

2017

m a n i t o b a
U N D E R G R O U N D
o p e r a

o ANNUAL REPORT



Who are we?

The role of opera and the arts in general is to act as a mirror to society, challenging us to understand our world in different ways. In a world where racism runs rampant and human rights atrocities based on cultural differences and beliefs are prevalent, identity becomes an important and dangerous weapon. As a young company and collective of young artists we are all keenly aware of the significance of our identity in today's political and economic climate. This season we challenged our audiences and encouraged a conversation about who we are, and what that costs.

Table of Contents

Message from General Manager	3
Message from Artistic Director	4
Opera Canada (excerpted)	5
Artistic Casts & Teams.....	7
Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi.....	7
Idomeneo	9
The Billy Goats Gruff	11
Opera 360°	12
Outreach Summary	13
Heritage Winnipeg	14
Financial Summary	15
Supporters.....	18
Looking ahead to 2018.....	19
2017/2018 Staff	20
2017/2018 Board of Trustees	20
Contact Information.....	20

Message from General Manager

OVER 1,100 AUDIENCE MEMBERS,
47 SINGERS, 24 ORCHESTRAL PLAYERS,
3 DIRECTORS, 2 STAGE MANAGERS,
1 CONDUCTOR, 5 PIANISTS, AND 6 VENUES

2017 was a milestone year for us! We maintained our trajectory of producing two operas in unconventional locations in Winnipeg within a festival format, as well as adding our first opera for children and a concert featuring a chamber orchestra and singers.

Tackling the question ‘who are we?’ has long been a goal of ours at MUO. Our production of *Idomeneo* was our first social justice piece, and merged the heightened reality of opera with contemporary social issues. We chose to explore the realities of the refugee crisis and authoritarianism by presenting a 236-year-old work in Winnipeg’s revered Canadian Museum for Human Rights. It is always fascinating, yet slightly demoralizing, to see that many of the

contemporary challenges we grapple with today are the same problems that have arisen over and over again throughout history. This production renewed within MUO our desire to continue to present artistic products that have social value, as well as artistic value.

In addition to *Idomeneo*, this year MUO performed some of the most beautiful music in our company’s history. Puccini’s *Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi* comprise both some of the most heart-wrenching and most slapstick comedic moments in the entire operatic repertoire. *Opera 360°* also featured excerpts from a few of my personal bucket list operas: *Eugene Onegin*, *Rigoletto*, and *Roméo et Juliette*. The festival highlight for me was most definitely the intimate act two prelude and duet from *Roméo et Juliette*, featuring tenor Adam Sperry and soprano Emily Diehl-Reader.

This season, we saw a fantastic overall increase of 35% in revenue. We would like to thank the Manitoba Arts Council for its fourth consecutive year of support and the Winnipeg Arts Council for its second consecutive year of support. Overall funding from government organizations increased by a staggering 74%. Box Office records were shattered once again as we sold out many of our shows and increased the number of events presented from eight to twelve. Additionally, our total audience reach grew slightly from 1,000 to 1,100 people.

Looking beyond our summer festival, MUO performed at outreach events throughout the year, and was represented by singers who performed at senior residences and city-wide events. Partnerships with other organizations in the city were strengthened, including Heritage Winnipeg, the Alliance for Arts Educators of Manitoba, and the Misericordia Health Centre.



After such a mammoth season, MUO is excited and inspired to continue to make opera relevant to Winnipeggers. We will strive to further experiment and present distinctive performances that push the boundaries of our art form and ourselves.

Start getting ready for 2018 now. It’s gonna be a doozy.

Brendan McKeen
General Manager

Message from Artistic Director

Identity is an elusive concept. Are we this? Aren't we that? Does that make us this? The search for this concept and definition was at the heart of our season this year, not only from a thematic programming standpoint but also from a managerial position. We have always striven to create productions that are new, challenging, and engaging to our audience. Each year we've delved even farther into truly achieving the highest of caliber for both our performers and our audiences. This season found us asking ourselves: Who are we? What do we as a company stand for? Why do we create art? Out of these questions came the realization that social issues hold an important place nestled deep in the heart of who we are. This season we strove to not only challenge our audience to think about their identity, but we also challenged ourselves to discover our own.

