

manitoba

UNDERGROUND

opera

2019 Annual Report

Looking Back & Moving Forward

*"A figurative and literal journey into
imaginative opera landscapes"*

Opera Canada



*Sometimes when we feel as if
society is moving backward, art is
what pulls us forward.*

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Staff

Brendan McKeen
General Manager

Brenna Corner
Artistic Director

Laura Gow
Director of Production

Janice Marple
Administrative Director

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Chair
Andrea Bellhouse

Vice-Chair & Artists' Representative
Sydney Clarke

Treasurer
Nicki Kirton

Members
Lara Rae (until September 30)
Craig Ross
Danielle Tétrault

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT



What a year! I am so grateful to write to you of the wonderful year Manitoba Underground Opera has had. This season especially touched my heart by focusing on social issues in a pair of new venues, as well as utilizing a favourite venue in a new way.

Dido|Aeneas marked the first time MUO has produced a Canadian composed opera. We paired Purcell's traditional *Dido and Aeneas* with James Rolfe's *Aeneas and Dido* in the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. Both operas tell the same tragic story but from two different points of view. Purcell's from Dido's, sung by Elizabeth Hoyt-Surdhar, and Rolfe's from Aeneas', sung by Paul Winkelmans. Led by stage director Adam Da Ros and conductor Dr. Alexandra Dee, our production focused on high school bullying and teenage suicide. Our Sorceress and witches, imagined as the popular clique, ran a vicious campaign of social media bullying and mass texts against the main couple. The devastating final chorus number was preceded by the chorus receiving news of Dido's suicide via texts and social media updates.

On a lighter note, MUO held its first promenade opera this year, *Lost Voices*. Audiences traveled around the La Cathédrale de Saint-Boniface in a new production created by Artistic Director Brenna Corner and multi-talented artist Sawyer Craig. Focusing on women historical figures, poets, and composers, this show spoke to those that have lost their voices. Despite history doing a great disservice by ignoring some prominent women, this show ended on a hopeful note: that we will all move forward with an open red, red heart.

Completing our traditional trio of festival shows was my own artistic child, a semi-staged version of *The Triumph of Truth and Time* by Handel presented in the cre8ery gallery. I've loved this oratorio for so many years not only because of its musical riches but because it speaks to a great inner conflict of our contemporary society.

Our world of instant gratification and convenience lends itself to choosing our own pleasure over self-sacrifice. Our protagonist, Beauty (sung by Sawyer Craig - we kept her very busy this summer) confronts her own decisions and mortality and turns away from Pleasure, sung by MUO veteran Carmen Harris.

If our season had only been those three successful productions, we would have been thrilled, but we were elated by the incredible successes of our outreach activities and our Opera for Children tour.

45 events in 2019

Our friend, the Downtown Winnipeg Biz, invited us to perform at their Cityplace Concert Series on Tuesday, August 20th and at their Farmers' Markets at True North Square every Thursday of August. Combined with our regular Lunch Hour Concert at the Amsterdam Tea Room, we presented public opera for free to over 600 Winnipeggers.

Our Opera for Children tour of *The Three Little Pigs*, stage directed by Sarah Jane Pelzer and music directed by Nicola Davies, was performed 23 times. In Winnipeg, this show was performed at 14 Public Library locations, one daycare and one summer camp. This tour was also a landmark in MUO's history. The Three Little Pigs performed at seven regional libraries,

including Altona, Gimli, Morden, Portage la Prairie, Selkirk, Steinbach, and Winkler, marking the first time MUO has performed outside the city of Winnipeg. Being that Manitoba is in our name, we have long wanted to make an impact outside of the city. We are so excited to have finally made it happen. This tour reached over 1,000 parents and children.

New this year, we were engaged by our friends at the Dalnavert Museum to present a concert series to compliment their *Strike 1919* exhibit. We presented three concerts in the fall about revolution and music that highlighted underdog stories.

In addition to our artistic success, we were very fortunate to receive substantial public funder money, as well as foundation money for which we were eligible for the first time. Financially, you'll notice this was our strongest year and has built a nest egg for our future seasons.

Thank you for all of your support. 2019's season was the greatest so far in MUO history.



