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the voice of opera in Canada / la voix de l'opéra au Canada

2017-18

# Annual Report



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In 2017/18, we continued to pursue the goals laid out in our strategic plan, Charting our Civic impact by delving into our collective civic practice through the Newfoundland Opera Colloquium. I was very proud to be the host company for this important meeting of the sector, with inspiring speakers and lessons in designing civic impact through opera. As well, we were honoured to be joined by Ron Rice from Pacific Opera Victoria, who led us in an exploration of how opera can respond to recommendations in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Dylan Robinson, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts, who cautioned us in the pitfalls of cultural appropriation as demonstrated through the misappropriation of a Nisga mourning song used in the opera, *Louis Riel*.

The fall also marked the launch of our ground-breaking Coproduction Loan Program, in support of the production of *La Traviata*, in partnership with five Canadian opera companies, the largest coproduction in Canadian history.

Our continued relationship with OPERA America is beneficial to the Canadian opera sector and was strengthened by the opportunity to collaborate again on their Civic Action Learning Group. Opera.ca selected two more Canadian companies, Tapestry Opera and Opera de Montreal to join Pacific Opera Victoria and Manitoba Opera and 8 US companies to form a larger learning cohort. This group met in New York in January 2018, and again in St. Louis for Opera Conference 2018. A valuable resource was developed as result of this effort and is available on the Opera America website.

We continued our connection with the field throughout the year, honouring two Canadians with the National Opera Directors Award, Richard Cook of Edmonton Opera, and a special Emeritus award to Bruce Wright. Both were honoured in February 2018 in New York City as part of the larger OPERA America Trustee Weekend.

In spring, a delegation of Canadians was present in Madrid for the first ever World Opera Forum, and we were proud to be supported by Global Affairs Canada and the Trade Commission through a special reception at the home of the Canadian Ambassador to Spain, Matthew Levin. The reception featured a performance by soprano, Suzanne Rigden, a co-founder of the new *Musique 3 Femmes*.

Thanks go out to our committed hard-working board of directors for their contributions to the field over the past year, and to also thank Executive Director Christina Loewen for her insights, leadership, and sound financial oversight.

Cheryl Hickman

## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The writing of the annual report is a satisfying task, and hope it is equally satisfying to read. These reports are a time for reflection and looking back on all that has been achieved, and 2017/18 was really an amazing year. So much of the heavy work around our current strategic plan came to fruition with the second year of the Civic Impact Learning Group, and the collection of stories of the good work being done in the sector in this area.

I was honoured last December to speak at the meeting of National Arts Service organization at the Canada Council for the Arts in Ottawa on the theme of evaluation. Because our plan is about measuring impact, I was invited to share how the Opera sector is doing this. Even though we had not defined our framework yet, sharing our learning was an unparalleled opportunity to trumpet the success of all our member opera companies to a national audience in increasing their civic practice. Collectively, your powerful stories of civic activities provided strong evidence-based evaluative impact, demonstrating concepts like equity, creating belonging, leading with your assets, focussing on the beneficiary, and setting brave targets for change. It was a proud moment for opera in Canada, and I had many requests for my presentation from delegates after the meeting, and very positive remarks, affirming that the opera sector has established best civic practices, and is positioned to lead in evaluative impact.

Another area where we lead is in our financial strength, a position unique among arts service organizations. The remainder of the former COCF, now at over \$500,000 was created from interest earned on years of well-invested capital. This allows us to explore the world of Impact Investing, delivering creative and renewable support to the sector in the form of coproduction loans, and in the future look forward to leveraging and bolstering this fund through social impact bond offerings in support civic practice, evaluation, market development, and other identified areas of support.

With regard to Advocacy, we both collaborate on events like Arts Day on the Hill in Ottawa, as well as meet with parliamentarians for Opera Advocacy Days, last year speaking to MPs in February 2018 about the absence of Opera in our nation's capital. On behalf of the opera sector, I was also invited to appear as a witness before the Standing Committee of Canadian Heritage on gender equity, and to make recommendations.

