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If you are actually reading this issue on its launch date (Feb 2, 2022) then it’s already been six or seven hours since your local meteorological groundhog (for us it’s Wiarton Willie) either saw their shadow or didn’t. If a shadow was seen, so the story goes, then our groundhogs took the shadow to be some dangerously contagious lurker of some kind, and fled back into their lairs, for a further six weeks of hibernation. Not necessarily a bad thing, because, barring further setbacks, that takes us to full reopening of live performance venues!

— David Perlman, page 7
JUST RELEASED

Paris 1847, The Music of Eugène Jancourt is the first recording entirely devoted to this 19th century French composer.

Bassoonist Mathieu Lussier invites us to discover these rarities and is joined by Camille Roy-Paquette, cello; Sylvain Bergeron, guitar; and Valérie Milot, harp.

Quatuor Saguenay’s return with string quartets by Felix Mendelssohn, Maurice Ravel, and Giovanni Sollima.

Original melodies by pianist and composer Louis Dominique Roy get their first airing on Rêves enclos, (Enclosed dreams) a new ATMA recording with baritone Olivier Laquerre.

Vocal

Classical and Beyond

Modern and Contemporary

Jazz and Improvised Music

Pot Pourri

Something in the Air

Old Wine, New Bottles

Other Fine Vintages

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Blue Pages for 2021-2022
Directory of Music Makers and Arts Services
NO STRAIGHT LINES

DAVID PERLMAN

¢blacklivesmatter how to be an ally:

- Research to learn about the history of the struggle in which you are participating
- Be aware of your implicit biases
- Stand up, even when you feel scared
- Educate those around you
- Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it.
- Acknowledge that while you too, feel pain, the conversation is not about you.

Red Pepper Spectacle Arts, Baldwin Street, Kensington Market

FEBRUARY 2, 2022: There’s no automatic, straight-line connection between the #blacklivesmatter poster above and the 2022 Black History Month poster on the next page. Dutifully observing something officially called “Black History Month” for one month a year, can even backfire: offering an excuse to get back to “business as usual”, whatever we think usual may be, for the rest of the year.

And the journey towards Black History Month has been a winding road too, from its beginnings in 1926 when Harvard-educated African American historian Carter G. Woodson proposed setting aside “a time devoted to honour the accomplishments of African Americans and to heighten awareness of Black history in the United States.”

The result was the establishment of Negro History Week in the USA the same year, with Canada following suit shortly thereafter. It then took till the early 1970s for the week to become known as Black History Week, after which it only took till 1976 for it to become Black History Month.

After that, it took almost two decades (December 1995), for the House of Commons to officially recognize February as Black History Month in Canada, thanks to a motion, carried unanimously, by Jean Augustine, the first African Canadian woman elected to Parliament.

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So we decided to do two things: the first was to delay the publication date from January 20 to February 2 a) to see if the province’s staged plan for reopening, albeit at severely reduced capacities, would go ahead, and b) to buy a bit more time for the presenters and musicians (whose art is the lifeblood in our pages) to figure out what to do and what to say about it – to replace the divots from their latest pivots, you could say. We are glad we waited, as you will see.

The second decision we made was way tougher. For the first time in 254 issues, dating back to September 1995, this issue is available only via our various digital formats and platforms (see our back cover). A detour we hope not to have to repeat.

Groundhog Day

I am not sure at what point we also twigged to the fact that our revised publication date was Groundhog Day. But it works for me!

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And if no shadows were seen? Well, we’re all in luck, then. “Oh well it’s a bit overcast,” we get to say “but smells more like snowdrops than digital snow!” And off we go, using the eclectic array of performances on offer in this issue, live and digital, up to the middle of March, to get our bums in shape for mid-March’s full capacity array of seats.

But, really truly, only if you are good and ready! There’s no shame in, like our shadow-phobic groundhog, opting for another month and a half of cautious digital dozing. It’s ok. To each their own winding path, in their own sweet time. At some point, take my word for it, you’re going to recognize the moment when (as the song sort of says), you are ready: to grab your mask and proof of vaxx and leave your worries on the doorstep, as you meander on out in search of music, live and sweet, carried by the air we share.

David Perlman can be reached at publisher@thewholenote.com

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NEW OPERA WORKS

Scaling Gould’s wall

The mysteries of collaboration

GLORIA BLIZZARD

What happens when you combine a cornucopia of talented musicians with a decidedly off-the-wall idea? A magnificent new work presented by Tapestry Opera, titled Gould’s Wall, featuring the talents of director Philip Akin, writer Liza Balkan and composer Brian Current.

Brian Current dreamed for years of creating a project using a wall in the Atrium, the enclosed space that joins the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) and Koerner Hall in Toronto. It took a conversation with librettist Liza Balkan (followed by a few years of writing and workshopping) to create the work, and the alchemical processes of director Philip Akin to animate it into being.

Gould’s Wall tells the story of a young artist as she struggles to develop her career. For Balkan, the building itself was the inspiration. The presence of pianist, composer, broadcaster Glenn Gould is everywhere. His photograph is on the walls. The namesake Glenn Gould School resides here. “The desire for mastery in music, the constant practising and the revelling in music and the vibrancy of it – it seemed that wall, what lives around it, through it, in it, behind it, is connected to pursuing excellence,” Balkan says.

I had the opportunity to sit in on an early rehearsal of the work. As I arrived, Akin was leading the cast and crew through a physical warm-up. It ended. He turned and welcomed me. I heard bits of text and music as the company blocked their scenes. There were three levels of platforms to approximate the multiple levels of the windows in the RCM’s wall. There was a piano, the conductor, a second conductor and, at a long table along one wall, most of the artistic and technical crew from lighting to librettist.

Lauren Pearl who plays the lead, Louise, clambered into climbing gear. (Throughout the piece, Pearl’s Louise climbs the red-brick wall several times, a feat that must be accomplished while singing.) Meanwhile, Roger Honeywell, who plays Gould, sat stretched out, head angled and fingers twirling, inhabiting the essence of his character. “Tut tuts”, sung by the cast, could be heard, fashioned after Gould’s way of verbalizing as he worked. And there was Akin, crafting movement through space with a call to the actors to bring in their whole selves to the moment. I was smitten by the sounds, the movement and the process.

Says Akin, “Singers in opera are used to just being told what to do, how to sing it. I refuse to work that way. I give a clue, the inspiration, the breadcrumb trail and say, bring your best self to this. It gets amazing results. Artists gain power and know that their contributions are valuable. It is actually more interesting to me than sticking to the boundaries of opera or musical theatre.”

To that end, the artist’s climb can be lateral learning or a deepening of process as well as a vertical climb.

The Space

The location itself presents a significant additional artistic challenge. For the five performances, the Atrium will house the 15-piece Glenn Gould School’s New Music Ensemble, multiple pianos, a catwalk and
harnessed performers leaning out of the wall’s windows to sing to each other on multiple levels.

The artistic wall can, however, evoke challenges beyond the physical, particularly for Black artists and audiences.

“We need to speak of this,” says Akin. As the founder of Obsidian Theatre, Canada’s first and perhaps only theatre that specializes in work by Black writers, he has significant experience with the vagaries of Canada’s performance industry. “You also have to break down some walls, to be able to acknowledge who else is in a rehearsal hall full of predominantly white people. I have not seen another Black person working in the building (RCM/Koerner Hall), not even a janitor. However, everywhere I work is a Black space. I bring this to the table. By inhabiting the space that does not include some, we bring them to the table.”

Michael Hidetoshi Mori, artistic director and Jaime Martino, executive director of Tapestry Opera, are also engaged with broadening what opera is, who does it and who hears it. Additional specificities to the concept of artistic struggle for excellence have been woven into the production process. Tapestry Opera’s Women in Musical Leadership program ensures that women conductors are mentored and included in the process. Jennifer Tung and Juliane Gallant are assistant conductors on this production. Akin has brought in Sheree Spencer as assistant director and award-winning set and costume designer Rachel Forges – two Black artists. “We have to bring others along,” he says.

Finding an Artistic Compass

Gould continues to serve as a guide for many musicians, not all in a traditional way. Says Balkan, “There are those who can inspire, be a muse, and support a climber. Gould’s work can directly be that for some. It can also be something to stand on, to launch from. It can be a spiritual/practical mentoring – through memory/essence/naming.” Gould once spoke at a graduation ceremony at the Conservatory, Balkan says. “After an extraordinarily long speech about art and listening, and silence and creation and finding your own voice, he said, ‘If I could give you anything, it would be to remind you not to rely on the advice of others.’” The quote is included in Balkan’s libretto.

Akin has a less elliptical experience of mentorship to draw on, both as mentor and mentee. As a young theatre student at Ryerson, he was recommended by theatre journalist Herbert Whittaker for a part in the Shaw Festival’s production of Caesar and Cleopatra. At that time, there was little work for Black artists. He auditioned, won his first part and was working six months after graduating from Ryerson’s theatre program. To later receive the Herbert Whittaker Award in 2019 for his contributions to Canadian theatre was deeply meaningful.

His version of mentorship, particularly for Black artists, he refers to as “radicalization.” He gives an example: “You are a dark skin, black woman, you have strong ideas. You know, the task is not just 50% more difficult. You have to prepare for that. It is not the same as being twice as good to get half as far. You need to be determined. You need to be strong. You need to call out. You need to go and do whatever you have to do to make your art happen. And you know you’re not going to get the same kind of respect because you’re not a child. You grew up
“So much of the dialogue is inspired by and informed by Gould’s work, ... a sort of contrapuntal musical play.”

— Liza Balkan

in this country. You know that dark skin, Black women have it tough. Right? So, is that mentorship? I guess you can call it that. In my head, I think of it as radicalization. It’s about trying to find fearless artists because I think there’s too much accommodation going on.”

**Movement and Magic**

In addition to writing, acting, directing and many other talents, librettist Liza Balkan is also a dancer; she brings the essence of motion, of movement to the text. “I feel the rhythm, in the language; working on something like this project where so much of the dialogue is inspired by and informed by Gould’s work, [I am] constantly hearing a sort of contrapuntal musical play – rhythm, speed and rests,” she tells me.

— Liza Balkan

How it all turns out remains to be seen. The show was originally scheduled for mid-January and has been postponed due to Ontario’s lockdown. In light of this new scenario, the idea of movement is even more poignant. Philip Akin’s martial arts influenced direction that ensures connection between performers working on multiple physical planes, is now translated into working with time as well. And to land us firmly in the present, Brian Current, conductor and prime instigator of this enormous undertaking, will be on site, swaying and guiding each step of the musical journey.

“I believe art is a freaking mystery,” Akin says. “So things happen serendipitously and my reaction when presented with a brick wall, a cast and crew, a libretto is, ‘Let’s go! Let’s make magic!’”

Gloria Blizzard is a non-fiction writer, poet and penner of songs, whose wordsmithing has appeared in numerous literary publications, magazines and sound recordings. She is currently completing her first full-length book, a collection of essays, and can be reached at www.gloriablizzard.com.

It’s just a flesh wound!” says the Black Knight, after King Arthur chops his arms off in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail.*

Just as it seemed live music was reasserting its presence in the GTA and beyond, the Omicron variant of COVID-19 forced the Ontario government to pivot to new lockdown guidelines that nipped reopenings in the bud, and effectively curtailed live music for most of January. The new guidelines however offer hope. If they stick, from January 31 to February 21, live music attendance can resume, albeit capped at “50 percent or 500 people, whichever is smaller” a measure impacting disproportionately severely on the smallest and the largest venues. After February 21, barring setbacks, progress accelerates: 50 percent capacity, no matter the venue size, until March 15; and then, barring a further re-assessment, permission for a return to live performance at full capacity.
Unlike the ill-fated fall reopening, when the TSO waited for the 50% capacity cap before resuming, this time they are in, boots and all even at the 50% capacity cap. They have announced a full slate of diverse live programming over the next six weeks, with music director Gustavo Gimeno leading the orchestra, February 2, 3 and 5, in Schumann’s First Symphony, “Spring,” composed in January and February of 1841 in anticipation of better weather ahead. Also on the program is Scylla, Jordan Pal’s concerto for trombone and orchestra written as a showcase for TSO principal trombone, Gordon Wolfe.

Even before the February feast begins, there will be an appetizer available: a performance of Gimeno conducting Beethoven’s jovial Symphony No.2 Op.36, to be streamed live on January 28 and available on demand until February 4. In that concert, Beethoven’s Second proves to be a fruitful muse for Odawa First Nation composer Barbara Assignaak, whose Innenohr meditates on the German master’s storied love of nature. Missy Mazzoli’s evocative Dark with Excessive Bright also draws inspiration from the past, bringing Baroque-era techniques into the 21st century through the skillful bow of TSO principal double bass, Jeffrey Beecher.

There’s something for everyone in the mix. On February 12, the TSO and conductor Lucas Waldin celebrate Valentine’s Day (well, close enough!) with a selection of romantic songs from musical theatre and the movies, including favourites from The Phantom of the Opera, West Side Story, La La Land and the iconic “Love Theme” from Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet.

Then celebrated pianist Angela Hewitt takes charge on February 16, 17 and 19, leading a varied program from the keyboard. Two well-known concertos – Mozart’s No.12 K414 and Bach’s No.2 BWV1053 – anchor the concert. Two lesser-known works complete the program: Saint-Saëns’ charming Wedding Cake Op.76, a valse-caprice for piano and strings written as a nuptial tribute to pianist Caroline Montigny-Rémaury; and Finzi’s Eclogue for Piano and String Orchestra Op.10.

Chinese-born Xian Zhang leads the TSO on February 26 and 27 in Beethoven’s energetic Symphony No.4, principal flautist Kelly Zimba is the soloist in Nielsen’s masterful Flute Concerto. Then, on March 9, 10, 12 and 13, 32-year-old American, Ryan Bancroft, the newly appointed chief conductor of the the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra.
leads the TSO in a concert featuring crowd-pleasing works that were shared digitally during the early days of the pandemic: Dvořák’s Slavonic Dance No.8; Beethoven’s Violin Romance No.2; Mozart’s Symphony No.29 K201; Vivian Fung’s Prayer; and Aaron Copland’s restorative Appalachian Spring.

**Mark Williams:** on the corporate side of things, the TSO has announced the appointment of Mark Williams to be the orchestra’s new CEO as of April 2022. Williams has held positions at the San Francisco Symphony and IMG Artists New York, prior to his current role as chief artistic and operations officer at The Cleveland Orchestra, where he oversees all aspects of artistic planning and programming, touring and orchestra operations.

Williams, who holds a bachelor of music degree in horn performance, is quoted in the announcement: “This is an orchestra with immense musical gifts, big ambitions, limitless energy and a desire to connect with its community through music. I look forward to forging deep and long-lasting relationships with Torontonians, and getting to know the Toronto Symphony Orchestra’s dedicated patrons, subscribers and donors. I have been privileged to work with Gustavo Gimeno for many years as a guest conductor at The Cleveland Orchestra, and I feel confident that our strong partnership will achieve his artistic vision for Toronto’s great orchestra. My husband Joseph and I are eager to call Toronto, one of the world’s greatest cities, home,” said Williams.

An interesting footnote on the relationship between the two orchestras: onetime TSO interim CEO Gary Hanson, who preceded Matthew Loden at the TSO in 2016, had been executive director of The Cleveland Orchestra from 2004 to 2015 during the time Williams was hired there; Williams, in turn, while at Cleveland, hired current TSO music director, Gustavo Gimeno, for his Cleveland Orchestra conducting debut.

“I have worked with Mark for many years,” Gimeno added. “And I am really thrilled that he will be leading our great orchestra. ... I know that I will have an ideal partner.”

**KWS**

Also rejoining the live-concert fray will be The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony (KWS) performing for live, in-person audiences once again on February 11, after a 23-month hiatus, within the window of the difficult 500-cap capacity restrictions in place until February 20. The KWS solution? They have added a second performance on Saturday, February 12 at Centre In The Square. There will be plenty of space to keep patrons safe and comfortable in the 2,000-seat concert hall.

“It is going to be an amazing atmosphere returning to the stage for live audiences again for two shows that weekend,” said music director Andrei Feher. “We musicians feed off the energy in the building and are beyond excited to perform for live audiences once again.”

Feher is joined by Canadian superstar pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin for Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto. “It is an incredible piece that was well before its time, a true gift that Beethoven gave the world,” said Feher. “Emperor is triumphant, filled with beauty, and Charles is the perfect person to perform this concerto with us.”

**HPO**

Touch wood, Hamilton concert-goers will also finally get the chance to renew their acquaintance with Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO) music director, Gemma New, on March 19 for “Gemma conducts Mendelssohn”. Her previously scheduled appearance on January 29, 2022 was cancelled, so this will be her first appearance with the HPO since the pandemic began.

The March 19 Mendelssohn concert features Canadian violinist Susanne Hou performing Mendelssohn’s consummate Violin Concerto. Also on the program is the premiere of a new work by HPO 2021-22 composer fellow, Maria Eduarda Mendes Martins, composed after six months of mentorship with music director New and composer-in-residence Abigail Richardson-Schulte. That work will be followed by Bizet’s effervescent Symphony in C, a favourite of legendary conductor Sir Thomas Beecham.

“I hold close the memories of our joyous concerts together prior to the pandemic,” said New. “I used to see live music performance as an invincible art form. Now it feels like it is a rare and precious experience, that I am so grateful to create when the circumstances make it possible. I’m glad to have such a phenomenal team to work with through these tough times, as we patiently hope, resiliently create and carefully plan for better days.”

**Classical Music Festivals Canada (CMFC)**

Meanwhile, Stratford Summer Music artistic director Mark Fewer and James Campbell, artistic director of Festival of the Sound, have launched Classical Music Festivals Canada (CMFC), a collaboration among 11 Ontario festivals. The free online video chamber music festival started with a bang on January 28, with each of the participating Festivals, launching their contribution to the 11-concert slate. All will now be available on demand online at classicalmusicfestivals.ca.

“As we approached our colleagues at different festivals,” Fewer said, “one thing was abundantly clear – we all feel more collaborative and open than ever before, and the results show it! You’ll find interviews with each festival director and host Eric Friesen at the start of each presentation, followed by a one-hour concert of music that showcases just how world-class we are here in Ontario! You can click on...
Canadian harpist Valérie Milot, at Westben, summer 2021, in one of the CFMF’s 11 “July in January” concert videos.

any festival link and listen to the musical offerings as often as you like from January 28 until February 28. We’re calling this first version (of what will surely become a yearly event) July in January.”

The nine other participating festivals are Collingwood Summer Music Festival, Elora Festival, Music Niagara Festival, Ottawa Chamberfest, Prince Edward County Chamber Music Festival, Studio ‘S’ Series, Sweetwater Music Festival, Toronto Summer Music and Westben.

QUICK PICKS


FEB 25 & 26: Confluence Concerts commemorates the 200th anniversary of the death of the influential and whimsical 19th-century Viennese storyteller, E.T.A. Hoffmann, with music by Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Offenbach and others. Curated by Larry Beckwith. confluenceconcerts.ca.

FEB 25, 8PM: The Royal Conservatory (RCM) presents Angèle Dubeau celebrating the 25th anniversary of her ensemble La Pietà. “Added to the music of Olafur Arnalds, Armand Amar, Ludovico Einaudi, Alex Baranowski, Philip Glass and Max Richter will be works from my latest opus, Elle, an incursion into the musical world of women, including Rachel Portman, Elena Kats-Chernin and Rebecca Dale,” says Dubeau.

See www.rcmusic.com/performance for information about other standout February RCM events: pianist Stewart Goodyear, Feb 9; Tania Miller conducting the Royal Conservatory Orchestra, Feb 11; pianist Vikingur Olafsson, Feb 24; early music virtuoso, Jordi Savall, Feb 27.


MAR 6, 3PM: MacArthur “Genius Grant” winner, pianist Jeremy Denk leads Les Violons du Roy in a program of Renaissance and Baroque works by Hildegard von Bingen, Byrd, Morley, Monteverdi, Biber, Purcell, Dowland, Gesualdo and anchored by two J.S. Bach keyboard concerti, BWV 1052 and 1053.

Paul Ennis is the managing editor of The WholeNote.
When the rapidly increasing spread of the Omicron variant and the new lockdown closed down our performance spaces once again in January, all kinds of theatre-going plans for the early new year had to be tossed out. Luckily, resilient companies and artists didn’t stop creating; their new and growing ease with filming and streaming, is still providing us with many ways to enjoy good music theatre in spite of the pandemic, and to cheer our souls during the coldest time of the year.

Silver linings

Among these bright spots is the opportunity to catch filmed versions of live shows we might otherwise not have seen. One of these is prolific Canadian composer Dean Burry’s Sweetheart, a one-woman musical about Canadian-born Hollywood star and brilliant business woman, Mary Pickford. Burry is probably best known for his operas, whether written for children like The Brothers Grimm, or telling Canadian stories such as the recent Dora Award-winning Shanawdithit, but he has also been a creator of musicals from the beginning of his career.

I have known Burry since directing his opera for and about teenagers, Pandora’s Locker, at the Glenn Gould School back in 2008, so I reached out to him to find out more about this show.

It turns out that Sweetheart is one of his earliest works. “It was first written in 1997,” he told me, “just after I graduated with my master’s degree in composition from the University of Toronto, and was working in the box office at the COC. I was reading all these biographies of musical theatre composers for inspiration and came across a mention of Irving Berlin at a dinner party with Mary Pickford. Remembering that she was from Toronto, I investigated a bit further and that led to the first version of the show.” That early version only got as far as workshops with friends, but in 2011 a revised version was performed in the newly renovated 1920s setting of Toronto’s Spadina House, with a remount in Haliburton the following summer. That was that for ten years, until the fall of 2021 when new workshops were undertaken with director Greg Wanless and actor Melissa Morris, resulting in a newly revised version that was performed in Kingston last December.

But why a one-woman version of this story? Well, for several reasons. “As a young Canadian composer,” Burry told me, “economy of means was always in my thoughts – i.e. how can we do the most with the very least? I imagined Sweetheart as a female version of John Gray’s excellent one-man show, Billy Bishop Goes to War. I also just love the theatricality of this kind of show where one actor plays all the characters to the point that we believe we see them talking to each other. There is something magical about that.” And to top it off, “usually, silent movies [like Pickford’s] were accompanied in the movie theatre by a single piano and I wanted to create that kind of feeling.”

There is also something meta-theatrical about this reconceptualized version of Sweetheart: we, the streaming audience, will be watching on our screens, captured on film, a live show that is itself being...
performed in front of a movie screen that can function as either a projected backdrop, or moving picture that the actor will sometimes interact with.

Burry praises both director Wanless and actor Morris for their contributions to this new version of *Sweetheart* which is much tighter and more streamlined, leaving behind the documentary detail that his younger self, as he describes it, “had become obsessed with including.” Instead it focuses on the dramatic core: “[Pickford] always feeling held back by her famous bubbly young girl film persona as ‘America’s Sweetheart,’ and then her fading celebrity with the advent of the talkies.” Her famous creation of film company United Artists with husband Douglas Fairbanks and friend Charlie Chaplin also features significantly, and weaving everything together is Burry’s original score inspired by the music of Irving Berlin and the Gershwins, evoking the early days of Tin Pan Alley and the first moving pictures.

*Sweetheart* was captured live over several performances in Kingston, Ontario and will be streamed online from January 27 to February 6.

“We want to create accessible versatile shows that feel like folk concerts [and] tell stories like musical theatre.”
— Jake Schindler and Sam Boer

**Ursa: A Folk Musical**

Equally theatrical but even more experimental is The Uncommon Folk Collective’s theatre-concert hybrid *Ursa: A Folk Musical* which will premiere as part of The Next Stage Festival. *Ursa*, like most of the other shows in the festival was originally supposed to be performed to live audiences, but from necessity has pivoted and is in the final stages, as I write, of being filmed to stream online from January 30 to February 7, with a possible extension to be confirmed soon. I was lucky enough to catch a virtual (online) glimpse of *Ursa*...
Belinda Corpuz

Ursa poster designed by Abby Nowakowski

Belinda Corpuz as Ursa and Stephen Ingram as the Bear, with a live band backing up the fresh and want change and struggle to make it happen.

Ursa is truly a child of the pandemic. It was written collaboratively over weekly Zoom sessions over the past two years by Jake Schindler “a theatre lover with a passion for folk music” and Sam Boer “a touring folk musician with a passion for musical theatre” and is inspired by the two friends’ mutual love of iconic Canadian folk music and the transformative experiences they’ve had at great concerts which, they believe, “have a distinct ability to bring people together and create a sense of belonging and inclusivity.” In their own words they “want to create accessible versatile shows that feel like folk concerts, tell stories like musical theatre, and invite our audiences to experience something both familiar and brand new.”

Ursa draws on the universal power of folklore by inventing its own fantastical tale of a small-town Ontario teenager who runs off into the forest in search of adventure only to meet an anxious bear in the middle of an identity crisis. As the girl and bear become friends the audience is taken on a whimsical journey exploring what it is like to be young, want change and struggle to make it happen.

Margot Greve directs emerging talents Belinda Corpuz as Ursa and Stephen Ingram as the Bear, with a live band backing up the fresh and surprising folk tunes. As a fan of both folk music and musical theatre, perhaps I am too much the ideal audience member, but from what I have seen so far, I think this young ambitious team will meet their goals of bringing new audiences of all ages to their new hybrid folk concert-theatre creation.

INNERchamber Kindness

One of my favourite “silver linings” of the pandemic, as I have written before, was discovering INNERchamber’s concert series at Stratford’s Revival House. Before the pandemic I had never been in town to watch their live performances, but because they had to pivot to film and streaming in order to keep performing, I had the opportunity to enjoy their intimate concerts online and fell under the spell of the wonderful composer and arranger. Bolt-Martin also arranged the text for the key anchor story for the show, one that had inspired Ranney to start collecting stories of kindness years before. It was a real-life story from World War Two, of German fighter pilot Franz Stigler who, instead of shooting down American bomber pilot Charlie Brown, guided him safely back to England. Neither man, of course, told anyone else what had happened until many years later. “What is even more remarkable,” Ranney said, “is that Stigler later settled in Vancouver, was reunited with Charlie Brown, and they became the best of friends.”

Leading up to this story and a final song by Jacques Brel, is a collection of six to eight songs interwoven with stories of kindness from real life, balancing lighter fare such as Neil Bartram and Brian Hill’s comedic song Mrs. Remington about a teacher’s kindness, with heavier fare such as the shooting of young Amish girls in the Nickel Mines community by a deranged gunman, and the remarkable unexpected kindness shown by that Amish community afterwards to the parents of the killer.