BRENDAN MCKEEN
General Manager



Photo Credits

Opposite page, top to bottom
Karen Santos (*Dido|Aeneas*), Yujene Oh,
Sawyer Craig & Adam Sperry (*Triumph of Truth
and Time*)

Current page, Clockwise from top left
Elizabeth Hoyt-Surdhar (*D|A*), Adam Kuiack
(*D|A*), Anya Steur (*D|A*), Sawyer Craig &
Carmen Harris (*TTT*)

Bottom image
Ashley Rees (*Lost Voices*)



2019 FESTIVAL



Reflections of Ourselves

August 16 - 24





"Manitoba Underground also offered arguably its boldest production yet (and that says a lot),"

"One of the show's most potent moments came during Dido and Aeneus's final duet sung into cell phones, which underscored the emotional alienation so rampant among today's youth (and adults). But even moreso, seeing chorus members share news of Dido's ultimate suicide with ominous cell phone texts before subsequently reacting in horror trembled with verisimilitude."

Opera Canada



DIDO | AENEAS

Creative Team

Stage Director ADAM DA ROS

Conductor ALEXANDRA DEE

Stage Manager MEAGHAN FLETCHER

Répétiteur & Harpsichord LEE HOUGHTON STEWART

Cast (in order of vocal appearance)

Belinda / Anna KAREN SANTOS

Dido ELIZABETH HOYT-SURDHAR

Second Woman REBECCA GENGE

Aeneas PAUL WINKELMANS

Sorceress / Goat MEGHAN SYMON & YUJENE OH

First Witch OLIVIA KANG

Second Witch NICKI KIRTON

Spirit / Mercury SYDNEY CLARKE

Chorus

ARCHIE CAMPBELL

PAUL FORGET

KATY UNRUH

MONTANNA COAD

KYLA KELSEY

JEAN VAN DER MERWE

BEVERLEY COVERT

ADAM KUIACK

CATHY WACH-DUECK

LINDA FEASBY

ANYA STEUR

HAILEY WITT

Orchestra

Violin I CAROLINE ROTHSTEIN

Violin II MOMOKO MATSUMURA

Viola TATIANA FRIESEN

Cello NATALIE DAWE

Flute LAUREL RIDD

Oboe ELIZABETH MILLER



"One always longs for a stirring performance that will bring a grown woman to tears, and Kinnon Weddall brought many to that brink—including this writer—"



"[Carmen Harris'] emotionally volatile portrayal of 'mad Ophelia' proved especially harrowing as she presented twigs and gentle violets to palpably nervous audience members during her finale,"

Opera Canada

LOST VOICES

Creative Team

Co-Creator BRENNA CORNER

Co-Creator & Director SAWYER CRAIG

Stage Manager LAURA GOW

Performing Duos EMILY DIEHL-READER & SAM TIDD
(in alphabetical order) PAULINA GONZALEZ & NICOLA DAVIES
CARMEN HARRIS & LEE HOUGHTON STEWART
JANICE MARPLE & LISA RUMPEL
ASHLEY REES & BRENDEN JANZEN
KINNON WEDDALL & CELORIS MILLER

Tour Guides SYDNEY CLARKE
SARAH CORY
KAREN SANTOS
JENNIFER TURNER
LYNLEE WOLSTENCROFT

"Harris's spellbinding 'Leave the thorn, gather the rose,' which began as a tender ballad sung to Sawyer before oozing into a power-driven seduction, became its own forbidden fruit, and instilled a fascinating subtext of homoeroticism between Beauty and Pleasure."



"Her sudden tightening of Beauty's arm like a cobra's deathgrip at the end of her solo was hands-down the most heartstopping moment of the entire Manitoba Underground season, with Harris clearly unafraid to go for the emotional jugular during her masterful performance."

Opera Canada

THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH AND TIME

Creative Team

Conductor BRENDAN MCKEEN

Dramatuge SARAH PELZER

Stage Manager LAURA GOW

Cast (in order of vocal appearance)

Beauty SAWYER CRAIG

Pleasure CARMEN HARRIS

Truth YUJENE OH

Time ADAM SPERRY

Orchestra

Violin I CAROLINE ROTHSTEIN

Violin II MOMOKO MATSUMURA

Viola TATIANA FRIESEN

Cello NATALIE DAWE

Oboe ELIZABETH MILLER

Bassoon SCOTT MILLER

"...the high-octane show also gently affirmed the intrinsic value of libraries and power of reading, as Despina travels to her local branch to research 'huff-proof, puff-proof' home construction."

