET AND PROPS CONSTRUCTION

MASTER CARPENTER	Brent Letain
SCENIC CARPENTERS	Claude Robert Chris Seida Liam Shattuck Christopher Thomson
HEAD SCENIC ARTIST	Carla Schroeder
SCENIC PAINTERS	Linda Beech Shauna Jones Larissa Shabaga Tiffany Taylor
PROPS CO-ORDINATOR	Heather Lee Brereton
ORIGINAL ARTWORK PROVIDED BY	Corinna Wolff

WARDROBE CONSTRUCTION

HEAD OF WARDROBE	Brenda Belmonte
WARDROBE CO-ORDINATOR	Tess Martin
WARDROBE ASSISTANT	Samantha Lekach
CUTTERS	Tess Pallister Edmond Santelices Clair Sparling Lela Stairs Evan Stillwater
SEWERS	Rosaria Curatolo Noel DeLeon Amanda Isaac Barry Malenko Natalia Tkachenko
BUYERS	Ame Hutchinson Barry Malenko Angela Vaags Jackie Van Winkle
MOCCASINS	Cree-Ations (Winnipeg, MB)
BEADWORK IMAGERY PROVIDED BY	Gregory Scofield

HAIR & MAKE-UP

HAIR/WIG DESIGNER	Jill Buhr
HAIR/WIG ASSISTANT	Adrianna Oliphant
HAIR CREW	Laura Warren
MAKE-UP DESIGNER	Christian Hadley
MAKE-UP ASSISTANT	Theresa Thomson
MAKE-UP CREW	Jean-Marc Lafond Sarah Leighton

CENTENNIAL CONCERT HALL PRODUCTION STAFF

STAGE MANAGER	Dave Martin
STAGE ELECTRICIAN	Brian Mann
SOUND TECHNICIAN	Glen Jonatchick
STAGE CREW/ WARDROBE DRESSERS	I.A.T.S.E. Local #63



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

WINNIPEG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2023/24

FIRST VIOLIN

Gwen Hoebig
CONCERTMASTER
The Sophie-Carmen
Eckhardt-Gramatté
Memorial Chair, endowed
by the Eckhardt-Gramatté
Foundation

Karl Stobbe
ASSOCIATE CONCERTMASTER
 Jeff Dyrda
ASSISTANT CONCERTMASTER
 Mona Coarda
 Tara Fensom
 Hong Tian Jia
 Mary Lawton
 Sonia Lazar
 Julie Savard
 Jun Shao
 Rebecca Weger**

SECOND VIOLIN

Chris Anstey
PRINCIPAL
 Elation Pauls
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL
 Karen Bauch
 Kristina Bauch
 Elizabeth Dyer
 Bokyoung Hwang
 Rodica Jeffrey
 Susan McCallum
 Takayo Noguchi*
 Jane Radomski

VIOLA

Elise Lavallée
ACTING PRINCIPAL
 Dmytro
 Kreshchenskyi**
ACTING ASSISTANT
PRINCIPAL
 Marie-Elyse Badeau
 Laszlo Baroczi
 Richard Bauch
 Greg Hay
 Michael Scholz

CELLO

Yuri Hooker
PRINCIPAL
 Robyn Neidhold
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL
 Ethan Allers
 Arlene Dahl
 Alyssa Ramsay*
 Sean Taubner
 Emma Quackenbush

BASS

Meredith Johnson
PRINCIPAL
 Daniel Perry
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL
 James McMillan
 Eric Timperman*
 Emily Krajewski
 Taras Pivniak**

FLUTE

Jan Kocman
PRINCIPAL
Supported by Gordon &
Audrey Fogg
 Alex Conway

PICCOLO FLUTE

Alex Conway
PRINCIPAL

OBOE

Beverly Wang
PRINCIPAL
 Robin MacMillan

ENGLISH HORN

Robin MacMillan
PRINCIPAL

CLARINET

Micah Heilbrunn
PRINCIPAL
 Alex Whitehead

BASSOON

Kathryn Brooks
PRINCIPAL
 Elizabeth Mee

HORN

Patricia Evans
PRINCIPAL
 Ken MacDonald
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
The Hilda Schelberger
Memorial Chair

Aiden Kleer
 Caroline Oberheu
 Michiko Singh

TRUMPET

Chris Fensom
PRINCIPAL
 Paul Jeffrey
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
 Isaac Pulford
The Patty Kirk
Memorial Chair

TROMBONE

Steven Dyer*
PRINCIPAL
 Keith Dyrda
ACTING PRINCIPAL
The Stuart Bremner
Memorial Chair
 Kyle Orlando**

BASS TROMBONE

Eric Prodger**

TUBA

Justin Gruber
PRINCIPAL

PERCUSSION

Andrew Johnson
PRINCIPAL

EXTRA MUSICIANS

Rene Adame
OBOE
 Alanna Ellison
HARP
 Andrew Nazer
TIMPANI
 Ben Reimer
PERCUSSION
 Samantha Spurrier
HARP
 Jay Uschold
TUBA

ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL

Isaac Pulford
MANAGER
 Michaela Kleer
MUSIC LIBRARIAN
 Aiden Kleer
ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

* On Leave

** One Year Appointment



(l-r) Jacques Arsenault (Le Remendado), Barbara King (Mercédès), Lara Secord-Haid (Frasquita), Johnathon Kirby (Le Dancaire) and Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Lara Ciekiewicz (Micaëla), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

2023/24 SEASON

Carmen

APRIL 13, 17, 19 | 2024

MUSIC BY
Georges Bizet

LIBRETTO BY
Ludovic Halévy & Henri Meilhac



Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen) and a member of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Jacques Arsenault (Le Remendado), Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen) and Johnathon Kirby (Le Dancaire), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

“Delayed staging of Bizet’s *Carmen* proves well worth the wait.”

THE FREE PRESS

*Manitoba Opera debut

PRINCIPAL CAST (IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE)

MORALÈS <i>a corporal</i>	Johnathon Kirby
MICAËLA <i>a country girl</i>	Lara Ciekiewicz
DON JOSÉ <i>a corporal</i>	David Pomeroy
ZUNIGA <i>a lieutenant</i>	Giles Tomkins
CARMEN <i>a free-spirited young woman</i>	Ginger Costa-Jackson*
FRASQUITA <i>a friend of Carmen</i>	Lara Secord-Haid
MERCÉDÈS <i>a friend of Carmen</i>	Barbara King
ESCAMILLO <i>a bullfighter</i>	Daniel Okulitch
LE DANCAÏRE <i>a smuggler</i>	Johnathon Kirby
LE REMENDADO <i>a smuggler</i>	Jacques Arseneault*

ALSO APPEARING:

LILLAS PASTIA <i>an innkeeper</i>	Don Larsen
--	------------

CONDUCTOR	Tyrone Paterson
DIRECTOR	Brian Deedrick
SCENERY DESIGN BY	Camellia Koo
COSTUME DESIGN BY	Deanna Finnman
LIGHTING DESIGN BY	Hugh Conacher*
SCENERY, PROPERTIES, AND COSTUMES PROVIDED BY	Edmonton Opera
STAGE MANAGER	Chris Porter
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	Kathryn Ball Heather Lee Brereton
PROJECTED TITLES BY	Sheldon Johnson

MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS

SOPRANO

Janine Brémault Bamford
Linda Feasby
Deborah Ginther
Kadri Irwin
Joanne Kilfoyle
Joanna Loepp Thiessen
Diana Rockwell
Deanna Smith
Marlise Yarjau

MEZZO

Mélanie Dupuis
Kelley Fry
Kathy Gawlik
Chantal Kuegel
Agata Ploszanski
Christina Pyrz-Kowall
Mavis Ritchie
Stephanie Schmid
Isla Shea
Alison Stenekes Loewen
Karla Weir

TENOR

Russ Foster
Evan Glazier
Marlon Goolcharan
Peter Klymkiw
Michal Kowalik
Tim Magas**
George Nytepchuk
Lawrence Pauls
Nicholas Ruta
Adam von Lau

BASS

John Anderson
David Boyes
Chris Caslake
Dariyan Dubik
James Dutton
Max Fingerote
Jayden Fraser
Don Larsen
Dan Szymanski
Ted Wiens

CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Evelyn Andres
Elisha Bautista
Alexa Cellamare
Finn Deck
Dylan Eskin
Ianthe Groumoutis
Azalyn Huesca
Sage Kanhai
Ava Kilfoyle
Karina Kowalik
Nathaniel Mercer
Lila Naismith
Charlie Pulford
Alex Schaeffer
Salvador Tait

SUPERNUMERARIES

Christopher Dunn
Paul Forget
Costa Ginakes

**Appearing with permission of Canadian Actor's Equity Association (CAEA)

CENTENNIAL CONCERT HALL PRODUCTION STAFF

STAGE MANAGER	Dave Martin
STAGE ELECTRICIAN	Brian Mann
SOUND TECHNICIAN	Glen Jonatchick
STAGE CREW/ WARDROBE DRESSERS	I.A.T.S.E. Local #63

PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION	Sheldon Johnson
CHOREOGRAPHER	Brenda Gorlick
FIGHT DIRECTOR	Jacqueline Loewen
ADULT CHORUS DIRECTOR/ RÉPÉTITEUR	Tadeusz Biernacki
CHILDREN'S CHORUS DIRECTOR	Carolyn Boyes
ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR/ FRENCH DICTION COACH	Eve Legault*
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER	Anika Binding
CHORUS REHEARSAL PIANISTS	Cary Denby Celoris Miller
FIREARMS SAFETY CO-ORDINATOR	Dave Brown
APPRENTICE DIRECTOR	John Hirst Anderson
APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER	Tia Morann
REHEARSAL STAND-IN (Micaëla)	Karen Santos
WARDROBE SUPERVISOR	Alena Zharska
WARDROBE CO-ORDINATORS	Brenda Belmonte Barry Malenko
WARDROBE ALTERATIONS	Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet
HAIR/WIG DESIGNER	Jill Buhr
HAIR/WIG ASSISTANT	Adriana Oliphant
HAIR CREW	Laura Warren Sydney Orr Leslie Rodgers
MAKE-UP DESIGNER	Christian Hadley
MAKE-UP ASSISTANT	Theresa Thomson
MAKE-UP CREW	Jean-Marc Lafond Sarah Leighton Emily King Chelsea Rankin
PROJECTED TITLES CUEING	Cary Denby

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra musician listing on page 13.