Ranney and Nadajewski complement each other well. “I am more earnest,” Ranney said, “but my husband has good funny bones. There will even be a ‘kindness lightning round’ as he calls it, of quick quotes.” There will also be songs by Shirley Eikhard, Leonard Cohen, Stephen Sondheim and others. Not what you would expect from a classical chamber ensemble? Exactly.

“Andrew Chung approached us and asked if we had anything we might want to pitch as ideas for a concert … [I suggested] unexpected kindnesses.”

— Glynis Ranney
QUICK PICKS & SHOW INFO

FROM JAN 16 ON: Sundays at 7pm, In-Home Concert Series curated by Donavon LeNabat of Donavon’s Anti-Social Gathering, Porch Side Concerts and In-Home Open Mic. Livestreamed Sunday nights, and available on demand following the livestream. The first concert featured musical theatre star Charlotte Moore with LeNabat at the piano. Other guests booked include musical theatre artists, as well as jazz/pop singers and musicians. FREE (tips welcome).

JAN 27 to FEB 6, 7:30: Sweetheart: A One Woman Musical by Dean Burry, Sweetheart Productions. Recorded presentation of the December 2021 production of Sweetheart. Melissa Morris; Clare Marion (piano); Greg Wanless, director. www.events.ely.com/SweetheartAOneWomanMusical. $10. ONLINE

JAN 30 to FEB 7: (with possible extension TBC), Ursa: A Folk Musical. The Next Stage Festival. Tickets $15 plus fees. Festival passes also available. Show will be available to view on demand once released. fringetoronto.com/next-stage/tickets-passes

FEB 11 to 19: The Quest, a new Canadian musical by Murray Foster and Kieren MacMillan at the Canadian College for the Performing Arts in Victoria, Live and ONLINE across Canada. www.ccpacanada.com/the-quest

FEB 13, 7pm: Kindness, INNERchamber 7pm, Revival House, pre-show chat 6:30 pm (free), Concert tickets $10-40. innerchamber.ca ONLINE (also live if allowed, please see website for updates)

FEB 16 to MAR 16: Via Kanana, Harbourfront Centre in partnership with Digidance. As a highlight of Kuumba, Harbourfront Centre’s longest running Black Futures Month Festival, Via Kanana is a non-stop torrent of energy. The hour-long work condemns the corrosive effects of corruption in South Africa and expresses frustration at how little has changed for the better for Black people since the end of Apartheid.

Video on Demand Streaming in Canada only. From $15 + applicable taxes. www.harbourfrontcentre.com

Jennifer Parr is a Toronto-based director, dramaturge, fight director and acting coach, brought up from a young age on a rich mix of musicals, Shakespeare and new Canadian plays.
ineteen-year-old opera student Charlotte Siegel is getting frustrated as she sings an aria from Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro over and over again in a cramped rehearsal studio at the University of Toronto. She wants to impress her new teacher and is concentrating hard on getting every element right. But the more she tries, the more her body tenses and the notes get stuck in her throat.

“[Singing] is not a gentle thing,” says her teacher, Frédérique Vézina. “It’s like jumping off a cliff – you have to just let go.”

Siegel takes a deep breath. She turns off her brain and lets her instincts take over. The song’s energy pumps from the ground to her face; every part of her vibrates like a pitchfork. The pounding pulse of the music takes over her being, annihilating her worries. The moment shimmers. Times like these, when the “controlled scream” of opera whisks her right out of herself, make all the effort worthwhile. “It’s the most luxurious feeling in the world,” says the soprano.

Learning to immerse herself in the moment has benefitted Siegel in both music and life. But it hasn’t been easy. Like many musicians, Siegel tends towards perfectionism, over-analyzing situations and undercutting actions.

Letting go is another of many life lessons that music and her mentors have taught her: learning to communicate and collaborate have bolstered her confidence both in singing and in general. “I question who I would be if I hadn’t had those experiences,” says Siegel.

Regent Park School of Music

Siegel’s instruction in music began at Toronto’s Regent Park School of Music (RPSM), [rpsm.org] which offers highly subsidized music lessons for children living in the mostly lower-income and racialized communities of Regent Park and Jane-Finch. From the age of nine, when she began studying voice, Siegel says, she was transfixed by the transformative power of music. She could be upset or frustrated or tired – but the moment she started singing everything else faded away.

Later, when her classically trained teacher introduced her to opera, Siegel learned to absorb her character’s perspective into her own skin. “I always try to imagine what the person I’m trying to portray was going through in that moment, and breathe it in and fully become it,” she says. These excursions into the minds of others have broadened her vision. “Everyone wants to be transformed, to go outside of themselves,” says Siegel.

As Siegel honed her voice at Regent Park School of Music, her overall confidence bloomed in tandem. As a young child, Siegel says, she was “bubbly but also self-contained. I lived in my own world happily for a really long time,” she recalls. Music, where she could comfortably express her feelings, drew her out of her shell. “That’s helped me…communicate with people,” she says.
Of course there were times when the magic went missing, and that’s when mentors like Zorana Sadiq jumped in. During one practice session, Siegel recalls how sadness over some now-forgotten incident seeped into the exercise. The uncharacteristic quiver in her voice affected Sadiq so profoundly that she baked her struggling pupil a batch of cupcakes to console her. Siegel remembers how touched she was by the gesture. “It makes you feel seen,” she says, “and like someone cares about you.” The former RPSM grad remains close with many of her former instructors, who have become a “second family.”

Performing also boosted Siegel’s morale. From the age of nine, the young girl was belting out solos in front of large crowds, and these stints in the spotlight have, for the most part, immunized her against stage fright. Her growing technical expertise in turn fuelled a sense of competence that extended into other domains. “Feeling like you’re getting better at something is …a really big part of becoming more confident,” she says.

But perhaps her greatest gift from RPSM, she says, was the school’s cultivation of her speaking voice. In their youth groups, students worked actively at exchanging opinions and taking a stance on social issues. “That’s the biggest thing that music gave to me as a youth,” Siegel says.

When she embarked on her music studies at the University of Toronto in 2013, though, Siegel was initially more bent on conforming than crusading. The only Black person in a sea of white faces, she recalls spending hours every weekend ironing out her thick, curly tresses in order to blend in with her straight-haired peers. Her classmates called her “Michelle Obama” (who sported a similar sleek bob). Siegel didn’t mind then, she says.

But her whole world view shifted on its axis the day George Floyd, an unarmed Black Minneapolis man, was murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin in May 2020. “I feel like a completely different person after that moment,” she says. While the former self-described “people pleaser” once ignored minor racial slurs, her tolerance ground to zero after that watershed event. “Things that you let slide before, there’s just not a place for them anymore,” she says. Siegel the songwriter poured her grief into a composition, *The Dream*, about a world without prejudice, performing it online with Pacific Opera Victoria.

But she did more than just dream. The pandemic gave her space to reassess her priorities. She had always wanted to give back to her old music school, and, in the fall of 2020, began co-leading their youth group, facilitating delicate discussions on both personal issues and current events. She was a natural. “The best part was seeing some kids start out quite shy then open up a little bit.”

**Marigold**

Revisiting Regent Park School of Music catalysed another, more far-reaching opportunity for their former protégé. After a visit there, staff connected Siegel to two other classically trained, like-minded musicians, Khadija Mbowe and Kevin Mulligan. Two years ago, the trio...
co-founded Marigold, [marigoldmusicprogram.com] an initiative to make community-based music education (both classical and other genres), accessible to racialized youth from a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, with the goal of helping to build stronger, more resilient communities. “It is important to show youth that people who look like you do this kind of music,” says Siegel, who serves as the program’s managing director.

Marigold’s namesake brilliant orange flower, Siegel explains, sprouts up anywhere but only thrives in a particular type of soil. Marigold strives to supply each participant with their own uniquely enriching environment tailored to make them thrive. Co-founding Marigold was another leap of faith for Siegel. “What do I know about running a non-profit?” she wondered. But the bolder, braver Siegel forged ahead. “I believe in it,” she told herself. “So let’s figure it out.” (Marigold has already secured Ontario Arts Council funding, as well as a Pillar Sponsorship from the University of Toronto.)

The program unfolds in two steps. The Summer Music Intensive, staffed by professional musicians, targets the tools of music, including composition, and culminates in a collective showcase partially written by the youth. Afterwards, the participants are individually matched to compatible mentors who meet with them weekly to flesh out their aspirations, offer resources and accompany them on outings to shows and other venues.

Marigold’s philosophy, including its championship of accessibility, echoes that of Siegel’s own alma mater. Both RPSM and Marigold inspire students to dig deep and take stock of their innermost feelings. Monthly meetings at Marigold begin with a check-in, when every participant gets the chance to tell whatever is on their mind. “[We’re] making sure they feel heard and valued,” says Siegel. Marigold’s egalitarian staff-student relationships are also modelled on RPSM. Mentors act as cheerleaders and advocates for their charges, providing a safe space for mentees to learn to trust their instincts as they explore their lives’ directions. “It’s not ‘Do what I say,’” says Siegel. “It’s believing in yourself.”

Like RPSM, Marigold hopes to build a sense of belonging and community through participants’ intense, shared adventure in music. Regardless of their aspirations, everyone benefits from the connections woven by exposure to the medium. “You’re not alone, we have shared experiences,” Siegel says. “That’s what the arts have to offer.”

Ultimately, Siegel hopes that participants’ immersion in Marigold will empower them, whatever life path they find themselves on. The discipline instilled through practice, the chance to experiment with new possibilities and the opportunity to play games and have fun all contribute to a heightened sense of agency, says Siegel. “I’m one of those people who believe you can do anything you want,” says Siegel. “We’re just hoping to show that.”

It seems that Siegel and her team are succeeding. Members are already forging a community. “They just love coming in to chat and hang out and reconnect with the group.” Recently, one trainee was elated when she received a scholarship to Branksome Hall, the high school of her dreams. “She never would have thought of applying there before,” says Siegel. But the interviewing and résumé skills gleaned from Marigold, along with a renewed confidence in herself, helped to clinch the coveted spot. “I am just so proud of what we have been able to do in a year,” says Siegel.

Siegelay too is flourishing. Last August she was admitted into the Canadian Opera Company’s Ensemble Studio, a training program combining elite level mentorship with challenging performance opportunities, onstage and in recital. “I do feel quite supported,” she says. Today Siegel takes vocal classes as well as master workshops in breath work, diction and acting. She’s also preparing for her upcoming debuts in Fantasma and The Magic Flute. “And that I’m very, very excited about,” says Siegel.

Siegelay continues to hone her musical craft, absorbing life lessons along the way: a life coach at the Canadian Opera Company has recently helped her recognize that she is happiest when balancing hard work with reparative self-care and family time. Siegel says. This discovery has been liberating “because if you are a full person outside of music, then you need not dread making the inevitable musical mistake.” This knowledge continues to bust Siegel out of the bonds of perfectionism and propels her towards a freer future.

Charlotte Siegel has come a long way from the hesitant 19-year-old teetering on top of the metaphorical cliff. She’s become a risk-taker, taking the plunge, finding new possibilities outside her comfort zone. It’s never easy. “It’s a scary feeling right before you go,” says Siegel. But the euphoria of jumping and surviving more than makes up for the anxiety. “You do something and you don’t die,” says Siegel. “Yeah, it’s addicting.”

Upcoming COC performances by Charlotte Siegel: Fantasma (she plays Léa’s mother, Manon) March 9,10,12,13 (2022) The Magic Flute (she plays Second Lady) May 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21 (2022) To learn more about Marigold, see marigoldmusicprogram.com.

Vivien Fellegi is a former family physician now working as a freelance journalist.
The stutter-step reopening!
Four stories of discovery

A N D R E W  T I M A R

After nearly two years unable to perform, the lucky among us found it was possible in the latter part of October 2021 and into November to begin rehearsing with larger groups. We saw friends and colleagues in bands and orchestras, large and small, grinning in Facebook and Instagram selfies – duly masked (except during the selfies) and double vaxxed of course. But as Omicron swept through, lots of ground was lost where live performance was concerned.

Here are four – I hope inspirational – stories from this particular variation on the two-year musical rollercoaster ride.

Labyrinth Ensemble: Winter Launch, Spring Concert

Responding to venue closures, last year the multifaceted Toronto music organization Labyrinth Ontario created a summer video series in parks across the city, in several small-scale outdoor summer concerts, and in October took part in the Music Gallery’s X Avant festival. More significant, perhaps, was the late year launch of its 14-musician Labyrinth Ensemble, long a dream of Labyrinth Ontario’s founding artistic director Araz Salek. Playing some 20 instruments in more than a dozen “modal music” genres among them, LE musicians were finally able to rehearse in-person in early November with Montreal-based guest vocalist, oudist Lamia Yared. The ten-day intensive focused on the study of the history, forms and other musical aspects of classical Arabic music, learning repertoire and fostering a sense of ensemble, culminating in a sold-out debut concert at the Aga Khan Museum on November 13, 2021 that I was honoured to attend.

Under Yared’s able on-stage leadership, the group unravelled a series of elaborate classical Turkish and Arabic musical songs and instrumentals, a notable few in complex metres. An impressively democratic, if inherently risky, element was that each musician was given a solo feature. You can view the entire concert on the Aga Khan Museum’s Facebook page.

This April and May LE has its second two-week Toronto intensive, this time mentored by guest Egyptian music scholar and oud master...
Mustafa Said, culminating once more in an LE May 6 concert, again at the Aga Khan Museum.

Cross-Border Music-Making with NEXUS at 50

Having participated in dozens of international festivals for half a century, they've been tagged “one of the world's most influential percussion ensembles.” They've also mentored and inspired several generations of Canadian and American percussionists (some of whom I've shared the stage with). But many more readers will recognize renowned percussion ensemble NEXUS from their music on radio, or from a TV or film soundtrack, even if they've not seen them in concert.

NEXUS gave its first, entirely improvised, concert in 1971. Percussion Hall of Famers today, they continue to celebrate their 50th concert season this year despite the impediments imposed by the pandemic. Being a cross-border, American-Canadian group, has given NEXUS an additional handicap during the period under discussion here: in-person rehearsals have for the most part been stymied by group assembly and border restrictions.

Now that lifting those is on the horizon, they're once again planning for resumption of in-person rehearsals in April. Even before that, though, on March 15 their music will be front and centre, when the percussion duo Escape Ten premieres NEXUS' Russell Hartenberger's score Magic Time at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. Hartenberger is staying busy. In June he is scheduled to be a featured artist at the Tócalo Tucson Festival in Arizona – an appearance already frustratingly postponed twice. He is also writing book chapters sharing his career in percussion performance and teaching. One, with the catchy title Learning Time, sounds bang-on for a lifelong percussion educator.

NEXUS' 50th anniversary live events resume full force this summer, kicked off in a July 2 concert headlined by American saxophonist and world music pioneer Paul Winter in Woodstock NY, and followed by a residency at the St. John's NL Sound Symposium XX later that month, where the ensemble will premiere Hartenberger's multi-movement work, Red River.

Finally, veteran Toronto-based contemporary music presenter Soundstreams is programming a concert, also postponed for the last two years, featuring works of American composer Steve Reich, with NEXUS among the featured performers. I'm sure NEXUS is looking forward to being able to honour Reich, their longtime friend and music colleague, on this side of the border.

My First Gigs in Two Years!

Here's where it gets personal. It's not a secret to dedicated WholeNote readers that I've long been an active participant with Toronto's Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan: as a musician since its 1983 founding; serving as its artistic director for five years; and running its community and educational music groups. The ensemble has been my primary musical home and extended family all this time – also offering priceless opportunities to share the stage with a range of other musicians and ensembles.

For all those reasons and more, ECCG's two-year lockdown has been personally rough. I particularly missed playing suling (bamboo ring flute) with my ECCG friends, collaboratively making some of the best music of our lives on our beautiful bespoke bronze, bamboo, wood and string gamelan degung. The long lockdown months have felt like I was doing physical and emotional hard time.

Imagine the relief and exhilaration in the room when late in November 2021 we stumbled on what now seems to have been an all-too-short sweet spot between the decline of Delta and the onset of Omicron. Finally, an opportunity to roll up our sleeves to rehearse, albeit mostly masked. Good planning meets sheer luck!

For several days we worked intensively interpreting four newly commissioned compositions in our downtown Array Studio space. We then travelled across provincial lines to Montreal to rehearse with the virtuoso six-person Sixtrum Percussion Ensemble, finally realizing a collaborative project four years in the making! On November 24, the two ensembles gave a passionate performance at the salle Claude-Champagne, Université de Montréal, then together crossed the provincial border in the other direction, repeating the program in Toronto to appreciative, physically distanced and masked audiences at the Music Gallery on November 27 and 28.

Within the limits of current January and February Ontario restrictions on larger group rehearsals, public workshops and concerts, ECCG remains hard: reactivating our community music workshop series Gamelan Meetup; collaborating with Indonesian collective Jatwangi Art Factory for the upcoming Toronto Biennial of Art in late March; and actively planning a month-long June composer gamelan workshop with partners Array Music and Canadian Music Centre.

Picanto, CMC's Canadian Music Online Video Portal

Last October 14, the Canadian Music Centre launched Picanto.ca, a digital platform aiming to become a hub for the Canadian music community and music lovers alike by providing an online platform for “uncommon music from diverse genres through music videos, documentaries, educational videos and live-streaming events.”

With the world of conventional broadcasting and recording in decline (especially in the CMC's wheelhouse genres of classical, jazz and contemporary music), and at a time when the pandemic impacts across all musical genres, the time was right, according to Glenn
Hodgins, CMC president, “for a cohesive digital dissemination strategy for Canadian music.” For the CMC’s wheelhouse genres, yes, but for all music with discovery at its heart in the way that discovery has always been at the heart of the Canadian Music Centre.”

So enter Picanto. With a mandate that dovetails neatly with the CMC’s role as a publisher, record label, and champion of Canadian music, it (so far) showcases nine music categories: jazz/improvised; Indigenous; inter-cultural; sonic exploration/musique actuelle; electroacoustic; vocal/choral; chamber music; opera; and orchestral music. Lots of doors marked push, I’d say!

What’s in the name? According to its media release, Picanto is a crafty blend of the words “piquant” (having a pleasantly sharp taste or appetizing flavour) and “canto” (“sing” in Italian), with an additional emphasis on the “can” for Canada. The service intends to provide a place for enthusiasts who seek musical experiences beyond the short-form and song-based music already available everywhere else.

At the fall virtual launch, the show hosts sampled some of Picanto’s diverse musical content: drumming from Uzume Taiko; music for three trumpets and orchestra by Vancouver composer Anna Pidgorna; and Soundstreams’ All Could Change composed and performed by Montreal-based jazz vocalist Sarah Rossy. A new work by Indigenous composer Raven Chacon performed by Vancouver’s Black Dog String Quartet segued to a vibrantly coloured video serving as the visual foil to composer Frank Horvat’s A Little Loopy performed by harpist Sharlene Wallace.

Then, literally the day of this story deadline I received an update from the CMC – announcing its 7X Picanto Festival running February 4 to 11, 2022. Sometimes life just works that way.

The Festival will showcase seven newly produced Canadian music videos – which two of their nine Picanto music categories are missing, I wonder? - the production of each sponsored by the CMC. This pilot new music video creation project is promised to be the first of “many such projects to support artists on the new platform,” including exploration of future initiatives such as pay-per-view video and livestream performances.

Meantime, in the digital media, eyeballs are currency, so take yours to the Picanto website. There’s more about 7X Picanto there, along with a slowly but steadily expanding universe of Canadian music videos with discovery at their heart.

Andrew Timar is a Toronto musician and music writer.

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Radio art is a lesser-known creative medium yet is perfectly designed for these concert-barren times we’re in. Deep Wireless is a festival of radio and transmission art, plus encompassing installations, performances, radio programs, symposiums and a series of CD compilations. The festival is entering into its 21st year of activities, thanks to the committed vision of New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA) and its artistic director Darren Copeland.

When I proposed this story to my WholeNote editor, he recalled that he had performed the role of a live radio host at a very early Deep Wireless event in 2002 held at Theatre Passe Muraille. One of the memories of that event that stood out for him, he said, was a performance of Radio Music by John Cage, a work written in 1956 for one to eight performers. His mention of that event in turn jogged my memory – I too had been involved in it. Later when I chatted with Copeland about this year’s festival, he was able to confirm that, not only was I involved, but that I had actually conducted the Cage work. In fact, most of the performers were students from my sonic arts class at OCAD who executed the movements on the radio dials according to the notated score.

Now Deep Wireless is 20-years old and this year’s festival opens on February 3 with sound installations by James Bailey and Shaughn Martle that will run for the duration of the festival, ending on April 4. The events will be presented online and in-person and are described not as concerts, but as Listening Parties or Group Listening events, often accompanied by a Q&A.

One event in particular caught my eye because of recent stories I wrote in this magazine: on February 5 and 6, a new work titled Winter Diary Revisited by Claude Schryer will be presented as a Group Listening event; it will also appear as an episode in Schryer’s ongoing conscient podcast series. The “revisiting” of the work’s title is a return to recordings Schryer made in 1997 with Murray Schafer in rural Manitoba that Schafer used in his radio piece commissioned by Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln (WDR) in Cologne, Germany. For the Deep Wireless event, Schryer will remix sounds from this trip along with some of Schafer’s writings and new winter soundscapes he has recorded in Ontario and Quebec in 2022.

Radio art, also known as Hörspiel and Ars Acustica, has been a prominent art form in Europe over the last number of decades largely supported by the larger state radio stations such as WDR in Cologne, who commissioned many different composers to create full one-hour pieces or radio dramas. Canadian equivalents have mostly arisen from CBC programs such as Ideas and Outfront and productions by the Radio Drama department. In fact, for several years, Deep Wireless partnered with Outfront to create shorter ten-minute radio-art pieces, assigning four artists from across Canada to a CBC producer who provided mentorship and guidance in the development of the story ideas. Wonderful pieces were created during this time, many of which can still be heard on NAISA’s SoundCloud page. [soundcloud.com/naisa]. One that I recall often when riding the TTC, featured the story behind recording the voice heard over the sound system announcing the next stop.

Looking back, Copeland spoke about the creation of a Deep Wireless Ensemble as being “a distinguishing feature” for the NAISA organization. This initiative brought together disparate artists to create live radio work. Copeland described it as being like a “four-way blind date” combining artists from different disciplines and backgrounds, each responsible for creating a piece with input from the others or alternatively, all working together to create a larger collective work. These interactions would often result in the start of a new direction for some
of the participants. One such recent collective work was *Power Play* created for the 2021 version of Deep Wireless by Anna Friz, Christine Duncan, Richard Windeyer and Richard Lee with contributions from Gregory Whitehead. It can be seen on [NAISAtube](https://naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless) as part of the 20th anniversary collection.

**Transmission art**

Over time, both the field of radio art and Deep Wireless’ objectives have evolved and changed. Copeland explained: “In the early days, public radio was certainly a destination or influence, but also community radio in North America became an outlet, with NAISA hosting a radio program on CKLN. With the beginning of Internet broadcasting and CKLN closing down, we shifted to a podcast format and also have an online radio station that streams 24/7 on our website.” As things moved to digital platforms, transmission art, as it was called, became a more prominent way for artists to engage. (Transmission art uses the conventions of broadcast technology to create artwork incorporating the transmitters as a sound source. It is even possible to work with the transmitter like a theremin, with body movement affecting the nature of the sound.)

In this year’s festival, the installation by James Bailey is a good example of transmission art. Several transmitters will be placed onto the strings of an upright piano, creating a type of prepared piano. The difference in this case is that the physical activity of the string vibrating on the transmitter itself is picked up and broadcast to a radio. Bailey’s piece - *The Piano Travels* - places multiple transmitters on a series of piano strings so that the frequency of each string will be broadcast to its dedicated transmitter without any microphone being needed. “It will be like a piano radio,” Copeland said.

Other events at this year’s Deep Wireless Festival include the presentation of British composer Trevor Wishart’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights - A Comic Opera*, an hour-long radiophonic journey through the landscapes of the human predicament. As well, two opportunities to experience an electro-acoustic composition workshop given by Dan Tapper will happen on February 13. Wishart’s piece will be presented in a new binaural audio version adapted from the 8-channel surround version. As well, two opportunities to experience an electromagnetic composition workshop given by Dan Tapper will happen on February 20 and 27.

This year’s Deep Wireless Festival coincides with the opening of the newly purchased NAISA North Media Arts Centre in South River, Ontario, an artist-owned dedicated space for the multiple projects that NAISA produces. This facility, Copeland hopes, will help usher in a new era for this ambitious arts organization, one of the few in Canada dedicated to the ever-expanding field of sound art. A full listing of festival events can be found on the NAISA website: [naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless](https://naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless).

**Rhubarb is back at Buddies**

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre has recently announced a return to main-stage programming at Buddies, with the return of Canada’s longest-running new works festival, Rhubarb, back for its 43rd year from February 4 to 13. In this year’s version, curated by festival director Clayton Lee, participating artists will respond to a large-scale installation, titled *Calculus of an infinite rot, part 1*, being created by designer and architect Andrea Shin Ling. Ling’s award-winning work, as described in this year’s Rhubarb announcement, “explores how biological and digital processes can intersect in design”. In her conceptual prompt to this year’s participating artists, she asks, “What does it mean after a year such as this, to regenerate one’s practice? What have we left to deteriorate, and what do we use as fodder and fuel for new creation?”

The festival’s 2022 programming includes, among many others, work by generational duo Lara Kramer and Ruby Caldwell Kramer, an impromptu sonic performance by New York-based Jesús Hilario-Reyes and a performance lecture by Sarah Garten Stanley. The Buddies website will be updated regularly to reflect changes and developments.

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**NMC Spring 2022 Live Concert Dates**

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thewholenote.com
Fragile Glim

'Tis the season, it would seem, for piano-and-weather-related art works. One particular event, currently slated for February 4 ahead of the festival’s official start, caught my eye too – a composition, Fragile Glim, by neo-speculative artist Stanford Cheung and poet Alvin Wong. Described as a multi-form soundscape composition, it derives its sound materials from an upright piano that has been exposed to the weather elements over many months, becoming a “degenerative piano that pushes against our human-centric ideas of what is considered beautiful.” The performance will also include free improvisation on found objects such as stones, sand and tuning forks, field recordings, electronics and spoken word.

And so, here we are again, again.

If you’re interested in the usual subject matter of this column, you already know that as of January 31, musical venues in Ontario will be permitted to operate at 50 percent seated capacity or 500 people, whichever is less, then move to 50 percent on February 21, and full capacity March 15 – just in advance of the two-year anniversary of Canada’s lockdown restrictions.

