

OPERA SUMMIT WINNIPEG

Embracing Challenges, Unlocking Opportunities



November 20-22, 2023
Canadian Museum for Human Rights
Fort Garry Hotel, Concert Hall

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Summary/Overview

Opera Summit 2023, November 20–22, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Embracing Challenges, Unlocking Opportunities

Co-hosted by Manitoba Opera on the occasion of the production of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, a new work of music and theatre written and conceptualized by Métis poet/librettist Dr. Suzanne Steele (Gaudry/Fayant), with music by Métis composer/fiddler Alex Kusturok and composer Neil Weisensel.

Sponsored by:

Summit Gold Sponsor: Manitoba Opera

Summit Opening Reception Sponsorship: Elba Haid and Realcare, Inc; Skybridge Artists

Summit Title Sponsor: Canadian Opera Company

Summit Lunch Sponsor: Vancouver Opera

Summit Coffee Break Sponsors: Dean Artists Management; Domoney Artists Management; Women's Musical Club of Winnipeg

Funders: Canada Council for the Arts; Ontario Arts Council

Schedule

Monday November 20

- 9:00 am to 4:00 pm National Auditions
5:00 pm to 7:00 pm Opening Reception, Manitoba Club
7:00 pm to 9:00 pm Threepenny Submarine Watch Party

Tuesday November 21 – Canadian Museum for Human Rights

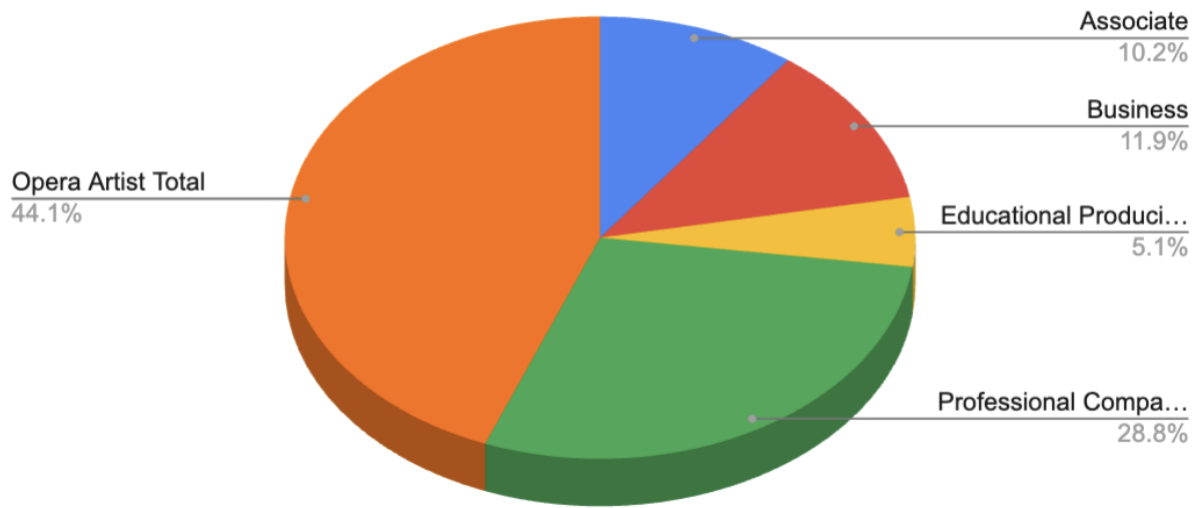
- 8:00 am to 9:00 am Thought Bubbles:
- Rebecca Hass (Pacific Opera Victoria): Power sharing with our visiting/ resident artists
 - Barbara Scales (Latitude 45 Arts | International Music Booking Agency): Making an Opera
 - Lawrence Wiliford (Canadian Art Song Project): Producing creative work for film and the digital media ecosystem: What is our role as a sector in Canada?
- 9:00 am to 9:30 am Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, Opening Ceremony
9:30am to 10:15 am Keynote Address, The Honourable Patricia Bovey, FRSA, FCMA, Former Independent Senator for Manitoba
10:30 to 11:00 am Setting the Context, Christina Loewen, Executive Director, AOC
11:00 am to 12:30 pm Revitalizing the Art Form through the Wisdom of the Room, David B. Devan
1:30 pm to 2:30 pm Sectoral Initiatives, Rich Coburn, BIPOC Voices, Women in Musical Leadership, Michael Mori and Camille Rogers
2:45 pm to 3:45 pm Revitalizing the Art Form: Action Breakouts
3:45 pm to 5:15 pm Official Tour of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights
8:00pm to 10:00pm Opéritifs, an Opera Cabaret (Little Opera, Flipside Opera)

