

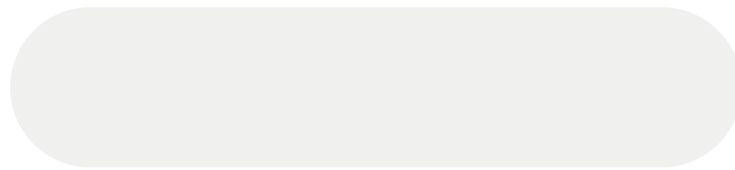
MANITOBA  
• OPERA



2024/25  
ANNUAL REPORT



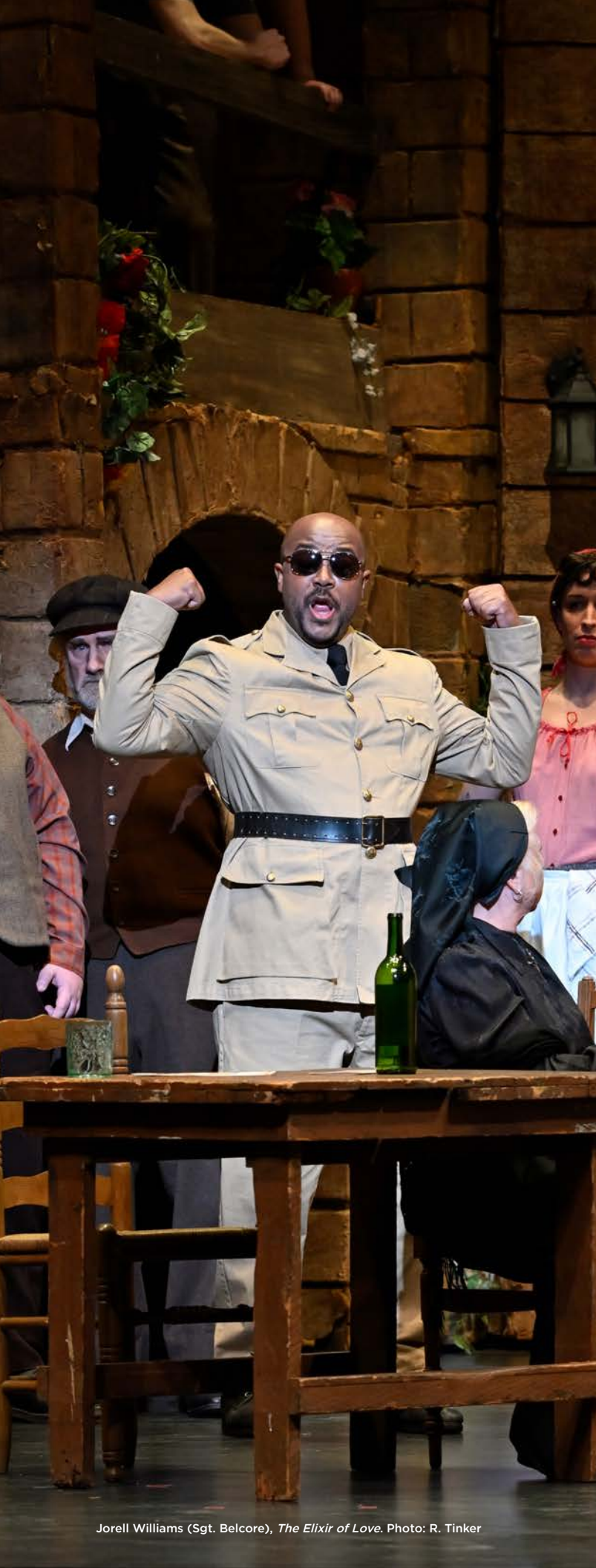
**OUR MISSION:**  
**TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S  
LIVES THROUGH THE  
GLORY OF OPERA**



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.



Jorell Williams (Sgt. Belcore), *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

**The 2024/25 season was a dynamic and affirming year for Manitoba Opera, underscoring the company's role as both a cultural leader and a creative force in the province.**

Programming, community engagement, and education initiatives coalesced around several core themes: artistic excellence and innovation, support for emerging talent, equity and inclusion, connecting to communities, language and cultural reclamation, and civic leadership. With generous community support, Manitoba Opera continued to expand its

impact while staying grounded in the timeless power of storytelling through music.

## Artistic Excellence and Innovation

Manitoba Opera presented two treasured works from the operatic canon, Gaetano Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* and Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*, to near-capacity audiences. Both productions exemplified the company's commitment to high-calibre performance and imaginative interpretation.

Directed by Winnipeg's Ann Hodges, *The Elixir of Love*, performed in November, was staged in a 1950s Italian village, offering a fresh

visual take on this classic romantic comedy. The production marked the celebrated return of soprano Andriana Chuchman, whose professional debut occurred with Manitoba Opera in 2005 in the role of Gianetta in *The Elixir of Love*. She was joined by rising tenor Jonah Hoskins in his company debut, as well as strong performances from Peter McGillivray, Jorell Williams, and Winnipeg soprano Karen Santos in her MO debut.

In April, *La Bohème* closed the season with a powerful all-Canadian cast led by Zachary Rioux and Suzanne Taffot. Directed by Anna Theodosakis in her Manitoba Opera debut, the production delivered emotional depth and vocal excellence. Rounding out the cast was Hugo Laporte, Charlotte Siegel, Clarence Frazer, and Alex Halliday, with long-time MO collaborator David Watson returning for his 47th role.

Music Advisor & Principal Conductor Tyrone Paterson led both productions with distinction, joined by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and the Manitoba Opera Chorus under the direction of Tadeusz Biernacki.

The season's scenic and design elements were rented from New



*The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



Patrons in the lobby at *La Bohème*. Photo: L. Rowan

Orleans Opera, The Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Edmonton Opera, and Winnipeg's own Harlequin Costumes.

### Nurturing Emerging Talent

This season marked the fifth anniversary of the Digital Emerging Artists Program (DEAP), a national initiative that provides intensive digital and performance training for young Canadian opera artists. Five participants received 89 hours each of mentorship, totaling 445 hours, and created professional-quality video projects.

DEAP's commitment to equity was reaffirmed through its BIPOC Independent Learner position, filled in 2024 by Indigenous mezzo-soprano Gabrielle Côté-Picard from Montréal. Additional program highlights included a panel on Indigenous perspectives in opera and a civic engagement session led by DEAP alumnus Nicholas Borg. The program drew on a national roster of instructors and was supported by RBC Emerging Artists, the Azrieli Foundation, and the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation.

### Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Manitoba Opera's equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work expanded meaningfully in 2024/25, with particular attention to Black and

Indigenous representation. The company worked closely with a newly formed Black Communities Advisory Committee to co-create welcoming initiatives for *La Bohème* audiences. These included a multilingual welcome sign, a digital slideshow celebrating Black opera artists, and a ticket giveaway aligned with the BMCC Veteran's Legacy Awards. Manitoba Opera also had a visible presence at the Ignite Winnipeg Conference, promoting the roles of Suzanne Taffot and Charlotte Siegel, two Black sopranos in leading roles.

Representation on stage extended to the education program, where Indigenous artists led sessions and language revitalization was supported through content translation. EDI was treated not as an add-on, but as a guiding principle woven into every aspect of programming and planning.

### Community Engagement and Accessibility

Over the season, nearly 6,000 people participated in Manitoba Opera's wide-ranging community engagement events. From lectures to social gatherings, the programming invited audiences to explore opera in new and inclusive ways.

Highlights included Opera Uncorked, a wine and music pairing evening themed around *The Elixir of Love*; a sold-out French High Tea event

tied to *La Bohème*; and Brunch & a Movie at The Met, featuring a screening of *Moonstruck* with live entertainment. These events offered alternative entry points into opera for diverse audiences.

Educational programming, including Opera Primers and Understanding the Music lectures, was presented at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and made operatic storytelling accessible to new learners.

### Lifelong Learning and Youth Education

Manitoba Opera continued to prioritize educational programming, reaching over 2,000 students through a range of programs.

- Student Night at the Opera welcomed 688 students to the dress rehearsals.
- Summer and in-school workshops reached hundreds more, including 250 students through B.E.E.P. and 525 students in Opera Class sessions.
- February's I Love to Read month included 16 opera-themed literacy workshops.

Teachers and students were supported with updated classroom resources, bilingual content, and free programming, thanks to support from the Pass the Hat initiative and other donors.

### Language and Cultural Reclamation

The Opera Storytime initiative, first launched in 2021, continued to evolve in 2024/25. Four opera-themed children's stories are now available in multiple languages, including French, Tagalog, Anishinaabemowin, and American Sign Language. This year, *Opera Cat* was translated into French Michif,



with narration scheduled to be video recorded next season. The project reflects Manitoba Opera's commitment to linguistic diversity, cultural connection, and Indigenous language reclamation.

## Civic Engagement and Cultural Leadership

In addition to its artistic programming, Manitoba Opera acted as a civic leader, using opera as a tool for dialogue and community building. The season featured civic-themed discussions through DEAP, school programming that explored opera's social themes, and a community art supplies drive inspired by *La Bohème*, which

distributed materials to eight youth-serving organizations via the United Way.

This multi-faceted engagement positions Manitoba Opera as more than a performing arts company; it is a community connector and cultural convener.

The 2024/25 season was a testament to Manitoba Opera's evolving identity as an artistically ambitious, socially responsive, and deeply rooted in community. 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 partners, and investments from all three levels of government.

We are grateful for the community coming together to support opera in Manitoba.



Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, speaking at the *La Bohème* post-show reception. Photo: R. Driedger

**"...boasts a particularly strong Canadian cast...who make this 'verismo' opera sing"**

*La Bohème*

THE FREE PRESS



Andriana Chuchman (Adina), *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Scott Miller, Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, briefs volunteers at *The Elixir of Love*.



Nicole Chabot and Martin Gurtman at *La Bohème*. Photo: G. Ouskun



# ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

Manitoba Opera Chorus, *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker

**Manitoba Opera's 2024/25 Season featured two works from composers familiar to audiences: Gaetano Donizetti's hilarious, yet touching *The Elixir of Love* and Giacomo Puccini's tragic *La Bohème*.**

Some season highlights included the return appearance in a leading role of an established artist whose career began at Manitoba Opera, several truly impressive Manitoba Opera debuts from rising young Canadian artists as well as from an impressive new international artist, and a long-standing fixture on the local opera

landscape adding to their already impressive tally of appearances on our stage.

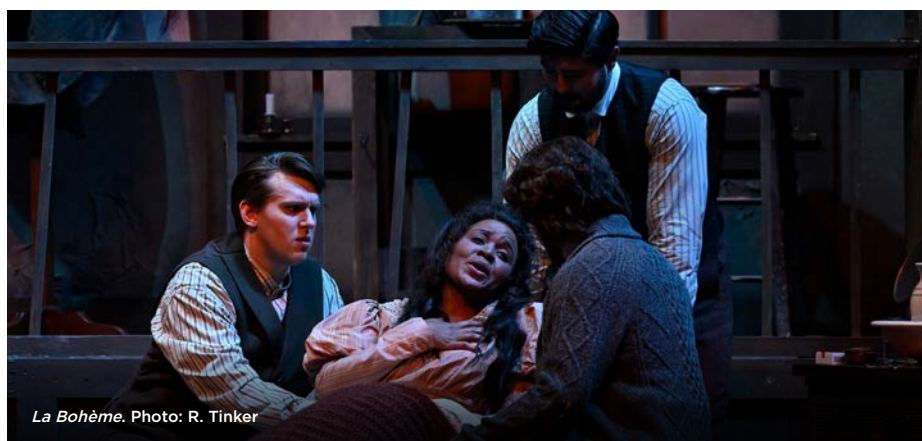
## **Production: *The Elixir of Love***

The season began with a production of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, last seen on our stage in 2005. Set in a rustic Italian village, the opera revolves around an endearing but awkward young fellow named Nemorino (Jonah Hoskins, US/Germany), who is hopelessly in love with the beautiful and wealthy Adina (Andriana Chuchman, Winnipeg). Of note is the fact that, prior to her establishing an international performing career, Ms. Chuchman made her professional

debut with Manitoba Opera as Gianetta in our 2005 production of *The Elixir of Love*. The audience's overwhelmingly positive response to Mr. Hoskins' Manitoba Opera debut performance as Nemorino is indicative of the impact this young performer is making on opera stages around the world. This is indeed an artist to watch.

Stage director Ann Hodges (Winnipeg) opted to maintain the traditional physical setting of the opera in a rustic Italian village (set provided by New Orleans Opera, New Orleans LA), but she updated the time setting to the 1950s (costumes provided by Harlequin Costumes, Winnipeg). Instead of a wealthy landowner, the character of Adina was reimagined as the successful operator of a tour company guiding a group of American tourists through a quaint Italian village populated by local merchants and townsfolk (the Manitoba Opera Chorus), as well as a young woman named Gianetta, sung by Winnipeg soprano Karen Santos who made her professional debut with this production.

To win Adina's heart, Nemorino purchases a love potion from the traveling quack Dr. Dulcamara (Peter McGillivray, Toronto, ON),



*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



who claims it to be a potent elixir of love. The catch is that this 'elixir' is nothing more than cheap wine. Nonetheless, Nemorino believes in its magical effect. As Nemorino drinks the so-called elixir and gains confidence, Adina becomes increasingly intrigued by his newfound assertiveness. Meanwhile, a rival suitor, the arrogant Sergeant Belcore (Jorell Williams, Toronto, ON), also pursues Adina, creating a love triangle. Misunderstandings and comedic situations ensue as the characters navigate the complexities of love and relationships. In the end, the true nature of Nemorino's charm and Adina's feelings are revealed, proving that genuine love does not require magic potions.

Manitoba Opera's Music Advisor & Principal Conductor Tyrone Paterson (London, ON) returned to lead the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Assistant Music Director and Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki (Winnipeg) prepared the 35-voice Manitoba Opera Chorus. Winnipeg-based lighting designer, Scott Henderson, lit the production. Hair design for the production was provided by Jill Buhr (Selkirk), and make-up design was provided by Christian Hadley (Winnipeg). Edmonton-based Stage Manager



(l-r, back) Anna Theodosakis, Clarence Frazer, Hugo Laporte, David Watson; (l-r, front) Charlotte Siegel, Alex Halliday, Suzanne Taffot, Zachary Rioux at the *La Bohème* post-show reception. Photo: R. Driedger

Tim Yakimec kept the production running smoothly with the aid of Assistant Stage Managers Kathryn Ball (Winnipeg) and Heather Lee Brereton (Winnipeg).

