

ARTISTS for NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Michael Bridge, accordion
Kornel Wolak, clarinet
with Amahl Arulanandam, cello

Michael Bridge's mother arrived home one afternoon in 1998 with a \$5 mini-accordion she'd purchased at a garage sale. Little Michael soon proclaimed it didn't have enough notes, and a long journey began...

Aged 11, Michael began performing in retirement homes. Seduced by earning \$30 in an afternoon, he would soon perform 75 events annually in Calgary, and learn to host a show. A technology tinkerer, Michael constantly bought keyboards, microphones and recorders. He produced a half-dozen albums from his family's basement by 15.

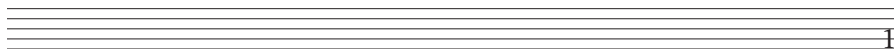
Then, two transformations took place: discovering classical accordion repertoire, and encountering the digital accordion. To play classical music, Michael bought a free-bass button "concert" accordion, which required re-learning where all the notes were. He entered and won the Canadian Digital Accordion Championships twice, receiving digital instruments and allowing him to finally "play all the instruments at once," blending his love for technology and his musical abilities.

Already touring internationally, Michael enrolled at the University of Toronto in 2011, where he is now completing his doctorate (the first Canadian to do so). His professor, Joseph Macerollo, emphasized working with other instruments and with composers to create new music — leading to over 50 world premières and a keen interest in new music.

Bridge's work has received many accolades from national and international media; he was awarded the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Medal, a Massey College Junior Fellowship, and funding supporting his performance, recordings, and research from SSHRC, OGS, the Canada & Ontario Arts Councils, and the Sylva Gelber Music Foundation. In 2021, he will become a Rebanks Fellow at the Glenn Gould School in his post-doctoral studies.

As an orchestral soloist, Bridge has appeared with the Boston Pops, National Orchestra of Brazil, Edmonton Symphony, Ontario Philharmonic, and his hometown Regina Symphony, among others. With his duo partner, clarinetist Kornel Wolak, Bridge & Wolak have toured extensively in Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, France, Ecuador, in many US states and in every Canadian province. Among the most active Canadian groups during Covid-19, Bridge & Wolak's virtual concerts (pre-recorded), virtual school shows (live), and Music Mentorship Program for high school students are reaching the community in new ways.

Touring as a member of Lodom Ensemble since 2015, the quartet has risen



to national acclaim, giving hundreds of concerts in nearly every province and creating a unique brand of classical-world music fusion.

Invested in music education, Bridge plans to eventually scale back from touring half the year and teach accordion at the university level. He gives masterclasses at every opportunity, including at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Kiev, Krakow and Łódź Academies in Poland, Princeton University, and the Universities of Colorado Boulder, Alberta, Lethbridge, Western Ontario, and Queen's.

Michael lives in Toronto near a natural valley, and has never owned a car. He dances salsa, engineers guacamole, shoots espresso, nurses scotch, and knows by heart (and by stomach) the best vegan restaurants from Kiev to São Paulo.

Highly acclaimed for his musical imagination and astonishing versatility: "Control, and a smooth, elegant expressivity... are what make **Kornel Wolak** shine." (*Toronto Star*)

Winner of Debut Atlantic Tour, Prairie Debut Tour, British Columbia Touring, Allied Concerts Tour (USA, 2016), the Royal Conservatory Concerto Competition and the Presser Music Award. Mr. Wolak performed with the renowned Quartetto Gelato.

He continues to expand the clarinet repertoire by commissioning new pieces and regularly appears in recitals as a chamber musician and as a soloist with American and European orchestras. A "Fryderyk" nominee, Poland's highest recording award, he is a regular fixture on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Classical 96.3 FM, Public Radio International, and in the US, National Public Radio.

As a soloist/clarinet clinician, he has toured and taught master classes in Europe, Asia and both Americas.

Since August 2015 he has been actively involved in research on the role of oral articulators in clarinet playing at the Speech-Language Pathology Department at the University of Toronto. Results of the preliminary studies are to be presented in the upcoming months.

Dr. Wolak is a regularly published author of articles on clarinet-related issues in *Your Muse*, the largest music magazine in Poland, in which he is an editor and contributor of a section called "Clarinetist's Vademecum".

