



# NEWS & NOTES

MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

NUMBER 57 | APRIL 2018

## FROM THE PRESIDENT: BUILDING A CONCERT SERIES

By Diane Martello

“How do you choose the musicians for your concerts?” is a frequent question to *Music in the Afternoon* volunteers. The short answer is with time, attention to detail and patience. To be more specific, the plans for the 2018/19 Season of *Music in the Afternoon* were hatched two years ago. Artistic Director Simon Fryer and volunteers on the WMCT's Artists Selection Committee (ASC)\* reviewed the concerts presented over the past ten years with a goal to providing quality, variety, and balance for the 2018/19 season. Considerations included: instruments, gender, Canadian/international presence, emerging/mature artists—and budget. With a slate of top choices in mind, Fryer checked for availability and negotiations were begun about repertoire, with emails flying back and forth between agents, Fryer and ASC members.

The established Canadian artist in the series was asked for composer suggestions for the commissioned work. Would the composer selected be able to deliver the work several months ahead of the performance and provide a copy for our partner, the Canadian Music Centre? Which of the other artists should we ask to teach the WMCT-sponsored Master Class?

Finally, after two years of planning and verbal agreements, contracts were signed and the 2018/19 *Music in the Afternoon* season was ready to go to press.

And what an outstanding season it is! Five concerts featuring woodwinds, baritone voice, double bass, piano and string quartet. Musicians from Canada,



Poulenc Trio (Photo: Matt Dine)

the USA, The Netherlands, and Georgia. Works by fourteen composers, representing five centuries of music, including Canada's own Bramwell Tovey and R. Murray Schafer.

The [Poulenc Trio](#) (oboe, bassoon and piano) are

based in New York and are thrilled to be making their TORONTO DEBUT on October 4, 2018 at *Music in the Afternoon*. Oboist James Austin Smith is particularly pleased, because his mother lives right here in Toronto.

Baritone [Thomas Oliemans](#) is a Dutch opera singer known for his physical comedy and communicative singing style. On November 8, 2018, he and Scottish



Thomas Oliemans (Photo: Marco Borggreve)

pianist Malcolm Martineau will perform an innovative interweaving of two song cycles: one by the bold young Brahms and the other by his often more pensive mentor

Robert Schumann. The two will conjure up a magical world of old forests, crumbling castles, missed loved ones, brave knights and consoling birds, all bound by love and song.

Juno award-winning virtuoso Canadian double bass player [Joel Quarrington](#) is world famous among bass players. For one thing, while the bass is traditionally tuned in fourths to accommodate hand size, Quarrington tunes his 1608 Italian instrument in fifths, like a cello. The result is a heart-warming tonal richness which will be combined with his string-playing friends on February 28, 2019 as they present an afternoon of chamber works from the double bass repertoire. Included will be a WMCT-commissioned work for double bass and string quartet by Canadian composer [Bramwell Tovey](#).



Joel Quarrington (Photo: Fred Catroll)

On April 4, 2019, Georgian pianist [Mariam Batsashvili](#) will make her TORONTO DEBUT at *Music in the Afternoon*. Now just in her mid-twenties, Batsashvili gained international recognition by winning first prize at the 2014 Franz Liszt Piano Competition in Utrecht. She has performed throughout Europe, and was recently nominated a “Rising Star” by the European Concert Hall Organisation. We are thrilled



Mariam Batsashvili (Photo: Attila Kleb)

that she will also give the WMCT-sponsored Master Class to which all *Music in the Afternoon* subscribers are invited. Further information TBA.

Canada’s own [Rolston String Quartet](#) are on their Grand Tour after their 2016 First Prize win at the 12th Banff International String Quartet Competition. Other honours have included CBC’s “30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30” and Grand Prize at the 31st Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition. The Quartet will perform works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer for *Music in the Afternoon* on May 2, 2019.

How do you build a concert series? The short answer is: with quality, variety and balance; a diverse repertoire; Canadian compositions; a variety of instruments; artists who are men and women, emerging and mature, from Canada and abroad. The 2018/19



Rolston String Quartet (Photo: TianXiao Zhang)

Season of *Music in the Afternoon* has it all. Can’t wait to hear it with you in Walter Hall!

