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Women's Musical Club of Toronto Foundation



The Women's Musical Club of Toronto gratefully acknowledges
Dianne Henderson
for her support of the WMCT Student Outreach Programme

and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council
for assistance in presenting
Music in the Afternoon.





GREETINGS from Simon Fryer, Artistic Director Women's Musical Club of Toronto

Welcome to the 119th season of *Music in the Afternoon*. The WMCT proudly presents the most sought-after musicians on the world stage as well as introducing performers who will surely be in that position before very long. It is especially exciting to note that three of the five programs feature Toronto recital debuts for the artists: our opening concert featured spectacular American heldentenor Issachah Savage, next year we will welcome the international instrumentalists of the Trio Shaham Erez Wallfisch and the four dynamic young women who are the Aizuri Quartet. These highly anticipated debuts are complemented by the return to Walter Hall stage of Canadian virtuoso French horn player James Sommerville, violinist Scott St. John and pianist Peter Longworth, who will include in their program the premiere of the latest WMCT commissioned work, this time from Vivian Fung. The season closes with Charles Richard-Hamelin, a pianist of dazzling musicianship, and our 2015 Career Development Award winner. All these artists shine brightly in their field, and their music-making is sure to delight and enthuse. You really won't want to miss a single one of these events.

Principal Horn of the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 1998, James Sommerville has pursued a solo career that has spanned 25 years, and has brought critically acclaimed appearances throughout North America and Europe. Today he brings favourite collaborators violinist Scott St. John, formerly of the St. Lawrence String Quartet, and well-known soloist and chamber musician pianist Peter Longworth to perform a program of classic and new material. As well as Mr. Sommerville's selection of French recital works, the trio performs the world premiere of the new work commissioned for them by the WMCT from Vivian Fung and Brahms' much loved Horn Trio Op.40.

Thank you for subscribing to the 119th season of the WMCT – the heart of artistry, the essence of chamber music

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

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PROGRAMME

<i>Villanelle</i>	Paul Dukas (1865 - 1935)
<i>Mélodies</i> <i>Le premier jour de mai</i> <i>O ma belle rebelle</i> <i>Venise</i>	Charles-François Gounod (1818 - 1893)
<i>Bounce</i> for horn, violin, and piano	Vivian Fung (b.1975)
<i>Variations sur une chanson française</i>	Marcel Bitsch (1921 - 2011)

INTERMISSION

<i>Élégie</i>	Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963)
Horn Trio Op. 40 Andante Scherzo (Allegro) Adagio mesto Allegro con brio	Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Visit the artist's website at <http://bostonsymphonychamberplayers.org/>


Complimentary refreshments will be available at intermission.
Please come and meet the artists in the lobby following the concert.

NOTES

Some years ago, when a WMCT concert featured a trombonist, I had some fun in the notes, pretending to be surprised at finding that particular instrument in a chamber music setting. I remember quoting the seventeenth-century French writer Marin Mersenne, who thought the trombone such an uncouth instrument it should only perform out of doors. Today, with another piece of sparkling and complex machinery in the hands of the soloist, perhaps I can repeat the joke? No, not this time! The French horn, admittedly also a member of the brass family, is a different animal altogether. It is, according to Hector Berlioz, "a noble and melancholy instrument [whose] tone and sonority are such that it can be used in any kind of piece [since] it blends easily with the rest of the harmony." It is, in other words, well behaved, a perfect instrument to take part in a variety of chamber ensembles; and this in spite of its outdoor origins, seen most obviously in the hunting horn, one of its predecessors. It was a domesticated version of this that first found its way into instrumental ensembles and despite having some drawbacks, it had devotees long after the introduction of valves, the invention that characterizes the modern horn. The slow adoption of the new instrument is strangely reflected in some of the background to this afternoon's programme.

Let me make a small detour at this point and look at this a little more closely without getting too far outside our mutual comfort zone. The weight of the French horn is supported by the performer inserting one hand a little way into the bell, giving the appearance to the fanciful among us of the instrument devouring its player. Gerrard Hoffnung has a marvelous cartoon that shows a bemused horn player contemplating a rather extreme stage of this fantasy. But as well as supporting the instrument, the fist in the bell can be used to change the tone and the pitch of the notes, and before the adoption of valves, this played a vital role in the horn player's arsenal. A length of metal tubing – which if we're being unromantic is what a horn is – can be persuaded to give out a series of notes, wide apart at the bottom of the range and closer together as you go higher. It is the laws of physics that determine what those notes will be and you have to accept the gaps. What you can do, however, is to bend some of the available notes by some careful manipulation of the hand in the bell, and thus increase the supply of notes. It was this technique that was used by all horn players before the adoption of the valve instrument, and these early horns are sometimes known as hand horns as a result.

Gounod's *Six Mélodies* are early works, written sometime after 1840 when the composer was 21. In 1839, on his second attempt, he had won the Prix de Rome, and so these pieces must have been written while he was in Italy, or a little later when he spent some time in Vienna and Leipzig during the third year of his prize. In the French




battle between proponents of the new valve horn and the die-hard natural horn supporters, Gounod was on the progressive side. James Sommerville has said of these pieces, [they] “are very much within the fine sentimental style of popular opera of the mid-nineteenth century, but their Gallic elegance and suavity balances the sweetness of the tunes. They are above all, unassuming and sensual.”

