IT'S QUESTION TIME

Blue pages, orange shirts?
R. Murray Schafer’s complex legacy?
What makes theatre necessary?
Live music: ready or not?

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In the last week of June, as the identification of Indigenous children’s unmarked graves at former residential schools in B.C. and Saskatchewan was making the truth unavoidable, I took an orange shirt and loosely wove it into a piece of trellis in my Kensington Market front yard, facing along the sidewalk. In time for Canada Day. An orange shirt, in tatters but still somehow in one piece, speaking, if only to myself, to my feelings of helplessness, sorrow, paralyzing complicity.

A bit later in the summer, I took it down and twisted it into a kind of rope, then wove it back into the trellis, more permanently, the way you see it here.

A child came by while I was twisting and weaving the cloth, 16 or 17 years old, maybe, an empty wine bottle in each hand, weaving in a different way. “Do you have a toonie for me?” he asked.

“Sorry, no change” I said, automatically, absorbed in making art. — David Perlman

PHOTO: LUCA PERLMAN

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Blue Pages and Orange Shirts

DAVID PERLMAN

Fall can be either a rough time or a good one to start feeling hopeful, depending on your point of view. Just like “back to school” means a lot of different things, depending where you are coming from and who is taking you there.

This year in particular, the season of first cold nights and falling leaves brings very mixed feelings. Alongside “fourth wave” pandemic dread that nothing will ever be “normal” again, is a glimmering hope that, yes indeed, there is a chance that some aspects of what we called normal are gone for good, because just like “back to school” what’s called normal depends on where you stand in relation to it.

Blue Pages

Normally, for more than 25 years in fact, the fall issue of The WholeNote has been “Blue Pages” time – a special supplement containing dozens of short profiles by music makers and presenters in our community, telling readers about themselves and their plans and hopes for the season underway. Individual profiles could be interesting or not to a reader, depending on your personal musical likes, but collectively they were always more than the sum of their parts, because they gave a comforting sense of who “we” were as a music community, check-a-block with the familiar, but always offering up something new for the adventurous to explore.

One thing you could count on: when our Blue Pages members – usually more than 150 of them – said in the fall they were planning to do something over the course of the season, that was usually the way it worked out. Not so simple these days, as we all know.

So last year, instead of publishing one official October Blue Pages in the print magazine, we took the Blue Pages online, so music makers could wait till they were ready to announce their plans. Just as important, they’d be able to revise what they’d said if and when the COVID finger of fate summarily disposed of what they had bravely proposed. This year, we are doing the same.

Encouragingly, there are already 40 or so presenters who have taken the plunge; there’s an index of directory members so far on page 29. As always they are more than the sum of their parts: this year reflecting the same mix of hope and dread, tentativeness and caution bravely thrown to the winds, that we at The WholeNote and probably most of you are feeling too.

Choosing a cover for the Blue Pages issue has always been a bit of a challenge: choosing a “flagbearer for the team” has never felt quite right. Why single out some particular ensemble or artist to grace the cover when the underlying message is that the community’s collective strength is greater than the sum of its individual parts, especially in these complex times?

Collectively, our ideas of what putting on or attending a concert means are being challenged as never before, along with our most comfortable assumptions of what constitutes “our” musical community. The need for good questions is largely what this issue’s cover is about.

Orange shirts

Yesterday (September 14, 2021) the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Red Sky Theatre announced a joint project, titled Mistatim, in the works since late winter, to be launched on September 30, now officially Canada’s National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

“The show] is about a fast-paced horse who will gallop into the hearts of children” says Red Sky Theatre’s artistic director Sandra Laronde. “[It’s] a story of reconciliation that asks its audience, ‘Why tame and punish when we can learn to listen and seek to understand?’” Its release on September 30, she says, “is an opportunity to set the stage for children to dream about the kind of world they want to live in, and an opportunity for us to shift our perspectives in light of historical inequities, and equip young people with the vocabulary to continue these critical conversations about reconciliation and diversity.”

It is a new name for the day, but not a new observance. Under the name Orange Shirt Day it came to be in 2013, intended to promote awareness in Canada about the devastating impact of Canada’s residential school system on Indigenous communities for over a century – an impact that continues today.

As Orange Shirt Day it was a grassroots initiative arising organically from the testimony in spring 2013 of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad from the Stswecem’c Xgat’tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band) about her orange shirt, given to her by her grandmother and taken from her on entering “the Mission School” at age six or seven in 1973.

I suspect that Orange Shirt Day will not easily be dislodged as the name for the day. National Day for Truth and Reconciliation sounds too much like something you check off the calendar when it’s done – something maybe you only raise a glass to when there is finally, after all the promises, clean drinkable water in every tap.

In my mind, I hear some baffled reader ask What does all that have to do with music? Or theatre, or dance or live art of any kind? Good question.
KINDRED SPIRITS ORCHESTRA
Kristian Alexander | Music Director

IN SINISTRIS MANIBUS
Saturday, October 30, 2021 at 8 pm
Concert season opening night gala

Dukas, Fanfare pour précéder la Péri
Prokofiev, Piano Concerto No. 4
Stravinsky, Symphony in Three Movements

REFLECTIONS
Saturday, December 11, 2021 at 8 pm

Tchaikovsky, Capriccio Italian
Korngold, Violin concerto, Op. 35
Shostakovich, Symphony No. 15

PASSION AND COLOUR
Saturday, January 29, 2022 at 8 pm

Bizet, Carmen Suite No. 1
Ravel, Piano Concerto in G Major
Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra

ENIGMA VARIATIONS
Saturday, March 12, 2022 at 8 pm

Prokofiev, Lieutenant Kijé Suite, Op. 60
Chopin, Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 21
Elgar, Variations on an Original Theme

PULCINELLA
Saturday, April 2, 2022 at 8 pm

Stravinsky, Pulcinella Suite
Hindemith, Kammermusik No. 2, Op. 36

LOVE AND TURMOIL
Saturday, May 21, 2022 at 8 pm

Hindemith, Overture to Amor and Psyché
Rachmaninov, Piano concerto No. 4
Prokofiev, Symphony No. 6

METAMORPHOSES
Friday, June 24, 2022 at 8 pm

FATE AND TRANSFORMATION
Saturday, June 25, 2022 at 8 pm

Franck, Symphonic Variations
Shostakovich, Piano Concerto No. 2
Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 5, Op. 64

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"Murray had the tendencies of a renegade and rascal, but one with a benevolent and honourable artistic purpose in mind," wrote Esprit Orchestra conductor and music director Alex Pauk, in a September 10, 2021 remembrance for The Globe and Mail. And Pauk should know, having, by his own count, conducted more than 80 performances of R. Murray Schafer’s music over the years, with Esprit and other orchestras.

And Schafer’s response as Pauk remembers it? “Alex, don’t get involved in academia – just go on being a conductor and composer – a much better thing for you to do!”

Esprit’s founding, a decade later, anchored a lifelong relationship between the two men, creating a whole repository of “Murray stories” to confirm Pauk’s “renegade and rascal” characterization of Schafer. One is mentioned in the Globe story: the composition North/White in which pristine layers of orchestral sound depicting the purity of the Arctic environment are gradually overpowered by sounds of chains and oil drums, culminating with a roaring snowmobile that shows up in the percussion section to represent the deluge of industrial activity brought to Northern Canada by humans.

“The audience goes from laughing to spellbound,” Pauk writes, “enthralled at the piece’s powerful, searing visual and sonic imagery having a serious environmental message.”

Another example of what Pauk calls Schafer’s “mischievous ways” dates back to 1971 – Schafer’s piece No Longer Than Ten Minutes, commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Strategically placed at the beginning of the concert so as not to unsettle audiences, such commissions had contractual stipulations for the piece’s duration possibly aimed at fulfilling content quotas for government support without too much impact on the audience’s tolerance for new music. “But, audaciously, Schafer’s score specified that at the end of the piece, with its tam-tam fadeouts, each time the audience began applauding, the percussionists should begin a new rolling tam-tam crescendo and fadeout. Each fadeout therefore, would lead to a new wave of sound if the audience began applauding. Thus ensued a loop that could go on for much longer than ten minutes.”

Just naughty or with a deeper intent? “Certainly we can chalk it up to Murray being a trickster with a hilarious sense of humour, but definitely with a deeper intent to make people aware of time, contemplate the piece they’d just experienced and/or consider the relationship between composers, orchestras and audiences? It only works because it is actually a fine piece of music – not just a gimmick. But the audience at the premiere sure was confused!”

The Quiver of Life, 1979

“Music keeps us in touch with this entire vibrating world both outside and in,” says Yehudi Menuhin, almost exactly 17:30 minutes into the first episode, titled The Quiver of Life, of his eight-part documentary series called, comfortably at the time, The Music of Man. As he says the words, the camera cuts from a groomed European cottage garden to a farm hillside near Bancroft, Ontario.
“This is what I would call a bi-fi soundscapes, in which the signal to noise ratio is very favourable,” says Schafer to Menuhin, as they stand there, listening deeply. “There are very few noises here and therefore every sound around us can be heard, even at a very great distance ... the city by contrast is very low-fi soundscapes - that is to say there are so many noises that it’s very hard to determine what the signals are.”

“Although I had heard of Murray Schafer’s soundscapes I never knew what fun they could be,” says Menuhin, in voice-over as, a couple of minutes further into the episode, they enter Schafer’s Bancroft barn. What follows is six or seven minutes of hilarity interspersed with profundity as they activate the gigantic musical apparatus, built specifically for Menuhin’s visit, by riding a teeter-totter in the middle of it. “It’s a lesson in listening isn’t it,” says Menuhin to Schafer as they catch their breath. “It’s something every child should have recourse to... the best training in the world.” Schafer’s reply reveals the teacher in him: “Actually what they should do is build one, because when you build a thing you discover the properties of sound that are inherent in each object.”

And then he follows with another pedagogical insight: “If you take a group of kids out into the woods, and say ‘ok we are going to listen to the sounds’ then of course what everyone will do is to talk. So the best way to do it... a very simple thing... is to say I want everyone to walk one behind the other just out of earshot of the footsteps of the person ahead of you, and the kids love to do that... listening for the footsteps of the person ahead of them and that puts them in a private cocoon.”

**The Tuning of the World**

The road not taken by Pauk in Vancouver in 1973 when Schafer declined to hire him for the World Soundscape Project is a path we can follow here in order to understand another aspect of Schafer’s complex legacy, his soundscapes work and everything that flowed from it. It’s a trajectory neatly summarized by Wendalyn Bartley in her story “Valorizing Nature” in the previous issue (Volume 26 no 8) of this magazine – a story which deals with the field now known as acoustic ecology. “This particular field of ecological awareness,” Bartley writes, “was originally born on Canadian soil out of the work of composer R. Murray Schafer and his colleagues in the World Soundscape Project (WSP) during the 1970s.”

From WSP in the early years came Schafer’s seminal book *The Tuning of the World* in 1977 – “Entertaining recreations of soundscapes of past times and places precede a survey of methods for analyzing present-day soundscapes, distinguishing types of sound, and developing an understanding of the effects of sounds on us all” is how the Amazon website describes it now. (At time of writing there are five copies available, used, from $180 to $275!)

That book was the catalyst for a Banff conference in 1993, also titled *Tuning of The World*, and, as Bartley explains, the conference in turn “brought about a watershed moment: the birth of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE) and its Canadian spin-off called the Canadian Association for Sound Ecology (CASE).”

**Corfu 2011**

It’s at a WFAE conference in Corfu where we catch up with with Schafer in his own words again, in an informal videotaped waterside interview by Rafael De Oliveira (with a distinctly less favourable signal to noise ratio than the Bancroft hillside in the Menuhin encounter, I should add, but still worthwhile.)

*Crossing Listening Paths* is the Corfu conference title; a session titled “Schafer’s and McLuhan’s Listening Paths Convergences, Crossings and Divergences” is presumably the part of the proceedings that De Oliveira, a Brazilian composer with a particular interest in electronic music was taking in. He asks usefully straightforward questions and Schafer’s responses are trenchant.

This, for example, when asked how far the idea of soundscape has advanced in thirty years: “When we started using it in Canada people laughed at us. Now I don’t think anyone is laughing anymore. The word is used in the language and people even think they understand what it means.”

And when asked what future directions research into soundscape as an aspect of acoustic ecology should take, it is Schafer the incipient environmentalist rather than Schafer the composer/sound artist that we hear. “I would say today the only thing I would hope is that we would grow into an organization that would have more influence on the environment,” he says. “Directly on the environment and directly on the administrators of the environment.”

And then he muses on the direction soundscape would have taken if it hadn’t been “a bunch of artists” involved at the beginning: “[What if] instead of being associated with art and with music and composition, things like that, it had been associated with other kinds of activity like cleaning up the environment? ... So I think now we just need to continue to expand the meaning of that word. It is a word that is as open as “landscape” is and *everything* is landscape. Well this [gesturing around them] is all soundscape too. We have to study all aspects of the sounds around us.”

Equally illuminating is when he is asked how soundscape changed his compositional practice, and Schafer the composer kicks in, downplaying the connection between the two.

“It changed when I left the university and the music program and went to live on a farm, about 200/300 miles north of Toronto, and that changed my whole life,” he says. “I wasn’t part of a big music department, I didn’t have an orchestra at my disposal, I didn’t have students, I didn’t have anything, and I started writing a different kind of music... performed outdoors rather than in a concert hall. So you have a totally different kind of music. If you think about our music we’ve been sitting – sitting on our bums for years in rooms called concert hall and playing away like that [mimes a wind instrument] so the music was always very close to the audience. ... It’s an entirely different thing, we all know, when you listen for sounds in the distance. It has a different quality and if that sound comes closer to you and then goes away again it is really quite spectacular. You can only do that with the real atmosphere you have.
Indoors and Out

“As I wrote in the Globe, Murray always told me the outdoors, having no walls like those of the concert hall, provided his ideal performing space,” says Alex Pauk. “And I’ve been fortunate to conduct several of the outdoor spectacles that make up his Patria series, which will undoubtedly be at the core of his legacy, including The Princess of the Stars and two separate productions of The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix (which we commissioned). But we should remember that in spite of his professed aversion to concert halls, he wrote many brilliant works for the concert stage – his trumpet concerto The Falcon’s Trumpet, a work with soaring trumpet lines, searing string parts and all musicians spatially distributed throughout the hall; Scorpius which provides a sting unlike any other; music of exquisite beauty, tenderness, passion, mystery, allure, like Dream Rainbow Dream Thunder; the list goes on.

“As I wrote in the Globe, he generated a unique piece every time he composed, with a sure, clear message in every work. All this while staying on top of sonic environmental issues, pioneering educational methods and producing a significant body of books and essays. And through it all maintaining a keen philosophical approach, sense of humour and, yes, demanding attitude about getting things done as he wanted. He leaves a complex legacy.”

Signal-to-noise ratios

A complex legacy indeed, and one we have barely scratched the surface of here.

Right after the moment I described in the Bancroft barn, where Schafer describes teaching children to listen for the footfall ahead, is the following exchange: “It’s sort of a Red Indian thing!” Menuhin responds, “A Red Indian walk?” “Yes it’s a Red Indian walk” Schafer replies and returns to the topic of why it would be good for children to just experiment building something like this because that way you learn about the acoustic properties that are inherent in any object.”

“Well the Africans,” Menuhin interjects, “the Africans have that approach to any object, I’ve often noticed that they won’t judge by the visual aspect of an object, they’ll go to an object and knock it … “And knock it,” Schafer echoes and smiles delightedly. “And knock it,” Menuhin repeats. “And they don’t judge an object until they hear it.”

The signal to noise ratio in that unguarded exchange has changed dramatically over the course of the 42 years since the two men sat on the teeter-totter in Schafer’s barn. It’s harder to just focus on the delighted essence of an exchange that would end up on the cutting room floor if expressed that way now.

In the necessary reappraisals of legacy, let’s hope that “the favourable noise to sound ratio” Schafer spent his life seeking remains a hi-fi soundscape.

**David Perlman can be reached at publisher@thewholenote.com**
Back in my M.A. thesis-writing days in the late 1980s at the University of Warwick where I was studying English and European Renaissance Drama, I latched onto the phrase “necessary theatre” to describe a kind of theatre that is calling out to be created, that needs an audience, a shared community, in order to enable us to see the world around us in a new way – so that we are inspired to react, to do something to make the world a better place.

A decade or so later, in 1999, the phrase took on an entirely different resonance, as the title of a book, *The Necessary Theatre*, by Sir Peter Hall, which to this day stands as a powerful manifesto for state support, rather than private patronage, of theatre as an art form. Left to its own devices, he argued, if theatre has to support itself it will stagnate, falling back on the tried and true. (Not that state support is, in and of itself, necessarily a guarantee that stagnation will not ensue, particularly when that support is directed primarily toward large organizations competing for resources, who must meet budget targets for what they do.)

What is equally necessary for the very best theatre to happen, Hall argues, is for permanent companies of actors and technicians, secure in their premises, to feel they have permission to push the boundaries of their art.

So, to merge Hall’s definition with my own, necessary theatre is always uncomfortable, irrespective of how technically polished it is, or how securely funded the companies of players are. What distinguishes it in its discomfort is its vitality – and the current and upcoming season is chock full of music theatre, plays, dance and interdisciplinary works that make us see and think, by giving us space to share the emotions brought to the surface by this time of upheaval.

Shakespeare has Hamlet say, to the players, that the purpose of their work is to hold the “mirror up to nature” (which, granted, lots of theatre often does). But then he goes on to describe an even more essential purpose: to show “the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure.” In other words, to hold a mirror up for us so we can see ourselves within the current state of the world – to make us realize what is happening to us as well as around us.

The thing that got me thinking along these lines was being struck by the words being used to advertise a new play being presented as part of Canadian Stage’s Dream in High Park season – “powerful, urgent and necessary.” The new play by Jordan Tannahill (with music by Veda Hille) is inspired by, and peppered with, quotes from that unstoppable climate-change warrior, Greta Thunberg, and performed by a group of 17 young Torontonians aged 12 to 17. It aims to galvanize its audiences around the issue of climate change and the world’s seeming inability to do anything about it. The theme is so huge that, for me, the production only scratches the surface of it, although the title *Is My Microphone On?* has continued to resonate. This question that Thunberg posed to the UN was not really asking if her microphone was turned on but if the people she was about to speak to were really going to listen to what she had to say.

The Dream in High Park season as a whole was inspired by necessity; the company, hit with too many unknown variables to plan for a regular Shakespeare play season, had to abandon the tried and true, opting instead for an extraordinary opening up and sharing of resources with many companies of various genres and cultural heritages from around the GTA. These groups have shared the space, bringing with them audiences that may never have been to this part of the city, thereby creating a wonderful gathering of multiple points of view and reactions to our current world in one extremely accessible place.

Surely this is something that can continue on into the future, as, across the country and around the world, artists and arts companies, large and small, grapple with the need to reinvent themselves in the wake of the Black Lives Matter and Me Too protests and the horrific events that triggered them; and with the equally horrifying revelation of Indigenous children’s deaths at Canadian residential schools. A necessary reawakening of our individual and collective consciousness to the inequities existing in the arts as well as other sectors of society is under way.

**Stratford**

As exciting as the redistribution of artistic resources in the Dream in High Park season, is what can happen when an even larger flagship organization such as Stratford’s classical Shakespearean Festival is called on to respond to the need for change, and responds to the call. With the Festival’s usual tried and true season of...
necessity pared down to bare essentials, they went one step further: reimagining the essentials themselves. New faces, new voices, new and lesser-known artists have all come to the forefront as audiences have flocked to the live performances under the canopies outside the Festival and Tom Patterson Theatres.

The two Shakespeare productions have been pared down to the core and given license to reinvent or subvert the usual audience expectations. The American classic, Edward Albee’s Three Tall Women, is a showcase for a top-notch female creative team and cast led by Diana Leblanc and Martha Henry. Thomson Highway’s The Rez Sisters is also a showcase for female artists, as well as Indigenous voices. I Am William is an anarchic take on our understanding of Shakespeare using adventure and music to subvert expectations and, along the way, empower young watchers to follow their dreams. And Marcia Johnson’s Serving Elizabeth opens our eyes to the many layers of the story and points of view around Elizabeth II’s visit to Kenya in 1952, and to the rewriting of that history now.

On the musical side, the commissioning of five new cabarets has opened the doors to more vital conversations, told through a mix of song and spoken text, each curated by a different artist or team. They have been performed live under the Festival Theatre canopy but, like the plays, also filmed for viewing online on the Festival’s STRAFEST@HOME streaming service. The first cabaret, Why We Tell the Story, curated and directed by Marcus Nance who also performs, was first seen in an earlier version as part of the 2019 Meighen Forum. Experiencing this passionate journey through the African-American musical canon interspersed with the voices of legendary Black poets, it is obvious why this show was invited back. The second cabaret, You Can’t Stop the Beat, was equally strong and passionate but focused on the genre of musical theatre itself, wonderfully curated and directed by Thom Allison to celebrate how musicals have always been “the ultimate tonic for the soul in good or troubled times.” Three more cabarets follow on a variety of themes as well as introducing lesser-known and new Stratford performers to audiences.

Joining the dance
Meanwhile, the dance world also seems to be exploding with new work as a way to explore our emotional experiences of the last year and a half and the urgent issues that are facing humanity. Taking this to a new immersive personal level is Touch, a world premiere by dancer and choreographer Guillaume Côté and multimedia artist Thomas Payette (who collaborated previously on Frame by Frame for the National Ballet of Canada). Produced by Lighthouse Immersive at 1 Yonge Street, where many have already experienced the immersive Van Gogh exhibit, Touch aims to go beyond that event, combining live dance, music and multimedia projections into an all-encompassing experience that brings us back to what we have been deprived of during the pandemic – the basic human need to touch and hug each other.

Back in High Park, the dance: made in canada/fait au Canada Festival is presenting InTO Focus, a program of several works that range from a personal human response to the deprivations of the pandemic, to the more political, such as Lua Shayenne Dance Company’s WAVES.
A new work of dance, song, music and words (with live musicians on stage) that takes an honest look at the arduous road to justice and unity. Digidance is also back this fall, with a screening highlighting the state of the environment in Brazil with Deborah Colker’s Dog Without Feathers, in which the mud- and dust-covered dancers explore the beauty and destructive impact of Brazil’s Capibaribe River.

Audio immersion

Focusing on sound rather than sight, two more productions coming up this fall grabbed my interest as necessary theatre calling out to be created – focusing on important local historical events that yet relate very clearly to our lives today.

The Hootown Collective take us on an audio journey back to The Christie Pits Riot in 1933 when “Toronto the Good became suddenly ground zero for a series of brazen anti-Semitic acts... with devastating consequences.” Created by Sam Rosenthal and Drew Carnwath as an audio walking tour, the listener is immersed in the story of one Jewish boy’s personal journey through the old neighbourhood to the scene of the crime: the notorious Christie Pits ballpark itself.” Described by the creators as “an engaging and dynamic story of innocence and experience; of redemption and hope”, the story will be enhanced by original music written by Measha Brueggergosman including the new song Champions by Brueggergosman and Lennie Gallant.

Coincidentally, using the same format of an audio-immersive historical walking tour, the Luminato Festival (transposed from June to October) is highlighting a more recent fraught political event, the riots around the G20 Summit in Toronto in June, 2010. Henry G20, conceived and directed by Christine Brubaker and co-written by Brubaker and Constantine X. Anastasakis, takes Shakespeare’s famously either pro- or anti-war play, Henry V, as a starting point, freely adapting and adding to the original to explore the unanswered questions from that fateful weekend where hundreds of people, protesters and innocent bystanders were arrested and detained as part of the largest mass arrest in Canadian history. The PodPlay, with augmented reality experiences that are tied into the walking tour, can also be enhanced by Henry G20 Protest Radio, a curated combination of music and audio memories of the G20 demonstrations that can be played in between the theatrical chapters of Henry G20, as you travel between the locations in the city where the drama actually unfolded.

Vital signs

The strong pulse of this rich and varied season of necessary theatre in live and digital formats is a strong answer to tough questions: How can artists help to keep our world vital and safe for all? How can we keep our hearts up while facing the realities of the world around us? How better to share these stories with each other, experiencing all points of view, all heritages, all cultures, all possibilities, than (in the most fundamental ways) to make a virtue of theatrical necessity?
GREAT CHAMBER MUSIC DOWNTOWN

STRINGS

Oct. 21  Parker Quartet
Nov. 18  St. Lawrence Quartet
Dec. 9   Gryphon Trio
Jan. 13  Juilliard Quartet
Feb. 3   Ensemble Made in Canada
Feb. 24  Miró Quartet
Mar. 24  Esmé Quartet
Apr. 28  Lafayette Quartet

PIANO

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Nov. 9   Stephen Hough
Jan. 25  Vanessa Benelli Mosell
Mar. 29  Benjamin Grosvenor
Apr. 12  Marc-André Hamelin

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ty-five years is a respectable milestone for an organization dealing with culturally diverse music, and Toronto’s veteran leader in this category, Small World Music, is celebrating in style. It has launched “25 for 25”, an ambitious yearlong festival, with the initial September 13 to 19 event lineup consisting of eight online and in-person concerts, plus a panel discussion, *Beyond Community*, co-presented with BLOK (Eastern European music summit). Three of the events are online, three in-person at Lula Lounge and the rest at DROM Taberna with its patio/parking-lot stage; the musicians being showcased range from emerging to well-known, and include both local and international talent.

The Founder’s Journey

When I reached Alan Davis, Small World Music’s founder, on his cellphone he was relaxing at a Georgian Bay cottage, BBQ-ing and soaking in the last hot days of summer. His comments in our wide-ranging talk on his “baby,” Small World Music, were understandably framed within his founder’s perspective. He was eager to share thoughts on his music curating career, with its roots going back to his days at Toronto’s Music Gallery beginning 35 years ago.

