

MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

NEWS & NOTES

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WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON FOR MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

By Simon Fryer

Normally by this time of the year we would all have a completely clear picture of the remaining concerts of the current season, and I would have already appeared before you to announce the forthcoming season of *Music in the Afternoon* concerts.

As you know, normal is no longer. The artistic world is in disarray as restrictions come and go, and concerts are postponed or cancelled.

Nevertheless, we have plans of course, as I will explain.

The remaining performances of our current season will be 'virtual' – online for us all to enjoy at home. April brings us a video recital from the [Viano String Quartet](#) and in May we will enjoy soprano [Joyce El Khoury](#) in collaboration with pianist Serouj Kradjian. We have had to postpone the planned June recital by oboist Ramón Ortega Quero until a future season, but I have planned a very special event to fill the June spot. Keep an eye out for more information about this!



Viano String Quartet (Photo: Jeff Fasano)



Joyce El-Khoury (Photo: Fay Fox)

We sincerely hope that the 2021/22 season (our 124th) will find us all back together in Walter Hall. To open, we look forward to performances from the wonderful violinist [Blake Pouliot](#) - our 2018 CDA winner - followed by one of Canada's favourite

percussionists, [Beverley Johnston](#), who brings a brilliant group of friends and artists with her. Once we get to 2022, in March, we present fabulous Canadian tenor, [Andrew Haji](#), followed in April by Canada's "next big cello star" (CBC) [Cameron Crozman](#), in partnership with pianist Philip Chiu. We close the season with a superb international string quartet originating from a country whose musicians we do not hear at the WMCT as often as we might... Intrigued?

As the plans firm up, I will make sure everyone is informed of the dates and programs for these concerts. We will reach out to members with information on

subscription renewals in early May. In the meantime, please keep in touch, and be ready for the WMCT's continued celebration of the joy of chamber music.

Simon Fryer is the Artistic Director of the WMCT.



Cameron Crozman (Photo: Nikolaj Lund)

"A WIZARD OF THE ACCORDION" (CBC) - THE EXTRAORDINARY MICHAEL BRIDGE!

By Annette Sanger

Further to the official announcement at our March 4 concert, the WMCT is thrilled to share the news that Calgary-born, Toronto-based accordionist [Michael Bridge](#) is the winner of its 2021 Career Development Award with a prize of \$25,000 and a concert in our 2022-23 *Music in the Afternoon* chamber music series. The WMCT has a long history of supporting young Canadian musicians through its concerts, post-secondary scholarships, and triennial [Career Development Award](#) which dates back over 30 years to 1990!



Michael Bridge (Photo: Bo Huang)

Perhaps not surprisingly, Michael is the first accordionist awardee, making him particularly special in the history of the CDA, showcasing the WMCT's overarching mission to be inclusive and cutting-edge while still respecting history and the music of times past. Actually, Michael epitomizes this past-future interdependency – his favourite composer to play is from the 17th century – none other than J.S. Bach – because “his music is very idiomatic for the accordion and there is zero margin for imprecision.”

Michael already has an extensive performing career that has taken him all over Canada, the US and South America, as well as to Europe. He says his favourite city is, without doubt, Kraków, Poland, where he spent three months while on tour in Eastern Europe. He particularly enjoys that city's tradition, dating back to 1241, where every hour a trumpeter plays a traditional anthem in each of the four cardinal directions from the highest tower of the cathedral (originally to signal approaching enemies).

Now in the final stages of his Doctor of Musical Arts at the University of Toronto, Michael is equally passionate about education and performance. His goals in life

include university teaching, and performing as a soloist with orchestras as well as with his ensembles, i.e. Lodom, the acclaimed world music quartet whose eclectic repertoire ranges from Persian and Classical fusion to Tango and Radiohead. Ever-creative and community-minded, during the pandemic Michael's Duo, with clarinetist Kornel Wolak (who performed with Michael in the November 12, 2020 *Music in the Afternoon* concert), inaugurated a six-month online mentorship program for high school students interested in careers in the arts.

