

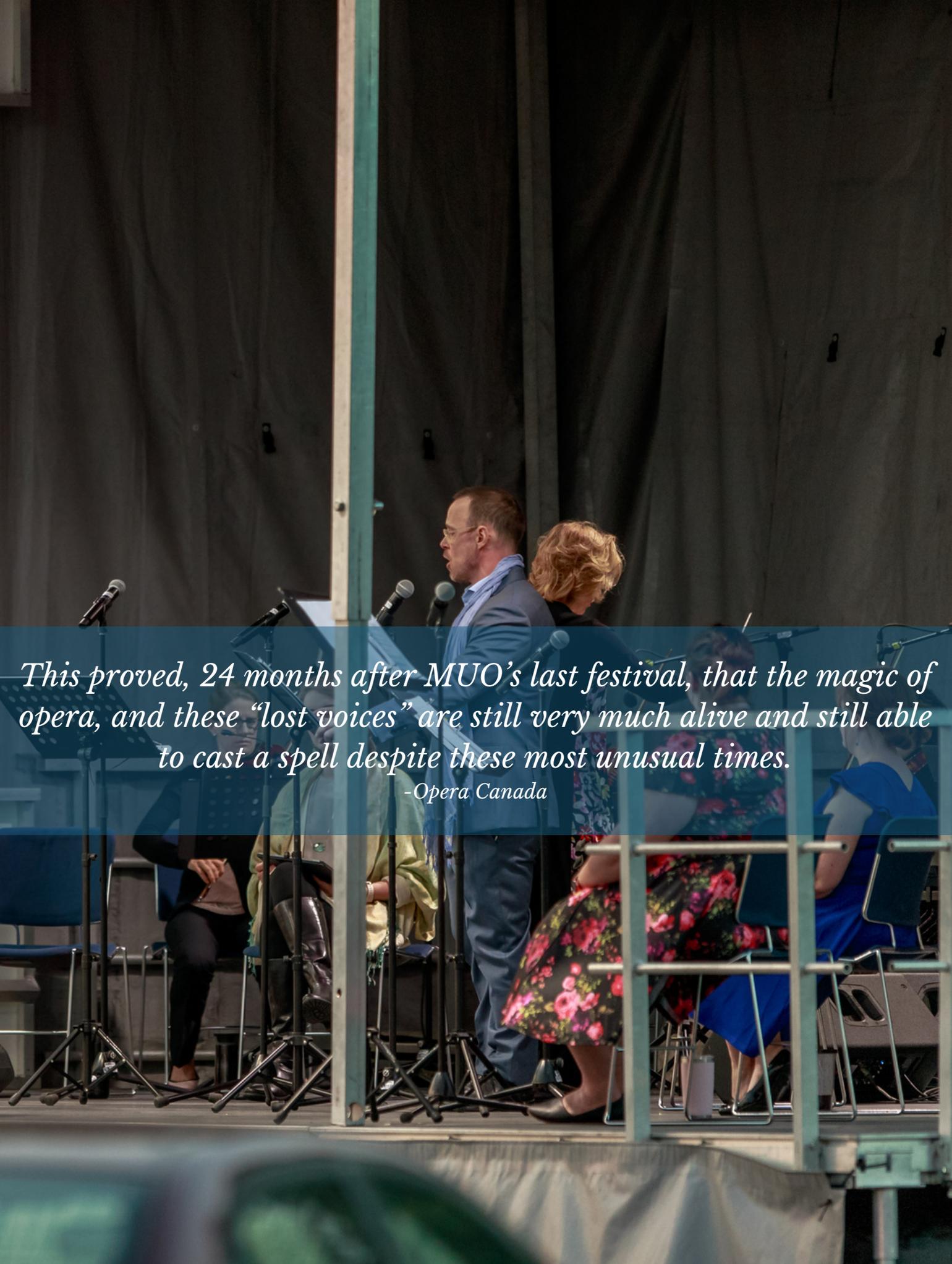
manitoba

UNDERGROUND

opera

2021
ANNUAL REPORT

Triumph over uncertainty



This proved, 24 months after MUO's last festival, that the magic of opera, and these "lost voices" are still very much alive and still able to cast a spell despite these most unusual times.

-Opera Canada

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Staff

Brendan McKeen
General Manager

Brenna Corner
Artistic Director

Janice Marple
Director of Administration

Kimberley-Ann Bartczak
Associate Artistic Director

Karen Santos
Director of Production

Carmen Harris
*Social Media Manager &
Opera for Children Tour
Coordinator*



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Kinnon Weddall,
Artists' Representative
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Danielle Tétrault
Dr. Carolyn Weiss

REPORT FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER⁴

To Have and To Hold was conceived in late 2019, in the “before” times. We imagined a season based on marriage: two people finding love within the ever-swirling chaos of the world around us. But as the pandemic continued and personal connection became limited to screen time, “having” and “holding” took on new significance as we all struggled to maintain connections within our families and communities.

