



**GOVERNOR GENERAL'S
PERFORMING ARTS AWARDS FOUNDATION
FONDATION DES PRIX DU GOUVERNEUR GÉNÉRAL
POUR LES ARTS DU SPECTACLE**

NEWS RELEASE

2026 GOVERNOR GENERAL'S PERFORMING ARTS AWARDS LAUREATES ANNOUNCED

OTTAWA, February 12, 2026 – At a moment when many are reflecting on Canadian identity, the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Foundation (GGPAAF) is delighted to celebrate the people who help tell our stories, in Canada and around the world. Today, we announce the 2026 recipients of Canada's highest distinction in the performing arts.

These awards are a national celebration of artistic excellence and collective pride. Since their inception in 1992, the GGPAA have recognized and elevated the artists and volunteers who give voice to our shared experiences across generations, regions, languages, cultures and traditions.

The laureates of the **2026 Governor General's Performing Arts Awards (GGPAA) for Lifetime Artistic Achievement**, which recognize artists who have made an indelible contribution to cultural life in Canada and beyond, are:



Photo: David Borrowman

Susan Benson, C.M. – Set and costume designer and painter

Susan Benson is one of Canada's leading set and costume designers, whose artistic vision has shaped stage productions across Canada and internationally. A creative trailblazer, she has designed for major theatre, opera, and ballet companies across Canada, notably the Stratford Festival, as well as for international productions. She is also an accomplished painter whose work has been shown in Canadian galleries and group exhibitions.

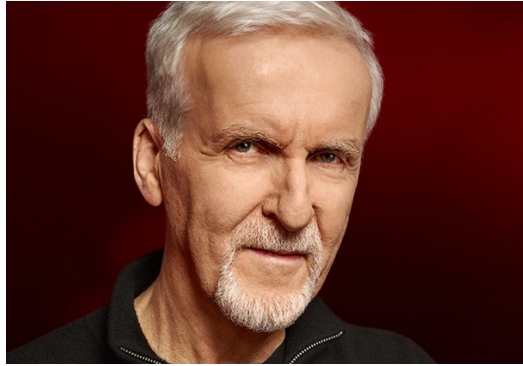


Photo: John Russo

James Cameron, C.C. – Filmmaker, explorer, inventor and environmental entrepreneur

James Cameron is an acclaimed filmmaker, explorer, inventor and environmental entrepreneur. As director, writer and producer, he is responsible for *The Terminator*, *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *True Lies*, *Titanic*, *Avatar*, *Avatar: The Way of Water*, and *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, as well as 12 documentaries, including *Ghosts of the Abyss*, *The Game Changers*, and the Emmy-winning *Secrets of the Whales*. His 1997 film *Titanic* held the record for highest-grossing film in the world for 12 years, surpassed only by his own *Avatar* in 2009. His films have earned numerous nominations and awards, most notably *Titanic*'s record 11 Oscars, including Best Picture. He has written, produced and directed three of the four highest-grossing films in history.



Photo: Camille Gladu-Drouin

Sylvain Émard – Dancer, choreographer and teacher

One of Canada's foremost choreographers, Sylvain Émard has created more than 40 original works and has made an enduring contribution to contemporary dance in Canada and internationally. His practice is grounded in his keen interest in the body's expressive power and in the dynamics of human physicality and interconnection. From meditative solos to large-scale communal pieces and an immersive installation, his work stands out for its precision, inventiveness, and inclusivity, bridging the gap between high art and popular dance, professional performers and amateurs, intimacy and spectacle.



Photo: Valérie Paquette

Daniel Lavoie, O.C. – Singer–songwriter, performer and poet

Daniel Lavoie has had a profound impact on popular music in Canada and on our country’s cultural landscape. A Franco-Manitoban of great integrity and authenticity, he has won the hearts of audiences worldwide with his pop-rock songs, performed in both French and English. In particular, “Ils s’aiment” was a massive hit in Canada and Europe, and “Jours de plaine” has become an anthem of sorts for Francophones in Western Canada. Alongside his award-winning albums, he is acclaimed for his live performances of his original compositions and for his dynamic portrayal of Frolo in the blockbuster musical *Notre-Dame de Paris*.



Photo: Alan Weissman

Tonya Williams, O.C. – Screen actor and producer, arts executive and activist

Tonya Williams is an award-winning actor, producer, arts executive, and activist, widely recognized by television audiences for her work in numerous Canadian series and for her iconic, long-running role as Dr. Olivia Winters on *The Young and the Restless*. She is also known as the founder of Reelworld, a groundbreaking organization dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion in Canada’s screen industries. Throughout her career, she has blended artistic achievement with tireless activism, shaping a more inclusive future

for storytellers in Canada. She currently serves on the Ontario Creates Industry Advisory Committee.

The **Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts**, which recognizes outstanding contribution by an individual or group in voluntary service to the performing arts in Canada:



Photo: Beckett Chung

Sae Hoon (Stan) Chung

Sae Hoon (Stan) Chung is a writer, educator, and consultant whose career is deeply intertwined with service to arts organizations, public institutions, and Indigenous communities. He has played a crucial role in enhancing accessibility and relevance in arts programs in his home province of British Columbia, notably during his tenure as chair of the BC Arts Council, and his dedication to promoting diversity, inclusivity, equity, and community-centred stewardship, particularly in non-urban and Indigenous communities, has had a tremendous influence on organizations nationwide. Recognized as a champion for change in Canada's arts community, he continues to contribute his time and expertise to advancing cultural and educational equity.