### Production: *La Bohème*

In April, we concluded our 2024/25 season with a production of arguably Puccini's most beloved work, *La Bohème*. The production featured an impressive all-Canadian cast of principal artists, all of whom – save one – were making their Manitoba Opera debuts.

Set in the bohemian neighbourhoods of 19th-century

Paris, the opera follows the lives of a group of four young artists living in a garret and struggling to make ends meet: a poet Rodolfo (Zachary Rioux, New Brunswick/Germany), a painter Marcello (Hugo Laporte, Quebec City QC), a musician Schaunard (Clarence Frazer, Toronto ON), and a philosopher Colline (Alex Halliday, Toronto ON). Rodolfo meets his neighbour Mimì (Suzanne Taffot, Montréal QC), and they fall deeply in love. Despite their genuine affection for each other, their relationship faces challenges due to poverty and Mimì's declining health.

Marcello has a tumultuous relationship with the flirtatious Musetta (Charlotte Siegel, Toronto ON), adding another layer of romantic drama to the story. Appearing as Benoit, the bohemians' womanizing landlord and as Alcindoro, one of Musetta's fervent admirers, was Winnipeg baritone David Watson, making his 47th appearance in a Manitoba Opera production. As the story progresses, the characters experience the highs and lows of love and friendship. They are also forced to confront the harsh realities of life, including illness and loss.

Another Manitoba Opera debut came in the person of stage director Anna Theodosakis (Toronto ON). Tyrone Paterson returned to lead the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra while Tadeusz Biernacki prepared the 36-voice Manitoba Opera Chorus and Carolyn Boyes prepared the 16 members of the children's chorus.



*The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



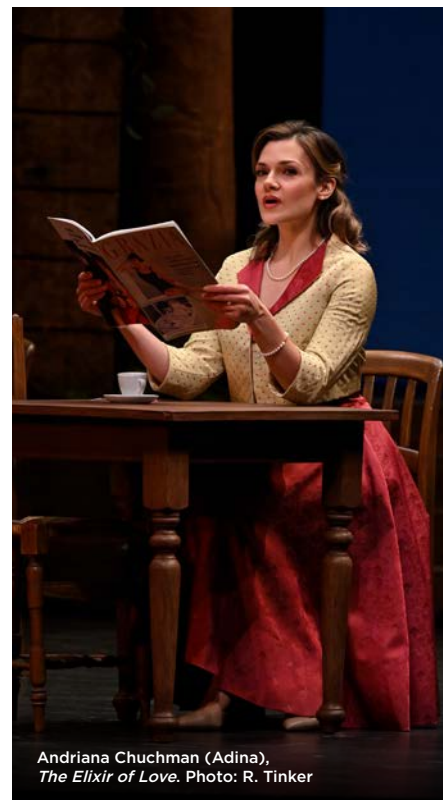
Winnipeg's Hugh Conacher was the lighting designer, with set design by R. Keith Brumley (set provided by The Lyric Opera of Kansas City), and costume design by Deanna Finnman (costumes provided by Edmonton Opera). Jill Buhr and Christian Hadley once again provided the hair and make-up designs, respectively. Victoria-based Stage Manager Bonni Baynton was assisted once again by Kathryn Ball and Heather Lee Brereton.

This production marked Christian Hadley's final production as make-up designer and as the head of the make-up department for Manitoba Opera, having held that position since the spring of 2013. We want to express both our thanks to Chris for his hard work and dedication to our productions, and our sincere best wishes for much success in all his future endeavours.

Throughout our 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 very best work. Manitoba Opera remains honoured to present these artists to the community and to continue to bring great stories - told through beautiful music - to life.



Suzanne Taffot (Mimi), *La Bohème*.  
Photo: R. Tinker



Andriana Chuchman (Adina),  
*The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker

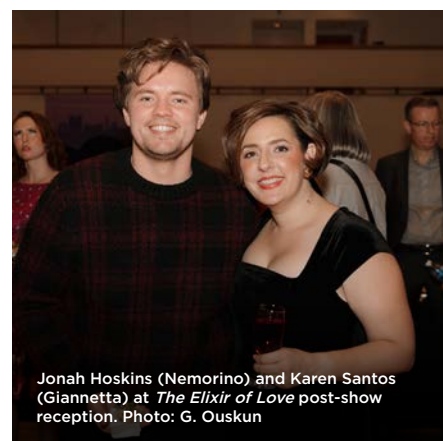


Laura Warren, Sydney Orr, Jill Buhr, Nancy Lecocq, Joyce Kolaski, and Jeffrey Raposo, the hair crew for *La Bohème* at the post-show reception. Photo: R. Driedger

**"[Andriana Chuchman] nimbly tosses off its effervescent coloratura passages with the lightness of a hummingbird, navigating its larger leaps with every note perfectly placed."**

*The Elixir of Love*

THE FREE PRESS



Jonah Hoskins (Nemorino) and Karen Santos (Giannetta) at *The Elixir of Love* post-show reception. Photo: G. Ouskun

2024/25 SEASON

# *The* Elixir *of* LOVE

DONIZETTI

OCTOBER 26, 30  
NOVEMBER 1 | 2024



**MUSIC BY**  
Gaetano Donizetti

Sung in Italian with  
projected English  
translations.

**LIBRETTO BY**  
Felice Romani

Based on the French  
comedy *Le Philtre*



Peter McGillivray (Dr. Dulcamara) and  
Jonah Hoskins (Nemorino), *The Elixir of Love*.  
Photo: R. Tinker



Andriana Chuchman (Adina), *The Elixir of Love*.  
Photo: R. Tinker

**4 Stars!**  
“...an evening of  
high-spirited fun...”

THE FREE PRESS



Karen Santos (Giannetta), *The Elixir of Love*.  
Photo: R. Tinker



## PRINCIPAL CAST

(IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE)

### GIANNETTA

*a friend of Adina*

Karen Santos\*

### ADINA

*a wealthy young woman*

Andriana Chuchman

### NEMORINO

*a not-so-wealthy young fellow*

Jonah Hoskins\*

### SGT. BELCORE

*a soldier*

Jorell Williams\*

### DR. DULCAMARA

*a snake oil salesman*

Peter McGillivray

## MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS

### SOPRANO

Janine Bremault Bamford  
Linda Feasby  
Deborah Ginther  
Kadri Irwin  
Joanne Kilfoyle  
Ana Latorre  
Katherine Mayba  
Deanna Smith  
Marlise Yarjau

### TENOR

Brady Barrientos  
Russ Foster  
Evan Glazier  
Michal Kowalik  
David LaRue  
George Nytepchuk  
Lawrence Pauls  
Raymond Sokalski

### MEZZO

Mélanie Dupuis  
Kelley Fry  
Kathy Gawlik  
Micheline Hay  
Christina Pyrz-Kowall  
Mavis Ritchie  
Stephanie Schmid  
Isla Shea  
Cathy Wach-Dueck

### BASS

David Boyes  
Chris Caslake  
Steve Denby  
Dariyan Dubik  
James Dutton  
Max Fingerote  
Don Larsen  
Caleb Rondeau  
Ted Wiens

### SUPERNUMERARIES

Paul Forget  
Reynaldo Gomez

\*Manitoba Opera debut



*The Elixir of Love.* Photo: R. Tinker



(l) Jorell Williams (Sgt. Belcore) and supernumeraries, *The Elixir of Love.* Photo: R. Tinker

## ARTISTIC TEAM

### CONDUCTOR

Tyrone Paterson

### DIRECTOR

Ann Hodges

### SCENERY DESIGN

Constantinos Kritikos

### LIGHTING DESIGN

Scott Henderson

### COSTUMES PROVIDED BY

Harlequin Costume and Dance

### SCENERY AND PROPERTIES PROVIDED BY

New Orleans Opera

### STAGE MANAGER

Tim Yakimec\*

### ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS

Kathryn Ball  
Heather Lee Brereton

### PROJECTED TITLES BY

Sheldon Johnson

## PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

### DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION

Sheldon Johnson

### CHORUS DIRECTOR/ RÉPÉTITEUR

Tadeusz Biernacki

### ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR

Eve Legault

### CHORUS REHEARSAL PIANIST

Cary Denby

### APPRENTICE STAGE DIRECTOR

Liam Eric Dawson

### APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER

Kyra Krassnigg

### PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Carolyn Schroeder

### PROJECTED TITLES CUEING

Cary Denby

### HAIR/WIG DESIGNER

Jill Buhr

### HAIR/WIG ASSISTANT

Adrianna Oliphant

### HAIR CREW

Nancy Lecocq  
Laura Warren

### MAKE-UP DESIGNER

Christian Hadley

### MAKE-UP ASSISTANT

Theresa Thomson

### MAKE-UP CREW

Erica Hastings  
Emily King  
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

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra musician listing on page 12.

2024/25 SEASON

# La BOHÈME

PUCCINI

APRIL 5, 9, 11 | 2025



**MUSIC BY**  
Giacomo Puccini

**LIBRETTO BY**  
Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Sung in Italian with projected  
English translations

Based on the novel *Scènes de la  
vie de Bohème* by Henri Murger



Suzanne Taffot (Mimi) and Zachary Rioux  
(Rodolfo), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Charlotte Siegel (Musetta), *La Bohème*.  
Photo: R. Tinker

**"4 ½ Stars!  
Manitoba Opera's  
take on Puccini  
classic delivers  
tragic romance with  
passion, verve..."**

*THE FREE PRESS*



**PRINCIPAL CAST**

(IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE)

<b>RODOLFO</b> <i>a poet</i>	Zachary Rioux*
<b>MARCELLO</b> <i>a painter</i>	Hugo Laporte*
<b>COLLINE</b> <i>a philosopher</i>	Alexander Halliday*
<b>SCHAUNARD</b> <i>a musician</i>	Clarence Frazer*
<b>BENOÎT</b> <i>their landlord</i>	David Watson
<b>MIMI</b> <i>a seamstress</i>	Suzanne Taffot*
<b>ALCINDORO</b> <i>an admirer of Musetta</i>	David Watson
<b>MUSETTA</b> <i>a singer</i>	Charlotte Siegel*

## ALSO APPEARING:

<b>PARPIGNOL</b> <i>a toy vendor</i>	George Nytepchuk
<b>A CUSTOMS HOUSE OFFICER</b>	Don Larsen
<b>A SERGEANT</b>	Christopher Dunn

**MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS****SOPRANO**

Janine Brémault Bamford  
Mélanie Dupuis  
Linda Feasby  
Loralie Friesen  
Deborah Ginther  
Ana Gomez  
Kadri Irwin  
Joanne Kilfoyle  
Ana Latorre  
Diana Rockwell

**MEZZO**

Kelley Fry  
Kathy Gawlik  
Chantal Kuegel  
Christina Pyrz-Kowall  
Mavis Ritchie  
Stephanie Schmid  
Isla Shea  
Cathy Wach-Dueck  
Karla Weir

**TENOR**

Russ Foster  
Evan Glazier  
Marlon Goolcharan  
Michal Kowalik  
George Nytepchuk  
Ian Olson\*  
Lawrence Pauls  
Chris Rawluk  
Ronald Mervin Sison

**BASS**

David Boyes  
Chris Caslake  
Christopher Dunn  
James Dutton  
Max Fingerote  
Paul Forget  
Don Larsen  
Dan Szymanski  
Ted Wiens

**CHILDREN'S CHORUS**

Evelyne Andres  
Amy Bouchard  
Faye Campbell  
Dylan Eskin  
Nicolino Giancola\*  
Daphne Groumoutis  
Ilanthe Groumoutis  
Sage Kanhai  
Ava Kilfoyle  
Julia Kowalik  
Karina Kowalik  
Nathaniel Mercer  
Charlie Pulford  
Alex Schaeffer  
Emiliya Vasylyeva  
Grace Lynn Williams

**SUPERNUMERARIES**

Mark Brubacher  
Zachary Caslake  
Christopher Douglas  
Jayden Fraser  
Reynaldo Gomez  
Micheline Hay  
Ashley Kay Frantik  
Joanna Loepp-Thiessen  
Tanner Manson  
Tim Webster

\*Manitoba Opera debut

**ARTISTIC TEAM**

<b>CONDUCTOR</b>	Tyrone Paterson
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Anna Theodosakis*
<b>STAGE MANAGER</b>	Bonni Baynton*
<b>ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS</b>	Kathryn Ball Heather Lee Brereton
<b>SCENERY DESIGNER</b>	R. Keith Brumley
<b>COSTUME DESIGNER</b>	Deanna Finnman
<b>LIGHTING DESIGNER</b>	Hugh Conacher
<b>SCENERY AND PROPS PROVIDED BY</b>	Lyric Opera of Kansas City
<b>COSTUMES PROVIDED BY</b>	Edmonton Opera
<b>PROJECTED TITLES BY</b>	Sheldon Johnson

**PRODUCTION PERSONNEL**

<b>DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION</b>	Sheldon Johnson
<b>CHORUS DIRECTOR/ RÉPÉTITEUR</b>	Tadeusz Biernacki
<b>CHILDREN'S CHORUS DIRECTOR</b>	Carolyn Boyes
<b>ADULT CHORUS REHEARSAL PIANIST</b>	Cary Denby
<b>CHILDREN'S CHORUS REHEARSAL PIANIST</b>	Celoris Miller
<b>APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER</b>	Devon Helm
<b>PRODUCTION ASSISTANT</b>	Tia Morann
<b>HAIR/WIG DESIGNER</b>	Jill Buhr
<b>HAIR CREW</b>	Joyce Kolaski Nancy Lecocq Cristina Massey Sydney Orr Jeffrey Raposo Laura Warren
<b>MAKE-UP DESIGNER</b>	Christian Hadley
<b>MAKE-UP ASSISTANT</b>	Theresa Thomson
<b>MAKE-UP CREW</b>	Erica Hastings Emily King Sarah Leighton Chelsea Rankin
<b>PROJECTED TITLES CUEING</b>	Lara Ciekiewicz