Wednesday October 22, Fort Garry Hotel, Concert Hall

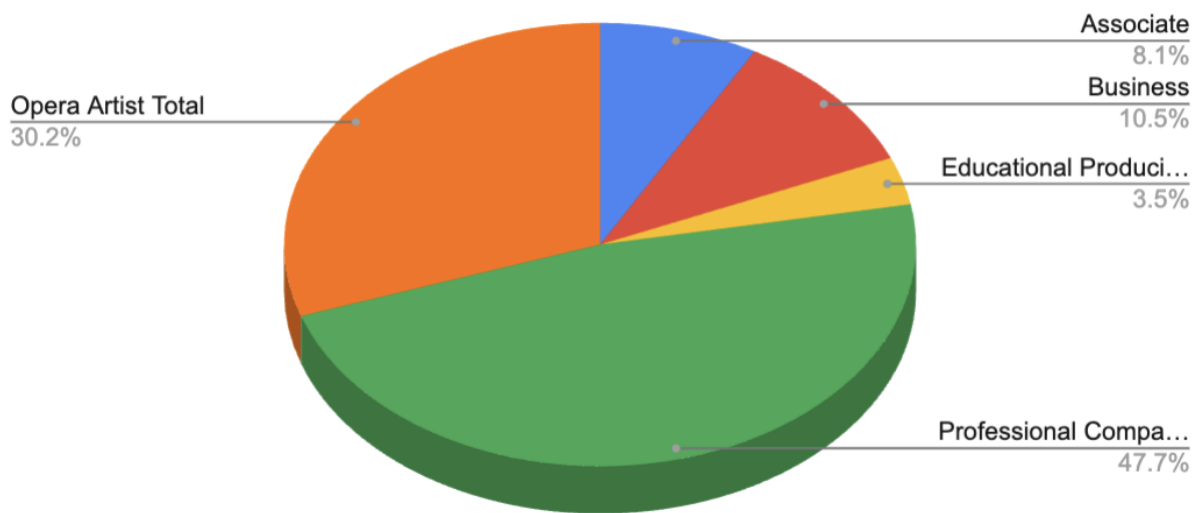
- 8:00 am to 9:00 am Thought Bubbles: Breakfast Conversations
- Yvette Guigueno (Pacific Opera Victoria): Making a case for opera in a troubled world
 - Rachel Krehm (Opera 5) New Models for a Sustainable Careers and Institutions
- 9:00 am to 10:00am Fostering the Next Generation of Leadership, Moderator: Rebecca Hass
- Jean-Pierre Primiani, Director of Development, Opera de Montreal
 - Jennifer Szeto, Director, Atelier Lyrique, Opéra de Montréal
 - Juliane Gallant, Associate Artistic Director, Tapestry Opera
 - Rachel Krehm, General Director, Opera 5
 - Robert Milne, Trustee, Pacific Opera Victoria
- 10:15 am to 11:15 am Action Breakouts on Leadership Theme
11:15 am to 12:30 pm: Conversation Cafés:
- Producers Forum A (Smaller and Indie)
 - Producers Forum B (Mid and Large)
 - Your Artist Future is Now
 - Universities and Training Programs
- 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm Social/Alternative Finance In The Arts: A Consultation
3:15 pm to 4:00 pm Findings
7:00 pm to 10:00 pm Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North (Manitoba Opera)

Who was in attendance?

