

*The Vocalis Series is made possible in part by a generous gift from Dianne W. Henderson.*

Voice Studies at the University of Toronto presents:

**Vocalis II - The Music of Ian Cusson**

**Ian Cusson (b. 1981), composer and curator**  
**Mélisande Sinsoulier and Timothy Cheung, pianists**

Wednesday, April 3rd, 2024, at 7:30 pm | Heliconian Hall, 35 Hazelton Avenue

**PROGRAM**

*A Breakfast for Barbarians*

III. Manzini: Escape Artist

IV. The Children are Laughing

Jordan Baldwin, countertenor; Timothy Cheung, piano

*Where There's A Wall*

I. Invasion

III. Grief Poem

Nicole Percifield, mezzo-soprano; Mélisande Sinsoulier, piano

*Dzifa' Aria (Of the Sea)*

Zyion Stevens, soprano; Mélisande Sinsoulier, piano

*Le Récital des anges*

IV. Banquet macabre

V. Confession nocturne

Lauren Estey, soprano; Timothy Cheung, piano

*Bird Song (Where There's A Wall, no. II)*

Maeve Palmer, soprano; Timothy Cheung, piano

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*We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.*

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures. Visit [indigenous.utoronto.ca](http://indigenous.utoronto.ca) to learn more.

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*Where There's A Wall*

IV. Where There's a Wall

V. Offerings

Chloé Dionne, soprano; Mélisande Sinsoulier, piano

*Songs From the House of Death*

II. I Am A Dangerous Woman

III. The Creation Story

Skylar Cameron, soprano; Timothy Cheung, piano

*Joan's Aria (Empire of Wild)*

Maeve Palmer, soprano; Timothy Cheung, piano

*Dodo, mon tout petit (Louis Riel)*

Anaïs Kelsey-Verdecchia, soprano; Mélisande Sinsoulier, piano

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**Ian Cusson** is a composer of art song, opera and orchestral work. Of Métis (Georgian Bay Métis Community) and French Canadian descent, his work explores Canadian Indigenous experience including the history of the Métis people, the hybridity of mixed-racial identity, and the intersection of Western and Indigenous cultures.

He studied composition with Jake Heggie (San Francisco) and Samuel Dolin, and piano with James Anagnoson at the Glenn Gould School. He is the recipient of the Chalmers Professional Development Grant, and grants through the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.

Ian was an inaugural Carrefour Composer-in-Residence with the National Arts Centre Orchestra for 2017-2019 and was Composer-in-Residence for the Canadian Opera Company for 2019-2021. He was a Co-artistic Director of Opera in the 21st Century at the Banff Centre and the recipient of the 2021 Jan V. Matejcek Classical Music Award from SOCAN and the 2021 Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize. Ian is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre and a member of the Canadian League of Composers.

He lives in Oakville with his wife and four children.



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**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

**U of T Opera: Mostly Mozart**

April 5, 5:00 pm | Walter Hall

**Piano Vocal Vingettes: Featuring Pianists and singers from the 2nd year Piano-Vocal Class**

April 8, 6:30 pm | Room 330

## Text and Translations

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### **A Breakfast for Barbarians,** *Poems by Gwendolyn MacEwen*

#### III. Manzini: Escape Artist

now there are no bonds except the flesh; listen—  
there was this boy, Manzini, stubborn with  
guts stood with black tights and a turquoise  
leaf across his sex

and smirking while the big  
brute tied his neck arms legs, Manzini  
naked waist up and white with sweat

struggled. Silent, delinquent, he  
was suddenly all teeth and knee, straining slack  
and excellent with sweat, inwardly

wondering if Houdini would take as long  
as he; fighting time and the drenched  
muscular ropes, as though his tendons were worn  
on the outside—

as though his own guts were the ropes  
encircling him; it was beautiful; it was thursday; listen—  
there was this boy, Manzini

finally free, slid as snake from  
his own sweet agonized skin, to throw his entrails  
white upon the floor  
with a cry of victory—

now there are no bonds except the flesh,  
but listen, it was thursday, there was this boy,  
Manzini—

#### IV. The Children are Laughing

It is Monday and the children are laughing  
The children are laughing; they believe they are princes  
They wear no shoes; they believe they are princes  
And their filthy kingdom heaves up behind them

The filthy city heaves up behind them  
They are older than I am, their feet are shoeless  
They have lived a thousand years; the children are laughing  
The children are laughing and their death is upon them

I have cried in the city (the children are laughing)  
I have worn many colours (the children are laughing)  
They are older than I am, their death is upon them  
I will wear no shoes when the princes are dying

#### **Where There's A Wall**

*Poems by Joy Kogawa*

##### I. Invasion

They come in swarms,  
In swarms are coming  
Hollow eyes and ragged limbs  
Bloated babes and toothless women  
Dry and haggard denizens.

Trembling we, with wide-eyed worry  
Tremblingly, we watch them come  
Bringing filth, disease and squalor,  
Bringing feeble outstretched palms  
To our apple trees and parlours.

