The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 21 October 2025: Notice of meeting #1376

Founded 1894

Visit our website at www.owls.org.za for current notice, back notices, Constitution (as amended 2021), In Memoriam 1894-2023, list of members and more.

Committee 2025/2026

President: Mike James

Senior Vice-President: David Little

Junior Vice-President: Owl Nigel Gwynne-Evans

Secretary: Hugh Amoore

Treasurer: Richard Morris

Immediate Past President: Ron Duff

Additional Members: Paul Murray, Julian Wannell, Peter Sutherland, Peter Hyslop, Kevin Rorke, Anthea Serritslev, Martin Hess, Keith Mac Hutchon and Kate McCallum.

Honorary Auditor: Verwey Wiese

Dinner bookings:

Email: secretary@owls.org.za

Telephone: 021 671 3121

Mobile number: 082 440 8204

Treasurer: Richard Morris

Email: treasurer@owls.org.za

Mobile number: 0832720500

Bank details

The Owl Club, Standard Bank of South Africa

A/c no. 071 818 006

Bank branch code: 051 001

This month's edition:

Editor: Peter Hyslop

Proofreaders: Kate McCallum, Mike James and Hugh Amoore

Contributors: Hugh Amoore, Nigel Gwynne-Evans, Mike James and Mike Bruton

Photography: Alan Lindhorst and Mike Bruton

Drawings: Tony Grogan

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1376th meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 21st October 2025, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Mike James**

Guest speaker: **Alan Winde** on the topic of: ***"Future-Fit and Fearless: Unlocking the Western Cape's Potential"***

"Alan Winde has been Premier of the Western Cape Province since 2019. He champions innovation, participatory governance and data-driven crime prevention. His priorities in Government have been community safety, economic growth and collaborative solutions to advancing the region. The focus of his talk will be on his priority of encouraging strong economic growth to unlock the potential of the Western Cape."

Music: **Trio Performance: Hans Huyssen (cello), Antoinette Huyssen (soprano) and Jan Hugo (Piano)**

"The trio will be playing works by Schumann, Brahms, Mendelssohn , Viardot-Garcia and Hand Huyssen."

WPB: **Owl Tessa Graaf** on the topic of**: "***The 'Scent of an Owl' - a reflection of our 5 senses and our least used one, our sense of smell."*

Dinner fee: R350.

Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Secretary Bird at 082 440 8204 or 021 671 3121 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay'n Perch procedure by paying their (and their guest's) dining fee into the Club's bank account by EFT and instructing the bank (using the option provided) to send a remittance confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za whereupon their perches will be booked.

Besides details of your invited guests (see above), no further emails will be needed from you unless you also have special dietary needs or if you are using a dining credit.

In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 19th October 2025.

All bookings will be acknowledged.

September 2025 Meeting

On Tuesday, 16th September, 52 Owls and 5 Guests gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1375th Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 18:45, with President Owl Mike James welcoming all and Owl Peter Hyslop delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 15 for the menu).

Owl President Mike James then congratulated the 18 Owls celebrating birthdays in September. They include: Owl Robin Marais (90), Owl Tony Hooper (in New Zealand) who has just turned 82, Owl Dennis Nick (91), Octogenarians Craig Howie, Ian Glass, and John Steer, Septuagenarians Steve Broekmann, Paul Wilcox, Geoff Everingham, and Dirk Kemp. Younger Owls, Erwin Hiddema, Jon Horn, Stefan le Jeune, and James Price were also amongst the birthday group. Those birthday Owls present at the meeting were: Tony Murray, Alex Andeson, and Owl Derek Leisegang.

Owl President Mike James then informed the assembled Owls of the sad passing of Owl Nick van der Merwe who was elected as a member in 1982, and was a Past President of the Club.

Owl Nick was a prominent archaeologist, whose strong American accent, acquired during his student days at an Ivy league university belied his South African roots. He died peacefully in September. Tribute will be paid to Owl Nick in the usual way at the next AGM. Having made the announcement, Owl President Mike James then asked all Owls and guests to stand in memory of Owl Nick.

The President then (requesting that guests remained seated) ordered that the lights be dimmed whilst he proposed the traditional Toast to Our Guests.