He is the founder of Music Mind Inc., an initiative that creates music education programs for schools and communities.

With tastes ranging from baroque music to death metal, Toronto-based cellist **Amahl Arulanandam** is known for his musical versatility and ability to adapt to many different genres. Feeling at home in studios, small clubs and large concert-halls, Amahl hopes to convey that musical expression is beyond

genres and labels.

In the “classical” realm of Toronto, Amahl is quickly becoming known as a strong advocate for the music of our time, performing with ensembles such as Soundstreams, New Music Concerts, Tapestry Opera, FAWN Chamber Creative, Caution-Tape Sound Collective, Thin-Edge New Music Collective (TENMC), Music in the Barns and Esprit Orchestra, as well as regular appearances at the 21C Music Festival. In his time with these ensembles, he has had the opportunity to work closely with leading composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino, Ana Sokolovic, Luna Pearl Wolf, Brian Current and John Rea.

As a soloist and chamber musician, Amahl has presented several recitals and performed alongside artists such as David Geringas, Robert Aitken, John Novacek, Steven Dann, Angela Cheng, Mark Fewer, James Campbell and Jeffrey Beecher. He was a featured soloist with Esprit Orchestra, performing the world première of Bekah Simms’ cello concerto *Foreverdark*, for which he was the dedicatee. He has toured the US with Matt Haimovitz’ all-cello ensemble, Uccello and been a featured artist at the Salzburg Chamber Music Festival, Ottawa Chamberfest and Sweetwater Music Festival. He was a semi-finalist in the 2015 Eckhardt-Gramatte National Music Competition, and performed Barber’s Cello Concerto with the McGill Symphony Orchestra in the fall of 2014. Mr. Arulanandam is a co-founder of the VC2 Cello Duo alongside friend and colleague, Bryan Holt. VC2 has performed all across Canada, and recently completed a tour of the Prairies presented by Prairie Debut.

Amahl completed his undergraduate studies in 2012 at the University of Toronto under Shauna Rolston where he received the Gabriella Dory Prize and Suba Institute Award as top graduating performance major. He received his Master’s degree from McGill University under Matt Haimovitz where he, as part of the Strathcona Piano Trio, won the 2013 chamber music competition, and was runner up in the 2014 concerto competition. He wrapped up his studies at the Glenn Gould School where he received an Artist’s Diploma and was winner of the 2015 chamber music competition.

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PROGRAM for NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Asturias Isaac Albéniz
(accordion solo) (1860-1909)

Spanish Dance No.5: *Andaluza* Enrique Granados
(accordion + cello) (1867-1916)

Five Dance Preludes Witold Lutoslawski
(trio) (1913-1994)
Allegro molto
Andantino
Allegro giocoso
Andante
Allegro molto

French Suite No.5, in G major, BWV 816 Johann Sebastian Bach
Sarabande (1685-1750)
(accordion solo)

Violin Partita in E Major, BWV 1006 Johann Sebastian Bach
Prelude (1685-1750)
Gavotte
Gigue
(accordion + clarinet)

Le carnaval des animaux Camille Saint-Saëns
Le cygne: The Swan (1835-1921)
(accordion + cello)

Lekking Birds Anna Pidgorna
(trio) World première of WMCT Commission (b. 1985)

Piano Quartet No.1 in G minor, op.25 Johannes Brahms
Rondo alla Zingarese (1833-1897)
(trio)

NOTES for NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Michael Bridge's mentor, Joseph Macerollo, has spent his career advocating for a wider acceptance of the accordion and yet, as our concert history shows, it still seems a little exotic in surroundings like *Music in the Afternoon*. It is of course the juxtaposition that is exotic not the instrument itself. There are a number of ways in which an instrument can be made comfortable in a different or unusual environment: one is to commission new works written specifically for that instrument, and we have one of those today; another is to transcribe and arrange works that were originally for other instruments. We can get a bit sniffy about such things these days, but all the composers on today's program were quite happy to rearrange their own or other composers' works on occasion. Why not for accordion?