It is impossible to say whether or not the province will end up sticking to this schedule. It’s also impossible to know for sure, at this point, how quickly individual clubs will respond to what’s allowed, stage by stage. By the way, for most of the venues that I write about here, “clubs” is a useful misnomer: the majority are restaurants/bars, with diverse staffing needs that include kitchen staff, bartenders, hosts, managers, music bookers, and more. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the hiring/rehiring process in this industry is not simple, and takes time, training and money. The booking process is also complicated: there are a number of decisions that have to be made about artists whose shows have been postponed, artists who are currently scheduled but who may not be ready to return to the stage, and a number of other COVID-era scenarios.

All this being said, it is a good time to be cautiously optimistic, to get out of the cold, and to enjoy some live music once again. Here’s a taste.

The Tranzac

At this point in the pandemic, most everyone – ages nine to 90 – is familiar with Zoom, and has developed some kind of relationship with it, for better or worse. Zoom has been a popular platform for musical artists hosting conventional virtual performances, but it has also had real utility as a vehicle for virtual recitals. Though any kind of performance has the potential to be a nerve-wracking experience for those new to the practice, a Zoom performance allows one to play in the same place where one practices, to avoid the necessity of uncomfortable, formal footwear, and – crucially – to know that one can simply press command-Q if things really go south.

At The Tranzac, a new weekly series has emerged: Tranzac Open Stage Mondays on Zoom. A virtual adaptation of their traditional Monday-night open mic, the Zoom session typically goes for about an hour, and guests are invited to join any time after 7:45pm, with two songs per performer being the standard. While participation is 100 percent free, performers and audience members alike are encouraged to “support the club by buying a virtual beer,” “becoming a member or renewing your membership online,” or by “donating to the club.” (The Tranzac, as a member-run club, has a low-cost membership option for those interested.) Whether you’re an experienced musician looking to try out new material, a casual musician who wants a new goal to work towards, or an audience member looking to check out some fun, community-based performances, Monday night is your night.

The Jazz Room

In Waterloo, the Jazz Room at the Huether Hotel has a wealth of impressive shows booked for February. On February 12, vocalist Eliana Cuevas performs with her quintet, including drummer Mark Kelso, pianist Jeremy Ledbetter, bassist Ross MacIntyre, and percussionist Juan Carlos Medrano. Originally from Caracas, Venezuela, Cuevas

Wendalyn Bartley is a Toronto-based composer and electro-vocal sound artist. sounddreaming@gmail.com

QUICK PICKS

FEB 17, 8PM: New Music Concerts continues its series of commissions for distanced ensembles in celebration of their 50th anniversary with a performance of John Oswald’s re-Refuse. ONLINE: www.newmusicconcerts.com

FEB 25 to 27: Continuum and Jumbies Theatre + Arts. Small Arms Inspection Building, Mississauga. The Grounds for Goodness collaboration brings together Continuum’s contemporary music practice and professional ensemble with Jumbies interdisciplinary and community-arts practices, including many diverse and mixed-ability community participants. Two newly commissioned works by Robert Fleitz (NYC) and Christina Volpini (CA) will be performed. The event is part of a Jumbies multi-year interdisciplinary project “which presents works that artfully explore and express why and how people sometimes behave in good ways towards each other.” Check www.groundsforgoodness.ca for space updates and times.

MAR 6, 7PM: INNERchamber Ensemble. Revival House, Stratford. This concert, titled Flow, will feature two contemporary works: String Quartet No.3 by Kevin Lau and Strum by Jessie Montgomery. Ravel’s String Quartet in F will round out the program. Performers: Julie Baumgartel, violin; Andrew Chung, violin; Jody Davenport, viola; and Ben Bolt-Martin, cello. LIVE & LIVESTREAM. www.innerness.com

AND AT YOUR LEISURE: The Music Gallery has put together a series of music documentaries to watch to get you through February. Included will be favourites drawn from the Music Gallery archives. Sign up to have their recommendations sent to your inbox: Sign Up for Film Fridays

MAINLY CLUBS, MOSTLY JAZZ

Fingers crossed
Towards full capacity

COLIN STORY

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has been based in Toronto throughout her career and has released six albums of original music. Her newest, *El Curruchá*, is a collaboration with famed Venezuelan musician Aquiles Báez, and was released on Alma Records in 2021. Whether in the duo format of her new album, or in the quintet format in which she’ll be appearing at the Jazz Room, Cuevas is a powerful, accomplished performer, whose vocal prowess is matched by her deep melodic and rhythmic engagement.

On February 19, the Lorne Lofsky trio takes the stage. Lofsky is one of Canada’s pre-eminent jazz guitarists, with a long and storied career that includes a coveted tenure in Oscar Peterson’s quartet, touring with Peterson in the 80s and 90s, and appearing on three of Peterson’s albums: *The More I See You*, *An Oscar Peterson Christmas* and the live album *Oscar in Paris*. Though 2021 was a complicated year for new music, Lofsky released a brand-new album: *This Song Is New*, which came out in April on Modica Music. Featuring saxophonist Kirk MacDonald, bassist Kieran Overs and drummer Barry Romberg, the album sees Lofsky rearranging some standards (Seven Steps to Heaven in 5, Stablemates in 7) and playing contrafacts over others (Evans from Lennie, a Lennie Tristano-style adaptation of Pennies from Heaven). At the Jazz Room, Lofsky will be joined by Barry Elmes and Kieran Overs, for what should prove to be a night of exciting, swinging music.

**The Rex**

At the Rex, live music is coming back strong in February. Their Juno series continues, with four four-day residencies throughout the month. The first, from February 2 to 5, features the Kirk MacDonald Quintet, with MacDonald on tenor, Virginia MacDonald on clarinet, Brian Dickinson on piano, Neil Swainson on bass and Terry Clarke on drums. Up next, from February 9 to 12, the Dave Young Quintet hits the stage, with Young on bass, Kevin Turcotte on trumpet, John Johnson on saxophone, Terry Clarke on drums, Reg Schwager on guitar (February 9 and 10) and Brian Dickinson on piano (February 11 and 12). From February 16 to 19, check out pianist Bernie Senensky’s Quintet and, from February 23 to 26, drummer Mark McLean’s Playground project.

It’s hard to say what February will bring, but – in both this column and the club listings – I am assuming the best, and writing about currently scheduled shows. Only time will tell whether or not these shows will happen, so please be in touch with clubs directly to confirm. Stay safe, support your local clubs and musicians, and here’s hoping that we all see one another in person soon.

*For venue contact information, see In the Clubs (Mostly Jazz), page 31/32.*

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.

**Just announced, cancelled, postponed, rescheduled from, new date TBA**

INFO ON LIVE PERFORMANCE CHANGES FAST THESE DAYS!

Sign up HERE for The WholeNote weekly listings updates.

Straight to your email inbox. thewholenote.com/newsletter
Our next print issue covers from March 4 to April 15.

The submission deadline for new listings and updates to listings previously processed is **6pm Monday February 14**.
Saturday February 12

• 7:30: Rose Theatre/Rose Orchestra. Music From The Heart. Rose Theatre, 1 Theatre Ln., Brampton. [https://tickets.brampton.ca or 905-874-2800. From $30].


• 8:00: Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra. Charles Richard-Hamelin & Beethoven. See Feb 11.

Saturday February 19


• 7:30: Guitar Society of Toronto. In Concert: Irina Kulikova. St. Andrew’s Presbytery Church, 73 Simcoe St. www.guitarsocietyoftoronto.com or 416-964-8286. Advance: $35; $50(sr); $75(st); $10($at); $40; $55(sr); $70(st & youth). Also Feb 20 (2:30pm).

• 8:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Hewitt Plays Bach & Mozart. See Feb 16.

Sunday February 13

• 7:00: INNEnChairmEnsemble. Kindness. Songs and stories of kindness curated and performed by Glynis Ranney and Michael Nadajewski and arranged by Ben Bolt-Martin. Revival House, 70 Brunswick St., Stratford. www.innerchamber.ca or tickets@innerchamber.ca. $40; $10-$25 (arts workers/st). Pre-show 6:30pm. A light meal is available for patrons in Stratford. LIVE & LIVE STREAM

Tuesday February 15


Wednesday February 16


Thursday February 17

• 8:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Hewitt Plays Bach & Mozart. See Feb 16. Also Feb 19.

Friday February 18

• 8:00: Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society. Shades of Grief. Coriolio Trio: Joung Tsai, violin; Rebecca Morton, cello; Tomoko Inui, piano. First United Church, 16 William St. W., Waterloo. 519-569-1809 or www.tickets.cane/kwcms. $35, $20(st).
Available Online | February 2 to March 15, 2022

Thursday February 3

| 7:30: COSA Canada. The Pirates of Penzance. Jacob Abrahamse, tenor (Frederic); Amy Moodie, soprano (Mabel); Nolan Kehler, tenor (Major General Stanley); Cristina Lanz, mezzo (Ruth); Ryan Hofman, baritone (Pirate King); Renée Savelski, stage director; Dar- ry Edwards, music director. 647-272-6732. $20.11 or PWYC. Also Feb 5 (2pm), ONLINE.

Friday February 4

| 7:00: Confluence Concerts. Theme and Variations. The Music of Nina Simone. Shaku ra S'aida, vocalist; Andrew Downing, double bass; Alexia Belgrave, piano. www.con- fluenceconcerts.ca. Free. ONLINE.

| 7:30: COSA Canada. The Pirates of Penzance. See Feb 3. Also Feb 6 (6pm), ONLINE.

Saturday February 5

| 7:00: Bravo Niagara! Festival of the Arts. Kimoko's Pearl (Digital Short). Music by Kevin Lau. Choreography by Yousuke Mino. Alanna McAdie, Chenxin Liu, and Yue Shi, dancers; Ron Korb, flute; Mariko Anraku, harp; Conrad Chow, violin; Rachel Mercer, cello; Jeff Hrd, director; Mary Ito, moderator: www.bravoni-agara.com. Free. ONLINE.

| 7:30: COSA Canada. The Pirates of Penzance. See Feb 3. Also Feb 6 (2pm), ONLINE.

Sunday February 6

| 2:00: COSA Canada. The Pirates of Penzance. 647-272-6732. $20.11 or PWYC. See Feb 3 ONLINE.


| 7:30: COSA Canada. The Pirates of Penzance. See Feb 3 ONLINE.

Sunday February 13

ALBUM RELEASE

THE ART OF CHOPIN

ALAN HOBBS piano

FEBRUARY 25, 8PM
LIVESTREAM

www.alanhobbins.com/concerts

The Gull, the Raccoon, and the Last Maple
Digital Family Concert
STREAMS FEBRUARY 17–21, 2022
tafelmusik.org

The Gull, the Raccoon, and the Last Maple. Music by Abigail Richardson-Schulte. Text and story by Alexis Diamond. A powerful new digital concert for the whole family, inspired by the music, featuring works of Hietala, Sirett, and Mendelssohn, as well as songs from Catalunya, Brazil, Israel.

Friday February 20

● 8:00: Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, The Gull, The Raccoon, and the Last Maple. Music directed by Jamie Hillman & Darryl Edwards, with tenor Robert McCrindle, soprano Kelly Anakie, mezzo-soprano Jeanne Lamon, tenor Endymion; Renée Salewski, stage director; Ryan Godfrey, stage manager; Emma Lee, stage manager. www.naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless/workshops-talks. $30 (for all 3 events), $20 (for individual events), PWYC.

Saturday February 26

● 7:30: Jubilate Singers. Together in Song. An online concert of Canadian and world music, featuring works of Hietala, Sirett, and Mendelssohn, as well as songs from Catalunya, Brazil, Israel.

Thursday March 3


Sunday March 6

● 7:00: INNERchamber Ensemble. Flow. Julie Baumgartel, violin; Andrew Chung, violin; Jody Davenport, viola; Ben Bolt-Martin, cello. Revival House, 70 Brunswick St., Stratford. www.innerchamber.ca or tickets@innerchamber.ca. $40; $10–$25 (arts workers/st). Pre-show 6:30 pm. A light meal is available for patrons in Stratford. LIVE & LIVESTREAM

Friday March 11

● 7:00: COSA Canada. Endymion’s Dream. Music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Gwendolyn Yearwood, soprano (Selene); Ryan Downey, tenor (Endymion); Renée Saleski, stage director; Jamie Hillman & Darryl Edwards, music directors. 647-272-6232. $20.11 or PWYC. Also Mar 11, 12, 13 (2:30 pm), ONLINE

In the Clubs (Mostly Jazz)

As venues begin to reopen, please consult their websites and social media directly to confirm their reopening plans.

Jazz Room, The
Located in the Huetner Hotel, 59 King St. N., Waterloo. 226-476-1565
kwjazzroom.com

Lula Lounge
1585 Dundas St. W. 416-588-0307
lula.ca

Manhattans Pizza Bistro & Music Club
951 Gordon St., Guelph 519-767-2440
manhattans.ca

Mezzetta Restaurant
681 St. Clair Ave. W. 416-658-5687
mezzettarestaurant.com

Monarch Tavern
12 Clinton St. 416-531-5833
themonarchtavern.com

Old Mill, The
21 Old Mill Rd. 416-236-2641
oldmillToronto.com

The Home Smith Bar:
Pilot Tavern, The
22 Cumberland Ave. 416-923-5716
thepilot.ca

Poetry Jazz Café
224 Augusta Ave. 416-599-5299
poetryjazzcafe.com

Reposado Bar & Lounge
136 Ossington Ave. 416-532-6474
reposadobar.com

February 2022 | 31
RESIDED & transferred to CD, DVD.

PRECIOUS MEMORIES

NEED HELP WITH YOUR TAXES?

HORIZON TAX SERVICES INC.

EXPERIENCED FEMALE VOCALIST NEEDED FOR JAZZ QUARTET (SSAA): must be able to read music, have good pitch and ability to blend well. Rehearsals near Broadview-Danforth. Please contact donnagreed045@gmail.com to inquire. Repertoire includes many jazz standards.

INSTRUCTION

BE A MORE CONFIDENT CHORIST ER? Treat yourself to private sight-singing lessons, (using the solfège movable DOH system). ZOOM or in-person. East end of Toronto. Call or text Sheila at 416-574-5250.

CETTOS CSSIONS

FRENCH HORN:

ACCOUNTING AND INCOME TAX SERVICE

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Under the **WHO'S WHO** tab at THEWHOLENOTE.COM, you’ll find several directories containing detailed profiles about active participants in several areas of the musical life of our region and beyond. In our **Blue Pages** you can read about a variety of music makers and presenters; the **Canary Pages** reveals the riches of choral activity all across southern Ontario. You can also find information about Summer Festivals in our **Green Pages**, and about seasonal learning opportunities in **Summer Music Education**.

Traditionally we published a single annual print supplement for each of these: The Blue Pages in the fall, Summer Music Education in late winter, The Canary Pages in May, and The Green Pages in early summer. But these days it’s more useful to allow for rolling deadlines for all concerned, so we’ve moved the directories entirely online. This means that directory participants a) can wait till their plans for the season have taken shape, and b) revise them as frequently as necessary, as restrictions governing venues and live performance continue to adjust, hopefully for the better! So what follows here is an up-to-the-moment index (as of January 2022) of current members of the Blue Pages. Profiles are being added or updated on a weekly basis on our website. As for the Green Pages and Summer Music Education, we’ve kept the 2021 profiles online for your awareness for now, but these will be updated for 2022 soon, so check back in a few weeks. We’ll be updating the Canary Pages in May.

The current index below offers you a handy way to window-shop presenters who’s season’s are in progress or just starting up. You can access their websites directly – via the web addresses that accompany every name in the index, with a “click!” if you explore these pages while reading *The WholeNote* in our online flipthrough edition, accessible via [kiosk.thewholenote.com](http://kiosk.thewholenote.com). So happy browsing! If you have any questions about the directories, either as a reader or prospective directory member, contact me at [karen@thewholenote.com](mailto:karen@thewholenote.com)

*Karen Ages, directory and member services*
Elsewhere in these pages you will find reviews of new recordings of music by Bach: the English Suites performed by Vladimir Ashkenazy, *Autour de Bach*, woodwind arrangements of a number of his works as recorded by Pentatèdre, and two sets of Goldberg Variations, one with Sarah Hagen on piano and one with Cameron Carpenter in his own transcription for grand organ. The Goldbergs are arguably the most recorded, most transcribed and most adapted for other purposes of Bach’s works, and certainly the most often reviewed in The WholeNote. With the two reviews mentioned above I count 25 in as many years and here comes number 26.

When Karlheinz Essl (b. Austria 1960) was approached by the Orpheus Trio in 2002 to arrange an existing string-trio version of the Goldberg Variations with the addition of live electronics, his initial reactions were “astonishment and bewilderment: how could that be possible with this music?” Was there any artistic necessity of doing so? The idea of manipulating the sound of the live instruments electronically, of ‘spicing it up,’ seemed almost sacrilegious.” The trio was persistent however and this eventually led to the first of (so far) realizations of *Gold.Berg.Werk*: for string trio; for harpsichord; for saxophone quartet; and, most recently, for piano. It is a recording of this last variety, featuring Xenia Pestova Bennett (Ergodos ER33 ess.at/records/goldbergwerk-2021.html), that arrived on my desk last month. In *Gold.Berg.Werk* – a pun on Goldberg Work and Goldbergwerk (to mine, as in mining for gold) – Bach’s Goldberg Variations are “confronted with electronic sounds that are played between groups of variations, bridging the gap between the sound world of the Baroque era and the sonic reality of the third millennium.” The electronics are based on the harmonic progression of the fundamental *Aria*, from which the composer stripped all figurations and ornaments. Through manipulation of the overtone spectrum and the use of granular synthesis – compressing, stretching, and stopping forward motion ad libitum carried out in real time with the help of compositional algorithms – Essl has created five electronic interludes, which in live performance are spatially projected in surround sound throughout the auditorium. Even in the binaural mix for CD the sound is immersive and compelling, Pestova Bennett’s outstanding performance of the selected movements, 20 variations chosen by Essl and arranged in groups of five, bookended by the signature *Aria*, is beautifully integrated into the overall fabric of this “new” work. Regarding Essl’s question as to whether there was any artistic necessity to enhance such an iconic piece in the first place, I suppose we each have to decide for ourselves. For me, *Gold.Berg.Werk* has brought a new perspective that, after initial resistance to the idea, I have embraced and found enchanting.

And speaking of Bach, you would be excused for thinking that after last month’s column I might have had enough cello for a while, but not so gentle reader. *Julia MacLaine’s Preludes* would have fit nicely in that cello-centric column but it has only now been released by Analekta (AN 2 8914 analekta.com/en). MacLaine says that she found the inspiration for this project in a Hilliard recital by Bonnie Hampton some years ago in which the Preludes from Bach’s Solo Cello Suites were interspersed with contemporary works. With funding from the Canada Council, MacLaine commissioned six Canadian composers to write works “in response” to the Bach preludes. The result is an intriguing CD with six very different responses, from Airat Ichmouratov whose quite traditional *Praeludium for Cello Solo in G Major*, Op.69 quotes freely from Bach before venturing onto less familiar paths, through a gamut of approaches before culminating in *Post Bach* by Prince Edward Island fiddler and composer Roy Johnstone. This last work features rollicking dance sections juxtaposed with what MacLaine describes as a “grumpily [...] glimpse of the underworld, the murky place that gave rise to the motives that permeate Bach – and Johnstone.” Along the way we are treated to Gabriel Dharmoo’s *sarasaraaahat*, a piece inspired by the *Prelude* from the *Suite in D Minor* that uses the Indian Carnatic music of the composer’s cultural heritage to put the sound produced by the cello under a microscope, exploring the “very limit between pitch and white noise.” Carmen Braden’s *Play Time* asks the cellist to “play the score as if you just heard the Bach *Cello Suite No.3* for the first time and now sit down and improvise, playful as a child.” In her signature way, Nicole Lizée employs technology to expand the palette of the cello, in the words of MacLaine “a marvellous, fantastical electronic world [with the cello] singing expressively above it, weaving in and out of it, and chasing after it.” Cris Derksen states “LAND BACH is my response to Bach’s fifth prelude as an Indigenous composer and cellist.” Her treatment includes a section of “looped rolled chords” which MacLaine says is characteristic of Derksen’s music.

As I have said before, it must be extremely hard for a performer these days to find a way to present Bach’s iconic works – that have been recorded countless times – in a new light. I find MacLaine’s performances of both the Bach originals and the new companions insightful and convincing. While I have mixed feelings about “cherry picking” just the preludes from the Bach Suites, in this context where the composers are specifically reacting to the movements in question I find the project as a whole very well-considered and satisfying. I’ll give MacLaine the last words: “My hope is [...] that you will hear Bach differently, as though past and present composers were having a conversation across the years, across the ocean.”

Nicole Lizée is also among the seven composers commissioned by Vancouver’s venerable Standing Wave ensemble for its project 20C Remix (Redshift Records standingwave.ca) in which a number of iconic 20th century works are reimagined for the new millennium. With three decades under its belt, Standing Wave is touted as Western Canada’s foremost contemporary chamber ensemble. *20C Remix* – a digital release with a limited edition vinyl run – opens with *Stone’s Throw*, Jocelyn Morlock’s ebullient take on Ann Southam’s *Glass Houses No.9*, adapted for full ensemble: flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion. It’s a roller coaster ride for all concerned and I particularly enjoyed finding hints of Stravinsky in the mix. Jennifer Butler enhances Messiaen’s *Le merle noir* for piano and flute with the other members of the ensemble in a fairly straightforward and effective homage to the French master. *Walking in Claude’s Footsteps* is Jordan Nobles’ gentle take on Debussy’s *Des pas sur la neige* and Jared Miller finds *Guilty Pleasures* in his interpretation of John Adams’ *China
Gates. Unlike most of the works here which enlargc the original forces, Chris Mayo and Bekah Simms take orchestral textures and adapt them for the sextet. Mayo’s Oh Come Now! There is a Beautiful Place! is an arrangement “on a relatively miniature scale” of Reinhold Glière’s mammoth Symphony No.3. Although the liner notes tell us that the title is taken from a poem by Kenneth Patchen, there is no explanation of how this relates to the symphony and I’m left scratching my head. Simms’ Tenebrese explores the “night music” from the third movement of Bartók’s Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta with “approaches that I feel the composer would have been likely drawn to had he lived into the 21st century,” including microtonal glissandi and the use of non-tempered pitches while incorporating familiar motifs from the original. Lizée is represented with two tracks, her own inimitable treatments of songs by pop icons Dead or Alive (You Spin Me Round) and Justin Timberlake (Cry Me a River). While certainly a different sensibility from the other offerings here, they somehow manage to fit in seamlessly. I particularly enjoyed the bass clarinet and vibraphone lines in Epilophia, her take on Timberlake’s classic, which brings this very satisfying disc to a close.

The next release features two relative newcomers on the contemporary music scene, composer Xander Simmons and Montreal’s Collectif Novart. Simmons’ second release Inner Landscapes (xandersimmons.com) features five works for varying ensembles, opening with the contemplative Three Points for piano trio which gradually builds to a dramatic peak before receding. Pink Mountain is a four-movement work – Daun, Daylight, Drift and Dusk – which is one of two works here that take direct inspiration from the painted landscapes of Peter Doig, the other being Grande Riviere, a work that adds ambient electronic textures to acoustic instrumentation. Solstice is in two parts, and utilizes the largest ensemble here, a nonet. Winter opens with a dark duet between contrabass and bassoon, slowly brightening as if the pale sun were shining through. Summer opens with busy flute over a bassoon ostinato and continues in a minimalist melisma of insect sounds with birds soaring above in the cloudless sky (my imagery). The composer describes the closing Vorticites as “a collage of string performances mixed with synthesizers and field recordings.” As with the other pieces here, the language is consonant and tonal, but here the extra-musical materials add an edge to the layers of sound. Overall this is a strong release from a young composer, showing a breadth of interest and understanding that bodes well for future endeavours. The collectif is in fine form, with convincing performances and solid ensemble work.

I first heard the music of Petar Klanac (then known as Pierre-Kresimir Klanac) at Glenn Gould Studio back in November 1997 as part of New Music Concerts’ contribution to the Made In Canada Festival, and then in 2000 on the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal CD Nouvelles Territoires 1. In the intervening years he had fallen off my radar until a few weeks ago when he reached out to me about his new CD.

Klanac has a surprisingly small presence on the Internet. The little biographical information I’ve been able to glean tells me that his principal instruments are violin and electric guitar and that he studied composition with Gilles Tremblay at the Montreal Conservatoire from 1992 to 1995 and later with Gérard Grisey and Marco Stroppa at the Paris Conservatoire and Denys Bouliane at the Rencontres de musique nouvelle du Domaine Forget in Charlevoix (Québec). He was a child chorister in the Maitrise des Petits Chanteurs du Mont-Royal (Saint-Joseph’s Oratory, Montreal) for nine years and this seems to have strongly informed his compositional aesthetic. That first piece I heard was titled Le ressuscité de Béthanie (on the subject of the resurrection of Lazarus), a theme to which he returned two decades later in a work for Ensemble Nahandove. Many of the works in his oeuvre focus on religious themes, such as Agnus Dei for men’s choir, Pope Noster for tenor and string quartet and Sancta Parens for two saxophones and cello. When commissioned by the Société de musique contemporain du Québec to compose a new work for its 55th anniversary concert last December he presented the 18-minute chamber ensemble work Yerushalayim.

Klanac has made his home in France for some time and his latest project, Pozgarría da (peteklanac.bandcamp.com), was commissioned by Ensemble o, a group whose members are based in different cities in France, Catalonia and Belgium, as part of 30th anniversary celebrations for the Institut Culturel Basque. Pozgarría da (How wonderful it is) is a setting of four poems by the Basque Franciscan Father Bitoriano Gandiaga for voice (Fanny Chatelain singing in the original language) and an unusual ensemble consisting of flutes, rebec and nyckelharpa, four organs, gamelan sedulung and percussion. There is a sparse instrumental prelude and two interludes, all titled Maite dut bizitza (I love life), separating the first three poems, whose sparse and subdued settings are vaguely reminiscent of medieval music. The final movement, also Maite dut bizitza, is the most expansive by far at almost 17 minutes, and is also the most exuberant; a flamboyant minimalist – think cinematic Philip Glass – paean to “The joy of life / To my surroundings / that are alive. / I wish the joy of being alive / To everyone who lives / the grace of life.” Amen! A very welcome anthem and reminder in these unjoyful times.

And now for something completely different, although I find joy here too. “What if Dark Orchard (Jim Casson’s experimental music project) and ‘The Blues’ got together in New Orleans and watched Tu/in Peaks with Daniel Lanois?” That’s the premise behind Davis Hall & The Green Lanterns (greenlanterns.ca). Originally conceived in the early days of COVID-19 as a remote collaboration with bass player Russ Boswell, Casson laid down drum tracks in his home studio that he shared with Boswell who added funky bass licks and a song outline. They invited Bernie LaBarge to add some guitar lines and Brent Barkman on organ; and Marshallville Station, the second track on the current album, was born. Although the project was shelved for a while, the ongoing pandemic has provided the perfect opportunity to revisit the idea.

