Meet The Makers

Music by date, live and livestreamed
Recordings reviewed - 101 recent DISCoveries
Stories, interviews, listening room.

thewholenote.com
FEATURING 25 EXCEPTIONAL SOLOISTS ALONE IN AN EMPTY ROY THOMSON HALL


MUSIC FOR SELF-ISOLATION
composed by Frank Horvat

It takes a special skill to be able to create a whole atmosphere in a work that is just 2 minutes long. I really liked that.
– BBC Radio 3

WATCH & LISTEN
frankhorvat.com/M4SI
This inlay is based on a painting by my lovely friend Henry Hassan who died of AIDS in the mid-80s. When he found out he had terminal illness he left his teaching job to pursue his real passion - painting. “Floating Man” is in a series of paintings depicting what he felt was happening to his body/soul. He used a fascinating technique: he cut different levels into the plywood and painted them - it’s actually relief painting. So I layered different types of wood on this peghead, including purpleheart, maple and ebony and then I cut into them and painted his image. This is my tribute to Henry. — Linda Manzer

ON OUR COVER

PHOTO: BRIAN PICKELL

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Music by date, live and livestreamed
Recordings reviewed - 101 recent DISCoveries
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5 OPENER | Quoth the Canaries, ... Evermore! | DAVID PERLMAN

STORIES & INTERVIEWS

6 EARLY MUSIC | Handel’s La Resurrezione: A Premiere 300 Years in the Making | MATTHEW WHITFIELD

8 FEATURE | Summer Music in the Garden Bids Farewell to Founding Artistic Director Tamara Bernstein | CATHY RICHES

11 CLASSICAL AND BEYOND | Surfing the Third Wave | PAUL ENNIS

14 MUSIC THEATRE | Synchronicity and Innovation in a WATERSHED Spring | JENNIFER PARR

16 MUSIC AND FILM | A Concerto is a Conversation Counters a Limiting Trope | GLORIA BLIZZARD

PHOTO: BRIAN PICKELL

Volume 26 No 7 | May 7 – June 24, 2021
STORIES & INTERVIEWS

18 CHORAL SCENE | “Click Unmute!” How the Zoom Boom is Shifting the Choral World | MENAKA SWAMINATHAN

20 MEET THE MAKERS | Michael Sankey and Linda Manzer - Master Builders | COLIN STORY

22 JAZZ NOTES | How did I not see that coming? A (Lost) Year in Retrospect | STEVE WALLACE

54 REARVIEW MIRROR | Music the Penetrates to the Heart | ROBERT HARRIS

DISCOVERIES:
RECORDINGS REVIEWED

28 Editor's Corner | DAVID OLDS
30 Strings Attached | TERRY ROBBINS
32 Vocal
36 Classical and Beyond
41 Modern and Contemporary
46 Jazz and Improvised Music
48 Pot Pourri
50 Something in the Air | KEN WAXMAN
52 Old Wine, New Bottles | BRUCE SURTEES

LISTINGS

24 By Date
27 Classified Ads

Upcoming Dates & Deadlines

For Volume 26 No 8
SUMMER
June 25 – September 13

Free Event Listings
NEW Weekly online updates
6pm every Tuesday for Friday posting

Print edition deadline
Midnight, Friday June 11

Display Advertising, reservation deadline
6pm Tuesday June 8
Classifieds deadline
6pm Saturday June 12
Publication Dates
Tuesday, June 21 (online)
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ACK IN THE DAY (almost 20 years ago) and flushed with the success of our annual fall BLUE PAGES directory of presenters (aimed at readers looking for music to listen to), we decided to start an annual spring choral directory (aimed at readers searching for opportunities to sing). Calling it our YELLOW PAGES was an obvious choice – you know, “let your fingers do the walking ..” But it was pointed out to us that “Yellow Pages” was already taken as a name, by an organization with lawyers.

So “Canary Pages” it became instead. Truth be told, the necessity was a virtue, because not only did “canary” keep the “yellow pages” allusion alive, but it also straight out said “songbird,” which made it an even better fit. It also carried with it another, somewhat grimly useful undertone: after all, in society, as in coal mines, as long as the canaries are still singing, everything is relatively fine.

The canary underground

As far back as the 1880s, canaries (along with canaries) had become part of the regular supply lists for coal mines in Britain, Canada and the United States. The vast amounts of air the canaries took in with every breath to fuel their singing made them highly sensitive to poisonous gases of one kind or another, and in particular to carbon monoxide, the miner’s most insidious and dangerous airborne enemy. When the canaries fell silent, or dropped from their perches, there was just enough time for miners to down tools and reach for respirators. But as long as the canaries were singing, it was business as usual, for better and for worse.

To be clear, coal mine canaries were not volunteers the way the vast majority of choristers are, at least in these parts. And, not your standard choral practice, the better the canary sang the less likely they were to get the job, because the birds with the best voices (the males, according to the usual reliable sources), fetched prices too rich for coal mine budgets – like aspiring tenors, dreaming of gilded rather than miners’ cages.

It took a lot longer for the coal mine canary to be rendered redundant than it did for Paul Bunyan’s ox to be railroaded by technology. They were only outlawed from British coal mines in 1986, for example. But slowly and surely “canary in the coal mine” as a phrase has become almost universally metaphorical and detached from its origins. Interestingly, the less rooted in particularity it has become, the more easily it can be used with an equally straight face by doomsayers across the entire socio-political spectrum, and up and down the scale from the momentous to the trivial.

Dire seems to be the only requirement. “Are car sales the canary in the post-pandemic coal mine?” asked another, somewhat grimly useful underpinning. Australia may be the canary in the climate-change coal mine said another. And my most recent favourite: “Is Alberta the coal miner’s canary in the great Canadian environmental divide?”

Here at The WholeNote, mind you, we have, for almost two decades, happily, and only slightly manipulatively, stood the metaphor on its head – pointing to the dozens and dozens of choirs signing up for our choral canary pages every May as a significant sign of the music community’s good health.

But this year, since early April when the invitations to join the 19th annual Canary Pages went out, we have for the first time since we adopted the Canary Pages name, had to face up to the grim side of the “canary in the coal mine” metaphor we so cheerfully cocked a snoot at all these years. We’re holding our breath and hoping for the best while choirs and choral societies make up their minds again about whether it might be wiser to hunker down and say nothing at all, rather than run the risk of getting it wrong. Or, worse, that the silence will be broken not by song but a series of little thuds as one by one they fall from their perches.

Full circle

Just over a year ago, choirs were among the first musical collectives forced by a different kind of noxious air to fall silent. So, rather than flocking to our directory in droves in early spring, they struggled in all the way from May to September, determined to say something about their upcoming plans, best laid or wishful as the case may be, but jinxed every time they did, it seemed, by another twist or turn to the plot.

And a year later, here we are again facing the reality that it’s still going to take months for a clear picture to emerge of a path forward for live collective community arts. So we’ve put the Canary Pages online again, making it possible for choirs to join whenever they are ready, all the way through to the fall, and, just as important, to be able to say “oops” when COVID makes liars of us all, and to update the information they gave us on an ongoing basis.

We all have our dark moments these days. But slowly and steadily our canaries are finding their way back to us, and what was a trickle is becoming a steady flow. The stories they are bringing with them, best laid or wishful as the case may be, and a year later, here we are again facing the reality that it’s still going to take months for a clear picture to emerge of a path forward for live collective community arts. So we’ve put the Canary Pages online again, making it possible for choirs to join whenever they are ready, all the way through to the fall, and, just as important, to be able to say “oops” when COVID makes liars of us all, and to update the information they gave us on an ongoing basis.

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For readers looking for music to listen to, we have, for almost two decades, happily, and only slightly manipulatively, stood the metaphor on its head – pointing to the dozens and dozens of choirs signing up for our choral canary pages every May as a significant sign of the music community’s good health.

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It’s an odd kind of metaphorical full circle to have come when it’s the canaries that are the “canaries in the coal mine” for the entire live performing arts sector! But it’s a small ray of hope, at a time when the air we breathe in common cannot be taken for granted, that they are still perched and prepared to sing.

publisher@thewholenote.com
Handel’s *La Resurrezione*: A Premiere 300 Years in the Making

MATTHEW WHITFIELD

If one were to compile an orchestra and soloists to perform a religious work by Georg Frideric Handel, audience members could be forgiven for thinking that *Messiah* was on the program, so synonymous has this oratorio become with both the Christmas and Easter seasons. Despite this strong connection, there is another large-scale piece written by Handel that combines his uniquely dramatic style with Christian theology.

*La Resurrezione* is a two-part oratorio, or liturgical drama, focused on the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion and burial, detailing the events between Good Friday and Easter Sunday through the eyes of Lucifer, an Angel, Mary Magdalene, John the Evangelist and Mary Cleophas. Composed when Handel was only 23 years old, it is one of the composer’s earliest surviving works, preceded only by the opera *Almira* and a single oratorio, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*.

Although an early-career work by a relatively junior composer, *La Resurrezione* was premiered in grand fashion on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1708 in Rome, with the backing of the Marchese Francesco Ruspoli, Handel’s patron at this time, featuring lavish staging and scenery as well as four-tiered seating for the orchestra. In an interesting convergence of significant musical figures, Arcangelo Corelli led the orchestra in this premiere performance, a large ensemble (by early music standards) consisting of 39 strings of varying types, one viola da gamba, two trumpets, one trombone and four oboes.

Unlike the later *Messiah*, which features soloists and choir in an equally dramatic capacity, *La Resurrezione* features the five aforementioned character-soloists who carry the action through recitative, arias and smaller ensembles, with the full group coming together only in the concluding movements of each section. In this way, *La Resurrezione* is more operatic than its later counterpart and more Italianate in style, with demanding and florid vocal writing requiring both sensitivity and agility from its performers. Opera was forbidden during Holy Week by the Roman censors, but by taking this liturgical drama and cloaking its operatic contents in seasonally relevant religiosity, Handel evaded this ban while incorporating operatic style and substance.

What makes *La Resurrezione* a notable work, apart from the high quality of the music itself, is the way in which events are portrayed on two levels, in the earthly and supernatural realms. Earthly events are documented through recitative, moving the drama along, while arias provide an opportunity to engage with the characters themselves, exploring individual affects and moods as snapshots within the larger dramatic work. The supernaturally based Lucifer, for example, takes credit for Christ’s death at the beginning of the work, claiming triumph over the forces of good; by the end of the oratorio, however, he is once again banished into Hell, Christ proving victorious through the resurrection. Combining Handel’s musical skill with this remarkable libretto (written by Carlo Sigismondo Capece, who was living in exile in Rome) is indeed a recipe for success, and *La Resurrezione* is still considered one of the finest and most ambitious products of Handel’s years in Italy.

Despite the acknowledged success of this work, *La Resurrezione* had yet to be performed on Canadian soil – until now. On May 27, Opera Atelier will release the Canadian film premiere of this hidden gem, featuring an all-star roster of soloists, artists of the Atelier Ballet, and musicians drawn from the Tafelmusik orchestra. This
performance, originally intended to be live and in-person, was initially scheduled for April 2020, but the pandemic-related state of emergency declared in that month necessitated the cancellation of those concerts.

One year later, however, Opera Atelier is soldiering on. Recorded in late March of this year at both Koerner Hall and St. Lawrence Hall, Resurrezione performers faced the unusual challenge of capturing Handel’s vision in two parts: through sound, by first recording the audio alone; and then through action, staging the production to their previously recorded tracks, acting, lip-synching and dancing to their own sounds and voices. While such an extraordinary break from normalcy would be inconceivable at any other time, these are the demands placed upon performers amidst unprecedented pandemic circumstances. (For an in-depth look at Opera Atelier’s process, watch The Making of the Resurrection, a marvellously informative and interesting 30-minute documentary available for free on their website.)

As much as this performance of La Resurrezione is a testimony to Handel’s enormous artistic achievements, it is also a testament to the resilience, endurance and creativity of performing artists during one of the most challenging times in modern history. Through perseverance and skill, the artists of Opera Atelier have triumphed over ongoing pandemic adversity and are, at long last, able to present this extraordinary work to Canadian audiences, not just those within commuting distance of Toronto, but around the country.

I encourage you to support La Resurrezione and tune in for what will undoubtedly be a musical highlight of the season. It is an exciting opportunity to encounter a new piece of music, even more so when the novelty comes from the pen of such a familiar figure as Handel, and we are gifted to partake of such undiscovered treasures.

The film premiere of Opera Atelier’s La Resurrezione takes place May 27, 2021 at 7pm EDT (available until June 10, 2021). Carla Huhtanen, soprano, is the Angel; Meghan Lindsay, soprano, is Mary Magdalene; Allysone McHardy, mezzo-soprano, is Mary Cleophas; Colin Ainsworth, tenor, is John the Evangelist; and Douglas Williams, bass-baritone, is Lucifer.

Matthew Whitfield is a Toronto-based harpsichordist and organist.

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### Strings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ensemble</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday Oct. 21</td>
<td>Parker Quartet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Nov. 18</td>
<td>St. Lawrence Quartet</td>
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<td>Thursday Dec. 9</td>
<td>Gryphon Trio</td>
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<td>Thursday Jan. 13</td>
<td>Juilliard Quartet</td>
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<td>Thursday Feb. 3</td>
<td>Ensemble Made in Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Feb. 24</td>
<td>Miró Quartet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Mar. 24</td>
<td>Esmé Quartet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Apr. 28</td>
<td>Lafayette Quartet</td>
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</tbody>
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Strings subscriptions $352, $323

### Piano

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Artist</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct. 26</td>
<td>David J albert</td>
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<td>Tuesday Nov. 9</td>
<td>Stephen Hough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Jan. 25</td>
<td>Vanessa Benelli Mosell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Mar. 29</td>
<td>Benjamin Grosvenor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Apr. 12</td>
<td>Marc-André Hamelin</td>
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Piano subscriptions $225, $207

FULL SEASON OF 13 CONCERTS AVAILABLE AT $500, $459

Summer Music in the Garden Bids Farewell to Founding Artistic Director
TAMARA BERNSTEIN

CATHY RICHES

Anyone who witnessed the first concert in June 2001 – a miserable rainy evening with only a handful of people in the audience – might have been forgiven for thinking the Summer Music in the Garden series was doomed to failure. But that first concert didn’t daunt Tamara Bernstein, the founding artistic director of the series. Nor were the audiences deterred. In its 20-year history, the free concert series grew to become one of the most popular on the Toronto summer festival roster.

By its name, you would think that a venue called the Toronto Music Garden was made for live music, but that wasn’t the case. Perched on the inner harbour of Lake Ontario near the foot of Spadina Avenue, and designed in consultation with famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma, the Toronto Music Garden interprets, through the landscape of its six different garden sections, the six movements of J.S. Bach’s Suite No. 1 in G Major for Solo Cello.

It’s an idyllic natural setting with the breezes off the lake and the rustling of the trees, or so it seems, but for some of the performers it could be both a blessing and a curse. Flamenco dancer Esmeralda Enrique, who has been a regular performer there from the early days of Summer Music in the Garden, remembers how challenging those first performances were.

“At first, it was quite difficult technically. Outdoors, the sound dissipates and it’s difficult for musicians and dancers to hear each other, which is vital in live flamenco performances,” said Enrique. “The mist coming in later in the afternoon muffled the sound quite a lot and at times there were a lot of bugs flying around. I remember one flew into my mouth once! Ugh!

“As we came to know the physical limitations and sound level limits, we programmed performances more suited to the environment and temperature,” Enrique explained. “Despite some challenges, I always loved performing outdoors. In the Music Garden we were inspired by the trees and the wind and felt like they were part of our set.”
The Festival That Almost Wasn’t

Don Shipley was the creative director for performing arts at Harbourfront from 1988 to 2001 and was responsible for starting up the Summer Music in the Garden series and bringing Tamara Bernstein on board to program it.

“I was familiar with Tamara through her writing for The Globe and Mail and I was very impressed by her breadth of knowledge and musical intelligence,” said Shipley. “Her pure love for music was apparent and her interests stretched beyond classical and included contemporary genres. I felt she was the right person at the right time."

Bernstein recalls how completely out of the blue the call was from Shipley to take on the programming; and how she immediately agreed despite never having done work of that nature or having even gone to the Music Garden. “Once or twice in your life you just say yes to something, and this was one of those times,” she said.

Bernstein cites the way she herself was recruited as an object lesson for how to develop a diverse program and how to find interesting underexposed talent. “It was always in the back of my mind as a programmer that, yes there’ll be pitches from performers, but you always have to look for people who might not contact you,” said Bernstein. “Younger artists and people who might not think of playing at the Garden or who had never even heard of it.”

However, Summer Music in the Garden almost didn’t come to be. Shipley recounts how there was major opposition to having live music in the garden from a condo building nearby, due to noise concerns, and from one condo owner in particular who was very vocal.

“Jim Fleck, who was a major benefactor and fundraiser for the Garden, had the brilliant idea of asking Yo-Yo Ma himself to meet with the condo owner,” recalled Shipley. “So when Yo-Yo Ma was in town to play a concert, arrangements for a meeting and private concert at the condo were made. After that, the opposition magically melted away and the music series went ahead.”

Development of New Works

One of the key contributions Bernstein made to the cultural landscape during her tenure was the commissioning of new works. This enabled artists to explore ideas in a safe and unique space.

Composer and performer Barbara Croall recalls being invited by Bernstein to compose a new work back in 2008. Titled Calling From Different Directions, it was planned as a commemoration of the 9/11 attack in New York City and the loved ones of those lost.

It was a short, arresting piece invoking the four sacred directions, featuring Croall (cedar flutes and First Nation drum) and Anita McAlister (trumpet and conch shell), and bringing together instruments from different cultural “directions”: trumpet, conch shell, traditional cedar flutes and First Nations hand drum.

“Thinking of the trumpet and its ancestry, I immediately thought of how the conch shell goes back very far in many cultures globally,” said Croall. “Many Indigenous cultures for thousands of years have used it as an instrument of healing through sound. I mentioned this idea to Anita and by a really neat coincidence it turned out that her husband owned a conch shell that was playable and that I could use as one of the instruments in the piece.”

“Tamara was so excited by this idea, and the location of the TMG worked perfectly for Calling From Different Directions, as the sound really carried across the water,” explained Croall.

“Tamara takes great care, sensitivity and detailed planning with everything she does,” Croall continued. “She truly supports the artists that she invites, treating them with respect and kindness.”

All Were Welcome

Another feature of Bernstein’s tenure was the ahead-of-the-curve programming of a range of musical cultures and genres. Although multiculturalism and Indigenous and women artists are featured
much more these days, in those early days of Summer Music in the Garden, it wasn’t so usual.

Eric Stein has performed at the Garden for many years both as leader of the Brazilian choro group Tio Chorinho and as the artistic director of the Ashkenaz Festival.

“I’ve always admired the eclecticism of the programming,” said Stein. “And I especially appreciate how, although she maintained classical music as the core genre, she was clever about how she expanded it to other styles of music. Choro is a good example of that as the chamber music of Brazil.”

Classical Persian music, Taiko drumming, traditional Chinese stringed instruments and Indigenous music all had prominent places on the roster next to the Baroque and classical works.

“In 2000, I was totally new to the Toronto music scene,” said tabla player Subhajyoti Guha. “And the performance at the Music Garden gave me immediate access to a mainstream audience which later helped me to build up my career there and also to get students for teaching tabla.

“Tamara always made it a point to present the best of the diverse cultures in her festival and it was a sheer joy for me when she included my band in her festival in 2011.”

Women Rule
Looking back over the rosters of performers during the 20-year history of the music series, it’s striking how many women appeared – not only as performers, but as leaders and composers. From musicians presenting more traditional repertoire such as violinist Erika Raum – who played on the very first evening of the series in 2001 – to cellist Winona Zelenka, to improvisers like pianist Marilyn Lerner and clarinetist Lori Freedman, to Sarangi virtuosa Aruna Saroyan performing North Indian ragas.

“There was an obvious depth of thought Tamara put into the choice of acts and the balance she would strike by including many cultures and lots of female performers, long before it was mandated or popular,” said Eric Stein.

The all-woman Cecilia String Quartet is a prime example. The group played at the Music Garden every year from 2006 until they disbanded at the end of the 2017/2018 season. Violist Caitlin Boyle recalls that it was her first paying gig with the quartet.

“As a young musician just graduating, there aren’t tons of opportunities to get paid and recognized,” said Boyle. “And I know within Toronto, Tamara has given chances to many young artists, plus the freedom to choose their repertoire, which isn’t always the case.”

The Future of Music in the Garden
So the big question now is “what’s next?” In these pandemic times, uncertainty is the word of the day, especially when it comes to the performing arts. “We believe that this summer we will not be able to properly gather in large numbers in public places,” said Iris Nemani, chief programming officer for Harbourfront Centre. “So we’ve decided to put our efforts into commissioning new works that we hope will be performed in person in the Music Garden in 2022.

“Tamara has left a legacy of exemplary programming, created opportunities for hundreds of artists and presented beautiful music and dance performances for thousands of patrons,” said Nemani. “Summer Music in the Garden is a beloved, free program and we are looking forward to welcoming audiences back to the Garden next summer.”

Last words go to another contemporary composer whose work has shown up often across the life of the series, Quebec-based Michael Oesterle (although he characterizes his involvement as being more by chance than by design). “It’s not so much that I was specifically commissioned for the series but because musicians invited to perform there already had works by me in their proposed repertoire, and as luck would have it Tamara found the pieces interesting as well. And the feedback I got from those musicians after their performances there was always joyous and positive.

“Some of what Tamara brought to her 20-year tenure,” he continues, “is that she’s intelligent and knows music, but beyond that she is extremely curious, and has found courageous and wonderful ways of drawing audiences into music you might think wouldn’t have a hope in a challenging acoustic environment – ranging far, but never losing touch with the solo cello intimacy which inspired the place and the series all along.”

“I am sad to hear her time there is at an end.”

Cathy Riches is a self-described Toronto-based recovering singer and ink slinger.
A s I write this while an early spring blooms beyond my locked-down window, music presenters are trying their best to surf COVID-19’s Third Wave. The venerable Women’s Musical Club of Toronto – founded in 1898 – calmly announces on its website, “We’ve been here before... and we’ve survived.” After all, they have been holding Music in the Afternoon concerts since well before the flu pandemic of 1918/1919, enduring two World Wars, depressions and recessions, and our current devastating virus. “We will survive this one too.”

Their 2020/21 season has pivoted to live streaming and video on demand. 2019 Banff International String Quartet Competition winner, Viano String Quartet, has just concluded an on-demand run from April 1 to 25. May is devoted to Lebanese-Canadian soprano, Joyce El-Khoury, and Armenian-Canadian pianist, Serouj Kradjian, in an on-demand recital that mixes songs by Bizet, Fauré, Chausson, Ravel and Saint-Saëns with 20th-century Lebanese songs in Arabic. El-Khoury and Kradjian are preparing an extensive project involving music and instrumental artists from their home countries culminating in a CD that will include these Lebanese songs.

The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM)

“If I’m walking down the street, the rhythm of my walk will set off a tune in my head,” Eugene Levy said during an entertaining conversation on April 22 with RCM president and CEO, Peter Simon. “I’m always humming something – a lot of time I’m making things up.”

The multi-talented comic actor – known worldwide for Schitt’s Creek – was helping to launch the new online RCM series Music of My Life, a free continuing event featuring well-known performers in conversation illustrated with musical excerpts. The series is accessible at RoyalConservatory.Live, the new digital channel of the Royal Conservatory. At the time of writing, four more episodes have been confirmed: celebrated pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim (April 29); Steven Page, founding member of the Barenaked Ladies (May 6); Cynthia Dale, star of music theatre (May 13); and Paul Shaffer, best known as David Letterman’s musical collaborator for more than three decades (May 20).

Surprisingly – considering Levy’s memorable musical roles in Waiting for Guffman and A Mighty Wind as well as his accordion-playing Shmenge brother duo with John Candy on clarinet – there was no music played in his house until he was 12, which he attributed to the busy lives of his parents. Eventually, his brother took piano lessons and he dabbled in the accordion; in high school he took music as an option for five years, choosing tenor saxophone. He played in a full orchestra (“Wow! This is a whole new world here,” he thought) and also a 12-piece dance band (“You gotta do the standing-up thing”).

During the 48-minute conversation, Levy spoke about the origin
of the Shmenge brothers in Candy’s hotel room while shooting SCTV in Edmonton; and about faking live concerts backed by a polka band, with his accordion gutted so it couldn’t make a sound. Prompted by Simon, Levy talked about the origin of his character’s two left feet in Christopher Guest’s film Best in Show. And how his love of Bach (“I just loved the cluster of notes in a fugue”) grew out of watching a friend (Bob Morrow, who later became Hamilton’s longest-serving mayor) play Bach on the piano. That anecdote was the cue for Glenn Gould School student Godwin Friesen to perform Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp Major in an empty Koerner Hall.

Nowadays, music is a big part of the Levy household. His wife Deborah puts music on in the morning – “usually a classical station” – and plays piano most days. Simon prodded Levy for his take on Gershwin (“I love the intricate rhythms, the dynamic piano; it kind of says New York to me”) – which set up Anagnoson & Kinton who delivered a spirited two-piano version of Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue from an empty Koerner Hall.

The new channel features hundreds of hours of performances filmed in Koerner Hall with its superb acoustics, as well as engaging talks, documentaries (including the Music of My Life series) and celebratory events. New content will be added weekly.

