

Duo Concertante: Ecology of Being

Nancy Dahn, violin

Timothy Steeves, piano

1. Ian Cusson *The Garden of Earthly Delights* 9:24

2. Carmen Braden *The Seed Knows* 5:07

3. Randolph Peters *Frisson* 8:08

Dawn Avery *Onekha'shòn:a, Yakòn:kwe (The Waters, The Women)*

4. Onekha'shòn:a (The Waters) 2:28

5. Yakòn:kwe (The Women) 3:43

6. Onekha'shòn:a, Yakòn:kwe (The Waters, The Women) 3:28

Melissa Hui *Ecology of Being*

Poetry by Shannon Webb-Campbell

7. Ecology of Being 3:04

8. Cape Race 2:40

9. See How Low the Moon Hangs 2:13

10. Sleeping with the Northern Lights 1:31

11. By Reclaiming Ktaqamkuk 7:57

with Clara Steeves, actor

12. Bekah Simms *shedding, as if sloughed* 7:34

Total 57:19

About the music

With the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, Duo Concertante commissioned six works inspired by nature and the climate emergency. These pieces - each in a unique way - consider our interconnectedness to the environment, our complicity in the world's rapid and alarming changes, and what we are leaving to the next generation. They also pay tribute to the gloriousness of our planet and the power of nature, recognizing our dependence on it for survival, resilience, and healing, and our role as stewards of the Earth.

Ian Cusson on *The Garden of Earthly Delights*

The Garden of Earthly Delights is the first in a cycle of works based on paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and is a reflection on the cycle of life and death in the natural world. The work's formal structure parallels that of the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead and also journeys across the painting's panels, from the images of creation on the *grisaille* exterior, through scenes in the Garden: Paradise, the Fall of humanity, the fires of Hell, and finally to a circling back to the *grisaille* exterior. The opening three chords in the piano suggest the Trinity and also herald the events to come. The violin responds with a plaintive melody, one which will appear again after the cataclysmic events of the work before vanishing into a mist.

Carmen Braden on *The Seed Knows*

“What is a seed? A promise, a hope, the start of something new. It is also the end of what came before, a message for the future, blueprints, instructions. There is a mystery and also a simplicity to a seed. It is one of the most confident and clear and astounding parts of our ecosystem that I can think of. I wrote *The Seed Knows* with an ear towards today's and tomorrow's ecological concerns, my own growing family, and fascinating research on plant sentience. You'll hear a repeating note in the piano - this is the core of the seed. It is surrounded by enveloping harmonies - almost symmetrical! Flaws exist in the symmetry - it allows for evolution. The violin echoes and amplifies the seed core with vibrant and shifting timbres, and rises slowly up from the core. Plant seeds, human seeds, idea seeds - we must trust the knowledge contained in these almost-perfect beings.”

Randolph Peters on *Frisson*

Frisson is a sudden feeling of excitement or fear, especially when you think that something is about to happen. Musical frisson can strike like a bolt of lightning or as slight as a shiver. For those of us who are somewhat addicted to the sensation, we know that these dopamine spikes can occur at specific places in the music. We tend to look forward to them with sweet anticipation.

At first, we react with delight to the mix of uncertainty and fulfilled expectations. Later, when we know the piece better, the frisson can still be there, as if we have been conditioned to respond in that manner. It's part of the *mélange* of emotions that makes music so rewarding.

In this piece, I've written a few musical motifs that mimic the onset of goosebumps. But the biggest chill, I hope, is the return of the main theme right at the chaotic apex of the second section—combining two kinds of music that are very different from each other in a way that is surprising and yet inevitable.

Dawn Avery on *Onekha'shòn:a, Ya'kòn:kwe*

Onekha'shòn:a, Ya'kòn:kwe means the Waters, the Women in the *Kanien'kehà:ka* (Mohawk) language. Dedicated to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Onekha'shòn:a, Yakòn:kwe* explores the symbiotic relationship between the well-being of our water and our women.

Water is Life, a slogan most recently used at Standing Rock and by the Native American Women Water Walkers, refers to a Native American understanding of water that gives us life and has a spirit. The symbiotic connection of women, who are also life-givers, has a deep spiritual connection to the waters being not separate from each other. Traditionally and today, women in many Indigenous cultures are the water-keepers.

