

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
Timothy Vernon

PACIFIC  
Opera  
VICTORIA

Patrick Corrigan  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

www.pov.bc.ca

## Key Notes

# OTELLO

Verdi



## From OTHELLO to OTELLO *The Alchemy of Verdi and Boito*

**I**t has been said that any production of *Otello* is an event.

The reason lies both in the astounding brilliance of the opera itself and in the enormous challenges of marshalling the instrumental and vocal forces and the cast to carry it off.

When the peerless team of Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito took on one of Shakespeare's most compelling dramas and forged it into an opera, the result was what many consider Italian opera's greatest tragedy. (Shortly afterward, the pair would gleefully write the greatest **comic** opera in the Italian repertoire – *Falstaff*.)

In common with Verdi and Boito, POV artistic director Timothy Vernon has an abiding love for Shakespeare. And in *Othello* he finds *Shakespeare's greatest poetic expression, with its extraordinary level of diction, consistent invention of thrilling metaphors, and high level of dramatic inevitability. Here is Shakespeare at the pinnacle of his power.*

**Verdi loved Shakespeare all his life**, although he didn't speak English and relied on Italian translations to convey to him some glimmer of the Bard's poetic and literary achievement.

Only late in his life did a librettist come along who was gifted (and diplomatic) enough to entice Verdi, now in his late 60s, semi-retired, and resting comfortably on his laurels, to take on another opera. With the connivance of Verdi's publisher Ricordi (who knew that if anything could seduce him into composing again, it was Shakespeare), Boito drafted a libretto for *Otello* without a commitment from the composer. Verdi swallowed the bait, and after eight years of on-again, off-again work, *Otello* premiered in 1887, when Verdi was 73.

An oddity about opera is that composers get the lion's share of the glory. The luckless librettist is usually ignored – often deservedly, for opera is strewn with bad libretti, the pain multiplied by clumsy translations.

**Otello is an exception, acclaimed as much** for Boito's masterful libretto as for Verdi's astonishing score – this despite the fact that Boito too understood little English and worked mostly from a French translation. Yet Boito's distillation of the play and Verdi's fusion of words and music resulted in an opera that is, as Timothy observes, *brilliant with chiaroscuro vividness in the writing – a match for Shakespeare's searing poetry.*

**How then could Timothy resist** staging *Otello* during a season that marks the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death?

**He admits it's an audacious project:** *It means stepping beyond what looks like repertoire normally considered appropriate for a company of our size. A score of immense size and sophistication, Otello calls for three extraordinary leading performers, a huge choral component, and Verdi's biggest orchestra.*

Verdi hits us with that orchestra the instant the curtain rises. The opera opens with a cataclysmic thunderstorm. It is, in the words of author Garry Wills, *as if the whole universe were cracking open... The screaming sense of doom resembles the "Dies Irae" of Verdi's Requiem. An organ rumbles throughout ... piccolos dash out lightning streaks, horns howl like the wind ... Harmonic slides make it seem as if the very frame of the universe were dissolving... Great choral expressions of terror wash over each other like sheets of driving rain. The organ's continued roar gives an ominous undertow.*

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## POV Keeps on Trucking with Co-productions

**When the lights go out** after *Otello's* fifth performance October 25, the production won't be over. It will be reincarnated for performances in January and February in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Montreal's Place des Arts.

POV and Opéra de Montréal are partnering on this co-production of *Otello*. Glynis Leyshon directs in both cities, Peter Hartwell is designing for both spaces, and Kristian Benedikt is performing on both stages.

**Designer Peter Hartwell is making a double debut** with POV and Montreal to create a single design that will fit the Royal Theatre (one of Canada's smallest opera stages) and then expand to fill Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier (whose stage could gobble up four Royal Theatre sets).

POV's production staff are building the set in our Opera Shop. Peter Hartwell and Sandra McLellan, our head of wardrobe, have raided Opéra de Montréal's closets for costumes that are now being altered and rebuilt.

After the curtain falls in Victoria, the whole shebang – set, costumes, props – will be loaded into two 52-foot semitrailers and trucked to Montreal. Even the surtitles are included! POV's surtitle maestra, Teresa Turgeon, will translate them into French and send them on to Montreal.

**All this is happening** because POV is the only Canadian opera company to create all its own productions. Other companies present a mix of new and rental productions and so are often on the lookout for fresh designs for their audiences.

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Her Honour,  
The Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC  
Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia

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## POV Co-Productions

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**POV's productions now appear on nearly every opera stage in Canada** – and have travelled to Santa Barbara, Kentucky, and Salt Lake City. We are a regional company with national impact.

Among our recent co-production highlights was the staging of *Macbeth* by Opéra de Québec in 2014 and by Kentucky Opera this September (with Greg Dahl and Lyne Fortin reprising their roles as the violent power couple).