As long as I’ve known Alan, his passionate appetite for musical exploration and expression has been fundamental. I reminded him that he was among the first cohort to join Gamelan Toronto in 1995 when I was invited to organize that large community music group by the Indonesian Consulate General, Toronto. “It’s very funny that you mention that,” he replied, “because I literally just had a conversation about it with a new friend last evening, ... about my music practice and how it intersects with Small World, about playing gamelan at the Indonesian Consulate.”

Going further back, Davis grew up on rock music and came to love jazz, appreciating its complexity and nuance as a kit drummer. “Frankly, I was never a trained musician, but was intuitive and very enthusiastic. In fact right now at the cottage I have my clarinet, dara-buka, cajon and glockenspiel, and a good friend is coming tomorrow with his bass guitar, keyboard and accordion to jam. So I’m still doing and thoroughly enjoying music all these years later!

“I think it’s not an exaggeration to say that to a certain extent I channelled my desire and passion to be a musician into Small World. I probably realized I didn’t have what it took to be a professional musician, but putting music on stage gave me almost the same feeling. That musical charge never gets old.”

Small World origins

“The impetus to start Small World didn’t arise from nothing, David tells me. “It really started well before SW, because while working at the Music Gallery in the late 80s and 90s I had an opportunity to put music from other cultures on its stage. Coming from a rock background, I discovered this music through people like Brian Eno and Peter Gabriel, especially through the latter’s WOMAD festival, which was a huge personal influence.”

Among his pivotal memories, he says, is watching the Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan family qawwali party at Harbourfront Centre’s WOMAD. “I found myself watching them in performance in an intimate room where I was no more than ten metres from the star singer himself, being profoundly moved. I realized I may not understand what he was saying but the spirit and energy in the room was so powerful that it...
left a lasting impression. It really opened my eyes, ears and mind to the power of ‘pure’ musical experience.

“Essentially what it came down to was that I was learning about what was going on in the world outside my own purview, my own culture. Furthermore, I wanted to share that powerful experience and I had a platform to do it at the MG. So that’s where I started.”

After a decade at The MG it was time to move on, he says. “Coincidentally, it was exactly at that moment when Montreal booking agent and friend Patrick Darby called and suggested I arrange a concert for a touring Vietnamese group on my own. I’d never considered such a thing, so I slept on it. But in the spring of 1997, I presented the first concert under the name Small World featuring the Vancouver Vietnamese duo Khac Chi, along with a Georgian choir. That’s the concert I’m tagging as the beginning of our 25-year run.”

Next steps
Our conversation turns again to November 1997, when he and I collaborated on the Gamelan Summit in Toronto. “SW was still in its infancy,” he says, so it was actually a very ambitious project with over 75 performers from across Canada and the US playing in three Harbourfront concerts and participating in a week of workshops at the Indonesian Consulate General. Luckily it turned out to be a tremendously successful ‘kickstarter,’ if you will, showing everyone that we’re capable of bigger and bolder endeavours. It led to more growth.”

But it wasn’t all smooth sailing by any means. “Up until the 2000s I was running everything out of my house. It was a one-man shop
where I was doing everything. A moment which illustrates that was at a show at The Reverb at Queen and Bathurst where I booked an awesome Tuvan rock band called Yat-Kha. Naturally, I was doing box office (that is after I had shopped for food for the band, because I didn’t have a volunteer pool at the time). But when I looked at the mere handful of people in the room I felt totally despondent, thinking, “Why am I doing this? Nobody really cares.” Ready to throw in the towel, at those low moments I really wondered what the hell I was doing. But then you persevere.

An important milestone, he says, was getting SW’s first Trillium grant which enabled him to rent office space, to hire an administrator, to formalize the SW structure, and to move SW out of his house. “Let’s not forget that those early years were marked by tremendous sacrifice. As you’d remember, the arts were a place of poverty; we lived in a culture of poverty. We were the last to be paid; everything had to be paid first, the artists, marketing and venue. Fortunately things have changed substantially. Today SW is doing comparatively well, with a team of around a dozen people.”

Another turning point in SW’s growth was his connection to top Iranian artists through two close friends. “Through them I was able to present the great vocalist Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, and virtuoso kamancheh and setar player Kayhan Kalhor and their colleagues on major stages.”

Suddenly SW was functioning at an entirely other level in terms of audience exposure, professionalism and revenue. “We took them to the Toronto Centre for the Arts, sold out shows there, and the next year to Roy Thomson Hall. On the other hand as you know too, doing concerts for Canadians is one thing, but doing them for internationals is another entirely. Suddenly you’re talking about visas, hotels, transportation, accommodation, hospitality, special meals and international currency exchanges.”

All the stress he took on was exhausting at times. “For instance, at that Toronto Centre for the Arts sold-out Shajarian show, I sat in an usher’s chair at the back because there were no house seats – thankfully. But when the wave of emotion from the band on stage reached me, I literally began to weep from feelings of being overwhelmed, combined with release and relief offered by the power of the music. At the intermission a woman I knew well came up and said, ‘Congratulations. But have you been crying?’ ‘Yes, I guess I have,’ I confessed. I still can’t help feeling very emotional when I tell these stories. I still can’t say what made me keep doing it. Insanity or sheer passion for the music?”

**From there to here**

Two major factors have changed the Toronto scene substantially since those early years, he explains, dictating that SW change shape. “For me the key change is that SW today is a more diversified organization, in which presenting is only one thing that we do,” he says. He points to two key changes. “First of all, in the last two decades other organizations have entered the arena. Today we have the Royal Conservatory, Koerner Hall, Aga Khan Museum and others who can put diversity on stage and make money at it. … It was a pretty open field back when I started. Today it’s a more competitive and thus difficult environment.”

The second factor he points to is that the communities themselves are much more organized and better equipped to do it themselves. “In this context Tirgan comes to mind. It’s the largest Iranian festival in North America happening right here in Toronto. It’s clear the Persian community doesn’t need SW’s help. They can deal with it themselves. Community music presentation has shifted significantly over the years.”

One way SWM has responded to this changed situation has been with intensive strategic planning, an area where he points to SW’s new executive director Umair Jaffar’s pivotal guidance in formalizing what they had been doing before. “A good example is artist development. I’ve always helped, advised, mentored and tried to nurture artists who come to this country and are launching their careers. Now we have a structured program like Emergence that has funding just for that.”

Another pivotal moment for the company happened in 2014 when they opened the Small World Centre in the Shaw Street Artscape building. “Although the room is small, it has provided a platform for many young and emerging artists to stage their first professional show, also a place to do high quality audio recording and shoot video. Today we have a near state-of-the-art video production facility by virtue of the emergency COVID funding from various funders.”

But some things don’t change, even after 25 years. “Even during times when the challenges feel overwhelming, a special, sometimes transformative moment for me begins when the band goes on stage. It’s particularly when the audience gets up to start dancing or roars its approval that I can really relax and get the sense of, ‘Oh yeah, this is why I do this.’ And it still feels beautiful every time … it still feels beautiful every time.”

**Returning for a moment** to the first eight events of SW’s “25 for 25”, Beny Esguerra and New Tradition Music, based in Toronto, close the lineup with a Sunday, September 19 concert at Lula Lounge. Esguerra mashes up bilingual socially conscious spoken word, Colombian kuisi bwnsi (flute), turntablism, beatboxing and salsa with Afro-Cuban and Colombian drumming. Opening the evening is Nimkit Osawamick from Wiikwemkoong, Unceded Territory in Ontario, a renowned hoop dancer and drummer/singer who blends traditional singing, drumming and dancing with contemporary music and modern dance.

*Please visit the Small World Music website for detailed information on the musicians, venues, tickets and times.*

*Andrew Timar is a Toronto musician and music writer. He can be contacted at worldmusic@thewholenote.com.*
Take the plunge now?
Or wait and see?

PAUL ENNIS

As various musical presenters of all sizes either hunker down for another few months or take a deep breath and take the plunge for a return to live concertizing, it’s particularly heartening to see Music Toronto, going into their 50th season, among those diving right in. So I started out by speaking to Music Toronto’s artistic producer, Jennifer Taylor, for her take on the new season.

WN: With the Parker Quartet opening the strings section of your season on October 21 and David Jalbert opening the piano portion on October 26, I wonder if you can tell me how you approached building your line-up for this special anniversary. You must have acted during the depths of the pandemic.

JT: We originally planned years 49 and 50 together – 2020/21 and 2021/22 – choosing many artists we considered friends of the house, so much of the planning was done before the pandemic. Then COVID meant we cancelled all of 2021/22. So some artists – such as Stephen Hough, Vanessa Benelli Mossell and the Miró Quartet – we had planned in 2020/21 we asked to move to 2021/22.

We always welcome back the St. Lawrence Quartet and the Gryphon Trio; we also wanted to include the Lafayette and Ensemble Made in Canada. The legendary Juilliard are enjoying a renaissance in the 75th year of the franchise, and the young all-female Korean quartet, the Esmé, fulfil our mandate to always introduce new artists to Toronto. The Parker gave us a bright and energetic opening, and we asked David Jalbert to play the work we commissioned from Kelly-Marie Murphy for our 50th.
What alchemy produced the wonderful piano concerts? I’m especially pleased that you will be bringing Benjamin Grosvenor back for a fourth time.

We are pleased and proud to present both Stephen Hough and Marc-André Hamelin, giants of the Hyperion label, in one season – thanks in Stephen’s case to COVID re-dating. And we have liked Benjamin Grosvenor since we first heard him in 2014; we are delighted he is sharing his rise into the stratosphere with us. David Jalbert is an established Canadian virtuoso whom we have enjoyed hearing, and Vanessa Benellli Mosell is a rising star especially in Europe as recitalist, chamber musician, orchestral soloist and conductor. We like variety in repertoire and interpretation.

How will the current COVID protocols affect your recitals? Will all attendees need to be double vaccinated? Will mask wearing be required?

We have just been informed that we are allowed 50% capacity of the Jane Mallett Theatre, so seating is not as limited as we feared. The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts is owned by the city and managed by TO Live; we will be following all the public health advice and regulations. Proof of full vaccination will be required (or a valid medical exemption); masking and social distancing will be required; there will be no concession service – and no intermission cookies!

Will there still be an intermission?
Yes (the call of nature…).

How many seats are you permitted to sell?
Absolute max 250, but probably fewer because of seating patterns and distancing.

The Parker Quartet’s program includes works by Schubert, Di Castri and Schumann. As well as the Kelly-Marie Murphy world premiere, David Jalbert will perform a selection of Debussy, Ligeti and Prokofiev.

RCM Presents

The first time violinist Gidon Kremer heard Astor Piazzolla play, he was deeply moved. He was watching a videotape with Manfred Gräter of the West German Radio and Television Network. Gräter was a good friend and the person who introduced Kremer to Piazzolla’s music. Whenever Kremer was on tour in Europe, he never missed an opportunity to stop off in Cologne and dig around in Gräter’s videotheque, “a treasure trove stored in a dark room.” Gräter offered to arrange a meeting with Piazzolla once he died before the meeting could take place. Kremer wrote the booklet

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### 1. Saturday Oct. 2, 2021 8 pm  
*guest conductor Pratik Gandhi*  
*Beethoven Symphony No. 6 (“Pastorale”) Schumann Cello Concerto*  
*with guest soloist Samantha Yang*

### 2. Saturday Nov. 6, 2021 8 pm  
*guest conductor Christine Fong*  
*Brahms Symphony No. 3 Dvořák In Nature’s Realm*

### 3. Saturday Dec. 11, 2021 8 pm  
*guest conductor Martin MacDonald*  
*Abigail Richardson-Schulte The Hockey Sweater Tchaikovsky Nutcracker Suite Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto*  
*with guest soloist Eva Lesage*

### 4. Saturday Feb. 12, 2022 8 pm  
*Schumann Symphony No. 1 (“Spring”), Mahler Songs of a Wayfarer with guest soloist Danielle MacMillan*  
*(winner of the 2019 CBSO Clifford Poole Vocal Competition)*

### 5. Saturday April 9, 2022 8 pm  
*Holst The Planets Barbara Croall Nimki N’gamwin (Thunderbird Song) with Ottawa First Nations composer and soloist Barbara Croall Sibelius Finlandia*

### 6. Saturday May 28, 2022 8 pm  
*Dvořák Symphony No. 8 Glenn Buhr Akasha Robert Rival Northwest Passage Variations*
notes – excerpted from his book Obertöne – for his first recording of Piazzolla’s music for Nonesuch in 1997. The first time Kremer heard Piazzolla play, on that videotape, and later at a concert in Paris, he felt “enveloped in an atmosphere full of energy – a truly unbelievable force which only a few contemporary composers elicit.”

“When I play his music,” Kremer wrote, “I try to understand it from within in order to create a unity with the composer… In my view Astor’s music represents an enormous playing field in which the most divergent emotions are expressed in highly artistic yet simple ways. Piazzolla was daring, honest and uncomplicated, all at the same time… I believe in [Astor Piazzolla’s] music because it evokes a better world through the language of nostalgia. All of that – in one single tango.”

On October 31, Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica’s Koerner Hall program – from Bach to Piazzolla – will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Astor Piazzolla and 75th birthday of Kremer with a special homage to Glenn Gould.

The Kremer concert is one of more than 90 (including 40 rescheduled from the 2020/21 lineup) in the recently announced 2021/22 season. Keep your ears open for the Dover Quartet’s recital on October 24 with Beethoven’s Op.18 No.2 and Op.130 quartets book-ending Samel Barber’s touching setting of Matthew Arnold’s poem Dover Beach (sung by baritone Davóne Tines). The Dovers will perform Op.130 (with its ineffable Cavatina) finishing up with the Grosse Fuge. On November 5, the acclaimed Jerusalem Quartet will team up with Pinchas Zukerman and Amanda Forsyth for sextets by Brahms and Dvořák.

Over the next several months look for Jan Lisiecki’s sixth Koerner Hall appearance which mixes Chopin’s etudes with his nocturnes, juxtaposing them in an unusual way; also the Danish String Quartet; Joshua Bell in recital with Peter Dugan; Joyce DiDonato; and Gautier Capuçon accompanied by Jean Yves Thibaudet.

Music in the Afternoon and more chamber music

The venerable Women’s Musical Club of Toronto (WMCT) begins their 124th season on September 30 with a recital by violinist Blake Pouliot and pianist Hsin-I Huang. This recital is a delayed celebration of Pouliot’s WMCT Career Development Award, a welcome opportunity for the Music in the Afternoon audience to experience the passion, technique and romantic fervor Pouliot brings to his musical approach. The program features music by Bach, Janáček and Prokofiev and is available in-person or as a livestream.

Music at St. Andrew’s – at the corner of Simcoe and King – resumes its 45-minute free noontime series on October 1, with Younggun Kim at St. Andrew’s Bösendorfer Imperial grand piano. The program includes a Haydn sonata.

INNERchamber Ensemble welcomes autumn on September 19 at Revival House in Stratford. The program features Schumann’s Fantasiestücke Op.73 (arr. Aribert Reimann), Ibert’s Deux Interludes for flute, viola and harp and works by Paul Rae, Bizet and others, performed by Liesel Deppe, flute; Peter Shackleton, clarinet; Julia Seager Scott, harp; and Judith Davenport, viola. Available in-person or livestream.

FRIDAYS OCT. 1 - NOV. 12
12:10 P.M.
WE’RE BACK!
FRIDAY NOONTIME RECITALS

OCT 1 Younggun Kim piano
Haydn, Sonata E-flat major
OCT 8 Jordan Klapman jazz piano
Seasonal favourites
OCT 15 Brian Hsu piano
Liszt, Années de pèlerinage II
OCT 22 Bedford Trio violin, cello & piano
Schubert, Piano Trio, Op. 100
OCT 29 The Ezra Duo viola & piano
Schumann, Märchenbilder, Op. 113


St. Andrew's Church
73 Simcoe St., Toronto (King & Simcoe)

Music at St. Andrew’s
Music at St. Andrew’s
St. Andrew
The Sweetwater Music Festival – September 16 to 19 in Owen Sound – features artists from the Rosebud String Quartet to Tamar Ilana & Ventanas; Tom Allen and Patricia O’Callaghan to the sublime violinist Edwin Huizinga (the Festival’s artistic director) and pianist Philip Chiu. Available in-person or livestream.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society (KWCMS) has its fingers crossed for their new season which begins October 2 and 3 with the fifth installment of the Penderecki String Quartet’s traversal of Beethoven’s complete string quartets – Opp.132 and 130 (including the Grosse Fuge). Current COVID protocols prevent KWCMS from using their usual venue, the Music Room, so they have moved the concerts to First United Church in Waterloo. Montreal-based pianist Tomoko Inui leads a quartet of musical friends in piano quintets by Dvořák (ever popular) and Bartók (a rarely performed curiosity) on October 16. Eminent Canadian pianist Robert Silverman delves into Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier, Book One on November 7.

Sinfonia Toronto will kick off its 23rd season with a free Ontario Culture Days concert for both in-person and virtual audiences on October 2 at 3pm in the main lobby of Meridian Hall, 1 Front Street East. “This will be an hour of popular gems, favourite melodies from Mozart to Shostakovich,” says music director Nurhan Arman. “It will be an occasion for audiences around the world to access our free livestream – in a casual concert in the spectacular lobby of Meridian Hall.” Free registration for the livestream is now available through Eventbrite.

The regular season, featuring guest soloist Igor Pikayzen, begins at the George Weston Recital Hall on October 23. The program opens with Toronto composer Alice Ping Yee Ho’s tribute to health workers, Resurrected Angel II, continuing with Bach’s Violin Concerto No.2 in E Major, Wieniawski’s Faust Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra and concluding with Tchaikovsky’s breathtaking Souvenir de Florence.

Sinfonia Toronto

A handful of community orchestras are looking forward to getting back on stage after their concertizing was sharply curtailed by COVID-19. Cathedral Bluffs Symphony Orchestra, a volunteer community orchestra which has been based in Scarborough since 1986, returns to the P.C. Ho Theatre October 2. Pratik Ghandhi conducts Beethoven’s Symphony No.6 “Pastorale” and Schumann’s Cello Concerto with guest soloist Samantha Yang. Christine Fong picks up the baton on November 6 for Brahms’ unjustly underrated Symphony No.3 and Dvořák’s In Nature’s Realm. Fong and Yang are among the finalists auditioning for the currently vacant conductor’s post.

The Kindred Spirits Orchestra is a critically acclaimed, auditioned-based civic orchestra whose new season begins on October 30 in the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts with music director Kristian Alexander leading the orchestra in Stravinsky’s Symphony in Three Movements, Dukas’ Fanfare pour précéder La Péri and Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No.4 for the left hand performed by pianist Dong Xu.

Active since 1972, and under the direction of Denis Mastromonaco since 2013, the Mississauga Symphony Orchestra – with a combination of 90+ community musicians and professional section leads – has earned a reputation as the best hybrid orchestra in Canada. They are looking forward to a triumphant return to Hammerson Hall on November 30; complete repertoire will be announced shortly.

Orchestra Toronto, a community orchestra under the musical direction of Michael Newnham, is looking forward to welcoming audiences back to their home stage at the George Weston Recital Hall on October 24 for a program of works by Rossini, Respighi and Mendelssohn (Symphony No.5 “Reformation”).

Paul Ennis is the managing editor of The WholeNote.
Ah, September. Across the country – as books are cracked open, backpacks are zipped up, and “back to school” carries a whole different set of connotations: a pervasive sense of COVID-related anxiety weighing heavy on the collective national consciousness. It still doesn’t quite feel as though things are getting back to normal. It does, however, feel as though we’re gradually heading in the right direction, further potential lockdowns notwithstanding. Let’s hope so: for the venues I cover here, it’s a knife-edge situation still.

As I have documented in multiple pieces over the last year, the pandemic has been exceptionally difficult for Toronto’s club scene, not least, as I outlined in a recent article, the exorbitant insurance premiums that venues have been asked to pay this year. For many venues, this development intensified existing financial hardship, introducing yet another element of precariousness to the Sisyphean task of hosting live music.

The changing season, however, brings with it a kernel of hope. Though jazz venues don’t follow the same seasonal cycle as classical institutions, the relatively recent date – July 16 – of the return of live music means that this fall represents a potential turning point for clubs. Having had the summer to hire/re-hire staff, implement new safety protocols, make changes in payment policies, and attend to the myriad other demands of the reopening process, clubs are as ready as they’ll ever be to get back to business, whatever that may look like as the fall progresses into winter.

Makeover for The Rex
In the immediate future, however, things are looking good, at least where live shows are concerned. At The Rex – which has implemented a new stage-centred layout (with an accompanying tiered-seating/pricing system, in which seats at the rear of the venue have a lower cover charge than those adjacent to the stage – a new series has emerged. The Rex JUNO Artist Appreciation Series, as it’s called, is funded by FACTOR Canada, and entails a new kind of booking for The Rex: a four-night engagement, from Wednesday to Saturday at 8:30pm every week. This format, of course, has a rich history, and a multi-night booking was once the standard for many clubs. (It still is, in a few notable venues, including the Blue Note, in Manhattan.) In Toronto, there are a number of clubs that have had the occasional multi-night booking, but these have typically been limited to three consecutive evenings, usually reserved for high-profile visiting artists; and it will likely be some time until we see regular visits from international artists.

For The Rex, the JUNO Series is a smart move, for multiple reasons. The first: the JUNO name is a great way to apply a bit of brand recognition to their bookings, providing audiences new and old with an easy entry point (though, of course, it is not hard to hear JUNO
winners and nominees on any given night in Toronto). The second, closely tied to the first: the JUNO label must have been a help to the FACTOR application process, which, like all Canadian funding bodies, places an emphasis on Canadian content. And the third: allocating prime weekly time for one artist cuts down on the amount of administrative time that has to be spent coordinating bookings, which must make things just a little bit easier during this novel year.

The JUNO Series started at the beginning of this month, with the incomparable bassist Dave Young bringing two different bands over four nights, then continued from September 8 to 11 with Sammy Jackson, a burgeoning singer whose debut release, *With You*, beat out albums from Diana Krall, Laila Biali, and more this year, to win Vocal Jazz Album of the Year. Jackson is joined by guitarist Tom Fleming, keyboardist Joel Visentin, bassist Mark Godfrey, and drummer Ian Wright, a seasoned band who have been a part of Jackson’s project for some time. From September 15 to 18, drummer Barry Elmes brings his quintet to the party, with trumpeter Brian O’Kane, saxophonist MikeMurley, guitarist Lorne Lofsky and bassist Pat Collins. Rex regulars will no doubt recognize the annual John Coltrane tribute shows, running from September 22 to 25; how lucky that bandleaders Pat LaBarbera and Kirk MacDonald are both JUNO Award-winners, though perhaps this is not such a coincidence. Finally, Peripheral Vision – the perennial passion project of Trevor Hogg, Don Scott, Michael Herrings and Nick Fraser – rounds out the month and carries The Rex into October, with their sensitive blend of jazz, rock, and other influences.

**Clubs are as ready as they’ll ever be to get back to business, whatever that may look like as the fall progresses.**

Jazz Bistro

Elsewhere in Toronto, other notable musical events are on offer throughout the month. At Jazz Bistro, Adrean Farrugia’s UNICITY band takes the stage on September 16. Joining Farrugia are saxophonist Kelly Jefferson, bassist Dan Fortin and drummer Ethan Ardelli, a stellar group of technically accomplished, musically intuitive bandmates playing in the modern jazz tradition. For those who missed Dave Young’s early-September performances at The Rex, he’ll also be at Jazz Bistro, on September 18, with pianist Brian Dickinson, drummer Terry Clarke, trumpeter Kevin Turcotte and saxophonist Perry White. And, for those looking for a vocal jazz hit: Hannah Barstow celebrates the release of her new album, *Beneath*, on September 22, also at the Bistro. Barstow – doing double duty on vocals and piano – is joined by bassist Reknee Harrett, drummer (and brother) Keith Barstow and saxophonist Mike Murley.

**The Jazz Room**

Outside of the GTA, live jazz has also made something of a return. The Jazz Room in Waterloo will host its Women in Jazz Series, a more-or-less-weekly event featuring a wide range of musicians. Starting things off in September is the guitarist Jocelyn Gould’s quartet. Gould – who, like Jackson, also won a JUNO this year: Jazz Album of the Year, for her release *Elegant Traveler* – will be joined on stage by pianist WillBonness, drummer Mark Kelso and bassist Mike Downes. The series continues through the year, with appearances in September and throughout October from Laila Biali, Denise Pelley and Teri Parker’s Free Spirits quintet.

It is impossible to know, at this point in time, whether or not live music will continue to be presented throughout the winter. With the upcoming election, the return to schools, the Delta variant, and many other factors, nothing is guaranteed. So if, like me, you enjoy live music, don’t hesitate to go check out some shows sooner, rather than later. Remember: it’s either this or actually learning how to make that loaf of sourdough.

Colin Story is a jazz guitarist, writer and teacher based in Toronto. He can be reached at www.colinstory.com, on Instagram and on Twitter.
Something Else! + Watch it Burn! at the Bay Series

September 25, October 2, October 9  
STUART BROOMER

S
ince 2014, the Zula Arts Collective and director Cem Zafir have been programming the further shores of jazz and improvised music in Hamilton. From an annual festival to various concert series throughout the year. Now, with the lightening of COVID-19 restrictions, Zula launches a series of festive Saturday performances; each presents four groups – some local, some travelling, some interdisciplinary – and, following a dinner service, concludes with a film that’s intimately involved with improvised music.

September 25  
Film: Imagine the Sound  
In 1981, Toronto filmmaker Ron Mann (creator of Grass, Altman and Comic Book Confidential) and musician/writer/producer Bill Smith undertook a significant project to document some major figures of the free jazz movement, producing a mix of performances and interviews with Cecil Taylor, Paul Bley, Bill Dixon and Archie Shepp that retains its power today, including some extraordinary footage of Taylor’s end-to-end piano runs (7pm). Ron Mann is on hand for a Q&A (8:30pm).