We are working hard to adopt many of these recommendations ourselves, within our own organizational policies around diversity and equity. I am pleased to see that with the election of both Chantal Lambert and Marion Newman, we have nearly achieved gender equity, with a goal to be at parity by next year, while also nominating our first board member of indigenous heritage, artist Marion Newman of the Kwagiulth and Stó:lō First Nations and look forward to learning and practicing decolonization from a board perspective.

We have good geographic and linguistic representation and have enhanced our representation among artist training institutions now with both Opera de Montreal's Atelier Lyrique and Opera McGill represented.

With this annual meeting, and the soon to be articulated framework for measuring opera's civic impact, we will have achieved what we set to in our strategic plan, Charting our Civic Impact. We will also have laid the groundwork for many new strategic goals to emerge and be supported through our financial strength. For those in attendance at the Education Summit in Montreal in September 2018, it was clear to me the seeds of a new goal being sown in the area of Artist Development and Training.

Thank you to the board of directors for their thoughtful leadership and guidance on so many initiatives this year, and a special mention to our Chair Cheryl Hickman who also sits on the board of Canada Council for the Arts. Cheryl is tireless leader and advocate for opera and dedicates so much of herself to actively representing the sector at home, in our capital and abroad.

Christina Loewen

## FINANCIAL REPORT

The 2017/18 finance audit committee member were Tim Yakimec, Edmonton Opera, Tom Wright, Vancouver Opera and Dale Sulymka, Manitoba Opera.

### **Overview**

The 2017/18 Opera.ca auditor's report was unqualified and the auditor was satisfied with the systems and procedures in place. For the year ending June 30 2018, the Association reported an operating surplus of \$2,561, an improvement over the projected year end position of -\$3,500 due mostly to earned investment interest and improved unrealized gain on investment.

### **Investments**

Management of our portfolio was provided by TD Waterhouse up to August 2018 at which point, they were transferred to Harbourfront Wealth Management, to better serve our level of activity, future programming, and service goals. Our overall net assets at year end, including the Board Designated Operating Reserve is \$533,018.

Complete financial statements are available by request to [c\\_loewen@opera.ca](mailto:c_loewen@opera.ca)

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## LEADERSHIP INTENSIVE

AUGUST 2017

In 2017, we selected two Canadians, **Nicole Malcolm**, Development Manager of **Pacific Opera Victoria** and **Robin Whiffen**, Manager of Artistic Operations of **Opera on the Avalon** to participate in OPERA America's Leadership Intensive. As part of the Leadership Intensive, participants convened at the National Opera Center in New York City in August 2017 for a weeklong learning program in strategic issues, building essential skills and fostering strong professional connections. These developing leaders are now prepared to apply new skills, share their learning with colleagues and demonstrate leadership that will contribute to their local companies and communities.

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## NEWFOUNDLAND OPERA COLLOQUIUM

SEPTEMBER 2017

The **Newfoundland Opera Colloquium DESIGNING CIVIC IMPACT IN OPERA** was a great success, attended by over 20 delegates from Opera companies coast to coast. The event opened with a beautiful reception overlooking St. John's harbour at The Rooms and attended by Newfoundland's Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, **the Hon. Christopher Mitchelmore**. Other highlights of the gathering included an inspiring keynote address by **Susan Knight**, Chancellor of Memorial University and a presentation by **Ken McLeod** on Sistema NB. Renowned activist, speaker and social/cultural innovator **Arlene Goldbard**, offered guidance and direction on socially-engaged artistic practice, as well as led several workshops exploring practices and processes for deepening civic engagement for opera companies. Indigenous leaders in opera, **Ron Rice** and **Dylan Robinson** helped delegates explore the relationship between Opera, Indigeneity, and The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. Special thanks to our local hosts, **Opera on the Avalon**, **Cheryl Hickman** and staff, program funder **Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency** and the **Canada Council for the Arts** for travel support.