OPERA ACCESS

(L-R) Melissa St. Goddard (fiddle), Keely McPeck (Marie Serpente), Paulette Duguay (Mémère), Charlene Van Buekenhout (Josephine-Marie), and Rebecca Cuddy (Josette La Grande), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

Each season, Manitoba Opera donates tickets to social service agencies for clients who might not otherwise be able to attend a performance. By removing an economic barrier to attend opera, we hope to foster a sense of belonging for all members of our community. While the Opera Access program has transformed over the years, the program grew by over 300% for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. There were 90 organizations who received 856 tickets free of charge.

Ticket Recipients:

(NOT ALL ORGANIZATIONS LISTED)

Aboriginal Student Services Centre
 Acorn Family Place
 Bear Clan Patrol
 Big Brothers Big Sisters
 Blue Thunderbird Family Care Inc.
 Broadway Neighborhood Centre
 CEDA Pathways for Education
 Clean Mothers Healing Village and Knowledge Centre
 Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba
 Elmwood Community Resource Centre
 Exchange Met School
 Faculty of Arts (Native Studies) at the University of Manitoba
 Huddle Selkirk
 Ikayuqtiit (Manitoba Inuit Association)
 Inclusion Winnipeg
 Indian & Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg
 Indigenous Achievement
 Indigenous Languages of Manitoba Association Inc.
 Indigenous Vision for the North End
 Indigenous Women's Healing Centre
 Indigenous Chamber of Commerce
 Interlake Art Board
 Ka Ni Kanichihk
 Lorette Métis Local
 Louis Riel Institute Adult Learning Centre
 Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
 Madeline's Closet
 Main Street Project
 Marymound
 Mount Carmel Clinic

N'Dinawemak
 National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
 Native Clan Organization
 North End Community Renewal Corp.
 Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin
 Onashowewin Justice Circle
 Opikihiwawin (New Directions)
 Resource Assistance for Youth Inc.
 Rossbrook House
 Sunshine House
 Thrive Community Support Circle
 Turning Leaf Support Services
 Two-Spirit Michif Local
 Urban Circle Training Centre
 West Broadway Community Organizations
 West End Resource Centre
 Winnipeg Central Park Women's Resource Centre



Students in the lobby at Student Night at the Opera (dress rehearsal) for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan

Manitoba Opera connected with 24 local service organizations, distributing 551 tickets through the Opera Access for *Carmen*.

Ticket Recipients:

- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Broadway Neighbourhood Centre
- Canadian Mennonite University
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- CANOO, Great Wall Performing Arts
- Ikayuqtiit Inc.
- Imagineability Inc.
- IRCOM
- KIDTHINK
- Klinic Community Health
- Main Street Project
- Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council
- Meals on Wheels of Winnipeg
- New Directions for Children
- North End Community Renewal Corp.
- North End Womens Center
- Paul Ong Associates
- Rainbow Resource Centre
- The Ukrainian Refugee Community
- University of Manitoba Students Union
- Volunteer Manitoba
- Winnipeg Jamming
- Canadian military



Li Keur Advisory Committee members and Elders (l) June Bruce and Lorraine Coutu deliver a ceremonial prayer at Opening Night of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: L. Rowan

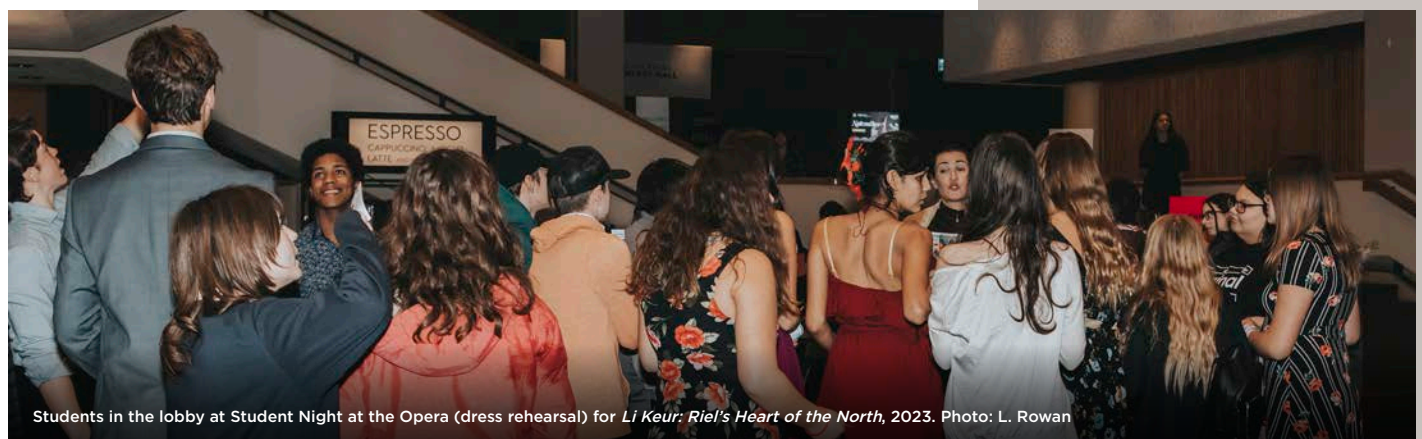


Patrons in the lobby at *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan

“What got me emotional is hearing our own Anishinaabe language being sung in opera style!...sooo powerful indeed!”

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

ARLENE FLATFOOT
Patron



Students in the lobby at Student Night at the Opera (dress rehearsal) for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan

COMMUNITY PRICING INITIATIVE

In conjunction with the Opera Access program, a new initiative - Community Pricing - was launched with *Li Keur*. Through this initiative, \$20 tickets were made available for community members who self-identified their need to access subsidized tickets.

To manage this program, Alice Macgregor, a former student ambassador, was hired to connect with members of the community and promote the program. Starting in October, Alice reached out to over 150 organizations about the Opera Access program. There were 196 tickets provided at the discounted rate.

Manitoba Opera also donated 94 tickets to non-profit organizations for their fundraising activities in the community.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

During the 2023/24 season, over 11,000 people experienced the events, initiatives, and exhibits that were part of Manitoba Opera's Community Engagement activities.

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

In order to extend this production's impact beyond its performances, it was critical to have input from the Métis community in terms of shaping the company's role in this venture and creating meaningful community engagement activities.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An advisory community was assembled with the mandate to provide guidance in the development of these activities, advise on culturally appropriate protocols throughout all stages of the initiative, act as ambassadors for the project, and facilitate connections between Manitoba Opera and Métis organizations and leaders. The 12-member *Li Keur* Advisory Committee, along with staff members, convened six times from March through October.

Community Members:

- Liz Barron
- Dr. June Bruce
- Dr. Agathe Chartrand
- Dr. Lorraine Coutu
- Rhonda Forgues
- Dr. Laura Forsythe
- Louise Gordey
- Jean-Marc Lafond
- Sharon Parenteau
- Nicole Stonyk
- Andrea Tailleu
- Dée-Anne Vermette

Staff:

- Larry Desrochers
- Tania Douglas
- Dr. Scott Miller
- Darlene Ronald

PRODUCTION AMBASSADORS

Soprano Keely McPeek who sang the role of Marie Serpente in the production and soprano Camryn Dewar who was in the chorus and understudied for the role of Josette, served as production ambassadors for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

In conjunction with the *Li Keur* Advisory Committee, the production ambassadors identified opportunities to engage with Indigenous communities to promote awareness and interest in the new opera. Keely and Camryn spoke with community leaders, making connections and receiving invitations to represent Manitoba Opera and perform excerpts from *Li Keur* at community functions throughout the summer.



Li Keur Production Ambassadors (l) Camryn Dewar and Keely McPeek at the We Are All Treaty People event at The Forks in September.

These performances were heard by nearly 6,000 people at events including the following:

- l'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba annual picnic (June 17)
- Nellie McClung Foundation Annual Luncheon (June 21)
- Indigenous People's Day at Assiniboine Park (June 24)
- Pioneer Day at Grant's Old Mill (August 12)
- Corn Roast at Riel House (August 26)
- St. Boniface Foundation Rosé Soirée (September 13)
- We're All Treaty People at The Forks (September 17)
- Festival du Voyageur "Tous Ensemble" (September 21)
- Nuit Blanche at The Forks (September 23)
- Métis Research Methodology Symposium Kitchen Party at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (September 28)
- Manitoba Métis Federation Annual General Assembly (October 13-15)

ELDERS - CEREMONIAL DUTIES

Before the curtain rose at each performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, as well as at the start of each of the pre-show dinners that were hosted on performance evenings, Métis elders were invited to perform ceremonial duties that included opening prayers and addresses. Prayers were given in English and in French Michif.

The Student Night performance on November 16 included a special dedication to Louis Riel, as on that date Métis across Canada observe the anniversary of Riel's execution in 1885. Additionally, when the Honourable Anita R. Neville, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, entered the hall for the opening night performance on November 18, the Viceregal Salute was performed on solo fiddle.



Elders who delivered ceremonial duties:

- Oliver Boulet
Viceregal Salute, November 18
- Dr. June Bruce
Opening prayers, November 18
- Dr. Lorraine Coutu
Opening prayers, November 18
- Verna Demontigny
Opening prayers, November 24
- Will Goodon
Pre-show address, November 16
- Linda St. Cyr-Saric
Opening prayers, November 22

BEADING WORKSHOP

Sunday, October 15
St. Boniface Museum

Red River Métis beadwork artist Claire Johnston led an afternoon of visiting and creating Métis two-needle style flat stitch beadwork. During the workshop, Claire shared about her family, the living legacy of Métis beadwork, and guided participants in making their own Métis flower pin with antique beads and traditionally smoked moose hide.