The film and Bill Smith’s career are also apparent in other performances. Trombonist Scott Thomson presents a solo set of music inspired by Bill Dixon (5:15pm). Hamilton’s Lee/Palmer/Bennett (bassist David Lee, guitarist Chris Palmer and saxophonist Connor Bennett) presents music performed by the Bill Smith Ensemble in the 1980s when Lee was a member (5:45pm). Another Ensemble veteran, the brilliant guitarist/singer Arthur Bull, performs as part of Spokes with longtime collaborator drummer Bob Vespaizani. The duo is then joined in by Lee/Palmer/Bennett to form a blues/rockabilly band called The Five Spokes (3pm).

Brodie West Quintet

In the midst of his artful compositions, alto saxophonist Brodie West creates improvisatory puzzles that resolve in surprising ways, carried forth on his laconic lines and subtle timbral shifts. His Toronto quintet includes pianist Tania Gill, bassist Josh Cole and drummers Nick Fraser and Evan Cartwright, with West making fine use of the possibilities afforded by two drummers (4pm).

October 2

The focus is on Toronto bands with highlights on the piano, from the opening trio of pianist Bill Gilliam, soprano saxophonist Kayla Milmine and drummer Ambrose Pottie, a hive of spontaneous invention (3pm) to pianist Adrean Farrugia’s trio with bassist Jon Maharaj and drummer Ethan Ardelli on drums, creating subtle harmonic weaves (5:30pm). So Long 7 creates multicultural music from Ravi Naimpally’s tabla, Tim Posgate’s banjo, Neil Hendry’s guitar and William Lamoureux’s violin (4pm). Dancer Megan English is accompanied by Dale Morningstar (5pm). Voc Silent Film Harmonic, led by bassist Ted Harms, provides live accompaniment for a silent film, The Unknown (7pm).

October 9  
Ochs-Robinson Duo

Tenor saxophonist Larry Ochs is best known for his work with ROVA, the saxophone quartet that has, over its 44-year history, collaborated with everyone from John Zorn to Terry Riley, but Ochs and drummer Don Robinson have been working together for three decades, achieving maximum expressive power with minimal means, whether playing with the economy of elemental blues or the unrestrained passion of free jazz. Their recent CD, A Civil Right, is at once manifesto and tour de force (6pm).

Film: New York Eye and Ear Control, Michael Snow 1964.

For the soundtrack, Snow enlisted a New York free jazz supergroup, including saxophonists Albert Ayler and John Tchicai, trumpeter Don Cherry and trombonist Roswell Rudd, then instructed the band, contrary to their usual practice, to just improvise collectively, no themes, no solos, later mating the music to his flow of New York images. The result? A major film that’s also a significant creative contribution to the history of improvised music (7:30pm).

Also: Composer/guitarist Pete Johnston’s song project Stranger Still matches his own transit from rural Nova Scotia to Toronto with that of poet Alden Nowlan, setting Nowlan’s subtle, rugged words amidst traditional English song and acoustic takes on progressive rock, all realized with bassist Rob Clutton and singers Mim Adams and Randi Helmers. Trumpeter Nikole Rampersaud and pianist Marilyn Lerner are Brass Knuckle Sandwich (5pm), playing music as spirited as the name, though often far more lyrical. Eschaton is the improvising Hamilton duo of Aaron Hutchinson on trumpet and electronics and Connor Bennett on saxophones, bass and vocals (4pm).

Something else, indeed.

Events take place at the gazebo in Bayfront Park, 200 Harbour Front Dr, Hamilton. Admission is pay what you can with a suggested donation of $15-25. For complete information, consult somethingelsefestival.com.

Stuart Broomer writes frequently on music (mostly improvised) and is the author of Time and Anthony Braxton. His column “Ezz-theitics” appears regularly at pointofdeparture.org.
listings@thewholenote.com

Event listings are free of charge to artists, venues and presenters.

Our listings continue to be a work in progress as we all, musicians, presenters and media alike, explore the best ways to reach audiences in a timely fashion. For us, a comprehensive and reliable monthly calendar of live musical events, in these rapidly changing times is not a realistic goal. Instead what you see here is a snapshot, dated September 12, of live musical events, in these rapidly changing times is not a realistic goal. Instead what you see here is a snapshot, dated September 12, of our website.

In these volatile times, readers are encouraged to check weekly for changes and updates to existing listings, and for the numerous new listings being added each week, both current and further into the future. You can register for the weekly updates at thewholenote.com/newsletter.

IN THIS ISSUE: TWO LISTINGS SECTIONS

• Section 1: Events by date for Sep 15 – Nov 5
These are events with an announced date and time that one could circle on a calendar, in order to “be there” when it happens for the first (or only) time. This includes live and livestreamed performances; first broadcasts and screenings; concerts, workshops, symposia, and so on.

If the event in question remains available after that first presentation (e.g. online or on demand), this noted at the end of the listing.

• Section 2: Ongoing online musical activity including date-related events now available on demand online.
These are musical activities that readers can access in their own time, usefully identified by the name of the presenter or the nature of the event.

HOW TO LIST:

1. Use the convenient online form at thewholenote.com/applylistings

2. Email listings to listings@thewholenote.com. Please note, we do not take listings over the phone.

Deadlines

1. Weekly online updates: submission deadline is 6pm Tuesday of the week prior to the event in question, for Friday posting.

2. Print: approximately fifteen days before publication.

Our next print issue covers November to mid-December 2021, and the submission deadline for new listings and updates to listings previously processed is 6pm Monday October 11.

Events by Date | September 15 to November 5, 2021

Wednesday September 15

● 7:00: Small World Music. The Borderless Project. Five remarkable women unite their talents and traditions to explore music from across Asia. Amely Zhou, erhu; Raa Lee, gayageum; Heidi Chan, shionbue; Padideh Ahmrnejad, tar; Nour Kdn, percussion. 416-536-5439 or smallworldmusic.com/shows/the-borderless-project. Free. ONLINE.

Thursday September 16

● 8:30: SweetWater Music Festival. Coming Together Again: A Celebration Concert. Schubert: String Quintet in C D956; Select- tion from Tamar Ilana Flavencenco Trio; Aaron Schwebel; Keith Hamm; Leana Rut; Sheila Jaffe; Julie Hereish; Tamar Ilana Flavenco Trio (vocalist Tamar Ilana, vocalist; Benja- min Barrile, flaeonco guitar; Justin Gray, per- cussion). 416-645-9043 or Afiker Gallant Home, 495764 Grey Road 15, Owen Sound. sweetwatermusicfestival.ca. $40.


Friday September 17

● 7:00: Magisterra Soloists. The Trout - Featuring Guest Soloist Pianist Francine Kay. Piano Quintets by Jan Ladislav Dussek, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and Franz Schub- bert. Annette-Barbara Vogel, violin; Jutta Puchhammer, viola; Katerina Juraskova, cello; Travis Harrison, double bass; Francine Kay, piano. Museum London Theatre, 421 Ridout St. N., London. 519-615-0183 or magisterra.ca. $30 (plus fees).


● 7:00: Westben. Laila Biali. Laila Biali, singer, songwiter, pian. The Barn, 6898 Country Road 30, Campbellford. 877-883-5777 or www.westben.ca. Also Sep 17.


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Saturday September 18

● 10:00am. Westben. Sounds in Nature. A guided magical sound installation amidst the beauty of the Mary West Trail, just minutes from Westben. Andy Thompson, recording engineer. Mary West Trail, 6698 County Road 30 N., Campbellford. 877-883-5777 or www. westben.ca. Also Sep 17.


● 2:00: Westben. Leafy. Willow Hill Amphitheatre, 6698 County Road 30 N., Campbellford. 877-883-5777 or www.westben.ca. Also Sep 19.

● 4:00: Something Else! Festival. Saturday at Bayfront Park. Evgeny Trio & Togetherness!; Sourpussy; Man Made Hill; Tidal Pool; Film: Night Bird Song. Bayfront Park, 20 Harbour Front Dr., Hamilton. www.somethingelsefestival.ca. $15-$25 (door); $14 (adv).


Wednesday September 22


• 9:30: Italiano di Cultura/Dante Alighieri Society of B.C. Julian Garfield in Concert: The Piano and the Classical Art of Being Funny. Standard classical repertoire, tango transcription, and original music. info@dantesocietybc.ca. Free. Donations to the Dante Alighieri Society of B.C. are welcome. ONLINE.

Thursday September 23

• 7:30: Music Toronto. Virtual Concert Series. Maria Szymanska: Nocturne in B-flat; C. P. E. Bach: Suite in Bw8212; Schubert: Sonata No.20 in A D959. Marc-André Hamelin, piano. music.toronto.ca. Free. ONLINE.


• 7:30: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Mozart & Martines. Mozart: Symphony No.40; Eine kleine Nachtmusik; a work by Mariana Martines. Simon Rivard, RBC Resident Conductor. CityView Drive-In, 20 Polson St. 416-588-3375 or www.tso.ca. $60-$120 per car. Also Sep 25. Concert is one hour in length.

• 8:00: Soundstreams. Garden of Vanished Pleasures. See Sep 23. Also Sep 26, 28-30, Oct 1-3, 5-10. ONLINE.

Saturday September 25

• 10:00am: Westben. Sounds in Nature. A guided magical sound installation amidst the beauty of the Mary West Trail, just minutes from Westben. Andy Thompson, recording engineer. Mary West Trail, 6998 County Road 30 N. Campbellford. 877-883-5777 or www.westben.ca. Also Sep 18.

• 2:00: Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestras. Free Community Concert with the HPO. Haydn: Mvt IV from Symphony No.83; Bologne Symphony No.2 in D; Gossec: Mvt I from Symphony in C; Bologne: Mvt II from Violin Concerto in A; Mvt No.2; Mvt XV from Symphony No.32 “Haydn”. Lysa Pelton, violin; Stephen Stitas, conductor; FirstOntario Concert Hall, 1 Summers Ln., Hamilton. 905-526-7576 or hpo.org. Free. Registration required. Livestream & on-demand viewing available.


• 3:00: Something Else! Festival. Saturday at Bayfront Park. Film: Imagine the Sound; Lee Palmer / Bennett; Scott Thomson; Brodie West Quintet; The Spokes, Bayfront Park, 200 Harbour Front Dr., Hamilton. www.somethingelsefestival.com. $15-$25(door); $15/day.

• 7:30: Canadian Opera Company. In Concert: Russell Braun and Tamara Wilson with the COC Orchestra. Verdi: Overture to La forza del destino; Wagner: Die Walküre; Verdi: Tutto è desterto... Il balen del tuo sospirsi da il trovatore; Bizet: Entr’acte to Act III of Carmen; Offenbach: Scintille, diamant from Les Contes d’Hoffmann; and other works. Russell Braun, baritone; Tamara Wilson, soprano; Canadian Opera Company Orchestra; Johannes Debus, conductor. www.coc.ca/watch. Free with COC digital membership. ONLINE.

• 7:30: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Mozart & Martines. Mozart: Symphony No.40; Eine kleine Nachtmusik; a work by Mariana Martines. Simon Rivard, RBC Resident Conductor. CityView Drive-In, 20 Polson St. 416-588-3375 or www.tso.ca. $60-$120 per car. Also Sep 24. Concert is one hour in length.

• 8:00: Sound Show BBQ & Brew. Lady Strange. Smoke Show, 744 Mount Pleasant Rd. 416-901-7469 or www.redhotramble.ca or www.smokehousebbqandbrew.com. ONLINE.

Sunday September 26


• 3:00: Smoke Show BBQ & Brew. Red Hot Ramble. Smoke Show, 744 Mount Pleasant Rd. 416-901-7469 or www.redhotramble.ca or www.smokehousebbqandbrew.com. ONLINE.

• 8:00: Soundstreams. Garden of Vanished Pleasures. See Sep 23. Also Sep 26-30, Oct 1-3, 5-10. ONLINE.

Tuesday September 28


• 8:00: Soundstreams. Garden of Vanished Pleasures. See Sep 23. Also Sep 29-30, Oct 1-3, 5-10. ONLINE.

Wednesday September 29

• Sep 30: The Hogtown Collective. The Christie Pits Riot. An audio walking tour immersive experience. Created by Sam Rosenthal & Drew Carnath. Original music by Measha Bruggergossman, Measha Bruggergossman (Nalia); Sam Rosenthal (The Narrator); Drew Carnath (The Tour Guide); and others. Find the Audio Walking Tour app at: www.hogtowndr.com. ONLINE.

Thursday September 30

• 1:30: Music in the Afternoon. Blake Pouliot. Sonatas by Bach, Janáček, and Prokofiev. Blake Pouliot, violin; Hsin-I Huang, piano. Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building, University of Toronto, 80 Queen’s Park, rcmusic.ca or 416-923-7052. ONLINE.

• 8:00: Soundstreams. Garden of Vanished Pleasures. See Sep 23. Also Oct 1-3, 5-10. ONLINE.

Friday October 1

TEN SINGING STARS – NEW GENERATION PERFORM LIVE ON THE NEW CLASSICAL FM!

Direct from the Encounter with BRETT POLEGATO, Friday, Oct. 1st
Mr. Pogelato has generously stepped in for Theodore Baerg, who is indisposed.

YOU ARE INVITED!
The concert will be broadcast live on THE NEW CLASSICAL 96.3 FM, with video at classicalfm.ca

Friday, Oct. 15th, 2021, 7:30 – 9pm
Rachel Andrist, Pianist

INFO: 416.362.1422 / info@ircpa.net / www.ircpa.net
October 21 at 8 pm
PARKER QUARTET

Friday October 22
- 8:00: Music Toronto. The Parker Quartet. Schubert: Quartet in c D703 “Quartettozat”; Di Castri: String Quartet No.1; Schumann: Quartet in A Op.41 No.3. St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, 27 Front St. E. 416-366-7723. $47.50-$50.

Saturday October 23

October 26 at 8 pm
DAVID JALBERT pianist

Thursday October 28
- 8:00: Opera Atelier. Angel. 70-minute film fully staged and filmed at St. Lawrence Hall. Music by Edward Huizinga, Jean-Philippe Rameau, William Boyce, Matthew Locke; Colin Answorth, tenor; Jesse Blumberg, baritone; and other soloists; Canadian Opera Company Orchestra; Jader Bignamini, conductor; Amy Lane, stage director. www.OperaAtelier.com. Single tickets on sale Oct 1. Available until Nov 12. ONLINE.

Saturday October 30
- 7:30: Canadian Opera Company. Gianni Schicchi. By Giacomo Puccini, Roland Wood (Gianni Schicchi); Hera Hyesang Park (Lauriitta); Andrew Haji (Rinuccio); Meghan Latham (Zita); and other soloists; Canadian Opera Company Orchestra; Jader Bignamini, conductor; Amy Lane, stage director. www.coc.ca/watch. ONLINE.
- 8:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Opening Night Gala: In Sinistri Manibus. Dukas: Fanfare pour précédé La Péri; Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No.4 (for the left hand); Stravinsky: Symphony in Three Movements. Dong Xu, piano, Michael Berec, host; Kristian Alexander, conductor. Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts, 10268 Yonge St., Richmond Hill. 905-604-6339 or kissorchestra.ca. $20-$40. LIVE & STREAMED.

Sunday October 31

Monday November 2
- 7:30: Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. Coming to Carry Me Home. Brahms: Ein deutsches Requiem; Dett: The Chariot Jubilee; Jonelle Sills, soprano; Brent Polegato, baritone; Toronto Mendelssohn Choir; Toronto Symphony Orchestra; www.tmc.ca. $20-$115. Sunday tickets available Oct 7. ONLINE.

October 21 at 8 pm
MALLONEES: STORM KING SUITE FOR VIOLA AND CELLO; MOZART: DIVERTIMENTO IN E-FLAT FOR STRING TRIO K563; JESSICA TONG, VIOLIN; DAVID ROSE, VIOLA; NATASHA FARNY, CELLO. FIRST UNITED CHURCH (Waterloo), 16 William St. W. WATERLOO. 519-569-1809. $40; $25(st).

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DAVID JALBERT pianist
Events by Date | September 15 to November 5, 2021

Wednesday November 3

● 7:00: Confluence Concerts. Bach Cello Suites: Part 3. Bach Cello Suites No.2 in d BWV1008 & No.5 in c BWV1011. Andrew Downing, double bass; and Ryan Davis, viola. confluenceconcerts.ca. Live concert Nov 3. Youtube premiere Nov 10. A limited number of tickets available for in-person attendance. LIVE & ONLINE

Friday November 5


Still Available Online

● Arts@Home. A vibrant hub connecting Torontonians to arts and culture. Designed to strengthen personal and societal resilience through the arts. Visit www.artsathome.ca.


● Recollectiv: A unique musical online meeting group made up of people affected by memory challenges caused by illness (such as dementia) or brain injury (stroke, PTSD, etc.) and their care partners. Volunteers of all ages also form part of the band, providing a positive intergenerational experience for all ages also form part of the band, providing a positive intergenerational experience for all. Participation is free with pre-registration. Email info@recollectiv.ca for meeting times, information and registration.

Blogs, Podcasts, Streaming

● Kevin Barrett. Live from Lockdown. Kevin Barrett does a live-streamed set of solo guitar tunes, coming directly from his Lockdown studio. Tune in to Kevin’s Facebook page on Friday at 4pm at http://www.facebook.com/kevin.barrett.165470.


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MUSIC DIRECTOR 12 hrs/week: Leaside Presbyterian Church, a welcoming and inclusive congregation, seeks a talented, proficient musician with a music degree, strong playing skills in piano and organ and choral experience. Passion for music ministry, solid leadership, excellent communication and interpersonal skills essential. Details: leasidepresbyterianchurca.ca. Resume to Leaside Presbyterian Church, 670 Eglinton Avenue East, Toronto ON. M4G 2K4 or email admin@leasidepresbyterianchurca.ca attention search committee. Confidentiality assured.

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ARE YOU LOOKING TO SELL YOUR VINYL OR CD COLLECTION? Contact THE RECORD GUYS for professional and courteous service. We are music specialists with thirty years’ experience, and offer the best prices for collections of distinction: classical, jazz, etc. We come to you, anywhere in GTA and beyond. All COVID safety measures
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BLUE PAGES 2021-22, Continued

- Mississauga Chamber Singers
  www.mississaugachambersisters.ca
- Mississauga Symphony Orchestra
  www.mississaugasymphony.ca
- Music at Metropolitan
  www.metunited.ca
- Music at St. Andrew’s
  www.standrewstoronto.org
- Music in the Afternoon (Women’s Musical Club of Toronto)
  www.wmct.on.ca
- Music Gallery
  www.musicgallery.org
- Music Toronto
  http://music-toronto.com
- Opera Atelier
  www.operatelier.com
- Orchestra Toronto
  www.orchestratoronto.ca
- Pax Christi Chorale
  www.paxchristichorale.org
- Peterborough Singers
  www.peterboroughsingers.com
- Sine Nomine Ensemble for Medieval Music
  www.pims.ca/article/sine-nomine/
- SoundCrowd
  www.soundcrowd.ca
- Soundstreams
  https://soundstreams.ca
- Tafelmusik
  www.tafelmusik.org
- Toronto Chamber Choir
  www.torontochamberchoir.ca
- Toronto Mendelssohn Choir
  www.tmchoir.org
- Toronto Mozart Players
  www.mozartproject.ca
- Upper Canada Choristers
  www.uppercanadachoristers.org
- Wychwood Clarinet Choir
  www.wychwoodclarinetchoir.ca

Arts Services
- Eric Alper Public Relations
  www.thatericalper.com
- International Resource Centre for Performing Artists
  www.ircpa.net
- Linda Litwack Publicity
  www.facebook.com/LindaLitwack

CANARY PAGES 2021/2022
Directory of Choirs

- Achill Choral Society
  www.achill.ca
- Amadeus Choir of Greater Toronto
  www.amadeuschoir.com
- Annex Singers
  www.annexsingers.com
- Bel Canto Singers
  www.belcanto.ca
- Bel Canto Singers
  www.belcanto.ca
- Canadian Celtic Choir
  www.celticchoir.ca
- Cantabile Chamber Singers
  www.cantablechambersisters.com
- Chorus Niagara
  www.chorusniagara.org
- Chorus York
  www.chorusyork.ca
- City Choir
  www.citychoir.ca
- Cummer Avenue United Church Choir
  www.cummeravenueuc.ca
- Echo Women’s Choir
  www.echowomenschoir.ca
- Ensemble vocal Les voix du coeur
  www.lesvoixdouceur.com
- Etobicoke Centennial Choir
  www.etobicokecentennialchoir.ca
- Exultate Chamber Singers
  www.exultate.net
- Georgetown Choral Society
  www.georgetownchoral.ca
- Harbourfront Chorus
  www.harbourfrontchorus.com
- Jubilate Singers
  www.jubilatesingers.ca
- King Edward Choir
  www.kingedwardchoir.ca
- Leaside United Church Choirs
  www.leasideunited.org
- Men of Note
  www.menofnote.com
- Milton Choristers
  www.miltonchoristers.com
- Mississauga Chamber Singers
  www.mississaugachambersisters.ca
- Novi Singers Toronto
  www.novisingersutoronto.ca
- Oasis Vocal Jazz
  www.oasiovocaljazz.com
- Oriana Choir
  www.orianachoir.com
- Pax Christi Chorale
  www.paxchristichorale.org
- Peterborough Singers
  www.peterboroughsingers.com
- Serenata Singers
  www.serenatasingers.ca
- Society of Singers
  www.societyofsingers.ca
- Tempus Choral Society
  www.tempuschoralsociety.com
- Toronto Children’s Chorus
  www.torontochildrenschorus.ca
- Toronto Classical Singers
  www.torontoclassicalsingers.ca
- Toronto Concert Choir
  www.torontocorectchoir.ca
- Toronto Welsh Male Voice Choir
  www.welshchoir.ca
- Upper Canada Choristers
  www.uppercanadachoristers.org
- Vespivka Choir
  www.vespivka.com
- Village Voices Community Choir
  www.villagevoices.ca
- VIVA Singers Toronto
  www.vivayouthsingers.com
- VOCA Chorus of Toronto
  www.voacchorus.ca
- West Toronto Community Choir
  www.facebook.com/groups/westtorontocommunitychoir
- Windsor Classic Chorale
  www.windsorclassichorale.org

GREEN PAGES 2021
Summer Music Festivals & Series

- Brott Music Festival
  www.brottmusic.com
- Collingwood Summer Music Festival
  www.collingwoodfestival.com
- Domaine Forget International Festival
  www.domaineforget.com/en/
- Humbercrest Summer Concert Series
  www.humbercrest.ca
- Markham Village Virtual Music Festival
  www.markhamfestival.com
- Music Mondays
  www.musicmondays.ca
- No Strings Theatre - Many Voices Many Stories
  www.nostringstheatre.com
- Something Else Festival
  www.somethingelsefestival.com
- Stratford Summer Music
  www.stratfordsummermusic.ca
- SweetWater Music Festival
  www.sweetwatermusicfestival.ca
- Symphony in the Barn
  www.symphonyinthebarn.com
- TD Niagara Jazz Festival
  www.niagarajazzfestival.com

SUMMER MUSIC EDUCATION 2021

- CAMMAC
  www.cammac.ca
- Creative Strings Workshop Online
  www.christianhowes.com/
- Stratford Music Academy
  www.stratfordmusicacademy.ca
- Interprovincial Music Camp
  www.campimc.ca
- Lake Field Music
  www.lakefieldmusic.ca
- No Strings Theatre - Teen Summer
  www.nostringstheatre.com
- Orchestra North UX
  www.orcheasnorux.com
- Summer/Eastman
  summer.esm.rochester.edu
- Tuckamore Festival Young Artist Program
  www.tuckamorefestival.ca

SUMMER MUSIC EDUCATION 2021
I have enjoyed the extended hiatus since the last issue and took advantage of the break to spend almost a month away from my computer and my stereo system; a kind of purge during which the only music I experienced was the sound of waves pounding the shore of Lake Erie, loon calls across Canning Lake and the wind in the trees in my backyard accompanying the chattering of squirrels and chirping birds. Oh, and some homemade string music with a few friends. It was lovely to be “unplugged.”

When I was back at my desk, I found solace in a unique recording by two (now) local musicians Amber & Zebulun whose self-described “ambient instrumental post-rock music” provided a perfect background as I faced the daunting task of editing nearly a hundred reviews that had been filed in my absence. South of North, East of West (amberzebulun.bandcamp.com) also rewards as foreground listening, but its gentle ambience was just what I needed to help keep me focussed. Born in Yellowknife NT, and raised in Marysville ON, Amber Walton-Amar is a classically trained cellist. Husband Zebulun (Zebulun X Barnow, although I had to do some Googling to find that out), originally from Marquette MI via Chicago IL, is a multi-instrumentalist who seems to be responsible for the plucked and bowed bass lines, drum kit and melodic mallet instrument layers here. They have been making music together for more than a decade since first getting together in a Chicago-based Tom Waits cover band (an unusual context in which to find a cello). The liner notes tell us “South of North, East of West is about who you are, as defined by where you are. [...] The meaning of each of [the] four directions is defined by its opposite, its relationship to the others. If we remove the meaning of our origin, of our destination, we are either lost or exactly where we should be.” With intriguing titles such as Cognitive Dissonance, Advice by Coincidence and Forgiving Garden, the music itself is mesmerizing; mellow and melodic, generally slow-paced with long cello lines, often in tandem with bowed double bass, soaring over compelling rhythm beds. It did indeed place me “exactly where I should be.”

Another is A Piazzolla Trilogy (BIS 2385 SACD bis.se) which features violinist Karen Gomyo who was born in Tokyo, raised in Montreal and studied at the Juilliard School at the invitation of Dorothy DeLay, before embarking on an international career as soloist and chamber musician. She is heard here performing a selection of unaccompanied strings of events that constantly surprise and command rapt attention. Ranging from near silence, eerie harmonics and glissandi to percussive bursts, scratches and scrapes, there is also a meditative final section reminiscent of medieval harmonies that gradually rise in pitch and fade into breath sounds or, perhaps, the gentle lapping of waves upon a shoreline. The three-time Grammy-nominated Spektral Quartet is obviously well within its comfort zone with this challenging though beautiful music, even while the listener is sometimes left discomfited.

