

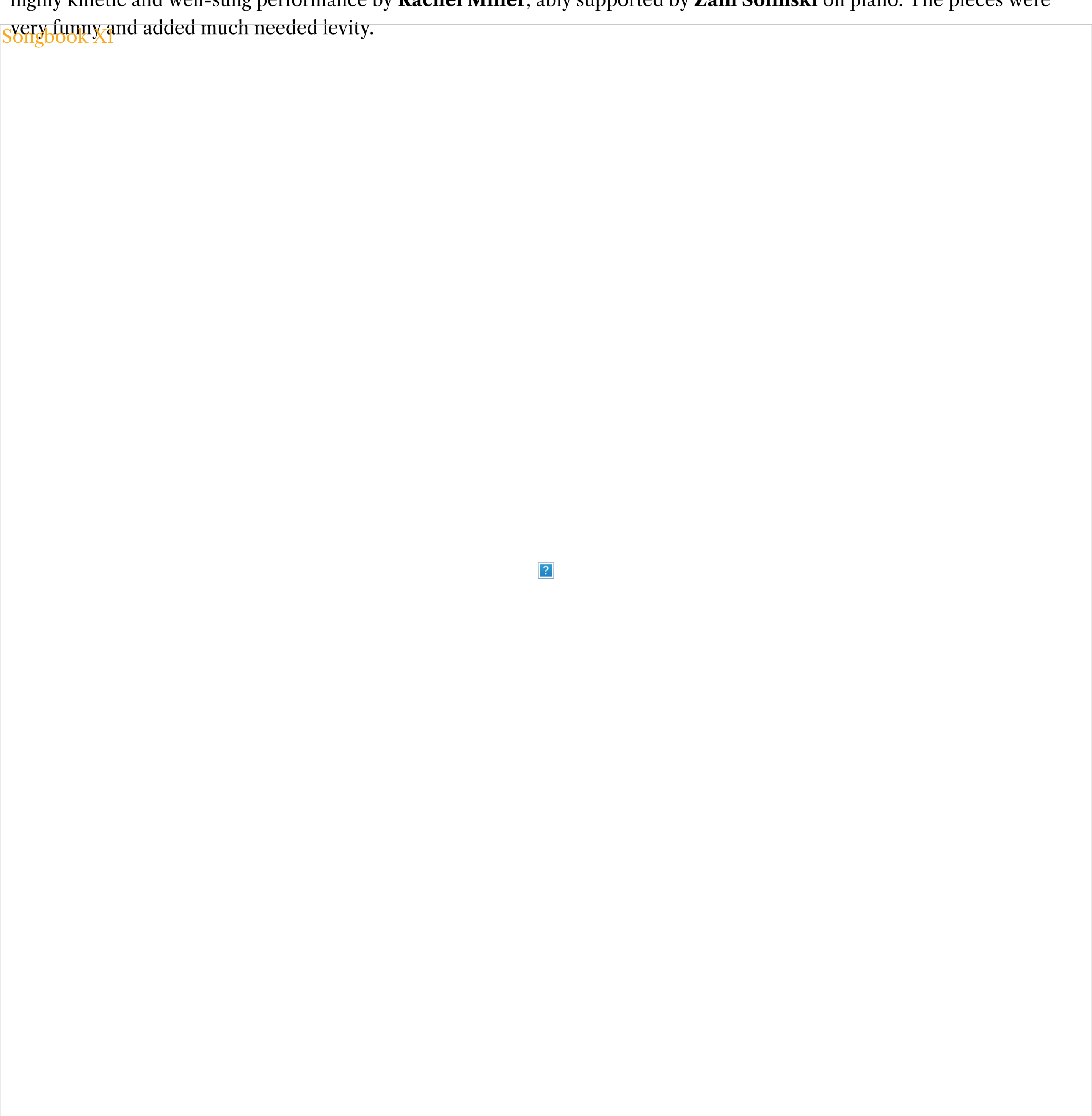


L-R: Jennifer Tung and Jorell Williams in Tapestry Opera's Songbook XI. Photo: Dahlia Katz

