

GREETINGS from SIMON FRYER



We close our 127th season of *MitA* concerts with a second vocal recital, this time featuring one of Canada's most versatile singing artists, tenor Asitha Tennekoon.

Asitha asks: What does it mean to belong? What combination of life events challenges and propels the search for it? "These themes have always been close to my heart. As a Sri Lankan, born and raised to love Western art music but dissuaded from engaging with my own culture, as a foreigner and a traveling artist, whose work is sought after yet whose future is caught up in a slow, uncertain immigration system, I find myself in a continuous fight to define what it means to belong." In this recital Asitha explores the continuous struggle to find belonging - searching for it in people, places, the past, and ultimately in oneself.

-Simon Fryer, WMCT Artistic Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping underline that loops back under the name.

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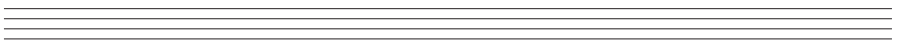
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@WMCT120



WomensMusicalClubofToronto



May 8th, 2025, concert
Asitha Tennekoon
and
Steven Philcox
with
Yolanda Bruno
Aysel Taghi-Zada
Laurence Schaufele
Amahl Arulanandam

in memory of
Kathleen Davis

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The WMCT gratefully acknowledges
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As a courtesy to others, please refrain from wearing perfume or other scents.
Please turn off cell phones and other noise-making devices.
No photography or recordings of any type during the performance.

Please join us in the Boyd Neel room for a post-concert reception

BELONGING

On Wenlock Edge

Ralph Vaughan Williams

On Wenlock Edge
From far, from eve and morning
Is my team ploughing?
Oh, when I was in love with you
Bredon Hill
Clun

(1872-1958)

Where There's a Wall

Ian Cusson

Invasion
Bird Song
Grief Poem
Where There's a Wall
Offerings

(b. 1981)

The Thread of Life

Danika Lorèn

Première of WMCT Commission

(b. 1989)

---INTERMISSION---

Stranger

Nico Muhly

(b. 1981)

Knoxville Summer of 1915

Samuel Barber

(1910-1981)

Tuning Your Mind Lecture:

Breathing and Belonging

Dr. Caryl Clark, University of Toronto, Professor Emerita

Open to all, 12.15 p.m. sharp

Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building

Visit the artist's website at
www.amplifiedopera.com/asitha-tennekoon

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Asitha Tennekoon, tenor, and **Steven Philcox**, piano
with
Yolanda Bruno, violin; **Aysel Taghi-Zada**, violin;
Laurence Schaufele, viola; **Amahl Arulanandam**, cello

Praised by *The Globe and Mail* for "...his silky, emotional presence on stage – both vocally and dramatically...", Sri Lankan tenor **Asitha Tennekoon** has established himself as one of Canada's most versatile singing artists. In 2017 he drew critical acclaim and received a Dora Award for his portrayal of Paul in Tapestry Opera/Scottish Opera's *Rocking Horse Winner*. Asitha is sought after for performances spanning from Baroque to experimental repertoire.

This season, Asitha added debuts with Symphony Nova Scotia (in Handel's *Messiah*), and Britten's *War Requiem* with Vancouver Bach Choir. Asitha continues to expand his reputation as an impressive interpreter of J.S.Bach's Evangelists, performing with the Grand Philharmonic Choir in *St. Matthew Passion*. Asitha shares the stage with pianist Steven Philcox in "Belonging", a solo recital for the Women's Musical Club of Toronto featuring works by Cusson, Vaughan Williams, Lorèn and Muhly.

On the operatic stage, Asitha performed with Vancouver's re:Naissance Opera in the world premiere of *Eurydice Fragments*, an immersive re-imagining of the Orphean myth, and debuted the role of Bill in Vancouver Opera's production of Jonathan Dove's *Flight*. In July, Asitha joins the cast of *Missing* (Current/Clements) with Toronto Summer Music Festival.

Recent roles for Asitha include Peter Quint in *Turn of the Screw* (Opera 5), Tamino in *The Magic Flute* (The Little Opera Company), Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with Opera Kelowna and Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Vancouver Opera. Asitha has performed principal roles with Pacific Opera Victoria, Canadian Opera Company, Edmonton Opera, Opera de Montréal and Opera Lafayette.

