

Renaissance altarpiece reassembled after 400 years

By **SUSAN HALLETT**
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—A two-year undertaking by the National Gallery of Canada's Stephen Gritt, assistant conservator Tomas Markevicius, and the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London has resulted in the remarkable unveiling of what is known as *The Petrobelli Altarpiece*.

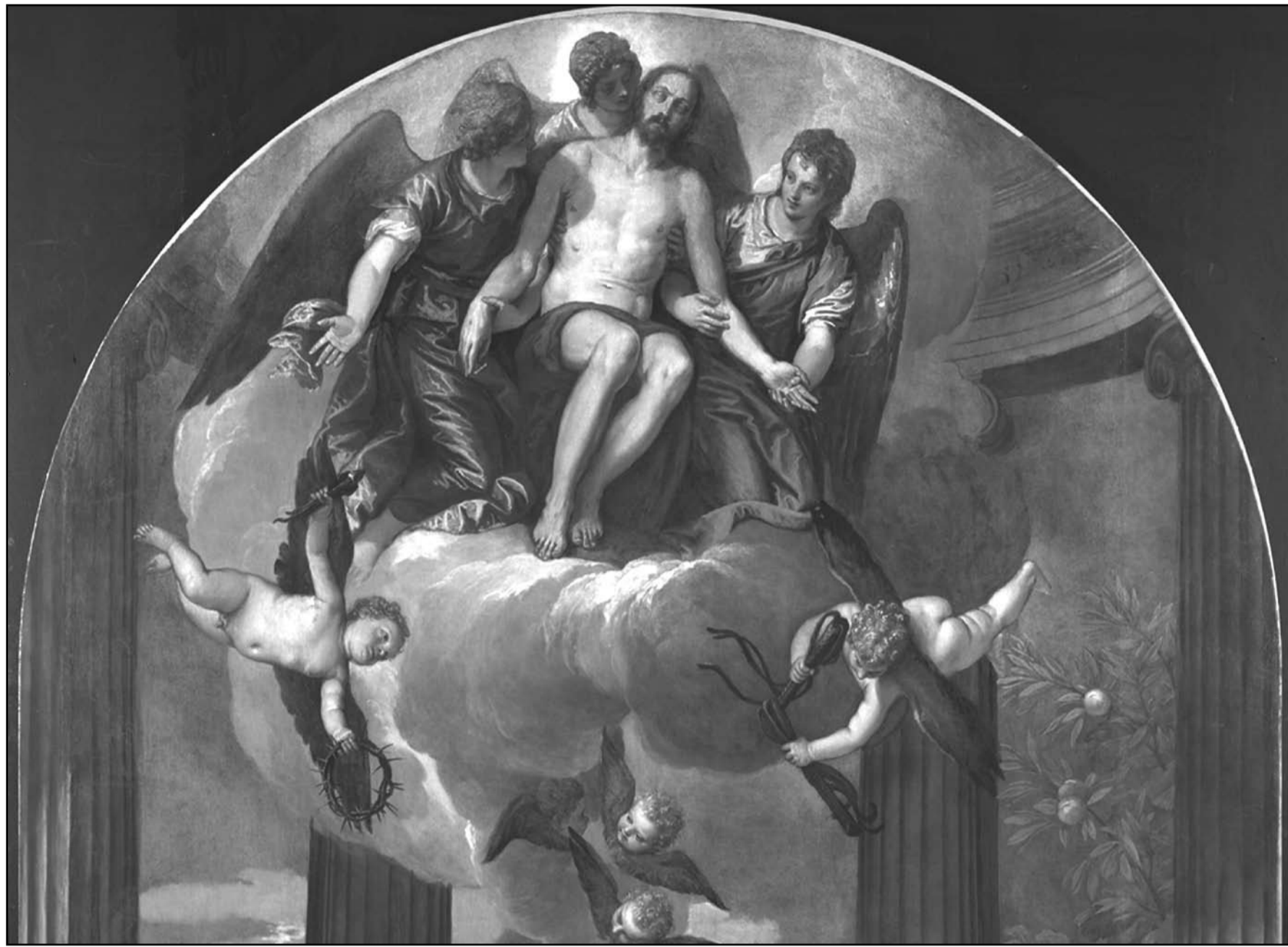
This historic work by Paolo Veronese, the famous 16th century Venetian Renaissance painter, went on public display on May 29 in Ottawa.