Last January, Cameron Porteous' beautiful design for *The Marriage of Figaro* resurfaced in Calgary; it travels to Winnipeg in November.

In 2013, Vancouver Opera co-produced our *Albert Herring* (built with an expandable set to fill the enormous Queen Elizabeth Theatre). And next March, Vancouver will stage our 2015 *Madama Butterfly*.

**Every co-production is unique**, and each company decides how to integrate POV's work into its own staging. Some are simple set rentals. Others, like *Macbeth* and *Albert Herring*, can share many key elements – set, lighting, director, designer, conductor, cast.

**Otello is a true artistic collaboration** between POV and Montreal: all major decisions regarding director, designer, budget, set, and costumes have been shared, although each company is using its own orchestra and cast (with the exception of the title role).

One *Otello* component that isn't going to Montreal is the wigs – whereas the wild and woolly wigs from *The Marriage of Figaro* (including a memorable Marge-Simpson-style do) were essential parts of that co-production!

**Always, the musical and dramatic experience** will be unique with each co-production. Even with the same director and cast, performances and interpretations evolve. No production – no performance – is completely predictable. That's where the real magic lies!

## From *Othello* to *Otello* continued from p.1

**It's no surprise that *Otello***, like other operas we've done, demands orchestral forces too large to fit into the Royal Theatre. That is why we use orchestral reductions. That is how POV audiences have been able to see operas such as Richard Strauss' *Daphne* and *Capriccio* (rescored by Timothy) and last season's production of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (in a reduction by Alfons Abbass).

Timothy is now reworking the *Otello* score for our production. Fortunately, Verdi doubled many of the parts, so the reduction (from four trumpets to three, from four bassoons to two, etc.) will be a matter more of size than texture and richness.

As for the organ, we won't be trucking in a pipe organ anytime soon, but somehow the Victoria Symphony will provide that disquieting, subterranean growl.

We are fortunate in our partners, the Victoria Symphony, whose players continue to join us in our operatic outings, and we look forward to hearing them play this big romantic score with its depth of emotion, its romantic sensuality, and its sonic thunderbolts.

### **Casting presents another of the great challenges of this opera.**

*Otello* is notorious for being one of the most difficult roles in opera. It demands a dramatic tenor with a heavy, heroic sound, strong top notes, great stamina, and impressive acting ability. It is demanding physically, vocally, and emotionally.

Timothy again: *This is perhaps Verdi's most heroic writing for the tenor. It's a long role and an intensely emotional one. Once Iago starts in on him, Otello is basically in the grip of raw emotion through to the end. The singer must maintain that growing tension and despair, that potential for violence that is finally unleashed.*

*Iago too, he adds, is a big sing, and a fabulous acting role. It takes a real actor to make this character more than one-dimensional. He must be quicksilver, smart, nimble, yet reveal darkness and hypocrisy.*

**We have secured two international singers** who know these roles well: Kristian Benedikt, who sings *Otello* all over the world, and Todd Thomas, who last season brought power and anguish to the role of Alberich in *Das Rheingold*.

As for Desdemona, Timothy has watched Leslie Ann Bradley's beautiful performances for POV, most recently as the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and believes she is

ready to sing this great role for the first time. *Desdemona is innocence incarnate. The singer must convey warmth and purity, dignity, desolation, and complete devotion to her husband. This is a great lyric soprano part that demands a beautiful voice.*

Verdi himself searched in vain for a perfect Desdemona. He wrote to Ricordi shortly after the premiere, *Desdemona is a part in which the thread, the melodic line, never ceases from the first note to the last. Just as Iago has only to declaim and laugh mockingly, and just as Otello, now the warrior, now the passionate lover, now crushed to the point of baseness, now ferocious like a savage, must sing and shout, so Desdemona must always, always sing. She is, in essence, truth, beauty, pure song.*

**As we explore the truth and beauty and desolation of this opera**, we are also extending the range and depth of the art we're able to present, not only for our audience, but on the national scene as *Otello* joins a growing number of POV co-productions.

Timothy explains, *Like our recent productions of Falstaff and Das Rheingold, Otello is a step out beyond the obvious for POV. Even though we don't have the big orchestra and theatre, we are always very respectful of the artistic essence of the work. It demands that we be, if anything, more creative and inventive in finding ways to bring it to the stage.*

*This is a production in which we stretch ourselves as a company – and that is always a good thing.*

Maureen Woodall

## KeyNotes

Beginning this season, POV will deliver our KeyNotes Newsletter and invitations to Producers events by **e-mail**.