I’ve been a sucker for blues tuba since I saw Taj Mahal at the Mariposa Festival 40–some years ago backed by a quartet of tubas headed by the late great Howard Johnson (1941–2021). Well, that’s how this adventure begins, with the funky, N’awlins-flavoured Temperanceville co-written by Casson, tuba player N. Jay Burr and guitarist Wayne DeAdder, with Mike Branton sitting in on slide guitar. The personnel of the Green Lanterns changes from track to track, with Casson on drums, keyboards, autoharp and even theremin the only constant, but the result is always bluesy and frequently scorching. Burr, DeAdder, Boswell and Brandon make numerous contributions and guests include Steve Marriner and Al Lerman on harmonica, Stephen Miller on dobro, and an archival appearance by 60s DJ Bob Bowland from CHOW radio in Welland, Ontario. Casson explains the name of the group, and of the songs, as a tribute to the Niagara Peninsula, the stomping grounds of his formative years. “Davis Hall” was the name of the community centre in his hometown where he attended nursery school, “The Green Lantern” was the soda shop in town when he was a kid and the names of all the songs correspond to place names on the peninsula. Who knew that the fruit belt could be so darn funky? This one is guaranteed to lift your spirits (and your heels)!

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

thewholenote.com

February 2022 | 35
Alma is the third album of original arrangements by Fire & Grace, the duo of violinist Edwin Huizinga and guitarist William Coulter (Roaring Girl Records fireandgracemusic.com). Coulter’s plectrum guitar is an acoustic steel-string Custom Meridian made by Mike Baranik. Piazzolla’s Libertango, Albéniz’ Asturias (with violin shredding!) and Vivaldi’s L’Estate – Summer open a fascinating CD, at the heart of which is Suite Española, a continuation of the duo’s project of arranging the solo music of Bach (in this case the Cello Suite No.1) and blending it with folk music, the six Bach movements in this case interspersed with melodies from Spain.

An arrangement of Tanya’s Tune, composed by the former Väsen guitarist Roger Tallroth, completes a hugely entertaining disc.

For Muse, their first album together, the young brother and sister duo of Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason chose two works that they love playing in concert (Decca Classics 4851630 deccaclassicals.com/en). Barber’s Cello Sonata in C Minor Op.6, written when he was 22 and a student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, opens the disc, while Rachmaninoff’s Cello Sonata in G Minor Op.19 from 1901 closes it. The duo notes that the two works are from completely different worlds, but “somehow they work together in terms of their emotional intensity.” Certainly there’s no lack of emotional intensity in these outstanding performances.

Songs by the two composers effectively tie the sonatas together on a terrific disc. The three Rachmaninoff songs – It Cannot Bel!, How Fair This Spot and The Muse – were already among the duo’s favourites while the four Barber songs – There’s Nae Lark, A Slumber Song of the Madonna, With Rue My Heart Is Laden and Sure on This Shining Night – were new to them.

Two outstanding representatives of the younger generation of Russian musicians, pianist Maxim Emelyanychev and violinist Aylen Pritchín, are featured on Brahms Sonatas for Piano & Violin on period instruments (Aparé AP237 apartemusic.com). The instruments in question are an 1875 Steinway piano and a 1725 Jacques Boquay violin, but there’s plenty of powerful, full-bodied piano playing to accompany Pritchín’s beautifully bright and sensitive touch.

The Scherzo from the 1853 F-A-E Sonata, Brahms’ contribution to the three-movement work written with Schumann and Dietrich as a gift for Joseph Joachim, opens the disc. Fine performances of the three sonatas from the period 1878-88 – No.1 in G Major Op.78, No.2 in A Major Op.100 and No.3 in D Minor Op.108 – complete a lovely CD.

The booklet essay notes the references to Brahms’ own songs in the sonatas, particularly the first two, and there’s certainly a delightfully lyrical approach to the beautiful performances here.

Kornauth & Fuchs Works for Viola and Piano is another CD product of the Covid lockdown, this time featuring the Litton Duo of Katharina Kang Litton, principal violist of the New York City Ballet and her pianist husband, conductor Andrew Litton (BIS-2574 bis.se).

Through playing the Brahms sonatas together the two discovered the viola and piano music of Brahms’ contemporary Robert Fuchs (1847-1927), whom Brahms greatly admired, and Fuchs’ student Egon Kornauth (1891-1959). Fuchs’ other students included Mahler, Wolf, Sibelius, Zemlinsky, Korngold, Enescu and Franz Schmidt.

Kornauth is represented by his Viola Sonata in C-sharp Minor Op.3 from 1912, and Fuchs by his Viola Sonata in D Minor Op.86 from 1909 and Six Fantasy Pieces Op.117 from 1926-27.

While not exactly “of their time” from a progressive viewpoint they are nonetheless beautifully crafted and extremely attractive works that require passion, warmth, feeling, effortless technique and perfect ensemble, all here in abundance on a lovely CD.

Cellist Laura van der Heijden and pianist Jâms Coleman make their Chandos label debut with Pohádka: Tales from Prague to Budapest, an album that explores the rich folk melodies of Janáček, Kodály and Dvořák (CHAN 20227 chandos.net).

Janáček’s Pohádka (Fairy Tale) is typical of the composer’s late and highly individual voice. Kodály’s Cello Sonata Op.4 from 1909-10 is here, as are two short songs transcribed by van der Heijden and the Sonatina, also from 1909 and originally intended as part of the Op.4 sonata. The Dvořák is the short song Als die alte Mutter Op.55 No.4 from 1880.

There are two works by lesser-known composers: Mouvement, written for Kodály’s 80th birthday in 1963 by András Mihály (1917-1993); and van der Heijden’s transcription of the brief 1936-37 song Navzdy (Forever) Op.12 No.1 by Vítězslava Kaprálová, who died from tuberculosis in 1940 aged only 25.

Van der Heijden’s remarkably effective adaptation of Janáček’s Violin Sonata closes an excellent disc.

Another artist making her label debut is the young Japanese violinist Coco Tomita, who was offered a debut album on the Orchid Classics label after winning the Strings Final of the 2020 BBC Young Musician competition; she is accompanied by pianist Simon Callaghan on Origins (ORC100194 orchidclassics.com).

At the heart of the recital are Poulenc’s Violin Sonata – a marvellous piece, despite his doubts and misgivings – and the Ravel Violin Sonata No.2, both works given superb readings. The other major work is Huy’s Carmen – Fantasie brillante, one of Tomita’s performance pieces from the 2020 competition and indeed played quite brilliantly.

Enescu’s unaccompanied Ménétrier (Country Fiddler) from his Impressions d’enfance Op.28 opens the disc. Lili Boulanger’s brief but beautiful Nocturne from Two Pieces is included, and the Heifetz arrangement of Debussy’s Beau Soir closes an outstanding CD.

There must surely be great things ahead for such a talent as this. [Please Note: the disc is not scheduled for release until March 2022.]

Gabriel Schwabe is the cellist on Elgar & Bridge Cello Concertos, with the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under Christopher Ward (Naxos 8.573420 naxosdirect.com/search/8573420).

The Elgar Cello Concerto in E Minor Op.85 dates from 1919, when the composer was appalled and disillusioned by the suffering caused by the war and by the loss of the Edwardian world he loved. Schwabe’s
performance gives you everything you could want from this beloved concerto. The real revelation here, though, is Frank Bridge’s Oration, Concerto elegiaco. Written in 1929–30, it shares spiritual affinities and shadows of the Great War with the Elgar, and is described as “a funeral address of huge solemnity and narrative power in its outcry against the futility of war.” At times it is much like the Elgar in sound and style, but not in form, having seven connected movements with a particularly martial sonority, as Brahms Violin Concerto Bdf-ed-85007-2.

The American violinist Oscar Shumsky, who died in 2000 at the age of 83, recorded extracts from the Brahms Violin Concerto in D Major Op. 77 for the Music Appreciation Recordings LP label, but a complete performance with the Philharmonia Hungarica under Uri Segal in 1984, although apparently it was forgotten for almost four decades. It has now been released by Biddulph Recordings, with the Shumsky family’s permission, as Brahms Violin Concerto (85007-2 naxosdirect.com/search/bdf-ed-85007-2).

Shumsky was generally considered to be one of the great violinists of the 20th century, the New Grove Dictionary calling him “a player of virtuosic technique, pure style and refined taste,” qualities that are fully evident in this really fine performance. The orchestral sound is quite resonant, with the violin’s brilliant tone very much up front. It’s a gem of a CD.


Sonatas No.1 Op.82 and No.2 Op.85 were both written in 1964, and are comprised of several short movements: Adagio, Andante, Allegretto, Lento and Presto for the Op.82; and Monody, Rests, Intervals, Replies, Accompaniment, Invocation and Syncopes for Op.85. Sonata No.3 Op.126 from 1979 is a single-movement work with a decided Shostakovich feel about it.

Kremer really throws himself into this music, which has a great range of emotional and technical challenges, but is capable of playing with much tenderness and sensitivity when required. This may not be the first recording of these fascinating works, but it’s difficult to imagine a set with a greater commitment.

There’s music by Weinberg’s compatriot himself this month as well, with a new recording of Shostakovich String Quartets No.3 & No.8 in excellent performances by the Korean ensemble Novus Quartet (Aparťe AP271 apartemusic.com).

The String Quartet No.3 in F Major Op.73 from 1946 was triumphantly received by the public and critics alike, and seems to chart the path from the losses of the war to a return to daily life, albeit with a “forced cheerfulness” typical of the composer.

The String Quartet No.8 in C Minor Op.110 is the most autobiographical of the Shostakovich quartets, with its musical monogram D, E-flat, C and B natural (DSCH in German notation) forming the basis for much of the work. Moreover, the quartet is full of direct quotes from earlier Shostakovich works, most touchingly the melody from the opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, the work which resulted in his initial persecution by the Soviet authorities. Written in 1960 in response to the wartime destruction of human life and artistic treasures in Dresden, it was portrayed by Soviet propaganda as denouncing fascism, while it was almost certainly a reaction to Soviet atrocities under the Stalin regime.

The Sound and the Fury is the first studio recording by the Shea-Kim Duo, the husband and wife team of violinist Brendan Shea and pianist Yerin Kim (Blue Griffin Recording BGR593 bluegriffin.com). Dvořák’s Můzurk Op.49, with its abundant and virtuosic double stops, was inspired by and dedicated to the great Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasate. Grieg’s Violin Sonata No.3 in C Minor Op.45 is the biggest of his three violin sonatas and, possibly because of the simply beautiful slow middle movement, one of the composer’s favourite works.

Janáček’s Violin Sonata, his only work in the genre, was written in early 1914, just prior to the outbreak of the Great War. The composer later referred to “the sound of steel clashing” in his head.

Shea plays with a warm tone on a violin which can tend to sound somewhat muted at times. Kim’s piano contribution is first-class throughout.

Finally, space restrictions usually preclude our covering short streaming-only releases, but in view of the recent passing of the legendary Broadway composer Stephen Sondheim, as well as the superb quality of the arrangement and performance, I just have to mention Stephen Sondheim A Little Night Music: Suite for Violin and Piano, arranged by Broadway veteran Eric Stern for the Opsuo Duo of violinist William Terwilliger and pianist Andrew Cooperstock (Bridge 4010 bridgerecords.com).

The third in a series of Stern Broadway arrangements commissioned by Opsuo and made with the composer’s approval, it’s just under 15 minutes in length, but the four-movement suite of Night Waltz, You Must Meet My Wife, A Weekend in the Country and Send in the Clowns is an absolute delight.

I was lucky enough to receive a promo hard copy, but it can be streamed on Amazon, Apple Music, Spotify and YouTube Music, and purchased via Amazon, iTunes and Google Play, among others.
VOCAL

Mirrors
Jeanine De Bique; Concerto Koln; Luca Quintavalle
Berlin Classics (berlin-classics-music.com)

Mirror is Trinidadian soprano Jeanine De Bique’s debut album. Accompanied by the renowned Baroque orchestra Concerto Köln, with musical direction by Luca Quintavalle, the album focuses on Baroque arias and includes three world premiere recordings.

De Bique’s album reflects her unique style and personality in a well-crafted concept. Her flawless technique is impressive and includes carefully sculpted notes and stunning articulation amid invigorating Baroque rhythms and flying high notes. De Bique, a seasoned Handel performer, was also given the freedom to play with and create new ornamentation for each aria.

Developed in collaboration with musicologist Yannis François, the concept of the album is that of looking through a broken mirror; different settings of the same libretti are placed side by side on an album for the first time. Mirrors juxtaposes Handel’s operatic heroines Alcina, Cleopatra, Deidamia, and Rodelinda with the same characters’ arias from the works of Riccardo Broschi (brother of famed castrato Farinelli), Carl Heinrich Graun, Gennaro Manna and Georg Philipp Telemann, each prominent opera composers of their time. The arias of Mirrors are meant to relate key moments in the psychological development of each heroine, thereby also opening a window into the varied female experience. In the liner notes De Bique writes that this project allowed her to sing from a place of vulnerability and that she was “given the opportunity to be a voice for women across the ages who are still trying to find spaces to free their voices, and for those ready to reclaim their autonomy.”

Sophie Bisson

Verdi – Macbeth
Soloists; Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini; Coro del Teatro Regio Parma; Roberto Abbado
Dynamic DYN-CDS7915.02 (naxosdirect.com/search/dyn-cds7915.02)

My love for Verdi’s Macbeth began here in Toronto many years ago when I saw Hungarian soprano sensation Georgina Lukác in the famous Mad Scene, the late Richard Bradshaw conducting with such a rapport between them that it seemed like he was conducting just for her. Today my love has been rekindled with this new CD from Parma. Parma is now what Salzburg is to Mozart or Bayreuth to Wagner, a Verdi Mecca.

Success for Macbeth was a long time coming. In 1847, it was the first time Verdi tried to tackle Shakespeare, his idol since childhood, but the atmosphere of foggy, rainy Scotland plus the witches didn’t please the Italian public. However in 1865, a golden opportunity came from Paris and big money too. He revised the opera by translating it into French, adding new music and a mandatory ballet to suit the taste of Paris. This version fared better and it is presented here.

This is an open air concert performance with no doubt necessitated by COVID, using Parma’s resplendent Opera House as a backdrop and with the best singers available. Perhaps the greatest Verdi baritone alive, Ludovic Tézier from Marseille, with his velvety, many shaded but strong voice, simply lives the title role. His bloodthirsty wife and helpmate, Lady Macbeth, is sung by Sylvia Dalla Benetta who is rapidly becoming Italy’s leading dramatic soprano. His bloodthirsty wife and helpmate, Lady Macbeth, is sung by Sylvia Dalla Benetta who is rapidly becoming Italy’s leading dramatic soprano. She is sensual with a tremendously wide vocal range and power. Her high notes could shatter glass and her low notes are bloodcurdling. Her first scene and the cabaretta Viens! Viens! Sois homme! Il faut régner is explosive. Riccardo Zanellato’s smooth baritone is heartrending as Banquo. Scholarly conductor and Verdi expert Roberto Abbado conducts with throbbing vitality.

Janos Gardonyi

Voice of Nature: The Anthropocene
Renée Nézet-Séguin
Decca Classics (deccaclassics.com/de/kuenstler/reneeleming)

Voice of Nature: The Anthropocene is another album responding to the devastating current pandemic. According to celebrated veteran American opera diva Renée Fleming it was inspired by the solace she found while hiking near her Virginia home during lockdown. Canadian conductor and pianist Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Fleming have chosen 16 songs which feature lyrics exploring “the centrality of nature in Romantic-era song and highlight[ing] the peril ... of the natural world today; ... Now, in the Anthropocene, we see the effects of our own activity, and the fragility of our environment,” reflects Fleming.

A dedicated performer of art song, she draws on her classical repertoire including scores by Liszt, Grieg, Fauré and Hahn for the core of this recital. Also featured are recording premieres of Caroline Shaw’s 2017 Aurora Borealis, evoking flickering lights in the northern sky, plus two commissions from American composers.

Pulitzer Prize-winner Kevin Puts gives Evening by the American poet Dorianne Laux a retro-musical setting, characterized by a supple lyric soprano melody highlighted by Fleming’s soaring high notes, and supported by Nézet-Séguin’s rippling tonal arpeggios and harmonies.

Nico Muhly’s bricolage-like Endless Space, on the other hand, draws on several disparate texts: poetry of the 17th-century English theologian Thomas Traherne plus writing by climate change journalist Robinson Meyer. It starts with a sort of recitative before taking advantage of Fleming’s core vocal strengths still at her command in her sixth decade: velvety rich lows, graceful high passages, flawless intonation and dynamic control.

Andrew Timar

Patrick Cassidy – The Mass
Laude; David Harris; Christoph Bull
Supertrain Records (supertrainrecords.com)

The Catholic Mass is one of the most frequently set texts in the history of music, encompassing works ranging from the 14th century to modern times. Whether Palestrina’s marvellous Missa Papae Marcelli or Beethoven’s grandiose Missa Solemnis, performances and recordings of these masterpieces bear testament to the inspirational power of these ancient rites and texts.

Unique among the plethora of recordings of the Mass, however, is this documentation of Patrick Cassidy’s The Mass, originally composed for choir and orchestra and later adapted for choir and organ. Growing from the challenges of quarantine, it is perhaps among the first major works in history to be recorded virtually, with each member of the choral group singing their individual part in isolation. Anyone who has worked on a virtual choir project is aware of how involved, tedious and time-consuming such a task can be, especially when the result is intended to be a release-worthy recording, and the excellence attained in this instance cannot be overstated.

Cassidy’s writing is stunningly beautiful and primarily uses a late-Romantic idiom, with luscious harmonies and gorgeous melodies that are both profound and sublime. The singers, despite their isolation, blend with a precision and clarity that is, in a word, unbelievable, while Christoph Bull, organist-in-residence at the First Congregational Church of Lost Angeles – which houses one of the world’s largest pipe organs – is in fine form, making that single instrument sound as
varied and convincing as an entire orchestra. If the above review sounds almost too good to be true, that is because this recording is as well. This project demonstrates the human potential to persevere, and the spiritual capacity to grow together and bring to light beauty in isolation, regardless of external factors and influences. It is highly recommended to anyone whose spirit needs uplifting, or who simply wants to bathe in the glorious sounds of Cassidy’s Mass.

Matthew Whitfield

Hans Thomalla – Dark Spring: Opera in 11 Scenes

Shachar Lavi; Anna Hybiner; Christopher Diffey; Magid El-Bushra; Nationaltheater-Orchester Mannheim; Alan Pierson

Oehms Classics OC 994 (oehmsclassics.de)

The whole idea of Dark Spring as being born of both song and opera is a considerable philosophical and stylistic leap. But what its creator Hans Thomalla achieves in this work is a lofty Singspiel recast as musical meta-theatre. Happily the 11 scenes are acted and/or sung by a fine cast who interact with each other in a deeply emotional manner as this avowed song-opera goes like a bolted arrow directly into the listener’s heart.

Thematically this is a cautionary tale (the word “narrative” is technically more appropriate), one whose four characters we meet at an existential 21st-century crossroad where the theatre of Brecht and the angst of Jean-Paul Sartre collide. The playwright and where the theatre of Brecht and the angst of at an existential 21st-century crossroad prerequisite), one whose four characters we meet in order to wear his emotions on his sleeve, nor does he shrink away from the bitterness of social commentary. He is also a master of atonal turbulence and semi-spoken lines describing both political and intimate interactions. Field’s music in the song cycle Chimneys, Sonnets-Realities, dramatically reinvigorates the poetry of e.e. cummings with masterfully applied dissonant harmonies. The pinnacle of the recording, however, comes when Field pours his spirituality into the intense, gospel-soaked Let the Light Shine on Me.

Raul da Gama

Brian Field – Vocal Works

Various Artists

Navona Records nv6360 (navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6360)

Reactions to Brian Field’s Vocal Works – as well as the red-white-and-blue graphic evocative of the forbidding spires on a US/Mexican border wall – can be predicted: it’s an important disc, no doubt, often dripping with sardonicism and bitterness, shrouded in the music’s frequent dissonance. Gorgeous songs complemented by great choral and solo singing, however, triumph over these feelings, in a program selected and sequenced with uncommon care, with Field drawing on his consummate musicianship fuelled by hopefulness.

Field’s extraordinary lyricism is deeply attuned to human emotion. Even when his music is immersed in feelings of fear, disappointment or even sarcasm – as in his adaptation of Charles Albert Tindley’s poem By and By, in the swirling music accompanying Pablo Neruda’s bittersweet love poems, Tres Canciones de Amor and his own uniquely American satirical commentary in Let’s Build a Wall. In those works as well as elsewhere, Field shows that he isn’t afraid to wear his emotions on his sleeve, nor does he hover dangerously close at hand.

Relationships crumble in overwrought romanticism and rolling sexuality leading to the climactic suicide of one of the four characters, Moritz, played with explosive combustion by countertenor, Magid El-Bushra. Tenor Christopher Diffey, contralto Anna Hybiner and mezzo-soprano Shachar Lavi sing their respective ways through the storyline that exudes visceral energy throughout Dark Spring. The Nationaltheater-Orchester Mannheim conducted by Alan Pierson shines as it navigates this difficult score.

Raul da Gama

Why do the Nations

Stephen Powell

Acis APL51200 (acisproductions.com)

American baritone Stephen Powell’s album Why do the Nations is a personal, vibrant and thoughtfully curated collection of 27 art songs from 11 nations in ten different languages, written between 1839 and 1965.

Ddicted by world pandemic isolation requirements and in part as a personal challenge, Powell takes on the musical task of both singing and accompanying himself on the piano. Powell’s artistry imprints the album and flows via his warm and capable voice. His skillful accomplishment is especially on display in the songs of de Falla, Ives and Rachmaninoff. Even more compelling is the album’s depth of introspection, based equally on the minutiae of his research and his interpretation of text.

Why do the Nations takes its title from a bass aria in Handel’s Messiah, Why do the Nations so furiously rage together? (Psalm 2). This question ultimately guides the album’s
journey with Powell asking his listeners to reflect not on the manmade geographical lines that divide us into nations, but to focus on what unites, what connects us and our shared humanity: “If listeners can hear the connections between countries represented perhaps they will appreciate that everything we do ripples across oceans and through time.”

Why do the Nations offers a rich repertoire of art songs from well-known composers (Brahms, Schubert, Verdi) and composers to discover such as Xavier Montsalvatge (Spain), Cláudio Santoro (Brazil), Rentarō Taki (Japan) and Zhao Yuanren (China). Also of note, Terra e Mare, one of the few works Puccini wrote outside of opera, and a world premiere recording of Petits Enfants by Émilie Paladilhe (France).

Sophie Bisson

Early Moderns, The (very) First Viennese School
Quicksilver
Independent (gemsnry.org/online-store/quicksilver-early-moderns)

► Viennoise music means Mozart and Haydn. Well, not according to Quicksilver. They have compiled a CD of music from the very familiar venue that is Vienna, but by mainly unfamiliar composers.

Perhaps the strangest factor is Quicksilver’s frequent use of the dulcian, ultimately familiar to Mozart as its descendant the bassoon, here helping to reinforce this school of music’s claims to be recognized in its own right. Dominic Teresi’s vigorous dulcian playing in Giovanni Battista Buonamente’s Sonata prima à 3 is a real highlight.

Throughout the CD, the trombone and dulcian are prominent. This is noteworthy in the Sonata à 3 attributed to Heinrich I. F. von Biber, where Greg Ingles’ dignified trombone-playing proves that Viennese Baroque does not consist exclusively of violin and cello chamber music.

This is not to dismiss the stringed element. Johann Caspar Kerll’s Canzona à 3 in G Minor combines violins and viola da gamba with harpsichord/theorbo continuo. The result is a very lively and highly entertaining composition. One wonders how these pieces came to be so neglected.

And yet, there is still room for solo compositions for more established instruments. Avi Stein’s harpsichord skills are tested more and more intensively as Kerll’s Passacaglia variata unfolds, making demands worthy of Bach or Couperin on the player. Kerll is perhaps the most overlooked composer on a CD of a certainly overlooked school of music. 

Michael Schwartz

Bach – English Suites 1-3
Vladimir Ashkenazy
Decca (deccaclassics.com/en)

► Musicians, most especially those who perform or record within a tradition that has a crowded and storied line of artistic interpreters of seminal performances, often stand on the shoulders of those who came before them. This can be in order to raise themselves to a heightened vantage point from which to spot new insights and perspectives. Or it can be in order to tramp down those who went before, in an attempt to assert their own dominance and singularity of artistic approach. And most certainly, when performing the music of Johann Sebastian Bach on solo piano it would be virtually impossible to avoid the supreme influence and shadow cast by Canadian pianist Glenn Gould.

For the Russian-born highly feted pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, who has been performing and recording the music of Bach since 1965 (arguably living and working through the entire period of Gould’s dominance), his approach to Bach echoes, in his own words, a “different concept” than that of Gould. How lucky then are we to now have a newly released double CD on Decca Records that combines Ashkenazy’s latest recording of Bach’s English Suites 1-3 with his first recording from 1965 of Bach’s Concerto in D Minor. Not only does the music sparkle with a straightforward, didactic approach to the Baroque master that brings forth all of the beauty and detail of the original compositions without the idiosyncratic flourishes for which Gould was both reviled and revered, but there is bravery in this release as it shows just how much Ashkenazy’s own development as a Bach interpreter and world-class performer has matured, developed and even changed over the years.

Andrew Scott

Bach – Goldberg Variations
Sarah Hagen
Independent SH004CD (sarahhagen.com)

► Great expectation always precedes a new recording of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. Glenn Gould’s benchmark recordings (1955 and 1981) may have thrown down the gauntlet to anyone recording this epic composition after him, but it was Bach who left the door of interpretation slightly ajar. Yet, playing these wonderfully varied and emotionally differentiated Goldberg Variations is one of the most daunting experiences a pianist could face.

The chords of the “Fundamental Bass” are the first hurdle because the inspiration for the entire piece originates in the accumulation and release of tension by the harmonies of these chords. In composing the Goldberg Variations Bach was also probably thumbing his nose at Johann Adolph Scheibe who once criticized his compositions as being fraught with “a turgid and confused style.” Bach’s playful rebuttal came by way of the complexity of many voices collaborating to form the lofty harmonic beauty of the Goldbergs.

Canadian pianist Sarah Hagen’s Goldberg Variations are dramatically different. Naysayers and refuseniks beware: her approach combines unfettered joy, wide awake with wonder, requisite pedagogy and the ability to make the instrument bend to her will. The epic scope of the work is stated right out of the gate, with an extensive exploration of the Aria that opens the way to the variable tempi, harmonic adventure with unlimited changes in registration and emotion. Hagen’s performance combines vivid precision of touch with perfect articulation of line, making her Goldberg Variations something to absolutely die for.