Also from the Royal Conservatory, it’s always noteworthy hearing what Marc-André Hamelin is up to. His consummate musicianship fuelled by seemingly effortless technique will be on display in a live stream from Koerner Hall on Sunday, May 30, 2021 at 3pm and available for seven days for ticket holders (the concert has already been rescheduled twice). It’s a classical lineup with a C.P.E. Bach Rondo, a Haydn Fantasia and two Beethoven sonatas – Op.3 in C Major, Op.2 No.3 and the justly celebrated, dynamic Op.23 in F Minor, Op.57 (“Appassionata”). Rounding out the program is the world premiere of a new work Hamelin commissioned from Canadian composer John Oswald.

TSYO
During this unusual season, the 89-member Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra (TSYO) – made up of talented young musicians under the age of 22 – has maintained a commitment to learning and developing their craft. The students have continued to practice and work hard from the safety of their homes, with regular online workshops, lectures and masterclasses with TSYO Conductor Simon Rivard and TSO musicians and staff. Ordinarily, the TSYO would give performances throughout the season, culminating in a finale at Roy Thomson Hall. But this year, the young musicians came together online, giving a virtual recital for family and friends.

“Thanks to the efforts of the TSYO, we have all remained motivated and musical throughout these difficult times,” said 16-year-old cellist Antila Grieve, a member of the TSYO for two years, who performed in and co-hosted one of the recitals.

Gemma New
Earlier this year, New Zealand-born Gemma New, music director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and principal guest conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, was named the 12th woman to be so honoured. She has previously earned Solti Foundation U.S. Assistance Awards in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

The Solti Foundation U.S. is currently the only American foundation to grant these kinds of awards each year to young conductors. American citizens or permanent residents of the United States, 38 years of age or younger, who are career-ready artists in the field of conducting are eligible. The award comes with a $30,000 prize “to provide the recipient means to continue to master their craft.” The winner is selected “based on their skills and abilities, as well as their passion for communicating through music.

Music Toronto
Music Toronto’s free virtual concert series continues May 13, 2021 at 7:30pm (available until 7:30pm May 15) with a representative program of new music by the celebrated JACK Quartet. Included are works by Rodericus (arranged by Christopher Otto), Ruth Crawford Seeger, Elliott Carter and Tyshawn Sorey. Two weeks later at 7:30pm, May 27 (and available until 9:30pm May 29), clarinetist Julian Bliss joins the UK-based Carducci String Quartet in a performance of Mozart’s sublime Clarinet Quintet K.581 and David Bruce’s Gumboots (2008) – the title refers to South African labourers’ footwear in flooded gold mines. The York Press described it in 2019 as having a deceptively

20/21 Spring Virtually Yours
Online Season Announcement

The Ice is Talking – May 16.21
Works for violin and percussion as performed by Mark Fewer and Alyun Huang. Pieces by Georges Aperghis, Vivian Fung, Lei Liang, Sophie Dupuis, Tania León, Michael Oesterle, and Jean-Claude Risset.

Not Alone – broadcast date TBA (previously May 30)
Works for soloists with electronics. Pieces by George Lewis, Mélín Bång, Michel van der Aa, Bruno Mantovani, Luigi Nono, and Rebekah Cummings.

Aulos – broadcast date TBA (previously June 22)
Works for flutes performed by Dianne Aitken and Robert Alten. Pieces by Maurice Ohana, Hitomi Kaneko, Yoshishisa Taira, Toru Takemitsu, Hilda Paredes, Thorkell Sigurbjörnsson, Shaun E. Okpehholo, and Diego Luzuriaga

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calm opening leading into a “whacky dance that grows increasingly wild.”

*Rituaels*, a concert film featuring the engaging Quebec ensemble *collectif9*, with interpretive dance, stage movement and visuals and music by Hildegard von Bingen, Arvo Pärt, Michael Tippett, Nicole Lizée, Jocelyn Morlock and more, will be streamed June 17 at 7:30pm (available until 9:30pm, June 19). The St. Lawrence String Quartet presents a new *Haydn Discovery*, a lecture/demonstration followed by a complete performance of Haydn’s *String Quartet Op.20*, No.5 on June 30 at 7:30pm (available until midnight July 3).

**Einaudi**

The Ludovico Einaudi Seven Days Walking Tour, originally set for Roy Thomson Hall on April 25, 2021, has now been rescheduled to July 6, 2022 at 8pm. Excerpts from *Day One* and *Day Three* of Einaudi’s Seven Days Walking were crucial to the artistic success of *Nomadland* which won three historic Oscars on April 25 (during what would have been the RTH concert). Frances McDormand became the first Best Actress winner to also win Best Picture – McDormand was one of the film’s producers – and Chinese-born Chloe Zhao became the first woman of colour (and only the second woman) to win Best Director. Zhao recently spoke to Joe Dempsie, the host of *Experience: The Ludovico Einaudi Story* podcast about discovering Einaudi’s music for the first time. “I went online to search for classical music inspired by nature... I then started listening to Seven Days Walking and was so amazed by how I felt Ludovico was walking in the Alps. I felt like he and Fern [Frances McDormand’s character] were walking in parallel; their love of nature connects them, and I knew then his music would fit perfectly with our movie.”

*Paul Ennis is the managing editor of The WholeNote.*
Ever since I began writing this column four years ago, I have searched out and championed companies and artists exploring and breaking down the barriers between musical theatre, opera and dance. Imagine my delight when I discovered a new festival debuting in the last week of May this year dedicated to the same goals, to “reimagining the future of music theatre” and to building a new community of artists, scholars, journalists and students from across genres and generations.

The Watershed Festival, given this name to symbolize the coming together of these many streams of interconnected art forms, is helmed by prolific Canadian composer Dean Burry, now also an assistant professor at Queen’s University in Kingston, where the idea of the festival was born. Burry has been a friend of mine since I directed the world premiere of his opera Pandora’s Locker at the Royal Conservatory of Music’s Glenn Gould School in 2008; I got in touch to find out more about both the inspiration behind the festival and how the pandemic might be affecting plans for participants and attendees.

One thing that is clear right away in speaking to Burry about Watershed is how closely the goals of the festival align with his own belief in the need to break through the long-standing walls between the worlds of opera and musical theatre: in both the professional and academic worlds. As he told me, “I feel as though this is something that my heart has been in for a very long time. I work a lot in the opera field, but never did think that opera had to be one boxed-in thing. I have had some professional musical theatre shows, as well, and I’ve found that as much as we all try to be open, a lot of people in those two fields have strong feelings about what ‘opera is supposed to be’ as opposed to what ‘musical theatre is supposed to be’. The reality, though, as far as I am concerned, is that they are all on the same spectrum; both are methods of storytelling that use every art form: drama, literature, music, movement and design.”

Timing is sometimes the essence of alignment. Burry was just finishing up his doctorate at the University of Toronto, and Queen’s was looking for the right person to take up the reins of the new festival. In 2016, Queen’s had taken the unusual step of merging their previously separate drama and music schools – a move that still surprises many people – and inaugurating an academic program that integrates drama and music in a program focused more on an overview of creation than on learning specific technical skills. With a large donation (five million dollars) that followed shortly after from the Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation, this became the Dan School of Drama and Music. “When I came to Queen’s,” says Burry, “there was a real desire to capitalize on the gift and to really explore the concept of what music theatre is.” The Watershed Festival is, in effect, the spearhead of this mandate.

Opera and music theatre creation programs abound, especially at the company/collective level – Tapestry Opera, the Musical Stage Company and Loose Tea Music Theatre come readily to mind – but
as a festival Watershed brings something new to the mix, sitting as it does at the cusp of art and academia. Along with a showcase of recent new work from around the country and further afield, there will be a full-fledged accompanying symposium where scholars from around the world will present and exchange views with established and emerging music theatre thinkers, practitioners and writers engaged in the field. And anchoring it all, each year, will be a newly commissioned large work.

Enter Leslie Arden
For the debut festival commission Burry turned to acclaimed Canadian musical theatre creator Leslie Arden “as the perfect person for our first outing because we wanted to do a big musical and she has such a grasp of working at that scale, and would be wonderful to have as a mentor for our students.” The one caveat was the need to create a lot of female roles – a typical need in a university setting. Arden quickly said “Yes” and set to work creating The Lancashire Lass which tells the tumultuous story of the British suffragette movement through the eyes of a conflicted young woman, Annie Kenney.

Two professional musical theatre performers lead the otherwise student company. Queen’s alumna Tracy Michailidis (Life After at Canadian Stage, Kiss of the Spider Woman and Sunday in the Park with George at Eclipse Theatre Company) plays the role of Mrs. Pankhurst, and multi-talented performer, musical director and Queen’s faculty member, Melissa Morris, is Annie. Given current restrictions, this first festival is promising “a substantial online sneak peek” at The Lancashire Lass as the final evening event of the 2021 festival, with a full in-person production in 2022.

The Symposium
Daytime during the festival, which runs from May 25 to 28, the inaugural symposium will take place – all on Zoom this year - featuring both presentations (15 minutes at most, followed by Q&As) and panel discussions. Most of these sessions will be hosted by the symposium organizer, Queen’s professor, Dr Colleen Renihan, whose wide-ranging knowledge of the music theatre field as both a musicologist and trained singer has drawn in many participants from not only Canada, but the US, England and the Netherlands. With the festival taking place online, many more people from around the world will be able to take part as both participants and attendees.

The title of the very first panel, Reimagining The World of Music Theatre Together, sums up Watershed’s raison d’être. Burry will host it, bringing in leading professionals from the worlds of musical theatre, opera, operetta and avant-garde music theatre to speak passionately, and perhaps even argue, about the extent to which the two genres’ shared interests in song, theatre and story, can transcend what divides them, at this watershed moment in time and world history. Storytelling, representation, teaching, spectatorship and dramaturgy, reimagining the future of opera, and decolonizing music theatre: all these and more will come into play during the symposium.

New Works Showcase
Burry will be a busy man throughout the festival, hosting live discussions with the artists, and live chat question and answer
sessions following each of the evening New Works Showcase performance events. Already announced are 15-minute filmed excerpts of new works from three different teams including Afarin Mansouri (Zuleykhā), Jake Schindler and Sam Boer (Urso), and Kevin Skelton (Pulse). Also already announced, Montreal’s Musique 3 Femmes, with a filmed workshop presentation of three of their most recent commissions (all by women), followed by a livestreamed discussion and live chat Q&A.

The festival launch on the evening of May 25 is also, in a manner of speaking a “new works” event – the Gala Launch of Julie Salversen’s new book When Words Sing: Seven Canadian Libretti. It was going to be, festival organizers thought, a quiet, intimate event, until the number of people wanting to be involved increased dramatically: it will be hosted by Salverson and Tapestry Opera artistic director Michael Hidetoshi Mori, and will now feature readings by several of the creators of those libretti, including, so far, Ann-Marie MacDonald (Nigredo Hotel), George Elliott Clarke (Beatrice Chancy) and Marie Clements (Missing).

It’s a case in point for what Burry calls “opening the doors and welcoming everyone in”: scholars, practitioners at every level, journalists and other writers, interested audience members and students, “in order to shine a light on the exciting work that is being done in Canada and around the world and to look at how it is all connected.” Sparking conversation among participants and attendees is at the heart of it – about all the facets and permutations of music theatre, past, present and future, with the future paramount, as Watershed explores what music theatre needs to become as it moves towards a more complete inclusion of all histories and viewpoints, and styles of storytelling theatre.

As Burry said to me, “‘Music Theatre’ is opera and musical theatre and everything in between and everything beyond. Everyone is welcome under this tent, we have no walls.”

The Watershed Festival at Queen’s University runs from May 25 to 28, 2021.

All events will be online and free to attend. Free registration is required.

For more details and to register, please visit the festival’s website at www.watershedmusictheatre.com or email watershed.mt@queensu.ca

**QUICK PICKS**

**Ongoing:** The new online version of the popular in-person SINGular Sensation open mic shows at Staltered’s Piano Bar and then the 120 Diner, SINGular Sensation Online! offers biweekly programming combining performances, conversations, and new segments on wellness and world events. Starting May 17, they are adding an Open Mike’ show on every third Monday of the month on their YouTube channel, hosted by the charismatic Jennifer Walls. All shows are free to watch, and stay online after their first broadcast. Find them on Instagram at @singular_sensation, or on Facebook at Singular Sensation Online!

**Mid-June:** Nightwood Theatre’s annual fundraising The Lawyer Show presents an audio recording version of Stars from Mars, the new Canadian musical comedy set inside the first human colony on Mars, about a mother and daughter who are worlds apart. Book and lyrics by Ashley Botting; music by Daniel Abrahamson. This Toronto-born musical was developed for Sheridan College’s Canadian Music Theatre Project; nightwoodtheatre.net

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.

A Concerto is a Conversation counters a limiting trope

GLORIA BLIZZARD

A Concerto is a Conversation is this complex tale of two men – their vision, resilience and successes – told in exactly 13 minutes. In this story of family, transcendence, love and the pursuit of excellence, we follow a young Black American classical pianist and composer, Kris Bowers to the premiere of his violin concerto, For a Younger Self, at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. The story is told in parallel with the journey of his grandfather, Horace Bowers Sr., from Jim Crow-era Florida to the position of highly successful businessman in California.

Often when I watch films about Black people, I do not recognize myself or anyone I know in the stories and perspectives presented for consumption. I know that film is not always meant to be “the whole truth” or “the story of a people”, but what is often presented as Black is a limited trope, is unbeautiful, is a sidekick for a white lead.

This documentary, co-directed by Kris Bowers and L.A.-based Nova Scotia-transplant Ben Proudfoot, counters that vision, centralizing the story of the Black leads without compromise and with what I can only call love.

Within the first few minutes, Bowers questions whether he belongs in the traditionally whitespaces and professions of classical music. Bowers’s query is startling given his list of achievements: collaboration on Jay-Z and Kanye West’s 2011 joint album Watch the Throne; scores for Gotham Chopra’s Kobe Bryant’s Muse (2015) and the multiple Oscar-winning Green Book (2018); and the series music for Ava DuVernay’s When They See Us (2019), Justin Simien’s Dear White People (2014); and Chris Van Dusen’s period romp, Bridgerton (2020), all on Netflix.

His response is not so surprising when seen in context, though. It can be hard to maintain a feeling of surety when one’s position can be so constantly precarious.

Pianist Morgan-Paige Melbourne, for example, in a previous story of mine, described some of her experiences as a young, Black classical pianist in competition in Canada, facing hostility.
from teachers, adjudicators, other performers and their parents, who questioned her right to be in that environment. A piece by composer Daniel Bernard Roumain, who questioned her right to be in that environment. A piece by composer Daniel Bernard Roumain, was recently decommissioned, and the composer Daniel Bernard Roumain, was recently decommissioned, when Tulsa Opera in Oklahoma, decided one crucial word in the lyrics of his work was offensive.

 Granted, artist responses to this constant feeling of pressure can be very different. Melbourne developed deep concentration, and the abilty to block out these experiences. Her recent short film, Where Do I Go?, with Tapestry Opera director Michael Hidetoshi Mori, relates her journey into resilience. The documentary Disruptor Conductor, directed by Sharon Lewis, shows conductor Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser transferring the discomfort by disrupting the conventional use of space: taking a string quartet to a women’s prison in Kitchener, Ontario; bringing drag queen and violinist Thorgy Thor into a Halifax concert hall to play with the Nova Scotia Symphony Orchestra; and creating concert experiences inclusive of any kind of neurodiversity.

What film can be
I generally write about music, dance, art and literature. Watching A Concerto is a Conversation reminded me how film (with its vast vocabulary of pacing, angles, framing and editing) has complex and amazing possibilities for storytelling. There has always been within it, the potential to expand the limited stories told to date of Black people. What comes to mind is Frances-Anne Solomon’s full-length docudrama HERO, where archival black and white footage is spliced in to fill our historical perspectives of the pan-African movement. In A Concerto is a Conversation, Horace Bowers Sr.’s journey from Jim Crow Bascom, Florida, his motivation to get out of there, and his arrival as a successful L.A. businessman are similarly elucidated.

To me, this short feels like an antidote to the peripheral placement of the classical pianist Don Shirley in Green Book, or the limited vision accorded to Miles Davis in the bio-flick Miles Ahead. The centralization of Bowers Sr., the Black musician and the tenderness of the relationship between the two men is something that I have not seen before, and that I do recognize.

Both Bowers and his grandfather somehow manage to speak directly to the audience through the camera and to each other at the same time. According to Proudfoot, in a wide-ranging interview with POV Magazine, it’s an approach to filming he has used before, notably in his Almost Famous short film series for The New York Times. Known as the Interrotron technique, it was developed by award-winning documentarian Errol Morris – a method of rigging the camera so that, in looking straight at the questioner, the subject is also looking straight through the camera at the audience.

As Bowers points out to Ava DuVernay, Concerto’s executive producer, in an interview, most people now view media on their phones and this Errol Morris technique creates an uncanny intimacy with the interlocutor. With warm lighting and soft voices, every flicker of emotion or almost imperceptible flinch is revealed. The audience feels invited into dialogue, into the skin of Bowers and his grandfather.

The conversation must continue
As I said earlier, I often experience a cognitive disconnect when I watch Black people on film. I must first de-centre myself in order to engage with someone else’s limited vision of who we might be. Film itself is not the culprit, though. It offers the full range of methodologies needed to portray the infinite voices of Black artists. This includes everything from Melbourne’s iPad-filmed, single-take creations, to the multi-dimensional Where Do I Go? with Tapestry Opera that combines lyrics, dance, poetry and improvised piano, to A Concerto is a Conversation’s 13 brilliant minutes – which tells of the lives of two Black men, with beauty and warmth, from loving angles, a perspective that is deeply needed and rarely seen.

The men in the film experience racism, but racism is not solely what the film is about. If it were, it would of necessity centralize the system and the perpetrators. It is also about the capacity for excellence, about living well, being happy, about transformation. It is about how we, as humans, stand on the shoulders of those who went before us. It is about how we can transcend. At time of writing this, the film is up for an Academy Award in the short documentary category. By the time this is published, we’ll know if it has won that award. Whether it does or not, it is an outstanding remedy for our times, and the reward will be that it will be more widely seen.

Throughout the score of the film (composed by Bowers, of course), we hear what he calls “loose variations” of How Great Thou Art, gospel music as familiar to Bascom, Florida as it is to Hollywood. As the credits roll, the grandfather sings the full melody and lyrics as Bowers accompanies him. “You did it, you did it,” the elder man exclaims as they finish the piece. Perhaps he is talking to the man he coached and mentored, no longer a boy, but a fully realized and successful musician. Perhaps he is talking to himself.

I recall a children’s board book by Vera B. Williams that I used to read to my daughter when she was very little. I’d carefully chosen it because amongst the illustrations was one Black child doing perfectly ordinary things. The baby, when tickled or hugged or given something precious, would say, and we, my daughter and I, would repeat it. Perhaps he is talking to the man he coached and mentored, no longer a boy, but a fully realized and successful musician. Perhaps he is talking to himself.

Gloria Blizzard is a non-fiction writer, poet and penner of songs, whose wordsmithing has appeared in numerous literary publications, magazines and sound recordings. She is currently completing her first full-length book, a collection of essays, and can be reached at www.gloriablizzard.com.
“Click Unmute!”
How the Zoom Boom is Shifting the Choral World

MENAKA SWAMINATHAN

Lockdowns! Vaccines! Homemade focaccia! Yes, we are still talking about the pandemic. The media cacophony rises like the tides: job losses, school closures, suspension of hobbies, failing businesses, whole sectors with the rug swept out from under them, including live performance and gathering to make music.

Happily, with survival depending on reevaluation, creativity and adaptation, we are witnessing an unexpected resurgence among musical ensembles finding ways to get together, even at a time when gathering in person is met with finger-wagging (not from the conductors) and hefty fines.

Regular readers know that May is usually the month when The WholeNote publishes its Canary Pages Choral Directory, but that in May 2020 the period for joining the directory was extended from May right through September, with choral profiles being posted to the website as soon as received. Well, it’s May again, and while uncertainty still prevails for many choirs, a heartening number have already signed up. So I reached out to several of these “early adopters” who have already submitted profiles for this year’s Canary Pages, to try to get a feel for how they weathered the past year and how, if at all, their plans for the coming season are further along than at this time last year.

Many expressed frustration, mostly due to the shift of being predominantly online. Most are in agreement, however, that the show, and the opportunity to sing together, must go on. And although more muted than usual, choral directors and choristers are still working together behind the scenes to keep the music in the air. Figuratively speaking, of course.

Keeping a Sense of Community

A choir is not just a performing ensemble, it is a community, synonymous with togetherness: the weekly rehearsals, members shoulder to shoulder or facing one another, breathing in unison, voices harmoniously creating magic ... all in the current context a condemnable germ-y activity.

When the first lockdown was announced, choristers were faced with a tough decision: interrupt the choral season or sing on whilst learning to navigate unfamiliar territory. Like true leaders, many choral directors forged on and took their choruses online. It wasn’t perfect; memberships decreased and singers were initially skeptical about singing virtually, some choosing to pull back altogether until in-person rehearsals resume.

I asked the directors I reached out to how they had kept their members engaged in a time that saw a decline in motivation. The general consensus was that the pandemic, although unwelcome, prompted them to be even more creative in their approach in order not to stagnate.

Pauline McKenzie is the advertising representative of the Jubilate Singers, a community choir of between 25 and 50 singers, conducted by Isabel Bernaus. She mentioned integrating social activities into their rehearsal time. An example she gave was holding “pot lucks”, where snacks or full meals were eaten “companionably with others”. She also detailed breaking out into “rooms” to allow for small group interactions on assigned topics, [such as] “show-and-tell” where members would share a personal item with their groups.

Peg McCracken, business manager of the Peterborough Singers, an auditioned choir of over 100 singers under the direction of Sydney Birrell, acknowledged that “there was a definite decrease in attendance at [their] virtual events; but for those who wanted to stay connected [they] created things like a singer’s buy-and-sell page and have intentionally been very active on social media and YouTube with trivia contests and information sessions.”

Les voix du cœur is a vocal ensemble of over 40 amateur singers, dedicated to showcasing French popular songs from Canada and Europe; they pride themselves on being a prominent fixture in Toronto’s French-speaking cultural community. Catherine Chereu-Sharp, vice-president and secretary of the board of directors, described a similar approach to McCracken’s, “offering workshops on music theory, breathing, acting techniques and regular virtual meetings to keep everyone informed and stay in touch.”

Zoom Adventures: the Good, the Bad and the Pantless

From business meetings, to parties, to dates, Zoom became the leading online platform for video conferences during the pandemic, so it is no surprise that Zoom was unanimous as the chosen method of practice for the choirs I contacted. Unsurprisingly, it comes with its challenges, some recognized benefits and many humorous anecdotes. One thing is for sure, when this is all over, there will not be a shortage of awkward Zoom tales.

When asked about the most challenging aspect of an online environment, Jenny Crober, artistic director of the VOCA Chorus of Toronto, an auditioned, inclusive ensemble, comprised of 50 to 100 singers, detailed it perfectly. “The first thing that comes to mind is the heartache of not being able to enjoy the simple, irreplaceable joy of singing together with each other […] and missing the simple, incredibly powerful physical connections with each other … like a hug, and monthly pub night at a real (not virtual) pub.” Additionally,
she mentions “dealing with the occasional vagaries of technology, including Zoom, where calls of ‘You’re still muted!’ , ‘My Internet just died!’ , and ‘Could you put me back into my Breakout Room please?’ were aplenty. Crober spoke highly of Zoom’s “Breakout Rooms” feature as a method used to organize the choir into smaller, more manageable sectional, led by herself, the accompanist, and the professional section leads accordingly.

Each VOCA session begins together in the main room, where a variety of warm-ups are conducted and one of their six professional section leads teaches the rest of the choir about specific musicianship skills. (And on Monday nights yoga sessions with their accompanist, Elizabeth Acker.) They then separate into pre-assigned breakout rooms, “absolutely invaluable each week for fine-tuning and providing detailed coaching sessions.”

Crober finds a silver lining to their new online practice, sharing that “many choristers, who had initially doubted the effectiveness of Zoom at the beginning of the season, began to really enjoy and look forward to [their] Monday night sessions” – partly for the coaching, but also very much for the camaraderie. She has no shortage of humorous anecdotes from choristers: loud pets, swearing neighbours and interminable construction. All are entertaining after the fact, but she emphasizes that “all manner of poorly timed incidents made [our] virtual choir recording experiences unforgettable!”

Virtual fatigue

Running a smooth online rehearsal requires technological savvy, and awkwardness is an unavoidable aspect of the past year’s learning curve. Was that a delay in the soprano section, or did the Internet just cut out for a second? Albert Wong, musical director of the Harbourfront Chorus, a non-auditioned community choir with under 25 singers, preaches to the choir (in every sense of that phrase) about recognizing “Zoom fatigue.” Being a smaller, more intimate group, as Wong points out, “the community aspect of [the] choir is very strong.” He, therefore, was adamant on ensuring they had “some sort of continuity” as the isolation has dragged on, with two Zoom sessions every month. He is quick to acknowledge that they were not for everyone, noting a decrease in attendance during online sessions compared to the normal number with in-person rehearsals. On the plus side, he says, a benefit of Zoom has been the ability to reconnect with members of the choir who had moved to different provinces, and have now been able to rejoin the group.

The Peterborough Singers, Peg McCracken says, had to take a slightly different approach to maintain the Singers during the
pandemic. Zoom rehearsals “proved to be quite frustrating for a certain portion of the choir that was unable to access reliable Wi-Fi.” So right from the onset they “formed a recovery task force that set up the guidelines and safety objectives for small in-person rehearsals. Just over half of [their] members were able to attend a series of weekly in-person rehearsals lasting one hour each. Strict protocols were set up in order to ensure everyone’s safety. These sessions concluded at Christmas as the COVID situation worsened.”