The composition is written in three movements and each starts with the violinist imitating the Native soundscape of a rattle in honor of the landscape of both the waters and the women. The pianist speaks phrases in *Kanien'kehà:ka* from the *Haudenosaunee Ohénton kariwatéh'kwen* (Iroquois Thanksgiving address) that translate as follows - Mvt 1: “We give blessings to the waters,” Mvt 2: “We give blessings to the women,” Mvt 3: We give blessings to the waters, the women.”

Much of my music contains what I call Indigenous soundscapes or perceptions of sound that come from my Native heritage. In addition to the contemporary effect of speaking inside the piano, the work uses prepared piano techniques: strumming the strings, and placing glass rods inside the piano to create rattling sounds.

The first movement honours the waters with a passionate melody for the violin, while piano arpeggios represent the natural flow of water. In the second movement, we hear the breakdown of the water through dissonance and dynamic interruptions. This movement depicts the reciprocated effect of waters

and women. I incorporated part of the Adagio melody from Bach's *Sonata No. 3* for violin and keyboard (inspired by Duo Concertante's 2016 recording), to be symbolic of the damaged relationship and encroaching Western values of materialism over spirituality, especially in terms of our responsibility to Mother Earth. The last movement honors the traditional balance between the waters and the women and reflects my hope for the future in healing both. In this movement, one hears a melody in the style of a Haudenosaunee women's song, water sounds, specific harmonic and melodic references from the Bach sonata, as well as rattle sounds in both the violin and the piano. This last movement can stand alone as a sonic blessing and call to attention to both the waters and the women.

Melissa Hui on *Ecology of Being*

My intention was to create a sonic space where words and music enhance the meaning of what is said and left unsaid. We all bear the responsibility of caring for our environment and for each other.

Shannon Webb-Campbell on the poems

Ecology of Being is a selected suite of poetry spanning my collections: *Lunar Tides* (Book*hug 2022), *I Am a Body of Land* (Book*hug 2019), and *Still No Word* (Breakwater 2015). These poems chart questions of belonging, a reciprocal relationship to the land and water, as well as love, longing, and Indigenous resurgence. The poems provoke the personal and are deeply ancestral. In particular, "By Reclaiming Ktaqamkuk," is a poetic honour song to my Mi'kmaq relations on the west coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. While "Ecology of Being," inspired the title of Duo Concertante's commissioning project and this recording, the poem reflects on an emotional and reflective journey of ecological trauma and connection. "Point Mistaken," traces the first signs of life on the planet at Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve where fossils become love. "Cape Race" charts rugged coastline to where a lighthouse cracks and silent hearts roar. At the crossroads of land and sky, "See How Low the Moon Hangs," hovers where a lunar cycle and the body become one. An ode to our eternal mother, "Sleeping with the Northern Lights," reminds us of our collective responsibility to protect and care for the land.

Bekah Simms on *shedding, as if sloughed*

Writing for Duo Concertante's program "Ecology of Being," I was asked to consider humanity's shifting relationship to the Earth in the Anthropocene: an epoch defined by humanity's all-encompassing impact on the planet. This rumination led me to think about a line from singer/songwriter/harpist Joanna Newsom's song "Money and Bear," where the titular bear sheds her limbs and skin, which fall off "as easy as if sloughed like boiled tomatoes." This skin shedding combined with the ripe red tomato imagery evoked thoughts of grotesque burning – of people, of life, of everything. It also painted a picture of renewal, although painful; the cycle of fire and regrowth. The violin takes the principal role in this "burning" – it is gravelly, a sound object constantly in tiny, curling motion. I also wanted to consider a strange balance between wonder and beauty, strangeness, and unease/discomfort. This is partially achieved through types of psychoacoustic phenomenon and tuning systems that use ratios and natural properties of sound, even though they can sound "out of tune" on the concert stage. A blend of acoustic and electronic, tempered and non-tempered, slow/simple and hurried and complex – it all boils down to a conflicted, strange, desperate shedding of all that has gotten us to this point.

