

Counterpoint Three

A second update to

Counterpoint to a City
The History of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto

Robin Elliott



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MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

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Dedicated to

John McNeil

(1934–2018)

Financial genius, patron extraordinaire, lover of music

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Counterpoint to a City:

The History of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto

by Robin Elliott

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CHAPTER ONE

Behind the Scenes

IT IS 1:30 PM on Thursday. The lights in Walter Hall dim, the expectant hum of conversation in the audience falls silent, and the artists stride eagerly on stage. The performers have been blessed with the gift of a talent for music, a talent they have honed to perfection through years of intense practice and study. Now they are going to share that gift with an appreciative Women's Musical Club of Toronto (WMCT) audience. It is a scene that has been repeated many hundreds of times over the past 125 years, and one that we took for granted before Covid-19 taught us that nothing can ever be taken for granted again. But few among us truly understand and appreciate what remarkable efforts by a small army of volunteers went on behind the scenes to bring about that magical moment when the music begins and transports us to a different, better world.

The process begins up to two years before the concert date, when Simon Fryer, the WMCT Artistic Director, in consultation with the Artists Selection Committee, begins to plan out the events for the season. "We have a sort of template for what we're going to want in a given season," notes Simon. "We usually feature a string quartet, a recital by a solo artist, and a pianist, but this is not to say that we always do. I get together with the Artists Selection Committee, and we throw around ideas. We also want a balance of international and Canadian artists and a mix of established and up-and-coming musicians. One cornerstone of our artistic mission is to be the introducers of talent, so I'm very conscious of this. Does this group play in Toronto regularly? Do they tour Canada? Do we want a senior established group for that date who can headline on our series, or are we looking for a younger artist who has the talent but not yet the name recognition? We make a list of potential performers we would like for that season, then I try and put all those artists together to make that season. I also have to consider the overall shape of the concert series. Some people just don't fit once you've got some others in place,

so we may leave those people for a future date. It's a loose and evolving process of drawing things in."

Once the desired lineup has been sketched in, the negotiations begin. Simon approaches the artists' management agencies. Some of the desired musicians will be available, others won't be. Some of them will command a fee that is well beyond the WMCT budget. In that case, the agency may suggest another artist from their roster, or Simon and the committee may have to go back to the drawing board. An added complication over the past 15 years has been the proximity of Koerner Hall. "Koerner is a bigger venue, with an expansive budget, and it's a beautiful hall," Simon explains. "Artists are anxious to appear there, so if Koerner gets an artist, then we lose them. This is something new since I joined the WMCT (in 2006; Koerner Hall opened in 2009). So, it has rather compressed the possibilities for us. But there are plenty of artists out there who are not necessarily on Koerner Hall's horizon, and who we can feature within our budget and make a great concert."

Assembling a WMCT concert season is a bit like putting together a rather complicated jigsaw puzzle; it takes time, patience, and some inspired guesswork. Once the lineup for the season has finally been established, the next phase of operations begins: getting the word out and attracting an audience. This is when the WMCT's Membership, Concerts and Marketing Committee kicks into gear. The WMCT is fortunate in being able to count on a solid core of subscriber members who will turn out year after year, knowing that they can count on the *Music in the Afternoon* series for a rewarding group of stellar concerts. From the 110th to the 115th seasons (2007 to 2013), WMCT membership numbers alone were enough to guarantee a full house for every concert. In other seasons, media relations and targeted advertising need to be strategized to bring in enough single ticket buyers to fill out the audience. Notices go out on the WMCT's Twitter and Facebook accounts to attract the attention of those on social media.

As the concert date nears, the Editorial Committee begins the process of putting together the concert program. John Mayo is tasked with the job of writing the program notes, and without fail he rises to the challenge brilliantly. For each concert, he explains in compelling detail what the

magical connecting thread is that ties the selections together to create an organic musical experience that is something more than a random collection of individual pieces. He is also adept at finding an amusing anecdote or an interesting personal reflection that brings the music vividly to life. Meanwhile, the *Tuning Your Mind* speaker is thinking about how to introduce the concert in a way that will bring added meaning to the audience's experience of the music. The student outreach team has contacted up to 100 schools who might be interested in taking advantage of the WMCT's offer of free tickets for a couple of dozen music students to attend one of the recitals. Communications to determine which school will attend on which date are completed, and a dedicated section at the front of Walter Hall is set aside for the students to occupy.

On concert day, it is the turn of the front of house team to spring into action. The artists typically hold a dress rehearsal, or at the very least a tune up and sound check, in Walter Hall on the morning of the recital. Volunteers are on hand to make sure that all goes smoothly: that the musicians know where to find not just the stage but also the washrooms and the green room, and that their last-minute needs or requests are met. More volunteers arrive a bit later in the morning to set up the lobby area for ticket taking, distribution of programs and any other materials that the WMCT is handing out that day, and perhaps a table to sell CDs by the artists. If refreshments are to be offered at intermission, then tables need to be set up, snacks and drinks, cups and napkins brought in, and more volunteers must be on call to serve everything.

By 12 noon the artists have left the stage to relax in the green room or attend to whatever their own particular pre-concert ritual may be. Audience members who have turned up for the pre-concert talk are admitted, and at 12:15 pm the speaker begins a presentation that runs until 1:00 pm (and no later). At that point the doors are then opened again for the rest of the audience to take their seats. The buzz of anticipatory conversation intensifies over the next half an hour while the musicians undertake their final preparations for the performance. At 1:30 pm sharp, the lights dim, the conversation suddenly decrescendos to silence, and another WMCT concert begins. If everything has gone smoothly, then the majority of the audience will be oblivious to the

many hours of work that have been put in by a host of volunteers to make the event happen.

IMPROVISATION

But of course, everything does not always go smoothly. The weather turns foul, and flights are cancelled. Artists get sick or are unable to get a visa to enter Canada, or for some other reason are unable to perform that day. Or maybe a global pandemic shuts down all non-essential public activity for two years. And that is when the WMCT, like good jazz musicians, have to learn how to improvise on the spot.

Sometimes the artists just get lost. As someone with a terrible sense of direction, I can sympathize; university campuses can be the most difficult places to find your way around in, even with Google Maps helping out. Kathleen McMorrow relates one such case when an entire string quartet from Eastern Europe went missing on the day of what was to be their Toronto debut.¹ It was the morning of April 10, 2014. The Pavel Haas Quartet from Prague was due to appear at Walter Hall for their warm-up rehearsal at 10 am. By 10:45 am, when the quartet had not yet appeared, Kathleen, who was on her first tour of duty as a green room volunteer, was becoming seriously concerned. A series of urgent phone calls ensued (thank heavens for mobile phones), from Kathleen to the WMCT office, from the office to Simon, from Simon to the quartet, and then back to Kathleen. The quartet was at Hart House. They were either lost, or they were 73 years late; the last WMCT recital to take place at Hart House Theatre had been given in 1941. Kathleen hurried over to Hart House, which is fortunately less than a ten-minute walk away, but when she inquired at the porter's desk there, no one had seen the elusive quartet. On her way back to Walter Hall, Kathleen happened to spot the four musicians in the vicinity of Hart House and shepherded them to the right place. Just over two hours later, the audience was treated to a superb recital of string quartets by Shostakovich, Britten, and Brahms, blissfully unaware of the morning's drama. Kathleen heaved a sigh of relief and revised protocols for communication between performers and the WMCT green room volunteers.

The Aviv String Quartet from Israel was scheduled to appear during the 113th season (2010–11). When the booking was made in 2009, the

quartet's cellist was the outstanding Canadian musician Rachel Mercer, who as a student had won a scholarship from the WMCT. By 2011, however, when the Aviv recital was due to take place, Mercer had left the quartet and had been replaced by the cellist Aleksandr Khramouchin from Minsk in Belarus. The other three members of the Israeli quartet were all Russians. The quartet had planned an extensive tour of the USA with a few Canadian recitals added into the mix, including the appearance for the WMCT on March 10, 2011. But at the last minute, the quartet was denied the temporary work visas necessary for the US tour dates, which drastically reduced the scope of their tour and resulted in a big financial hit for the group. Then, for inscrutable reasons, the quartet's violist was denied entry to Canada. The local violist Carolyn Blackwell, an experienced chamber musician, bravely stepped in to fill his shoes so that the WMCT recital could go ahead. Next, by some kind of malevolent pathetic fallacy, Mother Nature conjured up a blinding snowstorm for the night of the quartet's arrival in Toronto, when they were to give a masterclass at the Faculty of Music. They made it to the venue, but not many audience members did. On the morning of their recital, the quartet met their substitute violist. Fortunately for all concerned, the repertoire was standard fare: Dvořák, Beethoven, Schubert.² The recital was superb; Blackwell played as though she had been a member of the quartet for years rather than just a couple of hours. Once again, few in the audience were aware of the drama that had unfolded in the preceding days.

Those two concerts were just warmups for November 2015. The brilliant and glamorous US mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard was booked for a headline recital that month that was to be the highlight of the 118th season. Leonard was a very hot property, having just won a Grammy Award in 2013, the same year that she had made her local stage debut in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* with the Canadian Opera Company. The WMCT was fortunate to be able to engage her for her local recital debut ... it was sure to be a sellout event with lots of media attention.

The day before the recital, Simon got a call from Damon Bristo, Leonard's agent. "He calls and says, 'Isabel Leonard isn't feeling so great,'" Simon relates. "I needed someone to fill the gap pronto. This agent says he has a young artist who can fill in the gap. Great, okay, so that's convenient.

I know Simone Osborne. She's fantastic. She certainly deserves to be on our stage. But the less generous side of me might think that he allowed me to hire Isabel Leonard, with the full knowledge that when this recital comes up, he's going to pretend that she's sick and substitute a young artist in there that he wants to have more exposure."

Of course, the truth will never be known; but the fact of the matter is that not all artists' agents are nice people,³ and scenarios such as the one that Simon imagines here are not all that uncommon. Indeed, the violinist Henri Temianka in his highly entertaining memoir *Facing the Music* notes that his own career began when he was hired as a last-minute replacement for an indisposed Bronislaw Huberman. "I advise the young debutant soloist with enough money to engage a famous artist for a concert appearance, on condition that he agrees to cancel at the last minute," Temianka writes. "Advertise his appearance widely, announce his indisposition, and then step in and play in his place. A successful career is assured."⁴ Concert agents are obviously counting on the fact that few people have read Temianka's memoirs.

The day before the recital date, Simone Osborne (who was in Winnipeg) got the call from Bristo and was told to make her way to Toronto posthaste. A collaborative pianist had to be found as well. Osborne had worked with John Arida recently at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. Arida flew in from Boston, Osborne from Winnipeg, and on the evening before the recital they got together to rehearse. The first half of Osborne's program was devoted to *Les nuits d'été* by Hector Berlioz. Osborne had sung the orchestral version of this lovely song cycle recently in San Francisco, but Arida had never played it in public before. Fortunately, he is a quick study, as many collaborative pianists are (and indeed have to be, especially if they work regularly with singers), and so he had the piece under his fingers by the next day. The second half of the recital was a mixed bag of fairly conventional song repertoire by Richard Strauss and others.

Meanwhile, the WMCT had printed up 500 copies of Isabel Leonard's recital program, which of course was completely different from what Osborne was going to sing. The entire print run had to be scrapped. There was no time for John Mayo to prepare new program notes, so the audience

was given a single folded sheet which simply listed the new repertoire. Fortunately, the brilliant Iain Scott was giving the *Tuning Your Mind* lecture that day. Talk about improvising! Not only was he able to speak entertainingly and knowledgeably about the new repertoire on the spot, but he also knew Simone Osborne well and gave insightful remarks about her career to date. Iain, if you are reading this, bless you and thank you! The recital was yet another brilliant success in the annals of the WMCT. Osborne sang beautifully, Arida played the Berlioz and the rest of the recital brilliantly, and the audience was so delighted that the artists were called back for an encore: the lovely "Song to the Moon" from Dvořák's opera *Rusalka*. Truly an afternoon to be remembered.

In retrospect, of course, even the November 2015 improvisational experience was but a bagatelle compared to what lay in store for the WMCT less than five years later. That, however, is the story for another chapter...

1. Kathleen McMorrow, "Back stage basics—the lost quartet," *News & Notes* 52 (October 2015): 7.
2. Annalee Patipatanakoon was not as lucky when she substituted on short notice as a violinist with the Penderecki String Quartet in their WMCT recital a year earlier on March 25, 2010; that program included Glenn Buhr's String Quartet No. 4, a newly commissioned work with very demanding parts for each player. But as a reward, she got to play the Schubert String Quintet in the second half of the program, with Simon Fryer as the second cellist.
3. As reported in *Opera News* on August 11, 2020, Damon Bristo was arrested in St. Louis on July 23, 2020 "on charges of sex-trafficking in the second degree involving a minor." Isabel Leonard now has a new agent.
4. Henri Temianka, *Facing the Music: An Irreverent Close-up of the Real Concert World* (New York: David McKay Co., 1973): 22–23.

Fifteen Years in Three Acts

IN A BRIEF BUT insightful article published in 2019, WMCT President Kathleen McMorrow drew attention to the fact that the days of newspaper reviews of classical music are all but over.¹ The most recent WMCT recital reviewed in the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, of the special Koerner Hall recital celebrating the Club's 115th anniversary, was published in 2013, ten years ago as of this writing. When I wrote *Counterpoint to a City* (1997), the centennial history of the WMCT, I relied heavily on reviews of concerts in the local newspapers to reconstruct the history of the Club. Hanna and Fred Feuerriegel combed through newspaper reviews to create their huge and indispensable *History of Concerts and Performers of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto*.² The chronicle of classical music concerts that newspaper reviews provide is no longer available, so ironically the most recent 15 years of the WMCT's concert giving activities are more poorly documented than the 110 years prior to that, at least in terms of the field of music criticism.

Thanks to the Herculean labours of the Feuerriegels, we have a comprehensive record of what music the WMCT has presented, who played it, and where it took place. But an *evaluation* of the recitals is sparse and often absent altogether, especially for the past 10 years. Since 2013, as Kathleen notes, "WMCT concerts, and the rest of the rich classical musical life of Toronto, have been almost entirely unrecorded, undocumented, unevaluated and uncontextualized in print." Reviews have appeared on Ludwig van Toronto (<https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/>) and a handful of other websites,³ but these are ephemeral, uneven in quality, focus on vocal music, and as Kathleen notes, "will remain alive only as long as domain and hosting fees are covered."

Like Kathleen, I despair for the future chronicler of Toronto's classical music scene of the early 21st century; so much history has already been lost. This chapter is an attempt to record for posterity some of the concert giving activities of the WMCT during the period from 2007 to

2023. I attended almost all of these recitals myself, and so I offer here my personal opinions, recollections, and reflections in the hope that this is at least better than nothing. The concerts that I highlight here are selective; for complete details of each season, the interested reader can turn to the Feuerriegels' volume. Every WMCT concert meets the highest professional standards and offers a great deal of enjoyment; the ones mentioned here are those that particularly stood out for me from an exceptionally high general level. For the sake of convenience, I have divided the 15 years into three five-year blocks. If these were the three acts of an opera, it would be a decidedly tragic one, with Covid-19 providing the peripeteia in the final act. But I get ahead of myself. Let's start with the good old days and work our way slowly towards that fateful final act.