Asitha is a Co-Founder of Amplified Opera, a Toronto based indie opera company committed to placing artists at the centre of public discourse. He makes his home in the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and TsleilWaututh Nations (Vancouver, BC).

Hailed by Toronto's *The Globe and Mail* as "a superb piano partner....gorgeously accompanied", pianist **Steven Philcox** is highly regarded as one of Canada's finest collaborators and is a frequent partner of Canada's vocal elite performing in concert halls both at home and abroad. From 1999-2010, Philcox was a celebrated member of the music staff of the Canadian Opera Company where he served as répétiteur and assistant conductor on more than 35 productions and was the pianist of choice for baroque and classical continuo. In 2006, Philcox distinguished himself in an auspicious debut conducting the company's final performance of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at the newly opened Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. Other assistant conducting credits with the company include performances of Gounod's *Faust*, Britten's *Albert Herring* and Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

Philcox is regularly invited to mentor young artists at prestigious training programs including: Opera on the Avalon, Vancouver International Song Institute, University Of Texas, Austin, Canadian Opera Company Studio Ensemble, Stratford Summer Music Vocal Academy, Ukrainian Art Song Project Summer Institute, and the Centre for Operatic Studies in Italy. He is the director of the Art of Song program at Toronto Summer Music and has been an invited jury member for vocal and piano competitions throughout Canada.

In 2011, Philcox co-founded the Canadian Art Song Project with tenor Lawrence Wiliford. CASP's mission is to foster the development of new song through an annual commission and its performance as well as providing opportunities for Canadian artists to program and reinvigorate the existing song literature. Since its inception, CASP has brought together composers, writers, and performing artists in the creation of fifteen new works

for voice and piano. It previously released six CDs dedicated to the music of Derek Holman, John Greer, Healey Willan, Norbert Palej, and Jeffrey Ryan, all of which have been received with great critical acclaim including a JUNO nomination for Vocal/Choral recording of the year (Willan). Their newest recording *Known to Dreamers: Black Voices in Canadian Song* (featuring Philcox on the piano) was released February, 2024, and was nominated for a 2025 JUNO for Classical Album of the Year Small Ensemble. For more information please visit: canadianartssongproject.ca

Philcox has recorded for the Stone Records and Centrediscs labels.

Philcox is currently Associate Professor and head of Collaborative Piano studies at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music.

Yolanda Bruno is an Ottawa-born violinist, praised for her "total control of her instrument with infinite variety in the sound palette" (*La Presse*). She's won Grand Prizes at the Montreal Symphony Orchestra Competition, the Isabel Overton Bader Violin Competition, and the Canada Council for the Arts' Virginia Parker Prize—the nation's highest honour for young musicians. As a soloist, she's performed with the Montreal Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Orchestra of the Americas, and London Mozart Players.

Yolanda has performed for the Queen at Buckingham Palace and recorded for the Australian heavy metal band Parkway Drive. Yet her most memorable and rewarding musical experiences have happened in unexpected places. She believes deeply in the power of music to break down barriers of all kinds—personal, cultural, even political.

In 2021, Yolanda founded Music for Your Blues—a performance project offering free-of-charge, personalized, online concerts combining music and poetry. Yolanda has now offered over 70 free performances.

The Wild Swans - Yolanda's first CD, with pianist Isabelle David—was released in 2019. It features music by 11 women composers, spanning ten centuries, including several world premieres. Yolanda

releases her second album in 2025—dedicated to the late Jeanne Lamon. She performs on Lamon's 1759 Santo Serafin baroque violin.

She was Concertmaster at the Kingston Symphony Orchestra and Associate Concertmaster at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. She teaches chamber music at The Glenn Gould School.

Yolanda's violin is an exquisite Venetian-made instrument made by Domenico Montagnana in 1737, on private loan from Groupe Canimex. She lives in Toronto with her partner, accordionist Michael Bridge. When the two are off-stage, they love to foster cats, dance salsa, and hike forest trails across Canada.

www.YolandaBruno.com

Laurence Schaufele is a violist intent on exploring musicianship in a wide variety of genres. His experience spans diverse styles of music such as classical, jazz, klezmer, celtic, bluegrass, and many more. Hailing from rural southern Alberta, Laurence trained in the European classical tradition. He specialized at an early age at chamber music, from duos to string orchestra ensembles. Starting his post-secondary in Calgary, he transferred to Toronto for a change of pace. After graduating from the Royal Conservatory of Music in 2015 in viola performance, Laurence set off on a career, which stretched the viola between many genres.