Raul da Gama

Concert Note: Sarah Hagen has a very busy performing schedule planned over the next three months with two dozen concerts in six provinces across Canada (COVID-19 permitting). Please check her website for up-to-date listings: sarahhagen.com/concerts.

Bach – Goldberg Variations; Hanson – Romantic Symphony
Cameron Carpenter
Decca Gold
(deccarecordsus.com/labels/decca-gold)

► J.S. Bach’s Goldberg Variations have become ubiquitous in the classical music world, brought to popularity primarily through Glenn Gould’s debut recording in 1955. Originally written for harpsichord and published in 1741, this virtuosic masterwork has since been adapted for a wide range of instruments and ensembles, from piano to full orchestra. This recording features renowned American organist Cameron Carpenter performing his own transcription on the International Touring Organ, the American digital concert organ designed by Carpenter that travels from country to country with him on his tours.

What makes the organ such a unique
instrument for the performance of the Goldberg Variations is the number of sounds that can be contrasted and combined by a single player, resulting in clear contrasts that amplify the linear complexities of Bach's counterpoint. Where other instruments are limited by timbral similarities, the organ is capable of producing strikingly different sounds simultaneously, with one set of pipes sounding like a flute and another like an oboe, for example, creating a textural clarity that is almost impossible on any other single-player instrument.

But while the tonal variety of the organ is an indispensable asset, its lack of acoustic attack can be a challenging factor. The harpsichord is, perhaps, the most attack-heavy keyboard instrument in history, its sound almost entirely characterized by the plucking of a string and the sound’s subsequent, rapid decay. Conversely, the organ produces relatively little attack but can sustain pitches indefinitely, requiring deft use of articulation to produce the clarity required in Bach's music.

As one of the world’s best orchestral organists, Carpenter manages both the pros and cons of the organ with an expert hand, applying his mastery of timbral variety and thoughtful articulation to bring the Goldberg Variations to life in a new and exciting way.

Carpenter reinforces his status as a master of orchestral performance with his own transcription of Howard Hanson’s Symphony No.2, the “Romantic,” demonstrating both his own stunning virtuosity and the capabilities of the International Touring Organ. This powerhouse performance is both unique and remarkable, and sheds light on a work that, while less well known than its recorded counterpart, is equally satisfying and impressive.

Matthew Whitfield

Vivaldi – The Four Seasons; Piazzolla – The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires
Nikki Chooi; Tessa Lark; Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra; JoAnn Falletta

Beau Fleuve Records 605996-998562

This CD’s two works based on the “four seasons” idea is intriguing, since Astor Piazzolla’s The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires makes references to Vivaldi’s familiar The Four Seasons violin concertos. Canadian violinist and Buffalo Philharmonic concertmaster Nikki Chooi and the JoAnn Falletta-led Buffalo Philharmonic play the latter with vitality, colour and precision. For example, in the concerto La primavera Chooi brings clean intonation and articulation, the orchestra adding fine dynamics and lots of bounce. Slow movements of concertos evoke night in different ways. Outstanding is L’autunno with soft chromatically connected string chords sounding over a steady harpsichord. Given our present frightful winter, the first movement of L’inverno seems especially effective: shivering string tremolos; raw cold of a harsh violin bow stroke; a fateful mood in the steady bass tread and relentless harmonic sequence of fifths. In the finale Chooi takes advantage of opportunities for free-tempo playing that come often in this concerto cycle – here because the solo protagonist is walking on ice!

Piazzolla’s tango-based The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires (1965-70), written for a cabaret group, became a four-piece suite for violin and strings arranged by Leonid Desyatnikov in 1998. Soloist Tessa Lark has plenty of technique and temperament for rapid mood changes in each piece. Summer begins in a chugging offbeat-accented rhythm, followed by a violin solo with occasional references to Vitaldi’s work. Languid playing with

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

Brian Field - Vocal Works
Brian Field
A stunning array of diverse vocal music featuring post-romantic works with poetry from Pablo Neruda and E.E. Cummings, among others.

Johann Sebastian Bach: Goldberg Variations
Sarah Hagen

Mozart. Post Scriptum
Sergei Kovtik
“Explosion of creativity. This man is simply incredible. It is Mozart after Mozart” – EarRelevant. “refreshed, beautifully etched performance” – Audophile Audition. “new cadenzas are spectacular” – Pizzicato

Metamorphosen
Maiburg Ensemble
Their new album explores transformations, reflected in the fascinating life and art of many cultures - through classical, jazz, folk and world music.
frequent slides alternates with faster jazzy passages. The following enticing pieces show similar variety.

Roger Knox

**Mozart – Post Scriptum (Rondos K382/386; Concerto No.20)**

Sergei Kvitko; Madrid Soloists Chamber Orchestra; Tigran Shiganyan

Blue Griffin BGR597 (bluegriffin.com)

► Sergei Kvitko explained that he wanted this disc to be “full of surprises.” The Russian-born artist is not only an accomplished pianist, but also an arranger, producer and sound engineer who founded the Blue Griffin label in 2000 while completing his doctoral studies at the University of Michigan. Who better then to inject new life into this brief all-Mozart program where he partners with the Madrid Soloists conducted by Tigran Shiganyan? As for the surprises, they involve reconfigurations of the two Rondos, K382 and K386, with respect to orchestration, ornamentation and dynamic markings, with new cadenzas composed by Kvitko himself.

The two rondos – the first a set of variations – were written as possible alternate finales for piano concertos. Kvitko and the 29-member ensemble deliver a polished performance displaying solid musicianship, with alternative orchestral ornaments and cadenzas at times foreshadowing Beethoven.

Starkly contrasting in mood is the Concerto in D Minor K466 from 1785. Again, the pairing of Kvitko and the Madrid Soloists is a formidable one. But as for the cadenzas, this writer has never heard such musical excursions in a Mozart concerto before. Not only are they lengthier than the average, but stylistically, Kvitko jumps ahead some decades to the Romantic period. Here are modulations to remote keys (including E-flat Major and F Minor) and dazzling bravura passage work. Do I hear echoes of Franz Liszt and is that a quotation from Saint-Saëns? Indeed, the writer may have cause to wonder if soloist and ensemble will ever reunite!

Nevertheless, this is an exemplary performance and whether the enhancements should be viewed as creativity on the part of the soloist or mere musical indulgences, it should be up to the listener to decide. Surely Mozart would have approved – this disc is definitely worth investigating.

Richard Haskell

**Schubert – Chaleur/Warmth**

Mathieu Gaudet

Analekta AN 2 9185 (analekta.com/en)

► This classy album hits all the right marks in its pursuit of excellence – beautiful music, engaging performance and a meaningful message to the world. Volume 5 in a series of 15 projected albums covering the wealth of Schubert’s piano music, this album is filled with warmth and artistry, perfect for a season of solitude, contemplation and discovery.

Mathieu Gaudet has an undeniable connection with Schubert’s music. Being an exuberant and lavish piano player, he is capable of grand gestures that bring out the magnificence of Schubert’s form and architecture. On the other hand, listening to Gaudet makes me feel like he is playing this music just for me, such is the intimacy of his lyrical sound and phrasing. Most appreciated is how intensely this artist conveys the subtlety and the meaning behind all the magnificence.

Sonata No. 5 in A-flat Major opens the album with the traditionally noble atmosphere of the post-classical mode, continuing with four smaller pieces in the form of dances and Thirteen Variations on a Theme by Schubert’s contemporary Anselm Hüttenbrenner. Although placed last, the Sonata No.16 in D Major is the central work of this album. The monumental composition offers a compressed experience of all the Schubertian characteristics – exultation, passion, memorable melodies and grace.

As for its gentle message, this album shows that despite all the unselfishness in the world one can always find a way to connect to what matters.

Ivana Popovic

**Brahms – 3 Sonatas**

Michael Collins; Stephen Hough

BIS BIS-2557 (bis.se)

Here with You – The Brahms Sonatas; Weber – Grand Duo; Montgomery – Peace

Anthony McGill; Gloria Chien

Cedille CDR 9000000 207 (cedillerecords.org)

► No longer, it seems, is it enough for clarinetists to throw down their hottest take on Brahms’ majestic Opus 120 Sonatas for Piano and Clarinet on its own. If recent examples are anything to go by, something more is now called for, a sidecar offering some alternate musical perspective. Last year, for example, the recording released by Jörg Widman and Andras Schiff included Widman’s own Brahmsian Intermezzetti for piano. This month, two more collaborations do something similar: Anthony McGill and Gloria Chien perform Opus 120 and then add Weber’s Grand Duo Concertant, Opus 48, and Peace, by Jessie Montgomery; meanwhile Michael Collins and Stephen Hough open with a transcription (at pitch!) of Brahms’ Opus 100 Violin Sonata in A Major and then move on to Opus 120.

I’m never fond of poached repertoire, but I admit the violin sonata feels like it could easily have been written for the clarinetist, Richard Muehlfeld, as the Opus 120 were. Only when Collins extends the range to the higher reaches do I think Brahms wouldn’t have offered Muehlfeld that opportunity to suffer. Not that there’s anything wrong with Collins’ technique; he deals quite beautifully with the higher tessitura of the violin piece. It’s just uncharacteristic, un-Brahmsian per his treatment of the clarinet elsewhere.

McGill and Chien, presenting the late Classical/early Romantic Carl Maria von Weber’s tour-de-force, arguably made the more conservative decision, but I prefer it because it proposes an unexpected comparison of the two composers. Brahms can be a tad wordy, like some reviewers I might name. Weber is seriously underappreciated, and deserves a good deal more respect than he’s been afforded in the past century. McGill sounds fabulous; Chien wrings, and rings, out the miffuls of Brahms’ piano writing. In the Weber, avoided by some pianists on account of its dastardly technical demands, she bats no eyes and crosses no fingers; in short, she kicks the piece into gear and roars away. We should all be so lucky to play the piece with her! The Grand Duo is a dessert, which leavens out the weighty Brahms, and is so much more Romantic: more fun and, I’ll admit it, entertaining. The slow movement is an arioso without words, beautifully rendered by the tandem. The presto payout of the Rondo movement is a rousing display of music hall bravura; see if you don’t rise at the end to give them a standing ovation.

Collins plays a somewhat brighter set-up than McGill, and sounds great. Then there’s Stephen Hough, who is already in the pantheon. His work on the three sonatas is impeccable, considered and moving. Collins and Hough drew to a steadier, faster pulse than the Americans, whose fluid flexibility appeals to me but might bother some. McGill and Chien are too indulgent during the Sostenuto section of the Second Sonata’s second movement, which plods. Collins
and Hough have more the right idea. And in Hough’s hands the *Andante un poco adagio* from the F-Minor Sonata receives more lingering affection than Chien seems willing to spend. Both clarinetists’ pitch is immaculate throughout. There is so much to appreciate in both offerings, choosing between them is not recommended. Last month I proposed a new artistic genre: Responses to the Pandemic. Montgomery’s *Peace* is exactly such a work. The mood is pensive, opening with augmented, searching harmonies, insistent but not harsh dissonance that hints at kindness or obscured joy. McGill has an incredible range of colour and depth in his low register, which Montgomery exploits with heart and soul.

Max Christie

Brahms – Piano Sonata No. 3
Alexandre Kantorow
BIS BIS-2600 (bis.se)

► Despite his youth, French pianist Alexandre Kantorow is already heralded as a considerable talent with an ongoing and upcoming concertizing career to be examined with interest. And, with this marvellous 2021 recording of Johannes Brahms’ Piano Sonata No. 3, Kantorow contributes mightily to this well-established blue-chip reputation, initiated by winning the prestigious Tchaikovsky Competition at age 22.

While Brahms is famously listed as a progenitor of so-called Absolute Music, do not think for a moment that there is no meaning to be ferreted out from these wonderfully Germanic compositions as interpretation, richness and new possibilities are brought to the fore for over 85 minutes during this thoughtful and evocative performance.

Finally, Kantorow brings the recording to a close with Bach’s playful *Chaconne*, arranged from the original violin to the left-hand piano. With a forceful pianistic dynamism that enables Kantorow to both thunder loudly and sparkle with fragile insight, this is a recording that will go a good distance to solidifying Kantorow as a Brahms and Bach interpreter of the highest order, while encouraging us all to stop, even momentarily, guffawing towards the catastrophizing media and lean in to the beauty of these melodies as performed with deft touch and aplomb.

Andrew Scott

Love Songs
Angela Hewitt
Hyperion Records CDA68431 (hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA68431)

► We can certainly declare Angela Hewitt by now a national treasure. Graduating from the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto and winning the 1985 Toronto International Bach Competition, she has had a stellar career with concerts all over the world and a wide-ranging discography. She has even been inducted into the Gramophone magazine Hall of Fame (!) and has received many other honours and accolades.

Unfortunately this beautiful career came to an abrupt and brutal halt with COVID-19 and all her concert engagements disappeared overnight. For a two-year period she was forced into idleness, retiring to her home in Italy with her Fazioli piano. To fill her time she had the idea of making this recording, a collection of love songs spanning the entire piano literature.

Since these are love songs written for the human voice they had to be transposed to piano solo, mostly done by other composers or pianists, like Liszt, a master of love songs himself. The vocal line of the original song must be emphasized and the pianist has to express the ebb and flow of emotion of the beautiful poetry with bravura embellishments, modulations and variations.

Hewitt gives us a nice collection and a musical journey from the Baroque (Gluck and Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel) to the Romantics (Schumann, Schubert, Grieg) then the post-Romantics (Fauré, Richard Strauss, Mahler) through the Spanish flamenco of de Falla and even popular music of Gershwin and Percy Grainger.

There are many beauties close to my heart such as the wonderful Schubert Ständchen and An die Musik, Strauss’ opulent Cécile, the lovely Adagietto from Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, arranged by Hewitt herself, and Gershwin’s *Love walks in* so lovingly played. A recording to treasure.

Janos Gardonyi

Home Suite Home
Fraser Jackson; Monique de Margerie
Galley Records GRCD002
(galleyrecords.com)

► Co-created in the spring of 2020 by bassoonist Fraser Jackson and pianist Monique de Margerie, Home Suite Home was directly inspired by the weekly concerts held on the front porch of their Toronto home during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. These concerts, intended to brighten the mood of their neighbours and community, resulted in an album of short and varied pieces for bassoon and piano as well as a few special musical guests, Winona Zelenka on cello, Marie Bérard on violin and Dominic Desautels on clarinet. Not all originally
written for bassoon, this collection highlights Jackson’s gift of masterful arrangement and features several rare and delightful pieces for contrabassoon, his specialty.

Moving and uplifting, the smooth expressive playing of Jackson’s performance coupled with de Margerie’s elegant interpretation must have been a delightful and unique experience for their neighbours; and now for the rest of us too.

Melissa Scott

Metamorphosen
Maiburg Ensemble
Ars Produktion Ars 38 328 (proclassics.de/aktuelle-cd-news)

▶ Annette Maiburg, artistic director of the Maiburg Ensemble, aspired in this CD to engage in a “dialogue” in which the music of disparate cultural traditions fuse, so to speak, to produce a music which is new and which did not exist before. Maiburg, a highly accomplished classically trained flutist, is joined in the project by pianist Pascal Schweren and double bass player Matthias Hacker, both also classically trained but with strong educational backgrounds in jazz, and percussionist, Fethi Ak, a renowned German-Turkish darbuka player.

Each musician makes great and unique contributions to the project. For example, Schweren’s solo, which brings Bartók’s Pé Loc to a surprise ending, is a delight; Ak has several wonderful solos in compositions as diverse as Bartók’s Måruntel and Buciumeana and Mendelssohn’s Scherzo from A Midsummer Night’s Dream; Hacker, to my ears anyway, brings the most convincingly idiomatically based jazz contribution throughout, connects beautifully with Ak’s solo in Måruntel and plays a very effective bowed passage in Mahler’s Adagietto. Maiburg not only plays the challenging flute part from Mendelssohn’s Scherzo flawlessly but also brings wonderful lyricism to her solos in Ravel’s Kadäisch and Bartók’s Buciumeana.

The cultural fusion, however, just doesn’t seem to happen, despite the good intentions, until the last track on the CD, Hov Arek, an Armenian folk melody noted by the great Armenian composer and ethnomusicologist, Komitas. Here magic happens, music and music become one, and the dream becomes reality.

Allan Pulker

Hindemith – Mathis der Maler; Nusch-Nuschi-Tänze; Sancta Susanna Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien; Wiener Singakademie; Marin Alsop Naxos 8574283 (naxosdirect.com/search/8574283)

▶ The title work on this terrific all-Hindemith release, Symphony ‘Mathis der Maler’, gets a probing, gutsy performance from Marin Alsop and the superb ORF Vienna Radio Symphony. For 27 dramatic minutes, we’re swept into the harsh, visionary world depicted by the German Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald in his magnificent Isenheim altarpiece. This symphony is rightly one of Hindemith’s best-known works. Yet the related opera, Mathis der Maler – for me, his greatest work – is rarely done.

Hindemith arranged Nusch-Nuschi-Tänze from an earlier opera, Das Nusch-Nuschi. But unlike Mathis der Maler, it’s no masterpiece. And the dance suite remains forgettable, despite Hindemith’s imaginative orchestrations and Alsop’s lively performance.

Hindemith’s daring Sancta Susanna is the standout here. Alsop’s recording of this youthful one-act opera is so gripping, it belongs among the outstanding recordings of his works, along with Roxolana Roslak and Glenn Gould’s sublime Das Marienleben and Svatoslav Richter’s wonder-filled Ludus Tonalis.

The tension builds relentlessly – an organ pipe whirls, heavily scented lilac blossoms rustle, nightingales sing joyfully, a couple makes love right outside the church window, a giant spider leaps into Susanna’s hair. August Stramm’s expressionist libretto is truly shocking, especially when Susanna, finally unhinged, strips off her nun’s habit and embraces a sculpted image of Christ nailed on the cross.

Ausrine Stundyte conveys the devastating impact of Susanna’s defiance with ravishing expressiveness, while Renée Morloc’s Klementia sets the stage for the horrific ending with harrowing dramatic power. This is opera at its most explosive – and delectable.

Pamela Margles

Resonances
Aiyun Huang
Sideband Records 06 (sidebandrecords.com)

▶ Virtuoso percussionist Aiyun Huang has recorded a selection of new works that challenge the performer in different ways. In each, the listener is immersed in varying intimate and unique sound worlds. In a piece titled Désastre, Inouk Demers produces a dreamy landscape that evokes slowly descending sonic blankets upon the watershed resonance of gongs and cymbals. This homogenous and enchanting piece creates a wondrous metallic stasis – fittingly so, as the work’s title suggests something falling from the stars. Chris Mercer’s Concerto Chamber places an acoustic guitar into the percussion setup and asks the percussionist to strike it with mallets, slides, rubber balls and a triangle beater. Mercer cleverly infuses his piece with these novel percussive guitar sounds amid a flurry of spellbinding auras that are highly impressionistic and otherworldly in their creative expance.

In Valerio Sannicandro’s Disentio (translated as “extension”), Huang exhibits her world-class command over the vibraphone in a piece full of expression and angular melodic leaps. Canadian composer Chris Paul Harman creates hypnotic intricacies in Verve – an evocative piece that spans the entire range and resonant capabilities of the marimba. The soloist must use their voice to execute percussive utterances that alternate with tambourine and drum punchiness. With each piece, Huang delivers a performance of the highest quality – a testament toward why she is among the leading percussion soloists of our time.

Adam Scime

Soaring Spirits
UBC Symphony Orchestra & Choirs; Jonathan Girard
Redshift Records TK492 (redshiftrecords.org)

▶ Jonathan Girard conducts the UBC Symphony Orchestra and Choirs in a release of newly recorded orchestral music by three of Canada’s most visible composers. Stephen Chatman’s A Song of Joys alternates between boisterous pulsations and tender interludes throughout its seven
movements. The text is based on fragments of Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, and Chatman intended the work to be a companion piece to Beethoven’s monumental ninth symphony. The last movement builds to a resounding climax using the full power of the orchestra and choir.

In Dorothy Chang’s Flight, the listener is introduced to a delicate and mysterious dream world amid darkened melodic enchantment produced by the solo flutist and supporting strings. The piece quickly takes a turn for the dramatic with raucous jabs and swirling gestures. Chang’s brilliant writing for the flute (performed by Paolo Bortolussi) and command over novel orchestral colours produces a deep artistic statement and significant contribution to the Canadian orchestral repertoire.

Keith Hamel’s Overdrive is a ten-minute ride of intense orchestral fireworks. Enduring piano trajectories reinforce accented cross play and shimmering fissures throughout. Hamel creates a sense of temporal multipli-
city that could easily be extended in a work of considerably increased length. The orchestra performs the demanding passages with a confident musicality—brining to life what is clearly a gifted compositional voice.

Under Girard’s baton the university orchestra delivers a recording of rather challenging repertoire with impres-
sive musicality and a professional level of performance prowess.

Adam Scime

Light Through Dark
Bill Gilliam; Bill McBirnie; Eugene Martynec
Independent (gilliammbirnimartynec.bandcamp.com/releases)

- It’s clear from the first of the seven tracks of Light Through Dark that the Toronto trio of pianist Bill Gilliam, flutist Bill McBirnie and Eugene Martynec on electroacoustics possesses big ears and hearts. Each, however, has different roots. One of the city’s top jazz and Latin flute specialists, McBirnie is renowned for his outstanding technique as much as for exceptional improvising chops in bebop, swing and Latin idioms. Gilliam has been active in town since the 1980s as a composer and pianist exploring in his words the “boundaries between new music, improvisation, electroacoustic music and contemporary jazz.” Martynec on the other hand has been on the scene as guitarist and record producer for even longer. He’s mostly focused today on performing live interactive electroacoustic music with other improvisers. Both Gilliam and Martynec are core members of the Toronto Improvisers Orchestra.

The moody and languid opener Time Floats – Japanese Suite, Part 1 centres on McBirnie’s low metal alto flute melodies in which he tastefully introduces shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) nuances into its warm breathy vibrato. Martynec chooses harp, koto and mbira-sounding timbres to weave around the flute throughline, while Gilliam complements with seamlessly effective keyboard work.

The other two parts of the Japanese Suite, Icy Still and Crane Flight, continue the shakuh-
achi theme and sonic imagery. Collectively the trio’s music is inventive, technically adroit and elegant at the same time. Most of all, we can hear their “mutual fascination with the mystery of creating entirely spontaneous music,” as aptly stated in the liner notes.

Andrew Timar

Saman Shahi – Microlocking
Various Artists
People Places Records (peopleplacesrecords.bandcamp.com)

- Microlocking, a new release by the award-winning, Iranian-Canadian composer Saman Shahi, delves deeply into the world of microtonality. By locking in and interconnecting pitches, colours and layers of sound, he creates dialogues and open-ended statements that require an alert ear but inevitably include elements of beauty, even in the sometimes chaotic landscape.

Shahi keeps making surprising turns in his compositional career. His musical trajectory is firmly based in classical music but has included explorations of world music, rock and electronics, all featured on this album. The compositions are vibrant and compelling, especially in the way Shahi treats the solo instruments. Microlocking I, II and III have a distinct character, progressing from sparse to denser textures. Microlocking I, written for six digital pianos (three of which are tuned a quarter-tone sharp) mesmerizes with the constant ripples of ostinato sounds. The colors resulting from uneven pitches bring in the sense of the past, nostalgia. Microlocking II, on the other hand, is very much rooted in the present immediacy of the sound. Written for solo electric guitar, it is a dreamland of techniques and effects, and soloist Andrew Noseworthy pulls it off with flair. Microlocking III is for solo accordion (Matt Pulkki) and electronics. Shahi’s masterful hands push the boundaries of the sound even further, as if imagining the sound of the future. The surprising but fitting conclusion comes in the form of a remix of Microlocking I by electronic music producer Behrooz Zandi, binding together the aspects of Shahi’s music – the expressiveness and probing sonority, wrapped up in minimalism.

Ivana Popovic

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

Equanimity: A Futuristic Jazz Tale
VIO
Viktor Harasztis is a Hungarian-born, Holland-based saxophonist, composer and producer. Futuristic style, deep melodies, sonic elements and rhythmic fusion reflect an experimental electronic approach.

... and then there’s this
Artifacts
The ensemble’s previous album honored vanguard AACM composers; this largely original session continues along the same adventurous path with a more cohesive, collaborative sensibility.

Libre
Jesse Cooke
The new studio album from Jesse Cook featuring Libre, Oran and Uprooted. Named album of the year by the American syndicated show JazzTrax.

Uprooted
Matt Sellick
In his fourth instrumental solo album, Northwestern Ontario flamenco guitarist and composer Matt Sellick puts down roots in Toronto to explore new collaborations.
Flute in the Wild  
Jaye Marsh; Darren Hicks; Heidi Elise Bearcroft; Andrew Morris; John Rice; Christina Marie Faye; Richard Herriott  
Centrediscs CMCCD 28921 (cmccanada.org/product-category/recordings/centrediscs)

► A solo flute in lofty, avian dialogue with recorded loon calls: this CD’s opener, Diane Berry’s five-minute Calling (2013), inspired Ontario-based flutist Jaye Marsh to ask three friends “to express their experience of our shared landscapes” for her debut disc, producing four works completed in 2021.

Two are by the well-established Elizabeth Raum. In her 16-minute Northern Lights, flute, harp (Heidi Elise Bearcroft) and percussion (Andrew Morris) generate phosphorescent sonorities mirroring the aurora’s ephemeral, glittering pulsations before fading into afterimages. Bassoonist Darren Hicks joins Marsh and Bearcroft in the sweetly nostalgic, 17-minute Bridal Veil Falls, five movements illuminating sonic snapshots from Raum’s childhood visit to Manitoulin Island: A Walk along the Path, Morning Rain, Mist over the Falls, Porcupines (delightfully gawky music!) and Kagawong River.

Narrator John Rice, a Wasauksing First Nation elder, tells of traditional harvests, songs and dances in Richard Mascaill’s five-movement, 23-minute Nilbin (Summer) but the music, for flute and piano (Christina Marie Faye) seems bland and understated; I miss the character and energy which, by contrast, make Mascaill’s orchestral Manipoulin so powerfully stirring.

Virtuoso pianist Richard Herriott accompanies Marsh’s solo flute in his five-minute Twilight Song of Trinity Bay that “reveals,” writes Herriott, “a lonely church...at fog-ridden twilight.” The flute’s drifting, searching melodies, underlined by the piano’s bell-like tolling and rippling arpeggios, immediately transported me to a Newfoundland coastline, remote and shrouded.

