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Andrew Norman – Piano Concerto*
Christopher Goddard – piano soloist
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Act 2
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Eugene Astapov – A Still Life* for soprano and orchestra
Keiko Devaux – Excavated Sound*
Unsuk Chin – Mannequin
Žibuoklė Martinaitytė – Saudade
Shannon Mercer – soprano
Alex Pauk – conductor
Eugene Astapov – conductor

Act 3
Thursday May 12
Claude Vivier – Orion
Stephanie Orlando – riptide*
Julia Merelstein – in water suspended*
Christina Volpini – waves, breaking, reflecting light*
Art and video creations by Moira Ness
Alex Pauk – conductor

Act 4
Thursday June 9
Sofia Gubaidulina – Fachwerk for accordion, percussion and strings
Alison Yun-Fei Jiang – Sanctuary*
Thomas Adès – Polaris
Michael Bridge – accordion
Alex Pauk – conductor

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“I wanted to begin with The Galileo Project, which is the one I mostly closely identify with Jeanne. And Galileo begins with Vivaldi.”

The Galileo Project: Music of the Spheres is a Tafelmusik multimedia performance piece featuring the music of Vivaldi, Lully, Monteverdi and others. Conceived and scripted by Alison Mackay, the ensemble’s bassist, and unveiled in Calgary in 2009, which the United Nations had declared the International Year of Astronomy, it includes projections of astronomical and other scenes, a narrator and an “unfettered” orchestra: the players memorized their parts so that while playing they could move around the performance space, including into the audience. The production was designed by Glenn Davidson, who has designed several of Tafelmusik’s multimedia programs. The cover photo is from 2010, when the show played in La Jolla, California.

Alison Mackay explains — page 8.

PHOTO: GLENN DAVIDSON
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APR 9
Gustavo Gimeno, conductor
Peter Oundjian, conductor
Jukka-Pekka Saraste, conductor
Günther Herbig, conductor
Sir Andrew Davis, conductor
Marion Newman, host

SARASTE + SIBELIUS
MAR 23, 24 & 26
Jukka-Pekka Saraste, conductor

TRUTH IN OUR TIME WITH NACO
MAR 30
Alexander Shelley, conductor
Blake Pouliot, violin
National Arts Centre Orchestra

RACHMANINOFF’S SECOND
APR 1 & 2
Eun Sun Kim, conductor
Karen Gomyo, violin

EHNES PLAYS BEETHOVEN
APR 6 & 7
Sir Andrew Davis, conductor
James Ehnes, violin

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Publication Dates
Tuesday, April 12 (online)
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March 4, 2022: I woke this morning, brutally at a loss for words of my own. Instead, these: Simon Wynberg’s, from Back in Focus, the final section of this issue, echoing in my head.

“Hard to watch and impossible to ignore.” So I reached automatically for the remote, channeling to the BBC, where I go as an admittedly weak antidote to CBC and CNN – the closest thing I can find to a triangulated viewpoint on world news within a closed and often self-congratulatory loop where refugees in adjacent seats on the same bus, fleeing the same war, can expect to be treated differently at the border to freedom, based on the colour of their skin. Uncannily, this is what flashed immediately onto my screen.

BBC: The acclaimed Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, has been sacked by the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra for refusing publicly to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The mayor of Munich said Mr. Gergiev could no longer remain in his position because of his support of President Putin. Well, Semyon Bychkov joins me now. He is the chief conductor and music director of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and he is Russian.

Semyon Bychkov, let me ask you, first of all, unlike some other very prominent culture and art figures from Russia living in the west, are you prepared to condemn what you see happening in Ukraine?

SB: Since day one when this war has begun, since the invasion happened, myself as well as the office of the Czech Philharmonic immediately issued statements to that effect and I have gone further in the following days. You know, there is time in life when one feels one must take a position on something that is so existentially important as this particular subject today. Everyone is free to make up their mind what they want to do if anything. In my particular case I’m free to take the position that I take, which is fiercely opposed to this genocide, this act of aggression.

BBC: Well you couldn’t be clearer Mr. Bychkov, but when you say you’re free is that because you have made a decision to cut your ties with your homeland completely?

SB: I have emigrated in 1975 at the age of 22. And at that time, people have asked me but why have you left your country, and I said because I had to be free. And the question sometimes comes up today, and the answer has never changed. And I am actually fortunate to be free – not to have any debt to any state or company. The only debt I have in life (which will be for the rest of my life) is to my family, to my friends, to my teachers, to those colleagues, those orchestra musicians, all of the musicians with whom I make music, all those who helped me be better than I otherwise could have been. And that debt is something that I am very happy to pay.

Therefore I am absolutely free to express my opinions on the matter when it is called for, and I feel that, now, silence is not the right thing, because basically it means acquiescence to this, ah, power of evil if you will, and that is what we are faced with.

BBC: Mr. Bychkov thank you very much for speaking to us.

David Perlman can be reached at publisher@thewholenote.com

March 4 - April 15, 2022 | 7
I wanted to begin with The Galileo Project, which is the one I mostly closely identify with Jeanne. And Galileo begins with Vivaldi,” Alison Mackay explains. It is February 15 and we are chatting, via Zoom, about an upcoming April 2 Tafelmusik concert, curated by Mackay and Christina Mahler, as a tribute to Jeanne Lamon who, at the invitation of Tafelmusik’s founders, Kenneth Solway and Susan Graves, become the ensemble’s first music director just two years after they founded the ensemble in 1979. She remained at the Tafelmusik helm till 2014, by which time the ensemble had grown from a quirky and belovedly Birkenstockian niche player downtown west Toronto’s music scene into what Neil Genzlinger, in a June 26, 2021 New York Times obituary for Lamon, described as “one of the world’s most acclaimed baroque ensembles, ... striving not only to present centuries-old music as it was originally heard, but also to reach modern audiences.

“Never was that more evident,” Genzlinger continued, “than in ‘The Galileo Project: Music of the Spheres,’ a multimedia performance piece, conceived and scripted by Alison Mackay, the ensemble’s bassist, featuring the music of Vivaldi and others, projections of astronomical and other scenes, an actor providing narration, and an unfettered orchestra.”

“Unfettered orchestra” refers in part to the players having memorized their parts, free to move around the performance space, something that was to become a Tafelmusik trademark over the ensuing years, in a series of story-driven thematic programs which reached deep into the times and places in which baroque music, the re-emerging with startling parallels, convergences and sometimes hard truths. We got to hear it differently. Unfettered by old assumptions.

It’s right that the task of curating the April tribute concert falls to Alison Mackay and Christina Mahler. Both were long-standing members of Tafelmusik: Mahler as principal cello since 1981, and Mackay, principal double bass since 1979, there from the very beginning. “Both have contributed significantly to Tafelmusik’s renown over the years, epitomizing the orchestra’s heartbeat for almost four decades” as a press release announcing their retirement in June 2019 put it. Each brings a unique perspective to the April 2 event. Both will play in it.

“I suppose in the end I wrote the script,” Mackay says. “But Christina and I are in almost daily contact anyway, and have had many discussions about it, and about Jeanne’s character and work at Tafelmusik, and about pieces of music that would be important to highlight: sections of Jewish music, especially song, to reflect Jeanne’s own Jewish heritage; the early 17th century, because of Jeanne’s love of the period; Monteverdi, for the years when Christina and Jeanne first met, spending summers in Europe with Alan Curtis and Il Complesso Barocco exploring Monteverdi’s operas; and of course Bach, lots of Bach.”

“And it all begins with Vivaldi, you were saying?” I remind her.

“You always look for a hook or a handle on these things,” she replied. “Of course it’s biographical. But biographical can mean different things. I’ve met with a lot of people who were closest to her to discover what to uncover. I talked to her older sister who is the family genealogist, to old friends, to colleagues, to members of the committee who have given time to organize this. Everyone has a story to tell and their own way to tell it.”

Mackay’s storytelling style often entails time travel to some particular place, followed by voraciously detailed exploration of that time, in all directions, in search of context - convergences, parallels,
connections and small startling things. So she finds herself, for example, twelve generations back in time, at a spot on the Grand Canal in Venice where Vivaldi, in 1730, moved “from an eastern Venice backwater. “So there we are, almost in Monteverdi’s backyard, two minutes walk away from the studio where Jeanne’s treasured violin was made, at the moment some kind of music was first being made, trying to figure out how, twelve generations later, it will still be found and heard. A living stream.

Part of how that happens, she says, has to do with the art and craft of the violin at the time: “There was a very formal system of apprenticeship in baroque times: from apprenticeship to journeyman to master – in a way the pattern persists through the generations where this music is concerned. Knowledge, art, craft are a living stream.”

Generational transmission of art was something, Mackay says, that Lamon felt deeply. “There’s a really beautiful quote about Jeanne’s belief that there is no other way to learn a musical instrument: ‘It goes so deeply into me I can hardly even speak of it. ’ You can see in her later life when she became a teacher in the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute how very, very important that was to her.”

In Mackay’s musical storytelling, the personal nests in the intergenerational and historical. Themes of community, expulsion, enterprise, for example. “In Amsterdam, for example,” she says, “by 1700 one third of the population was Ashkenazi Jews. And, it’s interesting, as can be found in Amsterdam city records, all four of Jeanne’s grandparents can trace their lineage to that city. Her parents came to New York in 1939. Her father used to say ‘if it wasn’t for America’ … the enterprise it takes to come and settle in a new country, and that’s what Jeanne did too.”

“Jeanne always seemed, to me from the audience, happiest off to the side,” I offer, “turned three-quarters away from the house towards you, not us. So how do you think she would like being front and centre this way – in the hall that bears her name, no less?”

“She had a certain shyness about the limelight. So I very definitely had her possible opinion very much in mind,” Mackay says (and laughs). “I do think she would like that it’s like one of our shows, and she would love the music. Frankly what is going to tell the story and the emotion of it is the images and the music. And the way I have designed it there will be 55 minutes of music and 15 minutes of narration. So it’s very much a concert, and very much like my shows.”

A pause: “I feel as though she would embrace it, the same extraordinary way, the Tafel family from top to bottom embraced our other shows, threw themselves into it. But that’s a part of the whole culture of the place [Trinity-St. Paul’s Centre], isn’t it? one of the places where people of all kinds, classes, statuses, can have a place and a purpose. Try to think of places that mingle a unique concert scene with all this. That way what we do becomes part of the living stream of the whole place.”

The 2pm, April 2 concert sold out right away. An 8pm concert has been added. And award-winning Canadian filmmaker Barbara Willis-Sweete will direct the film version of the concert, to be broadcast online on June 2, for digital subscribers.

David Perlman can be reached at publisher@thewholenote.com
In what promises to be an unforgettable night, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra is bringing all five of their living music directors to the Roy Thomson Hall stage on April 9 at 7:30 for a unique historical event. The five conductors’ tenures span the last 47 years, as the TSO eases into its hundredth year. Former TSO music directors Sir Andrew Davis (1975-1988; 2018-2020), Günther Herbig (1989-1994), Jukka-Pekka Saraste (1994-2001) and Peter Oundjian (2004-2018) will join current music director Gustavo Gimeno and host Marion Newman for this special Centennial Season event – a program of orchestral showpieces highlighting key moments in TSO history.

Davis starts the evening off by taking the podium for Berlioz’s Roman Carnival Overture which has been conducted by seven of the TSO’s music directors, notably by Davis as part of the TSO’s Canadian Odyssey tour of the North in 1987. Davis also leads the orchestra in Delius’ The Walk to the Paradise Garden, paying tribute to Davis’ British roots. (British-trained Canadian, Sir Ernest MacMillan, is the only other TSO music director to have performed it.)

In a nod to his German origins, Herbig (who recently turned 90) will conduct Wagner’s Overture to Tannhäuser, a work that has been conducted by eight of the ten TSO ten music directors since the orchestra’s founding in April 1923. It is a piece that the TSO has programmed 51 times since 1924, when it was conducted by TSO founder Luigi von Kunits.

Next, Finnish-born Saraste conducts Sibelius’ “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island” from Lemminkäinen Suite. First performed by the TSO in 1958 under Saraste’s baton, the Sibelius suite was part of the orchestra’s tour to Carnegie Hall later that year and was subsequently recorded (with Saraste) in 2000.

Toronto-born Oundjian conducts Alexina Louie’s The Ringing Earth as a tribute to his championship of contemporary and particularly Canadian contemporary music. Louie’s piece was also part of the Oundjian 2005 Northern tour. Oundjian and the TSO performed “Sárka” from Smetana’s Má vlast on a 2014 residency at the Prague Spring Festival. Programming Smetana on April 9 is a tribute to the TSO’s Czech-born music directors, Karel Ancerl and Walter Susskind.

Gimeno brings the event to a close with Ravel’s dazzling Rapsodie espagnole, acknowledging his own Spanish roots. (Five of the ten TSO music directors have performed it.)

Performing Arts Sundays in Hamilton
Hamilton’s Performing Arts Sunday Series (PASS) – now in its first season – was put together by HCA Dance Theatre and the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts. It stems from the Conservatory’s long-standing Concert Series, growing to include a wider range of performing arts. This season so far they have welcomed a flamenco performance featuring Compañía Carmen Romero and an opera recital with soprano Adriane Pieczonka (who also led a masterclass for emerging opera singers). This spring they will host three pianists: Valerie Tryon, André Laplante and Janina Fialkowska. Tryon’s bountiful
A recital at 2pm on March 20 begins with two Scarlatti sonatas, two Schubert impromptus (D899), three pieces from Brahms’ Op.118 and two from Brahms’ Op.76. Debussy’s Suite: Pour le Piano and Rachmaninoff’s transcriptions of Kreisler’s Liebesleid and Liebesfreud complete the afternoon program.

I reached out to Vitek Wincza, artistic director of the Hamilton Conservatory, for some historical context. “The Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts has a history of chamber music performances that predates its modern history,” he explained. “When it operated as the Royal College of Music in the early 1900s, the building was erected with the express intent to host musicians in the Recital Hall. Knowing this rich history, Zdenek Konicek of Trio Canada approached me with the interest of rebuilding the concert series, and we worked tirelessly to continue the Conservatory’s tradition of live music.”

Working closely with Jan Narveson at the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society (no strangers to this column), they cultivated shared programming and the HCA Concert Series was born. Then, just before the pandemic, they received a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation that allowed them to reinvigorate their Recital Hall. “New technical equipment, cosmetic upgrades, and a name refresh have allowed us to emerge from lockdowns with a beautiful new space: The Black Box Theatre. These technical improvements allow us to explore new methods of performance, including livestreaming.”

The reinvigoration of the space was the inspiration for the Performing Arts Sunday Series, or PASS. “Along with a long-term goal to host events every Sunday throughout the year, we are thrilled to begin to expand our programming to include our historic chamber music concerts, as well as opera, theatre and dance. In addition, we look to offer masterclasses with our esteemed artists so that young people studying to develop an artistic career can find inspiration and mentorship.”

As mentioned, for this, their inaugural season, they have invited pianists Valerie Tryon [March 20], André Laplante [April 10] and Janina Fialkowska [May 8] to return to the Conservatory. “These artists
While I have spent the majority of my creative life in theatre in one form or another, through friendly coercion and also with great joy, I have written a number of symphonies. — Philip Glass

“...When we consider a figure like Peter Jennings – a Canadian by birth, an immigrant, a journalist, an American by choice – rather than making a proclamation about ‘what is truth,’ for the composer we are on much better ground when we talk about ‘This is the music that I listen to, this is the music that I like, and this is the music that I write.’”

The Esmé Quartet at Music Toronto

Praised for their warm sound and powerful stage presence, the Esmé Quartet makes its Toronto debut on March 24 with a program featuring two pillars of the string quartet repertoire, Debussy’s String Quartet in G Minor and Beethoven’s String Quartet Op.59 No.2 “Razumovsky.”

Formed in 2016 at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne, Germany by four Korean musicians, the Esmé made a sensational entrance into the string quartet world by winning the first prize and sweeping four of the special prizes, among them the Mozart and Beethoven prizes, at the 2018 London Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. They began touring internationally and in the summer of 2018, they were named as the quartet in residence at the Aix-en-Provence festival and also appeared at the McGill International String Quartet Academy in Montreal.

The name of the quartet – Esmé – is borrowed from an old French word meaning “being loved.” Based in Germany, the quartet has been mentored in masterclasses with artists such as Günter Pichler (Alban Berg Quartet), Alfred Brendel, Eberhard Feltz, Andras Keller, Christoph Poppen and Jonathan Brown (Cuarteto Casals). The quartet also studied with Heime Müller (Artemis Quartet) and Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet).

The Esmé Quartet

The Esmé Quartet at Music Toronto

Philipp Glass: Symphony No. 13

On March 30 at Roy Thomson Hall, the first concert of a mini-tour to Toronto, New York and Ottawa – the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) will present the world premiere of Philip Glass’ Symphony No. 13, a work commissioned by the Orchestra on the theme “Truth in Our Time.” Under the direction of Alexander Shelley and featuring violin soloists Blake Pouliot (Roy Thomson Hall) and James Ehnes (Carnegie Hall and the National Arts Centre), the concert will also feature music by Nicole Lizée (Zeiss After Dark: SESQUIE for Canada’s 150th), Dmitri Shostakovich (Symphony No.9) and Erich Korngold (Violin Concerto).

Glass’ Symphony No. 13 is a tribute to Toronto-born journalist Peter Jennings who died in 2005. A highly respected ABC News anchor, Jennings was also a trustee of Carnegie Hall during his years in New York City, the founding director of the American chapter of the Friends of the NAC Orchestra and a lifelong champion of Canadian artists.

Philip Glass provided the following introduction to his new work:

“I started to compose Symphony No.13 in the summer of 2020 in New York City. My life as a ‘symphonist’ began 30 years ago in 1992, when, at the suggestion of conductor Dennis Russell Davies, I was commissioned to write my First Symphony. While I always thought of myself as a theatre composer – which has the virtue of being true – it was Dennis that ‘didn’t want me to be one of those opera composers who never wrote a symphony.’ So, while I have spent the majority of my creative life in theatre in one form or another, through friendly coercion and also with great joy, I have written a number of symphonies which were purely instrumental, as well as another group which included vocal materials or were based on outside material: poetry, wisdom traditions, and even popular music.”

Glass’ connection with the National Arts Centre Orchestra dates back to 2016. “I first heard [them] live in 2016 at the Glenn Gould Prize concert when they performed my Symphony No. 8. I have had a home in Nova Scotia for over 50 years and come here every year. And a number of my pieces have premiered in Canada over the years. When invited by the NAC Orchestra to compose a new work, I began to think of a new full-scale instrumental symphony to be part of their program ‘Truth in Our Time.’ The piece is part of the kind of music which I view to be a new body of work that started with Symphony No.7 from five years ago. The journey continues to explore my own ideas about the language of music as it has evolved for me in the form of these symphonies.”

So, what can a piece of music express about the idea of truth?
Also on the March 24 program is Yessori – one of Kronos Quartet’s 50 for the Future – written for string quartet and haegeum (a Korean stringed instrument) and performed by Soo Yeon Lyuh, its composer.

“When I first played the haegeum for Kronos violinist David Harrington,” explained Lyuh, “he commented that the sound seemed ‘ancient’ and commissioned me to write a piece that explores aspects of Korean traditional music. With his observation in mind, I composed Yessori, which is Korean for ‘sound from the past.’ The first time I experienced Korean traditional music, the relative pitch relationships and fluid nature of the rhythmic cycles felt chaotic, perhaps because of my background in Western music. However, over the past two decades of studying the haegeum, I came to love these unique qualities and am excited to share them through Yessori.

“My compositional process began with improvisations on the haegeum in the style of traditional Korean music. I then adapted the distinctive techniques, vibrato, and articulations for string quartet.”

QUICK PICKS

MAR 12, 4:30PM: In five concerts spread over the next six weeks, the Royal Conservatory gives us an opportunity to hear the musicians of the future. First up on March 12 is the Taylor Academy Showcase Concert with elementary and high school students – FREE tickets can be reserved for Mazzoleni Hall from March 4. On MAR 30, 7PM, RCM presents the Glenn Gould School Chamber Competition Finals. FREE tickets available for Koerner Hall from March 23. On APR 13, 7:30PM hear artists on the cusp of major careers when Mazzoleni Hall hosts the Rebanks Family Fellowship Concert – FREE tickets available from April 6. On APR 14, 4PM, the Robert W. and G. Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition takes place in Koerner Hall; FREE tickets available from April 7. On APR 23, 7:30, Mazzoleni Hall hosts the Glenn Gould School (GGS) Piano Showcase. All seats $20.

MAR 27, 3PM: Show One presents Mischa Maisky playing Bach Suites 1, 4 and 5 for solo cello at Koerner Hall. Born in Latvia and educated in Russia, Maisky has the distinction of being the only cellist in the world to have studied with both Mstislav Rostropovich and Gregor Piatigorsky. Rostropovich said that Maisky’s playing “combines poetry and exquisite delicacy with great temperament and brilliant technique.”

MAR 29, 8PM: Thanks to the acumen of Music Toronto artistic producer, Jennifer Taylor, we have been privileged to hear British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor in recitals in 2014, 2015 and 2017 and witness him maturing before our eyes as he enters his 30s. His programs are typically built on a foundation of technical prowess and sensitive musicianship. This one begins with Franck’s Prelude, Chorale and Fugue and Schumann’s Fantasie Op.17 before the pianist tackles Albeniz’s Iberia Book One and two Ravel gems: Jeux d’eau and La Valse.

MAR 31, 1:30PM: The Women’s Musical Club of Toronto (WMCT) presents the acclaimed chamber duo of Cameron Crozman, cellist, and pianist Philip Chiu, who will bring us a musical tasting-menu of Spanish and Hispanic-American pieces from their Tapeo recording, and a new WMCT commission written by Allan Gordon Bell. Crozman was just awarded the Canada Council’s Virginia Parker Prize of $25,000.

APR 1, 8PM: Sinfonia Toronto presents Daniel Vnukowski in Mozart’s Piano Concerto No.12 K414; Marc Djokic is the soloist in the world premiere of Robert Rival’s Violin Concerto (which is dedicated to Djokic); conductor Nurhan Arman’s arrangement of Haydn’s String Quartet in D Minor Op.42 concludes the program.

APR 7, 6:45PM: The TSO Chamber Soloists series curated by Jonathan Crow returns with guest violinist James Ehnes joining Crow, Rémi Pelletier and Theresa Rudolph, violas, and Joseph Johnson, cello in a pre-concert performance of Beethoven’s “Storm” Quintet (1801). Ehnes is playing Beethoven’s Violin Concerto – conducted by Andrew Davis – on April 6 and 7 at 8pm.

Paul Ennis is the managing editor of The WholeNote.
Two concerts, one in early March, the other in early April, resonate with the day on the calendar set aside to celebrate the historical, cultural and political achievements of women: International Women’s Day (IWD) on March 8. This special day has its origins in Russia, a fact that feels significantly ironic – as I sit writing this column, Russia has begun its invasion of Ukraine. On March 8, 1917, the women textile workers of Petrograd rose up to demand “Bread and Peace” – which meant for these women an end to World War I, to food shortages and to czarism. It remained a holiday primarily in Communist countries until 1967 when second-wave feminists in Western Europe, the UK and North America adopted the date as a day of action, highlighting issues such as equal pay, reproductive rights, and the prevention of violence against women.

On March 8 of 2022, percussionist virtuoso Beverley Johnston will be performing a series of compositions that highlight various mythic and real-life female characters in a concert she is calling Finding HER Voice. When I asked Johnston whose voice she is referring to in the title she responded by saying that it has several meanings. “It can be my own voice because I’ve been incorporating a lot of voice into the percussion works that I’ve been learning, either by singing or speaking. Metaphorically, the title draws attention to how women through the ages have empowered themselves, found their voice and become stronger within themselves.”

Johnson uses her voice in all of the pieces, and even though she is not a trained singer, she became comfortable using her voice due to her experience as a member of the URGE collective in the 1990s and in workshops with Richard Armstrong, an original member of the Roy Hart Theatre known for its pioneering of extended vocal techniques. These activities “empowered me to know that it’s okay to find that gruff quality in the voice, and allowed me not to be afraid to use my voice,” she said.

Two of the works on the program are composed by Alice Ping Yee Ho: Woman Runs with Wolves (2010) and Witch on Thin Ice (2019). The first work was inspired by a story from the well-known book Women Who Run With the Wolves written by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. After reading the book, Ho approached Johnston with the idea of writing a trilogy of pieces for Johnston to perform about iconic female figures, the first based on the myth of La Loba, the opening story in Estés’ book. It tells the tale of a woman who gathers the bones of wolves, sings over them, and brings them to life in the form of first a wolf, and then a woman. Coincidentally, Johnston had also read the Estés’ book and was enthusiastic about the idea. When Ho proposed Yoko Ono as a second character, Johnston was more reluctant at first due to the fierce opposing opinions held about Ono. However, after reading more about
Ono’s life, her peace-activist work, and understanding that Ono’s work is rooted in the avant-garde of the 1960s, particularly Ono’s use of vocal screaming, Johnston embraced the project; Witch on Thin Ice is the result. Johnston described her role in the piece as alternating between being an accompanist to a video, and other moments when “I grab the microphone and start screaming Yoko Ono style and playing the drums at the same time.” The video uses both animation and slides from various periods of Ono’s life, spanning from her early childhood up to her husband John Lennon’s death.

Other works include To the Earth (1985) by Frederic Rzewski who pays homage to Mother Earth with a Homeric style text and a performance on pitched flowerpots, and the world premiere of Eris (2021) by Christos Hatzis, a work based on the Greek myth of the Judgement of Paris. In the story, the Prince of Troy (Paris) has to choose from among three goddesses: Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, which ultimately leads to the catastrophic consequence of war with Troy. The piece is named after Eris, the Greek goddess of strife and discord.

The second world premiere on the program, wild with the world of color (2021), is composed by Holly Winter, whose work Johnston heard during an online Continuum concert. After a conversation between Winter and Johnston, they agreed that the new work would highlight three moments in Georgia O’Keeffe’s life. During the performance, Johnston will be wearing a paper dress that she will rip while performing in a duet with an audio playback full of ripping sounds and O’Keeffe’s spoken voice. In keeping with the legacy of IWD, proceeds from the concert will go to Nellie’s Shelter.