**Moving Forward**

While some choirs simply decided against putting on concerts entirely until given permission to perform live again, others dug deep into the virtual world and produced online concerts and other productions online, learning along the way. Tedious and extensive as the process might have been, it’s a true testament to the tenacity of these choral communities, and the strength of their support for one another, that they were able to accomplish as much as they did. We’ll dig deeper into progress being made in regard to this aspect of things as 2021/22 takes clearer shape.

It was certainly very unbecoming of March 2020 to have all of us strap ourselves into a rickety, year-long roller coaster ride, including loops we really did not want to go through. But, a year later, nauseated and with our knuckles turned white, we have at least figured out the mechanics. Safe to say, however the coming year unfolds, we will all be better equipped to enjoy the ride.

Menaka Swaminathan is a chorister and soloist on hiatus, eager to get back to a singing groove. She is currently a writer and student of Vision Therapy, based in Toronto.

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**MEET THE MAKERS**

**Michael Sankey and Linda Manzer**

**Master Builders**

While the focus in this magazine is typically on the musicians, venues, and institutions that comprise our shared musical community, it seemed like the time was ripe to focus on something a bit different: master builders who create exceptional instruments, beloved by players and audiences alike.

This month, I interviewed two notable Ontario guitar luthiers: Michael Sankey and Linda Manzer. Sankey - whose business, Sankey Guitars, is based in Ottawa – builds forward-thinking instruments, with an emphasis on ergonomic shapes, unique wood, and cutting-edge design. Manzer, based in Toronto, has long been a world-renowned guitar maker; her instruments can be heard in the hands of luminaries such as Pat Metheny, Julian Lage and Bruce Cockburn.

In my interview with Manzer and Sankey below, we discuss the effects of the pandemic on their practices, their exciting upcoming projects (including a new Manzer guitar for Metheny), and their hopes for the post-pandemic future.

**WN:** In March of last year, when the pandemic first broke and quarantine protocols began, how were your operations affected? How have the ongoing workplace COVID protocols affected the way that you do business?

**LM:** When the pandemic broke last March, I was actually visiting a guitar-maker friend (Steve Grimes) in Hawaii to celebrate his 1000th guitar. I returned about a week before Canadian travel restrictions were being seriously put in place. The reality of what was happening in the world was just settling in. Travelling was pretty wild. The morning I arrived home I had what I thought was a really bad cold, but in an abundance of caution I put myself in a self-imposed quarantine for about a month and a half while I recovered. I’ll never know for sure if it was COVID or not. I tested negative but it was early testing days and I had all the signs.

I have a shop in Toronto but also in Almonte, Ontario, which is where I do the bulk of my work these days. I completely stopped working for about two-plus months. Every working musician I know suddenly lost their jobs and suddenly stopped touring, and it was pretty shocking and devastating for them. There was no end in sight and as time marched on it became obvious things weren’t going to change anytime soon and they had to make huge adjustments. I was quite sure I would never get an order for another guitar. Then, about four months in, that flipped on its head and I suddenly got a flurry of guitar orders.

**MS:** COVID hit me personally and professionally at the same time.

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**the WholeNote**

**CANARY PAGES**

For current profiles of the choirs mentioned in this article, and all the others in the process of joining The WholeNote 2021/22 Canary Pages Choral Directory, please visit thewholenote.com/canary.

A warm welcome, so far, to the following:

- Achill Choral Society
- Bel Canto Singers
- Cantabile Chamber Singers
- Chorus Niagara
- Chorus York
- Ensemble vocal Les voix du coeur
- Georgetown Choral Society
- Harbourfront Chorus
- Jubilate Singers
- Pax Christi Chorale
- The Peterborough Singers
- Serenata Singers
- Tempus Choral Society
- Toronto Chamber Choir
- Toronto Children’s Chorus
- Toronto Welsh Male Voice Choir
- Village Voices Community choir
- VOCA Chorus of Toronto
- West Toronto Community Choir

Choirs ready to join or re-join, contact karen@thewholenote.com

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20 | May and June 2021
One of the main avenues for marketing and selling my instruments is to display and present them at musical-instrument trade shows around the world. And one of my favourite things to do is travel to interesting cities and connect with the people there who love the art of the guitar. I had a few of those planned, and of course with the travel bans (not to mention bans on gatherings) those shows had to be cancelled, perhaps never to return.

It could have been worse, though. My workshop is in my home, so with nowhere to go I could devote extra time to building guitars. I did run into a few issues with suppliers having difficulty fulfilling my orders for parts and sometimes shipping instruments internationally took a lot longer than expected. But overwhelmingly, my clients have accepted and understood when my delivery timelines had to be extended.

Contrary to initial expectations at the outset of quarantine in March 2020, large instrument companies such as Fender, Taylor, Martin and others experienced a major boom in sales during much of last year. This boom, however, is largely attributed to a surge in casual hobbyist musicians buying low- and mid-price instruments. As a luthier who makes specialized, pro-level instruments, how has the pandemic affected your sales?

**MS:** I don’t have the volume or the consistency of output to be able to draw such precise conclusions as the big companies, but I also felt a substantial boost in demand at the beginning of the pandemic. It may have tapered down to “business as usual” by now, but, given the rather long lead time it takes for me to build guitars, I get to keep riding this wave longer than them. Many of the guitar makers I chat with have noticed the same thing. I suppose a lot of folks have found that working from home gives them more free time to do the things they want to do, like play guitar!

**LM:** The first few months I got no inquiries at all, and then suddenly I was flooded with orders. I’m now booked a full year in advance. I’ll be 100% honest: I was actually starting to think of other projects I’ve been putting off for years and looking forward to having the time to work on them, but that evaporated.

How would you describe the target market for your instruments?

**LM:** I build for guitar players who know what they want in an instrument and feel an affinity to my building style. If someone comes to me for a guitar they usually know about my work and have a pretty good idea of what they will be getting acoustically. I try to make the best instrument I can to suit their playing style and their needs.

**MS:** Typically, people who are interested in my guitars are not just musicians, they are connoisseurs of the art of fine guitars. That’s the funny thing about guitars: they are not just a means of making music; they are expressions of identity, vessels for sonic exploration, visual inspiration and tactile satisfaction.
music: they are expressions of identity, vessels for sonic exploration, visual inspiration and tactile satisfaction. So my instruments need to be highly functional, but also succeed at engaging the other senses of highly discriminating individuals. They are simultaneously art and tools for making art.

The relationship between specialized builders and professional musicians is often close. Of the musicians playing your instruments, what current (or upcoming) projects are you most excited about?

LM: I’m working on a guitar for Pat Metheny right now that is very close to being finished and I’ll be sending it to him within the month. He always surprises me with what he does with my instruments. He is so adaptable to whatever I make for him and he finds ways to musically explore it that I usually can’t imagine. He’s such a pleasure to work with.

And I’m working on a series of archtop guitars for some really wonderful players who have been patiently waiting. Some supplies have been a little harder to get, and with the lockdowns on and off in Ontario it’s made everything a little more cumbersome, but I’m one of those lucky people who gets to work at home so absolutely no complaints from me. I am extremely grateful to the people on the front lines keeping everything working and adapting to the ever-changing rules and protocols. These people are heroes.

MS: 2022 is going to be the 100th anniversary of the modern archtop guitar, as exemplified by the first Lloyd Loar L-5. I really enjoy making archtop guitars and pushing the boundaries of what they can be and what they can do; I have a couple of very special projects in mind to celebrate that milestone. So far they’re just on the drawing board, but I can’t wait to start sharing their progress!

Final reflections, on the pandemic and the future:

MS: As a very (very!) small business I can’t really separate the company from the person – they are the same entity. Always have been. And that entity is looking forward to backyard BBQ dinners with friends and family – the kind where you just relax and accept all the noise, mess and chaos as an inevitable part of life. Because now I know that it’s not.

LM: While this year has been incredibly challenging and nightmarish for a lot of people, there’s some aspect to what has happened to all of us socially that may change us all forever. Some for the good, I hope. There will be some healing to do and I hope we can all look after one another. My own personal experience of this imposed isolation is reminiscent of how my career started when I worked really long hours alone and was able to dive deep into what I was doing without interruption. It’s been cleansing in some ways and feels a little like a full circle. But I’m really looking forward to hugging my friends and family.

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.
I’ve come to realize that playing the bass, at least playing it the way I do, is like being a shark. Sharks have to swim constantly to live.

To start because one of the players tested positive, then suspending the entire season the next day. The other major sports rapidly followed suit and that’s when we knew we were in trouble: when multi-billion dollar industries relying on ticket sales suddenly shut down, it gets your attention. Opera companies closing? Who cares? Theatre seasons cancelled? So what? Jazz clubs shuttered? Please, I’m kidding of course, with some bitterness, but it was professional sports shutting down that signalled we weren’t in Kansas anymore, and wouldn’t be for some time.

The night the NBA suspended that game my wife Anna developed a sudden, severe cough and chest tightness and we both thought, “Uh-oh, she has it.” I was supposed to teach private lessons the next day and wondered about the wisdom of going in because if she had it, I likely did too. But she had no fever or other symptoms and in the end I did teach the next day, a case of “If I knew then what I know now, I never would have done it.” Anna made an appointment with her doctor that day – probably the last day she could have – and in between lessons I got a text from her saying, “Honey, great news! It’s only pneumonia!” surely the only time anyone was ever relieved to have pneumonia.

Laughin’ to Keep from Cryin’

One of the great side benefits of being a jazz musician is that underdog gallows humour becomes second nature: jazz players are used to being marginalized and beating their heads against the wall, so having a mordant sense of humour is a necessary defense. A good example was an early pandemic cartoon showing a pre-lockdown jazz club with six people in the audience and a post-lockdown club with the same six people. COVID Shmovid, bring it on, we’re used to losing. Or a musician friend’s declaration that whoever amongst us had the most cancelled gigs was “the winner.” Or that before COVID, having a mordant sense of humour is a necessary defense. A good example was an early pandemic cartoon showing a pre-lockdown jazz club with six people in the audience and a post-lockdown club with the same six people. COVID Shmovid, bring it on, we’re used to losing.

Being and Nothingness

After the March 16 lockdown, I spent a lot of time doing what I uncomfortably came to realize I’m pretty good at: nothing at all. It was like the reverse of those sports car ads – from 100 to zero m.p.h. in three seconds flat. I came to realize that my closest practical involvement with music would be through teaching and spent a lot of the summer trying to sort out the challenges of what that would look like, without really knowing what changes might lie ahead. And to be sure there were some, mostly a switch from a hybrid of in-person and remote teaching to remote only. It involved some compromise, adaptation and outside-the-box thinking, but given the trying circumstances, I would say the year was successful; my students all made good progress and still learned a lot. Congratulations to my fellow teachers, the support staff and, most of all, the students for their efforts in making it all work.

As for playing? Not so much. In earlier articles I wrote about playing with Mark Eisenman and Mark Micklethwaite and streaming our efforts to a subscribing audience, but that shut down in early November once we entered the second (?) wave. Now that we’re in the third, or ninth, or wherever the hell we are, this won’t resume anytime soon. So my relationship with the bass has been reduced to practising, with mixed success. I end up working on intricate things like playing the melodies to songs in all 12 keys, which is a workout and useful to an extent, but doesn’t really address the nuts and bolts of what I mostly have to do: bang out hard, fat quarter notes till I’m blue in the face. I know I should be practising that but the trouble is it’s too boring without the presence of a drummer to make me bear down. I’ve come to realize that playing the bass, at least playing it the way I do, is like being a shark. Sharks have to swim constantly to live and bassists need to play with people continuously or else they wither. Playing jazz bass alone doesn’t mean much, not even to me.

Hope Dawns

So, where are we? What do we do? How do we keep faith as this mess goes on longer and seems to be getting worse and worse? Just the other day I received some answers to these questions along with a glimmer of hope from the teaching front.

I was asked to adjudicate the recital of a fourth-year bassist named Ian Aff, whom I know but hadn’t heard play yet. I’ve done this work many times, but this round would be different. No audiences or adjudicators can be present at the recitals; the ensembles livestream their concerts on a YouTube channel; and the performances are archived so they can also be watched later. Being naturally distrustful of digital technology I had my doubts, but while there were reportedly some glitches early on, it was seamless. At the appointed hour the camera went live to show bassist Aff with his quartet of tenor saxophone, piano and drums, the rhythm section in masks and everyone distanced. I felt for them playing in such a vacuum, but it didn’t seem to faze them at all. They began to play Herbie Hancock’s Toys and within seconds the magic spell of live music took over, even with no one physically present. And the spell deepened over the next hour or so, their concentration and interplay and intense listening winning the day – a real band playing music for keeps.

It was a beautiful presentation of a nicely varied program involving thoughtful, interesting and engaging improvisation; perhaps necessarily a little more subdued than usual, but riveting nonetheless. I was stunned and grateful, as this concert made me forget the pandemic for a while. How could I have forgotten that’s what good music is supposed to do? Stopping time and lifting you up, I likely did too. But she had no fever or other symptoms and in the end I did teach the next day, a case of “If I knew then what I know now, I never would have done it.” Anna made an appointment with her doctor that day – probably the last day she could have – and in between lessons I got a text from her saying, “Honey, great news! It’s only pneumonia!” surely the only time anyone was ever relieved to have pneumonia.

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listings@theWholeNote.com

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

Our listings continue to be a work in progress as we all, musicians, presenters and media alike, explore the best ways to reach audiences in a timely fashion, and for us a comprehensive and reliable monthly calendar of live musical events, in these rapidly changing times is not a realistic goal. What you see here is a snapshot, dated May 1, of our new WEEKLY UPDATES, available both as a regular e-letter and on our website.

In these volatile times, readers are encouraged to check weekly for changes and updates to existing listings, and for the numerous new listings being added each week, both current and further into the future.

IN THIS ISSUE: TWO LISTINGS SECTIONS

• Section 1: Events by date for May 1 – July 7

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: Listings for ongoing events or previously date-related events now available on demand online.

These are musical activities that readers can access in their own time, usefully identified by the name of the presenter or the nature of the event.

HOW TO LIST:

1. Use the convenient online form at thewholenote.com/applylistings
2. Email listings to listings@thewholenote.com.

Please note, we do not take listings over the phone.

Deadlines

1. Weekly online updates: submission deadline is 6pm Tuesday of the week prior to the event in question, for Friday posting.
2. Print: approximately fifteen days before publication.

Our next print issue covers July and August 2021, and the submission deadline for new listings and updates to listings previously processed is 6pm Monday June 7.

Events by Date | May 1 to July 7, 2021

PLEASE NOTE: All times are Eastern Time unless otherwise noted. Listings are based on information sent to WholeNote in advance by event presenters. Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, some events may be cancelled or postponed. Please visit presenters’ websites or contact them directly for updates.

May 02 1:30: Elin Soderstrom. Binary! Two-Part Didactic Music from the 16th Century and Beyond. Call 416-337-6611 or email info@temptomario.net. ONLINE

May 02 7:00: TD Niagara Jazz Festival. Twilight Jazz Series: 40 Years With Music. Vox Violins; Youth Performers Alex George and Dexter Frank. Visit niagarajazzfestival.com/twilight $15(adv); $19(on May 2); $29(dinner & show). Discounts available for musicians, arts workers and students. ONLINE

May 02 8:00: New Music Concerts. Broadcast: The Ice Is Talking. Works for violin & percussion by Georges Aperghis, Vivian Fung, Lei Liang, Sophie Dupuis, and others. Mark Feyer violin; Aiyun Huang, percussion. Available on Facebook and YouTube. Broadcast links available closer to the date. ONLINE

May 05 7:30: Toronto Consort. A Stellar Evening of Premium Wine Tasting, Treats, and Musical Delights. Join wine and music enthusiasts for guided tastings by wine-maker Adnan Icel. The Toronto Consort’s Artistic Associate Esteban La Rotta rounds out the evening with unveiling and musical demonstration of his latest lute acquisition. Visit torontoconsort.org. $109 for a single package $175 for two packages (single delivery location required). Open to adults over 19 years of age. ONLINE

May 06 7:30: Art of Time Ensemble. A Singer Must Die. Works by Leonard Cohen: Anthem (arr. Andrew Downe); Come Healing (arr. Robert Carlio); Famous Blue Raincoat (arr. Jonathan Goldsmith); Dance Me To The End of Love (arr. Steve MacKinnon); Halilullah, and others. Sarah Harmer, Gregory Hoskins, Steven Page, Sarah Slean, Tom Wilson, singers. Visit artoftimeensemble.com or call 647-344-2254. Free. Available until May 9 at 7:30pm. YOUTUBE

May 08 University of Toronto Faculty of Music. Spotlight on Diversity. Curated by U of T Opera Diversity Coach Korin Thomas-Smith, this initiative details the diverse and rich history that traditionally marginalized groups have to Classical music, and the contributions they have made and continue to make in the operatic world. The program theme “Connection” is expressed in three ways: how we relate to others, to our space, and to the land we occupy; how our diverse identities connect with what is seen as a static and archaic art form; and the connection of traditionally othered people to a musical future, and also to a developed past. Pre-registration is required for this free, pre-recorded concert. Visit music.utoronto.ca/mob-concerts-events.php for details. ONLINE

May 09 7:00: INNERChamber Inc. Souvenirs. Bernard Hermann: Souvenirs de Voyage for Clarinet Quintet; Beethoven: String Quartet in C op.59 No.2. Peter Schackleton, clarinet; INNERChamber String Quartet (Andrew Chung, violin; Julie Baungartel, violin; Jody Davenport, viola; Ben Bolt-Martin, cello). Revival House, 70 Brunswick St., Stratford. Visit innerchamber.ca. $35; $10(arts workers). Pre-show 6:30pm. A light take-out meal is provided by Revival House for patrons living in Stratford. LIVE & ONLINE


May 15 7:00: Rezonance Baroque Ensemble. Universal Harmony. Chamber works by Bach & Vivaldi, Rezan Özen-Lapointe, baroque violin; David Podgorski, harpsichord. Visit rezonanceensemble.com/concerts. May 15-23. $29(dinner & show). Discounts available. ONLINE


May 18 6:00: New Music Concerts. Broadcast: The Ice Is Talking. Works for violin & percussion by Georges Aperghis, Vivian Fung, Lei Liang, Sophie Dupuis, and others. Mark Feyer, violin; Aiyun Huang, percussion. Visit niagarajazzfestival.ca or call 647-344-2254. Free. ONLINE

May 18 8:00: Array Music. Array Ensemble – Baroque Reflections: Sheila Jaffe, Ligeti: Sonata for Solo Viola; Bach: Chaconne in D; Saariala: Frises for violin and electronics. Sheila Jaffe, violin & viola. Visit arraymusic.ca for details. ONLINE

May 20 8:00: Anchored: Annual Spring (Virtual!) Concert. Nicola Winstanley. The Pirate’s Bed. HCC Ensembles: Kolíbro, Komenki, Esplorsi, Esprimas, Illimin and Profunda. Visit hamiltonchildrenschoir.com for details. PWYC. ONLINE

May 21 8:00: ISMIR. Conference 2021. Virtual. Visit ismir2021.org. ONLINE

May 23 8:00: UT Departement of Music. Spotlight on Diversity. Curated by U of T Opera Diversity Coach Korin Thomas-Smith, this initiative details the diverse and rich history that traditionally marginalized groups have to Classical music, and the contributions they have made and continue to make in the operatic world. The program theme “Connection” is expressed in three ways: how we relate to others, to our space, and to the land we occupy; how our diverse identities connect with what is seen as a static and archaic art form; and the connection of traditionally othered people to a musical future, and also to a developed past. Pre-registration is required for this free, pre-recorded concert. Visit music.utoronto.ca/mob-concerts-events.php for details. ONLINE

May 24 8:00: Array Music. Array Ensemble – Baroque Reflections: Sheila Jaffe, Ligeti: Sonata for Solo Viola; Bach: Chaconne in D; Saariala: Frises for violin and electronics. Sheila Jaffe, violin & viola. Visit arraymusic.ca for details. ONLINE


May 27 8:00: ISMIR. Conference 2021. Virtual. Visit ismir2021.org. ONLINE

May 28 8:00: UT Departement of Music. Spotlight on Diversity. Curated by U of T Opera Diversity Coach Korin Thomas-Smith, this initiative details the diverse and rich history that traditionally marginalized groups have to Classical music, and the contributions they have made and continue to make in the operatic world. The program theme “Connection” is expressed in three ways: how we relate to others, to our space, and to the land we occupy; how our diverse identities connect with what is seen as a static and archaic art form; and the connection of traditionally othered people to a musical future, and also to a developed past. Pre-registration is required for this free, pre-recorded concert. Visit music.utoronto.ca/mob-concerts-events.php for details. ONLINE

May 29 8:00: ISMIR. Conference 2021. Virtual. Visit ismir2021.org. ONLINE

May 30 8:00: Array Music. Array Ensemble – Baroque Reflections: Sheila Jaffe, Ligeti: Sonata for Solo Viola; Bach: Chaconne in D; Saariala: Frises for violin and electronics. Sheila Jaffe, violin & viola. Visit arraymusic.ca for details. ONLINE

May 31 8:00: UT Departement of Music. Spotlight on Diversity. Curated by U of T Opera Diversity Coach Korin Thomas-Smith, this initiative details the diverse and rich history that traditionally marginalized groups have to Classical music, and the contributions they have made and continue to make in the operatic world. The program theme “Connection” is expressed in three ways: how we relate to others, to our space, and to the land we occupy; how our diverse identities connect with what is seen as a static and archaic art form; and the connection of traditionally othered people to a musical future, and also to a developed past. Pre-registration is required for this free, pre-recorded concert. Visit music.utoronto.ca/mob-concerts-events.php for details. ONLINE

May 31 8:00: ISMIR. Conference 2021. Virtual. Visit ismir2021.org. ONLINE
Fewer, violin; Ayun Huang, percussion. Available on Facebook and YouTube. Visit newmusicconcerts.com or call 416-961-9594. Broadcast links will be available closer to the date. ONLINE.

● May 21-23: Tkaronto Music Festival. Under the motto Artists for Artists, TKMF has curated a roster of established as well as up-and-coming Indigenous talent from around the world. Information available at info@TKMF.ca. Streaming on TKMF.ca, Facebook Live, twitch.tv/tkarontomf, and YouTube Live. ONLINE.

● May 27-17:00: Magisterra Solists. Viva Bohemia. Beethoven, Martinu, Smetana: Piano Trio. Martin Karlik, piano. Museum London Theatre, 421 Ridout St. N., London. Call 519-852-0983 or visit http://www.magisterra.com. $30; $25 (or $15 student with id); $10 (child under 10); $85 (young adult pass-30 years and under); $15 (streamed tickets-adult). All tickets must be purchased in advance.

May 27 at 7:30 pm
CARDUCCI QUARTET
with clarinetist JULIAN BLISS


● Jun 12 8:00: Array Music. Virelai for Virus Days: Sandeep Bhagwati. Visit arraymusic.ca for details. Also Jun 11. ONLINE.

● Jun 14 12:15: Music Mondays. Impressions. Works by Xinyan Li, José Ríos-Pareja, Chen Yi, Guillerme Lago, and Viet Cuong, aks s quartet (Nicole Tye, soprano sax; Jesse Mo, alto sax; Christopher Jones, tenor sax; Jennifer Tran, baritone sax). Visit a440.live/artists for details. PWYC. Suggested donation $10. ONLINE.

Details available soon. ONLINE.


● May 28 8:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Melodies of Emotion. Chopin: Piano Concerto No.1 in C Op.11; Mendelssohn: Symphony No.1 in C Op.11; Doral Solomon, piano; Kristian Alexander, conductor. Call 905-604-8339 or visit KSOrchestra.ca or RHCentre.ca. $15. ONLINE.


● Jun 07 12:15: Music Mondays. Piano Concerto No.1 in C Op.11; Mendelssohn: Symphony No.4 Sz91. Teska Quartet; Nicholas Kitchen, conductor. Call 905-604-8339 or visit KSOrchestra.ca or RHCentre.ca. $15. ONLINE.


● Jun 21 12:15: Music Mondays. Chamber Concerts: Carducci Quartet. Works by Xinyan Li, José Ríos-Pareja, Chen Yi, Guillerme Lago, and Viet Cuong. aksəs quartet for Piano and orchestra “The Fire”. Christina Petrowska-Quilico, piano; Bartosz Zurakowski, conductor. Call 905-604-8339 or visit kohechestra.ca or rhcentre.ca. $15. ONLINE.

● Jun 24 8:00: Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. Spotlight 15. Fifteen soloists and fourteen concerts are featured in this playful mix-and-match showcase of Tafelmusik’s artistry. Elsa Citterio, director. Information at info@tafelmusik.org or call 1-833-964-6337. ONLINE.


● Jun 22 8:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Bruckner’s First Symphony. Prokofiev: Symphony No.5 in B-flat Op.100; Tan Dun: Concerto for Piano and orchestra “The Fire”. Christina Petrowska-Quilico, piano; Bartosz Zurakowski, conductor. Call 905-604-8339 or visit kohechestra.ca or rhcentre.ca. $15. ONLINE.