Owl President Mike James invited the guest speaker, Jeremy Silver, Professor and Director of Opera at UCT's SA College of Music, to address the meeting on the topic of *Not Just for Italians: Reclaiming Opera for a Nation.*

After the address, Owl President Mike James thanked Jeremy Silver for his insightful talk and presented him with a bottle of port. Following this, Owl Julian Wannell introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening, presented by Petrus Coetzee (Viola) and Tertia Visser-Downie (piano).

After the first set of the music, Fiscal Shrike Richard Morris, ably assisted by guest Noëleen Murray, conducted the Club Flutter.

Following a short bar interval, the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme. At the conclusion of the performance, Owl President Mike James thanked the performers for their contribution to the evening's entertainment.

Owl Ron Duff then presented his WPB, on the topic of *The 1995 Colorado River Rats: Viewing the Grand Canyon From the Bottom Up!*

After the WPB, Owl President Mike James thanked Owl Ron Duff for his entertaining and informative presentation, and then invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club, and wished all a safe flight home.

Guest Speaker: Professor Jeremy Silver: "Not Just for Italians: Reclaiming Opera for a Nation"

In a stirring and deeply personal address to the Owls, Professor Jeremy Silver, conductor, educator and champion of South African operatic talent, offered a panoramic reflection on the evolution of opera in South Africa, its cultural tensions, political challenges and its transformative potential. His speech, rich with anecdote, critique and vision, traced his own journey from a curious visitor in 1997 to a committed educator and advocate for young South African singers.

Professor Silver began by describing his first visit to South Africa in 1997, where he was introduced to a vibrant arts community notably through conducting *La Traviata* at the State Theatre in Pretoria, featuring notable performers such as Angela Gilbert, Stefan Louw, Thami Zunga and Ntsikelelo Mani. The impression was immediate and lasting, a scene bursting with energy, diversity and promise. Yet as he noted this was still early in the post apartheid era and the cultural landscape was in flux.

His return in 2004 marked the beginning of a more sustained engagement. From Pretoria to Durban, Silver immersed himself in operatic and orchestral projects, witnessing firsthand the flowering of young talent in the new South Africa. His admiration was palpable but so too was his growing awareness of the structural and ideological challenges that framed this artistic renaissance.

One of the most provocative moments in Silver's speech came with his recounting of a Sunday morning encounter with the words of former Arts Minister Pallo Jordan. Jordan's critique that teaching African singers to imitate Italians was akin to exporting spaghetti to Italy, struck Silver as both reductive and troubling. It challenged the legitimacy of opera as a universal art form and cast doubt on the aspirations of young South African singers. Silver's rebuttal was measured but firm. Opera, he argued, is not the property of any one nation. Most of us in the world who enjoy opera are not Italians he noted, pointing to its global embrace in Russia, the UK and the United States. South Africans, he insisted, have every right to participate in this international tradition not as imitators but as contributors.

Silver's relationship with Cape Town Opera began serendipitously through a phone call from former Owl Angelo Gobbato following a performance of *La Traviata* in Pretoria. Though initially hesitant to accept an invitation from someone he had not met, Silver eventually engaged with the company's leadership including Michael Williams and Christine Crouse (now his colleague at Opera UCT). While the initial offer of a music directorship fell through, this encounter laid the groundwork for future collaborations.

By 2012 Silver was conducting regularly at Cape Town Opera and working closely with Crouse. He became increasingly aware of the institution's unique role, the only place on the continent offering comprehensive training for opera singers. This exclusivity however was bittersweet. Other centres of excellence in Pretoria and Durban had faded leaving Cape Town as the sole bastion of operatic education. These formative experiences laid the groundwork for his long-term involvement in South African opera, culminating in his permanent move to the University of Cape Town in 2019.

Silver's talk turned towards the issue of training. Despite the abundance of vocal talent he observed a troubling pattern. South African singers were often praised for their voices but deemed uncastable due to gaps in musicianship, language proficiency and stagecraft. He recalled hearing them on audition panels in London, where invariably they struggled to get roles despite their vocal abilities. This critique became a personal challenge. Silver resolved that under his watch, no South African singer would be dismissed for lack of breadth. He emphasized the need to teach not just vocal technique but musicianship, the ability to read and interpret scores, musicality, the innate sense of phrasing and expression and deep linguistic understanding. Opera after all demands more than sound, it demands storytelling, emotional truth and cultural fluency.