**If you already receive POV Enews**, we'll email you when each issue of KeyNotes is available on our website.

**To start receiving POV Enews & emailed notification of KeyNotes**, sign up for Enews at [www.pov.bc.ca](http://www.pov.bc.ca) or email [enews@pov.bc.ca](mailto:enews@pov.bc.ca)

**If you don't have email**, please phone **250-382-1641**. On request, we'll mail KeyNotes to donors & subscribers who don't have internet access. We will also have copies at POV events.

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## Mary's Wedding in Schools

**Mary's Wedding**, the opera that POV commissioned and premiered in 2011, is returning this fall for performances in regional schools, in time for Remembrance Day and ongoing commemorations of the Centenary of World War I.



From top: Thomas Macleay, Alain Coulombe, Betty Wayne Allison. World premiere of *Mary's Wedding*. David Cooper Photography

Set in Western Canada in the aftermath of the Great War, *Mary's Wedding* is the love story of a Canadian farm boy and an immigrant girl, told against the backdrop of the War and the Battles of Ypres and Moreuil Wood.

**The opera will be performed for young audiences** by young artists, connecting students in a powerful way with the experience of youth in a time of war.

To complement the school performances, the University of Victoria Libraries will mount a touring exhibit of WWI artifacts, many of them from local sources. A Teachers' Professional Development Day will be offered in partnership with POV, the Greater Victoria Public Library,

the University of Victoria Libraries and the Royal BC Museum. In addition, an online memory project will invite students and teachers to explore connections with family, community, and history.

**A public performance of the opera** will allow the community to participate in the WWI commemoration and to experience a uniquely Canadian opera that was inspired by our own history. Details of the public performance will be published on POV's website and sent out via Enews.

Learn more at [www.pov.bc.ca/schools.html](http://www.pov.bc.ca/schools.html)



## UVic Shakespeare Connections

A wonderful resource on Shakespeare, the University of Victoria presents several special events in time for our production of *Otello*, including these:

**Shakespeare's Othello: Tuesday, October 6, 2 pm**, at Mary Winspear Centre. Herb Weil, PhD, is Professor Emeritus of the Department of English at the University of Manitoba. He will examine the play, its characters, and the opera, probably the most highly praised adaptation of Shakespeare. Offered through UVic Continuing Studies. Fee: \$24 + GST

**University Librarian's Lecture Series 2015: Friday, October 16, 6 pm**, Room 129, McPherson Library—Mearns Centre for Learning.

Daniel De Simone is the Eric Weinmann Librarian at the renowned Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC.

His lecture topic, *Learning Shakespeare at an Advanced Age: A Bibliographical Approach* will focus on early scholars who were so passionate about making Shakespeare and his world available for generations to come that they built important collections of Shakespeariana, including the Folger Shakespeare Library, which is home to the world's largest Shakespeare collection and to major collections of other rare Renaissance books, manuscripts, and works of art.

[www.pov.bc.ca/otello.html](http://www.pov.bc.ca/otello.html)

Story Music Artists Background Resources

## Otello Artists

**Kristian Benedikt**: When a great tenor takes on the formidable role of **Otello**, it can define his career.

Lithuanian tenor Kristian Benedikt, has performed this signature role throughout Europe, including at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg and the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. He now makes his Canadian staged opera debut.

*This role haunted me from when I was a student, says Kristian. Of course I did not try to sing it then, but I imagined that I should sing it in the future. My interpretation of Otello changes as I work in different productions with different stage directors. I'm always very open to the new conceptions ... I prefer to be a creator together with the conductor, stage director and partners on the stage.*

In coming months, Kristian sings *Otello* in Montreal, Beirut, St. Petersburg, and Savonlinna, Finland.



**Todd Thomas**: Last season POV welcomed Todd for his company debut and his very first outing singing Wagner: he was impressive as Alberich in *Das Rheingold*.

He's a master of villainous roles, including Rigoletto and Scarpia, as well as **Iago**, which he has sung with Arizona, Des Moines, and, most remarkably, at Chicago Lyric Opera where he was the understudy; on opening night he was sent onstage at the beginning of the second act – taking over the role just in time to sing Iago's show-stopping Credo. He garnered praise for his performance as *the slimy archvillain, pouring poisonous insinuations into Otello's ear with the tenacity of a pit bull.*



**Leslie Ann Bradley** turned heads in 2012 with her POV debut as Micaëla in *Carmen*. We welcomed her back in 2014 as the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

She renders beautifully the kind of devoted, warm-hearted character who forgives, endures, and carries us away with sublime vocalism. **Desdemona** is a perfect next step for this young Canadian singer.



**Director Glynis Leyshon** has directed 25 performances with POV, including Verdi's other great Shakespearean adaptation, *Falstaff*.

One of Canada's most respected opera and theatre directors, she has also directed for Calgary Opera, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Opera Lyra Ottawa, and in January she directs this co-production of *Otello* in Montreal.