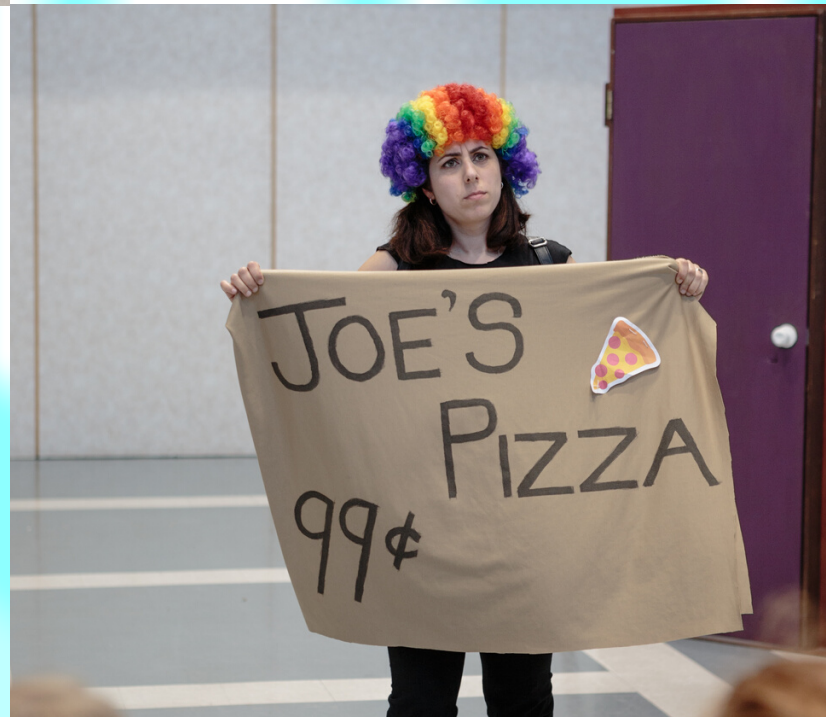


"Hearing Robinson's increasingly forceful 'Open the door, pig!' packed as much dramatic punch as the terrifying Commendatore scene from Don Giovanni, and proved this is a Wolf to reckon with."



"The full house of toddlers gleefully egged on the pigs during the climactic finale, unaware they were soaking up grand opera by osmosis. No doubt their appetites were whetted for more."

Opera Canada



THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

July 27 - August 23

Creative Team

Stage Director SARAH PELZER

Music Director NICOLA DAVIES

Cast

Despina JANICE MARPLE

Cherubino NIKITA LABDON

Don Giovanni ADAM KUIACK

Wolfgang B. Bigbad KELLY ROBINSON





BY THE NUMBERS

PERFORMANCES

23

CITIES

8

DAYS

28

KILOMETERS TRAVELED

1,454

PARENTS AND CHILDREN REACHED

1,060



"The ambitions of Manitoba Underground Opera remain untempered as the company also launched its latest initiative: Opera Around Town (OAT), a series of free, live performances from its burgeoning roster of opera singers and collaborative pianists at select businesses around town, sowing seeds into Prairie loam that promise to grow new opera lovers of tomorrow" Opera Canada



Opera Around Town



MUO continued partnering with Heritage Winnipeg to bring opera to Winnipeg landmarks, both old and new.

On May 25, MUO partnered with Cercle Molière to present an afternoon of French opera and cabaret in between tours of their new facilities. Sopranos Sarah Cory and Kinnon Weddall were joined by tenor Jon Stitt and pianist Lee Houghton Stewart.



MUO performed at Heritage Winnipeg's Annual Fall Fundraiser on December 5th. Katherine Mayba was joined by pianist Paul Roderman to present Christmas carols and old classics in a one-of-a-kind heritage home.