**CENTENNIAL CONCERT HALL PRODUCTION STAFF**

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

# WINNIPEG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## 2024/25

**FIRST VIOLINS**

Gwen Hoebig,  
**CONCERTMASTER**  
*The Gwen Hoebig  
Concertmaster Chair*

Karl Stobbe  
**ASSOCIATE  
CONCERTMASTER**

Jeremy Buzash\*\*  
**ACTING ASSISTANT  
CONCERTMASTER**

Mona Coarda

Tara Fensom

Hong Tian Jia

Mary Lawton

Sonia Lazar

Julie Savard

Jun Shao

Trevor Kirczenow^

**SECOND VIOLINS**

Chris Anstey  
**PRINCIPAL**

Elation Pauls  
**ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL**

Kristina Bauch

Elizabeth Dyer

Bokyung Hwang

Rodica Jeffrey

Susan McCallum\*

Takayo Noguchi\*

Jane Radomski

Erika Sloos\*\*

Darryl Strain^

Rebecca Weger\*\*

**VIOLAS**

Elise Lavallée,  
**ACTING PRINCIPAL**

Laszlo Baroczi

Greg Hay

Soren Lorentzen

Katherine Moran\*\*

Michael Scholz\*

John Sellick\*\*

Miguel Stamato^

**CELLOS**

Yuri Hooker\*  
**PRINCIPAL**

Robyn Neidhold  
**ACTING PRINCIPAL**

Ethan Allers

Arlene Dahl

Samuel Nadurak\*\*

Emma Quackenbush

Alyssa Ramsay

Sean Taubner

Gabriella  
Costa de Oliveira^

Patricia Vanuci^

**BASSES**

Meredith Johnson  
**PRINCIPAL**

Daniel Perry  
**ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL**

James McMillan

Emily Krajewski

Ruslan Rusin^

**FLUTES**

Jan Kocman  
**PRINCIPAL**  
*Supported by Gordon  
& Audrey Fogg*

Alex Conway

Laura MacDougall^

Laurel Ridd^

**PICCOLO FLUTE**

Alex Conway  
**PRINCIPAL**

**OBOES**

Beverly Wang\*  
**PRINCIPAL**

Robin MacMillan

Alicia Maloney^

Caitlin Broms-Jacobs^

Tracy Wright^

**ENGLISH HORN**

Robin MacMillan  
**PRINCIPAL**

**CLARINETS**

Micah Heilbrunn  
**PRINCIPAL**

Sharon Atkinson^

Alex Whitehead

**BASSOONS**

Kathryn Brooks  
**PRINCIPAL**

Elizabeth Mee

**HORNS**

Patricia Evans  
**PRINCIPAL**

Ken MacDonald  
**ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL**  
*The Hilda Schelberger  
Memorial Chair*

Aiden Kleer

Caroline Oberheu

Michiko Singh

**TRUMPETS**

Chris Fensom  
**PRINCIPAL**

Isaac Pulford  
**ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL**  
*The Patty Kirk  
Memorial Chair*

Marhsall Carter^

Paul Jeffrey

Daniel Lehman^

**TROMBONES**

Steven Dyer  
**PRINCIPAL**

Keith Dyrda

Micah Kroeker^

**BASS TROMBONE**

Eric Prodger  
**PRINCIPAL**

**TUBA**

Justin Hickmott\*\*  
**ACTING PRINCIPAL**

**PERCUSSION**

Andrew Johnson\*  
**PRINCIPAL**

Ben Reimer\*\*  
**ACTING PRINCIPAL**

Andrew Nazer^

Brendan Thompson^

**TIMPANI**

Justin Gingrich  
**PRINCIPAL**

**HARP**

Charlene Chin  
**PRINCIPAL**  
*Endowed by W.H.  
& S.E. Loewen*

**PERSONNEL  
MANAGER**

Isaac Pulford

**LIBRARIAN**

Michaela Kleer

**ASSISTANT  
LIBRARIAN**

Aiden Kleer

\*On Leave  
\*\* 1 year Appointment  
^ Extra Musician



Tyrone Paterson, Music Advisor & Principal Conductor, *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



# MANITOBA OPERA PARTICIPATES IN WOMEN IN MUSICAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The 2024/25 season marked Manitoba Opera's third 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 women. As a program partner, Manitoba Opera has committed to offering mentorship in this program through to the 2025/26 season.

This year, we were pleased to welcome back Eve Legault as WML Assistant Conductor for *The Elixir of Love*. 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 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.

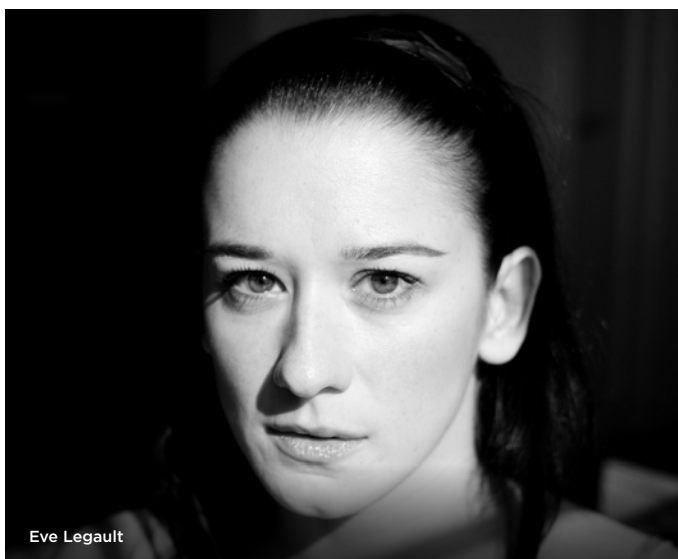
"During the fall 2024, I had the chance to work with Maestro Tyrone Paterson as an assistant conductor on the production of *The Elixir of Love* at the Manitoba Opera. I received this opportunity thanks to the Women in Musical Leadership program at Tapestry Opera, where I am an associate conductor.

"This three-week experience was my second engagement with MO, after having been a part of the *Carmen* production in the spring 2024. Maestro Paterson gave me the chance to conduct often during staging rehearsals, as well as the

chance to conduct the piano tech rehearsal. Podium time is extremely valuable at this stage of my career. I felt very appreciated by the whole team. There was a true sense of team spirit during rehearsals and I hope to have the chance to come back to the company in the near future."

**"I felt very appreciated by the whole team. There was a true sense of team spirit during rehearsals..."**

EVE LEGAULT  
2024/25 Assistant Conductor



Eve Legault



(l-r) Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing; Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO; Tyrone Paterson, Music Advisor & Principal Conductor; and Eve Legault, Assistant Conductor, at *The Elixir of Love* post-show reception.

# TY PATERSON CELEBRATES TWO DECADES AS MUSIC ADVISOR & PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR

Maestro Tyrone Paterson celebrated his 21st anniversary as Manitoba Opera's Music Advisor & Principal Conductor in the 2024/25 season.

Appointed to this role in November 2004, Maestro Paterson has conducted almost every company production during this time. *La Bohème* marked his 31st production with the company, although his connection to MO goes back 32 years, with his first engagement conducting *Madama Butterfly* in 1993.

"Manitoba Opera has played a huge role in my development as a conductor, and I was honoured to be asked by Larry Desrochers to join the leadership team in 2004 as music advisor and principal

conductor," says Maestro Paterson. "Over the years, we have performed many wonderful productions for Winnipeg audiences. It has been my privilege to conduct the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, one of Canada's top professional orchestras."

"Working with Ty over the past two decades has been a privilege," commented Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO. "His musicianship, dedication and good humor have made a lasting impact on Manitoba Opera and on all of us who have had the pleasure of collaborating with him. I'm grateful for his contributions and friendship."

Considered one of Canada's finest opera conductors, Maestro Paterson

had his professional conducting debut leading the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 25.

Over the course of his career, Maestro Paterson has conducted over 130 different opera productions in nine countries, with 100 of them in Canada. He has 20 plus years as an arts administrator as well. He served as artistic director and principal conductor for Opera Lyra Ottawa from 1998 to 2014. From 1998 to 2003, he also served as the general director there and was responsible for both the artistic and business aspects of the company. He was also the director of production for Calgary Opera and their artistic administrator.



Joanne and Tyrone Paterson, Music Advisor & Principal Conductor, at the *La Bohème* post-show reception. Photo: G. Ouskun



*The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



Tyrone Paterson, Music Advisor & Principal Conductor; and Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, at the *La Bohème* post-show reception. Photo: R. Tinker



# CELEBRATING WINNIPEG'S 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

## The Mayor's Ball

On Saturday, October 5, more than 700 party goers gathered for the Winnipeg 150 Mayor's Ball at the RBC Convention Centre for an evening that combined civic pride with a powerful show of support for the city's arts sector. Hosted by Mayor Scott Gillingham, the ball was part of the Winnipeg 150 celebrations and raised over \$80,000 in support of the province's four cornerstone performing arts organizations: Manitoba Opera, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Guests enjoyed performances by each of the recipient organizations.

The funds, distributed equally through the Winnipeg Foundation, provided meaningful support to these organizations, helping to sustain their work and amplify their impact in the community.

"For decades, these organizations have brought the stories of Winnipeg to life with their talent and artistry," said Mayor Gillingham

at the event. "The support shown at the Winnipeg 150 Mayor's Ball demonstrates how much our community values the arts."

The Mayor's Ball was a signature moment in the city's year-long 150th anniversary celebrations, offering an opportunity to honour the role of culture in shaping Winnipeg's past, present, and future.

## City of Song Initiatives

In 2024, the City of Winnipeg celebrated its 150th anniversary through a year of song that showcased the community's spirit and artistic excellence while providing opportunities for Winnipeggers to engage in the power of song.

As part of these City of Song events, Manitoba Opera joined forces with the Winnipeg Goldeyes Baseball Club on August 2. Mezzo-soprano Ashley Schneberger and bass-baritone Christopher Dunn led fans in the singing of "Happy Birthday, Winnipeg" at Blue Cross Park.

In November at the Opening Night Post-Show Reception for *The Elixir of Love*, more than 75 guests joined the Manitoba Opera Chorus to sing director Rob Herriot's Winnipeg version of two popular tunes: Bizet's Habanera from *Carmen* and Italian composer Luigi Denza's "Funiculi-Funicula." With piano accompaniment by MO Assistant Music Director and Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, the crowd enthusiastically embraced the chance to showcase Winnipeggers' love of song.

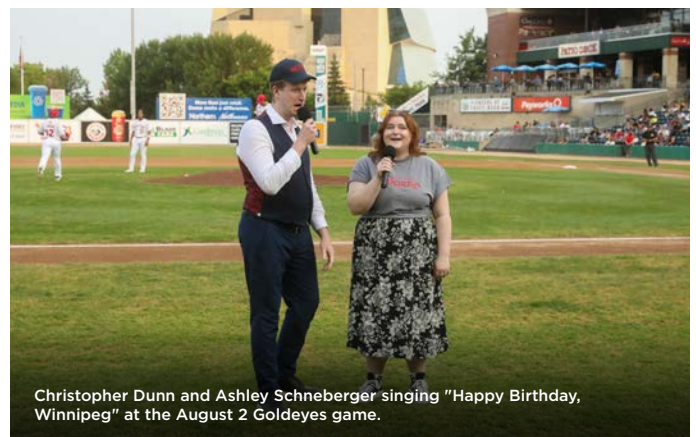
Thanks to the Winnipeg Arts Council's City of Song initiative for providing funding for these initiatives.



**WINNIPEG  
ARTS COUNCIL**



*La Bohème* post-show reception City of Song sing-along. Photo: R. Tinker



Christopher Dunn and Ashley Schneberger singing "Happy Birthday, Winnipeg" at the August 2 Goldeyes game.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

**This season nearly 6,000 people attended or experienced one or more of our community engagement events and initiatives.**

Community engagement programming this season included our familiar lecture series: Understanding the Music, Opera Primers, and Pre-Show Chats, as well as innovative special events themed around *The Elixir of Love* and *La Bohème* and initiatives celebrating Black opera artists and creators. These initiatives were developed by MO staff with guidance from our

Community Engagement Committee and from a newly established Black Communities Advisory Committee.

## Community Engagement Committee

The Community Engagement Committee consists of members of Manitoba Opera staff, the board of trustees, and the community at large. The committee met over the season to develop initiatives that uphold Manitoba Opera's four pillars of community engagement: the art of opera, the humanities, social causes, and enhancing the experience. These initiatives provide opportunities for our patrons to deepen their understanding of opera as an art form and use opera as a medium for creating connections within our community.

a tasting session themed on the characters and plot of *The Elixir of Love* that took them to France, Italy, Spain, and Argentina. Guests were also treated to a performance of art songs by tenor Aaron Hutton accompanied by pianist Lisa Rumpel.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC

### Saturday, October 5

Canadian Museum for Human Rights classroom

Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello, Associate Professor of Musicology, University of Manitoba Desautels Faculty of Music, presented an hour-long lecture on the music of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*. Dr. Simonot-Maiello discussed the opera as a textbook example of the bel canto style of the mid nineteenth



Patrons at the Opera Uncorked: Wine Appreciation Workshop.

## *The Elixir of Love*

### OPERA UNCORKED: WINE APPRECIATION WORKSHOP

**Tuesday, October 8**

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg

A capacity crowd enjoyed a relaxed evening learning about wine. A Manitoba Liquor Mart product ambassador lead guests through

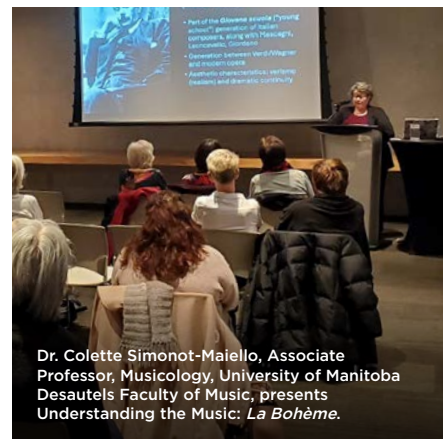


Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello, Associate Professor, Musicology, University of Manitoba Desautels Faculty of Music, presents Understanding the Music: *The Elixir of Love*.





Opera lovers and movie buffs enjoy a brunch buffet before a screening of *Moonstruck* at The Metropolitan Entertainment Centre.



Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello, Associate Professor, Musicology, University of Manitoba Desautels Faculty of Music, presents Understanding the Music: *La Bohème*.

century, marking a pivotal development in the modernization of operatic singing technique.

#### OPERA PRIMER

**Saturday, October 29**

Canadian Museum for Human Rights classroom

Dr. Scott Miller, Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, Manitoba Opera, presented a lecture on the characters and synopsis of *The Elixir of Love* complete with video examples. The presentation also included notes and pointers for patrons from stage director Ann Hodges.

#### PRE-SHOW CHATS

Pre-show chats were presented a half-hour before curtain at each performance by Nicole Stonyk, BA Music, BA Arts, MA Indigenous Studies. Each evening, Ms. Stonyk was introduced by one of our Next Stage artists: Eli Granger, Avery Kellett, and Kyler Humble.