Imagined Sounds

Imagined Sounds is the title of a concert on April 10 produced by New Music Concerts that offers a fitting connection with Johnston’s March 8 event. The evening’s program is curated by Montreal-based composer Keiko Devaux, conducted by Juliane Gallant and includes several works by female composers. Devaux’s 2020 Azrieli Prize-winning work Arras will be featured; to complement this award, she was invited to create an entire program of works that inspired her imagination.

Composing Arras gave Devaux the opportunity to consider the meaning of her own Canadian identity, a blending of Japanese and French backgrounds. In the piece, she investigates her contrasting cultural upbringing by incorporating the influences of environmental soundscapes, such as bird and wind sounds, the sound of a Japanese weaving loom similar to the model her grandparents used, and Japanese sacred chant. Although we do not hear literal recordings of these sounds in Arras, Devaux’s process involved transcribing the rhythmic patterns she heard in the recordings, and using a computer-based process called spectral analysis to identify the complexity of pitches that make up any given sound. All the differences and commonalities in these varied sound sources were then integrated into an instrumental score.

One of Devaux’s key interests as a composer is an inquiry into how we imagine sounds in our mind, the ways in which we remember sounds and the relationship many composers have had over time with musical works from the past. “Those memories can be either consciously or unconsciously integrated into a composer’s work,” she says.
said during our phone conversation, “and some people do it in a very formal way with a citation or an homage.”

In choosing works for the evening’s concert, she began by listening to a playlist of composer’s works that inspired her, listening for timbral details that she found “striking and beautiful, pieces that would catch my breath.” She followed that by reading more about what inspired those works, with an eye out for descriptions that mentioned the creative influence of other composers or artists from the past. Her third criterion for selecting works was to create a program of contrasts. The end result will be a fascinating evening to stimulate our sonic imaginations with works by Canadians Cassandra Miller and Margareta Jeric (who wrote a new work for the evening commissioned by Chantal Perrot), Montreal-based French composer Olivier Alary, and Americans Carolyn Chen, Tyshawn Sorey and David Lang. In addition to this opportunity to hear Arras in March, Esprit Orchestra will be presenting Devaux’s new work Excavated Sound on April 20. See the Quick Picks entry below.

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

**QUICK PICKS**

**MAR 9, 10, 12, 7:30PM & MAR 12, 1PM:** Canadian Opera Company, COC Theatre. Fantasma. Music by Ian Cusson. Text by Colleen Murphy. Fantasma is a chamber opera created in particular for audiences ages 12 to 18. When creators Cusson and Murphy began exploring ideas for the production, they shared stories important to them about life, and in particular, stories of children’s fears of being lost. They sought to create something that was both exciting and dangerous, that had artistic depth and was not patronizing to the audience. Cusson’s experience watching a play when he was 12 years old led him to the conviction that theatre is a sacred place where stories can be told, and he knew immediately that he wanted to be part of this world. For Murphy, it was important that the two masks of theatre – comedy and tragedy – be presented together. The story follows two friends as they make a discovery while visiting an old-fashioned carnival. They are faced with the dilemma of what to do in the face of suffering. Do you stop to help out, or do you run away?

**MAR 11, 8 PM:** New Music Concerts, Harbourfront Centre Theatre. Difficult Grace: Seth Parker Woods in Concert. American cellist Seth Parker Woods presents a solo multimedia concert made up of works inspired by various historical events and commentaries on the human condition. Woods has been described as an artist full of power, grace and possessing a versatility that enables him to both straddle several genres and willing to go to the brink.

**APR 3, 8PM:** Esprit Orchestra, Koerner Hall. Esprit Live 2022! Act 1. Works by Canadian composers Alexina Louie and Christopher Goddard. Louie’s The Void, Rivers of Stars from 1990 will be performed along with a world premiere of Goddard’s Piano Concerto (2020). A third piece, by American Andrew Norman, will also be presented.

**APR 20, 8PM:** Esprit Orchestra, Koerner Hall. Esprit Live 2022! Act 2. In an evening full of premieres, Canadian composer Eugene Astapov will be appearing as a guest conductor as well as presenting the premiere of his Esprit-commissioned work A Still Life (2020). A second world premiere, also commissioned by Esprit, will be Keiko Devaux’s Excavated Sound. Other works on the program include Mannequin (2014) by Korean composer Unsuk Chin and Saudade (2019) by Lithuanian composer Žibuoklé Martinaitė.

Celebrated composer Keiko Devaux curates a concert of exciting new works to accompany her Azrieli Prize-winning work Arras. Each piece examines our relationship with musical memory. This concert also features the direction of Juliane Gallant in collaboration with Tapestry Opera’s Women in Musical Leadership Project. This concert is generously supported by the Azrieli Foundation.

For tickets to Imagined Sounds on Friday April 10 at Steam Whistle Brewery, and any other information, please visit newmusicconcerts.com or call our office at 416-961-9594,
SACRED MUSIC FOR A SACRED SPACE
YORKMINSTER PARK BAPTIST CHURCH    FRIDAY, APRIL 15
In-person and Online
www.tmchoir.org  | 416-408-0208
Jean-Sébastien Vallée
Artistic Director
TMC & Nathaniel Dett Chorale join together to sing
All-Night Vigil
Sergei Rachmaninoff
Plus, works by Nathaniel Dett, Adolphus Hailstork, and others
SACRED MUSIC FOR A SACRED SPACE
Simon Rivard  conductor  Brainerd Blyden-Taylor  conductor
YORKMINSTER PARK BAPTIST CHURCH    FRIDAY, APRIL 15
In-person and Online  www.tmchoir.org  | 416-408-0208
Although a little bit misleading, and perhaps overly optimistic, the notion that we are entering a post-pandemic world is a seductive one right now, as governments, performing arts venues, theatres, restaurants, and countless other businesses enter a period of comprehensive reopening unseen since the summer of 2021.

Whether driven by a new, 'hands-off' governing approach or an overwhelming public desire to return to normalcy after nearly two years of restricted living, the progression of this latest loosening of restrictions is undoubtedly a source of hope, optimism, and relief for many performers, ensembles, presenters, and venues. Indeed, a cursory scan of this month’s concert listings could almost be mistaken for a month in pre-pandemic times, with a comprehensive collection of performances in a variety of genres that is very encouraging.

Midday Magic

One of the stalwart features of a healthy music scene is the noon-hour concert, usually held in churches throughout a given city with admission either free or by donation, and featuring a range of performers and performances, including pianists, organists, and chamber groups. This month marks the return of several such concert series, including Organix Concerts, an organ-centric set of recitals that feature some of Toronto’s finest organs and organists. With performances taking place on both the modern instrument at All Saints’ Anglican Church and the mechanical-action instrument at Our Lady of Sorrows, fans of all types of organ music are sure to find their match with Organix.

Housing the largest pipe organ in Canada with 8,333 pipes, Metropolitan United Church is a premier source for top-notch organ music, and the return of their Noon at Met recital series is a welcome one. Presented every other week both in-person and online, the audience has a range of viewing possibilities, though nothing compares with the immense drama of hearing this spectacular instrument live. For those seeking broader musical selections, Music at St. Andrew’s offers virtual performances of soloists and chamber music groups every Friday at 12:10 pm, and Yorkminster Park Baptist Church offers their Lunchtime Chamber Music series every Tuesday at 12:10.

An important part of Toronto’s classical music scene, noon-hour concerts serve as a useful indicator of the overall status of the community. The reintroduction of these performances and the broad range of repertoire they present are vital and valuable, and we are fortunate to once again be able to hear such beautiful music in beautiful spaces.

More Music at Met

One of Toronto’s perennial musical events that captivates audiences every year is the Good Friday concert at Metropolitan United. Rather than featuring a solo performer on their magnificent pipe organ, as they do during the aforementioned Noon at Met series, the Good Friday concert presents masterworks for choir, organ, and orchestra, with a focus on the Passiontide theme. This year’s performance is centered on Johann Sebastian Bach and Dieterich Buxtehude, two of the German Baroque’s greatest musical minds, and includes Bach’s 23rd Cantata, Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn, excerpts from the Johannes Passion, and Buxtehude’s passion cantata Fürwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit. Written for strings, continuo, and five-part chorus, Fürwahr is a single-movement work that will undoubtedly enthrall audiences, especially those who enjoy the early-Baroque, quasi-improvisatory writing style that Buxtehude mastered so thoroughly.

In addition to these renowned composers, this year’s Good Friday performance will also include Johann Michael Bach’s Unser Leben währet siebenzig jahr. Known primarily for a small chorale prelude that was misattributed to J.S. Bach for many years, J.M. Bach (1648-1694) served as the organist and town clerk of Gehren, where he lived until his death. The Bach family tree is rather complex and closely knit, and J.M. Bach’s relation to J.S. Bach is no exception – the elder Bach was the first cousin, once removed and father-in-law of Johann Sebastian Bach, being the father of Johann Sebastian’s first wife Maria Barbara Bach.

In short, then, this Good Friday concert is about the universe of J.S. Bach, encompassing both his extended family and his professional interaction with Buxtehude. The clever programming, as well as the extraordinary quality of the music itself, makes this performance a guaranteed highlight of this April, even without the opportunity it will afford to recognize the conductor, Metropolitan United’s Minister of Music, Dr. Patricia Wright, who is retiring in May 2022. Wright has devoted 35 years to arts programs as Minister of Music at Metropolitan United Church, including numerous inspired organ performances and the tireless nurturing of countless young organists.
Tafelmusik Tackles Dvořák

Considered one of the highest quality and most specialized period performance ensembles in the country, Tafelmusik is poised to break out of their mold, as they tackle Czech composer Antonín Dvořák’s Serenade for Strings, Op. 22 in a groundbreaking performance of late Romantic music, with Leila Schayegh as guest director. The Serenade is a renowned and widely appreciated work, at times tender and lilting, at others animated and optimistic, and this will surely be a worthwhile experience for anyone who tunes in. The concert is part of Tafelmusik’s digital series, and has its online premiere April 7, 2022, at 8pm EDT.

Such a divergence from the established norm of an equally established group can be perplexing, but it is important to understand that historical instruments exist on a temporal spectrum. In the same way as there are newly built period performance instruments based on old models and entirely modern instruments built using modern principles, there are also instrumental models based on the instruments of the 19th century, which give yet another take on the music. Consider, for example, Roger Norrington’s recordings of the Mahler Symphonies in which the orchestra used replicas of the instruments of Mahler’s time. While Norrington’s recordings are subject to mixed reviews – largely due to Norrington’s interpretive eccentricities, rather than any instrumental inferiority – it is not a stretch to suggest that the cross-pollination of period instruments and Dvořák’s music will be equally illuminating, from both auditory and musicological perspectives.

In addition to the Dvořák Serenade, this performance includes Louise Farrenc’s Nonet, op. 38. Farrenc (1804-1875) was a French composer, virtuoso pianist, and teacher, whose fame and reputation earned her an appointment as Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatory, a position she held for 30 years. Despite her great success in this role and the successes of many of her students, Farrenc was paid less than her male counterparts for nearly a decade, and it was only after the premiere of her Nonet that she was able to demand and receive equal pay. Recognized by many of her contemporaries as a first-rate composer, Farrenc’s works nonetheless fell into neglect after her death, before a revival of interest took place in the late 20th century.

With two late-Romantic works on the program, written in approximately the same era, it will be fascinating, as it was during their September 2019 foray into the work of Tchaikovsky, to hear how instrumental considerations and interpretive decisions shape the performances of the Serenade and Nonet, especially in comparison to contemporary approaches on modern instruments. This is a concert worth looking forward to and it will undoubtedly be exciting to witness Tafelmusik’s latest foray into the 19th century when it arrives online this April.

Whether in search of a short midday break to unwind with some live music, a full-length performance, or a living room concert, there are many options available, only a few of which are mentioned in this column. Flip, scroll, or scan your way through this issue of The WholeNote, rejoice in the fact that concerts are once again being presented throughout the city, and engage with as many of these fine organizations as you can. The road to recovery for the Arts world is a long one which will not be easy, and the courage, fortitude, and strength of each of these performers is admirable and highly worthy of our support.

Matthew Whitfield is a Toronto-based harpsichordist and organist.
I started to write this column in early February, we were under full lockdown ... again. No theatres or concert halls were allowed to present performances for live audiences ...again, and we were forced to turn to our computers (again), for virtual versions of our favourite performance genres.

The unforeseeable Omicron lockdown was doubly heartbreaking after the gradual resurgence of the fall, for creators and audiences alike; nowhere more poignantly, for me, than in the official closing of *Come From Away* only a week after its glorious reopening, its staging refreshed and the company thrilling – perhaps even more alive, if that’s possible, to the potential of the show than they had been at their original opening just under two years before.

Pick your own heartbreak, though. *Come From Away* was just one of many shows that closed, never opened, or were postponed again. Some were able to pivot, including the Next Stage Festival which did a wonderful job of presenting a fully digital slate of a wide variety of shows. Most of the new live season that should have begun in January, however, was either cancelled or postponed until a time in the future that felt even more indefinite than before, because having the rug pulled out from under us after having hope dangled, was harder to bear than just hunkering down stoically, the way we had before.

Yes, there were some new digital performances to immerse ourselves in, in the interim, but not as many as earlier in the pandemic as when it was the only option. Tossed back and forth between changing protocols, companies have understandably played it safe, hesitating to announce new dates, for fear of having to postpone or cancel, yet again. The result: a gulf.

**Hope springs**

Late in February, hope springs again, like snowdrops lifting their heads. For once, fortune favoured the brave. *Opera Atelier*, for example, gambled that the promise of lifting restrictions would allow their *All is Love* program to go ahead at Koerner Hall on February 19 and 20, and their gamble paid off with a live audience of stalwart supporters returning to fill the hall to the allowed 50% of capacity. Being back watching friends and colleagues perform live felt surreal. What made it even better was the semi-experimental nature of the production. Amidst the expected Baroque beauty of beautifully staged arias, duets and dance sequences was one of my favourite OA experiments, the Canada 150-commissioned *Inception* created by violinist/composer Edwin Huizinga and dancer/choreographer Tyler Gledhill, and two new experiments: an interweaving of an English with a French aria for soprano Measha Brueggergosman-Lee off the top, and a new Baroque version of an extended excerpt of Debussy’s *Pellèas and Mélisande*, both arranged by Christopher Bagan.

*Harbourfront Centre* who have kept dance performances happening virtually across the country as one of the producers of the *Digidance* series, is another producer who has taken the chance of restarting as early as possible with their 2022 international (live) dance series *Torque* that began with the Israel-based L-E-V’s visceral new work, *Chapter 3: The Brutal Journey of the Heart*, in early March, and will continue with other visiting companies through until late spring, to be followed, I hope, by Harbourfront’s usual live performance festivals in the summer.

Staying in the dance realm, the *National Ballet of Canada*, after having to cancel half the run of *The Nutcracker* over the holiday season, is now officially back in business with a nicely varied combination of Nureyev’s beloved version of *The Sleeping Beauty*, a return of John Neumeier’s 1983 impressionist take on *A Streetcar Named Desire* which will feature retiring star, and wonderfully dramatic dancer, Sonia Rodriguez in the lead at some performances, and a fun mixed program combining Kenneth MacMillan’s joyous Scott Joplin-inspired *Elite Syncopations* with *On Solid Ground*, the main stage choreographic debut of rising star Siphesihle November.

So, as the beginning of March approaches with the promise of capacity limits being lifted, it now feels as if, perhaps, that new season we have been waiting for can actually take place after all.

At the *Grand Theatre* in London it must feel like the old song “*Finnegan Begin Again,*” with the Canadian premiere of Emma Donoghue’s musical, *Room*. Let’s hope that “third time lucky” will be true for them as the twice-postponed opening is now set for March 11 in London (with previews starting March 8) with a short run to March 19, followed by a run in Toronto at the Princess of...
Wales Theatre under the Mirvish banner April 5 to May 8. Based on Donoghue’s novel that inspired the award-winning film of the same name, the story is very dark but also life-affirming; word of mouth from previews back in 2020 is that it promises to be worth seeing.

Mirvish Productions have rejigged the rest of their planned season as well, and there are some exciting musical productions coming up in April, notably Toronto native Jake Epstein’s autobiographical Boy Falls From The Sky (which I loved at the Toronto Fringe in 2019). It will now take up residence at the storied Royal Alexandra Theatre on April 19, to be followed by the return of the long-running Canadian hit 2 Pianos 4 Hands, with creators and original stars Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt, in June.

Flooded inbox

There is new hope in the air as the volume of ‘Omicron aerosols’ diminishes; press releases are flooding my inbox with new dates set for live performances around the province: the experimental RISER series at the Theatre Centre presenting Why Not Theatre; the Luminato Festival presenting the Creative Current Lavender Creek Story Cabaret where culture, family and storytelling traditions meet synth pop, video, comedy and hip-hop outdoors at Black Creek Pioneer Village; a new opera, The Lion Heart, by Corey Arnold (music) and Kyle McDonald (libretto) of Mightier Productions, about the famous crusader king and his escape from captivity.
And the Glenn Gould School at the Royal Conservatory of Music, after some very interesting experiments with digital production, is also getting back to live opera production with Handel’s Rinaldo at Koerner Hall. What makes this a must-see for me is that brilliant director and acting teacher Tom Diamond who has mostly been directing south of the border the past few years, is back. Perhaps this could lead to Diamond directing once again for the COC? We can hope.

The Shaw and Stratford Festivals have also now muscled up and set dates for their big musicals of the season. Shaw will be presenting the Faustian baseball-set classic Damn Yankees to be directed by Brian Hill, starring Kimberley Rampersad as Lola. Stratford is promising a newly choreographed version of Kander and Ebb’s Chicago, created specifically for the Festival Theatre’s thrust stage by director/choreographer Donna Feore. There is nothing quite like seeing a great production of a large-scale musical to restore a sense of hope and joy. Both shows will run through the summer in repertory with other productions, including (at Shaw) with a return of the outdoor musical and dramatic programming.

Silver (screen) linings

Luckily while theatres were closed, we have had the silver lining of companies and individual artists embracing the digital realm, both sharing existing work and creating new, specifically to share with audiences over the airwaves. The digital wave will continue with two innovative projects debuting in March that have both artistic and societal goals: Opera Trans*formed, a short (seven minute) documentary starring opera innovator Teiya Kasahara, produced by Leah Bortskaperman and Maria Sarrourh, seeks to urge audiences to recognize that, in a time of existential crisis for the opera industry, the emerging presence of genderqueer voices is helping reimagine a more vibrant, sustainable, relevant future for the genre. Opera Trans*formed can be seen on March 21 as part of the Toronto Short Film Festival, March 21 to 31.

Against the Grain’s latest opera/film hybrid, Bound, in association with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Crows Theatre, also aims to knock down some of the walls in the traditional world of opera, showcasing four life stories that challenge Canada’s myth of belonging in an unusual format, interwoven with music by Handel.

Across the footlights

As much as the digital production revolution has been a pandemic silver lining, and an important evolution of the art form in its own right, it has to be said that watching a show online is not the same as actually being in a theatre as a performer or member of the audience able to experience that feeling of sharing the experience across the footlights and with other people in the same space. I know I am not alone in being thankful for the wonderful digital creations that have sustained us over the past two years, but even more grateful for the return to live performance.
QUICK PICKS and SHOW INFO

MAR 9 to 13: Winter Mixed Program: Elite Syncopations (Kenneth MacMillan to Scott Joplin and others); Skyward by Alysa Pires; On Solid Ground by Siphesihle November; After the Rain by Christopher Wheeldon, National Ballet of Canada, Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, national.ballet.ca LIVE

MAR 11, 8PM & MAR 12, 4PM: Songbook XI, Tapestry New Opera, Ernest Balmer Studio, Always a fun opportunity to get to know new singers and hear again some of Tapestry’s greatest hits. LIVE

MAR 16 & 18, 7:30PM: Rinaldo, Glenn Gould School, Royal Conservatory, Tom Diamond directs. LIVE and ONLINE

MAR 18 to 27: The Sleeping Beauty, National Ballet of Canada, Four Seasons For The Performing Arts. LIVE

MAR 19, 7:30PM & MAR 20, 5PM: The Lion Heart, Mighty Productions, College St. United Church, mightierproductions@gmail.com (416) 882-8044. Live Stream at: mightierproductions.com/lion-heart. LIVE & ONLINE

MAR 21: Opera Trans*formed, a short documentary starring opera-superstar Teiya Kasahara, produced by Leah Borts-Kuperman and Maria Sarrouh, at the Toronto Short Film Festival, (Shorts Documentary 2) www.torontoshort.com ONLINE

MAR 24, 7PM: Lavender Creek Story Cabaret, Black Creek Pioneer Village, Outdoors, www.chinatownfestival.com LIVE

MAR 27 to APR 24: Bound, Against the Grain and TSO, Free, atgttheatre.com/bound/ ONLINE

APR 1 to MAY 8: Riser Toronto, new work series, Why Not Theatre, Theatre Centre, www.whynottheatre/riserottoronto LIVE

APR 6 to OCT 30 (opening night June 3): Chicago, Festival Theatre, Stratford Festival, strathford-festival.ca. LIVE

APR 8 & 9, 7:30PM: Only You (Canada), Anne Plamondon Productions: Only You is an exploration of everything that binds and separates us. In a quest towards understanding, acceptance and honesty, its two protagonists gradually remove the invisible veils between them to unmask the truth. Fleck Dance Theatre, harbourfrontcentre.com

APR 19 to MAY 29: Boy Falls From The Sky, Royal Alexandra Theatre, Mirvish Productions, mirvish.com. LIVE

APR 19 to APR 30: GROW: Premiere of new Canadian musical. Book by Matt Murray, music by Colleen Dauncey, lyrics by Akiva Romer-Segal. Directed by Dennis Garnhum, Grand Theatre, grandtheatre.com, LIVE

APR 23 to OCT 9 (opening night May 19) Damn Yankees, Shaw Festival, shawfest.com LIVE

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.
On February 18, 2022 a post in my Facebook feed stopped my scrolling in its tracks. The Tranzac Club announcement exclaimed, “Please welcome Matthew Fava, our new (and first) Executive Director!”

Accompanying it was a photo of Fava, mic in hand, in a black T-shirt emblazoned with “ann southam is my hero” in a lowercase sans-serif font. Fava starts at the Tranzac on March 3, the post continued, “leading our operations, budgeting and implementation of our strategic plan, programming and staff management.”

Part of my initial surprise was due to the fact that I’d only known Fava as the personable Director of the Ontario Region at the Canadian Music Centre (CMC) for over a decade. From that position he encouraged and nurtured numerous creative music projects and communities in our province.

I was among those who benefited from his musical curiosity and collegiality. In July 2015, I knocked on his door to pitch an article about my novel arrangement of a James Tenney work for the CMC’s Ontario Region publication. (Having Never Written a Note for Kacapi was published in the Spring 2016 issue of Notations.) Fava has also facilitated two Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan series of composers’ and performers’ workshops, projects I tackled as an ECCG member.

During his decade-long tenure at the CMC he facilitated many more workshops and programs which typically had collaborative, multidisciplinary and intergenerational earmarks.

At the same time Fava also served as a founding organizer of the Toronto Creative Music Lab (2015-2019). It presented annual international workshops for early-career musicians with an emphasis on less-hierarchical models of composer-performer collaborations, and anti-oppression training as a component of artistic virtuosity. He connected more musical communities while serving on the boards of The Music Gallery and Contact Contemporary Music, and between 2013 and 2018 as a core organizer of the Intersection Festival held in Yonge-Dundas Square.

In addition to his 15 years of activism on Toronto’s non-profit music scene, Fava also made time to play music with others. Most recently
it’s been with the improvisational bands Moonwood and Stargoon.

**Musical Heroes**

Intrigued by Fava’s imminent move from the national CMC to the downtown Toronto community-focused Tranzac, I set up a Zoom call. I began by asking about his “ann southam is my hero” T-shirt.

For readers who may be unfamiliar with the career of the distinguished Toronto classical music composer Ann Southam (1937-2010), as well as being a CMC associate composer, she co-founded Winnipeg’s concert series Music Inter Alia (1977-1991). Southam was also a prominent feminist artist who in 1981 was a key figure in launching the Association of Canadian Women Composers, “blazing a trail for women composers in a notoriously sexist field.” *(The Globe and Mail)*

Was he planning to take his musical hero to the Tranzac from the CMC, the latter a place she was closely associated with? Fava laughed. “Oh yes, she certainly donated generously and consistently to the CMC’s Ontario Region. Unfortunately I arrived at the CMC the year after she passed away, so I didn’t know her in my official CMC capacity. Yet Ann’s music informed my personal musical listening, for example, as reflected in Centrediscs albums by Christina Petrowska-Quilico, Eve Egoyan and others. Her music has been a helpful guide in my education in the Canadian composition scene and in understanding the CMC. And when I heard her electronic music … oh my God, I adore her electronic music! So yes, she’s a musical hero of mine. Before long I started to appreciate the fact that she was a hero for other folks as well who didn’t quite know what Canadian composition was.”

As for the T-shirt, “I came from community radio where I was a jeans and T-shirt person. I chose to have the Ann-slogan shirt made for a Toronto Symphony Orchestra lobby interview when I found out that the orchestra was allowed to dress down.”

**The Tranzac**

I changed my tack from the CMC to his new role as Tranzac’s first executive director.

“One distinguishing feature is that unlike many other community arts organizations the Tranzac Club has owned its building on Brunswick Ave. since 1971,” stated Fava. “Formed initially by Australia and New Zealand communities in Toronto, 2021 was going to be the Tranzac’s 50th anniversary. Sadly the celebrations had to be postponed until after the pandemic. An interesting sidebar is that another of our assets, our onsite parking lot, is leased to the Toronto Parking Authority, generating revenue which helps with the bottom line.”

Looking at its primary physical assets, the Tranzac boasts three venues: Main Hall, Southern Cross Lounge and Tiki Lounge. Their capacity ranges from intimate to small-medium size. Inevitably, over the years, these welcoming casual spaces were getting long in the tooth.

Last December, the Tranzac launched a GoFundMe campaign to pay for renovations, called Help the TRANZAC Rebuild: Bar Renovations! The campaign page states that the Tranzac “took the opportunity of closed doors to embark on some long overdue renovations, and in the process, we discovered that our bar infrastructure needed to be completely overhauled.”