The final disc this month is the most traditional, although there was a time not too long ago when the music of Astor Piazzolla (1912-1992) was considered outside the mainstream. There has been a wealth of discs released in recent months in celebration of his centenary – you’ll find Tiina Kiik’s appraisal of one of them in the Modern and Contemporary section of this issue. Another is Aufs Lautenwerk (104250 sonolumin.us) with the Spektral Quartet and video artist Sigurdur Gudjonsson entitled Enigma. Ultimately there will be a 360-degree immersive film magnifying the music when it is performed in the Adler Planetarium in Chicago and later taken on a national planetarium tour, but like so many current projects that has been put on hold during COVID-19. What we have at this point is a Sono Luminus audio recording of the striking three-movement, half-hour-long quartet (DSL-92250 sonolumin.us). Like much of her music, which has garnered the Nordic Council Music Prize, the New York Philharmonic’s Kravis Emerging Composer and the Lincoln Center’s Emerging Artist Awards, Enigma is replete with extended techniques, extra-musical effects, unusual timbres and juxtapositions. There are few melodies per se, but rather moments and strings of events that constantly surprise and command rapt attention. The three-time Grammy-nominated Spektral Quartet is obviously well within its comfort zone with this challenging though beautiful music, even while the listener is sometimes left discomfited.

What we’re listening to this month: thewholenote.com/listening

We Want All the Same Things Erin Propp & Larry Roy With an all-star line-up, this album reaches into the everyday and blurs the edges, with songs that are at once deeply personal and achingly relatable.

Saskatchewan Suite Saskatchewan All Star Big Band The Saskatchewan All Star Big Band communicates the beautifully unique history of Saskatchewan in a live recording with one of Canada’s most talented composers, Fred Stride

Aufs Lautenwerk Daniel Lippel Three iconic Bach suites in a period Well temperament on an adjustable fret guitar, highlighting the subtle coloristic differences between keys.

Drifting, Volume 3 of the New Lullaby Project Aaron Larget-Caplan Beautiful 2-5 minute guitar solos in the malleable genre of lullaby. Simple and yet complex - by over 55 composers in 10 countries.
Among the interesting biographical information included in Eric Johns’ extensive essay in the program booklet is that, at its first performance, Piazzolla’s Sinfonía Buenos Aires Op.15 (1951) “scandalized the audience to the point of fistfights and shouting, supposedly in response to the inclusion of two bandoneóns [concertinas] in an orchestral work.” It seems that he managed to alienate the tango community as well, with his introduction of classical styles, techniques and instrumentation to the traditional form. Eventually, as we know, his Nuevo Tango style became widely accepted and is now lauded in concert and dance halls alike. Although originally written for flute, both the Etudes and Histoire are published in alternate versions for violin, and are well suited to the stringed instrument which, along with bandoneón and flute, was a staple in the traditional tango ensemble. In fact, again from Johns’ notes, “When performed on violin, Etude No.5 allows for the inclusion of double-stops, impossible on flute, to outline the alternation in the rhythmic pattern between 3’3”2, 3’2’3” and 4’4.”

Several works were originally scored for Piazzolla’s quintet of violin/viola, piano, electric guitar, double bass and bandoneón but is heard here in a string orchestra arrangement by Leonid Desyatnikov. It is the earliest work presented here, having been written between 1965 and 1970. It was not originally conceived of as a suite – the first movement Verano (Summer) was written as incidental music for a play by Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz – nor evidently as a tribute to Vivaldi, but there are a number of quotations from that Baroque master’s own Quattro Stagioni and it certainly serves as one.

Gomyo’s playing is stellar throughout, full of idiomatic nuance and enthusiasm, with a rich warm tone in the lilting melodies, but suitably gruff as the sometimes gritty music requires. The same is true of Jones’ guitar, lyrical and percussive by turns. There is a lovely cello solo in Otoño Porteña (Autumn) superbly performed by Paul Ben Soussan, but the highlight of the movement is Gomyo’s extended and extravagant cadenza. A fine disc, and a wonderful centennial tribute to the Argentine master.

Well, I thought that was all I had this time around, but as I was putting the finishing touches on my scree I received an advance copy of the latest from Toronto (former wunderkind Stewart Goodyear. Phoenix (Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0154 brightshiny.ninja) will be released on October 8 and adds a glimpse into yet another side of this many-faceted musical force to an already impressive discography. The press release tells us that “The ashes from which Phoeniix rises are, as the pianist says: the ‘soundworld, past traditions, and gestures of Franz Liszt’ [who was] thought to have had a profound influence on Debussy and Ravel, the latter of whom famously orchestrated Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition.” Mussorgsky’s masterwork, masterfully performed in the original solo piano version, is the centrepiece of this impressive sonic essay. The disc is bookended by unaccompanied renditions of original works by Goodyear himself – the quasi moto perpetuo Congotay, recently released as a single with his jazz quintet, and the ebullient Panorama, extracted from Callaloo, a Gershwin-inspired work for piano and orchestra – both based on his half-Trinadian heritage. Jennifer Higdon’s Secret and Glass Gardens, called by the composer “a journey of wonder and discovery” that “reflects the paths of our hearts,” is contrasted by Anthony Davis’ more introspective and ultimately tumultuous Middle Passage, inspired by a poem of Robert Hayden that, according to Davis, “speaks to the essential irony of our people and culture born of the horror of slavery.” Middle Passage includes two sections in which the performer is instructed to improvise and this recording marks Goodyear’s debut as an improvising pianist. Two works by Debussy, L’isle joyeuse and La cathédrale engloutie, complete a thoughtful and fascinating disc.

We invite submissions. CDs, DVDs and comments should be sent to: DISCoveries, WholeNote Media Inc., The Centre for Social Innovation, 503 – 720 Bathurst St. Toronto ON M5S 2R4. David Olds, DISCoveries Editor discoveries@thewholenote.com

**STRINGS ATTACHED**

TERRY ROBBINS

The new CD Debussy-Franck-Szymanowski finds the Canadian duo of violinist Marie Bégin and pianist Samuel Blancette-Gagnon in quite superb form (ATMA Classique ACDe2850 atmaclassique.com/en).

Bégin’s Carlo Bergonzzi violin from 1710-1715 produces a glorious sound, and there’s a lovely range of tone colour from both players in the Debussy Sonata in G Minor and in the shimmering, atmospheric performance of the three Szymanowski Mythes Op.30. The heart of the disc is a wonderfully expansive and insightful reading of the Franck Sonata in A Major, with a slow build-up through the opening Allegretto, a brooding and passionate Allegro second movement, a heartfelt Recitative: Fantasia and a final canon of depth and strength.

Two short transcriptions – Faure’s Après un rêve and Debussy’s Beau soir, the latter in the Heifetz arrangement – complete a superlative CD.

**Roots**, the debut CD from the young American violinist Randall Goosby has been attracting a lot of interest, and with good reason. Described as “an exploration of the music written by Black composers and inspired by Black American culture” it’s a strong recital that features fine playing from Goosby and pianist Zhu Wang (Decca Classics 4851664 store.deccaclassics.com/)

CD Classics/Roots-6Z5A16YW000).

Xavier Dubois Foley’s Shelter Island for violin and string bass (with the composer on bass) is a world-premiere recording, as are the three pieces by Florence Price: Adoration and the two Fantasies, No.1 In G Minor and No.2 in F-sharp Minor. Also here are Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson’s Blue’s Forms for Solo Violin, four songs from Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess in the Heifetz transcriptions, William Grant Still’s Suite for Violin and Piano (with its gorgeous second movement), Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s Deep River (in an arrangement by violinist Maud Powell) and Dvorák’s three-movement Sonatina In G Major.

Goosby draws a full, warm tone from the 1735 “Sennhauer” Guarneri del Gesú violin, and has a lovely feel for line and phrase. Wang provides excellent support on an impressive debut disc.

From the opening bars of The Viennese Viola: Emma Wernig, the debut CD from the winner of the 2017 Cecil Aronowitz competition with Albert Cano Smit at the piano, it’s clear that we’re in very good hands. Wernig’s warm, assured playing is supported by Cano Smit’s perfectly matched accompaniment in a beautifully balanced recording of Austrian rarities for viola and piano (Champs Hill Records CHRCD163 emmawernig.com).

Hans Gál wrote his VIola Sonata In A Major Op.101 in Edinburgh in late 1942, having fled Austria in 1938. It’s a lovely work, lyrical and passionate but with moments of melancholy and gloomy introspection. Two fine works by Robert Fuchs are at the centre of the recital: his Sechs Phantasietücke Op.117 from 1927 and his Viola Sonata In D Minor Op.86 from 1899. Brahms greatly admired Fuchs, and his influence – as well as that of Schubert – is keenly felt.
Four Schubert songs – *Am See, Frühlingstraum, An die Musik* and *Litanei auf das Fest Aller Seelen* – chosen and arranged by the two performers, complete an outstanding CD.

A third – and equally accomplished – debut CD is *Elegy: Toby Hughes*, featuring the young English bassist accompanied by pianist Benjamin Powell in a recital that Hughes feels offers an insight into the instrument’s versatility (Champs Hill Records CHRC162 toby-hughesdoublebass.com). Hughes’ bass is built for solo playing, custom made for him, and what a sound it has – the warmth and agility of a cello, but with heft.

The *Aria et Rondo* from 1952 by the French composer Alfred Desenclos opens the disc, followed by Reinhold Glière’s *Four Pieces – the Prelude and Scherzo Op.32 Nos.1 & 2* and the *Intermezzo and Tarantella Op.9 Nos.1 & 2* – the Tarantella drawing dazzling virtuosity from Hughes. The brief *Ekskize No.1*, in a transcription by its composer Richard Dubugnon, was originally for voice and piano. The brief Ekskize No.1 brings an impressive debut CD to a close.

On the *Sonata for Two Violins* – the first movement of Ysaÿe’s *Chenal*, the most recent winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition, in a recital that Hughes feels offers an insight into the instrument’s versatility (Champs Hill Records CHRC162 toby-hughesdoublebass.com). Hughes’ bass is built for solo playing, custom made for him, and what a sound it has – the warmth and agility of a cello, but with heft.

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On the outstanding *Bach’s Long Shadow*, his first solo album, the Spanish-American violinist Francisco Fullana builds a program of interlinked yet contrasting works around the Bach *Partita No.3 in E Major BWV1006 (Orchid Classics ORC100165 orchidclassics.com)*. Ysaÿe’s Solo Sonata Op.27 No.2 directly quotes the Bach *Partita*. Kreisler’s *Riccativo & Scherzo Op.6* was dedicated to *Ysaÿe*, and Fullana is playing Kreisler’s first Guarneri violin, the 1735 “Mary Portman” Guarneri del Gesti which, for the Bach, is set up with gut strings, Fullana using a Baroque bow and historically informed ornamentation for that performance. Striking transcriptions of Albéniz’ Asturias and Tárrega’s *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, the latter particularly difficult and effective, end a dazzling solo recital, Fullana being joined in an “encore” by Stella Chen, the most recent winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition, in the first movement of Ysaÿe’s *Sonata for Two Violins*.

On *Richard Strauss/César Franck* the French duo of violinist Brieuc Vourch and pianist Guillaume Vincent present the *Strauss Sonata in E-flat Major Op.18* together with yet another recording of the Franck *Sonata in A Major* (FARAO Classics B 108112 farao-classics.de). There’s a strong, bright tone to Vourch’s 1690 Francesco Ruggeri violin in a suitably passionate performance of the Strauss. Interestingly, the performers’ booklet notes for this and the Bégin/Blanchette-Gagnon disc both mention the tough challenge of trying to find an authentic personal voice in the much-recorded Franck sonata, but the resulting performances could hardly be more different. Vourch and Vincent push the tempo throughout, especially in the *Allegro* and in a final canon faster than any of the four other Franck CDs I’ve received recently, but at times it simply feels rushed and lacking in subtlety – certainly not as thoughtful or satisfying as the Bégin disc.

Diffusion, the outstanding debut CD from the *Verona Quartet* is described as exploring a mosaic of folk cultures through the lens of three quartets from the early 20th century (Azica Records ACFD-71339 veronaquartet.com). As musicians hailing from across the world, the quartet wanted their first album to reflect the essence of the cultural migration that is such a big part of their identity. The performances of the three works – Janáček’s *String Quartet No.2 “Intimate Letters”*, Szymanowski’s *String Quartet No.2 Op.56* and Ravel’s *String Quartet in F Major* – are quite superb in all respects.

The intensely personal intimacy and passion of the Janáček, written near the end of his life and inspired by his unfulfilled love for a much younger married woman, are beautifully captured in a performance that penetrates to the heart of the work. The Szymanowski, similar in style and tone, is equally striking, and a shimmering performance of the Ravel completes an extremely impressive disc full of breathtaking interpretations and playing.

The two guitarists who form the contemporary *FretX Duo*, Daniel Lippel and Mak Grgic have both issued solo CDs of music by Johann Sebastian Bach played on the well-tempered guitar. The guitar is by the German luthier Walter Vogt, using his invention *The Fine-Tunable Precision Fretboard*, in which each fret is split into six individual moveable frets, placed according to the Well-Tempered III tuning designed by Johann Kirchner, a composer who studied with Bach. This not only enables the music to be heard in its original keys but also retains the specific Baroque character of each key that
On the Wings of Song

Kira Braun; Peter Krochak

Independent (kirabraunsoprano.com)

On the Wings of Song – with more art songs by Poulenc, together with works by Mendelssohn and Obradors – is a ravishing duet between a singer who excels at being both a lyric and dramatic soprano and a pianist who springs and leaps with much agility and nuance.

All the songs receive terrific performances and although the program is weighted slightly in favour of Poulenc and Obradors, Mendelssohn’s Wanderlied is particularly radiant – perhaps predictably so, given Braun’s German heritage. She strikes an ideal balance between a certain compassion and sophistication, something that makes Mendelssohn seem quite ideally suited for Braun as she delivers his songs with affectionate communication of the poetry. Her command of Poulenc is unrivalled and she proves this with her airy sculpting of Les chemins de l’amour. She also grows into the characters of Obradors’ songs with great feeling and intensity.

Krochak’s contribution to the unique musicality of this disc cannot be overestimated. Being a singer himself seems to give him an added edge over others who might have accompanied Braun. This is what gives his playing a beguiling refinement, enabling him to traverse this repertoire with judicious melodiousness and delicacy.

Raul da Gama

A Sanctuary in Song

Daniel Cabena; Stephen Runge

Chestnut Hall Music (chestnuthallmusic.com)

A Sanctuary in Song is a collaboration between countertenor Daniel Cabena and pianist Stephen Runge. The album follows a man’s journey via love, loss and death. We follow him first in a prelude, and then, in his wanderings and sanctuary explorations interspersed with instrumental commentaries.

Although the repertoire is mostly curated from the English art songs of composers born in the 19th century (York Bowen, John Ireland, Roger Quiller, Charles Villiers Stanford, Peter Warlock and Ralph Vaughan Williams), other more contemporary composers are also featured.

is lost with today’s equal temperament, where the subtly varying interval sizes are smoothed out.

The Lautenwerk was a Baroque keyboard instrument, essentially a lute-harpischord with gut strings that could be plucked with different quill materials at different points along their length. On **aufs Lautenwerk**, Lippel performs two works for the instrument – the *Suite in E Minor BWV996* and the *Sonata in C Minor BWV997* – along with the *Prelude, Fuga & Allegro in E-flat Major BWV998*, written for lute or harpsichord (New Focus Recordings FCR920 / MicroFest Records MF18 microfestrecords.com).

On **MAK/Bach** Grgic presents a simply beautiful recital of solo masterworks and chorales: the *Flute Partita in A Minor BWV1013*, the *Solo Violin Sonata in G Minor BWV1001*, and the *Cello Suite in D Major BWV1002*. Four brief chorales fill out the disc (MicroFest Records MF19 microfestrecords.com).

To be honest, it will probably take a very good ear to fully distinguish the nuances in the tuning here, but there’s no denying the beauty of the sound or the beauty of the playing, with both performers displaying faultless technique – no easy task given the variations in individual fret placements – and an unerring feel for the period style. The Grgic CD, especially his own transcriptions of the *Violin Sonata* and the *Cello Suite* is perhaps the more satisfying program of the two, but with music and playing of this remarkable quality there’s no need to choose between them.

The guitar works of Ludovico Roncalli have long been popular in modern transcriptions, but on **Roncalli Complete Guitar Music** they are performed by Bernhard Hofstötter on a Baroque guitar attributed to Matteo Sellas of Venice, c.1640 (Brilliant Classics 2CD 93856 brilliantclassics.com).

The five-course Baroque guitar had five pairs of gut strings (the first course often single-strung, as here) with the fourth and fifth sometimes octave-strung (here with a low octave on the fourth course only).

Roncalli’s 1692 *Capricci armonici sopra la chitarra spagnola* consists of nine sonate (suites), with eight paired in major and relative minor keys, an opening *Preludio* and *Alemanda* being followed by various dance forms. Movements are really short – mostly under two minutes. There’s no indication of pitch or tuning, but the actual pitch heard is down a minor third from the listed keys.

Monica Hall’s excellent booklet essay notes that Roncalli’s “exquisite melodic lines and elegant counterpoint are seamlessly combined with the strummed five-part chords which were still a defining feature of guitar music at the time.”

Hofstötter’s masterful playing is an absolute delight throughout.

The addition of a sixth string (the low E) in the 1790s established the guitar form that would flourish throughout the 19th century. In his second volume of **Histoires de guitares** Quebec guitarist **David Jacques** features 15 historical guitars from his astonishing private collection, all but one from the period 1800-1880, and each one illustrated in colour in the excellent booklet (ATMA Classique AC132 2821 atmaclassique.com).

The 28 short, charming pieces by Giuliani, Sor, Carulli, Paganini and 13 lesser-known composers were chosen specifically to showcase each instrument’s individual qualities and character, and they include some real gems – the three pieces by the English composer Ernest Shaw, for instance.

They’re all beautifully played too, with clean technique, sensitivity and a nice range of tonal colour.

VOCAL

**On the Wings of Song**

Kira Braun; Peter Krochak

Independent (kirabraunsoprano.com)

The soprano — with more art songs by Poulenc, together with works by Mendelssohn and Obradors — is a ravishing duet between a singer who excels at being both a lyric and dramatic soprano and a pianist who springs and leaps with much agility and nuance.
(Australian-Canadian Barrie Cabena – the singer’s father – as well as British-born Gerald Finzi and Edmund Rubbra). The influence of, training in, or adherence to musical practices associated with Romantic music are felt throughout the album. Runge’s playing is sophisticated and elegant, all the while creating both intimate and grand pianistic expressive soundscapes for Cabena to soar above. Cabena’s commitment to the texts gives life to the various layers of emotional meaning that one can find in nature, love, beauty, solitude or spirituality.

With 26 pieces of music and over 70 minutes of repertoire A Sanctuary in Song is a generous offering and a thoughtfully curated story that showcases a great number of composers and poets to (re)discover. Kudos to the Canadian duo for also featuring two compositions by Canadian composer Cabena.

A Sanctuary in Song was recorded December 12 813, 2017 at the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Sophie Bisson

Artem Vedel – Twelve Sacred Choral Concerti
Luminous Voices; Spiritus Chamber Choir
Leaf Music LM244 (leaf-music.ca)

The choral concerto is a uniquely Eastern European form, arising in the Russian Empire in the 19th century and continuing to be written well into the 20th. In general terms, the choral concerto was defined by its multi-movement form and psalm-based texts, written for unaccompanied chorus and containing passages for full ensemble as well as soloists. While parallels can certainly be drawn between the choral concerto’s form and that of the Western instrumental concerto, this similarity is more coincidence than correlation, as the developments of these like-minded styles occurred largely contemporaneously.

The most renowned and oft-performed composer of choral concertos is Dimitri Bortniansky, an Italian-trained, Russian-Ukrainian musician whose 45 concertos are considered by many to be the pinnacle of the form. At the same time as Bortniansky was putting pen to paper, another Ukrainian composer was authoring his own essays in the choral concerto style, and it is these works by Artem Vedel that are the focus of Vedel: Choir Concertos Nos.1-12 & Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

While a relatively unknown composer in modern times, Vedel was widely respected in his homeland during his lifetime and was one of the “Golden Three” composers, along with Maxim Berezovsky and Bortniansky. Vedel’s concertos are strikingly expressive yet deceptively simple, many of them written for three- or four-part chorus, and often set anguished texts from the psalms: nine of the eleven intact concertos are written in minor keys and are of a pleading, mournful nature.

Far from being pessimistic and despite Vedel’s angsty outlook, there are moments of great beauty and striking optimism contained within each work, particularly as the texts turn to the goodness and saving power of God; these cadences are arguably some of the most delightful and satisfying in the oeuvre and are magnificently executed by the performers.

This double-disc collection is immense, containing over 150 minutes of material, all of it performed by the Calgary-based ensemble Luminous Voices. A seven-year project, this recording is a testament both to the compositional capabilities of Vedel and the musical skill of Luminous Voices and its director, Timothy Shantz.

Matthew Whitfield

Mozart – Cosi Fan Tutte
Eriksmoen; Dragojevic; Schuen; Peter; Kulman; Werba; Concentus Musicus Wien; Arnold Schoenberg Choir; Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Unitol Edition 804108 (naxosdirect.com/search/804108)

Collaborations between composer and librettist always create happy results, often the composer’s best operas, e.g. between Verdi/Boito, R. Strauss/Hoffmannstahl or Wagner/Wagner (as he wrote his own librettos). This is the case with Lorenzo Da Ponte with whom Mozart produced three of his masterworks: Figaro, Don Giovanni and Cosi fan Tutte.

Nicholas Harnoncourt’s long-cherished dream has been to conduct all three of them, one after the other, as authentically as possible, in an intimate setting with close collaboration with singers while still maintaining complete control. This is a concert performance, with bare stage, no sets or costumes. Singers sing from scores, but act and move freely, interact with each other and the emphasis is entirely on the music; the most beautiful music of the three operas according to connoisseurs.

Cosi fan Tutte means all women are fickle, deceitful (even Verdi’s Duke of Mantua sings it: La donna è mobile), a thesis proven by the philosopher Don Alfonso (Markus Werba, baritone) with an experiment on two sets of lovers Fiordiligi (Mari Ericksmoen, soprano) and Dorabella (Katija Dragojevic, mezzo) vs. Ferrando (Mauro Peter, tenor) and Guglielmo (André Schuen, baritone) in this hilarious comedy. And in the music, one beautiful piece after another. Like Fiordiligi’s angry outburst: Come scoglio immoto resta in
Act One, or Ferrando’s Un’ aura amorosa so beautiful that even Harndoncourt sings along. Donatella’s É amore un ladroncello is tempestuous and Guglielmo’s Donne mie la fate tantì is a swaggering boast of male pride. The clever and worldly chambermaid, Despina (Elisabeth Kulman), the interlocutor who helps Don Alfonso carry out his scheme, also sings a lovely aria Una donna a quindici anni that delights Harndoncourt and garners big applause.

“Something we had never heard before like this” says the Serbian newspaper Kurir, and that just about sums it up.

**Janos Gardonyi**

Malcolm Arnold – The Dancing Master Vocal Soloists; BBC Concert Orchestra; John Andrews

Resonus Records RES10269 (resonusclassics.com)

Joe Mendoza, has written a screenplay based on a 1671 comedy, The Gentleman Dancing Master. For years, they’ve discussed collaborating on an opera; now, Mendoza turns the screenplay into a made-for-television opera libretto. Only two weeks after receiving Mendoza’s draft, Arnold completes the score for a one-act, 75-minute opera. Deemed “too bawdy for family audiences” by BBC executives, The Dancing Master languishes until an amateur concert performance with piano in 1962; it finally receives its first full production in 2015 in London.

Miranda faces an unwanted marriage to her Frenchified cousin, “Monsieur” Nathaniel, arranged by her pompous father and puritanical aunt. Supported by her maid Prue, Miranda attempts to pass off her ardent but maladroit admirer Gerard as her dance instructor. Comic complications inevitably ensue.

Mendoza’s libretto (included in the booklet) boasts sharply drawn characters and abundant clever rhymes. It’s hardly “bawdy” – mildly risqué only when Prue tries to seduce Nathaniel. Arnold’s score is brightly orchestrated, poignant in Miranda’s lament, boisterous in the ensembles, unashamedly cinematic in the climax of Miranda and Gerard’s love duet, wickedly satiric in Nathaniel’s absurd serenade, clearly echoing Beckmesser’s hapless effort in Die Meistersinger’s song contest.

The Dancing Master is a melodic, laugh-inducing romp. While a more distinguished cast might have been desirable, this CD promises guaranteed operatic entertainment.

**Michael Schuman**

**CLASSICAL AND BEYOND**

J. G. Graun – Chamber Music from the Court of Frederick the Great

Augusta McKay Lodge; Georgina McKay Lodge; Eva Lymenstull; David Schlenenberg

Brilliant Classics BR196289 (naxosdirect.com/search/br196289)

▶ Frederick the Great’s patronage of classical musicians is well known; Frederick was himself an accomplished player and composer. Surprisingly, several of these composers did not perform before the King and are therefore less well known than they should be. This CD seeks reversal of the situation.

A comment is made in the CD notes that the pieces bridge a gap between Baroque and mainstream classical music. This is borne out in Janitsch’s Allegrino which possesses a liveliness worthy of Mozart or Haydn. When it comes to Johann Gottlieb, the slightly older Graun brother, we are treated to a highly spirited Allegro scherzando from violinist Augusta McKay Lodge, echoed literally by David Schlenenberg’s harpsichord playing before all instruments proceed to a real virtuoso performance of which J. S. Bach would have been proud.

It is Bach’s oldest son Wilhelm Friedemann who tutored one of the stars of this CD, Franz Benda. Benda’s Sonata for viola brings out the best of Georgina McKay Lodge’s playing. Listen, for example, to her stately and measured approach to the Adagio. Benda, in fact, moved in exalted circles, being a pupil of Wilhelm Friedemann but also having as patron one Sarah Levy, great-aunt of Felix Mendelssohn. And yet it is the Grauns who dominate the CD. Johann Gottlieb’s Trio sonata in A for the string playing of both McKay Lodges. All in all, this well-chosen collection demonstrates the tremendous array of talented composers Frederick the Great attracted – which paved the way for Haydn and Mozart.