May and June 2021 | 25
Visit the wholenote.com

Events by Date | May 1 to July 7, 2021

A concert of women composers. Dr. Rosephanye Powell: To Sit and Dream; Sarah Quartel: Snow Angel; Carlotta Ferrari: O Splendid Gem (arrangement of O splendidissima gemma by Hildegard von Bingen); Vittoria Alleotti: Two Renaissance Madrigals; Elaine Hagensen: The Music of Still and of Other Works. Laura Evan Fraser, conductor; Hye Won Cecilia Lee, piano. Visit uppercanadachoristers.org, or call 416-256-0510. Free. Donations welcome. Streamed from Grace Church on the Hill. Toronto. Visit YouTube at youtu.be/CS8BY7v_F_Cd or Facebook at fb.me/e/SgC0v4463. ONLINE

● Jun 28 8:00: Array Music. Situated Sounds III. Sound as Contact. Visit arraymusic.ca for details. ONLINE

● Jun 28 8:00: Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Grace, Fire and Beauty. Tan Dun: Concerto for Piano and orchestra “The Fire”; Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5 in E-Flat Op.100. Christina Petrovska-Quilico, piano; Kristian Alexander, conductor. Call 506-604-8393 or visit kssorchestra.ca or rcncentre.ca. $15. ONLINE


AWARDS & COMPETITIONS


ETCETERAS

● Arts@Home. A vibrant hub connecting Torontonians to arts and culture. Designed to strengthen personal and societal resil- ience through the arts. Visit artsathome.ca to learn more about this exciting collaborative initiative. ONLINE

● Ottawa Chamberfest. Chamber Chats: At Home, Chat, Colloquy, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 2pm. Hosted by celebrated broadcaster/ writer Eric Friesen. Interactive episodes combine chat with pre-recorded and live performances and feature guest artists and lecturers from all over the world. For infor- mation: 613-234-8008 or visit chamberfest. ca. ONLINE

● Soundstreams. Composer Spotlight: Melissa Hui. Watch two movements from Map of Reality for string quartet. Ecology of Being for violin and piano; and listen to (1) Lyrin- osa for soprano, clarinet and piano; (2) And blue sparks burn for violin and piano; and (3) Come as you are for pipe and nine instru- ments at soundstreams.ca. ONLINE

ONLINE BLOGS

● Toronto Consort. Explorer: Discovering the World of Early Music. Explorer is a blog for the curious; a place of learning, sharing, and community. This all-new offering will present an assortment of curated content in a range of formats, like original short- or long-form articles, original video and audio recordings, and educational content on relevant topics relating to Early Music, history, and world music, as they relate our beloved repertory.

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● FabCollab. Women in Song: A Celebr- ation of International Women’s Day. Amanda Martinez featuring Canada’s Ballet’s Jörgen Dalsgaard, Jeanie van der Donk, Adrian Ramirez, Juizure; Akihiko Fujisawa, Jihyun Yoo, Maryem Tol- lari; Tamar Ilana featuring Indigenous fancy shawl dancer Cotee Harper. Visit fabcollab. ca. FREE. ONLINE

● Kevin Barrett. Live from Lockdown. Kevin Barrett does a live-streamed set of solo gui- tar tunes, coming directly from his Lock- down studio. Tune in to Kevin’s Facebook page on Friday at 4pm Facebook.com/kevin.bar- rett.165470. If you can’t join live, the video will be available afterwards on Kevin’s page with each episode’s archived on his YouTube channel. Visit youtube.com/playlist?list=PLX5pxf._Ed_cogAMK7N9PNAT1Fy3RFK30. YOUTUBE & FACEBOOK

● Kingston Symphony. Finale of Beethoven’s Third Symphony (Eroica). Forty mem- bers of the orchestra perform the finale of the Eroica. Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 while in isolation in their homes. To view the vir- tual performance, please click youtube.com/ watch?v=FZ4uBqg4AY. For more infor- mation on the Kingston Symphony, please visit kongsymphony.ca. ONLINE

● New Music Concerts. Sonic Grace: An AMC Audio Diary. Lynn Kuo, Canadian viol- in virtuoso and Assistant Concertmaster of the National Ballet of Canada Orchestra has made her mark as one of Canada’s most celeb- rated performers. Listen to Synchronisms No. 9 for violin and Tape by Mario Davidovsky at newmusicconcerts.ca. ONLINE

● Tafelmusik. Music in Motion Video. Tafelmusik cellist Karen Campbell performing the Prelude from Bach’s Cello Suite no. 1 in G on our home stage at Trinity-St. Paul’s Centre in Toronto. Some solace until we can meet again, or, if you are new to Tafelmusik, a taste of the intimacy and character for which our home venue performances are known. Visit tafelmusik.org. ONLINE

● Tafelmusik. Music in Motion: Mozart for Violin and Tape. Maple Leaf Music. Alex McLeod, an artist- minded with “simulation and the tran- sition of matter” was drawn to Tafelmusik’s recording from Mozart’s Requiem: K. 626: III. Sezuenz, 6. Lachrimosa—a piece, in McLeod’s words, “shrouded in mystery, re-imagine-}
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May and June 2021
During the pandemic I have been spending some of my enforced stay-at-home time digitizing material from my archives, specifically composer interviews recorded during my tenure as producer and host of Transfigured Night on CKLN-FM (1984-1991). One of the earliest I have unearthed comes from January 1986, on a show previewing an event marking the 15th anniversary of the founding of New Music Concerts (NMC). On that occasion I devoted an hour to young composer and guitarist Tim Brady who discussed, among other things, the Chamber Concerto – commissioned by NMC – which would be premiered during that celebratory concert. That was Brady’s first of many appearances with NMC over the ensuing years, and my first encounter with one of this country’s most prolific and eclectic composers and musical entrepreneurs. His discography includes some 25 compact discs and the pandemic has not succeeded in slowing him down. Most recently he released a virtual edition of Instruments of Happiness 100 Guitars 2021 produced in isolation (youtube.com/watch?v=yODkTMXqFKg) and a three-CD set of mostly new material Tim Brady – Actions Speak Louder (redshiftrecords.org).

Act 1: Solos and a Quartet, is subtitled “Simple Loops in Complex Times,” which describes not only the process involved but also the temporal context in which the seven works were composed. Brady is a master when it comes to the technology available to extend the potential of the electric guitar. It’s hard to conceive of these works as solos with all the multi-layering and timbral complexity on display, but I realize that Brady can indeed perform these works by himself in real time using a plethora of looping devices and effects pedals. The final piece, Uncertain Impact (Quartet), was recorded one month into the COVID quarantine, with distanced, virtual performances featuring the members of his guitar quartet, Instruments of Happiness. On Act 2: v-Orchestra: Triple Concerto “Because Everything Has Changed”, Brady is joined by Helmut Lipsky on violin and Shawn Mativetsky, tabla and percussion. The three improvising soloists are known collectively as Of Sound, Mind and Body. Brady says the title of the concerto “refers not only to the nature of the social and political landscape of 2020, but also to how our relationship to music is continuing to be transformed by technology.” The virtual orchestra consists of sound files produced by Brady using NotePerformer 3.3.2 (an artificial intelligence instrument) to which the soloists reacted with improvised harmonies, melodies and rhythms recorded in their home studios. The result is a stunning reimagining of the orchestral experience in the context of current lockdown protocols. Act 3: Voices: Revolutionary Songs / As It Happened is comprised of an archival recording from 1995 of Brady’s setting of poems inspired by the Russian, Angolan, French and Nicaraguan revolutions featuring Bradyworks with soprano Nathalie Paulin; and an orchestrated radio documentary using a 2000 CBC interview with Linda MacDonald, who had been the subject of horrific drug and shock therapy experiments funded by the CIA at the Allen Institute in Montreal in the 1960s. The latter, Brady’s most ambitious studio production to date, is a powerful and devastating document that has to be heard to be believed. Actions Speak Louder may well be Brady’s own motto. It’s obvious that it will take more than a global pandemic to stifle his creativity.
Beethoven’s late works form a bridge from the Classical era to the Romantic, and the next disc has some striking works for cello from this latter period. *Romantic Cello on KNS Classical* features works by Schumann, Brahms and Brahms’ only composition student, Gustav Uwe Jenner, performed by young Toronto-based cellist *Thomas Charte* (thomascartre.com) and Ukrainian-born pianist *Serhiy Salov* (serhiysalov.com).

Among Charte’s accolades is a first prize in the Canadian Music Competition, the Sylvia Geller Award, and the loan of the “Gand Père” cello from the Canada Council Instrument Bank in 2016. He currently plays a Giovanni Battista Ceruti cello (1813) on loan from Canimex which is perfectly suited to the repertoire on display here. Salov also has many achievements and awards, but surely a highlight of his young career was touring South America with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and Kent Nagano, as soloist in Liszt’s Second Piano Concerto. I must confess that Jenner’s name was new to me, but what a wonderful expansion of my knowledge of the period. It was thanks to a recommendation from Brahms that Jenner was appointed music director at the University of Malmborg in 1893. He held until his death 25 years later. The *Sonata in D Major* was first performed by Jenner and cellist Hugo Becker in 1904, and although quite Brahmsian in its sensibility, it is infused, in Charte’s words, “with Jenner’s distinctive artistic voice.” The three-movement work in the traditional fast-slow-fast form is lyrical and at times dramatic, if a bit anachronistic – nothing forward-looking here. Of particular note is the *Andante con variazioni* played with tasteful expression and restrained use of vibrato. Jenner’s piece is followed by Schumann’s *Adagio and Allegro Op.70* composed in 1849. Although originally for French horn, a relatively new invention at the time, and taking advantage of the chromatic possibilities of that valved instrument, the composer also intended it for performance on violin, viola or cello. It works especially well in the warm, rich range of the cello in the hands of Charte. Brahms’ *Cello Sonata No.1 in E Minor, Op.38* completed in 1865, brings the disc to a suitably Romantic close. This is a promising maiden voyage from a young duo that I hope to hear more of.

Rossini – 6 Sonate a Quattro (leaf-music.ca) features two musicians who need no introduction, violinst *Mark Fewer* and bassist *Joel Quarrington*, and two rising stars, violinst *Yolanda Bruno* and cellist *Julian Schwarz*. They were recorded in conjunction with residencies at the Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance in Nova Scotia in 2017. I had the pleasure of working with Bruno in May 2018 when her Iris Ensemble participated in New Music Concerts’ “Zipangui!” as part of the 21C Festival. On that occasion she played both violin and viola. Coincidentally, she was the recipient of the loan of the Stradivari Taft violin (1700) from the Canada Council Instrument Bank the same year that Charte had the “Gand Père” cello. Schwarz, scion of the famed American musical family, made his US touring debut in 2010 with the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra and was the recipient of the first prize at the inaugural Schoenfeld International String Competition three years later. Rossini’s *sonate a quattro* are youthful works, disavowed by the composer as “dreadful sonatas composed […] at a most infantile age, not even having taken a lesson in accompaniment.” That being said, they are charming works that must be a lot of fun to play – it certainly sounds like these musicians are having a good time at any rate. Written at the estate of Rossini’s friend Agostino Triossi at the age of 12, the unusual instrumentation – two violins, cello and contrabass – reflect the resources available there: Triossi played the bass, his cousins violin and cello, and Rossini took second desk. Rossini’s scorn notwithstanding, these pieces have been in the repertoire ever since he wrote them. They were first published as traditional string quartets and later in an arrangement for wind quartet; it was not until 1954 that the original manuscript came to light. These performances use the 2014 Critical Edition published by the Fondazione Rossini Pesaro and as such I am willing to declare them definitive. Although there are few indications of the operatic writing to come from one of the giants of that form, these are delightful works played with a twinkle in the musicians’ eyes and a spark in their step. One more personal note: after reading Vikram Seth’s *An Equal Music* which mentioned a “lost” string quintet arrangement of one of Beethoven’s piano trios, I had the temerity to ask Fewer whether he would be willing to read through the piece with me and a group of my friends. He agreed and it remains one of the highlights of my amateur music making to have spent an afternoon working on this rarely performed piece with such a consummate musician. As I recall, he did not think very highly of the string writing adapted from the piano part, but was gracious about it all and the afternoon provided me a treasured memory.

Although I’ve never been to the South Pacific, there is a connection for me with the next disc. *Rapa Nui Odyssey* (Rubicon RCD 1066 rubiconclassics.com). Last issue I mentioned Liszt’s transcription for piano trio of *Vallee d’Obermann* from one of his *Années de pèlerinage*. I was not familiar with the original and wondered how all that was going on between the piano, violin and cello could have been realized in a solo piano performance. My answer came in the form of this double CD featuring *Mahani Teave* performing that work by Liszt and other staples of the repertoire by Bach, Handel, Schubert, Chopin and Rachmaninoff. Teave was born on Easter Island (Rapa Nui) to an American mother and a local singer/songwriter. Music was in her blood, so to speak, and when the opportunity came to study piano – there was none on the island until a visiting teacher brought one when Teave was a young girl – she took to it like wildfire. The teacher, a violinist by profession, did not have any simple piano music and Teave’s introduction to the instrument was Mozart’s *Sonata in C Major* – considered easy, but by no means a beginner’s piece – and Beethoven’s *Für Elise*. She practised incessantly and advanced to such a degree that just a few months after those lessons Roberto Bravo, a well-known pianist from Chile who visited the island and heard her play, suggested she move to the mainland to study. She spent nine years there, receiving a degree from the Austral University of Chile in Valdivia and eventually won first prize at the Claudio Arrau Piano Competition in 1999. Teave left Valdivia with the intent to study in Europe, but a stop off in the US for a masterclass turned into a six-year stint at the Cleveland Institute of Music as a pupil of Sergei Babayan. From there she was off to Berlin to build her performing career under the wing of Fabio Bidini. This is certainly the stuff on which major careers are built, but after a few years of successful concertizing in Europe Teave decided it was more important to return to her native island to give back to the land that fostered her interest and her talent in the first place. Since then she has established an arts and culture centre to serve all the children of Rapa Nui. Her crusade for musical culture could be favourably compared to Venezuela’s El Sistema in my opinion, but her vision goes beyond culture to encompass ecology and to making the island self-sufficient. There is a wonderful film by John Forsen, *Song of Rapa Nui*, available (exclusively unfortunately) on Amazon Prime Video that I highly recommend. It documents her life in music, but more importantly her vision for the future of Rapa Nui and its people. Fortunately, her work there has not compromised her own performance abilities and this wonderful 2CD set, recorded in Seattle in November 2018, is a fine testament to her art.  

*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*
There are two fascinating CDs from Canadian guitarist Emma Rush. On *Fandango* by the Azuline Duo she is joined by flutist Sara Traciente in a program of mostly contemporary works for flute and guitar (azulineduo.com). The title track is the duo’s own arrangement of a piece for solo Baroque guitar by Santiago de Murcia (1673-1739), the duo also arranged the two works by the Brazilian Chiquinha Gonzaga (1847–1936).

Traciente plays alto flute in Miroslav Tadić’s *Macedonian Pieces* and wooden flute and tin whistle in *Five Celtic Pieces*, Gerald Garcia’s striking arrangements of traditional Irish and Scottish melodies. Maximo Diego Pujol’s *Nubes de Buenos Aires* and Jeffrey McFadden’s *Aguardiente* complete a refreshingly different and quite beautiful CD.

Rush’s solo CD *Wake the Sigh* – 19th Century Music for Guitar (emma-rush.com) opens a window on a world we rarely encounter with a collection of works for both accomplished amateur guitarists and professional players, all written by women, five of whom were renowned soloists in their own right. Featured are: Emilia Giuliani-Gagliardi (1813–1850); Angiolina Panormo Huerta (1811–1900); Catharina Pratten (1824–1895); Susan C. Domett (1826–1911); Julie Fondard (1819–1864); and Madame Delores de Gofi (1833–1892).

As with the *Fandango* CD, there’s clean, sensitive playing of an intriguing program. No information on when or where they were recorded, other than “in Hamilton Ontario, produced and engineered by Kirk Starkey,” who clearly did a terrific job.

**Napoli 1810: Italian Romantic Music** is the first album on the Analeka label for Canadian guitarist Pascal Valois, who performs music from the Romantic era on period instruments (AN 2 9195 analeka.com/en). The guitar here is a Cabasse-Bernard model c.1820 with a soft, warm sound – not big, but with a nice range of colour and tone.

Italian music, with its strong bel canto vocal influence, dominated the early-19th-century virtuoso guitar repertoire, and Valois uses period-appropriate elements of the style to highlight the lyrical nature of the music. Niccolò Paganini’s *Grand Sonata*, Mauro Giuliani’s *Sonata Op.15* and Ferdinando Carulli’s *Six Andantes Op.320*, his *Sonatina Op.59 No.1* and *Sonata Op.150 No.1* – the latter two in world-premiere recordings – make an attractive and finely played recital.

**René Capuçon** is the soloist on Elgar Violin Concerto & Violin Sonata with Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra, pianist Stephen Hough joining Capuçon in the sonata (Erato 9029511282 warnerclassics.com). Capuçon admits that the concerto has always moved him deeply, and that recording the work with Rattle and the LSO – the orchestra that played in the 1910 premiere and was also conducted by Elgar in the famous 1932 Menuhin recording – was an inspiring experience, feelings that are clearly evident in a heartfelt performance.

The Violin Sonata in E Minor Op.82 from 1918 is a truly lovely work, with Capuçon and Hough proving to be sensitive partners in an outstanding reading.

The **Trio Arnold** is in outstanding form on its debut CD for the Mirare label, *Beethoven String Trios Op.9* (MIR550 mirare.fr).

The three works – *No.1 in G Major*, *No.2 in D Major* and *No.3 in C Minor* – were written as Beethoven sought to establish himself as a chamber music composer, the risk of comparison with the string quartets of Haydn and Mozart leading him to choose the safer option of string trios. They clearly act as preparation for the string quartets, and indeed sound like quartets at times.

The release sheet cites “beauty of sound and a high degree of instrumental virtuosity” in the works, and that’s also exactly what the Trio Arnold displays in superb performances.

There’s more Beethoven on another Mirare CD with Liya Petrova playing *Beethoven & Mozart Violin Concertos in D* with the Sinfonia Varsovia under Jean-Jacques Kantorow (MIR552 mirare.fr).

The Beethoven is a beautiful performance in all respects, but the bigger interest here, perhaps, is the Violin Concerto No.7 K271a/271i attributed to Mozart, the true provenance of which remains unknown and hotly debated. Breitkopf & Härtel published an edition in 1907, and a set of parts was prepared in 1837 in Paris, apparently from the now-lost autograph. It’s a substantial work with passages of pure Mozartean beauty and sections that sound less than convincing, especially the pizzicato cadenza in the slow movement.

Again, simply beautiful playing makes a strong case for a fascinating work.

Beethoven was obsessed with Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier and used many melodic motifs from it in his late quartets. *Prism III* is the third volume in the ongoing series by the Danish String Quartet that aims to show how the radiance of Bach’s fugues is refracted through Beethoven’s quartets to illuminate the work of later composers. (ECM New Series ECM2563 ccmrecords.com/catalogue).

There’s a clear line here from Bach’s *Fuge in C-Sharp Minor*, with its four-note BACH motif, through Beethoven’s String Quartet No.14 in C-Sharp Minor Op.131, which starts with a fugue and a four-note motif, to Bartók’s String Quartet No.1, which also opens with a four-note motif and pays direct homage to the Beethoven.

Outstanding playing and interpretation result in a terrific CD.

Even if you’re aware of the Lithuanian composer Jurgis Karnavičius (1884-1941) you almost certainly haven’t heard his string quartets; *Jurgis Karnavičius String Quartets Nos.1 & 2*, the first two of his four quartets, are presented in world-premiere recordings by the Vilnius String Quartet (Ondine ODE1351-2 naxosdirect.com/search/ode1351-2).

Karnavičius moved to St. Petersburg in 1903, writing his first quartet on graduating from the Conservatory in 1913. Drafted into the Russian army the following year, he wrote his second quartet in 1917 while a prisoner of war. They are works in the Russian classical
It’s a very pleasant disc with some passionate playing, particularly in the Dvořák, with a singing cello tone and crystal-clear piano playing, although the double-stopping passages in the cello sound a bit laboured in places.

Chances are you’ve never heard Boccherini cello concertos sound the way they do on Cadenza, the new CD from cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton that features the concertos No. 3 in D Major G.476, No. 4 in C Major G.477 and No. 6 in D Major G.479 in small combo arrangements by Wieder-Atherton and cimbalom player Françoise Rivalland. The other players are Amaryllis Billet (violin), Rémi Magnan (double bass) and Robin Billet (bassoon) (ALPHA667 naxosdirect.com/search/alpha667).

Wieder-Atherton says that incorporating the cimbalom results in our “hearing the dances, the infinite colours and the bursts of rhythmic music,” but it does seem an odd way to present Boccherini, especially when you add the lengthy cadenzas from various contributors with – at times – cimbalom, drones and finger cymbals, and musical material from Handel and Stravinsky.

Guitarist Aaron Larget-Caplan follows up his 2010 CD New Lullaby – 14 Enchanting Ways to Fall Asleep with Nights Transfigured – Vol. 2 of the New Lullaby Project, a second collection of short pieces by 14 different composers written for Larget-Caplan between 2009 and 2020 (Stone Records 5060192781106 stonerecords.co.uk).

Don’t be misled by the title. Although there’s obviously a general sense of calm throughout the CD, this isn’t a disc of music for children but a fascinating collection of exquisite contemporary miniatures for classical guitar that explore a wide range of musical languages and often employ extended guitar technique, all of it beautifully played and recorded.

Greek guitarist Pavlos Kanelikakis is the soloist on Kaleidoscope, a recital of world-premiere recordings of works by George Kontogiorgos (Naxos 8.579084 naxosdirect.com/search/8579084). The music is essentially tonal and very accessible.

The five-movement Sea Vespers from 2015 takes melodies from the composer’s songs from the 1960s and 1970s. Kanelikakis is joined by cellist Vangelina Nina in the four-movement Cansonata from

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The Partitas, all consisting of eight, nine or ten very short movements, are described as “an extraordinary bridge” from the solo compositions of German composers like Biber to the later masterpieces of Bach and Telemann. They receive beautifully nuanced performances in a generous CD of almost 82 minutes.

As always, Sheppard Skærved’s booklet essay is remarkably erudite and informative, examining the use of scordatura and the emotional effects attached to specific key signatures in order to understand the physical and emotional structure of the music.


A dazzling Presto from Sinding’s Suite im allen Stil Op.10 sets the tone for a recital bursting with strong, brilliant tone and outstanding technique, with Hadland an excellent partner. Stenhammar’s Two Sentimental Romances Op.28, three of the Six Pieces Op.79 by Sibelius, Nielsen’s Romance in D Major, Rautavaara’s Notturno e Danza and Grieg’s Sonata No.1 in F Major Op.8 complete an impressive recital disc from a player from whom we will clearly be hearing a lot more in the future.

On A French Connection violinist Daniel Rowland and pianist Natacha Kudritskaya present what the violinist calls “two wonderful, luscious, gorgeously romantic pieces, one a perennial favourite, the other still all too rare heard” (Champs Hill Records CHRCD157 champshillrecords.co.uk).

The latter is Chausson’s Concerto for Violin, Piano & String Quartet, the duo being joined by violinists Francesco Sica and Asia Jiménez Antón de Vez, violist Joel Waterman and cellist Maja Bogdanović in a passionate performance to open the disc.

World-premiere recordings of effective arrangements of three Debsussy Preludes by Craig White precede the “perennial favourite”: the Franck A Major Sonata. It does indeed turn up regularly on CD, but is nevertheless always welcome, especially in warm, sensitive performances like this.

Cellist Yi-wen Zhang and pianist Nanyi Qiang have been collaborating since 2002 and founded the DUO SHU in 2019. Their self-titled debut CD on the Blue Griffin label features two songs by Fauré, Schumann’s Five Pieces in Folk Style Op.102, Rachmaninoff’s Valse Op.34 No.14, Dvořák’s Four Romantic Pieces Op.75 and Bartók’s Romanian Folk Dances, together with Longing for SHU by Wetje.

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**Thomas Serhiy Chartré Salo**

Through its interpretation of Brähms, Schumann and Jennier, “The duo communicates musical intricacies effortlessly, compellingly and with a great sense of colour and style.” Yegor Dyachkov.

**Rossini – 6 Sonate a Quattro**

Mark Fewer, Joel Quarrington, Yolanda Bruno, Julian Schwarz Written in 1804, these works were commonly performed by wind quartet. In 1864 Rossini’s original manuscripts were discovered showing the arrangement for string quartet.

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2014. *Elegy* was written in 1980 and revised for Kanellakis in 2006 when Kontogiorgos was writing the commissioned guitar suite that gives the CD its title, the four-movement *Kaleidoscope* consisting of multi-coloured fragments that shift and dance as if viewed through a kaleidoscope.

The darker *Emotions* from 2018 completes a recital of performances that can be considered definitive, Kanellakis having worked closely with the composer.

**Mirror Images**, the latest album from violinist, violist and vocalist Violeta Vici, features world-premiere recordings of solo works by Ragnar Söderlind, Imogen Holst and Jean-Louis Florentz, plus related works by Bach and Ysaÿe and six interspersed improvisations (two of them vocal) by Vici (Gramola GRAM98010 naxosdirect.com/search/gram98010).

Bach's *Partita* No. 3 in *E* Major (with hardly any repeats, lasting just 1.4 minutes for all seven movements) and Ysaÿe's *Sonata in A Minor* are given competent if somewhat mundane performances; the Söderlind is the brief *Elegia II* and the Florentz an equally-brief *Vocalise*. By far the most interesting work, though, is the *1930 Holst Suite for Solo Viola*, which also draws the best playing from Vici.

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**VOCAL**

**John Eccles – Semele**

**Academy of Ancient Music; Cambridge**

**Handel Opera**

**AAM Records AAM012 (aam.co.uk)**

> What looks like Handel, sounds like Purcell and is a world premiere recording? If you guessed the answer to be the latest release from the Academy of Ancient Music, you win! Any mention of the words “opera” and “Semele” together immediately turns minds to Handel’s frequently performed 1744 masterwork, but there is another older, lesser-known Semele living in the operatic world, written in 1707 by the English composer John Eccles.