Hail the fence!  
The barbs all hail!  
Keep us safe and pure and clean.  
Separate us. Immunize us.  
Free from evil let us reign,

Turning inwards all around us,  
All around us turning in  
Till we halt the mad invasion,  
Halt the sound of all the pleading  
Of our world-wide hungry kin.

Death to migrants. Death to welcome.  
Death to justice. Death to love.  
Save our happy laughing children,  
Happy healthy blind-eyed children  
From invasions from above.

### III. Grief Poem

o that after all no  
thought breaks  
the mind's cold spell

chill these bones their  
language lost

in this fresh silence  
weather hides all  
odours of decay

by freezing time  
I travel through  
this numb day

look look  
my small  
my beautiful child

the icicle here  
how it shimmers  
in the blue sun

my small  
my beautiful child  
look once more  
into the shimmering

### **Of the Sea**

*Libretto by Kanika Ambrose*

#### Dzifa' Aria

Darkness, darkness, yes...  
Cool stillness,  
Vastness, yes.  
Deep.

Home...yes,  
Free floating.  
Come to it with ease.

So few when I came down,  
There are so many now.  
Thousands? Yes.  
Millions? Yes.  
Bodies fallen like the rain.

As I touch your body,  
The water wakes you  
As I touch your body of water  
You will come to your queen with ease.

*Dzifa leads the waking ceremony. The Irete  
people circle Maduka, placing their hands on him.*

As I touch your body,  
As I touch your body of water,  
You will come to your queen.

## Le Récital des anges

Poems by Emile Nelligan

### IV. Banquet macabre

À la santé du rire! Et j'élève ma coupe,  
Et je bois follement comme un rapin joyeux.  
Ô le rire! Ha! ha! ha! qui met la flamme aux yeux,  
Ce vaisseau d'or qui glisse avec l'amour en poupe!

Vogue pour la gaité de Riquet-à-la-Houpe!  
En bons bossus joufflus gouaillons pour le mieux.  
Que les bruits du cristal éveillent nos aïeux  
Du grand sommeil de pierre où s'entasse leur  
groupe.

Ils nous viennent, claquant leurs vieux os: les voilà!  
Qu'on les assoie en ronde au souper de gala.  
À la santé du rire et des pères squelettes!

Versez le vin funèbre aux verres par longs flots,  
Et buvons à la Mort dans leurs crânes, poètes,  
Pour étouffer en nous la rage des sanglots!

### V. Confession nocturne

Prêtre, je suis hanté, c'est la nuit dans la ville,  
Mon âme est le donjon des mortels péchés noirs,  
Il pleut une tristesse horrible aux promenoirs  
Et personne ne vient de la plèbe servile.

Tout est calme et tout dort. La solitaire Ville  
S'aggrave de l'horreur vaste des vieux manoirs.  
Prêtre, je suis hanté, c'est la nuit dans la ville;  
Mon âme est le donjon des mortels péchés noirs.

En le parc hivernal; sous la bise incivile,  
Lucifer rôde et va raillant mes désespoirs  
Très fous!...

Le suicide aiguise ses coupoirs!  
Pour se pendre, il fait bon sous cet arbre  
tranquille...

.....  
Prêtre, priez pour moi, c'est la nuit dans la ville!....

### 4. Macabre Banquet

To the health of laughter! I lift my cup,  
And drink, madly, like a young artist.  
O laughter! Ha! ha! ha! that inflames our eyes,  
A golden ship that glides with love in its sails.

A celebration of the joy of fairytales  
Of chubby hunchbacks that we mock for fun.  
The sound of clinking glasses awakens our ancestors  
From their deep sleep, crammed in their stone tombs.

They come to us, their old bones rattling: here they  
are!  
Let them sit in the round at the gala dinner.  
To the health of laughter and skeletal fathers!

Pour long streams of funereal wine into glasses.  
Poets, let us drink to Death from their skulls  
To stifle our raging tears!

### 5. Nocturnal Confession

Father, I'm haunted, it's nighttime in the city,  
My soul is a cage of mortal sins.  
A horrible sadness rains on promenades  
And no one from the slavish crowd comes to me.

All is calm, everything sleeps.  
The horror of the lonely city  
Is worsened by the enormous manor homes.  
Father, I'm haunted, it's nighttime in the city;  
My soul is a cage of mortal sins.

In the wintry park, beneath the bitter wind  
Lucifer lurks and mocks my deranged despair

The suicidal one sharpens his knives!  
It would be good to hang oneself from such a  
peaceful tree...

.....  
Priest, pray for me, it's nighttime in the city...

## **Where There's A Wall**

*Poems by Joy Kogawa*

### II. Bird Song

Flung from our nests  
in the late spring  
and ordered to fly  
or die we are  
weaned to the air.

In this our flight  
Lord in this long  
fall the call  
is clear—

to rise to sunlight  
through spring  
storms and wars with  
wings grown strong.

But here these wind-trimmed  
unformed bones  
and tiny beaks

that sing  
inaudible songs.