Michael Schwartz

Bach; Beethoven

Andrew Von Oeyen

Warner Classics 0190295020514 (vonoeyen.com)

▶ After the silence descended over concert halls in 2020, many performing artists focused on exploring the possibilities of new sonic spaces through repertoire, musical approaches or unusual physical spaces. Intimate solo sessions offered these artists the opportunity for introspection and extended a salute to their audiences. According to Andrew Von Oeyen’s liner notes, his desire to turn to the repertoire that expressed the essence of current times and fortified noble feelings of resilience and perseverance resulted in this album. And what an album it is! Every piece carries a deeper meaning of our collective experiences in the times of the pandemic and Von Oeyen conveys it on both the intellectual and emotional level. The performance goes beyond his dazzling technique and splendid phrasing. It is as if he simply knows where the heart of each composition lies and he is unveiling it for the listener.

Bach’s Overture in the French Style, a quest for order and clarity, is particularly well played. Not being a Bach specialist allows Von Oeyen to hear the interweaving voices in a slightly more juxtaposed – rather than contrasting – way. Beethoven’s piano sonatas (Nos.13 and 23), embodying vitality and determination, bring in the currents of energy. The choice to end the album with Kempff’s piano arrangements of the movements from Bach’s Flute Sonata No.2 and Harpsichord Concerto No.5 are surprising but welcomed. These solitary musings of one artist are well noted and well appreciated.

Ivana Popovic

Mozart – Piano Concerto No.20; Beethoven – Piano Concerto No.3

Rasa Vitkauskaite; Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra; Anima Musicae Chamber Orchestra; Jonathan Kohler

Ongaku Records 024-129 (ongaku-records.com)

▶ Released in honour of Beethoven’s 250th birthday anniversary, this album also honours the long and beloved tradition of the classical piano concerto. The concept is cleverly simple: choosing to record the first concertos written in a minor key by both Mozart and Beethoven allows Lithuania’s pianist Rasa Vitkauskaite to explore the multitude of interrelations in the ways both composers approached piano playing and piano writing. Furthermore, her extensive and thoughtful liner notes not only offer a wealth of historical information but also aid the listener’s aural comprehension of these two masterpieces.

Vitkauskaite’s performance is buoyant and certainly does not lack fully fledged ideas. Whether it is the poetic opening of Mozart’s concerto or the relentless dancing bounce in the concluding movement of the Beethoven, Vitkauskaite has a strong presence and willful execution. Each composer
chose specific minor keys (D minor for Mozart and C minor for Beethoven) as ideal canvases for expressing tempestuous feelings and darkness, and they continued to do so in their later works. Vitkauskaite understands that darkness perfectly. She is capable of bringing forth the intensity and tension while still retaining the lyricism of the melodies. She favours her own improvisations and embellishments in the cadenzas, which makes this performance exciting as we are able to hear something new and surprising. Jonathan Cohler is a perfect collaborator to Vitkauskaite, directing both orchestras with clarity and conviction.

Ivana Popovic

Mozart – Piano Concertos Vol.3 K449 & K595
Anne-Marie McDermott; Odense Symphoniorkester; Sebastian Lang-Lessing
Bridge Records 9538 (bridge-records.com)

This Bridge recording is the third in a series of Mozart piano concertos featuring American pianist Anne-Marie McDermott with the Odense Symphony conducted by Sebastian Lang-Lessing, this time presenting Concertos No.14, K449 and No.27, K595.

A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, McDermott has earned a reputation as a consummate artist during the last 25 years, one who continues to appear in concert internationally both as a soloist and a chamber musician. Her first two recordings in this series were met with considerable critical acclaim and this one is equally impressive.

Written in 1784, K449 is regarded as the first of Mozart’s mature works in the genre and was the first composition to be entered into a notebook of his music he retained for the next seven years. McDermott approaches the score with a thoughtful intelligence, her phrasing at all times carefully nuanced, while the Odense Symphony is a sensitive and formidable partner. The second movement andantino is all heartfelt lyricism while the optimistic and sprightly finale is carried out with great gusto.

Concerto No.27, Mozart’s last contribution to the concerto form, his “swan song” so to speak, was probably written between 1788 and 1789, but the manuscript is dated January 5, 1791. Once again, McDermott’s performance is wonderfully expressive, the brisker passages marked by an adept precision. Throughout, the warm strings and woodwinds under Lang-Lessing’s skillful baton further contribute to a most satisfying performance.

While recordings of Mozart piano concertos continue to be plentiful, this one – by an exemplary soloist and orchestra, both of whom deserve greater recognition – is a welcome addition and we can look forward to further editions in the series.

Richard Haskell

MM 1785 – Mozart Momentum
Leif Ove Andsnes; Mahler Chamber Orchestra
Sony 19439742462 (naxosdirect.com/search/194397424621)

1785 was a landmark year in Mozart’s all-too-brief existence. He had finally achieved a degree of financial security, he commenced a period of tremendous creative energy and he was beginning to “push the boundaries” with respect to his musical style. This Sony two-disc set titled Mozart Momentum, is an intriguing presentation of seven works all composed that year – three piano concertos, the Piano Quartet K478, the Fantasia K475 and the Masonic Funeral Music K477 performed by Leif Ove Andsnes and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

The Piano Concerto No.20 – the first of two Mozart wrote in a minor key – took some time to be fully accepted by Viennese audiences, but they ultimately embraced it wholeheartedly. The overall theme of “light triumphing over darkness” clearly foreshadows the 19th century, and Andsnes with the MCO are a formidable pairing, delivering a polished performance.

Similarly, the Concertos No.21 and 22 (the latter the first to make use of clarinets) demonstrate a buoyant confidence – tempos in the outer movements are brisk but never rushed, the cadenzas are creative and there’s a solid connection between soloist and orchestra.

For the G-Minor Quartet, Andsnes drew upon the principals from the ensemble and what a wonderfully intimate sound they produce! Here the listener is struck by the enthralling interplay of the musicians, particularly in the third movement scherzo where they engage in a true game of “cat and mouse” including a false ending before the jocular conclusion performed with great panache.

Andsnes sits on the sidelines for the brief Masonic Funeral Music but returns for the Fantasia in C Minor, a score that clearly anticipates Beethoven.

Kudos to all concerned – this set is a treasure bound to be enjoyed for many years to come.

Richard Haskell

What we’re listening to this month: thewholenote.com/listening

Now Pronouncing: Caity Gyorgy
Caity Gyorgy
An exciting and beautiful new release from one of Canada’s up and coming jazz musicians where she serves as the vocalist, composer, lyricist, arranger, and bandleader!

L’Impact du Silence
François Bourassa
When used wisely, silence is emotional, poetic. This musical adventure combines improvisation, lyricism, and abstraction and features integrity and emotion as the main themes.

Dressed in Borrowed Light
Clara Engel
“A deeply immersive and rewarding experience” – LOUDER THAN WAR “Absolutely intoxicating, and full of soul” - THE SLEEPING SHAMAN
The Schumann Project: Robert – Symphonic Etudes; Clara – Sonata in G Minor
Inna Faliks
MSR Classics MS 1763 (msrcd.com)
Reimagine: Beethoven & Ravel
Inna Faliks
Navona Records nv6352 (navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6352)

The name Inna Faliks may not seem familiar to music lovers today, but the credentials of this Ukrainian-borne American pianist are impressive indeed. Currently head of the piano department at UCLA, Faliks has made a name for herself both as a performer and pedagogue, and has appeared in concert throughout the world including a tour of China in 2016. The recording, titled The Schuman Project, is the first in a series designed to juxtapose the music of Robert Schumann with that of his wife Clara, who for too long has had the unfortunate reputation as “a pianist who also composed.” The 19th century wasn’t kind to women composers (or any women involved in the creative arts) and Clara was no exception. Her Piano Sonata in G Minor, which opens the disc, was an early work dating from 1841 when she was all of 22. It was composed specifically for Robert and despite her youth, there is much to admire here including solid construction and fine thematic development among the four movements. Faliks approaches the unfamiliar score with a clear understanding of the music, delivering a compelling and heartfelt performance.

Schumann’s renowned Symphonic Etudes were begun in 1834 and have long been regarded as one of the most challenging of his large-scale piano works. Faliks easily proves her grasp of the material, rising to all the technical demands. But she is no mere technician – at all times her phrasing is carefully articulated and, beginning with the mysterious opening theme, her performance is a captivating musical journey right through to the jubilant finale.

Faliks turns her attention to very different material in the disc Reimagine: Beethoven and Ravel. Here she focuses on putting a new “spin” on standard repertoire, in this case, the Beethoven set of Bagatelles Op.126 and Ravel’s suite Gaspard de la Nuit. These were used as a basis for new compositions by modern composers such as Peter Golub, Tamir Hendelman and Richard Danielpour. Just as the Beethoven set is a study in contrasts, so are the reinterpretations. For example, the mood of the Bagatelle by Golub based on the first in the Beethoven set is pensive and contemplative, closely following that of the original, while Ian Krouse’s Etude 2a based on the second is a true perpetuum mobile. For whatever reason, Faliks didn’t include any original movements from the Ravel suite, but pieces such as Variations on a Spell by Paola Prestini are an evocative reimagining of Ondine.

These are fine recordings demonstrating two sides of a gifted artist – and recorded during a pandemic no less. We can hope to hear more from Inna Faliks in the future.

Richard Haskell

Brahms – Symphony No.3; Serenade No.2
Budapest Festival Orchestra; Ivan Fischer
Channel Classics CCS SA 43821 (channelclassics.com/catalogue/43821)

“There is no more magnificent opening of a symphony than the first 38 bars of Brahms Third” says Ivan Fischer, and obviously he is very partial to the work. Fischer is known to pursue unjustly neglected works and restore them to mainstream repertoire. Brahms Third Symphony is certainly the dark horse, the least performed of his symphonies and I first heard it composed symphonies and I first heard it during a pandemic no less. The nickname heroic fits only the outer movements and works that few have equalled. Accordingly, it was a pleasure for me to dig into Schiff’s recent double-disc recording of the reimagined piano concertos of Johannes Brahms, accompanied capably by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Captured following a string of highly acclaimed European concerts in the spring of 2019, the resulting recording is magical. Doing double duty as pianist and conductor, Schiff leads this unique Kingdom-based period-piece orchestra through some of the most musical and challenging pieces in the Western art music canon (Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No.1 in D Minor, Op.15 and No.2 in B-flat Major, Op.83), mining the depths of Romantic-era dynamics and expressivity for which Brahms is revered. Further, the recording, captured at London’s Abbey Road studios, contains all of the fidelity hallmarks for which ECM Recordings has earned its blue-chip reputation over the last near half-century, exhibiting the tell-tale expansive sonic fingerprint of executive producer Manfred Eicher, who helps realize here a recording that captures Schiff, and the 1859 Blüthner piano on which he performs, beautifully.

Andrew Scott
Brahms – Double Concerto; Tchaikovsky – Romeo and Juliet; Liszt – Les Preludes
Lisa Batshawili; Gautier Capuçon; Staatskapelle Dresden; Christian Thielemann
C Major 757108
(naxosdirect.com/search/hc20086)

► Christian Thielemann had already estab-
lished himself as a card-carrying
man-about-Brahms when he recorded
the complete symphonies, the
piano concertos with Pollini and the violin concerto with
Batashwili; DG was
still attempting to develop a successor to the late Herbert von Karajan.

Of course this concert with the Dresden Staatskapelle could be nothing less than
a memorable event given the incompar-
able technique and sonorities of the soloists, violinist Lisa Batashwili and cellist Gautier
Capuçon, with Thielemann in command. This Blu-ray has had lots of play in the past
weeks as I just had to hear, just one more
time, my very favourite Brahms concerto.
The encore, Il Zingaresca: Allegro giocoso,
is a pleasing interplay between violin and cello by Schulhoff. The Tchaikovsky and Liszt
war horses each enjoy a well-controlled,
commanding performance.

Bruce Surtees

Busoni – The Six Sonatinas
Victor Nicoara
Hanssler Classic HC20086
(naxosdirect.com/search/hc20086)

► Victor Nicoara, a bona fide expo-
nent of the piano music of Ferruccio
Busoni, joins an increasing number of musicians deter-
mined to familiarize audiences
with the Italian composer’s catalogue,
bringing them “closer to an emotional under-
standing of... neglected masterpieces.” As
such, Nicoara has fashioned an aesthetic-
ically pleasing album featuring Busoni’s Six
Sonatinas – out of chronological order – set
amongst smaller pieces. It is immediately
apparent that Nicoara has long been
involved to Busoni’s art and brings a depth of inter-
prediction and impressive conviction to his performance. The pianist displays attrib-
utes of expression not perniciously associated
with Busoni: a tenderness of line and sense of satirical gesture (with playfulness); a dreamy,
almost absent-minded notion of soundscape,
a rational lingua franca of harmony. (Busoni’s
harmonic language can sometimes seem out
of reach for many listeners.)

This is a disc to be thoroughly enjoyed,
varying in scope with intimations of dusted-
off treasure. The musical gemstones Nicoara
brings to our ears from vaults below are not
unknown, they’re just rarely heard and must
therefore be reclaimed and re-appreciated in
the natural light of day. Here is the conceit of
Nicoara’s newest recording and he succeeds in
its conveyance, admirably.

Outside of the sonatinas, a more novel highlight is the Nuit de Noël, BV 251. Without
knowing, one might guess this music to be
written by Debussy, Grieg or even a
proponent of the Romantic English school.
Finally, Nicoara’s own, Quasi Sonatina,
illuminates the nooks and crannies of
our aforementioned museum finds in “an attempt... to distill the spirit and compos-
tional procedures of the works recorded...”
As listeners, we revel in his sensitivity for the
material: material he plays with an earnest,
even humble, brand of pianistic expertise.

Adam Sherkin

Mahler – Symphony No.7
Bayerisches Staatsorchester; Kirill
Petrenko
Bayerische Stattoper BSorec0001
(naxosdirect.com/search/bsorec0001)

► The Bayerisches Staatsorchester, the
resident orchestra of the renowned
Bayanian State Opera, launches a
new label featuring their purely orches-
tral performances with this 2018 live performance under their
former music director Kirill Petrenko, recently
appointed to succeed Simon Rattle at the
Berlin Philharmonic. The reclusive and modest
Petrenko has very few recordings to his credit
up to now, but of 12 radiant female composers. Both
historic and contemporary artists are repre-
sented here by way of Johnson’s transcrip-
tions of venerable piano works by Cécile
Chaminade (Aubade – 1911), Amy Beach (A
Hermit Thrush at Morn – 1921), Mel Bonis
(Cinq Morceaux – 1894 to 1927), Fanny
Mendelssohn Hensel (Mélodie – 1846), Clara
Wieck Schumann (Romance – 1853) and
Lili Boulanger (D’un vieux jardin – 1914).
Contemporary contributors to this superb
collection include Australian flutist/composer
Johanna Selleck, British composer Freya
Waley-Cohen, British violin/composer<br>
Annaia Selleck, with such alacrity . Stay tuned!

Daniel Foley

Quest
Elisabeth Remy Johnson
Albany Records TROY1863
(albanyrecords.com)

► This compelling new recording from<br>world-renowned principal harpist
(Atlanta Symphony) Elisabeth Remy
Johnson, is a magnificent cele-
bation of not only the harp itself,
but of 12 radiant female composers. Both
historic and contemporary artists are repre-
sented here by way of Johnson’s transcrip-
tions of venerable piano works by Cécile<br>Chaminade (Aubade – 1911), Amy Beach (A
Hermit Thrush at Morn – 1921), Mel Bonis
(Cinq Morceaux – 1894 to 1927), Fanny
Mendelssohn Hensel (Mélodie – 1846), Clara
Wieck Schumann (Romance – 1853) and
Lili Boulanger (D’un vieux jardin – 1914).
Contemporary contributors to this superb
collection include Australian flutist/composer<br>Annaia Selleck, British composer Freya
Waley-Cohen, British violin/composer Sally
Waley-Cohen, with such alacrity . Stay tuned!

Daniel Foley

Leslie Mitchell-Clarke

Hand throughout the psychedelic central
Scherzo and truly comes into his own in the
dense polyphony of the grandiloquent Finale
which zips along jubilantly.

Though it’s certainly not the finest
recording of this work available (I would
recommend Bernstein/NY or Abbado/
Lucerne) it nevertheless shows great promise
that Petrenko interprets this demanding work
with such alacrity. Stay tuned!

Daniel Foley

Quest
Elisabeth Remy Johnson
Albany Records TROY1863
(albanyrecords.com)
Matthew Larkin Organist – Casavant Opus 550
Matthew Larkin
ATMA ACD2 2857 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Not only is the pipe organ one of the world’s oldest musical instruments, it is also one of the most complicated. Comprised of thousands of pipes ranging in size from that of a small pencil to 32 feet in length, as well as innumerable internal mechanisms and electronic controls all managed by one musician at an equally complex (and appropriately named) “console” containing up to five separate keyboards. It takes a significant amount of training and dexterity to successfully maneuver these marvels of musical engineering.

When executed properly, the organist’s job is to make the technical operation of the instrument a behind-the-scenes process, secondary in nature to the music itself. The audience need not (and should not) be aware of every button that is pushed, every pipe that is activated, but rather these small adaptations should be incorporated into the whole in a subtle and organic way, a challenging objective that grows increasingly complex as the size of the instrument increases.

The Casavant organ at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Bloor Street is one of largest such instruments in Canada, with over 7,500 pipes at the organist’s disposal; it is also one of the finest. Matthew Larkin Plays Casavant Opus 550 at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Toronto illustrates just how magnificent and convincing a superb instrument can be in the hands of an equally gifted performer.

A fascinating collection of international works, including those by a number of notable Canadian composers, ensures that this double-disc offering has something for every listener. Whether it is Healey Willan’s Passacaglia and Fugue No. 2, Keith Jarrett’s Hymn of Remembrance, or César Franck’s legendary Chorale No.3, Larkin and the organ of St. Paul’s provide interpretations that rise above the technical challenges (both musical and material) presented by the pipe organ and enter the realm of the sublime.

With expertly crafted material spanning continents and centuries, this recording is highly recommended to all who have an interest in the organ, its history, and its music.

Matthew Whitfield

Paris, La Belle Époque
Robert Langevin; Margaret Kampmeier
Bridge Records 9555 (bridge-records.com)

Robert Langevin, a native of Sherbrooke, Quebec has served as associate principal flute of the Montreal Symphony and, since 2000, principal flute of the New York Philharmonic. In this CD, he and pianist Margaret Kampmeier scintillate in ten delectable works composed during France’s “Belle Époque” (1871-1914), when Paris, rebounding after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, again became a leader of European arts and culture.

The luxuriantly liquid melodies of Charles-Marie Widor’s Suite, Op.34, offer a musical counterpart to the entrancing beauties of Monét’s celebrated, willow-draped lily pond in Giverny. Jules Mouquet’s three-movement La Laité de Pan, Op.15, depicts the nature-god cavorting with shepherds, birds and nymphs. The second movement, Pan et les oiseaux, is especially ravishing, as “ancient” modal melodies float over harp-like piano plinks and arpeggios.

Gabriel Fauré’s Fantaisie, Op.79 and Morceau de concours, the latter a sight-reading test-piece for students at the Paris Conservatoire, are in Fauré’s familiar ambulatory, lyrically captivating style. George Enescu’s Cantabile et presto and Philippe Gaubert’s Nocturne et allegro scherzando were also composed for Conservatoire competitions. Both are very Fauré-like in character, as is Gaubert’s lovely Madrigal. Gaubert’s charming Fantaisie suggests the influence of Debussy, who closes this CD with two treasures of the flute repertoire, Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (arranged for flute and piano) and Syrinx for solo flute.

Throughout, Langevin’s flute seems a living thing, a “magic flute” with a mellifluous voice and amazing acrobatic agility, yet always exquisitely graceful. Bravissimo!

Michael Schuman

Ink
Merz Trio
Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0148 (brightshiny.ninja)

Subtlety is the overarching quality that violinist Brigid Coleridge, cellist Julia Yang and pianist Lee Donné – the Merz Trio – convey so luminously in the works of Vincent Scotto, Lili and Nadia Boulanger, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy interpersed between spoken words from Anna de Noailles, Jean Cocteau, Guillaume Apollinaire and other writers. All of this comes together seamlessly in the trio’s extraordinary debut disc, Ink.

The recitation often doesn’t raise its voice much above a whisper, and even when it does, the narratives and music are skillfully and intricately interwoven to maintain a certain expressive decorum. The trio alters spoken word, harmonies and structural elements with impressive restraint, heading in directions that surprise and captivate the ear.

Most of the movements in the pieces presented here have a somewhat programmatic basis, though it isn’t always necessary to know the storyline to appreciate the result. Moreover, both written word and musical notes spring off the page and rise in graceful, elliptical arcs pirouetting in balletic movement. Just when you think that things couldn’t get any better than Lili Boulanger’s D’un vieux jardin, it is Ravel’s Piano Trio in A Minor that unfolds in a series of ethereal gestures, emerging in a panoply of colours and harmonic implications. Throughout, the Merz perform with consummate artistry, blending superior control and tonal lucidity with a breathtaking sense of line and motion.

Raul da Gama

Piano Protagonists – Music for Piano & Orchestra
Orion Weiss; The Orchestra Now; Leon Botstein
Bridge Records 9547 (bridgerecords.com/collections/catalog-all)

All of the Piano Protagonists works are “firsts.” Erich Korngold’s Piano Concerto in C-sharp Major for One Hand (premiered 1924) was the first Paul Wittgenstein-commissioned left-hand piano concerto. It has one dramatic movement in the style of Korngold’s opera Die tote Stadt, more complex than his later Violin Concerto. Its tough-minded, ceremonial character was appropriate for the commissioner/pianist Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm in World War I. There are also tender-minded and mysterious moments in the middle section, Reigen (Round Dance – used ironically), Pianist Orion Weiss conveys these subtleties well. His technical mastery of massive octaves and chords, and of the lightning-fast burlesque section, never falters.

Chopin’s Variations on “La ci darem la mano” (from Mozart’s Don Giovanni) for piano and orchestra first brought him to public attention. The variations’ intensity and freedom of piano ornamentation and passagework were striking, prefiguring his piano concerts. I particularly like the runs with double notes in Variation I, and the
History of the Russian Piano Trio Vol.1
(Alabieiev; Glinka; Rubinstein); Vol. 2
(Tchaikovsky; Pabst); Vol. 3
(Rimsky-Korsakov; Cui; Borodin); Vol. 4
(Arensky; Taneyev); Vol. 5
(Dyck; Sternberg; Youferov)
The Brahms Trio
Naxos 8.574112-6 (naxosdirect.com/search/8574112-6)

Roger Knox

Most histories of Russian music are either written from a European perspective or with a Eurocentric bias in documenting events and achievements; something that you could hardly fault as the overarching influence – political and cultural – on Russian music came from outside its Western borders. But if the emancipation of the serfs was a political tipping point in Russian history and culture, it was the power of the so-called Big Five (Balakirev, Glinka, Cui, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov) that initiated the painting and sculpting of the significant landscape of a unique Russian musical character, quite apart from Western Europe; one which was later altered by the Russian Revolution, the horrors of Nazism, as well as the denouement of Communism.

The character of Russian music may be influenced by, but is unlike anything in, Western Europe. It is music significantly “younger” than that of Europe, phenomenally Eurasian in its cultural construct, and echoes with elegant and sometimes rustic flavours that are special to Slavic and Russian literary and other (folk) cultural traditions. All of this, though ancient in many respects, came into being just over 200 or so years ago. And so, just as Russia adopted its own script late in history, so did the music reflect these momentous changes, as if to bring to life its singular cultural topography. This is not only captured by the composers represented here by their work, but in large measure by this stellar ensemble: The Brahms Trio of Moscow.

Violinist Nikolai Sachenko, cellist Kirill Rodin and pianist Natalia Rubinstein bring Alabieiev’s lost work magically alive before turning to Glinka’s Trio pathétique in D Minor and Anton Rubinstein’s piano trio in G Minor with orchestral intensity, playing white-hot in ensemble and solo. Tchaikovsky’s piano trio in A minor and Paul Pabst’s in A major, are delivered with power and uncommon élan. Rimsky-Korsakov’s Piano Trio in C Minor, Cui’s À Argenteau, Op.40, No.2 and Borodin’s Piano Trio in D Major are all superbly textured and delivered with delicate instrumental colouring and balance.

Arensky’s beautiful Piano Trio No.1 in D Minor and Taneyev’s masterful Trio in D Major are played with shimmering delicacy. The Brahms Trio imparts a power and tragic stature to the monumental architecture of Dyck’s turbulent Piano Trio in C Minor. Sternberg’s Trio No.3 in C Major is played with effortless distinction and Youferov’s Piano Trio in C Minor, with debonair virtuosity and aristocratic grace. It is not only thrilling to listen to these five discs one after the other, but also seems poetic justice that such characterful music should be literally brought to life by this spectacular contemporary Russian trio.

Raul da Gama

Clifford Crawley – Moods and Miniatures
Maureen Volk; Christine Carter; Michelle Cheramy; Beverley Diamond
Centrediscs CMCCD 28621 (centrediscs.ca)

“Cliff was a master of the miniature,” writes pianist Maureen Volk, Memorial University professor emeritus. This CD presents 39 of them, most under two minutes, one only 17 seconds! It begins, though, with the three-movement, 13-minute iPieces, composed for Volk in 2010. iOpeners and iDeals feature Gershwin-esque bluesiness and dreamy nostalgia; iDears is a perky succession of different dance rhythms and a Gershwin-esque finishing flourish.