Photos:

Top - Sarah Cory, Middle - Kinnon Weddall,
Bottom - Katherine Mayba and Paul Rodermond



MUO partnered with the Dalnavert Museum to present a concert series to complement their *Strike 1919: Our Cause is Just* exhibit.

Three events were performed on the outdoor veranda and in the salon.

September 28: *Operatic Rebellion*

September 29: *Rebellion Throughout History*

September 30: *The Artists' Salon*

Performers included Sarah Cory, Nicola Davies, Cary Denby, Lee Houghton Stewart, Jayne Hammond, Marlise Ritchie, Christina Thanish-Smith



Photos to the left, clockwise from top left:

1. Sarah Cory
2. Marlise Ritchie
3. Jayne Hammond
4. Christina Thanisch-Smith

With Winnipeg Downtown Biz, MUO performed six times over the month of August.

Every Thursday in August, MUO sang a lunchtime concert for their Downtown Biz Farmers' Markets and performed as part of their Downtown Concert Series presented by Cityplace.

Over 600 people experienced free outdoor opera over the course of the month.

Performers included Emily Diehl-Reader, Lee Houghton Stewart, Jon Stitt, Sam Tidd, Jennifer Turner, and Lynlee Wolstencroft

Photos to the right, clockwise from top left:

1. Jon Stitt
2. Jennifer Turner
3. Lynlee Wolstencroft
4. Cityplace Terrace





EVENTS

Welcome Spring May 5th

Although spring had not arrived to Manitoba yet, *Welcome Spring* celebrated the season with pastels, flowers, and effervescent opera singing.

Attendees sipped on tea and enjoyed some tiny nibbles alongside a silent auction.

All proceeds from this event went directly to helping MUO's Opera for Children tour reach as many parents and children as possible.

Performers included Sydney Clarke, Cary Denby, Paulina Gonzalez, Katherine Mayba, Ashley Rees, Christina Thanisch-Smith, and Jennifer Turner

Photos to the left, top to bottom:

1. Katherine Mayba
2. Sydney Clarke and Ashley Rees
3. Paulina Gonzalez
4. Sydney Clarke

Thank you to everyone who attended our events, raising over \$5,000 for our Opera for Children Tour and special initiatives!

Without you, young minds would not get the chance to expand their horizons and learn about the power of their own voices.

BON APPÉTIT

SEPTEMBER 27TH

A one-of-a-kind dinner in the heart of downtown
Winnipeg at Kitchen Sync.

The evening's guests were treated to a three-course
meal, prepared by Chef Ben Kramer, paired with four
courses of singing, by Sydney Clarke and Kinnon
Weddall.

TOAST
GLITTER AND BE GAY
KINNON WEDDALL

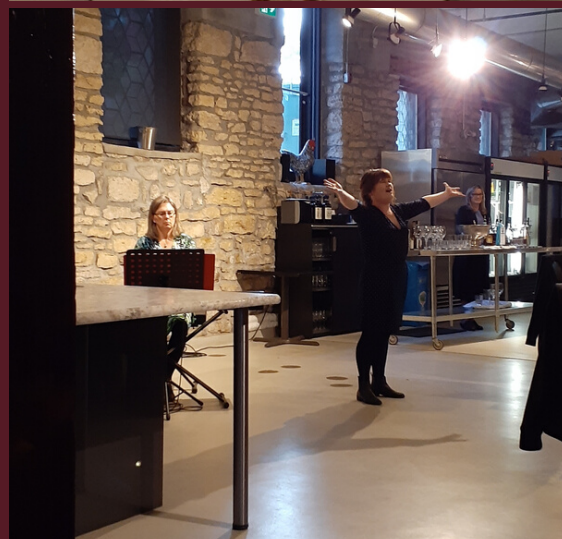
AMUSE-BOUCHE
IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE
SYDNEY CLARKE

SOUP
*BRAISED RABBIT SOUP WITH FRESH
SPAETZLE AND FRIED SAGE*

ENTREMENTS
LA BONNE CUISINE
KINNON WEDDALL

MAIN
*SEARED MANITOBA BEEF WITH
POTATO-CAULIFLOWER PUREE,
ROASTED VEGETABLES, RED WINE AND
FRESH HERBS*

DESSERT
*BON APPÉTIT - SYDNEY CLARKE
PAIRED WITH LE GATEAU AU
CHOCOLAT
(A LA JULIA CHILD)*



Photos to the right, top to bottom:

