

2025|26 SEASON

GLUCK'S

# Orpheus & Eurydice Keynotes

Moving on from Myth

ALEX CHEN

Gluck & Opera Reform

ROBERT HOLLISTON

Ballet & Opera

PAUL DESTROOPER

Q3 Impact Report

Upcoming Events



**OPERA**  
PACIFIC  
OPERA  
VICTORIA

SEASON SPONSOR/  
HOST HOTEL

 Chateau Victoria  
HOTEL & SUITES

PRODUCTION SPONSOR

 Butler

TOP: THE PACIFIC OPERA VICTORIA CHORUS. BOTTOM: BALLET DANCERS FROM BALLET VICTORIA DURING REHEARSALS FOR ORPHEUS & EURYDICE AT THE BAUMANN CENTRE. PHOTOS BY ARCADE PALLOT

## Moving On From Myth

---

People say that the only constants in life are death and taxes. Given that a good many among us are currently being plagued by tax season, it's the perfect time to retreat to the opera to ponder the depths of Hades with *Orpheus & Eurydice*.

In Pacific Opera Victoria's final opera of the season, we are presented with a unique transformation of the stories of Eurydice and Orpheus. Our action is moved from the mythical Greek underworld to the very human reality of palliative care. The production puts a spotlight on the kernel of humanity that exists between the canonical tellings of the tragic myth and the triumphant opera.

### *The Canon*

For those wanting a refresher on the tale of *Orpheus & Eurydice*, it goes something like this: In Greek myth, lovers Orpheus and Eurydice are separated when Eurydice meets an untimely death. Moved by his grief, Orpheus descends to Hades where his dulcet musical tones convince the residents of the Underworld to offer him a means of reviving Eurydice (so long as he doesn't look back at her during their ascent back to the world of the living). However, Orpheus fails his trial and glances back at Eurydice, sending her permanently to Hades. Tragic.

The classic arc of the Orphean myth proved perhaps too tragic or insufficiently heroic for composer Christoph Willibald Gluck. He inserted a happy ending into the standard story in his opera *Orpheus & Eurydice*: the cherub Amour (a.k.a. Love) is moved by how strongly Orpheus loves and suffers at losing Eurydice (again), so opts to revive Eurydice. *Convenient*.

### *The Reality*

Life tends not to be quite as dramatically tragic as the standard myth nor as convenient as the standard Gluck opera. Every day, we confront loss and grief, including in circumstances where we love no less strongly than *Orpheus & Eurydice*. Yet, we don't have the burden of a trek to Hades, nor the celestial assistance of an enthusiastic cherub. So how can we feel connected to or comforted by a classic such as Orphée & Eurydice in the face of the reality of grief?

In this production by director Amanda Testini, Gluck's opera frames Eurydice and Orpheus' journey differently. Death encroaches as an inevitability. Yet, through an inspired reordering of the musical score and a moving setting in a hospice, we glimpse more deeply what Eurydice and Orpheus are to each other. They are held together by love, yes, but they are also aware of how their circumstances make them a source of grief for one another in palliative care. Eurydice's passage into the next life is not a passive consequence of Orpheus' actions, but a path Eurydice knowingly treads herself.

Instead of being a story striving to overcome death, Pacific Opera Victoria's *Orpheus & Eurydice* searches for comfort, acceptance, and peace as death comes into focus. It is a story about how we release one another when the time comes and the bonds of love *that linger*. While Testini's production may not be as flashy as the idealized tragedy and heroism of some standard iterations, may it remind us of the love that lies at the centre of our grief and its capacity to outlive it.