ACT ONE: THE HALCYON DAYS

The celebratory 110th season of the WMCT marked the first sold-out season for quite some time and it ushered in five years of capacity audiences. Emmy Homburger, in her final season as the WMCT President, also served as co-artistic director for the season along with her husband, the outstanding concert promoter and manager Walter Homburger. The overall planning for the 110th season was undertaken by an ad hoc committee that was chaired by WMCT Past President Danuta Buczynski. For this one season, the number of recitals was increased from five to six. The higher number and the outstanding calibre of the performers appearing this season increased the budget for artists' fees by 100%; the increased costs were met by individual donations and assistance from the WMCT Foundation.

Two of the artists appearing for the 110th season, the violinist James Ehnes, and the St. Lawrence String Quartet, had appeared 15 years earlier during the WMCT's 95th season, near the start of their careers. In the interim they had become celebrated international stars, the SLSQ based now in Stanford University and Ehnes living in Florida. Walter Homburger had come out of retirement to manage Ehnes's career. Incidentally, Walter told me that Ehnes is not only an outstanding violinist but also an excellent pianist and has played Mozart and Shostakovich piano concertos with orchestra. For the WMCT he appeared in recital (on violin) with the

local pianist Stewart Goodyear, another remarkable musician who was a child prodigy as both a pianist and a composer. I used to play in the Mississauga Symphony under John Barnum, and I recall that Goodyear guested with us as a youngster (he was about twelve years old) in a piano concerto that he himself had written. Goodyear was commissioned by the WMCT to compose a new work for the Club's 110th anniversary season.

The unforgettable moment of that season for me, though, was Ehnes's performance of the Bach *Chaconne* for solo violin. He made this demanding work sound completely effortless, and for the entire 15 minutes of the performance time stood still and the spirit of Bach filled the hall. Ehnes would perform the *Chaconne* again in the special Koerner Hall recital for the 115th anniversary of the WMCT, a performance that is available on the CBC YouTube channel.⁴ That YouTube video has been viewed half a million times to date and has attracted hundreds of comments, every one of them admiring how stunning and flawless Ehnes's performance is. All quite true, but for me the 2007 performance was, if possible, *even better*.

The Beaux Arts Trio appeared that season during its farewell tour after a career that had lasted 52 years. Menahem Pressler was the pianist throughout that entire time; for the farewell tour, the other members were the cellist Antônio Meneses and the violinist Daniel Hope. The program included two stellar works from the piano trio repertoire, Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio, and Schubert's Trio in E-flat major. For me, once again, the violinist was the standout. I confess that as a (former) violinist myself, I am always most interested in my own instrument, so I may be biased. But from the moment Hope's bow touched the strings, his music making was simply transcendent, drawing the audience straight into the music from start to finish. More recently, Hope brought comfort to millions of viewers with his "Hope@Home" series of online concerts from his home in Berlin during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It seems that no WMCT season is complete without at least one major unexpected twist, as noted in the previous chapter. For the 110th season, it was the recital by Karina Gauvin, who had won the WMCT's Career Development Award in 1994. She was to have appeared in a duet recital with the contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux, but Lemieux had to cancel after having sinus surgery. Gauvin quickly prepared a new solo recital

for the February 7, 2008 concert date, but was then unable to travel to Toronto due to a major snowstorm. The concert was rescheduled for May 8, 2008, in Isabel Bader Theatre, as Walter Hall was not available, and it took place without any further complications, at least none that I am aware of.

Julia Smith became the new WMCT President beginning with the 111th season in 2008. Once again, the entire series was essentially sold out: Walter Hall has 496 seats and there were 485 subscriber members. The season featured its fair share of novelty, notably the flamboyant early music ensemble Red Priest, which offered a varied recital titled "Pirates of the Baroque: Stolen Masterworks and Long-Lost Jewels," with the four musicians (recorder, violin, cello, harpsichord) dressed up like pirates (minus the eye patches). The WMCT tradition of featuring the most recent winner of the Banff International String Quartet Competition brought the Tinalley String Quartet from Australia, appearing on this occasion with the German pianist Hinrich Alpers, who had won Calgary's Honens Piano Competition in 2007. The Adaskin String Trio brought along an oboe player, Thomas Gallant, which offered the rare chance to hear oboe quartets by Mozart and his contemporary Josef Fiala.

During the 112th season, the WMCT trademarked the name *Music in the Afternoon* for its concert series. The name had been in use since immediately after the centennial season, but now became the official property of the WMCT. The highlight of the season was the recital by the Toronto soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian, accompanied by her husband Serouj Kradjian, in the recently opened Koerner Hall on February 25, 2010. Bayrakdarian had come to the music world's attention when, as a fourth-year engineering student at the University of Toronto, she had won the Metropolitan Opera's National Council Auditions in 1997, resulting in an abrupt shift in her career plans. It was a big step up for the WMCT to present a concert in the 1,135-seat Koerner Hall rather than the much smaller Walter Hall, but it rose to the challenge and the recital was sold out. On top of the recital itself, the event was also notable for the witty and engaging *Tuning Your Mind* talk by the inimitable vocal coach, collaborative pianist, and opera producer Stuart Hamilton. His death in 2017 was keenly felt by all who love the vocal arts. Among the other artists

appearing that season were the Penderecki String Quartet, with former member Simon Fryer as second cellist in the Schubert String Quintet, and the Canadian pianist Janina Fialkowska, in a program marking the 200th anniversary of the births of Schumann and Chopin.

The 113th season saw two of the WMCT's Great Women step down from the board; Emmy Homburger and Betty Gray. Both continued to be involved with the WMCT in various capacities, but not on the board. Betty had been a member of the Club for 22 years, including a term as President from 1995 to 1997, when *Counterpoint to a City* was being written. She hired Susan Corrigan as the WMCT's part-time professional arts administrator, set up the student outreach program, and initiated the popular annual "fun-raising" lunches at the end of each season at the Donald Club. Both Emmy and Betty had worked extremely hard as passionate volunteers for the WMCT, and they left the Club in much better shape than they found it.

The season was virtually sold out once again, with 480 subscribers. The memorable concert for me this season was one that I had not been expecting to enjoy. The Canadian baritone Russell Braun appeared with the Pentaèdre Wind Quintet from Montreal and accordionist Joseph Petric in an arrangement of Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* by Normand Forget, the quintet's oboist. I had my doubts about hearing Schubert's piano accompaniment tinkered with (the vocal line is not altered), and on top of that Forget rearranged the order of the songs, to follow the poet Wilhelm Müller's, rather than Schubert's, ordering of the texts. In the event, I was completely won over by Forget's concept right from the start; the haunting quality of the cycle is beautifully captured by the austere wind sonorities, and the wheezing accordion ostinato in the final song, "Der Leiermann" (The Hurdy-Gurdy Man), provided a totally apt and positively heart-breaking conclusion. The same instrumental forces, along with the noted German lyric tenor Christoph Prégardien, recorded the arrangement for Montreal's ATMA Classique label in 2007 (ACD2 2546) to positive reviews.

Another warmly received work this season was one commissioned by the WMCT: Timothy Corlis's *Raven and the First Men* for clarinet and string quartet, which was inspired by and featured projections of sculptures by the Haida artist Bill Reid. It was premiered by James Campbell

with the New Zealand String Quartet and met with an enthusiastic standing ovation. The same program included a second premiere, *Time Revisited* for clarinet and piano by the Canadian composer, clarinetist, and jazz legend Phil Nimmons, written as a memorial tribute to his late wife of 52 years, Noreen Liese Spencer-Nimmons (1931–2002), a classical pianist and educator. This recital was preceded by yet another one of those unexpected twists: a burst pipe in the ceiling of Walter Hall flooded a section of the auditorium, rendering 42 of the seats unusable. The WMCT took this in its stride and the show went on, starting 10 minutes late but otherwise unaffected by the plumbing problems.

Membership numbers dropped slightly during the 114th season, to 465 subscribers. The season opened with the Weilerstein Trio, which consists of husband-and-wife Donald and Vivian Weilerstein on violin and piano respectively, and their daughter Alisa on cello. A child prodigy, Alisa first performed publicly with her parents in the trio in 1988 when she was six years old. There was added interest in the WMCT recital when, just days before it took place on September 28, 2011, Alisa received a MacArthur Fellowship, frequently referred to as the "Genius Grant". Two years later Alisa married Rafael Payare, who was named as the new conductor of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra in 2021.

Simon Fryer returned to the WMCT stage in October 2011 with the flutist Robert Aitken to premiere another WMCT commission, *Sonatine* for flute and cello by the McGill University composer Chris Paul Harman. The biggest demand for tickets this season was for the recital by the Toronto soprano Adrienne Pieczonka, a graduate of the University of Toronto Opera School who was at the height of her career as an international opera superstar. The season ended with the latest Banff International String Quartet laureates, the Canadian all-woman ensemble the Cecilia String Quartet. The Cecilia enjoyed a highly successful career during the eight years it was in existence, releasing four CDs on the Analekta label and encouraging women composers with its Celebrating Canadian Women in Music project, but unfortunately it disbanded in 2018.

A survey of WMCT members was given out at the Pieczonka recital in December 2011. There was a 70% response rate, so the results can be

regarded as statistically valid. Of the 300 people who completed the survey, 54% had been a member of the WMCT for six years or more, and 82% were female. So, as of 2011, the WMCT remained very much a women's club, though of course it is open to everyone. The season ended on a high note financially when the WMCT received a generous six-figure bequest from the estate of Miriam and Irving Steinberg.

ACT TWO: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

There was a changing of the guard to begin the 115th season when Annette Sanger succeeded Julia Smith as the President of the WMCT. The next five years would be a period of stability on the whole, though marked by a slow decline in membership numbers from a high of 485 in 2008 to a total of 365 during the 2016–17 season. In the context of the WMCT's 125 years of concert giving activity, such fluctuations in numbers are the norm and not necessarily a matter of deep concern. It is unlikely, at least for the foreseeable future and as long as Walter Hall remains the WMCT's regular concert venue, that the Club will ever reach the membership numbers that it enjoyed in the mid-1960s, when there were over 1,000 subscribers. But the Club's regular venue then was the 1,275-seat Eaton Auditorium; 1,000 subscribers represented less than 80% of the hall's capacity. By that measure, 365 subscribers in Walter Hall represents almost 75% capacity.

The opening concert of the 115th season attracted much interest; it was the Toronto debut of the English pianist Paul Lewis, who had just turned 40. He is renowned for his performances of Beethoven and Schubert; for the WMCT he played Schubert's three late piano sonatas, and certainly lived up to his advance billing. Writing in the *Globe and Mail*, the music critic Robert Harris called Lewis "the thinking person's pianist" and opened his review as follows: "Toronto finally got a chance to experience what the rest of the musical world has known for some time—that British pianist Paul Lewis is one of the great artists of his generation. And it's not the Toronto Symphony or Koerner Hall we can thank for this revelation, but the Women's Musical Club of Toronto, now in its 115th season."⁵ It was a coup for the WMCT to be able to present Lewis, and he provided a memorable afternoon to be sure.

Making their Canadian debut that season was the Tippett Quartet from



Fig. 1: Koerner Hall concert, May 2, 2013. James Ehnes, Ruth Ann Onley, The Honourable David Onley, Carolyn Maule, Russell Braun.

Britain. The novelty on their program was a string quartet arrangement of Bernard Herrmann's score for the Alfred Hitchcock film *Psycho* (1960), which Norma Herrmann, Bernard's widow, had granted them permission to make and perform in 2011 to mark the centenary of the composer's birth. The celebratory event of the season was the Koerner Hall recital on May 2, 2013, featuring James Ehnes and Russell Braun, with Braun's wife Carolyn Maule on piano. There was a good turnout (960 tickets were sold), and Lieutenant Governor David C. Onley attended with his wife Ruth Ann Onley. The composer John Estacio was there for the first performance of his song cycle *Away and Awake in the Night*, a set of three songs for baritone, violin, and piano to texts by his regular librettist John Murrell. The new song cycle's theme of desire for an absent beloved made it a nice companion piece to Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved), which was also on the program. In addition to his repeat performance of the Bach *Chaconne*, Ehnes played three Paganini caprices for solo violin, further showcasing his stunning technique and musicality.⁶ The summary verdict of the music critic John Terauds was that "this was one of the great recitals of the season"⁷ and I am sure that all who were present would agree.

The 116th season featured three and a half concerts by Canadian or Canadian-based musicians. The "half" was provided by the pianist Lucille



Fig. 2: WMCT Presidents meeting, April 23, 2014. Emmy Homburger, Annette Sanger, Julia Smith, Françoise Sutton, Hanna Feuerriegel, Susan V. Corrigan (Arts Administrator), Isabel Jackson, Esther McNeil, Danuta Buczynski, Betty Gray.

Chung, who was born in Montreal and performs with her Italian husband Alessio Bax as a piano duo. Included on their WMCT recital were works by Stravinsky and Piazzolla that they had just recorded for their debut CD on the Signum Classics label, which was released shortly after their Toronto appearance.⁸ The second concert featured early music specialists from Montreal, the soprano Suzie LeBlanc and Les Voix humaines viol ensemble. In addition to a variety of early music selections, they also played new music, including the premiere of *After Simpson* by John Beckwith. The Simpson in Beckwith's title is the English composer Christopher Simpson, author of an instructional book titled *The Division-viol* (1665). Beckwith read Simpson's book and then wrote his piece for two recorders and two viola da gambas inspired by Simpson's example. "I tried to do something rather in the way Simpson went about writing," Beckwith explained to John Terauds. This involved writing a piece with a distinct theme followed by variations (which Simpson called divisions), where the theme is broken down into shorter notes, "almost like a raga" in Beckwith's words.⁹

The season featured two Career Development Award winners. Recorder player Vincent Lauzer, winner of the 2012 CDA, appeared with harpsichord and a quartet of Baroque string instrumentalists in a recital



Fig. 3: Fundraising concert at Integral House, May 4, 2014. Fred and Hanna Feuerriegel, with Annette Sanger.

of Baroque and contemporary music. The cellist Yegor Dyachkov, who had won the CDA in 2000 and had appeared in a WMCT recital in 2002, returned and, as on the previous occasion, played Beethoven's Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69. His program in 2014 also included the first performance of *Atonement* for solo cello by the University of Toronto composer Christos Hatzis, a work commissioned by the WMCT.¹⁰ The title derives from the fact that Hatzis began writing it in 2012 on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.