For the first time, this season we made our flagship production one that spoke directly to a social issue near and dear to many peoples' hearts. Led by our fearless director Adam Da Ros, we updated Mozart's Grecian classic *Idomeneo*. Instead of setting the opera in war-torn Crete, we instead transposed it to an 'any land', placing the focus directly on the refugee crisis. For the first time, we partnered with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, for sold out shows of *Idomeneo* performed in their Stuart Clark Garden of Contemplation. Though not without its challenges, the themes presented in this production seem to have touched the hearts of the audience, proving to be "as relevant today as when the wunderkind first penned his opera seria in 1781" (Holly Harris, Opera Canada).

Continuing our quest of self-identity, this season we presented an opera for children for the first time: *The Billy Goats Gruff*. Adapted by John Davies, this piece focuses not just on bullying itself, but also on what it says about us if we allow bullying to take place. In its short 36 minutes, this piece not only held us true to our season's theme but also introduced a whole new audience to the world of opera. Another new development this year was the presentation of a concert. *Opera 360°* sought to allow the audience to experience the concert from any vantage point. While this concert did sell out, we had some presentation difficulties in achieving our desired result. We are confident that we have resolved these issues and are truly excited to present again next year. This concert also helped us solidify our new partnership with the Winnipeg Art Gallery, one we hope to continue to develop and strengthen as our company continues to grow.

Our final production this season was a double-bill presentation of Puccini's *Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi*. Performed at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, these pieces contained some of the most technically difficult elements we as a company have ever used. Purchasing entire bedsets and lighting the church sanctuary proved to be a challenge, but our teams rose to the occasion and the pieces were incredibly well received.

Our technical department grew enormously this season. We added a second Stage Manager this year, and hired a Director of Production for the first time. We commissioned the creation 16 Nun habits for our production of *Suor Angelica*, and we both purchased and rented props that years ago would have been out of our reach, particularly the stage weaponry in *Idomeneo*.



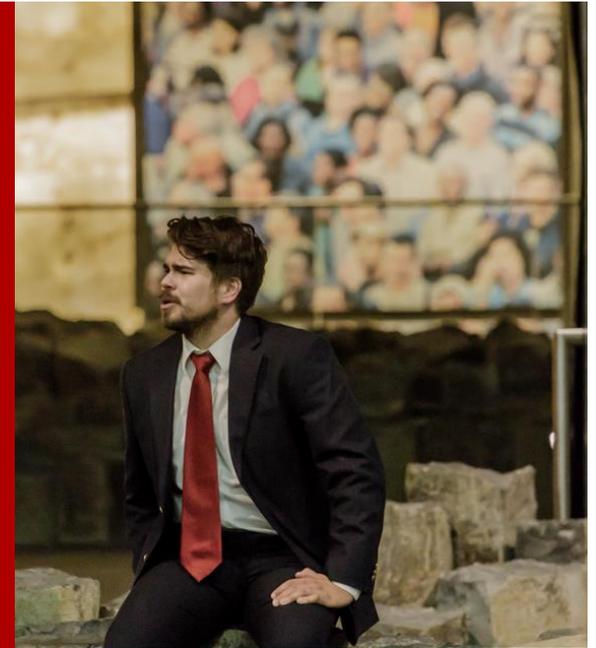
This season was a success that we can all be very proud of. Not only did we discover our newly refocused mandate of presenting one socially relevant piece a year, but our struggles and achievements this season helped us to identify who we are, and who we want to be: A company that challenges its audiences to ask relevant questions, and a company that uses respect and gratitude to motivate, teach, and inspire everyone.

Brenna Corner
Artistic Director

Opera Canada (excerpted)

Holly Harris

This year's cornerstone, Mozart's lesser-heard Idomeneo, bore further testament to the troupe's penchant for innovative artistic choice. Re-envisioned as a cautionary tale about the harrowing plight of refugees, this version... focused less on love than on modern international conflict, immigration policy and racism. Idomeneo is sadly as relevant today as when the wunderkind first penned his opera seria in 1781.