ALEX CHEN

---

## Gluck & Opera Reform

---

At some time during the Spring of 1637, the Teatro S. Cassiano in Venice opened its doors to ticket-buying customers, and the first "public" opera house was born. A decisive step in the evolution of this still young art form: during the four decades since the first "opera" was presented in Florence, it had relied exclusively on aristocratic and royal patrons. Almost immediately after 1637 opera houses opened throughout Italy and outward to other countries, particularly Austria and Germany (the Oper am Gänsemarkt, where Handel was to make his earliest operatic impressions, opened in Hamburg in 1678). Inevitably the idealism of the Florentines - their insistence on the highest standards of poetry and music and respect for the integrity of the plot - yielded to the demands of theatre managers for material that would satisfy the demands of the public: spectacular stage machinery; plots that, even if serious, made room for often low comedy; music that was accessible and familiar (often based on

popular melodies and rhythms); and, above all, star singers. Thus, there was a complete reversal in the relationship of text to music: the Florentines had considered music accessory to poetry; the Venetians and their followers treated the libretto as hardly more than a conventional scaffolding for the provision of musical vehicles for celebrity singers to strut their stuff in exchange for public adulation and extravagant fees. (Even Handel in early 18th century London understood that to sell his Italian operas to a ticket-buying public he had to engage virtuoso vocalists whose fees were often higher than his own.)

Handel's operas in the 1720s and 1730s were, structurally, a succession of da capo arias (i.e., ternary structures - ABA - which provided singers with opportunities to ornament if not rewrite the musical material when the A section was repeated) connected by passages of recitativo secco (a speechlike declamation of text accompanied only by harpsichord and a sustaining bass instrument - the equivalent of dialogue in a musical). Imbued with Handel's genius for melody and musical drama, this structure functioned successfully - for a while. But by the mid-eighteenth century it had become threadbare and predictable, with the demands of star singers reaching levels of entitlement that reduced the roles of poet and composer to those of underlings, and pandered to the demands of a public that valued glitter over substance (whatever we may think of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocrats and royals, they tended to be very well-educated and culturally discerning).

In 1755, Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764) published his *Essay on the Opera*, a landmark 18th-century treatise advocating for reform in opera, urging a shift toward a more unified, dramatic, and naturalistic style. He argued that drama should be pre-eminent over mere musical spectacle.

Among Algarotti's suggested reforms:

- all elements of opera—music, singing, dancing, and staging—should serve the dramatic plot, rather than the plot being a flimsy excuse for virtuoso display.
- reliance on da capo arias and excessive focus on singers must give way to a more coherent, emotional, and streamlined, rational dramatic structure.
- the poet or librettist should be the “soul of the spectacle,” controlling the entire dramatic vision, rather than acting

as a servant to the composer.

- to truly affect the audience's heart and mind, music and spectacle must be integrated into a cohesive whole, avoiding the interruptions caused by excessive, unrelated virtuoso performances.

Algarotti's essay was highly influential in the development of “reform opera” in the 1760s, directly impacting the ideals of Christoph Willibald Gluck and his librettist Ranieri de' Calzabigi.

Gluck (1714-1787) was born in what is now the western extreme of Czechoslovakia (Czech was his native tongue). At about 14 he left home to study in Prague, soon moving to Vienna and then Milan, where his first opera was given in 1741. During a visit to London in the mid-1740s he got to know Handel's music. After further travel he settled in Vienna. In 1756, Pope Benedict XIV knighted Gluck and awarded him the Order of the Golden Spur. From that time on, Gluck used the title “Ritter von Gluck” or “Chevalier de Gluck”.

In Vienna he met the poet Calzabigi and the choreographer Angiolini, and in collaboration with them wrote a ballet-pantomime *Don Juan* (1761) embodying a new degree of artistic unity. The next year they wrote the opera *Orpheus & Eurydice*, the first of Gluck's so-called ‘reform operas’. Gluck's idea was to make the drama of the work more important than the star singers who performed it, and to do away with secco recitative which he felt broke up the action. If *Orpheus & Eurydice* is the first of Gluck's (and Calzabigi's) “reform” operas (they are not exclusively their own, for several other composers had been working along similar lines), his manifesto appears in the score for *Alceste* (1767):

*When I undertook to write the music for Alceste, I resolved to divest it entirely of all those abuses, introduced by the vanity or by the too great complaisance of composers, which have so long disfigured Italian opera and made of the most splendid and most beautiful of spectacles the most ridiculous and wearisome. I have striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry by means of expression and by following the situation of the story, without interrupting the action or stifling it with a useless superfluity of ornaments [...] I believed that my greatest labour should be devoted to seeking a beautiful simplicity...*

**CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE...**

What this beautiful simplicity entailed:

- a) reducing the number of *da capo* arias and therefore the opportunities for star singers to interrupt the action to indulge in irrelevant (if spectacular) display;
- b) a more predominantly syllabic setting of the text to make the words more intelligible
- c) far less repetition of text within an aria
- d) less reliance on *secco* recitative
- e) simpler, more flowing melodic lines
- f) an Overture that is linked by theme or mood - and often even thematic material - to the ensuing action

Gluck's work is by no means of historical interest only (though it is that, too) - he was an important influence on Hector Berlioz (who was a fan) as well as Richard Wagner.

