



DONOR SPOTLIGHT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Opera Atelier Board member **Sharon Giffen** and her husband **Ken Giffen** have long been dedicated supporters of the company's educational outreach programs and new artistic creations. Their support has helped bring new art to life, and they have recently chosen to pledge a gift to Opera Atelier in their will. Ms. Giffen took the time to give us deeper insight into this legacy gift and into their greater philanthropic vision.

How do you tailor your philanthropy to support various causes? Our giving has always been divided between four basic categories: education, health, animals and the arts. Education is so foundational in helping anyone make the very best of their lives. Ill health touches every person; amongst our friends and family, there are few causes that do not bring a face or a memory to mind. Animals, whether wild or domestic, depend upon human kindness or at least non-interference. But the arts are my escape—whether music, dance or theatre, I value the few hours to escape all distractions and let myself be immersed in another world.

What is your first memory of opera? What about Opera Atelier specifically? My very first experience at an opera was a field trip in high school. A busload of us from Lindsay came to Toronto (more years ago than I like to think about!) to see *The Barber of Seville*. While I can't say that I fully appreciated it at the time, it definitely sparked an interest for me that I would follow-up on later in life. I was drawn to my first Opera Atelier performance specifically to hear great baroque music.... but once I got the OA "bug", I really came to appreciate how the orchestra, singers and dancers can work together to bring a piece to life.

What do you wish other people knew about Opera Atelier? Wow—mostly that they exist! And that Opera Atelier is like no other opera company in Canada; what Marshall and Jeannette create

is so very different. Dance and music are woven together, and their sensibility transports you to another place. It is the magic of music and movement, set in beautiful costumes and backdrops that is an immersive experience. It is unique in my own personal experience, and I understand that their approach is what singles out Opera Atelier for acclaim in the wider opera world.

How does your legacy gift to Opera Atelier help support their work? Why did you make the bequest? I so enjoy and appreciate Opera Atelier that I want to do my small part to help the company thrive in the future. As OA fans will know, their touring and commissioning of original works is expanding their appeal to an ever-wider audience—while staying true to their core mission. It has also been very gratifying to wish them well, even from afar, as Marshall and Jeannette have carved a place for their Canadian company in the tough, critical European opera market. I do hope they will always come home to Toronto and not get swept away in the glamour of Versailles! This is why we made a legacy gift to Opera Atelier; we are happy to know that they will use our gift where it's needed most.

What would you tell someone who is thinking about donating? Just do it! Any amount is appreciated. Ticket income really pays only a small portion of the overall cost of their productions. While I believe that is positive (we want tickets to be affordable to allow the broadest possible audience appeal), it does mean that fund-raising is a vital and constant challenge—not only for OA, but for all arts organizations. You don't have to be extremely wealthy to consider a legacy donation. After thinking about it for a while, we realized that we could support Opera Atelier in this way, and that by doing so we could help ensure that there would be quality opera productions for years to come.

What is your greatest hope for Canada's future opera-lovers? There are so many approaches—I hope that people find what they truly enjoy. Opera Atelier deeply appeals to me, and I hope that they will continue to attract new audiences to the sensibility for which they are known. It truly is an amazing investment opportunity for us to support Opera Atelier and the future of the performing arts in Canada. We are excited to see where this company goes in our lifetime, and want to help it continue on beyond that. We want future audiences to be transfixed and excited by opera. We feel satisfied knowing that our legacy gift will help make that possible.

To find out more about planned giving, please contact Dan Hickey at 416-703-3767 ext. 226, or dan.hickey@operaatelier.com.