

TD Jazz Concerts

Oscar Peterson's 100th Birthday Celebration

This three-day celebration of the “Maharajah of the Keyboard” featuring concerts, symposia, masterclasses, and more, curated by Kelly Peterson and Mervon Mehta, runs from Thursday, October 23, to Saturday, October 2025.

31 years ago, one year after the stroke that took away the use of his left hand, Oscar Peterson returned to concert performance with a series of four concerts in Europe that July. The following month, on August 7, 1994, he appeared at the Ravinia Festival. That evening proved to be the beginning of an enduring professional relationship with Ravinia's young program director. The following year, and for several years afterward, our daughter Céline and I accompanied Oscar to Ravinia for his concerts there. When the same program director moved to Philadelphia's Kimmel Centre, their second season opened with an Oscar Peterson concert.

The Royal Conservatory's beautiful new Koerner Hall opened two years after Oscar died. I was thrilled when a familiar name was announced as the Executive Director of Performing Arts, because I knew this was wonderful news for music in Toronto. Personally, it was also an opportunity to renew a connection with that young program director from Ravinia, Mervon Mehta.

During Koerner Hall's second season, Mervon consulted with me on a concert series celebrating the varied aspects of Oscar's performing career. One of the most memorable nights of my life was in this very hall 10 years ago, when I was figuring out how to launch *Oscar, With Love* – my first venture into record producing – Mervon said quietly, “I would be happy to produce the concert for you.”

This partnership continued in 2020 with the world premiere of Oscar's *Africa Suite*, another unforgettable evening. So, it is fitting that festivities marking Oscar's centenary be presented here, adding to the party that was started in June with the all-star Canadian celebration produced by Céline at Massey Hall.

Throughout a career that spanned more than 65 years, Oscar toured the world, taking his listeners and audiences on breathtaking and exhilarating musical journeys. He is still the quintessence of piano virtuosity. Oscar was a champion for human rights. He was an advocate for music education and dedicated teacher. He was a prolific composer. This three-part celebration highlights some of those journeys, celebrates Oscar's dedication to excellence, his delight in sharing his knowledge and experience with students, showcases his compositions, and carries on, through the generations, the traditions of the music he loved: jazz.

Among all the marvelous musicians who will play in these performances, I am thrilled to present the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra's Toronto debut in a performance of John Clayton's stunning arrangement of Oscar's *Africa Suite*. Jeff Hamilton was Oscar's drummer from 1990 to 1995 and is a beloved member of our “family.” Equally huge smile-producing: this concert will be hosted by our dear friend, Rosie Abella.

There is so much to say about each of the talented artists you will see and not enough room on the page to say it. I am sure you will be as mesmerized as I will be by their performances and by their dedication to honouring Oscar.

A closing thought: when the world beyond the walls of the concert hall is filled with chaos and loud, divisive voices, we have the sanctuary of music within. Music that unites us, gives us hope, and reminds us that there is beauty in the world. It is my hope that this music lifts you up and brings you joy. That is, after all, what Oscar most embodied: joy.

- Kelly Peterson

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Oscar Peterson's 100th Birthday (Part I)

Thursday, October 23, 2025

Leslie & Anna Dan Galleria

PROGRAM

5:30pm: Drum masterclass featuring Jeff Hamilton

6:45pm: Performance by students from The Oscar Peterson Program

7:30pm: Panel discussion on the legacy of Oscar Peterson moderated by the Honorable Rosalie Abella, featuring Kelly Peterson, Mark Ruffin, and Paul Wells

8:30pm: Performance by the Sean Nimmons Trio

Sean Nimmons, piano

Jon Meyer, bass

Morgan Childs, drums

For a biography of **The Honourable Justice Rosalie Abella** please refer to page 16 and for **Jeff Hamilton** to page 18.

The Oscar Peterson Program provides high-quality comprehensive musical training, 100% tuition-free, to underserved youth from across the Greater Toronto Area. Launching into the fourth year, these diverse and passionate musicians continue to flourish in the inspiring and inclusive community of the Oscar Peterson School of Music. Students participate in weekly private lessons and rehearsals, learn from RCM Faculty and Glenn Gould School mentors, and perform in Mazzoleni Concert Hall and Koerner Hall. Additionally, students have had the chance to meet and work with several artists including, Robi Botos, Stewart Goodyear, Joy Brown, Rachel McFarlane, and Randall Goosby.

Kelly Peterson is President & General Manager, Regal Recordings, Ltd.; Producer, Two Lions Records; Trustee, the Estate of Oscar Peterson.

Mark Ruffin is a renowned broadcaster, author, and Grammy Award nominated producer, celebrated for his contributions to jazz, art, and culture. He is a former program director at *WBEZ* in Chicago and is currently program director on *Sirius XM*.

Paul Wells is one of Canada's leading political journalists. His popular Substack newsletter reaches nearly 40,000 subscribers, including decision-makers in politics, business, academics, and journalism. He is a regular commentator on French- and English-language television. He has written four best-selling books and covered 11 federal elections. He has also written about music and the arts throughout his long career.

Sean Nimmons-Paterson, M. Mus., is a musician, composer, and producer, whose work is heard around the world in films, TV series, and advertisements. He is the grandson of Canada's legendary clarinetist and lifelong friend of Oscar, Phil Nimmons.