Vivian Fung has provided these notes about her WMCT commission: “*Bounce* is inspired by my son Julian, who was about 9 months old when I started to work on this piece. Ever since he was a newborn, Julian has had the habit of banging his head against his mattress to soothe himself to sleep. Even though his pediatrician reassured us that this is perfectly normal, and that about a third of all boys do it, Julian’s nightly ritual has had a profound effect on my psyche—so much so that I would routinely hear him pounding away even when he was sleeping quietly or not even around.

The piece is a compact 12 minutes, but swings through many different moods, from the leisurely ebb and flow of harmonies in the beginning, through the playfulness of the bouncy scherzo-like middle sections and the bell-like tolling of the interlude, to the schizophrenic culmination at the end. Throughout the piece, the idea of a constant drone or thump remains constant, with a deep ostinato that permeates the beginning; playful, rhythmic, repeated notes in the faster sections, and fast, muted sounds in the virtuosic final section. A few notable moments include some inside-the-piano sounds in the beginning and final sections; use of harmonics in the violin; and a final horn call, before the fiery ending, that involves the performer singing into his instrument while playing.”

Paul Dukas composed his *Villanelle* in 1906. The previous year Gabriel Fauré had been appointed as director of the Paris Conservatory during a particularly volatile period in that institution’s history and had set about reforming its administration and curriculum. In the course of this, according to one source, he asked Dukas to write an examination piece for the annual horn competitions, and the composition on today’s programme is the result. In order to give the competitors a tough work out, he includes passages that he asks be played as though on the Natural Horn, that is without use of the valves.

Marcel Bitsch was born in Paris in 1921, and studied music at the Paris Conservatory. He won the Prix de Rome in 1945, and later joined the staff of the Conservatory, where he taught counterpoint and fugue. He wrote several orchestral works, including three piano concertos, chamber works and numerous studies and pieces for wind instruments, as well as textbooks on harmony, counterpoint and fugue. The variations were written in 1954.



The horn player depicted in the Hoffnung cartoon mentioned earlier was the famous English virtuoso performer Dennis Brain, who was killed in a tragic road accident in 1957 at the age of 36. The French composer Francis Poulenc, who knew Brain, was in London at the time and immediately set to work writing the *Élegie* in response to the news. He dedicated it to Brain's memory and played the piano part in its first performance, a BBC broadcast on the first anniversary of Brain's death, with Neill Sanders as the soloist.

Brahms composed his Horn Trio in the summer of 1865 when he was staying in Lichtenthal on the edge of the spa town of Baden Baden. A few years before, Clara Schumann had taken to spending her summers there with her family, and this was undoubtedly part of the attraction of the place for Brahms. In previous years the composer had stayed with friends or in a hotel, but this summer he rented a couple of rooms in a hillside house overlooking the Cistercian Abbey. "I look out," he wrote, "on three sides on the dark wooded mountains, the roads winding up and down them and the pleasant houses." Here he established a regular routine, rising early, taking a long walk in the surrounding woods and then working until 5 p.m. when he visited Clara, returning to work for a while and then joining her again for dinner. He later told his composer friend Albert Dietrich that the opening idea for the trio was conceived "high up in the woods among fir trees," indeed he took him to the exact place and said "I was walking along one morning and as I arrived at this spot the sun came out and the theme immediately suggested itself." In February of that year Brahms' mother had died and in the months following he had composed two sections of what was to become his *German Requiem*. There is clear evidence that he regarded at least parts of the trio – the Adagio Mesto movement, for example – as another memorial. Brahms asks for the work to be performed on the Waldhorn, literally the Forest Horn, or in other words the Natural Horn. In many respects Brahms was a conservative musician, so this is not surprising, but it is quite probable that the old instrument had very clear personal associations for him since it was one that he had learned as a boy. The reception of the work was mixed: writing in her diary after a 1870 performance Clara Schumann said, "it went very well, but was not well received...the people did not understand this truly spirited and thoroughly interesting work." Nevertheless the composer was very fond of the composition, performing it often and recommending it to others.

John Mayo

TODAY'S ARTISTS

James Sommerville, French horn
Scott St. John, violin
Peter Longworth, piano

James Sommerville is Principal Horn of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a position he has held since 1998, and was until recently, Music Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra. The winner of the highest prizes at the Munich, Toulon, and CBC competitions, Mr. Sommerville has pursued a solo career that has spanned 25 years, and has brought critically acclaimed appearances with major orchestras throughout North America and Europe. His disc of the Mozart Horn Concertos with the CBC Vancouver Orchestra won the JUNO Award for Best Classical Recording in Canada.

<http://bostonsymphonychamberplayers.org/>

Violinist **Scott St. John**, a member of the St. Lawrence String Quartet from 2006-2013, continues an intense touring schedule. Maintaining an ongoing relationship with the Marlboro Music Festival, Scott plays an enormous variety of concerts across North America, including solo appearances with orchestras, recitals and chamber music.

<http://www.scottstjohn.com/>

Pianist **Peter Longworth** performs as soloist and chamber musician in major venues around the world and with orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Fairbanks Symphony, and the Vancouver Symphony. Peter is a founding member of the Duke Piano Trio and regularly collaborates with many of today's finest instrumentalists.

<http://www.peterlongworth.ca/>

Each year the WMCT commissions a new work by a Canadian composer for performance in the series. Juno award winner, **Vivian Fung**, was born in Edmonton and received her doctorate from The Juilliard School. Artists and ensembles world-wide have embraced her work as part of the core repertoire.

<http://vivianfung.ca/>
