



ELEKTRA

WOMEN'S CHOIR

creating • exploring • celebrating

Elektra's mandate is to inspire and lead in the choral art form through excellence in performance and the creation, exploration, and celebration of women's repertoire.

When the Spring is Born: Music by Women Listener's Guide

By Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director

Saturday, March 9, 2019, 7:30pm
Shaughnessy Heights United Church, Vancouver
Pre-concert talk at 6:45 in the sanctuary for ticket-holders
Elektra Women's Choir
Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director
Stephen Smith, piano
with the singers of Elektra's Mira Youth Mentorship Program

Welcome! This "Listener's Guide" is meant to give you insight into Elektra's season programming and to make the concert experience richer and more meaningful. I'll be sharing my thoughts on the music we're singing on March 9, 2019 and the thinking behind the program as a whole. Here you'll also find texts and translations of the works.

Our concert is a celebration of the work of twelve women composers and arrangers, all but one of whom are alive and well and continuing to create new works across Canada and further afield. Those of you who have been following Elektra in recent years know we have made a special project over the past three years of finding and promoting the work of women composers. Since our concerts are always explorations for both us and you, I took the opportunity to dig and find for myself as well as to share the work of some outstanding women composers we have all "met" before.

We are very pleased to welcome our Featured Composer, Marie-Claire Saindon. A multi-talented musician, Marie-Claire grew up singing in treble ensembles, and now serves as the Composer-in-Residence of Adleisia Women's Chamber Choir in Montreal. Her biography is below. In her days with us, she will meet some of Vancouver's choral directors and composers, make two videos about her music for treble choir, give a pre-concert talk with me, and be in the audience to hear three of her works, meet and rehearse with Elektra.

One of the best things about music is that it allows us to be in the moment, connected with the past through poems and concepts, and with the memories and thoughts that it evokes differently in each of us. I hope our concert gives you some moments of calm, refreshment, excitement, and reflection. It's what we're here to do. Again, thank you for being with us on our continuing journey.

I chose a slow, beautiful cascade of vocal tones to open the concert, found in **Karen P. Thomas' *O Virtus Sapientiae***. Karen (b. 1957), composer and conductor, is the Artistic Director and Conductor of the Seattle Pro Musica and I have met her many times over the years at the annual Chorus America conference, where she and I both serve on the board. Her compositions are performed and broadcast throughout the world, by groups such as The Hilliard Ensemble and the Vocal Consort of Brussels. Her works are published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing and from her website, and have been featured at numerous ACDA and AGO conferences. A prize-winning composer, she has received grants from the NEA, The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and Meet the Composer, among numerous others. www.karenpthomas.com

O Virtus Sapientiae is the first movement in a suite called *Lux Lucis*. Here are Karen's notes:

Lux Lucis is a collection of three motets for women's voices, on texts by Hildegard von Bingen. The title translates as "light", and especially refers to the light of life or the light of day – it can also translate as "hope" or "elucidation" in certain contexts. The texts by Hildegard for these three motets contain numerous references to light, the sun, flame, life and radiance. Musically, the motets make some references to Hildegard's compositions – particularly in the use of the interval of the ascending fifth, which is found in many of Hildegard's songs, and also in the extended chant which opens the third motet – however, there are no direct quotes of Hildegard's melodies. Lux Lucis is dedicated to Seattle Pro Musica, and is recorded on the CD Music of the Spirit, by Seattle Pro Musica – SPM 9805. Lux Lucis has won the 2009 New York Treble Singers Composition Contest, the 2007 Roger Wagner Contemporary Choral Composition Contest, and the 2005 Jezic Ensemble Composition Contest.

text by Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)
sung in Latin

O virtus Sapientiae,
que circuiens circuisti,
comprehendeno omnia
in una via que habet vitam,
tres alas habens,
quarum una in altum volat
et altera de terra sudat
et tertia undique volat.
Laus tibi sit, sicut te decet, o Sapientia.

