

National Gallery of Canada Foundation fêtes Marc Mayer with classy farewell dinner

Gala includes the announcement of \$3 million in gifts supporting national gallery's outreach efforts

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Thank goodness for pictures, because no amount of words could paint just how beautiful the farewell dinner was for **Marc Mayer**, outgoing director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada.

The gala evening was hosted Wednesday by the National Gallery of Canada Foundation to celebrate Mayer's 10 productive years at the helm. The dinner also helped to raise **\$3 million in support of the gallery's national and international outreach efforts.**

The guest list read like a who's who of Canadians. Former governor general **Adrienne Clarkson** was there. So were Supreme Court Justice **Rosalie Abella** and her former colleague **Beverley McLachlin**, who retired as chief justice a year ago.

Finance Minister **Bill Morneau** and his wife, **Nancy McCain**, attended, as did former prime minister **Joe Clark** and his wife, **Maureen McTeer**, and former B.C. premier and diplomat **Gordon Campbell**.

As well, galagoers included former tech executives **Jozef Straus** (wearing his trademark black beret), and **Zita Cobb**, who has successfully put the small Newfoundland community of Fogo Island on the map through her Shorefast Foundation. Also spotted were **Rob Sobey**, chair of the Sobey Art Foundation; prominent Toronto theatre producer **David Mirvish**; French Ambassador **Kareen Rispal**; **Bruce Heyman**, former U.S. ambassador to Canada, with his wife, **Vicki**; and National Arts Centre president and CEO **Christopher Deacon**.

The evening began with a reception in the contemporary galleries before continuing into the Scotiabank Great Hall for a dinner that was sprinkled with tributes to Mayer by **Thomas d'Aquino**, chair of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation board; **Françoise Lyon**, chair of the National Gallery of Canada board of trustees; the gallery's former board chair, **Michael Audain**, who is also a distinguished patron of the gallery; and **Karen Colby-Stothart**, CEO of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation.

Capping off the evening was a powerful performance by young cellist **Bryan Cheng**, accompanied by his sister, classical pianist **Silvie Cheng**. They played one of Mayer's favourites, Haydn's Adagio, which, explained Mayer, perfectly captured how he was feeling: bittersweet.



Bryan Cheng and his sister Silvie Cheng, of the Cheng² Duo, perform at the Farewell Gala for Marc Mayer, hosted by the National Gallery of Canada Foundation on Wednesday, December 5, 2018. Photo by Caroline Phillips



Some 170 guests attended the Farewell Gala for Marc Mayer, hosted by the National Gallery of Canada Foundation on Wednesday, December 5, 2018. Photo by Caroline Phillips

Mayer, 62, was first appointed director and chief executive of the National Gallery in 2008. He is stepping step down once his second term wraps up in January.

The time has gone by so fast, he mused in his remarks, which he mostly dedicated to thanking the many individuals with whom he's worked during his time at the gallery.

"For those who are a little bit older than me, does it ever slow down?" asked Mayer, drawing knowing chuckles from the room. "Because, it just has gotten faster and faster and faster. You don't even notice and then — the next thing you know — you're gone."



Guest of honour Marc Mayer delivered an emotional speech, referring to his job as director of the National Gallery of Canada, as "the greatest honour of my life" at his farewell dinner held in the gallery's Scotiabank Great Hall on Wednesday, December 5, 2018. Photo by Caroline Phillips

The room heard how Mayer grew up in Sudbury but that his mother's favourite sister lived in Hull. They visited her often and he became familiar with the National Gallery. "This is the place where I fell in love with art as I grew older," he said, speaking in both official languages.

"I thought I had a good sense, and that's why I applied for the job," said Mayer, whose 33-year-long career has taken him to art museums and galleries in New York, Paris, Toronto and Montreal. "It's a hell of an honour, the National Gallery of Canada.

"Do you know that while doing the job I realized I had no idea how important this institution is ... This is one of our key cultural and intellectual centres. I didn't really understand that until I actually was responsible for making sure that it stayed that way. The role that we play in the world; we represent Canada on the world stage.

"All of you who have been so generous to this institution, so generous to me, who have helped me love my fate: be vigilant. Keep an eye out for my old beauty," he said with emotion.

Mayer ended his remarks by telling everyone that he's leaving his position as director with the view that it's been "the greatest honour of my life".

The room immediately responded with a lengthy standing ovation.



Accomplished musicians Bryan Cheng and Silvie Cheng at the Farewell Gala for Marc Mayer, outgoing director of the National Gallery of Canada. Photo by Caroline Phillips

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