Eccles’ *Semele* provides fascinating insight into how opera in England might have developed after Henry Purcell’s death had Handel not moved to London in 1712. For this *Semele*’s musical vocabulary is indeed a slightly more advanced and refined adaptation of Purcell’s own lexicon; if one were to select a pinnacle of the English Baroque, they would be hard-pressed to find a more representative example than this. Despite his indebtedness to Purcell, Eccles achieves even greater depths of expression and extremes of emotion than his predecessor, utilizing similar forms and expanding their structure, so that *Semele* ends up being more than double the length of *Dido and Aeneas*, for example, but without once feeling overspun.

What is most remarkable about *Semele* is the way in which music and text receive equal attention. The delivery of William Congreve’s libretto and forward motion of the drama is never interrupted, suspended or usurped by over-composition. Director Julian Perkins and the Academy of Ancient Music in turn keep the opera moving forward, selecting tempi that lend the necessary affect to these dance-based arias and overtures while keeping the text constantly intelligible.

With world premiere recordings being issued with ever-greater frequency, it can be challenging to find those works that contribute something worthwhile to the canon, much less provide an eye-opening exploration of something revelatory, but *Semele* does just that. The saying “just because you can, doesn’t mean you should” is correct more often than not, but in this case, we are grateful that those behind this recording could, and did.

**Matthew Whitfield**

**L’homme armé – La Cour de Bourgogne et la musique**

**Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal; Andrew McAnerney**

**ATMA ACD2 2807 (atmaclassique/en)**

> The Court of Burgundy’s powers extended well beyond the borders of the modern French region. Its musical brilliance obviously affected the *Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal* with eight composers on one CD; it is difficult to think of a major Burgundian composer not included here.

At the heart of the CD is the *Missa L’homme armé*, itself set 40 times from roughly 1460 to 1560. Track one is the Anonymous/Morton interpretation, featuring not only the original words to *L’homme armé* but also a contemporary twist willing on a crushing defeat (in three passionate and imploring voices) for those fearsome Ottoman Turks on their way to destroy Christendom.

Not everything, though, is so belligerent. Listen to the ethereal *Kyrie Eleison* from Antoine Busnois’ *own Missa L’homme armé*, uplifted by the sackbut playing of the Studio. Then be inspired by the delicate performance of Gilles Binchois’ *Motet Asparges me*. It may have been Binchois who taught and inspired Johannes Ockeghem, who in turn did teach Josquin des Prés. This comes out in this CD: in addition to the pieces by Binchois, the Studio performs Ockeghem’s *Sanctus*, a full-blooded performance combining sometimes stark singing with the Studio’s sackbuts.

As for Josquin, he is remembered by two compositions. First, *Agnus Dei* is performed admirably, notably in its soprano part. Then there are the five parts of *Ave verum corpus*. Josquin relished the more complex structure: the Studio rises to the challenge with its appropriately celestial singing.

Josquin was a contemporary of the revolution in music printing. His sheer musical genius and the printing press ensured his influence on composers for at least a century.

**Michael Schwartz**

**And the sun darkened**

**New York Polyphony**

**BIS 2277 (bis.se)**

> For as long as music has been written down, the Catholic Church has played an essential role in the development of the art form. Whether directly, as in early monodic plainchant and Palestrina’s polyphony, or tangentially, for example in post-Reformation works by Tallis in England and Bach in Germany, the influence of the Catholic Church has provided inspiration to composers for centuries.

New York Polyphony’s *And the sun darkened* surveys a range of Catholic-centric works, ranging from the 15th century to the 20th. With such an enormous body of material to work with and choose from, this release focuses its attention on music for Passiontide, the last two weeks of the Lenten season, using this specific and narrow segment of the liturgical year as its theme.

The focal point of this disc is the world premiere recording of Loyset Compère’s *Officium de Cruce*, a multi-movement motet cycle based upon a set of devotional texts focused on the Cross. A contemporary of Josquin who followed a similar career path, Compère was a Franco-Flemish composer who worked in Italy for the Duke of Milan (where Josquin would arrive a decade later).

*Officium de Cruce* is expressive in its simplicity, exploring the text’s facets through spacious and effective settings, and New York Polyphony’s poised performance is a fine
introduction to Compère and his works. In addition to music by Compère’s contemporaries Josquin, Willaert and de la Rue, And the sun darkened contains two striking works by much more recent composers. Cyrillic
Kreek’s Psalm 22 (1914) is a striking and evocative setting by one of Estonia’s greatest musical figures, while Andrew Smith’s Psalm 55, written in 2011, synthesizes old and new harmonic languages to produce a remarkably organic blending of medieval, Renaissance and modernist lexicons.

Far more than just a seasonal listen, And the sun darkened is a worthwhile exploration of fascinating composers and musical works expertly and sensitively performed by New York Polyphony, well worth listening to regardless of the time of year.

Matthew Whitfield

Pietro Antonio Cesti – La Dori

Ascioti; Enticknap; Mazzulli; Baráth; Accademia Bizantina; Ottavio Dantone

Naxos 2.110676 (naxosdirect.com/search/2110676)

Bartók that calm and soothe

What we’re listening to this month:

thewholenote.com/listening

L’homme armé

Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal; Andrew McAnerney

A musical journey into the music of the Court of Burgundy in the 15th century, a program of motets by the first Franco-Flemish polyphonists.

Boundless

Sirens Choir

Prince Edward Island’s award winning women’s vocal ensemble have debuted their first full-length album of a cappella choral music. Available at www.sirenschoir.com

Cavatine

Duo Stephanie & Saar


Available at www.sirenschoir.com
Nathalie Warmerdam, a victim of domestic violence.

With a concept inspired by Schubert’s \textit{Winterreise}, Songs for Murdered Sisters follows Hopkins on his journey of seven short songs: \textit{Empty Chair}, \textit{Anger}, \textit{Dream}, \textit{Bird Soul}, \textit{Lost}, \textit{Rage} and \textit{Coda}. Songs for Murdered Sisters, as the woman’s internal voice, contralto Noa Frenkel eloquently exposes her most intimate subconscious feelings. The man’s internal voice, powerfully sung by countertenor Terry Wey, is as candid as his female counterpart. But he’s less demanding, so causes less trouble for his character.

This is the third opera by Czernowin that Claus Guth has directed. Like his production of Mozart’s \textit{The Marriage of Figaro} seen at the Canadian Opera Company in 2016, it’s set on a stairway. But here, unlike the controversial Mozart production, the relationship between Guth’s concept and the work itself is seamless.

Conductor Johannes Kalitzke deftly commands the large assemblage of remarkable musicians, with the orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Czernowin’s frequent collaborators, the new music group Ensemble Nikel, enhanced by vibrant electronics from SWR Experimentalstudio.

Pamela Margles
Dreams of a New Day – Songs by Black Composers
Will Liverman; Paul Sánchez
Cedille CDR 90000 200 (cedillerecords.org)

Dreams of a New Day – Songs by Black Composers is an album that features art songs by eight composers. From Henry Burleigh (1866–1949) to Shawn E. Okpebholo (b.1981), the album showcases several generations of composers and a repertoire that offers an honest, and, at times, devastating, account of life for African Americans in the United States. Composers set music to texts of raw poetry by American poets and artists such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes and Adela Florence Nicolson.

Paul Sánchez captures our attention with a breadth of pianistic sonorities and timbres while baritone Will Liverman’s skilled and beautiful singing sings all of the nuances of challenging topics that include the Middle Passage, Civil Rights, past and present injustices, and Black pride. Most poignant are Okpebholo’s Two Black Churches songs (Ballad of Birmingham and The Rain, commissioned for the album) and Birmingham Sunday (Richard Fariña 1937–1966). Whereas the first pair combines several tragic events and deals with race-based violence, the last song reminds us that while dreaming of a new day, the road to equality for all is still ahead of us.

The booklets included with the album provide both context and the rich history behind the repertoire with a 15-page songbook and a 20-page extensive program note booklet written by Dr. Louise Toppin, a specialist of African American composers’ concert repertoire.

Sophie Bisson

Scott Ordway – Girl in the Snow
Julia Dawson; Anna Naretto
Acis APL85820 (acisproductions.com)

Confronting the complex, deeply personal and philosophical narrative, Ordway creates allusive metaphors to describe both the imaginary landscapes of the mind and the places where we store memory. The girl in the snow is initially portrayed as a young girl wandering a snow-covered dreamland and remembering parts of her relationship with nature. The eight songs of the cycle total approximately 37 minutes of music and as the cycle progresses we understand the girl to be a woman remembering her life, the events that have shaped her since, the love she experienced, ultimately, coming back to the present and “awakening” to the end of her life.

Dawson and Naretto act as narrators and bring the audience on an intimate, philosophical journey. Their connected interpretations give shape and meaning to poetry that needs a touch of decoding but music that is rich in sounds and colours. Naretto’s playing is nuanced and deliberate while Dawson’s tone quality and colour, distinctively mezzo-soprano, are written in a range more closely aligned with a higher soprano. This, along with the solemn and ethereal nature of the work, especially in the Memory Play sections, leaves the listener feeling unsettled, perhaps intentionally, about the sometimes intangibility of remembrance.

Sophie Bisson

Boundless
Sirens
Leaf Music (leaf-music.ca)

The ethereal polyphony of the Sirens Choir is absolutely bewitching on Boundless. You would be forgiven for falling prey to the charms of the women of this Prince Edward Island-based choir as they wax eloquent with their celestial 11-voice harmonies on this disc. So perfect is this programming that it is surprising to note that this debut didn’t happen much earlier.

This is a quietly potent recording. Its feminism is whispered rather than broadcast, with all the singers conveying a sense of strength, joy and spontaneity. Ensemble director Kelsea McLean guides, with a firm hand, the often delicate musicality of the group. Together with the rest of Sirens, she is able to inspire a performance where balanced rhythm, soaring harmonies and subtle dynamics are both flexible and dramatic. The overall sound is highly translucent, made more memorable in the meditative atmosphere of St. Bonaventure’s Church, where the recording took place.

The music of Selene’s Boat and of Boundless is utterly captivating, Turlutte acadienne montréalaise may be the disc’s apotheosis. By the time you get here, however, you may wish that you had a booklet of lyrics with which to follow the vocalists; it’s a small price to pay for listening to this outstanding music. Odysseus may have resisted the women of this disc for falling prey to the charms of the Sirens Choir as they wax eloquent with their celestial 11-voice harmonies on this disc. So perfect is this programming that it is surprising to note that this debut didn’t happen much earlier.

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Raul da Gama

What we’re listening to this month:  thewholenote.com/listening
The Tower and the Garden
The Crossing; Donald Nally
Navona Records NV6303
(crossingchoir.org)

Gavin Bryars – A Native Hill
The Crossing; Donald Nally
Navona Records NV6347
(crossingchoir.org)

► American professional chamber choir The Crossing, conducted by Donald Nally, is a multi-Grammy-winning ensemble dedicated to new music, collaboration and modern day social, spiritual, environmental and cultural issues. In these two recordings, they perform recent works with in-depth understanding of the music and issues the composers explore.

The Crossing commissioned three composers on The Tower and the Garden. Estonian Toivo Tulev set Walt Whitman’s words in the slow new music-flavoured, haunting A child said, what is the grass? (2015). Almost shrill attention-grabbing opening vocals lead to contrasting high female and low men’s interval patterns and drones in fluctuating tonal/atonal segments to the final hopeful long note. The Tower and the Garden (2018) for choir and string quartet by Gregory Spears, is a more tonal four-movement setting of poems by Keith Garebian, Denise Lerveto and Thomas Merton exploring religion, technology and conservation. Highlight is the tonal third movement Duneness Documentary. Set to Garebian’s text which pays homage to the late filmmaker Derek Jarman’s final days, its slower, slight dissonant strings opening, and subsequent emotional tight choral vocalizations with strings, is breathtaking listening. Composer Joel Puckett’s I enter the earth (2015) sets words, spoken by shaman Kxao -Oah of northwestern Botswana in 1971, in a meditative work connecting body and soul with vocal swells, wide-pitched lead lines and static reflective held notes.

A Native Hill (first complete performance 2019) is a 12-movement work for 24-member a cappella choir with minimal keyboard parts, composed by Gavin Bryars as a gift to The Crossing. A follow-up to his Grammy Award-winning work composed for them, it is based on the 1968 essay of the same name by American author and activist/environmentalist Wendell Berry about his rural life existence. Bryars’ understanding of The Crossing’s talents makes this over-one-hour monumen-tal composition amazing in content, musicality and choral sounds. Mostly tonal, each movement has a nature-based name. Highlights include Sea Level where the wave motion can be heard in longer, full harmonic notes and dynamic swells. More water music in The Music of Streams with slower occasional sudden swells and subtle atonality. The shorter The Hill has answering between vocal groups and a suspenseful drone. Clever use of choral whirls and hums in Animals and Birds. At Peace is a dramatic change in sonic pace with the opening featuring each choir member singing their own note to create a 24-voice cluster followed by touches of romanticism, atonalities and tonal harmonies building dramatically to close the work.

Conductor Donald Nally is brilliant leading The Crossing from musical subtleties to complexities. The Crossing’s performances illuminate their expansive musical artistry. Production is clear and detailed. Both these discs are highly recommended!

Tiina Kilk

CLASSICAL AND BEYOND

Au Monde
Daniel Zapico
Alborada editions ALB001
(alborada-editions.com)

► Daniel Zapico explains that, as soon as he picked it up, the theorbo was to be his instrument. Such is his dedication to it that he takes manuscripts of compositions for inter alia harpsichord, viola da gamba and guitar and transcribes them for theorbo.

Taking inspiration from the Vaudry de Saizemay manuscript of 1699, Zapico performs pieces from six composers in Au Monde. From the start, the theorbo demonstrates capabilities in excess of its younger sister the lute, in the shape of a more resonant, mellow and deeper tone, the instrument being perfectly suited to Zapico’s interpretations. Robert de Visée’s Prelude brings out this very deep and resounding sonority.

Then there are the longer and more demanding compositions. Zapico selects Couperin’s Les Bergériés and de Visée’s Pastorale to demonstrate his forceful technique. Contrast these with the sensitivity of Monsieur du Buisson’s Plainte sur la mort de Monsieur Lambert (one of the other composers featured on this CD). This piece is complex and makes real demands on Zapico’s technique.

Of course, there is always the Bourée by de Visée for a lighter enjoyment of this CD, which is sufficiently varied to show Zapico’s mastery of an instrument overshadowed by the lute in popularity and ultimately by the harpsichord. Zapico’s love for the theorbo is brought home by the highly complex tablature he works from - printed in copper-coloured ink to grace even further this very sumptuously presented CD.

Michael Schwartz

Telemann – Polonaise
Holland Baroque; Aisslinn Nosky
PentaTone PTC5186878 (naxosdirect.com/search/827949087868)

One walks a fine balance when performing early music. Often, musicians and audi-ences who perform, record and appre-ciate early music are, and I say this kindly, authenticity fetishists who value the period veracity of everything from the repu-terature, tempo and interpretation of the music to, in some cases, the lineage and pedigree of the instruments played, to the ensemble dress. Holland Baroque, led by Judith and Tineke Steenbrink (who supply new arrange-ments of Georg Philipp Telemann’s familiar music for the recording here), manages to thread the difficult needle of adhering to the purity and concretized tradition of Germanic Baroque performance while imbuing a flair for innovation that places this musical style in a contemporary setting that includes elements of improvisation and innovative collaboration. It is little wonder then that the ensemble has won fans worldwide. Here, on their second strong release for PentaTone Records, the group is sure to earn even more accolades and listeners. Joined by Canadian early music violinist Aisslinn Nosky, the group explores Telemann’s Danses d’Polonie (TWV 45), which the composer wrote during his Polish travels, and which had a lasting impact upon his compositional style and artistic output. Cinematic and rich in its thematic mining of the imagery, landscape and nature of Poland and its surroundings, this recording is a winner. Sure to delight connoisseurs of early music while making fans out of other listeners too.

Andrew Scott

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Johann Georg Pisendel – Neue Sonaten
Scaramuccia
Snakewood Editions SCD202001
(snakewoodeditions.com)

> The name Johann Georg Pisendel is perhaps not all that familiar today, but during his lifetime he was highly acclaimed as a violinist and concertmaster. Born near Nuremberg in 1687, Pisendel studied at the Royal Chapel at Ansbach where among his teachers was Giuseppe Torelli. He continued his studies in Leipzig and ultimately enjoyed a long and successful career in Dresden as leader of the Dresden Hofkapelle, an ensemble that won the praise of no less a figure than J.S. Bach.

Pisendel’s own output was small, but among his compositions are four chamber sonatas scored for violin, cello and continuo, discovered in the immense assemblage of scores that he amassed during his lifetime which now comprises the esteemed Schrank II collection in the library of Dresden University. These Neue Sonaten are presented here for the first time ever on this splendid Snakewood label disc performed by the ensemble Scaramuccia.

Under the leadership of director/violinist Javier Lupiáñez (performing on a 1682 instrument), the four-movement miniatures truly come alive – what a joyful sound these musicians produce! Lupiáñez’s skilful playing – his phrasing always carefully articulated and artfully nuanced – is complemented by the solid performances of cellist Inés Salinas and harpsichordist Patricia Vintém. Many of the ornamentations in the form of cadenzas and passagework were added by the musicians themselves, based on a thorough study of Pisendel’s performance practices. Indeed, the melding of Pisendel’s solid compositional style exemplified in these recently discovered works with Scaramuccia’s careful and intelligent approach is a fortuitous one. An added bonus is a charming but anonymous harpsichord sonata in D Major that Vintém performs with much flair. The attractive slipcase and artwork further enhance an already appealing disc.

Richard Haskell

Cavatine
DUO Stephanie and Saar
New Focus Recordings FCR274
(stephshaarduco.com)

> This piano duo disc by Stephanie Ho and Saar Ahuvia (DUO) has expressive virtuosity written all over it. It’s not simply four-hands piano that has been captured on disc, but repertoire as poignant as it is rare. Its late Beethoven is paired with late Schubert. And its music is evocative of the unrequited love both men lived with. In Schubert’s case, it was also a life lived in the permanent and towering shadow of the master, so much so that he – in an almost Shakespearean kind of twist – was even buried next to Beethoven.

All of this spills over into the highly charged program on Cavatine. DUO Stephanie and Saar has completely subsumed every emotive aspect of this music. There is even an extraordinarily eerie seamlessness of how Beethoven’s String Quartet in B-flat Major Op.130 slides into the Cavatine, then into the Grosse Fuge Op.133, before ending up in Schubert’s Fantasie in F Minor D940.

This is a made-for-each partnership. The amazing rapport between Ho and Ahuvia and their impeccable style unite to produce winning results. The warmth and tangible empathy on display here bring out all of the music’s emotive aspects – especially in the intensely lyrical movements of the Quartet in B-flat and the Cavatine, which gives way to the chromatic boldness of the Grosse Fuge and finally in the rhapsodic features of Schubert’s Fantasie. All of this makes a disc to absolutely die for.

Raul da Gama

Schubert: Explorations
Mathieu Gaudet
Analekta AN 2 9184 (analekta.com/en)

> One year ago, in May 2020, this reviewer wrote of a new release from pianist Mathieu Gaudet. Late Inspirations was the second installment of an ambitious project to record the entirety of Franz Schubert’s sonatas and major works for piano. Since then, Gaudet has added another two discs to the anthology: The Power of Fate in October 2020 and Explorations in March 2021. What a thrill it has been to discover each of these records in an alimentative journey comprised of attentive listening. From its wondrous, heights to its simplest of gifts, Schubert’s art is a way of life for Gaudet.

As a fulltime emergency physician, Gaudet has persevered through a harrowing year for human beings on our planet, combatting a health crisis on a magnitude not seen for a century. The compassion, care and healing that Gaudet surely delivers to his patients is transfused – erewiely – to his musical artistry. As listeners around Gaudet’s keyboard, we are in safe hands. His deeply empathic connection with Schubert is genially revealed, phrase by phrase, piece by piece, as we are led through a lifelong tended garden, ever-watered with a sublime Schubertian prowess.

A consistent feature of each disc thus far is a blending of the known with the unknown. Explorations opens with the familiar Moments Musicaux, D780. What comes next...
is unexpected: three fleeting German Dances, Day and Night that sway and yodel with a folksy kind of charm.

Of Gaudet’s many attributes, his rhythmic sense of rightness remains high atop the list. With a shrewd savvy for pulse on the highest order, Gaudet sculpt phrases and perfectly arrays accompaniments. Such rhythmic irresistibility – such fantastic finesse – offers trips of light indeed. His pianism is capable of casting spells of merriment, akin to the province of tunesmiths who magically set their songs ablaze, dancing and frolicking in the hot sun. Daylight ordains such tales of love and loss, of anguish and dubiety. And yet, a celestial certitude hovers over such oases of musical expression. Such is the stuff as Schubert’s art is made on.

Adam Sherkin

Correspondences
Aljoša Jurinić
KNS Classical KNS A/097 (knsclassical.com)

How fortunate for Toronto that an artist of Jurinić’s stature has chosen to settle here – we can only hope his residency will be a lengthy one and that we may hear him perform in concert when conditions allow. Richard Haskell

Lineage – Tracing Influence
Deborah Grimmett
New Classic Records NC01 (deborahgrimmnett.com)

The full range of both the beautiful – and beautifully recorded – Glenn Gould Studio piano, and a solo piano repertoire that spans the historical continuum from Brahms and Debussy to such contemporary composers as Iman Habibi and the little-known Rhoda Coghill (this may be the recording premiere of any of Coghill’s compositions) is on full display here with this wonderfully expressive FACTOR and Canada Council for the Arts-supported 2021 release. Exhibiting a deft touch and clear musicality, Toronto pianist Deborah Grimmett presents an intimate view into not only her own considerable musical talent, but her biographical story of overcoming a repetitive strain injury from over-practising as a music student, to stepping away from the piano in order to heal and then, finally, returning to the instrument to make what is clearly a meaningful and deeply personal recording.

This is one of those presentation formats (solo piano) and recordings (live off the floor, close-miked instrument) that when you take away any other extraneous factors, all that is left is the musicality and interpretive power of the performer and the music itself. As such, Lineage: Tracing Influence does a fine job, offering one of those listening experiences where fans of classical music, solo piano or just those who need some auditory solace from the everyday banality of life (particularly so during yet another lockdown) can immerse themselves in order to derive pleasure, meaning and inspiration.

Andrew Scott

Mahler – Symphony No.10 in F-sharp Major
Minnesota Orchestra; Osmo Vänskä
Bis BIS-2396 (naxosdirect.com/search/bis-2396)

Mahler’s final work lay hidden for decades as short-hand sketches still awaiting a full orchestration. Alas, the completion of the work was tragically cut short by the composer’s premature death from a broken heart at the age of 50. Fragments of this manuscript were subsequently revealed over the decades by his imperious widow Alma Mahler-Gropius-Werfel, who considered the work to be a private love letter to herself and only relented to allow the work to be published after listening to a BBC broadcast tape of the “performing edition” that Deryck Cooke prepared for the Mahler centenary in 1960. Cooke’s realization underwent subsequent refinements and his third and final 1976 edition, incorporating previously suppressed materials, has become the preferred version among several alternatives.

Recordings of the work are relatively rare, as a fair number of conductors have questioned the legitimacy of the score. These skeptics will, I hope, be won over by this commanding performance from the Minnesota Orchestra, which ranks among the finest available. The work is in five movements, similar in structure to Mahler’s Seventh Symphony. The slower first and fifth movements are tragic cries of despair while the inner, faster movements are comically sarcastic, echoing the scherzo and rondo movements of his Ninth Symphony. There is a wonderful spontaneity to Osmo Vänskä’s choice of tempos in these central movements, strikingly so in the acceleration of the unusually asymmetrical measures of the second movement, which tumble over themselves in a delightful confusion.

The longer outer movements feature the highly refined playing of the string section, hovering at times at a nearly inaudible level, with superlative contributions from the solo wind instruments. Add to this excellent program notes and stellar sonics from the BIS recording team and you have yourself an outstanding addition to the discography of this passionate, autobiographical masterpiece. Not to be missed!

Daniel Foley

Rachmaninoff – Symphony No.1; Symphonic Dances
Philadelphia Orchestra; Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Imagine you have the entire Deutsche Grammophon catalogue, a whole wall covered in shelving designed for CD’s, each spine of every disc displaying the well-known colours. Lucky you! Just now, taking pride of place is this sparkling new release, the Philadelphia Orchestra led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin performing Rachmaninoff’s First Symphony Op.13 and Symphonic Dances Op.14 (his final published work).

What to praise first? Recording quality,
which whisks you around the sections of this fabulous orchestra as, one by one, they show off their mastery of dynamics, technical agility, musical insight; and most of all, the unheard presence channelling the composer through the players before him, the young (still young!) maestro from Quebec. Possibly no composer offers better witness to Nézet-Séguin’s mastery. With seamless logic, he links the furioso character of the Allegro ma non troppo first movement to its episodes of pathos. Every detail is considered and brought forth. This recording is an encounter with deep Russian melancholia, and Philadelphia’s legendary warm sound is the perfect medium for the maestro’s skill.

Interesting to pair this youthful early symphony, from 1895, with the Symphonic Dances, composed in 1940, when Rachmaninoff was living in California. Poorly received as it was at the premiere, the symphony is incredibly ambitious, and if tonally conservative, it offers glimpses of the strange wonderful paths the 22-year-old would soon follow. Make yourself wait before letting this recording of the Dances deliver you into another world of wonder. If the engineers have filed off any “edge” in the sound, there’s punch and beauty in spades, and a luxurious gong fade at the end!