England-born Clifford Crawley (1929-2016) came to Canada in 1973 and taught at Queen’s University for 20 years. In 2002, he moved to St. John’s where his wife, pianist-ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond, joined the Memorial University faculty. Volk writes, “My colleagues” – including this CD’s flutist Michelle Cheramy and clarinetist Christine Carter – “and I met a soft-spoken and generous man with a ready smile and a sly sense of humour who soon became a good friend. We also discovered a composer who had written a trove of wonderful music that deserves to be more widely known.”

Listening to Toccatas and Twelve Preludes for solo piano, Ten a Penny Pieces for clarinet and piano, pieces-of-eight for flute, clarinet and piano and Kalamalka for piano-duet (Volk and Diamond), I was often reminded of Poulenc who, like Crawley, enjoyed juxtaposing dancehall and circus music with poignant, melancholic lyricism. Crawley’s playful waltz, tango, polka and foxtrot rhythms, combined with his innate melodic gift, created music that was surely gladdening to compose and, for this listener, definitely gladdening to hear.

Michael Schulman

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thewholenote.com
Linda Catlin Smith – Ballad
Another Timbre at176 (anothertimbre.com)

Barbara Monk Feldman – Verses
GBSR Duo with Mira Benjamin
Another Timbre at177 (anothertimbre.com)

► New discs from two Canadian composers – Linda Catlin Smith and Barbara Monk Feldman – and both are standouts. They are the latest releases in the invaluable Canadian Composers Series from Another Timbre. As we’ve come to expect from this innovative British label, the sound is stellar and the performances, by some of Britain’s top contemporary music specialists, are consistently terrific. As well, there are some significant recording premieres here.

Like many composers on Another Timbre’s roster, Smith and Monk Feldman engage directly with 20th-century game-changers John Cage and Morton Feldman, so tempos are slow, dynamics are subdued and textures are sparse. But Smith and Monk Feldman have distinctively personal voices. Smith, a dynamic presence on the Toronto new music scene, has developed an ardent international dynamic presence on the Toronto new music scene, has developed an ardent international

Monk Feldman’s realm extends from the enchanted vistas of Duo for Piano and Percussion and the eerie mists of Verses for Vibraphone to the uplifting chorale-like contours of Clear Edge for solo piano. The I And Thou, from 1988, is dedicated to Monk Feldman’s teacher and husband, Morton Feldman, who had died the previous year. Here she weaves a fabric of luminous stillness. Yet beneath the shimmering surface an uneasy presence stirs, unarticulated but palpable, especially with pianist Swan Rhys’s sensitivity to the mood of longing that suffuses this moving work.

Monk Feldman has written that The Northern Shore, a trio for percussion, piano, and violin, takes inspiration from the landscape of the Gaspé region of Quebec. Reflecting such an immense expanse, this work is the longest here. And it covers a vast expressive territory, from precisely shaped and positioned tones to an unexpectedly effulgent passage of delicate piano chords marked “freely”. The responsiveness of percussionist George Barton and pianist Rhys is beautifully matched by the imaginative palette of colours from Canadian violinist Mira Benjamin (a member of Apartment House).

Pamela Margles

Music of François Tousignant
Myriam Leblanc; Catherine St-Arnaud; Vincent Ranallo; Ensemble Paramirabo
Centrediscs CMCCDD 28821
(cmccanada.org/shop/cmccd-28821)


The first disc features five earlier compositions. Lyrical colourful solo Conflicts (1973) has artistic director/flutist Jeffrey Stonehouse musically perform the long meditative phrases with alternating high and lower pitches. It is also an introduction to Tousignant’s widespread compositional tool of attention-grabbing silent breaks between phrases. Quatre incantations (1974) is another easy-to-listen-to early work, with wide-ranging soprano Myriam Leblanc vocals set to Tousignant text answering pianist Pamela Reimer’s clear melodies and well-placed occasional atonalities. La muse venue (1975), set to a Charles Baudelaire text, is an intelligently contemplated atonal yet never dense work, featuring cello (Viviana Gosselin) and flute (Stonehouse) plucks, detached notes, and trills and slides, magnetic tape effects (Tousignant) and baritone Vincent Ranallo’s low mysterious singing and closing shining laughter. More atonality and large silent breaks in the alternating crashing and reflective piece Anatoile, sans paroles (1982) for cello and piano. Reimer’s virtuosic solo performance Sonate pour clavecin (1983) features a multitude of contemporary harpsichord effects.

The second album features three later works. Virtuosic contemporary Histoire (1984) opens with Reimer’s contemplative piano detached notes and Charlotte Layec’s held, reflective, clarinet notes. Shifts in mood, like loud piano ringing notes and clarinet swells and changes in articulation, create a slow, sad and occasional explosive mood. Etude for Shajol No.3 (1986) is set to a Rainer Maria Rilke poem. Violinist Hubert Brizard and soprano Catherine St-Arnaud perform this very contemporary piece with atonalities, string vibrations, vocal high held notes and spoken words, and more Tousignant compelling “what’s next” silences between phrases. The closing Trois paysages proustiens (1987) is considered Tousignant’s most famous work – set to words by Marcel Proust. Reimer and St-Arnaud are joined by percussionist David Therrien Brongo. Longer abstract percussion and piano atonalities, spoken/sung vocals, shorter mood section and silent breaks abound.

Understandably, Tousignant did not compose during his years as the music critic. His output reflects a composer with modern atonal technique, clear delicate lyrical scoring and respect for the written word.

Tilina Kilk

Robert Lemay – Cinq Études for Alto Saxophone
Jean-François Guay
Domine, spine CMCCCT 11621
(cmccanada.org/shop/cd-cmccct-11621)

► Our world of streaming media has a few benefits including how the creation and distribution of music projects is less expensive and simpler than a decade or two ago. This ease of production makes niche products more accessible and an excellent example is Cinq études for alto saxophone by Robert Lemay (commissioned and exquisitely performed by Jean-François Guay).

The five movements total just 18 minutes and Cinq études is released as a stand-alone digital offering. While Cinq études works as a concert piece, its unique purpose is to demonstrate different playing techniques, including double and triple tonguing, multiphonics, altissimo, rapid register changes and subtones. These techniques are heard in most contemporary saxophone works, but can pass by so quickly we may miss identifying them. Double ou triplez la mise is a great demonstration of double and triple tonguing which Guay performs cleanly and with verve, while Additions &
multiplications has some subtle and quiet melodic lines leading into some excellent multiphonic work.

The liner notes state: “Each piece is a tribute to a great saxophonist/pedagogue: Marcel Mule, Jean-Marie Londeix, Eugene Rousseau, Frederick Hemke and Daniel Defafayet.” I am surprised the altissimo section is not dedicated to Sigurd M. Rascher whose Top Tones for the Saxophone (which I purchased decades ago) is a standard in saxophone literature. This small quibble aside, Cinq études is worth a listen for its inventive and musical demonstration of multiple techniques.

Ted Parkinson

Steve Reich

Nexus; Sō Percussion

Nexus 11042 (nexuspercussion.com)

▶ A collaboration between two leading percussion groups, veteran Toronto-based Nexus and younger-generation New York-based Sō Percussion, this album features four percussion-centred scores by American composer Steve Reich.

Reich’s music is generally characterized by repetition, canons, slow harmonic changes and, for a time, the adoption of selected musical notions from West Africa and Indonesia. By the mid-1960s Reich sought to create music in which his compositional process was clearly discernible by the audience in the music itself. From 1965 to 1971, his style was dominated by a process called “phasing,” a kind of Escher-like perceptual magic where incremental changes to the music being performed are revealed to the listener in real time.

All those compositional and performative approaches deeply colour the brilliantly performed music on this album: Clapping Music (1972), Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ (1973), Mallet Phase (2016), based on Piano Phase (1967), and Quartet (2019). The first three, controversial in their day, have become contemporary standards. Quartet, a jazz-inflected work scored for two vibraphones and two pianos, is an outlier in this program. Reich called it “one of the more complex [pieces] I have composed.” While frequently shifting key and continuity by restlessly changing metres, the outer sections maintain a pulsed momentum, a recognizably link to Reich’s earlier compositions. In stark contrast, the middle slow movement introduces chordal harmonies unusual in his music, evoking a peaceful, pensive mood.

This is Nexus’ 31st commercial album release – and a resounding way to celebrate both its 50th anniversary and its deep and enduring relationship with Reich.

Andrew Timar

Ofer Pelz – Trinité

Meitar Ensemble; Quatuor Ardeo

New Focus Recordings FCR303 (newfocusrecordings.com)

▶ Intricate prepared-piano ricochets and barbed ensemble alchemy converge to permeate the Meitar Ensemble’s latest release – a portrait of music by Montreal-based Israeli composer Ofer Pelz.

The five pieces on the disc represent an eight-year collaboration between the composer and the virtuosic ensemble.

Pelz’s clear and punctuated sound world is well suited for the bravura and precision of intent capable by the Meitar musicians. The first work, Backward inductions, for augmented piano, evokes a process whereby reverse reasoning achieves a sequence of optimal actions. This dynamic music produces fluidity through compartmentalized yet spinning lines and tempestuous interuptions. A piece titled Convergence for alto flute and electronics is a wondrous barrage of granulated tinctures that envelopes the ear and the mind. The chamber work, marchons, marchons, performed in Toronto when New Music Concerts presented Meitar at the Music Gallery in 2017, offers delicate and distant conversations spoken in metallic whispers. Finally, a piece written in two movements for flute, prepared piano and amplified string quartet titled Blanc sur Blanc begins with a dance-like mysteriousness followed by wind-swept panorama.

The confident nature of Pelz’s music is propelled forward by what is clearly a process-oriented approach – yet this attribute also contains a wealth of originality and expression. The music and performances on this release are as compelling as they are refreshing, Bravo to all.

Adam Scime

Fantasy – Oppens plays Kaminsky

Ursula Oppens; Jerome Lowenthal; Cassatt String Quartet; Arizona State University Orchestra; Jeffrey Meyer

Cedille CDR 90000 202 (cedillerecords.org)

▶ Titan of the contemporary keyboard, Ursula Oppens is a rarity among artists living today. She is the stalwart bearer of a mid-century musical torch that apparently burns eternal. How fortunate we are to have such musicians as Oppens still making music with fortitude, passion and tireless faith.

A most recent episode for Oppens has been a record made with the Cassatt Quartet and Arizona State University Orchestra showcasing music of American composer Laura Kaminsky. This disc, themed “Oppens Plays Kaminsky” seems a testament of friendship (these two impressive musicians have been longtime pals). Presently, they come together in a variety of idioms to demonstrate Kaminsky’s portfolio in a traversal of quartet, fantasy and concerto.

Despite evocative titles such as Maelstrom, and…, or Hurting, Still, the music isn’t always convincingly first rate. Nevertheless, there are moments of tunefulness and poetry. The affinity between Oppens and Kaminsky radiates throughout, leaving a palpable sense of fellowship and mutual joy amongst colleagues.

Oppens wields her piano at the album’s centre, steering a varied vessel with consistent skill and surety. Even in brief piano passages, as she peeks out from dense ensemble material, Oppens’ artistry sings unmistakably. The 20-minute solo Fantasy (2010) should be considered a tour de force in and of itself. When it comes to a career such as Oppens’,
dedication and staying power carry the day. May she always urge us to listen close and listen well, ever compelling our ears toward the future.

Adam Sherkin

Richard Danielpour – An American Mosaic
Simone Dinnerstein
Supertrain Records 025 SR
(richard-danielpour.com)

The ever-engaging American pianist, Simone Dinnerstein, has been rather active during the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on, in lockdowns last spring, she retreated into studio – inspired by nourishing walks through Brooklyn’s Green-Wood Cemetery – to lay down some favourably works by Schubert and Philip Glass. (See my review of the album A Character of Quiet, in the October 2020 issue of The WholeNote.) She has now embarked on an attractive new project with Grammy Award-winning composer, Richard Danielpour: an album of pieces written expressly for her. This is a sequence of 15 miniatures, each offering comfort and musical solace during the difficult pandemic months of 2020 and 2021. The disc is capped by three arrangementsစားသျှ့သဘော

À Claude
Benedetto Boccuzzi
DiG Classic DCTT111
(nxosdirect.com/search/8054726141112)

Twentieth-century piano-repertoire specialist, Benedetto Boccuzzi (b. 1950), is not only a concert pianist but also a composer, improviser and teacher. He regularly performs in Italy and conducts workshops on contemporary piano repertoire, extending techniques and improvisation. À Claude, Boccuzzi’s debut album, is an eclectic keyboard feast, featuring works by Claude Debussy, George Crumb, Toru Takemitsu, Olivier Messiaen, Diana Rotaru and Boccuzzi himself. The programmatic conceto of the album pays homage to Debussy, before moving on to a selection of the French maître’s musical heirs.

Beginning with three miniatures from Debussy’s Images: Cloches à travers les feuilles; Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut; and Poissons d’or (1907); the album sets a relaxed, impressionistic atmosphere inviting the listener to let imagination roam. Boccuzzi then very effectively renders six of American composer George Crumb’s texture- and allusion-rich Makrokosmos I (1972-1973). This collection of aphoristic piano pieces describes the temperaments of the houses of the zodiac, famously using an encyclopedic range of colouristic effects including plucking the strings, producing massive tone clusters, coaxing overtones from depressed keys not played and directly quoting music of composers such as Chopin.

Three pieces of the Vingt regards sur l’enfant-Jésus (1944) by French composer Messiaen receive a muscular performance here, though sections of Regard de la Vierge exude a poignant cantabile quality. Particularly admirable is Boccuzzi’s precise rendering of the demanding birdcall references throughout.

Andrew Timar

Blow – Wind Quintets by Donatoni, Salonen & Lash
The City of Tomorrow
New Focus Recordings FCR294
(newfocusrecordings.com)

Part way through the sixth movement of Leander and Hero (2015) by Hannah Lash, a ghostly flute-like voice enters the texture. As the liner notes reveal, the sound is one player blowing across the open mouth of another. When it comes to unusual directions from composers, I apparently have neither seen nor heard it all. This new release, from the spectacularly capable woodwind quintet The City of Tomorrow, delights and amazes.

Put aside that in the current circumstances this would simply be an unacceptable breach of personal safety for both performers, the intimacy of the act demands trust and care, to say nothing of technical control of “embouchure” and “instrument.” It wouldn’t surprise me to learn the effect was overdubbed onto the track, but I’m willing to bet the players didn’t need to. Given how the rest of this disc is presented with complete assurance and musicality, a little thing like playing your colleague’s head like a jug in a jug band would hardly be beyond them.

The title track, Franco Donatoni’s stutter-stepping Blow (2000), provides the players an opportunity to show off more conventional technical skills. I love his music, it’s always full of swing and fire, and this is no exception. The group’s sound is crisp, tart and sweet, like a perfect fall apple.

Esa-Pekka Salonen closes things with Memoria (2003), music reworked partly from unpublished material, composed over a period of 20 years, and compiled to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra, a group he co-founded. Angst-y Finnish melancholia suits the group to a tee.

Max Christie

Arnold Griller – Orchestral Music, Volume Three
Kamila Bydlowska; Matilda Lloyd; Liepaja Symphony Orchestra; Paul Mann
Toccata Classics TOCC0590
(nxosdirect.com/search/tocc0590)

In 1955, while studying composition with Darius Milhaud, Arnold Griller (b.1937 in London, England) wrote his 13-minute, Coplandesque Concerto Grosso for strings, filled with long-lined, brooding melodies. Griller’s father Sidney was first violin of the renowned Griller Quartet but, writes Douglas Finch, “Griller chose to withdraw from the musical maelstrom into which he was born and for most of his adult life has remained in relative seclusion.” Now living in a small Cornwall village, Griller even spent 25 years teaching ESL in Winnipeg!

Three recent (2017-2018) works, each over 20 minutes, variously utilize what conductor Paul Mann calls “the Griller gamelan” – harp, xylophone, marimba, celesta, glockenspiel and harpsichord.

Griller’s Violin Concerto memorializes Yoedid Tekle, Toccata Classics founder/CEO Martin Anderson’s partner, cancer victim at 37. The dark-hued orchestra, lacking violins, grows...
Now Pronouncing Caity Gyorgy
Independent (caitygyorgy.bandcamp.com)

Previously released by Bridge, Symphony No.3 “Dream Catcher” is a two-movement orchestral extravaganza conducted by Scott Yoo. The loud percussive start transforms into a tonal, sweet-dream string section. In the second movement, faster birdlike horn trilling leads to full-steam-ahead virtuosic orchestral multi-rhymic chase music. Catch this great Ruders sound release!!

**Tiina Kiik**

**Piazzolla Cien Años (100 Years 1921-2021)**

Juanjo Mosalini; Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston; Gisèle Ben-Dor

Centaur Records CRC 3844 (giselleben-dor.com)

This world premiere recording of the seven-movement Sound and Simplicity (2018) concerto is performed by Danish accordionist Bjarke Mogensen and the Odense Symfoniorkester; Sebastian Lang-Lessing; Scott Yoo

Bridge Records 9553 (bridgerecords.com/collections/catalog-all)

While Piazzolla originated his two-movement Concerto for Bandoneon (1979) as a two-movement, true-to-his-style Aconcagua, Concerto for Bandoneon (1979) a three-movement, free-to-his-style work, featuring rhythmic symphonic grooves, lyrical bandoneon solos with fast trills and virtuosic lines, and tight soloist and orchestra interchanges creating a danceable yet concert-hall classical-flavoured rendition performed perfectly by all concerned.

Four world premiere recordings scored for bandoneon and orchestra follow. Two Mosalini single-movement original compositions incorporate Piazzolla influences with popular/classical touches in his own soundscapes. Tomá, Tocá (Take It, Play It) is faster with repeated notes and virtuosic flourishes. Cien Años (One Hundred Years) combines tango elements with nostalgic bandoneon melodies, long phrases and bright high pitches. Two Piazzolla works arranged by Mosalini follow. Originally in four movements, The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires is presented as one long, connected work. Piazzolla purists will respect this for its true-to-style playing. Shifts in tempos, grooves and moods, the deep cello lines, florid fast bandoneon and orchestra accompaniments are amazing, ranging from danceable and fun to serious and slow. In the closer, Piazzolla’s popular Libertango, technically challenging solos now alternate with colourful orchestra lead lines above bandoneon rhythmic accents. Fantastic performances and great music, what more could we want?

**Tiina Kiik**

**Flicker Down**

Waxwing

Songlines SGL1633-2 (songlines.com)

**JAZZ AND IMPROVISATION**

Formed in 2007, Waxwing is a co-led trio created by three veterans of the Vancouver music scene: Tony Wilson on saxophone, Peggy Lee on cello and Jon Bentley on saxophones. Flicker Down is the third album from this energetic group: not just veterans of the busy Vancouver scene where they are based, individually these three players collaborate in dozens of other musical combinations from folk to jazz to classical around North America.
and beyond. When they reunite, each brings their best in not only their playing experience, but as equal composers and co-leaders. The result of this fine balance is exquisitely produced on this album. Already a huge fan of this trio, and though their first two albums were thoroughly enjoyable, Flicker Down is a whole other listening experience.

As improvisers, the group keeps their freshness alive with a freedom of expression and a nuanced sense of timing that decades of experience has only heightened. With several manipulated improvisations added to some tracks, this album has a more composed feel but manages to retain the creative freedom and melodic flow that the group is revered for. As cultural travellers, there is a flavour of world music mixed with jazz, folk and contemporary composition, sublimely polished with fine chamber playing. With 18 beautiful tracks there is a plethora of favourites. Montbretia Gates (1’49”), featuring guest flutist Miranda Clingwall, is one of many gems. The decisiveness of Highway of Tears – based on lyrics that concern the murder of Indigenous women – avoids sentimentality and keeps clear the social messaging. Each player’s technical execution is sheer perfection; gorgeously subtle mixing and production from Bentley only raises the bar. 

**Cheryl Ockrant**

**Sings & Plays**

**Jonathan Bauer**

**Slammin’ Media**

(jonathanbauermusic.com)

▶ Renowned Canadian-born, New Orleans-based trumpeter Jonathan Bauer is exposing a new artistic side on this newest release – a smooth tenor voice that both rivals and adds to his talents on the horn. Featuring well-known musicians such as Mike Clement, Gerald Watkins Jr. and Ryan Hansen, this sultry and classy album is one that any jazz lover would want in their collection. The selection of songs by classics, ranging from Henry Mancini to George Gershwin, does a great job of not only showcasing Bauer’s skills as a leader, trumpeter and now as a vocalist, but also the superb talents of the all-star lineup that backs him.

Sonorous, silky horn melodies lead the listener through staples of the genre like Days of Wine and Roses and Love is Here to Stay. For those that are familiar with the musician, the unique dark and buttery tone that he conjures out of the trumpet, almost reminiscent of the flugelhorn, is back in full force throughout the record. What makes Bauer stand out even more is the way that the happiness and bliss he pours into his instrument clearly translates into his vocals, his voice having the same soaring, joyous quality that the trumpet melodies invoke. The album is a fabulous introduction to this side of the famed artist’s talents and leaves the listener excited to hear more, both instrumentally and vocally, in the future.

**Kati Kiilaspea**

**You Don’t Know What Love Is**

**Angela Wrigley Trio**

**Cellar Music CM051920 (cellarlive.com)**

▶ On her impressive debut offering, Alberta chanteuse, pianist and composer Angela Wrigley has come forth with a delightful recording that incorporates funky, horn-infused original compositions with tasteful standards, reimagined for a contemporary audience. Joined by her fine trio members, Derek Stoll (bass/piano/organ) and Dave Lake on drums, Wrigley also welcomed percussionist Bob Fenske, saxophonist Cory Weeds, trumpeter Vince Mai and trombonist Rod Murray. This clever and appealing project was also produced by long-time jazz-focused record-label visionary Scott Morin and master saxophonist, producer, recording label owner and jazz impresario, Weeds.

The opening salvo, How Did I Get Here, is a funky original composition, in which Wrigley’s warm and soulful pipes wind themselves around this siren song of compelling lyric and melody. Mai infuses the arrangement with both sexy muted trumpet and a large, mouth-pieced Latin sound. Another intriguing original track is Crazy Fool – a nostalgia-tinged tip of the hat to Tower of Power and other funky horn/vocal bands of the 70s and 80s. Stoll’s classic Fender Rhodes sound is as refreshing as it was back in the day.

Other standouts include Hoagy Carmichael’s moving I Get Along Without You Very Well, in which Wrigley utilizes her sweet, vulnerable upper register, while Weeds cries through his horn in delicate counterpoint; also a bluesy, B3-infused Lover Man; the superb title track, featuring pristine vocals and Stoll’s eloquent piano work; and finally Drive, where composition, performance and arrangement merge in perfect symmetry. This CD is a beautifully constructed first release that clearly establishes this talented new artist’s identity and sound.

**Lesley Mitchell-Clarke**

**Live**

**John MacMurchy; Dan Ionescu**

**Independent**

(johnmacmurchy.bandcamp.com)

▶ Performing music with friends in the intimacy of a celebrated studio appears to be among the greatest joys of a practicing musician. This is certainly demonstrated by woodwinds specialist John MacMurchy and guitarist Dan Ionescu. Live (at the Canterbury Music Company) allows the two musicians to probe the dark and light recesses of the art of the duo; to enter private worlds in which sadness and joy, and despair and hope, are shared in the most striking terms.

Both MacMurchy and Ionescu express their virtuosity and evoke dramatic and psychological atmospheres in a manner so alive that the musicians seem to be looking over their shoulders, pursuing – and being pursued by – one another, each with a sense of urgency and anticipation marked by rhythm and colour. The idea of interpreting standards – extended to cover the musical topography of Brazil – is central to this disc. However, it is also clear that this is an ode to songfulness. The apogee of this record may be Ionescu’s and MacMurchy’s exquisite composition For the Love of Song. 

MacMurchy’s smoky articulation is beautifully suited to the woody tones of the clarinet, and to I’m Old Fashioned, with which he opens the disc. The warmth of his playing, breathy phrasing and softly lingering vibrato, extends to the tenor saxophone as well. Meanwhile Ionescu proves to be a perfect musical partner, his tone redolent of a luminosity that marks his single-note lines and chordal playing.

**Concert Note:** The John MacMurchy Quintet is scheduled to perform at the Jazz Bistro on Thursday October 21.

**Raul da Gama**

**L’Impact du silence**

**Francois Bourassa**

**Effendi Records FND162 (francoisbourassa.com)**

▶ An entire album of solo piano music truly brings listeners into the concept that the pianist is creating. From Art Tatum to Fats Waller, to the bebop stylings of Bud Powell and rhythmically advanced soundscapes fashioned by Lennie Tristano, through Bill Evans,
Herbie Hancock, Richie Beirach and count- less others, the unifying thread throughout the history of jazz piano is creating one’s own harmonic/ rhythmic/ melodic world.

François Bourassa brings us into his world with l’Impact du silence, and it is a compelling one to experience even at its most avant-garde. I had written all of the preceding text while listening to the album but having not yet read it’s liner notes. The English notes are penned by master pianist Ethan Iverson, who mentions Maurice Ravel and Paul Bley in his description of the music. Two more examples of the kinds of material Bourassa’s release brings to mind, and unique ones which I had not thought of.

From Small Head, the opening track, where we’re met with a drone-type harmony in the key of C. Bourassa brings us into a space that is uniquely listenable while also being avant-garde. The phenomenon that makes this such a compelling album is one I see more often in live performance than in recorded music, which is that anything presented expertly will captivate an audience more than any attempt to “sell out.” The level of expertise and heart behind each chord and arpeggio, regardless of how abstract, make this recording down-right accessible, without compromising its uniqueness.

Sam Dickinson

Twisting Ways
Sarah Slean; Karly Epp; Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra
Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra WJOCDO0005 (winnipegjazzorchestra.com)

This Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra recording has been an exciting assignment to review, as it features a core of local musicians along-side guests from Montreal, Toronto, New York, and the work of Liverpool UK conductor, baritone and poet, Lee Tsang. For years I have known the work of Philippe Côté, David Braud, Mike Murley and Stephan Bauer, the four guests from this side of the Atlantic. It is also always a pleasure to write about Winnipeg, which I described in a December review for The WholeNote as having “a long thriving music scene, unfairly receiving less attention than other large Canadian cities’ communities”. This still holds true of the aforementioned midwestern metropolis, but ideally large projects like Twisting Ways and its myriad out-of-town guests will help bring this vibrant arts community more of the notoriety it deserves.