Stand-out performances by strong principals included Canadian rising star mezzo-soprano Victoria Marshall in the trouser role of Idamante, her warmly burnished vocals and dramatic intensity immediately apparent in her opening aria, "Non ho colpa, e mi condanni." Soprano Sydney Clarke as Elettra, who troops onstage in red power stilettos, delivered an all-funs blazing "D'Oreste d'Ajace ho in seno i tormenti," earning the night's only cries of bravo.

Suor Angelica –

The performance became truly experiential as the cast of nuns moved throughout the church's aisles, altar, choir, and chapel areas, creating intriguing spatial effects. ...the production, which included mezzo-soprano Meghan Symon as the icy Principessa, was thoughtful overall, ensuring a very moving incarnation of Puccini's 100-year-old classic.

Gianni Schicchi –

Once again, Martin kept the opera's action tight and bright, including its nail-biting trio "Spogliati, bambolino" crisply by soprano Judy Oatway's La Ciesca, mezzo-soprano Kelly Robinson's Zita, and soprano Janice Marple's Nella.

MUO has also expanded into children's opera this year, with John Davies' The Billy Goats Gruff. ...it was an appealing first offering and a promising new step for an ambitious company that is as fearless as those fairy-tale goats.





Artistic Casts & Teams

Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi

SUOR ANGELICA CAST (in order of appearance)

LA SUORA ZELATRICE	Elizabeth Hoyt-Surdhar
SUOR GENOVIEFFA	Ainsley Wray
SUOR OSMINA	Janice Marple
SUOR DOLCINA	Sarah Cory
LA SUORA INFERMIERA	Jayne Hammond
LA CERCATRICE	Emily Diehl-Reader
LE NOVIZIE	Christina Tanisch-Smith
.....	Avery Penner
.....	McKenzie Warriner
.....	Joanne Kilfoyle
.....	Brielle Dorais-Fleming
LA CONVERSA (PRIMO)	Emily Ready
LA CONVERSA (SECONDO)	Erica Wiebe
SUOR ANGELICA	Ashley Rees
LA ZIA PRINCIPESSA	Meghan Symon

GIANNI SCHICCHI CAST (in order of appearance)

LA CIESCA	Judy Oatway
MARCO	Nathan Sawatsky-Dyck
ZITA	Kelly Robinson
NELLA	Janice Marple
GHERARDO	Tony Bittar
GHERARDINA	Kelsey Ronn
SIMONE	Paul Winkelmans
BETTO	Nick Niebuhr
RINUCCIO	Chris Donlevy
GIANNI SCHICCHI	Nicholas Urquhart
LAURETTA	Jessica Kos-Whicher
SPINELLOCCIO	Elliot Lazar
SER AMANTIO DI NICOLAO, A NOTARY	Elliot Lazar
GIORGETTA	Sarah Cory

SUOR ANGELICA & GIANNI SCHICCHI PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTORSuzanne Martin
CONDUCTORBrendan M^cKeen
VOCAL COACHDeena Grier
STAGE MANAGER.....Maddie Hanton
RÉPÉTITEUR.....Kaitlyn Barr
ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR.....Brielle Dorais Fleming

ORCHESTRA

Violin One
Caroline Rothstein
Sylvie Reimer

Flute
Alicia Kim
Emma Ridd

Violin Two
Teodora Dimova
Isaac Zee

Oboe
Ian Egeberg

Viola
Andrea Klymochko
Joanna Simoens
Laetitia Guillemette

Clarinet
Elizabeth LaRue
Mikaela Oldenkamp

Cello
Sean Taubner
Natalie Dawe

Bassoon
Rhiannon Madden
Nathan Schroeder

Bass
Daniel Perry

French Horn
Zachary Dark
Ryan Wehrle
Caralie Heinrichs
Andrea Dicks

Harp/Celeste on Keyboard
Megan Duftrat



Idomeneo

IDOMENEO CAST (in order of appearance)

ILIA Katherine Mayba
IDAMANTE Victoria Marshall
CHORUS SOLOISTS Janice Marple
..... Emily Diehl-Reader
..... Tony Bittar
..... Paul Winkelmans
HIGH PRIEST Jon Stitt
ELEKTRA Sydney Clarke
IDOMENEO Adam Sperry

