

YEAR IN REVIEW



2020/2021



THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY

As all of you know, nothing about the 2020/2021 season was ordinary.

But thanks to the inspiring support of our community we have been able to continue finding new and creative ways to adapt to this prolonged period of disruption — all while continuing to invest in our many artists and musicians, and sustaining vital community connections that expand the reach and relevance of opera.

In this report you will learn more about what our partners, members, subscribers, donors, and audience members have made possible over the course of our season of **Opera Everywhere programming**: engaging our artists in innovative projects, building and deepening relationships with local organizations and community partners, and reaching new audiences through our reimagined programming.

Each of the 20/21 season projects outlined in this report was made possible by the financial support of our members, donors, subscribers, and partners. I would like to extend a special thank you to each of you who have made a gift during this past season. We are incredibly grateful for every contribution: your generosity has provided critical support to the singers, musicians, directors, craftspeople and so many others who make up our creative community. I know that our artists' resilient efforts and commitment to securing the future of opera are matched only by your own dedication to this art form, and I am profoundly grateful to you for standing with us during this difficult time.

Together, I know we will rise to the challenge of these unusual circumstances and return to the thrill of live opera. Our new General Director, **Perry Leech**, who took the helm of the COC a short four months ago, has already charted a course for our return to the stage and the recovery of live performance, while looking to sustain and multiply the connections in our communities that allow us to deliver a positive impact through the power of music.

Reflecting on the past season, I remain inspired by the music lovers and COC members who have generously stood by us in 20/21. The report in your hands celebrates the impact of your support and points the way to our future: the moment when we will once again reconnect you with the extraordinary artists and experience of live opera, recognizing your unfailing belief in the transformative power of our art form.

With gratitude and determination,



Deputy General Director
Executive Director, Philanthropy & Audiences



Our Community of Supporters

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTNERSHIP

The support and philanthropic leadership of our members is foundational to all that we do at the COC. Because of your generosity during this unprecedented year, we have been able to continue supporting our community of artists, and find new ways to connect you to opera.

As a supporter, you are a vital partner in our work. Thank you for choosing to be part of the inspiring chain of collaboration that makes extraordinary opera possible!

Opera lovers made close to
8,000 donations
during the 20/21 season.

More than 50%
of COC annual donors
increased their contribution.





Opera Everywhere

BRINGING OPERA TO YOU

In September 2020, we launched **Opera Everywhere**, our reimagined slate of programming created especially for that continued period of uncertainty. Through interactive videos, podcast conversations, and panel discussions on YouTube, your participation in these programs — from over 90 countries around the world — truly brought opera everywhere and made more than **10 million impressions** across our channels.

15,565 hours of programs
watched

92 countries reached

54 artists engaged

SOLO SPOTLIGHTS

In an ongoing series, COC Music Director **Johannes Debus** turned the spotlight on incredible artists often unseen by opera audiences — the brilliant instrumentalists of the COC Orchestra. Over four episodes, each centered on a different opera, orchestra members discuss the pivotal musical moments in a score where the spotlight is on them. With a mix of personal anecdotes, technical tidbits, and stories from just below the stage, each episode was capped with a live solo performance of the excerpt. Nearly 3,000 viewers tuned in to meet this season's guests: COC Concertmaster **Marie Bérard**, Principal Clarinet **Dominic Desautels** (right), flute and piccolo player **Shelley Brown**, and Principal Horn **Scott Wevers**.

Watch all four episodes at coc.ca/SoloSpotlights



KEY CHANGE: A COC PODCAST

With bi-weekly episodes from late October through early June, this digital audio series explored the operagoing experience from a variety of perspectives, with invigorating conversations about the past, present, and future of the art form. Featuring guests from the opera field and beyond — including COC’s own General Director **Perryn Leech**, soprano **Sondra Radvanovsky**, actor/director **Michael Greyeyes** and novelist **Cherie Dimaline** — each episode was co-hosted by classical singer and culture critic **Robyn Grant-Moran**, a member of the COC’s **Circle of Artists**, alongside Canadian stage director, dramaturg, and COC Academy graduate **Julie McIsaac**. With 16 full-length episodes plus a much-loved (and highly entertaining) bonus episode featuring soprano **Rebecca Caine**, *Key Change* gained listeners in over **30 countries**, including Norway, South Korea, Bahrain, and Belgium, with **9,000 downloads** over the course of the season.