*O energy of Wisdom!
You circled, circling,
encompassing all things
in one path possessed of life.
Three wings you have:
one of them soars on high.
the second exudes from the earth,
and the third flutters everywhere.
Praise to you, as befits you, O Wisdom.*

Our next composer, **Dr. Ramona Luengen**, is no stranger to Elektra, living here in Vancouver and having written our very first commissioned work in 1987 plus many other cherished compositions over three decades. Ramona (b. 1960) has composed extensively in the choral genre and has been commissioned and recorded by Canada's finest choirs as well as the CBC. Her works have been performed in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan and broadcast on the national radio stations of Britain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Luengen's opera for young audiences, Naomi's Road, has received over 350 performances, and her 1995 Stabat Mater, premiered by Elektra Women's Choir, was awarded 'Outstanding Choral Composition of the Year' and 'Outstanding Choral Event of the Year' by the Canadian Association of Choral Conductors. Previously on the faculty of the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University for 12 years, she also directed the award-winning Phoenix Chamber Choir from 1995-2012. Luengen has been the Artistic Director of the Amabilis Singers since 2006 and Choir Director at Shaughnessy Heights United Church since 2004. www.ramonaluengen.com

Ramona's ***To Every Thing There is a Season*** is new to Elektra. The flowing lines of this piece have been such a joy to learn and shape, and such a good representation of Ramona's skill with both choir and piano writing. It was commissioned in 2006 in memory of Susan Jane (Slemon) Gower for Toronto-based Cantores Celestes Women's Choir and revised in 2013. Ramona tells us about its origins:

I was honoured when Peter Slemon commissioned me to write a work in memory of his sister, a commission deep with personal connections. Peter and I met at the University of British Columbia many, many years ago – and now, decades later, our paths have crossed again. Cantores Celestes is to premiere this piece because of Peter's friendship with Kelly Galbraith, the Director, and also because his niece sings with the choir. Such connections do indeed influence the tenor of the work and also the commitment to its performance.

I know of no better way to keep the spirit of departed loved ones alive and renewed than through the inherent beauty and human expression of choral music.

Peter asked me to set the well-known text from Ecclesiastes which is, without doubt, perfect in sentiment and viewpoint for this particular commission. And yet, there is a regularity in both the length and structure of the phrases which does not allow for sufficient variation or emotional build-up. We decided to combine Ecclesiastes with a beautiful chant taken from the end of the Stabat Mater Sequence – a chant which emotes hope and a truly remarkable sense of peace. It works in tandem with the Ecclesiastes text and yet also creates contrast and a far richer choral texture. This ancient music expresses the universal and the human – the loss we feel and the peace for which we search when touched by the death of someone we love.

From *Ecclesiastes* 3: 1-6

To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to take up what is planted;

...a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to seek, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away.

From the Stabat Mater Sequence

Quando corpus morietur
fac ut anima donetur
paradisi gloria.

*When my body dies
grant that my soul be given
the glory of Paradise.*

We move from this place of acceptance to another expression of the same idea in the first of three works by our featured composer, **Marie-Claire Saindon**. Born in 1984, Marie-Claire is a Franco-Ontarian composer based in Montréal. She began creating in high school, where she wrote and produced her first musical. She continued to participate in many collaborations, from choral pieces, to scoring short films and full documentaries, to accompanying dancers, to fiddling in a team of folk musician on a historical steam train. Ms. Saindon holds a BMus: Composition from the Schulich School of Music (McGill, 2007) and an MMus: Composition—Film and Multimedia music from Université de Montréal (2010). Winner of multiple composition prizes such as the SOCAN Young Composers' National Awards in the vocal category (2013) and the Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Composition Competition (2018), her choral works are also published with Boosey & Hawkes, Cypress Choral Music, and Alliance Music, Publishers. She currently scores films, composes choral commissions, and is composer-in-residence of the Montréal upper-voice ensemble Adleisia. www.marieclairesaindon.com

You'll see the choir move into a double-choir formation for **Blinded by a Leafy Crown** and you'll hear the different rhythms each side of the choir has, particularly in the opening section. This work was commissioned by Adleisia, under the artistic direction of Amelia McMahon and Virginie Pacheco. Premiered on April 28th, 2018 in Montreal by Choeur Adleisia and Oriana Women's Choir of Toronto. Says Marie-Claire about this piece:

In her poem "Leaves", Sarah Teasdale compares her faiths and beliefs to leaves - of a tree, or, in her very evocative analogy, a crown of leaves. We identify ourselves with our beliefs and often wear them proudly. Yet, such a leafy crown can be blinding. During the course of our lives, some of these beliefs end up leaving us. As they do, painful as the process may be, it does feel like blinders have been removed. All of a sudden, we see the world just a little more clearly. Blinded by a Leafy Crown, a piece for two treble choirs, begins with the falling of our faiths, one by one, as voices intermingle like autumn leaves: one choir remains on the beat, and the other weaves on through with syncopations. As we look back at the past, during a time when our faiths still had a stronghold, the music becomes joyous and carefree. But it does not last long. When the sadness of the loss of the leaves takes hold, the music grieves a while, until the full realisation hits us: "Blinded by a leafy crown / I looked neither up nor down". This is the most stately moment of the text: simple but to the point. What follows is then a celebration of all the new things we can experience now that we are rid of our old blinders and prejudices. The music swells and expands in ecstasy of our new freedom, and ends in hushed humility and gratitude.

Leaves

by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)

One by one, like leaves from a tree
All my faiths have forsaken me;
But the stars above my head
Burn in white and delicate red,
And beneath my feet the earth
Brings the sturdy grass to birth.
I who was content to be
But a silken-singing tree,
But a rustle of delight
In the wistful heart of night--
I have lost the leaves that knew
Touch of rain and weight of dew.
Blinded by a leafy crown
I looked neither up nor down--
But the little leaves that die
Have left me room to see the sky;
Now for the first time I know
Stars above and earth below.

Continuing with poet Sara Teasdale, a positively vibrating work for choir and piano by Canadian composer **Kathleen Allan**, with whom Elektra has had many collaborations in recent years. We took her *Primary Colours* to both the World Symposium on Choral Music in Barcelona in 2017 and to Canada's national choral conference, Podium, in 2018. Conductor, composer and soprano, Kathleen (b. 1989) is the Director of Choral Studies and Associate Orchestra Conductor at the Vancouver Academy of Music, Artistic Director of Canzona, Winnipeg's professional baroque choir, and founding co-artistic director of Arkora, a chamber collective dedicated to interdisciplinary performance. She was the 2016 recipient of the Ernest MacMillan Prize in Choral Conducting and in 2015, she made her Asian debut conducting Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in Japan. Her compositions have been commissioned and performed throughout the Americas and Europe. She studied composition at UBC and holds a master's in conducting from Yale University. www.kathleenallan.com

Joy was commissioned for Elektra in 2012 with financial assistance from the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund for Elektra Women's Choir and a generous gift from Kate MacColl.

I am wild, I will sing to the trees,
I will sing to the stars in the sky,
I love, I am loved, he is mine,
Now at last I can die!
I am sandaled with wind and with flame,
I have heart-fire and singing to give,
I can tread on the grass or the stars,
Now at last I can live!

At this point in the program, we're joined by the 12 singers of our 2019 Mira Youth Mentorship Program (<http://elektra.ca/outreach/mira-youth-mentorship/>). Coming from five different schools, each auditioned for her spot and has been rehearsing with Elektra for about a month. In their

midst this year, two international students from Germany and one from Japan. Congratulations to all of the singers!

Occasionally, we sing a solo art song in unison, which gives each member of the choir the opportunity to sing a beautifully-shaped melody. A side benefit is that every singer then knows an art song that she could sing in an audition elsewhere – particularly handy for the high school girls as they look for choirs at university and wherever the next chapter takes them. As **Clara Schumann** didn't write any repertoire for women's choir, that's the approach I took when wanting to include her in our featured composers this year. Clara (1819-1896) was one of the most prominent and accomplished classical musicians of 19th century Europe. A child prodigy as both a pianist and composer, she took Europe by storm, touring and performing her own compositions at age 20 before turning her attentions to raising seven children and organizing and promoting her husband Robert Schumann's compositional career. When widowed at 38, she supported herself and her family by reviving her touring career. Her works have enjoyed a revival in the past 40 years. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clara_Schumann

In September 1841, husband and wife Robert and Clara Schumann jointly published a set of twelve songs with piano on Rückert's (1788-1866) set of poems called *Liebesfrühling* (*Love's Spring*). She was 22 and he was 31. It had been a project all year, with him encouraging her to add to her prodigious piano output with some vocal music. The resulting set is his opus 37 and her opus 12. It was their only collaboration of this nature, since she was pregnant at the time with their first child. Among the set, three songs by Clara, including *Liebst du um Schönheit* (If You Love for Beauty). We sing in the original German of the poem.