*Diane Martello is President of the WMCT and Chair of the Marketing & Membership Committee.*

\*ASC members: Simon Fryer, Penelope Cookson, Diane Martello, Kathleen McMorro, Annette Sanger and Julia Smith

## 2018 BRING-A-FRIEND DRAW WINNERS

Elias String Quartet, March 8th  
*Barbara Walker*

Sylvia Schwartz, April 12th  
*Helaine Shiff*

## A MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE: "SHIKSA"

By Ruth Miller

When my two friends and I took our seats and perused the program for the first concert of the year I was shaken to notice the title: "Shiksa".

I am 78 years old, and in the Toronto Jewish community where I grew up the Yiddish word shiksa was a pejorative term for a Gentile woman. I wondered why anyone would choose to use it in such a public way.

When introducing the second half of her program, the "Shiksa" part, Ms. Lara St. John, with a smile on her face and an easy-going manner said, "Look at me, I'm a big, red-headed pale-faced woman – definitely a shiksa!"

By now I was less uneasy but still perplexed. Was I missing something? Why was she so unabashedly using what to me was such a negative word?

I tried to explain my discomfort to my Gentile friends, but even as I did so I was keenly aware of something I hadn't previously understood. What Jews see as a negative word is, to the wider world, merely a word. In fact, to Gentiles, there was nothing attached to the word at all.

My children, aged 53, 50 and 48 never thought of the word shiksa in a negative way but then, they never heard it used in a derogatory way in our family. So, their generation is already seeing the word differently from the way I saw it. Another young friend, not Jewish, told me she knows the word from a Seinfeld episode, and sometimes refers to herself as a shiksa in fun.

I decided then that if Lara St. John wants to call herself a shiksa, who am I to tell her that she can't?



Lara St. John & Matt Herskowitz in concert  
October 5, 2017 (Photo: James Kippen)

It's not that she is taking back the word, the way gay people have taken back the word queer, because she never felt demeaned by the word in the first place, and therefore had nothing to take back. I was greatly relieved and thought no further about it.

We Jews can debate endlessly the actual meaning and use of the word, but Gentiles couldn't care less. A word that has so much power in one community seemingly has none at all in another. In this particular case, because that other culture is the dominant one, the negative meaning is not there.

Many Jewish words have found their way into English, enriching it. "Shiksa" is apparently just another of those words.

*Ruth Miller has been a WMCT member since 2007.*

## VERITY RECITAL

By Susan Johnston

On March 20, Verity (the Toronto women's club), in collaboration with the WMCT, presented an evening of chamber music for members of its Arts and Culture Club. The initiative for this event came from WMCT Treasurer Janet Murray. Verity provided an elegant and comfortable venue, while the WMCT provided the musicians – four of our WMCT Foundation scholarship winners – as well as a brief and entertaining account of the WMCT's 121-year history from our president, Diane Martello.

The audience heard Alessia Disimino (violin), with her accompanist Ben Smith, play Dvorak's *Romance* for violin and piano; Michaela Kleer (viola) perform two movements from Bach's cello suites, arranged for viola, as well as the *Capriccio* from Canadian composer Marjan Mozetich's *Baroque Diversion*; Chieh-Ying Lu (oboe), with her accompanist Nancy Li, play Saint-Saëns Sonata for oboe and piano; and then pianist Vivian Chen brought the concert to a dramatic conclusion with Chopin's *Andante Spianato* and *Grande Polonaise Brillante*. All of the musicians are, or have been, students at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music or the Royal



Diane Martello, Nancy Li, Alessia Disimino, Vivian Chen, Michaela Kleer, Susan Johnston, Chieh-Ying Lu and Lucy Bugoski at Verity on March 20, 2018 (Photo: Bonita O'Dacre)

Conservatory's Glenn Gould School, and they are a wonderful advertisement for the quality of their training and musicianship. The Verity members were loudly enthusiastic, as were the WMCT members who were able to attend.

The event was a great opportunity to raise awareness of the WMCT and its concerts and scholarships, and we hope that it may lead to further such opportunities.