Albéniz's *Asturias* and the *Spanish Dance* by Granados are both examples of the slipperiness of categories. Originally written as piano pieces that imitated the typical style of guitar music, they were later taken over by guitarists as regular items of their repertoire. The piano version of Albeniz's work appeared under a variety of titles and the piece has no particular connection with the Asturias region of Spain. Granados wrote his collection of *12 Danzas españolas* in the 1890s for his own performance as a pianist. The title "Andaluza" by which this fifth piece is sometimes known is a later addition and not by the composer.

Lutoslawski's *Five Dance Preludes* also appear in different guises, in this case produced by the composer. Originally for clarinet and piano, there are later versions for clarinet and chamber orchestra and for an ensemble of nine instruments. The work was written while the composer was under a cloud, his earlier Symphony having been proscribed by the Communist cultural authorities in Poland as "formalist", a favourite condemnation of the Stalinist period. As a reaction to this criticism he composed a number of works with folk music connections, always a safe bet as music for the proletariat. The Preludes were the last of these compromise works before he set out boldly to explore a much more modernistic world; they were, he said, his "farewell to folklore".

The French Suites – the "French" designation was not Bach's – were written originally for Anna Magdalena Bach, Bach's second wife, who was a singer at the ducal court of Cöthen where he was director of music. They are written into Anna Magdalena's personal album that was begun shortly after their marriage in 1721. As one authority puts it, the "stylish dances" of these suites represented "the most fashionable genre of galant music, and are suggestive of the couple's intimate musical companionship". The idea of rearranging music for different instruments, or for a different situation, was quite familiar to Bach and the Violin Partita in E major provides a spectacular example. The six works, three Partitas and three Sonatas, that Bach wrote for unaccompanied violin are also products of his time in Cöthen. Like the French Suites, the Partitas consist of a chain of contrasting dances with an introductory prelude. In 1731 Bach reworked the prelude on today's program for strings, organ, and trumpets and timpani as the opening orchestral sinfonia for a cantata celebrating the inauguration of the new Leipzig town council, surely one of

the most audacious rearrangements imaginable.

Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* is now one of his best known works, a fact that the composer might have regarded a little ruefully since it was something he dashed off in record time as relief from working on his Third Symphony. Some of the movements contain amusing parodies of other composers' works and the whole is scored for an unusual combination of instruments, including the use of the almost obsolete glass harmonica in a couple of places. It was first performed for a private gathering and Saint-Saëns didn't allow it to be publically performed during his lifetime, "with an eye to his reputation", as one authority writes. The one movement that he did publish was the penultimate one, "The Swan", which soon became an essential item in every cellist's repertoire.

Anna Pidgorna has supplied the following notes about her WMCT commission *Lekking Birds*. This work "explores the fascinating group mating displays of certain species of birds, in particular the Blue Manakin. A lek is made up of several males with adjoining territories who gather to practice their elaborately choreographed collaborative mating display. The displays take years to perfect, with junior males taking the place of the female as they watch and learn from their elders. Females visit multiple leks and judge the overall group performance. Though they perform together, only the alpha gets to mate; the betas truly are wingmen. When writing this piece I was very much aware of the fact that I was writing for three young men, who would have to work collaboratively to execute this display. The fact that they are, in a sense, 'displaying' for a female composer also didn't escape my amusement. The individual female manakins did not create the choreographies they are observing, but the display evolved through generations of small choices they made, which favored certain movements and ornamental features over others. When composing, I too make my choices based on hundreds of performances I have witnessed."

Exactly what Brahms was conjuring up with his *Rondo alla Zingarese* – that is, Rondo in the Gypsy style - is a minefield of contentious issues for modern scholars with such questions as what 19th century musicians understood to be Gypsy music and how that related to Hungarian folk music; Bartok later became quite impassioned on the topic. Brahms, who was probably not too bothered by any such distinctions, completed the quartet in 1861 and performed it the next year in Vienna. The members of the Hellmesberger Quartet, who played the work with Brahms at the piano, were enthusiastic but the press less so: "an offence against the laws of style", according to one critic. Like the other composers on today's program, Brahms was ready to transcribe and re-arrange his and other composer's music for different instrumental forces and I like to imagine that he would have approved the accordion in this particular movement; perhaps even that he could have been persuaded to play the instrument himself.

John Mayo