MICHIF COOKING EVENT

Saturday, October 21
Churchill Park United Church

Participants prepared a traditional Michif meal: Les boulettes (large meatballs), vegetables, bread pudding with brown sugar sauce and Bannock, under the supervision of *Li Keur* Advisory Committee members June Bruce, Agathe Chartrand, Lorraine Coutu, and Andrea Taillieu, along with

Suzanne Zeke. Once preparations were complete and the food was cooking, participants were treated to a performance of music from *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* by Keely McPeck and Camryn Dewar, storytelling by Andrea Taillieu, and browsed an interpretive display of Métis cultural artefacts curated by the Louis Riel Institute.

AN EVENING OF LEARNING & DIALOGUE

Wednesday, November 15
St. Ignatius Parish

This evening of learning and conversation presented as part of an ongoing dialogue circle between St. Kateri Tekakwitha Indigenous Parish and St. Ignatius Parish featured a presentation by Dr. Suzanne M. Steele, as well as entertainment by mezzo-soprano Hailey Witt, and Ramsey Rae and





Participants in the kitchen at Churchill Park United Church for the Michif Meal event held in October.

Company providing fiddling and a jiggging demonstration. The audience also had an opportunity for table discussions related to reconciliation.

PRE-SHOW CHATS

Thirty minutes prior to the curtain at each performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* audiences were treated to a 20-minute presentation to contextualize the new opera. At Opening Night, Ella Speckeen, a fiddler and the daughter of librettist Dr. Suzanne M. Steele, was in conversation with Dr. Monique Giroux, Canada Research Chair in Métis Music and Associate Professor in Music at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta.

On Wednesday, November 22, Ella spoke again and gave a short performance. Closing Night featured a presentation by Firearms Safety Coordinator Dave Brown.

LI KEUR BEADED ARTWORK BY CLAIRE JOHNSTON

Manitoba Opera commissioned Red River Métis beadwork artist Claire Johnston to create a beaded replica of the *Li Keur* artwork. The original design was the work of The Show and Tell agency creative team (formerly known as McKim Communications Group).

The art piece took nearly three months to complete and was displayed in the lobby for patrons to view during the production run. This beautiful art will continue to celebrate Métis culture, creativity, and contributions to modern opera as it is made available for touring to exhibits within and outside Winnipeg.

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO THE ARTS

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North is first and foremost a celebration of Métis culture and community. However, the opera does contain scenes that reference events in Métis history that were traumatic for those who experienced them and have been the root of generational trauma that continues to impact Métis communities.

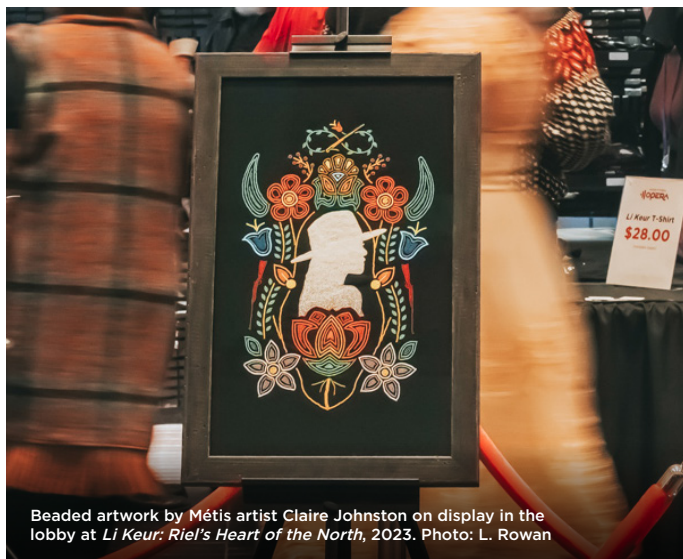
In recognition of this, Manitoba Opera provided information in the program about trauma and arranged to have two elders: Beverly Lee and Norman Meade in the lobby during intermission and after the show to speak with anyone who might be triggered by these themes and needed to talk with someone.

MÉTIS ARTISAN VENDORS

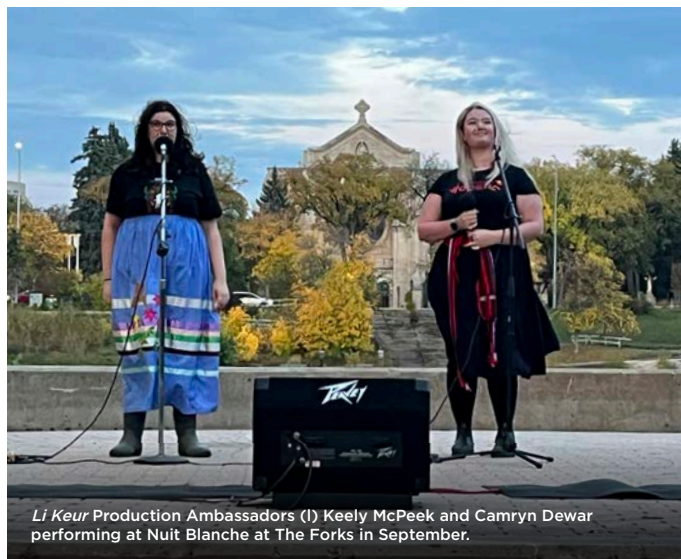
In conjunction with the Red River Métis Marketplace, patrons were able to purchase a variety of products available from Métis artisans who were featured in the lobby before the show and during intermission at performances of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

Featured artisans:

- Christine Brouzes
- Rachael Campbell
- Prairie Desjarlais
- Candace Lipischak
- Kim Parker
- Jessie Pruden



Beaded artwork by Métis artist Claire Johnston on display in the lobby at *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan



Li Keur Production Ambassadors (l) Keely McPeck and Camryn Dewar performing at Nuit Blanche at The Forks in September.



Parks Canada staff members in the lobby at a performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: L. Rowan

ART EXHIBITION - 21ST CENTURY MÉTIS: ART, IDENTITY & INNOVATION

An art exhibit, 21st Century Métis: Art, Identity & Innovation opened on Closing Night of *Li Keur* on Friday, November 24 at the Concert Hall. Manitoba Opera was proud to have this exhibit, curated by Liz Barron, a member of the Advisory Committee, coincide with the world premiere of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

The exhibition featured the works of Jason Baerg, David Garneau, Amanda Smart, and Claire Johnston and explored the vibrant and ever-evolving Métis identity. The artists' powerful narratives and innovative expressions illuminated the complex interplay between heritage, culture, and the path forward.

COLLABORATION WITH PARKS CANADA

Li Keur presented a unique opportunity for Manitoba Opera and Parks Canada to work together in showcasing Red River Métis culture and history.

In advance of the premiere, selections from the production were performed by Production Ambassadors Keely McPeck and Camryn Dewar at Riel House National Historic Site during the annual Corn Roast, as well as during Nuit Blanche at The Forks National

Historic Site where they were joined by fiddler Melissa St. Goddard who also performed in the opera.

Throughout the run of the production, a display of period-accurate outfits provided by Parks Canada was displayed at the Concert Hall. The clothing represented what was historically worn by the Red River Métis at the time in which the opera was set. At each performance, Parks Canada staff, dressed in period-accurate clothing, were also in the lobby interacting with patrons.

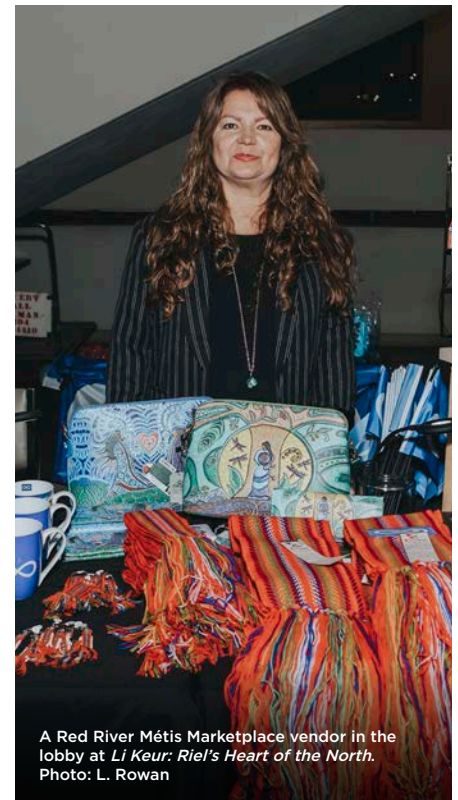
CAST INTERVIEWS

In August, Barney Morin, Indigenous Initiatives Co-ordinator for Festival du Voyageur, sat down with members of the principal cast and creative team of *Li Keur* to record a series of three video interviews. These conversations, some in French and some in English, were freely accessible online, and provided insights into the creation of the opera and the Indigenous perspectives that shaped the production.

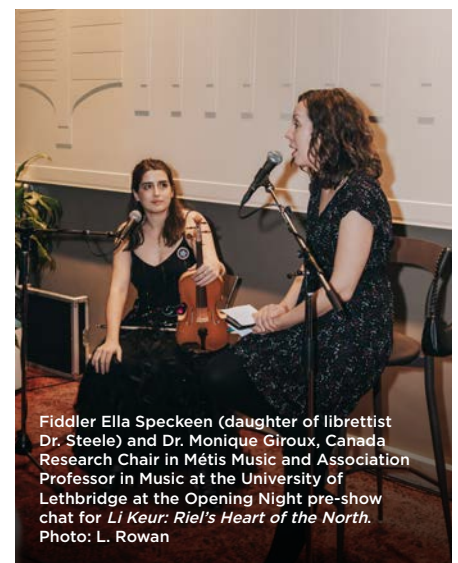
SOIRÉE-CAUSERIE LI KEUR

Thursday, December 7
Université de Saint-Boniface

Following the close of *Li Keur*, co-composer Neil Weisensel and cast members Paulette Duguay (Mémère) and James McLennan (The Englishman/La Crosse), along with emcee University of St. Boniface President Sophie Bouffard, had a conversation about the production of this new work.



A Red River Métis Marketplace vendor in the lobby at *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: L. Rowan



Fiddler Ella Speckeen (daughter of librettist Dr. Steele) and Dr. Monique Giroux, Canada Research Chair in Métis Music and Association Professor in Music at the University of Lethbridge at the Opening Night pre-show chat for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: L. Rowan



Li Keur Advisory Committee member Andrea Taillieu shares stories at the Michif Meal event.