Top to bottom: Sondra Radvanovsky, Robyn Grant-Moran, Julie McIsaac

9,000 downloads

Over **4,000** hours listened to

34 artists and guests interviewed

Listen at coc.ca/KeyChange
or wherever you get your podcasts

MINDBODYMUSIC

Hosted by COC Composer-in-Residence **Ian Cusson** (below), this digital panel discussion in October brought together artists and scientists to explore the positive physical and mental impacts of experiencing and participating in music. Panellists included Ensemble Studio soprano **Jamie Groote**, alongside active musicians

Dr. SarahRose Black, **Dr. Charles Limb**, and **Dr. Swathi Swaminathan**, representing the fields of psychotherapy, neuroscience, and psychology respectively. Viewers were able to ask questions in real-time in a live Q&A that followed, with nearly 800 people having caught the chat on YouTube.

Watch the panel discussion at coc.ca/MindBodyMusic



Ian Cusson

GENDER & OPERA

Expanding on the COC’s popular Women in Opera event, this digital roundtable brought together artists and creators from across the arts industry to talk about personal experiences dealing with gender constructs and how they’d like to see change in the performing arts. The discussion and live Q&A was moderated by **Aria Umezawa**, Canadian stage director and co-founder of COC’s new Disruptor-in-Residence, **Amplified Opera**. Panellists included: **Avery Jean Brennan**, **Jonathan Christopher**, Ensemble Studio artist **Jonah Spungin** and Amplified co-founders **Teiya Kasahara** 笠原 貞野, **Marion Newman**, and **Asitha Tennekoon**. More than 1,100 people tuned in across YouTube and Facebook Live.

Watch the panel at coc.ca/GenderandOpera

Gender & Opera

March 5, 2021
7-8:30 p.m. ET



ARIA UMEZAWA
Host

SPECIAL GUESTS



AVERY JEAN
BRENNAN



JONATHAN
CHRISTOPHER



TEIYA
KASAHARA



MARION
NEWMAN



JONAH
SPUNGIN



ASITHA
TENNEKOON

Read more about the COC’s Disruptor-in-Residence, **Amplified Opera** on page 17.



OPERA MAKERS

GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF OPERA LOVERS



In the summer of 2020, we launched **Opera Makers**, a series of interactive video tutorials for young people. The digital program was so successful, it expanded into tailored collaborations, connecting COC teaching artists with local partner organizations. Programming not only supported and responded to community needs and enriched educational curriculum through opera creation projects, it opened

new pathways into the art form for young audiences.

Opera Makers uses hands-on activities to explore every element of an opera, from storytelling and composition, to performance and design. Participants create their own operas, empowering them to tell the stories of their own communities and lived experiences through music.

Thank you to all of the wonderful teaching artists and collaborators at the COC and our partner organizations for an incredible year of opera-making!

SEPTEMBER — DECEMBER

Opera Makers' new community programming launched in the fall in partnership with **Sistema Toronto**, a free after-school music and social development program for children living in underserved communities. Through virtual workshops, COC and Sistema teaching artists facilitated the creation of the program's first digital opera premiere, *Change of Heart*, complete with scenery created with custom Zoom backdrops.

OCTOBER — DECEMBER

In October, Opera Makers began a new collaboration with **West Neighbourhood House** in Toronto. Through weekly online workshops, COC teaching artists worked with young opera makers ages 7-12 to produce *Trial by Fire*, an original opera centred on the importance of environmental caretaking.