Video from the event: <https://splice.gopro.com/v?id=6mWXDz>



**Pictured (L-R): Marc Scorca, CEO OPERA America, Ian Rye, CEO, Pacific Opera Victoria, Tim Yakimec, General Director, Edmonton Opera, Christina Loewen, Opera.ca, Opera.ca Board Chair Cheryl Hickman of Opera on the Avalon**

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## COPRODUCTION LOAN PROGRAM

OCTOBER 2017

In October, we launched a new innovative new service to members, **The Coproduction Loan Program**. The loan program provides low interest, repayable capital to members involved in a major coproduction. Coproducing is a proven strategy for opera companies to meet and exceed the ever-changing expectations of audiences and to achieve higher production values for operas than they could alone. Coproducing however requires significant upfront investment from partners, who may not be presenting the opera in their communities until several years later. The Coproduction Loan Program responds to the needs of an under-capitalized sector by providing much needed financing for coproduction activity. The pilot year of the program supporting a new coproduction of *La Traviata* with partners, Manitoba Opera, Edmonton Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Vancouver Opera, and Opera de Montreal. This Coproduction of five partners in four provinces spans 3 fiscal periods from 2017 to 2020. This collaboration is the largest coproduction in the history of Canadian opera and is providing a model for future collaborative activity and increasing the sector's capacity for coproducing.

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## GRAND SALUTE TO BOB MCPHEE

OCTOBER 2017

Opera company general directors from across Canada came to Calgary in October 2017 to honour one of our greats, Bob McPhee at his Grand Salute, after announcing his retirement earlier that year.

Executive Director Christina Loewen was joined by members Kim Gaynor and Tom Wright of Vancouver Opera, Larry Desrochers, Manitoba Opera, Cheryl Hickman, Opera on the Avalon, as we paid tribute to Bob McPhee and the lasting impact he has had on **Calgary Opera**.

Pictured (L-R): Larry Desrochers, **Manitoba Opera**, Opera.ca Executive Director Christina Loewen, Opera.ca Board Chair Cheryl Hickman (of **Opera on the Avalon**), Jim Wright, former (retired) General Director, **Vancouver Opera**.



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## ARTS DAY ON THE HILL

NOVEMBER 2017

Executive Director Christina Loewen participated in **The Canadian Arts Coalition's Arts Day on the Hill** that was held on November 2, 2017. This is an annual opportunity to bring arts advocates from across the country together to collectively to speak to federal stakeholders and to talk with them about the value that the arts bring to Canadian communities.

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## OPERA.CA ADVOCACY DAYS

DECEMBER 2017



**Opera.ca Advocacy Days** were held on December 4 and 5th in Ottawa this year. Advocacy Committee members, **Cheryl Hickman**, **Amy Mushinski**, and **Christina Loewen** attended meetings with over 15 members of parliament, senators and staffers. In addition to sharing stories around the important contributions opera companies make to their communities, they highlighted the importance of the presence of opera in our nation's capital. Since the unfortunate close of Opera Lyra in 2015, opera has not had a regular presence in Ottawa or onstage at the **National Arts Centre (NAC)**. The Advocacy team carried forward the recommendation that the act of parliament governing the affairs of the NAC, be amended to include opera in its definition of the performing arts.

Pictured (L-R): Opera.ca Board Chair Cheryl Hickman (of **Opera on the Avalon**), Canadian Senator **René Cormier**, Opera.ca Advocacy Committee member Amy Mushinski (of **Canadian Opera Company**), and Opera.ca Executive Director Christina Loewen.

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## OPERA.CA SPEAKS ON IMPACT AT NATIONAL ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS MEETING

DECEMBER 2017

On December 9, 2017, **Opera.ca's** Executive Director, **Christina Loewen** spoke at the annual meeting of National Arts Service Organizations on the theme of Assessing Impact. Drawing on examples of civic action in the opera sector across Canada, she illustrated various questions to ask when evaluating the overall impact of programs designed to create change. Her presentation **8 QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING IMPACT** can be found [here](#).

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## CIVIC ACTION LEARNING GROUP – SECOND COHORT

JANUARY 2018

In January, we selected two more Canadian companies to participate in the second year of the OPERA America led learning group on Civic Action in New York City, Tapestry Opera and Opera de Montreal joined Year one companies, Pacific Opera Victoria and Manitoba Opera and eight other US opera companies.

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## NATIONAL OPERA DIRECTORS RECOGNITION AWARDS

FEBRUARY 2018

In February, Opera.ca honoured the 2018 recipients of the National Opera Directors Award and the Opera.ca Opera Directors Emeritus Award, Mr. Richard Cook and Mr. Bruce Wright, respectively. Both were on hand in New York City in February for a special presentation, surrounded by opera company board members from their own communities and from across Canada.