Max Christie

Rachmaninoff – Symphony No. 2
London Symphony Orchestra; Sir Simon Rattle
LSO Live LSO0851D (lsolive.lso.co.uk/products/rachmaninoff-symphony-no-2)

► It’s just about time that we realize Sir Simon Rattle is one of the greatest conductors of our time. His bio is the ultimate success story. As a kid from Liverpool with minor conducting assignments in England, in 2002 at age 42, he was elected music director of the Berlin Philharmonic, the most prestigious and probably the best orchestra in the world. The youngest ever for this honour! He kept this post amazingly until 2018 when he “retired” with the highest accolades, beloved by the orchestra and the City of Berlin, but his career was far from over. Soon thereafter, he went to Vienna and conducted a wonderful Ring Cycle at the Staatsoper, televised, so I was lucky to watch it. He had numerous recordings on the EMI label, but in 2017 he took over the London Symphony and began recording on the orchestra’s own label, LSO Live. Rachmaninoff’s Second Symphony is the best of the three he wrote and has always been a favourite of mine. After the failure of his First it shows full maturity of his creative powers. It has a “sustained vitality, richness of lyrical invention and a glowing eloquence capable of rising to extraordinary power” (Robin Hull). Rattle conducts the entire uncut version from memory and it’s such a relaxed and spontaneous reading aided by the highest quality HD sound that so reverberated throughout the house that I was wholly enchanted.

Janos Gardonyi

Richard Strauss – Complete Tone Poems
SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden and Freiburg; François-Xavier Roth
SWR Music SWR19426CD (naxosdirect.com/search/swr19426cd)

► When searching for the performance of Also Sprach Zarathustra that would mightily reinforce the opening of 2001, A Space Odyssey, Stanley Kubrick finally selected, presumably on its impact, the Decca version with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan. After much negotiating, it was agreed that Kubrick may use that performance under the condition that it is never identified (perhaps I should have prefixed with “spoiler alert”). I am quite sure that if that were today, the power of the vehement timpanist in the opening of the SWR version in this outstanding new set could very well be the choice.

At the helm is François-Xavier Roth, the French conductor who is well known as the director of Les Siècles, an original instrument orchestra that he founded in 2013, and which has recorded many stunning versions of Baroque and early–20th-century favourites, including Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps. Among his myriad appointments and awards are general music director of the City of Cologne and principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. Undoubtedly his activities in the field of historically informed performance have attuned his ear to ensure every instrument in the orchestra is audible as these performances of familiar and perhaps less familiar tone poems demonstrate. They are Ein Heldenleben, Sinfonia Domestica, Also Sprach Zarathustra, Tod und Verklärung, Metamorphosen, Don Juan, Don Quixote, Eine Alpensinfonie, Till Eulenspiegels Lustige Streich, Aus Italien and Macbeth. Strauss is well served by performances of commitment and intensity, passages where winds, brass and percussion appear…not spot-lit but there. The perfectly recorded performances dating from 2012 to 2015, as in earlier recordings from this source, are convincingly live.

Roth’s same meticulous attention to detail and perfect balances may be viewed and heard conducting different orchestras in diverse repertoire on the optional music channels available on cable TV and YouTube.

Bruce Surtees

Good Water
Leahy

“Tradition with edge.” A thoughtful varied collection of original music that adds new dimensions to Leahy’s folky/roots/trad/Celtic influenced work. Produced by David Bottrill.

Speaking Hands
Curtis Andrews

Curtis Andrews delivers his signature brand of genre-bending ‘Afro-Indian-World-Jazz’, featuring a global palette of guests including Sri Trichy Sankaran.

Roots
Ventus Machina

Reflecting the strong artistic voice of Ventus Machina, this music was chosen by the ensemble: representing both their musical heritage and current musical influences.

In D
Brooklyn Raga Massive
A minimalist suite of 3 Ragas performed by 25 musicians on sitars, bansuris, tabla, vocals, violins, cellos, and harmonium in homage to Terry Riley.

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

thewholenote.com/listening
McCoy and console assistant Grant Wareham collaborate in Jean-Louis Florentz’s *Poème Symphonique “La Croix du Sud”* (2000), named for the constellation. With influences from Florentz’s teacher Messiaen, and Tuareg and Sufi music, it grows, chirps, and surges around disquieting interludes that conjure mysterious, desolate landscapes. A noble central anthem illuminates the celebratory Allegro Vivace from Félix Alexandre Guilmant’s *Organ Sonata No.2* (1862). Joseph Bonnet’s brief *Elfes* from his 12 Pièces (1910) is a gossamer swirl of shimmering light, rendered in sound. *Fantaisie*, Op.101 (1893) by Camille Saint-Saëns comprises a murmuring, gentle andantino, a tempestuous fugue and a calm, reassuring finale. *Clair de Lune* from Louis Vierne’s 24 Pièces, Suite No.2 (1926) paints a secluded nocturnal scene in muted pastel watercolour. At nearly 28 minutes, the CD’s longest and most “symphonic” entry is a remarkably effective arrangement by McCoy and percussionist Brady Spitz of Edgard Varèse’s *Amériques* (1911), the original version requiring 27 woodwinds, 29 brass and an immense percussion battery. Collin Boothby assists McCoy on organ and Spitz on percussion, employing all of Varèse’s noisemakers – lion’s roar (!), siren, rattle, cymcione and steamboat whistles, etc., etc.

Fascinating listening, from mystery-laden start to roaring finish! Michael Schulman

**Uncovered, Vol. 1: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**

**Catalyst Quartet; Stewart Goodyear; Anthony McGill**

Azica ACD-71336 (catalystquartet.com/uncovered)

Yuri McCoy; Brady Spitz

**Symphonic Roar – An Odyssey of Sound from the Paris Conservatoire**

Yuri McCoy; Brady Spitz

Acis APL92957 (acisproductions.com)

The late-19th-century British composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, conquered the United States with his musical ingenuity. But could his being billed – somewhat patronizingly – as the “African Mahler” have blunted his singular musical achievements? We will never really know, and it may even be unimportant now as, with *Uncovered, Vol. 1: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, the Catalyst Quartet turns the marquee lights on to illuminate his elegant music, and not the colour of his skin.

But poetic justice must also come by way of inviting pianist Stewart Goodyear and clarinetist Anthony McGill – two prodigiously gifted Black musicians – to participate in this significant musical project. The association with Mahler does have some significance however, because it took decades of proselytizing by conductors such as Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Mengelberg and Leonard Bernstein before Mahler’s symphonies became audience-pullers. If it’s fallen upon the Catalyst to do likewise for Coleridge-Taylor they’ve certainly delivered.

These are über-articulate readings of the *Quintet In G Minor for Piano and Strings* Op.1 featuring Goodyear, *Quintet In F-sharp Minor for Clarinet and Strings* Op.10 featuring McGill and Fantasiestücke for String Quartet Op.5. The Quartet’s musicians shape phrases with attention paid to every nuance of the scores, while the music’s grand sweep remains paramount throughout; Goodyear’s pianism sings in the piano quintet and McGill’s clarinet does likewise in Op.10. The Catalyst’s performance is marked by a wide range of touch and timbre, with extraordinary emphasis on the inner voices of Coleridge-Taylor’s eloquent music.

Raul da Gama

In a Time of War

**Phillip O. Paglialonga; Richard Masters**

Heritage HTGCD 173 (heritage-records.com)

In a Time of War, featuring clarinetist Phillip Paglialonga and pianist Richard Masters, professors works by two composers suffering exile during WW2. An odd pairing to be sure, but it’s possible to hear some common ground between Serge Prokofiev and John Ireland. If you listen to the late moments of Ireland’s *Fantasy-Sonata for Clarinet and Piano* there’s an argument to be made. Written in 1943, the same year as Prokofiev’s *Flute Sonata Op.94*, the Ireland work does what a lot of mid-century English music does: explore modernity and expression, but also in a way that might evoke Prokofiev the man, although not his music.

I think clarinetists should leave well enough alone when it comes to poaching repertoire, especially in the case of the Prokofiev, which after all was more or less stolen from futilists for the already-crammed violin library by David Oistrakh (with Prokofiev’s complicity!). Sorry, futes, it’s a better piece in the second take. *Opus 94a* is heard as often, if not more than the original. The clarinet version here should maybe be called Opus 94(b), I don’t know. It’s very dicey, range-wise, and hardly idiomatic for the clarinet. Paglialonga manages the high tessitura quite well, but most tempos are slower than you might be used to, and the balance has his sound too far in front of Masters, which jars a bit at the opening. The duo’s rendition is a work apart from the original, as a quick reference to Oistrakh’s recording will confirm.

A third work is included, also from 1943, *Ireland’s Sarnia: An Island Sequence*, a solo Masters performs with more freedom than the other tracks demonstrate. These are good performances, if somewhat staid.

Max Christie

**Classical Kids: Gershwin’s Magic Key**

**Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras**

*Classical Kids Music Education 270541 (classicalkidsnfp.org)*

Gershwin’s *Magic Key* is the first new album in 20 years from the award-winning platinum-selling *Classical Kids*, most famous for *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*. This high quality, dynamic studio recording features the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras conducted by Allen Tinkham, voices of professional actors Elie Bramlett and Leslie Ann Sheppard, and head writer/music supervisor/featured pianist Will Martin, who premiered the original live concert.

Set in 1920s New York, the three-act story revolves around a newspaper boy’s chance meeting with composer George Gershwin, leading to the two travelling through New York, verbally telling stories based on Gershwin’s life and the times, intertwined with his music. The opening attention-grabbing string swirls, clear spoken words, piano solo and wailing clarinet set the stage for a fast-paced, exciting fact-based production both children and adults will love. The supportive spoken tips from Gershwin, such as “I was a changed person learning piano; Every sound is music; Do not let anyone tell you what you can or cannot be;” are positive reinforcement for the boy, and all children listening and reading the liner notes.

Gershwin’s compositions featured include fabulous orchestral renditions of *Summertime, An American in Paris* and the upbeat singalong/dance-along *I Got Rhythm*. Educational musical outtakes from other composers include Dvořák’s *Humoresque*, the Tin Pan Alley hit *Take Me out to the Ballgame*, and 1920’s *Baby Face*. *Finale* recreates the world premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*, from the piano/orchestra exuberant performance to the recording’s closing audience cheers. Bravo!

Tiina Kiik

**Inspired by French composers’ exploitation of the organ’s myriad sonorities in these “symphonic” works, Houston-based Yuri McCoy says he feels “free to orchestrate... in many different ways,” often making “many more registration changes than indicated in the score.” (As for the “roar,” wait for it!)**
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY

To Anatolia – Selections from the Turkish Five
Beyza Yazgan
Bridge Records 9549 (bridgerecords.com/collections/catalog-all)

A love letter to Anatolia (Asia Minor), this album introduces young artist Beyza Yazgan, a Turkish pianist now based in New York. Yazgan expresses immense pride for her homeland and gentle longing for her homeland through a wonderful selection of piano pieces by a group of 20th-century composers known as the Turkish Five. She also includes her own illustrations and detailed liner notes on Turkish music traditions, thus making this album even more personal.

Yazgan’s interpretation of these compositions is simply lovely. Her heartfelt approach brings out beautiful colours from gentle and melancholic pieces. On the other hand, she engages masterfully with complex rhythms in more percussive compositions, making her performance well balanced and charming.

The Turkish Five – Ahmet Adnan Saygun, Ferid Alnar, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Necil Kazim Akses and Cemal Reşit Rey – transformed the music of their time by introducing Western compositional styles and forms and blending them with rhythms and modes of traditional Turkish folk music and dances. Just as Anatolia itself has been the land of many cultures and flavours, so is the music on this album. From the beautifully atmospheric Little Shepherd by Erkin and feet-stomping Horon by Reşit Rey, to the elegant Zeybek Dance by Alnar, the pieces tell stories of the unique and rich musical heritage of this land, its people and customs.

Ivana Popovic

Alexander Mosolov – Symphony No.5; Harp Concerto
Taylor Ann Fleshman; Moscow Symphony Orchestra; Arthur Arnold
Naxos 8.574102 (naxosdirect.com/search/8574102)

Russian composer Alexander Mosolov (1900-1973) was active in the early Soviet era, and his artistic voice sits somewhere between Shostakovich and Prokofiev. The latest recording of director Arthur Arnold and the Moscow Symphony Orchestra is a dedicated release of the lesser-known composer’s Fifth Symphony and Harp Concerto. In the former, never performed during the composer’s lifetime, Arnold and the Moscow Symphony deliver the work with subtle musicianship and crisp articulation – aspects that are needed to execute the contrasting three movements.

Mosolov’s Harp Concerto is a delicate and beautiful work in four movements that takes the listener on a journey from contemplative sustained atmospheres in the first movement, through a mysterious Nocturne, to a charming Gavotte, and finally a flashy Toccata. Harpist Taylor Ann Fleshman’s technique and phrasing are outstanding in this performance. Her captivating interpretation leaves no doubt that this work deserves a lasting place in the harp concerto repertoire.

It is always nice to encounter an effort to keep lesser-known composers’ music alive – Arnold and the Moscow Symphony certainly make a strong case for increased future performances of Mosolov’s music.

Adam Scime

Frank Horvat – Music for Self-Isolation
Various Artists
Centredics CMCCD-28521 (cmcccanada.org/shop/cd-cmccd-28521)

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Toronto composer and pianist Frank Horvat observed fellow musicians struggling to cope with loss, precarity triggered by cancelled gigs and the strain of isolation. Wondering how to effectively respond, his answer: write new compositions to counter self-isolation. Thus, during the spring of 2020 he composed 31 short classical-style pieces, shared immediately with the international community on social media. They were an instant hit. Numerous performance videos were posted on the Internet and Horvat made plans to record them on the album Music for Self-Isolation at Toronto’s Roy Thomson Hall. The session wrapped the day before Ontario’s stay-at-home order came into force on January 14, 2021. The album also includes the ensemble composition Together in Spirit, using overdubbing technology to effectively bring together the 22 talented musicians who played solos and duos on the other tracks of Music for Self-Isolation.

Part two of the album comprises eight nuanced The Idea of North-style audio documentaries titled Pandemic Stories. These layered monologues, each by a different musician, are deeply personal stories about impacted careers and lives during the pandemic, accompanied by Horvat’s instrumental music. The aim: to present “the hopes, dreams and fears,” of each musician, and their views on the arts and culture sector, “in order to heal and move forward together.”

Taking the two sections together – the 32 music miniatures and eight audio reports – the 40-track Music for Self Isolation offers accessible, soothing music, plus international voices of resilience during this time of plague. The album reminds us that music is among the most mysterious and highest order of human skills.

Andrew Timar

#4
Andrzej Pietrewicz
Independent (soundcloud.com/andrzej-pietrewicz/sets/4a-1/s-h6vdD1K KYM)

Andrzej Pietrewicz is an independent musician, small instrumental ensemble composer and producer based in Port Credit, near Toronto. His unique inspirational compositional and performing sound makes this six original-song, self-produced-during-COVID-lockdown creation, unforgettable! Pietrewicz clearly has a comprehensive technical understanding of diverse musical genres such as Baroque, jazz, blues, folk, classical and contemporary. He draws on this knowledge to develop his own vibrant sound performed here by talented instrumentalists on piano, strings, percussion, guitar, winds, programming and, in the closing track, vocalists.

Multi-instrumental track 1 is a great introduction to his music, combining quasi-orchestral tonal sounds with modern touches such as interval jumps and tweeting bird-like piano sounds. The faster, happier track 2 with its rhythmic piano interval patterns, instrumental held notes, simultaneous tonal/ modern effects and high-pitched woodwind sounds creates a musical pre/post-COVID sunny warm spring day for me!

Track 3, with a nod to Baroque keyboard music, yet so modern day in tonality, moves from the contrapuntal mood-changing opening lines to subtle dissonant intervals, steady rhythms and detailed phrasing, performed with sensitivity, passion and hope by the composer. Nice addition of singers Nacre, Timbre, Laura and Caroline Joy Clarke to track 6 as their high pitches alternating with tight string, flute and piano parts create a captivating positive soundscape.

This is uplifting, joyful, beautiful music to be enjoyed over and over again.

Tilina Kilk
Claire Chase
Corbett vs Dempsey CvsD CD076 (corbettvsdempsey.com)

Claire Chase is a force. Our modern understanding of contemporary music performance is pushed forward with artists of this calibre. The eminent flutist’s latest release comes as a monumental four-disc statement toward why Chase is one of the world’s most celebrated performers. As one would expect, the execution on this release is extraordinary. That said, expected excellence must not be confused with anything inherently predictable: each piece is delivered with a stunning level of musicianship that demands attention and respect. Titled Density 2036, this release represents the first five years (2013-2017) of a 24-year project through which Chase will commission new pieces for solo flute each year until the 100th anniversary of Edgard Varèse’s seminal flute composition Density 21.5, written in 1936.

The first disc begins with Marcos Balter’s Pessoa for six bass flutes—a piece that embodies a rather meditative atmosphere with shakuhachi-like gestures. There are two pieces by Brazilian-American composer Felipe Lara, the second of which, titled Parábolas na Caverna, is wonderfully mysterious in its richness, drawing the listener into a highly successful soundworld and unusual invocations for the flute. Chase takes command of the extended techniques to such a world-class level that I had to listen several times to believe what was being heard.

It is not simply technical fireworks on display that makes Chase’s playing so compelling: it’s technical wizardry combined with a level of care, dedication and nuance that makes a recording like this so important. George Lewis’ Emergent for flute and electronics is a true gem of the repertoire. This highly original music is stunning for its thrilling otherworldliness. An Empty Garlic for bass flute and electronics written by Chinese-born composer Dun Yun is exquisite. It is a lush garden of undiscovered essences producing an irresistible listening experience. The first CD caps off with Chase’s own interpretation of Varèse’s Density 21.5 that may objectively be considered a seminal recording of this early-20th-century masterpiece.

We also receive a dynamic and adventurous piece from Dai Fujikura and an engagingly hip work from Francesca Verunelli. Pauline Oliveros’ Intensity 20.15: Grace Chase—a work inspired by a text written by Chase’s grandmother—is 20 minutes of pure ingenuity suspended in a realm beyond imagination.

Suzanne Farrin’s The Stimulus of Loss is an expressive and delicate work with an appearance by the ondes Martenot; the playful energy in Tyshawn Sorey’s Bertha’s Lair is a magical landscape with percussive edges; Pauchi Sasaki’s Gama XV: Piece for Two Speaker Dresses makes brilliant use of technology in a highly evocative soundscape where the ears become enveloped within an airy expanse. The fourth CD contains an eight-movement work by Balter, titled Fun, which is a substantial journey inspired by memory. This work embodies a rather theatrical aesthetic and is written with an intense and luminous brilliance and with clever novelty of material.

This first installment of Chase’s Density 2036 project is impressive, and a profound affirmation of why Chase is one of the most important champions of contemporary music. Her tremendous musicality and breathtaking command of the flute is a matter of scale; this release deserves 10 out of 10 with any metric I can think of.

Adam Sherkin
Echos et résonances
Martine Vialatte (piano)
CIAR CC003 (ciar.e-monsite.com)

Debussy’s piano Preludes have become staples of the repertoire and with so many fine recordings, it is difficult to say something different—a feat that virtuoso Martine Vialatte achieves with subtle mastery. The phrasing and careful use of the pedals creates a sonorous palette not heard in many recordings of Debussy’s set of Preludes (Premier livre).

Also found on this release, aptly titled Echos et résonances, are two pieces by French composer Tristan Murrail—a short piece titled Cloches d’ailleurs et un sourire and the spectral masterpiece, Territoires de l’oubli. In the former, a piece dedicated to Messiaen, chords swing before the listener like memories becoming ever more elusive. In the latter, Vialatte’s delicate touch provides a stunning resonance necessary for this hypnotic and intriguing work. In spite of the composer’s reluctance to be labelled an impressionist, the two pieces by Murrail do make for perfect companions to Debussy’s preludes with clearly similar evocations of the natural world. Vialatte delivers world-class interpretations of some of the most resonant works written for her instrument, making for a rich and rewarding listen.

Adam Scime
Alvin Lucier – Music for Piano XL
Nicolas Horvath
Grand Piano GP857 (naxosdirect.com/search/gp857)

American composer Alvin Lucier has found an impressive exponent in pianist Nicolas Horvath. An artist regarded for a dizzying variety of musical tastes, Horvath is especially celebrated as a leading interpreter of Franz Liszt and yet he has recorded the music of Philip Glass, Cornelius Cardew and Jaan Rääts, to critical acclaim. In his latest release, Horvath dives headlong into the whole note.com
into a vast, single-movement work for piano and wave oscillators. He is no stranger to such endeavours, having staged past live performances running up to 12 hours in length. Here, Horváth (via Lucier) offers a sprawling brand of listening experience, supported by “slow sweep pure wave oscillators.” Only single acoustic piano notes are struck throughout, echoing for minutes at a time over a backdrop of acoustic beating. (Two pure wave move up and down with a range of four octaves. The beats are directed by the piano tone’s proximity to pitches from the oscillator.) While the resulting soundworld is undeniably retro, such creations can reward the assiduous listener. This aesthetic urges a holistic mode of attentiveness. One has to empty the ears of preconceived notions of structure, melody – and even of texture. These tones and beats sear through a vacuum of space on their own sort of photon, commingling and naturalistic: unhindered sonic spectres that speak truly. In what realm of this brief and chipper quartet or worse, clarinet choir. Listen to the blends intentionally exploited by Michael Gilbertson in the brief and chipper *Kinds of Light.*

That opening moan is from *Rites for the Afterlife,* a four-movement work inspired by ancient Egyptian rituals guiding the soul from this world to the next. Composer Stacy Garrop’s unearthly timbres of microtonal clusters, executed with clean precision, draw the listener into the mystery. Unpitched whispery effects evoke reed beds by a river. No, but the instrumentation is: two clarinets (soprano and bass), plus an oboe, a bassoon, and… saxophone! Here is range, here is agility and grace, here are complementary colours, never the cloying homophony of a saxophone quartet or worse, clarinet choir. Listen to the wild card of the British contemporary classical music scene, composer Leo Chadburn (aka Simon Bookish) widens the scope of his musical experimentation with this remarkable new release. Featuring performances by Quatuor Bozzini (Canada) and Apartment House (UK), and the voices of actress Gemma Saunders and Chadburn himself, the album combines minimalism with spoken word in a way that is symmetrical in form, yet inquisitive and uninhibited in its expression.

The six compositions included on *Slower/Talker* span a decade of the composer’s work. All explore the relationship between found text and its instrumental counterpart, made up of mostly strings and keyboard instruments. The text’s subjects are comprised of lists of a kind – names of moth species (*The Indistinguishables*), topographical features encircling London (*Freezewater*), a lexicon of words used in the fragrance industry (*Vapour Descritors*) or a stream of consciousness and properties of chemical elements (*The Halogens*). The words are spoken theatrically or in a musical way, always with restraint. Some are sung, understatedly, such as words of Mao Zedong in *X Chairman Maos* and Stacy Garrop’s unearthly timbres of microtonal clusters, executed with clean precision, draw the listener into the mystery. Unpitched whispery effects evoke reed beds by a river. Styx or Nile?

Iranian Niloufar Nourbakhsh based *Firing Squad* on the greatest opening sentence in literature, from Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* This melancholy, melodic one-movement work explores mortality and memory.

Jeff Scott, French horn of the Imani Winds, wrote the disc’s most substantial work: *Homage to Paradise Valley.* This is activist music, composed to poems by Marsha Music, commissioned to commemorate the destruction of Detroit neighbourhoods and landmarks taken from the African American community during the mid-20th century, in the name of urban renewal.

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**Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0145**

*In Your Hands*  
**Lavena**  
Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0145 (brightshiny.ninja)  

**Leo Chadburn – Slower/Talker**  
Apartment House; Quatuor Bozzini; Gemma Saunders  
Library of Nothing Records CD06 (leochadburn.com)

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**Undone**, a valentine gift to the artist from her composer husband Judah Adashi, inspired by Björk’s *Unravel*, gently closes the album. In this iteration it’s played by solo cellist with loop pedal. This is an adventurous yet cohesive manoeuvre from the disc’s most substantial work: *Homage to Paradise Valley.* This activist music, composed to poems by Marsha Music, commissioned to commemorate the destruction of Detroit neighbourhoods and landmarks taken from the African American community during the mid-20th century, in the name of urban renewal.

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**Ghost Light**  
Akropolis Reed Quintet  
New Focus Recordings FCR292  
(newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

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**Caryl Ockrant**

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**Adam Sherkin**

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**Ivana Popovic**

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**Max Christie**
George Lewis: The Recombinant Trilogy
Claire Chase; Seth Parker Woods; Dana Jessen
New Focus Recordings (newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

Few musicians have explored the relations between instrumental music and computer programming with the creative zeal of George Lewis, from Rainbow Family, the recently released IRCAM works from 1984 (Carrier Records), to his various interactive works with his Voyager program. His Recombinant Trilogy shifts from works employing improvisation to compositions that apply “interactive digital delays, spatialization and timbre transformation to transform the acoustic sounds of the instrument into multiple digitally created sonic personalities.” Each of the three pieces combines a soloist with computerized electronics, in the process creating a kind of malleable ensemble that achieves often startling effects within seemingly acoustic timbres, including parallel microtonal lines. Materials are reworked out of sequence, liberating time and continuity in the process. The opening Emergent (2014), performed by Claire Chase, flute, and Levy Lorenzo, electronics, is the sunniest of the three, exploiting and expanding the flute’s range and Jessen’s bassoon, crafted by the well-heeled; it provides contemporary humankind with an escape from time’s clutches, through ritual provided by “music’s hierophants” (the priesthood of composer/performers). Not sure about that, but let’s turn to the music itself.