On winning the CDA, Michael said “this award's transformative potential comes at a very important time. With your support, I will be able to pursue a number of my dream projects: recording an album of Baroque masterworks re-imagined for accordion; increased showcasing at costly booking conferences in the USA; and new artistic-technological collaborations to design innovative programming and sound sets for the next generation of digital accordions.”

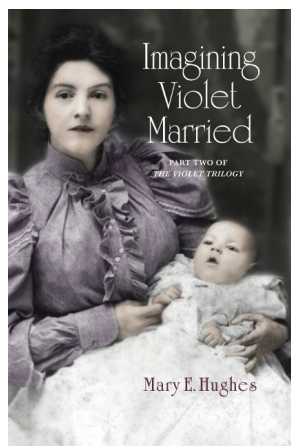
Many congratulations, Michael, and we eagerly look forward to following your future musical endeavours!

Annette Sanger is the WMCT Vice-President and Chair of the DEI and CDA Committees.

IMAGINE A VOLUNTEER FROM THE PAST

By Bonnie O'Dacre

Why her parents let her go when she was just 16 I can't imagine, but Violet Courtenaye did leave her home in Edinburgh to study violin at the famous Leipzig Conservatory, in Germany. The journey took four days in 1891, involving multiple trains and a paddle steamer. Violet was determined to become a career violinist even though there were few female role models ahead of her.



But life was to take a different musical path, away from Germany across to Canada and arriving in 1898 Toronto, just in time to become one of the early volunteers with the Women's Musical Club.

Of course it was a “gentleman” and fellow Leipzig student, charming Canadian Frank Welsman, who was responsible for the directional change in

Violet's life. Frank became the first conductor with the

Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Violet participated in the vibrant music scene in Toronto in the early 1900s.

Now, writer Mary Hughes, Violet's granddaughter, tells her story in three books - beginning with *Imagining Violet*. Written in the epistolary format, Violet pens letters to family in the UK and to friends. The format works well, it's like finding a box of old letters. Writer Hughes calls her work historical fiction or creative non-fiction. She found information about her grandmother's life in her Bible, and did extensive research on the period before writing Violet's story. Information about the WMCT was sourced from Robin Elliott's [*Counterpoint to a City, a History of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto*](#).

Imagining Violet - the first book deals with Violet's life at the Leipzig Conservatory and the courtship with Frank Welsman is there too. "Skating with Mr. W. is wonderful and it is very nice indeed that we may hold hands in public provided we have our skates on" (p 110). By book's end the two are married and sailing for Canada.

Both the second book *Imagining Violet Married* and third, *Imagine Violet Blooming*, are steeped in Toronto's history and it is surprising how much music there was in the city during that period. Some weeks Violet attends four concerts. Massey Hall was built in 1894, creating a venue for visiting musical performers from the US and beyond. Violet works on the WMC Programme Committee and finds: "the members are always on the lookout for something new and interesting". (p. 101)

One hundred years later, they still are. *Imagining Violet* is available at the Toronto Library and [online for purchase](#).

Bonnie O'Dacre is the Chair of the Advertising Subcommittee and Co-Chair of the Media Relations Subcommittee.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

By Susan Johnston

The winner of this year's Graduate Fellowship is Vlad Soloviev, a Master's candidate in collaborative piano studying with Steven Philcox at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. Vlad was born in Siberia but immigrated to Canada with his family while in his teens. He has a BMus from Western and has also studied at the Mannes School in New York, as well as at the Eastman School. Vlad already has an active career as a performer, teacher and choir master. In his letter of thanks to the WMCT, Vlad wrote: "Because of your support, I was able to continue



Vlad Soloviev

my work at the University of Toronto in pursuit of a career as an operatic répétiteur.... Thank you for your devotion to our common love of art. It fills me with hope that the future of our genre is a bright one and makes me endlessly excited to be part of it."

Unfortunately, our usual award winners' recital at

the Annual General Meeting was, of course, cancelled, but you can hear Vlad and our other 20-21 award recipients performing on our [YouTube channel](#), or through the WMCT's [website](#).