Up-to-date infrastructure which helps generate bar sales is key to the continued financial health and functioning of this not-for-profit. “Prior to the pandemic, bar sales accounted for more than half of our revenue. Like pretty much every performing arts venue, our two bars are an essential part of our business. And they’re also one of the reasons you love coming back.” The GoFundMe has attracted strong support from the community with 66% of its goal being raised as of this writing.

**Tranzac Programming Strategies and Highlights**

Hybrid performances: like many other venues faced with mandated pandemic closures, partial and complete, the Tranzac turned to livestreaming. More recently it has begun to explore a hybrid in-person plus livestream production model. For example, the February 12, 2022 concert with the Titillators – Ryan Driver (streetsweeper bristle bass and compositions), Thom Gill (whistling and synth), Tania Gill (synth), Phil Melanson and Nick Fraser (percussion) – was broadcast live on YouTube and also attended by a small studio audience.
Hybrid music shows (in-person as well as on YouTube) will continue, at least for the next month and perhaps longer. As an example, the series Bluegrass Thursdays restarts with Strangetooth, followed by Masaru on March 3. The bands CHANDRA, New Chance and Motorists take the stage March 5, while Porchcouch and Meredith Moon and the Layrite Boys play on March 6.

In-person performances: after nearly two years, the Tranzac officially reopened for in-person shows at 50% capacity on Tuesday, March 1 with the improvisation-centred new band Pukeylips. Check the website for all its COVID policy details. And for fans of Against the Grain Theatre’s cheeky Opera Pub, who have been waiting for ages for the announcement of the return of its fun monthly events, starting April 7 they’ll be able once more to enjoy Opera Pub night with a pint at the Main Hall’s newly refurbed bar.

That’s merely the tip of the iceberg. I just checked the Tranzac calendar and see only five days in all of March which are dark; some evenings sport three separate concerts. Scrolling through the calendar to the fall reveals consistently dense listings suggesting a deeply engaged music community. That engagement extends to leading Toronto experimental music event producer Tad Michalak. Under his Burn Down the Capital moniker, he is presenting a double album release in the Main Hall featuring Picastro, plus Fortunato Durutti Marinetti on March 26.

Residencies: Holy Oak Family Singers, the Toronto band which adds its bespoke spin to the North American vernacular songbook, is in the process of organizing a monthly residency in the Southern Cross Lounge, dates TBA. A new Tranzac initiative (for which it received a project grant) – the Queer Music Series – is tentatively pencilled in to launch this spring. Several other series are also in the works.

Circling Back
I asked Fava about the blooming of community support at the Tranzac amid the crushing difficulties surrounding music performance, especially for venues, during the last two years.

“Even though this is just the beginning of my arrival at the Tranzac, one significant story that already caught my attention is that they’ve survived the extreme uncertainties of the pandemic. And a big part of that success is the massive rallying of support of music community members volunteering to work in the Club. This included generous donations and in-kind work in order to make some of the necessary changes internally to the building. The $51,000 GoFundMe goal, which we’re well on our way to meeting, is also a really impressive performance.

“Taken together, these successes, I feel, are really important to the community the Tranzac serves and a deep source of inspiration for me. It’s yet another compelling reason I felt excited about taking on this work.”

Andrew Timar is a Toronto musician and music writer. He can be contacted at worldmusic@thewholenote.com.
basic premise of these two musical styles as discrete genres is somewhat reductive, but for our purposes, we’ll maintain the distinction.)

The fusion of jazz and funk begins in the late 1960s and early 1970s: albums such as Miles Davis’ *In a Silent Way* (1969), *Bitches Brew* (1970), *On the Corner* (1972), and Herbie Hancock’s *Head Hunters* (1973), stand out as foundational recordings of the genre.

The canonization of swing

From the beginning, however, there was also a sense that with funk the chamber-music ethos of bebop-based jazz had been abandoned in favour of blatant commercialism. While the popularity of fusion only grew throughout the 1970s and 80s, coincidentally or not, this period also marked the beginning of the proliferation of jazz studies programs in post-secondary institutions. As jazz education became formalized, canonization followed. At the centre of canonization is a simple question with a complex answer: what is jazz? To this day, the core skills that most jazz programs teach tend to be derived from bebop, and roughly adhere to the period of 1945 to 1965. Swing is prioritized over backbeat, the melodic minor scale is prioritized over the pentatonic minor and standards are prioritized over vamp-based originals.

“What I object to is the abandonment of the swing rhythm that is essential to jazz,” opines Wynton Marsalis, a musician whose principal position at Jazz at Lincoln Center has conferred on him the mantle of pedagogical authority. “There is no way that anyone can be a great jazz musician playing along to funk or rock rhythms. It just ain’t gonna happen.” Marsalis, certainly, has the credentials to stand behind his claims, but, for many musicians in jazz programs – certainly for those who were born well after the mainstream breakthrough of rock, funk and hip-hop – fusion often represents an honest concatenation of their genuine musical interests. While the sounds of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Miles Davis transcriptions abound from individual jazz program practice rooms, it is often, trust me, the sounds of fusion that can be heard through the doors to group rehearsal rooms, especially late at night.

Wynton Marsalis

There is no way that anyone can be a great jazz musician playing along to funk or rock rhythms. It just ain’t gonna happen.

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

This issue contains event listings from March 2 to April 22, 2022.

THERE ARE TWO LISTINGS SECTIONS IN THIS ISSUE

- Section 1: Live and/or Livestreamed Events, Mar 2 – Apr 22
  - These are events with an announced date and time that one could circle on a calendar, in order to “be there” when it happens for the first (or only) time. This includes live and livestreamed performances, first broadcasts and screenings; concerts, workshops, symposia, and so on. If the event in question remains available after that first presentation (e.g. online or on demand), this is noted at the end of the listing.

- Section 2: In the clubs (Mostly Jazz)
  - “Clubs” is a loose catch-all for a wide range of informal listening rooms where food and/or drink may be part of the mix, but listening to the music is the primary focus. “Mostly jazz” describes venues we’ve built relationships with over the years, but it’s not a rule! If you think you belong, based on this description, you probably do, so get in touch.

How to List

1. Use the convenient online form at thewholenote.com/applications
2. Email listings to listings@thewholenote.com. Please note, we do not take listings over the phone.

Deadlines

Weekly: Eligible listings received by 6pm Tuesday, each week, will be included in The WholeNote WEEKLY LISTINGS UPDATE e-letter sent to registered readers the following Sunday. Listings received for the Weekly Listings Update are simultaneously posted to JUST ASK, our searchable online listings database. The weekly listings update looks five to six weeks into the future on an ongoing basis.

Print: Our next print issue, Volume 27 no.6 covers April 15 to the end of May. The print submission deadline for new listings is 6pm Monday April 4.

Readers are encouraged to register for the Weekly Listings update, or to check our online listings regularly for new listings or updates to listings previously submitted. Each weekly update looks 5-6 weeks into the future.

Register for the weekly updates at thewholenote.com/newsletter

Deadlines

Weekly online updates: submission deadline is 6pm Tuesday of the week prior to the event in question, for weekend posting.
Thursday March 10

**7:00: COSA Canada. Endymion’s Dream.**

Music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Text by Colleen Murphy. Dir: Renée Salewski. Stage director: Jamie Hillman & Darryl Edwards, music directors. 647-272-6232. $20.11 or PWYC. Also Mar 12, ONLINE.

**7:30: Canadian Opera Company.**

See Mar 9. Also Mar 12(1:30pm at George Weston Recital Hall, Meridian Arts Centre).

**8:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra.**

Enigma Variations. Prokofiev: Lieutenant Kije Suite; Chopin: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No.2; Elgar: Variations on an Original Theme. Naomi Wong, piano; Kristian Alexander, conductor. Roy Thomson Hall Centre for the Performing Arts, 2025 Yonge St., Richmond Hill. 905-604-8339 or KSOorchestra.ca or RHCentre.ca. $15-$40. LIVE, ONLINE OR RECORDED.

**8:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra.**

Screen to Stage: Appalachian Spring & More. See Mar 9. Also Mar 13(3pm at George Weston Recital Hall, Meridian Arts Centre).

Sunday March 13

**2:30: COSA Canada. Endymion’s Dream.**

See Mar 10.

**2:30: Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts.**

Faculty Artist Series Dan School: Quasar Saxophone Quartet with Peter Freeman & Jeffrey Leung. 390 King St. W., Kingston. 613-533-2424 or icp@badercentre.ca. $10-$30.

**3:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra.**

Screen to Stage: Appalachian Spring & More. See Mar 9. George Weston Recital Hall, Meridian Arts Centre (formerly Toronto Centre for the Arts), 5040 Yonge St. 416-598-3375 or 1-855-593-7199. Starting at $29.

**6:00: TD Niagara Jazz Festival.**

Ilan Altman & the Jazz’n Laughs Band. Jazz standards, lesser-known gems and a smattering of comedic tunes. Ilana Waldston, vocals; Stu Harrison, keyboards; Ross MacIntyre, bass.
Monday March 21

**10:00am:** Beach United Church. Jazz Lecture. From New Orleans to Big Band Swing. Dr. Mike Daley, 140 Winchester Ave. eventbrite.ca/e/jazz-from-new-orleans-to-big-band-swing-tickets-261791123297. Lecture series: Mar 21, 28; Apr 4, 11.LIVE & LIVESTREAM


Tuesday March 22


**8:00:** Flato Markham Theatre. A John McDermott Celtic Celebration with Special Guests DALA. John McDermott, tenor. 171 Town Centre Blvd., Markham. Flatonmarkhamtheatre.ca or 905-305-7469 or boxoffice@markham.ca. $15–$75(live); $18(live streaming). LIVE & LIVESTREAM

**Wednesday March 23


**5:00:** Fallsview Casino Resort. The Plat- ters. See Mar 22. Also Mar 23 (6:00pm).


Thursday March 24

**8:00:** Music Toronto. Esmé Quartet. See Mar 19.

**Saturday March 19, 7:30 PM**

**Sunday March 20, 7:30:** Guitar Society of Toronto. In Con-cert: Anna Pietrzak. St. Andrew’s Pres-byterian Church (Toronto). 73 Simcoe St. guitarsoctoronto.com or 416-964-2898. Advance: $35; $30(sr); $15(st); Door: $40; $35(sr); $20(st).

**7:30:** Mighty River Productions. The Lion Heart. Music by Corey Arnold. Book by Kyle McDonald. Montreal. Workshops: Kyle McDonald, bass (Richard); Tonatihu Abrego, tenor (Blondell); Andrew Derynych, tenor (Leo- pold); Nicole Dubinsky, soprano (Mirriela); John Kirby, baritone (Waloe); Andrew Nees, bass-baritone (The Captain); Corey Arnold, conductor. College Street United Church, 452 College St. Livestream at mightier-productions.com/lion-heart. In person: $40 (cash at door); $35(online); $20(students). Livestream: $30; $20(st). Also Mar 20 (5pm). LIVE & LIVESTREAM

**8:00:** Acoustic Harvest. Mary Kelly with John Sheard. St. Paul’s United Church (Scarbor- ough). 200 McIntosh St., Scarborough. acousticharvest.ca. $30(advance only).

**8:00:** Westben. Digital Concert: Cana- dian Brass 877-883-5777 or westben.ca. Free or by donation at westben.ca/donate. ONLINE

**9:00:** Fallsview Casino Resort. Straight No Chaser – Back in the High Life. See Mar 18.

**Sunday March 20**

**2:00:** Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts. Performings Arts Sunday Series: Valerie Tryon in Recital. Valerie Tryon, piano. 126 James St. S. Hamilton. hearts.ca/pass or 905-528- 4020 Live: $35; $25(SR); Livestream: $15. LIVE & LIVESTREAM

**2:00:** Royal Conservatory of Music. Mazzo- leni Masters Series: Artists of The Royal Conservatory. Schiorsky: Hora, for violin and piano; Ben-Haim: Quintet for Clarinet and Strings Op.31a; Czirratz: Piano Quintet. Mazzoleni Concert Hall, Royal Conservatory, 273 Bloor St. W. 416-408-0208 or rcmusic.com/performance. $25.

**2:30:** Niagara Symphony Orchestra. Enigma Variations. Kelly-Marie Murray: Mur- muration; Shostakovich: Cello Concerto No.1; Elgan: Enigma Variations. Joseph Johnson, cello; Bradley Chaukch, conductor. Par- tridge Hall, FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, 250 St Paul St., St. Catharines. niagarsymphony.com or 905-688-0722 or 905- 688-5601 x3700 or 1-855-515-0722. $68; $60(sr); $59(arts worker); $40 (sr/tyouth). **4:30:** The Emmet Ray. Opera Re- view at The Emmet Ray. Works by Mozart, Donizetti, Weill, and Verdi. Darrie Friesen, soprano; Alexan- der Hajek, baritone; Claire Harris, piano. 924 College St. 647-637-7749 or www.theemmetray.com. $10.

**5:00:** Mighty River Productions. The Lion. See Mar 19.

**March 22 at 8 pm**

**ESMÉ QUARTET**

**March 23 at 8 pm**

**Music Toronto**
Thursday March 31

MARCH 31 | 1:30 PM
CROZMAN & CHIU
Cameron Crozman, cello
Philip Chiu, piano
416-923-7052
wmct.on.ca

March 29 at 8 pm
BENJAMIN GROSVENOR

Friday April 1

7:30: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Rachmaninoff’s Second. Samy Moussa: Fanfare pour Arc; Mozart: Overture to The Marriage of Figaro K492; Mozart: Violin Concerto No.3 in G K216; Rachmaninoff: Symphony No.2 in e Op.27. Karen Gomyo, violin; Sun Kim, conductor. Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St. 416-598-3375 or 1-855-593-7769. Starting at $29. Also Apr 2.
8:00: Sinfonia Toronto. Mozart Haydn Rival: Soaring. Robert Rival: Violin Concerto (world premiere); Mozart: Piano Concerto No 12 Haydn: String Quartet No.53 in D (“The Lark”) Op.64 No.5. Daniel Vukalowski, piano; Marc Djokic, violin; Nurhan Arman, conductor. Jane Mallett Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, 27 Front St. E. In person 416-366-7723; virtual 416-499-0403 or sinfoniatronto.com. In-person $55.97; $46.06 (sr); $20.96 (st). Livestream: $15. LIVE & ONLINE.

February 27

8:00: Music in the Afternoon. Crozman & Chiu. Works from the Tapeo album, a musical tasting-menu of Spanish and Hispanic-American pieces. Allan Gordon Bell: New Work (WMCT commission) and other works. Cameron Crozman, cello; Philip Chiu, piano. Grace Church on-the-Hill, 300 Lonsdale Rd. wmct.on.ca or 416-923-7052. $45(in-person); $25(online). LIVE & ONLINE.
6:30: Royal Conservatory of Music. Music on Film Series: It’s More Than Music. Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, 506 Bloor St. W. 416-837-3121 or hotdocscinema.ca. $17; $12(members); $10(or members); free(st members).

Friday March 25

3:00: Royal Conservatory of Music. String Concert Series: Maisky Trio. TELUS Centre, 273 Bloor St. W. 416-408-0028 or rcmusic.com/performances. $50-$105.

Saturday March 26

4:00: New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA). Constellations Online Listening Party. Experimental Sound Art (focused on radio, transmission, and electronic). John Hill: Speaker (er) to the Land; Arif Mirbaghi: Painting at Canopus; Sophia Steiert-Evoy: I don’t think it’s my place; Nicole Pogone: The Mystery Box. Michelle Macklem and Jess Shane. NAISA North Media Arts Centre, 106 Ottawa Ave., South River. 705-386-0880 or naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless/archives. $10. Event is hosted online through Whereby.com.

Tuesday March 29


Wednesday March 30

8:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Truth or Our Time with the National Centre Orchestra. Nicole Liée: Zeiss After Dark (TSO/NAAC Co-commission); Shostakovich: Symphony No.9 in E-Flat Op.70; Korngold: Violin Concerto in D Op.35; Philip Glass: D (“The Lark”) Op.64 No.5. Daniel Vukalowski, piano; Marc Djokic, violin; Nurhan Arman, conductor. Jane Mallett Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, 27 Front St. E. In person 416-366-7723; virtual 416-499-0403 or sinfoniatronto.com. In-person $55.97; $46.06 (sr); $20.96 (st). Livestream: $15. LIVE & ONLINE.

Saturday April 2

2:00: Tafelmusik. A Tafelmusik Tribute to Jeanne Lamon. Curated by Christina Mahler.
TAFELMUSIK

A Tafelmusik Tribute to Jeanne Lamon
Live Concert: April 2 at 2pm & 8pm
tafelmusik.org

& Alison Mackay. Vivaldi: Allegro from Concerto for 2 violins in A Op.3 No.5; Monteverdi: Excerpts from Beatus vir; Rossini: Sinfonia undecima; Shir hamma’allot. ‘Ashrei kol yere dador; R. H. Thomson, narrator; Brett Polegato; Tafelmusik Chamber Choir; Ivars Taurins, director.

Sunday April 3

1:00: Royal Conservatory of Music: String Trio for 2 violins in A Op.3 No.5; Monteverdi: & Alison Mackay. Vivaldi: Allegro from Concerto for 2 violins in A Op.3 No.5; Monteverdi: Excerpts from Beatus vir; Rossini: Sinfonia undecima; Shir hamma’allot. ‘Ashrei kol yere dador; R. H. Thomson, narrator; Brett Polegato; Tafelmusik Chamber Choir; Ivars Taurins, director.

2:00: Royal Conservatory of Music: Mazzeneli Masters Series: Asitha Tennekoon. Mazzeneli Concert Hall, Royal Conservatory, 273 Bloor St. W. 416-408-0208 or rcmusic.com/subscriptionfee. $25. $10 (ages 16-26); $5 (ages 15 and under).

6:00: Royal Conservatory of Music: Jazz From Around the World Series: Miles from India - A Celebration of the Music of Miles Davis. Koerner Hall, TELUS Centre, 273 Bloor St. W. 416-408-0208 or rcmusic.com/performance. $45-$110.

Monday April 4


Tuesday April 5

2:00: Tafelmusik. A Tafelmusik Tribute to Jeanne Lamon. See 2pm.

Wednesday April 6

8:00: Flato Markham Theatre. Barbara Lica: Songs for Orchestra. Barbara Lica, vocalist; Toronto-Chamber Pop Orchestra. 171 Town Centre Blvd., Markham. flatomarkhamtheatre.ca or 905-305-7469 or boxoffice@markham.ca. $15-$60.


Thursday April 7

8:00: Tafelmusik. Tafelmusik Meets Dvořák. Dvořák: Serenade for Strings; Farrenc: Nonet (the composer); Dvořák: Serenade for Strings; Farrenc: Nonet (the pianist). Magic Flute Academy. 3:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Rachmaninoff’s Second. See Apr 4.

Friday April 8

2:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Pulcinella; Stravinsky: Pulcinella Suite; Hindemith: Kammermusik No.2 Op.38 No.1. JU Jun Li Bui, piano; Kristian Alexander, conductor. Cornell Recital Hall, 3201 Bur Oak Ave., Markham, 905-604-8339 or ksochicago.ca. $20-$30. LIVE OR RECORDED.

Cathedral Bluffs Symphony Orchestra
Martin MacDonald, music director

Saturday April 9, 2022 at 8 pm
P.C. Ho Theatre
Glenn Buhr Akasha (Sky)
Holst The Planets with Voices Chamber Choir
Mahler Songs of a Wayfarer
with soloist Danielle MacMillan mezzo soprano
Winner of the 2019 CBSO Clifford Poole Vocal Competition

Tickets: $30 adult $25 student/senior (children under 12 are free)

Subscribe Today & Save!
cathedralbluffs.com | 416.879.5566


Sunday April 3, 3pm
Trinity St. Paul’s Center, 427 Bloor St. W.
Questions? Contact admin@trioarkel.com
https://trioarkel.eventbrite.ca

Légende
harp and string quartet by Caplet and String Quartet by Ravel

With guest artists
Heidi Elise Bearcroft, harp
Emily Kruspe, violin

Sunday April 3, 3pm
Trinity St. Paul’s Center, 427 Bloor St. W.
Questions? Contact admin@trioarkel.com
https://trioarkel.eventbrite.ca

ESPRIT LIVE 2022! Act 1
April 3 at Koerner Hall
espiritorchestra.com

Sunday April 3


8:00: Esprit Orchestra. Esprit Live 2022! Act 1. Alexina Louie: The Void; River of Stars; Christopher Goddard: Piano Concerto; Andrew Norman: Sustain. Christopher Goddard: Piano Concerto; Andrew Norman: Sustain.

Goddard (the pianist) performs Goddard (the composer)

70 Brunswick St., Stratford. www.innerchamber.ca or tickets@innerchamber.ca. $40-$125 (arts workers/st). Pre-show 6:30pm. A light meal is available for patrons in Stratford. LIVE & LIVESTREAM
Friday April 8

- 8:00: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Ehnes Plays Beethoven. See Apr 6.

Saturday April 9

- 7:30: Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Celebrate 100: Maestros’ Special Homecoming. Berlioz: Roman Carnaval Overture; Dellius: The Walk to the Paradise Garden; Wagner: Overture to Tannhäuser; Sibelius: Movement 1 from Lemminkyäärä Op. 22 - Lemminkyäärä ja saaren neider (Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island); Alexina Louie: The Ringing Earth; Smetana: Movement 3 from Má vlast - Sárka; Ravel: Rapsodie espagnole. Gustavo Gimeno, conductor; Peter Oundjian, conductor; Jukka-Pekka Saraste, conductor; Günther Herbig, conductor; Sir Andrew Davis, conductor; Marion Newman, host. Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St. 416-598-3375 or 1-855-598-7769. Starting at $29.

Sunday April 10


- 2:00: VOICEBOX: Opera in Concert. Vanessa, Music by Samuel Barber. Libretto by Gian Carlo Menotti. Simona Genga, mezzo; Lauren Marjison, soprano; Scott Rumble, tenor; Robert Cooper, chorus director; Narminda Mandyova, music director/piano. Jane Mallett Theatre, 43 Lois Lane Centre for the Arts, 27 Front St. E. stlc.com and 416-366-7723 or 1-888-708-6754. Introducing at 2:15pm.

- 8:00: Amici Ensemble. Schubert Octet. Schubert: Sonatensatz in B-flat D80; Rondo Brilliant in B for violin and piano D895; Octet in F D803. Joaquin Valdepeñas, clarinet; Michael Sweeney, bassoon; Neil Deland, horn; Mayumi Seiler, violin; Katya Poplyansky, violin; Alejandro Valdepeñas, viola; David Hetherington, cello; and Serouj Kradjian, piano. Performing Arts Sunday Series: André Laplante in Recital. André Laplante, piano. Koerner Hall, TELUS Centre, 27 Front St. E. amiciensemble.com. $50; $40(st/youth); $25(adult ticket plus $50 donation).

Fauré & Durufle
Requiem
April 15, Guelph
April 16, St. Catharines

Both concerts at 4:00pm

theedisonsingers.com

July 30: Music at Met. Behold, He Carried Our Sorrows: Bach and Buxtehude for Good Friday. Bach: Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn (You True God and Son of David), Cantata No.23 BWV23; St. John Passion (selections); and other works. Choir, soloists and orchestra; Dr. Patricia Wright, conductor. Metropolitan United Church (Toronto), 56 Queen St. E. metunited.ca/live. $15-$25. Live & Streamed.

July 30: Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. Sacred. 7:30:

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir

APRIL 15

All-Night Vigil: Dett: Don’t You Weep No More, Mary; Dett: Go Not Far From Me, O God; Robinson (arr.): Steal Away; Hailstork: Crucifixion. Toronto Mendelssohn Choir; Nathaniel Dett Chorale. Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, 1585 Yonge St. 416-408-8744 or boxoffice@markham.ca. $15-$50.

APRIL 16

April 16(St. Catharines).

Music for a Sacred Space. Rachmaninoff: All-Night Vigil for a Sacred Space. 7:30:

Music at Met

Sunday, April 17, 8:00pm.

BEHOLD, HE CARRIED OUR SORROWS

FRIDAY APRIL 15, 7:30PM

Bach: Cantata #23 St. John Passion (Selections) Buxtehude: Fürwahr

Festival Choir, Soloists & Orchestra Recognizing Dr. Patricia Wright Conductor & Minister of Music

LIVESTREAM/IN-PERSON metunited.ca/music
In the mid-to-late 2000s, this music was John Scofield’s A Go Go; Joshua Redman’s Elastic and Momentum; the Brecker Brothers’ Heavy Metal Be-Bop; D’Angelo’s Voodoo; Robert Glasper’s In My Element; and countless others. In Toronto, it was also Rudder. Their song SK8, from their debut album, was one of the first songs shared with me by a classmate in a listening session in 2007, during my first year in the University of Toronto’s jazz program; it was the kind of exploratory, improvisatory, groove-based music that spoke equally to my interests in swing and backbeat-based music. I don’t think that I made it to their December show at The Rex that year. But – now that the border is open, bands are touring and the prospect of spending an evening in an enclosed space with a roomful of other people is no longer the bone-chilling prospect that it so recently was – I’ll be at one of their shows this year.

And for the Rudderless

There is, of course, a lot of other excellent music happening in Toronto in March, both at The Rex and elsewhere. At Jazz Bistro, Montreal-based alto saxophonist Remi Bolduc appears on March 17 and 18, with Kirk MacDonald on tenor, Brian Dickinson on piano, Neil Swainson on bass and Terry Clarke on drums. Bolduc is one of Canada’s preeminent authorities on bebop-saxophone playing. (A faculty member at McGill, he is also a sought-after educator, and a voracious transcriber; his YouTube page contains approximately 400 transcriptions of Charlie Parker solos, as well as more modern saxophonists such as Jerry Bergonzi, Chris Potter and Rudresh Mahanthappa, pianists such as Herbie Hancock, and his own live performances. On March 31, Speak No Evil takes the stage, with Virginia MacDonald on clarinet, Mike Murley on tenor sax, Bernie Senensky on piano, Morgan Childs on drums and Swainson returning on bass. Speak No Evil, of course, is the classic Wayne Shorter album, released in 1964, with late-bop classics like Witch Hunt, Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum, and the famous title track.

