



manitoba
UNDERGROUND
opera

Annual Report

2023



About Us

Opera is an artform that resonates with people from all walks of life, and our goal is to continue that tradition by making classical works relevant to the modern world. Manitoba Underground Opera presents a season of three mainstage operas between May and August each year. Outside of our season, our annual Opera for Children Tour brings live opera to thousands of children and parents across Manitoba. This fully staged, kid-friendly production is presented for free to libraries, community centres, and daycares. Our Opera Around Town initiative (OAT) brings pop-up opera to Winnipeg year-round with intimate or outrageous concerts presented in museums and gay bars. We passionately believe that everyone deserves access to high quality art and are committed to ensuring that opera remains relevant and attainable for all.

At a Glance

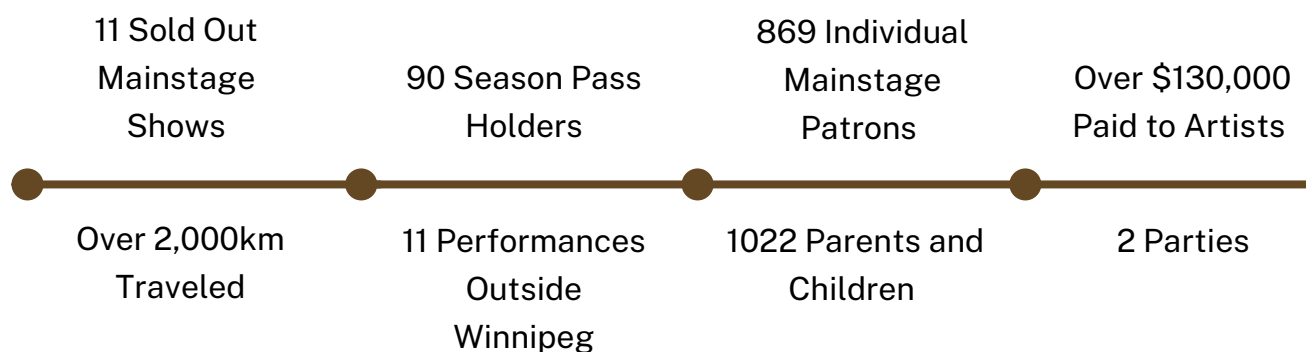


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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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STAFF

Brendan McKeen
Executive Director

Janice Marple
Administrative Director

Carmen Harris
Social Media Coordinator



Executive Director's Report

What a year!



Early in 2023, we weren't sure what to expect as we embarked on a completely different method of presentation. Local organisations were on their path to recovery and audience numbers were just starting to make a tangible rebound after the holiday performances concluded.

MUO was embarking on a completely new model. Sure, we had data and testimonials to ensure us that we were on the right path, but big change is never guaranteed.

2023 featured MUO's first full season of activities. What brought on the change? It's simplest to say that we outgrew our festival format for a variety of reasons.

Filling ten days with three different productions or concerts was asking a lot of ourselves and our patrons during the treasured last moments of summer. We saw on countless surveys that patrons would see more of us if it was spread out. Also, we could support our artists more without spreading our attention across different productions.

And so, we birthed our new season format. Three productions between May and September; uniquely MUO. As many organizations wind down, MUO opens up. Prudently, we decided to continue with our late August performance date for one of our productions but May and September allow us to reach new audiences and build momentum.

The worries and doubts we had were quickly dispelled as each performance reassured us that we made the right decision by selling out! A particular highlight was selling out our production of *The Corsair* an entire week before we opened.

Financially, we hit the \$200,000 milestone for the first (and not last) time. Public support skyrocketed thanks to five separate project grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and Government of Canada, totalling over \$100,000. Individual donations grew and we welcomed a new corporate sponsor for our Opera for Children Tour. Box office hit a company record totaling over \$28,000.

Our financial success afforded us the opportunity to pay artists over \$100,000 for the work they did. Onstage or off, they told stories of heartbreak, triumph, and tormented a lost man with horrendously outdated views.

We continued to build bridges to our community by working with organizations not typically associated with opera. Our first production turned the Pyramid Cabaret, normally known for punk and hip hop, into a methodical realm with crazed opera fans. We returned to Club 200 to celebrate queerness and raise funds for Sunshine House, one of our favourite social charities. We also performed a lesbian pirate opera on a boat. I'll remember that one forever.