Registration Breakdown by Membership



Individuals in Attendance



Session Findings

Revitalizing the Art Form

[Click here for the full report from David Devan:](#)

Through four guided prompts of Stop, Start, and Continue, breakout groups explored the following questions:

In order to revitalize the art form:

1. What do we (I) need to stop doing?
2. What do we(I) need to start doing?
3. What do we (I) need to continue doing?
4. What is one thing AOC can do?

What do we (I) need to stop doing?

During the summit, attendees shared a myriad of insightful responses on what the opera community should cease doing as it hinders progress and detracts from overarching goals. There was a call to reconsider the high pricing of tickets. Attendees advocated against performing operas in unfamiliar languages, and outdated artist training. There was a collective plea to redefine success beyond past generations and to avoid overly prescriptive definitions of opera. The consensus included avoiding compromise with core missions for funding, and breaking free from the shackles of familiar venues. The need to address representation issues in programming, avoid programming blockbusters exclusively, and steer clear of assuming the past as the sole solution for the future were recurring themes. Overall, the responses underscored a collective desire for the opera community to break free from limiting beliefs, embrace change, and focus on creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and artistically vibrant future.

What do we(I) need to start doing?

Summit participants offered a wealth of constructive suggestions on actions and behaviors that can contribute to positive impacts within the opera community. A recurring theme was the importance of valuing input from all contributors, including both artists and administrators, fostering open conversations. Emphasis was placed on making opera more accessible by reaching out to communities, engaging in dialogue with non-institutional perspectives during project creation, and integrating audience engagement with performances. Attendees advocated feeding the ecosystem with amateur productions. The community was urged to expose young students to opera in the curriculum and implement reasonable ticket pricing scales. The importance of paying all artists a living wage, offering free or pay-what-you-can tickets for community previews, and showcasing new works by Canadian, equity-seeking composers and librettists, including indigenous languages, was highlighted. Other suggestions included initiating contemporary opera productions, research and development ensembles, community opera series, composer/librettist residencies, and vocal arts festivals.

What do we (I) need to continue doing?

Summit attendees highlighted several practices that are currently serving the long-term goals and priorities of the opera community. Participants emphasized the value of creating new works, supporting and protecting younger artists, and maintaining a patron-centered approach for experiences. There was a consensus on the falsehood of the notion that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives work against artistic excellence. Participants expressed the need to continue the core activity of producing opera while challenging conventional boundaries and calling projects opera even if they diverge from traditional norms. The commitment to producing and programming contemporary work was reinforced as a positive strategy. The nurturing of the full creation-development-production process for female creators and operatic leaders, commissioning new music, and working with

composers were seen as valuable practices. Attendees advocated for the continuation of initiatives such as school shows, free performances, and projects that engage young artists.

What is one thing AOC can do?

Summit attendees provided a range of suggestions for the Association for Opera in Canada (AOC) to enhance its role and impact. Key recommendations include positioning the AOC as a hub to facilitate connections and collaborations. Participants expressed the need for the AOC to enrich and inspire the community, expand the definition of equity-seeking, and compile a list of resources related to the topics discussed. Attendees advocated for the AOC's involvement in creating a multi-organizational program for comprehensive composer and librettist training, more advocacy at both federal and provincial levels, and city-specific events for networking and education. The community emphasized the importance of regular meetings, mentorship programs. Suggestions also involved addressing broken developmental pipelines in the industry, supporting opera companies through FaceTime/Zooms with boards, and sharing programming resources for BIPOC composers and works. Additionally, attendees called for the AOC to continue its work, reach out to smaller companies, serve as an artists' representative outside of Equity, and highlight the financial challenges faced by performing artists. The community proposed the creation of an online accomplice hub, inclusion of community choirs and non-professional opera groups, and the breaking of silos between artists, administrators, and agents. The AOC was urged to address audition conditions, offer opportunities for monthly learning sessions, and consider hiring a lobbyist for the arts. Lastly, participants suggested yearly check-ins with member organizations, transparent communication across different industry levels, and spotlight sessions on organizations and artists to share their experiences and insights regularly.