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.
For those of you who may be new to The WholeNote, or as a reminder to long-time readers, we have a wealth of information online that doesn’t get printed in the magazine. Our Who’s Who section at thewholenote.com is where you’ll find detailed profiles of music presenters (the Blue Pages), choirs (the Canary Pages), Summer Music Education, and Summer Music Festivals (the Green Pages). These directories are open for submissions on an ongoing basis, and are updated regularly as new submissions arrive.

At this time, as we start to make plans for musical activities over the summer months, whether for ourselves, our children, or the entire family, we’d like to welcome some “early bird” submissions to our summer months, whether for ourselves, our children, or the entire family.

You can read full profiles at thewholenote.com under our Who’s Who directory. We’ll be taking this down soon, as the 2022 directory continues to grow.

For more information on how to join our Summer Music Education directory, Summer Festivals, or other directories, please contact Karen at karen@thewholenote.com

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If you can read this, thank a music teacher.
The iconic American composer George Crumb died peacefully at home with his family on February 6. He was 92. Of the many world-renowned composers I had the privilege to meet during my two-decade tenure at New Music Concerts, Crumb was among the most affable, knowledgeable and accomplished. In 2003 he spent most of a week working with NMC musicians, accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, son Peter and daughter Ann, who was the soloist in our Canadian premiere performance of Unto the Hills. It was a magical week and one that remains a cherished memory. Crumb had a long relationship with NMC and on a previous visit in 1986 he supervised the first performance of An Idyll for the Misbegotten, performed by its dedicatee Robert Aitken and three percussionists. You can find NMC’s recording of that work among others on George Crumb (Naxos American Classics 8.559205 naxodirect.com/search/8559205). In a tribute published by NMC, Aitken says “The music of George Crumb has the quality of an elixir, which keeps drawing you back through intricacies in time to a world you feel you know and look forward to enjoying but as many times as you have experienced it, the slightest change takes you to a different place, somewhere you have never been before and never thought of, but will never forget.” I said something similar in a July 2020 review of Metamorphoses Book I: “There are many references to Crumb’s earlier compositions and in many ways these new works sound familiar. One sometimes wonders ‘Why does Grandpa keep telling the same stories?’ but listen carefully; you’ll find vast new worlds buried within them.”

In December Bridge Records released Volume 20 in their ongoing series devoted to Crumb’s complete works (BRIDGE 9551). Metamorphoses Books I & II features a remastering of Book I (2015-2017) and the first recording of Book II (2018-2020) performed by Marcantonio Barone, to whom the second book is dedicated. Subtitled Fantasy Pieces (after celebrated paintings) for amplified piano, each of the 20 depicts a different painting by such artists as Picasso, Chagall, Dali and Gauguin. In the excellent and extended booklet notes by Crumb scholar Steven Bruns we learn that “Rather than aiming for precise musical analogs, Crumb responds to the ethos, the characteristic tone of the painting, and often to the title as well. The music explores a dazzling expressive range, and Crumb positions the movements in each Book with the mastery of an expert gallery curator.” You can read my impressions of those in the first book here: thewholenote.com/index.php/booksrecords2/editorscorner/30201-editor-s-corner-july-2020. Book II opens with two paintings by Paul Klee and includes others by Andrew Wyeth, Simon Dinnerstein, Gustav Klimt, Georgia O’Keeffe and the abovementioned Gauguin, Picasso and Chagall. The set ends with a stunning and ethereal interpretation of van Gogh’s The Starry Night.

As always with amplification in Crumb’s pieces, the purpose is not to produce loud effects, although there are a few jarring interpolations, but rather to make the most subtle effects audible. The pianist is required to venture inside the piano to pluck and strum and dampen strings, use fists and other implements, vocalize and employ a variety of small instruments to expand the solo piano into a real orchestra of timbres. Barone worked extensively with Crumb for two decades and his understanding of the sensibility, and his command of the techniques required, and often invented, by the composer makes this recording definitive. Bridge Records here provides an exhilarating tribute and important addition to the recorded legacy of this master composer. The Complete George Crumb Edition now numbers 21 CDs and one DVD and is currently available at a special price ($US190) from the Bridge Records website (bridgeercords.com).

The oratorio Am I Born by David T. Little with libretto by Royce Vavrek (Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0152 brightshiny.ninja) is another spectacular work that finds its inspiration and context in a painting. The painting in question is Francis Guy’s 1820 Winter Scenes in Brooklyn, depicting a neighbourhood destroyed for the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. Originally composed in 2011 for the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Am I Born was the first collaboration between Little and Vavrek, who went on to great success with the operas Dog Days and JFK. This SATB version of the oratorio was commissioned by Trinity Church Wall Street where it premiered in 2019. Opening with big bass drums blazing and full fortissimo chorus reminiscent of Carmina Burana, the listener is captivated immediately. Throughout its half-hour duration the drama does not let up, although there are moments of respite along the way and beautiful soprano solos by Melissa Hughes before the haunting denouement. The libretto draws on Ananias Davison’s 1816 hymn Idumeu with its lyric...
“And am I born to die? / To lay this body down! / And must my trembling spirit fly / Into a world unknown?” The solo soprano personifies Guy’s painting, which hangs in the Brooklyn Museum. She gradually draws consciousness and understanding from the crowds of spectators passing by each day, until, urged on by the chorus, she is “born” out of the frame and enters a confusing and lonely present-day reality. At that point, the philosophical speculation “am I born to die?” is modified to the much more pressing and immediate: “am I born?” Hughes and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street are accompanied in this powerful performance by the NOVUS NY orchestra, all under the direction of Julian Wachner.

Like George Crumb, Sofia Gubaidulina (b.1931) has shown no signs of slowing down creatively in her later years. To honour her 90th birthday Deutsche Grammophon has released a disc of world premiere recordings of two recent works and the earlier The Light of the End, written in 2003 for the Boston Symphony (deutschegrammophon.com/en/catalogue/products/gubaidulina-nelsons-repin-12472). Andris Nelsons conducts the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig for which Gubaidulina has served as composer-in-residence since 2019. The last-mentioned work is based on a fundamental conflict that characterizes the physics of music, namely, the irreconcilability between the natural overtone series, played here by the horns, and the tempered tuning of the rest of the orchestra. This conflict leads to a series of dramatic crescendos and climaxes and is illustrated to exemplary effect in a duet between solo horn and solo cello.

The disc opens with Dialog: Ich und Du (Dialogue: I and You // Violin Concerto No.3). It was written for Vadim Repin in 2018, and he is the soloist here. This and the companion piece The Wrath of God are extrapolated from Gubaidulina’s oratorio On Love and Hatred (2016–2018), which constitutes her appeal to humankind to follow God’s commandments and to overcome hatred through the conciliatory power of love. The title of the violin concerto deliberately recalls religious philosopher Martin Buber’s Ich und Du (I and Thou) which describes the world as “dichotomous,” contrasting two things that are opposed or entirely different, here represented by a conversation, often interrupted, between the solo violin and the orchestra. The Wrath of God is a shimmering depiction of the Day of Judgement, or Dies Irae, for enormous orchestral forces. “God is wrathful, He’s angry with people and with our behaviour. We’ve brought this down on ourselves,” the composer explained in the preamble to the first performance in an empty Vienna Musikverein in November 2020, a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Gubaidulina has dedicated the piece “To the Great Beethoven” and we can hear hints of the Ninth Symphony peeking through in the dramatic finale.

Speaking of Beethoven, following on their recording of his complete works for cello and piano, Yo-Yo Ma has once again teamed up with Emanuel Ax, this time with violinist Leonidas Kakavos. on Beethoven for Three – Symphonies Nos. 2 & 5 (Sony Classical yoyoma.link.to/SymphoniesNos2and5). The arrangements are by Ferdinand Ries, under Beethoven’s supervision (No.2), and the contemporary British composer Colin Matthews (No.3).

It must be a daunting task to adapt the full resources of a symphony orchestra to just three players, even if we concede that the pianist’s two hands can render separate independent lines. Still we must realize that in Beethoven’s day arrangements were the norm, and in many instances the only opportunity to experience great works of orchestral repertoire. Recordings were still a hundred years in the future and orchestral concerts beyond the reach of most people. I am pleased to report in this instance both of the arrangements are convincing and satisfying. On the one hand I am amazed at how the trio is able to convey the musical scope and range of emotion of these familiar orchestral masterworks. On the other, I was intrigued to realize how reminiscent some of the movements were, especially the scherzo of the second symphony, of Beethoven’s early actual piano trios. I suppose that’s not really a coincidence.

Satisfying as I found this recording, likely another result of COVID-imposed restrictions, I must confess it inspired me to revisit the cycle of nine symphonies in all their orchestral majesty, and for this I chose Simon Rattle’s live set from 2000 with the Vienna Philharmonic (EMI Classics). So thanks to Kavako, Ma and Ax for an inspirational and illuminating experience, and for an excuse to look up some old friends.

Founded 20 years ago, the Claremont Trio (Emily Bruskin, violin; Julia Bruskin, cello; and Andrea Lam, piano) has been commissioning works for much of its existence that expand the repertoire and in some instances push the traditional boundaries of the contemporary piano trio. Queen of Hearts (Tria Records amazon.com/Queen-Hearts–Claremont-Trio dp B09RQDVRV7) brings six of these works together with compositions by Gabriela Lena Frank, Frank, Sean Shepherd, Judd Greenstein, Hine Grime, Nico Muhly and Kati Agócs. Frank’s Four Folk Songs draws on her Peruvian heritage on her mother’s side for a set that ranges from lyrical to playful and to frankly disturbing. Shepherd’s Trio was commissioned for the opening of Calderwood Hall in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. It was inspired by the architecture of Renzo Piano and the three movements consider different aspects of the construction. Most compelling is the finale, Slow Waltz of the Robots.

Muhly’s Common Ground (2008) and Agócs’ Queen of Hearts (2017) mark the earliest and latest works on this compelling CD. Muhly’s title refers to the ground bass a la Purcell that appears in the final section of the work. Agócs also employs a repeating bass line, in this case alternating with a lyrical melody. She tells us that “A life fully lived may see challenges that can seem insurmountable. The work’s variation structure, by representing tenaciousness and ingenuity – continuously finding new ways to respond – ultimately reveals an inner strength and an emotional core that hold steadfast and unshaken no matter how they are tested. The title Queen of Hearts […] symbolizes resilience, magnetism, nobility, empathy, decorum, a flair for the dramatic, and a distinctly feminine power.” This piece makes a powerful end to a diverse disc with fine performances right across the board.

I spoke earlier about musical works inspired by paintings. I have experienced two artistic epiphanies in my life, one visual and one aural. The first was on a family trip to Washington in my teenage years when I turned a corner in the National Gallery and came face to face with Salvador Dalí’s The Sacrament of the Last Supper. I gasped and said to myself “Oh, that’s what they mean by a masterpiece!” The second was in 1984 when I attended the CBC Young Composers’ Competition and had the most visceral musical experience of my first 30 years. Paul Dolden’s The Melting Voice Through Mazes Running, which won the top prize in the electroacoustic category that year, was unlike anything I’d ever heard before. Although it sent some audience members rushing to the exits with hands pressed over their ears, it held me riveted to my seat and ultimately inspired me to commission a new Dolden work (Caught in an Octagon of Unaccustomed Light) for my radio program Transfigured Night at CKLN-FM. Now, some three and a half decades later, Dolden has published his entire catalogue of works and writings and I’m very pleased that Nick Storring has agreed to review The Golden Dolden Box Set in these pages. Storring is a composer in his own right, a generation younger than Dolden, who uses some similar techniques in his own work. I believe his insights are extremely apt and articulately expressed and I welcome him aboard the WholeNote team.

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
In 1988 Canadian electroacoustic composer Paul Dolden (b.1956) started creating *Below The Walls of Jericho* – the first instalment of a three-part series that invoked the biblical story of Jericho, whose walls crumbled from the sheer power of sound. Though a number of Dolden’s earlier pieces – notably *Vells* (1984–5) – also employed multi-layered swirls of studio-recorded acoustic instrumentation, this was his first work to display an explicit preoccupation with sonic excess. Many of Dolden’s ensuing pieces also exhibit varying degrees of fascination with loudness, density, and velocity – enough for detractors to label his music, brazen or over-the-top.

It might therefore seem fitting that his latest offering occupies a similarly massive scope. *Golden Dolden*, is a career-spanning digital compendium featuring ten hours of music (including seven unreleased works), 34 scores, six hours’ of lectures, and a generous serving of text. The virtual box-set’s reverse-chronological avalanche may indeed be overwhelming, but immersing oneself in it reveals the depth of Dolden’s vibrant, utterly singular vision.

Even at its most claustrophobic (such as on the aforementioned *Jericho* series) his music’s prevailing drive seems more inquisitive than destructive. The composer’s liner notes may be dismissive of his early catalogue’s underlying nihilism or postmodern posturing, but the swirling microtonal maelstroms are always projected through a radiant sheen of awe and wonder.

Various philosophical inputs have motivated Dolden’s practice over the years – modernist innovation, then postmodern’s fusion and fragmentation, even his own peculiar brand of romanticism. Yet despite outward shifts in conceptual approach, Dolden’s work finds unity in its unquenchable and downright contagious curiosity about what music can do.

The foundational reality of his pieces is the “anything-is-possible” frame provided by recorded music as a medium. Within it, he deploys the tactility of acoustic instruments in imaginary ensemble settings, the scales of which are sufficiently gargantuan to obscure their instrumental make-up. This allows him to craft outlandishly colourful, but decidedly organic sonorities, while forging strange and unexpected connections between disparate musical realms. His meticulous superimposition of multiple temporal strata and tuning systems is equally deft. It’s a paradigm-busting approach that situates him in the lineage of Charles Ives’ orchestral collages and Conlon Nancarrow’s whimsical automation, alongside the late Noah Creshevsky’s “hyperrealism.”

Studio composition *L’ivresse de la vitesse* (1992–3) – once Dolden’s calling card – is almost cartoonish in its wayward juxtapositions of material. Maniacal cascades of endless choir magically dissolve into big-band bedlam as filaments of free-jazz skronk explode into time-smeared rock ‘n’ roll. Its vivid conjuring of various genres may tie it superficially to postmodernism, but its formal fluidity, giddy potency and conspicuous lack of irony steers its panoply of references somewhere unfamiliar.

According to Dolden, *Entropic Twilights* (1998–2000) refutes the notion that “the postmodern world is drained of substance, meaning, value and difference,” occupying a buoyant soundworld where unabashed prettiness wraps itself around precarious hair-pin turns. The shimmering 36-minute suite slithers between sonic spaces that variously resemble psychedelic orchestral music, agitated new age, jazz fusion and even metal. Yet these dramatic textural transformations never feel at all contrived. Where other composers have employed such adjacencies for their perverse humour, Dolden’s approach is almost stranger. It’s audible that these relationships exist on a profoundly visceral and sincere level for him.

In one of his essays, Dolden explains that “as a creator who learned from recordings and books, I could not afford to establish borders for acceptable musical behaviour.” His immersion in DIY experimentation since his teens is clearly one of the biggest determining factors behind his unorthodox sensibility. Though uncommon amongst peers of his own age, this trait aligns him with younger composers whose creative journeys began with recording technology.

The theme of transcendence runs throughout Dolden’s output but has become more central within the past two decades. He’s harvested musical data from the natural world, his long-standing respect for many global traditions has preserved it from external logic. March 4 – April 15, 2022 | 39
TERRY ROBBINS

Quatuor Sagenay (formerly Quatuor Alcan) celebrates its 33rd anniversary this year, and while three of the members have been together for almost 30 years, the new CD Mendelssohn – Ravel – Sollima is the first recording with first violinist Marie Bégin (ATMA ACD2 2846 atmaclassique.com/en).

The ensemble says that Bégin brings freshness and a colour to the project that particularly suits the two major works on the CD, Mendelssohn’s String Quartet in E Minor, Op.44 No.2 and the Ravel String Quintet in F Major. Certainly the former is bursting with life and the latter full of shimmering warmth in lovely performances.

Federico II, the first movement from Italian composer Giovanni Sollima’s Viaggio in Italia closes the disc. Written in 2000, its percussive rhythms and bursting energy provide a perfect finale.

The Montreal classical guitarist Jasmin Lacasse Roy recorded, mixed and produced his self-issued CD Météores (fanlink.to/metéores), an album he describes as “an ecstatic homage to a neighbourhood that deeply inspires me with its laid-back atmosphere imbued with artistic energy – Montreal’s Mile End district.” The title comes from his desire to have each piece “shine like a meteor.”

The ten short pieces are not literal depictions of scenes or events, but impressions (Roy wanted an album that “sounds like an impressionist painting”), and they're terrific, displaying great imagination, technical skill and virtuosity. The whimsical titles include Cast iron rhapsody, Impétuositeration, The nostalgic chronicles of count Rachmanula, Mile End Winter and Midnight disco lounge.

Roy can write great melodies and hooks as well as challenging tours de force, all of it beautifully recorded in a delightful CD.

On Sylvius Leopold Weiss Baroque Lute Works the Canadian guitarist Alan Rinehart plays selections from the Moscow and London manuscripts, transcribed by him from original tablature for 11 or 13 course lute (Ravello Records RR8056 ravellorecords.com/catalog/rr8056).

Rinehart feels that Weiss’ lute music was overshadowed by keyboard music, especially that of his direct contemporary J.S. Bach, and consequently under appreciated, and the recital here certainly supports that view. The three major works, all with five to seven dance movements, are the Partita in A Minor, the Partita in G Major and the Suite in D Major. An Allegro in E Minor, a Fantasia, the Tombeau sur la mort de M’Comte de Logy, a Gallanterie and a Minuet & Trio complete the disc.

“Travelling bass lines, intricate melodies, and pleasant harmony,” say the booklet notes. Add clean, stylish playing and you have a top-level CD.

Montreal guitarist Pascal Valois continues his exploration of the guitar during the Romantic era with his new CD Vienna 1840 – Romantic Viennese Music (Analekta AN 2 9197 analekta.com/en).

Valois employs period-appropriate ornamentation, stylistic practices and improvisation in his playing, and for this recording aimed to rediscover the expressive mannerisms widely used in the German Romantic period.

Two of the Six Preludes Op.16 from 1840 by Emilia Giuliani-Gaglilemi – the daughter of Mauro Giuliani – open the disc. The Hungarian guitar virtuoso Johann Kaspar Mertz is represented by five selections from his Barden-Klänge Op.13, his Hungarian Fantasy No.1 Op.65 and his arrangement of Schubert’s song Ständchen. Giulio Regondi’s Nocturne Rêverie Op.19, with its demanding tremolo work completes the CD.


Violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann has been recording for four decades, but has never included the Bach solo works. With “great respect for the task at hand” his new CD J.S. Bach Sonatas & Partitas Vol.1 begins to rectify that, and boy, was it ever worth the wait (BIS-2577 bis.se).

The three works here are the Sonata No.2 in A Minor BWV1003, the Partita No.2 in D Minor BWV1004 and the Partita No.3 in E Major BWV1006, and the performances are simply outstanding. Zimmermann is faultless technically, with never a hint of anything less than supreme control and artistry. There’s great clarity of line through the multiple-stopping, added ornamentation in the slow movement repeats and an intelligent approach to tempos.

A spacious, resonant recording ambience adds to a superb release.

The outstanding American violinist Elena Urioste and her English pianist husband Tom Poster follow their superb Jukebox Album release with From Brighton to Brooklyn, another CD overflowing with absolute gems and sumptuous playing that explores composer connections (sometimes somewhat tenuous) with the two cities from their respective countries (Chandos CHAN 20248 naxosdirect.com/items/from-brighton-to-brooklyn-572573).

Paul Schoenfeld’s terrific Four Souvenirs opens the disc with a bang. Three lovely short pieces – Cradle Song, Romance and Heart’s Ease – by Frank Bridge, who was born in Brighton and conducted in New York – are here, as are the Three Pieces from Suite Op.6 by his student Benjamin Britten, who was president of the Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra.

Aaron Copland was born in Brooklyn; his Two Pieces date from 1926. Also included are Amy Beach’s Three Compositions Op.40, Coleridge-Taylor’s Ballade in C Minor Op.73 and the absolutely charming – and very Kreisler-ish – Elfenzant by Florence Price.

Once again, this superb duo enchants the listener from start to finish of another gorgeous CD.

Heritage is the debut CD by the young Dominican violinist Aisha Syed Castro, with pianist Martin Labazevitch (Divine Arts DDA2522 divineartrecords.com/recording/heritage).

Recorded in England in April, it’s an album of works with primarily American and Latino roots, including Una Primavera para el Mundo by the Dominican composer Rafael Solano in his own arrangement made specifically for this recording. There are three numbers from Bernstein’s West Side Story, tangos by Piazzolla (Oblivion), Carlos Gardel (Por Una Cabeza) and Albeniz (España Op.165 No.2), the latter arranged by Kreisler, who also arranged the Granados Spanish Dance No.3 and the Danse Orientale from Rimsk-Korsakov’s Scheherazade. William Grant Still’s Suite for Violin and Piano, Samuel
Coleridge-Taylor’s *Deep River* and Aisha’s *Dance* from Khachaturian’s *Gayaneh* ballet fill out a captivating program that ends with Aisha’s *Prayer*. Labazevitch’s arrangement of traditional hymns built around *Amazing Grace*.

The signing of Castro and the launch of this CD were announced with great fanfare, and it’s easy to hear just why Divine Arts is so excited. She’s clearly a talent to watch.

There are two sets of complete works this month:

Violinist Gil Shaham is joined by reduced forces of the SWR Symphonieorchester under Nicholas McGegan on the 2CD set of *Mozart Violonkonzerte Nr.1–5*, along with the *Adagio In E Major K261* and the *Rondo in C Major K373* (SWR Classic SWR19113 naxosdirect.com/search/SWR19113cde). The concerts were written when Mozart was a full-time violinist at the Salzburg court, the final four in an astonishing six-month period in late 1775.

Shaham, who always has a radiant clarity to his playing, accurately described here as “flawless technique combined with his inimitable warmth and generosity of spirit,” is in superb form. McGegan is an expert in 18th-century style, and together they make wonderful music on a simply outstanding and beautifully recorded set.

Jennifer Kloetzel is the cellist and Robert Koenig the pianist on the 3CD set of *Beethoven: The Conquering Hero, Complete Works for Cello and Piano* (Avie AV2450 avie-records.com/releases).

The five cello sonatas are here, together with the three sets of variations and the *Sonata in F Major for Piano with Horn or Cello, Op.17*. The piano is a 19th-century Blüthner 9-foot grand and the cello a 1901 Camillo Mandelli. There’s a lovely balance in the recording, a clear piano sound that never over-whelms and a warm, rich cello tone.

Kloetzel has been playing the cello sonatas since she was eight years old, so it’s no surprise that we’re in very good hands here. Koenig is an outstanding partner.

The *Armida Quartett* continues its ongoing series of the composer’s complete string quartets with *Mozart String Quartets Vol.4* (Avi Music 8553205 armidaquartett.com). The three-movement *String Quartets No.4 in C Major K157, No.6 in B-flat Major K519* and *No.7 in E-flat Major K160*, written in 1773 during a journey to Italy are paired with the *String Quartet No.19 in C Major K465 “Dissonance”* from 1785, a work foreshadowed by the traces of dissonance in the three earlier quartets by the 17-year-old Mozart.

The Armida Quartett has been collaborating with G. Henle Verlag on their Urtext edition of Mozart’s string quartets, and their study of the manuscript and early edition sources has resulted in stylistically authoritative interpretations and finely detailed performances. The final volume in the series is scheduled for release in April.

The American-based Ukrainian violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv is the soloist on *Piano & Rhapsodies*, with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine under Volodymyr Sirenko (Centaur CRC379 amazon.com/ Poems-Rhapsodies-Solomiya-Ivakhiv/dp/ B09NSYKL93).

They are joined by cellist Sophie Shao in the little-heard but quite charming Saint-Saëns work *La Muse et le poète Op.132* (the publisher’s title, not the composer’s) which began life as a piano trio.

Ivakhiv displays a clear, bright tone and technical assurance in competent readings of Chausson’s *Poème Op.25* and Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark Ascending*, but really excels in the remaining three works on the disc. The simply lovely *American Rhapsody (Romance for Violin and Orchestral)* from 2008 by the American composer Kenneth Fuchs is heard between two works by Ukrainian composers: the 1962 *Poem in D Minor for Violin and Orchestra* by Anatol Kos-Anatolovsky (1909-83); and the *Carpathian Rhapsody* from 2004 by Myroslav Skoryk (1938-2020).


Berkeley lived in Paris from 1926 to 1932, studying with Nadia Boulanger and Ravel and counting Poulenc among his musical friends. Only one of his works here – the *Violin Sonata No.1* – was written during that time, the *Sonatina* dating from 1942 and the *Elegy and Toccata Op.33 Nos. 2 & 3* from 1950.

Bach’s playing seems quite tentative, not being helped by an over-prominent piano balance, and one can’t help feeling that these are works deserving of far more colourful and insightful performances.

The French pieces fare much better. There’s a lovely touch in the Boulanger pieces – *Nocturne, Cortège and D’un matin du printemps* – a sweet tone and nice feel to the middle movement of the Poulenc...
Sonata, and some assured playing in the Heifetz transcriptions of Poulenc’s ‘Mouvements perpétuels’ and Presto in B-flat Major.

Restless Nation – The Music of Andy Teirstein features works that were inspired by world music traditions (Navona NV6397 navonarecords.com/catalog_nv6397).

The Cassatt String Quartet performs the title work, its impressions of a year-long family expedition evoking “the fierce energy” of American fiddling.

On Secrets of the North, the Mivos String Quartet is joined by Marco Ambrosini on the nyckelharpa, the traditional Swedish keyed fiddle, in a work that incorporates elements inherent in Swedish folk music.

Azazme Songs, Suite for String Quartet, Oud and Dulcimer was composed after a four-day trek with Azazme Bedouins across the Aravah desert. They are not direct transcriptions but rather impressions gleaned, the dulcimer representing the sound of the Bedouin sumsumia, a strummed psaltery-type instrument. The Mivos String Quartet performs again, with the composer playing dulcimer and Yair Dala on the oud.

Teirstein plays a brief harmonica solo to open Letter From Woody with the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra under Jiří Petříček. Inspired by one of the letters that Woody Guthrie wrote to his future wife, it “draws on traditional American folk string bowings and energies.”