1. Le Gateau au Chocolat a la Julia Child
2. Kinnon Weddall singing Glitter and Be Gay
3. Sydney Clarke, Cary Denby, and Kinnon Weddall
4. Sydney Clarke as Julia Child making chocolate cake

FAST PITCH

Manitoba Underground was selected to participate in Winnipeg Foundation's 2019 Fast Pitch during January and February. 16 local charities are paired with 32 professionals from other industries to work on a 3-minute pitch for \$20,000 in prize money.

General Manager Brendan McKeen was paired with Kathryn McBurney (of Tripwire Media) and Kelly Fournel (from the Government of Manitoba).



"I loved Fast Pitch. I had two wonderful coaches who weren't artists themselves, but had such a passion for the arts, it was really inspiring to talk during our sessions about what we do and why we do it with people who didn't study [opera] for eight years." Brendan McKeen

Although we did not make it to the final round, the Winnipeg Foundation generously gave \$1,000 in prize money to each charity.

We are so grateful to Kelly, Kathryn, and the Winnipeg Foundation for helping to shape the amazing year that MUO had in 2019.



*"Art brings colour
to the world."*

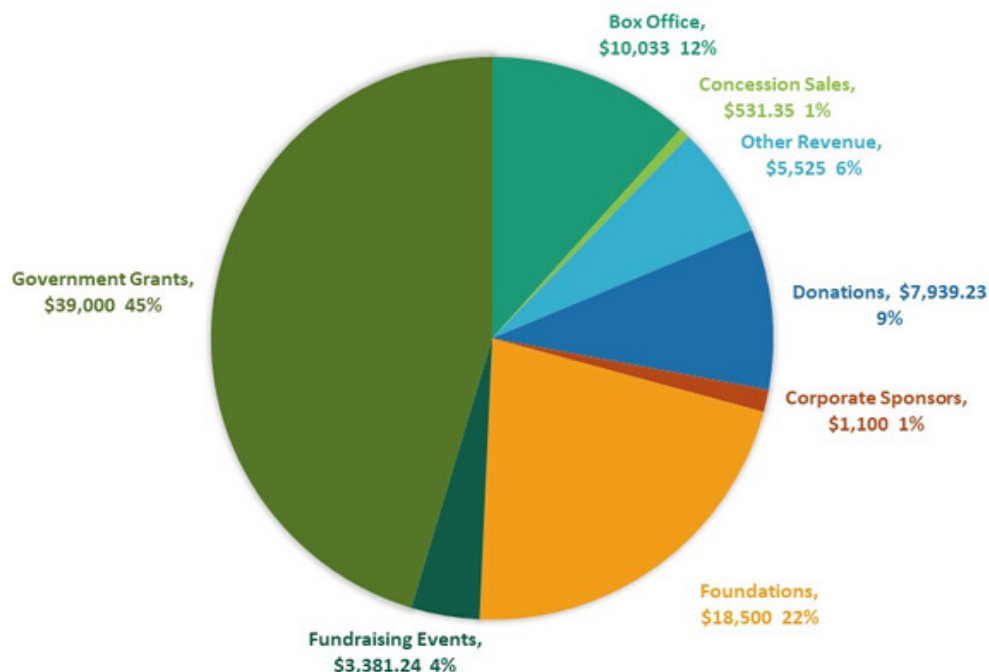
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

2019 was the most financially successful year for MUO to date. Revenues increased and allowed for more money to go towards our artists. Additionally the previous deficit was paid off leaving the company in positive financial standing.