Two unique events closed the 116th season. On April 23, 2014, there was a "Presidential Summit" when nine WMCT presidents got together at the home of Esther McNeil. The gathering represented more than 40 years of WMCT history. The presidents who attended, in chronological order of their presidency, were Françoise Sutton (1971–73), Isabel Jackson (1979–81), Hanna Feuerriegel (1985–87), Esther McNeil (1991–93 and 1997–98), Betty Gray (1995–97), Danuta Buczynski (2001–05), Emmy Homburger (2005–08), Julia Smith (2008–12), and Annette Sanger (2012–15). Over lunch the women enjoyed a robust discussion about WMCT history and lore. Just eleven days later, on May 4, 2014, the soprano Shannon Mercer (CDA winner, 2006) with the collaborative pianist Steven Philcox gave a recital to raise funds for the upcoming tenth Career Development Award. The event was held at the stunning Integral House, built for the



Fig. 4: Integral House stage, May 4, 2014.

mathematician and musician James Stewart. Integral House is one of the most significant private homes in North America, celebrated for its unique architectural features; it includes a two-storey performance space with curved windows overlooking the Rosedale ravine. Stewart had been diagnosed with the myeloma cancer that would lead to his death later that year, but he kindly allowed the recital to go ahead as planned; it raised \$11,600 in support of the next CDA.

Susan Corrigan resigned after 19 years as the WMCT's arts administrator at the end of the season. She did not abandon the Club altogether, however; she joined the WMCT Foundation board and has continued to assist with various matters, including the preparation of this update to the Club's history. Neva Peykova was chosen to succeed her.

In her President's Report for the 117th season, Annette Sanger offered some interesting reflections about WMCT operations that are worth quoting in full here:

Sometimes I ask myself how five two-hour concerts can generate so much work, but I can assure you they do! Here are just a few examples

of the many tasks in the past year: selecting and securing performers; preparing publicity materials; dealing with memberships, single ticket sales and subscriber donations; mailing out materials; preparing the bi-annual newsletter, website concert reviews and blog to keep in touch with members; developing annual budgets and regularly updated financial statements; applying for grants; contacting more than 100 high schools in the GTA as part of our student outreach program; and coordinating a large group of helpers for "front of house" at our concerts. Thanks to a veritable army of dedicated and hard-working volunteers, the WMCT continues to do all this (and more) every year with just one paid part-time administrator. Much has changed during the 117-year history of the Club, but the high quality of our concerts and the importance of volunteers continue to endure—long may they both last!¹¹

Annette does not mention in her list the extra work that is entailed in dealing with unexpected twists and turns that every season offers; a prime qualification for those seeking the WMCT presidency should be training in emergency management! This was Annette's final year as the President of the WMCT before handing over the reins to Diane Martello.

The 117th season offered a succession of standout concerts. The first was the local debut of the Dover Quartet, which did not just win the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2013, it swept *all* of the four top prizes. On the evidence of their WMCT recital, it was clear to see why. As I noted in my review, "this was a performance to treasure; the maturity of the music making completely belied the youthfulness of the players."¹² Two standards of the string quartet repertoire, Haydn's Op. 76, no. 1, and Beethoven's Op. 127, surrounded an intriguing recent work titled *Terra memoria* (2006) by the Finnish-born composer Kaija Saariaho, who lives in Paris. The conclusion of the Beethoven quartet was met by an enthusiastic standing ovation; I clearly recall the excitement that the electrifying performances by the Dover Quartet generated. This was chamber music performance at the very highest level.

Another exceptional concert, on March 12th, 2015, was completely different in nature, but equally memorable. The Canadian trumpet virtuoso Jens Lindemann, who lives in Los Angeles, offered ten selections ranging

across classical and jazz idioms, accompanied by his wife Jennifer Snow on piano for the classical selections, and a jazz trio (piano, bass, drum set) in the other works. A true showman in the best sense of that word, Lindemann interspersed his playing with impromptu spoken remarks that were by turns hilarious and deeply poignant (the latter when he touchingly dedicated his performance of “Fragile” by Sting to the memory of Joan Watson, the former Toronto Symphony and Canadian Opera Company Orchestra French horn player who had died that very morning). He played on a variety of gold-plated Yamaha trumpets (including a piccolo trumpet and flugelhorn), and on his signature blue trumpet, famous for its remarkably sharp and piercing tone. Lindemann’s ability to switch between instruments and idioms on the fly without missing a beat was truly remarkable. This was music making of a very special order.

Lindemann’s recital was the first time in 117 years that jazz had been featured in a WMCT concert, and it caught the Club a little off guard. Diane Martello relates the story: “Of course we all know that pianists do not arrive with their own instrument, but did you know that jazz drummers don’t either? We sure didn’t! They bring their sticks and cymbals only. When not in use, the Faculty of Music’s very best jazz drum kit is kept chained to the wall inside a locked room. Only two people have both keys! Fortunately, the drums were available that day. Doors and padlocks were unlocked, student movers were engaged, and the show went on to multiple standing ovations.”¹³ One more reason why Walter Hall is an ideal venue for the WMCT: it is in the same building as a fully equipped Faculty of Music!

The season closed with Ensemble Made in Canada, a professional piano quartet with close ties to the WMCT, as the violist Sharon Wei pointed out in brief spoken remarks before the recital began: the pianist Angela Park, the violinist Elissa Lee, and the cellist Rachel Mercer all had won scholarships from the WMCT early in their careers. The composer of the commissioned work for that recital, Christopher Mayo, also enjoys a tie to the WMCT: his father, John Mayo, has supplied the excellent program notes for the Club since 2003. John explained to me that it was not his doing that Christopher was commissioned; the initiative came from Simon Fryer. In his *Tuning Your Mind* pre-concert talk, Christopher

offered an overview of his compositional style and an introduction to the new work, *Twentieth-Century Ikon*, which was inspired by a set of nine pencil sketches by the British artist Bob Law. As I noted in my review, “The sound palette was very imaginative and sophisticated, ranging from sharp, stabbing vertical sonorities to whispered tremolo figures. The work was given a compelling, committed performance.”¹⁴

Also taking place during the 117th season was the WMCT’s tenth Career Development Award. Unlike previous iterations of the CDA, which had been decided in private by a jury listening to recordings, this time the three finalists were invited to give a joint recital in Walter Hall on April 26th, 2015, to which the public was invited; the young musicians were competing for a total of \$35,000 in prize money. The event was hosted by Julie Nesrallah of the CBC (and was subsequently broadcast on CBC Radio 2) and the jury consisted of the pianist Midori Koga, the cellist Winona Zelenka, and the conductor Kerry Stratton. The finalists were the pianists Charles Richard-Hamelin and Pierre-André Doucet and the cellist Stéphane Tétreault, all of them based in Montreal. Richard-Hamelin won the top prize of \$20,000 and an appearance in a forthcoming WMCT concert; Tétreault received the second prize of \$10,000 and Doucet took home the \$5,000 third prize. All three have gone on to significant professional careers in music, and indeed Hamelin came to widespread international attention later that same year when he won the silver medal at the XVII International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw in October 2015.

The 118th season opened with a recital featuring the harpist Caroline Léonardelli, who was born in France and studied at the Paris Conservatoire but then moved to Canada to study at McGill University, and subsequently



Fig. 5: WMCT program notes writer John Mayo with his son Chris, WMCT’s commissioned composer in the 117th season.

settled in Ottawa. Harp recitals are not all that common compared to, for instance, piano recitals, but in fact the harp is no stranger to the WMCT: it has made numerous appearances in Club concerts over the years, and the great French harp innovator Carlos Salzedo even played a recital for the Club in 1925. On Léonardelli's program was music by three French harpists who were contemporaries of Salzedo and, like him, composed works for the harp to help fill out its concert repertoire: Marcel Grandjany, Henriette Rénié, and Marcel Tournier. Also appearing on this program was the Afiara String Quartet, which had placed second to the Cecilia String Quartet in the 2010 Banff International String Quartet Competition.

Making a return appearance this season was the Daedalus String Quartet, whose debut with the WMCT came in 2002 after winning the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2001. There were two new members in the quartet for the 2016 appearance, and this time they were joined by the Quebecoise clarinetist Romie de Guise-Langlois, for two works, *Tuireadh* (Lament), written in 1991 by the Scottish composer James MacMillan, and Brahms's autumnal, bittersweet Clarinet Quintet. MacMillan, who had been knighted the previous year (2015) for his services to music, was in Toronto for this occasion, having been invited by Soundstreams.

The next concert, a mixed program by the Toronto violist Steven Dann with family and friends, also called for a drum set, but this time around the WMCT was not caught off guard! "Dannthology" was the title of the recital, which featured Dann's sons Nico (percussion) and Lucas (piano), daughter Robin (mezzo-soprano), and daughter-in-law Ilana Zarankin (soprano, married to Nico) along with friends Joel Quarrington (bass) and James Parker (piano). Like Lindemann, Dann gave amusing and informative impromptu introductions to each work on the varied program, noting that the last time he had given a solo recital in Walter Hall was 40 years earlier, for his BMUS graduating recital in 1977! The Canadian composer Zosha Di Castri was commissioned by the WMCT to write a new work, titled *Near Mute Force*, the only one on the program featuring all of the Dann family members; the entire "Dann clan" as she noted. The varied program was tied together by the older Dann's superlative music making; he is truly one of the great violists of his generation.

In addition to support from a host of donors, the WMCT Foundation, and the Toronto Arts Council, the WMCT received a generous bequest this season from the estate of Pat Brodie. This was put to use to fund the Club's first-ever formal strategic planning exercise, undertaken by Carey Suleiman's firm *C.S. Arts Consulting* and completed in 2016.

The 119th season opened in October 2016 with a recital by the US tenor Issachah Savage, who had made his much-praised local stage debut as Siegmund in the Canadian Opera Company production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* the previous year. His program included Schumann's superb song cycle *Dichterliebe* (A Poet's Love) and ended with three spirituals, the first one sung unaccompanied. The audience adored Savage and rewarded the recital with an enthusiastic standing ovation.

The next recital featured the Canadian French horn player James Sommerville, who had been appointed as the principal horn of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1998. He was accompanied by the Toronto pianist Peter Longworth in his fifth and sadly last appearance with the WMCT before his untimely death from kidney cancer two years later.¹⁵ The violinist Scott St. John joined in for horn trios by Vivian Fung (*Bounce*, a WMCT commission) and Brahms. The *Tuning Your Mind* lecture, one of the very best in the 20 years I have been organizing those talks, was about the Brahms Horn Trio and was given by Ryan McClelland, a University of Toronto music theorist and Brahms specialist. It was a deeply insightful and very moving lecture that shed light on the fascinating deeper levels of meaning that this work had for the composer, especially in regard to his relationship with his mother, who died just before Brahms began work on the trio. Ryan explained the autobiographical significance of the musical quotations that are embedded in the work and shared moving details from a long-suppressed letter that Brahms wrote to his mother in the final week of her life. I was so taken with the talk that I asked Ryan for a copy of it; I was even more impressed to learn that he had improvised the tightly organized and beautifully expressed lecture on the spot from a single page of brief notes.

The 119th season concluded with Charles Richard-Hamelin's recital as part of his CDA first-prize package. Richard-Hamelin's career had



Fig. 6: 2015 CDA winner, Charles Richard-Hamelin's performance on May 4, 2017.

Richard-Hamelin's affable manner and modest stage demeanor, coupled with his sterling technique and musicality, won over the audience completely. In touching remarks that he gave at the reception after the recital in the Geiger Torel Room of the Edward Johnson Building, Richard-Hamelin thanked the WMCT for its support and related how important the CDA win had been to him in his career trajectory.



Fig. 7: WMCT office moving day in March 2017 with Diane Martello, Shannon Perreault and Jerri Merritt-Jones.

taken off since winning the silver medal at the Chopin Competition in Warsaw in October 2015, as runner-up to the South Korean pianist Seong-Jin Cho. His sold-out WMCT recital featured a generous selection of Chopin impromptus and mazurkas, as well as music by Mozart, Schumann, and Arno Babajanian, a Soviet Armenian composer and protégé of his older and better-known mentor Aram Khachaturian.

A flurry of administrative developments took place this season. Neva Peykova left her position as arts administrator and was replaced by Shannon Perreault; among Shannon's first duties was to deal with the move of the WMCT administrative office in March 2017 from 56 The Esplanade to 59 Adelaide Street East, where it shared rented space with the National Youth Orchestra of

Canada. The Strategic Plan crafted by *C.S. Arts Consultants* had been received in August 2016 and it included a number of recommendations, and the following cogent vision statement for the Club: "To present an annual series of world-class chamber music concerts that includes both well-established international and Canadian performers, as well as exceptional musicians on the threshold of their careers. To nurture the development of young talent by providing scholarships and hosting the Career Development Award every three years."

As part of the strategic planning process, The Connected Brand was hired to advise on a new marketing plan. This in turn led to a renewed emphasis on the *Music in the Afternoon* title for the concert series; associations with the phrase "Women's Club" were felt by some to be old-fashioned and to present barriers to inclusion. In March 2017 a colorful new logo for the *Music in the Afternoon* concert series was unveiled, which combined a brightly coloured stylized treble clef tilted to the left side, with a deep blue circle sending out rays of light on the right. The online presence of the WMCT was increased, with a more active Facebook page, a new Twitter account (with the Twitter handle @WMCT120) and more website content, with the informative *News & Notes* newsletter posted there. It was a delicate balancing act to update the operations of the WMCT to appeal to a new, younger audience, without alienating the core membership, which remains predominantly retired women over the age of 70 (who account for 75% of the WMCT demographic, according to the strategic plan survey). Given the decline in membership numbers over the preceding five years, though, some action was clearly necessary. Little could the WMCT leadership know that the Club would be put to its severest test in the near future...



Fig. 8: Diane Martello and Danuta Buczynski at the 2017 AGM.

ACT THREE: THE STORM CLOUDS GATHER

The 120th anniversary season of the WMCT marked Simon Fryer's tenth year as the Artistic Director, and to celebrate the occasion he was joined by seven other cellist friends in the final concert of the season. A new partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship gifted 52 new Canadians with free tickets to the spring concerts. In March 2018 four scholarship winners presented a free concert in Verity, a private downtown Toronto women's club that may not have been on many members' radar before this event. Student ushers were hired to help members with mobility issues find suitable seats in Walter Hall, not always an easy task in a small hall with general admission seating. And finally, the 11th Career Development Award took place this season, with an exceptionally strong field of ten candidates.

The season opened on October 5, 2017, with a recital by Lara St. John, whose brother Scott St. John had appeared three times previously with the WMCT. Lara was a child prodigy who began playing the violin at two (yes two!), debuted as a soloist with orchestra at four, toured Europe from the age of 10, and entered the prestigious Curtis Institute at 13. Accompanied by the jazz pianist Matt Herskowitz, Lara presented a highly idiosyncratic performance of Franck's famous Violin Sonata in the first half. The second half featured selections from her CD *Shiksa* (2015), complete with video projections. The album had been released on the label Ancalagon, which she founded in 1999 to allow her to have complete artistic control over her recordings. The large audience, including students from the R.H. King Academy in Scarborough, gave the performers an enthusiastic standing ovation.