CHORUS

SOPRANO Jane Bullied
..... Andrea Dicks
..... Linda Feasby

TENOR John Tanner
..... Xi Yin

MEZZO Montanna Coad
..... Cathy Dueck
..... Katie Philips
..... Erica Wiebe
..... Hailey Witt

BARITONE Paul Forget
..... Nick Niebuhr





IDOMENEO PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR Adam Da Ros
 CONDUCTOR Brendan M^cKeen
 VOCAL COACH & RÉPÉTITEUR..... Deena Grier
 STAGE MANAGER..... Sawyer Craig

ADAPTATION Adam Da Ros
 COSTUMES & PROPS..... Sawyer Craig

ORCHESTRA

Violin One..... Caroline Rothstein
 Violin Two Teodora Dimova
 Cello Sean Taubner
 Natalie Dawe
 Bass Daniel Perry

Flute Alicia Kim
 Oboe..... Ian Egeberg
 Clarinet..... Elizabeth LaRue
 French Horn Zachary Dark
 Harpsichord..... Deena Grier

The Billy Goats Gruff

THE BILLY GOATS CAST (in order of appearance)

LUCY Emily Ready
ERNESTO Tony Bittar
DANDINI Jean van der Merwe
OSMIN John Anderson

THE BILLY GOATS PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR Shannon Melody Unger
MUSIC DIRECTOR Megan Dufrat



Opera 360°

CONDUCTOR	Brendan M ^c Keen	ORCHESTRA	
SINGERS		Violin One	Caroline Rothstein
		.....	Louise Faurshou
		.....	Sylvie Reimer
SOPRANO	Emily Diehl-Reader	Violin Two.....	Teodora Dimova
.....	Jayne Hammond	.....	Jason Vanwynsberghe
.....	Ainsley Wray	.....	Isaac Zee
.....	Lynlee Wolstencroft	Viola.....	Barb Hamilton
MEZZO SOPRANO.....	Elizabeth Hoyt-Surdhar	.....	Joanna Simoens
.....	Meghan Symon	.....	Laetitia Guillemette
TENOR	Adam Sperry	Cello.....	Sean Taubner
BARITONE.....	Paul Winkelmans	.....	Natalie Dawe
		Keyboard	Deena Grier
		Flute	Alicia Kim
		.....	Emma Ridd
		Oboe	Ian Egeberg
		Clarinet.....	Elizabeth LaRue
		.....	Mikaela Oldenkamp
		Bassoon.....	Rhiannon Madden
		.....	Nathan Schroeder
		French Horn	Zachary Dark
		.....	Ryan Wehrle
		.....	Caralie Heinrichs
		.....	Andrea Dicks

Opera 360° was presented with a chamber orchestra of 23 conducted by Brendan M^cKeen on August 19. Artists of the 2017 main stage season performed selections from Rigoletto, Eugene Onegin, and Roméo et Juliette. Presented in the grand foyer of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, audiences surrounded the orchestra and singers in a circle. Seated mere feet away, they could truly appreciate the raw power of an opera singers voice and the inner workings of an orchestra. The performance was presented in concert-style and allowed the audience to see the artists as who they are instead of characters or background orchestral performers.

Outreach Summary

STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

Manitoba Underground Opera continued many partnerships and performed year-round at various locations. Performances included regular appearances at the Misericordia Health Centre facilities, Christmas caroling at assisted living residences, and a second consecutive performance at Heritage Winnipeg's annual Doors Open event.

MISERICORDIA HEALTH CENTRE

MUO performed regularly at the Misericordia Health Centre and Misericordia Place. Concerts consisted of young artists presenting a variety of arias and duets from traditional operatic repertoire. During August, main stage artists Victoria Marshall, Sydney Clarke, and Katherine Mayba presented a condensed version of *Idomeneo* for an audience of 90 residents.

DECEMBER CAROLING

In December, MUO sent groups to two senior residences to spread Christmas cheer and perform operatic selections, as well as leading a Christmas carol sing-along.