January found Winnipeg amid a fierce third wave of the pandemic. The uncertainty of the winter months led us to redesign each of our festival productions so that no matter what, we would present operatic content in some capacity. Thankfully, conditions improved and MUO was immensely grateful to present a fest of three successful productions.

On August 25 and 27, we welcomed back live audiences with Svadba & Bluebeard’s castle at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. On August 26, MUO ventured outside Winnipeg to Lower Fort Garry for Béatrice et Bénédict at the drive-in. Finally, MUO was grateful to collaborate with Willow Place and create our deeply meaningful digital production, A Place of Healing.

In addition to the fest, we took opera around the city with live events with Heritage Winnipeg, Downtown Winnipeg Biz, and the Dalnavert Museum.

Financially, the company held strong thanks to extensive support from public funders at all levels and our exceptional donors.



Brendan McKeen

REPORT FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We were beyond thrilled to welcome each and every one of you back to live opera. Thinking back on this past year, I am thrilled with the projects MUO has been able to accomplish. Our joy is always sharing music and stories both in person and digitally, and we were thrilled to be back doing that with you.

This season was like no other MUO has ever produced. The first Drive-In Opera in Manitoba, along with a multimedia one woman show on the roof of the Winnipeg Art gallery, were definitely new ventures for us. But if there is one thing that we have learned from Covid it is: Adapt. Pivoting our scheduled shows to fit within the confines of the COVID regulations was a challenge, but it was also an incredible opportunity for all our artists to think outside the box and find something entirely new!

This season's theme of "to have and to hold" was even more inspiring after the year of lockdown we had. The importance of cherishing those people and even ideals we hold dear has never felt more potent. As we continue the longer than desired return to normalcy, I find myself taking a moment to reflect on all the people who made this project possible. Not just our extraordinary casts, production teams, and staff, but also the amazing scientists, doctors, nurses, teachers, and other essential workers who have really brought us through this pandemic. It is very safe to say we would not be here without all their work, and I, for one, am beyond grateful!



Brenna Corner

SVADBA & BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

STAGE DIRECTOR Sarah Jane Pelzer*
MUSIC DIRECTOR Kimberley-Ann Bartczak
STAGE MANAGER Meaghan Fletcher

SVADBA

MILICA Jayne Hammond
DANICA Janice Marple
LENA Katherine Mayba
ZORA Karen Santos
NADA Kathleen Murphy
LJUBICA Melanie Nicol

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

JUDITH Dawn Bruch-Wiens
BLUEBEARD Ian Fundytus

KEYBOARD ONE Kimberley-Ann Bartczak
(RECORDED)

KEYBOARD TWO Shannon Hiebert
(LIVE)

CAMERA OPERATOR Natalie Buckley

*“The participation of these Artists is arranged by permission of
Canadian Actors’ Equity Association under the provisions of the
Dance Opera Theatre Policy (DOT).”*

*a masterclass in
subtext, often
shuddering with
profound
ambivalence and
regret.*

-Opera Canada



The exciting double-bill of Svadba & Bluebeard's Castle featured these two contemporary works in an exciting digital/live-hybrid format. Presented at the Winnipeg Art Gallery on August 25 and 27, Judith appeared alone on stage, surrounded by video projections of the other performers. The events of Svadba were presented on film as Judith's memories and inner turmoil while Bluebeard appeared as an oversized phantom haunting Judith's current situation.



BÉATRICE ET BÉNÉDICT

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

CONDUCTOR Michelle Mourre
DRAMATURG Brenna Corner
STAGE MANAGER Meaghan Fletcher

(in order of vocal
appearance)

LÉONATO Raymond Sokalski
CLAUDIO Jean van der Merwe
HÉRO Kinnon Weddall
BÉATRICE Lizzy Hoyt
DON PEDRO Matthew Pauls
BÉNÉDICT James McLennan*
URSULE Nicki LeGrand

RÉPÉTITEUR Shannon Hiebert

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I Susan McCallum
VIOLIN II Liana Fonseca
VIOLA Elly Hooker
CELLO Yuri Hooker
BASS Meredith Johnson
PIANO Ari Hooker

“The participation of these Artists is arranged by permission of Canadian Actors’ Equity Association under the provisions of the Dance Opera Theatre Policy (DOT).”