Next up was the Zodiac Trio from New York, with violin, clarinet and piano; it was the first time this combination of instruments had been heard in the 120 seasons of the WMCT. The recital ended with the most famous work for this configuration, Bartók's *Contrasts*, written in 1938 for Benny Goodman. The other six works were arrangements, lesser-known works, and a new work written for the Zodiac Trio by the Montreal composer Nicolas Gilbert. For an encore, the group offered a brand new (just two days old, according to the clarinetist) and completely over-the-top arrangement of the song "House of the



Fig. 9: Soprano, Sylvia Schwartz with new Canadians and students from Pearson Collegiate Institute, April 12, 2018.

Rising Sun," which was greeted by a standing ovation and thunderous applause.

The Spanish soprano Sylvia Schwartz appeared in her Toronto debut with a recital of German and Spanish language songs on April 12, 2018. Despite freezing rain that day, Walter Hall was full. The knowledgeable music critic Joseph So wrote that Schwartz was "terrific, with great attention to textual nuance, the changes of moods handled beautifully. Also impressive was the technical control of her instrument, with the most exquisite pianissimos one is likely to hear today".¹⁶ Schwartz was indeed brilliant, but I have to admit that for me, the highlight was Steven Philcox's *Tuning Your Mind* lecture. It was titled "The Art of the Collaborative Pianist" but was actually a stirring account of his musical development and career trajectory, from his youth in British Columbia to graduate studies at Manhattan School of Music and his work at the Canadian Opera Company and the University of Toronto. He gave wonderfully insightful vignettes of famous musicians he has worked with over the years and offered a touching account of his education in music and in life. I entreated him to publish his talk, to no avail. Perhaps one day...

Cellodrama! was the title of the season finale, which provided a rare occasion to enjoy works for multiple cellos, one of my favorite musical mediums; on this occasion the program featured works for one, two, four, and eight cellists. One of the works was with piano (a fun arrangement



Fig. 11: Eight cellists and soprano Shannon Mercer performing at CelloDrama!, May 3, 2018.

of the song *Bohemian Rhapsody*, with Gordon Gerrard on piano) and one was with soprano (Villa Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5, with the indispensable Shannon Mercer). The drama implied by the CelloDrama! title unfolded offstage as well as onstage. Ariel Barnes from Vancouver was appointed principal cello of the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra just two months before the WMCT concert, but he managed to fly back



Fig. 10: Simon Fryer with WMCT commissioned composer Kelly-Marie Murphy after the CelloDrama! concert on May 3, 2018.

to Canada just in time. Of the eight cellists that were originally scheduled to perform, however, three ended up not being able to play the recital. Two cellists gave advance notice and were replaced ahead of time, but one had to cancel at the last minute for health reasons; Alice Kim, one of Simon's former students, stepped in and learned the music with only a few days' notice. This was no walk in the park, as

one of the works on the program that featured all eight cellists was newly commissioned by the WMCT for the event: Kelly-Marie Murphy's *Coffee Will be Served in the Living Room*. Murphy's octet was inspired by an incident from the life of the artist Jackson Pollock and won the Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music from the Canada Council for the Arts in 2020.

The 11th Career Development Award in 2018 was funded by the WMCT Foundation and was carried out in partnership with the CBC. Five jurors evaluated audio and written materials from ten finalists. Among the ten musicians who had been invited to apply for the award were the violinist Timothy Chooi, who later that year became the first Canadian ever to win the International Joseph Joachim Violin Competition (with a €50,000 prize); the cellist Cameron Crozman, who released his debut recording in 2019, won the Canada Council's Virginia Parker Prize (\$25,000) in 2021, and appeared in recital with the WMCT in 2022; and Emily D'Angelo, who made her Met debut in 2018 and in 2021 signed a recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. The winner of the \$20,000 prize was the Toronto-born violinist Blake Pouliot who, also in 2018, was awarded the loan for six years of a 1729 Guarneri del Gesu violin from the Canada Council's Musical Instrument Bank that had previously been used by Timothy Chooi. The achievements of all



Fig. 12: 2018 CDA winner Blake Pouliot with Annette Sanger (CDA Chair) and Alison Howard (CBC liaison) at a reception on April 18, 2018.

ten musicians provided an indication of the extraordinarily high level of classical music performance in Canada.

The 121st anniversary season began with another unusual chamber music group, the Poulenc Trio from New York (oboe, bassoon, and piano), in its Toronto debut. As with the clarinet, violin, and piano ensemble, there is only one well known work for this grouping, and it is by Poulenc, hence this group's name. Given that there is only one "name brand" composition for this combination of instruments, the trio fills out its programs with arrangements and newly commissioned works. As was becoming something of a trend for the WMCT, the newest work on the program, *Trains of Thought* by the US composer Viet Cuong (b. 1990), was accompanied by projections; in this case a whimsical animated film created by the artists Elizabeth and Alden Phelps. It was an entertaining recital and made one wonder why more composers have not been attracted to this combination of instruments, which after all is the double-reed equivalent to the standard piano trio instrumentation of violin, cello, and piano.

The second recital introduced an innovation: it was the first time that surtitles were used in a WMCT concert. This was the Toronto debut of the Dutch baritone Thomas Oliemans, with the pianist Malcolm Martineau (who is Scottish, despite his French surname). The program consisted of Brahms's *Romanzen*, a setting of 15 poems from Ludwig Tieck's tale about the lovely Magelone, daughter of the King of Naples, and Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Op. 39, a setting of 12 poems from Joseph von Eichendorff's collection *Intermezzo* (including "Mondnacht," one of Schumann's most celebrated songs). In an interesting experiment, Oliemans interleaved the two works together. Taking his cue from the fact that Brahms published his work in five volumes of three songs each, in this recital each volume of three songs by Brahms was followed by three songs from Schumann's Op. 39. With 27 songs and a great deal of text, it was the ideal occasion to inaugurate the use of surtitles, supplied on this occasion by Emilie Gelinás. The experiment was a great success, and the recital received an appreciative review by Joseph So for the Ludwig van Toronto website.¹⁷

The remaining recitals that season included the Canadian double bass virtuoso Joel Quarrington with friends (including Schubert's *Arpeggione* Sonata, which is done on cello and viola frequently, but works equally



Fig. 13: WMCT Scholarship winners Katherine Moffat, Frances Armstrong, Alex Hetherington, and Abigail Bachelor at the 2018 AGM.



Fig. 14: Thanking WMCT volunteers at the 2018 AGM.

well on bass when played by a virtuoso performer like Quarrington), the Canadian debut of the young Georgian pianist Mariam Batsashvili (b. Tbilisi, 1993), the first woman to win the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition in 2014, and the Rolston String Quartet of Canada, winners of the 2016 Banff International String Quartet Competition. The Rolstons played R. Murray Schafer's String Quartet No. 2, *Waves*; surprisingly, it was the first time for the WMCT to hear one of Schafer's 13 string quartets, which are the most important contribution to the medium by a Canadian composer.



Fig. 15: Receiving applause: Dominic Desautels and Liz Upchurch with Jane Archibald, soprano, November 14, 2019.

For what was to turn out to be the fateful 122nd season, Kathleen McMorrow took over as President from Diane Martello. The proceedings began normally enough in the fall of 2019, with a fine recital by Trio Fibonacci of Montreal (with the usual violin, cello, and piano grouping). Ontario Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell, a patron of the WMCT, attended the recital, which was greeted by yet another standing ovation after the concluding work on the program, Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio, Op. 70, no. 1. Next up was the Canadian soprano Jane Archibald in a wonderfully varied recital ranging chronologically from Purcell to Richard Strauss.

The first recital in the new year, by the Diotima Quartet of Paris on February 27, 2020, was greeted by bad weather (a cold, snowy day), and growing concerns about a mysterious disease that was believed to have originated in China. Nevertheless, life was still relatively normal. In his *Tuning Your Mind* talk before the concert, Simon Fryer revealed plans for the 123rd season. The Diotima Quartet gave a superb recital of works by Berg, Beethoven, and the Japanese composer Misato Mochizuki. Coffee, tea, and cookies were served during the intermission, there was a respectable turnout despite the bad weather, and Joseph So wrote an appreciative review in *Ludwig van Toronto*.¹⁸ Though we did not know it at the time, this was to be the last regular WMCT event for two years.

On March 17th, 2020, Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency, putting an end to all non-essential public activities in the province. The rest of the 122nd season went up in smoke and plans for the 123rd and 124th seasons would have to be continually revised on the fly.

On May 28th, 2020, the WMCT executive met on Zoom and made a number of decisions based on the situation in place at that time. Live concerts were to be postponed until June 2021 and the AGM would be held virtually in the fall of 2020. An online concert would be offered in November 2020, with the remaining concerts for the 123rd season offered to a limited audience in Walter Hall. At the time these seemed like drastic, overly cautious measures; in the event, they turned out to be wildly optimistic.

After lengthy negotiations, in the autumn of 2020 the University of Toronto allowed performances to take place in Walter Hall under two conditions: performers were to be masked (except for wind players, who of course cannot play with a mask on), and there was to be no audience. WMCT scholarship winners were announced in September and contributed videos rather than live performances. In October, the jury and the nine finalists for the 2021 Career Development Award were announced. In November, the accordionist Michael Bridge, along with the clarinetist Kornel Wolak and the cellist Amahl Arulanandam, gave a recital for the WMCT in Walter Hall that was livestreamed on the WMCT's new YouTube channel and doubled as one of the required recitals for his DMA degree (which assisted with the hall rental costs). The recital featured Anna Pidgorna's *Lekking Birds* for accordion, clarinet and cello, a new work commissioned by the WMCT. This was an intense period of coping with rapidly shifting regulations, learning how to use new technologies to enable virtual concerts, and improvising on the fly; in short, the new normal.

Covid-19 was not the only thing that caused a paradigm shift in 2020. The murder of George Floyd on May 25th that year led to widespread protests and anguished reflections about institutional racism not just in the United States, but around the world. The WMCT took a good hard look at its own policies and practices, and instituted a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee in July 2020. WMCT board members

attended an online workshop in January 2021 led by the consultant Renée Bazile-Jones of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion. The DEI committee, chaired by Annette Sanger, crafted a set of guidelines that were posted to the WMCT website in February 2021 and read as follows:

In consultation with the DEI Committee, the WMCT will:

1. Aim for diverse and under-represented communities to have equitable access to our concerts, awards and scholarships, and committee and board membership.
2. Aim for broader representation of equity-seeking groups among performers in *Music in the Afternoon* concerts.
3. Work towards ensuring our programs and decision-making are more inclusive and reflect the make-up of the Toronto community.

No further live concerts took place during the 123rd season, but the WMCT did somehow manage to put together a season of five concerts despite everything. The US pianist Eric Lu and the Viano (Banff laureates, 2019) and Rolston (Banff laureates, 2016) string quartets provided video performances, each about an hour long, that were made available on the WMCT YouTube channel during a two-week window. John Mayo created program notes on the fly, and the videos were viewed hundreds of times. Simon Fryer put together a grand finale to the virtual concerts in June 2021 with the cooperation and participation of nine Career Development Award winners, from the pianist Francine Kay, who won the first CDA in 1990, to Michael Bridge, the winner of the 2021 award. Each performer began with gracious and heartfelt remarks about the importance of the CDA to their career.

The challenges continued during the 124th season, as new variants of Covid-19 rolled forth in wave upon wave with dispiriting regularity. The season began in the fall of 2021 with the two concerts that were to have concluded the 122nd season before the pandemic intervened: the violinist Blake Pouliot, in a delayed celebration of his 2018 Career Development Award, and the percussionist Beverley Johnston with friends, in a recital that included the premiere of *Eagles* for percussion quartet, a new work by the percussionist and composer Russell Hartenberger

that was commissioned by the WMCT. Both concerts were livestreamed to online viewers from an otherwise empty Walter Hall and were subsequently broadcast on the CBC.

In December 2021, the provincial government allowed the reopening of performance venues, though with limited capacity audiences. The University of Toronto, however, continued to forbid the general public from entering the Edward Johnson Building,

and so the WMCT was forced to look to other venues to resume concert activity before live audiences. A committee was struck to consider the options, and it settled upon Grace Church on-the-Hill as the best available venue for the three planned Spring 2022 concerts. The facility rental fee was reasonable, there was a good piano and fine acoustics (though not great sightlines), and accessibility ramps were already in place. It was difficult to get to compared to Walter Hall, but the available venues were limited in number, and the decision was made to book the church.

The tenor Andrew Haji, with the collaborative pianist Stéphane Mayer, gave the first WMCT recital before a live audience in just over two years on March 3rd, 2022. The concert delivery was fourfold: in addition to the live audience, the event was livestreamed to an online audience, recorded for subsequent broadcast on CBC, and finally an edited version was posted to the WMCT's YouTube channel for a two-week period. The *Tuning Your Mind* lectures also returned, with a recorded presentation of Iain Scott interviewing Andrew Haji about his career. In the fourth concert of the season, the cellist Cameron Crozman with the collaborative pianist Philip Chiu presented a Spanish-themed program. The recital was



Fig. 16: Percussionist Beverley Johnston's concert, November 25, 2021.



Fig. 17: Tenor Andrew Haji with donor Nora Wilson and pianist Stephane Meyer, at Grace Church-on-the-Hill, March 3, 2022.

to have taken place on April 8th, 2022, but that date had to be changed for a happy reason: Crozman was offered a four-performance package deal in Paris at that time, so his WMCT recital was moved ahead to March 31st. The recital included the first performance of *Solastalgia*, commissioned by the WMCT for the occasion from the Alberta composer Allan Gordon Bell. On top of all the other improvising that the WMCT was having to do, a further curveball was thrown when the Meta4 quartet from Finland cancelled its North American tour on short notice. Fortunately, the Viano Quartet, which had supplied a video for the 123rd season, was available to appear at short notice in 3D. Their recital at Grace Church marked the resumption of the student outreach program and was attended by 50 appreciative students from Rosedale Heights School of the Arts.

It was quite a remarkable accomplishment that the WMCT was able to continue offering five high quality concerts per season throughout the disruptions, uncertainties, and despair of the ongoing pandemic. But success came at a cost, financial and otherwise. The increased financial burden of offering virtual concerts was only partially offset by government pandemic funding for the arts. The WMCT operated at a loss due to a drastic decline in subscription fees. Membership numbers plummeted to historic lows; by 2022 there were ca. 175 members, about half the pre-pandemic levels. Janet Murray took over as WMCT President from Kathleen McMorrow in

2022 and was immediately faced with the daunting task of rebuilding the Club in time to rescue the upcoming 125th anniversary season. There was at least one piece of good news to celebrate, though: Walter Hall would be open to live audiences again in the fall of 2022. As Simon Fryer noted at the conclusion of his report on the 124th season, “The light at the end of the tunnel began to shine and we moved towards it with alacrity!”¹⁹

Lieto Fine?