TAPESTRY OPERA MAKES A WELCOME RETURN TO LIVE PERFORMANCE WITH *SONGBOOK XI*

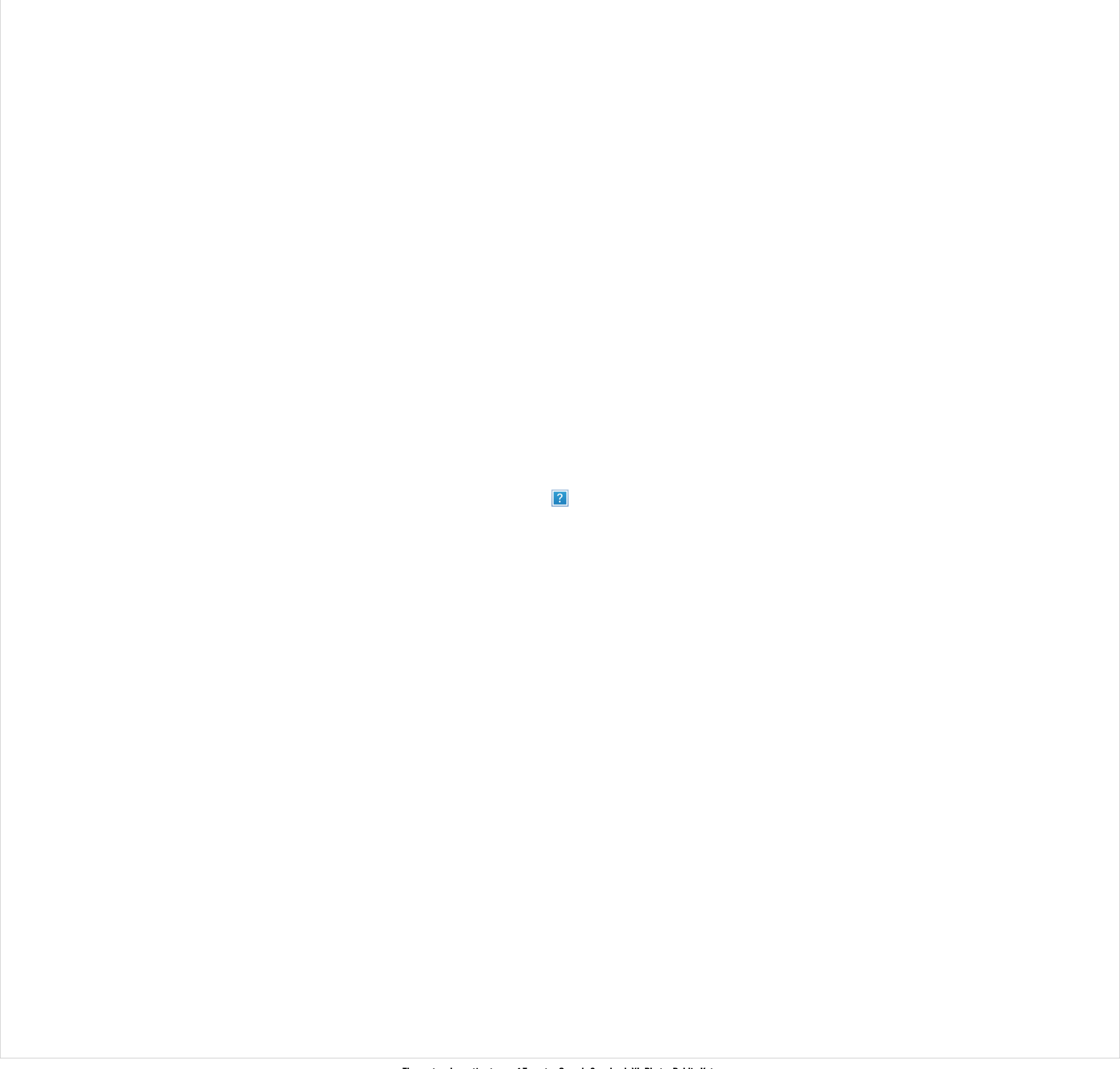
by John Gilks | Mar 18, 2022 | Featured, Reviews

