

GREETINGS from AMY HILLIS



Welcome to the last concert of our 2025/26 season featuring two exceptional Canadian musicians. Madeline and Caitlin are not only fantastic players but also truly lovely people. They have an infectious energy and warmth on and off stage. Equally established as solo performers who are constantly striving to make music resonate with audiences in new ways, their duo “Fierbois” allows us to hear the oboe and piano in a fresh light. Their program is an example of the wide variety of repertoire they present, from a 17th-century sonata to today’s première by David Braid. We at the WMCT are fortunate to welcome these two inspiring women as we enjoy the power, grace, and charm of Fierbois.

-Amy Hillis, WMCT Artistic Director

Tuning Your Mind Presentation:

In conversation with 2026 commissioned composer, David Braid

Robin Elliott, Professor of Musicology, U of T Faculty of Music

Open to all, 12.15 p.m. sharp

Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building

Women's Musical Club of Toronto

Suite 700 - 2 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M4W 3E2

416.923.7052 | wmct@wmct.on.ca | www.wmct.on.ca

May 7th, 2026, concert

Fierbois

Caitlin Broms-Jacobs

Madeline Hildebrand

Commission Sponsor

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The WMCT gratefully acknowledges

Dianne Henderson

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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.

JOIN US AFTER THE CONCERT

for a reception

In Celebration of our 128th Music in the Afternoon Season!

Boyd Neel Room

PROGRAM for MAY 7, 2026

Canadiana Suite (7min) Oscar Peterson
(1925-2007)
Wheatland
Land of the Misty Giants arr. Fierbois

Six Preludes for piano (9min) Gayane Chebotarian
(1918-1998)
I. Andante
III. Adagio con duolo arr. Caitlin Broms-Jacobs
VI. Allegro

*L'heure Bleue** (15min) David Braid
WMCT Commission (b. 1975)

Dances from Ruslan and Lyudmila (9min) Mikhail Glinka
(1804-1857)
arr. G. Konrada

---INTERMISSION---

The Lark Ascending (8min) Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)
arr. Caitlin Broms-Jacobs

Intermezzo in A major for piano, Johannes Brahms
op.76, no. 6 (6min) (1833-1897)

Spring Waters (2min) Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)
arr. Fierbois

Sonata in D major Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre
for violin and continuo (7min) (1665-1729)
arr. Fierbois

Sonatine in F sharp for piano (12min) Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)
Modéré
Mouvement de menuet arr. David Walter
Animé

*world première

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

FIERBOIS

The name **Fierbois** resonates deeply with **Caitlin Broms-Jacobs** (oboe) and **Madeline Hildebrand** (piano). Meaning “proud wood,” it references the core material of their instruments, the legendary sword and spirit of Joan of Arc, and the dignified majesty of the forests so central to the Canadian landscape. Through their music, Caitlin and Madeline reinforce these powerful connections, blending history and nature with their artistry.

Madeline and Caitlin have been fast friends and musical collaborators since 2014, when the duo performed their first concert together on Winnipeg’s prestigious Millennium Recital Series. Having instant chemistry both on and offstage, the two realized they had found their perfect musical match and have since gone on to bring their expressive music making to audiences across Canada. Their thrilling interchange of musical ideas is instantly apparent in their performances, which are infused with free-spirited warmth and ease of expression. Self-described as “serious musicians who don’t take themselves too seriously”, Madeline and Caitlin combine their infectious enthusiasm and unstuffy approach with sensitive and masterful playing, all with the goal of inspiring audiences and bringing joy through music.

Represented by Prairie Debut, the duo has been touring Western Canada this 2025/26 season. Their celebrated debut album *Sing to Me Again* was released in January 2025 and is supported by Canada’s Leaf Music Label.

Caitlin is the principal oboist of the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, where she has been often featured as a soloist and performs frequently as guest principal oboist with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Madeline has recently performed with Philip Glass and the Kronos Quartet, and has enjoyed solo concerts across Canada, the US, and Europe. A recent doctoral graduate from Stony Brook University, she is a passionate educator and teaches at Memorial University in Newfoundland.

NOTES for MAY 7, 2026

For a long time, string quartets and various kinds of trio have emphasised their communal identity by adopting a distinctive name and it is encouraging to find a duo doing that for exactly the same reason. You can read details of their name elsewhere, but I particularly like the connection of Fierbois to Joan of Arc, which suggests a fearlessness when it comes to programming. Sure enough, today we have an eclectic mix that encompasses the Canadian landscape, and the Canadian subconscious, music under the Russian tsars and in Soviet Armenia, a French woman contemporary of J. S. Bach, as well as Ravel's classically structured impressionism.

The Canadian jazz pianist and composer Oscar Peterson wrote the *Canadiana Suite* in 1962. It is in eight movements and notated in conventional terms for piano, but the composer said that he left it "very loose, to permit the freedom of jazz in performance." And that is the approach that Fierbois have taken, following the original score, but feeling free to introduce their own solos that have an improvisatory feeling about them. The whole suite is a picture of Canada seen, according to Gene Lees, "from east to west, which is the way the country thinks." *Wheatland* is a picture – this is Lees again – of the "awesomely flat country where, they say, if you stand on a railway embankment six feet high, you can see 50 miles." As for the last movement, Peterson said "there is an almost ethereal quality to the Rockies. That's what I tried to show, and that's the reason for the title" – *Land of the Misty Giants*.