The National Arts Centre Award, which recognizes work of an extraordinary nature by an individual artist or company in the past performance year:



Photo: Ari Magg

Barbara Hannigan, C.M. – Soprano and conductor

Internationally acclaimed for her groundbreaking dual career as a soprano and conductor, Barbara Hannigan is one of the world’s foremost champions of contemporary classical music. Her vocal career is especially associated with new music: she has premiered more than 100 works written specifically for her. She has worked closely with renowned composers, directors, and choreographers, and appeared as a conductor with major orchestras worldwide, establishing a reputation for creating innovative concert programs that broaden listeners’ horizons by interweaving contemporary and classical repertoire in a highly dramatic and engaging way.

“Our stories, our artists, our voices: they matter,” said Douglas Knight, C.M., Chair and CEO of the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards Foundation, and Anik Bissonnette, O.C., Co-Chair of the Foundation. “Our performing artists give voice to our shared experiences and create a common language that connects us, unites us, and inspires a deep sense of pride in being Canadian.”

“The performing arts help us see ourselves—and each other—more clearly,” said Michelle Chawla, Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts. “This year’s laureates remind us of the transformative power of creativity to connect communities, expand our understanding, and strengthen our shared sense of belonging. We are honoured to support the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards, and to celebrate artists whose vision and dedication enrich the cultural life of our country in profound and enduring ways.”

“The National Arts Centre is proud to be a founding partner of the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards, and honoured to annually produce the awards show, which is always such a moving and memorable evening,” said Annabelle Cloutier, NAC President

and CEO. “We look forward to celebrating this wonderful group of Canadian artists and the extraordinary contributions they have made to Canada’s cultural life.”

“We are proud to welcome back RBC as Presenting Sponsor of the 2026 Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards, celebrating the artists who shape Canada’s cultural landscape,” said Juniper Locilento, CEO of the National Arts Centre Foundation. “We sincerely thank RBC for their continued commitment to excellence in the performing arts.”

“The National Film Board of Canada is proud to be part of the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards since 2008, honouring GGPAA laureates through film portraits that are cinematic gems in their own right. Especially now, when the country is looking for great homegrown stories and Canadians who lead and inspire—what a wonderful group of champions we have to celebrate. Jointly conceived by laureates, directors and NFB producers, the films capture the essence of these extraordinary people and their passion, vision and dedication. Seven new films join the NFB’s GGPAA collection this year, which will feature more than 133 works, available for free on nfb.ca. This precious audiovisual legacy is an ever-evolving homage to the remarkable artists, patrons and volunteers who have helped to shape our cultural landscape, and the NFB is committed to sharing this amazing body of work with all Canadians, now and in the years to come,” said Suzanne Guèvremont, Government Film Commissioner and Chairperson of the National Film Board of Canada.

“Congratulations to the recipients of this year’s Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards — visionaries who have contributed to, challenged and enriched our country’s cultural landscape,” said Marie-Philippe Bouchard, President and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada. “Shining a national spotlight on these artists and giving Canadians a front-row seat to discover, acknowledge and celebrate their achievements, in partnership with the Awards, is part of our commitment to anchor and sustain a thriving cultural sector.”

“Congratulations to the 2026 laureates, whose artistry and leadership continue to inspire audiences in Canada and around the world,” said Devinder Gill, RBC Regional President, Ontario North & East. “At RBC, we believe the performing arts play a vital role in building strong, inclusive communities and reflecting who we are as a country. Our longstanding partnership with the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards celebrates the extraordinary impact these artists have made, at home and on the world stage. We are proud to honour the 2026 laureates and their lasting contributions to Canada’s cultural legacy.”

Thank you to our partners

These awards would not be possible without the support of our partners: the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the National Arts Centre (NAC). Compass Rose is our Communications Partner. As well, each year the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) creates incomparable short films that capture the essence of the laureates. This year’s films will premiere at the GGPAA Show at the NAC on June 6 and

online on [NFB platforms](#). The films will also be available after June 6 on CBC Gem and ICI TOU.TV, thanks to our National Media Partner, CBC/Radio-Canada.

The National Arts Centre is proud to produce the 2026 Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Show in partnership with the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Foundation.

Thanks to the many sponsors and donors who make the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Evening at the NAC possible, including Presenting Sponsor RBC, Lead Donor Donald K. Johnson, O.C., Crowe BGK, Keg Spirit Foundation, The Azrieli Foundation, Power Corporation of Canada and Meta.

Tickets

The 2026 laureates will be celebrated at two events in Ottawa, culminating in the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Show at the National Arts Centre on Saturday, June 6.

Tickets for the GGPAA Show at the NAC go on sale to the public on Thursday, February 12 at 10:00 am ET, at nac-cna.ca/ggawards and by phone at 1-844-985-2787.

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For more information or to arrange an interview with a 2026 laureate, please contact:

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