Professor Silver addressed attempts to explain South Africa's operatic talent through racial or physiological theories. While acknowledging that physical differences may affect resonance he dismissed these explanations as insufficient and potentially reductive. Instead he offered a more compelling cultural argument, that the strong role of institutions such as church and community choirs serve as spiritual and social anchors for the members. They offer young people a sense of belonging, excellence and purpose. In many cases they compensate for gaps in formal education becoming the primary environment where musical talent is nurtured. These choirs often perform Western classical and operatic repertoire not as foreign impositions but as vehicles of personal and communal expression.

Silver paid tribute to the pioneering work of Owl Gobbato and his colleague Vetta Wiese who scouted talent in communities and brought singers into Cape Town Opera and UCT. Their mantra, "let us not touch their voices, let us teach them the skills and get them on stage", led to a fast track model of training. While effective in its time, Silver acknowledged that this approach is no longer sufficient. Today's singers must compete on global stages often without the benefit of postgraduate training.

They must be able to read notation fluently, speak multiple languages with depth and act convincingly. Silver recounted moments of linguistic confusion among students even in their native tongues, underscoring the need for rigorous textual analysis and formal instruction.

Perhaps the most powerful theme in Silver's speech was transformation. He described the ability to identify raw talent in auditions and to bring these individuals into UCT despite gaps in formal education. Within six or seven years he could place them on international stages. It is, he argued, not just about feeding the arts community. It is about social justice, national pride and the redefinition of South Africa's cultural identity. Opera in this context becomes a tool of empowerment, a bridge between rural choirs and global careers.

Despite the success stories Silver was candid about the limitations of South Africa's operatic infrastructure. With only one company employing a permanent chorus of 18, full time careers are rare. Young singers must go abroad or abandon their dreams. This reality he suggested is both a cultural and economic failure. He called for a broader culture of arts patronage including broadening audience attendance. While Cape Town boasts vibrant visual arts and spoken theatre, opera struggles with irregularity and financial constraints. Without consistent programming and audience support it cannot thrive.

Silver's closing remarks were both hopeful and urgent. He envisioned a South Africa where opera is not a niche pursuit but a national treasure. He challenged government and community alike to recognize its value not just as entertainment but as a vehicle for transformation, excellence and international recognition.

He ended with a punt for the upcoming production of *Die Fledermaus* at the Baxter Theatre celebrating Johann Strauss's bicentennial. The operetta, he promised, would be a breath of fresh air, joyful, accessible and a testament to the talent of South Africa's young singers.

Professor Jeremy Silver's talk combined personal narrative, cultural critique and visionary leadership in a way that challenged assumptions and inspired action. His belief in opera as a universal art form, his commitment to rigorous training and his passion for transformation through the arts offer a compelling roadmap for South Africa's cultural future, where opera is not just surviving, it is evolving, expanding and asserting its place in the heart of a nation still discovering the full range of its voice.

Above: left & right: Tony Grogan, *Drawings of* Professor Jeremy Silver.

Musical Notes: Petrus Coetzee and Tertia Visser Downie: Works for Viola and Piano

Tertia Visser is is well known to Owls as an accomplished pianist who studied under national and international piano masters, John Antoniadis and London-based Martino Tirimo, after winning the prestigious Mabel Quick Overseas Scholarship.

Performing for the first time in Owldom, Petrus Coetzee has been the full-time principal violist of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO) since 2018, making his debut as soloist with the CPO in April 2021. After he obtained an M Mus. in Chamber Music with Violin at Stellenbosch University, he spent seven years abroad, studying Viola at the Vorarlberger Landeskonservatorium, Austria, and Viola and String Quartet at the Hochschule für Musik Theater und Medien in Hanover.

While studying in Hanover, he completed a two-year orchestral internship at the NDR Radiophilharmonie, and thereafter was employed as tutti violist at the Oldenburgisches Staatsteater for two years. He teaches viola part-time at both the Stellenbosch University Conservatory and UCT's South African College of Music. He is a member of the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra and performs regularly as soloist and chamber musician in various ensembles at concert series and festivals in South Africa.