Boyce writes lively, sometimes jarring and jagged lines, demanding for clergy and congregation alike. The title track was already released by counter)induction (Boyce is a founding member), reviewed last issue. It’s terrific to have a broad collection of his music to compare to that exhilarating junt.

Quintet l’homme armé references the canarius firmus Guillaume Dufay used in his eponymous Mass; extra marks if you can sing that melody, but even so, you’ll still need some imagination to find a connection between it and this mysterious descendant; I believe I hear the echoes, but I won’t bet the house. Piano Quartet No.2 involves intricate play with rhythmic blocks. There’s a chancy leeway to how the piece comes together, so this version is just one of the ways it might go. The longest track, and prize-winner for me, Sails Knife-bright in a Seasonal Wind is dedicated to Boyce’s young son. This whimsical triology between violin, guitar and percussion progresses from halting introductions, through a wacky little jig, and thence into the mystery world of a child’s deep slumber. Time keeps passing, but the listener feels it suspended for the duration.

Fantastic playing by the many participants. Clean crisp recording values too. Read and decipher the liner notes, if you can. Call it value added: I learned some arcane words, like apodeictic. As for the runes in the margins, no clue.

Max Christie

Anthony Girard – Éloge de la candeur
Jean-Pierre Arnaud; Geneviève Girard; Patrice Kirchhoff
CIAR CC 004 (ciar.e-monsite.com)

Released as a part of the “Albert-Roussel International Festival” collection, Éloge de la candeur by Anthony Girard is an offering of his works for oboe. The title piece for oboe and piano is a floating dreamscape of colours and expression. Épilogue en trio for flute, oboe and piano is a stark contrast to the previous works. There is an energetic playful-ness throughout, exploring different textures of articulation, voicing and range of all three instruments. Once pieces breves for oboe and piano are 11 quick movements showing the technical possibilities of the instrument. Most lasting no more than 30 seconds, these short pieces are energetic and dissonant compared to Girard’s other writing for the oboe.

Overall, this collection of works by Girard is an inspiring addition to the oboist’s repertoire. This album was beautifully interpreted by Jean-Pierre Arnaud, former English horn soloist of the Paris Opera Orchestra, as well as pianist Geneviève Girard and flutist of the National Orchestra of France, Patrice Kirchhoff.

Melissa Scott

Sid Richardson – Borne by a Wind
Various Artists
New Focus Recordings FCR285 (newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

Sid Richardson has an eloquent answer to the question: “How do you make art?” He comes together with poet Nathaniel Mackey and others to create this music. The black dots leap off the page entwined with Mackey’s lyrical recitations and the sound of horns, percussion and bass performed by the Deviant Septet. The searing heat of an artful sirocco, titled Red Wind, begins a memorable disc of Richardson’s music.

The repertoire of Borne by a Wind features three other works by Richardson. There is no sleep so deep a gentle, reassuring work that gets a suitably sensitive performance from pianist Conrad Tao, whose fingers seem to caress the notes of the melody. LUNE follows with the mystical high and lonesome wail of Lilit Hartuvian’s violin. It is a brilliantly conceived tone poem that soars skyward, evocative of a crepuscular musical event under a cloudless celestial canopy.

Richardson’s music is highly imaginative and reflects his singularly eclectic taste. The curved lenses and mirrors of a myriad of contemporary styles and movements in the arts have been telescoped into these works. The glue is, of course, Richardson’s spectral voice, somewhat reminiscent of Gerard Grisey and Kaïja Saariaho. These uncanny parallels are, perhaps, most discernable in Astrolabe where the Da Capo Chamber Players’ performance is interwoven with Walt Whitman’s and Geoffrey Chaucer’s poetry, the whispered climax of which brings this remarkable disc to a dramatic end.

Raul da Gama

Stuart Broomer

Douglas Boyce – The Hunt by Night
counter)induction; Ieva Jokubaviciute; Schuyler Slack; Trio Cavatina
New Focus Recordings FCR 278 (newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

Douglas Boyce’s erudite liner notes may make you reach for a dictionary. If I read him right, chamber music is no longer mere comfortable entertainment for
That Which Has Remained ...That which Will Emerge
Lucas Ligeti
Col Legno WWE 1CD-20452 (col-legno.com)

Described as a meditation on aural memory, this CD presents the electroacoustic sound installation percussionist Lukas Ligeti created for Warsaw’s POLIN Museum. Designed to comment on Polish Jewish life, the project weaves locally recorded interviews and songs in Polish, English and Yiddish triggered and mixed by Ligeti’s Marimba Lumina (MDI) with improvisations suggested by those recordings by clarinetist Paweł Szamburski, violinist/violist Patryk Zakrocki, cellist Mikołaj Pałosz, soprano Barbara Kinga Majewska plus Wojtek Kurek’s drums and synthesizer.

Juxtaposing folk songs with instruments means that the often melancholy, sometimes freylekhs melodies, suggest responses that range from storefront string thrums and barbed reed flutters to sequences which expand on klezmer and pre-War cabaret tunes. Majewska’s bel canto lyricism is most effective in unadorned recitations or personalizing familiar tunes. Modernism isn’t pushed aside for nostalgia though, as sections find her ululating vocals framed by clanking percussion vibrations. The keenest musical commentary is by inference on the connected City of the Damned and Elusive Counterpoint. With thick drum beats and pressurized string stops alongside the snatch of a Yiddish song, Warsaw’s pre-Holocaust Jewish ghetto and its destruction are suggested by City of the Damned. Harsh spicicato sprints from the strings are notable in Elusive Counterpoint. The sorrowful exposition gradually fades to ghostly echoes as the Yiddish tune becomes fainter subtly questioning what contemporary life holds for Jews in Poland.

Lacking the interactive element possible in the museum’s spatial atmosphere, the disc is still a superlative listening experience.

Ken Waxman

JAZZ AND IMPROVISED

No Bounds
Caity Gyorgy
Independent (caitygyorgy.bandcamp.com/album/no-bounds)

While having a beautiful voice is plenty to recommend any singer, also knowing how to use it in the myriad ways that Caity Gyorgy does puts her high up the list of young singers to watch.

Although the debate about what is and isn’t jazz is an old and often tedious one, it becomes especially tricky to nail it down when it comes to vocalists. Is covering standards enough to call yourself a jazz singer? Well, that’s all moot when it comes to Gyorgy because she is unmistakably a jazz singer. Just head over to her Instagram account, @liftaday, if you want to see what I’m talking about. There she posts videos of herself doing lifts – i.e. singing note-for-note – solos of jazz giant instrumentalists like Clifford Brown, Oscar Peterson and even Charlie Parker. She’s posted 180 videos since 2018! It would be an impressive accomplishment for a mature singer but for someone only 22 years old, it’s mind-blowing.

As well, her improv skills – the attribute that seals the deal for jazz credentials – are undeniable and on full display throughout her debut release, whether soloing over choruses or trading fours with her band members: Jocelyn Gould, guitar, Thomas Hainbuch, bass, and Jacob Wutzke, drums.

But Gyorgy isn’t all technique and prowess; she also has a ton of musicality and heart. These shine through on the songs she’s written herself like Postage Due which has a cute 60s vibe and Undefined, the only ballad on the album.

Despite the serious skills Gyorgy possesses she never gets too heavy and the overall feel of No Bounds is upbeat, warm and utterly charming.

Cathy Riches

Dream Logic
Sarah Jerrom
Three Pines Records TPR-002 (sarahjerrom.com)

With the release of her latest recording, Sarah Jerrom has reminded us that she is one of the most interesting, talented and creative vocalist/composers on the scene today. All of the 13 compositions on the CD were written by Jerrom, except for two (Illusions and Plastic Stuff) by ensemble member and gifted guitarist, Harley Card. Jerrom is also featured on piano and, in addition to Card, is joined by the uber-skilled Rob McBride on bass, Jeff Luciani on drums/percussion and Joe Lipinski (who also co-produced and engineered this project brilliantly) on acoustic guitar/vocals.

The opening salvo, Snowblind, has a silky, languid opening, featuring Jerrom’s pitch-perfect, clear tone – reminiscent of the great Jackie Cain or Norma Winstone. Cleverly arranged group vocals join in, followed by Card holding forth on an exquisite solo, rife with emotional and musical colours. An intriguing inclusion is Accolade Parade. Percussive and noir-ish, it deftly explores the desire for recognition – earned or not – and Jerrom shows herself to be a fine pianist on this harmonically dazzling tune. She also displays her vocal and compositional versatility on this well-written track. All is punctuated by the fine work of McBride and Luciani, who drives the ensemble down the pike with pumppitude to spare.

A highlight of the recording is the poetic, sultry, diatonic Fata Morgana. Again Jerrom dons another vocal guise with the deft use of her warm, lower register and her fine time feel. Card – this time on electric guitar – adopts a free, Bill Frisell-ish motif, set against the throbbing percussion of Luciani and the dynamic, soul-stirring bass of McBride. Another standout is Fergus – an unselfconscious, swinging, bonnie raij song – elegant in its simplicity and mysterious in its meaning.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

Into the Daybreak
Mike Freedman
Independent (mikefreedman.com)

A very welcome and positive pick-me-up to balance out these grayer times, local Toronto guitarist Mike Freedman’s latest release (and debut as a bandleader) is a rhythmically and melodically pleasing album that you would be hard pressed not to want to dance or at least tap along to. Spanning and mixing genres from Latin to blues and jazz to R&B, this record would be a great addition to the collection of listeners who tend to lean towards a classic sound or are looking for a modern take on the genre. All pieces are penned by Freedman himself and are given life by a sublime backing band with well-known names such as Chris Gale on tenor saxophone, Kobi Hass on bass and Jeremy Ledbetter on piano.

Samba on the Sand is definitely a standout on the album, a Latin-flavoured piece with
scintillating rhythms provided by drummer Max Senitt and a unique combination of melodica and guitar that creates a warm and distinctly Brazilian undertone to the tune. In Lamentation Revolution, focus is put on the interplay between distinctive piano chords, a smooth and quite funky bass line as well as Freedman’s mellow riffs forming a sultry R&B-flavoured whole. The title track manages to capture the exact essence of positivity, regeneration and awakening that each day brings; the driving rhythms and uplifting melodic progressions all contribute to maintaining this feeling throughout the piece.

Kati Kiiluspea

**Entièrement unanimes**

**Klaxon Gueule**

**Ambiances Magnétique AM 259 CD**

(www.actuellescd.com)

**While this session may at first appear to be a traditional guitar (Bernard Falaise), electric bass (Alexandre St-Onge) and drums (Michel F Côte) creation by Montreal’s Klaxon Gueule, the addition of synthesizers and a computer means it relates as much to metaphysics as to music. That’s because programming alters the sound of each instrument, blending timbres into a pointillist creation that brings in palimpsest inferences along with forefront textures.**

**A track such as Continuum indifférencié for instance, features a programmed continuum with concentrated buzzing that moves the solid exposition forward as singular string slides, piano clicks and drum riffs are interjected throughout. In contrast, la mort comme victoire malgré nous finds voltage impulses resembling a harmonized string section moving slowly across the sound field as video-game-like noise scraping and ping-ponging electron ratchets gradually force the exposition to more elevated pitches. Although aggregate tremolo reverb frequently makes ascribing (m)any textures to individual instruments futile, enough timbral invention remains to negate any thoughts of musical AI. Singular guitar plucks peer from among near-opaque organ-like washes on Société Perpendiculaire and a faux C&W guitar twang pushes against hard drum backbeats on toute la glu.**

**During the CD’s dozen selections, the trio members repeatedly prove that their mixture of voltage oscillations and instrumental techniques can create a unique sonic landscape that is as entrancing as it is expressive.**

Ken Waxman

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**Live from Frankie’s & the Yardbird**

**Al Muirhead Quintet**

**Chronograph Records CR082**

(chronographrecords.com/releases)

**There is an eloquent maxim in many musical discussions that “improvised music ought to sound written and written music should sound improvised.” In a similar vein I would argue that most studio jazz recordings benefit from a live energy, and most live recordings can sound as polished as their studio counterparts when well executed. The Al Muirhead Quintet strikes this balance beautifully on Live From Frankie’s & the Yardbird, performing a collection of jazz standards, one Muirhead original and Jimmy Giuffre’s Four Brothers; hardly a standard, but part of the jazz lexicon nonetheless. The album comes to a brief midway pause with the vocal Intermission Song, a showbiz-style way to end sets that only someone with Muirhead’s long connection to the music could pull off in such a fun and endearing manner.**

**The recording features Muirhead on bass trumpet and trumpet, Kelly Jefferson on tenor saxophone, veteran bassist Neil Swainson and percussionist veteran bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Ted Warren playing the Edmonton hit. The recording has a stunningly unified sound despite these personnel and venue changes, evidenced by the two contrasting versions of Sonny Rollins’ Tenor Madness. I recommend this album as a great example of Canadian jazz in a nutshell: easy to listen to, but far from devoid of depth.**

Sam Dickinson

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**This Song Is New**

**Lorne Lofsky**

**Modica Music (modicamusic.com)**

**The late Ed Bickert set the model: Toronto’s most distinguished jazz guitarists tend to be self-effacing, blending in, enhancing the music of which they’re a part, rarely assuming the foreground. It’s certainly true of Lorne Lofsky (and Reg Schwager, for another). Lofsky spent eight years co-leading a quartet with Bickert and a few years in Oscar Peterson’s quartet, but his last recording under his own name was Bill, Please, released in 1994, before his term with Peterson. This Song Is New presents Lofsky in a quartet with longtime associates playing five of his compositions, as well as two modern jazz standards that establish his frame of reference. The opening Seven Steps to Heaven, associated with its co-composer Miles Davis, suggests Lofsky’s biases: his strongest associations are with the subtle explorations, harmonic and melodic, of musicians like Bill Evans and Jim Hall, articulated with a beautifully even, glassy electric guitar sound. It’s even more pointed on his own compositions, like the ballad The Time Being, on which tenor saxophonist Kirk MacDonald finds a lightly metallic sound that perfectly embraces the melody. The buoyant Live from the Apollo has an extended trio segment in which Lofsky, bassist Kieran Overs and drummer Barry Romberg develop an intimate three-way dialogue, while the title track encapsulates the delicately nuanced nocturne of which Lofsky is a master.**

**At its best, it’s music to savour. One hopes Lofsky doesn’t wait 27 years to release another recording.**

Stuart Broomer
**Wrongs**  
Dan Pitt Quintet  
Dan Pitt Music DP003 (dan-pitt.com)

- The tracks on Wrongs, from the Dan Pitt Quintet, are moody and textured as they move forward through shifting soundscapes that are intense and intriguing. Pitt, a guitarist/composer living in Toronto, has put together a cohesive and talented group including bassist Alex Fournier and drummer Nick Fraser from his trio. The addition of Naomi McCarroll-Butler on alto sax and bass clarinet, and Patrick Smith on tenor and soprano saxophones, creates some fabulous textures. For example, on Shadows Loom, the bass clarinet and tenor sax combine organically for a nice mid-range opening harmony; then we have a nuanced bass clarinet solo followed by Smith’s wailing tenor with a few multiphonics thrown in. The piece ends with a blistering and over-driven guitar solo by Pitt.

Wrongs’ tracks evolve from one mood and collection of sounds to another which makes the listening experience a series of discoveries. Hunter’s Dream begins with a long, bowed bass intro, What Is opens with a whimsical guitar solo. Wrongs starts with a funky and off-kilter guitar and closed hi-hat/snare rhythm which persists under a bowed bass and sax/clarinet riff. Soon Pitt has changed to an ostinato pattern on bass, heater propulsively swirling through his entire kit and Smith is tearing through another terrific and intense solo. And then sudden quiet and introspection, before building towards its kinetic, yet tight ending. Pitt’s seven compositions are inventive and subtle; they, along with the quintet’s superb musicianship, make Wrongs so very right!

*Ted Parkinson*

**Facets**  
Hafez Modirzadeh  
Pi Recordings (pirecordings.com)

- Hafez Modirzadeh, an American composer and saxophonist, has a musical vision he calls “chromodal” merging modal Persian music and the harmonic language of jazz as embodied in the work of John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk. He’s crafted the Facets pieces, Facets, combining his own and others’ works, in which eight of the piano’s keys have been lowered in specific pitch values, creating an available series of microtones and radically altering the piano’s resonance. The 18 pieces heard here have been divided equally among three pianists who readily blur composed and improvised musics: Kris Davis, Tysawn Sorey and Craig Taborn. Facets, combining his own and others’ works, joins in on tenor saxophone on ten pieces. No description can account for the numerous variations in approach or the strangely playful eeriness and structured refractions that arise. Facet 33 Tides achieves a strange, limpid and previously unknown, watery beauty. Facet 34 Defracted has Davis improvising on two Monk compositions, Ask Me Now and Pannonica, each performed later by the duo of Modirzadeh and Taborn. Facet 39 Mato Paho is a superb reverie by Modirzadeh and Sorey in which the strange colouring of pitches transforms the initial mood, while Davis makes Facet 32 Woke an epic of transforming approaches. In Facet 32 Black Pearl, Modirzadeh creates a variation on Bach’s Goldberg Variation No. 25. As novel as this wedding of cultures might seem, there’s real substance here, combining rich and related inheritances in ways that underline distinctions and highlight concordances.

*Stuart Broomer*

**Lost Within You**  
Fraco Ambrosetti Band  
Unit Records UTR 4970 (unitrecords.com/releases)

- World-renowned Swiss trumpeter and flugelhornist Franco Ambrosetti has released a sultry and smooth collection of jazz ballads that take you to a faraway musical world into which it’s easy to escape in these trying times. The flowing and pleasant notes that the gifted musician conjures from his golden horn perfectly mimic and showcase his “refined and poised” nature and beautifully simplistic yet poignant approach to making music come alive. Supported by a sublime backing band featuring equally famed names such as John Scofield on guitar and Scott Colley on bass, Ambrosetti’s own tunes as well as classics by Horace Silver and Miles Davis, among others, are taken to new heights.

The record opens with Silver’s jazz standard Peace, a song that positively makes you sway along as Scofield’s melodic riffs and a softly soaring horn tune layered over Renee Rosnes’ mellow chords on the keys take you on a velvety musical journey. Silli in The Sky is a Latin-flavoured piece lovingly written about Ambrosetti’s actress wife; Jack DeJohnette’s quietly sizzling drum groove combined with lovely guitar and horn solos add just the right amount of edge to give a fiery undertone to the tune. Closing out the album is You Taught My Heart to Sing, tinged with slight melancholy but just the right amount of movement in the more up-tempo parts of the song to convey hope, ending it all on a positive and warm note.

*Kati Killiaspea*

**Maquishti**  
Patricia Brennan  
Valley of Search VOS 005 (valleyofsearch.com)

- Making a convincing statement without raising your voice is the mark of a sophisticated conversationalist. With solo vibraphone and marimba, New York’s Patricia Brennan expresses the same concept on compositions and improvisations which rarely rise past hushed tones and evolve languidly. Additional torque comes from the judicious use of electronic effects. This is all done so subtly that those few instances in which the squelchey wave forms are obvious are no more disruption to
the compositional flow than the tremolo pressure Brennan asserts with multiple mallets or varied motor rotation. Avoiding glittering statements, Maqwiš’ti’s 12 tracks are a study in pastel blends. This unhurried program isn’t sluggish however. I Like for You to Be Still for instance, is pulled out at a near lento tempo, but the thematic thread is never broken. Brennan also extends her idiophone timbres by creating tones that could come from bell ringing or gourd scratching. In fact, Magic Square, the most spirited tune, only picks up speed at midpoint after a series of echoing pops. It reaches a crescendo of merry-go-round, calliope-like sounds created by rolling mallets across the vibraphone’s metal bars, not striking them. Meanwhile the tracks built around more deliberate woody reverberations from the marimba evolve with similarly measured light touches.

The cornucopia of shimmering sound timbres projected is best appreciated by responding to the cumulative affiliations of this well-paced date and not expecting to hear the equivalent of a shouted argument.

Ken Waxman

Hanamichi – The Final Studio Recording
Masabumi Kikuchi
Redhook Records 1001 (redhookrecords.com)

The subtitle of Hanamichi is “The Final Studio Recording.” Reading this adds significant weight to the music. There’s something about the context of finality that makes a piece of art feel much more emotional, much more sensitive or fragile, and there is certainly a sombre component to this recording, though it doesn’t sound like a weathered musician looking back on his career and trying to recapture some of the magic. It could never be that simple with Poo (pianist Masabumi Kikuchi’s affectionate alias). As the great Gary Peacock said in the liner notes, “It wasn’t until a few years before he died [in 2015] that his ‘voice’ found him.”

Kikuchi was never one to stagnate. When he took a solo, the direction of his music was more likely to veer into uncharted territories than to revert to its original state. His wanderlust took him to countless destinations, both in terms of his sound and his life. He constantly reached beyond his own parameters, and this recording is no exception. He takes My Favourite Things and turns it into two completely contrasting spontaneous compositions. The track titled Improvisation sounds like the most calculated piece on the set. As always, Little Abi is his calling card, while also being his mode of transportation to previously undiscovered planets. In his swan song, Kikuchi still looks forward.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Uma Elmo
Jakob Bro; Arve Henriksen; Jorge Rossy
ECM ECM 2702 (ecmrecords.com/shop)

In the 50 years of producing music for his ECM label, Manfred Eicher has established a rubric that almost no one thought to create before him. It is characterized by a minimalist aesthetic, with sonic works delivered in almost pristine digital sound. There is almost always superb, impressionistic cover photography, rarely any liner notes (except for the odd Egberto Gismonti album). Booklets often feature graphics and an oblique, poetic line or two that seem illuminated by a translucent and shy ray of the sun.

This is exactly the feel of Uma Elmo by Jakob Bro, Arve Henriksen and Jorge Rossy. Put together, the two-word title might be translated as “the splendour or tranquility (Uma) of love (Elmo).” The music has a profound and meditative quality; songs bloom into a series of exquisite miniatures. Bro’s single-note lines are spacy; they shimmer and gleam, occasionally warmed in the blue flame of Henriksen’s horns. Meanwhile Rossy bounces brushes and sticks in rhythmic flourishes and glancing blows across the skins of his drums.

Songs such as To Stanko – a doffing of the hat to the late horn player Tomasz Stanko, beloved by ECM – Morning Song, Music for Black Pigeons (in memory of Lee Konitz) and Sound Flower, are typical of this musical performance in the splendid isolation of a studio in Switzerland. Purity of sound and an enduring love of artistic expression are all over the music of this album.

Raúl da Gama

Haerae
Andreas Willers
Evil Rabbit Records ERR 31 (evilrabbitrecords.eu)

As the COVID-19 lockdown settled in spring 2020, German guitarist Andreas Willers began a solo recording, the same kind of project with which he had debuted 40 years earlier. He’s playing two steel-string acoustic flat top guitars here, usually one at a time, though there are pieces when there may be two involved, and he’s playing them in a number of ways, whether traditional or employing extended techniques.

Willers clearly loves the guitar as an instrument, exploring its nooks and crannies and the myriad sounds they harbour, many of the kinds usually avoided: the metallic slap of detuned lower strings against the fretboard; likely the rustle of a plastic bag covering the picking hand; strings scratched longitudinally with fingernails or maybe rubbed with a moistened thumb; some hard material with some weight, probably plastic, dropped on the strings of a horizontal instrument. None of these things appear in isolation but arise in making spontaneous music, each piece developing a rich, varied life of its own in which evolving timbres and events create a sonorous whole. Sometimes he plays guitar in a conventional way, as in the three movements of langh’s arm 6-8 which abound in brilliantly articulated runs, dense chordal passages and singing, reverberant highs; there are dashes of blues, flamenco and slide with strange mergings of idioms.

While its likely audience is attuned to free improvisation, there’s enough exuberant guitar exploration here to appeal to any adventurous enthusiast of the instrument.

Stuart Broome

POT POURRI

Good Water
Leathy
North 28 Music Inc. N28MR0001LP (leahymusic.ca)

It would be redundant to attempt to summarize the incredible musical contribution that has been made to Canada, and to the world, by this award-winning, exceptionally talented Celtic-Canadian family. On this latest Leathy release, every track is a rare emerald. Although perhaps not totally in the traditional bag, it’s still a trans-world-folk family affair – featuring Denise on vocals; Erinn on piano, fiddle and vocals; Frank on drums; Julie Frances on vocals, piano, keyboards and acoustic guitar; Maria on acoustic guitar, mandolin and vocals; and Siobheann and Xavier on accordion. Produced by the iconic David Bottrill, Leathy manages to blur all of the lines, and in so doing, manifests a technologically organic masterpiece.

The title track has a sumptuous, angelic vocal intro followed by a contiguous, poetic vocal line of almost unbearable beauty – an uplifting feeling of an ancient one-ness, a statement that moves beyond the Irish diaspora. No doubt, the ancient Leathy DNA is ripe with incredible instrumental technique, as well as the rare gift of being able to transmute and share emotion.

Other brilliant tracks include Friend, which invokes the heartbeat of Mother Earth herself, blissfully intermingled with an ecstatic wall of sound and rich, layered “blood harmony” and also Star of the Sea, which is a radiant highlight of fiddling, odd measures and a
ballistic arco attack that channels the Tuatha de Danann themselves. Of special significance is My Old Man – a lush, sonorous, melodic reverie, filled with ethnic memory and longing. This gorgeous track is a tribute to the Leeah patriarch from two generations prior – singing out from the passing of time – blessing his descendants as they live their authentic musical traditions, creating fearlessly into the future.