### *La Bohème*

#### FRENCH HIGH TEA

**Saturday, March 8**

Pauline Bistro at the Norwood Hotel

Opera lovers were given a taste of Paris as they looked forward to attending *La Bohème*, at our sold-out, French-inspired high tea event. Specialty teas and a selection of French pastries, sandwiches, and desserts were served while guests

enjoyed a performance of French art song and opera arias by mezzo-soprano Ashley Schneberger and pianist Lisa Rumpel.

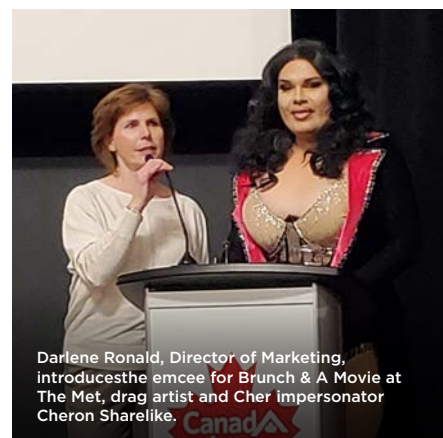
#### BRUNCH & A MOVIE AT THE MET

**Sunday, March 16**

The Metropolitan Entertainment Centre

*La Bohème* takes centre stage in the beloved, critically acclaimed 1980s film *Moonstruck* starring Cher and Nicholas Cage. The movie borrows heavily from themes in the opera, showing realistic depictions of the ups and downs of love and family relationships, as well as featuring a scene where Cher and Nicolas Cage's characters attend a performance of *La Bohème* at New York's Metropolitan Opera.

This sold-out event in the historic Metropolitan Entertainment Centre had 180 people enjoying a buffet brunch followed by a screening of



Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing, introduces the emcee for Brunch & A Movie at The Met, drag artist and Cher impersonator Cheron Sharelike.

the movie and the chance to win prizes. The film was introduced by *Free Press Arts & Life* contributor and movie buff Alison Gillmor. The event was emceed by drag artist and Cher impersonator Cheron Sharelike.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC

**Saturday, March 15**

Canadian Museum for Human Rights Classroom

Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello's presentation on the music of Puccini's *La Bohème* focused on the verismo style that came to dominate the Italian opera scene in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Audiences at that time were used to larger-than-life characters whose passions had dramatic and far-reaching consequences. *La Bohème* introduced audiences to characters who were realistic, ordinary people experiencing the kinds of joys and struggles that they could recognize in their own lives.



Mezzo-soprano Ashley Schneberger delights patrons at the French High Tea at Pauline Bistro with a selection of French art song and opera arias.

## OPERA PRIMER

**Saturday, March 29**

Canadian Museum for  
Human Rights classroom

Beyond introducing the characters and walking patrons through the story of the opera with video excerpts, this lecture by Dr. Scott Miller explored some of the reasons that *La Bohème* was a huge success at its premiere and continues to be a favourite among opera lovers, highlighting the genuine humanity we see in the characters and the relatable events in the opera.

## PRE-SHOW CHATS

Pre-show chats were presented a half-hour before curtain at each performance by soprano Lara Ciekiewicz who had previously performed the role of Musetta in the 2014 production. Each evening, Ms. Ciekiewicz was introduced by one of our Next Stage artists: Sonia Campbell, Eli Granger, and Melanie Hiepler

## ART SUPPLIES DRIVE

The young artists in *La Bohème* pursued their art with passion whether it be poetry, painting, philosophy or music.

Patrons were encouraged to join Manitoba Opera in supporting future artists in our community through the Art Supplies Drive. Donations of paints, brushes, markers, crayons, pencil crayons, coloring books, stickers, construction paper, sketch pads, and scissors were delivered to United Way for distribution among their youth-serving partner agencies.



Checking out video excerpts from *La Bohème* (La Scala, 1965) at the Opera Primer.

## Benefitting Agencies:

- Art City
- Graffiti Art Programming
- BGC Winnipeg
- Rossbrook House
- Evermore Gather Grow Lead
- Manitoba School Improvement Program – The Peaceful Village
- Teen Stop Jeunesse
- Spence Neighbourhood Association

## CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES

In the company's journey to connect with the diverse number of communities in our city and province, and as we work to ensure our spaces are welcoming and inclusive for all, we took the opportunity around *La Bohème* to reach out to Black communities who call Winnipeg home.

## BLACK COMMUNITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In January, an advisory committee convened for the first time to guide initiatives intended to make the

company's productions, spaces, and programs more welcoming and inclusive of Winnipeg's diverse Black communities. Members of this committee include Black leaders in arts, business, and charitable organizations in Winnipeg, and reflect a wealth of experiences and perspectives.

In addition to connecting Manitoba Opera with organizations to distribute tickets through our Opera Access program, the committee advised on initiatives that emphasized welcoming Black communities to Manitoba Opera performances and celebrating Black greatness in opera.

## Advisory Committee Members:

- Tanya Brothers, General Counsel, Manitoba Justice -Legal Services Branch
- Johnell Collins, Manager, Klinik Community Health
- Spencer Duncanson, Artistic Director, Little Opera Company
- Zilla Jones, Lawyer, Jones Law Office
- Delia Joseph, Founder & Lifestyle Coach, Improveology
- Dr. Zita Somakoko, President/ Founder, Black-Manitobans Chamber of Commerce
- Larry Strachan, Founder & Artistic Director, Chamber Orchestra Without Borders
- Chimwemwe Undi, Winnipeg Poet Laureate



Art supplies donated by MO patrons at *La Bohème* that were donated to youth-serving organizations.



## COMMITTEE-LED INITIATIVES

**Black History Month**

Social media posts celebrating Black opera artists and creators, researched by Delia Joseph.

**Ignite Winnipeg Conference**

Larry Strachan and Scott Miller, MO Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, attended the Ignite Winnipeg conference held by Black Talent Initiative (Toronto) at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights on February 11. The company was able to highlight *La Bohème* and the company debuts by Black opera artists Suzanne Taffot and Charlotte Siegel in leading roles as Mimì and Musetta, respectively, as well as provide a ticket discount for conference attendees.

**2025 BMCC Veteran's Legacy Awards**

Dr. Zita Somakoko and Mansi Bhatnagar coordinated with MO to provide a ticket giveaway for *La Bohème* for a prize drawing at this event held at the Princess Auto Stadium Pinnacle Club on March 3. A special ticket discount was also offered to all attendees.

**Welcome Signage at Performances of *La Bohème***

Lobby signs designed by members of the team at the Black-Manitobans Chamber of Commerce welcomed patrons to our production in 50 languages that are spoken in Black communities in Canada and around the world.

Created by:

- Mansi Bhatnagar, Black-Manitobans Chamber of Commerce

**Slide Show Celebrating Black Opera Artists and Creators**

At each performance of *La Bohème* two large-screen TVs on the Piano Nobile displayed a slide show celebrating Black opera artists and creators. This video highlighted historic and contemporary figures and included a number of artists who have performed with Manitoba Opera.

Created by:

- Yemilo Audu, Founder & Principal, Tukoda Productions
- Segun Olude, Graphic Designer
- Larry Strachan, research



Nicole Stonyk gives the pre-show chat at *The Elixir of Love*.



Board of Trustees member Flavia Fernandez Fabio pours wine at the Opera Uncorked: Wine Appreciation Workshop.



Bethany Bunko, Communications Coordinator, and her husband Holden, at Brunch & A Movie at The Met.



# LI KEUR IN THE COMMUNITY

*Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* is the historic first Indigenous-led mainstage opera on a Canadian opera mainstage that we premiered in November 2023. It continued to have a presence in the 2024/25 season having been honored by the Canadian opera community and with community displays.

## Artists Honoured with 2024 Rubies Award

Bravo to the artists of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* who were presented with the *Opera Canada* Rubies Change Maker Award! This award recognizes an individual or group of artists who has made an outstanding cultural contribution to the community or to initiatives

that create significant creative and social change in the field of opera in Canada.

Librettist and storyteller Dr. Suzanne M. Steele accepted the award on behalf of the artists at the Rubies Awards in Toronto November 18 at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

## Display at Lower Fort Garry

A selection of costumes, the beaded artwork commissioned by Manitoba Opera, and information panels were on display at Lower Fort Garry from June 28 to July 12, giving people an opportunity to see the items up close.

## Artist Claire Johnston Art Show

Manitoba Opera commissioned Red River Métis beadwork artist Claire Johnston to create a beaded replica of the *Li Keur* marketing artwork which was on display in the lobby during the run of the production

at the Centennial Concert Hall. The piece was featured in Claire's inaugural solo show at the Arts AccessAbility Network during the month of September.

The original design was the work of The Show and Tell agency creative team.



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



(l - r) Evan Korbut (Riel/Robideau), Scott Rumble (Black Goose #2), Neil Weisensel (co-composer/conductor), Julie Lumsden (Rose/Marguerite), Dr. Suzanne M. Steele (opera storyteller/librettist), and Michael Jones, Editorial Director, Opera Canada at the 2024 Rubies Awards. Photo: Dahlia Katz



*Li Keur* display at Lower Fort Garry.



## MANITOBA OPERA FEATURED IN FLEURS DE VILLES ARTISTE 2025

Manitoba Opera was featured in the Assiniboine Park's breathtaking Fleurs de Villes Artiste at The Leaf exhibit from January 16 to 26, 2025.

This curated collection featured 15 unique fresh floral mannequins inspired by Winnipeg arts and cultural organizations that were all created by the city's talented floral artists. Each floral display showcased an organization. The exhibit encompassed opera, dance, music, theatre, the visual arts, and more.

In a happy accident, longtime floral sponsor for Manitoba Opera,

Academy Florist, was randomly paired with MO and their mission was to create a floral interpretation of the character Musetta from *La Bohème*.

The team dove deep into the story and armed with costume and set design inspiration, they envisioned a full scene, complete with a real lamp post. Over 150 hours went into designing and assembling the display, with four florists bringing it to life. The team braved minus 35°C temperatures to transport their work and spent eight hours the next morning on site to assemble the display.



Academy Florist designer putting finishing touches on mannequin at Fleurs des Villes Artiste.



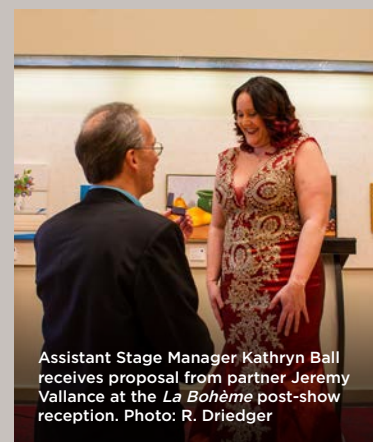
Academy Florist interpretation of a scene from *La Bohème* featuring Musetta.

## ASM RECEIVES PROPOSAL AT RECEPTION

Assistant Stage Manager Kathryn Ball was shocked and delighted at the *La Bohème* Opening Night Reception when towards the conclusion of the formal part of the evening, she was called to the podium, a red carpet was rolled out, and her partner, Jeremy Vallance, got down on bended knee to propose.

The couple was also serenaded by the MO Chorus singing "A Whole New World" from Disney's *Aladdin*, (a request from Jeremy).

**Kathryn said yes.**



Assistant Stage Manager Kathryn Ball receives proposal from partner Jeremy Vallance at the *La Bohème* post-show reception. Photo: R. Driedger



The ring. Photo: R. Driedger

# OPERA ACCESS

Jonah Hoskins (Nemorino), Jorell Williams (Sgt. Belcore), and Andriana Chuchman (Adina), *The Elixir of Love*. 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.

**This season, over 3,700 tickets (2,527 tickets for *The Elixir of Love* and 1,187 tickets for *La Bohème*) were distributed through community organizations including the following:**

(NOT ALL ORGANIZATIONS LISTED)

- 1Just City
- Acorn Family Place
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Black Film Space Manitoba
- Black History Manitoba Celebration Committee Inc.
- Canadian Muslim Women's Institute
- Clan Mothers Healing Village and Knowledge Centre
- Community Unemployed Health Centre
- Dignity House
- Elmwood Community Resource Centre
- Filipino Women's Initiative
- Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre
- House of Peace
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Inc.
- Immigrant Centre Manitoba Inc.
- Independent Living Resource Centre
- Indigenous Women's Healing Centre
- Italian Canadian Foundation of Manitoba Inc.
- Ka Ni Kanichihk
- Main Street Project
- Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO)
- Manitoba Conservatory of Music and Arts
- Marymount
- Native Addictions Council of Manitoba
- Native Clan Organization
- New Journey Housing
- Northwest Métis Council
- Onashowewin Justice Circle (Restorative Justice Program)
- Opikihiwawin  
(New Directions: for children, youth, adults, & families)
- Out There Winnipeg
- Pembina Valley Pride
- Rainbow Resource Centre
- Reaching Out Winnipeg
- S.H.A.D.E. (Safe Housing and Directed Empowerment) Inc.
- St. Amant Foundation
- St. Boniface Parent Child Coalition
- Sunshine House
- Thrive Community Support Circle
- Two-Spirit Michif Local
- Ukrainian Canadian Congress
- United Way
- Urban Circle Training Centre
- Volunteer Manitoba
- West Broadway Community Organization
- Willow Place
- Seven Oaks Immigrant Services





The Opera Access program coordinator engaged directly with partner organizations, supporting clients in navigating a variety of logistical and accessibility needs with the goal of making the experience as approachable and comfortable as possible.

To help prepare first-time opera goers, a “What to Expect at the Opera” guide was provided to help ensure that participants felt informed and at ease throughout their experience.

The impact of the Opera Access program was felt deeply across the community. Numerous participants and organizational partners shared heartfelt messages of gratitude and wonder following their experiences.

By addressing financial, informational, and cultural barriers, the Opera Access program continues to play a vital role in connecting new audiences to opera. Manitoba Opera remains committed to strengthening these community relationships and expanding access, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to experience the power and beauty of live opera.

**“Thank you so much for the free tickets. We went as a family and had so much fun. It was my daughter’s birthday -her first in Canada - and this made it extra special. During this difficult time, we really rested our souls.”**

VALERIIA SOLNTSEVA  
Ticket recipient through  
Eastman Immigrant Services



Sonya and Chris Sharpe from Black Space Manitoba at *La Bohème*.

**“I was inundated with pictures and messages all weekend about how much fun they had...I don’t know if the Manitoba Opera can properly understand, or if I can properly convey, what a once-in-a-lifetime, mind-blowing, therapeutic, life-giving evening this was for these girls.”**

ROSALINDA AMATO  
Executive Director,  
House of Peace

**“This was my first experience at the opera and I’m in awe. From the moment I walked into the Concert Hall, I saw all types of people dressed up, smiling, excited for the evening. The performers, the set, the orchestra...**

***La Bohème* was the perfect introduction. I’m now officially an opera fan.”**

ALANA HING  
Ticket recipient through  
Out There Winnipeg



Malou Josue, St. Boniface Parent Child Coalition, and Roselyn Advincula, Immigrant Centre Manitoba, at *The Elixir of Love*



Opera Access ticket recipients from The House of Peace at *The Elixir of Love*.