The first music set included:

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata for Viola and Piano in F Minor, Op.120 nr.1

Georges Enesco (1881-1955)

Concert Piece for Viola and Piano

The second music set included:

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Märchenbilder for Viola and Piano, Op.113

Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881)

Capriccio for Solo Viola in C minor, Op.55

Eduard Pütz (1911-2000)

Blues for Benni.

WPB: Owl Ron Duff: "River Rats of the Grand Canyon – A Journey Down the Colorado River"

In September 1995, a group of adventurous friends known as the River Rats embarked on a white-water rafting expedition through the Grand Canyon. Owl Ron Duff gave a lively Waste Paper Basket, capturing the spirit of the journey that blended geographical insight, historical context and personal anecdotes into a narrative that celebrate camaraderie, natural beauty, and the thrill of exploration.

Ron began by introducing the Colorado River, once called the Grand River and later renamed Rio Colorovo by Spanish explorers, meaning red coloured river. The name was eventually anglicised to the Colorado River, which stretches 2,330 kilometres through five US states and two Mexican states before emptying into the Gulf of California. Its source lies in the La Poudre Pass in the central Rocky Mountains of Colorado, at an elevation of more than 3000 metres. Major tributaries include the Green River from Wyoming and the Gila River from New Mexico. Though only the fifth longest river in the United States, the Colorado's importance lies in its role as a lifeline for millions and as the sculptor of the Grand Canyon's dramatic landscape.

Ron touched on the human history of the Colorado River Basin, where indigenous peoples such as the Puebloans, Navajo, Havasupai, and Mohave have lived in the region for thousands of years. In the twentieth century, the US federal government undertook extensive dam and aqueduct construction along the river, most notably the Hoover Dam, completed in 1935.

These interventions transformed the river's flow and ecology, enabling urban development and agriculture but also sparking debates about sustainability and water rights.

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The journey began with an invitation from close American friends who had planned an eight-day rafting trip through the Grand Canyon. Ron and his companions, twenty-three in total, came from Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. They convened in Phoenix, Arizona, before flying to Las Vegas for two nights of indulgence. At the time, the Sahara Hotel and Casino offered a promotion: fifty dollars' worth of gambling chips earned two nights of free accommodation. Ron took full advantage, though remaining most discreet about his success at the tables.

From Las Vegas, the group boarded small four-seater aircraft that traced the Colorado River's path, offering breathtaking aerial views of the Grand Canyon. Their destination was Lee's Ferry, located at the head of Marble Canyon and near the historic Navajo Bridge, one of only seven bridges crossing the Colorado River over a 1,207 km stretch. The rafting expedition would span 576 km, ending at Pearce Ferry near Lake Mead.

Two large inflatable rafts were required to accommodate the group, each helmed by experienced river guides. While the average daily distance was around 82 kilometres, the itinerary was flexible, allowing for hikes and swims in the canyon's many side tributaries.

The Grand Canyon's climate posed both challenges and delights. Daytime temperatures ranged from 38 to 42 degrees Celsius, necessitating sun hats and long-sleeved shirts to prevent sunburn. Nights were balmy, averaging 28 degrees, while the river itself, fed by snowmelt from the Rockies, remained a frigid 9 degrees. Fortunately, the side-canyons offered respite. Their streams, warmed by the sun, reached a comfortable 25 degrees, making them ideal for bathing and relaxation. Ron fondly recalled these excursions, which included hikes through evocatively named canyons such as Awatubi Creek, Badger Canyon, Buck Farm Canyon, and Soap Creek. One particularly memorable moment occurred in the Little Colorado River Gorge, where the group encountered two nude bathers enjoying the warm waters. They were affectionately dubbed the *Muddy Mermaids*.

Accommodation during the expedition was delightfully simple, camping on the soft sandy banks of the Colorado River. Tents were unnecessary, and the clear desert skies offered unobstructed views of the stars. The group embraced a minimalist ethos, with strict environmental protocols in place to preserve the river's pristine condition. Bathing was restricted to side-creeks, using biodegradable soap and shampoo. Urination was permitted only on land, away from water sources, while solid waste was collected in portable toilets and carried out of the canyon. These measures underscored the importance of a "Leave No Trace" principle in such a fragile ecosystem.

