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Annual Report 2015/16

Photo Credit: Ours, Opera on the Avalon 2016 Photo: Nate Gates

Message from the Chair

I am delighted to report to members on 2015/16 and my first year as Chair of the board of Opera.ca. It's the first year of our new strategic plan Charting Our Civic Impact voted into effect at the Annual Meeting of Members in October 2015. Our plan has one goal; to lay the groundwork for increasing opera's civic impact. To achieve this plan, we will develop a sector-wide framework to deepen and measure our public value, and encourage our member companies to use the framework in their own communities to increase their civic impact.



Our plan is uniquely tied and well-suited to our times. The opera milieu in Canada continues to transform and renew itself, and companies are seeking to deepen their community impact in response to demographical, cultural and societal changes. Some of these transformations are also generational, notably the emergence of Indie Opera TO, which has recently benefitted from an Audience Development grant awarded through our association with Opera America. Leadership changes at larger institutions are also afoot as Vancouver Opera prepares for its first full year as a festival, under the leadership of Kim Gaynor, their new General Director. Other leadership changes include Patrick Corrigan, heading l'Opera de Montreal as its new General Director replacing Pierre Dufour. In Victoria, Patrick's successor at Pacific Opera Victoria is Ian Rye, their previous Director of Production. Ian was chosen as one of the first Canadian cohort to attend the Opera Leadership Intensive program in 2011. While we were saddened by the closing of Opera Lyra Ottawa in November 2015, in its wake, Opera.ca is participating in some exciting discussions and negotiations around how some of the finest opera from across the country can be presented or produced onstage at the NAC.

Advocacy remains a core service to our members, and in February 2016, we held Opera Advocacy Day in Ottawa to address the absence of opera in our nation's capital. We met with members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage as well as Randy Boissonnault, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage to underscore the importance of opera in Ottawa.

Our continued relationship with OPERA America is strong and beneficial to the Canadian opera sector, and in May 2016, we demonstrated the strength of this partnership by co-hosting their upcoming international opera conference in Montreal. A highlight of the conference was the shared US/Canadian New Works Sampler, where we showcased Canadian creativity in new opera development.

I would like to thank our committed and 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
Chair of the Board of Directors

Executive Director's Message

Every fiscal year should begin with beautiful vistas, mountain air, and a rousing call to action. Such was the start of 2015/16 as the opera sector convened in the Rockies for the 5th bi-annual Banff Opera Colloquium. Themed Collaborations for Change we learned how to “think like a movement” and shared lessons from the world of social innovation and their applications to the opera field. It was a fitting warm up and dress rehearsal to the unveiling of our new Strategic plan, Charting our Civic Impact, which members approved without reservation at our AGM in October 2015.

Later in November, we convened an Ontario Opera Roundtable in advance of the Ministry of Culture's consultation on the development of a new cultural strategy. Over 25 people attended in what was probably the most generationally diverse convening I have seen in my time at Opera.ca, heralding a remarkable and resilient future for the sector. And so it was with some sadness and irony, when that same month, Opera Lyra Ottawa announced it would close its doors for good.

In contrast to this news, opera companies across Canada showed their will to thrive, responding boldly to an increased mandate for impact, finding new ways to connect with their communities, increasing their relevance and civic impact, and driving innovation and creativity onstage. Opera de Montreal's announcement that they would produce a new opera based on Roger Waters' The Wall is one example of this creativity, and the announcement that Vancouver Opera would transition into a festival in 2017 demonstrates the responsiveness of the sector to changes in their community.

Professional opera company membership has begun a steady recovery after the previous decreases. Opera.ca is in a position of some financial strength with a Board designated operating reserve built over time by the effects of operating surpluses. We finish this year with a near break-even position, posting a small deficit. After re-investing our reserve funds, we are now seeing increased revenues from interest that can fund strategic activities that flow benefits back into the field.

I would like to recognize and thank our board chair Cheryl Hickman for a wonderful job in her first year as Chair. She is a true champion of sector-wide issues and is a consistent and effective representative and spokesperson for the field in Canada.

Thank you as well to my board of directors and our members for the work you do, not only in your own cities, but for the benefit of the wider field and for the proliferation and success of the art form of opera we all love so much.

Christina Loewen
Executive Director



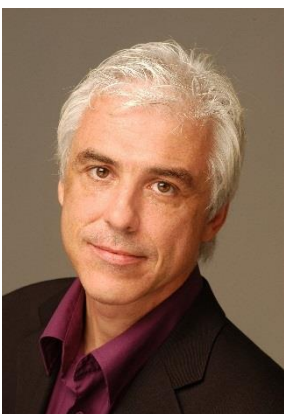
Celebrating Bernard Stotland



(Pictured L to R: Larry Desrochers, Christina Loewen Bernard and Merle Stotland, Cheryl Hickman)

Opera.ca honoured Bernard Stotland with the National Opera Directors Recognition Award. The award, in its 8th year, honours one opera company volunteer director annually for exemplary leadership and support on behalf of their respective opera companies within their communities across Canada.

In recognition of service



On behalf of its members, the board of directors of Opera.ca would like to thank Patrick Corrigan and Pierre Dufour for their year of service on the board of Opera.ca.



The Banff Opera Colloquium



The fifth Banff Opera Colloquium opened early in our fiscal year, July 17-19, 2015 with the theme of “Collaborations for Change”. It featured a keynote address by author, social innovator and Order of Canada recipient, Al Etmanski. His new book, *Impact: Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation* was recently published in February 2015 (impact6.ca)

While there, delegates also attended two presentation’s of the Open Space Summer Opera Program, a new opera, *Crush* by James Rolfe and Anna Chatterton, and *A Little Too Cosy*, an adaptation of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* by Against the Grain’s Joel Ivany.

OPERA America in Montreal

For the second time since 2013, we were partnered with OPERA America as their annual conference headed to Montreal in May 2015. The conference, called *Global Strategies/Local Actions*, was attended by delegates from all over North America.

Opera.ca opened the conference with a Kick-off Breakfast on May 18, where we updated member on our strategic plan, shared company reports, and recognized retiring General Director Jim Wright, as well as Bernard Stotland, the 2016 recipient of the National Opera Directors Award.

New Works Showcase

We were delighted to share the stage with Opera America for the New Works Sampler held on Friday, May 19 to a sold out house at Place des Arts. Four new Canadian operas were featured in the Canadian half of the evening: Ours submitted by Opera on the Avalon, *Stickboy* submitted by Vancouver Opera, *Six Revolutions* submitted by Opera de Montreal and *M’dea Undone* submitted by Tapestry Opera.

Opera Advocacy Day in Ottawa



(pictured L to R: Cheryl Hickman, Julie Dabrusin, MP Toronto-Danforth, Christina Loewen, James Wright)

Opera.ca's Advocacy team, James Wright, Vancouver Opera, Cheryl Hickman, Opera on the Avalon, and Christina Loewen went to Parliament Hill in February to meet with MPs on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. As this meeting was pre-budget, we stressed the importance of increased investment to the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as bringing forward the issue of lack of opera in our nation's capital after Opera Lyra Ottawa folded in November the previous year.

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2015/16**

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Canadian Opera Company
Chants Libres
Edmonton Opera
l'Opera de Montreal
l'Opera de Quebec
Manitoba Opera
Opera Kelowna
Opera Lyra Ottawa
Opera on the Avalon
Pacific Opera Victoria
Saskatoon Opera
Soundstreams
Tapestry New Opera
Vancouver Opera

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2015/16**

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