VOCAL

Messiah
Karina Gauvin; Ensemble Caprice; Ensemble Vocal Arts-Québec; Matthias Maute
Leaf Music LM247 (leaf-music.ca)

▶ Canadian soprano Karina Gauvin, German-born Matthias Maute and the ensembles he conducts, Ensemble Caprice and Ensemble Vocal Arts-Québec, present a new recording with highlights from Handel’s Messiah.

Although it would be easy to dismiss the recording as “another Messiah,” this interpretation is a unique and valuable contribution to the large number of recorded offerings of Messiah. Dictated by COVID restrictions in place at the time of recording, the chorus includes only 12 voices. Although, unlike the large choruses of contemporary times, this reading does somewhat align with musico-logical research that estimates the original performances of Messiah comprised only 16 men and/or 16 boy choristers. More controversial for Messiah and Baroque music purists are the many chorus sections with notable faster tempi than what modern ears are used to as well as unusual and sometimes chopped phrasing as in the opening of the “Hallelujah” chorus.

Artistic choices notwithstanding, this Messiah offers an intimate experience that never feels underpowered because of its smaller effective. Both ensembles offer solid musicianship and musicality; Gauvin, renowned for her performances of Baroque repertoire, is at ease and delivers her usual abilities with elegance, depth and conviction.

The album also offers two new choral works Hope and Belief by Jaap Nico Hamburger on a text from Polish Jewish writer Isaac Leib Peretz (1852-1915) and O Magnum Mysterium by conductor Maute based on the sacred Latin text of the same name. Both works featured prominently in the Mini-Concerts Santé, a Maute initiative that provided uplifting concerts to thousands during the 2020 lockdown.

Amata Dalle Tenebre
Anna Netrebko; Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala; Riccardo Chailly
Deutsche Grammophon B0034484-02 (deutschegrammophon.com)

▶ The great soprano, Anna Netrebko, is the epitome of the larger-than-life opera star; a diva who ought to be credited with perpetuating the mysterious appeal of the genre. She has the prodigious gift not only of reaching extraordinarily high notes – her high C is sung with electrifying charisma – but she also grasps the roles she brings to life with a tragic grandeur. There can also be no doubt that she is Riccardo Chailly’s operatic muse. The repertoire on Amata Dalle Tenebre certainly suggests that she has been so anointed – literally and figuratively – with the ink-black heartbreak of these arias.

Netrebko can easily lay claim to being the diva assoluta of our time. The disc is kicked off by the dark honeyed voicing of Richard Strauss’ ‘Es Gibt ein Reich, mouliding the lyric from Ariadne auf Naxos as if with molten lava. Then she proceeds to unveil – from her palpitation heart – the elemental ache of her very being with her touching evocations of Verdi’s ‘Aida. Puccini’s ‘Madama Butterfly’ and ‘Manon Lescaut. Netrebko’s Dido from Purcell’s ‘Dido and Aeneas’ is a deeply cathartic evocation of grief.

Her Wagner is perfectly judged. Both arias: Dich, Teure Halle (Tannhäuser’s ‘Elisabeth’ and Einsam in Tränen Tagen (Lohengrin’s ‘Elis’ are shaped in majesty and eloquence, transcending the pitch blackness of operatic emotions. Her Cléa is gorgeous, but the apogee of the disc is Tchaikovsky’s ‘Pique Dame’ in which Netrebko plays Lisa with unbuttoned authority and anguished poetic brilliance.

Henze – Nachtstücke und Arien; Los Caprichos; Englische Liebeslieder
Narek Hakhnazaryan; Juliane Banse; Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien; Marin Alsop
Naxos 8574181 (naxosdirect.com/search/747313418176)

▶ Right from the start of Hans Werner Henze’s long and productive career, performers and audiences have connected viscerally with his music – some of the most lyrical, complex, passionate, committed, literate, uncompromising, provocative, confrontational and powerful of its time.

Today, ten years after his death, it speaks to us just as directly as ever.

The works on this recording were never among Henze’s best-known pieces, compelling though all three are. The one I find most moving is Englische Liebeslieder. This collection of love songs is based on poems by Shakespeare, the Earl of Rochester, Joyce and Graves. But the texts are never actually heard. Instead, they are interpreted by a solo cello.

With cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan’s open-hearted lyricism, and the responsiveness of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony under chief conductor Marin Alsop, the effect is uncannily intimate – and utterly ravishing.

In Nachtstücke und Arien, the arias are sung, to exquisite poems by Ingeborg Bachmann. But here the three dreamy instrumental movements work better than the two wistful arias. soprano Juliane Banse captures the essential theatricality of Henze’s style. But her shrillness and pronounced vibrato dampen the mystery and magic for me.

Los Caprichos transports us to the world of foolishness and folly depicted in Goya’s series of 80 etchings of the same name. Under Alsop’s insightful direction the orchestra...
captures Henze’s brilliant characterizations, shapely phrases and delightfully clear textures, making this a disc well worth seeking out.

_Pamela Margles_

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Sasha Cooke; Kirill Kuzmin

Pentatone PTC 5186961 (pentatonemusic.com/product/how-do-i-find-you)

> American mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke is a two-time Grammy Award winner. Her most recent album, _how do I find you_, features songs composed by numerous living American composers (Missy Mazzoli, Rene Orth, Frances Pollock, Hilary Purrington, Kamala Sankaram and Caroline Shaw) and written by many living American and Canadian poets and lyricists (Liza Balkan, Mark Campbell, David Henry Hwang and Colleen Murphy).

_The repertoire offered crosses musical genres and eras, from classical Baroque songs from the 17th century to the modern contemporary and jazzy sounds of the 21st. The songs showcase themes of nature that have fascinated numerous composers, from Handel, Gluck and Mysliveček to Mahler, Ives and Copland. Eden also includes a world premiere recording of _The First Morning of the World_ by Rachel Portman and Gene Scheer, commissioned for the album._

DiDonato is a well-established versatile singer and little can be added to praise the quality of her voice, her technique, her creativity and her artistry, all equally displayed on Eden. Perhaps most notable is the care in curation which results in a cohesive product offering both vocal and instrumental works efficiently across the boundaries of musical genres and eras.

DiDonato’s partners, Ensemble Il Pomo d’Oro and the conductor Maxim Emelyanychev, are historical performance practice specialists and this is reflected throughout the album. Gluck’s instrumental piece _Danza degli spettri e delle furie_ is especially delightful.

_Sophie Bisson_

**Concert note:** The release of _Eden_ will be followed by a 45-city global tour that includes a Toronto stop at Koerner Hall on April 19.

**From Rags to Riches – 100 Years of American Song**

Stephanie Blythe; William Burden; Steven Blier

NYFOS Records n/a (nyfos.org)

> This debut album from the New York Festival of Song’s new in-house label NYFOS Records features mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe and tenor William Burden accompanied on piano by NYFOS artistic director/co-founder Steven Blier, who also arranged some of the songs. It is taken from a March 2000 live concert recording at Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College in New York celebrating 20th-century American songs including art song, musical theatre, jazz and opera.

The opening track has happy, energetic Blythe solo vocals in a dance-along rendition of Joplin’s _Pineapple Rag_, arranged by Blier. Blier’s arrangement of Cook’s vaudeville _My Lady Frog_ is amazing, with opening piano leaping frog line, Burden’s musical singing to higher tenor closing pitches and closing ragtime piano riff. Bernstein’s Broadway song _Wrong Note Rag_ provides a fun change of pace with piano “wrong note chords” hilarious under the vocalist. Nice to hear a more classical piece in the mix here with Samuel Barber’s _Nocturne_ for tenor and piano. Other songs include works by Gershwin, Monk, Weill, Rodgers, Sondheim and Bolcom.

What we’re listening to this month:  thewholenote.com/listening
The 17 songs comprise a comprehensive, stylistically wide-ranging overview of American songs composed in the last century. Blythe and Burden both sing with clear pitch, articulation and musicality in all the diverse styles. Blier’s rock-solid technique, musicality, accompanying and humour is amazing. His styles. Blier’s rock-solid technique, musicality, articulation and musicality in all the diverse styles. Blier’s rock-solid technique, musicality, articulation and musicality in all the diverse styles. Blier’s rock-solid technique, musicality, articulation and musicality in all the diverse styles. Blier’s rock-solid technique, musicality, articulation and musicality in all the diverse styles.

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That her warmth and depth of feeling also come out in her playing, not as an imposed emotionality but rather as a kind of transparency, through which the message of the music assigned to the flutist can be felt. This is true not only of the slow movements, the sublime Adagio of the D-Major Quartet or the Andante of the G Major, but also, for example, of the brilliant Allegro first movement of the D Major, where Slocum’s effortless virtuosity serves to convey an intensity of feeling no less than that of the slow movements.

This recording, however, also raises the question: are these quartets flute solos with string trio accompaniment or string quartets with the first violin part given to the flutist? Unfortunately whoever mastered the recording chose the former, consistently putting the flute in the foreground and the strings in the background. As an example, in measures 26 and 27 of the G-Major Andante movement the flute and the cello have a brief duet in contrary motion, in which the flute dominates and the cello is in the background, when the sound from both instruments should be equal.

So while Slocum’s playing is exemplary, the production values of the album do not, in my opinion, do justice to these wonderful works.

Michael Schwartz

The Breathtaking does not begin to describe Tristano’s talents. After his own highly spirited Toccata we are treated to his version of a John Bull Galliard which combines the pianist’s exceptional skills with the taxing sequences one associates with Bull. Other tracks are as complex; what is more, it is difficult to remember that we are listening to a pianist when so much of this CD sounds as if it is being played on a harpsichord.

Then there are the slower pieces, notably the surprisingly restrained Arla la folia and Pavan. Tristano also has a keen interest in the works of Orlando Gibbons, selecting four pieces, each with its own stately Elizabethan character. Above all, there is the longest track on the CD, Girolamo Frescobaldi’s Cento partite sopra passacaglia, with an intensity highly appropriate for Tristano’s vigorous technique.

Which leaves us with Tristano’s surely unique pieces. Ritornello offers no respite to its composer/player, what with its inspiring opening and ever more intense later rhythms. Neither does the breathless CIAcona seconda. It is a brave pianist who would seek to emulate him.

Standing ovations have graced many of Tristano’s performances. This reviewer adds one virtually.

Andrew Scott

One of the few silver linings to arise out of this incessant pandemic has been the boundless, world-class music events made available (often for free) for livestreaming on a variety of platforms. Taking advantage of as many of these musical offerings as my Zoomed-out brain has allowed, one day last October I spent a few sublime hours on YouTube watching the livestream of the 2021 Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. I was enthralled, in particular, by Bruce Liu, who in fact, went on to become the first Canadian to win the prestigious competition!

Shortly thereafter, Deutsche Grammophon (DG) released this CD featuring live highlights of Liu’s solo performances from the competition’s various rounds. According to Liu, DG chose the playlist: the entire round one recital of two Etudes (Op.10 No.4; Op.25 No.4), a Nocturne (Op.27 No.1) and the fourth Scherzo; the Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise Brillante, and a Waltz (Op.32) from the second round; the Op.33 Mazurkas and the Variations on “La ci darem la mano” from round three.

Tiina Kilk

On Early Music
Francesco Tristano
Sony Classical G0100045979848
(sonyclassical.com/releases/releases-details/on-early-music)

> “Recording these quartets was a dream we had as students at Curtis over 12 years ago...” writes flutist Sonora Slocum in her program notes. So it is no surprise that her warmth and depth of feeling also come out in her playing, not as an imposed emotionality but rather as a kind of transparency, through which the message of the music assigned to the flutist can be felt. This is true not only of the slow movements, the sublime Adagio of the D-Major Quartet or the Andante of the G Major, but also, for example, of the brilliant Allegro first movement of the D Major, where Slocum’s effortlessness serves to convey an intensity of feeling no less than that of the slow movements.

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Allan Pulker

Paris 1847 – La Musique d’Eugène Jancourt
Mathieu Lussier; Camille Roy-Paquette; Sylvain Bergeron; Valérie Milot
ATMA ACD2 2834 (atmaclassique.com/en)

> Most classical music enthusiasts know that Johann Sebastian Bach was, during his lifetime, better known as a church organist and music educator than as the composer of some of the finest and most canonical pieces of Western Art Music. While the classical world has Felix Mendelssohn to thank for not only contributing his own fine work to the aforementioned canon, but for his rediscovery of Bach’s music. The circuitous path that at least some of Bach’s pieces took from dashed-off manuscript sketchings for the pedagogical purposes of instructing his many students, to sacrosanct artifacts of musical genius, says as much about what society values, collects and ordains as symbols of high culture, as it does of Bach’s considerable genius.

Simply put, beauty and musical inspiration abound in exercise and method books, as well as in etudes composed for didactic and instructive purposes. And that is certainly the case here on this fine ATMA recording by Mathieu Lussier, Camille Roy-Paquette, Sylvain Bergeron and Valérie Milot. Collectively, they mine the beautiful repertoire of Eugène Jancourt, a 19th-century French bassoonist and educator, much of which originated in his 1847 method book. While Lussier, who remains a central figure in promulgating the solo bassoon as a concertizing instrument, acknowledges that this recording “may be of interest to anyone wishing to learn more about historically informed wind playing in the 19th century,” Paris 1847 is no archival recording or historical exercise. Rather the pieces, presented here as the first recording entirely devoted to Jancourt’s music, leaps from the speakers with energy, effervescence and a joie de vivre, capturing this unique and beautiful music from such an intriguing place and time in music history.

Andrew Scott

Chopin
Bruce Liu (Winner of the 2021 Chopin Competition)

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Michael Schwartz

Mozart – Flute Quartets
Sonora Slocum; Joel Link; Milena Pajarova-de-Stadt; Brook Speltz
Acis APL98573 (acisproductions.com)
Rather than parse out bits and pieces from those performances, I wish to say this about Bruce Liu: the to-be-expected and breath-taking technical prowess aside, what sets Liu apart from the others is his risk-taking spontaneity. His interpretations are revelatory; his joy in playing, palpable. He is a sparkling, elegant and original virtuoso. A true sensation!

Bruce Liu will continue to enchant a worldwide audience. This keepsake CD will continue to remind us why.

Sharna Searle

Clara Robert Johannes – Lyrical Echoes

Adrienne Pieczonka; Liz Upchurch;
Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra;
Alexander Shelley

Analekta AN 2 8880-1 (analekta.com/en)

Is it by accident that the lead-in to the album title Lyrical Echoes begins with the name of Clara Schumann – ahead of her more celebrated peers, husband Robert and Johannes Brahms? Even if the avowed aim of the proposed four-part series is to show how “closely intertwined personal and artistic connections between the three musical giants” were, I prefer to think it as poetic justice.

Clara Schumann (nee Wieck) was one of the world’s leading pianists of her day, admired by Goethe, Mendelssohn, Paganini and others. As a young woman she was known for her inclination to melancholy. She was proclaimed wundermädchen by the Emperor of Austria and praised by Liszt for her “complete technical mastery, depth and sincerity of feeling.”

Indeed her songs here highlight the ravishing daintiness and poetic feeling of her work. Her skilful use of rhythm, harmony and pianistic colours raises these miniatures to the divine, with the lustrous soprano Adrienne Pieczonka and masterful pianist Liz Upchurch performing them with such a whispered intimacy that you feel almost like an eavesdropper throughout.

Robert Schumann was a genius in his own right, albeit feeling himself a failure throughout his life. The Symphony No.2 is the darkest work he ever wrote. In each section of this poetic work the National Arts Centre Orchestra soars under Alexander Shelley. The orchestra’s Brahms Symphony No.2 is refined and lustrous, capturing the composer’s epic vision as Shelley maintains its flow and noble grandeur.

Raul da Gama

ARC I: Granados; Janáček; Scriabin

Orion Weiss

First Hand Records FHR127 (firsthandrecords.com)

American pianist Orion Weiss delivers a powerful musical statement with his new album, ARC I: Granados, Janáček, Scriabin. Please note that I am using the term album, rather than recording. This is purposeful. Without generalizing, or hopefully sounding overly pedantic, much of what exists in both classical (and jazz) discographies are recordings; a sound capture of what, essentially, is a live musical event documented in such a way as to preserve and remember a concertizing moment in time. An album, conversely, has, at the very least, an extra musical purpose to it, cognizant of track order, narrative arc and overall presentation.

What Weiss has created, by connecting music written by Enrique Granados, Leoš Janáček and Alexander Scriabin (historically congruent, but stylistically and nationally disparate composers), through their zeitgeist-appropriate shared aesthetic of writing bleak, self-referential and globally aware music shortly before the world plunged into a devastating and worldwide war, is creative, programmatic and most definitely, album worthy.

As the first of three recordings in a projected ARC trilogy, Weiss here finds the commonalities of modernism, despair and haunting beauty that unites Granados’ Goyescas, Janáček’s In the Mists and Scriabin’s Piano Sonata No. 9 “Black Mass,” mining historically prescient meaning from these pieces, as our world watches what seems likely to be an impending Russian invasion of Ukraine. Weiss’ album is beautifully played, captured with sonic elegance and presents an erie programmatic message in musical form of what creatively was in the air between 1911 and 1913. The world should listen. Not only for the beauty of this recording, but for the message therein.

Andrew Scott

Bruckner – Symphony No.2 in C Minor

Wiener Philharmoniker; Christian Thielemann

Sony Classical G010004595494F (naxosdirect.com/search/19439914122)

Bruckner is not everybody’s cup of tea. Some worship him and some outright despise him. And he is so easy to ridicule. He was a country bumpkin, a peasant. The funny story goes that he even gave a thaler to Hans Richter, his conductor, as a reward to buy himself a beer. His reputation was also hampered by the British critics calling his symphonies “boa constrictors” and so he had difficulties gaining acceptance in England or North America. Today however,
his reputation has never been higher. His symphonies are a step-by-step progression towards an ultimate goal and the last three are works of genius. Due to the COVID pandemic all concert activities were stopped so Christian Thielemann, onetime assistant to Karajan, famous as general music director of the Bayreuth Festival and principal conductor of the Dresden Staatskapelle, decided to record all nine of Bruckner’s symphonies in a leisurely manner with plenty of time now being available. The Vienna Philharmonic was the obvious choice, since it was they who had premiered those works, and in the Musikvereinssaal with its legendary acoustics. This recording is part of that series.

After the turbulent, sturm und drang First Symphony, the Second is entirely different. It is notable as the first time Bruckner opens with a tremolo on the high strings pianissimo, which has been described as a “primeval mist” that Thielemann renders nearly inaudibly. From this tremolo a sinuous cello theme emerges which returns in many guises throughout as a leitmotiv: Another new idea is the so-called “Bruckner rhythm” of two beats followed by three that appears here for the first time.

Thielemann takes a relaxed approach, a slower tempo than some, so all the details come out beautifully and the climaxes are shattering.

Janos Gardonyi

Debussy Orchestration
Pascal Rophé; Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire
BIS BIS-2622 (naxosdirect.com/search/bis-2622)

Who better than a French orchestra – in this case, the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire conducted by Pascal Rophé – to pay homage to the music of Claude Debussy in this delightful recording on the BIS label? Two of the works here – the Petite Suite and the Children’s Corner Suite – were originally composed for piano and later orchestrated by Henri Büsser while the ballet scenario La Boîte à joujoux (The Toy-Box) existed only in a piano version at the time of Debussy’s death in 1918, but was later orchestrated by his friend André Caplet. The four-movement Petite Suite from 1899 was inspired by the “fêtes galantes” paintings of Watteau and Fragonard as portrayed in poems by Paul Verlaine. The suite may have originated from a request for music that would appeal to skilled amateurs, and its simplistic and affable style stands in contrast to the more progressive music Debussy was creating at the time.

Debussy adored his young daughter “Chou-Chou” and she was undoubtedly the inspiration for the ballet-scenario La Boîte à joujoux devised by writer André Helle. The plot in this highly descriptive six-movement score revolves around three principle characters, and in the end, love triumphs over adversity. It was for Chou-Chou that Debussy composed the Children’s Corner Suite in 1908. More than 100 years later, the music continues to charm, with movements such as Serenade for the Doll, Jimbo’s Lullaby and The Snow is Dancing, a poignant and wistful glimpse of childhood in a more innocent age. Throughout, the ONPL delivers a polished and elegant performance, at all times thoughtfully nuanced. This is a fine recording of some familiar (and less-than-familiar) repertoire – Debussy, and quite probably Chou-Chou as well – would have heartily approved!

Richard Haskell

Prokofiev, Gershon – Piano Sonatas Vol.1
David Jaubert
ATMA ACD2 2461 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Sergei Prokofiev began his career as a concert pianist, so perhaps it’s not surprising that music for piano would comprise such an important part of his output. Undoubtedly his finest keyboard writing is to be found in the

Michael Schulman

Uncovered Volume 2 – Florence B. Price
Catalyst Quartet
Azica (catalystquartet.com/uncovered)

It is a proverbial travesty that we are “discovering” the work of an important Black composer – such as Florence B. Price – almost a hundred years after her career began. And that too, even as the music continuum has now been propelled into the 21st century. After all, it’s no secret that over three hundred years ago the it was a celebrated Black English violinist, George Bridgetower who, in 1803, performed Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No.9 in A Minor (Op.47) much to the composer’s delight.

Happily, Azica Records has taken action again with the Grammy Award-winning Catalyst Quartet’s Uncovered Vol.2, featuring Price’s stellar chamber works. A measure of how remarkable a recording this is is heard not only on Price’s re-invention of Negro Spirituals – such as Go Down Moses – in her elegant chamber works, Negro Folksongs in Counterpoint and Negro Folksongs for String Quartet. Even more remarkable is that five of these works are world premieres on this album that includes the Quartets and Quintets for Piano and Strings, which carry the heft of this recording.

The Catalyst penetrates the skins of these melodies and harmonies with deep passion and uncommon eloquence. The nobility of this music is quite beyond reproach. Each piece seems to speak to the musicians like a secret revealed from the heart. The Negro Folksongs in Counterpoint are bittersweet and often even exhilarating. This is a delicate, perfectly weighted performance by the Catalyst; a recording to die for.

Raul da Gama

Prokofiev – Piano Sonatas Vol.1
David Jaubert
ATMA ACD2 2461 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Schulhoff, Erwin – String Quartets
Quartet Berlin-Tokyo
ATMA ACD2 2461 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Catalyst; a recording to die for.
nine piano sonatas composed between 1907 and 1953, four of which are presented on this ATMA recording with pianist David Jalbert. A graduate of the Conservatoire de musique du Québec, the Glenn Gould School and the Juilliard School, Jalbert is currently head of the piano department at the University of Ottawa.

The brief Sonata Op.1 in F Minor from 1907 went through numerous revisions and is very much steeped in the late-Romantic tradition. From the outset, Jalbert demonstrates keen understanding of this daunting repertoire tempered by a flawless technique.

While the first sonata has roots in the 19th century, the second from 1914 is clearly a product of the 20th, with its biting dissonance and angular melodies. Very much the music of a young composer finding his own voice, the work embodies a spirit of buoyant enthusiasm. The single-movement Sonata No.3 completed in 1917 contains a variety of contrasting moods all within a seven-minute timeframe.

Jalbert admits his partiality towards the Fourth Sonata, Op.29, also finished in 1917. Again, the work is a study in contrasts, from the restrained and darkly introspective first movement to the exuberant finale, which Jalbert performs with great panache.

An added bonus is the inclusion of four miniatures, the Marche, the Gavotte and the Prelude from the set Op.12 and the Suggestion diaboliqque from Op.4, which further enhance an already satisfying program. This is a stellar performance of engaging repertoire and we look forward to future additions in this series. Richard Haskell

**Memory in Motion; Percussion in Surround (Xenakis, Mâche; lanza; Tan)**

**Percussion Ensemble; Aiyun Huang**

Mode Records mode325 DVD (moderecords.com)

- Renowned percussion virtuoso Aiyun Huang and the Memory in Motion Ensemble release a recording project representing Huang’s recent research into how percussionists memorize musical actions within ensembles. The album begins with François-Bernard Mâche’s goosebump-inducing Aera. This work undulates with a welcomed anxiousness that brings warmth and beauty amid its numerous menacing arrivals. Glowing microbe moths envelop and serrated swarms cascade upward – all working harmoniously toward Promethean attempts at an apogee.

- alcidès lanza’s sensor VI is an excited wild ride with an unrelenting hornet’s nest of activity. Here, the performers are able to place their incredible virtuosity on display. Sorîtes, one of two commissions for the project (and meant as a companion piece to Xenakis’ Persephassa – a work that appears later on the album), is a dusty scratchy expanse composed by Zihua Tan. Emerging from the haze is the occasional clarity of ringing bells – much like ephemeral shimmering grains flickering in brilliance but for a moment in a sunbeam strewn across a room. Next, lanza’s mnaís mnemes is the murmuration of starlings beyond which storm clouds signal their approach: the endopening of rumbling light in the distance.

- Lastly, the Ensemble’s interpretation of Xenakis’ Persephassa – a masterpiece of percussion repertoire – is outstanding and worth the price of admission alone. It is always a question for performers how to phrase contemporary music outside of what is taught when performing works of the common practice. The Ensemble brings a staggering interpretive quality that will surely propel this recording of Xenakis’ well-known work into definitive territory. The culmination of breathtaking musicianship and powerful performance mastery makes this album a must listen.

Adam Scime

**Marimba Collage – Open Score Works by Jordan Nobles**

**Nicholas Papador; University of Windsor Percussion Ensemble**

Redshift Records TK 512 (redshiftrecords.org)

- The music of Jordan Nobles draws you in from the first note – one immediately feels invited into an expanse that is gentle in its complexity. This Redshift recording represents the culmination of a longstanding collaboration between Nobles, percussionist Nicholas Papador and the University of Windsor School of Creative Arts where the composer’s Open Score Works for marimbas have been regularly programmed. As with many projects in the pandemic, this recording was achieved through each musician capturing their performance remotely, later to be multitacked for the finished album.

- Nobles’ Open Score Works are indeterminate in their structure leaving many performance attributes – such as number of musicians, combinations of instruments, pitch, and duration – to be determined by the performers themselves. The result is a series of haunting intermixtures where the

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**What we’re listening to this month:** [thewholenote.com/listening](http://thewholenote.com/listening)

- **Love for Connoisseurs**: Angela Verbrugge

  Something new for vocal jazz connoisseurs... Angela’s playful, original lyrics for catchy melodies written by modern-day jazz artists in the style of classic jazz.