Side note: the French revision of *Orpheus & Eurydice*, which allows for much more ballet than is traditional in Italian opera, excited the admiration of Marie Antoinette.

ROBERT HOLLISTON

---

## *Ballet & Opera*

---

Dance has always been part of the human experience since the dawn of time. As civilization evolved so did the various forms of dance often linked to festivities, or religious practices. Ballet originated in Italy during the Renaissance as a form of entertainment for the court. In France, with Louis XIV it truly became a Royal artform. The Sun King eventually formalized it by establishing the Academie Royale de Dance in 1661.

It was incorporated into opera very early with the Italian/French Baroque composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, who often featured elaborate ballet sections in his operas. Lully was himself a dancer, and he worked at the court of Louis XIV. He created roles for and shared the stage with the King on many occasions.

Ballet was used to empower vocal performance in opera. The physicality and expressiveness of ballet inspired opera singers to incorporate more dynamic and emotive movements into their performances, thereby enhancing their storytelling capabilities.

Ballet then spread through Europe and became an art for the aristocracy. In the 19th century, with the rise of the Romantic ballet which focused on the ethereal themes (narratives with

nymphs, fairies etc) and the use of pointe work, ballet started to be widely incorporated in opera thanks to its choreographic storytelling. Ballet's *divertissements* also significantly influenced the choreography and staging of operas. For example, it would bring a sense of festivity to a work; a celebration, a spectacle within a spectacle. Many operas include ballet sequences which serve to enhance the narrative and the visual opulence of the performance. Many opera and ballet companies still share the same theatres across Europe. This benefitted both artforms, including in-house orchestras as well. There are still many opera houses in Europe that host all three organizations.

Unfortunately, as costs increased and interests changed in the 20th century the artforms started to work more separately to mitigate costs.

Thankfully, many arts organization are still committed to maintain such collaborations and enrich their offering to audiences. Pacific Opera Victoria is such an organization that brings original creations to the stage and incorporates ballet in a wildly creative rendition of *Orpheus & Eurydice*.

PAUL DESTROOPER



# Q3 IMPACT REPORT

CELEBRATING THE RESULTS OF YOUR GENEROSITY



## OPERA SPROUTS

### GROWING THE FUTURE OF OPERA

In partnership with Vancouver Opera, Opera Sprouts is a new mentorship-driven creation program responding to two long-standing gaps in Canadian opera: the lack of supported pathways for composers and librettists to develop new work, and the shortage of opera written specifically for young audiences that can tour into schools. “We’re in a field where we want new work, but the overhead of producing a work... is really expensive. It starts to become the question of who even has access to do that?” says Rebecca Hass, Director of Engagement and New Works.

Applications from composer-librettist teams flooded in for the three available opportunities. One of the three works currently in development will be selected for production and touring to schools across BC in the spring of 2027, bringing the work directly to tens of thousands of young people in their own learning environments. The composer-librettist teams leave the program with a developed libretto, score, and a network of opera professionals “so we can support long-term collaboration,” says Hass.

The Opera Sprouts program is built upon mentorship, collaboration, and a libretto-first process that prioritizes story development before music is written. Hass states, “For us to write new operas successfully...we have to talk about the fact that opera is a very particular form and it succeeds in ways that are different from other art forms.” Teams work within constraints that reflect the realities of touring shows. Mentors, like Hass, challenge teams to consider “can you create a show for four people who have to carry their own sets? Can they sing this show three times a day?” Works evolve through multiple drafts and feedback cycles, allowing structure, clarity, and production realities to emerge early. “It is important to be honest if we want work that actually gets produced,” Hass adds.