Supporting Next Generation of Leadership

Through four guided prompts of Stop, Start, and Continue, breakout groups explored the following questions:

In order to support the next future generation of leaders in the art form –

1. What do we (I) need to stop doing?
2. What do we(I) need to start doing?
3. What do we (I) need to continue doing?
4. What is one thing you can do yourself right now from where you are?
5. What is one thing AOC can do?

What do we (I) need to stop doing?

In summary, the findings urge a reevaluation of the traditional pathways to arts leadership, emphasizing the need to diversify and be open to different backgrounds. Report backs advises against apologizing for one's vision or current position and calls for breaking down silos, avoiding myopic thinking, and not valuing worth solely based on external opportunities.

The findings advocate for ending prescribed career paths, acknowledging the multifaceted skills of portfolio artists, and redefining leadership. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing existing talent, promoting collaboration, and discouraging complacency in leadership development. Additionally, it highlights the need to stop gatekeeping, embrace diversity, and adapt to contemporary approaches in arts and education.

What do we(I) need to start doing?

he proposal outlines a comprehensive plan to revitalize and improve the opera industry, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and leadership development. Key initiatives include creating networks for new producers, sharing information, promoting compensation transparency, and encouraging bilingualism in Canada. It also calls for education and training efforts targeting hiring managers and boards, as well as universities and young artists. The

plan seeks to bridge the gap between education and professional organizations, expand mentorship opportunities, and involve artists in administrative processes. It advocates for the inclusion of diverse voices, the identification of emerging leaders, and proactive leadership transitions. Additionally, it emphasizes community engagement, vocal training, and value-driven opera production.

What do we (I) need to continue doing?

The key points in this statement revolve around fostering professional development, embracing mentorship, expanding roles within Young Artists Programs (YAPs), maintaining transparency, listening to diverse voices, engaging with indie companies for leadership opportunities, creating work experiences for young talents, supporting composer in residence programs, and strengthening relationships with training institutions. Collaboration, networking, and community-building are emphasized, as is the importance of valuing artistic backgrounds for administrative roles. There's a focus on making music more integral to our lives, disrupting traditional norms, and ensuring representation on opera stages while continuing education and audience engagement efforts.

What is one thing you can do yourself right now from where you are?

The group's goals and priorities were to shift focus from minor issues to broader perspectives, maintaining a connection with students and colleagues, fostering curiosity, recognizing and nurturing talent, and speaking honestly to demystify the arts.

The findings emphasize mentorship and transparency in leadership, along with creating opportunities for growth. They encourage optimism in leadership training, collaboration with partners, and expanding training programs to include arts management skills.

Additionally, the findings stress the importance of inviting diverse artists into the field, learning from other artistic disciplines, supporting collectives, and promoting internal transparency and trust. Lastly, findings aim to uplift others, reaffirm their leadership role, and contribute positively to their community while cherishing music and colleagues.

What is one thing AOC can do?

The findings focus on AOC enhancing the opera industry in Canada through mentorship, resource development, advocacy, and collaboration. Suggestions include creating a resource bank for opera mentorship, renewing mentorship programs, and facilitating cross-country mentoring.

Advocacy efforts involve lobbying the federal government for arts job placements, affordable internships, and subsidies for artists and creatives. The AOC could establish a toolkit to connect schools with companies and grow its membership through voice faculties. Additionally, the AOC can collaborate with other arts organizations to address sector needs and provide online resources and courses on cultural mediation and artist royalties.

Social Finance Consultation

Breakout groups explored the following questions:

1. How might a loan serve you in your current work that generates a social return and revenue?
2. What are some barriers to your participation?
3. What questions/concerns arise?

How might a loan serve you in your current work that generates social outcome and revenue?

A social finance program tailored to the arts sector could leverage loans in a multifaceted manner, strategically enhancing both social impact and financial sustainability.

One avenue involves utilizing loans to hire fundraisers, thereby amplifying the ability to secure donations and grants over time.