Artist Bios

Grammy-nominated composer, cellist and world music artist Dawn Avery creates contemporary soundscapes with spiritual, classical, contemplative and folk elements that reflect a deep devotion to

spiritual and sacred traditions, including her own Mohawk heritage. Her music has been performed around the world, and at the Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, and Carnegie and Merkin Halls. She has worked with musical luminaries Luciano Pavarotti, Sting, Phillip Glass, John Cale, John Cage, and R. Carlos Nakai and has toured the world playing delta blues with the Soldier String Quartet, Persian funk with Sussan Deyhim, and jazz with Will Calhoun and Grover Washington, Jr. Awards include two Global Music Awards for her work on Heather Henson's (Jim Henson legacy) IBEX Puppetry production "Crane on Earth, in Sky: A Journey" (2017) and her CD "50 Shades of Red; New Love Songs for a Changing World", created with collaborator and Grammy Award-winning producer/guitarist Larry Mitchell. Other commissions include the American Dance Festival, the Smithsonian and John Duffy's "Meet the Composer". Dawn Avery holds a PhD in Ethnomusicology with primary research on the application of Indigenous theory on Native Classical Composers. With the support of the Ford Foundation, she created the North American Indian Cello Project, commissioning original works by Native American composers. She is the published author of several scholarly articles on Indigenous theory and Native Classical music, and leading and producing workshops as part of the Native Composer's Project and Longboat's Idawadadi Project with residential school survivors.

Carmen Braden, a unique emerging voice in the world of new music, is a genre-jumping musician from the Canadian sub-Arctic. As a composer and singer/songwriter, Carmen is "growing into the role of acoustic ambassador of the Canadian Subarctic" (Musicworks). Her music straddles a diverse range of influences, from her classical training, to folk music, rock, electroacoustics and natural sounds that she grew up with – ice, in particular – to create a pan-Northern sound.

Winner of the 2019 and 2020 Western Canadian Music Award for Classical Composer of the Year, her works have been both commissioned and performed by notable artists and groups across the country, including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Elmer Isler Singers, James Ehnes, the Gryphon Trio, the Penderecki Quartet (ArtArctica Festival, Finland), as well as at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and in Germany's "The Global Composition". She won the Audience Choice Award at the Land's End Emerging Composer Competition and was recipient of the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition Winner's Cross-Canada Tour. Carmen has released two albums: "Ravens" (2017) and "Songs of the Invisible Summer Stars" (2019), both on the Centrediscs label, earning nominations for ECMA Classical Album of the Year (2020), as well as WCMA Classical Artist of the Year (2019), and WCMA Classical Composition of the Year (2017). As an educator, Carmen regularly gives workshops, individual instruction, guest lectures and collaboration facilitation ranging from elementary level to university graduate level.

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, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation Award, and grants through 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 is 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. 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.

Melissa Hui was born in Hong Kong and raised in Vancouver, Canada. She received her DMA from Yale University and MFA from the California Institute of the Arts. Her mentors include Jacob Druckman, Earl Kim and Mel Powell. Initially inspired by the haunting music of the African pygmies and Japanese gagaku court orchestra, she strives to create a personal music of ethereal beauty, intimate lyricism, and raucous violence. Her commissions include works for the Oregon Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, the Kronos and the St. Lawrence String Quartets, New Millennium Ensemble and Essential Music (NYC), Ensemble Antipodes (Switzerland), New Music Concerts (Toronto), the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne and the Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec (Montréal), Melody of China/Citywinds (San Francisco). She also created a soundtrack for the Oscar-nominated documentary, *Sunrise Over Tiananmen Square*. International performances include the American Composers Orchestra, San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, California EAR Unit, Esprit Orchestra, Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, and at International Gaudeamus Music Week (Amsterdam), ISCM festivals in Switzerland and international festivals in Croatia, France, Mexico, Japan and across North America. Her compositions have been released on the CRI, UMMUS, Santa Fe New Music, Nisapa and Centredisc labels. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1997) and a Fromm Foundation commission (2000) as well as numerous grants and awards that include the Grand Prize of both the CBC and du Maurier/WSO Young Composers Competitions in Canada. Formerly on faculty at Stanford University (1994-2004), she now teaches at McGill University's Schulich School of Music.