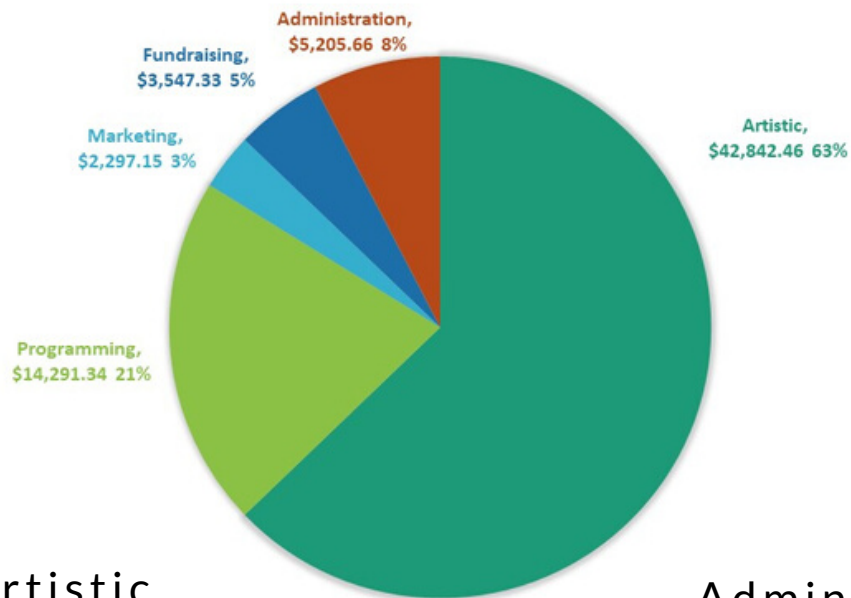
This year marks the first complete year of charity status for the company. Grants from the Winnipeg and Thomas Sills Foundations account for most of the revenue gains.

Moving forward, all box office sales will be "rolled over" to the succeeding year. The box office revenue from 2019 will be budgeted into 2020, 2020's box office will be budgeted into 2021, etc. This will allow MUO more flexibility in planning with current box office sales never being required to make our budget balance.

