

The Globe and Mail's Canadian arts heroes of 2020

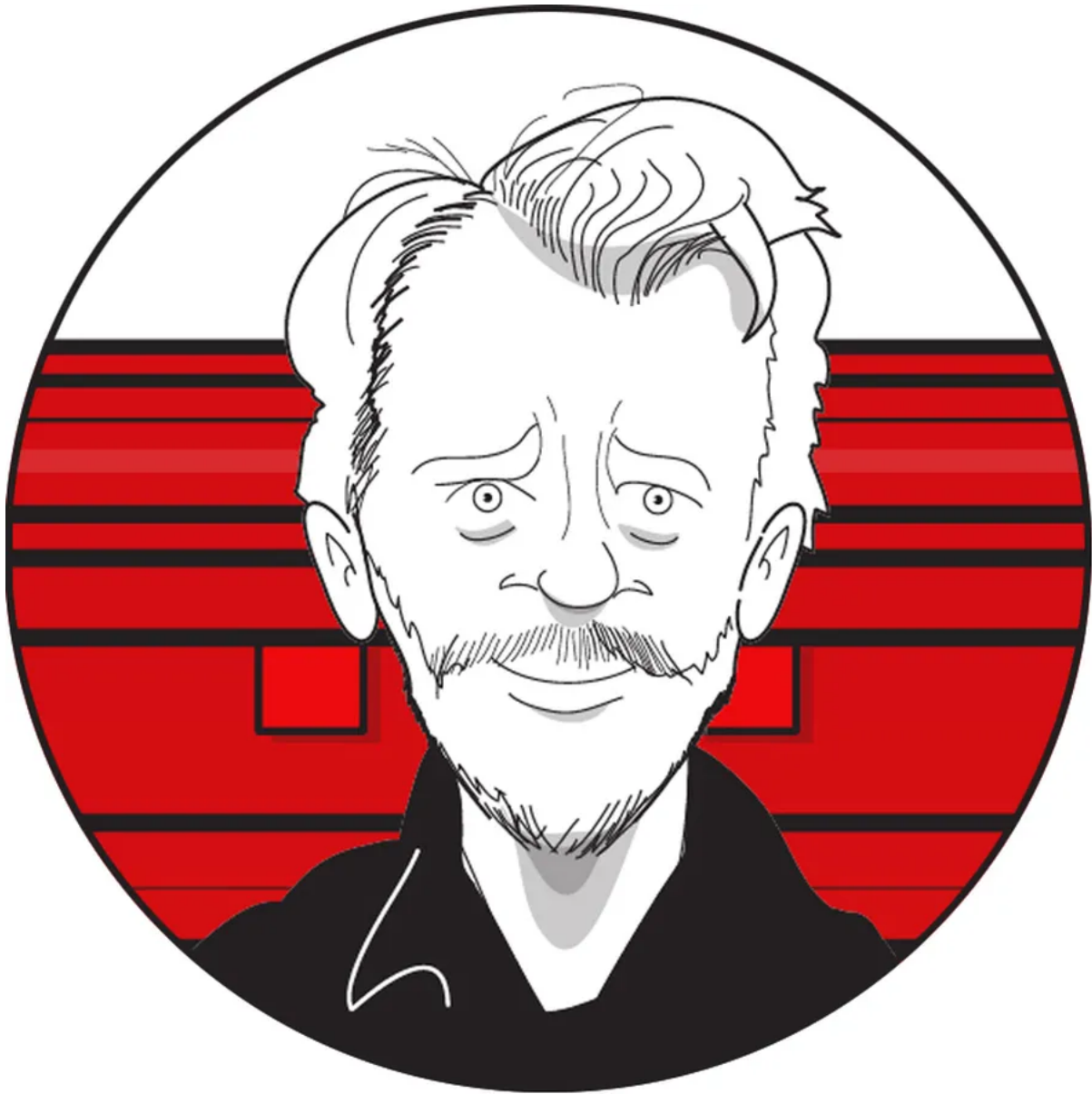
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John Doyle, Barry Hertz, Marsha Lederman, Brad Wheeler, J. Kelly Nestruck, Kate Taylor, Judith Pereira

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The past 12 months were an extraordinary year for Canadian culture. While cinemas, theatres, concert halls, galleries, museums, and even book stores were off-limits, the arts themselves never went away. Indeed, this country's most passionate and dedicated voices only grew louder, finding all kinds of ways to remind us about the power of creativity, and the importance of meaningful cultural change. Here, The Globe and Mail spotlights a handful of these heroes of Canadian arts who made 2020 such an exciting and invigorating year, despite absolutely everything else.

Illustrations by Antony Hare



Joel Ivany

In answer to the challenge presented to performing arts organization this year, we saw some regrettable poverty of imagination and ingenuity. Not so with Against the Grain Theatre (AtG), the small but indomitable opera company. To its great credit, in its 10 years alive, AtG has been devoted to opera in unconventional spaces with unique approaches. It has also relied on social media to build an audience for everything from its Dora-winning productions to its popular Opera Pub Nights.

Founder and artistic director Joel Ivany nimbly moved AtG online, created a YouTube channel and weekly, if not more often, presented performances, discussions with performers and directors and then created original digital content. First there is the unique web series *A Little Too Cozy*, “a digital prequel” to the company’s inventive, re-imagined version of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* as a TV dating show. The original production was done at CBC

studios in 2016. Ivany turned TV writer/director for a backstory to that crazy reality-TV/Mozart mash-up. Fresh and cheeky, it's about the contestants and the makers of an absurd TV show about love and ego

Then came the ingenious and stirring *Messiah/Complex*, an online performance interpretation of Handel's *Messiah* using 6 languages, 12 soloists, four choirs, and anchored in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. The 70-minute filmed performance is truly an inclusive Canadian experience, in Arabic, Dene, English, French, Inuktitut, and Southern Tutchone. With singers participating from every province and territory, and the whole country in vivid display, the work is an astonishing declaration of optimism when all around is COVID-induced doom and gloom. —*John Doyle*



Dan Levy

“Always leave them wanting more.” Maybe Dan Levy learned that showbiz adage from his father, Eugene, and his honorary aunt, Catherine O’Hara. He certainly applied it when he was arcing out the final season of *Schitt’s Creek*, one of the brightest stars in the 2020 TV firmament. The CBC series, about a rich, callous family who lose everything and realize they don’t want it all back, had a slow build for three seasons, and then instant success in Season 4, when the world discovered it on Netflix.

It could have gone on and on, but Levy knew it shouldn’t. He gave us a final season that could be its own screenwriting course, in which every character is launched into a new life directly because of what they’d learned in their nowhere-but-everything town. In September, *Schitt’s Creek* swept the top seven Emmy Awards, a feat no other series had ever achieved. It was an acknowledgement of what a gift Dan Levy gave us, particularly in this COVID year: the chance to miss his characters, and so we love them even more. —*Johanna Schneller*

