



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

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

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 to learn more.

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

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.



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.