

VOCALYPSE PRODUCTIONS
ESCAPE TO FREEDOM
A WORLD PREMIERE IN HALIFAX

by **Daphna Levit** | Oct 20, 2022 | **Featured, Reviews**

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This 90-minute performance of song was an intense interpretation of a real woman's story. **Mona Parsons**, the only Canadian woman to be imprisoned by the German army in World War II, was a Nova Scotian who married a Dutch businessman and moved with him to Holland. The couple was involved in a resistance unit that rescued allied airmen but were arrested by the Gestapo in 1941. Although she was originally sentenced to death, this was commuted to life in prison. Along with another prisoner, she successfully fled one of the prisons to which she was relocated, to freedom.

The opera does not tell the story. Her early life of elegant high society, possibly somewhat debauched, is initially and briefly portrayed by the performers in frozen moments of styled postures. The opera then conveys the anguish and the degradation she endured through the music, the choreography, the stark set and the skillful use of lighting to create a variety of claustrophobic effects, including prison bars. The singing was interspersed with occasional moments of speech or *sprechstimme*, in several European languages, augmenting the global incomprehensibility of the turmoil. six of the seven singers performed multiple roles, from prisoner to interrogator to guard, in a dance-like fluidity of arrangements. Their voices and harmonies blended well with the music that was itself shifting from lyrical to jarring. But since their identities constantly changed it is difficult to single out any performance. But **Jon-Paul Decosse**, **Bodvar Ingi Geirfinnsson**, **John Lindsay-Botten**, **Amelia McMahon**, **Dominique Saulnier** and **Tessa Short** were all noteworthy.

Soprano **Janice Isabel Jackson** sang the demanding role of Mona Parsons with clarity, initial power and conviction turning as the dreadfulness of her situation continues into despair. She was onstage throughout the opera. This may have been a formidable challenge in a larger venue with a bigger orchestra, but the entire combination was effective.

A very powerful moment was the performance of the four women, in prison garb, lamenting their deterioration into captive animals with superb harmonies against a strong percussive jazz-like composition. The small four-member orchestra under the direction of **John Bogardus** was consistently impressive.

VOCALYPSE PRODUCTIONS
OCTOBER 13 TO 16 2022



ESCAPE TO FREEDOM

THE MONA PARSONS STORY
AN OPERA BY SANDY MOORE



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