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Robert Aitken
artistic director

new music concerts

47th season | 394th event

Thursday March 22, 2018

The Music Gallery, 197 John Street, Toronto

New Music Concerts and The Music Gallery present:

THE LIONESS OF IRAN

An Evening of World Premieres

featuring the poetry of Simin Behbahani

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Instruments of Happiness electric guitar quartet: Tim Brady (artistic director)

Jonathan Barriault, Simon Duchesne, Francis Brunet-Turcotte

Marie-Annick Béliveau mezzo-soprano

Introduction @ 7:15 | Concert @ 8:00

Programme:

Kiya Tabassian (Iran/Canada b.1976)

Faryâd * (2018)

poem: Cry

Laurie Radford (Canada b.1958)

my cut glass body * (2017)

poem: *Sounds of Blossoms*

Jennifer Butler (Canada b.1976)

The stars have closed their eyes * (2017)

poem: *Wine of Light*

Parisa Sabet (Iran/Canada b.1980)

A Cup of Sin * (2017)

poem: *I Want a Cup of Sin*

Tim Brady (Canada b. 1956)

His Master's Voice (2017)

poem: *His Master's Voice*

Juliet Palmer (New Zealand/Canada b.1967)

Morse * (2017)

poems: *Morse* and extracts from *Bani Adam* by Sa'adi

* Commissioned by Bradyworks / Instruments of Happiness

⊗ Commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council

* Commissioned by the Toronto Arts Council

Please join us for a post-concert reception, courtesy of New Music Concerts' Board of Directors

Paul Hodge recording engineer | Sandor Ajzenstat stage manager
PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES AND OTHER DEVICES!

New Music Concerts

Robert Aitken, c.m., Artistic Director

157 Carlton Street, Ste. 203 • Toronto M5A 2K3 • 416-961-9594

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PROGRAMME NOTES BY TIM BRADY

In 2015, while reading a random magazine in a Bank of Montreal waiting room, I discovered Simin Behbahani's character and poetry. Immediately attracted by her history and her works, I quickly conceived a project of musical creation for my group "Instruments of Happiness": to gather six Canadian composers around the works of Ms. Behbahani to create an event which celebrates at the same time the richness and beauty of her work, but also the quality and diversity of Canadian creation.

We begin our journey with **Kiya Tabassian's** "Faryâd". Kiya was born in Tehran in 1976. His family came to Quebec in 1990. After studying in Iran and at the Montreal Conservatory of Music, he became well known as a musician for his work with the Constantinople group. His music cuts through the artistic space between traditional Iranian music and contemporary music. His work for this concert, "Faryâd", is based on the poem "Cry". It is a very rhythmic piece, which exploits ranges and sounds drawn from Persian music, but its structure and its development are very contemporary. The text is sung in Farsi.

FARYÂD – CRY

You, thinking of me, from time to time
Be happy with this, as you bring me happiness

You said to me, "GO", but you did not tell me where
A bird with a broken wing can fly towards.

Do not hide the secret of your sadness in the cloak of silence
Your cry is heard from afar, in each glance

The whirlwind of my tears, what are you saying?
The torment of love, what makes you lament?

Your image stays burned in the deepest layers
of the memory of Simin

You, thinking of me, from time to time.

Laurie Radford is a professor of composition at the University of Calgary, but has also played the electric guitar since he was a teenager. His work "my cut glass body", from the poem "Sounds of Blossoms", emphasizes the sound diversity of the electric guitar, adding a melodic line full of drama and contrast.

SOUNDS OF BLOSSOMS

My heart is more broken than the crystal cup you let drop on the rocks. – Khaghani

Hear the Spring in my body,
Hear the blossoms opening like the Pleiades,
singing, it's me, it's me.
Hear my drunken declaration: a wild rose, that's me.
Why should I wait any longer to play the lyre of Aphrodite?
Hear me plucking its veins in a thousand modes.
Each of my veins is now the string of an instrument:
hear their music rising and descending.
Hear me playing myself, singing, *tantanam, tantanam*.
This soaring, overflowing joy – is it me? No, not me!
Hear once more the old wine sparkling in the wine jar.
Gaze in my eyes at consciousness flourishing like a garden.
Hear a world of awakenings dormant in my words.
Hear the world awakening in my words.
You fill my body and soul like a pearl filling its shell.
Hear your own words, said and unsaid, on my lips.
For I am both the drunken gypsy
and the precious cup in your hand.
Hear your rivals gasp at the waste as I fall.
Hear the shattering sounds, my stonehearted one,
hear the sounds of my falling and liberation,
hear my cut glass body.