Those familiar with the conventions of opera will know that a *lieto fine* is the happy ending that is tacked on at the end of a libretto, no matter how direfully the plot might have been unfolding up to that point. This was characteristic of 18th-century opera in particular (*Don Giovanni* is a famous case in point), but the convention continued into the early 20th century, e.g., in Puccini’s *La fanciulla del West* (The Girl of the [Golden] West). As I write these words, the WMCT is half way through its 125th season and has returned to Walter Hall, giving concerts to live audiences and with *Tuning Your Mind* lectures in person. Planning is well underway for the 126th season. Has the hand of fate written a *lieto fine* for the WMCT?

On September 29th, 2022, the WMCT held its first in-person AGM since 2019 in the historic Arts and Letters Club building, which was built in 1891. The choice of venue was inspired; as Kathleen McMorrow points out in her report on the meeting, the WMCT had given its first evening



Fig. 18: Past and present Board members Julia Smith, Bonnie O’Dacre, and Jerri Merritt-Jones at the 2022 AGM.



Fig. 19: Accordionist and 2021 CDA winner Michael Bridge with mentor Joe Macerollo, October 6, 2022.

concert that was open to non-members in that same building in May 1899.²⁰ The building itself was thus a reassuring link with tradition and represents the dedication to timeless values and the sense of permanence that characterize the WMCT itself. At the AGM, business was transacted efficiently, a new slate of directors was elected (including Janet Murray as the new President), two scholarship winners presented stirring performances of violin sonatas by Beethoven and Fauré, and a light lunch was served afterwards. It certainly seemed like the beginning of a *lieto fine*.

In the first concert of the season, on October 6th, 2022, Michael Bridge returned to give a recital in celebration of his 2021 CDA success, this time with the Lodom Ensemble, of which he is a member along with the percussionist Adam Campbell, the cellist Beth Silver, and the pianist Pouya Hamidi. Bridge was also joined on stage by his teacher and mentor Joseph Macerollo for an accordion duo performance. Less than a month later, Michael successfully defended his DMA thesis at the University of Toronto, which was certainly a *lieto fine* for him! Next up, the Quatuor Despax from Gatineau played string quartets by Haydn and Ravel and then, joined by mentors Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt (formerly of the Dover Quartet) on viola and Brian Manker (of the Montreal Symphony and the New Orford String Quartet) on cello, they gave a ravishing performance of Schoenberg's sumptuous *Verklärte Nacht* for string sextet.

The sense of a *lieto fine* was tempered, however, by sparse attendance. Walter Hall looked to be only about half full for both concerts; it was



Fig. 20: Quatuor Despax with mentors Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and Brian Manker, November 17 2022.

certainly the smallest audience turn out that I have seen in 20 years of faithful attendance season after season. The jury is still out on the long-term effects of Covid-19. By this I do not mean long Covid-19, terrible though that is in itself, but rather the ongoing impact of the pandemic on people's mental health, social relations, and ability to return to ways of life that were in place before 2020. An editorial in *The Guardian* newspaper warns of a pandemic-induced "economic, political and social permacrisis."²¹ Will audiences slowly return to crowded halls? If so, will all groups experience this revival, or will some be left behind? The WMCT is in many respects in a fortunate position. The foresight and careful financial planning of Esther McNeil and her team that set up the WMCT Foundation has provided a buffer that allowed the Club to weather the pandemic crisis thus far. But membership levels below 200 are not sustainable in the long run; those numbers will need to see a substantial improvement before the sense of crisis recedes, and sooner rather than later. The WMCT has weathered many a crisis over the past 125 years and lived to see another day. The coming years will see if it can do so one more time.

In the meantime, like a wonderful *deus ex machina* in an operatic plot, on Tuesday, February 7, 2023, The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, hosted a reception at her suite in Queen's Park in honour of the Club's 125th anniversary.²² There were brief speeches from the Lieutenant Governor, and from President Janet Murray and Past President Kathleen McMorro of the WMCT, as well

as short performances by the talented clarinetist Isabella Czynnyj, the winner of the 2022–23 WMCT University of Toronto Graduate Fellowship, and by the superb accordionist Michael Bridge, in his third appearance for the Club within the space of just over two years. Despite the date, spring was in the air with sunny, mild weather; there was a good turnout of Club members, a constant buzz of engaged conversation, and a general feeling of good cheer in the stately Lieutenant Governor’s suite. Let us hope that it was a harbinger of the longed for *lieto fine* to the story of the Women’s Musical Club of Toronto.

1. Kathleen McMorrow, “From the President: music criticism and the WMCT,” *News & Notes* 60 (November 2019): 1.
2. Initially issued in print in 2003 by the WMCT, the publication was most recently updated in May 2022 and is now available as a free PDF download from <https://www.wmct.on.ca/wmct/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-05-25-Concert-History.pdf>.
3. Links (mostly intact although some are broken) to online reviews of past concerts are available on the WMCT website at <https://www.wmct.on.ca/concerts/past-seasons/reviews> (accessed 30 January 2023).
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjYQImpS69k>, accessed January 28, 2023. Ehnes has recorded Bach’s Six Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin twice, in 2001 on Analekta (AN 2 8772–3) and in 2021 on Onyx (ONYX 4288).
5. Robert Harris, “Paul Lewis: the thinking person’s pianist,” Toronto *Globe and Mail* (19 October 2012): online at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/music/paul-lewis-the-thinking-persons-pianist/article4623718/>.
6. Ehnes has recorded the Paganini 24 *Caprices* twice, for his very first commercial recording at age 20 in 1996 (Analekta CD-80398) and again in 2009 (ONYX 4044).
7. Ludwig van Toronto website, <https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2013/05/02/concert-review-james-ehnes-and-russell-braun-made-fine-115th-birthday-present-for-womens-musical-club-of-toronto/> (accessed 30 January 2023).
8. *Bax & Chung: Piano Duo* (Signum Classics SIGCD365), released on December 9, 2013. Bax writes charmingly about his long obsession with Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka* in “What’s next after *Petrouchka*?” *Huffington Post* (January 11, 2013): online at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/petrouchka_b_2459447.
9. John Terauds, “Issues: does consistent aesthetic trump bespoke composition? Just ask Toronto’s John Beckwith,” Ludwig van Toronto website (<https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2013/11/17/issues-does-consistent-aesthetic-trump-bespoke-composition-just-ask-torontos-john-beckwith/>), accessed January 30, 2023. John Beckwith enjoyed a long association with the WMCT, as noted in the “In Memoriam” chapter.
10. This performance of *Atonement* can be seen on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKkduxS7JiA>) and has been viewed over 5,000 times as of January 30, 2023.
11. Annette Sanger, “President’s Report,” *Women’s Musical Club of Toronto Annual Report 2014–15, 117th Anniversary Season*, (p. 1).

12. Robin Elliott, “The Dover Quartet flexes their brawn at the Women’s Musical Club of Toronto,” Ludwig van Toronto (November 14, 2014): online at <https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2014/11/14/review-the-dover-quartet-learns-how-to-win-over-toronto/>.
13. Diane Martello, “Back stage basics: ‘What drums?’,” WMCT website (<https://www.wmct.on.ca/tag/jens-lindemann/>), accessed on January 30, 2023.
14. Robin Elliott, “Scrutiny: Ensemble Made in Canada make homecoming at the WMCT,” Ludwig van Toronto website (<https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2015/05/08/scrutiny-ensemble-made-in-canada-make-homecoming-at-the-wmct/>), accessed 30 January 2023.
15. Hye Won Cecilia Lee wrote a lovely memorial of Longworth, with tributes from many of his friends and musical colleagues, for Ludwig van Toronto (<https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2018/06/29/in-memoriam-the-musical-life-of-peter-longworth-reflections-on-his-legacy/>), accessed 31 January 2023.
16. Joseph So, “Sylvia Schwartz offers exquisite vocalism in Toronto debut recital,” Ludwig van Toronto website (<https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2018/04/13/scrutiny-sylvia-schwartz-offers-exquisite-vocalism-in-toronto-debut-recital/>), accessed 31 January 2023.
17. <https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2018/11/12/scrutiny-thoughtful-programming-and-fine-vocalism-mark-ollemans-wmct-recital/> (accessed 31 January 2023).
18. <https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2020/02/28/scrutiny-wmct-doubleheader-combines-terrific-season-sneak-peek-and-virtuosic-diotima-quartet> (accessed 31 January 2023).
19. Simon Fryer, “Artistic Director’s report,” *Women’s Musical Club of Toronto Annual Report 2021–2022 124th Season*, online at <https://www.wmct.on.ca/wmct/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2021-22-Annual-Report-2021-22-ONLINE-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 1 February 2023).
20. Kathleen McMorrow, “Meeting face-to-face,” *News & Notes* 65 (November 2022): 1.
21. Editorial, “The Guardian view on pandemic recovery: we have only just begun,” *The Guardian* (28 December 2022): online at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/28/the-guardian-view-on-pandemic-recovery-we-have-only-just-begun> (accessed 1 February 2023).
22. This was the fourth viceregal reception for the WMCT at Queen’s Park, following those hosted by Lieutenant Governors Pauline Mills McGibbon (in 1974 and 1978) and John Black Aird (in 1983).

A Counterpoint of Conversations

TO GET A DEEPER insight into the behind-the-scenes operations of the WMCT, I interviewed ten people who have worked for the Club in various capacities. There are many more people whose contributions have been vitally important, but I think that the ten people I spoke with do provide a representative sample of those who have helped to shape the WMCT over the years. Here are brief biographies of those I spoke to, along with some highlights of those conversations.

JOHN MAYO

John has been the regular program annotator for the WMCT since the 2003–04 season. He grew up in Dorset, in southwest England, and was educated at Shaftesbury Grammar School. After graduating he worked in a government science lab for three years before deciding in 1961 to switch gears and study music at Trinity College London. Upon graduating in 1964, he taught instrumental music in the London school system for three years. In 1967 he decided to move to Toronto with his Canadian wife, Betty, to do graduate studies in musicology at the University of Toronto. He completed the MA degree in 1969 and the PhD degree in 1977 with a thesis on “Handel’s Italian Cantatas.” He has worked on all three University of Toronto campuses, but most of his career was spent at the Scarborough campus. I was hired to teach a music course at the U of T Scarborough campus in 1995, and John was a most gracious mentor to me at that time. He introduced me to his colleagues there and generally went out of his way to make me feel at home. Having done a lot of peripatetic university teaching in my day, I can attest that such a reception was definitely not the norm, and it was very much appreciated. I spoke with John by phone on Wednesday, December 14, 2022.

I was curious about how John began writing program notes for the WMCT. “Tim McGee was my boss at UT Scarborough,” John told me. “One day, during his term as Artistic Director of the Club (2002–2006),

he asked me to do some program notes for a WMCT recital. This was on an occasional basis at first, but then I became the regular annotator during the 2003–04 season and have been doing them ever since!”

One thing that I admire about John’s notes is that, in addition to being superbly literate and beautifully well written, they frequently identify an interesting theme that draws the program together in a satisfying way. I asked him how he goes about doing this. “To start with, I always consider the program as a whole and think about what kinds of ideas, either musical or extra-musical, might be recurring in all of the pieces. It’s nothing very mysterious, I look for natural links that are common to some or all of the works. If I don’t find such a link, then my next tactic is to provide some kind of general introduction to the program. I always note down any new or obscure works, because these often take a bit more digging to find something interesting to say. If there are works by living composers on the program, I get in touch with them. Composers are always very helpful and eager to share information about their work. (John should know . . . his son Christopher is a very successful composer who was commissioned by the WMCT to write a new work for Ensemble Made in Canada for their concert in the Club’s 117th season.) I used to dash off to the library to do my research for the program notes, but now that I am less mobile, I rely more on my own library; I find the diaries and correspondence of major composers particularly useful. Also, the U of T Library provides terrific online resources these days.”

I asked John if he planned out an entire season of program notes ahead of time. “Oh no,” he replied, “I always do them concert by concert. If a whole season of notes is done ahead of time, it is a big headache when changes occur. Singers often change their program at the last minute, and performers sometimes cancel, so it’s best not to do things too far ahead of time. There was one funny incident when one of the performers changed his program completely from what had been agreed upon ahead of time. I had done the notes for the original program and there was no time to provide new ones. Susan Corrigan decided to go ahead and print the original notes in the program anyways, on the basis that the audience might find them interesting, even though there was no overlap between the old and new programs!”

Susan's father worked for Alcan, and the family moved around quite a lot due to his work. She came to Toronto at the age of 16. She received her diploma in fabrics from the School of Crafts and Design at Sheridan College and a BA from the University of Toronto. In 1980 she started working at the Royal Ontario Museum as an installation officer. Then in 1985 she started working at what was then called the Ontario Potters Association and later became the Ontario Clay and Glass Association. She worked there for three years, and then after completing an arts administration internship, stayed on for two more years as the administrative director. When her son was born, she became a stay-at-home mother for a while, but went back to work in 1995 after she and her husband separated.

I spoke with Susan by Zoom call on Monday, December 12, 2022. She takes up the story of how she was hired by the WMCT: "I saw an ad for the Women's Musical Club of Toronto in the *Toronto Star*. In the interview, apparently, I reminded Betty Gray of one of her daughters, and I think that's how I got the job! I was also qualified for it, or course, and the interview did go well."

Although her background and training were initially in crafts, I asked Susan if she had any other experiences with music organizations. "Well, in a very peripheral way. When John Caldwell became treasurer of the WMCT, he kept saying, 'You know the Aldeburgh Connection (a vocal and piano concert series run by Stephen Ralls and Bruce Ubukata, which gave Sunday afternoon concerts in Walter Hall from 1982 to 2013), they really need somebody like you, Susan.' And so eventually Stephen Ralls hired me to do their bookkeeping, which I did until they closed down. So, that's the only other thing. I don't really have a musical background."

When Susan was hired as the WMCT arts administrator, it was a part-time job, and I was curious about what her typical work week was like. "Well, one of the nice things about the job was that it was very varied. I was to answer the phone, to take membership orders and ticket orders and process payments and so on. I did bookkeeping, and I did the desktop publishing for the newsletter and the concert programs. So, there really wasn't a typical day. I did the minutes for meetings of the board and the finance committee, and then, when the Foundation was

started, I did their board and their finance committee minutes as well, and for a little while I was doing the investment committee."

Keeping up with developments in technology was also part of Susan's job. "I had only just heard of this thing called email when I started working at the WMCT. I took an "Introduction to the Internet" course at Ryerson; a website was developed when I was working there (the wmct.on.ca domain was registered on November 1st, 2000) and it changed a number of times. I learned a lot on the job, because the job evolved, and so I picked up skills both on the job and through some training that I decided that I needed for the job. I was also invited to go to the concerts, which was great and probably something that I wouldn't have done on my own."