Laurence has toured with a variety of ensembles ranging from string quartets and orchestras to progressive rock bands. He has performed on stages across four continents. Most notably, Laurence recorded with the jazz/classical ensemble SymphRONica.

Their album *UpfRONt* received a JUNO nomination.

When not performing, Laurence spends his time teaching viola and violin, listening to music, cooking, walking his dog, and spending time with his family.

Aysel Taghi-Zada is a passionate violinist devoted to the performance of classical and contemporary music. She has collaborated with some of the most distinguished composers

and musicians from North America and Europe such as Philip Glass, Brian Current, Salvatore Sciarrino, Chris Paul Harman, Kevin Lau, Mark Fewer, Pierre Leroux, David Geringas and Pascale Beaudin. She is frequently invited to perform with contemporary ensembles such as Tapestry Opera, New Music Concerts, Freesound Ensemble, Thin Edge New Music Collective and Soundstreams Canada, and she recently participated in Continuum Contemporary Music's Hatch Summer Performance program as an emerging artist.

She is also a founding member of the Vaso String Quartet, which performs around North America and participated in the 2019 Scotia Festival of Music in Halifax. As a recording artist, she can be heard on Jason Doell's 2018 album ... *Amid the Cannon's Roar*, Catherine Daniel's *Sacred Christmas*, and the Marrieds' *Fire in the Flame*.

She was invited to be a Guest Concertmaster for the Georgian Bay Symphony in 2018 and 2019, and a Guest Assistant Concertmaster for the Kingston Symphony Orchestra in 2019. She has performed with several orchestras, including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Canadian Opera Company, Windsor Symphony, Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra and Toronto Concert Orchestra.

With interests from baroque to metal, Juno-nominated cellist **Amahl Arulanandam** is known for his musical versatility and ability to adapt to many genres. At home in studios, clubs, and halls, Amahl hopes to convey that musical expression is beyond labels. Amahl has wholly embraced the bizarre sounds the cello has to offer and takes special pleasure in playing on areas of the instrument other than the strings.

NOTES for MAY 8, 2025

I was asked recently whether I look for an underlying theme to a concert when I write these notes. The answer is yes, but today I don't have to search, it is provided by the performers: Belonging. Asitha Tennekoon's biography shows that as often as not this

The last two works on today's program are settings of prose texts rather than poetic ones. Nico Muhly has said that he "almost always prefers to set prose than poetry. I find that poetry already contains its own music in such a way that I feel like I'm competing with the poet in trying to set it. Prose, for me, offers a more oblique entry-point into the text ..." The texts for *Stranger* are an eclectic mix: an academic introduction to a project about the history of Chinese railroad workers; an interview with Rosa Brecci, a Sicilian woman who arrived at Ellis Island in 1911; an extraordinary letter from a Chinese-American about the racism he experienced and how it was legally codified and reinforced; and finally, a letter from a woman to her husband, serving in the U.S. Army in 1945. These texts, says Muhly, "... serve as an attempt to navigate different kinds of shared American stories, from the confrontational (forced assimilation) to the practical (eye exams at the border), and make the connection between oppressive 19th-century immigration policies and those being advocated in the U.S. even now."

Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* was written in 1947 for a commission from the soprano Eleanor Steber who gave the first performance the following year with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Barber, who in the words of one biographer was "one of the most honored and most frequently performed American composers in Europe and the Americas during the mid-20th century," was basically untouched by most of the modernist currents that swept through music during his lifetime; he remained committed to the tonal language of the late 19th-century. For the text of this piece, he took part of a 1938 prose poem by the American author James Agee. "We are talking now," says Agee, "of summer evenings in Knoxville Tennessee in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child." Agee later used this text as a prologue to his novel *A Death in the Family*. Barber wrote his deeply nostalgic work at a time when his father was seriously ill, and it is dedicated to his memory.

-John Mayo

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