Randolph Peters' compositions have been presented around the world by artists such as percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, the Kronos and the Penderecki String Quartets, and conductors Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Marin Alsop, and Bramwell Tovey. His work includes commissions from the Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Québec, Manitoba Chamber, and Edmonton Symphony Orchestras, the Hannaford Street Silver Band, and the Elmer Iseler Singers, among others. Although he works in a wide range of art forms and music media, Peters especially enjoys telling stories through his work in opera and film music. He served as composer-in-residence to the Canadian Opera Company from 1990–93, and in the same capacity to the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra from 1996–2001, curating its New Music Festival during that time. His operas include *Nosferatu*, commissioned by the Canadian Opera Company; *Inanna*, set to an original libretto by Margaret Atwood; and *The Golden Ass*, with an original libretto by Robertson Davies, which was premiered by the COC in 1999. In 2005, Peters' orchestral work *Juggernaut* was the Canadian submission at the International Rostrum of Composers. In addition to his opera and concert music, Peters has created more than 100 film and television scores for feature, documentary and animated productions including *The Diviners* (1993) and *Lost in the Barrens* (1990).

Two-time JUNO Award-nominee Bekah Simms is a Toronto-based composer whose varied output has been heralded as “cacophonous, jarring, oppressive — and totally engrossing!” (CBC Music) and “tough, even gutsy...with a sure sense of original and vibrant colours” (Vancouver Sun). Propelled equally by fascination and terror toward the universe, her work is often filtered through the personal lens of her anxiety, resulting in nervous, messy, and frequently heavy musical landscapes. Foremost among her current compositional interests is quotation and the friction between recognizability and complete obfuscation. Bekah's music has been widely performed across Canada, in over a dozen American states, Italy, Germany, France, Austria, Lithuania, and the UK and interpreted by a diverse range of top-tier performers, from soloists to symphony orchestras. In addition to commission and recording funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Council, Bekah has been the recipient of over 25 awards and prizes, including the 2019 Barlow Prize.

Bekah holds a DMA and MMus in music composition from the University of Toronto, and a BMusEd and BMus in theory/composition from Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her principal teachers during

academic studies were Gary Kulesha and Andrew Staniland, alongside significant private study with Clara Iannotta and Martin Bédard.

Shannon Webb-Campbell is a member of Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation. Her books include: *Still No Word* (Breakwater 2015), *I Am A Body of Land* (Book*hug 2019), and *Lunar Tides* (Book*hug 2022). Shannon is a doctoral student at the University of New Brunswick in the Department of English, and the editor of *Visual Arts News Magazine*. She lives and works in Kijipuktuk/ Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Clara Steeves is a New York-based actor. Recent film/TV credits include *Ecology of Being* (short) and the feature film *Life in USA* (in post-production), among others. She recently played Dubbs in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* at The Tank theatre in New York and was featured at the 2021 Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival. A 2021 graduate from the SUNY Purchase BFA Acting program, her credits include *Blood Wedding* (The Wife), *Bright Room Called Day* (Rosa), and *The Misanthrope* (Éliante).

Duo Concertante

“Grace and fire ... fury and repose ... a triumphant mass of non-stop energy” – *WholeNote*

“Majesty, passion and excitement. Inspiring!” – *Wiener Zeitung* (Vienna)

“Splendid ... a miracle of knowledge and poetry” – *Gramophone*

Canada’s premiere violin and piano ensemble, Duo Concertante, are partners in music and in life. Known for the passion and brilliance of their performances, critics have praised Nancy Dahn and Timothy Steeves’ “artistry, poetry, and impeccable technique” (*La Scena Musicale*) and “deeply integrated performances that flow naturally as if the music were being created on the spot” (*Gramophone*).

The Duo’s busy touring schedule across North America, Europe, and China has led to performances at Wigmore Hall, Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall, Roy Thomson Hall, the National Arts Centre, Shanghai City Theatre, and the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing. Duo Concertante have consistently revealed a passion for new music, commissioning a total of sixty-seven new works and original arrangements for violin and piano from many of Canada’s leading composers.

Their twelve commercial CDs on the ATMA, Centrediscs and Marquis Classics labels include a 2011 JUNO award winner and the ECMA Classical Recording of the Year for 2017, 2018 and 2019. Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada, they are Research Professors at Memorial University and Founding Artistic Directors of the Tuckamore Festival. Recently Memorial University jointly awarded them the John Lewis Paton Distinguished Professorship which recognizes exceptional teaching, world-class research, and widely shared expertise and knowledge.

Credits

This recording was made possible with the assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts, ArtsNL and Memorial University.

Production: David Jaeger

Engineer: Dennis Patterson

Editing/mastering: Leonie Wagner

Photography: Rich Blenkinsopp

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This album is dedicated to our parents - Margery and Ray Dahn, and Taylor and Margaret Steeves - who taught us about the joys of nature and were good stewards of the Earth.