

For immediate release
Press Release

STREET OPERA: Opera, instrumental to social reintegration, Marie-Josée Lord, spokesperson

Montreal, November 3, 2016 – Le Sac à Dos and the Opéra de Montréal this morning announced an innovative project that uses opera to promote the social reintegration of individuals who have experienced homelessness: **Street Opera**. This project involves a creative exchange between these individuals and established artists through introduction-to-opera workshops and the creation of a work that will be presented in the **Cinquième Salle** at Place des Arts **on May 15, 2017**. Renowned Quebec soprano Marie-Josée Lord has agreed to support the project and take part in the final event.

A participatory project

The idea came from Le Sac à Dos, which approached the Opéra de Montréal to propose a three-act opera project. 1st act: introduce people who have experienced homelessness to all aspects of opera (history, singing, stage direction, set design, stage management, librettos, and music). 2nd act: get these people to take part in the various steps involved in producing a short work. 3rd act: present the final result in a real-life situation, and have the project participants join the stage crew or appear as supernumeraries, choristers, or even soloists in the performance, if so desired. Throughout the entire process, the participants receive guidance from a team of performing arts professionals and a cultural mediator. The resulting work will be presented on **May 15, 2017 in the Cinquième Salle at Place des Arts** in a three-part event: first, a recital by soprano and Street Opera spokesperson **Marie-Josée Lord**; next, a screening of a short documentary produced by **Jab Productions** telling the story of the project; and finally, the premiere of the work itself.

A team of professionals

This adventure brings together talented artists, convinced that opera can be a powerful vehicle for the reintegration of vulnerable people who do not have contact with the arts in their daily lives. The libretto for the new work has been entrusted to poet **José Acquelin** (Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2004), and will be the result of the vision and expression of people who have experienced homelessness. The libretto will be set to music by composer **Éric Champagne**, performed by the singers of the **Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal**, and directed by **Martine Beaulne** in sets designed by **Danièle Lévesque**. Musical accompaniment will be by Ensemble Arkéa, under the direction of **Dina Gilbert**. Cultural mediator **Claudia Bilodeau** will provide support and guidance at each stage of the project.

Social commitment

For Pierre Vachon, Director of Communications, Outreach, and Education at the Opéra de Montréal, “community commitment is part of our mission in that it allows us to build closer relationships with groups that don’t necessarily have access to our art form. We firmly believe that art offers hope.” As for Frank Béraud, Chairman of the Board of Le Sac à Dos, he expressed his confidence in this association, convinced that the exchange and experience for both the performing arts professionals and the individuals in Le Sac à Dos’ social and economic reintegration program will foster an openness and a change in perspective with regards to people who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, thereby breaking down stereotypes and identifying these individuals as full-fledged citizens. To quote Sylvain, a project participant, “Opera is a marginal art form. We are marginalized people. I look forward to experiencing the meeting of these two marginalized elements.” Frank Béraud believes that this comment clearly illustrates the desire to come together, exchange ideas, and change the participants’ perception with regard to society, allowing them to realize that there are open-minded people who are understanding of their condition.

Partners

The workshops are made possible through the Community Fund for Canada’s 150th Anniversary, a collaborative effort between the Foundation of Greater Montreal, the Government of Canada, and extraordinary leaders from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic.

We would also like to thank the Société de la Place des Arts, which, as part of its access-to-the-performing-arts program, is offering use of the Cinquième Salle for the presentation of the event.

Le Sac à Dos and the Opéra de Montréal are seeking financial support in order to carry out the creative and production aspects of the Street Opera project. Similar to what the [Streetwise Opera](#) company is doing in London by bringing together homeless individuals and performing arts professionals to take part in operatic works, our organizations are hoping that businesspeople and sponsors will join this developing project for the good of the community and of marginalized people. We encourage them to donate to make this project a work of the entire community.

Le Sac à Dos and the Opéra de Montréal maintain close ties with Streetwise Opera. Le Sac à Dos is also a member of **With One Voice**, an international movement run by Streetwise Opera with a mission to promote innovative projects that bring together artists and homeless people around the world.

Le Sac à Dos

Le Sac à Dos strives for the social and economic integration of persons living in a situation of homelessness and of those at risk of becoming homeless. It promotes participation and engagement through the creation of a living environment and the development of exchange networks. **The core values of its approach** are autonomy, dignity, empowerment, and solidarity.

Opéra de Montréal

Founded in 1980 and based in Montreal, the Opéra de Montréal welcomes close to 50,000 spectators each year. Under the direction of General Director Patrick Corrigan and Artistic Director Michel Beaulac, its season is made up of four or five operas, several activities by the Atelier lyrique, and several outreach activities. The Opéra is a key player in the city’s economic, cultural, and social development as, each season, it maintains working relationships with over 360 local businesses, and hires no less than 800 artists and craftspeople. Close to 80% of the artists appearing at the company are Canadians.

Source: Nicole Blouin, Coordinator, Communications and Fundraising Activities, Le Sac à Dos, 514-978-5496; communication@lesacados.org
Pierre Vachon, Director, Communications, Outreach, and Education, Opéra de Montréal, 514- 985-2222, extension 2237; pvachon@operademontreal.com

