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**NMC Ensemble | Robert Aitken director**

Programme:

**Robert Aitken** (Canada 1939)

for 24 flutes | Robert Aitken conductor

**Tsunami and Solesmes** (2009)

**Robert W. Stevenson** (Canada 1954)

for 24 flutes | Robert W. Stevenson, conductor. World Premiere

**Two Fancies: 1. Before 2. After** (2015)

**Alex Pauk** (Canada 1945)

for 24 flutes | Alex Pauk, conductor  
World Premiere, commissioned by NMC with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council

**IMPULSE** (2016)

— Intermission —

**Bruce Mather** (Canada 1939)

for 24 flutes | Robert Aitken conductor

**Hors Piste - OFF TRACK** (2010)

**Christopher Butterfield** (Canada 1952)

for 22 flutes and cello | David Hetherington, solo cello | Robert Aitken conductor

**Bosquet** (2010)

flute orchestra: Dianne Aitken; Les Allt; Shelley Brown; Laura Chambers; Samantha Chang; Tristan Durie; Patricia Dydnansky; Amy Hamilton; Susan Hoepfner; Jan Junker; Christopher Lee; Sibylle Marquardt; Doug Miller; Sarah Moon; Leslie Newman; Nancy Nourse; Kevin O'Donnell; Maria Pelletier; Alheli Pimienta; Stephen Tam; Paul Taub; Anne Thompson; Jamie Thompson; Katherine Watson; Camille Watts.

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Robert Aitken, c.m., Artistic Director

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World renowned Canadian flutist, composer and conductor **Robert Aitken** has been honoured with the Order of Canada and is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France). He began formal composition studies with Barbara Pentland while principal flutist of the Vancouver Symphony (1958-59) and then at the University of Toronto with John Weinzwieg for both his Bachelor (1959-61) and Master's degrees (1961-64). As the first composition student admitted to the Electronic Music Studio of the U of T, he composed a number of prominent electronic works. The first work which established him as a composer in the eyes of the concert public was his Concerto for 12 Soloists and Orchestra. This was performed by the Toronto Symphony, conducted by Seiji Ozawa, in 1968. Since that time he has completed a number of commissions for such prominent organizations as the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the CBC, the National Youth Orchestra, the York Winds, IRCAM, the Elmer Iseler Singers, the National Flute Association and the Orchestre de Flûtes Français (OFF). Each of Aitken's works deals with particular questions of colour, space and instrumental technique and the music is an attempt to create a memorable, colourful, sonic solution to these problems. The earliest pieces deal with various 12 tone transformations and the spatial moving of sound. But following Aitken's five-month journey to the Orient, he undertook four works reflecting his musical experiences there. After these four *Shadows* he returned again to the extra musical challenge of instrumental extension and amplification with his *Spiral* for orchestra. Since that time, his music reflects the minimal and harmonic influences of today, mixed with a rhythmic drive from his student years with John Weinzwieg and the elaborate melodic structure of numerous Oriental musics. All of his works are published by Universal Edition, Salabert, Ricordi and Peer Music.

## Robert Aitken (Canada 1939) *Tsunami* and *Solesmes* (2009)

***Tsunami:*** It is difficult to imagine how anyone who has seen images of the destructive power and horrific magnificence of the 2004 tsunami that poured over Southeast Asia could ever forget it. That is why I chose this "memory" to be the first in a cycle of pieces for flute orchestra. Typical idiomatic flute writing with scales, trills and varieties of wind sounds has always proven ideal for representations of water. And piccolos, C flutes, alto flutes and bass flutes, in this case 24 of them, give the composer a wide range of possibilities over five octaves. Add to this the feeling of stereophonic space provided by dividing the orchestra and *Tsunami* becomes my impression of that calamitous event. The solo cadenzas at the end form a bridge to the bass flute solo which opens the following movement, my memory of *Solesmes*.

***Solesmes:*** One of my subjects in university was paleaography, the study of early notation and medieval music. During the course of study, a name which continually turned up was *Solesmes*, the Benedictine monastery in the wilds of the Loire Valley which had been assigned the task of finding the authentic Gregorian chant that had become lost and convoluted over the years. When at the age



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of 24, I had an opportunity to visit Europe, one of the first things I chose to do was find that monastery. I will never forget it! The music was so beautiful. The clouds of incense, the entire Latin service sung, and the ethereal sound of the voices resulted in an overwhelming sensory experience which has stayed in my mind until today.