Another avenue is investing in shared spaces through loans, not only addressing artistic needs but also creating an additional revenue stream through space rentals.

Loans can also be directed towards funding leadership training programs, fostering enhanced skills that contribute to increased revenue and broader social impact.

Financing the development of new artistic works, purchasing equipment for rental, and engaging in co-productions with technical innovations represent further possibilities for financial and creative growth.

Additionally, loans can support the production of socially relevant works, attracting both earned revenue and grants, aligning with a dual-purpose mission.

Investments in practice rooms, studios, full-time fundraisers, predictable funding, bridge financing, and audience capacity can all be strategically explored, emphasizing the need for careful consideration based on specific organizational goals and potential returns.

What are some barriers to your participation?

Participation in a social finance program for the arts is hindered by various barriers, reflecting concerns about financial viability, awareness, and organizational capacity. Firstly, the apprehension about the risk of financial failure looms large, posing a significant obstacle for potential participants. Additionally, there is a recognized need for increased education about the nature and benefits of such programs. The potential control exerted by investors raises uncertainties about the willingness to invest and the implications for artistic autonomy. The application process, viewed as time-consuming and costly, poses a practical challenge for smaller organizations. Moreover, the perceived inaccessibility of building a project as a small organization raises concerns about liability and feasibility. The requirement for ideas with volume and a longer-term return than a traditional show adds complexity. Convincing boards to embrace the associated risks and qualifying for grants while showcasing a deficit incurred through such investments present strategic challenges. Ultimately, the hesitancy stems from the fear of taking on additional financial risk and potentially jeopardizing the organization's stability in the pursuit of social finance initiatives.

What questions/concerns arise?

Participation in a social finance program for the arts raises a series of questions and concerns that reflect a nuanced apprehension about the mechanics and potential impact of such initiatives. Key inquiries include the identification of the target investor and the repercussions for the recipient if repayment becomes challenging. Questions regarding the similarity to traditional factors and the potential forgiveness of an unpaid loan underscore the need for clarity on financial arrangements. Participants express a concern about the turnaround time from the initial request to notification, highlighting the practical implications of timing. Understanding how the pool of investors functions and how the program compares to existing models, such as the MECENAT Musica model, becomes crucial for informed decision-making. Exploring the advantage of involving more partners, such as orchestras or the Canadian Music Centre, adds a layer of strategic consideration. The overarching worry centers on the level of risk involved, extending beyond individual livelihoods to the entire company. There's a lingering concern about the perception of this being a solution primarily for wealthier individuals, potentially favoring large organizations while posing a substantial risk for mid-sized ones, a nuanced dilemma that complicates the decision-making process for potential participants.

BIPOC Voices and WiML Findings

- BIPOC Voices: <https://morebipocvoices.com/opera-report/>
- Women in Musical Leadership: [WML Presentation Nov 2023.pdf](#)

From Women in Musical Leadership:

Throughout the world, less than 5% of music directors of major orchestras are women. In 2020, Tapestry Opera decided to meet this challenge head-on and developed a revolutionary and comprehensive 3-year pilot program to create new generations of women and non-binary musical leaders to come. Facilitated by Tapestry Opera and in lead partnership with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Pacific Opera Victoria, the Women in Musical Leadership program supports women and non-binary conductors by providing training and placements with orchestras, opera companies, and ensembles across Canada. WML conductors mentor with top conductors across the country, including women who have already trailblazed their way to the top of the field. Through paid placements, WML conductors build professional experience and expand their networks with a range of organizations in symphonic, chamber, operatic, and contemporary repertoire. In addition to hands-on musical experience, conductors also receive leadership skills training, which helps prepare them in their roles as music directors and artistic leaders of professional companies in the future. The included slides show just how transformative Women in Musical Leadership has been in the two and a half years since the program began. Please be in touch with Michael Mori, Tapestry Opera General & Artistic Director, if you have any questions about the program or want to get involved: mmori@tapestryopera.com.

