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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing
dronald@mbopera.ca 204-255-0508

LONGTIME CEO FOR MANITOBA OPERA STEPPING DOWN IN 2026

The Board of Trustees of Manitoba Opera (MO) announced today that longtime General Director & CEO Larry Desrochers will step down from the organization when his contract expires in May 2026. In early 2023, Desrochers informed the board of his decision not to seek a renewal of his contract. A leadership transition committee of board and staff members was then formed to assess Manitoba Opera's leadership needs and develop a transition plan.

On the advice of the committee, the board of trustees adopted a new leadership model to serve the company. The position of general director and CEO will be divided into the positions of executive director and artistic director.

The executive director has been contracted and will be announced in July. Effective August 8, Desrochers will act as the interim artistic director while the search is conducted to fill this role. He will continue to support the organization through this transition process until May 31, 2026.

Board of Trustees Chair Judith Chambers said, "This is a pivotal moment in the evolution of Manitoba Opera. For 25 years Larry Desrochers has led with vision, creativity, and a deep commitment to our community, helping to elevate the company's standing as one of Canada's leading opera companies.

"The new leadership model builds on the strong foundation Larry has established, and we are confident it will bring a reinvigorated focus, new ideas, and will position the company to grow and thrive in a changing arts landscape. The board looks forward to working with Larry and the new executive director over the next year to complete the transition."

Desrochers added, "I'm grateful for the opportunity to have led Manitoba Opera for such a long time. It's been a privilege to work with so many talented artists, staff, board members, colleagues, and passionate supporters to build a company that serves our community.

2. Longtime GD & CEO Stepping Down in 2026

“By dividing the role into an executive and an artistic director, we’re setting the stage for fresh perspectives, deeper collaboration, and a continued commitment to both operational excellence and creative innovation. This is the right step at the right time, and I’m happy to help guide the company through this important transition.”

Desrochers has been at the helm of Manitoba Opera for 25 years and is Canada’s longest-serving general director and one of the longest-serving general directors in North America. During this time, he has produced more than 50 opera productions and concerts and cast nearly 400 artists in productions. Under his leadership, Manitoba Opera has experienced a creative and organizational renaissance and is regarded as one of North America’s leading regional opera companies.

“Larry Desrochers has been a steady, generous, and wise presence in the Canadian opera sector for over two decades,” said Association for Opera in Canada (AOC) Executive Director Christina Loewen. “Trusted by colleagues across the country, he’s the person everyone wants at the table. His measured, balanced, and deeply collaborative approaches are qualities on full display as he stewards a thoughtful succession plan that will ensure stability and clarity for the future of Manitoba Opera.

“As the longest-serving board member in AOC’s history, Larry’s calm, steady presence has guided our sector through change and growth and inspired so many of us along the way. As he transitions away from leading Manitoba Opera, we celebrate his remarkable career and legacy of thoughtful, values-driven leadership in the sector,”

Opera America President and CEO Marc Scorca commented, “Larry Desrochers has been a great colleague and cherished friend across the opera sector throughout his tenure at Manitoba Opera. In addition to serving on the Opera America board for seven years, he has been a frequent panelist at conferences, most recently as an official delegate to the 2024 World Opera Forum in Los Angeles. Larry’s deep cultural knowledge and ability to connect opera to the world we live in distinguish him as a leading thinker for our field. We will miss him and wish him well in his next endeavor.”

3. Longtime GD & CEO Stepping Down in 2026

ACHIEVEMENTS AS GENERAL DIRECTOR & CEO

As the administrative and artistic head of Manitoba Opera, Larry Desrochers has profoundly shaped the organization's relationship to the community over the past quarter century.

His artistic leadership balanced offerings of traditional repertoire with opportunities to create and present new works and lesser-known operas.

In 2007, he presented the North American premiere of the children's opera *Jason and Hanna*, a Romeo and Juliet-style story of children caught in a war-torn country. In 2009 he commissioned renowned children's entertainer Al Simmons to create a one-man, 45-minute adaptation of *The Barber of Seville* to introduce opera to young audiences.

Committed to developing Canadian talent, Desrochers has ensured that, since 2000, more than 90% of Manitoba Opera's artistic roles have been filled by Canadians. His "Manitobans first" casting policy has helped launch the careers of many local artists while also providing opportunities for former Manitobans to return home to work.

His own creative output has resulted in milestone productions for Manitoba Opera including the commission of MO's first new opera, *Transit of Venus* in 2007, for which Desrochers served as both dramaturg and director. His groundbreaking production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* connected the opera's themes of oppression to stories of real-life political prisoners and to local refugees. *La Liberté* called *Fidelio* "perhaps the most important opera in the history of the company." *Opera Canada* chose *Fidelio* as MO's opera of the decade. He has directed several other productions for the company including *The Magic Flute*, *Otello* (a co-production with Opera Lyra Ottawa), *Candide*, and *Salome*.

His dedication to community engagement earned Manitoba Opera an invitation to Opera America's inaugural Civic Practice Group, a national think tank focused on strengthening opera's connection to local communities. He instituted the practice of creating advisory committees to provide guidance on subject matter that helps connect MO's work to specific communities. Funding from a two-year Opera America Innovation Grant enabled Desrochers to launch the Building Bridges Initiative to build meaningful, respectful relationships with Manitoba's Indigenous community. One outcome of this initiative was Manitoba Opera becoming a signatory to the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord in 2024.

4. Longtime GD & CEO Stepping Down in 2026

In 2023, under his guidance, the company raised more than \$1.1M to present Canada's first Indigenous-led opera creation on a Canadian mainstage, *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, with a libretto by Dr. Suzanne Steele and music co-composed by Alex Kusturok and Neil Weisensel. The opera combined contemporary operatic music, Métis fiddle tunes, and multiple languages, including Southern Michif, French Michif, Anishinaabemowin, French, and English. The production involved 149 artists, with 90% of the talent from Manitoba. Seventy percent of the cast and crew made their Manitoba Opera debut. The Manitoba Métis Federation listed *Li Keur* as the second most impactful achievement in advancing the Red River Métis in 2023, only behind the Province of Manitoba recognizing Louis Riel as Manitoba's first premier.

Throughout his time with Manitoba Opera, he has also focussed his efforts to build the institutional practices of the company. Desrochers has strengthened Manitoba Opera's board governance practices, expanded the number of staff, professionalized administrative practices, and increased fundraising. Following a long period of fiscal challenges, he posted 12 consecutive balanced budgets - an unprecedented achievement in the company's history. In 2019, he led a successful campaign to eliminate the decades-old debt and is now part of the leadership group raising funds for a \$10M endowment fund for Manitoba Opera's future. He has advanced the company's artistic practices, developed local artists, and fostered community relevance through new educational and civic-practice programs.

Born and raised in Manitoba, Desrochers has committed his 40 plus-year career to advancing the arts in Manitoba and Canada. His work spans the disciplines of opera, theatre, film, and major events as an artist and administrator. Prior to joining Manitoba Opera, he served as associate artistic director for the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre; the founding executive producer of the Winnipeg Fringe Festival; and executive director of the Winnipeg Film Group. He produced and directed the opening and closing ceremonies for the 1999 Pan American games.

Recognized for his contributions to the arts, Desrochers has received several accolades including the University of Winnipeg's Distinguished Alumni Award (2000), Opera America's Distinguished Service Award (2010), Lifetime Honorary Membership from the Winnipeg Film Group (2011), and the Winnipeg Arts Council's Making a Difference Award (2012).