The WMCT has changed the location of its administrative office many times, with varying results, as Susan explained. "The first official office they had was on Bloor Street near the Manulife Centre. Then, when I started, it was on Eglinton, near Mount Pleasant. When we lost that space, Sun Life moved us to an office on Bay at Yorkville. We just had one big room, but I designed it and divided it up, so I had an office space, and we had a meeting room space. That was my favorite of all the spaces. But Sun Life was leasing the building, and when they gave up that lease, we were sent out on our own. The phone line was in my house for about two weeks, and we had a bunch of stuff in storage. Then there was a spare secretarial office at Avenue Road and Heath, which I was at for a few months, before we went to 26 Wellington Street West, where we had two little offices. There was another move where I had one office the size of a walk-in closet, and that was terrible. But then we found 56 The Esplanade; Walter (Homburger) had a connection with Orchestras Canada, and they had an extra full office that they had rented on top of their own offices next door, so we sublet from them; eventually we sublet directly from the building owner. We were still there when I left, and it was okay, it wasn't a bad location, and it was a good size. We had a good-sized meeting room: we carved out some storage space in it, and I had my own office. Generally, it was handy for everybody, so it was good in that respect."

I concluded our conversation by asking Susan about who she enjoyed working with during her 19 years at the WMCT. “I liked all the Presidents that I got to work with. I really admired Betty Gray in terms of how she handled things because she was President at a difficult time. And, of course, Esther McNeil, she still is a force of nature and a pretty amazing person. Julia Smith is also a lovely person; she really learned a lot on the fly, and she did an excellent job as well. Ina van Berkel and I got along very well. I think the best part of my job was that I got to work with by and large a very interesting group of volunteers, mostly women, but also some interesting men.”

SHANNON PERREAULT

Shannon is from Ottawa and has a background in theatre. She did a BA degree in drama and worked in the theatre scene in Ottawa for a while, but there was not really a lot of acting work available there, so she retrained and moved to Toronto in 1998 to work behind-the-scenes in film. In Toronto she did both film postproduction and some theatre work, as well as voiceovers. Then she married the actor Jordan Pettle and had two boys, and decided it would suit her schedule better to get a regular job, but still in the arts. So, she went back to school again and completed a one-year postgraduate certificate in arts administration and cultural management from Humber College. I spoke with Shannon on Zoom on Tuesday, December 20, 2022.

I asked Shannon how she became involved with the WMCT. “There was an ad posted on WorkInCulture.ca for a job with the WMCT Foundation. I applied and was interviewed. Before the hiring process was finished, though, I was offered a different job. I started that job, but it wasn’t a good fit so I left. Meanwhile the Foundation had hired someone else, but the Club was looking for a new administrator. I was interviewed by Kathleen (McMorrow) and Janet (Murray) and Diane (Martello) at the old office on The Esplanade. I got the job and started work in March 2017; Diane was the President at that time. We were just moving offices, so on my very first day everything was in boxes, and we were relocating from The Esplanade to here (59 Adelaide Street East). Susan Corrigan was helpful with the transition; in fact, everyone was very supportive.”

The part-time nature of the job suited Shannon well, as she had two young boys to raise. I asked her about workflow and her responsibilities. “I am responsible for all the non-profit administration and bookkeeping and I assist the board and all the working committees with their responsibilities. For the concert series, Simon and the Artists Selection Committee set up the season, and then Simon negotiates fees, while I’m the person who puts the contracts together, and I deal with any tax forms and so on. I am also the box office. I do the desktop publishing for the programs and Newsletters, and look after some of the advertising, for example in *WholeNote*. I basically handle all the administration, other than the logistics of the performance. And then on the concert day I’m the main box office person at the concert as well, the one who deals with all the money.”

Dealing with the fallout from Covid-19 meant a big shift in Shannon’s responsibilities. “When things started to shut down, I became much more involved with the Executive Committee in trying to decide how to proceed. We applied for CERB and there was a lot of refunding to deal with, although many members donated their subscription money to the Club. Simon was the main contact with the artists, to see if they could provide video for a virtual concert. Kathleen handled the YouTube channel, but I took over the regular member communications via Mailchimp email campaigns because Kathleen had too much to do, and that’s still my job now. There was a lot of communicating with membership online, trying to keep them as members, guiding them through an engagement with the virtual concerts. I dealt with some people who weren’t happy about the whole thing. I was working from home and started using a laptop. I haven’t used the desktop computer in the office for almost three years.”

Shannon noted the particular challenges that Covid-19 presented: “It was difficult for all organizations, but for the WMCT, where the majority of stakeholders are an older demographic and prefer the traditional way of doing things, even Zoom meetings were quite a challenge at first. We had to do our annual meeting virtually, voting online and so on. I tried to do it in a way that people could still be comfortable with the online interface. I guess I was just trying to figure out new ways of doing things constantly, which can be very challenging.”

Bonnie and Julia were born six days apart and became friends in Aurora District High School.¹ Bonnie went on to study journalism at Ryerson and Julia went into nursing at Women's College Hospital, and they lost track of each other for a while. They each married, had children, and thrived in their respective careers. In retirement they reconnected with a mutual friend over lunch in 2005. Betty Gray, who was friends with Bonnie's sister, had given Bonnie tickets to a WMCT concert for that afternoon, and Bonnie and Julia ended up going together. They were hooked, and soon became some of the busiest of the WMCT stable of volunteers. Julia was President from 2008 to 2012, and Bonnie during that time chaired the Membership & Marketing Committee. They joined the WMCT at the same time, volunteered together for the Club for 15 years, and stepped down from the board in September 2021. I interviewed the two women separately on Zoom, Bonnie on Tuesday, December 13th, and Julia on Wednesday, December 14th, 2022.

I was curious to know how Bonnie and Julia got involved in the running of the Club after attending that first concert. "I guess there again it was Betty Gray," Bonnie told me. "She just said, 'Why don't you come and volunteer?' They needed people on the membership committee, so both Julia and I got involved with that. And then the next thing you know, we were in charge of it. For me it was always about the people, you know they were just wonderful, lovely people to be involved with."

I asked Bonnie about her background in music. "I had no formal background. Ed (her husband) and I always went to the symphony from the time the kids were little, because we realized if you didn't book something, you didn't go anywhere. So, we bought symphony tickets and went. But I have no formal music background. With the people in the Club there would come a point where the conversation would get quite musical, and I would just shut up because I knew that I was beyond my depth. But then there were all kinds of people who knew the music. When I got involved, they needed someone who could do some writing, and knew a bit of computer stuff. So, those were the strengths I offered."

With her background in journalism, marketing naturally fell to Bonnie and getting the WMCT recitals reviewed was part of the job.

This became increasingly difficult as newspapers stopped running local concert reviews. "In the beginning the newspapers came," she told me. "We would have Robert Harris from the *Globe*, Arthur Kaptainis from the *National Post*, John Terauds from *The Star*. Terauds later started Musical Toronto (website), which became Ludwig van Toronto. We would have four or five critics at each concert. One of the first things Julia and I did was put together a press kit, and we would deliver it around in the fall, all on paper. This 15-year period really has seen the wholesale shift from paper to screen. When I left, we were fortunate to get Joseph So from Ludwig van Toronto to review a recital. When we first started, the concerts were sold out and our job as the marketing committee was to market to a full house, try and sell seats when we didn't have any to sell. So, it was a challenge to keep the name out there and keep active and think of things to do when we really didn't need to market. I think the Club has really been a bellwether for what's going on in society generally."

I was curious about who had mentored Julia when she joined the WMCT. "It was Emmy Homburger," Julia told me. "I followed her directly (as President), and she was marvellous. Such a good friend, and she and Walter were a fabulous team. And it was Susan Corrigan who kept the ship of state afloat; I don't know how she did it, there were so many demands upon her time, not just with the Club but also with the Foundation as well. It was a great team, really; everyone was very helpful and cooperative."

When I asked Bonnie to name one of the highlights of her work with the WMCT, she talked about being involved with the implementation of the 2016 strategic plan, and rebranding; the creation of the new logo for the Club was part of that. "Kathleen (McMorrow) and I worked together on the project. That was probably the most interesting thing that I did. I remember the day we went to choose the logo. The design company had several different designs. There was one that was the five lines of the staff, with two circles down below. Kathleen looked at me and started to chuckle because to both of us it looked like breasts! We both laughed, and the design people didn't get it. The artists didn't see it at all. And for us it was perfectly obvious: those are two breasts! Kathleen was not entirely sold on the idea of having a treble clef in the

new logo, it was too obvious, but it was the best design, and the colors were fabulous. We talked it all through with the artist, then got four or five other Club people to vet it, and they chose the same one that we had. So, it was obvious that was the right one. The rebranding was really quite a time-consuming job and a lot of work, but interesting as well.”

Julia was President from 2008 to 2012 and oversaw the two Koerner Hall concerts. She has volunteered for other arts organizations, and I asked her what makes the WMCT special. “The big thing that makes us different is that we are run by volunteers, and always have been. This has led to many good friendships over the years, as we work towards common goals like keeping the membership numbers up. We really worked hard at that; it may have looked easy, but it wasn’t, behind the scenes there was a lot going on. We are also fortunate to be a small organization supported by a healthy Foundation, that is unusual too. It has been a really great experience to work with everyone else in running the Club. Working for the WMCT has truly enriched my life a great deal.”

ALISON HOWARD

Alison has not been a member of the WMCT, but as a CBC producer she was involved in five iterations of the Career Development Award. She grew up in Rossland, a small town in south central British Columbia, where she studied piano with Helen Dahlstrom, an excellent teacher with a strong national profile. Alison came to Toronto for graduate studies in musicology at the University of Toronto in 1984. After completing her MA degree, at Tim McGee’s suggestion she applied for a job at the CBC and ended up spending her entire career there. I spoke with Alison via Zoom call on Friday, December 16, 2022, just two days after her retirement from the CBC.

Alison became the CBC producer responsible for working with the WMCT on the CDA in 2007, taking over that duty from her colleague Marilyn Dalzell. For early CDA competitions, regional CBC producers would suggest talented young Canadian classical musicians and send in CBC tapes of their performances, but with cutbacks to classical music on the CBC, that changed. “Very often now there isn’t CBC audio to contribute,” Alison explains. “So, I reach out to the young performers that

we want to put forward to the committee, and I ask them for audio. It’s actually very streamlined now, because it’s all digital file sharing, and that makes it quite easy. So, it has gone from a process where CBC regional producers would be recording and it being more of a collective decision, to now where it’s just a conversation with Robert (Rowat, a CBC producer in Montreal) and myself and our executive producer, Katherine Duncan.”

Alison explained that the young musicians she approaches are always aware of the CDA and excited to be invited to submit materials. “The award is very meaningful; it’s a nice cash prize, and they all seem to know about it. I don’t remember anybody saying, ‘The what?’ They all say, ‘Oh, wow!’ They really put in the effort to get the material together. In addition to the 45-minute audio recording, I get their full cv, including education, their degrees, and masterclasses, and all that kind of thing, not just what they put up on their web page. Each candidate has a file, and that’s what goes to the jury. In conjunction with other CBC colleagues, I often contribute suggestions about who the jury members might be.”

From the CBC’s perspective the CDA has also been a rewarding collaboration. “We value our relationship with the WMCT and it’s a chance for us to help support a young deserving performer. We get a broadcast out of it as well; we pay the artist, of course, but it works out well; we end up with a recital that we are always happy to broadcast. It is such an excellent award, and it comes at just the right moment for so many of these performers, where a cash prize is just what they need. And the recognition of a performance on the *Music in the Afternoon* series is a real lift. I think it has really made a difference for a lot of young musicians. It has been a very, very good relationship for the CBC, and there is every intention to have it continue.”

ANNETTE SANGER

Annette worked closely with Alison on the CDA competitions. Like John Mayo, Annette is from Dorset.² She began piano lessons at age six and went on to study music at Dartington College of Arts, where in addition to her studies in Western classical music, she became interested in the music and dance of Bali. This became the focus of her doctoral studies

in ethnomusicology at Queen's University, Belfast, where she completed her PhD degree in 1986 and met her husband, Jim Kippen. She taught at QUB for five years before moving to Toronto in 1989 when Jim was hired at the University of Toronto, where Annette also worked, at both the Scarborough and St. George campuses, until her retirement in 2018. In addition, she served as the Director of the University Settlement Music School from 1990 to 2000. I spoke with Annette via Zoom on Friday, December 9, 2022.

I asked Annette how she became involved with the WMCT. "I joined the Artists Selection Committee in 2005 at the invitation of Timothy McGee, who was then the Artistic Director. Tim has been a close friend ever since we came here; he was extremely kind and generous to our family. He invited me on to that committee, and soon after Simon took over as AD. Emmy Homburger was President, and she encouraged me to join the board and to become the CDA chair. I was very nervous about it, because there were huge files of papers that the previous person, Dorith Cooper, had put together, because of course in those days everything was on paper. But Emmy was a lovely woman, and she took me under her wing a bit, and trained me to know more about the organization and what I was meant to do." Annette has continued as Chair of the CDA, including overseeing the 10th anniversary live competition and advocating for increased prize money, now \$25,000.

Annette also became very involved in helping to run the WMCT as a valued board member, and eventually President. "I became President in 2012. Julia Smith had become President in 2008 when Emmy had to leave her term early for health reasons. Julia was another wonderful mentor to me; she is still a great friend. Julia and Emmy were both important mentors, but to be honest, everybody has been very nice, and that's something I really like about the Club, it's a wonderful group of people. After my term as President, I became Past President with Diane (Martello) as President, and then when Kathleen (McMorrow) became President, I once again became Vice President, because there was not really anybody willing to fill the position. And then Janet (Murray) became President this year, and I'm still the Vice President. We're a close-knit group, helping each other out, that's the way it works."

Another initiative that Annette spearheaded is the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee, which she chairs. "One of the big issues for us is diversity. I have encouraged and strongly supported this, and have connected with Andrea Moffat of Divercity Consultants. We are having a diversity training workshop with her soon. We also had an initial workshop with Renée Bazile-Jones (former Senior Director of Learning at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion) a year and a half ago, and we have a statement on the website. So, yes, I am trying to move this initiative forward."

DIANE MARTELLO

Diane was born in Toronto and attended Royal York Collegiate (now Etobicoke School of the Arts); it was in the music program there that she met Don McLean, her husband of over 45 years now. She enjoyed a 32-year-long career as an elementary school music teacher, 12 years with the Peel District School Board, and then after moving with Don to Montreal in 1989, a further 20 years with the Lester B. Pearson School Board there. She returned to Toronto when Don became the Dean of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music in January 2011. In 2016, Diane formed Maureen's Bells, a welcoming and inclusive tone bell choir named in honour of her late music loving mother, Maureen Martello (1922–2016). A CBC Radio *Sunday Edition* documentary about the group from 2019 is titled "Ring Joy".³ I spoke with Diane on Wednesday, December 14, 2022 via Zoom.

Diane became involved with the WMCT via her husband. "When Don became Dean, he was asked to be an advisor to the WMCT. That seems to be ex officio, and then they invited him to speak at the end of season luncheon in 2012. Annette (Sanger) and Julia (Smith) approached me to ask if I would become involved, so that's how I started."

Diane rose quickly to a leadership position; she also enjoys helping with the selection of artists, as she explained to me. "I was the Vice President and then President (2015–2019); after that, I became Past President, but still on the board. I was still on all these other committees by default because you are ex officio on all the committees when you are President, so then it becomes a question of which ones should you resign from."