# Events Calendar

We've been in the Baumann Centre since January and are launching many new programs and events. For up to date information, please check the new listing on our website. [www.pov.bc.ca/calendar.html](http://www.pov.bc.ca/calendar.html)

## EVENTS AT THE BAUMANN CENTRE 925 Balmoral Road

RSVP for all events to 250-382-1641 or [rsvp@pov.bc.ca](mailto:rsvp@pov.bc.ca)

### Opera Motifs Tuesday, October 6, 7:30 pm.

Robert Holliston explores *Otello*. Free. All are welcome.

### Artist Lounge Wednesday, October 14, 7 pm.

Robert Holliston chats with Adam Luther (Cassio), Jeremy Bowes (Lodovico), and Matthew Bruce (Roderigo). Free.

### Lunchbox Opera Tuesday, October 20, 12:30 pm.

Baritone Alexander Dobson, violinist / poet Phoebe Tsang, and pianist Robert Holliston perform soul-searing works that explore the dangers of desire, from the sensual to the spiritual. Bring your lunch or pre-order a Zambri's lunchbox for \$15 (please order by October 16: 250-382-1641).

### Master Class Thursday, October 22, 8 pm.

Lynne McMurtry (Emilia in *Otello*) conducts a vocal master class with members of the POV Chorus. With Robert Holliston. Free.

### Lunchbox Opera Tuesday, November 17, 12:30 pm.

A musical break from your daily routine! Performers TBA. Bring your lunch or pre-order a Zambri's lunchbox for \$15 (please order by November 13: 250-382-1641).

### Annual General Meeting Monday, December 7, 5 pm

Annual Meeting of the Pacific Opera Victoria Association. All members of the Society are welcome. RSVP to 250-382-1641 or [rsvp@pov.bc.ca](mailto:rsvp@pov.bc.ca).

## Get your Glitter on!

### VICTORIA MASQUERADE BALL

Saturday, October 31  
6:30 pm  
Fairmont Empress



Tickets  
\$175

VIP & group packages  
also available

Make a grand entrance in evening wear or period costume. Masks mandatory (limited numbers available at the door)

Performances, live & silent auctions, festive cocktails & dancing in the Crystal Ballroom ... all to support POV's Youth & Education programs at the Baumann Centre.

[www.pov.bc.ca/masquerade.html](http://www.pov.bc.ca/masquerade.html)

250-382-1641

# OTELLO

October 15, 17, 23 – 8 pm

Wednesday, October 21 – 7 pm

Sunday, October 25 – 2:30 pm

Royal Theatre

Pre-performance  
lobby lecture  
1 hour before curtain

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### INSIDE OPERA at the UNION CLUB

Friday, September 25, 11:45 am to 1:15 pm

Union Club Centennial Ballroom, 805 Gordon St.

Robert Holliston talks about *Otello* with guests from the cast. Dress code: Business Dress. **\$35 per person includes lunch.** Please call 250.382.1641 by September 23 to reserve with payment.

### INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston

Sunday, September 27. Two sessions: 10 am and noon.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, UVic

Robert Holliston and guests present a guided tour of *Otello*. Bring your friends. **Free event. Free parking.**

RSVP by noon September 25: 250-382-1641 or [rsvp@pov.bc.ca](mailto:rsvp@pov.bc.ca). Please specify the session you plan to attend.

### Sense of Occasion Thursday, October 15, 6:30 pm. East Lobby, Royal Theatre

Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *Otello*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive. **\$35 per person.** Reserve with payment by October 9: 250-382-1641.

## DONOR RECOGNITION EVENTS

RSVP to 250-382-1641 or [rsvp@pov.bc.ca](mailto:rsvp@pov.bc.ca).

### Producers' Sneak Peek

Sunday, October 4, POV Opera Shop, 620 Discovery

10 am to noon: A come-&-go coffee for donors to get a peek at the set for *Otello* and meet POV's stagecraft professionals. For all donors. Invitations have been emailed. RSVP by September 30.

### President's Circle Working Rehearsal

Saturday, October 10, Royal Theatre

6 pm Coffee and cookies

6:20 pm Discussion with Director Glynis Leyshon and Conductor Timothy Vernon

7 pm Piano Dress rehearsal begins

For members of the Impresario Circle and President's Circle. Invitations have been sent by mail. RSVP by October 8.

### President's Circle Season Launch

Monday, October 19, 7 pm, Wingate Studio, 925 Balmoral.

A reception and concert with members of the cast of *Otello*. For members of the President's Circle and Impresario Circle. Invitations have been sent by mail. RSVP by October 14.

### Bravo Society Brunch Sunday, December 6, 11:30 am, Wingate Studio.

A celebration of POV's founders with Timothy Vernon and guest artists. For Bravo Society Members. Invitations will be sent by mail.

EDITOR: MAUREEN WOODALL

#### PUBLIC FUNDING