# STUDENT PROGRAMMING

*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

This season's student programming served over 2,000 students in grades K-12, with activities that included in-classroom experiences, streaming video, and live performance. For many students, these programs are their first exposure to opera.

## Student Night at the Opera

Student Night at the Opera is a unique opportunity for students to attend the final dress rehearsal before opening night of the opera and experience the production with an audience of their peers. There were 455 students in attendance for dress rehearsal for *The Elixir of Love* on Thursday, October 24, and 233 students took time out of their spring break to attend the dress rehearsal for *La Bohème* on Thursday, April 3. Many students dressed up to take group photos to commemorate the evening; one group even arrived by limousine!

## Cast Visit: Karen Santos *THE ELIXIR OF LOVE*

On Thursday, October 31, *The Elixir of Love* cast member, Karen Santos, (Giannetta) visited classrooms at Garden City Collegiate and St. John's High School to meet with students who had attended Student Night at the Opera. Karen spoke about her career as an opera singer and answered questions that students had about practice, audition preparation, and vocal health.

students in grades K-6 participated in hands-on learning. Students discovered how opera singers project their voices, learned about the different jobs that people do to produce opera, and used props and costumes to act out

## B.E.E.P.

In July, soprano Katherine Mayba presented eight opera workshops for students in the Seven Oaks School Division's Balanced Experiential Education Program (B.E.E.P.). Approximately 250



Students at Constable Edward Finney School at a B.E.E.P. workshop.

**"Katherine...was amazing!  
She kept the students engaged, and they  
learned a lot! They also loved the role play!"**

AMANDA HAGEMANN  
O.V. Jewitt School B.E.E.P. Coordinator





Soprano Keely McPeck (back) with music teacher Charlotte Cook-Dowsett (left) and her students at an Opera Class workshop at Lord Selkirk School.

operatic scenes inspired by Bizet's *Carmen*. Workshops this season were presented at Collicutt School, Constable Edward Finney School, O. V. Jewitt School, and R. F. Morrison School.

## Opera Class

Opera Class is a workshop led by a professional opera singer. Students are introduced to opera through hands-on activities, culminating in participating in a short opera performance in their own classroom complete with props and costumes. In a 45-minute session, students learn about the many people and the jobs they do to make opera happen: composers and singers, directors, instrumentalists, set and costume designers, hair and make-up artists, and more. Students learn about the places and languages in which opera is performed and that opera is for everyone. They also get to see how

the things that they are interested in play a role in making opera happen.

This year 21 Opera Class workshops were presented at eight schools in Winnipeg, serving approximately 525 students in grades 3-6, with workshops in English and in French. Workshops were developed and presented by teaching artists sopranos Katherine Mayba and Keely McPeck, and bass-baritone Stephen Haiko-Pena.

Thanks to support for our education programs through our Pass the Hat initiative and our education sponsors, Opera Class workshops are offered to schools at no charge.

## I Love to Read Month

Each year in February, Manitoba Opera sends opera singers into schools to read children's books about opera to students in grades K-4. In these sessions students

**"One hundred percent of the students were totally into what she was doing...I had so many comments on how fun that class was. We are thankful that MO has this program ..."**

ANDREA GOERTZEN  
Crestview School



Soprano Keely McPeck reads *Opera Cat* to students at Crestview School at an I Love to Read Month presentation.

**"Thank you again for coming to our school and the time you gave us. The kids are still talking about it."**

CHARLOTTE  
COOK-DOWSETT  
Lord Selkirk School



Soprano Karen Santos (centre) with teachers and chorus students at Collège Garden City Collegiate after speaking with the class about her career as an opera singer.

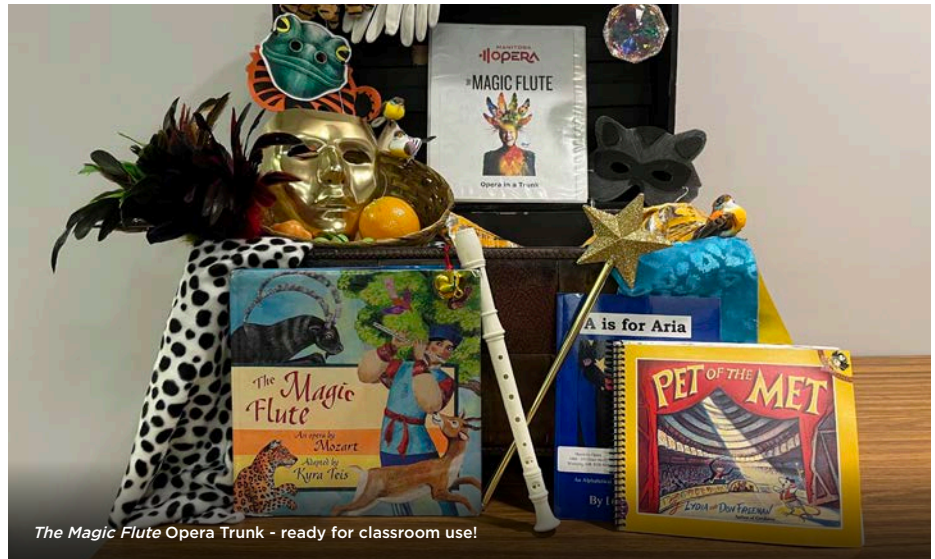
learn some Italian opera vocabulary, hear the powerful voice of an opera singer, and even practice their own operatic singing.

Sessions this year were presented in English and French, with 16 workshops presented at seven schools, serving approximately 400 students. I Love to Read Month presenters included teaching artists sopranos Katherine Mayba and Keely McPeck, and bass-baritone Stephen Haiko-Pena.

## Opera Storytime

Opera Storytime is an online video collection of children's books about opera-loving animals read aloud by artists and educators for children to enjoy at home and in their classrooms. Launched in 2021, this program includes videos of four books and features translations of some of these stories into French, Tagalog, Anishinaabemowin, and American Sign Language.

This season Manitoba Opera collaborated with two language keepers - Lorraine Coutu and June Bruce - who worked on the translations for the Indigenous-led



opera *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* (2023) on translating Tess Weaver's *Opera Cat* into French Michif. A read-aloud video will be recorded in the upcoming season. This project is a continuation of Manitoba Opera's commitment to language reclamation and community building.

**This project was generously supported by Winnipeg City Councillor Brian Mayes.**

## Opera in a Trunk

Since the program's inception in 2009, Opera in a Trunk has offered a fun, interactive way to introduce young students to a variety of operas through a treasure chest chock full of activities, costumes, props, books, and videos.

Over 3,500 students in 120 classrooms have enjoyed learning about the art form through Opera in a Trunk, which is provided free of charge to schools.

This season the program underwent a review with baritone Christopher Dunn. This teaching artist met with several teachers who have used opera trunks to find out how they used the trunks, what students enjoyed most about them, and what they would like to see in new trunks.

Based on his findings, Christopher developed a series of activities for students to be used in the classroom or further explored by students at home. Along with new props and costumes, and access to online audio and video resources, Opera in a Trunk is poised to continue engaging students and creating future opera fans!

The reimagined opera trunks are themed around four famous operas: *The Magic Flute*, *Carmen*, *Aida*, and *Hansel & Gretel*. The trunks became available for classroom use in May.



**“Keely [McPeck] put on fabulous lessons...I had so many comments from the students on how fun that class was. Of course, everyone loved that she sang for us.”**

ANDREA GOERTZEN  
Music Teacher, Crestview School



# NEXT STAGE ARTIST PROGRAM

Our 2024/25 season marked a new opportunity for students at the University of Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite University to get involved through the Next Stage Artist Program (NSAP). This program was launched as a unique opportunity for post-secondary music students to go behind the scenes at Manitoba Opera and have a chance to perform. The program provides an opportunity for students to learn about careers in arts administration, share their passion for opera with their classmates, and get paid to do so.

The artists worked at performances and events introducing speakers, assisting with the “I ♥ MO” fundraising campaign, supporting the photo wall and Boutique, light-walking, interviewing the directors at the Sitzprobes, and meeting the artists.

Next Stage artists also participated in an audition workshop presented by General Director & CEO Larry Desrochers. Artists performed an aria or song, received feedback on their song and acting choices, as well as on their resumes and repertoire lists. The session also included a broader conversation focused on casting, artistic planning, building productions, and bringing opera to 21st-century audiences.

A highlight of the season was a special donor appreciation event held on the Centennial Concert Hall’s Piano Nobile, where the NSAP artists performed. This intimate afternoon of music and conversation served to celebrate our donors’ invaluable support while offering the Next Stage artists a professional platform to showcase their talent.

The event also allowed the artists to emcee, practice networking, and engage meaningfully with Manitoba Opera’s most dedicated supporters, strengthening connections between emerging artists and the community that champions their growth.

“Returning to the Manitoba Opera Next Stage Artist Program was a valuable learning opportunity that deepened both my artistic and professional development,” says Sonia Campbell, a 2nd year master’s student from the University of Manitoba. She participated in the Student Ambassador Program in 2023 and 2024.

“I gained insight into the behind-the-scenes work that brings opera to life, including administration, fundraising, and community engagement. The NSAP performance event was a highlight of this year.

“I also continue to be inspired by Manitoba Opera’s commitment to outreach and their thoughtful engagement with opera’s more challenging histories.”

## Canadian Mennonite University

Avery Kellett, soprano

## University of Manitoba

Sonia Campbell, soprano  
Jayden Fraser, baritone  
Eli Granger, euphonium  
Melanie Hiepler, soprano  
Kyler Humble, tenor  
Diana Rockwell, soprano



Ann Hodges, *The Elixir of Love* director, with Next Stage artist Kyler Humble at Sitzprobe for *The Elixir of Love*.



Ashley Schneberger (former Executive Assistant, centre) with the participants in the Next Stage Artist Program.

# DIGITAL EMERGING ARTISTS PROGRAM (DEAP)

*The Elixir of Love. Photo: R. Tinker*

In August 2024, Manitoba Opera's Digital Emerging Artists Program (DEAP) celebrated its fifth anniversary. Over the past five years, DEAP has offered a unique platform for artists to develop their skills and express their voices. Participants and faculty met in person and over video conferencing platforms, allowing artists from across Canada to engage in meaningful work and collaboration regardless of their location.

This year's five participants were given the opportunity to delve deep into their creative processes, enhance their digital skills, and network with a distinguished group of internationally recognized faculty members.

Our core faculty, who have been with us since the program's inception, remain dedicated to fostering a collaborative and interactive learning environment. Their team-oriented teaching style has been instrumental in shaping the program's success.

The 2024 program included 89 hours of instruction per participant, totaling nearly 445 instruction hours. Participants produced high-quality videos that reflected their growth and learning throughout the program. The comprehensive training they received covered topics from digital media techniques to performance skills, ensuring that each artist was well equipped to undertake video projects that

showcase their technique, creative vision, and digital editing skills. The high level of creativity and polish demonstrated by this season's emerging artists was remarkable.

Participants also engaged in conversations with faculty, artists, and peers about subjects relevant to artistic careers. A 2020 DEAP alumnus, Nicholas Borg, led a discussion about artmaking and civic engagement that provided participants with examples of how artists are active in making a difference in their communities.

This year's program also featured a panel discussion led by Indigenous artists, focusing on collaboration with Indigenous creators in the context of opera. The panel provided a safe space to discuss relevant issues and propose solutions for a more equitable process moving forward.

The panelists included Anisinine soprano Keely McPeck, a 2023 DEAP alumna and cast member of Manitoba Opera's 2023 production of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*; Julie Lumsden, a Métis artist and cast member of *Li Keur*; Simon Miron, a Métis artist and director of *Li Keur*; Michelle Lafferty, an artist of the Tłı́chó Nation and cast member in *Li Keur*, and Marion Newman, a

**"...a unique and meaningful way to explore one's artistry. Not only do you get world class coaching and lessons; you create a project that is wholly your own."**

JAMES COOLE-  
STEVENSON  
2024 DEAP Participant



DEAP participant James Coole-Stevenson at a recording session.



critically acclaimed mezzo-soprano of Kwagwiltz and Stó:lō First Nations and DEAP core faculty member.

This discussion offered participants valuable insights into working with Indigenous creatives, the challenges of engaging with works featuring Indigenous content without Indigenous leadership, and current industry practices that are effective, along with suggestions for improvement.

Since 2022 the Digital Emerging Artists Program has designated an independent learner position for a BIPOC participant who is at the early stages of their artistic career, acknowledging that many such artists have not historically been presented with the same opportunities available to artists from non-marginalized communities. This year's independent learner was mezzo-soprano Gabrielle Côté-Picard, an Indigenous artist from Montréal.

**“DEAP offers the excellent balance of a program that is focused on the artist as both an instrument...and a whole person who has a unique artistic voice.”**

TARYN PLATER  
2024 DEAP Participant

## Emerging Artists

**James Coole-Stephenson** (ON)  
Baritone

**Lauren Estey** (ON)  
Soprano

**Jeremy Scinocca** (ON)  
Tenor

**Taryn Plater** (BC)  
Mezzo-Soprano

## Independent Learner

**Gabrielle Côté-Picard** (QC)  
Mezzo-Soprano

## Core Faculty

**Content Creation**  
Ann Hodges (MB)

**Digital Media**  
Stephen Bell (ON)

**Voice**  
Tracy Dahl (MB)  
Monica Huisman (MB)  
Marion Newman (BC)  
John Tessier (AB)

## Guest Instructors

**Acting**  
Rob Herriot (MB)

**Collaborative Piano**  
Tadeusz Biernacki (MB)

**Diction**  
Michael McMahon (QC)

**Life Coach**  
Rebecca Hass (BC)

**Personal Finance**  
Chris Enns (ON)

## Panels

### Civic Engagement

Nicholas Borg (ON)  
Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor (ON)  
Daevyd Pepper (ON)

### Indigenous Opera

Keely McPeck (MB)  
Michelle Lafferty (AB)  
Julie Lumsden (ON)  
Simon Miron (MB)  
Marion Newman (BC)

## Artistic Collaborators

### Bass

Harmeet Virdee (BC)

### Dance/Choreography

Sydney Faulkner (ON)

### Piano

Brian Cho (ON)  
Ivan Jovanovic (ON)  
Hyejin Kwon (ON)  
Joseph Stacy (BC)  
Derek Stoll (BC)

### Puppeteer

Mabel Joy (ON)

### Trombone

Casey Thomas-Burns (BC)

## Collaborating Organizations

Coffeshop Creative (ON)  
Franklin Studio (BC)  
Georgia Street Media (BC)  
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Faculty of Music (ON)

*The 2024 Digital Emerging Artists Program was generously supported by RBC Emerging Artists, Azrieli Foundation, and Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation.*



DEAP artists, faculty, and MO staff celebrate the completion of the 2024 program.