Liebst du um Schönheit,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Sonne,
Sie trägt ein gold'nes Haar!

Liebst du um Jugend,
O nicht mich liebe!
Liebe den Frühling,
Der jung ist jedes Jahr!

Liebst du um Schätze,
O nicht mich liebe.
Liebe die Meerfrau,
[Die]¹ hat viel Perlen klar.

Liebst du um Liebe,
O ja, mich liebe!
Liebe mich immer,
Dich lieb' ich immerdar.

*If you love for beauty, then do not love me!
Love the sun, with its golden hair!*

*If you love for youth, then do not love me!
Love the spring, which is young every year!*

*If you love for treasure, then do not love me!
Love the mermaid, who has many shining pearls!*

*If you love for love, oh then love me!
Love me always, as I will always love you!*

Our next piece takes this theme into the 21st century and makes the message more concrete. Composed by a Cuban composer and poet who are both new to me. **Ivette Herryman** (b.1982) earned her Bachelor's degree in Music Composition from the Higher Institute of Arts (ISA) in her native Cuba and her Master's in Music Composition at Baylor University, in Texas. In 2017, she completed a Master of Music in Music Theory and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music Composition at Michigan State University (MSU). Her music for solo instruments, chamber groups, large ensembles, electronic media, children, church music, film music, and musical theater have been performed in important concert halls across the Americas, Spain, the Netherlands, and Japan. <http://ivetteherryman.com/>

Ivette has this to say about her work, which is sung in Spanish:

Quiéreme entera uses the text of the poem *Si me quieres, quíereme entera*, by Cuban poet Dulce María Loynaz del Castillo (1902-1997). The poem presents a woman's desire to be loved without reserve. "If you love me," she says, "love me entirely. Do not love only parts of me. Love me black, white, gray, green, blonde, brown. Love me entirely, do not cut me short, love me entirely. In the piece, sopranos and altos sing independently most of the time, as if they were demanding with their own voices, with their own color and personalities, for this kind of love. The music is a plea, a gentle demand.

Si me quieres, quíereme entera
No por zonas de luz o sombra.
Si me quieres, quíereme negra
Y blanca. Y gris, y verde,
y rubia,
Y morena.
Quiéreme día,
Quiéreme noche.
¡Y madrugada en la ventana abierta!
Si me quieres,
no me recortes:
¡Quiéreme toda...
o no me quieras!

*If you love me, love me entirely
Not by zones of light and shade.
If you love me, love me black
And white. And gray, and green
and blonde.
And brown.
Love me day,
Love me night.
And dawn in the open window!
If you love me*

*Do not cut me short:
Love me entirely...
Or do not love me!*

To close the first half, and giving our young Mira singers the opportunity to learn something really gutsy, I've programmed **Look! Be: leap;** by American composer **Libby Larsen**. Hers is one of the first living female composer's names I heard of when I started in choral music, and Elektra has performed several of her pieces over the years. Born in 1950, Libby is one of America's most prolific and most performed living composers. She has created a catalogue of over 500 works spanning virtually every genre from intimate vocal and chamber music to massive orchestral works and over twelve operas. Her music has been praised for its dynamic, deeply inspired, and vigorous contemporary American spirit. Constantly sought after for commissions and premieres by major artists, ensembles and orchestras around the world, Libby Larsen has established a permanent place for her works in the concert repertory. <https://libbylarsen.com/>

Look! Be: leap; was commissioned in 2014 by the College of Musical Arts for the Bowling Green State University Women's Chorus (Ohio), Sandra Frey Stegman, conductor, in celebration of the Chorus' centennial anniversary. The published score tells us this about the poem:

Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980) was a highly acclaimed American poet and political activist. Educated at Vassar College and Columbia University, her writing focused on the truths of outrage and the truths of possibility in the world. She believed that poetry presented a way for people to learn more about themselves and their relations with others, and that through poetry people could be challenged to take action. Exemplary of this is Look! Be: leap;, the title poem in her award-winning first collection, Theory of Flight, published in 1935.