ALLIANCE FOR ARTS EDUCATORS OF MANITOBA

This year, MUO donated proceeds from our August 19th performance of *The Billy Goats Gruff* to AAEM. We were happy to pass along \$240 to promote their incredible work in promoting the importance of arts education and making it accessible. We will continue to seek guidance from AAEM as a key resource in the development of MUO's Opera for Children program.



Heritage Winnipeg

Once again, MUO sang at one of the locations for Doors Open. Six singers and one pianist performed from 11am to 5pm at the Millennium Centre to over 500 visitors as they explored Winnipeg's vast architectural history.

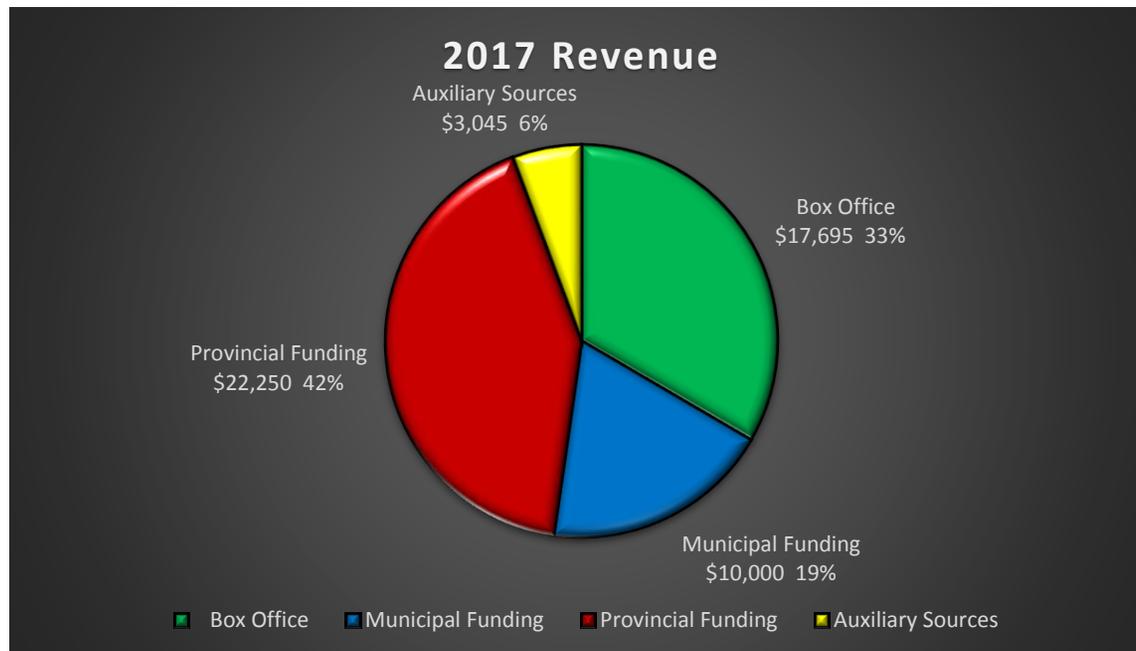


Financial Summary

REVENUE

- Box Office revenue increased.
 - Average ticket price increased to \$17.
 - Student, Senior, Artist ticket prices were increased from \$10 to \$15.
 - The Wine & Cheese Night ticket price was \$50.
 - Overall capacity was maintained for the two main stages.
 - Increases also came from the addition of a concert event and a children’s opera.
- Support from the Winnipeg Arts Council maintained its 2016 level.
- Funding from Manitoba Arts Council increased from \$7,000 to \$22,250.
 - The theatre department grant increased from \$7,000 to \$15,000.
 - An additional music department grant was submitted and awarded \$7,250.
- Auxiliary Sources include corporate donations, fundraising events, and honorariums for community outreach events.
 - The decrease comes from a reduction in fundraising events