Despite having spent ample time visiting friends, family and fellow jazz musicians in Winnipeg, I was aware of surprisingly few names on this project’s personnel list. This is rather refreshing, given the consummate professionalism heard here. Vocalists Sarah Slean and Karly Epp breathe beautiful life into the often-challenging melodies they are presented with and the WJO’s excellent rhythm section makes even the most intricate of grooves sound accessible. The four tracks that make up the Twisting Ways suite are some of my favourites on the album, but Lydian Sky and Fleur Variation 3, are far from disappointing as well.

Sam Dickinson

The Bright Side
Joel Frahm; Dan Loomis; Ernesto Cervini
Anzic Records ANZ-0068 (joelfrahm.com)

I first heard the outstanding, saxophone virtuoso Joel Frahm over ten years ago at New York’s Jazz Standard (sadly, a now-shuttered COVID casualty), and have since made a point of catching him in Toronto over the years, when he’s often been featured in drummer Ernesto Cervini’s band, Tuboprop. Frahm’s latest project and quartet album, The Bright Side, brings him and Cervini together again, along with bassist Dan Loomis (also a Tuboprop member). Fun fact: the trio arose out of a U of T jazz masterclass. These three masterful musicians are longtime musical friends and colleagues, and their empathetic, polished, “well-oiled machine-ness” is evident on each of the ten original tracks; seven are penned by Frahm, two by Loomis and one by Cervini.

Frahm offers three dedications on the album: the high energy Blow Poppa Joe is for Joe Henderson; Benny Golson is honoured in the cool and upbeat Thinking of Benny (where I’m sure I heard a nod to The Andy Griffith Show theme song); Omer’s World is a funky homage to the great Israeli jazz bassist Omer Avital. As for Frahm’s swinging and inventive title track, its inspiration was Lou Reed’s Walk on the Wild Side.

Loomis’ Silk Road is a moody and sensual track, with Frahm on soprano sax. And The Beautiful Mystery by Cervini is a hauntingly pensive and evocative ballad, showcasing the emotion and heart these stellar musicians bring to the table.

Here’s hoping we’ll hear more from Frahm in the chordless trio format!

Sharna Searle

Idiom
Anna Webber
Pi Recordings Pi89 (pirecordings.com/ albums/idiom/)

Anna Webber extends her creative trajectory with this two-CD set, exploring a critical issue arising between her roles as improviser and composer: “While as an improviser I was interested in extended techniques and in the saxophone as a creator of ‘sound’ and not just ‘pitch,’ my compositional world was limited to the latter. For her Idiom series, each composition is based on an “extended technique” from her improvisatory practice, whether circular breathing (for continuous sound), multiphonics (compound sounds) or audibly percussive fingering.

Disc One presents her longstanding Simple Trio with pianist Matt Mitchell and percussionist John Hollenbeck. That apparent economy of means testifies to Webber’s imaginative powers, demonstrating an expanding palette, from the percussive repetition of a short flute motif in Idiom I to the concluding Idiom III, a demonstration of the daunting intensity and complexity a trio might achieve as her repeating multiphononic phrase is matched to corresponding piano and drum parts, the tension ultimately breaking into free improvisation.

Disc Two presents the 62-minute Idiom VI, its six movements and four interludes performed by a 12-member ensemble of strings, winds, percussion and synthesizer, alive with distinguished improvisers and conducted by Eric Wubbels. Creating moods from subtle lyricism to raw expressionism, and some unnameable compounds, Webber fuses unusual timbres in fresh, sometimes unidentifiable ways, including loose-lipped trombone explosions, tamboura-like drones and similarly unlikely massed police whistle blasts. Along with Webber’s own presence on flute and tenor saxophone, trumpeter Adam O’Farrill, violinist Erica Dicker and contrabass clarinetist Yuma Uesaka make significant solo contributions to one of 2021’s most notable releases.

Stuart Broomer

The Long Game
Jacqui Naylor
Ruby Star Records RSR-011 (jaccuinalyzer.com)

World-renowned native- Californian jazz vocalist Jacqui Naylor has an interesting approach to the aforementioned genre. She loves the classics but definitely brings a modern touch into her music and this interesting combination couldn’t be more apparent on her newest, not to mention 11th, studio album. Featuring music by rock and pop greats such as Coldplay, David Bowie and Peter Gabriel, Naylor has lent her own unique touch to each of these songs; effectively jazzifying them in a very pleasant and listenable way. Sprinkled amongst these covers are originals penned by the diva herself, a couple of which are co-written by talented pianist Art Khu.

One piece that immediately stands out
is Coldplay’s Fix You; Naylor’s smooth alto vocals in combination with a flowing piano melody and a subtle but poignant bass line make the song take on a slightly more melancholy and softer tone than the original version. Naylor’s own I’ll Be Loving You pops out; a Latin-flavoured tune that does a great job of not only showcasing another side of her musical taste but also gets the listener grooving along in their seat. A truly outstanding track is Bowie’s Space Oddity, where a mellow piano line and an almost counter melody played on upright bass over-laid by chords on the Fender Rhodes make for a unique flavour given to the classic song.

Kati Killaspea

All or Nothing
Trineice Robinson
4RM 4RM-20210806 (trineicerobinson.com)

Trineice Robinson has established herself as an esteemed educator and author. Now with the release of her long-awaited debut she’s finally getting the chance to establish herself as a vocalist, telling her story and journey through music. One of Robinson’s missions as an educator has been to bring back to the forefront Black music traditions that have fallen to the background within the vocal music realm and this album does a fantastic job at not only showcasing Black jazz, soul and R&B artists who have been instrumental in advancing those genres but also shining a spotlight on current famed musicians, with a renowned lineup of all Black artists in her backing band.

Robinson’s soulful and powerful vocals take us on a journey through multi-genre staples such as Footprints by Wayne Shorter, What’s Going On by Marvin Gaye and You Know Who I Mean You by Thelonious Monk, while adding a unique flavour to each piece, making them her own. Interspersed within these tributes are original compositions, of note being the gospel-inspired piece Let It Shine, in which her own daughters lend their voices, creating a humble and heartwarming whole. Robinson skilfully crosses genres throughout the album, creating a delicious jambalaya reflecting what she states about finding her own place within the musical realm, “when you understand how ingredients are used in a dish, you can create whatever dish you want.” All in all, a strong and promising debut album.

Kati Killaspea

Nate Wooley – Mutual Aid Music
Nate Wooley; Joshua Modney; Ingrid Laubrock; Mariel Roberts; Matt Moran; Russell Greenberg; Sylvie Courvoisier; Cory Smythe

Pleasure of the Text Records POTTR1308 (pleasureofthetext.com)

Trumpeter, composer, conceptualist, Nate Wooley is a major figure in current free jazz and improvised music, consistently focused on issues of meaning. This latest work is an outgrowth of Battle Pieces, a quartet project begun in 2014 in which one member acts as improvising soloist while the other members choose from Wooley’s supplied materials to develop the work. Mutual Aid Music extends this method for surmounting the usual alternatives of composition/improvisation, doubling the quartet with four more musicians chosen from the New York contemporary music community.

The eight musicians play eight “concertos” in each, one musician has a primary score; one improvises throughout, based on the other seven’s input; others freely adapt secondary materials that have been individually assigned. Surrmuting Wooley’s complex methodology is a singular purpose: “it asks the musicians... to ask themselves, in each moment, how that gift will affect the community (ensemble) of which they are currently a member.” Wooley the conceptualist has effectively made each musician responsible for a work’s outcome in how they choose to make each transaction collectively meaningful.

Clearly the work depends on its community of stellar musicians – saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, pianists Sylvie Courvoisier and Cory Smythe, percussionists Matt Moran and Russell Greenberg, violinist Joshua Modney and cellist Mariel Roberts – but the results are always remarkable, sometimes astonishing, everyone engaged in making the richest, most expressive, organized and communicative music possible. Beyond category in its structure and immediacy, this feels as much like a success for listeners as the composer and ensemble.

Ted Parkinson

Prayerful Thoughts (covid time improvisations)
Paul Pacanowski
Independent (paulpacanowski.com)

Polish born Toronto-based multi-instrumentalist jazz/classical performer/composer Paul Pacanowski is inspirational in his 57-minute solo “covid-time improvisations.” Home recording has become more popular for musicians during COVID. As he writes on the CD cover, he would play improvs in his basement studio late at night to lift his COVID-time spirits until it “dawned” on him to record his work at home. He plays all the instruments in eight tracks/sections, each introduced by a short musical wave-like undulation, all joined together as one long work.

Pacanowski’s piano expertise drives the improvisations. Calming, repetitive 1. undulation leads to reflective jazz-flavoured slow 2. piano with long phrases, shifting tonalities, conversational high and low pitch runs and live sessions. This album is made even more poignant by the deaths of both musicians at relatively young ages; Mulgrew Miller was 57 when he died of a stroke in 2013 and Roy Hargrove was only 49 when he passed away in 2018. Fortunately for jazz history and for us, these two concerts (Kaufman Music Center, New York, January 15, 2006 and Lafayette College, Easton PA, November 9, 2007) were recorded by Hargrove’s manager, Larry Clothier. The recordings have now been released by Resonance Records in a limited edition LP format and as a two-CD set. The package includes a thick booklet containing an essay on the musicians and these two concerts, several colour photos and interviews and statements by several prominent jazz musicians.

Hargrove can be bright and crisp with a Miles Davis feel, but also soulful and he plays bop and post-bop lines which makes him the complete jazz trumpet player. Miller has a more subtle style which has many influences (including Oscar Peterson who inspired him to learn jazz). He can play a solid yet sophisticated accompaniment, perform an elegant solo with complex lines that seem effortless, and add some angular blues licks on Monk’s Tune. These two concerts are even more impressive because although Hargrove and Miller had played together in the past, this was their first (and second) time performing as a duet and the concerts were put together very quickly (but of course, that’s the jazz thing to do). They sound sophisticated and completely at ease with each other, exchanging ideas, joking around in tunes like Funki Mama, and generally paying an inspired homage to the tradition.

In Harmony
Roy Hargrove; Mulgrew Miller
Resonance Records HCD-2060 (resonancerecords.org)

In Harmony is a gorgeous time capsule displaying two performers at the top of their game and providing a sublime reading of jazz standards in two intimate
detached moments. From calm to faster intense moments, a shift to major tonality closer to the end creates a happier hopeful feel of COVID ending. Two other piano-only tracks are included.

Pacanowski takes a memorable musical leap to improvise with himself playing on other instruments. In 8. flute/piano, he breathes life into dramatic high, held-flute notes, detached sections and energetic, almost new-music sounds, as his piano mimics and supports in modern jazz at its very best. More jazz with a brief atonal section in alto saxophone and piano stylings in 14. alto sax/piano. He plays clarinet, keys and piano elsewhere.

Pacanowski’s well-thought-out “home-made” jazzy compositions and improvisations make for a great release to listen to, both upfront and as background music.

Tiina Kilk

Koki Solo
Natsuki Tamura
Libra Records 101-066 (librarecords.com)

► Executive produced by the incomparable Satoko Fujii and recorded in Natsuki Tamura’s own home, Koki Solo is a collection of improvisations that equally showcase Tamura’s decades of playing experience and his boundless curiosity. He breaks with conventions of instrumentation and form with admirable enthusiasm and assurance. Beyond his typical innovations on the trumpet, he also experiments with piano, voice and even cookware from his kitchen.

While he admittedly doesn’t have anywhere near the same mastery on instruments other than trumpet, it doesn’t stop him from doing amazing work. For example, during his piano improvising on Bora, Tamura’s patient drone in his left hand engages in compelling dialogues with both the open melodicism of his right hand and his arresting vocal exclamations. Similarly, on Karugamo, the detailed, textural tour through the contents of his kitchen gradually evolves into a lyrical call-and-response with his forcefully enunciated syllables.

Regardless of the various unfamiliar waters Tamura dips his toes into, he is the definition of a master improviser, and that translates to everything he does. Not a single phrase he plays or utters is an afterthought, or a throw-away. Every note is imbued with feeling and meaning and he expertly uses space to punctuate and emphasize. Fujii’s spotless production complements Tamura’s style perfectly, ensuring there is nary a detail in the music that sounds insignificant. An abundance of tangible passion can be felt in the performance of Koki Solo, and it’s infectious.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

POT POURRI

Armenian Songs for Children
Isabel Bayrakdarian
Avie AV2449 (naxosdirect.com/search/av2449)

► A tribute to Isabel Bayrakdarian’s personal heritage, this collection of songs plays like a musical kaleidoscope – ever-changing reflective melodies are connected to beautiful and simple forms, creating a magical sonic space.

The 29 tracks comprised of compositions by Armenian composer and musicologist Gomidas Vartabed (aka Komitas) and his students Parsegh Ganatchian and Mihran Toumanaj, as well as some traditional songs. One should not be deceived by the fairly slow tempos, there is plenty of movement here – swinging, rocking, bouncing, clapping. A wooden horse and a monkey hang around, and a scarecrow and a nightingale make friends. On the deeper level, there is much longing and sorrow connected to dreams and memories of the Armenian nation and their history. The melodies of these songs are beautiful, sometimes playful, often poignant. The arrangements are sparse, creating an abundance of space for breath and colour. Some of these songs have been sung through five generations of Bayrakdarian’s family and one cannot help but feel the sense of intimacy and immediacy that comes from the weight of life experiences.

Bayrakdarian is phenomenal in conveying the emotional context of these songs. Her voice is willowy and soothing at the same time and she is quite successful in combining the embellishments of folk idioms with the clarity of classical expression. The accompanying ensemble – Ellie Choate (harp), Ray Furuta (flute) and Ruben Harutyunyan (duduk) – has an understated elegance to it, allowing the intensity of Bayrakdarian’s voice to come through.

Ivana Popovic

Hourglass
Murray McLauchlan
True North Records TND777 (truenorthrecords.com)

► Murray McLauchlan, celebrated singer-songwriter and recipient of the Order of Canada, has turned to such issues as privilege and racism on his 20th album, Hourglass. Its pointed songs speak sincerely and directly to issues of greed and prejudice that make so many lives unliveable.

These are folk-style, gentle and homely songs, sometimes nearly whispered, although I think McLauchlan’s vocal mid- and upper-ranges are just fine! His acoustic guitar work, Burke Carroll’s steel guitar and other instruments are always reliable. Indeed, nothing on this album is overcomplicated and some of the songs would attract the interest of both children and parents.

I particularly like the title track, which emphasizes the urgency of current problems: “But I see the sand run out through the hourglass, I swear I don’t remember it ever ran so fast.” Here lyrics and melody, guitar accompaniment and the steel overlay come together especially well. Lying By the Sea I find the most moving song. It is based on the tragic media image of a refugee boy fleeing the Middle East who drowned and washed up on shore. America, with a beautiful steel guitar introduction, is a plea to the USA that could also apply in Canada: “Now you’re in your separate rooms, And all the doors are locked.” Finally, I Live on a White Cloud and Shining City on a Hill are songs reminding us of our obliviousness – to racism and to reality itself.

Roger Knox

Dressed In Borrowed Light
Clara Engel
Independent (claraengel.bandcamp.com)

► Songwriter Clara Engel has been busy during this pandemic, completing two collections of songs entirely self-produced while at home, based on lyrics that read like extended poetry and dressed in an album cover featuring Engel’s original artwork.

In Dressed In Borrowed Light, dark, evocative themes of cycles of life, loss and nature float atop rhythmic drone-like melodies that leave plenty of room for the poetry to come through. This is a performance much like one might find at a poetry reading or meditative retreat, and a collection of guests adds an assortment of instrumental sounds that provide some additional ethereal qualities, bringing to the album a meditative, folk-like feel.

Musical arrangements include Engel on vocals and a collection of instruments such as shruti box, gusli, lap steel and morin khuur (Mongolian horse-head fiddle), which delicately add colour to the songs.

A shorter album than some, it’s six tracks flow gently as a collection of spoken word set to music. From one poem to the next it makes a soft landing, belying some of the darker themes of the lyrics.

Cheryl Ockrunt
that include bassist Roberto Riverón, saxophonist Petr Cancura, percussionist Samuel Formell, congero and co-founder of the noted Cuban timba-band N.G. La Banda – has just released a glorious musical manifesto of genre-blending, unifying tunes, tunes that are also firmly rooted in the sacred and ancient feel of Cuban “songo,” a magical fusion of Afro-Cuban musics with elements of pop, Latin jazz, calypso and other esoteric influences. Joining de Armas on this invigorating CD are Marc Decho on bass, Michel Medrano on congas, as well as an array of luminary guests

**Continuous**  
Miguel de Armas Quartet  
Three Pines Records TPR-003-02  
(migueldearmas.com)

> Miguel de Armas – the inspired Cuban pianist/keyboardist/composer/producer and co-founder of the noted Cuban timba-band N.G. La Banda – has

...string-laden Eva Luna and the thoroughly satisfying Gone Too Soon. Without question, this is one of the most enjoyable, globally unifying and instrumentally thrilling CDs of the year.

**Lesley Mitchell-Clarke**

**Gong Renteng – Gamelan Music of Cirebon, Indonesia: Volume 5**  
Denggung – Gamelan Music of Cirebon, Indonesia: Volume 6  
Gamelan Sinar Surya

> The ancient region of Cirebon, located in Northwest Java, Indonesia is home to a large number of performing arts including several types of gamelan, the orchestral music indigenous to Java.

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**Something in the Air**  
Box Sets mark musical Milestones

**KEN WAXMAN**

Like other out-of-the-ordinary keepsakes, boxed sets of recorded music are issued to celebrate a special occasion, to honour an unrepeatable situation or to assemble all parts of a unique situation. Each of these sets fit one of those criteria.

To celebrate his 80th birthday, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, a founding member of Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) who has created sounds ranging from hushed atonality to free-form funk, organized special projects for his transition to his ninth decade. The most noteworthy was the three-CD Sacred Ceremonies (TUM Records Box 03 tumrecords.com), which matched the trumpeter with two of his longtime associates, electric bassist Bill Laswell and percussionist Milford Graves (1941–2021), on one CD each plus a final disc trio session. The material combined new Smith compositions with free improvisations.

An expert in novel pulses, Graves’ intersection with the trumpeter shows how differing concepts of musical freedom can fuse. Especially during the three-part Nyoto suite, Smith’s fluttering grace notes create the horizontal expression that’s propelled to tenacious echoes and brassy triplet bugling from the others. The third track climax matches powerful rhythms and grainy brass notes. The subsequent Baby Dodds in Congo Square is a nod to jazz history even through Graves’ postmodern non-timekeeping and Latin American and African influences are far removed from the cited New Orleans drummer’s straight-ahead beats. However, as Graves moves through rhythm permutations, Smith follows the narrative from adagio to allegro as he speeds up his playing from simple flutters to staccato squeals and shattering timbres at an elevated pitch. Laswell has produced the likes of Motörhead and Laurie Anderson, though as an instrumentalist he promotes the intersection between funk and free jazz. Smith, whose many projects include a recasting of Miles Davis’ electric period in the Yo Miles! group, is unfazed. Confirming this duality, one Smith-Laswell track is titled Donald Ayler’s Rainbow Summit, citing the free jazz trumpeter; and another – the longest – Minnie Riperton – The Chicago Bronzeville Master Blaster pays tribute to the Chicago-raised Rock/R&B singer. A more accomplished trumpeter than primitivist Ayler, Smith’s exposition mixes hardened slurs and staccato squeals and shattering timbres at an elevated pitch. Laswell pays tribute to a large number of his contemporaries, from mellow to motion during the second half of the track, heavier beats are emphasized with sliding bass guitar pops among the shimmering interface. Later, brass triplets curve the narrative into distanced string vibrations as the final sequence widens and rolls the sounds upwards. The third and longest disc has the three musicians in trio formation, but without falling into conventional solo/ensemble roles. Despite tracks moving in unexpected sequences, detoured motifs and shifting textures, Smith confirms his singularity with a distinctive brass sound. As in the Laswell duo, synthesized flanges and arrangements often push forward and suggest textures from additional instruments. The only concession to convention is the introduction to The Healer’s Direct Energy which becomes a showcase for the expression of Graves’ rhythmic subtlety where his pounding ruffs and paced paradiddles set up an undulating narrative of guitar-like echoes and brass triplet bugling from the others. Waves of Elevated Horizontal Forces is a more limited bass guitar elaboration, but brass bites and conga drum-like pops eventually predominate. Other than that, tracks evolve with three-part cohesion. Graves’ beats range from tom-tom like pressure to near silent raps, which lock in to bass lines that include watery whammy-bar twists besides fluid improvisation. Additionally, Smith’s tongue tricks encompassing disected runs, stratospheric trills and grainy ruggedness, fit appropriately among the other two players’ expressions.

Another trio which worked with near-extrasensory perception was the UK’s IST consisting of cellist Mark Watstell, harpist Rhodri Davies and double bassist Simon H. Fell. A More Attractive Way (Confront Core...
California group Gamelan Sinar Surya (GSS), directed by Richard North – the gamelan director and lecturer at UC Santa Barbara – specializes in the performance of all types of Cirebonese gamelan. North, who has been studying, teaching and performing this music since 1972, is a passionate international authority on Cirebonese music.

Cirebon gamelan music has been under-represented on records. GSS has however been assiduously addressing that lacuna. Impressed with the comprehensive scope of its growing recorded catalogue, I’ve reviewed its previous albums in The WholeNote, most recently in the November 2019 issue. The latest GSS releases cover two attractive antique pre-Islamic Cirebon gamelans: gong renteng (Gamelan Music of Cirebon, Indonesia: Vol.5) and denggung (Vol.6).

Significantly, both distinct genres appear to predate the better-known five-tone prawa/ slendro and seven-tone pelog gamelan types which appear to have emerged later in the 16th century. With its crashing cymbals, lively drumming and energetic tempos, gong renteng is a lively village gong ensemble type believed to date back to the 1400s – making it the oldest gamelan music in West Java. Denggung on the other hand is dramatically different in performance aesthetic. Its softer volume and sparse, peaceful, sometimes ritual mood better suit an aristocratic milieu.

Vol.5 – Gong Renteng: Gong renteng came to the brink of extinction a generation ago. Thanks however to the dedication and enthusiasm of young musicians in the Cirebon area – plus the concertized efforts of Richard North for over 40 years – this ancient music has recently experienced a revival resulting in several gong renteng festivals in the region. Over 18 instrumental tracks the album’s repertoire is split between pelog and slendro tunings, each evoking a different affect. The music is also enlivened by idiomatic vocalizations made by the Californian musicians. This delightful sonic touch captures the inner spirit of Cirebonese village-style gamelan performance.

Vol.6 – Denggung: With roots in the Hindu Pajajaran kingdom of West Java some 500 years ago, denggung is considered a rare, sacred gamelan. The atmospheric music on this album makes it clear that GSS has taken great care to honour that heritage. Out of the three Cirebonese palaces, only the denggung at the Kacirebonan Palace is still being played today. GSS is however giving back to the home culture by working closely with the palace ensemble to foster a healthy future for this beautiful and moving music.

These two albums are a testament to how gracefully a Western group can, with respect, embody the music of another culture – and spread it around the world. 

Andrew Timar

Series/Core 21 confrontrecordings.com) is a five-CD compendium of concerts from the turn of the century which proves that a string ensemble can create improvisations as intense as one with horns and percussion. Celebrating the trio’s 25-year existence it’s also a memorial to Fell, who died of cancer in 2020 at the age of 62. Avoiding for the most part charming harmonies associated with the frequent use of preparations to create staccato and percussive definitions. Predominately an improvised ensemble, IST devotes most of Disc V from 1998 to interpreting compositions, including Karlheinz Stockhausen’s Intensität. Understandingly, that version, which judders between string buzzing and harmonic clusters as well as proving how IST plays notated scores, isn’t far removed from the group’s pure improvisations. Ironically though, the swelling mid-section of Davies’ Wstrus, from the same concert, is the most the trio sounds like a conventional string trio. Still the harpist’s spread-up plucks and the trio’s sprinkle of squeaks and buzzes at the finale, confirms its individuality. Overall the three work within lower case parameters, but with frequent col legno bow strokes, below-the-bridge squeals, spiccato thumps and pressurized glissandi, so the tracks are never enervating. A particular instance of this is on Disc II’s Restrictive Parallels I. Climaxing with an explosion of jumps and sul tasto echoes plus door-stopper-like twangs, it follows a gradual deconstruction of the exposition. Cogwheel-like ratcheting portends later near-metal squeals after concentrated textures are augmented by modulated cello sweeps and double bass drones. IST hosts guests on two discs. Four tracks with violinist Phil Durrant add an extra timbral excitement but don’t resemble conventional hosts guests on two discs. Four tracks with violinist Phil Durrant add a unique box variant is Embrace of the Souls: (SMP 2020 smprecords.bandcamp.com/album/special-edition-box), which packages three examples of the almost-25-year musical partnership of Brazilian tenor saxophonist Ivo Perelman and American pianist Matthew Shipp. Included is an audio CD of a 2019 New York concert, a DVD of a São Paulo concert later that year, and a 49-page booklet discussing the musicians and 14 of their recordings by Belgian writer Jean-Michel Van Schouwburg. Building on the time he produced a Brussels concert with the duo, Van Schouwburg defines what he calls their sense of aesthetic familiarity, which allows them to create first-class music. Designed for both free jazz insiders and those exploring the sounds, Van Schouwburg describes the duo’s individual histories and situates their references and influences to swing era and bop stylists as well as more recent exploratory players. He insists on the unique qualities of every improvisation, live and recorded, and offers a succinct description of each disc. Meanwhile Perelman and Shipp’s art can be experienced audibly and/or visually. Filmed on a darkened stage and occasionally cutting away to show Perelman’s paintings, the DVD is one hour of uninterrupted improvisation that shows interwoven creativity. Consisting of a dozen tracks that take from between slightly over two to slightly over seven minutes to be resolved, the majority of the CD’s untitled tunes are pensive and romantic. Demonstrating again that free improvisation doesn’t have to be loud to be profound, logical shifts and slides are heard. Despite the saxophonist’s frequently climbing to altissimo or sopranissimo pitches with fragmented peeps, squeaks and screams, the two press on resolutely. Sometimes accelerating to a gallop to counter Perelman’s discursive reed lines or violent keyboard squalls before subsiding to double counterpoint, Shipp’s measured pattering and percussive aside indicate how he too subtly contributes to the tracks’ floating coordination. No vanity projects, each of these collections has something to offer and celebrate.
Old Wine, New Bottles
Fine Old Recordings Re-Released

BRUCE SURTEES

For those who may not recall his name, Peter Schreier was regarded as one of the finest lyric tenors of the 20th century. He was renowned for his Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mahler and Wagner in addition to incomparable lied recitals and recordings. Schreier was also a respected conductor. He was born in Meissen, Saxony in 1935 and died in 2019 in Dresden. He toured the world including recitals in Toronto. Berlin Classics has selected 19 familiar melodies issued in 1976, for re-issue as Schone, Strahlende Welt (Beautiful Radiant World). Although sung in German, a language that I do not speak, I had been totally absorbed by the beauty of Schreier’s voice and his delivery of the lyrics since about the 1970s. Included here are Schreier’s famous versions of Granada, La Danza and O Sole Mio, along with Toscelli’s Serenate, Grieg’s Last Spring and Ich Liebe Dich, also Leoncavallo’s Mattinata. Despite the language barrier, easily recognized are the beauty of Schreier’s voice and his delivery of the lyrics since about the 1970s. Included here are Schreier’s famous versions of Granada, La Danza and O Sole Mio, along with Toscelli’s Serenate, Grieg’s Last Spring and Ich Liebe Dich, also Leoncavallo’s Mattinata. Despite the language barrier, easily recognized are So deep is the night, Love’s last word is spoken, Speak to me of love and many more familiar melodies. Here is the embodiment of a perfect lyric tenor in interesting repertoire. (Berlin Classics 0301746BC naxosdirect.com/search/0301746bc).