Look! Be: leap;
paint trees in flame
bushes burning roar in the broad sky
know your color:
be:
produce that the widenesses be full
and burst their wombs
riot in redness, delirious with light,
swim blue through the mind
shout green as the day breaks
put your face to the wind
FLY
chant as the tomtom hubbubs crash
elephants in the fleshes jungle
reek with vigor
sweat
pour your life in a libation to itself
drink from the ripe ground
make children over the world
lust in a heat of tropic orange
stamp and writhe;
stamp on a wet floor
know earth

know water
know lovers
know mastery
FLY

After intermission, we lighten the mood and get to know **Marie-Claire Saindon** a bit better, first through ***Turlutte acadienne montréalaise***. Imagine in Québec or New Brunswick the dance band taking a well-deserved break, but the dancers insisting on keeping going – that’s what turlutte’s are for, because they are sung! You’ll hear some of our singers stomping to add to the intensity of the beat. Marie-Claire gives us this background information on her new turlutte:

Turlutte acadienne montréalaise is an original melody hailing from the traditional Acadian musical practice of the mouthreel. The composer recognises her Acadian roots, but also the cultural includes of her current hometown, Montréal, in the title. The French-Canadian mouthreel is the art of imitating an instrumental reel or a jig with one’s voice, using a specific set of syllables – not unlike jazz scat singers. Though mouthreels can be found in many other cultures around the globe, a little sound is featured in the Acadian and Québécois mouthreel, which is the “ts” sound, like a mini drum-kit high-hat hit.

Our concert is named for a line in **Joni Mitchell’s *Little Green***, the Canadian song that comes next in the program. This brand new arrangement by former Elektra singer **Kate MacColl** was commissioned for us with generous support from the Haebler Family. From coffee houses to some of the biggest concert venues in the world, the remarkable career of Canadian singer-songwriter **Joni Mitchell**, CC (b. 1943) is legendary. Drawing from folk, pop, rock, and jazz, Mitchell’s songs often reflect social and environmental ideals as well as her feelings about romance, confusion, disillusionment, and joy. She has received many accolades, including nine Grammy Awards. Rolling Stone called her “one of the greatest songwriters ever” and AllMusic has stated, “When the dust settles, Joni Mitchell may stand as the most important and influential female recording artist of the late 20th century”. Arranger **Kate MacColl** (b. 1968) has enjoyed for decades a vibrant and multi-faceted career in music. This is the second time Kate has been asked to arrange a Joni Mitchell song for Elektra, the first being “The Circle Game”, which is published and distributed internationally by Alfred Music, and was featured on Elektra’s programme for their concerts at the 2017 World Choral Music Symposium in Barcelona. She was a proud member of Elektra from 2005 until 2017, when she left the ensemble to finish a musical she began writing in 2013; *This Is Now* ran for 6 enthusiastically received shows in June of 2018.

Little Green tells the true story of 21-year-old Joni giving birth to a daughter in 1965 and realizing she couldn’t raise her on her own. At that time, Joni was a penniless artist living in Toronto, with no inkling that a big break would come for her just three years later. She decided that adoption was the best for the future of her girl, named Kelly Dale (hence “little green”). The song, released on Joni’s 1971 *Blue* album, imagines the small moments of the girl’s life with her new family: happiness and sometimes sorrow. Our performance on March 9 was to be the world premiere of this arrangement, but we decided to let the cat out of the bag at our Orpheum performance for the VSO Day of Music back in January. If you heard us there, you heard the world premiere! We love how Kate has captured the intimacy of this emotional story in her *cappella* arrangement.

Born with the moon in Cancer
Choose her a name she will answer to
Call her green and the winters cannot fade her
Call her green for the children who've made her
Little green, be a gypsy dancer

He went to California
Hearing that everything's warmer there
So you write him a letter and say "Her eyes are blue"
He sends you a poem and she's lost to you
Little green he's a non-conformer

Just a little green
Like the color when the spring is born
There'll be crocuses to bring to school tomorrow
Just a little green
Like the nights when the Northern lights perform
There'll be icicles and birthday clothes
And sometimes there'll be sorrow

Child with a child pretending
Weary of lies you are sending home
So you sign all the papers in the family name
You're sad and you're sorry but you're not ashamed
Little green, have a happy ending