None of this would be possible without our beloved supporters. Thank you to our donors, sponsors, government agencies, and patrons. You believed in us, championed us, and celebrated what opera can be. Beyond that, you have demonstrated unwavering trust in our artistic vision. We can't wait to show you more.

Brendan McKeen, Executive Director



Odyssey2023

New format and new successes

From hell to heaven, back to hell, and then to a pirate ship!

In August 2022, we sat outside dreaming of what would come next when we got a call from a patron. They asked for a ticket to *The Marriage of Figaro* and we had to tell them the last performance had just started...

We have heard politely over the years that our patrons couldn't fit in every performance we offered within such a short period of time. Plus, we had nearest and dearest supporters who would be away for exactly the one week our performances would happen.

We were called to critically look at our model.

How are we serving our patrons?

Are we being the best community members that we can be?

Insert a third question?

The decision was made to embrace a new model; leaving the festival model behind and lean into the tradition of a season.



The Mansplaining Division

Supported by

FONDATION
SOCAN
FOUNDATION

ARTISTS

LIBRETTO BY KAREN REMOTO

MUSIC BY LAURA GOW

STAGE DIRECTOR Alissa Watson*

MUSIC DIRECTOR Shannon Hiebert

STAGE MANAGER Samantha Desiree

PRODUCTION MANAGER Amanda Smith

PROJECTIONS Lovissa Wiens

*(in order of vocal
appearance)*

JOHN WOE IS ME Andrew Derynk*

ALEX & LILLIAN Carmen Harris

MEG & EISHA Alice Macgregor

TISH & BEATRICE Sydney Clarke

DAMEON, SAMUEL,
& HARRY BRINGER Max Fingerote

HADES Adam Sperry

PERSEPHONE Becca Oliviera

ORCHESTRA Caroline Bucher, Shannon
Hiebert, Nolan Powell,
Alyssa Ramsay

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



Castor et Pollux

ARTISTS

STAGE DIRECTOR Adam Da Ros*
MUSIC DIRECTOR Shannon Hiebert
STAGE MANAGER Samantha Desiree
PRODUCTION MANAGER Sonia Campbell
PROJECTIONS jaymez
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Melissa Langdon*
APPRENTICE DIRECTOR Max Fingerote

CASTOR Nikita Labdon
POLLUX Paulina Gonzalez
TÉLAÏRE Hailey Witt
PHÉBÉ Geneva Halverson
JUPITER Paul Forget
MERCURE & GRAND PRIEST Wes Rambo
CLÉONE, SUIVANTE D'HÉBÉ Mélanie Dupuis
& HOMBRE HEUREUSE

CHORUS

Liam Ciecko, Montanna Coad, Beverley Covert, Rebecca Danos, Linda Feasby, Max Fingerote, Jayden Fraser, Kyler Humble, Joanna Loepp Thiessen, Ian Olson, Isla Shea, Peter Steur, Chloe Thiessen, Cathy Wach-Deuck

ORCHESTRA

Julie Savard & Darryl Strain, Violins
Tatiana Friesen, Viola | Patricia Vanuci, Cello
Taras Pivniak, Bass | Caroline Bucher, Timpani

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



The Corsair



ARTISTS

STAGE DIRECTOR Sawyer Craig*
CONDUCTOR Maria Fuller**
STAGE MANAGER Airyn Lancaster
RÉPÉTITEUR Lee Houghton-Stewart
PRODUCTION MANAGER Mélanie Dupuis
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Ntara Curry

*(in order of vocal
appearance)*

CORRADO Simran Claire*
GIOVANNI Sonia Campbell
MEDORA Ashley Boychuk
GULNARA Janice Marple
SKELTON Stephen Haiko-Pena
MARINAIA Monica Hultin

CHORUS

Andrea Bellhouse, Sonia Campbell, Shea Carter, Monica Hultin, Joanna Loepp Thiessen, Stephanie Schmid, Carrie Schulz, Isla Shea

ORCHESTRA

Miona Milovanovic, Violin | Patricia Vanuci, Cello
Lee Houghton Stewart, Piano

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

** Appears courtesy of Tapestry Opera's Women in Musical Leadership Program



The Bremen Town Musicians

ARTISTS

STAGE DIRECTOR Jillian Willems*
MUSIC DIRECTOR Leanne Hiebert
STAGE, PRODUCTION,
& TOUR MANAGER Monica Hultin