In a recent interview that Fierbois gave on radio in Winnipeg, they describe the evolution of their interpretation of music from Gayane Chebotarian's Six Preludes. Madeline Hildebrand had performed these works by the Soviet Armenian composer in their original form as piano solos. Later they both realised that the texture of interweaving melodies that make up so much of the music lent itself to a little tweaking, so that the oboe might take up one of those melodic threads. Apart from this purely technical aspect of adapting the music for their own use, they were fascinated by a question presented by so much music of the Soviet era. In a culture in which what composers wrote was strictly governed, how do you uncover the composer's own voice from those notes on the page?

This year's WMCT commissioned composer David Braid has supplied the following note about his composition *L'heure Bleue*. "The piece emerged from an unsettling dream-encounter with a well-known composer who spoke of creativity requiring an equilibrium between deep-rooted musical knowledge and the mysterious, 'darker' corners of the subconscious. This tension defines *L'heure Bleue*—'the blue hour.' Embodying the fleeting twilight between sunset and night, the music inhabits a liminal space where chromatic colour-fields of French Impressionism assimilate to the visceral architecture of American blues. At the heart of this stylistic crosstalk is the 'Fierbois chord,' a nod to the ensemble premiering the work. This shimmering, metallic sonority functions as both a structural anchor and a harmonic disruptor, articulating the strophic framework of the blues throughout the piece. The performers act as guides through this terrain, weaving both modal and blues-inflected melodies with light and dark Impressionistic gestures. The work's ABACA rondo structure invites the listener into three distinct 'musical worlds,' each exploring a suspended, indigo state, capturing the elusive essence of the blue hour before the final shadows of the night take hold."

Glinka's 1842 opera, *Ruslan and Lyudmila* was his second and like the first, *A Life for the Tsar*, was a clear attempt to provide something home grown to combat the Italian operas that were flooding St Petersburg. The libretto is based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin, and the composer originally intended the two of them to collaborate. Pushkin's death in a duel put paid to that and the libretto was the work of several hands, sometimes adding text to music already composed. One source describes the original poem as "an epic literary fairy tale," and Richard Taruskin calls Glinka's work a "Magic" opera. This is of significance for the dances on today's program. They occur in Act III which is set in Naina's magic castle – Naina is described as an "evil sorceress" – and the dances are performed by her "magical maidens" with the aim of plunging another character, Ratnir into a stupor. Be warned!

Vaughan Williams began work on *The Lark Ascending* before the start of WWI but only completed it after the war when he was staying at King's Weston House, the 18th century mansion outside Bristol, owned by the businessman, philanthropist, and sometime composer, Philip Napier Miles. The first performance of a version for violin and piano was given in a local community centre by Marie Hall, a young violinist whose musical education was supported by Miles. The soaring melody and

the title give ample scope for the listener's imagination. In addition, the score contains some verses from a George Meredith poem that begin "He rises and begins to round, / He drops the silver chain of sound."

Brahms spent the summer months of 1877-79 in the small fishing village of Pörschach on Lake Wörthersee. In letters to friends he said, "It is beautiful here, the melodies fly around so much that you have to be careful not to step on them!" The eight Capricci and Intermezzi that make up Op. 76 were written there in 1878 and represent the composer's return to solo piano music after a gap of fifteen years. Brahms' great friend, the Viennese surgeon Theodor Billroth, who was also a good pianist was enthusiastic. "They are splendid pieces," he said, "beautiful and interesting to play ... it is a pleasure to practise them."

Spring Waters, sometimes translated as "Spring Torrents" is the penultimate song in a collection of twelve that Rachmaninoff wrote in 1896 and that were published as his Op. 14. The text by Feodor Tyutchev speaks of the approach of spring. The rushing waters shout out the message, spring is coming, spring is here.

The French harpsichordist and composer, Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre was, until her marriage in 1687, a member of the court of the "Sun King," Louis XIV, indeed her education was supervised by his mistress, Madame de Montespan. When many years later she published the six sonatas for violin and harpsichord she dedicated them to the king in the fulsome style then required. "Such happiness for me, Sire, if my latest work may receive as glorious a reception from Your Majesty as I have enjoyed almost from the cradle ..." That's just the beginning. Her modern biographer draws attention to the "variety, rhythmic vigour and expressive harmony" of these works.

Ravel's *Sonatine* for piano has a curious history. The first movement was written in 1903 for a competition run by a Paris-based magazine. His submission was unsuccessful, partly because he went over the stipulated length but also because the magazine went bankrupt soon after and the competition was abandoned. A couple of years later Ravel added the second and third movements and the work was published in that form. The composer gave the first, private performance in the Proustian salon of Winnaretta Singer, the American heiress of the Singer sewing machine fortune, known after her second marriage as Princess Edmond de Polignac.

-John Mayo

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