### IV. Where There's a Wall

where there's a wall  
there's a way  
around, over, or through  
there's a gate  
maybe a ladder  
a door  
a sentinel who  
sometimes sleeps  
there are secret passwords  
you can overhear  
there are methods of torture  
for extracting clues  
to maps of underground passageways  
there are zeppelins  
helicopters, rockets, bombs  
bettering rams  
armies with trumpets  
whose all at once blast  
shatters the foundations

where there's a wall  
there are words  
to whisper by a loose brick  
wailing prayers to utter  
birds to carry messages  
taped to their feet  
there are letters to be written  
poems even

on this side of the wall  
I am standing staring at the top  
lost in the clouds  
I hear every sound you make  
but cannot see you

I incline in the wrong direction  
a voice cries faint as in a dream  
from the belly  
of the wall

## V. Offerings

what you offer us—  
a soap bubble  
a glass thread—  
what you place  
in our open hands—  
one branch  
of one snow fleck  
a sliver  
of smoke

and if and if  
the offering bursts  
breaks  
melts  
if the smoke  
is swallowed in the night  
we lift  
the barricades  
we take the edges  
of our transience  
we bury the ashes  
of our absences  
and sift  
the silences

## **Songs From the House of Death**

*Poems by Joy Harjo*

### II. I Am A Dangerous Woman

The sharp ridges of clear blue windows  
motion to me  
from the airport's second floor.  
Edges dance in the foothills of the Sandias  
behind security guards  
who wave me into their gun catcher machine.

I am a dangerous woman.

When the machine buzzes they say  
to take off my belt,  
and I remove it so easy  
that it catches the glance  
of a man standing nearby.  
(Maybe that is the deadly weapon  
that has the machine singing.)

I am a dangerous woman,

but the weapon is not visible.  
Security will never find it.  
They can't hear the clicking  
of the gun inside my head.



### III. The Creation Story

I'm not afraid of love  
or its consequence of light.

It's not easy to say this  
or anything when my entrails  
dangle between paradise  
and fear.

I am ashamed  
I never had the words  
to carry a friend from her death  
to the stars  
correctly.

Or the words to keep  
my people safe  
from drought  
or gunshot.  
The stars who were created by words  
are circling over this house  
formed of calcium, of blood

this house  
in danger of being torn apart  
by stones of fear.

If these words can do anything  
if these songs can do anything  
I say bless this house  
with stars.

Transfix us with love.

### **Empire of Wild**

*libretto by Cherie Dimoline*

#### Joan's Aria

My prayer is small  
As small as these crickets  
Rubbing music into the corners  
Of this night

My prayer is large  
As large as their song  
Pushed into the curves  
Of this night

My prayer is whispered  
With old words from new days  
Bursting from ceremony  
Into this night

My prayer is shouting  
With old medicine  
Stories of women and the men  
They lost at night

If I can't bring you home  
I'll get you to the road  
If I can't bring you home  
I'll guide you with this map

*(Joan opens her cloak, she is wearing a  
gorgeous tight gown underneath, covered in  
beadwork)*

This is your home  
I am your home

This is the road  
I am your road

This is the map  
I am your map

And on that star,  
Marked in red  
We'll be together

**Louis Riel**

*Libretto by Maeve Moore (Translation by Jacques Languirand)*

Dodo, mon tout petit

Dodo, mon tout petit  
Pendant que ta mère  
confie à la nuit  
d'hiver  
tout ce qu'elle veut  
pour toi

Pour toi,  
Je veux, mon petit,  
les jambes agiles du chevreuil  
pour te porter vite et loin  
à travers la prairie

Pour toi  
je veux les ailes de l'aigle  
pour fendre le vent  
escalader le ciel  
élargir l'horizon

Pour toi  
les yeux d'un chat  
pour percer la nuit  
les oreilles d'un chien  
pour déchiffrer les bruissements  
les murmures  
et je veux la vigueur de l'ours

mais pour toi  
mon petit  
je veux surtout  
un coeur d'homme  
et la sagesse infinie  
des étoiles

Pendant que ta mère  
confie à la nuit  
d'hiver  
tout ce qu'elle veut  
pour toi  
tout ce qu'elle veut  
pour toi

Dors, dors, mon tout petit  
Dodo.

Sleep, my little one

Sleep, my little one  
While your mother  
entrusts to the winter  
night  
all of her hopes  
for you

I wish for you,  
my little one,  
the agile legs of the deer  
to carry you swiftly  
through the meadow

I wish for you  
eagle's wings  
to cut through the wind  
climb the sky  
broaden the horizon

I wish for you  
the eyes of a cat  
to piece through the night  
the ears of a dog  
to decipher the rustlings  
the whispers  
I wish for you the strength of the bear

but for you  
my little one  
most of all, I want you to have  
the heart of a man  
and the infinite wisdom  
of the stars

While your mother  
entrust to the winter  
night  
all her hopes  
for you  
all her hopes  
for you

Sleep, sleep, my little one  
Dodo.