No instrumental combination could be better suited to convey this impression than unison flutes. The subtleties in colour between registers and of course the instruments themselves, bass, alto, C flute and piccolo can transport the listener to a magical elevated world of pure sonic beauty. The movement I composed is very much in the style of Solesmes but without conscious quotations from the services. Working with the colour combinations of the four instruments, all playing in unison and octaves brought me infinite pleasure and transported me back to that fall day in 1964 in the abbé of Solesmes. — *Robert Aitken*

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**Robert W. Stevenson** has been an active force in the music community as a player, conductor, composer and educator since the early 70s. Mr. Stevenson's background is wide ranging and diverse, encompassing many forms including jazz, classical, new music, klezmer and free improvisation. He has performed regularly with a wide variety of ensembles including Arraymusic, New Music Concerts, Tapestry New Opera Works and the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band among many others. He leads four groups, The Bob Standard, Big Idea, The Bob Stevenson Quartet and Safety In Numbers and is also a member of Red Rhythm and has appeared on the recordings of many artists including Holly Cole, Lily Frost, Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band, Arraymusic, New Music Concerts, Red Rhythm and Anthony Genge as well as many film and television soundtracks. As a composer Robert has been commissioned by choreographers Bill James, Maxine Heppner and Holly Small; performers Arraymusic, The Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan, Innovations En Concert, Stephen Clarke, Toca Loca, the Modern Quartet and the Madawaska Quartet. His compositions have been recorded by such artists as Arraymusic, The Evergreen Club, Elliott Sharp and Toca Loca. He served as Artistic Director of the contemporary chamber music ensemble Arraymusic from 2005 – 2010 and was Artistic Director of the improvising new music big band Hemispheres from 1995-1998 as well as serving as its conductor from 1992. He served as guest lecturer in clarinet and composition at York University in Toronto and at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

**Robert W. Stevenson** (Canada 1954) *Two Fancies: 1. Before 2. After* (2015)

This work was composed in celebration of Robert Aitken's 76<sup>th</sup> birthday and is dedicated to him. The origin of this composition came from a telephone conversation with Daniel Foley in April of 2015. He told me of NMC's plan to present a concert of music for flute orchestra and shared with me Robert Aitken's score for *Tsunami*. My initial reaction was skeptical, as I had serious

reservations about these large groupings of like instruments. I had played in clarinet choirs as a teenager, experiences which were neither musical nor fun. I promised to look at the score however and give my opinion. Upon examining Aitken's inspiring piece, I thought that there were possibilities for me and began to think seriously about a new work. My first thought was, well, what do flute orchestras play? They play arrangements of existing repertory, everything from Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* to Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. I decided to select two of my own compositions for arrangement. However, the intention was not to create a faithful rendering for flute orchestra of pre-existing compositions, but rather to start anew, as though the selected works were sketches to be developed. The intention was to explore Mahler's belief that one does not compose the material so much as that one is composed by the material itself. It became immediately apparent that the very fact of creating a work for a large group of like instruments would completely transform the existing pieces. I had no desire to create a faithful orchestration of the music at hand. I allowed the sound of the flute orchestra and the history of flute performance itself to shape the composition. Thus, many things were transformed. The ensemble itself has metamorphosed all figuration, tessitura, pitch and even the length and rhythmic structure. I hope that these *Two Fancies* will please the dedicatee and that, in some small way, add to an appreciation of the musical possibilities of an ensemble that Robert Aitken values so much. — *Robert W. Stevenson*

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**Alex Pauk** was inducted into the Order of Canada in September of 2015. He has a wide range of experience as a composer with works for every kind of performing ensemble, film, TV, theatre, and dance and his music has been performed throughout Canada, the U.S., Europe and China. His most notable compositions include works for large orchestra (*Echo Spirit Isle, Cosmos, Portals of Intent*), music for choir and orchestra (*Devotions*), multimedia works (*Touch Piece*), a concerto for harp and orchestra, a flute quintet, and *Musiques immergées* for chamber orchestra and audio playback. Along with his work as a composer of concert music he has also had a burgeoning career as a composer of film music with over thirty scores to his credit. As a conductor and educator, Pauk revitalized orchestral life for composers across Canada in 1983 by founding the Esprit Orchestra as Canada's only orchestra devoted to new music. With his orchestra's core of 60 top instrumentalists, Canada's best soloists, and an annual subscription series in Toronto, he encourages composers to take bold new directions. His innovative programming and commitment to the community through Esprit have garnered SOCAN and Chalmers Awards as well as three Lieutenant Governor's Arts Awards. He was named Musician of the Year (1999) by peers at the Toronto Musicians' Association, was a recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize (2007) and has helped many composers advance their careers through commissions, high profile performances, recordings and broadcasts.