Kudos to fine flutist Jaye Marsh for this (mostly) enchanting CD!  
Michael Schulman

Lost and Found  
Blackwood  
Leaf Music SCCD n006 (leaf-music.ca)

► The last piece on Lost and Found is titled Welcome, Peter-Anthony Togni’s attractive slow jazz number. But here, I’ll use that title to segue into comments: this disc of compositions by Togni and Jeff Reilly is indeed welcome; and as the debut release of the Blackwood Duo – Reilly, bass clarinet and Togni, piano – it is most welcome, one of the best things I heard in 2021. Are Vērum by Togni and Reilly is remarkable for the bass clarinetist’s rich sound in the low register, followed by wide registral leaps and dives, and soft non-vibrato tones fading into overt key clicks. Togni’s evocative piano joins the lower instrument with a chant passage in the male voice register. Recorded effectively at the reverberant Trinity St.-Stephen’s church in Amherst, Nova Scotia by engineer Rod Sneddon, it gives me an impression of unmeasured vastness.

In Reilly’s much different title track, Lost and Found, his clarinet opens expressively, taking off with virtuosic runs, trills, sharp attacks and crescendos or diminuendos while the piano repeats chords suggestive of jazz. His humorous self-describing Suddenly, Snow begins with both instruments in a wild staccato passage, after which the piano’s running bass and comping coincide with an extremely agile bass clarinet; this piece reminds me that brevity is a feature in the pacing and texturing of this disc’s eight works. In contrast, Reilly’s To Dream of Silence opens with long tones in both instruments, including exquisitely controlled pianissimos. Bravo!  
Roger Knox

Port of Call: Curaçao  
Louise Bessette  
Analekta AN 2 9845 (analekta.com/en)

► Acclaimed Canadian pianist Louise Bessette launches her admirable new recording series of solo piano works, A Piano Around the World. Here, in Port of Call: Curaçao, she is the first to record these 22 pieces from Antillean Dances composed by Curaçao composer/pianist Wim Statius Muller (1930–2019), nicknamed the Chopin of Curaçao. After studies at Juilliard and teaching at Ohio State University, Muller worked over 30 years at security and counterespionage, returning to Curaçao and music after his retirement.

Muller’s music resonates and combines influences of Caribbean folk music and Chopin, whose music was introduced to Curaçao in the Netherlands Antilles in the 19th century. Opening track Tumba di Johan Op.2 No.1 is a mix of classical and popular as Bessette’s controlled playing with rubato, left-hand rhythms and right-hand melodies create a dance feeling. Piet Maal – Valse Op.2 No.13 is a more Chopin-like waltz performed with melodic subtle colour shifts, clear phrasing and balance between the hands, as is Muller’s renowned romantic Nostalgia – Valse Op.2 No.22. Bessette plays the more dance-along South American sounds with perfection, like in Kalin-Tumba Op.2 No.19, reminiscent of Piazzolla, and faster modern Chuchubi – A la rumba Op.4 No.5.

Bessette must be commended for taking on such a complex illustrious solo project. Her world-class virtuosic playing and understanding of classical and folk styles, clear production values and order of tracks bring uplifting sonorities and lasting vitality to Muller’s wide-ranging piano works.  
Tiiina Kilik

Vintage Americana  
Christina Petrowska Quilico  
Navona Records nv6384 (navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6384)

► The towering Canadian piano virtuoso Christina Petrowska Quilico performs six works on her latest release, Vintage Americana. This absorbing display of musicianship leaves no doubt that she can interpret works from any compositional aesthetic with world-class execution. Lowell Liebermann’s Apparitions is an anguished work with abundant opportunity for expressive interpretation and Quilico brings a very personal touch to phrasing the work. The four Fantasy Pieces by David Del Tredici highlight her range on the instrument. The Turtle and the Crane composed by Frederic Rzewski is a whirling flurry of repeated notes and rising harmonic pillars that are continuously interrupted by tip-toeing islands of contrasting moods that seem to be menacingly at odds with the more mechanical material.

In a work by the only Canadian on the disc, American expat David Jaeger delivers a substantial tone poem of considerable expression and artistic depth. Utilizing electronics in the work, Jaeger produces highly compelling and dramatic atmospheres, drawing the listener into a dark sonic landscape. Titled Quiet! Sospiri (taken from the third canto of Dante’s Inferno), Jaeger depicts a shadowy journey through a series of remarkably cogent moments of piano wizardry above deep and enigmatic electronic ambiances.
Mario Davidovsky’s *Synchronism No. 6* (also using electronics) is a brilliant work. The immediately arresting nature of artistic expression gives pause and it is no wonder this work was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1971. Petrowska Quilico performs Davidovsky’s masterpiece with stunning mastery and her interpretation can easily be considered among the most significant among the many recordings of this important work. In her seemingly inexhaustible efforts toward releasing recordings of the highest quality, Petrowska Quilico delivers yet another gift for our ears.

**Adam Scime**

**Dai Fujikura – Glorious Clouds**
**Various Artists**
**Minabel (daifujikura.com/#discography)**

> Prolific London-based Japanese composer Dai Fujikura (b.1977) used to dream of composing music for the movies. His studies at Trinity College of Music of the scores of Pierre Boulez, Tōru Takemitsu and György Ligeti, however, propelled him decisively in another direction: toward the concert stage. Fujikura’s compositions have since been championed by musical notables including the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Boulez and many others. In Toronto, Arraymusic, Thin Edge New Music Collective and the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Music coproduced the **Dai Fujikura: Mini Marathon** concert in 2020, showcasing “one of the most active composers on the international stage.”

At close to two and a half hours of music, Fujikura’s ambitious album *Glorious Clouds* comprises 15 substantial works for orchestra, ensembles and soloists, embracing concerti, chamber music, art song, instrumental solos and electronic genres. Sadly, I can only touch on a few samples of this rich musical horde here.

The impressive orchestral *Glorious Clouds*, evocatively performed by the Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra, was inspired by the interconnected microbiotic phenomena found everywhere on Earth, rather than by the atmospheric phenomena suggested by the title. Recounts the composer: “I thought, Ah!!! Various small microorganisms make the survival of the whole world possible – just like processes within an orchestra.” *Glorious Clouds* maintains a dynamic tension between floating, swirling sonic textures and an overall harmonic structure and thematic progression. My ear was initially reminded of Debussy’s orchestral sonorities and colours, yet soon enough Fujikura’s emerging strident effects, sonic shapes teetering on melody, plus novel orchestration and formal balances were reminders that we’re in another century entirely.

*Sparkling Orbit* for electronics and electric guitar follows, incisively performed by Daniel Lippel. Opening with atmospheric passages, it turns abrasive and edgy, the guitar repeating in the last section a rhythmically complex distorted chime-like overtone pattern over electronic craquelure. *Serene*, derived from Fujikura’s Recorder Concerto, is quite distinct again. Its three solo movements are given a powerfully dramatic performance by recorder virtuoso Jeremias Schwarzer on three contrasting recorders. I found the middle movement opening, scored for the soprano, evocative of the nohkan, the characteristically bracing, high-pitched *Japanese* transverse bamboo flute commonly played in *Noh* and *Kabuki* theatre. While a recent work, I can see *Serene* being widely adopted as a standard recital piece; it’s that good.

Finally for this review, Motion Notions features Mari Kimura’s brilliant violin playing. In addition, she’s also strapped a motion sensor to her bow arm wrist. It sounds like it controls various types of synthesized sounds and perhaps also live processing. The result is an interactively polyphonic, slithery texture, an unusual, and very effective, musical dialogue between the violinist’s acoustic music and the electronic sounds directed by her motion sensor. It’s another album favourite of mine.

Fujikura shares album credits on a second release with rising star LEO (Leo Konno b.1998 in Yokohama) who the label calls today’s “hottest koto artist.” The record features the premiere recording of the substantial single-movement **Koto Concerto** with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra conducted by Masato Suzuki, plus three related solo works for koto, all scored by Fujikura.

While the 25’42” concerto is an impressive work judiciously illustrated with the composer’s signature deaf orchestration, the three solos make a strong case for the koto achieving its finest, most delicate, satisfying chamber music, art song, instrumental moments in a solo capacity.

All the works here are rendered with sensitive bravura by LEO and vibrantly recorded by Nippon Columbia’s engineers. Bravos all around.

**Andrew Timar**

<whatwelistentothismonth>
American composer Adam Roberts delivers a selection of his chamber music demonstrating an expressive compositional voice and creating engaging instrumental spaces. Roberts’ approach is focused with a brave sense of acoustic adventurousness and, using top-notch ensembles and soloists, this release enraptures ear and mind. Whether through timbral exploration or enchanting stasis, Roberts has a propensity to secure his structures with a continuous and recognizable motif while shifting focus toward other musical narratives. The result is one of clever design and intent: the music unfolds with an initial sense of random moments, but is grounded by carefully constructed and recognizable gestural frameworks.

The disc begins with Shift Differential, an excited and energetic duet for violin and viola performed by andPlay. Roberts experiments with many successful timbral spaces that create momentum through constantly evolving, almost improvisatory, passages. Next, the Oboe Quartet performed by soloist Erik Behr and the JACK Quartet, shows Roberts’ more lyrical side in a work that is decidedly classical in its fast-slow-fast form.

The gem on the disc is a piece titled Rounds for solo harp, performed by Hannah Lash. Cascading apparitions of sound permeate amid gentle clusters and multi-layered auras. Lash’s performance is stunning, with a musicality that is rare and captivating. Happy/ Angry Music, a trio performed by Bearthoven, draws upon polyphonic material and utilizes repetition to propel the music forward. Lastly, Bell Threads, a work for solo viola performed by Hannah Levinson, produces a sinuous and mysterious soundworld that is unique on the disc. This haunting work is the perfect bookend to a truly impressive collection of chamber works.

**Adam Scime**

**Forward Music Project 2.0 – in this skin**

Amanda Gookin
Bright Shiny Things BSTC 0156
(brightshiny.ninja)

- Having enjoyed the first release of cellist Amanda Gookin’s Forward Music Project t.0, I was richly rewarded by its sequel. From the front cover, with a photo of Gookin perilously close to cutting her own tongue with a pair of scissors, we know this CD means business. “... in this visceral journey towards radical expression... This flesh is where we live... We are powerful in this skin.”

In this second installment of FMP, four more composers are invited, not as guests, but as the key tellers of the layers and complexities of women’s stories, each in their own way. Gookin takes each one as a precious gift, playing them with perfection and ferocity that makes clear her undeniable believability and dedication to every word. Translated sonically through her cello and her own vocals, with occasional added voices and electronics, there is simply no track to be missed. Paola Perlini’s _To Tell A Story_ was in itself a fascinating journey of how the power of storytelling can be misused and appropriated, with sound artist Skip Shirey’s backdrop of a 1983 interview with Susan Sontag creating brilliant sonic graffiti.

Not only executed with stunning prowess, Gookin’s dedication to each composer’s voice channels the direct, hard-hitting messages of the compositions, her virtuosity powerfully propelling them even further, reminding us that these are all our stories to be told. She delivers them with authenticity, never taking over. This is not an ego project. This is cello playing at its height; delivering art.

**Forward Music Project** is an undertaking that continues to leave me breathless.

- Cheryl Ockrant

**Wild At Heart**

Pauline Kim Harris
Sono Luminous DSL-92253
(sonoluminous.com)

- The second release in Pauline Harris’ _Chaconne Project_, this album explores interconnections between time, individual worlds and music. According to Harris, each commissioned composition is a reincarnation of J.S. Bach’s _Chaconne_ for solo violin and each composer has expressed their unique individual connection to this piece.

The music on this album is wild in the best sense of the word – an uninhibited violin wonderland of extended techniques, powerful, ingenious and enterprising. There are no memorable melodies here but instead a universe made of fragments, textures and gestures, all centered around _Chaconne_. The depth of sound is astonishing and Harris’ violin is so sonorous that one feels an incredible sense of expansion listening to this album. Harris has impeccable command of his instrument. She is an artist with a wild imagination, great stamina and extraordinary control.

The opening piece, Yoon-Ji Lee’s _Shakonn_, is a volcano of sound and energy built over a held bass note, pulling _Chaconne_ apart and transforming it. Morsels by Elizabeth Hoffman follows, a web of lovely harmonics that create both the rhythms and textures. Sequences of single gestures are juxtaposed with empty spaces, forming delicate balances. Annie Gosfield’s _Long Waves and Random Pulses_ has a powerful energy and occasional Gypsy flavour. Using extensive research of jammed radio signals as a foundation, Gosfield alternates whirls of notes with a ghostly noise to build the mystery.

The album closes with a grand C-H-A-C-O- N-N-E. John King’s composition that explores the form to the extreme through sequences that move from complex to simple. An imaginative and highly recommended album.

- Ivan Popovic

**Richard Bissill – Panoply**

Artists from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama
Three Worlds Records TWR0011 (three-worlds-records.com)

- The opening two-minute _Philharmonic Fanfare_ for brass and percussion, commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, boisterously heralds this CD’s many forthcoming pleasures. Richard Bissill, former LPO principal horn and longtime professor at London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama, enlisted students and fellow faculty members to perform the music recorded here, all composed between 2001 and 2016.

Bissill himself appears in his eight-minute _Trio_ for horn, violin and piano, two warmly lyrical sections embracing a graceful, lively scherzando. Episodically varying tempi and moods make the nine-minute _Twisted Elegy_ for flute, violin and harp much more “twisted” than “elegiac.” Bissill’s ten-minute Sirens for violin and piano vividly evokes the mythical temptresses with music that’s playful, sensuous and urgently seductive.

There are two 15-minute, three-movement pieces. The jazz-tinted _Triangulation_ achieves heightened impact through its unusual textures – dense and gritty – produced by seven bassoons and one contrabassoon. _Panoply_ for flute and piano, with its quicksilver first movement, languid, Debussy-inflected central movement and theatrical finale, is a fresh, delectable addition to the flute repertoire.

The 12-minute _The Magnificent Seventh_ for eight horns, piano, bass and drums, based on the interval of a minor seventh, moves from fanfares and busy syncopations to a slow, bluesy middle section before the piece, and the CD, ends in a burst of triumph.

Bissill’s inventively varied, thoroughly
engaging music – “progressive-conservative” in the best sense – deserves widespread exposure to international audiences. Recommended!

Michael Schulman

Sara Schoenbeck
Sara Schoenbeck; Harris Eisenstadt; Roscoe Mitchell; Mark Dresser; Peggy Lee et al
Pyroclastic Records PR 16
(pyroclasticrecords.com)

► As a pioneer of contemporary bassoon, Sara Schoenbeck’s self-titled album of duet collaborations reads almost like a list of party invitees who just happen to be the who’s who of modern improvisers.

Longtime friendships and musical partnerships culminate in a colourful quilt as Schoenbeck travels to recording studios across North America during a global pandemic to reach each collaborator. While her pairings are unique and intimately connected with each artist, Schoenbeck shares that her “deepest musical relationship is with the bassoon itself, the kernel of [her] inspiration.” It might be obvious by now, but it is worth noting that no more important a relationship can be intensified than an artist with their instrument during a pandemic, and each collaboration shines a spotlight on Schoenbeck’s skillful microtonal and multiphonic explorations. Long, arcing tones of bending, creaking, edgy vocalizations and melodic expressions are showcased across a wide and beautiful canvas of both scored and improvised duets.

The haunting and beautiful Lullaby with improvising guitar legend Nels Cline is soaked with a darkly sublime blend of bassoon and ambient electronic extensions that at times feels like one voice, where Suspend A Bridge, with cellist Peggy Lee, seesaws a fine balance between intertwined harmonies and vast textural space. The Sand Dune Trilogy, with Nicole Mitchell on flute, seductively reminds us of Schoenbeck’s symphonic past while simultaneously teasing it apart.

Other collaborators include Harris Eisenstadt, Roscoe Mitchell, Mark Dresser, Matt Mitchell and Wayne Horvitz. The closing track, Robin Holcomb’s Sugar, is a beautiful and unexpected finale – but then, parties do sometimes end with the most interesting, quiet conversations.

Cheryl Ockrant

You Are the Light and the Way
Alex Bird and the Jazz Mavericks
Independent (alexbird.net)

► Award-winning singer-songwriter Alex Bird has done it again on his newest release, showcasing his vocal prowess as well as great compositional skills.

Along with pianist and songwriting partner-in-crime Ewen Farncombe, the pair has penned 12 new tracks with string and horn arrangements courtesy of the latter. Backed by the stellar Jazz Mavericks and several guest musicians this time around, Bird’s sound has grown to newer and greater heights with this record. This album would be a valuable addition to the collection of any jazz lover who’s looking to dive into the deeper and darker crevices of the genre.

The album starts off with the sultry title track You Are The Light and the Way, bringing the listener on a journey through the intriguingly seedy underbelly of the jazz world where the traditional and raunchy merge. The unique theme that carries throughout the record is a musical “path that blends the light and dark” in a way that holds the attention of the listener to the last note. From melancholy songs such as Way Back Home to positively toe-tapping pieces such as Old Soul and Back To You, Bird and the Mavericks bring a scintillating spark and charm that liven up these dreary winter days. This golden-voiced vocalist, reminiscent of Sinatra and Elling, brings the album to a close with the touching Honey Bee Lullaby, a promise of much more to come from this young talent in the near future.

Kati Kiliaspea

Not This Room
Roddy Ellias Free Spirit Ensemble featuring Kellylee Evans
Independent (roddyellias.com)

► With this latest recording, eminent guitarist Roddy Ellias shines not only as a gifted musician, but as a fine and facile composer and arranger. Every song in this collection was written by Elias, and the compelling, and often haunting lyrics were written by noted Canadian poetess Sandra Nicholls. Both the music and lyrics here require the participation of very special artists, and joining Elias on this deeply personal project is the inspired vocalist and lyrical interpreter, Kellylee Evans, as well as a lineup of skilled musicians, including Ellias on acoustic steel string guitar, Marc Copland on piano, Justin Orok on nylon string guitar, Chris Pond on bass, Jose Garcia on percussion, Petr Cancura on reeds and mandolin, Guy Pelletier on flute, Richard Page on bass clarinet and Pierre-Yves Martel on viola da gamba.

Evans’ emotional intelligence permeates the stunning title track, and beckons the listener to participate in the journey ahead. As the tune segues into a more rhythmic section, the ensemble playing, including Garcia’s subtle and driving percussion, is nothing short of breathtaking. These artists are clearly listening to each other and are creating every musical nuance in synchronicity – like a single-celled being.

Of special note is the moving and
thought-provoking *Draw Me a Circle*, in which Evans’ warm and sinuous voice effortlessly scales the pure notes of her upper register, diving into her cello-like tones (the perfect complement for Martel’s gamba). Other gems include the stark and mystical *Blood and Bone* and the haunting, Middle Eastern-modality-infused *Suddenly*. The touching and uplifting *Prayer* is the perfect closer for this evocative project of nearly unbearable beauty and fragility.

_Lesley Mitchell-Clarke_

**News Blues**  
Greg Amirault; Steve Amirault; Adrian News Blues  
Vedady; Jim Doxas  
CUPFA GGA002 (gregamirault.org)

> For his third release as a leader, Montreal-based guitarist/composer/producer Greg Amirault has brought forth an intimate, swinging, potent recording– comprised of seven of his own well-constructed tunes, as well as two tasty standards (both arranged in gorgeous solo guitar formats). He is also joined here by long-time collaborators, including his uber-talented brother Steve Amirault on piano, the deft Adrian News Blues on bass and Jim Doxas on drums.

The title track – a sassy, up-tempo blues – features superb soloing from Greg on guitar, while the rest of the rhythm session cooks perfectly. The word “astral” in the title of the album, the name of the ensemble and the role of electronic instruments played by two musicians from the trio may lead to the assumption that the music that ensues fuses the spacey and the terrestrial. In reality, this music is far more profound. It is as if Oli Astral – guitarist Olivier Grenier Bédard (aka Oli Astral), bassist Frédéric Alarie and drummer William Régnier – lean into a theoretical belief, dwelling in an ethereal region comprising their sound world, where each of their artistic auras melds into music.

It is a lofty ideal, but Oli Astral makes good on that extra-terrestrial promise. The repertoire on *From the Astral* comes from a place of considerable imagination and intuition. The six songs are woven from elements created by the guitarist’s MIDI controllers and digital audio processing techniques as well as the bassist’s modular synthesizers that retain the feel of orchestral textures. Add the palette that the drummer’s percussion colours create and you have rhythmic frescoes onto which are projected a poignant musical artwork with purity of tone where jazz guitar meets the electronic realm.

The music of *From the Astral* also suggests that the trio’s inspiration lies at the juxtaposition of jazz and neoclassicism. The idiomatic adaptation of what ensues from those imaginary crossroads is altogether atmospheric, best experienced on charts such as *L’envoi* and *Spectre Sonore*.  

_Raul da Gama_

**The History of Us**  
Carn Davidson 9  
Three Pines Records TPR-005 (threepinesrecords.ca/home/carn-davidson-9)

> I enjoy reviewing more music, as I rarely run out of things to discuss. This applies to subtler and more ambient projects, as well as more boisterous spontaneous improvisations. This is why I was excited to have Montreal vocalist Jeannette Lambert’s* Genius Loci North* grace my desk. Lambert, her brother Reg Schwager on guitar, and husband Michel Lambert on percussion, all have a knack for playing improvised music that is both creative and mature. There is a genuineness to their interactions as a group that allows the smoother moments to sound fresh and the more angular offerings to remain inobtrusive.

While the recording is made up of 15 individual tracks, they flow naturally into one another and give the entirety of the album an undulating feel. This leaves an untrained listener with a lengthy but interesting meditation, while maintaining enough ebbs and flows to keep even the most expert set of ears enthralled.

Lambert’s vocals sound simple and pure enough to emphasize the poetry she has written, but the way she shapes her pitch over Schwager’s chordal textures is virtuosic as well. The same can be said of Michel Lambert’s percussion, which seamlessly traverses grooves and out-of-time textures.

To know that most of these tracks were heard on this disc stands on its own enough to pique the interest of any jazz fan, and behind the excellent compositions, solos and interplay, lies much personal inspiration. Listeners are treated to multi-move-ment suites by both of the group’s namesake members, William Carn and Tara Davidson, sandwiched around the brief but poignant

*Goodbye Old Friend*, a tribute to their late feline Murphy – namesake to their last release in 2017.

Both suites heard on the album utilise personal narratives from Carn and Davidson’s lives. Carn’s *Finding Home Suite* documents his parents’ migration from Hong Kong to Canada, and Davidson’s *Suite 1985* is described as “a collection of love letters to her family.” Alongside these non-musical themes, there is an ever-present balance between composition and improvisation. After first hearing the *Finding Home Suite*, I was craving more improvisation amidst the composed notes. But this ratio is definitely a creative choice, and a valid one given the quality of the writing. Each member of the nonet is an excellent soloist as well as a great section player, and Kevin Turcotte exemplifies this perfectly, soloing on the first movement of both suites. The album has a superb flow to it, and benefits from being recorded exceptionally well too. I recommend *The History of Us* for casual listeners and diehard jazz fans alike!

_Sam Dickinson_

**Genius Loci North**  
Jeannette Lambert; Reg Schwager; Michel Lambert  
Independent (jeannettelambert.bandcamp.com)

> For his third release as a leader, Montreal-based guitarist/composer/producer Greg Amirault has brought forth an intimate, swinging, potent recording– comprised of seven of his own well-constructed tunes, as well as two tasty standards (both arranged in gorgeous solo guitar formats). He is also joined here by long-time collaborators, including his uber-talented brother Steve Amirault on piano, the deft Adrian News Blues on bass and Jim Doxas on drums.

The History of Us

*Goodbye Old Friend*, a tribute to their late feline Murphy – namesake to their last release in 2017.

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Spring 2021
René Lussier; Erick d’Orion; Robbie Kuster; Martin Tétreault
Victo CD 134 (victo.qc.ca)

The Victo record label is almost as venerable as the Victoriaville, Quebec FIMAV festival that gave it birth, and this disc is a signal moment in the history of both. The performance comes from the May 2021 festival, a hardy, insistant edition with a Quebec focus following the pandemic-cancelled 2020 festival. The recording marks the label’s 35th anniversary with special significance: the first recording issued was a guitar duet that also featured René Lussier, then in the company of Fred Frith.

In keeping with the festival’s ideal of musique actuel, current music, this resists classification, a collective improvisational, combining Lussier’s electric guitar and saxophone (a bowed, fretted instrument), Robbie Kuster’s drums, Érick d’Orion’s computer and electronics and Martin Tétreault’s turntables. It blurs categories of electronic music, free jazz and anarcho-rock, the latter sometimes suggested by Kuster’s steady beat anchoring disparate elements.

The music’s aim is neither clarity nor easy consumption; its strengths are in its vision, energy and a palpable sense of resistance. Lussier’s guitar is often the central voice, suggesting a creation, electric wall or shifting to the barely amplified wandering of L’avant dernière. L’autre, a nine-minute segment near the temporal centre of the work, develops mysterious and distinct layers and events that are almost sculpturally arrayed in the sound field, the seemingly independent parts ultimately evolving into part of a collective vision.

In 1999, Charuest arranged some Montreal performances for the duo and dancer Alanna Kraaijveld, during which time he and Taylor recorded Knotted Threads.

There are innate difficulties in describing any music, but the problems compound with free improvisation. While one is free to say almost anything, finding something relevant is a challenge. Charuest and Taylor, generously, provide an ideal metaphor for their work: a series of titles taken from arcane knots used by fishermen, sailors and craftsmen for centuries, thereby highlighting both the practice and goal of their special idiom. Each is a virtuoso of extended as well as conventional techniques, each an explorer of sonority, attacks and decays – to the extent that their sounds, like their pitch ranges, intersect. Gauzy and gritty harmonics, whether bowed or blown; percussive knocks, whether plucked string or struck keypad; subtle shifts in dynamics or sudden glissandi: they all intertwine in myriad ways, whether designated as Ossel Hitch, Round Lashing, Poldo Tackle or Bimini Twist.

There are moments when the whole voyage is revealed. On Chain Sinnet, the viola sounds like a rope stretching against a gunwale, the saxophone like gulls, landed in the bow – yet all of it human, rope and gull crying as one. It’s an hour of music with the precision and gravitas of several chapters of Homer’s Odyssey or Moby Dick.