DEAP participant mezzo-soprano Taryn Plater with bassist Harmeet Virdee at a recording session.

# CONNECTING WITH SUPPORTERS

*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

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

## Sit in On the Sitz

A benefit for donors of \$100+, Sit in On the Sitz is an opportunity for donors to experience the first rehearsal of the singers with the orchestra. Prior to sitting in on the

rehearsal at the Centennial Concert Hall, guests enjoy light refreshments and a chat with the director followed by a Q&A. *The Elixir of Love* director, Ann Hodges, was featured in the fall with a Q&A led by Next Stage artist Kyler Humble. In the spring, donors heard from Anna Theodosakis, who made her Manitoba Opera debut as director of *La Bohème*. Next Stage artist Jayden Fraser led the Q&A.

## Dinners Before the Show

### THE ELIXIR OF LOVE OPENING NIGHT DINNER

On Saturday, October 26, the Opening Night Dinner launched the 2024/25 Season. Guests enjoyed a themed dinner on the Piano

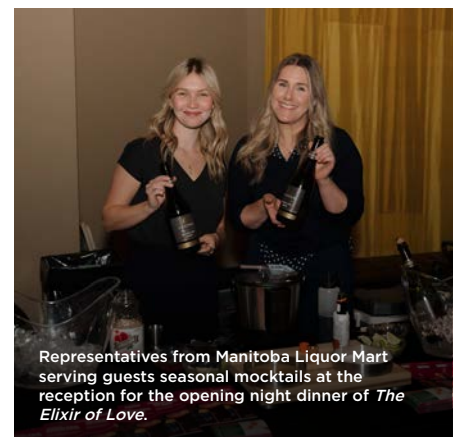
Nobile which was kicked off with a reception featuring sparkling wine and a Manitoba Liquor Mart mocktail tasting. Guests then enjoyed a three-course dinner catered by Bergmann's on Lombard, with paired wine selections by Season Wine Sponsor Manitoba Liquor Mart. The Honourable Glen Simard, Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism brought greetings.

### LA BOHÈME CLOSING NIGHT DINNER

On Friday, April 11, guests were welcomed to the season's Closing Night Dinner with complimentary beverages provided by Welcome Sponsor Liquor Mart. Soprano Lara Ciekiewicz prepped guests with a pre-show chat while guests enjoyed a delectable buffet catered by Bergmann's on Lombard.



(l-r, back) Rob Winter and Dr. Sheri Gibbings, Martin Gurtman, Dr. Andrea Darnbrough and Louie Ghiz.  
(l-r, front) John Pacak, Board of Trustees, Dr. Clare Ramsey, and Dr. Diane Ramsey.



Representatives from Manitoba Liquor Mart serving guests seasonal mocktails at the reception for the opening night dinner of *The Elixir of Love*.





(l-r, front ) Theresa Barker, Monica Huisman, Shauna Briscoe, Laurie Lam, Veronica Dyck, Assistant Minister Manitoba Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism. (l-r, back) Dr. Mark Barker, Kyle Dyck, Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO. Photo: G. Ouskun

## Intermission Receptions

During the mainstage production intermissions, Manitoba Opera hosts receptions attended by Camerata donors, government officials, sponsors, and special guests. The receptions provide a unique opportunity to connect with our most dedicated supporters and to build meaningful relationships with those who want to keep opera alive in our community.

## 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 the post-show receptions on opening night of each mainstage production. Held on the Centennial Concert Hall's Piano Nobile, the receptions are catered by Bergmann's on Lombard. The spring reception included a celebration of Tyrone Paterson who has been the music advisor and principal conductor for the company over two decades.

## Donor Appreciation Event

On Sunday, March 2, Camerata and Friends donors gathered on the Piano Nobile for an appreciation event which celebrated supporters who made gifts of \$100 and up.

Our 2024/25 roster of Next Stage artists, accompanied on piano by Megan Dufurat, performed a selection of works at the event.

*Next Stage Artists are listed on page 27.*

## Lake of the Woods Musicale in Support of DEAP

On August 24, 100 guests gathered for a memorable evening of music, food, and wine in support of the Digital Emerging Artists Program.

Set against the picturesque backdrop of Dr. Mark and Theresa Barker's lakeside residence in Lake of the Woods, ON, the evening featured captivating performances by Dr. Minna Chung, Shannon Hiebert, Gwen Hoebig, Monica Huisman, Dr. David Moroz, and Dr. Fraser Rubens.



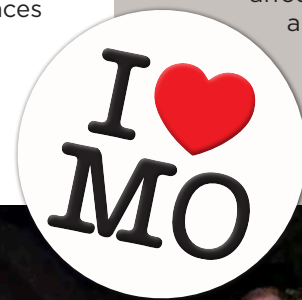
Gwen Hoebig, Dr. Fraser Rubens, Theresa Barker, Monica Huisman, Shannon Hiebert, Minna Chung, Dr. David Moroz, and Dr. Mark Barker after the Lake of the Woods concert.

## I HEART MO CAMPAIGN

During October and November 2024, Manitoba Opera launched the "I ♥ MO" campaign in conjunction with performances of *The Elixir of Love*, celebrating the passion our patrons have for opera. Staff and volunteers hosted a lobby table at each show, providing the opportunity for our development team to connect directly with audience members and encourage their support.

"I ♥ MO" postcards and stickers enabled patrons to proudly show their support for Manitoba Opera wherever they go.

In February, we continued "I ♥ MO" with a digital micro-campaign timed for Valentine's Day. Delivered entirely through email and social media, this initiative invited supporters to share their love for Manitoba Opera and "be our valentine" by donating. This heartfelt campaign not only highlighted our community's enduring affection for opera, but also inspired new support, resulting in 19 new gifts.





# 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 \$6M, 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, 2025, including all pledges and forecasted matching funds, The Power of Voice has raised \$5,134,733 towards our goal of \$10M.



Gerald Matheson and Luisa Matheson, MO Board of Trustees, at the Opening Night Dinner reception at *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: G. Ouskun

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**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.**

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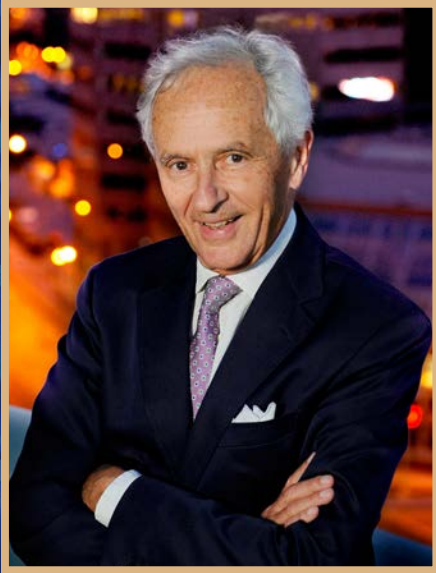
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Mazel Tov on the birth of Simon, Gail  
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In Memory of John Buhler  
Elba Haid ♦  
In Memory of Ruth Buhler  
Elba Haid ♦  
In Honour of Luisa Matheson's  
Birthday  
Elba Haid ♦  
In Honour of Her Honour, the  
Honourable Anita Neville Lieutenant  
Governor of Manitoba for hosting the  
King Charles III Coronation Award  
Event  
Elba Haid ♦  
The Honourable Senator Marilou  
McPhedran, Thank you for nominating  
me for the King Charles III Coronation  
Award  
Elba Haid ♦  
In Honour of Eileen & Bob Stuebing's  
55th Wedding Anniversary  
Nadine Hink ♦  
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# A GALA RECEPTION

IN HONOUR OF

## *Michael Nesbitt*

RECIPIENT OF



THE GAIL ASPER AWARD

WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 2025

Manitoba Club, Winnipeg

On Wednesday, May 28, nearly 200 generous sponsors, donors, and guests gathered at the Manitoba Club to celebrate Michael Nesbitt, recipient of The Gail Asper Award.

Established in 2018 by Manitoba Opera, this award recognizes outstanding leadership and honours individuals who, like Mr. Nesbitt, turn vision into reality and, in doing so, make the world a better place.

Michael Nesbitt is one of Manitoba's most influential philanthropists whose vision and generosity have transformed the province's cultural, healthcare, and educational landscape. His support has brought world-class artists and exhibitions to Winnipeg, championed local talent, and strengthened organizations including Manitoba Opera. Mr. Nesbitt has also funded scholarships and innovative programs at the University of Manitoba and the Women's Heart Health: Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at St. Boniface Hospital.

A dedicated supporter of Manitoba Opera for decades, including service on the board of trustees, Mr. Nesbitt's leadership and

philanthropy have helped ensure the company's artistic excellence and community impact for generations.

Guests honouring Mr. Nesbitt enjoyed an elegant evening featuring a memorable performance by Canada's premiere coloratura soprano, Tracy Dahl, C.M., accompanied by MO Assistant Music Director & Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, as well the sophisticated jazz stylings of the Parker Beesley Trio. The evening also included heartfelt tributes, a video presentation, and special remarks from MO's General Director & CEO Larry Desrochers and Board of

Trustees Chair Judith Chambers. The event was hosted by John Kearsy.

This year's Gala raised an outstanding \$238,457 in support of the company's operations and The Power of Voice Endowment Fund.



The Parker Beesley Trio performing at the Gala Reception in Honour of Michael Nesbitt. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Lori Yorke, MO Incoming Chair, Board of Trustees, Larry Desrochers, General Director & CEO, Michael Nesbitt, Judith Chambers, MO Chair, Board of Trustees. Photo: R. Driedger





(l-r) Bonnie Buhler, Larry Desrochers, MO General Director & CEO, Gail Asper, O.C., O.M., LL.D., John Pacak, MO Board of Trustees and 2025 Gail Asper Award Co-Chair, Elba Haid, MO Board of Trustees Past Chair and 2025 Gail Asper Award Co-Chair. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Richard Irish, Deborah Thorlakson, Elba Haid, MO Board of Trustees Past Chair and 2025 Gail Asper Award Co-Chair, and Alex Robinson. Photo: R. Driedger



Tracy Dahl, C.M. performing "Caro Nome" from *Rigoletto*. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Michael Blais, MO Director of Operations, Dr. Susan Thompson, O.M., former mayor of Winnipeg and Gail Asper Award Honorary Cabinet member, and Sandy Chahal, MO Board of Trustees. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Michael Nesbitt, Bonnie Buhler, and Judith Chambers, MO Chair, Board of Trustees. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Tara Letwiniuk, Nicole Chabot, Martin Gurtman, Markus Chambers, Deputy Mayor and City Councillor for St. Norbert - Seine River, and Judith Chambers, MO Chair, Board of Trustees. Photo: R. Driedger



(l-r) Brian Thiessen, Gail Asper Award Honorary Cabinet member, Michael Nesbitt, Henry Thiessen, Ida Albo, and guest. Photo: R. Driedger



John Kearsy, emcee for the Gala Reception in Honour of Michael Nesbitt. Photo: R. Driedger

## MANITOBA OPERA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF OUR 2025 GAIL ASPER AWARD GALA RECEPTION SPONSORS AND DONORS

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The Hill Family

Innovo XL

Don Konantz

Lana Maidment

Dr. Arnold Naimark

PCL Construction

Colin & Jenny-Lou Ryan  
- Wellington-Altus  
Private Wealth

Sons and Daughters of  
Italy, Garibaldi Lodge

Eileen & Robert Stuebing

Bruce Klassen  
& Karen Dunlop -  
Tamarack Industries

Deborah Thorlakson

Don White  
& Treena Hastings

### Print Media Sponsor



### Floral Partner

Academy Florist

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### Donations

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Nick Logan  
& Christine Skene

Victoria Newall

Stephen Runge

Sandra & Harvey Selter

Charles Shore

Henry Thiessen

## CABINETS

### Honourary Co-Chairs

Daniel Bubis

H. Sanford Riley, C.M., O.M.

### Co-Chairs

Elba Haid

John Pacak

### Honourary Cabinet

Gail Asper, O.C., O.M., LL.D.

Dr. Michael Benarroch

Dr. Stephen Borys

Susan Glass

Dr. Arnold Naimark

Kristie Pollard-Pearson

Brian Thiessen

Dr. Susan Thompson, O.M.

Arni Thorsteinson

Deborah Thorlakson

### Cabinet

Sandy Chahal

Flavia Fernandez Fabio

Peter George

Lana Maidment

Anthony Maros

Luisa Matheson

Andrea McLandress

Keith Sinclair

Lori Yorke

Larry Desrochers\*

Evan Maydaniuk, CFRE\*

\* Staff



# ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Karen Santos (Giannetta) with members of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *The Elixir of Love*. 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, Judith Chambers will be retiring from the board of trustees. Since joining the board in 2018, Judith served as vice-chair until 2020 before taking on the role of chair of the board and chair of the Executive Committee. Her leadership, thoughtful guidance, and commitment to strong governance have played a key role in the organization's continued growth and success. Judith will continue to serve on the board as past chair for the 2025/26 season.

Keith Sinclair concludes his service on the board of trustees after four full terms. A member since 2018, Keith most recently served as vice-chair of the board and served on the Governance Committee. He

supported recruitment efforts within the organization through his work with Harris Strategies, helping to strengthen our succession planning.

Dr. David Folk is also retiring after four full terms. Since 2018, David served on the Community Engagement Committee, bringing a valuable perspective that supported Manitoba Opera's outreach and audience development efforts.

In addition to those members completing full terms, we thank Ray Karasevich, who departs from the board after joining in 2022. Ray served on the Governance Committee and contributed thoughtful insights that helped inform board policy and best practices.

We also extend our deep appreciation to Elba Haid, who will be leaving the board and has been named Director Emeritus. Elba joined the board of trustees in 2007 and served as chair from 2015 to 2020, continuing to support the organization as past chair. A passionate arts advocate, she played an instrumental role as Co-Chair for The Gail Asper Award, and Co-Chair for The Power of Voice Endowment Campaign helping to raise funds and champion Manitoba Opera throughout the community.