We imagine Joni singing to her baby, so next on the program is **Supla Dziesma**, an a cappella lullaby by **Maija Einfelde** (b. 1939), another composer who was a new discovery for me. She is a Latvian composer and music educator and has received wide international recognition for her chamber music and choral works. She studied in Jānis Ivanovs' composition class at the Latvian State Conservatory, graduating in 1966. In 1997, she was awarded the Latvian Great Music Award. In 1999, she was awarded the Culture Award of the Republic of Latvia, and in 2000, the Copyrights' Infinity Award. In 2002, the composer became an honorary member of the Academy of Science. We're singing in Latvian, with Danica Kell and Stephanie Ching on solos. Our thanks to Laura Adlers for the translation of this charming, traditional text.

Little mouse rides his squeaky wagonload of "sleep"
Little mouse, ride into this home with your wagonload of "sleep"
Sleep has been teasing this child, squatting on the threshold
Mamma, take a birch rod and chase the sleep into the cradle
Little mouse rides his squeaky wagonload of "sleep"

Another lullaby, this time by Vancouver-based composer **Katerina Gimon** (b. 1993). Named as one of Canada's 'hot 30 classical musicians under 30' by the Canadian Broadcasting Company; composer, improviser, and vocalist Katerina Gimon's uniquely dynamic, poignant, and eclectic compositional style is rapidly gaining her a reputation as one of the most distinctive emerging voices in contemporary Canadian composition. With music described as "mesmerizing", "fiercely energetic", and "staggering in its beauty and originality", Katerina's compositions have been

performed and commissioned by ensembles across Canada, the United States (most notably at Carnegie Hall), and Europe.

Our performance of *The Bird's Lullaby* will be its BC premiere. The piece was commissioned by Ontario-based Arcady Women's Chamber Choir. The text is by Emily Pauline Johnson, commonly known as E. Pauline Johnson, who was, quoting Wikipedia, "a Canadian writer and performer popular in the late 19th century. Johnson was notable for her poems and performances that celebrated her Indigenous heritage; her father was a hereditary Mohawk chief of mixed ancestry." There's a prize for the reader who can tell us which other Canadian composer has written us a setting of this poem in the last decade! Listen for subtle sounds in Katerina's setting: bird whistles by Brenda Wilson and Patty Wagner, and moments where some of the singers choose their own tempo for a particular melodic motive. The effect is a softening of the texture, and a dreamy cloud of sound.

Sing to us, cedars; the twilight is creeping
With shadowy garments, the wilderness through;
All day we have carolled, and now would be sleeping,
So echo the anthems we warbled to you;
Swing, swing,
And your branches sing,
And we drowse to your dreamy whispering.

Sing to us, cedars; the night-wind is sighing,
Is wooing, is pleading, to hear you reply;
And here in your arms we are restfully lying,
And longing to dream to your soft lullaby;
Swing, swing...

Sing to us, cedars; your voice is so lowly,
Your breathing so fragrant, your branches so strong;
Our little nest-cradles are swaying so slowly,
While zephyrs are breathing their slumberous song.
Swing, swing...

In the audience on March 9 will be singers from Seycove Secondary School in North Vancouver and their teacher Melodie Langevin. The Elysian Vocal Ensemble are with us as the 2019 Girls Sing choir (<https://elektra.ca/outreach/girls-sing/>), and they are also working on *The Birds' Lullaby* at school!

The twelve Mira singers will join us on stage for the last two pieces of this concert. **Abbie Betinis** (b. 1980), the composer of *A Blessing of Cranes*, is no stranger to Elektra and our audiences. Here's a list of all of her pieces we've sung in recent years, including the charming waltz duet with Ben Heppner a few months ago: <https://elektra.ca/composers/abbie-betinis/>. Abbie writes music called "inventive, richly melodic" (The New York Times) and "superb... whirling, soaring" (Tacoma News Tribune). A 2015 McKnight Artist Fellow, and listed in NPR Music's "100 Composers Under Forty," she has written over 60 commissioned pieces and has been composer-in-residence with The Schubert Club, The Rose Ensemble and The Singers--

Minnesota Choral Artists. She lives in Minnesota, where she is adjunct professor of composition at Concordia University-St Paul.