- **JAZZLAB**

  LOGUSLABUSMUZIKUS JAZZLAB ORCHESTRA

  JAZZLAB ORCHESTRA based in Montreal is a multigenerational ensemble composed of 8 leaders - their new album LOGUSLABUSMUZIKUS - It’s beautiful, it’s big, it’s wonderful.

- **Home Suite Home**: Fraser Jackson & Monique de Margerie

  Short, beautiful pieces for bassoon and piano inspired by front porch concerts given during the Covid lockdown. Includes contrabassoon, even a bit of violin, cello and clarinet.

- **Dai Fujikura: Koto Concerto**

  Koto Concerto - Dai Fujikura’s new work for Japanese traditional instrument and orchestra
marimba gladly offers its deepest resonant brilliance. Throughout the 12 works on the recording the listener passes through a series of enchanting moods that shift like sand storms, as seen from miles above, that are somehow at once violently gripped across the landscape and also frozen in time. Works like Still Life, aether, Stasis and Nocturne paint sonic geomorphologies that propagate amid shimmering ephemera while works like Quickening, Ostinati and Kinetics rely on charming rhythmic interplay.

It is clear through listening to this release that Nobles’ Open Score Works are a pleasure to perform. The unmistakable gratification inherent in this recording only adds to what Nobles continues to offer through his music: a gift.

Adam Scime

Harrison Birtwistle – Chamber Works
Adrian Brendel; Melinda Maxwell; Nash Ensemble; Lawrence Power; Richard Benjfield
BIS BIS-2561 (bis.se)

▶ This album of Sir Harrison Birtwistle’s recent chamber works is released by the virtuosic Nash Ensemble. The exceptional performances by the world-class musicians are delivered with impressive bravura – a necessary quality when attempting to successfully interpret the highly challenging music of the British composer.

The Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano is richly complex and contains a great deal of cerebral expressionism throughout the single movement. The unrelenting prickly gestures in this trio are answered with sombre lyricism in the strings, only to be interrupted with towering pianistic dissonances. The 20-minute Duet for Eight Strings (scored for viola and cello – each instrument having four strings combining to eight) is decidedly more romantic in expression as compared to the powerhouse trio heard before it. The rich and sonorous colours in this piece are wonderfully at odds with the unexpected suspended atmosphere heard throughout. Written in 1981 and later revised in 2018, Pulse Sampler, for oboe and percussion, is a raucous display of oboe firewalls above bombastic hits and jabs on various drums and wood blocks. This thrilling music is remarkably challenging for the oboe and Richard Benjfield delivers a stunning performance of unbelievable virtuosity and clarity of tone. Lastly, the Oboe Quartet, for oboe, violin, viola and cello, is a scintillating ride in four movements where each player engages in clever interplay. For those familiar with Birtwistle’s music, this release won’t disappoint as the inventive neo-modernist approach is ever-present and performed expertly by the ensemble.

Adam Scime

Max Andrzejewski – Mythos
Berlin Ensemble; Max Andrzejewski
Backwash Music (backwashmusic.net)

▶ German drummer and composer Max Andrzejewski’s work takes up stylistic residence somewhere in between the freedom of jazz, energy of experimental rock and historically informed European classical music. His four-movement Mythos bears the earmarks of these multivalent stands of musical DNA, effectively interpreted by the 12-member Berliner Ensemble.

The liner notes give us insight into the work’s origin story, boldly proclaiming that “the piece is born out of Max’s violent interaction with Richard Wagner’s infamous Ring Cycle […] built on German myth.” The resulting work “deals with the artistic remains of a much heralded prophet of classical music the way it maybe should be dealt with: scrap it and leave it for parts.”

While few contest the ambition and grandeur of Wagner’s hefty four-opera cycle, or overlook his hateful personal anti-Semitism, how exactly does Andrzejewski repurpose this music? The notes claim he cite some (melodic) leitmotifs from the four overtures as a point of departure in Mythos, though it also imagines that, “even the most devoted Wagner connoisseur would have trouble picking out any trace of the original overtures.” I agree. Andrzejewski returns from his stealth mission having extracted thematic elements from his predecessor’s scores in order to recast them for his ensemble to render anew.

Moreover, with musicians hired from classical and jazz worlds Andrzejewski’s 21st-century group seamlessly integrates other worlds and electronics. It inhabits a completely different world from Wagner’s 19th-century orchestral aesthetic. And for listeners today that’s a good thing.

Andrew Timar

Illumination – Piano Works of Victoria Bond
Paul Barnes; Philharmony Bohuslav Martinů
Albany Records TROY1880 (albanyrecords.com)

▶ Veteran American conductor Victoria Bond (b.1945) is also very active as a composer. Her melodic inventiveness and dramatic flair are perhaps the most notable features of both her instrumental and operatic scores. On Illumination Bond shares her compositional spotlight with her collaborator, the concert pianist Paul Barnes. He has one of the most unusual doubles for a concert pianist I’ve ever heard: he is also a very credible singer of Byzantine chant. And he shows that vocal talent to good effect on the concluding four concise tracks, accompanied by a male chorus.

The album begins with Bond’s three-movement Illuminations on Byzantine Chant for solo piano (2021), an extended piano meditation on three contrasting Byzantine liturgical chants. It’s followed by two piano concertos – Black Light (1997) and Ancient Keys (2002) – the program bookended by Barnes’ idiomatically convincing rendering of the aforementioned Byzantine chants.

The composer writes that the title “Black
Light implies the light that shines from African America music, which has had a profound effect on my compositions. The first movement contrasts a driving, aggressive orchestra with a playful, jaunty response in the piano. "The slow soul-searching second movement was inspired by Jewish liturgical music, while the third by the scat singing of Ella Fitzgerald set in a combination of orchestral variation and rondo forms. Featuring the Philharmonie Bohuslav Martinu and Barnes’ rhythmically and dynamically inclusive solo piano, this is my favourite music on the album.

Andrew Timar

Melia Watras – String Masks
Various Artists
Planet M Records PMR003
(planetmrecords.com)

▶ American composer and virtuoso violist Melia Watras’ latest album String Masks primarily features her sensitive playing and several string instrument-centred compositions – with a brief detour to a delicate unaccompanied song with Icelandic lyrics. The dramatic exception is the 23-minute title track which also includes singers, actors and instruments invented by the iconoclastic American composer and music theorist Harry Partch (1901-1974), by far the longest and most complex work here.

String Masks opens with Watras’ Kreutzer for string trio, explicitly eliciting Beethoven’s well-known sonata for violin and piano of the same name, as well as borrowing from Janáček’s String Quartet No.1. Michael Jinsoo Lim (violin), Watras (viola) and Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir (cello) perform the four-movement score with restrained eloquence and passion.

Watras has been captivated by the Partch Instrumentarium ever since she served at University of Washington, where Watras serves as professor of viola. She includes three of them in String Masks, the narrative-based work in which she echoes Partch’s manner of using his microtonal instruments to reflect the cadences and phrases of human speech, and to set an idiosyncratic mood. She effectively uses Partch’s Harmonic Canon (44-string zither with microtonal tunings), Bass Marimba (with organ-pipe resonators) and Cloud-Chamber Bowls (12 large hung glass carboys) in addition to violin, viola and voices.

The composer writes that the “otherworldly sounds of Partch’s inventions” are used to set the aural stage for a “fantastical vision of an underworld inhabited by string-playing legendary musicians” from the past. Read by three actors, each is evoked in the text, the narrative forming the metaphorical backbone of the aptly titled String Masks.

Andrew Timar

Andy Akiho – Seven Pillars
Sandbox Percussion
Aki Rhythm Productions (andyakiho.com)

▶ Critically acclaimed new music composer Andy Akiho has created a captivating and powerful commission for the Sandbox Percussion quartet in the form of Seven Pillars, the collaboration a labour of love between friends spanning eight years.

Written as a multimedia chamber work, even without the intended video presentation included, the music is mesmerizing from the instant it opens. The complexity of the work belies the relative simplicity of the acoustic percussion tools at hand: bottles, glockenspiels, drums, wood blocks, metal pipes, sandpaper, marimbas, kick drum. Akiho takes full advantage of the skill and inventiveness of the individual performers by dedicating solo tracks to each, so that he can explore the nuances and textures of the simple objects. It is in the delivery that the writing takes flight. The remaining seven movements are for the full quartet, showing off not only the compositions but the slick performance and tight comradeship of the group.

Akiho and Sandbox Percussion commissioned 11 video artists to create original films for Seven Pillars – one film for each movement of the work – however the hard copy of the CD makes no mention of this. It does however include a complex insert, a complicated paper cutout designed almost as a stage setting in lieu of the visual films. These took some studying, slowly revealing explanations of the form of each movement in relation to the work as a whole, and spelling out the instruments used ("brake drum" for instance). But the cards can’t quite replace the brilliance of the collaborative videos that encompass the worlds of dance, animation, experimental narrative film, time-lapse and more. They are also a lot more fun, as you can see here: youtube.com/watch?v=EXHORW6xOQ.

Cheryl Ockrant

Dana Lynn – A Point On a Slow Curve
Instrumental Ensemble
In A Circle Records
(inacircle-records.com/releases)

▶ It took eight years for experimental visual artist Jay DeFeo to complete her mixed media painting The Rose in the 60s. The Rose is over ten feet high and weighs more than one ton. It is this impressively textured and radiant work that drew American composer and violinist Dana Lynn to start her own eight-year compositional journey. The result is A Point on a Slow Curve, a nine-movement sonic poem paralleling the creation of The Rose.

Scored for female choir, violin, clarinet, cello, bassoon, vibraphone, bass and drums, A Point on a Slow Curve is experimental in nature, sometimes wild and chaotic, sometimes angelic. The improvisatory sections are tightly connected with contrapuntal writing, depicting the long process of artistic creation. In each movement, Lynn matches the textures of the painting beautifully. She creates endless interconnected lines but somehow the work remains austere and symmetrical in its expression. It is precisely this combination of chaos and uniformity that reflects the scale of The Rose. As the painting illuminates everything from its centre, so does Lyn’s music.

That is especially obvious in three movements depicting major drafts of the work in progress – Death Rose, White Rose and, finally, The Rose.

The ensemble playing is exemplary and it includes the composer herself on violin. Lyn’s unconventional music really benefits from the musicians’ improvisational skills, as well as from their imagination.

Ivana Popovic

Maija Einfelde – Violin Sonatas
Magdalēna Geka; Iveta Cālīte
LMIC SKANI 129 (skani.lv)

▶ Every now and then there is an album that is simply captivating, the music so powerful that one feels the need to go back to it over and over again. This particular album of sonatas by senior Latvian composer Maija Einfelde (including world premiere recordings of the third sonata and a solo work) had that special effect on me. The three sonatas for violin and piano and one for solo violin were written over the span of the last 20 years of the 20th century. They do not feature any exuberant contemporary violin techniques (though the imitation of the clay bird whistle sounds in the second sonata is delightful) but rather share some similarity with the musical language of Messiaen.

What they do feature is an abundance of darkness, shades of deep sonority, profoundness of the life lived and an encompassing artistry.

This music is supremely focused, there is no note that is unnecessarily placed, and maintaining this sort of conceptual intensity requires both fortitude and heart from the performers. Violinist Magdalēna Geka and pianist Ieva Calīte have both. These two powerhouses delve deeply into the music of Einfelde, as if their lives depend on it. Geka’s tone is so resonant, so intense and clear (especially in the high register), that one feels its reverberations in the body. What is most
impressive is that both artists found a way to add another dimension to Einfeld’s music – joyful, triumphant moments between the waves of darkness. And this is the way that magic happens.

Ivana Popovic

Shostakovich – Symphony No.7
London Symphony Orchestra; Gianandrea Noseda
LSO Live (Isoline.iso.co.uk)

► As I remember, this symphony was performed in Toronto in the 1980s, Gunther Herbig conducting, and I was there and cherish the memory. Today, however, in the 21st century it comes to us in state-of-the-art high resolution technology, live and conducted by a one-time frequent visitor to Toronto, Gianandrea Noseda. His career is currently sky high and this projected complete series of Shostakovich symphonies is very promising.

The Seventh and the Eighth are the so-called War symphonies written during the Second World War. Symphony No.7 was written in 1941 during the Siege of Leningrad where the composer lived and suffered through the starvation, unable to escape. The score was microfilmed, smuggled out to America, conducted by Toscanini and became an international sensation.

Briefly, the symphony begins optimistically on a high note on the strings and the winds with astringent, unusual harmonies. What follows is the most important part of the symphony, a steady crescendo of a single theme repeated endlessly from nearly inaudible ppp step by step, layer upon layer. First, strings and flute, adding bassoon, then full woodwinds, the entire string section and finally the brass culminating in a shattering fortissimo (that could blow your speakers!). This is the so-called war theme with the snare drums beating constantly like soldiers marching. (Ironically the theme is partially lifted from Lehár’s Merry Widow). Peace is restored temporarily in the quiet second movement, followed by a beautiful Adagio third that leads into the Finale without interruption. The ending is magnificent with the brass triumphant, no doubt in reference to the Soviet victory at Stalingrad.

This is a highly inspired, exciting and monumental work heard here in a most worthy performance.

Janos Gardonyi

...and nothing remains the same...
Eight Strings & a Whistle
Ravello rr8061 (ravellorecords.com/catalog/rr8061)

► With the their latest musical salvo, the noted trio Eight Strings and a Whistle has yet again established themselves as one of the most compelling Baroque/classical/Romantic trios on the scene today. Since 1998, this superb, acoustic, international coterie (featuring Suzanne Gilchrist on flute, Ina Litera on viola and Matt Goeke on cello) has collaborated with some of the world’s most significant contemporary chamber music composers and performing artists. Included in this new offering are intriguing, multi-move- ment works, with contributions from Mark Winges, Paul Théberge, Jorge Aramado, Peter Köszeghy, Pamela Sklar and the transcendent John Newell.

First up is Winges’ Loki’s Lair and as the title would suggest, it is a haunting, mystical, mischievous and unpredictable work, to which the spare trio format lends itself magnificently. Litera and Goeke merge into a sinuous dance, punctuated by their dynamic arco and pizzicato skills – almost as if their human bodies had merged with the warm, wooden instruments themselves; and Gilchrist’s stirring flute work is resonant, contextual and a celebration of perfect pitch.

Théberge’s six-movement Maqâmbravely dips into our ancient engrams, seemingly exploring our proto-human awe, reverence and also fear of the natural world. The trio effortlessly bob and weaves through complex modalities on this stunning musical odyssey. Sklar’s Two Journeys is an intimate, soul voyage in two movements: Third Eye and The Inward Journey, both of heartrending beauty, manifested by Gilchrist’s rich flute artistry.

The dissonant and challenging title track was born out of the mind of American contemporary composer Newell, and is a glorious standout on this thought provoking, brilliantly conceived and thrillingly performed recording.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

Marģeris Zariņš – Orchestral Works
Ieva Pārsā; Aigars Reinis; Kremerata Baltica; Andris Veismanis
LMTC SKANI 128 (skani.lv)

► While comprising only a small portion of the European geographical landscape, the Baltic countries have contributed a disproportionately significant number of composers whose works are truly remarkable and impactful. Such is the case with Marģeris Zariņš, the 20th-century Latvian composer and author who wrote a wide range of musical material for an equally diverse range of instruments and ensembles.

The two largest-scale works on this disc are both organ concertos, composed for organ and chamber orchestra and augmented with two electric guitars, a jazz percussion set and harpsichord. While the use of such instruments might sound eccentric, the results are undeniably spectacular, successfully blending genres and producing an utterly unique sonic effect.

Both concertos, Concerto Innocente and Concerto Triptichon, cross numerous stylistic boundaries: Innocente begins with a forceful and driving first movement and ends with a playful, carnival-esque finale; Triptichon, although less childlike, is no less energetic, and the first movement’s classical/jazz hybridization is inexplicable through prose – it must be heard to be believed!

While these two concertos form the bulk of this disc’s material, Zariņš’ compositional virtuosity is displayed and reinforced through three additional works: Four Japanese Miniatures, which combine 20th-century Orientalism with atonality to great effect; the Partita in Baroque Style, which is amusingly “Baroque” the same way that Prokofiev’s First Symphony is “Classical”; and Carmina Antica, which takes ancient themes, both musical and topical, and reveals them in a modernized vernacular.

From electric guitars and jazz to atonality, Zariņš wrote it all, and there really is something here for everyone. But even the most ingenious music cannot exist without interpreters, and Zariņš’ works receive expert treatment from the renowned international orchestra Kremerata Baltica, their conductor Andris Veismanis and soloists Ieva Pārsā and Aigars Reinis.

Matthew Whitfield

Descended
Maria Finkelmeier; Jean Laurenz; Greg Jukes; Buzz Kemper
Bright Shiny Things BSTD-0157 (brightshiny.ninja)

► A suite of pieces that features blended electronics, vocals, acoustic percussion and trumpet, Descended is a project that warrants close listening. It’s not an easy collection to categorize. Jean Laurenz covers trumpet, vocals and percussion; Maria Finkelmeier, the composer, performs percussion and vocals as well. Laurenz is the great niece of Lafcadio Hearn, a 19th-century writer whose work explored Japanese culture, particularly ghost stories.
and mystical terror. The music is upbeat, yet distinctly scary. There’s a pop aesthetic to the beat-y sections, and the folk idiom I associate with Onibaba, a Japanese horror film. Sometimes cool and occasionally extremely hot, the collection shows a broad swath of influences.

Much of the disc features percussion, alongside spoken, wailing, or sung vocals (Yoko Ono in the recent Beatles documentary comes to mind more than once). Laurens’ trumpet playing is melodic and assured, as heard on several tracks: Orbs of Ghostliness (muted, in a beautiful duet with Greg Lukes on accordion), and Mirror in Matsuyama, another duet with Finkelmeier on marimba. Mujina’s Arrival hops along on a drum kit, marimba and various electronic synthesized beats. A female voice (sorceress, hag?) croons and croaks. Deep basso readings by Buzz Kemper on tracks three and six deeply the creepifying.

The title might refer to Laurens’ relationship (grandniece) to Hearn whose texts show up on three of the tracks. Her own texts are featured in two other tracks, Mujina’s Arrival and the Caribbean-infused Moon Song, whose childlike character (simple strophic and the Caribbean-infused) featured in two other tracks, Mujina’s Arrival and another duet with Finkelmeier on marimba. Her own texts are creepifying.

These first three tracks are followed by five more. Sweetly keening, Cradle links with Artifact in a way reminiscent of the first two tracks, although Artifact is much shorter; in turn it segues directly into the pop-happy Rally. Solo is, oddly a work for several voices, but perhaps it’s about the loneliness of facing certain existential truths. Not to be a downer, but the final haunting track is called Done Deal.

Max Christie

Sean Friar – Before and After
NOW Ensemble
New Amsterdam (newamrecords.com)

Maybe all art has ever been able to offer is solace. NOW Ensemble’s newest release, Before and After, is the compositional work of Sean Friar. His big ideas concern the rise and fall of human civilization, the tininess of our individual lives, perhaps the meaninglessness of it all? And yet, here are these beautifully crafted pieces that we can immerse our ears into and forget – or release – our grief.

Tracks one and two run together: Chant establishing a kind of jangling consonance, and Frontier fracturing it before subsiding into unison resignation. Spread repeats a manic cadential figure plucked on electric guitar? or inside the piano?: an ostinato that underlies the spread of melodic efforts to find a home.

This extemporary description is in keeping with the creative impetus of the work. Developed from improvised fragments, Friar sent his ideas as sketches to the performers in 2017; they each fleshed them out and over the intervening period performed various versions. The process culminated in this recording, made pre-pandemic (lest anyone think Spread is a reference to COVID).

Jānis Ivanovs – Symphonies 15 & 16
Latvian National Symphony Orchestra; Guntis Kuzma
LMIC SKANI 126 (skani.lv)

I’d never heard any of the 21 symphonies by Latvian composer Jānis Ivanovs (1906–1983) before listening to the two on this CD, each lasting about half an hour, both filled with dark sonorities, propulsive energy and clamorous dissonances.

Violence and disaster dominate Ivanovs’ Symphony No.15 in B-flat Minor (1972), subtitled “Symphonia Ipsa.” In the opening Moderato, quiet, tentative apprehension is suddenly shattered by brutal explosions. Heated struggle ensues in the Molto allegro’s agitated, snarling rhythms and desperate pleading. The grim, mournful Molto andante (Adagio) conjures, for me, a desolate battle-field strewn with bodies; brief, snide, sardonic phrases seemingly comment on the absurd futility of the preceding bloodshed. Nevertheless, martial mayhem returns in the Moderato. Allegro with cacophonous fanfares and pounding percussion before the symphony ends in a slow, ghostly procession.

Restless, fluctuating moods pervade Ivanovs’ Symphony No.16 in E-flat Major (1974), perhaps memorializing the victims of No.15. In the Moderato. Allegro moderato, gloomy, throbbing despair, sinister foreboding and dissonant shrieks are intermittently relieved by unexpected, hymn-like concordances and even touches of Sibelius. The Allegro busily churns with mechanized rhythms leading to the distressed Andante. Pesante. Here, dispirited resignation turns into anger and determined resistance until a gentle bassoon solo intones consolation. The Allegro moderato drives relentlessly to a triumphant choral ending, in a simple major chord, the first happy moment on this CD.

Powerful music powerfully performed by conductor Guntis Kuzma and the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra.

Michael Schuman

Gail Kubik – Symphony Concertante
Boston Modern Orchestra Project; Gil Rose
BMOP Sound 1085 (bmop.org)

March 4 – April 15, 2022

Three members of the Little Orchestra Society of New York were pestering conductor Thomas Scherman for solo opportunities, so Scherman commissioned Oklahoma-born Gail Kubik (1914–1984) for a work that would
“kill three birds with one stone.” Using his trademark mix of Stravinskian neo-classicism, Coplandesque Americana, Hollywood and jazz, Kubik drew from his 1949 score for C-Man, a crime-caper B-movie, for the 1952 Pulitzer Prize-winning Symphony Concertante for Trumpet, Viola, Piano and Orchestra. The brightly orchestrated first movement is filled with fragmented melodies and snappy syncopations. In the middle movement, uncomfortably shifting tonal centres reinforce the viola and muted trumpet’s long-lined desperation over thumping piano chords. A jazzy rondo features the solo instruments taking turns in the spotlight before the work ends with a raucous orchestral blast.

Gerald McBoing Boing (1950), based on Dr. Seuss’ story about a boy who “couldn’t speak but made noises instead,” won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short. Unusually, Kubik composed his 13-minute, percussion-heavy score before the visuals were created to fit the music and narration, here provided by Frank Kelley.

Both Kubik’s five-movement, 15-minute Divertimento No.1 (1949), scored for 13 players, and his six-movement, ten-minute Divertimento No.2 (1958), requiring only eight players, are predominantly perky, with movements including Humoresque, Burlesque, Dance Toccata and Scherzino (Puppet Show), Seascape (in No.1) and Dialogue (in No.2) offer some pleasing breathing space. It’s all persuasively performed by conductor Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. Entertaining throughout!

Michael Schulman

Slatkin conducts Slatkin
Various Artists and Orchestras; Leonard Slatkin
Naxos 8574352 (naxosdirect.com/search/8574352)

“Not many know that I have been active as a composer,” writes Leonard Slatkin, who here conducts three of his orchestral works. Slatkin’s 13-minute Kinah (2015) pays tribute to his distinguished parents, violinist Felix Slatkin and cellist Eleanor Aller. In 1963, two days after they had rehearsed Brahms’ Double Concerto, Felix suddenly died. Kinah (Hebrew for elegy) features metallic chiming and a noble, long-lined string melody, ending with hushed, haunting, incomplete phrases from Brahms’ concerto. In this recording of its world premiere, Leonard’s brother Fred plays the solo part on their mother’s cello.

Slatkin says that his 12-minute Endgames (2014) “celebrates the unsung instruments of the orchestra whose players sit at the far ends of the woodwind section.” Scored for piccolo, alto flute, English horn, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabassoon and strings, it includes a cheerful, vigorous dance and a sweetly serene middle section, finishing with familiar quotations for each solo instrument, guaranteeing smiles of recognition from the audience. In the 26-minute The Raven (1971), atmospheric, cinematic background music accompanies Alec Baldwin’s recitation of five poems by Edgar Allan Poe.

This CD includes In Fields (2018), a nostalgic four-minute piece by Leonard’s son Daniel b1994, archival recordings of Felix playing arrangements of Brahms, Dvořák and Bizet, and a soundtrack excerpt from the 1946 film Deception, in which Aller, who premiered Korngold’s Cello Concerto, plays a bit of Haydn’s Cello Concerto in D Major, with Korngold conducting his newly composed cadenza for it.

Michael Schulman

Matthew Schreibeis – Sandburg Songs
Tony Arnold; Various Artists
Albany Records TROY1856 (albanyrecords.com)

Hong Kong-based American composer Matthew Schreibeis’ elegantly urbane music seems eminently suited to capturing the pastoral imagery of Carl Sandburg’s poetry, which forms the second half (or so) of the repertory of this album, Sandburg Songs.

Schreibeis’ voice is unique. His songs appear to come from a pen dipped in the ink of Erik Satie and Alfred Schnittke. However, being his authentic self in all of this music, Schreibeis’ notes leap in divergent directions into a mysteriously poignant realm completely of his own creation. He is also stoically authentic to melodic and harmonic flights made in a spectral dimension not unlike Gerard Grisey.

The composer’s sound world seems to unfold in a series of moist landscapes that dissolve one into the other. His conceptions are extraordinarily vivid though, and he can conjure the reality of an extremely complex landscape with relatively sparse noted phrases written for the piano or guitar as he does on the piece, Inner Truth and the cycle, They Say.

The considerable range of his compositional palette is revealed twice on this recording. The curtain rises on the clarinet-violin duet, Noticing and on In Search of Planet X, where a piano makes it a trio. Schreibeis’ power is unveiled on the fully orchestrated Sandburg Songs cycle, replete with piano, strings, reeds, woodwinds and percussion from the Zohn Collective conducted by Timothy Weiss. Carl Sandburg’s breathtaking verse soars in the keening soprano of Tony Arnold.