Despite the rugged conditions, the River Rats dined well. Perishable foods were stored in waterproof containers and submerged in the icy river to maintain freshness. Beverages including beer, soft drinks and bottled water were similarly chilled, ensuring a steady supply of cold refreshments. Breakfasts featured muesli, cereal, and fresh fruit, accompanied by coffee or tea. Lunches consisted of sandwiches and fruit, often enjoyed during hikes. Dinners were hearty affairs, with stews, barbecues, curries, and tinned desserts, followed by after-dinner drinks and storytelling around the campfire.

The journey was punctuated by seventy-six rapids, each presenting its own challenge. The most formidable was Lava Falls Rapid, a notorious stretch that tested the skill of the river guides. Ron's group navigated all rapids without incident, thanks to the expertise of their crew and the resilience of their inflatable rafts. One notable landmark was the Bright Angel Trail Silver Bridge, a pedestrian crossing and the only dry feet bridge over the Colorado River within the canyon. Passing beneath it was a symbolic moment, marking the intersection of wilderness and civilisation.

The expedition concluded at Pearce Ferry, where the group was collected by a private bus and driven back to Las Vegas via the Hoover Dam. En route, they crossed the Mike O'Callaghan–Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge, a modern engineering marvel that spans the Black Canyon. From Las Vegas, the River Rats dispersed to their respective countries, carrying with them memories of a journey that defied expectations and deepened friendships. Ron's presentation to the Owl Club, delivered three decades later, was a testament to the enduring impact of that experience.

As Ron concluded his presentation, he quipped, "A river is mos a river. And a canyon is mos a canyon." But his journey proved that the

Colorado River and the Grand Canyon are far more than geographical features. They are living landscapes that challenge, nourish and transform those who venture into their depths.

Members' News

Owl Club Membership

Owls are notified that the Committee has received a proposal of membership for Marius Diemont (Literature: proposed by Owls Nigel Gwynne Evans & Ian Sutherland) and believing that he would make a worthy Owl resolved to Notice him.

Any Owl who has any information about the nominee that would be of assistance to the Committee is invited to contact the Owl President or the Secretary. (Older Owls will remember a similarly named Owl: the late Owl Marius A Diemont was the nominee's grandfather.)

The Committee has elected Solly Moeng (Literature: proposers Owls Gwynne Evans & Ian Sutherland) to membership. We hope that he will be inducted at the October meeting**.**

Owl Members' Publications

Owl Veitch has – we understand – recently completed a history of the Kelvin Grove Club: this is sure to be of interest to Owls who are, and those who are not, members of Kelvin.

Owl Jeremy Lawrence has added another to his considerable oeuvre: this time it is a collection of short stories. Owls may recognise an institution they know in one of them.

Owl Philippe Salazar (who is a qualified pilot, among many other things) has recently had published by Juta a new book *Drone Regulations in South Africa*. This complements his previous *Air Law: A comprehensive Sourcebook for Southern African Pilots (2019). This is sure to be of interest* to many – and even to Owls who might contemplate acquiring or flying a drone (for peaceful purposes we should add).

Owl Club clothing

The following Owl Club items will be available for sale at the October and November meetings:

Self-tie bow ties@ R250

Ready-tied bow ties @R250

Cummerbunds @ R300

Clutch bags @R475

Silver Owls @ R150

Owls who will not be able to come to the October or November meetings may reserve items by notifying the Secretary, and depositing the necessary amount in the Club's bank account with the reference: < name: clothing>

Owl Club Committee

Owls are invited to consider joining the Committee in 2026; the Committee has not yet identified an Owl able and willing to take over the role of Secretary Bird in 2026: Volunteers Please.

Colloquium: 7 November 2025

The colloquium on the theme 'South Africa's changing status in the global geopolitical landscape', will be held at 10h00 for 10h30 until 13h00 on Friday, 7 November 2025 in the Palmyra Room at Kelvin. The speakers will be:

Owl Sheila Camerer, Title of talk: "How Will South Africa Navigate a Hectically Changing Global Geopolitical Landscape?"