(l-r) Tracy Dahl, Ian Paterson, Dr. William Pope, Lyndsay Polakoff, Dr. Elizabeth Tippet Pope, Paul Bruch-Wiens, Kathy Domoney, Ron Wersch. Photo: G. Ouskun



(l-r) Antoni Zoledowski, Kathy Gawlik, George Nytepchuk, Deb Nytepchuk, Kathy Wach-Dueck, and Cristina Pyrz-Kowall at the post-show reception for *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Driedger

Manitoba Opera is grateful to Judith, Keith, David, Ray, and Elba for their advocacy, leadership and dedication, and they will be missed around the board table.

At the 2024/25 Annual General Meeting, members re-elected were Sandy Chahal, Charlene Ord, John Pacak and Grant Suderman. Trustees in mid-terms are Paul Bruch-Wiens, Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas, Flavia Fernandez Fabio, Lana Maidment, Luisa Matheson, Andrea McLandress, and Bill Pope.

Joining the board of trustees this year is Anthony Maros, a senior private banker at BMO with more than 20 years of experience in the financial sector. He brings extensive expertise in commercial relationship management, mergers and acquisitions, and corporate finance, along with a strong interest in the arts. We also welcome Dr. Verona Wheatley, a physician at Medigroup Portage Clinic. Originally from the United Kingdom, Dr. Wheatley brings two decades of international healthcare experience and a thoughtful, community-focused perspective to her work in Winnipeg.

Returning to the board is Incoming Chair Lori Yorke, who previously served as a trustee and chair of the Finance Committee. Lori has remained connected to the organization, serving on the Finance and Leadership Transition Committee. She was also a guest

at board meetings beginning in January 2024.

The staff looks forward to working with this talented group of trustees and to another successful season under their leadership.

## Professional Development

General Director & CEO Larry Desrochers represented Manitoba Opera as a delegate at the 2024 World Opera Forum, held in Los Angeles. As part of the session: Becoming Engaged Cultural Citizens, Larry participated in global conversations on how opera companies can embrace their roles as civic institutions - reflecting, responding to, and collaborating with the communities they serve. The session focused on strategies to deepen engagement through inclusive storytelling, educational partnerships, and

innovative outreach models. Larry's participation reaffirmed Manitoba Opera's commitment to cultural citizenship and informed the company's approach to outreach, advocacy, and audience development over the 2024/25 season.

In March, Dr. Scott Miller contributed to a thesis study on mature themes in opera educational resources that was conducted by a master's student at Davidson University (North Carolina). The opera study guides for Manitoba Opera's productions of *Don Giovanni* (2018), *Susannah* (2019), and *Carmen* (2024) demonstrate an approach to discussing mature themes in operas that maintains the intended emotion of the original work and provides activities to assist students in processing emotions that occur as a result of engaging with the work.



Patrons having fun at the photo wall.



*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



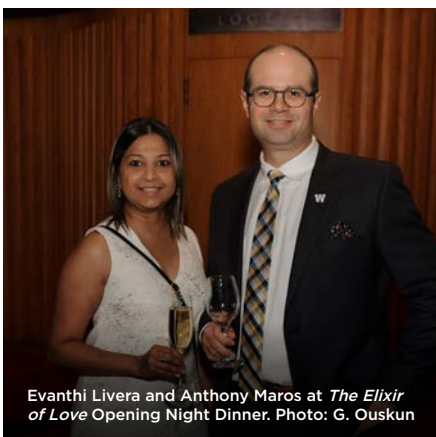
On March 4, Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing and Dr. Scott Miller, Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, participated in the Manitoba Arts & Cultural Tourism Summit hosted by Tourism Manitoba at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

This summit provided data-driven insights into the behaviours and motivations of cultural tourists from within Manitoba and from outside the province. Featured speakers presented topics that celebrated the "critical mass" of creatives and distinctive cultural assets in Manitoba, outlined strategies for audience development, and explored trends in arts and culture tourism. The summit included a panel discussion on Indigenous tourism that highlighted the challenges that Indigenous creators and organizations face in connecting with the settler-dominated cultural sector.

Breakout sessions allowed the opportunity for participants to identify ways in which cultural tourism can have a direct impact on their audiences and the communities they serve.

## Boards and Committees

Evan Maydaniuk sits on the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School Board, advising the school's leadership, collaborating with artistic and executive directors, and advocating for the school's vision and values.



Evanthi Livera and Anthony Maros at *The Elixir of Love* Opening Night Dinner. Photo: G. Ouskun

## Staff Roster

The 2024/25 season marked another year of evolution for the staff complement that supports the mission of the company.

Tania Douglas, Director of Development, departed the organization in June 2024 to become the executive director at the St. Amant Foundation. During her time at Manitoba Opera, Tania led the development team through key fundraising initiatives like The Power of Voice Endowment Campaign and was instrumental in deepening donor engagement, and expanding community partnerships.

Ashley Boychuk, who served as grants and sponsorship manager, left in December 2024 to take on the role of manager of annual giving and stewardship at CancerCare Manitoba. Ashley contributed significantly to the organization's fundraising success through her work on grant applications, sponsorship proposals, and stewardship planning.

Nadine Hink, who joined the company as development assistant in February 2024, departed in February 2025 to become the partnership and events coordinator at the St. Amant Foundation. Nadine provided essential support on The Power of Voice Endowment Campaign, including donor research, administrative coordination, and preparation of campaign materials.



Michael Nesbitt and emcee John Kearsey doing a Q&A at the Gala Reception in Honour of Michael Nesbitt. Photo: R. Driedger

# LENDING A HELPING HAND

As a flagship arts organization in the province, each year Manitoba Opera provides support to other arts organizations, particularly smaller opera and music companies/organizations.

Support can vary from promotional/marketing assistance and administrative advice to sponsorship.

**In 2024/25, the following organizations were lent a helping hand:**

- Art Song Lab
- Associated Manitoba Arts Festivals
- Choralfest
- Costume Museum of Canada
- Desautels Faculty of Music
- Flipside Opera and Art Song Collective
- Grit and Grace
- Legal Services for Artists
- Little Opera Company
- Manitoba Sings
- Manitoba Underground Opera
- Proximus 5
- Winnipeg Music Festival

The company also welcomed new team members throughout the year. In July 2024, Sofia Escamilla, a former student ambassador, joined the company as the Opera Access ticket coordinator for the 2024/25 season. She managed community ticketing initiatives for *The Elixir of Love* and *La Bohème*, working closely with partner organizations to remove barriers to attendance. In April 2025, Sofia transitioned to the role of development and sponsorship assistant, supporting donor relations and corporate partnerships.

Evan Maydaniuk joined Manitoba Opera as director of development in January 2025 and has been leading the department with a focus on strategic fundraising initiatives, including the launch and stewardship of The Gail Asper Award honouring Michael Nesbitt.

Keely McPeck joined the organization as development assistant in February 2025. She provided administrative support to the development team and played a key role in donor communications, event logistics, and campaign coordination.

### Building Bridges

The 2024/25 season marked the sixth year of Manitoba Opera's Building Bridges project, which continues to guide the company's reconciliation work and its

relationships with Indigenous communities across Manitoba.

As a signatory to the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord, Manitoba Opera has committed to four calls to action. The company fulfilled its commitment under Call to Action 83 with the fall 2023 production of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, the first Indigenous-led opera to be presented on a Canadian opera mainstage.

### OUR WORK CONTINUES IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING CALLS TO ACTION:

#### Call to Action 92i – Indigenous Engagement and Advisory

Rather than establishing a formal advisory council at this time, we are prioritizing a relationship-based approach to engagement. This includes meeting with Indigenous communities in their spaces, listening to their perspectives, and building trust through ongoing, respectful dialogue. These relationships will inform future Indigenous-led projects and help shape our long-term reconciliation framework.

#### Call to Action 92ii – Procurement and Recruitment

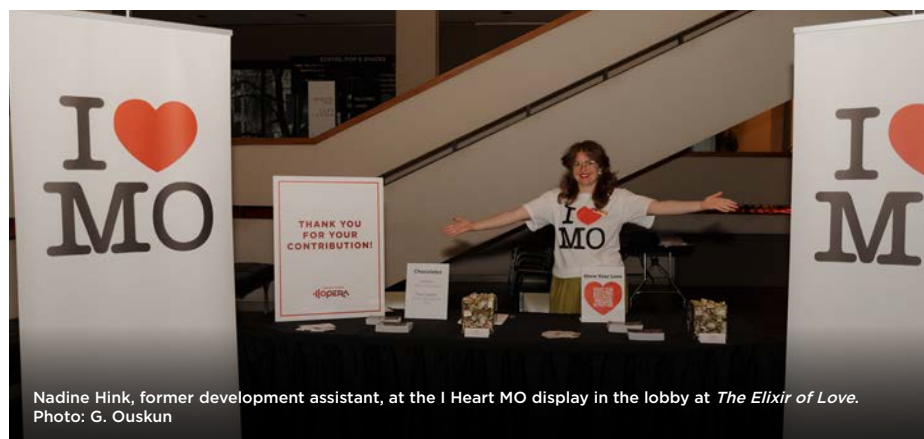
In November 2024, we implemented an Indigenous Procurement Policy to prioritize Indigenous-owned businesses in our purchasing decisions. We also continue to encourage Indigenous applicants

through inclusive hiring practices and have recently welcomed new Indigenous staff members, furthering our goal of increasing representation within our organization.

#### Call to Action 92iii – Education and Awareness

Staff have completed the University of Alberta's Indigenous Canada course, with follow-up presentations fostering continued reflection and learning. Educational resources, including books, documentaries, and presentations, remain available to both staff and board members to support ongoing understanding of Indigenous histories and contemporary issues.

Through these initiatives, Manitoba Opera remains committed to advancing reconciliation in a way that is authentic, responsive, and community informed.







Jorell Williams (Sgt. Belcore) with members of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



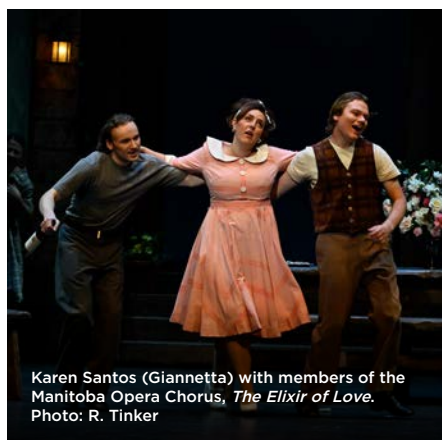
David Watson (Alcindoro) and Charlotte Siegel (Musetta), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Peter McGillivray (Dr. Dulcamara) and Jonah Hoskins (Nemorino), *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



Zachary Rioux (Rodolfo) and Suzanne Taffot (Mimi), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Karen Santos (Giannetta) with members of the Manitoba Opera Chorus, *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Andriana Chuchman (Adina), *The Elixir of Love*. Photo: R. Tinker



*La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

# THE BUSINESS OF OPERA

## MODERNIZING PRACTICES TO DRIVE GROWTH

Zachary Rioux (Rodolfo) and Suzanne Taffot (Mimi), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker

**The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to the performing arts sector. From 2020 to 2022, organizations across the country were forced to suspend live, in-person programming.**

For Manitoba Opera, this resulted in a \$935,000 loss in box office revenue and a marked decline in the subscription base. By the time operations resumed, ticket sales had returned to only about 60% of pre-pandemic levels. While some regions of the country began

showing signs of recovery, data from the Prairies indicated that this region was lagging behind.

In response to these challenging conditions, Manitoba Opera joined forces with 16 other performing arts organizations from across the Prairies, each grappling with similar setbacks. This included Alberta Ballet, Calgary Opera, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, Theatre Calgary, Vertigo Theatre, The Citadel Theatre, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra, Globe Theatre, Regina Symphony Orchestra, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Prairie Theatre Exchange, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

Together, the consortium engaged PAA, a government relations and communications firm, to advocate for increased support for the arts sector and to influence federal cultural policy. These efforts resulted in the creation of a \$20 million fund, administered through Prairies Economic Development Canada, to be distributed over three years. This bridge financing will give organizations the necessary time and resources to rebuild their audiences through innovative and strategic approaches.

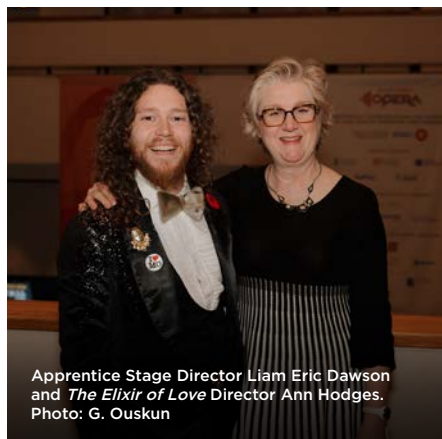
The proposal for funding submitted by Manitoba Opera - The Business of Opera - outlined a comprehensive, multi-year initiative aimed at rebuilding audiences, strengthening finances, and modernizing our practices to drive growth. The company was awarded the full amount possible - \$750,000 - which will be a truly transformative investment in the organization and the largest single investment ever received by the organization from any level of government. This strategic project focuses on innovation and technology and is transforming the way Manitoba Opera engages with patrons, donors, and communities.

When live performances resumed in the 2022/23 season, Manitoba



The Dakshinamurtis at *The Elixir of Love* Opening Night Dinner. Photo: G. Ouskun





Apprentice Stage Director Liam Eric Dawson and *The Elixir of Love* Director Ann Hodges. Photo: G. Ouskun



Post-show reception for *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Driedger

Opera had to rebuild its audience from the ground up. The initial return strategy, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the company, focused on pairing affordable comedic productions along with community celebration – the 50th Anniversary Gala Concert.

Recognizing the need for a transformative approach, Manitoba Opera pivoted in 2023/24 with programming that would both advance equity and reconciliation, through productions like *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, and re-engage broader audiences with beloved classics like *Carmen*. The 2023/24 season saw a modest improvement in single ticket sales and the year ended with a small surplus.

Despite these efforts, subscriber figures only achieved 70% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the 2023/24 season. The Business of Opera will act as an evolution of these strategies from the previous two seasons.

### Attracting A More Diverse Audience

Central to the initiative is the goal of making opera accessible and meaningful to a wider and more diverse population, including Indigenous, Black, LGBTQ+, and

younger audiences. Strategic casting, partnerships with community organizations, and culturally resonant programming are tools being used to build connection and relevance. Alongside these programming choices, the company's Opera Access ticket program ensures access to the art form for those who face barriers to attendance.

### Data-Informed Decision Making

A major investment in technology was initiated in 2024 with the adoption of Spektrix, a modern CRM, ticketing system, and donor management software. Complemented by platforms like FundraiseUp, DotDigital, and Dynamo Pricing, this digital infrastructure now allows the company to track and analyze customer behaviour, segment audiences, and personalize communications in a more sophisticated way than previously possible.