This year I resigned from Editorial. I am also on the Artists Selection Committee. One thing that I have done is help to diversify the concerts by championing new ideas that Simon had in the back of his mind. He recommended Jens Lindemann, trumpet, and I was able to help convince the group that this would be a good thing, and that was one of our most successful concerts. I also really wanted Joel Quarrington; I suggested him, and that was a huge success in terms of ticket sales, and it was a great concert, because we brought in the entire double bass community. I also championed Michael Bridge; I met him in his first year at the University of Toronto. It was at the launch of a fundraising campaign for U of T, and he was playing, and I just thought 'This kid is special.' Afterwards we went out with the students who had performed, and Michael had to wear a band because he was not old enough to order alcohol. That's how long I have known him. I am absolutely thrilled to see his career take off. When I was studying at the Conservatory, Joe Macerollo was my theory teacher, and his wife Fran was my piano teacher, so there was a bit of a connection there."

It was also Diane's idea to get mobility railings installed in Walter Hall. When I asked her what makes the WMCT special, she emphasized the personal touches. "I think it's heart. Something that I started was to have somebody stay behind at the end of the concert to make sure that people with Wheel-Trans and taxis get picked up. We have a donor who gives money to hire students to assist people with special needs. That's their job, to look after patrons with walkers. Patrons can phone and ask for assigned seats; we use general seating, but some people need aisle seats. We make contact that way, see if their needs are met, if they're able to come, and then we are waiting for them. We have a young person who is assigned to help them, and that includes intermission. So, I think the difference is the heart. And that people are volunteering so much."

Diane was on the board as Past President when Covid-19 struck; I asked her how the WMCT dealt with that. "Well, it just made it all a lot harder. First of all, we had cancellations, but we met every single financial commitment. We're very proud of that, we paid everybody. We switched to virtual concerts, and Simon did a fabulous job with the special concert

in May, where he got so many of our CDA winners together, and they all had something great to say about the award. We featured Michael Bridge, actually before he won the CDA competition he performed for us, and he did it with no audience in Walter Hall, in a mask. Kathleen and I were there and that was it. We had to learn about videography. It's not enough just to have one camera at the back. We had to hire videographers. Then we had to discuss what our prime focus would be when we could come back in person. Is it going to be for the people at home or is it going to be for the people who are there? Because the videographers are intrusive. Then the University wouldn't let us use Walter Hall, so we had to find another venue, and we found Grace Church on-the-Hill. It was really a good price, they did us a favor there, but it was difficult. We had to bring in all kinds of stuff including piano chairs and music stands, and they were doing some construction. There was a concrete buster jackhammer. I had to make a panicked phone call to the construction manager who was working from home to get them to call off the workers, and that was like 15 minutes before the concert. It was so much work, and it was so stressful that there was not adequate parking, and of course it's flat seating. So, the vision isn't good, plus we had the videographers there, going back and forth. It was all ten times the work!"

When I asked Diane what she most enjoyed about volunteering with the WMCT, like others she emphasized the camaraderie that arises from working together towards a common goal. "When I moved back from Montreal, I had the double whammy of moving, plus I was retiring. I had somewhat kept up with my friends in Toronto, and we had visited back and forth, but they had moved on. So, I needed to find a new group, and this has been absolutely fantastic for me, because the people that I volunteer with have become my friends. I have personally brought in maybe ten people who were friends of mine, who came in and are volunteering, or at least coming to the concerts. The executive team has been great, and I have become friends with them. Of course, it can happen that people stay on the executive too long because they're with their friends. It's important to mentor other people so they can take over. Our biggest job right now is to recover membership numbers, which have taken a big hit because of Covid-19."

JANET MURRAY

Janet has been a member of the WMCT for over 20 years, and thanks to her business background she has chaired the Finance Committee for the Club and was a Foundation Finance Committee member.⁴ I spoke with Janet via Zoom on Thursday, December 22, 2022. Janet grew up in Toronto and attended Lawrence Park Collegiate, where she sang and played the viola as part of the robust music program there under John McDougall. While doing her BCOM degree at the University of Toronto, she was active in musical events at both Hart House and Victoria College. After graduation she began her career in business and sang with the Orpheus Choir, but when marriage and family life ensued, time was limited, and she had to give up the choir.

I asked Janet how she got involved with the WMCT. “I was really missing music in my life, and I happened to mention this to a friend who said, ‘The Women’s Musical Club is looking for a treasurer. Maybe you should talk to them. It’ll be a tangential involvement with music.’ She was the auditor for the Club. I talked to Mandy Macrae (WMCT President, 1998–2001), and it turned out that we had friends in common. So, more than 20 years ago I joined as the Secretary-Treasurer. I was working full time, so I couldn’t attend the concerts, but that was fine. I felt it was a really worthwhile organization, and I just wanted to be involved on some level. So, I was on the board and head of the Finance Committee. Later on, the Foundation asked if I would join their Finance Committee too, so I did. When I retired in December 2016, I could finally attend the concerts. I wasn’t working anywhere close to downtown prior to that, so it would have been a whole day exercise to attend. Most of my meetings with the Finance Committee had been via telephone, we didn’t have Zoom.”

I asked Janet what she sees as the biggest challenges that she faces upon becoming the President. “Well, obviously the membership level. I remember the days when the Board had to stand back and if there weren’t going to be enough seats in Walter Hall, we would be giving up our seats. But now, people are working longer. The school system has cut funding to music programs, and therefore people like me, who grew up learning about music in high school and developing a love for it, don’t have those

opportunities. So, it isn’t engendering that lifelong desire to attend and participate in live concerts. The Club has always been fuelled by people attending concerts and then becoming volunteers, and then sitting on the committees and then on the board, if you can persuade them to, or different committees and the board. But because of Covid we lost two and a half years of regeneration, so our numbers are very low now. One of the innovations that we did during Covid, which I was really excited about, was the livestreaming of the concerts. If we could find the money to continue that program, then as people aged and couldn’t attend the concerts, they could still keep the connection with the Club. But our focus is on trying to get the live concert attendance back up.”

With her long association with both the Club and the Foundation, I was curious about what Janet most enjoyed about her involvement with the WMCT. “Well, because my concert going has been not as long as my overall association, I think it’s just being associated with something that has such a rich history and has contributed so much to the musical culture of the city of Toronto. In my small way I was doing what I could to help with that. But I certainly enjoy the music, and it’s not just the concerts. I do believe in the scholarship activities, and the CDA is something really truly wonderful.”

SIMON FRYER

Simon became the Artistic Director of the WMCT in 2006.⁵ He grew up in a musical family in Manchester and at age ten began studies at Chetham’s School of Music there. He continued on with advanced studies at Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, the Guildhall School in London, and the Banff Centre in Alberta. His peripatetic career has included stints as a cellist with the Toronto Symphony, the Penderecki String Quartet, the Tenerife Symphony Orchestra, and now with the Regina Symphony. I spoke with Simon via Zoom on Wednesday, December 14, 2022.

I began by asking Simon how he became involved with the WMCT. “I had recently joined the Penderecki String Quartet in Waterloo, and saw this ad for the Women’s Musical Club and thought that it would be interesting, and it would also be a way of keeping a toe in Toronto to

keep up my contacts in the city. And it has indeed been that, which is great. I was not too far away, but the quartet schedule turned out to be so completely insane that I might as well have been in Regina or Cape Town; it was difficult to find time to get from Waterloo to Toronto.”

Simon took up the position with the Regina Symphony Orchestra in 2011. “Although it’s further away, my schedule here is less intense and so it’s actually easier for me to allocate time, so that I can come to concerts. The board of the WMCT has allowed for travel expenses for me, so that it becomes possible in financial terms as well for me to come to Toronto. Ideally, I would be there three out of five concerts, which I think is actually going to happen this year. Obviously Covid got in the way considerably. But otherwise, it works out quite well. There was a two-year gap between my leaving the quartet and moving to Regina. For a good deal of that two years, I was in Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Through a variety of coincidences, I was asked to guest there in the orchestra, but yet still managed to keep things going at the WMCT, thanks to our online way of life these days.”

Although he had arranged one-off concerts and helped to organize summer festivals, the WMCT job was Simon’s first time as an Artistic Director. I asked him if the job unfolded as he expected it would. “I don’t really remember what my expectations were at the time, but I think working with the Artists Selection Committee was a lot more consensual than I had expected. The people had strong ideas, and it wasn’t just up to me to concoct everything, and then bring it to reality. In actual fact, there was a great deal of interest, experience and imagination available in that forum, and that was very welcome indeed. I didn’t have to create the role because they had a vision and they gave me a very clear direction, and that was very helpful at the beginning, for sure, and has been right through.”

Simon has very creative ideas about how to put together not just a season, but also each individual concert. “I’m not a big fan of a random selection of bits and pieces. I like a concert that tells me something. But I’m also not keen on themed shows, “Music of Spain,” or that sort of thing, although, of course, Cameron Crozman and Philip Chiu did just that, but they are intelligent musicians, and it wasn’t just a grab bag of

artificially related music. I’m always on the lookout for a program that has got some integrity running through it, but I don’t think I’m at all setting a trend, I think the trend is already there. People have realized that there are so many artists out there, and the Internet has made it so easy to look at artists from all over, so it is hard to attract people to a concert just because of who you are. You have to attract them not only with who you are, but what you do, and how you do it. So, I’m merely capitalizing on this trend.”

I asked Simon what he has particularly enjoyed about working for the WMCT, and what his hopes for the future are. “Looking at the future, I’m really excited by this new partnership with Xenia Concerts.⁶ The old view of outreach, where we were sponsoring masterclasses by our artists, was great, but it was really reaching into our own community. Outreach should be just that: reaching out to people who would not normally experience what we offer. Xenia Concerts is dedicated to that. As to highlights, there are elements of this job that I have always enjoyed: the way that the organization is solvent; that when that advert came out, they were not looking for a saviour, it was just another step, an evolutionary step. It is great that the Club is able to say, ‘We’re going to do our own thing artistically.’ If government agencies don’t like it, then they don’t have to support it, as our budget is not overly dependent on them. We are prepared to do what we believe is important. That’s fantastic. I love that, and I really love the excitement, experience and energy, and all those things that these people within the Club bring.”

1. The two women are profiled together in *News & Notes* 46 (October 2012): 4–6.

2. See Timothy McGee, “Volunteer profile: Annette Sanger,” *News & Notes* 47 (February 2013): 4–5.

3. The documentary is available online at <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1555271747733>.

4. See Shannon Perreault, “Janet Murray becomes President,” *News & Notes* 65 (November 2022): 2.

5. See Bonnie O’Dacre and Julia Smith, “Profile: WMCT Artistic Director Simon Fryer,” *News & Notes* 44 (October 2011): 3–4.

6. Xenia Concerts produces family friendly musical events that embrace neurodiversity and disability.

In Memoriam

THIS IS AN alphabetical list by surname of people with important ties to the WMCT who died between 2010 and 2022; they are greatly missed. Their activities with the Club included serving as board members, fund raisers, volunteers, donors, long-time members, and/or spouses/partners of WMCT leaders. They were much-loved, important supporters of the Club who helped to create that special atmosphere that makes the WMCT not just another music organization, but rather a warm, open, welcoming community of dedicated, loyal music-loving friends.

APPLIN, Anne-Marie (1952–2020) was a marketing and public relations expert who founded her own firm, Applin Marketing & Communications. A much sought-after board member, she devoted her time and energy to an extraordinary variety of health, educational, and cultural organizations. The Anne-Marie H. Applin Foundation was established in 2020 to honour and continue her legacy of supporting the arts. She served on the board of the WMCT Foundation until shortly before her death.

BEACH, Marcia (1939–2013) was born in Boston and was a talented pianist and enthusiastic chamber music player. She completed an MMUS degree in piano performance at Yale University in 1964. She also completed a PhD degree in musicology at the University of Rochester in 1988 with a thesis on Bartók's late string quartets. For the WMCT, she was a member of the Artists Selection Committee; her husband, David Beach, was the Dean of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music from 1996 to 2004 and was an Honorary Advisor to the WMCT until 2016.

BECKWITH, John (1927–2022) was a composer, scholar, and educator. A passionate advocate for Canadian music, he was associated with the University of Toronto Faculty of Music for 77 years as a student, professor,

Dean (1970–77), inaugural Jean A. Chalmers Chair in Canadian Music, and professor emeritus. His *After Simpson* was premiered at a WMCT concert in 2013. His life partner, Kathleen McMorro, was President of the WMCT from 2019 to 2022. John faithfully attended WMCT concerts until just weeks before his death on December 5, 2022.

BERNARDI, Mario (1930–2013) was a concert pianist but probably best known for his work as the founding conductor of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (1968–82) and later positions with the CBC Vancouver Orchestra (1983–2006) and the Calgary Philharmonic (1984–92). Equally adept at opera and concert music performances, he was renowned for his talents as a Mozart conductor but had a very wide repertoire and gave the premieres of many works by Canadian composers. He was an Honorary Advisor for the WMCT until shortly before his death.

BRICKENDEN, Ruth (ca. 1925–2013) and Jack (1925–2012) were from Winnipeg originally but settled in 1957 in Toronto, where Jack worked as a publicist for the CBC before setting up his own PR firm, J.S. Brickenden & Associates. The Brickendens started the WMCT's third newsletter in 1991 (the first two were short-lived efforts in the early 1950s and 1970s). They passed on responsibility for the newsletter to Susan Corrigan in 1995, and it was renamed *News & Notes* starting with the February 1999 issue.

BRODIE, Patricia Kay (ca.1937–2014) was born in Montreal and moved to Toronto with her family as a teenager. An alumna of the University of Toronto and the University of Manitoba, she enjoyed a long career as a physiotherapist. She joined the WMCT in retirement and volunteered for many years, cheerfully giving of her time to front of house and green room duties. A generous bequest from her estate allowed the WMCT to fund a strategic plan that was completed in 2016.

BUZYNSKI, Danuta (1937–2021) was born in France to Polish parents and moved with her family to Warsaw in 1950. She emigrated to Canada in 1962 with her husband, the pianist and composer Walter Buczynski, whom she had met in Warsaw in 1960 (by interesting coincidence, Walter

had won a WMCT scholarship in 1958). In 2019, she received the Lieutenant Governor's Distinguished Service Award from the Royal Ontario Museum for over 30 years of dedicated volunteer work there. In 1997 she joined the WMCT and soon became a hard-working volunteer; she initiated the *Tuning Your Mind* pre-concert lecture series, served as the President from 2001 to 2005, and chaired the committee that planned celebrations for the WMCT's 110th anniversary season. A profile by Betty Gray and Helen Taylor is in *News & Notes* 38 (October 2008): 4.

CALDWELL, Theresa (1927–2020) was a generous donor to the WMCT with her husband John Caldwell (a long serving volunteer and board member) and was recognized in 2012 along with her husband for having been a member for over 20 years. Their son Tony has donated his legal services to the WMCT Foundation.

