

Cecilia String Quartet Celebrates Canadian Women Composers

Thursday, May 25, 2017 at 8:00 pm

Post-concert Chat

Mazzoleni Concert Hall

Cecilia String Quartet

Min-Jeong Koh, violin

Sarah Nematallah, violin

Caitlin Boyle, viola

Rachel Desoer, cello

PROGRAM

Katarina Ćurčin: String Quartet No. 3 (Toronto premiere)

Kati Agócs: *Tantric Variations* (Toronto premiere)

INTERMISSION

Emilie LeBel: *Taxonomy of Paper Wings* (Toronto premiere)

Nicole Lizée: *Isabella Blow at Somerset House*

Video by Riddle Films: *Celebrating Canadian Women in Music*

Katarina Ćurčin

Composer

Katarina Ćurčin sang with the Jeunesses Musicales World Youth and World Chamber Choir, and earned a Bachelor of Music in her native Serbia before coming to Canada in 1999. She holds master's and doctorate degrees in composition from the University of Toronto. Her composition teachers were Dušan Radić, Gary Kulesha, and Chan Ka Nin.

Her orchestral works include: *Above the Clouds* (Vancouver Symphony Orchestra Olympic commission, also performed by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra), a Double Concerto for violin and percussion, the children's ballet suite *Princess for a Day*, and a cantata in nine movements, *Stabat Mater*. The composer's chamber repertoire includes three piano trios: *Gypsies* (Tuckmore chamber music festival commission), *In Between*, and *Unorthodox Obsession* (York University Piano Trio commission), as well as a clarinet quartet *The New Beginnings* (QAT commission). Ms. Ćurčin's string quartet *Walking Away From...* was awarded with the Karen Kieser Prize in Canadian Music in 2005. The quartet represented Canada at the 2006 International Rostrum of Composers in Paris, received a number of international broadcasts, and was performed throughout Canada, USA, and Europe by the Penderecki, Tokai, Madawaska, as well as the Cecilia string quartets.

Ćurčin is also a recipient of the 2008 K.M. Hunter Artists Awards for music.

The World on a String, Ćurĉin's second string quartet, was commissioned for the Tokai String Quartet's Second Debut Atlantic Tour in 2013, and the piece was performed by the ensemble throughout Canada. The most recent string quartet Ćurĉin created in 2015, *String Quartet No. 3*, was commissioned and performed by Cecilia String Quartet.

String Quartet No. 3

I felt very privileged, as a composer, when asked to write a piece for the Cecilia String Quartet. I already had a wonderful collaborative experience with this group when they performed my first string quartet, *Walking Away From...* on their European tour in 2014 as well as in Canada and United States. While writing my third string quartet for the ensemble, it felt like a wonderful reunion with such a fine group of musicians where I got to continue to explore the expressive potentials of the stringed instruments, which are literally endless.

Since the Cecilia String Quartet consists of ladies only and since the ensemble's project idea was to commission four Canadian female composers, including myself, I decided to write a piece inspired by a woman. The main melodic theme which reoccurs throughout the piece derives from the Romanian traditional song from Serbia called "M-a făcut muma frumoasă" or "My Mother Has Made Me Beautiful." The song is about a young woman whose mother kept her locked inside the house, afraid that someone will steal her because of her beauty. The piece does not describe a young girl's beauty; it is filled with the girl's emotions ranging from being rebellious and angry to becoming very sensitive and fragile.

This one-movement piece has a free formal structure filled with contrasting moods and episodes juxtaposing one another. In the quartet you will hear tapping on the wood of the instrument. It describes a young girl's attempts to escape from the house.

"My Mother Has Made Me Beautiful"

My mother has made me beautiful,
But she keeps me locked inside the house
And the window is stuck with a wooden sill.
She doesn't allow me to go get some water,
Nor does she let me get firewood from the courtyard
Because she is afraid someone might kidnap me.
Oh, mother, you are so vicious!
She's made me so pretty
And now she keeps me locked inside the house.

Even though I have been living in Toronto for over 15 years, I still feel very connected to my roots. I actually rediscovered my heritage when I immigrated to Canada. My music is greatly influenced by the Balkan traditional music and this latest quartet is just another example of it. Canada is a wonderful country with many different cultures where everyone can feel at home, yet still connected to their roots.

- Katarina Ćurĉin

Kati Agócs

Composer

The music of Kati Agócs has been honoured and performed worldwide, delivering both visceral power and otherworldly lyricism with soulful directness. From folk music of an imaginary culture to volatile spectralism, polytextual vocal ensembles to large symphonic forces, her work embraces the 21st-century orchestra in all of its protean possibilities. *The Boston Globe* has praised its elegance, citing "music of fluidity and austere beauty" with "a visceral intensity of expression" and encouraging audience members to "go, listen, and be changed." *The New York Times* has characterized her chamber music as "striking" and her vocal music as possessing "an almost nineteenth-century naturalness." A recent Guggenheim Fellow, she is also a winner of the prestigious Arts and Letters Award,

the lifetime achievement award in music composition from The American Academy of Arts and Letters. *The Debreceen Passion*, an album of her orchestral works on the BMOPSound label, is one of *The Boston Globe's* Top Ten Classical Recordings of 2016. The title track was nominated for Classical Composition of the Year in the 2017 Juno Awards. Reviewing the CD, *Audiophile Audition* named Kati Agócs “one of the brightest stars in her generation of composers,” New York’s *WQXR* called the album “high-craft, high-drama music” which “hurtles themes of love and devotion through a particularly intense prism of influences and language,” while Boston’s *WBUR* described it as “deeply spiritual.” Kati Agócs currently serves on the composition faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston and maintains a work studio in the village of Flatrock, Newfoundland.