*under a twinkling
night sky, with
prairie breezes, as
if on cue, blowing
against Kirton’s
floral dress while
she sang of the
wind.*

-Opera Canada



Opera came to the drive-in with MUO's presentation of *Béatrice et Bénédict* at Lower Fort Garry on August 26. Nestled comfortably in their vehicles, audiences enjoyed the sublime combination of Berlioz's music and Shakespeare's prose. The live singers and orchestra were transmitted over FM radio and a pair of giant LED screens on either side of the stage allowed audiences to see every detail as if you were up close and personal with the performers.

A PLACE OF HEALING

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

CREATOR Brenna Corner
MUSIC DIRECTOR Kimberley-Ann Bartczak
& PIANIST

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Karen Santos

HEAD CAMERA Paul McKeen
EDITOR Brendan McKeen

SINGERS Sydney Clarke
Julia Davis
Nicki LeGrand
Karen Santos
Kinnon Weddall

INTERVIEWEES Dr. Jen Anderson
Con. Maria Budahan
Pam Hadder
Victoria McIntosh

FEATURING Elijah Kanhai
Greer Kanhai
Sage Kanhai

We cannot fully express how special it was to participate in this uniquely creative endeavor, and we appreciated your sensitive and careful engagement with family violence and abuse survivors and supporters.
-Willow Place



MUO partnered with Willow Place, a local charity that provides domestic violence prevention services, to present A Place of Healing, an original digital production. This visual album consisted of music videos and interviews with experts on domestic violence and its effects. We were happy to raise over \$1,000 for Willow Place to support the important work they do.



COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE



Again this year, even working against Covid, you put together a fantastic program. I brought a couple of friends to Bluebeard, and they were knocked out.

Despite the extenuating circumstances, I would rate this season as one of the best so far. The venues, the productions, the extended need of creativity: this season set MUO apart from other indie opera companies, for sure.



I am glad that I saw Svadba & Bluebeard's Castle - it was a very different experience. Very dark, but incredibly well executed. Perhaps with the entire cast present, it would not have come across as effectively. (Perhaps covid is good for something after all!)



This is the third season of Manitoba Underground Opera I've seen, and I've been knocked out by every show. I've brought friends to see several shows, and they have always responded enthusiastically. Loved this event - the fun format - even without the kettle corn it would have been wonderful but that put it over the top!



My first time seeing MUO. I was really tired and worried that I would get sleepy once the lights went down. Not a problem! It was so compelling. And beautiful. And different. I liked the length of it. And the use of video. I thought it was excellent quality, all around. I kept thinking how challenging the first part would have been to sing. It was excellent!



OPERA AROUND TOWN



MUO is thankful for our strong relationships with Downtown Winnipeg Biz, Heritage Winnipeg, and Dalnavert Museum.

On August 3rd, MUO sang outdoors as part of the Downtown Winnipeg Biz Concert Series at the Chinese Gardens. Over 50 people joined us for a selection of opera and musical theatre sung by Nikita Silagy Labdon, Sydney Clarke, and Karen Santos, all accompanied by pianist Cary Denby.



MUO sang for Heritage Winnipeg's Doors Open event on September 11th. Sopranos Kinnon Weddall, Judy Oatway, and pianist Cary Denby presented two concerts to a capacity-filled Millennium Centre for a total of 150 people.



Our final performance of the year took place on October 9 at the Dalnavert Museum. Led by General Manager, Brendan McKeen, MUO presented a 20-minute lecture recital on the history of operetta through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Soprano Kinnon Weddall sang and was joined, once again, by Cary Denby.

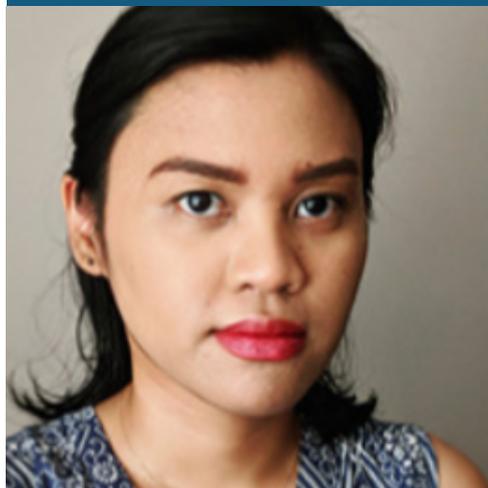
Thank you to all the artists who participated in these events. We were so grateful to share opera with our community during this turbulent time.