After some 400 years, various pieces of the original work—which had been cut up by an avaricious dealer to be sold piecemeal—are back together. A few sections are still missing but the restoration by Gritt and his assistants of the top part of the altarpiece is nothing less than miraculous.

"It is a landmark event, because while people have known for quite a while that the individual fragments from the various institutions belong together, no one's really seen them together, or no one's thought about them together in quite the way we have," Gritt, chief of the NGC restoration laboratory, told CBC News.

"In a sense, we've added a major work to the corpus of one of the most important and influential painters of the 16th century," he said.

Fragments include the National Gallery-owned oil on canvas, *Dead Christ Supported by Angels*, restored after being heavily water-damaged on the trip across the Atlantic in 1925, and the *Head of Saint Michael*,



Dead Christ Supported by Angels, c. 1563 Paolo Veronese, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa PHOTO © NGC

recently discovered to be a part of this work and owned by the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas.

Joining these sections is *Saint Anthony Abbot and Antonio Petrobelli*, on loan from the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, and *Saint Jerome and Girolamo Petrobelli* from the Dulwich Picture Gallery.

Cousins Antonio and Girolamo Petrobelli originally commissioned the work, created around 1563, which was intended to hang in a family chapel in Lendinara in the Veneto Region of northern Italy.

"They had themselves painted into the painting, and it was installed on their family altar in a chapel in a rather small town, and when they died they were buried beneath it," Gritt said.

A beautifully illustrated catalogue entitled "Paolo Veronese: The Petrobelli Altarpiece" is available in English or French. It describes the reunification process, the restoration itself, and the historic aspect of donor portraits. It may be ordered online at www.shopping.ca.

In a talk on June 11 at the Lecture Hall of the NGC, Gritt will discuss the reunification of four fragments of the original piece and the fascinating story behind Veronese's Petrobelli Altarpiece. Admission is free.

The Blanton Museum of Art will host the exhibition after it leaves Ottawa in September. At the end of the tour, *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* will remain as part of the National Gallery's permanent collection.

'Bard on the Beach' opens with *Othello*

By **CHRISTINA FERRERO**

VANCOUVER—Shakespeare's literary works are timeless, exploring as they do essential human dramas that still play out today.

The tragedy that can accompany true love (*Romeo and Juliet*), the tainted plots of politicians (*Macbeth*), and the wicked behind-the-scenes schemes of those who appear to be good and righteous are as much a part of life today as in 1604, when the world first saw *Othello* on stage.

Iago, brilliantly played by Bob Frazer—who we hate but, in some perverse Machiavellian way, cannot help but admire—is a great strategist.

Othello, which shows how very effectively jealousy, prejudice, deceit, and betrayal can destroy innocent love, was chosen for this year's opening event at Bard on the Beach, one of Canada's largest professional non-profit Shakespeare festivals.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, the festival holds its own when compared with the famous Stratford Festivals in England and Canada. Nature co-operated fully with the opening on Thursday, producing a nearly full moon on a cloudless night coupled with the fragrance of blossoms carried by the salty sea air.

This is the first time *Othello* has

been shown at Bard on the Beach. "With a single turn of phrase upon a single breath, it can paralyze...[at] such a moment, we can share a lifetime of humanity," said director Dean Paul Gibson about his choice.

One of Shakespeare's themes is the exploration of marriage where the light of true love is obscured as inconsequential in the affairs of men. It matters not that Desdemona and Othello or Romeo and Juliet love each other. True Love is present almost as a curse, unattainable due to worldly considerations and sullied by the jealous seditious schemata of those who place greed, power, and lust before it.

In *Othello*, a nice Italian girl goes against her father's wishes, and behind his back marries the moor Othello, a dark-skinned captain known for his valiant character.

Iago, brilliantly played by Bob Frazer—who we hate but, in some perverse Machiavellian way, cannot help but admire—is a great strategist. He is a ruthless schemer bent on achieving power and control by "weaving the net that catches them all" and planting a jealous seed in Othello's ear. He incites Rodrigo, a former suitor, to fund his schemes, then backstabs him, literally, as Desdemona's rumoured lover, Cassio, is nearly killed.