OCTOBER — MAY

In a season-long project aimed at closing gaps in literacy and numeracy, Opera Makers partnered with **Heydon Park Secondary School** in Toronto to integrate different forms of learning into HPSS's curriculum. Participants composed original songs, designed and costumed characters, and — throughout the year — were introduced to COC craftspeople in collaborative sessions that highlighted the many tangible entry points into a creative vocation. This spring, more than 70 people attended the virtual finale of the students' hard work, *The Light of Hope*.

MARCH — JUNE

In an Opera Makers first, COC teaching artists teamed up with **Building Roots**, a grassroots organization that fosters social cohesion across Toronto's Downtown East and the **Youth Enrichment Academy (YEA!)**, an initiative designed to address gaps in after-school programming for youth in Regent Park and surrounding communities. Weekly online workshops complemented YEA!'s virtual programming, providing several students with their very first opera, and sometimes music, experience. The students' original opera, *Dreaming Up Change*, premiered this June.

APRIL — JUNE

Opera Makers evolved further this spring with the Arts Connected program at **St. Elizabeth Catholic High School** in Thornhill, Ontario. For the first time, COC teaching artists worked with the entire music department, with different grades responsible for different areas of opera creation. After virtual sessions that included working directly with professional opera artists, the students' opera *Elevator Music* saw its virtual debut in June.

MAY — JUNE

As the Opera Makers program continues to grow, a new partnership with **York Region District School Board** is teaching students the elements of musical composition: participants create bars of original music, which COC teaching artists help to build into a full piece!

COC ACADEMY

MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF OPERA STARS

Thanks to your support, the **COC Academy**, our one-of-a-kind career development program, was able to continue mentorship and training activities through digital sessions and virtual workshops. These programs provide emerging opera professionals and creators with the skills,

experiences, and resources to thrive in a global opera environment. Through virtual sessions, our artists were able to keep honing their artistry, technique, and craft, readying them for the moment they can once again return to the stage and share their talent.

Ensemble Studio artists Alex Soloway (piano) and Jamie Groote (soprano) in performance at the Aga Khan Museum.



ENSEMBLE STUDIO

The Ensemble Studio is our young artist development program for opera singers and pianists/coaches. These early-career artists receive a blend of advanced study and practical experience through an individually tailored, multi-year program.

While the pandemic prevented in-person coachings and workshops from moving forward and severely limited live performance opportunities, the Ensemble Studio used this time to expand the development and mentorship opportunities that artists could participate in virtually, including:

- ◆ Regular one-on-one coachings & roundtables with COC Music Director **Johannes Debus**.
- ◆ Professional development sessions to equip artists for their careers as freelance opera professionals, including career management and representation, agents, civic engagement, and finance.
- ◆ A series of training workshops focusing on building capacity and digital skills including acting for film, self-recording and editing, digital self-promotion and personal websites.
- ◆ Remote coachings and masterclasses with special guests, including: **Jane Archibald, Russell Braun, Gerald Finley, Adrienne Pieczonka**, and **Russell Thomas**.
- ◆ Participation in public industry roundtables, including the COC’s MindBodyMusic and Gender & Opera panels, and **Musique 3 Femmes’** fall pop-up conference discussing new works.
- ◆ Introducing opera to young creatives in sessions with the **Canadian Children’s Opera Company** and Spring Break at the COC programming.

216 hours of vocal lessons

412 hours of diction & language coaching

482 hours of drama & movement coaching

1,119 hours of music coaching

COMPOSER- IN-RESIDENCE

As Composer-in-Residence, **Ian Cusson** has been working on *Fantasma*, a new opera commission written with young audiences in mind. Cusson’s residency has contributed to the collaborative training

approach of the COC Academy: members of the Ensemble Studio were able to participate in workshopping a new opera, and the development of *Fantasma* provided the basis of our Spring Break at the COC program.