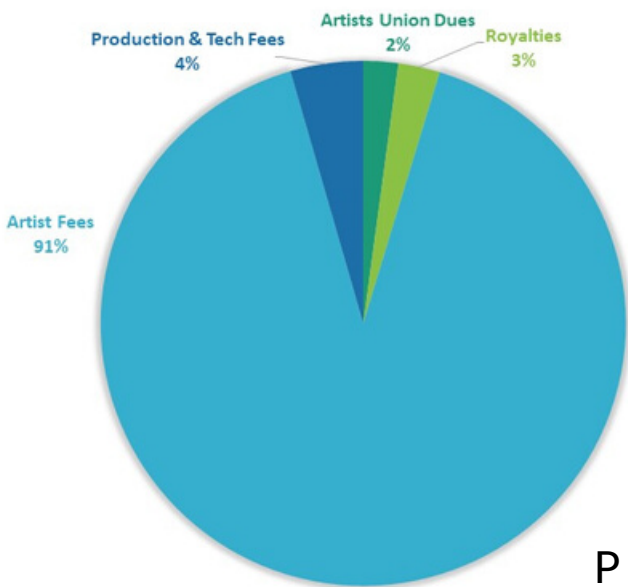
REVENUES : \$86,009.82



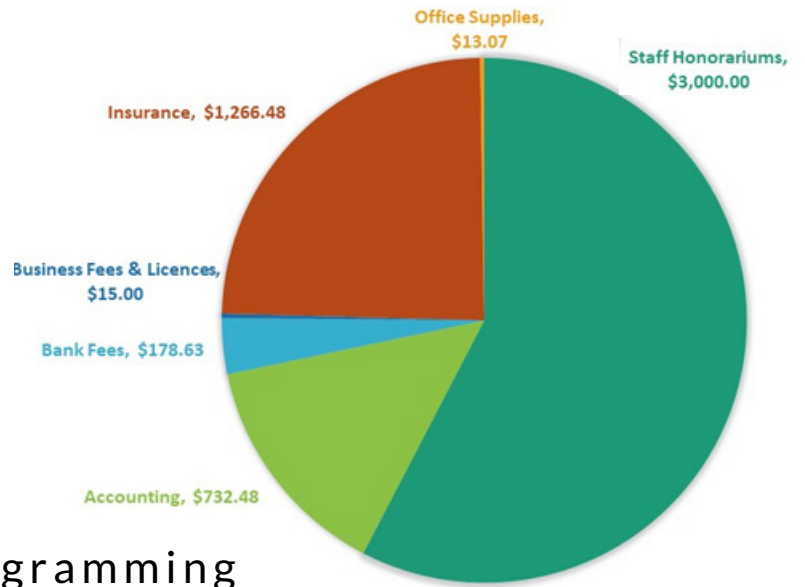
EXPENSES : \$68,183.94



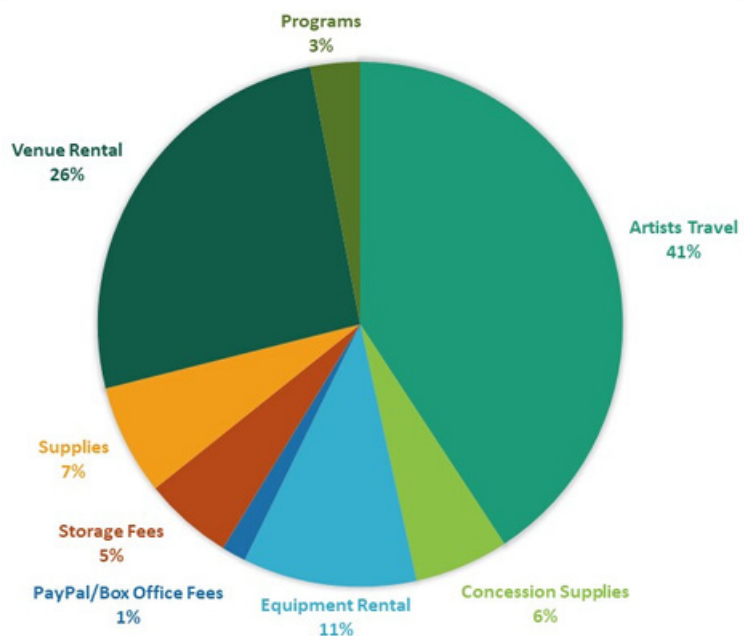
Artistic



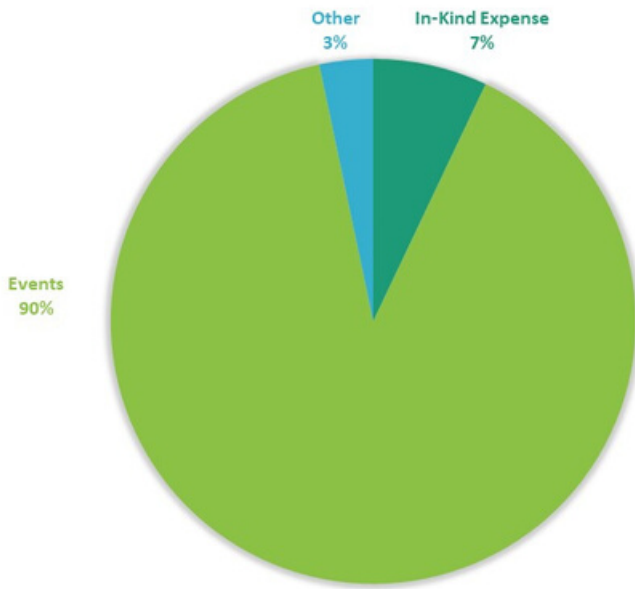
Administration



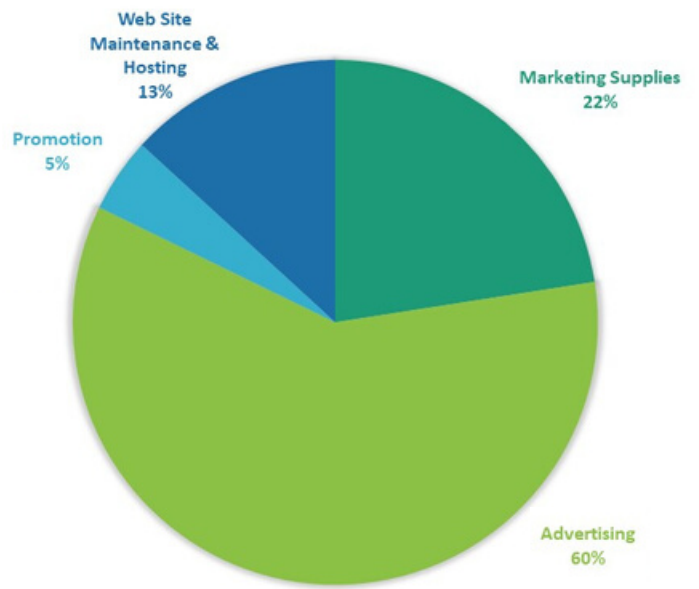
Programming



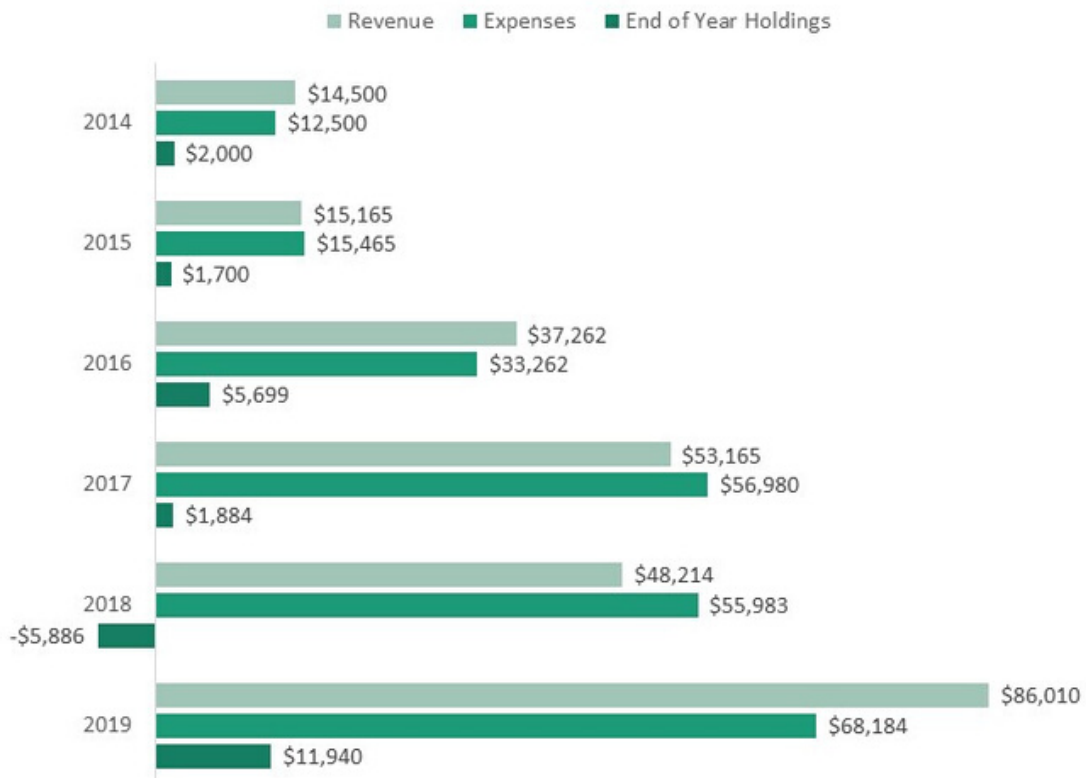
Fundraising



Marketing



YEAR TO YEAR COMPARISON



THANK YOU

We are very grateful for all of our donors, volunteers, partner organizations, and supporters.

Without you, none of this is possible!

Rene Ammann

Elizabeth Bachman

Andrea Bellhouse

Roma Bellhouse

Florence Carey

Susan Campbell

Cheryl Costen

Cheryl & Doug Durnin

Linda Feasby

Irene Gordon

Perry Grosshans

Herta Gudauskas

Tim Hibbard

Andrea Hurst

Ron Kirby

Donna Kormilo

Katarina Kupca

Grace Lintick

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Alice Strong-Penner

Danielle Tétrault

Robert Vineberg

Carolyn Weiss &

Meridian Chiropractic and Health Centre

Nancy Williamson

Blaine and Audrey Workman

Audrey Young

Public Funders



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CONSEIL DES ARTS DU MANITOBA



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