The process also extends beyond the rehearsal room. Artists engage directly with students and educators, aligning with BC curriculum needs and inviting real-time responses from young audiences. We “brought in teachers and students for the grades that the opera was to be written for, so that they might get a sense of what it is like to hold the attention of someone in grade four for 45 minutes” says Hass. “Kids give immediate feedback. If something is boring, you know immediately.” Much to the relief of composer Tawnie Olson, who “loved how the children were drawn in simply by telling them the story live over Zoom.”

That direct exchange has become one of the program’s most powerful elements, shaping both the work and the artists behind it. Librettist Scott Button, a self-proclaimed “opera newbie” says “I hope the works invite them to think of opera as contemporary, on their level and ‘for them’.” Olson shares a similar sentiment and “hopes that seeing opera written by diverse, living creators helps them realize that this art form is open to everyone and that it is something they can enjoy and maybe even create themselves one day, too.” The program’s impact is already visible in the way artists are reimagining what opera can be when trust, time, and young audiences are placed at the centre.

#### Education & Youth Programs Sponsor



#### Special Thanks to



# Found in Translation

## EXPANDING OPERA THROUGH LANGUAGE, CONNECTION, AND COMMUNITY

At a time when Indigenous languages are at risk of being lost, Found in Translation offers a powerful model for how the arts can support language revitalization through relationship, respect, and shared creative practice. Developed in partnership with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, this initiative explores the translation of operatic works into Indigenous languages as an act of reconciliation.

Inspired by this partnership, Director of Engagement and New Work, Rebecca Hass, reflects: "I am Métis... I had been working with Indigenous elders... so I wondered what would happen if we translated opera songs into Indigenous languages." From this question, the collaboration was born. "We started very carefully, with visits, tea, and conversation," says Hass. "Language is tied to identity and community," and from the outset, the work was grounded in cultural respect, reciprocity, and ethical collaboration, centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership.



INDIGENOUS ELDERS AND MEMBERS OF THE FOUND IN TRANSLATION PROJECT AT THE VICTORIA NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE. PHOTO BY ARCADE PALLOT.

Each elder works directly with singers to translate pieces into their respective languages, shaping not only the words but the meaning and cultural context behind them. As singer Chelsea Kutyn notes, "It creates an entirely different view of the world and the piece when you can understand the context and choice of each word the elders have selected," particularly where direct translations do not exist. As Hass explains, "Language and songs are considered family-owned in Indigenous worldview... we are very careful about avoiding extraction." Each elder retains ownership of the recordings and scores, ensuring the work remains within their families and communities. Any future use is guided through relationship rather than access alone. "Relationships matter more than speed or convenience... This is part of reconciliation: building real relationships" says Hass.

What began as a pilot with two singers and two elders has grown into a larger network, now including six singers, four elders, and a new partnership with the Inter-cultural Association of Greater Victoria, with additional translations expanding into languages such as Hindi and Japanese. "It is a privilege to hear stories from gracious Elders about their lived experiences and the meanings of their songs," says Parker Johnson, Community Engagement Coordinator with the Inter-cultural Association. "Even for a witness who does not speak the languages, the listening experience is impactful."

Looking ahead, participants see the program as a model for how classical music can evolve in relationship to community. As singer Alex Chen shares: "I hope this project reminds us that the classical music we perform is done in service to the community. When we prioritize flexibility in the music so that it can build new relationships and meaningful moments, we increase the genre's vitality, capacity for impact, and relevance to contemporary life." Come celebrate this work with community, speakers, and Elders on June 15 at 7:30pm in the Bauman Centre to hear these newly translated songs. Visit [pacificopera.ca](http://pacificopera.ca) for more information.

**Missed our Q2 Impact Report? [Read it here](#) →**

Featuring the Living Opera, Chorus Development Program, *Kamtila Totem*, & Opera Postcards.



**Supported By**

**OPERA  
AMERICA**

# In Gratitude and Remembrance

## HONOURING THREE PILLARS OF PACIFIC OPERA VICTORIA

---

Pacific Opera Victoria marks with deep gratitude and sorrow the passing of three remarkable members of our community, Jane Forster, Diane Kettner, and Carole Sabiston, each of whom shaped our company in enduring and meaningful ways.

