

Around Town: NAC Orchestra, opera singers go 'al fresco' for Italian garden party

 **CAROLINE PHILLIPS**
[More from Caroline Phillips](#)

Published on: July 6, 2016 | Last Updated: July 6, 2016 8:00 PM EDT



Classical music and opera lovers were swept away, like a pair of romantics on a gondola ride down a moonlit canal, at this year's Venetian-themed Italian garden party for Friends of the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

Ambassador **Gian Lorenzo Cornado** and his wife, **Martine**, greeted some 300 guests to their official residence in Gatineau on Tuesday. It was an exquisite evening for cocktails in a spacious backyard surrounded by stunning flowers, towering mature trees and an elegant mansion. Guests were gracefully summoned to their outdoor concert seats by a surprise flash mob of singers.

The \$90 to \$100-a-ticket party raised funds in support of the Friends' efforts to award bursaries and scholarships to gifted young musicians.

"Through events such as this, we (ambassadors) are able to show our gratitude and our support to the community that welcomes us and to the wonderful country that hosts us — Canada," said Cornado in his brief welcoming remarks.

The concert featured music inspired by Italy or written by Italian composers.



Marc Stevens, general manager of the National Arts Centre Orchestra, with pianist Silvie Cheng and her brother, cellist Bryan Cheng, both of whom performed as the Cheng Duo at a garden party in support of the Friends of the NAC Orchestra, hosted by the Italian ambassador at his official residence in Gatineau on Tuesday, July 5, 2016. CAROLINE PHILLIPS / OTTAWA CITIZEN

NAC Orchestra concertmaster **Yosuke Kawasaki** gave an electrifying performance of Vivaldi's Summer, with fellow violinist **Emily Westell**, violist **David Marks**, cellist **Thaddeus Morden** and double bassist **Hilda Cowie**.

During a subsequent Vivaldi performance, when trumpet players **Karen Donnelly** and **Steven van Gulik** ran into a minor glitch with their sheet music, Kawasaki got the crowd laughing with his unintentional product placement. "This is why I play with an iPad Pro," he announced, flashing his tablet to the audience.

Kawasaki's wife, **Jessica Linnebach**, associate concertmaster with the NACO, was in attendance and nine months' pregnant with their second child. She was in good hands, though; her physician, Dr. **David Finestone**, was also at the party.

Concert headliners also included baritone **Gary Dahl** and Heart Institute cardiac surgeon and trained tenor **Fraser Rubens**, with accompanist **Judith Ginsburg**.

Always a breath of fresh air were pianist **Silvie Cheng** and her younger brother, **Bryan Cheng**, playing on his rare 1754 Venetian cello. The young cellist, who is a 2016 NAC Orchestra bursary winner, also shared the stage with Kawasaki for a performance together.

Attendees included Supreme Court Chief Justice **Beverley McLachlin** and her colleague, Justice **Michael Moldaver**, with their respective spouses, Mayor **Jim Watson**, and former Olympian-turned-Royal LePage real estate agent **Rob Marland** and his wife **Jane Forsyth** as sponsors.

Getting lucky that night was former Liberal deputy prime minister **John Manley**, now president and CEO of the Business Council of Canada. He won one of the random prizes — a gift certificate to the Italian restaurant Babbos, located in Manotick.