Consultants from Capacity Interactive and Baker Richards have been engaged to analyze audience trends, help build loyalty models, develop pricing strategies, and assess marketing effectiveness using Google Analytics and other software tools.

### Donor and Sponsor Development

Alongside audience development, Manitoba Opera is transforming its donor engagement strategy. New digital tools are streamlining the donation process, personalizing stewardship, and enhancing reporting on impact. Customized sponsorship opportunities are being designed to better align Manitoba Opera's offerings with the priorities of corporate sectors.

### Looking Ahead

With the foundations laid in the first year, the next 18 months will see the integration of data-driven models to guide both marketing and fundraising. Dynamic pricing algorithms, new segmentation frameworks, and audience loyalty strategies will be finalized and implemented to increase revenue yield and deepen patron engagement.

In the coming years, Manitoba Opera will embrace a new way of working in the opera sector: one that centers audience, modern technology, and strategic programming to achieve our goals. The Business of Opera is more than a recovery plan, it's a reimagining of how opera companies can serve and connect with their communities.

### Supported by:



Prairies Economic  
Development Canada

Développement économique  
Canada pour les Prairies



# PRAIRIE PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATIONS UNITE TO INSPIRE RENEWED PASSION FOR LIVE PERFORMANCES

Manitoba Opera united with Prairie arts organizations to promote live arts attendance through a unique multi-media campaign - Prairie Live Arts Campaign - that ran from September 23 to December 9. The concept for the campaign was developed by Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Prairie Theatre Exchange, and the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre.

The Prairie Live Arts Campaign represented the collaborative effort of 13 live performing arts organizations from five cities: Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary.

Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan) supported the project with a \$500,000 contribution under the Community Economic Development and Diversification Program. The project was managed by Manitoba Opera, including monitoring the budget

and filing reports with PrairiesCan, setting campaign schedule, and liaising with the marketing agency.

Under the guidance of a steering committee, the campaign employed a vibrant and bold creative approach that was developed by the Winnipeg-based The Show and Tell Agency.

Through discussion and a survey conducted as part of the campaign consultation process, arts organizations confirmed audiences have been more tentative to return to venues and that season subscriptions, the core of performing arts groups audiences, have been rebuilding more slowly than expected.

Though a project of this scope had never been attempted before by Prairie performing arts organizations, the campaign out-performed industry benchmarks for efficiency across all platforms.

Display, Meta, and TikTok) to drive visibility and brand awareness across the digital landscape.

## Target Audience

People aged 30+ in the above-mentioned locations with interests directly or indirectly related to dance, opera, theatre, orchestra, or live arts in general.

## Campaign Outcome

### DIGITAL MARKETING

31.2M impressions, 1.1M users, 151K website visits

### DIRECT MEDIA

33.1M impressions, 2.4M connected TV views, 100% delivery

### ORGANIC AND OWNED RESULTS

27 organizations posts, 850+ organic engagements, earned (free articles) Media reach.

“We were thrilled to have the opportunity to remind audiences through a wide-reaching marketing campaign that every live arts experience is unlike anything else,” commented General Director & CEO Larry Desrochers, who led the initiative and funding proposal. “We would not have been able to run a campaign of this breadth alone and were very pleased to have the federal government lend its support.”

## Campaign Goal

Increase awareness of live arts events in Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg.

## Digital Approach

A digital campaign was launched combining static and video ads across three platforms (Google



Outdoor billboard in Winnipeg.

## Supported by:



Prairies Economic  
Development Canada

Développement économique  
Canada pour les Prairies





# FINANCE REPORT

**Manitoba Opera posted an operating surplus of \$5,000 following an internal transfer of \$47,082 to its board-designated Operating Reserve Fund. As of May 31, 2025, the Reserve Fund has a balance of \$314,561, up from \$267,479, to support its activities and programs for FY 2026.**

due to a variety of factors including funds raised through The Gail Asper Award (\$241,000), special fundraising for DEAP (\$94,300), and increased donations in major gifts (\$183,000). As a result of The Gail Asper Award honouring Michael Nesbitt, the organization was able to transfer \$75,000 to the A. Kerr Twaddle Robert H. Thorlakson Manitoba Opera Endowment Fund.

In FY2025 sponsorships returned to normal levels of \$231,000. This decrease from 2024 was due to special sponsorships related to the programming of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* in that season.

Production expenses returned to normal levels. Publicity and Promotions rose significantly, relating to the Prairie Performing Arts Initiative which is offset by funding from Prairies Economic Development Canada. Overall, expenses dropped by 8%.

Good fiscal management doesn't fully explain the expense side of the income statement; savings were also achieved by unfilled staff positions. During the year, the organization was without a director of development for six months and has been without a grants & corporate giving manager since January 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 \$25,000 in support of the City of Song Initiative from Winnipeg Arts Council, \$20,000 from Manitoba Arts Council to aid in sustainability, \$18,832.76 from the City of Winnipeg Mayor's Ball for the Arts, and \$169,982 from Prairies Economic Development Canada for the Prairie Performing Arts Initiative project: The Business of Opera.

## DONATIONS, FUNDRAISING & SPONSORSHIPS

The 2024/25 season saw a modest increase of 5% in donations, fundraising and sponsorships. This is

## Box Office

The season opened with the heartwarming comedy *The Elixir of Love* and concluded with the beloved classic *La Bohème*. There were 1,844 subscribers and while this represents just 70% of pre-pandemic levels, this number reflects a 20% increase over the previous year. Despite this success, single ticket revenue for both productions underperformed. The year ended with \$501,344 in box office receipts.

## Expenses

As in the previous year, savings were achieved across departmental budgets. And, despite inflationary pressures, Administration, Education, and Community Engagement only saw minimal increases in expense budgets. Fundraising expenses rose this season, related to the programming of The Gail Asper Award and

## 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 FY 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, 2025, the fund grew to \$4,227,251 from \$3,262,801 at the end of FY 2024.

# GOVERNANCE

The Governance Committee supports the effectiveness, accountability, and renewal of Manitoba Opera's board of trustees. The committee oversees governance policy, board recruitment and orientation, trustee engagement, and annual evaluations. It also ensures the board reflects a broad range of professional backgrounds and community perspectives, and that it operates with clear expectations and shared accountability.



**69.3% average attendance at board of trustees meetings.**



**Current average trustee tenure is 4.02 years.**



**Trustees serve on an average of 2.29 committees annually.**

## Board Composition and Culture

The board of trustees is a self-renewing body with recruitment and succession planning guided by an annually updated Board Composition Matrix. The matrix helps ensure the board reflects:

- Industry and sector diversity
- Lived experience and demographic diversity
- Geographic and community representation
- Governance experience and strategic skill sets

Committee members bring expertise in law, education, finance, the arts, healthcare, and business. This diversity strengthens decision-making and reflects the cultural fabric of Manitoba Opera's audience and community.

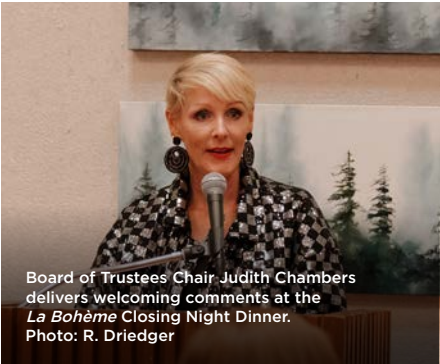
## Governance Practices & Planning

**The Governance Committee:**

- Oversees the annual orientation process for new trustees
- Maintains an annual policy review schedule
- Reviews and updates governance-related documents, including the Trustee Expectations Statement
- Conducts or facilitates annual board assessments to identify strengths and areas for growth
- Ensures board composition remains aligned with organizational needs and strategic priorities

## Diversity Statement

Manitoba Opera is committed to maintaining a board of trustees that represents a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, gender, ethnicity, Indigeneity, age, ability, geography, sexual orientation, and professional expertise. The board seeks inclusive leadership that reflects and serves the full spectrum of the community.



Board of Trustees Chair Judith Chambers delivers welcoming comments at the *La Bohème* Closing Night Dinner. Photo: R. Driedger



# COMMITTEES

## 2024/25 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### Executive

Judith Chambers, Chair  
Paul Bruch-Wiens  
John Pacak  
Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas

### Audience Rebuilding

D. Grant Suderman, Chair  
Michael Blais ♦  
Paul Bruch-Wiens  
Judith Chambers\*  
Larry Desrochers ♦  
Flavia Fernandez Fabio  
Dr. Bill Pope  
Darlene Ronald ♦  
Ashley Schneberger ♦

### Community Engagement

Charlene Ord, Chair  
Ashley Boychuk ♦  
(until December 2024)  
Holly Brown  
Sandy Chahal  
Dr. David Folk  
Leona Herzog, Past Chair  
Keely McPeck ♦  
Dr. Scott Miller ♦  
Paul Ong  
Darlene Ronald ♦  
Dr. Colette Simonot-Maiello

### Finance

John Pacak, Chair  
Judith Chambers\*  
Flavia Fernandez Fabio  
Andrea McLandress  
D. Grant Suderman  
Lori Yorke

### Governance

Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas,  
Chair  
Michael Blais ♦  
Judith Chambers\*  
Larry Desrochers ♦  
Ray Karasevich  
Andrea McLandress  
Keith Sinclair

### Leadership Transition

Judith Chambers, Chair  
Michael Blais ♦  
Paul Bruch-Wiens  
Larry Desrochers ♦  
Flavia Fernandez Fabio  
Charlene Ord  
John Pacak  
Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas  
Keith Sinclair  
D. Grant Suderman  
Lori Yorke

**Judith Chambers**  
CHAIR

**Paul Bruch-Wiens**  
VICE-CHAIR

**John Pacak**  
TREASURER

**Terence Sakohianisaks Douglas**  
SECRETARY

**Sandy Chahal**

**Flavia Fernandez Fabio**

**Dr. David Folk**

**Elba Haid**  
PAST CHAIR

**Ray Karasevich**

**Nupur Kumari**

**Lana Maidment**

**Luisa Matheson**

**Andrea McLandress**

**Charlene Ord**

**John Pacak**

**Dr. Bill Pope**

**Keith Sinclair**

**D. Grant Suderman**

♦ Staff Member \* Ex-Officio



General Manager & CEO Larry Desrochers and Board of Trustees Chair Judith Chambers deliver closing remarks at the 2025 Gail Asper Award Gala Reception. Photo: R. Driedger

# VOLUNTEERS

This season, 50 volunteers gave their time and effort to assist Manitoba Opera staff with a variety of essential duties, contributing to the season's success by providing nearly 250 hours of volunteer service.

## Duties included:

- Greeting guests and patrons at productions and events
- Staffing the boutique and renewals tables at our productions
- Assisting with box office operations at our productions
- Preparing mailings for season tickets, ticket renewals, and fundraising campaigns
- Collecting donations for education programs through our Pass the Hat initiative
- Stuffing season brochures for the 2025/26 renewal campaign



Manitoba Opera volunteers and Next Stage artists show how much they "heart" MO at *The Elixir of Love*.



(l-r) Next Stage artists Jaden Fraser and Eli Granger; Amanda Joy Smith; and volunteer Marilyn Slobogian staff the Boutique at *La Bohème*.



(l-r) Volunteers Hedie Epp, Ray and Barb Gislason, and Annette and Randall Hay at the season renewal tables at *La Bohème*.

## 2024/25 VOLUNTEERS

Katrina Adrian Epp  
Tatiana Balik  
Francesca Cesari  
Carlie Chartier  
Evan Chartier  
Donna Cuming  
Jackie Dubofsky  
Christopher Dunn  
Bev Dyck  
Livia Dymond  
Hedie Epp  
Lynne Fairhall

Francine Gillman  
Ray Gislason  
Barb Gislason  
Rita Greco  
Cleo Harcus  
Liz Harris  
Annette Hay  
Randall Hay  
Derrick Heaton  
Ryan Heaton  
Stewart Heaton  
Lena Horne

Stacy Joy  
Susan Kelso  
Elaine Kisiow  
Bev Laurin  
Letty Lawrence  
Ariel Leo  
Cheryl Liessens  
Andrea Mahalek  
Henri Mendy  
Myrna Mitchell  
Charles Pang  
Amy Passmore

Linda Scholz  
Valerie Schussler  
Kurt Schwarz  
Gail Singer  
Marilynn Slobogian  
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Jane Stewart  
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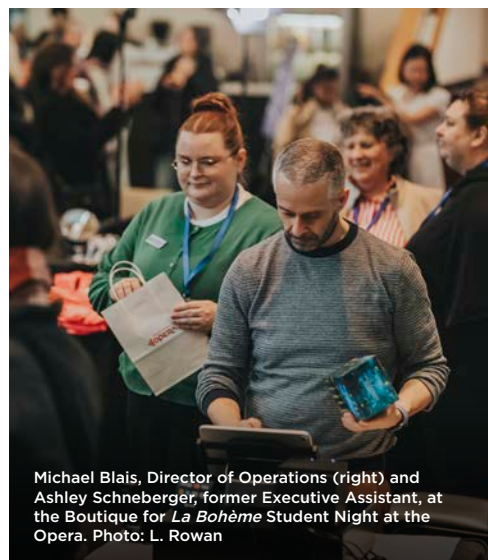
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Sheldon Johnson, Director of Production, and Liz Miller, Annual Giving Manager. Photo: R.Driedger



Michael Blais, Director of Operations (right) and Ashley Schneberger, former Executive Assistant, at the Boutique for *La Bohème* Student Night at the Opera. Photo: L. Rowan



Ashley Boychuk, former Grants & Corporate Giving Manager, with Darlene Ronald, Director of Marketing, at the Opera Uncorked; Wine Appreciation Workshop.



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Zachary Rioux (Rodolfo) and Suzanne Taffot (Mimi), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Students at Student Night at the Opera for *La Bohème*. Photo: L. Rowan

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Gail Asper at the 2025 Gail Asper Award Gala Reception. Photo: R. Driedger



Next Stage artist Sonia Campbell performing at a donor appreciation event.



George Groumutis, Daphne Groumutis, Ianthe Groumutis (La Bohème Children's Chorus members), and Melina Xinos. Photo: R. Driedger





(l- r) Hugo Laporte (Marcello), Alexander Halliday (Colline), Clarence Frazer (Schaunard), and Zachary Rioux (Rodolfo), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker



Suzanne Taffot (Mimi) and Zachary Rioux (Rodolfo), *La Bohème*. Photo: R. Tinker