Stuart Broome

You Can’t Take It With You
Chet Doxas
Whirlwind Recordings WW4778 (chetdoxas.com)

You Can’t Take It with You is a creative and swinging drummerless offering from Montreal-born New York-based saxophonist, Chet Doxas. Doxas’ tenure in NYC has led him to play with the who’s who of American musicians, including a long-term collaboration with Steve Swallow and Carla Bley, who encouraged Doxas to put together this trio project over conversations during a European tour. Pianist Ethan Iverson and bassist Thomas Morgan are perfectly suited for the ten original pieces Doxas penned for the recording, which comes as no surprise given their individual reputations for making creative yet grounded music. The album’s title track is almost bluesy in nature, making it a perfect introduction to this often abstract but always grooving recording. I was surprised to read that its inspiration comes from compositions by Count Basie, but this makes sense after a second listen. The following track Lodestar also takes its inspiration from a source I didn’t immediately recognize; saxophone legend

Stuart Broome

You Can’t Take It With You
Chet Doxas
Whirlwind Recordings WW4778 (chetdoxas.com)

You Can’t Take It with You is a creative and swinging drummerless offering from Montreal-born New York-based saxophonist, Chet Doxas. Doxas’ tenure in NYC has led him to play with the who’s who of American musicians, including a long-term collaboration with Steve Swallow and Carla Bley, who encouraged Doxas to put together this trio project over conversations during a European tour. Pianist Ethan Iverson and bassist Thomas Morgan are perfectly suited for the ten original pieces Doxas penned for the recording, which comes as no surprise given their individual reputations for making creative yet grounded music. The album’s title track is almost bluesy in nature, making it a perfect introduction to this often abstract but always grooving recording. I was surprised to read that its inspiration comes from compositions by Count Basie, but this makes sense after a second listen. The following track Lodestar also takes its inspiration from a source I didn’t immediately recognize; saxophone legend

Stuart Broome

You Can’t Take It With You
Chet Doxas
Whirlwind Recordings WW4778 (chetdoxas.com)
Shifting Sands
Don Macdonald
(donmacdonald.bandcamp.com/album/shifting-sands)

Award-winning Canadian composer/performer/educator, Don Macdonald, composed, produced and performs/improvises on violin on his nine original jazz works here. His unique orchestration adds violin and mandolin to a traditional jazz rhythm section—guitar, piano, acoustic bass, drums—performed by predominately Canadian musicians. Each tune is jazz based, yet intriguing touches from other musical influences and the instrumentation makes these jazz fusion sounds appealing to all music lovers.

Opening track Shifting Sands is so very happy and sets the musical stage. Pianist Dave Restivo’s quiet piano intro leads to a faster groove. Great full-band jazz to pop sounds, especially when guitarist Mike Rud’s solo contrasts with Macdonald’s violin high pitches. Dall’s Hourglass is darker, with contrapuntal detached piano chord opening until violin lead begins—a little bit of everything jazz with touches of minimalism in repeated lines. In Bayou, drummer Steven Parish’s solo opening sets up a Cajun groove in this tightly performed modern take on the familiar New Orleans style. Dreams of Ozymandias is slow and moody with close-knit instrumental conversations and underlying subtle rhythms. Four diverse tracks follow until the “sands shift” back to happy in the closing Homecoming with its fun, funky and florid party-time music. Bassists Rob Fahie and Jill McKenna, and mandolinists Dylan Ferris and Boston-based Jason Anick, also perform on select tracks.

This is a must-listen-to joyous release. Macdonald’s virtuosic works and violin playing never disappoint. All the stellar musicians play exuberantly, with care and respect.

Together Song
Avi Granite; Daniel Carter
Pet Mantis Records PMR013
(petmantisrecords.com)

Through three pieces of varying length, multi-instrumentalist Daniel Carter (flute, clarinet, trumpet, tenor saxophone) and electric guitarist Avi Granite demonstrate the value of patience in a purely improvisational setting. This isn’t to say that more kinetic free-form music with a shorter attention span isn’t a compelling alternative approach, but Carter and Granite’s musical relationship is a thing of beauty. They not only seem to be listening closely to one other, they’re in perpetual dialogue concerning the ultimate destination of the form itself. It’s not just about finishing each other’s sentences, it’s about taking an idea and expanding upon it in a manner that opens up new possibilities.

Carter and Granite both accompany in a way that feels far more like amplification than mere coexistence. Granite’s rhythmic reflexes constantly provide the context and environment in which Carter’s vignettes thrive. On the other hand, the intent and clarity of Carter’s own articulation gives the overall work a sense of unrelenting movement. Each piece feels like it’s constantly developing, and yet perhaps the characteristic that best defines this album is space. Rather than trying to continually build upon each passage until they hit a plateau, Carter and Granite opt to meditate on their surroundings, letting the music naturally mature rather than forcing a progression. In art, there are few things more inspiring than a creative bond this powerful.

Zephyr
Steph Richards
Relative Pitch Records RPR 1132
(relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com)

Dedicated to exploring an instrument’s every niche and extended technique is Canadian-in-California trumpeter/flugelhornist Steph Richards, joined by percussive pianist Joshua White with a similar aim here. In the form of three multi-track suites, the two explore visceral episodes that go beyond brass, wood, strings, air and pressure.

As Richards slides from one emphasized tone to another, she sometimes augments the output by plunging her bell into a watery vessel. The moist results add distinctive tinges to muddled plunger tones. Sacred Sea expresses that in its most extended form when mated with broken-octave blowing reflecting outward after being aimed at piano innards. White’s string preparations jangle sympathetically there. But elsewhere with pedal extensions, slaps against the instrument’s wood and keyboard clips and arpeggios that are inclined more towards stride than solemnity, his accompaniment is dynamic as well as linear.

Half-valve effects and rippling smears during all of the Northern Lights suite allow Richards to alternately advance greasy snarl and lyrical slides, finally culminating in hand-muted gutbucket tones that squeak upwards.

Lester Young. Tributes of this sort are often penned in a heavy-handed manner, so I very much appreciate Doxas using influences as jumping off points rather than strict rules.

The theme of obscuring influences permeates the entire album and feels apropos given the manner in which these three musicians improvise. Doxas’ compositions are detailed enough to unify the album’s sound, but open-ended enough to allow these unique improvisers to shine. This makes You Can’t Take It ended enough to allow these unique improvisations into his art. A jazz pianist, pedagogue, composer, ensemble leader/director and performer/educator, he is clearly a musician who incorporates numerous musical traditions into his art.

For the listener, given the deeply felt depths of meaning-making mind.”

Erlebnisse.
Noam Lemish
Independent (noamlemish.com)

In these times of reworked, remade and rebooted albums, movies and musicals, it is truly refreshing to encounter a CD of improvised music where each track has been recorded once... period. Noam Lemish’s debut solo album, Erlebnisse, is an engaging example of this.

Toronto-based Lemish wears many hats, traversing diverse musical boundaries and incorporating numerous musical traditions into his art. A jazz pianist, pedagogue, composer, ensemble leader/director and accompanist, he is clearly a musician who happily defies categorization.

Erlebnisse is a word/concept in German that means “deeply felt experiences.” What Lemish offers us on 16 tracks—each one an Erlebnis— is indeed an array of deeply felt experiences conveyed to us through the medium of music with all of its evocative powers on display. And, as Lemish explained to me, with “little interference from our meaning-making mind.”

Listening to this extraordinary CD—one would be well-advised to do so, repeatedly, as an uninterrupted whole (preferably with a glass of red wine in hand)–Lemish takes us along on his soul-baring, improvisational journey, which is nothing short of stunning (and which may even feel a touch voyeuristic for the listener, given the deeply felt depths that he plumbs). Infused with elements of jazz, classical and Middle Eastern music, Jewish folk and Israeli popular song, Lemish’s extemporizations are at times poignant, propulsive, yearning, mel ancholic, contemplative and quixotic. And they are masterful.

Erlebnisse is improvisation at its most inventive and intimate!

Sharna Searle

Sam Dickinson

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Tiina Kiik

Tilina Kilk

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thewholenote.com
on top of keyboard rumbles. However, no matter how experimental the brass-keyboard duets appear to be, during the set of Sequoia tunes and elsewhere, a feeling of joyous balance remains. With her clarion peeps sounding as if they’re from a piccolo trumpet, it seems a riff based on Largo al Factotum is being sounded.

Zephyr may be a gentle breeze but the blowing here offers a lot more than that. — Ken Waxman

What Is There To Say
Cory Weeds with Strings
Cellar Music CM110620 (cellarlive.com)

> So much classical and contemporary music features strings in orchestras, quartets and many other formats. When added into other genres the “string sound” can become a delicious addition to a country, pop or jazz recording (think of Frank Sinatra performing arrangements by Nelson Riddle or Gordon Jenkins). The Charlie Parker with Strings recordings are a milestone in jazz and were his best-selling albums.

Cory Weeds’ What Is There to Say continues this tradition by pairing a jazz quartet with an 11-piece string section playing standards and three Weeds originals (Waltz for Someone Special, Alana Marie and Love is Wild). The overall sound and performances here are exquisite. Phil Dwyer must be commended for creating such engaging and articulate arrangements and playing some great piano as well. Weeds is well known as a producer and all round jazz entrepreneur (his good work includes founding and managing Cellar Live) but primarily he is an excellent saxophone player with many albums to his credit as leader.

Throughout What Is There to Say? Weeds illustrates how playing the melody, with his full and assured tone, is perfect in some spots while in others (like the moderately up-tempo There’s A Boat Leavin’ Soon for New York, or trading fours with Dwyer at the end of Love Is Wild), some great bop lines add zest to the proceedings. So really, What Is There to Say?, except listen to this album for its elegance, fine performances and solid groove.

Ted Parkinson

Lorraine’s Lullaby
Anthony Wonsey
Cellar Music CM012421 (cellarlive.com)

> Pianist Anthony Wonsey’s style consists equally of tastefulness and invention. His renditions of Richard Rodgers’ I Didn’t Know What Time It Was and It Might as Well be Spring are full of tunefulness and clarity, while still maintaining a distinctive group sound. In particular, the way in which he plays around with groove and contour alongside drummer Chris Beck gives these classics a reinvigoration seldom seen elsewhere. The central fulcrum of this album, however, is Wonsey’s own composing, in which he establishes his abilities as both a consummate songwriter and attentive facilitator of his rhythm section. The harmony itself is shimmering with assurance familiarity and yet there is an element of unpredictability that entices the listener.

Rhythmically, the penmanship and improvisation seem to inform one another. On Blacker Black’s Revenge, Wonsey and bassist Dmitri Kolesnik’s phrasings are conversational yet serpentine, starting as abruptly as they finish, while seamlessly leading back to the primary motif. Wonsey’s own playing possesses key characteristics of control and range. More often than not his solos have the feeling of ease, leaving enough room to punctuate lines and accentuating the rhythmic pocket. His undying commitment to the cohesiveness of his ensemble makes those rare moments when he takes flight (see: Do You Remember Me) notably more impactful. Every track on here is golden.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Architecture of Storms
Remy Le Boeuf’s Assembly of Shadows
Soupsndrec Records SS202101 (remyleboeuf.com)

> I’ve been a fan of the Le Boeuf brothers (Remy and Pascal) since their concert at the Kitchener/Waterloo Jazz Room in 2017. Their music combines composed and improvised sections where the orchestration is as compelling as individual soloists. In 2019 Remy Le Boeuf released Assembly of Shadows which contained seven of his compositions for a big band. In 2021 Le Boeuf released Architecture of Storms billed (slightly confusingly) as Remy Le Boeuf’s Assembly of Shadows, signifying the connection between the two albums and the importance of the ensemble. In fact, four of these tracks were recorded in 2019 during the Assembly of Shadows sessions and three were recorded in 2021.

Architecture of Storms is, again, an exciting contemporary big band album. Le Boeuf’s compositions are complex and utilize the full palette offered by almost 30 excellent musicians. Repeated listenings are rewarded by the mood changes, shifting melodies and invigorating solos over ostinatos and nuanced brass and woodwind orchestrations. This album includes an expansive arrangement of the Bon Iver song Minnesota, WI and The Melancholy Architecture of Storms is sung by Julia Easterlin with lyrics by the poet Sara Pirkle. With both Assembly of Shadwos and The Architecture of Storms Le Boeuf has shown imaginative composition skills and should be commended for producing such a large collaborative work during a pandemic.

Ted Parkinson

Vio Music VM-0001-CD (viomusic.art)

> Vio is the alter ego project of multi-instrumentalist Viktor Haraszt, in which he seeks complete creative liberation from jazz conventions. On Vio’s latest album, which self-categorizes as a “futuristic jazz tale,” it is safe to say that Haraszt realizes his vision, both in ambition and execution. Unlike Vio’s prior work, this is undeniably a Haraszt solo effort. With the exception of three spoken word passages courtesy of Lisa Marie Simmons, and occasional percussion courtesy of Dave King and Marshall Curtly, every single aspect of this music is dictated by Haraszt. He plays every instrument (one of his favourite moves being layering multiple reed instruments to create harmonic lattices), is responsible for the rich production, and composes/arranges each second of music.

The stylistic qualities of Equanimity vary from enveloping ambient passages to solemn contemplations that soundtrack Simmons’ words while also giving them context. Between the heavier moments of the suite lie surprising instances of levity. Chapter Five is a change in pace and mood that I hadn’t realized the music needed. It retains the compelling spectacle of prior tracks, but creates an atmosphere of hopefulness by taking a turn into danceable territory. Haraszt introduces elements one by one throughout this masterfully paced experience, including successful flirtations with electronics, giving the overall sonic palette a new, unexpected dimension. The climactic Chapter Seven even borders on electro-pop at times.

Yoshi Maclear Wall
A Love Sonnet for Billie Holiday
Wadada Leo Smith; Jack DeJohnette; Vijay Iyer
TUM Records TUM CD 060
(tumrecords.com)

The Chicago Symphonies
Wadada Leo Smith’s Great Lakes Quartet
TUM Records TUM Box 004
(tumrecords.com)

Wadada Leo Smith is one of the most important artists of his generation. Although functionally a trumpeter, his real instrument is his far-reaching compositions, the artistry of which is subsumed in works that are aural and visual. Moreover the eloquent narratives that propel the elasticized rhythmic units that make up his iconic Ankhramation Symbol Language are so intensely and eloquently poetic that a literary dimension may also be ascribed to his musical art.

Smith rose to eminence when he became a very early member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), founded in Chicago by Muhal Richard Abrams. Then, with reeds master Anthony Braxton and violinist Leroy Jenkins, Smith began to create music that soared, outward bound. It began with his concept of rhythm units born of a belief that every musician participating in a musical excursion was a singular inventor in the congregate setting of ensemble music. This led to a musical canon that grew spectacularly with every new work. More than 50 albums later and celebrating his 80th year around the sun, Smith has led various ensembles to produce three new releases – the 3-CD solo Trumpet, Sacred Ceremonies with Milford Graves and Bill Laswell (reviewed by Ken Waxman in The WholeNote Vol.27/1) and the 4-CD The Chicago Symphonies with Smith’s Great Lakes Quartet included below – plus a single album that brings together drummer Jack DeJohnette and pianist Vijay Iyer in a unique collaboration titled A Love Sonnet for Billie Holiday.

Each of the members of this latter trio brought pieces to explore during this musical encounter. The uniqueness of Smith’s art is in what might be referred to as the small print – the intimate moments that only a genuine artist understands and has the ability to inspire in others. We experience majesty in his The A.D. Opera: A Long Vision with Imagination, Creativity and Fire, a dance opera (For Anthony Davis). Iyer’s Time No.1 and DeJohnette’s Song for World Forgiveness are also impressive. Throughout the album phrases are tellingly placed, every colour skilfully applied, whether with a subtle smudge of the thumb or the bolder stroke of the brush.

The Chicago Symphonies box set comprises four separate extended works of epic length. Each symphonic work is unique; Black History lessons told in song. The significance and matchless nature of each orchestral work expresses the birth pangs and often painful nature of the African-American in history from Lincoln to Obama, steeped – and expressed – in the Blues. It is impeccably performed by Smith with Jack DeJohnette and Henry Threadgill, a titan of music expressed in woodwinds and reeds, together with bassist John Lindberg, Saxophonist Jonathon Haffner replaces Threadgill on Symphony No. 4. Each work is rendered with ruminative prayerfulness and unfurled rhetoric. You’ll hear throughout – especially on Symphony No. 2 – the kind of textural complexity, intuitive pacing and abstract brilliance of melody, harmony and rhythm, grounded in piercing sunbursts of luminosity, that takes your breath away.

...and then there’s this
Artifacts: Tomeka Reid; Nicole Mitchell; Mike Reed
Astral Spirits AS129
(astralspirits.bandcamp.com)

The musical density and raw vibrancy, of the work by Artifacts – cellist Tomeka Reid, flutist Nicole Mitchell and drummer Mike Reed – often sounds as if it has sprung into being from a point before time as we know it, as well as from a future way beyond time. It evokes elemental human or natural forces from the rhythm of the natural world, sculpted in short and long inventions, by the joyously pendulous swing of time.

...and then there’s this owes much to being formed in the Association for Advancement of Creative Musicians. Black to the Future Afrofuturism is in the spine of the trio’s wondrously dark, vivacious musical palette. Homage is duly paid to Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell on Soprano Song and No Side Effects. The rest of the music comprises originals by the trio – Reid, Mitchell and Reed – and is made in the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic image of gleanings from (to coin a phrase) the Tao of AACM. But each song embodies the unique personality of the composer and the collective Reid’s voice is loose, joyously effusive, and redolent of soaring pizzicato leaps and capricious arco shrieks. Mitchell’s is magical, more tightly informed but with a similar depth of feeling and abounding in contrapuntal vigour and strange harmonies. Reed is a percussion colourist par excellence, tempering the rattle of drum skins with provocative hissing of cymbals. In Response, Blessed and Pleasure Palace are the album’s high points.

Raul da Gama

Some Comfort Here
Charlotte Moore; Mark Camilleri
Independent (open.spotify.com/album/0BnDapG1mPFfKfCUZhwLfI)

If, like me, you know Charlotte Moore as one of Canada’s top musical theatre performers, this new album is a fun window on another side of her performing personality. And yet, though the songs are more pop than theatre, they still display her signature ability to get to the essence of a song – making it seem she is making up both words and music on the spot.

The intimacy created by this ability is inviting and the choice of often wistfully melancholic songs of love and friendship from Joni Mitchell’s Help Me (I think I’m falling in love again) to Tom Waits’ Rainbow Sleeves and Old Friend (from the musical I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road), is cathartic listening material after almost two years of living through this seemingly unending pandemic.

Moore also lets loose in a couple of much more light-hearted jazzy numbers that suit her voice brilliantly: Chantal Kreviazuk and Raine Maida’s 2006 hit All I Can Do, and the 1932 classic Hummin’ to Myself (Sammy Fain et al).

Moore’s voice is at its best when relaxed in her lower register where tears and laughter can hover near the surface. When she aims higher into a belt her voice loses some of its rich quality and yet the very rawness of this “almost live-to-tape” recording of Moore’s voice backed by the masterful piano of Mark Camilleri is attractive and pulls us into the mix offered up of tears, hope and laughter.

Jennifer Parr

Canadiana
Canadian Brass
Linus Entertainment 270596
(linusentertainment.com)

One of the most iconic instrumental ensembles in Canada has just released its tribute to fellow Canadian musical
icons, *Canadiana*. Given the theme, it’s unsurprising that the covers should include Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen and Bruce Cockburn. What is surprising – and entertaining – is the presence of songs by Drake, Shawn Mendes and even EDM artist, Deadmau5.

Although the Canadian Brass is an incredibly prolific ensemble, having released 137 recordings since its inception in 1970, there’s been a hiatus of several years since their previous CD. The driving force behind *Canadiana* is trumpeter Brandon Ridenour who first joined the Brass when he was just 20 years old. He moved on to other projects and a successful solo career before returning in 2019 and conceiving, co-producing and writing all the arrangements for this project. Recorded during the pandemic, with the musicians working individually in their home studios, the album is a marvel of engineering and mastering.

*Canadiana* fittingly opens with *Je Me Souviens*, the song by Lara Fabian which became a Quebec anthem of sorts, and mastering. The standout tracks for me are the surprisingly gorgeous original intense flamenco sound in collaboration with some of his favourite Toronto musicians here, including Jesse Cook with whom he tours internationally.

Sellick plays solo on the opening *Quiet World* highlighted by technically challenging fast runs with slight spaces between phrases, as if two musicians were playing. Upbeat *High Park* is a happy-fast flamenco guitar walk/dance in the park grounded by electric bass (Dan Minchom) and rhythmic cájon and palmas (Matias Recharte). Cook is featured on *Sooit* and his characteristic guitar strums and fast melodious solo lines add his personal touch to Sellick’s rocking earworm flamenco sound. Full-band sound is surprisingly created with just Sellick’s guitar and Marito Marques’ percussion in the faster duet *Going Home*. Colourful high- and low-pitched guitar alternating melodic phrases and strums above drums build intensity to the accentuated closing. Saxophonist Chelsea McBride is also featured on one track. Thank you to Jesse Cook and Matt Sellick for admirably expanding and recording their uplifting flamenco guitar sounds during these difficult COVID pandemic times.

**Tiina Kilk**

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**Something in the Air**

**For Many Advanced Improvisers**

**All Roads Lead to Berlin**

KEN WAXMAN

When Toronto trumpeter Lina Allemano recently set up shop part of the year in Berlin it wasn’t much of a surprise. She joined other musicians from Canada and around the world who have made the German capital arguably second only to New York as a place to perform creative music. Cheaper living accommodations and efficient travel links to other areas of Europe are part of the appeal. So is the welcome given to new ideas in all the arts. Whether COVID, gentrification and evolving political currents will change this, as it did for Paris in the 1920s, is an open question. But right now, the situation remains stable.

Manchester, England’s loss was Berlin’s gain years ago when pianist Julie Sassoon moved across the channel. *Voyages* ([jazzwerkstatt JW 218 jazzwerkstatt.eu](https://jazzwerkstatt.eu)) is an ample exhibition of her talents as player and composer. With her quartet of Dutch saxophonist/clarinetist Lothar Ohlmeier, Austrian drummer Rudi Fischerlehner and German bassist Meinrad Kneer, the half-dozen tracks reflect moods from buoyant to bleak. The first adjective introduces the set on *Missed Calls* as stop-time pulses from the bassist and drummer undergird Ohlmeier’s snarly then stuttering tones, as the pianist’s rolling glissandi boost intensity that eventually turns to moderated and impressionistic vamps. Cymbal etching and reed whistles confirm the second sentiment on *Jerusalem*, as a buzzing
If Sassoon had to cross the Channel to establish herself in Berlin, other Berlin improvisers come from even farther afield. Vibraphonist Emilio Gordoa is Mexican and the cooperative GRIFF trio (Inexhaustible Editions ie G25 emiliegordoa.com) features Danish bassist Adam Pultz Melbye who also resides in Berlin and Austrian pianist Ingrid Schmoliner, who so far, still lives in Vienna. With the pianist mostly dedicated to plucking, pinching or stoppering the instrument’s internal strings and Gordoa clanking, rasping or slapping his instrument’s metal bars, the harmonies produced are, in the main, percussive. Currents of sound refract among all three when the bassist adds string pops so that timbres become threatening rather than tuneful. Yet when bell-pealing like vibraphone tones and dynamic keyboard patterning intersect, reflective lyricism is also present. Making effective use of silences – there’s no sound on the concluding Moss Rock until keyboard chops and vibe reverb are heard two minutes in and the exposition still proceeds with many pauses – the unique set-up also infers extended sound colours. This occurs when Schmoliner’s assembly line of echoes and clinks meets up with equivalent patterning from vibe reverb with the motor switched off. While some sequences are taken staccato and allegro, coordination is most notable on Bell Skin, as a polyrhythmic climax is attained by blending metal bar thwacks, double bass string buzzing and prepared piano string shakes and clatters, completed by a coda of paced ringing of single vibraphone notes.

Another Berlin-based international group is the Takatsuki Trio of Finnish bassist Antti Virtaranta, German string player Joshua Weitzel and Japanese pianist Rieko Okuda. On At KühlsPot (577 Records 5874 577records.com) the trio is joined by Berlin alto saxophonist Silke Eberhard for a single, almost 39-minute improvisation.

Without needing a percussion instrument, Virtaranta’s authoritative string pulse and Weitzel’s creation of dobro-like clanks from the three-string shamisen or authoritative guitar strums, provide enough rhythmic frails to back the pianist’s metronomic rumbles and staccato stabs as well as the saxophonist’s inventive trills, squalls and flutters. With bass strokes keeping the exposition linear, Okuda has latitude to circle in and out of supplemental melodies and occasionally strum internal strings. Meanwhile Eberhard’s theme reconstitution sometimes takes the form of avairy peeps, flutter tonguing or altissimo split tones. At points these unroll in one direction as the pianist moves in another. With concise snatches of reed lyricism sometimes bubbling to the surface, uncommon connections are made between them and bass-emphasized piano pulses. Doubling the tempo at the halfway point with galloping piano lines and crammed reed note spewing, variations solidify and return to the initial theme. Timbres from each quartet member then subtly combine for a formal ending signified by a thick double bass thump and guitar clanks.

Not all Berlin improvising is acoustic as Das Kondensat 2 (Why Play Jazz WP 057 whyplayjazz.com) shows. Created by three veteran German players, who now live in Berlin, Gebhard Ullmann soprano and tenor saxophones, looper and sampler; Oliver Potratz, electric bass, bass synthesizer and analog effects; and Eric Schaefer with drums and modular synthesizer, multiply the number of sound sources available. During 2’s 11 tracks, the trio members are able to straddle the boundaries among solid beats, adept electronic and free improvisation. While a couple of the tracks vibrate with atmospheric buzzes where voltage overlay leads to crossover shakes, alliances with tougher material is evident from Pendulum, the second track, on. As the bassist and drummer actualize a tough funk beat with string buzzes and solid cymbal taps, the saxophonist barks and bites wavering reed elaborations as circular tongue fluttering and irregular vibrations validate a link to energy music. That connection is proven on the separated I Was Born in Cleveland, Ohio (Part 1) and I Was Born in Cleveland, Ohio (Part 2), where the voice of tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler, the Ohio city’s most famous free jazzist, introduces the music and is heard faintly in the background as Ullmann’s tenor saxophone spews a variety of altissimo screams, triple tonguing and choked vibrations, while the others create a churning backbeat. Although (Part 2) adds higher-pitched reed squeaks and programmed wiggles beside percussion snaps, a calmer interlude on (Part 1) references Ayler’s spiritual side. Most of the other tunes migrate to a sophisticated form of fusion with designated bass thumb pops and fuzztones and a resonating backbeat. Yet Schaefer’s skill at switching to Latin rhythms or propelling tunes with only drum stick whacks, plus Potratz’s single string emphasis and broken chord advances negate any resemblance to heavy metal. Similarly, while the band’s use of swirling electronics adds a layer of oscillating textures that thicken the narratives, Ullman’s insertions of nasal slurs, tone flutters, whistles and squeaks roughen the expositions enough to confirm the non-simplicity of the playing and writing.