THE MANSPLAINING DIVISION

MUO is commissioning a new, original opera! After a few years of private workshops, we were happy to officially announce this initiative in 2021. We could not be more excited to have the dynamic duo of composer Laura Gow and writer Karen Remoto hard at work creating this unique show.

Entitled *The Mansplaining Division*, this show combines opera, ancient Greek mythology, and 21st century comedy to skewer modern day sexism.

We want to extend a special thank you to everyone who donated to our Mansplaining Division fundraising campaign last year. This project would not be moving forward without your support!

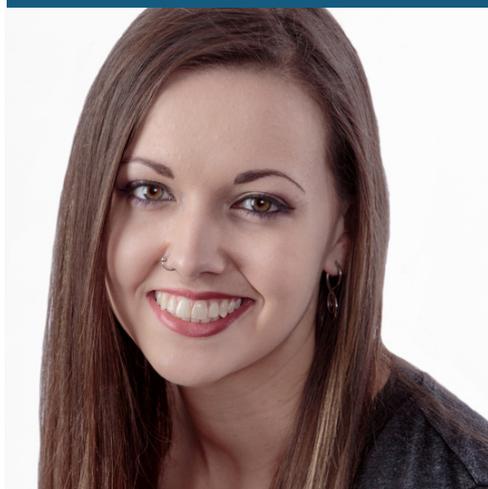


Karen Remoto

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Laura Gow

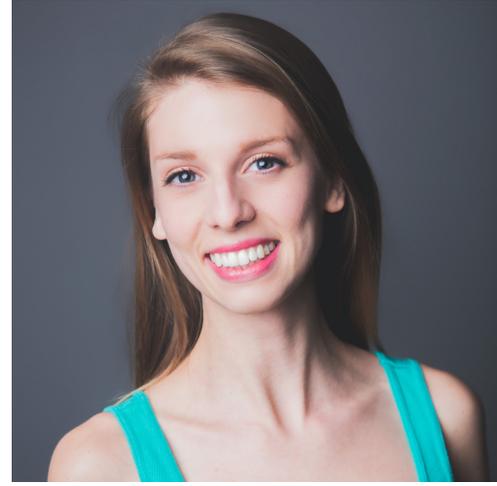
WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF



Kimberley-Ann Bartczak joins us from Victoria, BC where she is the Principal Coach and Accompanist at Pacific Opera Victoria. Kim and Brenna met at the Vancouver Opera Young Artists' Program in 2014 and have worked on many productions together since then. Kim jumps into the newly created role of Associate Artistic Director, and we are grateful to have her wealth of experience on the team.



Originally from Mexico, **Karen Santos** now calls Winnipeg home and is our new Director of Production. We first met Karen when she sang Belinda in our production of Dido|Aeneas. Alongside a busy teaching and performing career, Karen brings a wealth of creative knowledge and experience as an opera creator and visual artist.



Welcome to our new Social Media Manager, **Carmen Harris**. Carmen has a long history with MUO, having appeared in four productions and numerous outreach events. Nowadays, Carmen splits her time between Ottawa and British Columbia alongside a busy performing career and working for a boutique marketing firm. She has a deep knowledge of MUO, and that makes her the perfect person to share our story with the world.

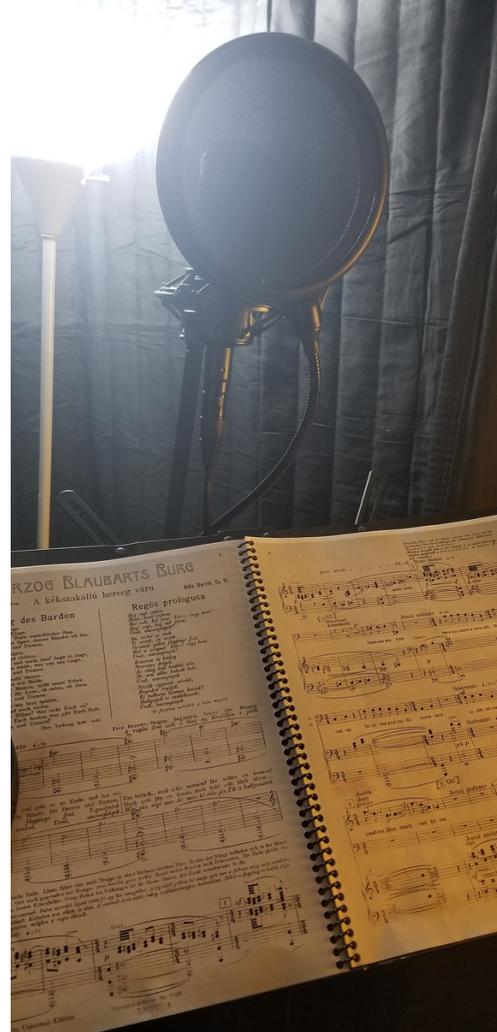
We thank previous DoP, Laura Gow, for her time and wish her well in her new pursuits (namely writing an opera for us!).