Raul da Gama

Editor’s note: Matthew Schreibeis was originally scheduled for a composer residency at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto in this month but that has been postponed due to the Omicron variant. A new work for violin and vibraphone written for faculty members Mark Fewer and Aiyun Huang is now scheduled to have its premiere at the soundSCAPE Festival in Italy this July (soundscapefestival.org) where Fewer, Huang and Tony Arnold will be among the featured musicians. Schreibeis’ Toronto residency is tentatively planned to take place this fall.

Krisits Auznieks – Coiled Horizon
Auziņš, Ķudars, Arutyunyan Trio; JIJI Guitar; Sinfonietta Riga; Normunds Šnē
LMIC SKANI 091 (skani.lv)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unrest worldwide, with no country handling it the same. Canada has tended to err on the safer side, while the United States has largely thrown caution to the wind. Right in between these approaches, Europe has found a fascinating middle ground when it comes to maintaining arts and culture during turbulent times.

The Sinfonietta Riga Chamber Orchestra of Latvia found themselves amidst this turmoil when attempting several times since 2020 to record exciting new guitar music by Krisits Auznieks. Once the music was finally able to be performed live in 2021, the results became the album Coiled Horizons. It features two different approaches to the guitar: music for trio, performed by saxophonist Karlis Auziņš, guitarist Mattis Ķudars and the drumming/percussion of Ivars Arutyunyan, followed by an orchestral work that features the aforementioned Sinfonietta Riga Chamber Orchesta and classical virtuoso JIJI playing electric guitar.

The album begins slow and ambient but draws the listener in immediately with a generous soundscape. Despite sounding like an adventurous jazz trio at first, Auziņš, Ķudars and Arutyunyan wait until close to 20 minutes into the disc before providing some-thing close to a “groove.” This makes for a beautiful transition into the album’s more classical sounding second half.

The orchestral finale to this recording is a specimen to behold, fusing dense 20th-century composition with virtuosic guitar playing. No matter how ambient the first half gets, and however dense the second, this is a treat to listen to as foreground or background music.

Sam Dickinson
Kranenburg Tree
Florian Wittenburg
Edition Wandelweiser Records EWR2104
(florianwittenburg.com)

> German composer/musician Florian Wittenburg was musically inspired by a small tree at the former Kranenburg train station. He took a photograph of it and then used it as a template for sketches in the Metasynth software program, with which one can draw/paint music. The four resulting tree/branch drawings are the basis for this four-part ambient electronic music composition.

Each kranenburg tree part is just over six minutes in length, and includes a calming connective drone sound Wittenburg describes as a “branch.” Part 1 opens with a long held colourful note that resonates throughout the part. A subsequent pulse, build in volume, additional notes and higher pitch is very engaging. More intense drone with pulse in Part 2, which builds with many held notes, until a totally unexpected sudden slide downwards to a single pulsing tone fade. Part 3 is dramatic as higher and lower drone pitches, washes and “crashing” drone cymbal-like sounds add texture until the closing sweeter drone fade. Part 4 opens with another held note from nowhere. Love the very high pitch drone above it and spacious sound effects, which disperse to a single note fade. Each part is separated by a one-minute track of reflective spacious silence.

I understand Wittenburg’s musical inspiration here – since childhood I have loved sitting under trees and listening to them grow. This release is a great tree-listening addition. At under 30 minutes, it is short in length but multiple listenings will illuminate countless sweet electronic music moments.

Tiina Kiiik

O Mistress Moon – Canadian Edition
Jennifer King
Leaf Music LM245 (leaf-music.ca)

> The moon is an ever-popular musical inspiration. Canadian pianist Jennifer King chose 12 solo piano works by six Canadian composers for their environmental relationship to the moon, night and outer space in this “Canadian version” sequel to her earlier recording. Each was released as a single to a monthly full-moon cycle related to folk and Mi’kmaw symbolism. Together, King’s self-described “musical meditative journey” takes off!

Opening track, In the Falling Dark 1 by Derek Charke, sets the musical twilight moon stage with chorale opening, repeated notes, calming sparse parts and improvisations. Kevin Lau’s The Dreamer is an accessible mystical dreamworld soundscape held together by repeated E flat “heartbeat” notes. Sophie Carmen Eckhardt-Grumette’s Nocturnes shows off King’s expertise in playing an expressive Chopin/Schumann influenced work. Sandy Moore’s three Nocturnes combine classical and modern music. Nocturne 3’s lyrical opening makes for relaxing moon watching until lower pitches and fast lines build dramatic tension before returning to a hopeful reflective closing.

Three Richard Gibson works include Espaces in which I love the outer space tranquility created spaces interspersed by few notes, ringing strings and atonal moments. Emily Doolittle’s Gliese 82c looks at a planet from outer space with faster high and contrasting dark sounds. Short, crisp, sudden flash-freeze chords and slower frost forming overlapping patterns in Amy Brandon’s brilliant Frost Moon.

Jean Coulthard’s Image Astrale is dramatic out of this world sonic listening featuring contrasting harmonic textures.

King’s sensitive performances make for moving moonlight listening.

Tiina Kiiik

JAZZ AND IMPROVISED

Bones
Millerd Meyers
Dream Tower Records (andymeyers.bandcamp.com/album/bones)

> Piano and trumpet player Simon Millerd (of Nomad fame) and guitar player Andy Meyers were ships in passing for many years. Though Millerd had done time with drummer Buff Allen and guitar legend Derek Bailey, the two had never managed to work together until finally having a chance to hang out and do some improv in 2019. What was captured is nothing short of beautifully quirky “art punk Euro jazz” (Meyers). Delightful improvisations (reminiscent of many lost nights at The Transac unfold, and we are treated to rich and responsive listening. Spontaneous compositions are both tight and loose, organically stretching out over time and space in a free but equally orderly capsule. Tuneful but unrestrained, textured but melodic, the music holds shape and never loses interest.

The four collage art cards included with the CD, created by Meyers and Susheela Dawne, are representative of the delightfully retro, fun miniature films included in the Bandcamp release which lent a vintage feel to the whole experience. The cards make a lovely souvenir of my journey. With only three compositions on the menu, coming in under 55 minutes the album is over too fast. Hopefully it is an appetizer for more releases in the future.

Cheryl Ockrant

Bell Tolls Variations; Fleur Revisited
Philippe Côté; Marc Copland; Quatuor Saguenay
Odd Sound ODS-21 (oddsoundmusique.com)

> In this release we have two different albums packaged together with the players themselves as the common theme: Philippe Côté, on soprano saxophone and bass clarinet, Marc Copland, piano, and the Quatuor Saguenay. The string quartet is the central anchor throughout both albums, with several tracks written for only the quartet, adding an interesting element to the material and keeping it fresh and varied. The double release is written as two suites.

With an opening sounding very much like a certain Arvo Pärt piece, we are gently led through the first album. Reed player Côté infuses his warm and melodic soprano sax sonorities throughout the album, keeping it just shy of contemporary classical with Copland’s deeply harmonic piano adding a jazz sensibility to the project. This is an album that is already so varied, it could be experienced either start to finish or popping up as surprises; most of the tracks are quite short and would be enjoyable sorbets in any playlist.

The second suite, Fleur Revisited (“revisited” as this is the second incarnation of this piece), follows a slightly darker, more adventurous path, with sonorities leading us through images of “a flower, growing on a rock in a very harsh environment” (Côté) and is an apt image for the times. Still edging between contemporary classical and jazz, this suite is more thematic and flows as one. A booklet of poetry by Lee Tsang is included with the CD, and the timing to take a moment to read poetry written to infuse the music could not have been better, giving me the opportunity to sink in and take a break from the isolation and too much news.

Cheryl Ockrant
Moments
Alyssa Giammaria w/Evan Dalling; Christian Antonacci; Nick Adema; Jen Lo; Leighton McKinley Harrell; Jacob Slous
Independent (alyssagiammaria.com)

- Alyssa Giammaria’s debut album Moments is a perfect sonic getaway from the restless pace and the noise of our daily lives. This concept album tells a story of an inner journey, at a peaceful pace and with an array of subtle emotions.

- Vocalist Giammaria is the full author of this 28-minute EP - in addition to composing, she also wrote the lyrics and arrangements for all the songs. Giammaria is currently enrolled in the master’s program at the University of Toronto for jazz voice performance and the accompanying band features a talented crew made up of fellow students from the same university. The album certainly has a youthful energy, driven by engaging rhythms, but there is also a thoughtful depth to both music and lyrics. Giammaria’s voice is airy and bright, effortlessly soothing and illuminating the space just outside the meaning of the words. She combines jazz with musical theatre and classical music elements which, coupled with classy arrangements, produces a recognizable overall sound. Nothing seems rushed, and everything is expressed in elegant and slightly understated ways.

- The accompanying band, consisting of three horns, piano, bass and drums, has a nice synergy and supports the vocal lines wonderfully. All are also engaging soloists in their own right. Watch for bassist Leighton McKinley Harrell’s mesmerizing opening solo in For Myself and Jen Lo’s sophisticated piano playing in Understand. Excellent debut album, highly recommended.

Ivana Popovic

Boomsling
Rich Halley; Dan Clucas; Clyde Reed; Carson Halley
Pine Eagle Records 014 (richhalley.com)

- Oregon-based tenor saxophonist Rich Halley is known as a great bandleader who has been churning out records for the past couple of decades. This latest release features a collaboration with acclaimed musicians Dan Clucas on cornet, Clyde Reed on bass and Carson Halley on drums; making for an engaging and energetic set of tunes. The album is all originals, penned by Halley himself and along with his band members, bold and intriguing, this musical journey is sure to catch the attention of any jazz fan, new or old.

- Corroboration opens the record with a unique saxophone and cornet interplay, something that isn’t heard too often and thus instantly reels in the listener. A lively bass line underpinned with a tight rhythmic groove sneaks in and the result is a tune you just can’t resist moving along with. Northern Plains is noteworthy as well for its tribute to First Nations music, the melody reminiscent of their chants and singing style and with the distinctive drum sound a constant in the background. Situational leads us into a more interpretative side of the record, where Halley showcases his talent of being able to mix a free-form style with what could be called a classic jazz sound. It’s an interesting balance and mix of sub-genres that captivates the listener and leaves them wanting more. For the connoisseur of jazz looking for something to freshen up their collection, this album is definitely it.

Kati Killaspea

Pittsburgh
Matthew Stevens
Whirlwind Recordings WR4779 (mattstevensmusic.com)

- Toronto-born, New York-based guitarist Matthew Stevens might be familiar to many as playing an instrumental part in creating the distinctive sound on several records by Esperanza Spalding. On his third solo release, Stevens manages to yet again carry over a completely unique sound to a set of all original tunes, penned by himself. The album is captivating in the way that it’s all acoustic, creating a warm and intimate atmosphere where the listener can almost imagine what the musician had in mind while composing these pieces. You could absolutely say the album is an entire soundscape, with each song calling forth images of different landscapes and experiences.

- Stevens mentions that “playing acoustic is a great way to develop a touch and a connection to an instrument” and that connection as well as the exploration of it is very apparent throughout this entire album. Each tune tells its own short story, whether it be more interpretative as heard on Northern Touch, a little more folksy and tranquil as showcased in Foreign Ghosts or altogether energetic like Blue Blues. Although Stevens credits taking inspiration from greats such as Pat Metheny and John McLaughlin who have been known to do a lot of acoustic exploration, the sound on this record is completely his own; being able to create such a niche for yourself is the mark of a true musician. A picturesque and pleasing whole, this record is a true gem.

Kati Killaspea

Were We Where We Were
Michael Formanek Drome Trio
Circular File Records CFCD 2922002202 (michaelformanekdrometrio.bandcamp.com)

- Making the most of a new trio configuration, New York bassist Michael Formanek calls on local drummer Vinnie Sperrazza and Montrealer–in-Manhattan Chet Doxas playing tenor/soprano saxophones and clarinet, to skilfully interpret four of his extended compositions. Avoiding sameness is the result of canny arrangements by Formanek, who has written and performed in many ensembles of various sizes over the years. Each track features one or another of Doxas’ reeds.

- For example, Never Odd or Even initially contrasts speedy clarinet trills with thickened double bass thumps. Then, as the pliable theme vibrates with additional energy from sul tasto string buzzes and cymbal vibrations, tenor saxophone scoops and flattening maintain the triple balance. Recurring clarinet flutters return to introduce a rhythm-section-driven swing groove which defines the tune’s last section.

- Furthermore, while the fluid rhythm which characterizes both versions of Tatarratat may be projected using Sperrazza’s popping press rolls and the bassist’s guitar-like strums, it’s the soprano saxophonist’s flutter-tongued twists, sometimes advanced a cappella, that fully personify the tunes. With a range that encompasses sweetened glissandi, slurping vibrations and fragmented split tones, Doxas’ dedicated reed individulaisms help make the compositions stand out. These and others evolve linearly and confirm Formanek’s high-quality musical concepts.

- Although each Drome Trio member gets some solo space on this, its first disc, perhaps next time out more, shorter tracks could create distinctive showpieces for each player.

Ken Waxman

Concert note: The Michael Formanek Drome Trio is scheduled to perform for four nights in Toronto at the Rex, March 23 to 26.

Route 84 Quarantine Blues
Joe McPhee
Corbett vs Dempsey CvsCD 081 (corbettvsdempsey.com)

- An engaged improviser for about 55 years, tenor saxophonist Joe McPhee adapted to COVID-19 restrictions...
in characteristic fashion. He recorded these individualistic tracks at night over a two-week period within a closet in his Poughkeepsie home.

Unconstrained by claustrophobia, McPhee’s tracks are as radical as those on his other discs. Besides thematic riffs he adds extended reed techniques encompassing overwhelming cries, dedicated multiphonics, doits and flattement, as well as speechifying and singing phrases associated with the Black Liberation Movement and the career of Charles Mingus. Twisting in and out of Mingus’ Self Portrait in Three Colors, he salutes the exploratory bassist/composer with fragmented bites and scooping squawks on two other tracks. He references Joni Mitchell and Carla Bley melodies during other intensive improvisations and adds the percussive sounds of water splashing on a pie plate in a salute to Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Expressing humour brought out by the pandemic, he inserts recordings of cars motoring on the actual freeway during the title track, which tweaks the 12-bar blues form. On it he also manages to simultaneously project two separate circling saxophone lines, one of which maintains the melody while the other becomes gradually louder as it fragments and hammers out sharp variations on variations. Elsewhere, other interpretations are lyrical and balladic.

Overall the impression taken from this disc is that in responding musically to the pandemic’s limitations, McPhee uses it astutely as he has assimilated other stimuli throughout his remarkable career.

Ken Waxman

Love for Connoisseurs
Angela Verbrugge
Independent (angelasjazz.com)

Although a relative newcomer to jazz, enchanting and witty vocalist/composer/lyricist Angela Verbrugge has already received numerous accolades. Verbrugge has created a vibrant presence internationally, performing at the world’s finest boîtes, concerts and festivals. Her latest offering was three years in development and features 12 original tunes (some written in collaboration with Ray Gallon, Ken Fowser, Neal Miner, Saul Berson, Nick Hampton and Miles Black). Joining Verbrugge (who also uses the producer’s hat here) are noted Vancouver jazz artists Dave Say on saxophones, Miles Black on piano, Jodi Proznick on bass and Joel Fountain on drums.

The original title track is a classic swinger, replete with witty lyrics, harkening back to Dorothy Parker, Cole Porter, Dorothy Fields and even Dave Frishberg, and Say’s warm, saxophone sound is the perfect complement to Verbrugge’s mellifluous vocal style. Enough’s Enough is a special, bebop-ish treat, co-written with Gallon and reminiscent of the great Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. Fountain tastefully urges the tune along, utilizing an array of tasty bop modalities. The sensual Je Ne Veux Pas Te Dire Bonsoir (I Don’t Want to Say Goodnight) is rendered here in perfect, sibilant French. Black manifests the mood with his exquisite, stylistic choices – superbly framing Verbrugge’s diaphanous and romantic vocal.

Other must-listens on this excellent vocal jazz project include Jive Turkey – rife with infectious lyrics and a lifting, cheeky Latin arrangement. Verbrugge’s charming trading of fours with Say are the icing on the jazz cake, and the closer, Maybe Now’s the Time (co-written with Black), is a clever tip of the hat to the great Charlie Parker tune. Proznick lays it down on bass with taste and a ridiculous, rich sound – seemingly channelling aspects of the late, great bassists Ray Brown, Leroy Vinnegar or Red Mitchell.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

My Astorian Queen – 25 Years on the New York Jazz Scene
Martin Wind Quintet
Laika Records 35103912 (laika-records.com)

Air
Martin Wind New York Bass Quartet
Laika Records 35104002 (laika-records.com)

Despite the global pandemic, he has created and released two brilliant, new discs. Besides thematic riffs he adds extended recording projects in quick succession for the world’s finest boîtes, concerts and festivals. This beautifully recorded project begins with J.S. Bach’s Air rendered here in a sumptuous bass quartet arrangement. It is difficult enough to capture every essence of an acoustic bass in the studio and here it has been done four times! Each bass has its own timbre, expression and innate sound – just as one would expect to hear from four human voice boxes.

Next up is (Give me some) G-String, which is a Wind original as well as a tasty musical confection. The bass lines are almost whimsical at times, reflecting Wind’s dry sense of humour. Eventually, the funkadelic White and Versace (89) jump into the soulful mix, driving the ensemble into some fabulous tight, harmonic sequences, culminating in an arco-gasm never before created by a jazz bass quartet. A triumph. Of spectacular beauty is the gorgeously arranged Beatles Medley, replete with some of Lennon and McCartney’s most lyrical compositions. A true standout is Wind’s arrangement of Joe Zawinul’s Birdland – replacing electronica with acoustic – utilizing those organic bass notes that can be felt in your solar plexus. Also stunning is Charlie Haden’s Silence, arranged here with somnorous tones creating a spiritual aura and Pat Metheny’s Tell Her You Saw Me, a cinematic arrangement in search of a movie. The fitting closer, a contemporary trio version of Air, perfectly parenthesizes this deeply moving and awe-inspiring recording.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke
LOGUSLABSMUZIKUS
Jazzlab Orchestra
Effendi Records FND164
(effendirecords.com)

▶ Forget trying to pronounce the title of the disc; you’d be best advised to just jump right in to the relentless whirlpool of its music. **LogusLabSmuzikus** is propelled by steamy horns and a deeply furrowed brow occasionally bursting out with ebullient and snazzy musical burble in hot, shifting sands, which obviously appeals to the pianist’s musical landscape. Each of her compositions has a rare breadth, from the formal clarity of her unaccompanied theme statement on the opening %u201cMarsh Music%u201d to the chromatic tangle of lines that she and Allemano create on %u201cClimate Striker.%u201d Some of the pieces are built of contrasting segments, sometimes adding new thematic content between improvised variations, creating particularly rich patterns of development on the later pieces in the program, like %u201cApology%u201d, marked by Clutton’s arco solo which approaches a cello-like timbre. Up-tempo pieces, like %u201cKrafty%u201d (featuring Gill on a vintage %u201cRealistic MG-1 synthesizer that she deploys here with a marked subtlety) and %u201cKnocked Over%u201d, can take on a wild playfulness, multiplying the complexity.

Along with eight of Gill’s compositions, the group also performs **People Gonna Rise Like the Water**, imbuing the climate activist anthem with a hymn-like nobility.

Stuart Broomer

Impermanence
Violeta Garcia; Émilie Girard-Charest
Tour de Bras (tourdebras.bandcamp.com)

▶ Impermanence is a recording of duo improvisations by two cellists, the Brazilian Violeta Garcia, primarily active in improvised music, and Quebecoise Émilie Girard-Charest, who has been primarily active in contemporary composed music, but whose adeptness as an improviser has been abundantly clear in recent duet performances with saxophonist Yves Charuest.

The five improvisations are titled merely %u201cI%u201d to %u201cV%u201d, with no effort made to add a programmatic dimension through verbal association. Similarly, there’s no detailed account of secondary materials, no hints whether the final track is created by amplified cellos played with bows covered with iron filings in an echo chamber shared with turbines. Perhaps it’s just a miracle of technique, possibly aided by close recording. The music is, in short, astonishing, whether it’s a dance of skittering harmonics, a ping-pong match of guttural, low register glissandi, soaring anarcho runs, microsecond timbral shifts, wondrous rhythmic counterpart, bow scrapings or sustained microtonal cries.

What is most beautiful about this recording may be the resonance of and its fidelity to, that title: Impermanence. The music is an insistent present, a presence, a mercurial shared consciousness. It lives in the instant of cognition, insisting on the listener’s attention to that instant, rather than dragging along the past as part of an ongoing, imagined formal construct. A sudden burst of Messiaenic birds in the midst of III is just that, something for which to be grateful as one moves on.

Stuart Brooner

Can You Hear Me?
Nick Maclean
Brownntasaurus Records NCC-1701M
(nicholasmaclean.com)

▶ The prodigiously gifted pianist Nick Maclean asks a simple – apparently rhetorical – question with the title of his double-disc: %u201cCan You Hear Me%u201d Listeners of this fine recording will get to reply in the affirmative, with loud, enthusiastic whoops for joy – the kind that audiences make wherever fine music – especially jazz – is created.

Maclean is to be roundly applauded because he literally soars in splendid isolation, although he did admittedly get help from the celebrated producer Brownman Ali. Enough help, it turns out, to turn in a brilliant recording, where both standards and original compositions come alive with perlocutive growls, and faintly eloquent phrases. Some of these are curvy and elegantly sculpted, others are long inventions punched, poked and – eventually – shaped into bravura melodies and harmonies with thumping left-hand triads and chords. The left and right hand conversations are dynamic and full of surprises. You don’t even have to wait long for the energy to begin flowing. This happens right out of the gate – with Herbie Hancock’s %u201cDolphin Dance%u201d.

The most outstanding songs of the set are Frank Churchill’s %u201cSomeday My Prince Will Come%u201d, and interestingly, Jimmy Van Heusen’s %u201cIt Could Happen to You.%u201d The latter (presumably) producer Brownman Ali is heard suggesting an alternate opening which turns the interpretation into a wondrous re-invention. Maclean’s original compositions such as %u201cWhy the Caged Bird Sings%u201d (an interpretation of Maya Angelou’s poem relocated to the pianist’s musical landscape) are exquisitely provocative and radically progressive.

Raul da Gama

Disappearing Curiosities
Tania Gill Quartet
Independent TJGO01 (taniagill.ca)

▶ It’s been 12 years since the release of the Tania Gill Quartet’s debut %u201cBolger Station%u201d, an invocation of Northern Ontario, and that’s far too long between recordings for a composer, pianist and band-leader with Gill’s special talents. Each of her compositions here is a fresh expedition, a different possibility in both style and mood. The latest edition of the quartet retains trumpeter Lina Allemano, an ideal foil as the co-lead voice, with support coming from newcomers to the group, bassist Rob Clutton and drummer Nico Dann, each adding illuminating nuance and animation.

Gill’s compositions have a rare breadth, from the formal clarity of her unaccompanied theme statement on the opening %u201cMarsh Music%u201d to the chromatic tangle of lines that she and Allemano create on %u201cClimate Striker.%u201d Some of the pieces are built of contrasting segments, sometimes adding new thematic content between improvised variations, creating particularly rich patterns of development on the later pieces in the program, like %u201cApology%u201d, marked by Clutton’s arco solo which approaches a cello-like timbre. Up-tempo pieces, like %u201cKrafty%u201d (featuring Gill on a vintage %u201cRealistic MG-1 synthesizer that she deploys here with a marked subtlety) and %u201cKnocked Over%u201d, can take on a wild playfulness.

Raul da Gama

Meadow of Dreams
Brodie West Quintet
An staple Editions AE-003
(ansibleeditions.com)

▶ This is the third release by Toronto-based alto saxophonist Brodie West’s quintet, retaining the same stellar personnel: pianist Tania Gill; bassist Josh Cole;
drummer Nick Fraser; and multi-instrumentalist Evan Cartwright, here contributing drums, vibraphone and guitar to significantly expand the group's palette. West's background includes extended work with the eclectic Dutch school of improvisers, including drummer Han Bennink and The Ex, musicians whose work extends from free jazz to synthesizes of anarcho-punk and African dance music. The result is that West's creativity ranges freely amidst existing genres, creating sudden juxtapositions of rhythm and timbre, from the glacier-slow, almost ceremonial Fortress to the piping life of Haunt and the wisful dissonance of the title track.

Grotto may begin as a slightly murky, film noir ballad, but West's thin, upper-register tone and quarter-tone pitch bends press it far afield, to a kind of science-fiction melancholy. His compositions can continuously shift ground. Inhabit III begins as a slow exchange of single notes by Gill and Cole before adding Fraser's drums and Cartwright's guitar; then West joins the complex rhythmic weave of single notes by Gill and Cole before adding Fraser and Gill.

If the music first fascinates with a deliberated disjoinedness, it's the compound mystery and intensity that will keep a listener engaged. West is among the most creative figures in Canadian music, reconstituting long-running conventions into musical puzzles as engaging as they are disruptive.

Stuart Broomer

All In
Shuffle Demons
Stubby Records SRCD 7732
(theshuffledemons.hearnow.com)

► The Shuffle Demons formed in 1984 by busking on the mean streets of Toronto and built their show and music into ten albums with much touring around the world. In fairness I must disclose sharing a Guinness World Record with these enterprising folks: we played the theme to Hockey Night in Canada with 900 other sax players in Dundas Square in 2004!

The Demons wear loud, colourful costumes, perform with enthusiasm and humour, and their music is exciting and fun. The personnel has changed over the years but their orchestration is consistent: three saxophones, upright bass and drums. Their latest album is All In (which could actually describe almost any of their musical performances or recordings) and features compositions by band members Richard Underhill (with six tunes), Matt Lagan, Mike Downes and Stitch Wynston.

There are no ballads on this album! One of my favourites is Walt: What? which begins at a blistering tempo with a melodic sax line I'd describe as "cosmopolitan" which is then harmonized and rolls into a bop solo. There is a great ensemble section in the middle, more solos and then the bright melody again for the outro. Watch Your Step has the funkiest riffs and much of the tune is filled with excellent ensemble work over delightful noodling melodies. In fact, all the tunes are melodic and inventive with energetic solos over top of the hard-working rhythm section of Downes and long-serving Demons' drummer, Wynston. All In swings and grooves for all ten tracks.