EDDIE PENSIER Meaghan Reimer
DORABELLA Alice Macgregor
BARCAROLE Jacqueline Arthur
GENERAL BOOM Stephen Haiko-Pena

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





“These programs make the opera accessible to families and children, and give them the opportunity to experience music in a family friendly environment. The performances from Manitoba Underground Opera are professional quality, and demonstrate a real respect for children as an audience for opera and music.” - WPL Staff member



“I look forward to their performance every year, and, as always, they did not disappoint... The audience was spellbound throughout and I overheard a number of glowing comments afterwards. Many bravos and since gratitude to everyone in the troupe! That was my favorite program of the summer, and I look forward to hosting them again next year.” - WPL Staff member



RURAL & NORTHERN LOCATIONS

Altona
Brandon
Dauphin
Flin Flon
Morden
Portage la Prairie
Selkirk
Swan River
The Pas
Thompson
Winkler

WINNIPEG LOCATIONS

Bill and Helen Norrie Library
Carpathia Children's Centre
Charleswood Library
Cornish Library
Henderson Library
Louis Riel Library
Millennium Library
Pembina Trail Library
Sir William Stephenson Library
St. Boniface Library
St. James-Assiniboia Library
Transcona Library
West Kildonan Library

“The Opera filled our hearts with joy!” - WPL patron

Opera Around Town & Events



In May, we participated in Heritage Winnipeg's Doors Open. Singers Paul Forget, Paulina Gonzalez, and pianist Paul Rodermond presented a program of opera and musical theatre to patrons in between tours of Cercle Moliere's space.

In December, our artists gathered to spread the holiday cheer with caroling at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Thanks to the Canada Council for the Arts, we began a series of fabulous concerts at Club 200. 2022's ultra-successful *Divas & Dragoons* returned for two shows in December with many more scheduled for 2024.

MUO started the year with a season launch party in March at Winnipeg Film Group. The event included upcoming artists, recordings of *The Mansplaining Division*, and an appropriately adorable, yet somewhat unhinged, preview video of our Opera for Children Tour.

In November we held a fundraiser for our Opera for Children Tour. Our outstanding Board of Directors took the reins under the leadership of Rosemarie van der Hooft. *Let's Party* was a charming get together held at the St. Norbert Arts Centre featuring jazz and cabaret with a silent auction and lots of treats. Together, we raised over \$3,000 towards bringing opera to children across our province.

Supporting Artistic Talent

The next generation of creative leaders



The artist's journey in opera is never straightforward to become a creative leader. This year, MUO invested in helping the next generation of leaders gain experience in the operatic artform through two assistantships, one apprenticeship, and a Conductor position.

MUO began a partnership with Tapestry Opera's Women in Musical Leadership Program. This program addresses a historic gender inequity on the podium by providing women and non-binary conductors active mentorship with leading conductors in the field, deep and varied experience with professional companies, and a robust artistic network. Conductor Maria Fuller joined us for *The Corsair* in one of the few Conductor positions offered in opera across the country.

Three local artists were selected to work with our directors this season as well. They already had extensive training in the theatre industry but less experience behind the table in opera rehearsals. Melissa Langdon and Max Fingerote worked alongside Adam Da Ros for *Castor et Polux* and Ntara Curry worked alongside Sawyer Craig for *The Corsair*.

Artists Engagement Report

Creating Space for All to Thrive

Thanks to federal support through the Community Services Revitalization Fund, we engaged J. Hogue and Associates to hold a consultation with 13 artists that were part of our 2023 season.

“Thank you to all the artists who supported the project through their participation in the interviews. Artists showed generosity in their willingness to participate, speak honestly about their experiences, and offer input. Additionally, the artists came to interviews with openness, kindness, and clarity.” - Jackie Hogue & Associates

Spurred by the desire to create an environment of care and actively challenge oppression, we launched the Artist Engagement Project. The purpose of the project was to connect with artists who had worked with MUO to learn how the company can shift and grow to ensure it is a place where all artists can thrive.

We learned more about how we can support artists whose identities are targeted by oppression to make their best work.

Below are a sample of the ten recommendations we received.

- Continue to use found spaces. Ensure these locations consider the needs of artists and consider accessibility for both audience and artists.
- Produce more contemporary operas, including operas that connect with the diversity of cultures within Manitoba and operas that challenge oppression.
- Continue adapting operas and roles in ways that challenge biases and oppression. Ensure there is full consideration for the impact of the adaptations and that both the adaptations and their impacts are explored with the cast.