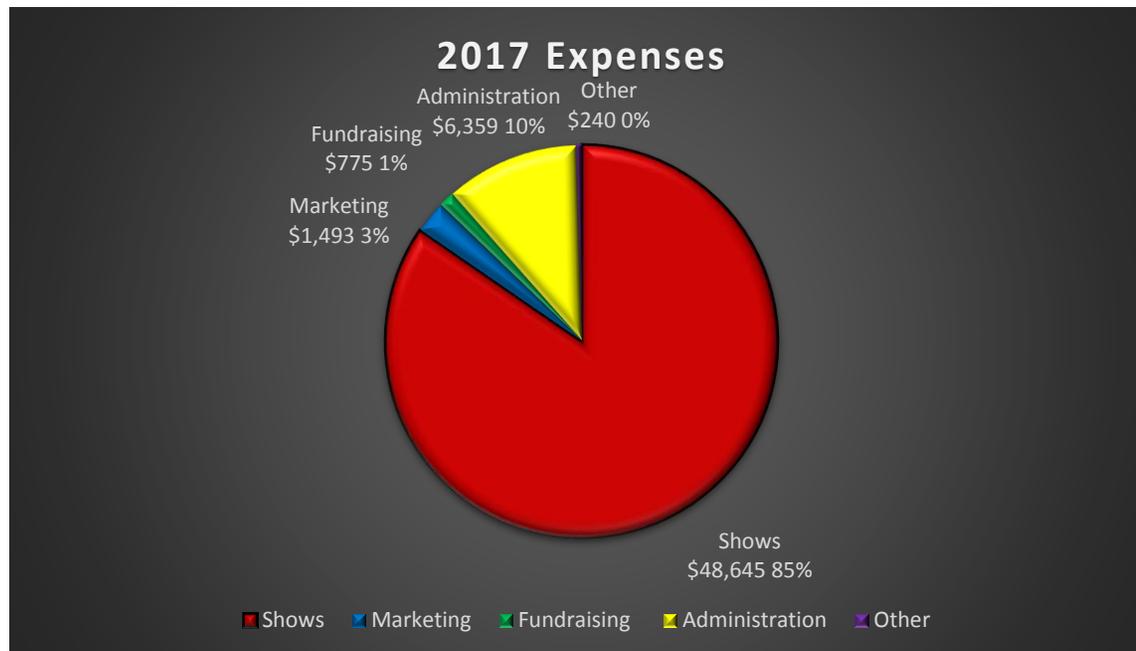
CATEGORY	2017 TOTAL (\$)	CHANGE FROM 2016 (%)
Total Revenue	52,990	+35
Box Office	17,695	+56
Municipal Funding	10,000	Maintained
Provincial Funding	22,250	+162
Auxiliary Sources	3,045	-67