**Jane Forster's** connection to Pacific Opera spanned both stage and leadership. Beginning with her chorus debut in *Roméo et Juliette* in 1991, Jane brought warmth, dedication, and musical vitality to 21 productions, concluding with *Carmen* in 2004. Her commitment extended beyond performance. As a board member from 1998 to 2006, she helped guide the company through years of growth and change. Jane's presence, both artistic and collegial, remains woven into the fabric of our history.

**Diane Kettner** will be remembered not only for her devoted service on the board from 2012 to 2023, but for her extraordinary generosity of spirit. A passionate lover of opera, Diane was a gracious and enthusiastic host who welcomed countless supporters and newcomers into the Pacific Opera community. Her gift for bringing people together strengthened the social heart of the company, ensuring that opera was not only experienced on stage, but shared and celebrated off it as well.

**Carole Sabiston's** artistic vision helped define the early identity of Pacific Opera Victoria. A distinguished textile artist and designer, she created costumes for some of the company's earliest productions, including *The Magic Flute* in 1977 and again in 1987. Her legacy lives vividly at the Baumann Centre, where her tapestry *The Remains of Madama Butterfly*, crafted from fabric remnants of the company's 1981 production, stands as a powerful testament to her creativity and to the enduring dialogue between visual and performing arts.



Each of these women contributed in unique and lasting ways, through performance, leadership, hospitality, and artistry. Together, they helped build the vibrant community we cherish today. We honour their memory with gratitude and extend our heartfelt condolences to their families and friends.

# Upcoming Events



## YOUTH IN OPERA

See Your Impact Come to Life | Scan the QR Code to Watch Now  
From first encounters to creative expression, our Youth in Opera programs are opening doors and building lasting connections. Through Living Opera, Youth Summer Performance Program, Community Previews, and school tours, young audiences and artists are finding their voices. Hear Artistic Director Brenna Corner share how this work is shaping opera's future. With thanks to **Acera Insurance, The Quail Rock Foundation** and **Creative B.C.**



## ENCORE WITH ROBERT HOLLISTON

**Sunday, May 24 & Monday, May 25** | Baumann Centre

As a valued supporter of Pacific Opera Victoria, donors receive an invitation to Encore with Robert Holliston, our annual appreciation event. This intimate gathering features an engaging program of music and conversation with special guest artist Emma Parkinson. A celebration of the community that makes our work possible, Encore offers a unique opportunity to experience exceptional artistry up close.



## YOUTH SUMMER PERFORMANCE PROGRAM: ROBIN HOOD

**July 17-19** | The Baumann Centre

The Youth Summer Performance Program returns with *Robin Hood* by Ben Moore & Kelley Rourke. This program offers youth aged 8-18 the chance to star in a professional production! In a forest under threat, Robin leads a rebel community to protect people and nature, facing love, danger, and the cost of leadership. No experience needed, just your passion. Learn more at [pacificopera.ca](http://pacificopera.ca) and join the adventure today!



## IL TROVATORE | HANSEL & GRETEL | THE MAGIC FLUTE

**2026/27 Season** | Live at the Royal Theatre

Subscriptions are now on sale for our 2026/27 season. Experience Verdi's *Il trovatore*, Humperdinck's *Hansel & Gretel*, and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, a season of passion, imagination, and adventure. Secure your seats today and join us for a season of magic at the opera!

### SEASON SPONSOR/ HOST HOTEL



### PRODUCTION SPONSOR



### ARTIST PATRON FOR ANDRIANA CHURCHMAN

**Drs. Bill Pope &  
Elizabeth Tippett Pope**

### PRINCIPAL ARTISTS UNDERWRITER

**NRS Foundation  
through the Victoria  
Foundation**

### ARTIST PATRON FOR ROBERT HOLLISTON

**Barbara Hubbard**

### ANNUAL OPERATING SUPPORT



### MEDIA PARTNERS



Pacific Opera Victoria works and creates on the traditional lands of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking people, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.