Financials

At MUO, we value transparency. Yes, there was a deficit this year. We knew this was coming when we didn't receive federal support for our Opera for Children Tour. We decided to soldier through and present our tour despite the certainty of needing to dip into our surplus. We knew that over 500 children and their families outside of Winnipeg deserved access to live opera performance. We're grateful that we had five consecutive surpluses to rely on and use when it was absolutely necessary.

Earlier this year, we were delighted to see that MUO ranked 23rd in Opera Canada's Top 40 companies for our 2022 season.

Building on that success, we increased our revenue to over \$200,000 for the first time in company history.

Over \$130,000
paid to artists

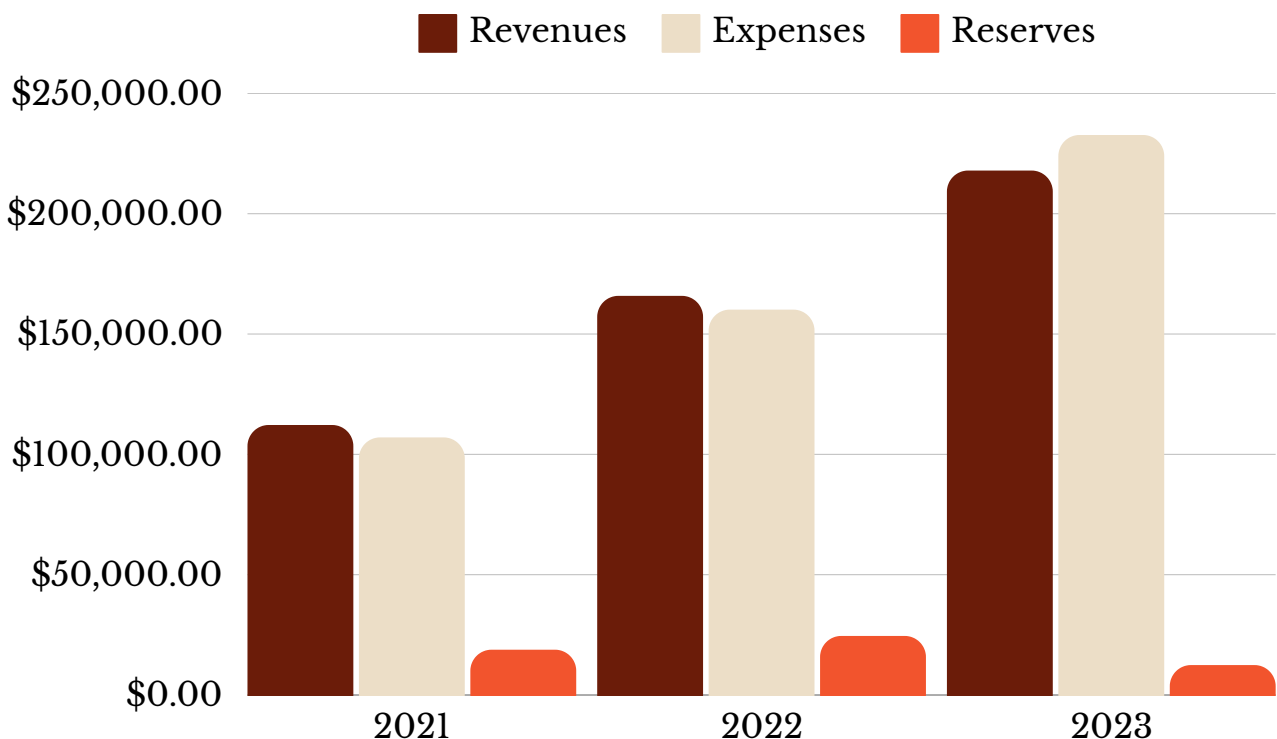
\$10,000 increase in
box office sales

88% increase to
Foundation support

30% increase to
individual donations

Balance Sheet Comparison

	DEC 31, 23	DEC 31, 22	DEC 31, 21
Assets			
Total Chequing / Savings	17,743.98	56,529.82	54,919.63
Accounts Receivable	47,842.00	4,135.30	
Other Current Assets	971.39	2,497.49	1,012.19
Total Assets	66,557.37	63,162.61	55,931.82
Liabilities / Equity			
Current Liabilities	3,793.97	8,120.79	13,755.49
Deferred Funding	51,325.00	30,550.00	23,354.00
Total Liabilities	55,118.97	38,620.79	37,109.49
Unrestricted Net Assets	26,214.19	18,822.33	15,127.64
Net Income	-14,775.79	5,719.49	3,694.69
Total Equity	11,438.40	24,541.82	18,822.33
Total Liabilities & Equity	66,557.37	63,162.61	55,931.82



