



Young Artist Grant

Villa Charities Announces Winners of the 2025 Young Artist Grant Program

*Three talented artists awarded grants in
music, literature and film*

Toronto, ON – January 13, 2026 – Villa Charities Inc., a Toronto registered charity and nonprofit organization is excited to announce the winners of their **2025 Young Artist Grant**. Driven by Villa Charities' vision to inspire the Italian in all of us, the Young Artist Grant was established in 2023 as a biannual fund to support emerging artists in their creative endeavours in the fields of literature, music, and film. The objective of the Young Artist Grant is to provide financial support to emerging artists who are either of Italian heritage, or who are developing projects that are inspired by and reflect the essence of Italian culture.

The 2025 Young Artist Grant awarded a total of \$15,000.00 to three (3) creative projects by young artists between 18 and 30 years of age, who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. The applicants were also required to be of Italian heritage or were developing a creative project that is inspired by or reflects the essence of Italian culture.

"The 2025 Young Artist Grant recipients exemplify creativity, excellence and a deep connection to Italian culture," said Marco DeVuono, President and CEO, Villa Charities Inc. "We are proud to champion these talented young artists as they bring their artistic visions to life, celebrating Italian heritage while contributing to Canada's vibrant arts community."

Villa Charities announced the three grant recipients along with an Honourable Mention today.

Category: Fictional Literature

Winner: Polina Trofimova-Sylvestre, Oshawa, ON

Creative Project: "Nonna's Hidden Tales" (Graphic Novel)

“Nonna’s Hidden Tales” is an illustrated children’s graphic novel for ages 4–6. The story follows a shy boy who spends a week at his Nonna’s home. Feeling out of place among the lively family gatherings, he discovers a dusty shelf of old fairy-tale books in the basement. As he reads the stories, his confidence grows, and by the end of the week he transforms into a bold young storyteller who captivates the entire family.

The project introduces Italian folklore through warm, whimsical illustrations and encourages children to explore their own surroundings with curiosity. It celebrates cultural heritage, the magic of reading, and the power of storytelling to inspire confidence, imagination, and a sense of belonging.

On winning the 2025 Young Artist Grant: “This support means more than I can easily express. Receiving the Young Artist Grant gives me the chance to bring this story to life with care and intention. It’s meaningful to have this support at this stage in my creative journey, and it encourages me to continue developing my voice as an artist.”

Category: Music

Winner: **Julia D’Ascanio, Woodbridge, ON**

Creative Project: **“The Roots Of The Fig Tree” (EP)**

“The Roots Of The Fig Tree” is the working title for the upcoming Extended Play (EP) by Canadian Italian vocalist, Julia D’Ascanio. Inspired by the unwavering love and support characteristic of Italian families, this EP will be dedicated to her parents, grandparents, and the generations who came before them. Julia’s goal is to honour the support she has always had from her family and create a musical body that gives back to them, and reflects the sacrifices, resilience, and triumphs of Italian immigrants. The narrative arc of the EP progresses from familial perspective to Julia’s personal, present-day voice, illustrating how the lives of past generations have made her creative journey possible.

Lyrical and thematically, this EP will use nature and landscape as a connecting thread between the physical environments of Italy and Canada, reflecting both the journey of migration and the emotional growth that comes with it. Nature serves a metaphor for generational change, familial growth, and cultural adaptation.

On winning the 2025 Young Artist Grant: “Winning the 2025 Young Artist Grant is an incredible honour. As far back as I can recall, my dream has been to be a musician. As I am still so early on in my career, it is extremely validating to be granted the funds to follow my dreams; it feels like a sign that I am on the right path. Through the Young Artist Grant, I will be able to produce my first body of work in a way that will be faithful to my vision and begin my career as a recording artist.”

Category: Film

Winner: **Massimo Russo, Toronto, ON**

Creative Project: **“A440” (Short Film)**

“A440” is a coming-of-age story of a young boy, his Nonno, and music. Dante is a rambunctious kid, always getting into trouble at school and at home. In stark contrast, his Nonno is a simple man: work hard, spend time with family, play the guitar. In an effort to bring structure and responsibility to Dante’s mischievous ways, Nonno teaches Dante about the discipline of music and craft of playing guitar. As Dante grows up and gets busier an inevitable distance grows between him and Nonno, making their bond through music even more important.

“A440” is a love letter to the Italian family, the care we have for each other, the responsibilities we shoulder in life, and the bonds we share through the beautiful art of music.

On winning the 2025 Young Artist Grant: “Receiving the Young Artist Grant is an honour. It’s a lifeline to emerging filmmakers like me. Storytelling in this medium is complex, time-consuming, and expensive. It demands many unique elements and people come together. This grant is both a catalyst and a foundation on which this process can now take place. I’m so thankful to Villa Charities for supporting this project and can’t wait to partner with them to tell this story that means so much to me.”

Category: Film

Honourable Mention: **John Cucchiella, Toronto, ON**

Creative Project: **“Palle Rosse’s Sanity Trinity” (Short Film)**

Freshly graduated from a prestigious arts school, a negroni-loving filmmaker shares his own grievances with the film industry in the form of three short films he has written and directed. Mixing authorial interjections with satirical and absurdist stories, “Palle Rosse’s Sanity Trinity” explores the modern day with sharp criticism. Taking on art, politics, and popular culture, there is no topic too daunting for Palle Rosse to confront. Besides himself, of course.

The selection and adjudication process was conducted by a Selection Committee with a judge for each grant category. The grants will support specific original creative projects that were submitted as works in progress for the application process, and funds were disbursed to the three winners in December 2025.

For more information about the 2025 Young Artist Grant winners and the program, please visit villacharities.com/grant or contact execs@villacharities.com.

About Villa Charities Inc.

Villa Charities Inc. (VCI) is a registered charity and non-profit organization that enriches lives through experiences and services that honour Italian culture and heritage. For more than 50 years across the GTA, Villa Charities has provided cultural and educational programs and supported culturally sensitive long-term care and independent living apartments for seniors. VCI fulfills their mandate through a broad range of activities, services and facilities, both directly and in conjunction with its affiliates and independent organizations. Affiliates include Columbus Centre and Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery; Villa Colombo Homes for the Aged Inc. in Toronto; Villa Colombo Seniors Centre (Vaughan) Inc. Di Poce Centre; Italian Canadian Benevolent Seniors Apartments Corporation/Casa Abruzzo Benevolent Corporation with apartments for independent seniors (Caboto Terrace, Casa Del Zotto and Casa Abruzzo); and Leonardo Da Vinci Academy. Each of these organizations is an integral part of the Villa Charities family with separate legal status and its own governance Board. Villa Charities has been certified as a Great Place to Work®, which recognizes the organization's commitment to creating an inclusive, positive and engaging workplace. For more information visit villacharities.com.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Sierra LeBlanc
MAVERICK Public Relations
Sierra@wearemaverick.com
647-405-2196

Kathleen Sloan, CM
Director, Marketing and Communications
Villa Charities Inc.
ksloan@villacharities.com
416-789-7011 Ext. 309