Carmen

UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC

Sunday, March 17

Canadian Museum for Human Rights

In this presentation, Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello examined how composer Georges Bizet used music not only to evoke the Spanish setting of his opera *Carmen*, but also to characterize Carmen as an “exotic outsider.” Issues of opera genre as they impacted the history of this work in the late 19th century were also explored.

STORYTELLING THROUGH THE TAROT

Tuesday, March 19

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg

In the opera, the title character foresees doom for herself and her former lover when she reads her future in the cards. Psychic medium and astrologer Bernice Bisson gave a presentation in which she discussed the tarot and numerology, exploring the role of interpreting the major arcana to offer insights into major events in one’s life.

PANEL DISCUSSION: CARMEN AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Saturday, March 23

Carol Shields Auditorium, Millennium Library

The conflict of the opera *Carmen* centers on the relationship between Carmen and her lover Don José, which tragically ends in violence and the death of Carmen at the hand of José. A panel of experts who counsel the victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence offered their perspectives on this subject.

Panelists

Dr. Tracey Bone

RSW, MSW, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

Lydia Hamel

RSW, MSW, CST

Brittany Krahn

BSW, RSW, Clinical Social Work/Therapist

Hailey Bird-Matheson

Peguis First Nation, BSW, MSW, Counsellor at North End Women’s Centre

Discussion Moderator:

Kara Neustaedter

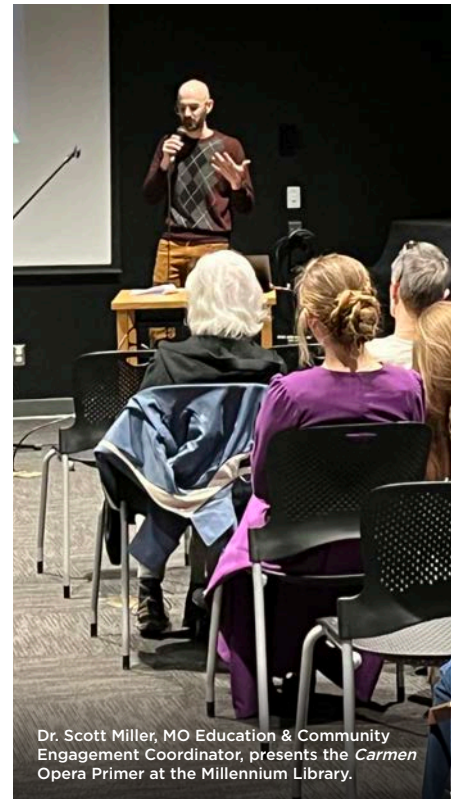
Manager of Counselling Services, Klinik Community Health

OPERA PRIMER

Saturday, April 6

Carol Shields Auditorium, Millennium Library

Dr. Scott Miller gave a one-hour lecture on the story and characters of *Carmen*, complete with video examples.



Dr. Scott Miller, MO Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, presents the *Carmen* Opera Primer at the Millennium Library.



Psychic medium and astrologer Bernice Bisson at the Storytelling Through the Tarot presentation in conjunction with *Carmen*.



Carmen and Intimate Partner Violence presentation at the Millennium Library.

**INTRODUCTION TO
CARMEN IN FRENCH**

Sunday, April 7
Université de Saint-Boniface

Dr. Sophie Bouffard, president of the Université de Saint-Boniface, gave a lecture about Bizet's most acclaimed opera. Dr. Bouffard was able to offer her perspective as a musicologist and as a performer, having studied *Carmen* and performed the role of Micaëla herself.

PRE-SHOW CHATS

Pre-show chats for *Carmen* were presented a half-hour before curtain at each performance by guest speaker Nicole Stonyk, BA Music, BA Arts, MA Indigenous Studies. Ms. Stonyk is a classically trained pianist/musician who appeared in the chorus for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. She is a PhD Indigenous Studies student at the University of Manitoba. Her research looks at ways of "decolonizing" Western musical performance within themes of possessive logics, Indigenous relationality, language, and aesthetics.



Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello presenting a lecture on Understanding the Music of *Carmen* at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.



Dr. Sophie Bouffard, president of St. Boniface College, giving a presentation on *Carmen* in French.

**FLAMENCO DANCE
DEMONSTRATION**

Patrons were treated each evening during the intermission to a demonstration of flamenco dance and music, presented on the Piano Nobile by dancers from Sol de España performing with flamenco guitarist Philippe Meunier.

**2023/24 COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The members of the Community Engagement Committee guide the development of Manitoba Opera's Community Engagement initiatives by contributing their diverse perspectives and experiences to discussions about issues that are important to the many communities that we serve. This committee consists of members of Manitoba Opera's board of trustees, staff, and the community at large.



(r) Sofia Escamilla, a 2023/24 Student Ambassador introducing guest speaker Nicole Stonyk at a pre-show chat for *Carmen*.



Sol de España dancers and guitarist Philippe Meunier demonstrating flamenco dance during intermission at *Carmen*.

**MO SUPPORTS
2024 PRIDE
WEEK WITH
CONCERT
SPONSORSHIP**

Manitoba Opera was pleased to be the Presenting Sponsor for a fundraising concert presented by former staffer, tenor Kyle Briscoe, during Pride Week.

Proceeds from the concert, which was held at Young United Church May 29, went to the Rainbow Harmony Project and the Rainbow Resource Centre, two pillars of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Blazing his trail as a queer interdisciplinary artist, Kyle, accompanied by pianist Megan Dufrat, presented *Requiescat: Rebirth* which explored life's cyclical nature through transformation and rebirth and included works by Brahms, Chausson, Tosti, Hailstork, and Emery, as well as original folk songs.

“As the title character Carmen, Ginger Costa-Jackson was fiery, lusty, thrilling, playful, threatening, and all the while sung with her lush, rich mezzo-soprano voice...For Carmen the opera to really succeed, you need an exceptional Carmen like Ms. Costa-Jackson.”

SCHMOPERA



Barbara King (Mercédès), Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen) and Lara Secord-Haid (Frasquita), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



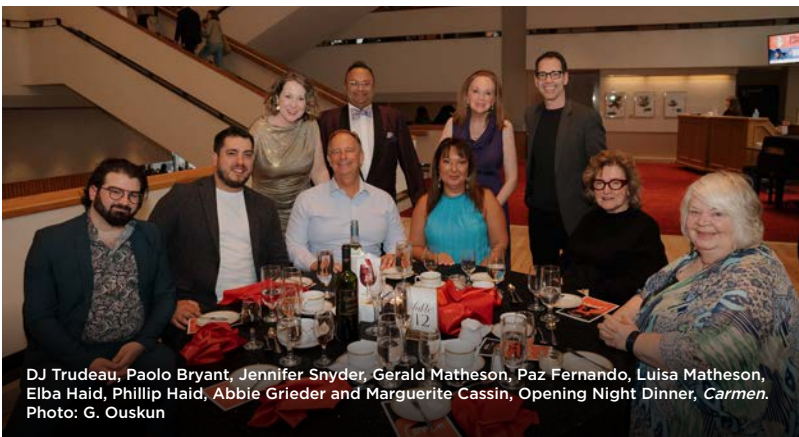
Li Keur Production Ambassadors (I) Camryn Dewar and Keely McPeck at the Festival du Voyageur "Tous Ensemble" in September.



Robyn Hughes and Blair Doell, BMO Financial Group, *In Vino Veritas*, 2024. Photo: G. Ouskun



Members of the artistic team, cast, translators and Advisory Committee at a *Li Keur* workshop in August. Photo: G. Ouskun



DJ Trudeau, Paolo Bryant, Jennifer Snyder, Gerald Matheson, Paz Fernando, Luisa Matheson, Elba Haid, Phillip Haid, Abbie Grieder and Marguerite Cassin, Opening Night Dinner, *Carmen*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan

DIGITAL EMERGING ARTISTS PROGRAM (DEAP)

The 4th annual Digital Emerging Artists Program (DEAP) took place over four weeks in August 2023. This innovative training program provided opportunities for four Emerging Artists and one Independent Learner to explore their creative agency as they learned from core faculty and guest artists, and developed and produced an opera video project in collaboration with a professional recording team.

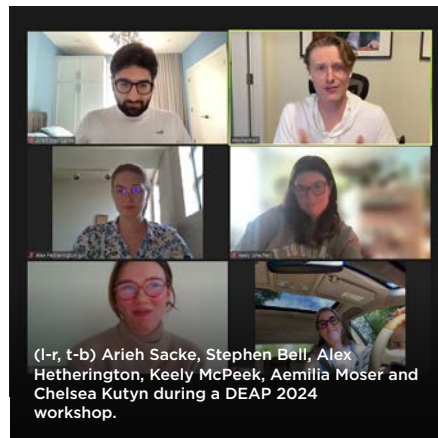
The program helped artists develop the necessary tools to apply the stagecraft and vocal techniques used in live opera performances to video productions. At the same time, participants learned about digital production, audience management, personal branding, and other skills that they will use to manage their careers as opera artists.

Program activities were held virtually over Zoom, with artists and faculty joining from across Canada. This year's participants received over 600 hours of instruction and professional development, and the program provided earning opportunities for 48 artists and arts professionals.

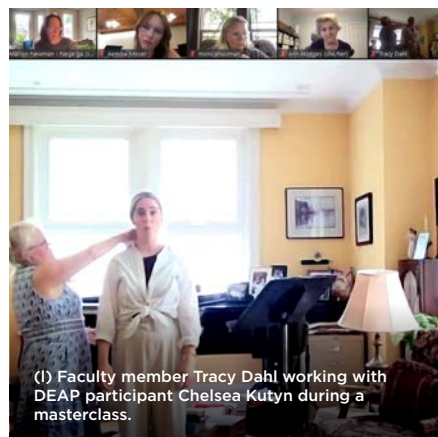
This season's emerging artists produced and edited their own opera video projects with the support of professional recording teams. Projects were filmed in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Edmonton, using opera and art song to create compelling narratives in settings that included historic churches and cemeteries, forested parks, sandy beaches, and the interior of a fashion boutique.