*Susan Johnston is the WMCT Archivist.*

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH 2018 CDA WINNER BLAKE POULIOT

*By Annette Sanger*

For this article, I thought it would be nice to have a different take on [Blake Pouliot](#) from the one presented on his "official" website biography which, inevitably, doesn't tell the full story. Of course, biographies are created for publicity purposes, and Blake's certainly contains some fantastic information about his concert engagements and awards won. But there is so much more that contributes to the making of such an incredibly talented, in-demand young musician. Hopefully, we can reveal some of that background through the conversation detailed below.

**AS: Can you tell us a little about music as part of your childhood and family life?**

BP: Music has always been a huge part of my life. My father was a television producer at CBC for *The Tommy Hunter Show*, as well as a music arranger for TV, and is a classically trained guitarist. My mom was

a singer on television and they met producing shows together on CBC. I was born into an overwhelming influence of Country music, classical guitar and piano and I was eager to make music when my parents discovered I had perfect pitch at age three. That developed into starting to play the piano at five, and after two years of asking, the violin at seven.

**AS: I see that you have studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and the Colburn School of Music in Los Angeles. Can you outline some of your experiences with these two renowned institutions?**

BP: After picking up the violin at seven, I excelled rather quickly and, with a thirst to learn more, my parents enrolled me in some Suzuki group classes and shortly after with a private teacher at the Royal Conservatory. I was lucky enough to be accepted into the [Taylor Academy at the Royal Conservatory](#) at age ten, where I studied first with Marie Berard and then Erika Raum. At the same time, I had the pleasure of being in a successful string quartet for five incredible years, and slowly worked my way through the Conservatory until the time for college. The Taylor Academy was one of the most influential parts of my life.



Blake Pouliot  
(Photo: Jeff Fasano Photography)

I now am getting ready to graduate from the [Colburn School](#) in downtown Los Angeles, where I've been the past six years studying with [Robert Lipsett](#), holder of the Jascha Heifetz Distinguished Violin Chair. I adore every nook and cranny of this institution, and I owe a massive amount of the success in my career to the dedication of my teacher, and the support from the school. It's a one-of-a kind conservatory, and I'm so humbled to have been a part of it for so many years.

**AS: What are your career plans and goals for the next five years? In particular do you have any**

## **new directions you are considering or would like to pursue down the road?**

BP: As a general overview, in the next five years I'd love to see my career continue to flourish and grow as it has done so rapidly the last few years. I hope to continue to proudly represent Canada in the American network, and I hope to continue expanding and pushing the boundaries of my own artistic limits by performing and sharing the stage with numerous other artists and organizations. Personal success is incredibly subjective so I like to always remind myself of this overview to help swallow the fact that this vocation is not one that happens overnight.

## **AS: Do you have a favourite musical piece (or few pieces if just one is too difficult) and/or composer and why?**

BP: I would say my favourite composer can fluctuate depending on my mood. But as a constant, I'm a huge fan of Shostakovich. I find his music incredibly intense and it evokes a powerful emotional response from me. His painful life and experiences are tangible in his music, and I am continuously impressed by his ability to capture such real and raw feelings in his phrasing and counterpoint. One of my favourite pieces of all time is Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola, K.364. I love this piece of music because I just find it to be compositionally perfect – an incredible piece of music that anyone can identify with, and no matter what my mood I find it can put me at ease.

## **AS: Who are your violin-playing heroes and why?**

BP: My violin-playing heroes range from artists who have a place in history, to violinists who are currently in the pinnacle moments of their careers, to my peers



Blake Pouliot (Photo: Jeff Fasano Photography)

in the same position as me. My violin teacher, Robert Lipsett, is one of the most dedicated individuals I've ever met, and I attribute a considerable amount of my success to his mentorship. Some of my favourite players of today include Norwegian violinist [Vilde Frang](#), Dutch violinist & violist [Janine Jansen](#), [Lisa Batiashvili](#), Artist-in-Residence with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Rome), and [Stefan Jackiw](#), ex-Harvard University and New England Conservatory, and recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

All four of those violinists have an artistic sound, vision and execution I find spellbinding. They possess an ability to manipulate sound, colour and texture with a sensitivity that I hope I too can achieve one day. I also am constantly inspired by studio mates, especially one of my closest friends [Simone Porter](#) (another Avery Fisher Career Grant awardee). She has a dedication and desire to push her own limits that constantly inspires me. We help validate each other's ideas, and even more importantly, help critique them.