GROWTH AND TECHNOLOGY

One thing that united us all this year was the need to continuously perfect how we interact with each other while staying apart. Ironically, at MUO we have all been meeting digitally since 2014. With Brenna's full opera directing schedule, it has always been common for Brenna to be in new place each month and for us to work around different time zones.

Svadba and Bluebeard's Castle provided an opportunity for us to learn more about how we can connect performers and audiences across Canada using technology. Each performer was engaged in their home city and participated in online creative meetings alongside self-recording the final product. This project was set in motion before the pandemic, and we were grateful to follow through on our original contract offers safely.

Also new this year, MUO got on the streaming train. When our Svadba and Bluebeard's Castle production had to move indoors due to rain, we added a streaming option for those who did not feel safe attending in person. This also put us in a unique position to share the work with the families and fans of our artists all over the country. In addition to our first live-streamed performance, we also streamed all our rehearsals so the artistic team could remain connected to the process.



"Thank you for the multiple cams!"

-Patron



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

We were very grateful to have a successful financial year despite the current challenges. We received increased support from the Winnipeg Foundation and due to financial reporting requirements, both installments of our 2-year project grant from the Manitoba Arts Council were received this year. Our largest single expense was working alongside AVentpro to present Manitoba's first drive-in opera, but the largest budget category overall is artist fees. During these uncertain times, it is more important to us than ever that we ensure our artists are fairly paid for their hard work and talent.

2021 marked the first year in the company's history that we exceeded \$100,000 in revenue. We are so thrilled to make it to the "six-figure club".

Balance Sheet Comparison

	DEC 31, 21	DEC 31, 20	DEC 31, 19	DEC 31, 18
Assets				
Total Chequing / Savings	54,919.63	45,170.28	12,330.09	-1,145.18
Accounts Receivable				2,430.00
Other Current Assets	1,012.19	817.26	798.40	698.37
Total Assets	55,931.82	45,987.54	13,128.49	1,983.19
Liabilities / Equity				
Current Liabilities	13,755.49	859.90	1,188.11	7868.69
Deferred Funding	23,354.00	30,000.00		
Total Liabilities	37,109.49	30,859.90	1,188.11	7868.69
Unrestricted Net Assets	15,127.64	11,940.38	-5,885.50	1,883.97
Net Income	3,694.69	3,187.26	17,825.88	-7,769.47
Total Equity	18,822.33	15,127.64	11,940.38	-5,885.50
Total Liabilities & Equity	55,931.82	45,987.54	13,128.49	1,983.19

PROFIT & LOSS

Income	DEC 31, 21	DEC 31, 20	DEC 31, 19	DEC 31, 18
Tickets Sales	5775.09	-	10,033.00	19,866.95
Concession Sales	-	-	531.35	301.00
Other Revenue	700.00	-	5,525.00	150.00
Donations	12,056.79	4,418.92	3,102.00	6,845.77
Donations - Receipted	-	-	4,587.23	-
Donation - In-kind	-	-	250.00	-
Corporate Sponsors	1,200.00	550.00	1,100.00	1,100.00
Foundations	27,813.00	5,000.00	18,500.00	-
Fundraising Events	-	-	3,381.24	2,000.00
Canada Council - Operating	-	5,000.00	-	-
Canada Council - Project	31,500.00	-	16,000.00	1,500.00
Manitoba Arts Council - Operating	3,150.00	-	-	-
Manitoba Arts Council - Project	30,000.00	-	15,000.00	16,450.00
Winnipeg Arts Council - Project	-	-	8,000.00	-
Total Income	112,194.88	14,698.92	86,009.82	48,213.72
Expense				
Artistic	77,587.55	2,477.04	42,842.46	24,245.79
Programming	8,237.36	2,031.44	14,291.34	18,095.19
Marketing	6,130.27	402.45	2,297.15	735.91
Fundraising	246.37	143.60	3,547.33	1,348.55
Administration	14,833.64	6,457.13	5,205.66	9,857.75
Total Expense	107,035.19	11,511.66	68,183.94	54,283.19
Net Ordinary Income	5,159.69	3,187.26	17,825.88	-6,069.47
Other Expense -				
Donation to Other Charities	1,465.00	-	-	1,700.00
Net Income	3,694.69	3,187.26	17,825.88	-7,769.47

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Thank you to all of the wonderful people and organizations who supported us this year!

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