Continuing in the lighter vein, there is a new boxed set of operettas by Franz Lehár produced by the Seefestspiele Mörbisch in Austria. The box contains Das Land des Lächelns from 2001, Guiditta from 2003, Die lustige Witwe from 2005, Der Graf von Luxemburg from 2006 and Der Zarewitsch from 2010. At the helm of the Mörbisch Festival Orchestra is Austrian conductor and pianist Rudolf Bibl (1929-2017), except for Der Zarewitsch under Wolfdieter Maurer. The cast of artists in each of these delightful operettas is far too extensive to identify individually but be assured, each production is echt Lehár and, of course, unmistakably Viennese. As in the Schreier disc above, the librettos are sung in German. (Franz Lehár – The Operetta Edition OEHMS Classics OC1902, 3 CDs naxosdirect.com/search/oc1902).

The Smithsonian has reissued their 1980 recording of Victor Herbert’s perennial operetta, Naughty Marietta. This performance was produced, directed and conducted by the late James A. Morris, then director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Division of Performing Arts. The Millenium Chamber Orchestra is in the pit, and also the Catholic University of America A Cappella Choir. The leads are sung by Judith Blazer (Marietta) and Leslie Harrington (Captain Richard Warrington), with more than 60 voices in the choruses. This bright version will please the audience of live theatre-goers. (Harbinger Records, HCD3702 naxosdirect.com/search/hcd3702).

For the past little while I have been listening and re-listening to an album named simply Artur Balsam Plays. Balsam the pianist was born in Warsaw in 1906 and died in New York in 1994. He was and is remembered primarily as the elegant accompanist of many of the prime soloists of the era. Balsam’s name would appear second whether it be in concert programs or record labels. In this set are the most exquisite and rewarding performances of piano solos and sonatas, violin sonatas and concertos, dances and a miscellany of named pieces. Composers from Balsam’s enormous repertoire represented in these recordings are Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, Richard Strauss, Hindemith, Muzio Clementi, C.P.E. Bach, Paganini, Hummel, Ravel, Debussy, Franck, Fauré, Milhaud, Dvořák, Wieniawski, Glazunow, Stravinsky, Vitali, Rimsky-Korsakov, Sarasate, Bizet, Carl Engel, William Kroll and Fritz Kreisler. Phew! The artists who join Balsam are Yehudi Menuhin, Michael Rabin, Zino Francescatti, Szymon Goldberg, Nathan Milstein, Joseph Fuchs, Raya Garbousova (the Russian-American cellist), Louis Kaufman, Erica Morini, Zara Nelsova and the Pascal Quartet. This is an unusually agreeable collection and thanks to the host of artists and composers, there is never a dull moment. (Profil PH 21004 10 CDs naxosdirect.com/search/ph21004).

As some readers may have previously discerned, I especially dote on the omnipresent sonorities in the sound of Isaac Stern’s playing of any score before him. In addition to his commercial recordings many of his admirers have been enjoying Doremi’s Isaac Stern Live series derived from live performances around the globe, unavailable elsewhere. Isaac Stern Live Volume 9 contains an impressive performance of the Sibelius from Paris (1980, Andrew Davis) together with the George Rochberg concerto of 1974 from Paris (1977, Torkanowsky). A second CD contains the Samuel Barber of 1939 from Paris (1980, Kondrashin), together with the Prokofiev second from Strasbourg (1958, Munch). Finally in this collection of distinctive performances is the Max Bruch Violin Concerto No.1 from Paris conducted by Leonard Slatkin in 1980. Stern’s playing is innately compelling throughout both CDs. (Doremi DHR-8147-8 naxosdirect.com/search/dhr-8147-8).

In another new release from Doremi, Isaac Stern shares the stage with Pinchas Zukerman playing works written for two violins for a joint recital in Massey Hall, Toronto from February 9, 1976. Judging from the enthusiastic applause after each work the audience was more than enthralled. Here is what they heard: Leclair Spohr Sonata Op.67 No.2; Mozart Duo for Violin and Viola K423; Wieniawski Étude-Caprices Op.18, climaxing with the Prokofiev Sonata in C Major, Op.56. There were two encores, by Leclair and Mozart. (Isaac Stern/Pinchas Zukerman Joint Recital Doremi DHR-8099 naxosdirect.com/search/dhr-8099).

Many of our readers will remember Paul Robinson, classical music director of radio station CJRT-FM (91.1) and the program Records in Review, where for years on Sunday afternoon and Monday evening he and I discussed new releases and basic repertoire. On a recent visit we listened to a performance of the Schubert Symphony No.9 conducted by Gerard Schwarz recorded in 1987 but unreleased until now (Master Performers MP 21 03).
masterperformers.com). Our opinions matched and upon request Paul wrote the following:
“...The American conductor Gerard Schwarz is probably best known for his 26-year tenure (1985-2011) as music director of the Seattle Symphony. They made dozens of recordings together including standard repertoire as well as works by American composers. But earlier in his career Schwarz conducted the New York Chamber Symphony and made some fine recordings with that ensemble back in the 1980s. One of them was only recently released, a very stylish and energetic performance of the Schubert Ninth Symphony. The orchestra included some of New York’s foremost freelance musicians and it sounds like it. Great playing and first-class recording quality. Incidentally, before turning to conducting, Schwarz was a child-prodigy trumpet player, becoming principal trumpet in the New York Philharmonic at the age of 25. And what is he doing now? He is music director of the All-Star Orchestra (www.allstarorchestra.org), an elite ensemble (e.g. the concertmaster is David Kim, concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra) which specializes in making DVDs, largely for an educational market. He is also a professor of music at the University of Miami.”

OTHER FINE VINTAGES

Cornelius Cardew – The Great Learning
Montreal Scratch Orchestra; Dean Rosenthal
Tone Glow Records (toneglowrecords.bandcamp.com)

► English composer-pianist, teacher and political activist Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981) was in the vanguard of the thriving 1960s UK experimental music scene. He co-founded the Scratch Orchestra which performed his monumental The Great Learning (1969) on the influential 1971 Deutsche Grammophon LP.

Cardew’s text score consists of seven Paragraphs (large sections) for a large number of both trained and untrained musicians, the libretto drawn from Confucian texts. The Great Learning’s musical idiom and democratic social message was in tune with the times and as such deeply challenged many musicians’ views on the possibilities of ensemble music-making.

To perform The Great Learning in Montreal in 1996 was also American composer Dean Rosenthal’s motivation to organize the Montréal Scratch Orchestra with 14 student experimental music enthusiasts at McGill University. Their 1996 live concert performance of two Paragraphs was recorded, and has now been released on Tone Glow Records.

The all-vocal Paragraph 7 features a constantly shifting sound cloud of male and female voices humming or singing the text. Each chorus member initially chooses their own note and proceeds according to the written instructions. Individual voices emerge, join others in unison, then recede, in a process which sounds organic: waves cresting and falling perhaps. Paragraph 1, on the other hand, is anchored by skilled organist Philip Clarke’s slowly shifting single tones which build into massive chord clusters. It’s joined by massed whistles interrupted by spoken choral recitations of the Confucian script. The track ends elegantly, a mirror of the way it began, with the acoustic organ’s voice gradually dying, literally running out of air.

Andrew Timar
Joe Coughlin – Debut: 40th Anniversary Edition

Joe Coughlin
Indie Pool (joecoughlin.ca)

Originally released in 1981, jazz vocalist Joe Coughlin’s eponymous forgotten gem of a debut features a group teeming with top-shelf Canadian talent. The lineup is highlighted by the likes of Ed Bickert on guitar, Bernie Senensky on keys, Terry Clarke on drums and Don Thompson on bass. The music itself covers quite a bit of ground, taking elements from straight-ahead swing, vintage synth-pop typical of the era, soul, gospel and even yacht rock (multiple tracks sound like they could belong on Steely Dan’s Gaucho).

Quite a few of the flavours on this album can be attributed to the great Rick Wilkins, who was responsible for conducting and arranging all the tunes. His flair is particularly evident on 500 Miles High, which takes a Chick Corea classic and chooses to go the full distance with a Latin groove that was merely implied in the original. The result is a thrilling showcase for the band that hits a pinnacle during Senensky’s dynamic solo.

Coughlin himself more than manages to keep up with the ensemble. It is his personality, effortlessness and elegance that give this album its identity. Coughlin’s astounding range is also on full display, whether it’s the fullness of his tone on What a Difference a Day Makes or his softer, borderline whisper on Here’s That Rainy Day. To complete the equation, Joe Coughlin by Joe Coughlin could not have been sequenced better. The moods blend together seamlessly, and the set list is positively spotless.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas
Evan Parker Electro Acoustic Ensemble with Sainkho Namtchylak
Victo cd 133 (victo.qc.ca)

This almost perfect division between vocal and instrumental affiliation with electronics, recorded at FIMA V 1996 in Quebec, comprises two 30+ minute tracks. The first, Fixing, centres around the vocal gymnastics of Tuvan singer Sainkho Namtchylak propelling her retches, yodels and gurgles, accompanied, synthesized and live-processed by Marco Vecchi and Walter Prati’s electronics, with obtuse, balanced and stretched interjections from violinist Philipp Wachsmann, bassist Barry Guy, percussionist Paul Lytton and saxophonist Evan Parker.

Namtchylak sits out Fluctuating, the second track, which is only slightly shorter than the opener. This allows the electronic wizards to add to and highlight the studied, in-the-moment improvising by the fiddler, bassist, drummer and saxophonist. Accomplished veterans of free expression, Wachsmann, Lytton, Parker and Guy shatter and stretch the program as the electronics subtly project mirrored and scrambled variants of their outputs. This includes col legno slaps and swabbing strokes from the bassist, faux-formalist sweeps and pizzicato rasps from the violinist, crunching crinkles and reverberation from the percussionist and a penultimate sequence where Parker’s circular breathed doits, multiphonics and fluttering trills vibrate towards and then amongst a persuasive finale of staccato stopping from the strings.

Earlier Namtchylak’s inimitable shaking cries, onomatopoeic asides and cracked warbling is multiplied by processing and backed by Guy’s bass string thumps and Wachsmann’s augmented string spiccato. When Parker enters at the halfway point, his reed trills and Namtchylak’s vocalizing sound nearly identical. No matter which player’s timbres are emphasized, a perfect mix is attained throughout.

Ken Waxman

Read the reviews here, then visit thewholenote.com/listening
When Words Sing: Seven Canadian Libretti, edited by Canadian author Julie Salverson, is the first publication to feature in-depth overviews of Canadian operas via their libretti. Each opera is given a section in which Salverson features the libretto first and foremost while also providing unprecedented access to the artistic craft and creative processes of those most involved with the opera. Interviews with, and essays by, librettists, composers, directors, set, lighting and costume designers, provide the reader with a rich portrait of individual operas as well as a larger view of the Canadian operatic creation process.

The librettists of When Words Sing, published in the same volume for the first time, are Robert Chafe (Ours / John Estacio), Anna Chatterton (Rocking Horse Winner / Gareth Williams), George Elliott Clarke (Beatrice Chancy / James Rolfe), Marie Clements, (Missing / Brian Current), Ann-Marie MacDonald (Nigredo Hotel / Nic Gotham), Julie Salverson (Shelter /Juliet Palmer), and Royce Vavrek (Dog Days / David T. Little).

The title of the anthology is a nod to the late R. Murray Schafer’s 1970 book of the same name, and the contributors listed in the table of contents read as a who’s who of contemporary Canadian opera: a foreword by Canadian soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan, and an introduction by opera scholars Michael and Linda Hutcheon. With contributions from notable librettists, composers and creative team artists, the opening page of When Words Sing creates high expectations that Salverson and her collaborators thankfully meet.

When Words Sing is exceptionally well crafted and generous in all aspects, with highlights that include a brief but solid history of the Canadian libretto (Michael and Linda Hutcheon); introspective essays on Dog Days by Royce Vavrek (“Writing Dog Days”) and David T. Little (“On the Origins of Dog Days and Little & Vavrek”); lighting designer Paul Mathiesen’s fascinating window into the mechanics of lighting that ultimately set the tone for a production (“Remembering Light and Shadow for Nigredo Hotel: Snapshots”); a most compelling read by director Baņuta Rubess (“The Alchemy of Nigredo Hotel”); and everything Beatrice Chancy.

Equally significant is the section on Shelter with essays from Keith Turnbull (director), Wayne Strongman (director and conductor), Julie Salverson (the editor is the librettist of this opera), Juliet Palmer (composer) and Sue LePage (set and costume design). Beyond the opera itself, this section provides significant insight into the Canadian opera creation process: the somewhat artificial initial process that often precedes Canadian operatic collaborations (composer librettist laboratories are fairly common); the subsequent workshops; the hiring of actors that sound out the text; the tentative gathering of a creative team should the funding application for a commission be granted; and finally the casting, staging and premiere – all aspects are laid bare. Strongman’s words on this process are especially valuable: as the founding artistic director of Tapestry Opera and a trailblazer in the commissioning of new works, he was intimately familiar with the inner workings of Canadian operatic creation for over 30 years.

For my part, I found myself particularly invested in the microcosm offered by When Words Sing: to a significant extent, the book’s elucidation of the themes and stories that matter to librettists, composers and opera producers also reflect Canadian preoccupations. The samples offered in When Words Sing reveal socially conscious individuals who write about historically based, spiritually charged and intellectually provocative subjects. Although the musical context of course always needs to be considered, it would be an exciting research avenue to study the libretti of Canadian operas for the stories they tell us about us in a repertoire which, from 1867 to today, already comprises more than 500 works.

Dedicated to Wayne Strongman, When Words Sing is both a captivating journey into the world of contemporary Canadian opera creation and a welcome addition to the Canadian operatic literature.
I’m not sure I’m entirely surprised that it was a Canadian who wrote “Don’t it always seem to go/That you don’t know what you’ve got ’til it’s gone.” Joni Mitchell’s 1970 lament for the loss of a bit of Hawaiian landscape has taken on new meaning in our pandemic-ropied lives some 50 years later. Today, lamenting what has gone, temporarily or not, has become a worldwide emotionally traumatic phenomenon.

But so has its reverse — being aglow in anticipation of what might return. That’s certainly how I’ve felt as I’ve eagerly devoured the announcements of what’s planned for the upcoming season for many of the major musical institutions in the city. It’s true — the bogey of the variants has taught us that our expectation of a clear, straight-line recovery from our own black plague is not to be. The future is considerably less than clear for performing arts organizations. Nonetheless, the desire to move forward, to plan, to anticipate the future, such a uniquely human characteristic, is on full display in our musical institutions.

The pandemic has been something of a litmus test for many organizations and institutions in society, testing their durability and persistence, and our musical institutions are no different. Some have struggled to keep the faith, and maintain their identity. Others have refused to let the incredible circumstances of the past 18 months dim their normal creativity. And for a very few, the pandemic has actually made them more creative than ever — among them two organizations in our community one might not have expected to do so: Tafelmusik and The Royal Conservatory of Music.

I have long been a great fan of Tafelmusik, so their ability to remain current and contemporary and relevant is not such a surprise, even though their chosen repertoire would seem inclined to trap them in a musical culture long past. Not in the slightest. Under their late, deeply lamented music director, Jeanne Lamon, Tafelmusik always pushed musical culture long past. Not in the slightest. Under their current leader, the deeply talented and immensely creative Elisa Citterio. One of the great tragedies of COVID for me has been its robbing of Citterio of the creative momentum she had just started to establish with Tafelmusik when the virus hit last year.

No matter. Tafelmusik is surging ahead this season: finally presenting Citterio’s new orchestral arrangements of Bach’s Goldberg Variations, which has been planned, and delayed, for two years, and continuing to boldly go where few Baroque orchestras have gone before, deep into the repertoire of the 19th century. Following their immensely successful Tchaikovsky concert of two years ago, they are back with another, this one devoted to Antonín Dvořák. Also, while bassist Alison Mackay has retired from the orchestra, the torch of her genius in creating Tafelmusik’s famed multimedia events is still alive, taken up in the season ahead by oboist Marco Cera and magician Nick Wallace in a show exploring the connection between these two famously dark arts.

Then there’s the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir, one of the great gems of the country, celebrating its 40th anniversary this season. With Citterio’s genius in creating Tafelmusik, the Choir’s own Ivars Taurins, but by one of the great Bach interpreters of our generation, Masaaki Suzuki. It is a function of Taurins’ grace, I think, that he has relinquished the podium on this special occasion. (Full disclosure: Ivars and I are friends; we have happily collaborated on three fine programs for CBC Radio’s Ideas). But make no mistake about it — and it’s not just friendly bias speaking — Taurins is one of the finest, and unfairly underrated, conductors in all of North America. (Check out the virtual Jesus bleibet meine Freude the Choir just posted if you need more proof — light and energetic, a revelation). The Choir’s 40th anniversary season is well worth celebrating.

But the real surprise for me in the spate of new programming announcements made recently was the season just unveiled by The Royal Conservatory of Music. Mervon Mehta has been running the Conservatory’s Koerner Hall programming admirably for many years now, but recently he has added considerably more original events to his mix. That began with the highly successful 21C New Music Festival he began seven years ago, so much more important now since the TSO dropped their New Creations Festival. But this season, the Conservatory has a wealth of exciting concerts, beginning with their star-studded gala performance of Stephen Sondheim’s Follies in Concert, certain to be an unforgettable evening in the concert hall (as was the original in the 80s). Then, there’s Gould’s Wall, a new Brian Current multimedia opera project co-presented with Tapestry Opera, bringing the spirit of Glenn Gould into the 21st century. There are concerts from pianists Seong-Jin Cho and the amazing Vikingur Olafsson. There’s a performance of Ana Sokolović’s wonderful a cappella mini-opera, Svaðbua, the music of Miles Davis interpreted by Indian musicians, and many, many other wonderful concerts, topped off by the first visit of Swedish mezzo Anne Sofie von Otter to Toronto in half a dozen years. A truly exciting schedule.
Not everything musical is rosy in our post-pandemic world, however. The uncertainty engendered by the pandemic has dangers as well as opportunities, and the institution I fear for most in this regard is the Toronto Symphony. OK, fear is maybe too strong a word. But for 12 years, from 2001 to 2013, the TSO had one president and CEO, Andrew Shaw. Since then, it has had four more. The disgraced Jeff Melanson from 2014 to mid-2016. Then six months of board member Sonia Baxendale. Then two years or so of Gary Hanson. Then what was supposed to be a long-term solution, Matthew Loden. Except that Loden abruptly announced his resignation from the position in July after only three years in the job. The TSO is now looking for his replacement.

That’s like a baseball team having five different club presidents in seven years: it’s not healthy, it’s not good for an institution trying to meet new and unprecedented artistic challenges. However, the TSO has proven remarkably resilient in the past, and will likely do so again. Because of an amazingly generous and saintly gift from the Beck family (Thomas Beck was a longtime TSO chair of the board; his daughter occupies that position today), the TSO’s finances are in much better shape than you might expect. They have a “new” musical director, Gustavo Gimeno, or should have, although the pandemic has delayed his true arrival here for over a year.

That being said, the TSO is refusing to be undone by the many issues it faces. While the TSO’s 2021/22 season lacks enormous blockbusters, there are some very encouraging signs within their concert programs. Virtually every concert of the season includes some contemporary music, and not just the inevitable seven-minute opening piece, programmed to score some Canada Council grant. Instead, significant works, from talented composers like Joan Tower, Vivian Fung, Caroline Shaw and Missy Mazzoli and several Canadian commissions and premieres are on TSO programs, including a new work commissioned from Zosha Di Castri for soprano Barbara Hannigan, and a slew of works throughout the season by Canadian composer Samy Moussa, the orchestra’s artist-in-residence.

On the more conventional side, the TSO is presenting a concert of Bach and Mozart featuring and conducted by Angela Hewitt; James Ehnes is playing the Beethoven concerto with Andrew Davis leading the band, and an all-Bach concert led by Jonathan Crow looks especially interesting. Despite everything, or perhaps because of everything, the desire to create and connect remains active within the TSO as it commences the celebration of its 100th anniversary season.

I haven’t noted everything that’s planned for the fall, including ambitious projects by Opera Atelier and the COC (especially their presentation of a Mozart Requiem conceived by Against the Grain’s Joel Ivany and the COC’s Johannes Debus). But I can feel a sense of anticipation that follows such a long period of intense deprivation as keenly as I’ve ever looked forward to any musical experience. Maybe in the end, despite all the dislocation and pain, Joni Mitchell will have written the last word on our love of music – that only when we lost it did we realize how profoundly important it is. Except, if we’re lucky, we’re getting it back.

Robert Harris is a writer and broadcaster on music in all its forms. He is the former classical music critic of The Globe and Mail and the author of the Stratford Lectures and Song of a Nation: The Untold Story of O Canada.

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Glenn Gould Prize thirteenth laureate

Alanis Obomsawin, Protégé Prize, award-winning Ojibwe filmmaker Victoria Anderson-Obomsawin's choice for recipient of the $15,000 Glenn Gould Prize in October 2020 “in an emotionally compelling virtual press conference that stretched across the planet, from Chennai, India, to Hollywood."

Presentation of the $100,000 award takes place Monday, October 4, 2021 at 7:15pm at the Royal Ontario Museum, at which time Obomsawin’s choice for recipient of the $15,000 Glenn Gould Protege Prize, award-winning Ojibwe filmmaker Victoria Anderson-Gardner will also receive her award.

Following the prize ceremony, at 8pm, the Glenn Gould Foundation presents the premiere of Seeds: The Art of Alanis Obomsawin. a spectacular sound and light show – 170 feet wide by 70 feet high — by Métis filmmaker Terrill Calder, projected onto the east façade of the Royal Ontario Museum. The show will continue nightly to October 17, from 8pm to 10 pm (four shows per hour), with the soundtrack, featuring the vocals of Obomsawin, accessible by attendees over local Wi-Fi. Seeds will then embark on a cross-Canada and international tour, with dates and details to be announced.

Cecilia Livingston’s Vocal Pleasures

“’No matter how difficult times are, try to remember that everywhere in the world there are a lot of good people and somehow, in the worst times, you meet someone who will help take you away from the danger. Do not forget that, because if you only think of the bad part, you do not have much hope for the future. But I think it is the contrary. All these years, many times I was in danger and there was always someone who would appear and help me and get me out of that danger. I want to thank all the people who helped me in my lifetime when it was difficult.’”

Composer Cecilia Livingston, quoted from a wide-ranging conversation with The WholeNote columnist Wende Bartley, December 2020, discussing working with English composer Donna McEvitt on Soundstreams’ Garden of Vanished Pleasures, originally scheduled as part of the Royal Conservatory’s 21C Festival in January 2021, and now a fully staged production for digital broadcast, devised and directed by Tim Albery, kicking off Soundstreams’ 2021/22 season, September 23 to October 10, as part of the company’s 2021 Digital Residency at Crow’s Theatre.

The Toronto Mendelssohn Choir at 127

“An interim conductor doesn’t get to make the same kind of imprint on an orchestra or choir as a permanent hiring would. One inherits a ‘sound’ and does not seek to change it using blunt instruments like the annual re-audition process to filter for one’s preferences. That being said, every conductor is in some sense, a stylist. You work with your material, and you focus on things you care most about achieving.”

David Fallis, then interim artistic director of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, quoted from an interview in October 2019 at the start of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir’s search for only the ninth conductor in the choir’s 127-year history – a search that culminated earlier this year in the hiring of Jean-Sébastien Vallée to fill that role. Rehearsals under Vallée are now under way (more about that – and about him – later). His first appearance at the choir’s helm since his appointment is scheduled for November 2, 2021 in a concert with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, titled “Coming to Carry Me Home.”

Back in Focus is compiled by the WholeNote editorial team

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The WholeNote - Volume 26
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