

I felt nurtured by the company and its mentors over the course of the program from November to June. It's hard to encapsulate what this meant for me personally and artistically. I felt in a rut personally and artistically due to the horrors of the pandemic, and also the transitional time of my career. I felt like I had ideas and passion to bring to audiences, but a bit paralyzed on realizing them. The barriers were external and real, but also interior as I am plagued by crippling self doubt. Opera is of course my passion, but I had been feeling like utterly giving up on mainstream opportunities and classical repertoire. I feel a bit out of place in experimental music world, because I love Mozart and bel canto singing, and I always feel out of place in opera world because of my fascination of new music and compositional ambitions. Victoria was the validation, support, and rigour I needed. With the acceptance letter I was overwhelmed with the feeling that my life would change for the better. It's a feeling I later drew from when performing *The Presentation of the Rose* in Victoria – in a moment everything shifts and the world seems different because you can suddenly imagine a better life for yourself. I won't lie and say that feeling has maintained itself through all the hustle and disappointment since, but I think back on key moments and achievements of my time with POV, and it helps.

Every day me and the other singers were brainstorming ideas for new operas and projects. Most were very silly, but silliness is such an inspiration for me. I am happy to report that one of my opera pitches was accepted by a Montreal company and I am hard at work composing a new opera. Having spent so much creative time with Ryan Macdonald, I feel certain we will be career long collaborators. He's currently subletting my apartment in Toronto! I cannot overstate the importance of these opportunities to build friendship and community. There is so much overlap between personal and professional life and I feel that both have grown so much richer.

A few key moments:

The process of building my video stretched me in mostly wonderful ways. I would never have had ambition to dive into all the facets of creation I did without POV. And I wouldn't have created

this work, which is the work I am most proud of to date. I hope to do future video work in the future, because it was such a special way to draw on my skills and create a work with permanence.

I was so impressed by the artists involved in the Jeffery Ryan project. Rehearsal observations can be dull, but this group was interested in a collaborative approach. Legend of Canadian music Jeffery Ryan wants my opinion on his work? And not only wants to hear it actually enacts changes as a result? It was a very special experience of generational exchange, particularly since LGBT narratives are so central to my identity and work.

Singing Strauss up a tree. I felt so sure of myself up there

My time with POV is a gift that will keep giving to me artistically and personally. It is my sincerest hope that the gifts I brought to POV will keep giving to the audiences we reached.

- Rebecca Gray