Meanwhile, Desdemona, played by Naomi Wright, is a faithful wife who foreshadows her own death. Watching the red curtains go up and the bed slide right out of a concealed drawer on the circular minimalist set is pure magic.

Desdemona sings a death song a cappella, her subtlety of movement speaking volumes, after being disrobed of her jewels and finery. Decked out in a fabulous sleeveless satin gown



Desdemona and the noble Othello. DAVID COOPER

she prepares to die.

Indeed, we can place all the costumes by Mara Gottler in the to-die-for category—body-hugging leather pants, cool boots, and vests atop sumptuous silks and satins. Rusching, folding, and binding are all used, and some of the pieces feature reverse seaming.

The lighting by Gerald King is equally exquisite; moonlit shadows mimic branches.

There is a real complicity between the two women, and in the end, Iago is discovered and his own wife betrays his foul deed. It is here that the smoldering rage of Emilia bursts forth, and Jennifer Lines plays the part convincingly and with heartfelt emotion. The restraint Michael Blake (*Othello*) showed in the first half, the endearing caresses between the couples, and the gradual heightening of his emotions until they reach a frenzied peak is a real testament to Blake's acting skills.

If *Othello* doesn't strike your fancy, check out the other plays at the festi-

val: *Richard II* directed by Christopher Weddell, *The Comedy of Errors* by David Mackay, and *All's Well That Ends Well* by Rachel Diner.

Desdemona sings a death song a cappella, her subtlety of movement speaking volumes, after being disrobed of her jewels and finery.

Entr'acte you can stroll on the grounds among the geese, picnic at the gazebo, or sip wine at the bar. There are coffee, snacks, and a gift shop with an abundance of local and foreign-made Shakespeare-themed goodies.

Bard on the Beach runs May 28th to September 26 under the tents in Vanier Park. (www.bardonbeach.org)

Arab poets mull threat of 'Western values' to culture

Poetry intrinsic part of Arab tradition

By **STEPHEN JONES**
The Epoch Times

DUBAI—Globalization may threaten Arab culture but also offers an opportunity to learn from others, poets said in a discussion in Dubai.

In a discussion at the Dubai International Poetry Festival this past spring, writers discussed whether Arab poetry should close itself off against the "corruption" of Western verse.

Egyptian writer and translator Mohammed Eid Ibrahim rejected the perception that Western poets were "battered by philosophy and literature" and their styles present a challenge to Arab poetry.

"The ones who are barbarians think that those all around them are barbarians," he said.

"Sometimes we should learn to appreciate the beauty in the things that people of other cultures create."

"We should appreciate the past but we should not remain fossilized to it. We should learn from diversity. We live in towers but our minds still live in primitive tents."

Ibrahim said that learning from others can help the tradition grow, but it will not necessarily threaten the Arab identity.

"Poetry should be honest to the environment," he added. "The individual can't help but write based on his own culture if he is writing from the heart."

Under the patronage of the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation, the festival offered poets from around the world recitals and discussions on issues affecting poetry in the region.

One of the attendees, Dr

Wolfgang Kubin, a German poet and translator, said that he noticed there was a major difference between European and Arab poetry.

"When I come to Arab countries I am always impressed with the performances given by poets," he told the Epoch Times. "European poets don't know how to read their poems in public."

"This is because poetry is still a living and breathing tradition in Arab countries. In Europe or China poets are normally on the fringes of society. The traditions of reciting poetry have been lost."

He said that European poetry has a philosophical and intellectual focus whereas Arab poetry is rooted in "conservative traditionalism," he said.

"In the Arabic world, religion, society and poetry are all part of the same coin," he said. "There doesn't appear to be any post modern tendencies. The majority of poems are about love, whereas the three German poets who are here focus their poems on issues such as permanence, vanity and transcendence."

It is precisely those qualities in Western poetry which could divorce Arab poetry from its Islamic identity warned Syrian literature professor Samar Ruhi Al Faysal.

"I'm afraid that the Arab society and culture will be lost," he said. "The language of globalization has been forcibly imposed on the Arab nation without the Arab nation being prepared for it."

"Media and TV stations make the young people follow what is going on without any question. People are losing their creativity and not thinking for themselves," he added.



Scene from *Othello*, one of three plays at Bard on the Beach in Vanier Park. DAVID BLUE