The playful, breezy flute sounds of this piece have been in my head for a long time but the initial spark or impulse for writing the piece came when I imagined how it would end. The music's flow is a continuity of impulses with my conception of the end having stimulated all that comes before it. From the start, *Impulse* has the quality of being a piece gradually coming together, with soloists or groups of players interweaving and interacting with each other, sometimes quite independently, sometimes as part of a larger conversation. In varying combinations, the voices offer commentaries, make individualistic outbursts (trying to "get a word in edgewise") interrupt one another with recurring flashes of thematic material or imitate and riff off of each other in solos, duos, or choruses. Finally the piece resolves with all the sounds percolating along in much the same beat. A tight rhythmic sense with a strong feel for syncopation is important for all players. The piece is written entirely in 4/4 time with all rhythmic complexities written into the score as overlays to the four beats per bar. Themes from the early part of the piece keep recurring and recombining in unexpected ways – sometimes shooting off in different directions like branches of a tree, at other times colliding, and finally coalescing in a harmonious ending. *Impulse* is dedicated to Robert Aitken and was commissioned by New Music Concerts with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council. — *Alex Pauk*

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**Bruce Mather** was born in Toronto, but has made Montréal his home since 1966 and is considered one of Québec's most important composers. He studied piano with Alberto Guerrero and composition with Oskar Morzwetz, Godfrey Ridout and John Weinzweig at the Royal Conservatory in Toronto and at the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto, completing his Bachelor's degree in 1959. Post-graduate studies took him to France where he worked with Darius Milhaud (composition) and Olivier Messiaen (analysis). Mather completed a master's degree at Stanford University with Leland Smith and received his doctorate from the University of Toronto in 1967. Mather's music has been performed regularly throughout Canada and is frequently heard in the United States and Europe. He has been commissioned by numerous major orchestras and contemporary music organizations at home and abroad, including the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio France, the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, Toronto New Music Concerts, the Esprit Orchestra, the Rouen Chamber Orchestra, Trio Basso (Cologne) and the Collectif musical international de Champigny (2e2m). Mather was appointed to the Faculty of Music at McGill University in 1966, and remained there for over thirty years, teaching analysis, advanced harmony, and composition. He also directed the institution's contemporary music ensemble.

My work *Hors Piste - OFF TRACK* was composed in 2010 for the Orchestre de Flûtes Français (OFF). In a way, quarter tones are "off track" or, in French, "hors piste." It calls for 2 piccolos, 10 normal flutes, 4 alto flutes, 4 bass flutes and 4 contrabass flutes. Half of the 24 flutes are tuned a quarter tone lower than normal pitch. The first performance, under the direction of Paul Méfano took place in Paris on March 14, 2011. — *Bruce Mather*

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**Christopher Butterfield** was born in Vancouver in 1952. As a boy he sang in King's College Choir, Cambridge. Deciding to be a composer, he studied with Czech-Canadian composer Rudolf Komorous in Victoria, BC, and Turkish-American composer Bülent Aral in Stony Brook, NY. From 1977 to 1992 he lived in Toronto and Montreal, where he played in the rock band *Klo*, and gave performances of sound poetry and performance art. In 1992 he returned to the west coast to teach composition at the University of Victoria. In 2014, Victoria's Aventa Ensemble and Toronto percussionist Rick Sacks toured 5 cities in Canada and the USA with *parc*, for vibraphone and ensemble. Butterfield's translations of three plays by Paris Dadaist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes: *The Emperor of China*, *The Mute Canary* and *The Executioner of Peru*, were published by Wakefield Press of Cambridge, MA, in January 2015.

*Bosquet* was commissioned in 2010 by Véronique Lacroix, director of ECM+, and Montreal's Ensemble Alizé. The commission was for a very particular ensemble: 22 flutes and one violoncello. At first I had no idea what to do, but quickly realized that the group's homogeneous nature would make it ideal for spatial music, in that the listener would be surrounded by a single timbral world, without the distraction of other voices. Structurally, the piece is built from a combination of all 43 possible four-note chords, and all 60 possible five-note chords. A direct ratio of 43:60 determines how the harmony changes over the duration of the piece. The 'cello part is entirely derived from the ever-changing combination of chords. While *Bosquet* appears to be a "concerto", the 'cello part is intended to be elusive rather than central, colouring and articulating the texture rather than being accompanied by it. It is part of a series of pieces written in the past six years which includes *Pastorale*, *Frame*, *fall*, *parc*, *Maritime*, and *Canter*. — *Christopher Butterfield*

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