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**MANITOBA OPERA NAMES MICHAEL NESBITT  
AS 2025 RECIPIENT  
OF THE GAIL ASPER AWARD**

Manitoba Opera announced today that the company will honour one of Winnipeg's most respected philanthropists, Michael Nesbitt, with The Gail Asper Award. Mr. Nesbitt is renowned for his exemplary vision in bringing world-class art and culture to his hometown of Winnipeg, as well as supporting arts organizations, and funding numerous educational initiatives. He believes Manitobans deserve to be exposed to top composers, artists, and the architects of our time. Mr. Nesbitt will receive The Gail Asper Award at a Gala Reception held in his honour Thursday, May 22, 2025, at the Manitoba Club, 194 Broadway, Winnipeg.

The Gail Asper Award was created by Manitoba Opera in 2018 to honour individuals who, like its namesake philanthropist Gail Asper, demonstrate exemplary leadership in a field of endeavor or pursuit of a visionary goal.

"We are delighted to honour such an outstanding and generous member of our community with The Gail Asper Award," commented Judith Chambers, Chair of Manitoba Opera's Board of Trustees.

"Michael has been a staunch supporter of many arts organizations, including Manitoba Opera, for years and his contributions to the arts and funding for educational projects have greatly enriched and benefitted this community both at home and nationally."

"I am deeply honored to receive The Gail Asper Award," said Michael Nesbitt, "but the true credit belongs to the countless individuals who dedicate their time and talents to enriching our cultural community. Supporting the arts has always been about making sure everyone has access to world-class experiences right here in Winnipeg. I hope this recognition encourages others to continue investing in the arts and in the future of our city."

Through his philanthropy, Nesbitt has enriched Manitoba's creative landscape, supporting organizations included the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Graffiti Gallery, and has been a major supporter of Manitoba Opera for decades, making ongoing investments to help the organization present rich artistic programming. He has also been an ardent supporter of the University of Manitoba's Desautels Faculty of Music including providing a foundational gift for the building of the recently opened Desautels Concert Hall.

## *2. MB Opera Honours Michael Nesbitt with The Gail Asper Award*

His contributions have brought important exhibits to Winnipeg and furthered the careers of Winnipeg-born, internationally recognized artists like Micah Lexier, Sarah Anne Johnson, and Dominique Rey.

Support for educational initiatives that benefit Indigenous students and inner-city youth programs are also high on Nesbitt's list of priorities.

"Michael Nesbitt's generosity has significantly shaped Winnipeg's cultural landscape" said Manitoba Opera General Director & CEO, Larry Desrochers. "Michael's steadfast support for Manitoba Opera and so many other organizations reflect his belief in the power of culture to enrich and uplift our community. We are proud to honour his contributions with The Gail Asper Award."

For information on Gala Reception tickets and sponsorship opportunities, contact Nadine Hink [nhink@mbopera.ca](mailto:nhink@mbopera.ca) 204-957-6361 or go to [mbopera.ca](http://mbopera.ca)

### **ABOUT MANITOBA OPERA**

Manitoba Opera is the only full-time professional opera company between Toronto and Calgary and is a vital part of the province's rich vocal tradition. The company's mission is to change people's lives through the glory of opera.

The 2024/25 season marks the company's 52<sup>nd</sup> season. Each year, Manitoba Opera presents two fully staged mainstage productions featuring internationally acclaimed artists, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and Manitoba Opera Chorus at the Centennial Concert Hall, as well as numerous community engagement initiatives and year-round educational programming. The company annually attracts more than 25,000 people to its productions and programs.

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### **MICHAEL NESBITT**

Michael Nesbitt is a distinguished businessman and philanthropist from Winnipeg, Manitoba, whose extensive contributions have significantly impacted the arts, education, and community development in his hometown and throughout the country.

He earned degrees in commerce and arts from the University of Manitoba before launching his career on Bay Street (Toronto). He returned to Winnipeg in 1965 to lead Montrose Mortgage Corporation, growing it into one of Canada's largest private mortgage firms. As Chairman and President, he was admired for his integrity and leadership, mentoring others with a philosophy of hard work and ethical behavior.

### 3. MB Opera Honours Michael Nesbitt with The Gail Asper Award

Mr. Nesbitt's philanthropic efforts are extensive and impactful. Known for his vision to bring world-class art and culture to the community, his investments in Winnipeg's art scene have offered a feast for the ears and eyes. From Philip Glass to Sarah Snider, Michael Daugherty to Ai Wei Wei, Fred Sandback to Anish Kapoor, Michael Nesbitt believes that Manitobans deserve to be exposed to the top composers, artists, and architects of our time. He has also invested in local talent, supporting artists such as Micah Lexier and Sarah Anne Johnson, ensuring their works remain in Canada.

His philanthropy has extended to many organizations, including Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Graffiti Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Jazz Winnipeg, and Manitoba Opera. He was also the Premier Patron for the WSO's New Music Festival from 2018 to 2025.

In 2021, Mr. Nesbitt made a three-year commitment to fund the University of Manitoba's School of Art Gallery's Visiting Curator Program to host visiting curators and deliver three major exhibitions and foster emerging voices in contemporary art. The program connects students, faculty, and the community with leading curators.

A major supporter of the Winnipeg Art Gallery *Qaumajuq*, Mr. Nesbitt has been the Presenting Sponsor for exhibits of artists like Tim Gardner, Karel Funk, and Andy Warhol. He will sponsor the new exhibit entitled *MOTHERGROUND* by Manitoban artist Domique Rey.

His support of visual arts in Canada extends to the National Gallery where he is funding the first three years of the National Engagement Initiative – a program designed to build meaningful new regional relationships, while also expanding cultural engagement from coast to coast to coast. The multi-year initiative focuses on highlighting both Canadian and international artists and will include one large-scale commission per year.

Mr. Nesbitt has been a major supporter of Manitoba Opera for decades, making ongoing investments to help the organization present rich artistic programming. He served on Manitoba Opera's Board of Directors from 1978-1982, including one year as Vice-President.

Mr. Nesbitt's philanthropic efforts extend far beyond the arts. He played a crucial role in founding Manitoba's first Montessori School in the mid-1960s and supported the establishment of Winnipeg's first public, co-ed squash courts in 1977. He has funded scholarships and bursaries to help Indigenous students and other underrepresented groups access higher education.

His support for the University of Manitoba has been particularly noteworthy and has contributed to the institution's ability to attract top graduate students and researchers. He has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Desautels Faculty of Music. He helped establish the Babs Asper Professorship in Jazz Performance and later helped the faculty launch the Bridge Program to bring jazz music instruction to inner-city kids. He made a foundational gift to the building of the newly opened Desautels Concert Hall.

#### *4. MB Opera Honours Michael Nesbitt with The Gail Asper Award*

Michael Nesbitt's legacy is one of integrity, humility, and a deep commitment to his community. His philanthropic efforts have not only enriched the cultural landscape of Winnipeg but have also provided countless opportunities for education and personal growth for its residents. Through his quiet, yet powerful contributions, Mr. Nesbitt has made a lasting impact on the city he loves.

For his extensive contributions, Michael Nesbitt was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by the University of Manitoba in 2015. He is a Distinguished Patron of the National Gallery of Canada and was recognized as the 2020 Outstanding Philanthropist by the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Michael Nesbitt's life and career are a testament to the power of ethical leadership and the profound impact of philanthropy. His contributions to the arts, education, and community development have left an indelible mark on Winnipeg, making it a better place for future generations.

His vision and commitment to advancing the artistic and educational life of the community is inspiring, making him Manitoba Opera's 2025 recipient of The Gail Asper Award.

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