Songbook XI on the evening of Mar. 11 marked Toronto-based **Tapestry Opera's** first performance in front of a live audience since *Jacqueline* in January 2020. It was the usual Songbook format. Fifteen singers, rather remarkably including two countertenors, and three pianists had spent the week being mentored by baritone **Jorell Williams** and pianist/conductor **Jennifer Tung**. The performances (Friday and Saturday) marked the culmination of their work during the week. The repertoire was largely drawn from Tapestry's back catalogue, though Williams and Tung also performed "Slim's Aria" from Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*. There was some ironic humour in the mix, but overall the tone seemed even darker than usual. Perhaps the choices were influenced by our dark times or perhaps they just seemed gloomier than they might in happier times. We did get the playful (*What Rhymes with Azimuth*) by composer **Ivan Barbotin** and librettist **Liza Balkan**, performed skillfully by **Alida Doornberg**, **Parker Clements** and **Christine Bae**. And, proving that often the best Tapestry vignettes come from works that go all the way to full-scale production, there was "Cuba Libre" from *Dark Star Rising*, the brilliant AIDS-related oratorio by composer **Andrew Staniland** and librettist **Jill Battson**. This was very well staged, with a highly kinetic and well-sung performance by **Rachel Miller**, ably supported by **Zain Solinski** on piano. The pieces were very funny and added much needed levity.



L-R: Zain Solinski and Rachel Miller in Tapestry Opera's Songbook XI. Photo: Dahlia Katz

Other highlights included the very creepy *Sooner than Later* (composer **Cecilia Livingston** and librettist **David Yee**), in which a son makes a horrible mess of helping his father commit suicide. It was played very straight by **Yanick Gosselin** and **Bruce Reid**, with **Indra Egan** on piano. The deadpan performance just contributed to the creepiness. "Namaste," from *Mother Everest* by composer **Abigail Richardson** and librettist **Marjorie Chan**, plays with the passage of time as a female climber loses track of it as she suffers from hypoxia high on Everest. There was some fine singing and a keen sense of drama in this from **Anna Sharpe**, with **Christine Bae** at the piano. There was much else to like in the slickly staged, 75-minute presentation though perhaps the best, and certainly the most timely, was saved for last. Williams and Tung sang us out with *To those fleeing, terror, persecution and war* by composer **Rene Orth** and librettist **Kanika Ambrose**. The song is about Haiti, but the sentiment is universal and was beautifully conveyed by Williams's powerful and characterful singing.



The cast and creative team of Tapestry Opera's Songbook XI. Photo: Dahlia Katz

So, a bitter-sweet evening at Tapestry's Ernest Balmer Studio. It was terrific to be back in a live audience listening to live music even if so much of that music spoke to the grim realities of the present.

More on *Tapestry Opera's upcoming 2022 season & programs* [here](#).

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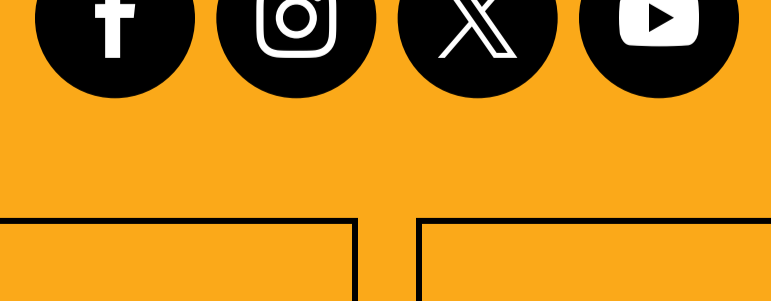
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