The 2023 Independent Learner was Anisininew soprano Keely McPeek. Her work with DEAP faculty prepared her for her mainstage debut as Marie Serpente in the world premiere of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, and connections made through the program brought her the opportunity to join Vancouver Operas' 2024 touring production of *Flight of the Hummingbird*.

Stephen Bell, who has been with DEAP since 2020 as a digital media specialist and videographer, was welcomed into the core faculty this season.



(l-r, t-b) Arieh Sacke, Stephen Bell, Alex Hetherington, Keely McPeek, Aemilia Moser and Chelsea Kutyn during a DEAP 2024 workshop.



(l) Faculty member Tracy Dahl working with DEAP participant Chelsea Kutyn during a masterclass.

Emerging Artists

Chelsea Kutyn (BC)
soprano

Aemilia Moser (AB)
soprano

Alex Hetherington (ON)
mezzo-soprano

Arieh Sacke (ON)
tenor

Independent Learner

Keely McPeek (MB)
soprano

Core Faculty

Voice

Tracy Dahl
Monica Huisman
Marion Newman
John Tessier

Content Creation

Ann Hodges

Digital Media

Stephen Bell

Coaches & Guest Instructors

Collaborative Piano

Tadeusz Biernacki

Civic Engagement

Nicholas Borg

Diction & Repertoire

Lara Ciekiewicz

Personal Finance

Chris Enns

Life Coach

Rebecca Hass

Diction

Michael McMahon

Acting

Katherine Twaddle

Manitoba Opera's Digital Emerging Artists Program has been generously supported by RBC Emerging Artists and the Gail Asper Family Foundation.

STUDENT PROGRAMMING

Students at Victor Wyatt School listen to *Opera Cat* read aloud in Anishinaabemowin by John McLean at an I Love to Read Month session. Photo: R. Tinker

This season, approximately 4,000 students experienced opera through Student Night at the Opera, in-class workshops, and online content. For many, these were their first experiences with the art form.

Student Night at the Opera

Student Night at the Opera is an opportunity for youth and post-secondary students to attend the final dress rehearsal of our mainstage productions at a reduced cost. Over 1,400 students from over 35 schools and youth organizations attended Student Night at the Opera this season; more than in any season since 2015.

In April, two lucky classrooms won a visit from mezzo-soprano Barbara King who sang the role of Mercédès in *Carmen*. Ms. King visited the International Student Program at Murdoch MacKay Collegiate and the Band Program at Gordon Bell High School for Q&A sessions with students who had attended the dress rehearsal for *Carmen*. She

answered questions about her career and memorable performance highlights, inspiring students to imagine how opera can bring them opportunities for travel and discovery.

Opera Class

This season 15 Opera Class workshops were presented at seven schools. These free in-class workshops use hands-on activities to show students how opera is an intersection of many different art forms that relies on the creativity and cooperation of numerous people.

Each workshop is delivered by a teaching artist who develops a unique workshop curriculum,

engaging with students through the use of props, costumes, and role play to bring stories and opera scenes to life right in the classroom. Workshops this season were offered in English and French and were presented by sopranos Jessica Kos-Whicher and Katherine Mayba and bass-baritone Stephen Haiko-Pena.

I Love to Read Month

Each year Manitoba Opera participates in I Love to Read Month in Winnipeg schools by bringing opera singers into classrooms to read from children's books about opera-loving animals, teach students some Italian opera vocabulary, and of course, to demonstrate their powerful operatic voices!

“Did you know that this was the world premiere of this opera? We were the first ones to see it! That’s amazing!”

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

ANONYMOUS STUDENT



Councillor Brian Mayes, soprano Keely McPeek, and translator John McLean pose after an I Love to Read Month session at Victor Wyatt School. Photo: R. Tinker



Barbara King (Mercédès in *Carmen*) visits with music students at Gordon Bell High School.



Members of the 31st Pathfinders and 350th Rangers Girl Guides of Canada at the dress rehearsal for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

This season soprano Keely McPeck and bass-baritone Stephen Haiko-Pena presented 35 I Love to Read Month sessions at 20 schools.

Ten of those workshops were presented for students in the Ojibwe Language Program classrooms at Louis Riel School Division, premiering a new translation of *Opera Cat* into Anishinaabemowin translated and read by John McLean. Those presentations were coordinated by Kelsey Lanaghan, Ojibwe Language Teacher with Louis Riel School Division, and were made possible by Councillor Brian Mayes and the City of Winnipeg through their generous support of a new translation project for Opera Storytime and I Love to Read Month.

Opera Storytime

In 2021 Manitoba Opera created an online collection of videos which feature local artists reading aloud from children's books about opera-loving animals, and this online library has grown each season since. Opera Storytime videos are freely available for educational use upon request.

In fall 2023, with the guidance of Kelsey Lanaghan, an Ojibway Language Teacher with the Louis Riel School Division, Manitoba Opera embarked on a project to have *Opera Cat* and *Encore, Opera Cat!* translated into the Ojibway language so that read-aloud videos could be produced in Ojibway. John McLean, Language & Technology

Developer, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre Inc., translated the text and read the stories for this video project, which became available to educators in spring 2024.

This project was generously supported by Councillor Brian Mayes and the City of Winnipeg.

Permissions to produce *Opera Cat* and *Encore, Opera Cat!* in new translations have been graciously given by author Tess Weaver.

Opera in a Trunk

The Opera in a Trunk program is a free classroom resource that lets teachers provide their students with the opportunity for hands-on learning about opera. Each Opera Trunk contains costumes, props, books, DVDs, CDs, and fun creative activities themed to a well-known opera: *The Magic Flute*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Aida*, or

The Daughter of the Regiment.

From September through June, eight schools borrowed Opera Trunks, including two outside of Winnipeg. In all, over 400 students in grades K-6 experienced opera through this program, many for the first time.

Balanced Experiential Education Program (BEEP)

Once again, this year Manitoba Opera participated in Seven Oaks School Division's BEEP summer program, contributing to the division's performing arts week activities by presenting workshops at three elementary schools: O. V. Jewitt Elementary, Constable Edward Finney School, and Victory School. Soprano Ana Toumine, an alumna of the 2022 Digital Emerging Artists Program, developed a workshop curriculum that used music, language, and movement



Students at Ecole Belmont dress up to put on a scene at an Opera Class workshop. Photo: J. Gibson

to help elementary and junior high students learn how the stories we tell connect us to the people and places in our lives.

Students learned about one another by sharing and celebrating the many places they come from and the many languages they speak, and learned about how opera is enjoyed by people in many different countries and cultures.

Each workshop culminated with a performance of a one-actor musical play that Ana wrote for Vancouver's 2023 International Children's Festival; an autobiographical story about music, imagination, fear, and learning to understand big feelings.



Keely McPeek with grades 1 and 2 students from Victory School after an I Love to Read Month session. Photo: Lisa Rumak

“I would be very happy to bring my kids to a student night again! Beautiful show last night. My students loved it. Laughter and tears all around.”

Li Keur, Riel's Heart of the North

ERIN THORLEIFSON
John Taylor Collegiate

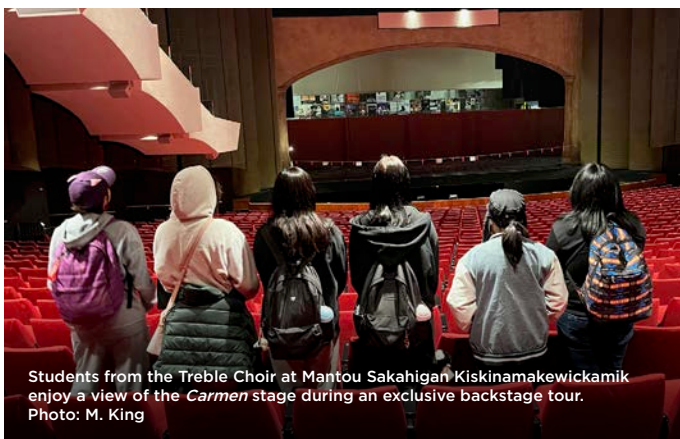
Choir Visit from Mantou Sakahigan Kiskinamakewickamik

Students from the Treble Choir of Mantou Sakahigan Kiskinamakewickamik flew in from God's Lake Narrows First Nation in April to see our production of *Carmen*. For most of the students, this was their first time travelling to a city the size of Winnipeg.

Their visit was made especially memorable with a backstage tour of the Centennial Concert Hall before the performance, a pizza dinner, and a singing workshop with Rhonda Head, a 20-time international award-winning mezzo-soprano vocalist from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation.



(l to r back row): Keely McPeek, John McLean, Councillor Brian Mayes, and Chris Sigurdson, School Trustee, Louis Riel School Division Ward 2, with students in the Ojibwe Language Program at Victor Wyatt School. Photo: R. Tinker



Students from the Treble Choir at Mantou Sakahigan Kiskinamakewickamik enjoy a view of the *Carmen* stage during an exclusive backstage tour. Photo: M. King



Soprano Ana Toumine leads students at Victory School in vocal warm-ups during a BEEP summer opera workshop.

STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Our 2023/24 season marked the second year of the Student Ambassador Program; a unique opportunity for post-secondary music students to go behind-the-scenes at Manitoba Opera. The Student Ambassador Program provided an opportunity for students from the University of Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite University to learn about careers in arts administration and share their passion for opera with their classmates, and get paid to do so.

Student ambassadors worked at performances and events introducing speakers, helping at the photo wall and Boutique, light-walking, interviewing at Sitzprobes, and meeting the artists.

Ambassadors also participated in a production workshop presented by General Director & CEO, Larry Desrochers, and Director of

Production, Sheldon Johnson. The workshop focused on casting, artistic planning, building shows, and bringing opera to 21st century audiences.

“The Student Ambassador program was an excellent opportunity for me to learn more about the business behind running an opera company and gave me a much deeper understanding of what mounting a production looks like.

