

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 4, 2020

**Opera Atelier's Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg  
Awarded Prestigious Cultural Distinction from Government of France:  
Officers of the Order of Arts and Letters**

**Toronto, ON** — Opera Atelier is proud to announce the company's esteemed Co-Artistic Directors **Marshall Pynkoski C.M.** and **Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg C.M.** have been awarded the extraordinary recognition of **Officers of the Order of Arts and Letters (Officiers de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres)** by the French Republic — the first time a Canadian couple has received this distinction simultaneously. The award acknowledges the pair's outstanding contributions to the enrichment of French cultural heritage in France and throughout the world. The ceremony of investiture will take place on the stage of the **Royal Opera House** at Versailles in **December 2021**, when Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg return to mount a Château de Versailles production.

"This remarkable distinction demonstrates the global impact of Opera Atelier's exceptional body of work over 35 years, and is the culmination of a lifetime of rigorous study and passionate devotion to the preservation and celebration of France's rich cultural heritage on the part of Marshall and Jeannette," says **Laura Money, Chair of the Opera Atelier Board of Directors**. "We trust this recognition will serve to further solidify Opera Atelier's place in the global opera sphere and illuminate the immense talent that is cultivated in Canada. On behalf of Opera Atelier's Board of Directors, I offer Marshall and Jeannette my heartfelt congratulations."

Lauded for its expertise in French Baroque repertoire, Opera Atelier solidified its role within France's cultural landscape with its production of Lully's *Armide* on November 20, 2015, the first performance to take place at the Royal Opera House in Versailles following the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. **Director of Château de Versailles Spectacles' Laurent Brunner**, who was instrumental in Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg receiving this cultural distinction, says the staging was "seen as an act of extraordinary solidarity and support to France, on behalf of Toronto and Canada."

"Jeannette and Marshall join distinguished company in receiving this honour from the Republic of France for their epic international and cultural contributions through Opera Atelier," says **John Tory, Mayor of Toronto**. "Uniquely as a couple they have contributed to the cultural enrichment of both Canada and France and to the strengthening of the historic relationship between our two countries. Again uniquely, Jeanette and Marshall have received high honours from both Canada and France just as Opera Atelier reaches its 35th anniversary."

Opera Atelier's commitment to staging French works was established early in the company's history, when Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg relocated to Paris to conduct extensive research at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and through the archives of various opera houses and theatres.

Throughout its history, the company has forged strong bonds with French conductors of international renown, including Les Musiciens du Louvre Founder Marc Minkowski and Le Concert Spirituel Founder Hervé Niquet. Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg's reputation was further established as guest instructors in Baroque dancing and acting technique at the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles — the world's most influential research centre for the study of French Baroque music and theatre.

Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg have built a prestigious relationship with the Royal Opera House in Versailles, where Opera Atelier has presented six fully-staged productions featuring up to 80 of Canada's finest artists (such as Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra), including Lully's *Armide* (2012 and 2015), Lully's *Persée* (2014), Charpentier's *Médée* (2017) and *Actéon* (2018), and Rameau's *Pygmalion* (2018). Most recently, the Co-Artistic Directors were invited to stage and choreograph Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the opening of the Royal Opera House at Versailles, which enjoyed tremendous success and has since been released internationally as a CD and a DVD. Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg were the only non-French artists involved in this extravagant production.

The second in three levels of distinction for cultural contribution to France, the Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters is, in particular, a great honour for Lajeunesse Zingg, who was promoted to the rank of Officer without first being named a Knight (Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) — an unprecedented honour that acknowledges the collaborative nature of Pynkoski and Lajeunesse Zingg's achievements. Pynkoski was awarded the distinction of Knight in 1996.

The letter of congratulations from **Madame L'Ambassadrice Kareen Rispal (Ambassador of France to Canada)** to each of the Co-Artistic Directors states the following:

Of Ms. Zingg: "This distinction underlines an exceptional career, and more particularly the strong bond you have with France. Exceptional dancer and choreographer, your work takes a very special place in the French repertoire.

Of Mr. Pynkoski: "You contribute by your work to the strengthening of relations between France and Canada in the cultural sphere"

In recognition of Opera Atelier's 35th Anniversary Season, the company is planning a special Toronto event in celebration of this award in 2020.

Past recipients of the Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters include such luminaries as Marcel Marceau, Meryl Streep, Anne Sofie Von Otter, Donald Sutherland, Frederica von Stade, and Lang Lang.

### **[About Opera Atelier \(OperaAtelier.com\)](http://OperaAtelier.com)**

Established in 1985, Opera Atelier is Canada's premier period opera/ballet company, specializing in producing opera, ballet, and drama from the 17th and 18th centuries. While drawing upon the aesthetics and ideals of the period, Opera Atelier goes beyond "reconstruction" and infuses each production with an inventive theatricality that resonates with modern audiences. These productions feature soloists of international acclaim, period ballet, original instruments, elaborate stage decor, intricate costumes, and an imaginative energy that sets Opera Atelier apart. Founding Co-Artistic Directors Marshall Pynkoski C.M. and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg C.M. were both awarded the Order of Canada for their

contributions to opera and ballet, and were recently both named Officers of the Order of Arts and Letters (Officiers dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) from the French Republic.

Opera Atelier has been acclaimed throughout Canada, and tours on a regular basis to the Royal Opera House in Versailles. The company has also performed at the Glimmerglass Festival in New York, Salzburg Festival, the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, and La Scala in Milan. Opera Atelier has collaborated with some of early music's most distinguished artists including Andrew Parrott, Trevor Pinnock, Hervé Niquet, Marc Minkowski and many others.

Through historically informed performance practice, Opera Atelier allows audiences to experience the continuum of musical form; hearing and seeing great works in the ways these works might have first resonated. In inspired programming, Opera Atelier creates art that speaks to the here and now; finding fresh relevance for society in evergreen creations. Through impassioned outreach and audience development, Opera Atelier aims to secure a future by ensuring opera has a place in the hearts and lives of the upcoming generation.

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