

OPERA 26 ATELIER 27

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Opera Atelier Presents Canada's First Fully-Staged Production of Charpentier's Masterpiece *The Descent of Orpheus* in a New, Innovative Design at Koerner Hall

Opera Atelier's production propels the company into a new creative mode

Toronto, ON — Opera Atelier opens its 2026/27 season with Canada's first fully-staged production of M.A. Charpentier's *The Descent of Orpheus*, at Koerner Hall's TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning, from October 22-25, 2026. Fully staged and choreographed by Opera Atelier Founding Co-Artistic Directors Marshall Pynkoski, C.M. and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, C.M., the production opens the company's 2026/27 *Season of Heroes* with a fresh sense of modernity.

"While still grounded in the concept of period performance, Opera Atelier's production of *The Descent of Orpheus* will reflect a more contemporary aesthetic," says Pynkoski. "This has much to do with Charpentier's unrivaled ability to blend soaring human emotion with the formality of 17th century French prose and music."

Charpentier's *The Descent of Orpheus* is the first known French operatic treatment of the Orpheus myth as related by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. *The Descent of Orpheus* was written at the command of one of Charpentier's protectors, the legendary Mademoiselle de Guise, who dominated the musical scene in Paris and Versailles in late-17th-century France. The extraordinary detail of Charpentier's instructions for every aspect of the opera's production make it clear that *Descent* was a unique experiment for all participants and is considered a masterpiece of dramatic writing.

Opera Atelier has assembled a superb team of French specialists for this production. American tenor Daniel McGrew, making his OA debut in the role of Orpheus, was introduced to Opera Atelier by French-Canadian soprano Mireille Asselin, who will sing the role of Eurydice.

"I think Daniel is one of the most compelling and beautiful singers I've ever heard because the way he connects to text and musical line is incredibly genuine. To hear Daniel is to love Daniel, and I can't wait for Toronto audiences to discover him," says Asselin.

French baritone David Witczak returns to Opera Atelier as Pluto after intense collaborations with Pynkoski and Zingg for the Royal Opera House Versailles, and French-Canadian bass Olivier Bergeron makes his company debut as Apollo. They will be joined by Canadian mezzo soprano Mireille Lebel as Persephone and an on-stage ensemble of soloists who will be seamlessly integrated with the off-stage chorus made up of members of Tafelmusik Chamber Choir.

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This being a French courtly drama, dancing is integral to virtually every scene. Opera Atelier is delighted to include a full complement of the Artists of Atelier Ballet in order to realize Charpentier's intentions.

"Charpentier's music for the ballet provides opportunities to explore theatrical dancing in late-17th-century France to its fullest extent," adds Zingg. "Often paired with choral excerpts, this style of movement emerged fresh from the groundbreaking dance academy founded by Louis XIV in 1661—where dancers were trained specifically for the professional theatre for the first time in French history."

Opera Atelier's Associate Music Director Dr. Christopher Bagan will conduct from the harpsichord an elite ensemble of soloists from Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and Opera Atelier's Artist-in-Residence Measha Brueggergosman-Lee will open the evening with a unique prologue—Ralph Vaughan Williams' art song "Orpheus with his Lute." Brueggergosman-Lee's prologue gives context to the opera's themes, much in the style of the famous prologue to Monteverdi's 1607 production of *L'Orfeo*. In it, the Goddess of Music appears to the audience to introduce the story taken from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and to familiarize the audience with the power of music and what Orpheus and his lyre were capable of achieving.

"Monteverdi believed his audience of aristocrats steeped in classical mythology needed to be reminded of the history of Orpheus, and we believe the same," adds Pynkoski "Measha's recent success singing the role of the Sorceress in Opera Atelier's production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* for Ottawa Chamberfest and her recent recognition by the Canada Council for the Arts with the prestigious Molson Prize make her eminently suited to portray the Goddess of Music in this production."

Opera Atelier designer Gerard Gauci continues his magical transformation of Koerner Hall into Toronto's most unique performance space thanks to the ongoing support of the Joan and Jerry Lozinski's Opera Atelier Reimagined Project at Koerner Hall. Lighting designer Kimberly Purtell and costume designer Michael Gianfrancesco round out the creative team for what promises to be an extraordinary evening of storytelling.

Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director Pynkoski has collaborated with many of the finest artists in the world of early music and his productions of opera and ballet have toured throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Toronto Arts Award, the Opera Canada Ruby Award for outstanding contribution to opera in Canada, the TIME Magazine award for Classical music and the Order of Canada. Most recently, Pynkoski was named Officier dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the Government of France in an investiture ceremony that took place on the stage of the Royal Opera House/Versailles.

Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director and Choreographer Lajeunesse Zingg has choreographed and performed in major theatres internationally. She received her training in London, Copenhagen, and Paris. Lajeunesse Zingg has received a multitude of awards including the prestigious Toronto Arts Award, the Opera Canada Ruby Award for outstanding achievement in the field of opera in Canada, was named by TIME Magazine as one of Canada's most influential artists in the field of Classical music

This presentation is made possible through the generous support of Jerry Lozinski, O.C. and Joan Lozinski, O.C., whose support has helped bring to life the designs for Opera Atelier's transformation of the Koerner Hall stage; and RBC Foundation, whose support enables students to experience the production, fostering cultural appreciation and artistic inspiration in our community.

Opera Atelier is North America's leading opera/ballet company dedicated to creating period productions realized as complete artistic statements - with equal attention given to music, dancing, acting, and design. With productions performed in partnership with Tafelmusik, Canada's premier award-winning baroque orchestra and chamber choir orchestra, Opera Atelier has toured to major opera houses and festivals internationally. Opera Atelier is dedicated to equity, diversity and inclusion, the education of youth and young artists, and offers a robust slate of education, enrichment and outreach opportunities to engage audience members of all ages. Since 1985, Opera Atelier has been led by co-founding Artistic Directors Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, who most recently, were both named members of the Order of Canada and Officers of the Order of Arts and Letters (Officiers dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) by the French Republic.

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