Discussions with various members of the Manitoba Opera administrative team, as well as various opportunities to volunteer on the year’s productions and fundraisers taught me a lot about the important work that goes into expanding audience and raising funds, both of which are essential tasks in ensuring that there is opera to see in the future. It was an invaluable learning experience I am certain will serve me well, both in and outside the world of opera,” commented Kyler Humble, University of Manitoba.

Canadian Mennonite University

JAVIER JIMÉNEZ
ANDRES PROAÑOS

University of Manitoba

SONIA CAMPBELL
SOFIA ESCAMILLA
ELI GRANGER
KYLER HUMBLE



“...an excellent opportunity for me to learn more about the business behind running an opera company and gave me a much deeper understanding of what mounting a production looks like.”

KYLER HUMBLE
Student Ambassador, 2023/24



CONNECTING WITH SUPPORTERS

Michelle Lafferty (Black Goose #1), Scott Rumble (Black Goose #2), and Evan Korbut (Louis Riel), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

Events around the productions provide excellent opportunities to connect with supporters, funders, and sponsors to strengthen relationships and enhance their opera experiences.

Sit in on the Sitz

A special benefit for donors of \$100+, Sit in on the Sitz is an opportunity to experience the first



Stephanie Scott, Executive Director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the Opening Night Dinner for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: G. Ouskun

rehearsal of the singers with the orchestra. Over light refreshments, guests enjoy a chat with the director followed by a Q&A and then proceed into the sitzprobe rehearsal.

In the fall, Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, discussed the state of the local and national opera sector and what's ahead for the art form, and *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* librettist and Métis poet, Dr. Suzanne M. Steele, discussed her work on the opera.

In the spring, *Carmen* director Brian Deedrick discussed his career and the upcoming production of *Carmen*. The emcee/host for both events was student ambassador Sofia Escamilla.

Dinners Before the Show

LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH

Before each performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, a dinner was held on the Piano Nobile. On Saturday, November 18, Opening Night kicked off with a pre-reception that featured an ice wine tasting from Canada's first Indigenous winery Nk'Mip Cellars, and a show-themed Saskatoon Spritz mocktail. Both beverages were provided by Season Wine Sponsor, Manitoba Liquor Mart, with



Christine Girardin, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, and Holly Janzen enjoy the *Carmen* Opening Night Dinner Reception. Photo: G. Ouskun

guidance from the *Li Keur* Advisory Committee. Guests then enjoyed a three-course, family-style dinner catered by Urban Prairie Cuisine.

On Wednesday, November 22 and Friday, November 24, guests enjoyed buffet-style dinners catered by the Indigenous-owned Feast Bistro.

At all three dinners, we were pleased to welcome leaders from the Indigenous community, including, Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew, Manitoba Métis Federation Minister of Languages Andrew Carrier and Minister of Housing Will Goodon, Idle No More Co-founder Tanya Kappo, visual artist Christi Belcourt, author, playwright, broadcaster and filmmaker Elder Maria Campbell, and many elders from our local community.



(l-r) Diane Ramsey, John Pacak, Scott McCulloch, Elizabeth Ling, Opening Night Dinner, *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: G. Ouskun

CARMEN

On Saturday, April 13, guests attending the *Carmen* Opening Night Dinner were treated to a pre-reception with passed hors d'oeuvres and a sangria mocktail tasting provided by Manitoba Liquor Marts. The three-course Spanish-style dinner was catered by Bergmann's on Lombard and took place on the Piano Nobile.

Intermission Receptions

During the intermissions of the mainstage productions, Manitoba Opera hosts receptions that are attended by guests including Camerata donors, government officials, and sponsor representatives.



Daniel Okulitch (Escamillo) and Ginger Costa-Jackson (*Carmen*) with members of the chorus, *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



(l) Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO introducing *Carmen* cast members at the Camerata event. (l-r) Giles Tomkins, Barbara King, Ginger Costa-Jackson, Johnathon Kirby, Jacques Arseneault, David Pomeroy and Daniel Okulitch. Photo: G. Ouskun

Post-Show Receptions

Special guests, including Camerata donors, sponsors, and members of government, are invited to join the board, staff, artistic team, and performers at a post-show reception on Opening Night of each mainstage production. The celebratory event is held on the Piano Nobile and this season was catered by Urban Prairie Cuisine in the fall and Bergmann's on Lombard in the spring.

Camerata Event

On Monday, March 25, Camerata donors and sponsors joined us for an evening with the cast of *Carmen* at the Nonsuch Brewing Co. Along with refreshments, guests enjoyed a performance by mezzo-soprano

“...Lara Ciekiewicz creates a pitch-perfect Micaëla...the singer-actress brings a rainbow of emotional colours to her carefully nuanced role.”

Carmen

THE FREE PRESS



Honourable Renée Cable, Minister of Advanced Education and Training; Billie Cross, MLA Seine River; Lisa Monkman; Honourable Wab Kinew, Premier of Manitoba; Andrew Carrier, Vice-President, Manitoba Métis Federation. Photo: G. Ouskun



MO Chair, Board of Trustees, Judith Chambers sampling wine at In Vino Veritas. Photo: G. Ouskun

Meagan Reimer and collaborative pianist Lisa Rumpel, and a Q & A with cast members and the director.

In Vino Veritas Wine Tasting

The In Vino Veritas Wine Tasting, a fundraiser held Thursday, May 9, at the Centro Caboto Centre, was a resounding success. The event was hosted by Escalade Wines in support of Manitoba Opera and The Dante Alighieri Cultural Society.

The 140 guests immersed themselves in a delightful evening, with the opportunity to sample 48 wines from around the world, while savoring Italian cuisine and enjoying performances by soprano Nikita

Silagy Labdon and bass-baritone Stephen Haiko-Pena. The singers were accompanied by collaborative pianist Lee Houghton Stewart and captivated the audience with Italian arias and duets.

Other highlights included the chance for guests to meet and get autographs from Winnipeg Blue Bombers' Kenny Lawler and Nick Hallett and to enter a raffle for a chance to win prize baskets that featured wines, arts' tickets, and Italian language classes.

This memorable evening was made possible by Flavia Fernandez Fabio of Escalade Wines and a member of Manitoba Opera's Board of Trustees, and the generous wine vendors. Thanks as well to floral sponsor Academy Florist for adding colorful and eye-catching spring centerpieces.



Johnathon Kirby (Moralès) and Lara Ciekiewicz (Micaëla), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



David Watson (Pierre La Grande) and chorus members, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Dancers Modeste McKenzie and Élise Page, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan



(Front row l - r) Billie Cross, MLA Seine River; Her Honour The Honourable Anita R. Neville, P.C., O.M. Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba; and Bernadette Smith, MLA Point Douglas (Back row l - r) Staff Sergeant Derek Inglis, C.D., B.A., A. de C., Michael Prokipchuk, and guest at the Opening Night Dinner for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Collaborative pianist Lee Houghton Stewart and soprano Nikita Silagy Labdon performing at In Vino Veritas. Photo: G. Ouskun



Barbara King (Mercédès), Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen), Lara Secord-Haid (Frasquita), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Rebecca Cuddy (Josette La Grande) and director Simon Miron at the *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* Opening Night post-show reception. Photo: G. Ouskun



BMO McPhillips Branch staff wear their *Li Keur* t-shirts.



Tim Boychuk, Ashley Boychuk, Grants & Corporate Giving Manager, and Brenda Boychuk at In Vino Veritas. Photo: G. Ouskun



Guests pose for a picture with the Honourable Bernadette Smith, Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness at a performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries DrinkSense mocktail tasting during the Opening Night Dinner Reception of *Carmen*, 2023. Photo: G. Ouskun



Johnathan Kirby (Moralès), Giles Tomkins (Zuniga) and Jacques Arseneault (Le Remendado), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



THE POWER OF VOICE

Nikki Einfeld (Adele), *Die Fledermaus*, 2006. Photo: R. Tinker

The Power of Voice Endowment Campaign was launched to create a fully capitalized \$10M endowment fund for Manitoba Opera. The goal is to have private donations raise \$5.8M, with matching funds of approximately 50 cents per dollar from the Canadian Heritage Endowment Incentives Program and The Winnipeg Foundation.

Held at The Winnipeg Foundation, the A. Kerr Twaddle Robert H. Thorlakson Manitoba Opera Endowment Fund is named for our founders and will be an investment in the future of opera in our province.

Gifts made through The Power of Voice campaign are combined with others and permanently invested. The annual income earned from the interest generated will be used to reach new heights of artistry, enhance education initiatives, and effect positive change in our community for decades to come.

As of May 31, 2024, including all pledges, The Power of Voice has raised \$4,449,436 towards our goal of \$10M.



Daniel Okulitch (Escamillo) and a member of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

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Tania Douglas (staff)

Thank you to the following donors who have already made a gift to the campaign and are helping to shape the future of opera in Manitoba.

\$1,000,000 +

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Lydia & Michael West
Three Anonymous Donors

LENDING
A HELPING
HAND

Each year, Manitoba Opera provides support to other arts organizations, particularly small opera/music companies, with administrative advice, promotional assistance, and ticket donations for fundraising.

In the 2023/24 season, the following organizations were supported:

- Agassiz Chamber Music Festival
- Desautels Chamber Opera Group (University of Manitoba)
- Flipside Opera & Art Song Collective
- Little Opera Company
- Manitoba Chamber Orchestra
- Manitoba Underground Opera
- Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre



Patrons enjoying the photo wall at Student Night at the Opera for Carmen. Photo: L. Rowan

ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen) and members of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

Manitoba Opera is committed to changing people’s lives through the glory of opera. Beyond our performances on the mainstage, we serve our community through the ongoing development of our practices, procedures, policies, and programming.

Through investments in our people, advancement in our technology, and the development of inclusive practices, the Board of Trustees and staff work together to create an invigorated opera company for the 21st century that resonates with our community.

Board of Trustees

After completing four full terms, Lori Yorke retired from the Board of Trustees. Having served since 2016, Lori was elected treasurer in 2019, sitting on the Executive Committee and providing her expertise as the chair of the Finance Committee. Lori was an ardent ambassador for Manitoba Opera during her tenure.