This is our first time performing *A Blessing of Cranes*, which came to us through our participation in the American Choral Directors Women's Choir Commissioning Consortium. Here are Abbie's notes about the piece:

In August 1945, the force of the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima, Japan, blew two-year old Sadako Sasaki out the window. She survived, but by age 12 had begun to show signs of leukemia, caused by radiation from the blast. Her friend Chizuko visited her in the hospital and brought a gold piece of paper which she had folded into a paper crane, using the ancient Japanese art form of origami. A Japanese legend promises a wish to the person who folds a thousand cranes, so Sadako set to work, saying "I will write peace on your wings, and you will fly all over the world." She folded over 1,300 cranes in the hope of healing her cancer, and healing the world from war. Sadako died later that year, but her statue stands today, holding an origami crane – now a worldwide symbol of peace – at the Children's Peace Monument in Hiroshima, which receives colorful "Senbazuru" (a thousand cranes tied together) from people all over the world. I've wanted to write music about this story for so long, and when I realized there would be about 1,000 singers as part of this special commission, I wondered, could I ask each singer to fold a paper crane? Perhaps together we could advance our wish for peace. What if each person could "fold" a paper crane musically, just by singing? I started experimenting with the paper, creasing and folding – trying to figure out how to render this beautiful, meditative, and geometric activity into sound. I mapped each fold to a note on the staff, and thus slowly transformed the folding process from physical to musical. With my cranes and sketches in tow, I went to my friend Michael Dennis Browne, poet and librettist, to ask if this idea inspired him too, and I'm so grateful that it did. He wrote a beautiful poem for this project – a quiet, geometric, hopeful and personal poem – and I've attempted to craft the music with as much elegance and thoughtfulness. At the end of this score is a pattern for you to cut out and fold into your own origami crane. I hope that you enjoy the process of transforming this flat square into a symbol of hope, and of transforming this silent score into sound.

How do we love you more than to shape you?
Turning so firmly in the shadows of fingers.
How do we love you more than to let you go?

Waves of earth's oceans, waves of our willing hands
Creasing and folding, creasing and folding, unfolding.
How do we love you more than to shape you?

Never a thought of thinking, only this weaving,
These thousands of wings we make to carry our longing;
How do we love you more than to let you go?

No trembling before the task, simply this sweetness,
Freedom from fear, receiving this heartbeat, receiving.
How do we love you more than to shape you?

Blossoms that shimmer and gather about their branches,

Returning to earth her peace, her original blessing;
How do we love you more than to let you go?

Deeper than dream to say, even than singing,
Releasing the wishes we have, the asking for healing;
How do we ever love you more than to shape you?
How do we love you more than to let you go?

*Our featured composer, **Marie-Claire** Saindon, gets the last word as we give the world premiere of the treble version of her **Terre-Neuve** (Newfoundland). Marie-Claire was commissioned to write the original SATB work to be sung by the National Youth Orchestra of Canada – yes, orchestra! If you have not had the opportunity to experience the work of this fine ensemble, I encourage you to note when they next come to town. This is an annual symphonic training program bridging the gap between study and career for Canadian classical instrumentalists. I believe that they require the musicians to also sing one piece each summer, and how great that in 2018 it was a new Canadian work of the power you will experience in *Terre-Neuve*. Most of us in Elektra were on the trip to Newfoundland in the summer of 2018, so the rugged terrain and jagged sea cliffs are fresh in our minds. The opening instructions on the score say “powerfully”. Says Marie-Claire:*

Terre-Neuve is a love-letter to the powerful geology that is the island of Newfoundland and its ancient mysteries.

The poem is by Annick Perrot-Bishop and the English translation by Neil B. Bishop.

Terre
éclaboussée du cri d'un soleil
aux couleurs d'océan
de roc
fauve la falaise se brise
craquements de glace
goût frais de neige qui fait trembler
la mémoire ensevelie
se mêle de vent
s'enroule au sel d'une joie
Neuve

*Land
splattered with shrieks of sun
with colours of ocean and
rock
rust-red the cliff splits
crackling ice
a fresh taste of shivering snow
stirs a shrouded memory
mingles with the wind
spirals vibrant with the salt of a joy
New found*