# 46th Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition Winner's Tour

McKenzie Warriner, soprano
Danielle Guina, piano

**Short Programme – Translations, and Programme Notes***\*denotes Canadian composer/poet*

**Ma Belle, Si Tu Voulais (1997)**
Music by Philippe Leroux (b. 1959)\*
Anonymous 18th century text

A common conundrum composers face in the post-modern era is how to write "new" music when so much has already been explored. Leroux approaches this problem by fusing musical genres from completely different centuries. The text of this piece is excerpted from a French children's song dating back to the 18th century, which Leroux completely deconstructs, recomposes, and directs the vocalist to perform "comme un rap." The result is a fast-paced, flirtatious showpiece quite unlike anything else in the standard recital repertoire.

My beauty, if you'd like,

We could sleep together,

In a large square bed,

Covered with white pillows,

At the four corners of the bed,

There are bouquets of periwinkles,

In the middle of the bed,

The river is so deep,

That all the king's horses,

Could drink there together,

And we could sleep there,

Until the end of the world.

*Translation by McKenzie Warriner*

**Leino-laulut (2008)**Music by Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023)
Poetry by Eino Leino (1878-1926)

The first songs Saariaho wrote in her native language Finnish, Leino-Laulut is an evocative exploration of love, restlessness, and tranquility. Eino Leino is considered one of Finland’s national treasures, as his works paved the way for many Finnish writers to come. Having coined the term “national neo-romanticism” to refer the works of himself, composer Jean Sibelius, and architect Eliel Saarinen among others, Leino’s poetry is accessible in its description of nature and mythology, yet darker emotions are ever present. While Saariaho remarked in an interview she was originally hesitant to compose music for Finnish texts because the language was “too concrete,” her settings show imagination and curiosity.

*Looking at You*

Looking in your eyes dazzles me

like looking at a rainbow's beauty,

I close my eyes and drift to your memory

as to a gladed island in the sea.

I look at you breathing softly

like an image of my mother dear

and it seems that the angels of childhood

must be stirring somewhere near.

*The Heart*

I.

Heart, what are you sawing?

are you sawing planks,

four planks for me

to lie down in,

a pleasant place to lie down?

It's iron I'm sawing

I'm breaking your chains

so that your soul

will be free,

your unhappy soul will be free.

II.

Heart, what are you whispering?

Are you whispering the wondrous

path of the daylight

a pass through the mountains

toward the stars in the sky?

It's darkness I'm whispering

dark Tuoni's poems

chasms, trouble,

uttering nothing,

the blessedness of pride.

*Evening Prayer*

Sleep, sleep, sleep

deeply to slumber.

Snow, snow, snow

over the black land.

Night, night, night,

night birds are flying.

Work, work, work

but even woe must rest.

Fly, fly, fly,

humankind’s pondering!

Away, away, away

the time has come to rest.

*Translations © Lola Rogers*

**Finis (Finishing Songs)**Music by Tristan Zaba (b. 1995)\*
Poetry by E. E. Cummings (1894-1962)

Toronto-based composer Tristan Zaba has written many works for voice, especially for McKenzie Warriner (since they are engaged), but his 2021 cycle *Finishing Songs*  departs from his previous works in several ways. First, while he has often set his own poetry to music, Zaba chose three early poems by E.E. Cummings for this cycle. He also composed this cycle with the intention of creating more accessible songs in terms of musical language and range than some of his earlier, extremely difficult works. All three movements in the cycle deal with endings of some kind, with this song showcasing the beauty of a sunset with its breathless vocal phrases and piano tremolo effects.

**Edibles? (2018)**Music by David McIntyre (b. 1950)\*
Poetry by Ogden Nash (1902-1971)

Saskatchewan composer David McIntyre is known for his whimsical works for piano and voice, so his choice of Ogden Nash texts for this mini-cycle is a natural fit. 20th century poet Ogden Nash wrote humorous poems for all ages, utilizing unconventional rhyme schemes to surprise and amuse the reader. McIntyre captures Nash's poetic style in this cycle with expansive tonality, varied textures, and an excellent sense of comedic timing.

**Peroration (1973)**Music by Brian Elias (b. 1948)
Poetry by Robert Browning's (1812-1889)

Originally written for legendary contemporary music soprano Jane Manning, *Peroration* is difficult piece musically, emotionally, and conceptually. The text is taken from Robert Browning's *Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis*, an epic 20,000-word poem recounting the 17th century trial of Count Guido Franceschini, who murdered his (supposedly) adulterous wife and his daughter to preserve his own honour. This piece flips constantly between the points of view of Guido's defence lawyer attempting to justify the killings, his murdered wife and daughter's accusatory outbursts, and a more detached observer providing commentary on the case. As such, Elias wrote the piece in three staves with many musical phrases overlapping, even interrupting each other mid-word. Although *Peroration* is a very abstract work, especially since it moves freely between English and Latin, the core emotion of the story being told still comes through to the listener.

**The Idlers (2016)**Music by Danika Lorèn (b. 1989)\*
Poetry by Tekahionwake/E. Pauline Johnson (1861-1913)\*

Danika Lorèn began her musical career as an opera singer, but has become increasingly known for her compositional work across Canada and beyond. Hallmarks of Lorèn's musical writing include expansive cantabile phrases, colourful use of tonality, and texts by female poets like E. Pauline Johnson. Known on the stage by her Mohawk name Tekahionwake, E. Pauline Johnson is one of Canada's most important poets of the 19th and 20th centuries. Of mixed Mohawk/European descent, Johnson was well known for her theatrical readings of her writing. Some critics argue she exploited her Indigeneity to achieve commercial success with white audiences, but at the same time Johnson writes honestly and openly about the struggles faced by Indigenous peoples at the time. In this particular song's text, Johnson places her focus on the beauty of summer and the bittersweetness of happy times ending.

**Breath (2022)**Music by Keith Hamel (b. 1956)\*
Poetry by Olive Senior (b.1941)\*

Breath was commissioned by the Eckhardt-Gramatté Competition and premiered by all six finalists of the 2023 competition in April. The chosen composer, Vancouver-based Keith Hamel, chose to set texts from Jamaican Canadian Olive Senior's book *Pandemic Poems.* The collection focuses on the intersecting crises of 2020, from COVID-19 to climate change, to the death of George Floyd and the protests that ensued. While Hamel chose three very diverse texts, he unifies them throughout the piece with the use of notated breaths and evolving motivic material. The final poem in the piece quotes some of Geroge Floyd's final words, which present a complex issue for both performers and audiences as we work to determine best practices in fighting for racial justice in classical music and beyond. Although McKenzie wishes to bring these important conversations to Canadian audiences, she does not want to profit from them. As such, she is donating 10% of all her competition earnings to Black Lives Matter Canada, and encourages audiences to continue these discussions in their own communities.

**Thyme 'tis a Pretty Flower (2023)**
Traditional Canadian Folksong, arranged by McKenzie Warriner and Danielle Guina

Canada is rich in musical genres, with far more going on than Western Art Music. McKenzie grew up attending music camp that focused on traditional Canadian fiddle music, so folk music is especially close to her heart. Thyme is used here as a metaphor for virginity, making it a great contrast to many of the folk songs told from a woman's perspective that end in tragedy.