Tantric Variations

Tantric Variations, commissioned by the Cecilia Quartet, is a string quartet 18 minutes in duration. “Tantric,” from the Sanskrit, means “woven together.” We weave the strands of our nature into a unified whole. The piece concentrates exclusively on an embellishing “turn” around a single note, weaving a continuous trajectory through which the motive finally flowers, bursting open into a more complete version of itself.

- Kati Agócs

Emilie LeBel

Composer

Described as having a “deft compositional hand, unwilling to hurry ideas” and “impressively subtle and sensuous,” Canadian composer Emilie Cecilia LeBel is active in the music community in various capacities: composing, teaching, curating, and organizing. She specializes in concert music composition, the creation of mixed works that employ digital technologies, and intermedia concert works. Her compositions have been performed/recorded by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Cecilia String Quartet, Plumes Ensemble, Quatuor Bozzini, Land’s End Ensemble, Awea Duo, Luciane Cardassi, Mira Benjamin, Black House Collective, Stephanie Chua, Terri Hron, National Youth Orchestra of Canada, Thin Edge New Music Collective, Onyx Trio, and junctQin keyboard collective, among others. She is a member of Blue Moss Ensemble with composers Anna Höstman and Mitch Renaud, and an Associate Composer at the Canadian Music Centre. Her artistic practice has been recognized through significant awards, including the Land’s End Ensemble Composer Competition (2016), Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award (2015), Canadian Music Centre Toronto Emerging Composer Award (2012), and Canadian Federation of University Women Elizabeth Massey Award (2012). Emilie LeBel completed her doctorate in composition at the University of Toronto in 2013, under the guidance of Gary Kulesha and Robin Elliott. She currently splits her time between Missoula (MT) and Toronto. www.emilielebel.ca

Taxonomy of Paper Wings, for string quartet

Commissioned by the Cecilia String Quartet with support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Over the past year I have been occupied with the poetry of Emily Dickinson in concurrence to my composition work. In the book *Gorgeous Nothings*, the “makeshift and fragile textual homes” of Emily Dickinson’s late writings are explored over a selection of 52 envelopes containing Dickinson’s handwritten poems. I am captivated by how the poet uses the envelope’s space and sections to organize and structure her work. This composition is based on catalogue A821, a poem composed by Dickinson in the early spring of 1885. “Taxonomy of paper wings” refers to the construction of the poem, made of a collage of two envelope sections, resembling the hinged wings of a bird.

- Emilie Cecilia LeBel

Clogged
only with
Music, like
the Wheels of

Birds
Afternoon an
the West and
the gorgeous
nothings
which
compose
the
sunset
keep
their high
Appoint-
ment
of
|
(Emily Dickinson)

Nicole Lizée

Composer

Called a “brilliant musical scientist” and lauded for “creating a stir with listeners for her breathless imagination and ability to capture Gen-X and beyond generation,” award-winning Montreal composer and video artist Nicole Lizée creates new music and video from an eclectic mix of influences, including the earliest MTV videos, turntablism, rave culture, glitch, Hitchcock, Kubrick, Lynch, and 1960s psychedelia. Her commission list of over 50 works includes the Kronos Quartet, BBC Proms, San Francisco Symphony, Carnegie Hall, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Darcy James Argue’s Secret Society, So Percussion, Tapestry Opera, and Eve Egoyan. Her music has been performed worldwide at festivals such as the BBC Proms (UK), Huddersfield (UK), Roskilde (Denmark), Bang on a Can (USA), Classical:NEXT (Rotterdam), All Tomorrow’s Parties (UK), Barbican’s Sound Unbound (UK), Metropolis (Australia), Luminato (Canada), Other Minds (San Francisco), Ecstatic (NYC), and Dark Music Days (Iceland).

Nicole Lizée was awarded the prestigious 2013 Canada Council for the Arts Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music. She is a Civitella Ranieri Foundation Fellow (New York City/Italy) and recently received a 2016 Lucas Artists Fellowship Award (California). In 2015, she was selected by acclaimed composer and conductor Howard Shore to be his protégée as part of the Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards. Additional awards and nominations include a Juno nomination, an Images Festival Award, Prix Opus, International Rostrum of Composers’ Top 10 List, Dora Mavor Moore Award nomination in opera, and the Canada Council for the Arts Robert Fleming Prize for achievements in composition.

Isabella Blow at Somerset House

Isabella Blow (1958-2007) was a passionate advocate for those who would bend the rules and take risks within the world of haute couture as she unearthed talented visionaries who were challenging convention. This homage to Blow and her posthumous exhibit at Somerset House in London in 2013 is inspired by photo sets of disembodied mannequin heads wearing hats and accoutrements from her personal collection, evoking the effect of having been curated from beyond the grave.

- Nicole Lizée

Cecilia String Quartet

Now entering its second decade, the Cecilia String Quartet is the James D. Stewart Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, performing for leading presenters in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Prize winners at several international competitions, the group was awarded First Prize at the 2010 Banff International String Quartet Competition and its concert recordings have been broadcast on more than a dozen international public radio networks. The Quartet has taught at leading universities and festivals across North America and has presented educational programs for elementary and high schools across North America as well as in Italy and France. It has performed for homeless youth, homeless veterans, prisoners, and for the elderly in care facilities. New initiatives include *Xenia Concerts*, welcoming children on the autism spectrum and their families, and *Celebrating Canadian Women in Music*, with newly commissioned works for both concert and CD presentation.