Jennifer Butler is a Vancouver-based composer who is deeply involved in her field as a freelance artist. She was President of the Canadian League of Composers from 2011 to 2014. "The stars have closed their eyes" is based on the poem "Wine of Light". It is a work that emphasizes the fragility, the beauty and the sonority of the text, while exploring these same qualities in writing for the musical ensemble. A piece that gently inspires a state of reflection.

THE WINE OF LIGHT

The stars have closed their eyes, come.
The wine of light flows through the veins of the night, come.
I have poured so many tears waiting in the night's lap,
that twilight has blossomed and the morning has bloomed, come.
In my mind's sky your memory etches lines of gold
like a shooting star, come.
I've sat so long with the night telling my tale of woe
that the night and I have turned pale with sorrow, come.

If you are waiting to see me again when I die,
understand, this is the time, come.
If I hear anyone's footsteps, I imagine they are yours,
with all this beating, my heart is bursting out my breast, come.
You didn't come when the sky was full of stars like grapes,
now that dawn has picked them one by one, come.

You're the hope in the heart of Simin-the-broken-hearted,
put an end to my misery, come.

Parisa Sabet is an Iranian-Canadian composer. She is completing a doctorate in music at the University of Toronto. Her composition "A Cup of Sin" is clearly divided into three sections. The first and third sections are drawn from traditional Iranian melodies, but the middle section creates another dramatic contrast, with harmonies and textures inspired by contemporary chamber music which underlines the text's metaphors.

I WANT A CUP OF SIN

He said I want that which cannot be found. – Mowlavi

I want a cup of sin, a cup of corruption,
and some clay mixed with darkness,
from which I shall mold an image shaped like man,
wooden-armed and straw-haired.

His mouth is big.
He has lost all his teeth.
His looks reflect his ugliness within.
Lust has made him violate all prohibitions
and to grow on his brow an organ of shame.
His eyes are like two scarlet beams,
one focused on a sack of gold,
the other on the pleasures found in bed.
He changes masks like a chameleon,
has a two-timing heart like an eel.
He grows tall like a giant branch,
as if his body has acquired vegetable properties.

Then, he will come to me.
intent on my oppression.
I will protest and scream against his horror.
And that ogre called man
will tame me with his insults.

As I gaze into his eyes
innocently and full of shame,
I will scold myself: you see,
how you spent a lifetime wishing for "Adam."
Here you have what you asked for.

My own composition, "His Master's Voice" comes from my fascination with 78 rpm records, the central image of the poem. As always in Ms. Behbahani's poetry, the 78 rpm and the gramophone are a metaphor for human memory.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

This antique lacquered disk,
where is the tool to make it sing?
With the dog and megaphone on its label,
it's a pity if it remains silent.
Tell this dog sitting on its haunches
to bark with all its might:
to awaken, perhaps, from their sweet sleep
the faithful Companions of the Cave.
Their old coins have become our oft-told tales.
The enchantment of our childish hearts
cannot be purchased with current coinage.
The heart of childhood beats
with childish rhythms.
Malign it not by calling it sick.
No doctor knows its secrets.

Speak, ancient record, speak!
Where's that woman, master of the house,
to wipe off the dust from your face
and the sorrow from your heart?
Where is she, to crank the handle with her soft hands
and make the needle of my childhood years
run in the grooves?
Where is she, to let the little girl decked in silk and lace
twirl like a bouquet of flowers,
dancing to your music?