Profit & Loss

Income	DEC 31, 23	DEC 31, 22	DEC 31, 21
Tickets Sales	28,899.95	18,168.38	5,775.09
Concession Sales	-	375.50	-
Other Revenue	1,200.00	8,650.00	700.00
Bank Interest	76.58	13.50	-
Donations	25,511.50	16,328.00	12,056.79
Corporate Sponsors	3,500.00	3,000.00	1,200.00
Foundations	57,790.00	30,747.00	27,813.00
Fundraising Events	1,272.27	3,053.60	-
Canada Council - Project	80,425.00	46,000.00	31,500.00
Manitoba Arts Council - Operating	-	3,000.00	3,150.00
Manitoba Arts Council - Project	11,250.00	28,020.00	30,000.00
Winnipeg Arts Council - Project	8,000.00	8,000.00	-
Total Income	217,925.30	165,855.98	112,194.88
Expense			
Artistic	147,209.67	103,878.10	77,587.55
Programming	54,101.52	33,240.62	8,237.36
Marketing	6,786.39	4,421.14	6,130.27
Fundraising	4,218.87	1,576.67	246.37
Administration	20,384.64	15,919.96	14,833.64
Total Expense	\$232,701.09	159,036.49	107,035.19
Net Ordinary Income	\$-14,775.79	6,819.49	5,159.69
Other Expense -			
Donation to Other Charities	-	1,100.00	1,465.00
Net Income	\$-14,775.79	5,719.49	3,694.69

Funders & Donors

Thank you for your support!

Public Funders



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts



MANITOBA ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DU MANITOBA



WINNIPEG
ARTS COUNCIL

Foundation Support



GAIL ASPER
FAMILY FOUNDATION

FONDATION
SOCAN
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Wine Sponsor



*Opera for Children
Tour Partner*

Winnipeg Public
LIBRARY

*Opera for Children
Tour Sponsor*



Venue Sponsors



Production Supporters

AventPro
The Audio Visual Event Professionals

ROYAL
MTC
MANITOBA THEATRE CENTRE

Donors

Roma & Allen Bellhouse	Elroy Friesen	Peter Letkemann	Danielle Tétrault*
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Debra Budgell*	Patrick Hanan	Paul McKeen	Erin-Brie Warwick
Florence Carey	Leona Herzog	Brendan McKeen*	Geraldine Weigeldt
Lisa-Marie Carlson*	Leanne Hiebert	Melissa Novecosky	Carolyn Weiss
Shawna Dempsey	Harry Ingleby	Jadranka Paskvalin	Wendy Whitemore
Isaac Ben Diamond	Barb Janes	Cody Pierson	Michelle Wiebe
Christopher Douglas*	Ron Kirby*	Dr. Bill Pope	Nancy Williamson
Gregory Fearn	Donna Kormilo	Sean Richens	Marcel van Woensel
Linda Feasby	Jackie Kreitz*	Craig Ross*	Audrey Young
Taliesen Dorais-Fleming*	Katarina Kupca	Peggy Sanders	Nicole Zajac*
Meaghan Fletcher	Zandra Lea	Helga Sickert	&
Erin Burns-Flett	Nicole LeGrand*	Catherine Taylor	Anonymous

*Monthly Donors



Looking Forward

It's exciting, yet intimidating, to think about the future based on our successes this year. Planning for lightning to strike twice is a fruitless pursuit although arts administrators frequently find themselves in a situation to replicate success.

When we embarked on this new season format, we committed to our next three seasons. We have big ideas and new experiences ahead that we can't wait to share.

The arts sector is in the midst of change and the operatic artform is being pulled into the fast lane. Entrenched in centuries of history, contemporary culture and our brave young artists are challenging conventions. The honest opinions of our artists' consultations drew a dark picture of how artists feel about the sector. We look forward to immediately implementing actions that will place MUO at the forefront of a healthier and more inclusive companies across Canada.

To grow to the company size that MUO feels is appropriate, we must find more funding avenues, invest in new performance models, and create a stable environment for creation. 2024 is filled with opportunities and we are poised and positioned to continue our growth.

Thank you for an incredible year

2023



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