Post-Summit Survey Results

19 responses were received. 66 were required to achieve statistical significance. Margin of error greater than 20%.

- 95% agreed that the Summit was a valuable opportunity to meet colleagues and strengthen relationships.
- 84% agreed that the summit addressed concerns that were relevant to them.
- 74% found the plenary and keynotes sessions useful or inspiring.
- 68% found the small group conversation useful or helpful.

The Summit highlights were: / Les points forts du sommet ont été les suivants :

Honourable Pat Bovey received positive feedback for her session. Networking opportunities, especially with groups of similar budgets, were considered essential. David Devan's contributions, including tapping into group vulnerability and using the "stop/start/continue" tool, were noted positively, with a particular emphasis on the "stop" element for concrete change. The Summit offered crucial networking moments, small group discussions, and engaging activities like the Cabaret evening and Li Keur's performance.

The interactive sessions, such as morning table talks and the Opera5 watch party, were well-received. The report on equity-seeking composers and the introduction to Social Financing were cited as fascinating and important.

Changes that would improve future Summits are: / Les changements qui amélioreraient les futurs sommets sont les suivants :

One recurring theme was the desire to bridge the gap between big companies and smaller indie companies by combining separate group sessions and encouraging the sharing of tools and experiences. There was a call for agents to lead sessions for interested artists. Feedback included a suggestion to allow time for reporting out to the whole group after the "Conversation Cafe" to share themes that emerged. Participants expressed a preference for structured problem-solving sessions rather than random groupings. There was a call for increased representation from training organizations to challenge current models of learning and training.

Other suggestions included enforcing masking for safety, having more trustees in attendance, addressing practical issues related to casting and hiring Canadian singers, and diversifying the Summit format to include walks, casual coffees, and one-on-one sessions.

11% of responses indicate that concepts of equity as detailed in AOC's strategic plan, are not a priority for them.

Subjects I would like to see on future agendas are: / Les sujets que j'aimerais voir figurer dans les futurs ordres du jour sont les suivants :

The survey responses revealed a range of desired subjects for future Summit agendas. Participants expressed a need for discussions on making opera more inclusive and reaching a diverse audience, both in terms of introducing new people to the art form and ensuring its vibrancy. There was a call for better training in Canada for emerging librettists and composers, with potential interest from M3F and support from the Azrieli Foundation. Financial aspects of the operatic world, including realistic discussions about achieving a decent living for performers and administrators, were emphasized. The challenges faced by larger, more mainstream Canadian companies were noted as an area requiring more focus. Discussions on the influence of technology (AI/VR/AR) in opera storytelling, as well as environmental sustainability in opera productions, were suggested

topics. Additionally, there was an interest in integrating Indigenous teachings and wisdom into the opera-making process and exploring sectoral changes through case studies from Canadian or international producers.

Additional comments, observations, ideas, etc: / Commentaires supplémentaires, observations, idées, etc :

A significant point emphasized was the recognition of diverse needs among organizations of different sizes and goals, advocating for a tailored approach rather than a one-size-fits-all solution.

Participants expressed appreciation for the fantastic and unique venues, emphasizing the value of the Summit as a platform for Canadian companies to connect and share information distinctively from the broader North American sector.

The feedback touched upon the need to address the siloed nature of the sector and find ways to demystify how opera companies operate. There were also concerns about the inclusivity of auditions and a call for measures to make the process more equitable. Daily emails about activities, delicious breakfasts, and the availability of snacks were commended. A first-time attendee expressed the unique opportunity the Summit provides to turn collective despair into new visions and appreciated the positive approach of addressing challenges.

The need for more time devoted to production/co-production forums was highlighted, emphasizing the importance of discussing collaborative efforts after addressing concerns. Overall, participants conveyed gratitude for the Summit while offering constructive feedback for refinement and enhancement in the future.

Link to Delegate list – no emails

<https://airtable.com/applOL0MoEcWm4OC5/shrLviVES6k4b29dM>

Link to Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/ISfBTYOI9RPuROexclhkA9VMC88xwII-D>