Susan Johnston is the WMCT Archivist, Awards Committee Chair and Scholarship Recital Liaison.

NO AVERAGE JOE

By Bonnie O'Dacre

Music has always been a big part of Joe Lesniak's life and when he leaves the Faculty of Music in May that won't change. After 32 years as Edward Johnson Building Manager at U of T he's changing up life for more time at the cottage, skiing, and a trip to Scotland that's been on hold for a while. Not that he doesn't like the work, for him the job was a perfect fit, "I couldn't have asked for a better situation". It's just time to retire.



Joe Lesniak

As building manager Joe's responsible for facility operations at the Edward Johnson Building including Front of House at the MacMillan theatre, Walter Hall and a rehearsal space on Wellesley. But Walter Hall is his baby and that's where he and the WMCT met up.

There's a symbiotic bit of fandom going back and forth between Joe and the WMCT. While he sends kudos to the organization for all it does for music, the people who have worked with Joe over the years send high praise.

Anne Spitzer who was in charge of refreshments for many years recalls a problem one day when the coffee pots wouldn't heat. Joe loaded up the urns and carted them off to a workshop, made the coffee AND heated the tea water. "I don't think making our coffee was exactly in his job description" says Jerri Merritt Jones who worked with him most recently. Previous "Cookie Lady" Nancy Lofft notes he was great at preventing disaster and "a true gentleman".



Music in the Afternoon audience members enjoying intermission refreshments, October 3, 2019 (Photo: James Kippen)

As a kid, Joe took piano lessons and completed Grade 8, but he really wanted to do behind the scenes support in the rock and roll industry as well as theatre/event production in town and on the road. It seemed to be moving in that direction when he purchased an old Ringo Starr-style drum set from a friend but: "my parents put an end to that." So he moved on to learn how to strum guitar as well as play harmonica which was a lot easier on everyone.

Theatre Technique and Production at Ryerson honed another skill set and it was while touring and working in town running sound and lighting he got the call to help with a "ladder situation" at MacMillan theatre. And the building manager job followed. "When times are good, you make a lot of money in rock and roll," he says, "but it's not the best life."

He and his wife, Helen, who just retired as a school principal last year, have three children and the words, "wonderful", and "amazing" pop into the conversation. Ahead are long summers at the cottage, lots of skiing and golf with the kids ("Dad's paying!"), and the delayed 30th wedding anniversary trip to Scotland and beyond. "And maybe I'll pick up a small job".

And that just might be in music.

Congratulations Joe, we will all miss you.

THE YEAR OF LIVING VIRTUALLY

By Kathleen McMorrow

The year of living in two dimensions. The shift from confidently presenting concerts to tentatively producing videos. A couple of dozen meetings via Zoom as WMCT volunteers worked to deal with it. Further [strategic planning](#) by our new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and an online Training Workshop on Diversity for the Board. Awards to post-secondary students, and even the complications of the triennial Career Development Award organized seamlessly online. Swarms of emails setting up a livestream from Walter Hall as the opening event of the 123rd season, during a brief period when regulations allowed video recordings in concert halls. Extended planning for the next two concerts by performers located south of a now fraught border. The magic of YouTube opening our presentations to a wide audience, including school groups and retirement homes.

I am proud that members and donors have made it possible for *Music in the Afternoon* to support our contracted artists, maintain our Artistic Director and Arts Administrator, and, with a little help from the government, pay the office rent.

Personally, I have had enough of the convenience of flute lessons and physio sessions at my laptop, rather than after a vigorous cross-town bike ride, and am longing for some close physical contact with those

near, dear, and even tangential. Let's all get our jobs, and see you in September in all dimensions.

Kathleen McMorrow is the WMCT President, Website Administrator and Co-Chair of the Media Relations Subcommittee.



WMCT Vice-President Annette Sanger and Arts Administrator Shannon Perreault conducting business outdoors during lockdown (Photo: James Kippen)



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