FELDBRILL, Victor (1924–2020) enjoyed a 75-year-long career in music as a violinist and a conductor, educator, and orchestra builder. In addition to his appointments with professional orchestras across Canada and abroad, he led youth orchestras in Toronto, Banff, Vancouver, and Tokyo. For the WMCT he chaired the Career Development Award competition in 1991, which was won by 15-year-old James Ehnes, and was an Honorary Advisor to the Club for many years. He gave a talk on women's contributions to Canadian musical life for the end-of-season WMCT luncheon in 2013; see the report by Annette Sanger in *News & Notes* 48 (October 2013): 1–2.

FORRESTER, Maureen (1930–2010) was a celebrated contralto from Montreal who made her Toronto debut with the WMCT in 1956. Decades later, having enjoyed a significant international performance career in opera and concert, she became a patron of the WMCT and also chaired the 1994 Career Development Award, which the soprano Karina Gauvin won.

HEGGIE, Grace (1933–2011) grew up in Toronto and enjoyed a lengthy career as a librarian at York University. Upon retiring in 1993, she devoted a good deal of time to her interests in jazz and classical music. She was a member of the Toronto branch of the Duke Ellington Society. Drawing

upon her professional expertise, she served as the volunteer archivist of the WMCT from 1997 to 2009, overseeing the transfer of the Club's rich archival materials to the Baldwin Collection of Canadiana in the Toronto Reference Library.

HOMBURGER, Emmy (1934–2019) was born in Bulgaria to Austrian parents, was educated in Vienna, and trained as a nurse in England before emigrating to Toronto. She joined the WMCT board in 1989 and chaired the first four Career Development Awards, bringing the CBC into the process in 2000. She co-ordinated the WMCT Centennial Celebration Concert in 1998, which netted \$100,000 for the Club and led to the development of the WMCT Foundation. During her term as the President of the WMCT from 2005 to 2008, she also served as the co-artistic director with her husband Walter Homburger for the 110th anniversary season. After stepping down from the WMCT board in 2011, she continued on the Artists Selection Committee for another two seasons. A profile by Esther McNeil is in *News & Notes* 38 (October 2008): 1.

HOMBURGER, Walter (1924–2019) enjoyed a distinguished career as an impresario, managing director of the Toronto Symphony for 25 years, and manager of a host of outstanding musicians including Glenn Gould and James Ehnes. He was a Patron of the WMCT, an Honorary Advisor to the WMCT Foundation, and with his wife Emmy Homburger, he co-ordinated the Centennial Celebration Concert and the 110th anniversary seasons.

HUGHSON, Ann (1930–2021) worked at the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario for many years, volunteered at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario, and supported many arts and cultural organizations. Like her brother John Lawson, she was a long-standing WMCT donor and attended the concerts faithfully. She chaired the Front of House Committee and served on the WMCT board, and subsequently on the honorary board, for many years.

LAWSON, John (1926–2021) enjoyed a long and successful legal career at McCarthy Tétrault and was a keen concert goer, a tireless supporter of

the arts, and a generous philanthropist. Like his sister Ann Hughson, who survived him by just one week, he was a constant supporter of the WMCT and attended its concerts without fail. He also served as an honorary adviser to the Club for over 25 years.

MACKENZIE, Pamela (1928–2020) was born in England and emigrated to Toronto in 1972 with her husband William MacKenzie. A keen gardener, she served as the librarian for the Toronto Botanical Garden for 23 years. She was a member of the Heliconian Club and of the Women's University Club. For the WMCT she served as the concert convenor (i.e., artistic director) from 1992 to 1999, and was a long-standing honorary board member and, with her husband, donor.

MACRAE, William (Bill) (1940–2017) graduated from the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine and went on to thrive in his private practice in ophthalmology and surgery for four decades. In addition, he was a devoted and much-loved medical educator and mentor of surgical students at the University of Toronto until his retirement in 2010. With his wife Mandy Macrae, a devoted WMCT volunteer and the President of the Club from 1998 to 2001, he was a steadfast supporter of and donor to the WMCT.

MCNEIL, John D. (1934–2018) was born in Southampton, England and moved to Canada in 1956. He enjoyed a long career in finance, rising to become the chairman and CEO of Sun Life from 1988 until his retirement in 1999. A keen and knowledgeable music lover, he assisted his wife Esther McNeil (two-time President of the WMCT) in setting up the WMCT Foundation in 2000 and served for many years on its Investment Committee and as an Honorary Adviser to both the WMCT and the WMCT Foundation.

NEWTON, Elizabeth (1923–2019) was born in England and in 1949 came to Toronto, where she enjoyed a long career in education with the East York Board of Education and Havergal College. Upon her retirement in 1986 she joined the WMCT and soon became an enthusiastic volunteer,

helping to set up both the Career Development Award and the WMCT Foundation, for which she served as the first Vice President. During the latter part of her long association with the WMCT, she served as an Honorary Adviser and a loyal annual donor, and as a Legacy Circle member she left a bequest to the Club in her will.

PREISS, Marlene (1939–2022) joined the WMCT in 2000 after retiring from a career that was spent in banking and later as an ESL teacher. She served as a volunteer, board member, and concert sponsor, and for 15 years she was Chair of the Telephone Subcommittee, making many hundreds of well received calls to members over the years to remind them to renew. She was on the WMCT Board from 2012 to 2017 and was responsible for the arrangements for the visit of Lieutenant Governor David Onley to the Koerner Hall recital in 2013 to mark the WMCT's 115th anniversary. A profile by Bonnie O'Dacre is in *News & Notes* 41 (February 2010): 6–7.

RICHLER, Florence (1929–2020) is perhaps best known as the wife, editor, and muse of her second husband, the writer Mordecai Richler, but she lived a long and remarkable life that was worthy of one of his most entertaining novels. She grew up in Montreal, where she associated with the likes of Oscar Peterson, William Shatner, and Christopher Plummer. In 2009, eight years after the death of Mordecai, she moved to Toronto where, despite blindness from AMD, she made a new circle of friends and participated actively in the city's cultural life. She was a generous donor to the WMCT in her final years.

SMITH, Michael (1938–2014) was for many years the Head of English at Parkdale Collegiate in Toronto. Music was one of his many passions, and upon discovering the WMCT in retirement in 2004 he became a dedicated volunteer in many capacities, ably assisting his wife Julia Smith, who served as the President from 2008 to 2012. The Michael Smith Memorial Fund contributed to the costs of the tenth Career Development Award, won by Charles Richard-Hamelin. A tribute to Michael Smith by his wife Julia is in *News & Notes* 51 (March 2015): 7.

STAFL, Dagmar (1926–2022) was born in Czechoslovakia, spent the last years of World War II in a concentration camp, and fled from her native country to Austria in 1949. Coming to Canada initially as a domestic worker, she then enrolled at the University of Toronto. Upon graduating in 1952, she began a career as an investment analyst and then as an economist with the provincial government. She joined the WMCT in retirement and put her financial skills to work as the Club treasurer from 1992 to 1997, creating a solid financial foundation upon which all future growth has rested. She told her remarkable life story in the self-published book *Blue Suit & Dictionaries* (2013), which was profiled by Bonnie O’Dacre in *News & Notes* 54 (October 2016): 5–7.

WHITE, Patricia (Pat) (1924–2019) graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto in 1947, and later trained as a psychiatrist and later still as a psychoanalyst. She was the Lead Psychiatrist for the University of Toronto Student Health service from 1964 to 1984 and then was in private practice until her retirement in 2010 at age 86. She was a member, donor, and volunteer with the WMCT until shortly before her death.

WEIL, Marianne (1926–2022) may hold the record for having been a member of the WMCT for the longest time of all; she joined the Club in 1958 and kept up her association from then until her death in 2022, for a total of 64 years. She served the WMCT in various capacities over the years, including in the membership and marketing committee, and as a concert volunteer (she donated the refreshment coffee for several decades), honorary board member and generous donor.

Women’s Musical Club of Toronto Presidents

Updated list continuing Appendix 1 in *Counterpoint to a City*

- 40. 1997–1998 Esther McNeil
- 41. 1998–2001 Mandy Macrae
- 42. 2001–2005 Danuta Buczynski
- 43. 2005–2008 Emmy Homburger
- 44. 2008–2012 Julia Smith
- 45. 2012–2015 Annette Sanger
- 46. 2015–2019 Diane Martello
- 47. 2019–2022 Kathleen McMorrow
- 48. 2022– Janet Murray

Women’s Musical Club of Toronto Concert Convenors / Artistic Directors

Updated list continuing Appendix 2 in *Counterpoint to a City*

- 18. 1992–1999 Pamela MacKenzie
- 20. 1999–2002 Mary VanderVennen
- 21. 2002–2005 Timothy McGee, Artistic Director (Artistic Director Emeritus, 2006–7)
- 22. 2006– Simon Fryer, Artistic Director

Women’s Musical Club of Toronto Award Winners

Updated list continuing Appendix 3 in *Counterpoint to a City*

Abbreviations

- CDA WMCT Career Development Award
- Centennial WMCT Centennial Scholarship for a student at University of Toronto
- Entrance WMCT Entrance Scholarship at University of Toronto
- Grad WMCT / WMCT Foundation Graduate Fellowship at University of Toronto
- OMG WMCT Otilie M. Gunning Scholarship at The Royal Conservatory of Music
- Summer WMCT / WMCT Foundation Summer Music Scholarship
- WMCT110 WMCT / WMCT Foundation 110th Anniversary Scholarship at The Royal Conservatory of Music

Note: Beginning with the 2012–13 season, the Centennial and Entrance awards (for University of Toronto students) and the OMG and WMCTHO (for Royal Conservatory of Music students) were combined in order to increase the dollar amount of the prizes.

1997–98	Rachel Mercer, cello	Centennial
	Megan Bulluz, oboe	Entrance
1998–99	Maneli Pirzadeh, piano	OMG
	Stephen Tam, flute	Centennial
	Praise Lam, violin	Entrance
1999–2000	Mari Ogawa, piano	OMG
	Yegor Dyachkov, cello	CDA
	Sarah Pratt, violin	Centennial
	Yuka Kobayashi, piano	Entrance
2000–01	Kimberley Fairbrother, piano	OMG
	Angela Park, piano	Centennial
	Elke Mau, double bass	Entrance
2001–02	Kimberley Fairbrother, piano	OMG
	Rafael Hoekman, cello	Centennial
	Emma Tessier, flute	Entrance
2002–03	Kimberley Fairbrother, piano	OMG
	Sonia Chan, piano	CDA
	Annick Santschi, flute	Centennial
	Tasmin Johnston, oboe	Entrance
2003–04	Sabrina Lin, piano	OMG
	David Haskins, French horn	Centennial
	Ashley Foot, tenor	Entrance
	Sarah Choi, piano	OMG
2004–05	Matthew Wicks, piano	OMG
	Elizabeth Loewen, violin	Centennial
	Vania Margani, soprano	Entrance
	Laura Reid, violin	Grad
	Shoko Inoue, piano	OMG
2005–06	Shannon Mercer, soprano	CDA
	Kenin McKay, violin	Centennial
	Nancy Mann, French horn	Entrance
	Joël Cormier, percussion	Grad
	Marketa Ornova, piano	OMG
2006–07	Marie-Cristine Pelchat St-Jacques, cello	Centennial
	Nicolas Mahon, trombone	Entrance
	Jennifer Smele, piano	Grad
	Matthew Bagasao, piano	OMG

2007–08	Andrea Cerswell, soprano	Grad
	William Callaghan, French horn	Entrance
	Krista Wodelet, bassoon	Centennial
	Baharak Beizaei, piano	OMG
2008–09	Kaili Maimets, flute	Summer
	Darrett Zusco, piano	CDA
	Mark Dimitroff, clarinet	Centennial
	Ilana Zarankin, soprano	Centennial
	Coco Chen, violin	Entrance
	Rebecca Norman, bassoon	Grad
	Katsiaryna Khatsko, piano	OMG
2009–10	Rachel Desoer, cello	Summer
	Jeanette Comeau, viola	WMCTHO
	Jian Zhang, piano	Centennial
	Christopher Arnold, violin	Entrance
	Mark Vuorinen, choral conductor	Grad
2010–11	Grace Kim, piano	OMG
	Leigh-Anne Martin, mezzo-soprano	WMCTHO
	Florence Mak, piano	Centennial
	Omar Ho, clarinet	Entrance
	Melody Chan, piano	Grad
	Samuel Deason, piano	OMG
2011–12	Hugo Rinfret-Paquet, double bass	Summer
	Ronelle Schaufele, viola	WMCTHO
	Vincent Lauzer, recorder	CDA
	Sara Schabas, soprano	Centennial
	Dalia Al-Khafajy, flute	Entrance
	Melody Chan, piano	Grad
	Rudin Lengo, piano	OMG
2012–13	Vladislav Kalinichenko, trombone	Summer
	Beth Hagerman, soprano	WMCTHO
	Claire Bellemare, soprano	Centennial
2013–14	Lisa Tahara, piano	Grad
	Alyssa Ramsay, cello	WMCTHO
	David Zucchi, saxophone	Centennial
	Lisa Tahara, piano	Grad
2014–15	Whitney Mather, soprano	WMCTHO
	Charles Richard-Hamelin, piano	CDA-1 st
	Stéphane Tétreault, cello	CDA-2 nd
	Pierre-André Doucet, piano	CDA-3 rd
	Alessia Disimino, violin	Centennial

	Braden Young, collaborative piano	Grad
	Tess Crowther, cello	WMCTHO
2015-16	Emily D'Angelo, mezzo-soprano	Centennial
	Braden Young, collaborative piano	Grad
	Danielle Green, violin	Summer
	Sophia Anna Szokolay, violin	Summer
	Michaela Kleer, viola	WMCTHO
2016-17	Myriam Blardone, harp and piano	Centennial
	Alexandra Bourque, conducting	Grad
	Emily Eng, viola	Summer
	Madeleine Zarry, violin	Summer
	Milica Boljevic, soprano	WMCTHO
2017-18	Blake Pouliot, violin	CDA
	Vivian Chen, piano	Centennial
	Chieh-Ying Lu, oboe	Grad
	Frances Armstrong, piano	Summer
	Milica Boljevic, soprano	WMCTHO
2018-19	Alex Hetherington, mezzo-soprano	Centennial
	Katherine Moffatt, trumpet	Grad
	Fiona Robson, cello	Summer
	Abigail Bachelor, harp	WMCTHO
2019-20	Hannah Corbett, violin	Centennial
	Katherine Moffatt, trumpet	Grad
	Vivien Ilion, soprano	WMCTHO
2020-21	Michael Bridge, accordion	CDA
	Emily Bosenius, violin	Centennial
	Vlad Soloviev, collaborative piano	Grad
	Hee-Soo Yoon, violin	WMCTHO
2021-22	Gabrielle Turgeon, soprano	Centennial
	Juliette Moreno, clarinet	Grad
	Keris Choi, violin	WMCTHO
2022-23	Lynna Bao, piano	Centennial
	Isabella Czynnyj, clarinet	Grad
	Jessy Je Young Kim, violin	Summer
	Daphné Bourbonnais, violin	WMCTHO



MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

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