**Lesley Mitchell-Clarke**

**Speaking Hands**

Curtis Andrews

**Independent (curtisandrews.ca)**

Among the first reviews I wrote for The WholeNote was The Offering of Curtis Andrews (December 2009). “I’ve been ... bopping around the apartment to this joie de vivre-filled CD by Curtis Andrews, Newfoundland’s globe-trotting percussionist and composer,” I enthused. “The music [draws] from Andrews’ studies in South Asian, West African and North American music ... [merging] all those influences in an energy-rich field, couched in mainstream jazz forms and improv-rich solos...”

Relocated to Canada’s West Coast, Andrews has continued his musical journeys inspired by those same global elements. And he’s joined on his sparkling new album, Speaking Hands, by 20 talented musical colleagues from across Canada, USA and Africa. Manifesting a mature musical voice, this sophomore release features nine Andrews’ compositions and one by Carnatic percussion master Trichy Sankaran, their tricky metric landscapes negotiated with aplomb by the Vancouver-based ensemble, The Offering of Curtis Andrews. Though recorded last year, Speaking Hands reflects two decades of travel, study and collaboration with master musicians on three continents.

Andrews’ compositions intertwine “rhythms and polyphonies of vodu-derived traditional music of West Africa, the micro and macrocosmic play of time and pitch found in Carnatic traditions of South India,” and jazz harmony and improvisation. It’s the novel intersection of all these seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive and high-spirited musical statement that marks the album as something special.

The album title? Andrews explains it was inspired by the practice of the Carnatic recited rhythmic language known as solkattu. “It is the voice that gives rise to rhythm before the instrument does... the hands ‘speak’ what the voice (mind) creates.” This album certainly speaks to me.

**Andrew Timar**

**Roots of Strings – The oud at the crossroad of Arabic, flamenco and Indian music**

Nazih Borish

**Analekta AN 2 9173 (analekta.com/en)**

Syrian-born Nazih Borish is a respected oudist and composer. While establishing and running his Syrian oud school, this already-renowned artist began to expand and embrace a wide variety of musics, including Arabic, flamenco, blues and jazz. In 2016, Borish arrived in Canada, where he seamlessly continued his international work as a composer and performer. On this energized program of original compositions, Borish has collaborated with two equally accomplished and gifted artists: bassist Roberto Occhipinti and acclaimed world-music percussionist (darbuka, req, ketim and dahola) Joseph Khoury.

Every well-produced track underscores the one-ness of mankind. From the most elemental bass notes of Mother Earth’s heart to the intensity of shared human emotional experience – this recording is a journey of profound meaning. The opening track, Nazhauwand (Nahawand taksim), is a resonant, mystical composition... with sonic elements that are steeped in human experience – sounds from a timeless place, in a place-less time – eventually segueing into a wider, more languid sequence, punctuated in an inspired way by Occhipinti and Khoury.

The title track is hearty with exotic spices, exploring the deep and ancient relationship between the indigenous music of Spain, Iberia, Portugal, the sub-Continent and the Arabian peninsula, followed by Ataba (Bayat taksim) – deeply moving, with rich, lustrous tones; the facile skill of Borish is breathtaking. I can hear this universal music echoing off the walls of the Blue Mosque, the Taj Mahal or Carriege Hall! Ali Baba Dance is a stunner – and Damasrose (Dast samal) is a sensual, Masala-flavoured trip, displaying complex string technique by Borish, all the while expressing the subtleties of several different instruments of antiquity – even hints of the Japanese koto.

**Lesley Mitchell-Clarke**

**Roots**

Ventus Machina

**Leaf Music LM239 (leaf-music.ca)**

Ventus Machina is a classical wind quintet based in New Brunswick which makes “excursions” into other genres. Roots is an inventive album containing arrangements of folk songs, fiddle tunes, Celtic music and a few iconic Canadian singer-songwriter staples. The majority of arrangements are by James Kalyn who plays clarinet and saxophone in the group. The album begins with Our Roots Medley which has five movements including an arrangement of some of Bach’s Goldberg Variations (The Goldberg “Variegations”), a Swedish folk song (Koppången) and Gordon Lightfoot’s The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. Kalyn’s arrangements are complex and use the full acoustic and technical resources of the quintet to present a unique perspective on these diverse selections. The Goldberg “Variegations” are quite contrapuntal, while Edmund Fitzgerald uses a majestic French horn to announce the theme amongst the other swirling instruments.

Bird on the Wire has Kalyn playing bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, singing and using slap tongue techniques for rhythmic purposes. On Joni Mitchell’s The Circle Game the quintet is augmented by the Atlantic String Machine and a small children’s choir. For the three fiddle tunes, Traveller’s Breakdown, Doin’ Repairs and Calm Before the Storm, they are joined by the composer Ray Legere, playing fiddle and mandolin, with Christian Goguen on guitar; the music gets lively.

The underlying delight present throughout Roots is having familiar music reinvented in an unusual and intriguing context. This is Ventus Machina’s second album and I look forward to more musical adventures with them in the future.

**Ted Parkinson**

**In D**

Brooklyn Raga Massive

**Independent (brooklynragamassive.org)**

Terry Riley’s iconic minimalist composition In C (1964) is scored for an indeterminate number and kind of instrument or voice. A drone-like pulse on the note C synchronizing the ensemble guides its performance, while superimposed repeated phrases give the work a phasing effect. (Riley had been deeply influenced by his studies with Hindustani classical vocalist Pandit Pran Nath.)

Hailed as “Leaders of the Raga Renaissance” (The New Yorker), Brooklyn Raga Massive was founded in 2015 by sitar player and composer Neel Murgai. Given the diversity of instruments and musical backgrounds of the group, BRM chose Terry Riley’s adaptable In C to record in 2017. Then at Riley’s suggestion in 2020, BRM members took inspiration from In C’s form and composed a new work. It is interpreted by 25 musicians on the album In D, each of the
three sections set to a different Hindustani raga (Indian classical melodic mode). Within that framework improvisational instrumental and vocal solos are balanced by effectively composed tutt passages and drum features. Musicians and instruments from numerous traditions playing together can prove a challenge; this album manages to avoid many of the pitfalls. Adding to the cultural diversity here, while there’s certainly an emphasis on the classical Indian soundworld, other traditions unexpectedly and delightfully come to the fore before receding back into the sonic prevalent texture.

In recognition of the pandemic context the recording was made in, the three ragas were selected to “match the pandemic situation we now face. We plunged from our normal happy lives into darkness and [now] finally… we have hope.” The joyful communal spirit of In D lives into darkness and [now] finally … we have hope. “The joyful communal spirit of In D gives me hope too.

Andrew Timar

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**Something in the Air**

**Sophistically Curated Box Sets Collate and Disseminate Important Music**

KEN WAXMAN

Assembled since the first significant 78s were collected in one package, the boxed set has traditionally been used to celebrate important anniversaries or extensive projects. CD collections are the same, with these improvised music sets aurally illuminating various programs.

The most meaningful collection is the seven CDs that make up Julius Hemphill The Boyé Multi-National Crusade for Harmony – Archive Recordings 1977-2007 (New World Records 80825; newworldrecords.org). Consisting of 83 previously unreleased tracks, the box presents a full picture of composer and saxophonist Hemphill (1938-1995), who was a member of the St. Louis Black Artists Group and founder of the World Saxophone Quartet. Hemphill is represented not only by numerous combo sessions with fellow sound innovators, but also by a disc of his chamber music compositions as well as multimedia creations involving solo saxophone forays and spoken word. While other tunes of his are interpreted by pianist Ursula Oppens and the Daedalus String Quartet, a more memorable compositional program on Disc 4 is of two pieces Hemphill conducted by improvisers using traditional orchestral instruments and without solos. Slotted among Baroque, blues and bop, the tracks include achingly melodic motifs plus timbral extensions into multiphonics and swing that are unique. *Roë Boyé Solo and Text* is an entire disc dedicated to the vernacular trickster character the saxophonist developed in theatrical presentations where his horns comment on verbalized themes extended with Malínke Elliott’s recitation of the poetry of K. Curtis Lyle. With the rhymes personifying a variety of inner city St. Louis characters from shouting preacher to rumbling hustler, Hemphill’s flute or soprano alto saxophone pieces offer either measured cadences as affirmation or use screech mould, triple tonguing plus the addition of miscellaneous percussion to rhythmically solidify the urban imagery and underline the barbed explosiveness of the situation.

However, it was as an improviser, composer and arranger that Hemphill’s identity was solidified, and these skills are expressed in cultivated and unique fashion involving numerous ensembles on the other five CDs. Hemphill’s best-known associates, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Jack DeJohnette, joined the saxophonist and long-time musical partner, trumpeter Balkida Carroll, in 1979 for one concert. Known for affiliations with Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis, the bassist and drummer easily respond to Hemphill’s music, as percussion rolls and ruffs and stentorian string plucks smash and swipe alongside light-toned grainy brass smears and an unbroken line of reed shrills. *Mirrors’* squirming exposition opens up for a jumping tempo-shattering snare- and-cymbal solo without upsetting the piece’s ambulating balance. Meanwhile, the concluding *Would Boogie* is defined by the title as a drum backbeat; walking bass lines match lockstep horn animation which splinters the theme into atom-sized reed bites and spayed brass flutters and then reconstructs it. This down-home quality is further emphasized with two groups on CD 6 which include electric bassists and guitarists. Pops and splatters from Jerome Harris’ electric bass evolve in tandem with Hemphill’s sax squeaks or flute trills as six duo selections become harsher and more pressurized. A similar intensity is expressed when bop meets blues on *Pigskin*, as Jack Wilkins’ echoing guitar licks and drummer Michael Carvin’s power backbeat add mainstream swing to the saxophonist’s astringent exploration. *One Waltz/Time* projects the group’s multiple identities as guitarist Allan Jaffe’s and Nels Cline’s blues-rock twangs and frails connect with Hemphill’s shifting split tones,
agitated delivery of nightmarish imagery combined with looping minor-key melodies is reminiscent of minimal wave outsider John Bender.

The album concludes on an ominous note of acceptance with *The End of the World*, as swirling arpeggios drift across 12 minutes of dystopian poetry. In Parker’s vision of the apocalypse, human skins peel off like snakes, while bodies ascend into heaven on electric light. As Mills-Cockell once said, “If it wasn’t disturbing and profoundly weird, it wouldn’t be Intersystems.”

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**String of Pearls**

Annabelle Chvostek

*Independent (annabellemusic.com)*

> It has been six years since JUNO-nominated, versatile singer/songwriter Annabelle Chvostek released a recording. The reason being is that Chvostek suffered significant hearing loss, the result of a massive feedback blast during a sound-check. This would be a challenging experience for anyone – let alone a musician. This new CD is a direct result of Chvostek’s desire to create a project that would be enjoyable and accessible to those with hearing loss – and in keeping with this directive, she decided to produce an alternate monaural version of the recording specifically for people with hearing issues, available digitally at annabellemchvostek.bandcamp.com.

There are three co-producers on *String of Pearls*: Chvostek, David Travers-Smith and Fernando Rosa, two of whom are hearing impaired. Rosa was born deaf in one ear, and by 2015 Chvostek was also. Through his brilliant engineering (and excellent hearing), Travers-Smith has created crisp, bright, satisfying digital tracks in stereo, and also in monophonic sound, a modality long gone but lovingly repurposed to allow people to experience the music in a new, authentic way. Joining Chvostek on this journey is a large cast of uber-talented characters, including violinist Drew Jurecka, guitarists Debi Botos and Tak Arikushi, vibraphonist Mark Duggan, bassist Rachel Melas and drummer Tony Spina. The majority of the material here was written by Chvostek, with the exception of a tasty Tom Waits tune, *Just the Right Bullets*, rendered with a highly creative “High Noon” horn-handoneon-percussion-laden interpretation. The title track boasts a clever lyric that eloquently explains Chvostek’s journey, with a bit of a nod to the Boswell Sisters. Huge standouts include *Je T’ai Vue Hier Soir (I Saw You Last Night)* – an unabashed love song, performed in gorgeous, sibilant French and perfectly presented in a “Hot Club de France” style. Violinist Jurecka shines here, out-Grappelli-ing Grappelli! Also the sumptuous *Firefly (You Just Love)*, replete with a delicious arrangement and equally delicious performances from Chvostek and the ensemble. Easily, this recording is one of the most enchanting and innovative of the year. Brava!

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Another box set celebrates not one man’s musical vision but those of 13 musicians and the record label that disseminates their works. After releasing adventurous music for 20 years, in 2018 Krakow’s Not Two label organized a three-day-anniversary celebration in the Polish village of Wier featuring players who regularly record for it. *Not Two... but Twenty Festival (NotTwo MW 1000-2 nottwo.com)* is a five-CD box that preserves those performances. They consist of different combinations featuring saxophonists Mikolaj Trzaska of Poland, Peter Brötzmann from Germany, Ken Vandermark from the US and Sweede Mats Gustafsson; bassists Barry Guy of the UK, Joëlle Léandre from France and Pole Ralal Mazur; drummers Paal Nilssen-Love from Norway and Zlatko Kaučič from Slovenia; plus Swiss violinist Maya Homburger, American trombonist Steve Swell, Swedish tubist Per-Åke Holmlander and Catalan pianist Agustí Fernández.

Ranging in length from four minutes to over 20, none of the 28 tracks disappoint, with a few more outstanding than others. Demonstrating inventive flair for instance, Léandre is in her element whether it’s in a trio with Swell and Fernandez, a quartet with Guy, Kaučič and Swell or going one-on-one with Guy or Trzaska. The quartet set demonstrates that resonating pumps from two sophisticated bass players can stretch enough horizontal and splayed patterns to either provoke or accompany as many crashing percussion or slurring tailgate brassy smears as the others can produce. Swell’s almost ceaseless scooping tones and Fernández’s metronomic keyboard vibrations set up a trio challenge at even greater length, but Léandre’s concentrated string stopping with tandem vocalizing is so powerful and percussive that her string buzzing consolidates the exposition from allegro interaction to andante solidarity. Solo, her string traction is such that she can create speed-of-light spiccatto jolts from the bass’ highest-pitched strings with the same textural innovation with which she pushes the narrative with bottom-aimed sul tasto stops, all the while spanning the instrument’s wood and verbally gulping and crowing additional onomatopoetic colour. Her duet with Guy shows both in top form(s) as they harmonize or test one another, constantly switching arco and pizzicato roles, splintering shrill notes or modulating deeper pitched ones, so intermittent melodies share space with pressurized movement.

Baritone saxophonist Gustafsson constantly challenges clarinetist Vandermark or alto saxophonist Trzaska in their meetings, but in each instance the reeds are part of an additional kaleidoscopic brass or percussion-affiliated canvas. With the clarinetist, contra-puntal reed trills and bites become shriller and more dissonant as Swell and Holmlander spread cascading bubbles below them until
all four reach screeching concordance. With Trzaska, Mazur and the tubist creating a continuum, double saxophone flutters can turn into barely there tongue slaps and whistles as flatulent brass quakes and sliding bass string crackles intersect to propel the narrative. Meanwhile, the Brötzmann, Guy and Kaučič meeting can be contrasted with the Gustafsson, Mazur and Nilssen-Love trio. The German saxist’s distinctive nephritic cry is met by the drummer’s calculated splashes and shatters as the bassist keeps the program chromatic. Each time the saxophonist speaks unexpected split tones from his horn, Guy produces connective stops while adding further grainy character along with Kaučič’s cymbal rubs. But when Guy’s subsequently powerful string pulls threaten to unbalance the exposition and push it to dissonance, it’s Brötzmann’s unexpected elaboration of a snatch of Sentimental Journey that launches the three into a near-swinging finale.

There’s no comparable respite with the other trio whose combination of reed glossolalia, sluicing string runs from Mazur and thumping cymbal colours and drum pops while the pianist tinkles out a floating bass work moors the exposition as the drummer decorates it with a cymbal colours and drum pops while the pianist tinkles out a floating bass work moors the exposition as the drummer decorates it with

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### Old Wine, New Bottles

**Fine Old Recordings Re-Released**

**BRUCE SURTEES**

**Louis Kentner Plays**
Louis Kentner

Profil/Hänssler PH20085 10 CDs

(naxosdirect.com/search/ph2008)

► Pianist Louis Kentner was born on July 19, 1905 in Karwin, then a part of Austrian Silesia, now Karvina in the Czech Republic. His parents were of Hungarian origin and named their son Lajos. Having later settled in London, in most modern biographies he appears as a British pianist and composer.

Kentner was highly gifted musically and from 1911/12 he studied at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest where he first came to attention with a concert performance of Chopin. At the Academy he studied piano with Arnold Székely, chamber music with Leo Weiner and composition with Hans Koessler and Zoltán Kodály. He made his official debut in 1915 and began concert tours in European cities attracting attention with his interpretations of Chopin and Liszt. He won the Chopin Prize in Warsaw and the Liszt Prize in Budapest. In 1933 he gave the first Hungarian performance of the Bartók Second Piano Concerto (with Otto Klemperer) and in 1946 the first performance in Europe of the Third Concerto under Sir Adrian Boult.

Kentner had settled in London in 1935 and was given British citizenship in 1946. Audiences were unstinting in their appreciation of his Mozart and he also gave radio performances of complete cycles of Beethoven and Schubert sonatas. He had a keen interest in Baroque music, especially Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier.

Looking through Kentner’s repertoire on these ten discs poses the usual question, what to play first? Here are the composers: Brahms, Bartók, Walton, Balakirev, Dvořák, Liszt, Bach, Mozart, Ravel, Beethoven, Hubay and Chausson. Assisting artists are Yehudi Menuhin and Hans Koessler. The set is appropriately

Kentner had a recognizable sound that identifies his playing throughout this unique collection.

**Ivan Moravec Edition**
Ivan Moravec: Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields

Hänssler CLASSIC HC 20084 4 CDs

(naxosdirect.com/search/hc20084)

► It was only recently that we raved about an 11CD Ivan Moravec set, Portrait, published by Supraphon, of incomparable performances from their and others’ archives of solos and concertos. Every performance on those discs remains a treasure. This new 4CD set from Hänssler is headlined by four Mozart concertos in collaboration with Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. It begins with No.20 in D Minor K.466 which is meltingly beautiful in every respect, both performance and recording. This is followed by No.23 in A Major K.488, and on disc two No.24 in C Minor K.491 and 25 in C Major K.503. The recordings were made in the Henry Wood Hall in 1997 and 1995. CD three contains sonatas by Haydn and Janáček, Chopin’s Preludes 17 to 24 and a couple of (presumably) encore by Debussy and Chopin, all recorded at the 2000 Prague Festival. The fourth CD finds Moravec in the Academy of Arts and Letters in NYC playing the Chopin Funeral March Sonata and half a dozen Chopin favourites rising to a triumphant Polonaise No.7 Op.61. Another stellar collection from the Moravec vaults.
**OTHER FINE VINTAGES**

Three Quintets by Peter Müller
Richards Wind Quintet
Crystal Records CD252 (crystalrecords.com)

This recording of Johann Peter Müller’s Wind Quintets has just been digitally remastered after its initial release back in 1976. Although a pastor by profession, Müller (Germany, 1791-1877) was also an avid composer, writing a substantial number of works including two operas, some organ preludes, string quintets and these three wind quintets.

All three are beautiful and charming, showcasing the best of the classical style. Müller had a deep understanding of the strengths of each wind instrument as well as how they blend together, creating works that are both virtuosic and perfectly balanced.

These works are performed expertly by the Richards Wind Quintet: Israel Borouchoff, flute; Daniel Stolper, oboe; Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, clarinet; Edgar Kirk, bassoon; and Douglas Campbell, horn. One of the first resident wind quintets in the United States, they toured around North America from 1948 to the late 1980s, proudly representing Michigan State University and the wind quintet form as a whole.

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**Sonatas for Horn and Piano**
Christopher Leuba; Kevin Aanerud
Crystal Records CD372 (crystalrecords.com)

Why resurrect a recording of horn and piano duets almost 50 years after it was first released? It is factual that the horn – the French horn as we know it today – is a mainstay in orchestral performance, woodwind quintets and chamber jazz settings, but true virtuosos are few and far between. The late Gunther Schuller comes to mind, as does John Clark, Vincent Chancey, Canada’s Jeff Nelsen, Sarah Willis who’s celebrated as being the first female brass player in the revered Berlin Philharmonic and of course Toronto’s own late, great Joan Watson, principal of the COC Orchestra and founder of True North Brass.

But what bearing should any of this have on Sonatas for Horn and Piano, a 1977 recording by the late Christopher Leuba? Biographically speaking, Leuba was first horn in Fritz Reiner’s Chicago Symphony and appeared with the Philharmonica Hungarica under Antal Doráti. Leuba was also a noted pedagogue and his Study of Musical Intonation is considered Bach-like in its importance: “the definitive work mathematically describing true, or just, intonation, in comparison to the tempered scale.” Which brings us to this recording.

Leuba truly practices what he once proverbially preached on these Sonatas for Horn and Piano by American composers John Verrall, Halsey Stevens and Paul Tufts. None of this music is considered – in our frame of reference – famous. But each is singularly eloquent; perhaps even a perfect example of how a French horn ought to sound when the spotlight is turned on it. Pianist Kevin Aanerud gently eggs Leuba on throughout, making for an utterly memorable performance.

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Melissa Scott

Raul da Gama
So here we are a year later, and we’re still waiting for our lives back. But for me, all of a sudden, the pandemic hasn’t all been bad – because I’ve fallen in love again. In musical love, that is.

For most musicians or repertoire that have penetrated my heart the actual circumstances in which I first heard them are lost to my memory. They’ve just been there as long as I can remember. But not for all. My most vivid repertoire love affair came when I was about 14, maybe, visiting New York, and walking with my parents by the construction site of what would become the Columbia Broadcasting System’s headquarters, the famous Black Rock building on 52nd Street in midtown Manhattan.

To make things more interesting for passersby, CBS had installed little listening posts with head-phones so you could sample CBS recordings as you walked by the site. And one of them contained the explosive Finale of Stravinsky’s Firebird Suite, in a Bernstein/NY Philharmonic performance – a piece I had never heard before. In fact I’m pretty sure I’d never heard a note of Stravinsky before. There I stood, on 52nd Street, utterly and completely transfixed, playing the excerpt over and over again, many, many times, to either the delight or horror or amusement of my parents. (I think I returned to the site to listen again the next day.) I still have the Bernstein album I bought immediately on my return home.

Is there anything more wonderful in music than discovering a performer who absolutely thrills you, who opens up the world to you in a way you never thought possible, who strikes you at a level you can’t really explain or understand, but who you know instantly will be a lifelong companion, a never-ending part of your life? I’m guessing we’ve all had these experiences; they are really the essence of our enjoyment of music. Music is highly erotic, let’s face it. It is a form of all-encompassing eros, really quite pagan in its dimensions, that allows us to open our hearts to an extraordinary degree in the safe privacy of our own emotional imaginations. That sensuousness, and the pleasure it gives us, is certainly one of the great achievements of music, one of its great mysteries.

Also mysterious, as with all love affairs, is exactly who and what creates this immense feeling of satisfaction within us. Who wants to analyze it? We just want to enjoy it. Also part of the pleasure of the experience is its unexpectedness, the way it bursts upon you when you are least anticipating it.

So it was for me about a month ago when I got a yen, which I do every so often, don’t ask me why, to listen to Frank Foster’s Shiny Stockings a tune which Foster, a saxophonist with the Count Basie band, wrote as an instrumental for the band in the 50s, and to which lyrics were eventually added (by Ella Fitzgerald). I googled Shiny Stockings and noticed that one of the video results that popped up was a thumbnail of what seemed to be a young kid with a microphone. I clicked on it. My life hasn’t been the same since.

What I clicked on was a bit weird – a bunch of teenage musicians, really, arrayed as a big band but in what looked like someone’s living room. But, from the moment I heard the solo piano vamping the opening figure, along with a great rhythm guitar, I was intrigued. After all, there was Scott Hamilton, the great American sax player, in the background, so this couldn’t be too amateur an outfit. And then, the girl who I had seen on the YouTube thumbnail started singing – and I was lost. I’ve listened to this video, honestly, probably 150 times since that day. I’m listening to it as I write this, and there are tears in my eyes.

I’m in musical love again – with Alba Armengou. Armengou, I have since learned, is a Spanish musician, now just 20 – she was only 17 or 18 when she recorded that video. She is, it turns out, a great trumpet player as well, part of an astonishing jazz educational program, sort of an El Sistema for jazz, run for the past 13 years in Barcelona by an extraordinary musician,
Sometimes, something special happens, something out of the ordinary, which reminds us, oddly, in its uniqueness, of what music actually is.

honestly, ever since. And, as I started out saying, for me, often the pleasure of discovery has not been of performers, but of repertoire.

But that’s how it is, isn’t it. We all listen to a lot of music, enjoy a great deal of it – but sometimes, something special happens, something out of the ordinary, which reminds us, oddly, in its uniqueness, of what music actually is. It’s as though these extraordinary moments, even if they are infrequent, are the truest evidence of what is happening in music all the time – its constant potential for these illuminating epiphanies of bliss. So even in these darkened, cloudy days, when the prospect of life as it was seems to constantly recede just out of reach, it’s important to be reminded what lies underneath. Music, and our reactions to it, is one of the best reminders of that enduring power in the world. As I discovered with one click of a computer mouse on one YouTube video just a few weeks ago. And for which I will be thankful forever.

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