Maria Mitousis concluded her service on the Board of Trustees after four full terms, sitting on the Executive Committee as Vice Chair for three seasons from 2017 to 2020. Maria also served on the Governance Committee from 2016 to 2024, assuming the role of chair

of the committee for the 2021/22 season. Maria was influential in the development of various policies and processes throughout her time on the board.

This year also sees the retirement of Daniela Ignat, a member since 2016. Since 2017 Daniela has been an integral part of the Finance Committee, most notably assisting the organization in setting up its first staff pension plan in 2022.

Manitoba Opera is grateful to Lori, Maria, and Daniela for their advocacy, leadership and guidance, and they will be missed around the board table.

At the 2023/24 Annual General Meeting, members re-elected Ray Karasevich, Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas, Flavia Fernandez Fabio, Lana Maidment, Judith Chambers, Keith Sinclair and David Folk. Returning trustees in mid-terms are Sandy Chahal, Nupur Kumari, John Pacak, Charlene Ord, and Grant Suderman.

Joining the Board as a new trustee is Andrea McLandress, Director of Public Services and Procurement Canada. We also have past Board members who will be joining us again for another term of service: Dr. Bill Pope, who previously served

on the Board in the 1990s and again from 2014 to 2022; Luisa Matheson, who served from 2014 to 2020; and Paul Bruch-Wiens, who previously served on the Board from 2019 to 2023.

The staff looks forward to another successful season under the trustees’ exemplary leadership, and to welcoming the new trustees to the Board.

Professional Development

Development staff concluded the season by attending The Western Canadian Fundraising



Evan Korbut (Louis Riel) and Rebecca Cuddy (Josette La Grande), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker



Rebecca Cuddy (Josette La Grande) and Keely McPeck (Marie Serpente), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

Conference, a three-day conference in Winnipeg for nonprofit leaders and fundraisers. Throughout the year, Development staff also attended various lunchtime learning sessions and webinars provided by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and ArtsReach.

Director of Development, Tania Douglas, re-certified in 2023 as a Certified Fund-Raising Executive, a professional designation that signifies fundraising experience, success, and knowledge carried out to the highest ethical standards.

Over the course of the season, Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing, attended online presentations by organizations including Arts Reach and Business/Arts that focused primarily on purchasing trends, audience loyalty, and attracting audiences in today's market.

Boards & Committees

Tania Douglas served as a member of the Manitoba Philanthropy Awards Selection Committee and on the Board of Directors of Continuity Care, a social services organization.

Tania continues her work as a mentor through the Association of Fundraising Professionals of Manitoba mentorship program and is working with an individual from the Lubov Foundation, a Ukrainian faith-based organization.

Staff Roster

The 2023/24 season marked another year of evolution for the staff complement that supports the mission of the company.

Anna Schwartz (student ambassador, 2022/23) joined the organization in the role of executive assistant in June 2023 and departed in September 2023 to pursue a development role at the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. During Anna's time, she assisted the General Director & CEO, as well as the Director of Operations, with administrative and research support, while managing meetings for the Board and various committees within the organization.

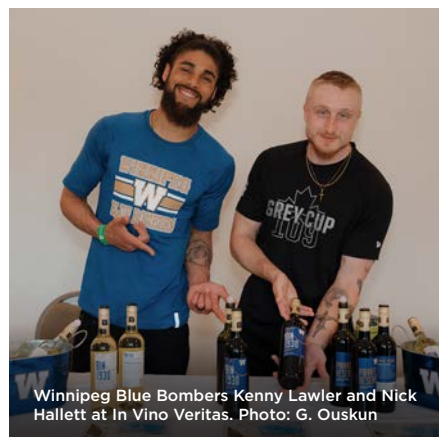
In July 2023, Manitoba Opera welcomed Ashley Schneberger (student ambassador, 2022/23) to the team as the development and grant assistant, and she worked closely with her colleagues on prospect research, grant writing,

and the Endowment Campaign. When Anna vacated her position, Ashley transitioned into the executive assistant role, providing administrative support to the General Director & CEO, as well as the Director of Operations, and managing Board operations.

As part of the Opera Access and Community Pricing Initiative, Alice Macgregor (student ambassador, 2022/23) was hired as the ticket coordinator from October to November 2023. This initiative focused on providing both free and subsidized tickets through community outreach to *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* and focused on community members who may not otherwise be able to experience opera. During her time at the opera, Alice made connections with over 90 community-based organizations.



Translator John McLean and Kelsey Lanaghan, Ojibwe Language Program Coordinator for Louis Riel School Division, after an I Love To Read Month presentation at Victor Wyatt School. Photo: R. Tinker



Winnipeg Blue Bombers Kenny Lawler and Nick Hallett at In Vino Veritas. Photo: G. Ouskun



Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen) and David Pomeroy (Don José), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

Beginning in February 2024, Nadine Hink joined the company as the development assistant, providing support to the Director of Development on the Power of Voice Endowment Campaign. Nadine is assisting with prospect research, administrative support, and creation of campaign materials.

Building Bridges

The 2023/24 season marked the fourth year of Manitoba Opera's Building Bridges project, designed to develop strong connections with Indigenous communities in Manitoba. Supported by Opera America's Innovation Grant Program, the company continued its work, building on the foundation laid by Rhonda Forgues of Spirited Ways Consulting, who served as a consultant for two seasons on the project.



James McLennan (Jacques La Crosse), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

In May 2023, Manitoba Opera became a signatory to the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord, committing to four Calls of Action through our 2023/24 season. Through the completion of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, the following commitment has been completed:

In support of Call to Action 83, Manitoba Opera continued their support of the *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* project. *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* explores a little-known chapter in Louis Riel's life and focuses on the beauty and love of the homeland and of its people, with a focus on the role women have played in this history. Presented in the fall of 2023, this production became the first Indigenous-led opera presented on a Canadian opera mainstage.



“Memorable and left me proud of Manitoba Opera.”

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

MARIANNE FARAG
Patron

The Building Bridges Committee reported on this goal in its recent submission to the Accord's annual report and reaffirmed our commitment to the remaining goals:

IN SUPPORT OF CALL TO ACTION 92I, MANITOBA OPERA WILL:

Begin the process of establishing an Indigenous Advisory Council to ensure Indigenous peoples are involved in the organization's decision-making processes.

IN SUPPORT OF CALL TO ACTION 92II, MANITOBA OPERA WILL:

Develop and implement an Indigenous Procurement Policy.

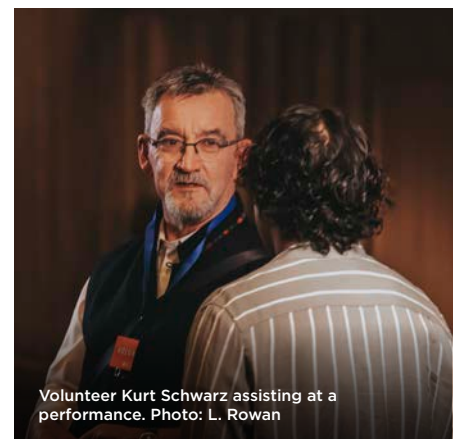
Complete a review of existing human resource and governance policies and procedures to identify and implement changes to increase the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees, board members, volunteers, performers, and audience members.

IN SUPPORT OF CALL TO ACTION 92III, MANITOBA OPERA WILL:

Create an ongoing Indigenous education and awareness strategy, which will include undertaking a needs analysis by comparing existing training opportunities or resources to the employees' and board members' existing knowledge, and then bridging that gap with specific learning opportunities.



Carmen, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Volunteer Kurt Schwarz assisting at a performance. Photo: L. Rowan

MANITOBA OPERA PARTICIPATES IN WOMEN IN MUSICAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The 2023/24 season marked Manitoba Opera's second year as a partner in the Women in Musical Leadership (WML) program. This program seeks to nurture the development of female and non-binary conductors. Currently, less than three percent of music director positions in Canadian orchestras are occupied by Canadian women. As a program partner, Manitoba Opera has committed to offering mentorship in this program through to the 2024/25 season.

This year, we were pleased to welcome Monica Chen and Eve Legault as WML Assistant Conductors. Monica was on the *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* team and Eve joined the *Carmen* team.

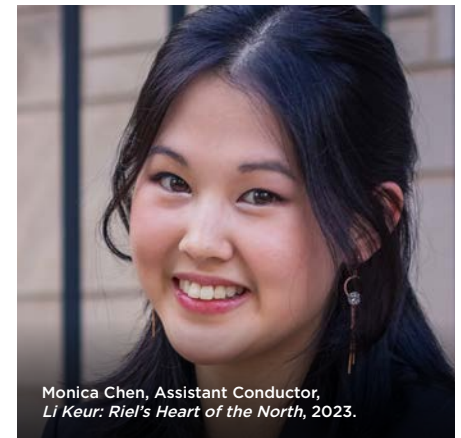
Vancouver-born Monica Chen is Assistant Conductor of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, as well as Music Director of the University of Manitoba Symphony Orchestra and Sistema Winnipeg program.

Monica completed two masters, one in Orchestral Conducting from UBC studying with Dr. Jonathan Girard and the other in violin performance from Indiana University studying with Mimi Zweig.

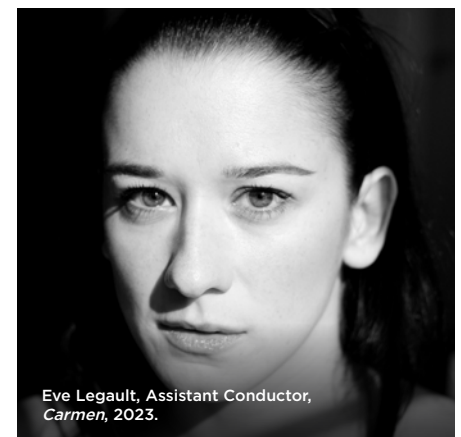
Hailing from Gatineau, Quebec, Eve became the first woman to conduct her hometown orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique de Gatineau and is now the Principal Conductor of the Pembroke Symphony Orchestra in Ontario.

WML is a three-year program led by Tapestry Opera that is designed to collectively develop the next generation of female and non-binary conductors and music directors in Canada. WML provides conductors the opportunity to assist, observe, conduct, and build experience within a range of organizations in symphonic, chamber, operatic and contemporary repertoire. This provides conductors with the professional experience and training that will enable them to take the podium anywhere in the world.