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## WORLD OPERA FORUM

APRIL 2018



In April, Opera.ca Executive Director Christina Loewen led a Canadian delegation of opera company representatives Cheryl Hickman, Michael Mori, Ian Rye, Evan Hazell, Patrick Corrigan and Michel Beaulac in the first ever World Opera Forum in Madrid. Hosted by Teatro Real and organized by Opera Europa, OPERA America and OperaLatinoAmerica, the two-day forum delved into four considerations around opera's heritage, new works, diversity and advocacy, punctuated by provocations, and various fishbowl conversations. We fortunate to be hosted by Canadian Ambassador to Spain, Matthew Levin and Rosalba Imbrogno Levin at a special pre-conference reception at the Official Residence, which also featured a stunning performance by Canadian soprano Suzanne Rigden.

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## APPEARANCE – CANADIAN HERITAGE STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENDER PARITY

MAY 2018

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is studying gender parity in senior positions and boards of directors of arts organizations in Canada. Opera.ca Executive Director Christina Loewen was a witness at the opening meeting on May 1 in Ottawa. Recommendation made included the need for gender parity analysis and research to best understand the current situation, funding for female mentorship and second-in-command positions, as well as investment in programs for arts boards in inclusive practices, unconscious bias and diversity in board composition.

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## OPERA EUROPA CONFERENCE ROTTERDAM

MAY 2018

Executive Director Christina Loewen travelled to Rotterdam to participate in Opera Europa's conference Heroic Stories, where she moderated a panel on *Managing Resources in Small Organizations*. Other Canadian present at the conference were member Lawrence Cherney of Soundstreams, individual member Colin Mendez Morris of ArsMusica, and Daniel Swift from the Canada Council for the Arts.

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## SELFIE FROM THE PINK TEAM – WORLD OPERA FORUM

FUN TIMES 2018



Pictured (L-R): Ian Rye, Pacific Opera Victoria, Traci L. Wilson, Cincinnati Opera, Lidiya Yankovskaya, Chicago Opera Theater, Opera Theatre, CL, Erollyn Wallen, composer, Kamala Sankaram, composer, in front Valérie Chevalier, Opéra-Orchestre de Montpellier

## OPERA.CA BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2017-18

*Cheryl Hickman - Chair*  
Artistic Director  
Opera on the Avalon

*Michael Mori- Vice-Chair*  
Artistic Director  
Tapestry Opera

*Tom Wright – Secretary-Treasurer*  
Director of Artistic Planning  
Vancouver Opera

*Dean Burry*  
Canadian Children's Opera Chorus

*Kim Gaynor*  
General Director  
Vancouver Opera

*Prof. Patrick J. Hansen*  
Associate Professor  
Opera McGill

*Ian Rye*  
CEO  
Pacific Opera Victoria

*Colleen Sexsmith*  
Past chair of the board  
Canadian Opera Company

*Tim Yakimec*  
General Director  
Edmonton Opera

*Marc Scorca*  
Ex-officio  
President and CEO, OPERA America

## OPERA.CA STAFF & SUPPORT SERVICES

*Christina Loewen*  
Executive Director

*Susan Durnin*  
Membership and Communications Services

*Simone Auger*  
Translation Services

*Amanda Whitney*  
Accounting and Book-keeping Services

# OPERA.CA THANKS ITS FUNDERS AND DONORS FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN 2017-18

## PUBLIC FUNDING SUPPORT, GRANTS



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

## FOUNDATIONS AND AGENCY



Atlantic Canada  
Opportunities  
Agency

\*INDIRECT: ACOA supports Opera on the Avalon, our hosts for the Newfoundland Opera Colloquium.

## FUNDING INDIVIDUALS

### *\$500 and Above*

Mr. Richard Cook  
Mr. Larry Desrochers  
Ms Christina Loewen

### *Up to \$499*

Ms Kim Gaynor  
Ms Margaret Genovese  
Ms Cheryl Hickman  
Ms Ha Neul Kim  
Mr. Michael Morres  
Mr. Alexander Neef  
Mr. Robert Vineburg  
Mr. James W. Wright  
Mr. Tom Wright  
Mr. Tim Yakimec