Ted Parkinson

You & I
Wild Blue Herons (Bill Sample; Darlene Cooper)
Independent WBH2021
(wildblueherons.com)

► Wild Blue Herons perform as a duo here. Vancouver-based husband and wife and longtime musical partners Bill Sample (piano/keyboard) and Darlene Cooper (vocals) share their love of standard songs inspired by the great women of jazz, and of course, of each other in this fabulous release. Recording two original songs and ten covers in their home studio during the 2020/21 lockdown was an experience that, as the liner notes say, "led to a huge technology learning curve."

The disc begins with I Wish I’d Met You which opens with brief piano single notes, then vocal entry. Love the matching colours of the held piano and vocal notes, back and forth piano countermelody answering the vocal melody, and clear vocal articulation and pitch. The 1930s’ romantic classic I’ll Be Seeing You features heartbreaking yet positive-for-the-future smooth vocals above detached piano chords and single notes, and a mid-piece jazz-tinged piano solo. Cooper and Sample themselves composed the slow song Don’t Know How to Love You with Cooper’s loudish yet never over-the-top vocals above Sample’s florid piano stylings, building to an intense ending. The title track by Stevie Wonder grabs the listener’s concentration with its slower straightforward storytelling rendition, as voice and piano are like two soloists instead of lead and accompaniment.

Thoroughly polished and staggeringly intricate, Thomas Steele’s latest release is a marvel in all its controlled fury. Unlike his last album The Bends (which featured two chordal instruments in a quintet format), Steele opts to go entirely without comping instruments here. Consequently, his horn section boasts eight parts, and the ensemble still manages to do an effective job of relaying substantial harmonic information thanks to consistently spotless arranging (particularly that of Dennis Kwok).
Flowers of the seven tunes are penned by contributors, a significant feature at some point, and three each individual musician. Everyone is given also gives way for the complete expression of unconventional instrumentation, and yet he achieve a very particular sound out of such baritone saxophone/bass clarinet playing of the group. Also indispensable is the versatile fully with immaculate time feel while laying and drummer Jacob Slous covers a fair bit rhythm section of bassist Evan Gratham lucidity in the compositional aspects. The artic density is built; all while maintaining elements, a persisting atmosphere of cath-structures, stabs and jabs in the arrange-ating. Through all the constantly moving sessions demonstrate creative music allows string players the freedom music, has upset the paradigm for appropriate string sounds. As these Contemporary notated music, and more emphatically, jazz and free texturally speaking, the music is captiv-ating. Through all the constantly moving structures, stabs and jabs in the arrange-ments, a persisting atmosphere of cathartic density is built, all while maintaining lucidity in the compositional aspects. The rhythm section of bassist Evan Gratham and drummer Jacob Slous covers a fair bit of ground between them, meshing master-fully with immaculate time feel while laying a foundation of rhythmic clarity for the rest of the group. Also indispensable is the versatile baritone saxophone/bass clarinet playing of Alex Manoukas, which adds an extra dimen-sion of low-end and greatly adds to the overall coherence.

Steele’s handlestyle feeling itself feels equal parts seltess and distinctive. He can continually achieve a very particular sound out of such unconventional instrumentation, and yet he also gives way for the complete expression of each individual musician. Everyone is given a significant feature at some point, and three of the seven tunes are penned by contributors aside from Steele. Jacob Chung’s February Flowers is a standout.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Something in the Air
New Affiliations mean Strings Project New Sonic Identities

KEN WAXMAN

When an idea of instruments associated with European high culture is broached, the violin, viola and cello instantly come into focus. But a lot has changed since the classical period. Contemporary notated music, and more emphatically, jazz and free music, has upset the paradigm for appropriate string sounds. As these sessions demonstrate creative music allows string players the freedom to play whatever and with whomever they choose.

Violin and marimba are anything but conventional duo partners, but on Elodie Das Sombras (Clean Feed CF 583 CD cleanfeed-records.com) two Portuguese stylists, fiddler Carlos Zingaro and Pedro Carneiro, who play marimba with damper pedals, disregard the shibboleth. While the veteran Zingaro has moved among rock, jazz and free music, Carneiro has high art creden-tials, often playing with symphony orchestras. But the 11 tracks here are pure improv, rife with advanced techniques and tunings. They also rarely neglect nods to theme and melody. When the two are involved in intense cross-sound pollination on such tracks as Clarão and Luminescência it’s the unique dampened and hollow marimba patterns undulating with rosewood percussiveness that define the parameters. Still, building on the other instrument’s constant low-pitch resonations, Zingaro detours from unleashing staccato stops and skipping sweeps to direct the fragmented interface towards linear grooves. While some sequences may involve the pressure from string-screeching motifs or expose wooden bar thumps that sound as if they’re resonations from plastic milk bottles rather than tone bars, percussiveness and energetic sul tasto pulls are moderated into a global cooperative vision. A piece like the extended Luz presents unity at its most profound. Throughout, hollow bell-like echoes and multi-string pressure shake out into a dampened and designated exposition that climaxes with joint moderation.

If balancing the timbres from violin and marimba appears quirky, imagine the chal-lenges implicit when the improvisation involves a violin and a full drum kit. But that’s what transpires on Circle Back (Relay Recordings relay 032 timdaisyrelayrecords.bandcamp.com) during a live set by New York fiddler Mark Feldman and drummer Tim Daisy. The CD’s single improvisation starts off this side of conventional, but gets more atonal as it runs its course. Gifted with an ESP-like connection, Daisy and Feldman intuit each other’s next move before any note is sounded and come up with perfect timbral ripostes. Initially advancing in a straight-ahead manner, the violinist works in concise quotes from I Got Rhythm and later, Night In Tunisia, among the spicato spaws and stopped stops which set up the exposition. For his part the drummer counters with cymbal clips, bass drum rumbles and persistent rim clipping.

One third of the way through however, the interchange heightens, challenges implicit when the improvisation involves a violin and a full drum kit. But that’s what transpires on Circle Back (Relay Recordings relay 032 timdaisyrelayrecords.bandcamp.com) during a live set by New York fiddler Mark Feldman and drummer Tim Daisy. The CD’s single improvisation starts off this side of conventional, but gets more atonal as it runs its course. Gifted with an ESP-like connection, Daisy and Feldman intuit each other’s next move before any note is sounded and come up with perfect timbral ripostes. Initially advancing in a straight-ahead manner, the violinist works in concise quotes from I Got Rhythm and later, Night In Tunisia, among the spicato spaws and stopped stops which set up the exposition. For his part the drummer counters with cymbal clips, bass drum rumbles and persistent rim clipping. 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One third of the way through however, the interchange heightens, challenges implicit when the improvisation involves a violin and a full drum kit. But that’s what transpires on Circle Back (Relay Recordings relay 032 timdaisyrelayrecords.bandcamp.com) during a live set by New York fiddler Mark Feldman and drummer Tim Daisy. The CD’s single improvisation starts off this side of conventional, but gets more atonal as it runs its course. Gifted with an ESP-like connection, Daisy and Feldman intuit each other’s next move before any note is sounded and come up with perfect timbral ripostes. Initially advancing in a straight-ahead manner, the violinist works in concise quotes from I Got Rhythm and later, Night In Tunisia, among the spicato spaws and stopped stops which set up the exposition. For his part the drummer counters with cymbal clips, bass drum rumbles and persistent rim clipping.
seesaw to squeaks so high-pitched that they reach a point above human hearing. Subtly, the tempo has also increased from moderato to presto, though with Daisy’s positioned clip-clops and rim shots keeping time. The violinist’s staccato dynamics finally meet up with the percussionist’s clock-ticking beats, with the brief coda signalled by Feldman’s single-string dobro-like plucks.

Acoustic timbres aren’t the only challenges which advanced string players face. On The Quantum Violin (FMR Records CD 622-9721 fmr-records.com), eponymously titled 12-track suite, Vienna’s Mia Zabelka adds electronic devices to her violin and joins Brampton’s Glen Hall, whose electronic trick bag includes all manner of synthesized, sampled and programmed tools to create the interaction. Maneuvering on a line that’s as thin as a single violin string, Zabelka and Hall manage to preserve humanity among the programming, which include OMax, CataRt, SPAT and other oscillations. Sometimes though, they find themselves falling headfirst into electronic miasma. That’s why it’s best not to hear these sound sequences as duets between acoustic instrument and electronics but as the performance of one sophisticated electroacoustic instrument. After all, the basis of much of the disc is the impulses initially created by the fiddle. The entire session is permeated with distant drones and percussive whooshes which move from foreground to background, as watery undercurrents become as prominent as vibrating segments. Yet except for brief twangs and faint swift glissandi, brittle violin tones are deconstructed to create varied parameters and treatments which meld on the overall sound canvas. Snatches of the violinist’s vocoder-synthesized voice are sometimes heard. But the only real vocal, is mumbled on The Quantum Violin #8 by author Kenji Siratori reading from his William S. Burroughs-influenced cut-up text, which is embedded within the overall metallic buzz. Tempos and transitions climax several times. For instance, rapidly speeding string sawing and pitch elevation isolate variances within the percussive drones that permeate The Quantum Violin #4 and The Quantum Violin #5, but are resolved by spiccatto bounces and switches to varied speeds. Meanwhile, spidery string squawks work their way through a thicket of synthesized non-linear vibrations on The Quantum Violin #9 to blend with pre-recorded descending vocal warbles for additional textural polyphony. The brief, concluding The Quantum Violin #14 - For Pauline Oliveros, is proposed as a sonic summation. However, as the narrative blend crests and declines, the mixture between rounded metallic oscillations makes it more of an elevated culmination than a separate coda.

As inventively electroacoustic, but much less complex in execution is Studies on Colour Field Modulation (Creative Sources CS 708 CD creativesourcesrec.com) by the I/O duo of German cellist Ulrich Mitzlaff and Portuguese laptippist Carlos Santos. Both also use so-called objects to add to the available textures. Blau, first of the CD’s two selections, confirms the noise-objects connection wrapping the laptop and cello in aluminum for increased playing turbulence. Simultaneously Mitzlaff’s sul tasto sawing and high-pitched swipes are often heard alongside thin voltage crackles and crinkles, although sounds hammered on the string or drawn from the hollow inards of the cello are most prominent. Santos’ voltage crackles are less affected, so that throughout concentrated drones, splatters and whooshes are present as cello strains reach the highest string extensions. A mini-climax at the halfway point adds auto horns, police sirens and crowd noises and movement into the mix. Subsumed by a romantic string interlude, the narrative then blends street sounds, strident string scratches and ring modulator-like echoes into a gradually swelling tonal crescendo and fade. Orange, the other track, is a rural contrast to the urban interface of Blau. With cello pitches projected prominently in an aviary affiliated mode at the top, it’s only by later turning to pressurized string stops that the expected qualities of Mitzlaff’s instrument are heard through the squiggling electronic drone that takes up the remainder of the sound field. Harmonic concordance of woody cello slices and accompanying electronic buzzes marks the finale.

Pairing one string instrument with another instrument can be expanded to include more players as Dawn to Dusk (JACC Records JR044/TRICO 18 jacc-records.com) demonstrates during two long and one short fully improvised tracks. Working through connected or contrapuntal impulses are Portuguese players, acoustic guitarist Marcelo dos Reis and trumpeter Luis Vicente, and French ones, violinist Théo Ceccaldi and his brother, cellist Valentin. As Chamber 4, the quartet, especially the bowed strings, play traditionally as the trumpet projects strained yelping breaths and the guitarist designates unexpected plucks. As string swabbling becomes more concentrated, a motorized drone is created. Soon the stops and stops from the cello and violin are joined by angled guitar-string clicks to create a squirming amoeba-like background for Vicente’s rugged triplets to slide up the scale in increments. Higher and speedier his portamento effects move, until a climax at the end of a brief interlude melds clunking cello string pressure and downwards guitar strums. Resolution comes in the concluding Dusk as the fiddle and trumpet lines coalesce with cello and guitar providing the clinking and clattering continuum. Finally, as the arco strings reach a crescendo of concentrated glissandi, they’re joined by tough guitar strums to frame half-valve trumpet screams until all descend to a moderated conclusion.

These sessions confirm that with the right ideas and sophisticated techniques any instrument can create creative music with any other, even ones as traditional as those in the European string family.
At a time when we are not able to go out and see live ballet and indeed ballet companies are shuttered, I was fortunate enough to be asked to review *The Royal Ballet Collection* (Opus Arte opusarte.com/details/OABD7210BD). This is truly an incomparable collection of both best-loved and several sensational new productions. I shared this experience with my granddaughters and if not quite like going to the ballet, it is in some ways better. While there is nothing quite like actually being at a live performance, the brilliant camera direction adds an element that is simply not available at the live event. The director chooses where to focus our attention at any given moment and this undoubtedly increases our appreciation ten-fold. The Royal Ballet has engaged experienced directors for each and every one of these productions.

Simply called *The Collection* this is a compilation of 22 ballets on 15 Blu-ray discs. Many of the ballets include select scenes and bonus features after the ballet is over.

Included is a beautiful book of notes and full plot synopses as well as pictures from each of the ballets. Whether you are a fan of the ballet, new to it, or interested in a brand-new experience, this box is the answer.

As a music reviewer, the most important component for me is the musical performance. I listened with and without the video and found the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House’s contribution to be at all times engaging, animated, musical and frankly breathtaking in parts. Ballet is an example of one of the most perfect combinations of the visual and the audible. The Royal Ballet’s new box set is just that, the perfect combination. In truth, in many cases, the marriage of the visuals and the power of the orchestra are literally overwhelming.

Of course, this box includes classic 19th-century ballets with three Tchaikovsky favourites, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, as well as *Giselle*, *La Bayadère* and *Don Quixote*. This collection also includes 21st-century ballets with the unique *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon, music by Joby Talbot and danced by the stunning Lauren Cuthbertson as Alice. Barry Wordsworth conducted this highly original work. Wheeldon also contributed the equally magical *The Winter’s Tale*, music also by Joby Talbot and danced by Edward Watson and Cuthbertson as Leontes and Hermione respectively.

*Chroma*, music by Joby Talbot and Jack White III, *Infra*, music by Max Richter and *Limen*, music by Kaija Saariaho, all choreographed by Wayne McGregor, are completely new to me and a real revelation. These are minimalist works, both visually and musically.

Choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton’s ballets, nine in all, are well represented with *Sylvia*, *The Two Pigeons*, *La Valse* and *Monotones I and II* among others, composed by Leo Delibes, André Messager, Maurice Ravel and Erik Satie. I have to admit that my favourite is *Marguerite and Armand*, with music by Franz Liszt. I’m not sure if it’s because of the orchestral setting of Liszt’s *Sonata in B Minor* or Ashton’s beautifully romantic visualization, but I suspect it is the perfect combination of the two.

Often considered Kenneth MacMillan’s finest work, *Mayerling* is included, along with his incomparable Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet*. Liszt’s *Faust Symphony* was chosen for the dark and compelling *Mayerling*, and with Barry Wordsworth on the podium it is a must see and hear!

The experience of reviewing these discs afforded the opportunity to view and listen to performances I would otherwise never have had.

**Karajan** (C-major Entertainment, naxosdirect.com/search/759704), is an unexpected but most welcome new Blu-ray video of two live concerts conducted by Herbert von Karajan, with soloists, from concerts in Berlin and Vienna.

From the Philharmonie in Berlin we witness *The 1988 New Year’s Eve Concert* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and pianist Evgeny Kissin playing the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Major. The opening work from this concert is Prokofiev’s Symphony Op.25, aka *The Classical Symphony*. Prokofiev wrote this work in the style of music written in the time of Haydn and Mozart. It is in four movements which sound, under Karajan’s baton, as exactly that, except for the timbre of the modern instruments. Nevertheless, it is Prokofiev. In the Tchaikovsky we see and hear a 17-year-old wunderkind play. When the LP of this performance was originally issued by Deutsche Grammophon, the critics and the classical audience were mixed in their reviews. One of the features of this performance is the second movement, *Andantino semplice – Prestissimo* which critics felt Kissin played too slowly. After all, this is a romantic concerto and Kissin felt that playing more slowly was more suitable. (Karajan also recorded this concerto with Weissenberg and Richter with the usual tempo.) One has to wonder whether Karajan was indulging the young pianist or did he feel this slower tempo served the composer well? There is no doubt when you watch the performance that they are definitely one mind.

The *New Year’s Day concert of 1987*, with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Karajan, featured the music of the two Johann Strausses, father and son, and Josef Strauss. The concert of 15 pieces, including waltzes, polkas and overtures, was broadcast as usual from Vienna and was heard and seen around the world. The concert opened with the rousing *Gypsy Baron Overture* and ended as usual, with the *Beautiful Blue Danube* followed by the *Radetzky March* involving the audience clapping to the tempo at Karajan’s direction. After the opening bars of the *Beloved Anna Polka* the broadcast audience is treated to a special performance from the Spanish Riding School of Vienna. Also featured especially for the broadcast audience is the Ballet of the Vienna State Opera dancing to the majestic *Emporer Waltz* in the Schönbrunn Palace. Kathleen Battle in her prime sings the *Voice of Spring*.

Little did we know at this joyous time, that Karajan was to pass away at his home in Anefa a brief seven months later. We are so lucky to have this recording of Karajan at his best. We experience him as a happy and enthusiastic conductor showing his abiding love and affection for the music and the orchestra.

*The Royal Ballet Collection and Karajan* are both available on Blu-ray Disc only.
OTHER FINE VINTAGES

Don’t Look Back
Bernie Senensky Quartet/Quintet w/Bob Mover; Sam Noto
Cellar Music CM040321 (cellarlive.com)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fluctuating lockdowns and closures that have accompanied it, musicians have gotten creative at navigating this difficult artistic landscape. Some have done remote recordings, others are on hiatus and a handful of musicians like Toronto stalwart Bernie Senensky have dug into the archives to release pre-pandemic music.

In a time when many of us are nostalgic about the past, Don’t Look Back brings the listener back to some of Toronto’s heydays, featuring an exciting repertoire choice and hard-grooving band. Trumpeter Sam Noto and saxophonist Bob Mover have since left the GTA, while bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Barry Elmes are still on the scene.

Originally recorded in 1989, this album encapsulates this time period perfectly. The opening track and several others share a 1960s’ Blue Note aesthetic, but more 80s- and 90s-inspired offerings like Senensky’s rhythmically complex arrangement of I Hear a Rhapsody are no less at home. The versatile band closes out the recording with a rousing version of Gershwin’s Who Cares, which this band tackles in a manner that pays tribute to jazz greats of the past without ever sounding dated or clichéd.

This album is a true time capsule that sounds right at home today, which is a testament to not only the musicians playing, but to Jeremy Darby’s mixing job and Peter Letros’ mastering, which has brought this Unity Records tape back to life on CD and throughout the streaming world.

Sam Dickinson

Peter Maxwell Davies – Eight Songs for a Mad King
Psappha Ensemble (Dov Goldberg; Benedict Holland; Tim Williams; Kelvin Thomas; Richard Casey; Jennifer Langridge; Conrad Marshall)
Psappha PSA1007 (naxosdirect.com/search/5029385997656)

Music can depict madness, but can’t derive from the mind of the insane person, at least not according to Jonathan Miller. As if in defiance of that outlook, Eight Songs for a Mad King, by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (1934–2016), with a libretto by Randolph Stow, even cribs some of the writing (musical as well as literary) of King George III, the lone protagonist in this musical drama. It’s heartbreaking to listen to. I wonder, can it be relevant or worthwhile committing the attention, time and even anguish the piece demands?

While he ruled England, George III suffered from a severe mental disorder, at times lucid and at others not. Davies and Stow depict the suffering of a terrified, befuddled and sad man, using his own words. Even without staging, the humanity and horror come through.

The work picks up where its arguable predecessor, Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire, left off. There’s a good deal of extended techniques shared among the six instrumentalists, while shrieks and guttural growls challenge the soloist’s larynx. Musical events alternate between synchronous and the opposite. The ensemble, as caged birds in the monarch’s aviary, whistle and call in response to the music box George is said to have used to try to teach them to sing.

Originally released on limited edition vinyl to celebrate the 80th birthday of its patron Davies in 2014, the Psappha ensemble has re-issued this 2012 recording on vinyl and digital formats in conjunction with the NMC Recordings label. Their assurance and familiarity with the dense and difficult material (they worked closely with Davies for years), make this as close as one could want to a definitive performance.

Max Christie
Hard to Watch and Impossible to Ignore

“The news from Ukraine is both hard to watch and impossible to ignore, about the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces. We are thinking of Jewish-Ukrainian composer, Dmitri Klebanov, whose career was a casualty of Soviet-era cultural suppression – his works nearly forgotten under Stalin’s regime. May we listen to his music today and not forget the terrible cost of conflict and war.”

Previously covered in The WholeNote, and topical again

The speaker is Simon Wynberg, Artistic Director of the ARC Ensemble, responding to the news that ARC Ensemble has been nominated for a JUNO award - Classical Album of the Year, Small Ensemble – for Klebanov: Chamber Works, the newest recording in their Music in Exile series on the Chandos label (CHAN 20233). ARC performs a wide range of music with a focus on music that was suppressed and marginalised under repressive 20th century regimes.

The Klebanov recording was reviewed by Michael Schulman in our December 2021/January 2022 edition. Schulman wrote as follows:

After his Symphony No.1 (1947), “dedicated to the memory of the martyrs of Babi Yar,” was performed in his native Kharkiv and then in Kyiv (where, in 1941, Nazis had massacred over 30,000 Jews at the Babi Yar ravine), Jewish-Ukrainian composer Dmitri Klebanov (1907-1987) was vilified as “unpatriotic” for memorializing Jewish civilians rather than Soviet soldiers. The Union of Soviet Composers banned the symphony and Klebanov lost his posts as chairman of the Composers Union’s Kharkiv branch and head of the Kharkiv state conservatory’s composition department. He was eventually “rehabilitated.”

This latest in the Music in Exile series by Toronto’s ARC Ensemble (Artists of the Royal Conservatory) presents violinists Erika Raum and Marie Bérard, violist Steven Dann and cellist Thomas Wiebe in Klebanov’s String Quartets Nos.4 and 5. The joyous No.4 (1946), filled with singable, folk-like tunes, is dedicated to the memory of composer Mykola Leontovych, a Ukrainian separatist murdered by the secret police in 1921. It includes two melodies by Leontovych familiar to Ukrainian listeners, one of them known in the West as the Christmas Carol of the Bells.

No.5 (1965) is more “serious,” its melodies tinged with dissonance and pessimism, with heavily accented rhythms – it’s strong, attention-riveting music. Pianist Kevin Ahfat joins Bérard and Wiebe in Klebanov’s String Quartets Nos.4 and 5. The joyful No.4 (1946), filled with singable, folk-like tunes, is dedicated to the memory of composer Mykola Leontovych, a Ukrainian separatist murdered by the secret police in 1921. It includes two melodies by Leontovych familiar to Ukrainian listeners, one of them known in the West as the Christmas Carol of the Bells.

There’s real beauty on this disc, all beautifully played.

Klebanov died in 1987, shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The fall and rise of choral music

On April 5, 2019, CHOIR!CHOIR!CHOIR! invited the public to come and sing The Beatles’ Here Comes the Sun to launch The Canadian Cancer Society’s Daffodil Campaign, The WholeNote’s Kevin King was there: “A fantastic event and experience to be there photographing it; surrounded by so many smiling faces and joyous voices. The sun itself had been a bit shy that day but these singers managed to bring the sunshine with them!”

That will seem like a lifetime ago, for choral singers and their audiences. When we published our Canary Pages in May 2019, with that joyful daffodil yellow cover, the profiles were bursting with projects and concerts and plans for the 2019-2020 season.

A year later, in April 2020 (Vol 25 No 7), our choral columnist, Brian Chang (currently running for running as a candidate, in Toronto Centre, in the upcoming provincial election campaign), was lamenting the more than hundred choral events precipitously postponed or cancelled in COVID’s first wave: among them Oakham House Choir’s Elijah, Consider Matthew Shepard with Pax Christi Chorale, and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir’s annual “Sacred Music for a Sacred Space” concert, always performed on Good Friday. (As a member of the TMC, Brian had been rehearsing Healey Willan’s How They So Softly Rest – written to commemorate service people who died in World War I.)
Within a matter of weeks, rehearsal halls and concert venues went silent and dark. Our choirs were the sector of the music community to comprehensively shut down live rehearsals and performances the fastest. There were so many good reasons for this beyond just the business of deep breathing in shared air. Some of it had to do with the kinds of performance and rehearsal spaces involved; some to do with the sheer numbers of people involved at close quarters. In Mount Vernon Washington, a Skagit Valley Chorale rehearsal became a “superspreader event” when 53 of 61 choristers became infected with COVID-19. A karaoke bar in Quebec City became the centre of a 70-person outbreak that would spread to three schools.

In that very dark April of 2020, Brian Chang offered us this: “Silence is part of the great music we all love, and rests mark so much of what we know in music. The world in isolation is no different. We’re on a grand pause right now. This isn’t the silence at the end of a song, it’s the dramatic silence before something wonderful. We have beautiful sounds ahead of us. We’ll see you back at rehearsal and in concerts soon enough.”

Now as we inch towards April 2022, “soon enough” can’t come soon enough; but choirs, for the same reasons that they were the first to succumb, are among the last to resume. Even so, April 2022 is looking hopeful for the resumption of live choral music, and May more hopeful still. Don’t expect the sector to throw caution to the winds just because the province is now saying full capacity is permitted. Choirs seem to be resuming with caution and care, based on their knowledge of their communities, rather than raw numbers – a fact that should reassure their singers and audiences alike.

An example: the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, with their new music director Simon Rivard conducting, will once again present “Sacred Music for a Sacred Space” on Good Friday (April 15) joined by the Nathaniel Dett Chorale, and their conductor Brainerd Blyden-Taylor, at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, with in-person or online streaming tickets available. And despite provincial permission to return to full capacity, TMC has chosen to maintain one-third capacity “for the safety and comfort of their patrons” who must still provide proof of Covid vaccination and wear a mask.

**Back in Focus is compiled by The WholeNote editorial team. We can be reached at editorial@thewholenote.com**
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