## **AS: What does the WMCT Career Development Award mean to you (for example financially and in terms of prestige)?**

BP: The [WCMT Career Development Award](#) is an unbelievably helpful, humbling and rewarding opportunity. This is a point in a budding career where one has to accept the fact that living on the edge is almost a necessity. Presentation and preparation are an essential element of projecting a lengthy and healthy career. As much time as I have to dedicate to my craft, I also have to make sure I'm buying strings, bow re-hairs, dry cleaning clothes, new suits, new shoes, haircuts etc. and making sure that every first impression I give is as polished as it can be. Developing a creative and earnest aesthetic is time-consuming and expensive, and living in Los Angeles is also not cheap. Receiving this award is overwhelmingly helpful and allows me to feel at ease when purchasing items that I need, so that my time and energy is properly channeled into my work, practice and artistic growth.

As for the prestige of receiving this award, the artists

who have previously received the Career Development Award are nothing short of brilliant and spectacular musicians. The fact that I get the opportunity to have my name on a list next to their names is humbling and gratifying. I was beaming with excitement when I was informed I was the winner, and I continue to be delighted as I give these answers.

**AS: What are your pastimes and interests outside of classical music? Do you have a favourite book or film?**

BP: I try to balance a lot of time outside of practicing and performing. I love cinema and enjoy going to the movies. Living in Los Angeles I have plenty of access to foreign and independent theatres and there is always plenty to do. Cooking is a huge pastime of mine and I'm unbelievably fortunate to live in a city whose climate allows for fresh local produce all year long. I very much enjoy reading and do a lot of it in my spare time. I have way too many favourite books to pick one, but over the past couple years two of my favourites were *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami, as well as *Just Kids*, the memoir of Patti Smith, her friendship with the great photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and their struggle to stardom living in New York in the 1970s. It helps keep me humble and understand that the idea of the "struggling artist" has perpetuated for centuries, and the best way for me to retain my ambition is to constantly look inward and reassure myself why I am doing this in the first place.

**AS: Any other comments, interesting stories or anecdotes to share?**

BP: Not much to add other than I'm exceptionally grateful! I will say however I have a funny habit before I go on stage now. My first performance ever of the Sibelius Violin Concerto was after I was awarded the Michael Measures Prize from the Canada Council, and I soloed with the National Youth Orchestra of Canada in Koerner Hall in Toronto. It wasn't until I walked off stage that I realized I played a 40-minute concerto with my fly down the entire time! Mortified, I zipped it up, and walked on for the encore. I now double or even triple check any time before I walk on stage. Rest assured, I have not done it since!

*Annette Sanger is Chair of the CDA Committee.*

*The Career Development Award is presented every three years to an exceptional young Canadian musician (or small ensemble) embarking on a professional performing career. The award includes a prize of \$20,000 as well as the opportunity to perform a concert in the Music in the Afternoon concert series. The CDA is a project of the WMCT in partnership with the CBC and funded by the WMCT Foundation.*

## A TRIBUTE: JOHN MCNEIL

John McNeil was an honorary adviser to both the Women's Musical Club of Toronto and the WMCT Foundation, as well as a member of the Foundation's Investment Committee, since its inception some eighteen years ago. He died on February 26, 2018.



John was the husband of Esther McNeil, founding chair of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto Foundation, and former two-time president of the WMCT.

John advised Esther when she created the Foundation eighteen years ago and was a vital partner in ensuring its successful launch and continuing growth. John was able to contribute both financial acumen and networking skills to create a distinguished roster of the Foundation's Investment Committee members. As a long-serving member of the Investment Committee, John guided the Foundation to invest its money wisely and for the long term, ensuring the health and continuing success of the WMCT Foundation and the WMCT.

John was also a keen music lover and attended all Women's Musical Club of Toronto concerts after his retirement from Sun Life.

John will be deeply missed by his WMCT and WMCT Foundation friends and colleagues.