While improvisers keep arriving, Berlin has been attracting musicians from elsewhere for decades. But now players who are more recent settlers get to exchange ideas with older residents who they may formerly have only known by reputation, even if they’re from the same country. That’s the situation on Swinging at Topsi’s (Astral Spirits AS 176 astralspirits.bandcamp.com) which assembles three Swedish improvisers. One of the pioneers of free jazz, drummer Sven-Åke Johansson has been a Berliner since 1968. Bassist Joel Grip made the move early in this century; while guitarist Niklas Fite, who is also 52 years younger than Johansson, was only visiting. Transparently descriptive, the CD title reflects exactly what transpired on this club date. As a coda to their extended improvisations, the trio members take on two familiar standards in full, lilting swing-era mode with Johansson vocalizing on Isn’t It Romantic and Out Of Nowhere. Jumping forward eight decades, the group adapts the flow that comes from consistent rhythm guitar strums, forceful double bass thumps and subtle percussion chromaticism to make the two extended improvisations cadence carefully as well as high-light exploration. Resounding drum rattles and cymbal swishes allow Grip to explore below-the-bride thwacks when he isn’t timekeeping and Fite to insert unexpected frails and runs when he isn’t fastened on a rhythmic function with flat top twanging. Interestingly, Set 1 is tougher and livelier than the second one, as the guitar moves between spiery and solid comping and the percussionist alternating between barely-there drum top rubs and sudden rumbling explosions. While he has his share of lyrical pulses and lacerating string set probes, Grip maintains the pulse that logically bonds the improvisations and bleeds their textures into those of the subsequent pop ditties.

Over the years Berlin has been the centre of many, mostly political situations that have drawn it in many directions. The direction it has established now though is as a haven for improvised music.
Opening the newly released Mariss Jansons – The Edition (Chor & Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks BR Klassik BRK900200 naxosdirect.com/search/brk900200) was like opening a jewel box of wonderful gems. I thoroughly enjoyed discovering all of them, both performances of repertoire with which I was already familiar and newly discovered works. As we have come to expect from this source, the sound quality is astonishingly good. Audiophiles will be especially pleased.

Mariss Jansons was born in Riga, Latvia on December 1, 1943 during the time of the Nazi occupation. His mother, Iraida was Jewish and had been spirited out of the Riga Ghetto for the delivery of her son. As the Nazis had murdered both her brother and her father, leaving the ghetto was a necessary precaution.

Jansons’ first violin teacher was his father, Arvids, who played in the Riga opera and was also assistant at the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra to Evgeny Mravinsky and Kurt Sanderling. Jansons also studied piano and conducting at the Leningrad Conservatory, and later in Austria with Hans Swarowsky. He studied with Karajan in Salzburg in 1969 and two years later won second prize in the Karajan Conducting Competition. Karajan later invited the young Jansons to become his assistant in Berlin but the invitation was intercepted by Soviet authorities. Jansons did not become aware of that missed opportunity until many years later.

In 1979, Jansons became music director of the Oslo Philharmonic where he remained until 2000, despite a near fatal heart attack in 1996 while conducting La Bohème. The orchestra and conductor finally parted company over his long-running dissatisfaction with the poor acoustics of the Oslo Concert Hall. He was principal guest conductor with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992. He was appointed director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 1997 with a three-year contract to be renewed yearly, but instead in 2002, he gave two years notice. He followed Ricardo Chailly as music director of the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam in 2004. Jansons inherited a flawless orchestra, admired around the musical world from the reign of Willem Mengelberg (1895 to 1945) and continuing through those who followed. Jansons’ refinement of their sound was subtle but noticeable to the extent that Gramophone magazine’s international panel of music critics declared that this orchestra was now “The World’s Greatest.”

Jansons had also been associated with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bayerischen Rundfunks) in Munich, founded by Eugen Jochum in 1949, now one of the very best orchestras anywhere. When he decided to cut back his conducting commitments due to age and ill health, he was forced to choose between the Concertgebouw and the BRSO. Surprising some observers, he chose the Bavarians. In retrospect, and based on this new 70-disc set, his years in Munich amounted to his Golden Age as one magnificent performance followed another.

The box contains 57 CDs, 11 SACDs and two DVDs. That’s a lot of music that would take more than two 40-hour weeks to hear and see just once. As to be expected in collections such as this, there are acclaimed performances of all the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms, Bruckner’s numbers three to nine and Mahler’s one through nine. The performances chosen are as fresh as paint and the result is often to take pause and play it again.

As an example, Beethoven’s Third Symphony is no stranger to these ears and hearing it is not the experience it once was. However, hearing the Eroica from this set was an unfamiliar experience akin to synesthesia. I was drawn in and somehow was among, but not one of, the players. Upon replay there was still the persuasive illusion of being there.

Richard Strauss is well represented with thrilling versions of Don Juan, and fresh sweeping performances of the suite from Rosenkavalier, Also Sprach Zarathustra, Ein Heldenleben, not to mention Burleske, Tod und Verklärung, Four Last Songs (with soprano Anja Harteros), Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche and the Four Symphonic Interludes from Intermezzo.

Tchaikovsky has six works in the big Jansons box: Symphonies Four, Five and Six; Francesca da Rimini, Overture to Romeo and Juliet and a complete performance of his opera, Pique Dame. Not related to Pyotr Ilyich is Alexander Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer born in 1946 whose Symphony No.4, Op.78 for tenor, choir and orchestra provides a workout for everyone, particularly the percussion. This could be a new modern favourite.

Another perfect example of new life in old favorites is Saint-Saëns’ Symphony No.3, the “Organ Symphony.” From the exquisitely hushed opening to the grandeur that follows, one’s attention never wanders. Throughout the rest of the recording the organ does not dominate but is omnipresent. In the last movement, where the organ can often swamp the other instruments, there is beautiful restraint and space to appreciate the rest of Saint-Saëns’ famous score. The organist is Iveta Apkalna who is also the soloist in the impressive Poulenc Concerto for Organ, String Orchestra and Timpani. Another welcome work by Poulenc is his Stabat Mater for soprano, mixed chorus and orchestra along with Arvo Pärt’s Berliner Messe for chorus and string orchestra and Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms. The Stabat Mater by Dvořák is also included.

The Symphonie fantastique would seem to be a natural for Jansons. We are gifted with excerpts of rehearsals for the immensely powerful performance of the complete work to be found elsewhere in this collection. Jansons addresses the orchestra in German only but there is no mistaking what he is telling the players, and exactly what he wants to hear from them. On the second of the three rehearsal discs we hear the Tchaikovsky Fifth Symphony and on the third, Jansons at work on Till Eulenspiegel. I believe that listening to these rehearsals before the complete performances may well enhance the pleasure in hearing how the passages undertaken fit into the whole.

Of course, in a collection of works by 42 composers there are more treasures that require an honorable mention, including a video of an in-concert Gurreleydter with my favourite Wood Dove, Mihoko Fujimura, who is also heard in other works in this set. Other astonishing performances include the Verdi Requiem, Rite of Spring, Petrouchka, Firebird Suite, Rhapsody in Blue and a powerful Pictures at an Exhibition.

This unique collection includes a 72-page LP-size fine-art booklet containing details on every recording and tributes from Jansons’ colleagues. It’s a really beautiful addition to this very impressive package. In all, this is a thoughtfully curated selection that highlights the great conducting performances with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus spanning Jansons’ distinguished career with them between 2003 and 2019, the year of his death (br-so.com/cd/dvd/mariss-jansons-the-edition).
OTHER FINE VINTAGES

Live
Roswell Rudd; Duck Baker
Dot Time Records (dottimerecords.com)

A master of blues, ragtime and folk idioms, Duck Baker has long applied his fingerstyle acoustic guitar skills to modern idioms as well, from recording the compositions of bop masters like Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols to free improvisation. This CD pairs him with a musical hero of his youth, Roswell Rudd, the first significant trombonist of free jazz but also a throwback who restored his instrument’s traditional jazz voice, with all its burps, smears and bellows along with its legato sweetness as well. Assembled from club recordings in New York City in 2002 and Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2004, these performances range from broad entertainment to high art.

Jelly Roll Morton’s Buddy Bolden’s Blues exemplifies Rudd and Baker’s shared joy in roots jazz, with Rudd’s vocalic expressionism and Baker’s crisp blues phrases coming to the fore. Melancholy People is just that, the lachrymose Streisand anthem drenched in as much excess sentimentality as can be dredged up for the occasion. There are a few Monk tunes in versions that are both expressive and precise with the two dedicated interpreters managing that fine balance on Well, You Needn’t and Bemsha Swing. Baker’s long solo stretch on Light Blue is a joyous account of a lesser-known Monk composition.

The duo is capable of playfulness and genuine sentiment, creating a sense of authentic dialogue on Going West, while the extended Church is lifted by Rudd’s exuberant use of muted tones.

Stuart Broomer

Best of the Best Live
Sharon, Lois & Bram
Elephant Records CAS-CD-42150 (sharonloisandbram.com)

Award-winning Canadian children’s/ family entertainers Sharon, Lois & Bram toured and performed extensively for decades since their founding in 1978 to astounding success with their generations-spanning fans and audience members. They also had their own television shows. After Lois retired in 2000 and then died in 2015, Sharon and Bram continued as a duet. This is the trio’s first new album release in 21 years, featuring 22 unedited live tracks recorded during their North American performances in different venues from 1989 to 1995.

Listeners will not be disappointed with the choice of songs, the trio’s verbal banter, the performances and the quality of the recordings. The tracks are seamlessly connected in attention-grabbing sequence. Classic song versions like She’ll Be Coming Round the Mountain and Alphabet Song feature them encouraging audience singing and movement participation, to backing band upbeat accompaniments. The witty How Much is that Doggie in the Window? has Bram barking and teaching the audience to sing as violin counter-melody, waltz tempo and closing harmonies drive the song.

Sharon, Lois & Bram’s signature song Skinnamarink is a (to be expected) highlight, replete with audience singing exchanges and a background rocking-band closing. The included (and well-deserved) audience cheers and applause make one feel like you are live in the audience.

The respectful performing relationship between Sharon, Lois & Bram and their band flourish in tight harmonies, changing tempi, and dance and singalong moments, making this a “greatest of the great live” collection for fans of all ages!

Tiina Kilk

New to the Listening Room

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BOOKSHELF

Two Takes on a Tumultuous Time

STUART BROOMER

The late 1960s/early 1970s were a tumultuous time for various musical genres with new forms arising, often aligned with social and political foment. These recent works focus intensely on that period in Canada through the related lenses of jazz and improvised music. Mark Miller’s Oneliness: The Life and Music of Brian Barley is a biography of the forward-looking, Toronto-born jazz saxophonist, while L’Atelier de musique expérimentale, compiled by musician-producer Éric Normand, focuses on a performance space for Montreal’s experimental musicians. The works share a vital connection in artist/writer Raymond Gervais, Barley’s Montreal roommate and a founder of L’Atelier de musique expérimentale.

Miller is the essential chronicler of Canadian jazz, the focus of eight of his 13 books, including recent biographies of Claude Ranger and Sonny Greenwich. While those musicians made extended contributions, Brian Barley, who died in 1971 at age 28, was a tragic figure of immense promise. Oneliness (the term comes from the mystic G.I. Gurdjieff, an interest of some in Barley’s circle), is alive with the detail that distinguishes Miller’s writing. It’s an evocative tracing of his life. Driving to Seattle in May 1966 to hear the Bill Evans Trio, Barley crashed, suffering brain injuries. He spent weeks in hospital and was left with epilepsy and a dependency on medications that caused intense headaches and other symptoms, which he self-medicated with cannabis as he followed his jazz muse east to Montreal. There he met his most compatible musical partner, drummer Claude Ranger, with whom he recorded his enduring testament, The Brian Barley Trio, 1970.

Miller’s scrupulous account of Barley’s life is constructed out of the traces left by periodical reviews and the memories of fellow musicians. Miller first chronicled Barley in 1982, in a segment of Fourteen Lives: Jazz in Canada, and his research includes 40-year-old interviews, creating a portrait that would otherwise be impossible to assemble today. Oneliness has a tragic dimension: and Miller’s scrupulously gathered details develop a looming resonance issuing from the chasm that separates Barley’s promise from the accomplishment ultimately betrayed by that head injury.

By contrast, the French language L’Atelier de musique expérimentale, which documents a short-lived collective performance space (AME), is virtually a playground, whether considered as a book accompanied by a CD or vice versa. It’s a sequence of distinct writings that range from reproduced typescripts to grey-scale copies of newspaper articles. Historian Eric Fillion and musician/producer Éric Normand have previously been responsible for chronicling Quebec’s radically politicized free jazz in both book and CD form, Fillion in his Jazz Libre et la révolution québécoise: Musique-action, 1967-1975 (M Éditeur: 2019), Normand in the four-disc Musique-Politique: Anthologie 1971-1974 by Le Quatuor de Jazz Libre du Québec (tourdebras.com). L’Atelier... has a scholarly account of the collective by Fillion, followed by illuminating typescripts by Raymond Gervais, including an omnibus account of the scene.

Barley sometimes seems limited by the scenes in which he works, while the Atelier is at the cutting edge of its era. The CD of previously unreleased improvisations by Le Trio Expansible (clarinetist Robert M. Lepage, guitarist Bernard Gagnon and bassist Yves Boulaine) presents unstructured interactions that are still slightly startling, often percussive and usually exploring unusual timbre, whether minimalist, pointillist or conversational. The close listening is such that similarities arise among the instrument’s sounds.

Oneliness concludes with Gervais’ 1986 audio-visual tribute to Barley, called “Oneliness”, with a soundtrack provided by a Gurdjieff piano piece; Atelier... includes a photo of Gervais, circa 1977, setting up an installation with four turntables.

Oneliness can be ordered at: https://volumesdirect.com/collections/music/products/oneliness-the-life-and-music-of-brian-barley
L’Atelier de musique expérimentale can be ordered at www.tourdebras.com.

Stuart Broomer writes frequently on music (mostly improvised) and is the author of Time and Anthony Braxton. His column “Ezz-thetics” appears regularly at pointofdeparture.org.
I am Omicron-sidelined, but mending. But if I had known they were going to run this pandemic using the Greek alphabet, I’d have signed up for Nu? instead.”

A friend of mine who has just come down with COVID emailed me that joke. A Jewish friend I should add, to explain the joke to those of you who have no reason to know that Nu is not only a letter of the Greek alphabet still available to name variants after, but also, in Yiddish, a word that translates roughly to “So?” In English, and like “So?” can carry all kinds of connotations depending on whether it is accompanied by a fatalistic shrug or a “so what” eye-roll.

In this case, the “nu?” would be a statement of communal resignation, the very best kind. “Nu - I have COVID? Who doesn’t?” In other words, we’re all in this together.

I admire my friend’s tenacity and good humour, because the rest of us aren’t making jokes about COVID – we’re just plain fed up with all of this – tired of talking about, thinking about, reading about, and living through it. Aren’t we?

The answer is yes, we are. So why, sir, are you writing another column about it? Why don’t you just leave bad enough alone?

Just this once more, I promise, because I’m beginning to think something significant has happened in virus-land over the past few weeks and months, where classical music is concerned, and it’s worth noting – and deliberating upon. So, please and thank you.

Hitting pause
I might be imagining this, because it’s been a very long time since I had a cassette player, but I seem to recall that if you were listening to a cassette tape and put it on pause, and then forgot about it and just left it that way, eventually the machine, if it was a good machine, would turn itself off, to avoid straining that pause mechanism and breaking it. If it wasn’t a good one, it made for an ugly picture.

That metaphor I think perfectly captures where we are as far as the classical scene finds itself in North America these days. It’s different in Europe – they’ve been trucking along, masked and distanced, for some time in European halls. But here, with a few exceptions, very few, actually, we’ve basically been without concert music for two full years, and it’s not over yet. So I feel as though my finely engineered internal aesthetic mechanism has kicked in, acting just like that cassette override. What was once merely a pause is now a full stop. Something that was originally merely interrupted, ready to pick up again right where it left off, at a second’s notice, has now ground to a halt and will need to be begun all over again.

To my way of thinking, that’s a game-changing difference.

In the first place, for many musicians, the interruption in their performing cycles, in the rhythm and pace of their usual music-making, normally buoyed periodically and repeatedly by exposure to the living presence of an audience, has left their aesthetic sense congealed into a tight web of absence. It is one thing to be held mute and artistically celibate for a short, anxious period of time, with your instincts still ready and warm. It is something quite different to feel yourself forgetting the emotional rush of connection to an audience, a connection that is quite different from your tie to your instrument or to the music you’re playing.

Those latter two connections might still be intact – you still practice, you still play, you still create music – but the final rush of completion (which can only happen when other bodies are brought into range of the music and it vibrates within them as well as within yourself) is missing. I worry that musicians, after a while (to protect themselves from terminal loneliness) will find the sense of connection has gone from pause to stop. Does hitting “play” again automatically restart things? Or do they have to be learned all over again?

Nu?”
For audiences too, I wonder if something of the same is not also beginning to happen. We have been tantalized so often with the imminent end of this gigantic emptiness, only to find it extended again and again; I wouldn’t be surprised if we have given up hope for now. I think of poor Gustavo Gimeno and the Toronto Symphony, waiting in suspense for over a year to perform, finally appearing in concert together to begin a new era, only to have that beginning snapped shut after three programs comprising seven concerts from November 10 to 20.

To be sure, my concerns might be the worst kind of overthinking. The memory and love of concert-going is so ingrained and intense for many of us that it will take nothing at all for us to regain our previous love affair with classical performance. Once this is done, it will be as though it never happened. Perhaps.

But something within me says that will not be the case, and that’s not an altogether bad thing. Classical music is not a completely obvious part of our lives, even for those of us who depend on it for aesthetic and emotional sustenance. It is fuelled by habit and convention, as much as anything. How we are going to react when we hit “play” on conventions and habits that have been shut down entirely, broken off, or stretched out of shape as thoroughly as they have been during the past 23 months.

Do I still want the same regimen of programming? I don’t know. But it’s entirely possible that I am ready for, and will not only want but expect, something new.

**TSO and COC**

There are more than a few indications that classical music has used the pandemic to rethink some of its basic programming assumptions, around inclusivity and diversity, repertoire, concert form and everything else. I know that, if nothing else, the musical institutions to which many of us will return are going to be quite different. To cite a couple of examples, here in Toronto (not completely because of the pandemic), both the Toronto Symphony and the Canadian Opera Company find themselves both under new management teams and facing quite different challenges than they could have anticipated in March of 2020.

The TSO has just hired Mark Williams, most recently with The Cleveland Orchestra, as their new CEO. As we’ve noted before, sheer bad pandemic luck has so far left Maestro Gimeno champing at the bit while being held back by circumstance from establishing his vision and sound and presence with the Orchestra. Through no one’s fault, it has been a long time since the TSO could count on continuity of artistic leadership. With Gimeno and Williams having collaborated effectively together in Cleveland, over a number of years, maybe the orchestra’s leadership luck has turned for the better.

I should also note that, for whatever reason, there has also been quite a sizable turnover among the players at the TSO, especially among first-desk positions; so there too the chemistry is changing. It’s hard to imagine the orchestra simply picking up where it left off when it finally starts performing again. And even harder to imagine that they would want to, even if they could. The world of symphonic classical performance in March of 2022 is just not the same as it was in March of 2020.

To say that the Canadian Opera Company seems like a completely different place under general director Perryn Leech than it was under Alexander Neef feels like an understatement. Not all of this change can be laid at the feet of the pandemic; in fact, two years of COVID-induced performance paralysis at the COC, for all its trauma, may have been something of a blessing in disguise for the institution. It seems clear that the COC Board had decided on a different sort of artistic vision for the company in the wake of Alexander Neef’s departure (which was accelerated, but not caused by the pandemic). It is a vision based on community and outreach, audience building and accessibility, including digital accessibility. The COC’s opening trio of productions under Leech – *Madame Butterfly*, *La Traviata* and *The Magic Flute* (interrupted sadly, by Omicron) – are quite a change from the more challenging repertoire we got used to under Neef. Having a buffer of a couple of seasons to separate the two visions may turn out to be to the COC’s great advantage.

**Pangs**

Paradoxically, it’s well-managed companies like Tafelmusik and Opera Atelier (to name but two of dozens), who maintained stable leadership during the pandemic, who are feeling the sharpest pangs of hunger from the long live-performing drought that has afflicted them. Well-functioning artistic companies need the adrenaline rush of production, before live human beings, repeatedly and constantly. It is their drug; it keeps them at the peak of their aesthetic capability. The lively arts have been in withdrawal for too long.

And we, the public on the other side of the footlights, have similarly withdrawn. We are about to return: weaker, perhaps; hungrier, perhaps; with changed sensibilities? For sure we should assume that we will not just get to hit “start”. The old machine of my musical self, like my old cassette deck, spent a long time in pause. Then it either felt like it finally had enough and prudently shut down. Or it didn’t, and has either burnt itself out or stretched the tape badly enough to distort our previous pleasure at what was on it.

But it will be a new beginning, I suspect. Game-changingly different? It needs to be. Because every new beginning has the potential for tragedy, comedy and everything in between. ☁

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. 

thewholenote.com
Worth weighing in on

**Joseph Burr Tyrrell** has his own Canadian Heritage minute (or, spoiler alert, just google “Albertosaurus” to find him doing what he loved best.) He also has at least one school and a Toronto park, on Brunswick Avenue, named after him. Well, more like a parkette aspiring to be a park, actually. One of a dozen or so “don’t blink or you’ll miss it” strips of green along the Line 2 subway right-of-way, between the backs of the north-side Bloor St. buildings, and the adjacent neighbourhoods (in this case the Annex).

For a parkette, aspiring to parkhood is a good thing, by the way. The city is dotted with gems of the genre: right-sized, community-defined, and neighbourhood-enhancing – healthy common ground. Typically, at some point enough neighbours are enthusiastic enough about park revitalization for the city to get involved, and city and neighbourhood stakeholders thrash out a plan for renewal. As reported by Joshua Chong, *(Toronto Star, January 24)*, the renewed Joseph Burr Tyrrell Park, unveiled in December, included in its new and improved play area, wonder of wonders, an octave set of colour-coded tubular bells, with beautifully satisfying hammer handles for any neighbourhood child wanting to whale away at the bells. Musical pennies from heaven!

Until “one neighbour complained,” and the bells were gone within days. ‘Right idea but wrong location” tends to carry a lot of weight when rate-payers (a.k.a. voters) get irate.

Richard Marsella, executive director of Regent Park Music School, wrote a wide-ranging March 2021 *WholeNote* article on the whole idea of “Musical Playgrounds, Virtual and Real”, and how and where to implement them. “With community music models out there such as Luke Jerram’s Play Me, I’m Yours project (which has seen over 2,000 street pianos installed in 65 cities) and others that allow public access to musical experience, the notion of noise in a public space cannot simply be ignored”, he acknowledges.

“But” he continues, “on this particular topic, I have always supported the concept of choosing, even helping shape, the noise and sonic landscape of one’s community. I can think of a lot less constructive soundscapes in a city or neighbourhood than a musical playground.”

Amen to that.

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**Tale of Two Butterflies**

It was shaping up to be an intriguing study in contrasts.

On the one hand was the Canadian Opera Company’s Madama Butterfly scheduled to run from February 4 to 26, to be conducted by rising Canadian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson, and featuring the COC directing debut of Aria Umezawa, co-founder of Toronto-based, experimental Amplified Opera. With lots of mutterings all round about the COC resorting to warhorse repertoire for their safety-first relaunch, and amid more general rumblings about the outdated premises of the opera itself, it was going to be very interesting to see what kind of contemporary rabbits the artistic team was going to be able to pull out of the hat. Outright cancellation of the run unfortunately means we won’t get to find out first hand.

The COC cancellation is all the more disappointing because February 11, a week into the run, their Butterfly was on an eagerly anticipated collision course with a Confluence Concerts online-only presentation titled Butterfly Project: The Ballad of Chō-Chō San, described as a “meditation on the ongoing controversies surrounding Puccini’s Madama Butterfly [and] the problematic nature of this opera in today’s environment of growing cultural awareness.” The presentation features Teiya Kasahara, who describes themselves as “a queer, trans/non-binary, multi and interdisciplinary creator-performer based in Tkarón:to.” Most interesting in this context, perhaps, Kasahara is co-founder, with Aria Umezawa, of Amplified Opera. So maybe we will get some hints after all, in the Confluence show, regarding the trajectory the COC’s cancelled Butterfly was on. So I’d say double underline Confluence’s February 11 show, rather than crossing it off your list.

And, before that, for some interesting insights into what motivates Amplified Opera and its founders, take a look at Sara Constant’s “Deep and Slow Thought: Amplified Opera’s artist-first mandate” in the July 2020 *WholeNote*. 
Connecting the dots

Pianist Angela Hewitt, as mentioned elsewhere in the magazine (“Orchestras and others buying into hope”) will be in town as a guest of the TSO, February 16, 17 and 19, leading the orchestra from the keyboard in a program that includes Bach, Mozart, Camille Saint-Saëns and Gerald Finzi.

Fast forward to the summer and it will be Hewitt as host rather than guest we will see, in her role as founder/curator of the Trasimeno Festival in Perugia, Italy. (For the really curious, feature writer Pamela Margles caught up with Hewitt at Trasimeno in an October 2007 cover story (Vol 13 no 2) that stands the test of time.

It’s not the TSO that will be going to Trasimeno, though. Hewitt’s Trasimeno guests will be Opera Atelier, making its debut. Hewitt has invited Opera Atelier co-founder Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg to choreograph and perform along with the Artists of Atelier Ballet, joined by OA regular ensemble member, soprano Mireille Asselin singing “music by Purcell that demonstrates the influence of Baroque dancing on 17th and 18th century vocal music.”

Here’s the nice coincidence, though: Sunday February 19, the third of Hewitt’s TSO performances also happens to be Opera Atelier’s first of two shows, in their long-delayed return to live performance, at Koerner Hall. It’s a Valentine’s Day-themed “fully staged production” titled All Is Love, with Measha Brueggergosman Lee, Opera Atelier’s artist-in-residence, headlining a stellar ensemble cast, including performing the title piece, a mashup of Henry Purcell and Renaldo Hahn created specifically for Brueggergosman Lee by composer Christopher Bagan, and with the show culminating in the opening scene of Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande.

Hewitt will be busy on February 19; but, who knows, maybe on February 20 she and the Opera Atelier team will get to connect some of the dots about Trasimeno after the Atelier show.
There will be no general print distribution of this edition. Subject to public health advisories, full print publication will resume with Volume 27 no 5, March 4 2022.

For additional information contact circulation@thewholenote.com