We conclude the concert with "Morse" by Canadian-New Zealand composer **Juliet Palmer**. After a doctoral degree in Princeton (USA), Juliet moved to Toronto, where for the past 25 years she has worked as an Artistic Director of

Urbanvessel and as a freelance artist. She has presented several productions across Canada, the United States and elsewhere. "Morse" uses the Morse code (suggested by the poem's title) for these rhythmic resources, allowing the music to explore the natural rhythms of English and Farsi. The text speaks of an "encoded" message and refers to the poem "Bani Adam", an important Persian work of the 13th century.

MORSE

Dash, dot, dot, dot, dash
songbird sings a song full of signs
from the branches of an elm tree.
As the night and the terror spread,
in my desperation to know,
the silences between sounds
convert every song into a message.
Perhaps from the borders of fire and blood,
perhaps from the fields of war and madness
a bird with a tired heart has brought a message
from a man with a tired body.
Her cries are daggers. Blood drips from her sighs.
Sadness chokes her like a noose.
Her moans question why these strife-smitten people
have drenched in blood the carpet of grass
spread by festive Zephyr.

Come, Paradise-lovers, this is Paradise,
with everywhere flowers sprouting
and jasmines in bloom.
You, heavenly heralds, why stoke the fires of hell,
set flame to people's lives and homes?

We are all parts of the same body,
similar in essence, told us that worldly-wise man.
How will he face the mothers and their tears,
that iron-hearted pourer of molten lead
in the dead of night?

O songbird, I have listened to your secrets.
I know something must be done.
but not by someone with her hands tied like me.

Dash, dot, dot, dot, dash – it's a message I misinterpret.
Silence, you won't break with this poem or that song.

I want to thank all the composers for their passion and their involvement in this project. We must also thank the guitarists of "Instruments of Happiness", as well as the magnificent and remarkable singer Marie-Annick Béliveau who transforms musical scores, by the magic of her voice, into performances rich in emotion, beauty and drama.

Instruments of Happiness comes in three formats: the quartet; the orchestra of 20 professional guitarists and a group that brings together 100 professional and community guitarists. Instruments of Happiness is obviously obsessed with the electric guitar. We seek to go beyond the guitar – to make concerts, creations, projects that are first and foremost fascinating, intriguing and exciting musical events, all prepared and presented with a great concern for quality of sound and performance. We also dare to dream of making you happy with our instruments.

Marie-Annick Béliveau has been present on Montreal's stages for more than 20 years. She recently received the Opus Award for "Music Event of the Year" for her presentation of Scelsi's *Capricorn Songs*, a performance-based opera for solo voice. She has premiered more than thirty works, and can be heard regularly in Europe and Canada, on the CBC and on several award-winning recordings. "Her rich voice and nuanced expressive palette make her an ideal interpreter, subtle, moving with disconcerting ease from pure playfulness to unsettling vulnerability." – *Lucie Renaud*

Simin Behbahani, born Siminbar Khalili, also called Simin Khalatbari (20 July 1927, Tehran – 19 August 2014, Tehran) was an Iranian poet who earned the nickname "Lioness of Iran" because she eloquently defied authorities in her country and opposed oppression and violence in more than 600 poems. Prolific all her life, she published her first collection, *Setar-e shekasteh* (The Broken Sitar), in 1951. She renewed the classical forms of Persian poetry by exploring modern themes, often through the use of a female narrator rather than a male narrator, reversing the traditional *ghazal* structure. She conducted these experiments at a time when free verse was gaining popularity among Iranian poets to the detriment of traditional classical forms. From 1962, she also wrote lyrics for Iranian state radio. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the coming to power of an Islamic regime, she used her pen to condemn human rights violations, which constantly exposed her to censorship and incarceration. She was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. The English translations of Simin Behbahani's poems come from *A Cup of Sin*, Farzaneh Milani and Kaveh Safa (Syracuse, 1999). Their use has been authorized.

Our next event: ZIPANGU!

Sunday May 27, 2018 @ 6 | Introduction @ 5:15

NMC String Orchestra | Iris Ensemble | Accordes | Robert Aitken flute and direction
Royal Conservatory of Music 21C Festival | Mazzoleni Hall at 273 Bloor Street West

Advance Tickets call 416.408.0208