"Last spring, I had the chance to work with Maestro Tyrone Paterson as an assistant conductor on *Carmen*. This three-week experience was my first placement in the WML program, and I loved every minute of it," says Eve. "Maestro Paterson is a wonderful mentor. He gave me the chance to conduct often during staging rehearsals, which was extremely valuable experience. I felt very appreciated by the whole team as I also served as the French diction coach on this production. There was a true sense of team spirit during rehearsals, and I hope to have the chance to come back soon."



Monica Chen, Assistant Conductor,
Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023.



Eve Legault, Assistant Conductor,
Carmen, 2023.



Manitoba Opera Chorus members and Ginger Costa-Jackson (*Carmen*) (r), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

FINANCE REPORT

Manitoba Opera posted an operating surplus of \$5,000 following an internal transfer of \$98,849 to its board-designated Operating Reserve Fund. As of May 31, 2024, the Reserve Fund has a balance of \$267,479, up from \$168,630, to support its activities and programs for FY 2025.

GRANTS

Operational funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, Manitoba Arts Council, and the Winnipeg Arts Council remained unchanged at \$255,000, \$370,000, and \$127,600, respectively.

Other Grants included \$100,000 from the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund, \$12,560 from the National Creation Fund at Canada's National Arts Centre, to support workshopping of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, \$23,357 from Opera America's Innovation Grant Program to support the Building Bridges program, \$10,000 from the City of Winnipeg to support operations, and \$5,000 from Councilor Brian Mayes to support the translation of Opera Storytime into Anishinaabemowin.

GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS FOR LI KEUR: RIEL'S HEART OF THE NORTH

Manitoba Opera was the recipient of special grants and sponsorships to support the premiere of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* which resulted in \$1,030,500. We received \$435,000 from BMO, our largest corporate gift to date. There was \$414,000 provided through grants

and foundation support from the Province of Manitoba's Art, Culture, and Sport in Community Fund, The Winnipeg Foundation, TELUS Indigenous Communities Fund, The Asper Foundation, and Thomas Sill Foundation. The corporate community, including the Richardson Foundation, Power Corporation of Canada, Wawanesa Insurance, Canada Life, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, IG Wealth Management, Payworks, Red River Co-op, Stantec, Taylor McCaffrey LLP, Travel Manitoba, Qualico, and Pitblado Law generously contributed a total of \$181,500.

BOX OFFICE

The world premiere of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, and the return of the beloved classic, *Carmen*, marked the highlights of FY 2024. Audience rebuilding remains a top priority for the organization as subscription figures this season are still just 60% of pre-pandemic levels. However, the community response for single tickets for both productions resulted in our best box office revenues since the pandemic. Revenues ended at \$669,821, which is an increase of \$264,088 from \$405,733 in FY 2023.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events this season included three pre-performance dinners for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, the Opening Night Dinner for *Carmen*, and a wine tasting event, In Vino Veritas. Total revenue from special events was \$33,507.

EXPENSES

Overall, savings were achieved across departmental budgets. Staging the new production of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* and an increased commitment to the community saw increases in both production expenses and community engagement events and initiatives. These expenses were offset by special fundraising efforts and other cost savings throughout the rest of the company.

ENDOWMENT

To help solidify the long-term future of Manitoba Opera, the Board of Trustees established an endowment fund through The Winnipeg Foundation. Launched in 2010, gifts made to the A. Kerr Twaddle Robert H. Thorlakson Manitoba Opera Endowment Fund will grow over time and provide a significant stream of revenue to help Manitoba Opera continue to serve the community with meaningful and inspiring programming.

During the fiscal period ending May 31, 2024, the fund grew to \$3,262,801 from \$2,213,323 at the end of FY 2023.

"...marks a pivotal step forward in the ongoing journey of reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples."

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North

THE FREE PRESS

VOLUNTEERS

This season, 60 volunteers contributed to the success of Manitoba Opera events and initiatives by assisting with a variety of essential duties, providing 330 total hours of volunteer service.

Volunteer duties included:

- Updating the patron database
- Scanning programs for digital archives
- Greeting guests and patrons at productions and events
- Staffing the boutique and renewals tables at our productions
- Selling raffle tickets at our In Vino Veritas fundraiser
- Assisting with box office operations at our productions
- Stuffing season brochures for the 2024/25 renewal campaign
- Collecting donations for opera education programs through our Pass the Hat initiative
- Assisting with mailings



Volunteers at a performance of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: L. Rowan



Student Ambassador Andres Proaños taking photos of patrons at the photo wall, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: L. Rowan

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John Pacak, MO Board of Trustees, and Dr. Clare Ramsey at In Vino Veritas. Photo: G. Ouskun



(l-r) MO Board members Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas, secretary and Flavia Fernandez Fabio. Photo: G. Ouskun



Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing, Markus Chambers, Deputy Mayor, Judith Chambers, Board Chair, Sandy Chahal, Board of Trustees, Lori Yorke, Board of Trustees at the Camerata reception in March. Photo: G. Ouskun

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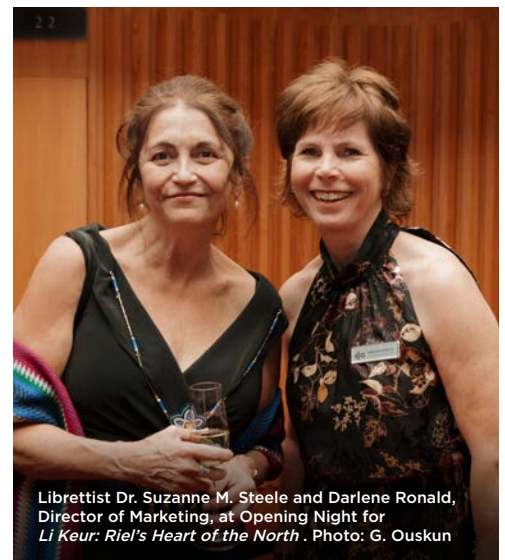
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Anna Schwartz (Until Oct. 2023)
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Karen Stuart
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Liz Miller, Annual Giving Manager and Nadine Hink, Development Assistant at the Camerata reception. Photo: G. Ouskun



Librettist Dr. Suzanne M. Steele and Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing, at Opening Night for *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Tania Douglas, Director of Development and long-time donors and patrons, Bill Stewart and Alison Darling enjoy the Camerata reception, March 2024. Photo: G. Ouskun

PARTNERS IN OPERA

Support from our corporate sponsors during Manitoba Opera's 2023/24 season has been remarkable. We received our largest ever corporate gift from BMO, the underwriter of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

Connecting to the themes of *Li Keur*, we facilitated Indigenous-led workshops for sponsors including a beading workshop for Johnston Group staff. BMO staff proudly wore their *Li Keur* t-shirts to work to promote the opera.

Sponsors enthusiastically supported our Opera Access Program, which provides free or heavily subsidized performance tickets.

We're grateful for these corporate relationships, which benefit our local community both on and off the stage.



Keely McPeck (Marie Serpente) and Rebecca Cuddy (Josette La Grande), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

2023/24 SEASON PRESENTED BY



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Manitoba Opera gratefully acknowledges the encouragement and financial support of our community of donors that allows us to create opera of the highest calibre. It is because of this generosity that the power and beauty of professional opera can be experienced right here in Manitoba. (Listings include donations made from June 1, 2023 to May 31, 2024.)

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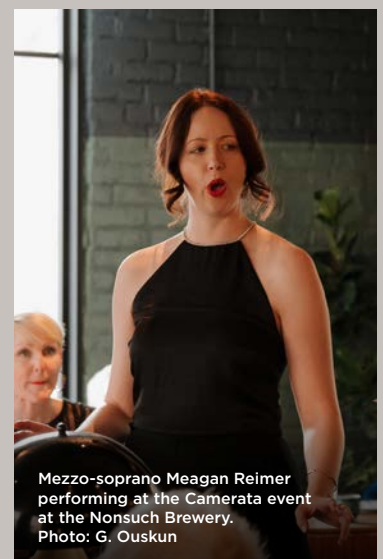
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Guests from IG Wealth Management enjoy the Opening Night Dinner Reception before attending *Carmen*. Photo: G. Ouskun



Mezzo-soprano Meagan Reimer performing at the Camerata event at the Nonsuch Brewery. Photo: G. Ouskun

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Friends of Manitoba Opera are instrumental to the success of our artistic, education, and outreach programs. Every gift makes a difference.

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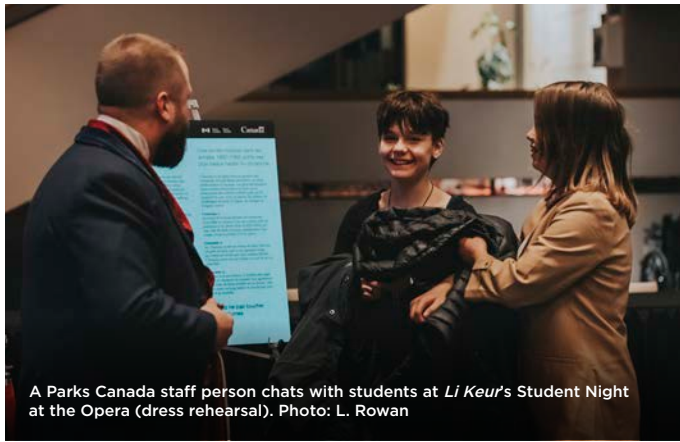
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Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker

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A Parks Canada staff person chats with students at *Li Keur's* Student Night at the Opera (dress rehearsal). Photo: L. Rowan

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Stephen Haiko-Pena (bass-baritone) presents an Opera Class workshop at Christ the King School.
Photo: B. Quinn



Scott Rumble (Black Goose #2) and Evan Korbout (Louis Riel), *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, 2023. Photo: R. Tinker.



(l-r) Barbara King (Mercédès), Ginger Costa-Jackson (Carmen), Lara Secord-Haid (Frasquita), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North workshop, August 2023. Photo: G. Ouskun



Daniel Okulitch (Escamillo), *Carmen*, 2024. Photo: R. Tinker