Make-up Supervisor Sharon Ryman and Costume Supervisor Sandra Corazza

SPRING BREAK AT THE COC: EXPLORING NEW OPERA

In April, students of all ages tuned in for virtual sessions exploring the creation of *Fantasma*. Hosted by COC Opera Teaching Artist **Makenzie Morgan**, Spring Break at the COC gathered a group of artists and craftspeople to explore different career paths in the performing arts.

Facilitators included COC Composer-in-Residence, and composer of *Fantasma*, **Ian Cusson**, Ensemble Studio artists

Matthew Cairns and **Alex Soloway**, Wig & Make-up Supervisor **Sharon Ryman**, Costume Supervisor **Sandra Corazza**, Props Supervisor **Wulf Higgins**, music therapist **Dr. SarahRose Black**, and dramaturg and director of *Fantasma*, **Julie McIsaac**.

9 artists engaged
190 live participants
3,580 total video views

DISRUPTOR- IN-RESIDENCE

In January 2021, we announced a new addition to the COC Academy: the **Disruptor-in-Residence**.

Toronto-based **Amplified Opera** was selected as the first participant in this unique, two-year residency, which offers resources and support during the critical transition period from start-up to established organization. Throughout the residency, Amplified Opera will have the

chance to share ideas and resources with a large organization like the COC; members of Amplified Opera will also contribute insights and ideas to COC programs, such as the Gender & Opera panel held in March 2021. The artistic collaboration aims to support increased equity, diversity, and inclusivity within the arts through workshops and training for fellow artists, as well as activities that foster greater community engagement.

Amplified Opera is co-founded by Canadian performing artists (below, left to right) **Teiya Kasahara** 笠原 貞野 (they/them), **Marion Newman** (she/her), **Asitha Tennekoon** (he/him), and Canadian stage director **Aria Umezawa** (she/her). The company launched publicly in the fall of 2019 with AMPLIFY, a series of concert recitals and panels that explored stories of blindness and vision loss; gender expectations in opera; and differences in Black identity across the U.S.-Canadian border.



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF OPERA

As we look ahead to reopening the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts and producing live opera once again, we're investing in equipment to ensure we can connect audiences across the country — and world — to their favourite operas and artists for years to come.

Thanks to support from the federal government, a new digital infrastructure project has equipped the Four Seasons Centre, along with the rehearsal space at the COC's administrative headquarters at 227 Front St. E., with top-of-the-line equipment for digital content capture, dramatically expanding the reach of the company's artistic activities and programming.

Whether you participated in some of our reimagined programming, interacted with us on social media, or made a financial gift, your ongoing commitment as a supporter ensures we can continue connecting you to this incredible and inspiring art form.

*A scene from the COC's new production
of Gianni Schicchi, 2021.*



A SEASON LIKE NO OTHER

66% growth in our online community

More than 50,000 people
engaged with digital programming through
our first month of activity

One-day record for subscription orders
on launch day for our three-opera package

With a growing and generous community of supporters, as well as an array of vibrant creative partnerships, the COC's current 2021/2022 season is already charting a path towards a revitalized era at the COC. This road to recovery supports not only our company and art form, but bolsters the larger performing arts ecosystem in Toronto and beyond.

Thank you for being part of it!



PHOTO & IMAGE CREDITS: FRONT COVER: Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre, photo: COC. PAGE 2: R. Fraser Elliott Hall, photo: Jesse Milns. PAGE 3: photo: Ryan Emberley. PAGES 4 & 5: backstage dressing room and Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, photos: Jesse Milns. PAGE 7: photo: COC. PAGE 8: screen capture: COC. PAGE 9: photo: Gaetz Photography. PAGE 11: photo: Jesse Milns. PAGE 12: video still: COC. PAGE 14: photo: Charity Chan, AKM. PAGE 16: photo: Gaetz Photography. PAGE 18: photo: COC. BACK COVER: Ensemble Studio soprano Jamie Groote, photo: Jesse Milns