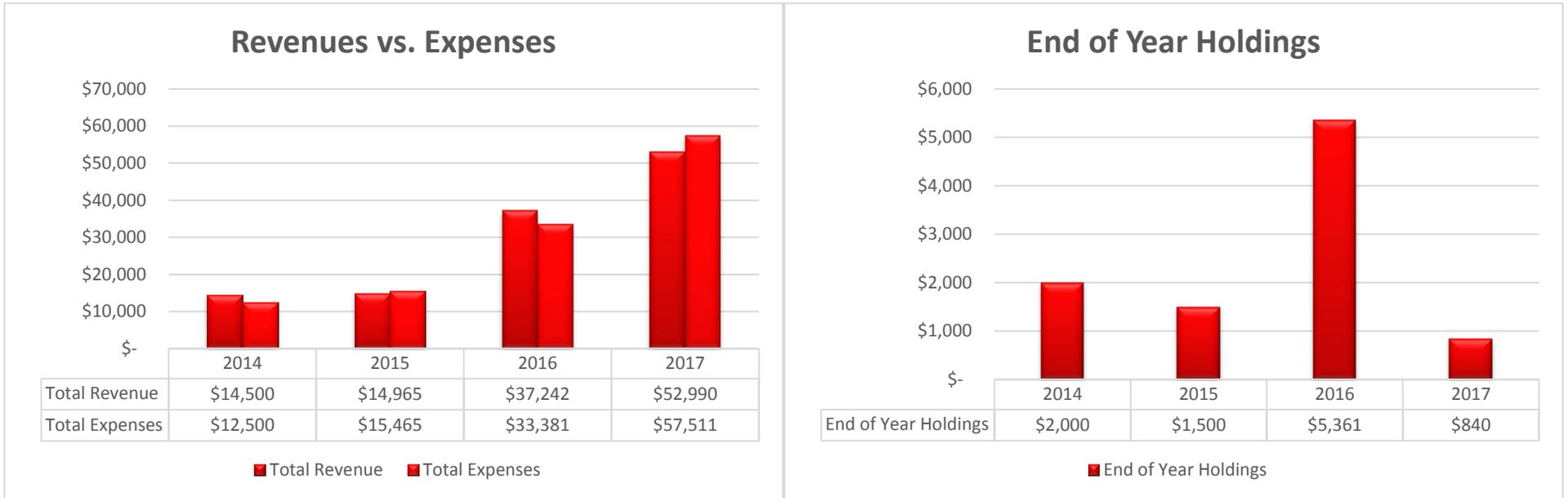
EXPENSES

CATEGORY	2017 TOTAL (\$)	CHANGE FROM 2016 (%)
Total Expenses	57,510.87	+76
Shows	48,644.63	+72
Marketing	1,492.67	-2
Fundraising	775.00	-32
Administration	6,358.57	See notes
Other	240.00	See notes

- Artists fees and Production costs were combined into a single category, Shows for 2017.
 - Artist fees increased due to the number of singers involved, an increase to orchestra size and quality, and increases to director fees.
 - Production fees remained consistent to 2016. MUO continued to purchase materials for continuous future use like music stands, fans, and acoustic equipment.
 - The Shows category also includes venue rentals, which were exponentially higher for 2017. Venue rentals included payments for our rehearsal space and five performance venues, most notably the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.
- Marketing expenses maintained 2016 levels with similar strategies implemented.
- Fundraising expenses declined as events were approached from a more experienced viewpoint. Costs for 2016's event were higher than anticipated in various areas and 2017 saw a major reduction in costs.
- Administrative costs were finally covered by the company in advance of the season. 2016's large surplus went towards paying four staff members as well as covering memberships for the company, banking costs, and long-term initiatives like securing charity status.
- The category Other includes a \$240.00 donation to the Alliance for Arts Educators in Manitoba for their partnership in discussing and promoting MUO's first opera for children. All proceeds from the August 19th performance were chosen to be donated.



YEAR TO YEAR COMPARISON



The above four years of operation are based on the summer festival model with minimum two mainstage productions taking place during August and September.

SURPLUS NOTES

For the past four years MUO has continuously operated with a surplus at the end of the season. The above surplus amounts for the first three years do not include financial compensation for administrative work. MUO's goal for 2017 was to invest in administrative staffing and costs to allow the organization to function at a competitive level to other theatre and music organizations in the city.

Supporters

We would especially like to thank our granters for their support this season. We enjoyed the backing of the Winnipeg Arts Council for the second consecutive year, and the Manitoba Arts Council has now supported us for four consecutive seasons. Our 2017 season would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of these two organisations.

We also welcomed the support of a new sponsor this year: Manitoba Liquor Marts. They kindly furnished the wine for our Wine & Cheese Night, held in conjunction with our closing night performance of *Idomeneo*. Additionally, they created custom labels featuring our company logo for the bottles they provided. This went a long way towards making our event more experiential and memorable.





Looking ahead to 2018

On November 20-22, General Manager Brendan M^cKeen and Artistic Director Brenna Corner held for a three-day strategic planning session. It included five hours of auditions, meetings with partners and board members, venue tours, the creation of a longer-term direction for the company. With renewed vision, MUO's role is to continue to experiment with what opera can accomplish outside of large organizations.

2018's goals include a narrowing of focus on what makes MUO Manitoba's leading indie-opera company. Administration will become a larger focus of the company to create lasting support for both the organization and the artists involved each festival season. Long term projects will be started now that the longevity of the company is secured for future years. MUO looks forward to a bright future and a memorable 2018 season. We hope that you will be joining us!

2017/2018 Staff

BRENDAN MCKEEN
GENERAL MANAGER



BRENNA CORNER
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



LAURA GOW
DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION



ASHLEY REES
HEAD OF OUTREACH &
COMMUNICATIONS



2017/2018 Board of Trustees

Danielle Tétrault, Chair
Andrea Bellhouse, Treasurer
Noreen Mian, Secretary

Contact Information

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