John Matisson, South African journalist and author of *Cyril's Choices, An Agenda for Reform*, which proposes a revamp of South African domestic and foreign policy. Title of talk: "Creating a South African Foreign Policy with Nuance and Agency."

Dr Anthea Jeffery, Head of Policy Research at the SA Institute of Race Relations, and author of books on different aspects of South African politics.

Owls who plan to attend the colloquium must contact Owl Mike Bruton (mikefishesbruton@gmail.com). Please arrive by 10h15 as the colloquium will start promptly at 10h30. Dress code: smart casual.

Owls attending the October dinner will be invited to suggest topics for colloquia to be arranged in 2026.

Excursion by Owls to Prins & Prins Jewellers and Museum

Nine Owls and guests attended a most interesting excursion to Prins & Prins, the "Home of Natural Diamonds", in Huguenot House, 66 Loop Street, Cape Town, on Friday morning, 3rd October 2025. Our host, Owl Petre Prins, the founder and managing director of the company, regaled us with fascinating insights into the diamond trade and the history of Huguenot House.

Over a welcome cup of tea and biscuits he also invited the Owls to offer a piece of jewellery to be professionally cleaned by their goldsmiths during our visit. He then asked us to guess the number of carats in a wine glass half full of precious stones (won by Owl Geoff Ashmead) and explained the origin of the exquisite paintings on the walls of their foyer, which were created by Dutch artists in the 1790s in the style of the then recently discovered wall paintings at Pompeii, and discovered during the restoration of the building.

After watching Petre's goldsmiths beavering away creating bespoke jewellery, we embarked on a guided tour of the remarkable Museum of Gems and Jewellery that Petre, a retired geologist, has created in the basement of the building. This intimate museum covers the geology of southern Africa and explains how diamonds as well as gold and other precious minerals were formed. It provides a fascinating overview of the meaning and value of jewellery through the ages, from the engraved ochre artefact from Blombos Cave in the southern Cape (dated at 77 000 years before present) to the Golden Rhino of Mapungubwe, and showcases traditional African jewellery as well as modern Western creations.

He even has on display the Krugerrand-studded dress that Anneline Kriel wore as her national costume at the 1974 Miss World pageant as well as the diamond-encrusted evening gown that she wore after being crowned Miss World.

We all left with a sense of awe and admiration for Prins & Prins, a hidden gem in Cape Town, where human ingenuity has turned earthly treasures into works of art, passion and commitment.

Seen & Noted at the September Meeting

Above left: Owl President thanks Owl "River Rat" Rob Duff for his WPB Presentation.

Above right: Owl Bishop Geoff Davies in conversation with guest speaker Jeremy Silver.

Below: Owls David Muller and Peter Gilchrist.

Food for thought:
September is South Africa's Heritage Month: why, what, when?

The 1994 Public Holidays Bill did not provide for a heritage public holiday (pre 1994 we had a Settlers Day in September) but the pressure to recognise what was Shaka Day (24 September is the presumed date of Shaka's birth in 1828) led to a compromise: designate the day as Heritage Day to "celebrate our diverse cultural heritages".
That this day has been designated as national braai day says much about how we have yet to come to terms with what that means and how we view heritage.
So, too, has the general absence of meaningful reflection by our political leaders in their Heritage Day messages.
If you were his speech-writer what speech would you write for Minister Grayton McKenzie for his 2025 Heritage Day Message? And if you were a betting Owl, what odds would you give on the Minister accepting your draft? A bottle of port for the best draft ministerial speech for Heritage Day 2025!
And what of heritage in the limited context of the Owl Club??

The Owl Club
Tuesday, 19th August 2025

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Starter
Vegetable soup

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Main Course
Grilled beef sirloin
Served with seasonal vegetables, baby potatoes and pepper sauce

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Dessert
Chocolate mud pie

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Filter Coffee

The Grace.
Creator God
For the biosphere that sustains us
For the earth that feeds us
For those who prepared this meal
For the food and wine we are about to enjoy and
For your love that enfolds us
Lord, we give you grateful thanks.

Grace by Owl Peter Hyslop