



ELEKTRA

WOMEN'S CHOIR

creating • exploring • celebrating

Lake of Stars Listener's Guide

by Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director

[Lake of Stars](#)

May 14 and 15, 2022

Pacific Spirit United Church, Vancouver

Elektra Women's Choir, Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director
with the Sitka String Quartet (Cassandra Bequary and Karen Gerbrecht, violin
Emilie Grimes, viola, Olivia Blander, cello)
Heather Beaty, flutes
Yefeng Yin, bass
Stephen Smith, piano
and with Candice Halls-Howcroft, educator and reader

Welcome to the **Lake of Stars** concert presented by Elektra Women's Choir. In this *Listener's Guide*, I'll share my thoughts on how the program came together, what you can expect as an audience member, and background on each piece of music.

One might think that, as a conductor, my job is mainly to conduct - that is the physical job of "waving my arms" to achieve phrasing, tempo, and dynamics, as well as instructing the singers through the rehearsal period as to language, tone, learning notes and rhythms, and more. It's true that I do all those things, but as Artistic Director, my job starts many months or even years ahead of that, when I decide what kind of experience we are going to give the audience in this particular concert at this particular moment.

There are hours of slogging through far too much possible repertoire, thinking about composers I'm interested in, connecting with other musicians, waiting for the spark that happens when one idea and one piece connects to another. I am thinking both about what has the potential to take the audience on a transformative journey and also what will interest and challenge me and the Elektra singers in the preparation. I look for a variety of textures and moods so that the journey has variety and interest. I also like to build some music into the program that other choirs may not know and may be interested in programming themselves. This is our choral ecosystem - which includes you, the listener.

I've been at this long enough to know what it feels like when the many possibilities come together in what is not just workable, but relevant and exciting. After tossing things around, putting it all away, and coming back to it again and again, there is a moment at which I know it's right. I'm excited for you to go on this journey with us in Lake of Stars on May 14 and 15.

After the silence of the pandemic, we are ready to perform no fewer than three world premieres for you, and one brand new instrumentation of a piece you might have heard before. Our guest artists, [Sitka String Quartet](#), are four musicians from the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, at home in both the standard classical repertoire and contemporary forms. This is our first collaboration with them. As always, I want our guest artists to show the Elektra audience who they are, as well as performing works together with the choir. As much as they will be a new performing ensemble for many of us, you are also a new audience for them. And we welcome on stage Candice Halls-Howcroft, a Squamish Nation educator, to give rich context to a new work by Métis composer [T Patrick Carrabré](#), words by [Tsitsáyxemaat Rebecca Duncan](#). We also welcome flautist Heather Beaty and bassist Yefeng Yin to share the stage with us.

The concert has music from many cultures, including Finnish, Squamish and Métis roots, Danish, Serbian/American, Argentinian, Swedish, and Canadian. You will experience three threads that weave through most of the program: folk melodies, images of water, and the experience of a starry night. These threads have subtle points of contact and connection. You'll hear the choir together with instruments as well as a *cappella*, and experience the string quartet speaking with its own solo voice.

Vesi väsy lumen alle

text by Eha Lättemäe, music by Harri Wessman, based on a traditional Finnish melody; English translation by Kari Turunen

We begin with a composition by Finnish composer Harri Wessman which is based on a very old Finnish folk melody. The solo flute opens the door to the whole concert - a gentle invitation to come further in with us. This work talks about water waiting under the snow for spring to arrive - a timely acknowledgment of the suppression of choral music that has happened for the past two years. Made famous by the outstanding Finnish children's choir, Tapiola, this work was on Elektra's very first concert in 1987.

Vesi väsy lumen alle,
jäiden alle jää lepohon.

Tuulee tuuli, ei torkahda.
Tanssii tuisku tuhatjalka,

pyryn poika pyörähtelee.
Tuulee tuuli, ei torkahda.

Sitä ei kuule kuloruoho,
kuloruoho, kuolonkorsi,
hangen alla ei aavista.

Aikaa on olla uninen,
Aikaa olla luminenkin.

*Water grows weary under the snow
it rests under the ice.*

*The wind blows, it does not sleep.
The flurry dances with a thousand feet.
The son of the flurry dances around.
The wind blows, it does not fall asleep.*

*It is not heard by the dry grass
The dry grass, the dead stalk
under the snow, it does not (even) suppose
There is time to be sleepy.
Time to be snowy, as well.*

Night

poem by Hilary Ilkay, music by [Ramona Luengen](#)
(world premiere of version for string quartet and piano)

Vancouver-based composer Ramona Luengen's beautiful *Night* sets the scene of an approaching, tranquil dusk. The text is by [Hilary Ilkay](#), then a Grade 9 student in Ontario, whose work was published in *Urban Voices/L'écho de la ville*, a publication of the Toronto District School Board. Read her bio linked above to see what this gifted woman has gone on to do. Ramona's work was written in 2007 for the Toronto-based Oriana Women's Choir (William Brown, conductor) with piano accompaniment. Ramona's dedication on the score reads "*To all parents and educators who value and foster the arts among our children.*" For the Lake of Stars program, knowing that we had a string quartet with us, we commissioned Ramona to reimagine and re-set the accompaniment for string quartet and piano, which is having its premiere at these concerts.

The sparkling stars
Pin an inky black canvas

Across the endless expanse of sky;
The sun dips low and
Whispers its last goodnight
To the world;
It's time to rest
Until the morning comes
In its reckless manner;
But now, now it is time
For the night to come
And the moon to rise
Suspended in the air,
And now it is time
For the stars to shine,
And for children to stare
In wonder, as they
Wish upon them with all their heart;
The noise dims,
The wind dies,
Everything slows,
The world shuts off –
And now, I say
Farewell to the world
Until the morning comes
To awaken the earth
From its deep slumber;
And now, all that reigns
Is the night.

Snewíyalh tl'a Staḵw (Teachings of the Water)

Squamish language text chosen, gifted, and taught by Tsitsáyxemaat (Rebecca Duncan), music by T. Patrick Carrabré. Water teachings contributed by Rebecca Duncan, Nadia Joe, Candice Halls-Howcroft, and Faye Halls, spoken by [Candice Halls-Howcroft](#). Dr. Jeanette Gallant, Project Concept and Co-Curator (world premiere)

This 25-minute, *a cappella* work in five movements is the result of over two and a half years of planning and collaboration to create a choral project of reconciliation with local First Nations. Ethnomusicologist [Dr. Jeanette Gallant](#), with whom I had been working on Elektra's Cultural Conversations talks, approached me with the idea of creating an Elektra concert that would focus around five concepts in Canada's First Nations cultures relating to water and what it teaches us about relationships. The concepts are particularly relevant to women, hence her approach to me and Elektra. The key words of the five concepts are: the natural world, birth, ceremony,

song, and identity, each of which you will hear expressed in words and music in the new work for women's choir.

The trajectory of the project through the pandemic and a willingness to be open to new directions meant that this changed from a live concert to a video project and, now that we can sing in person again, a live world premiere. If you are interested in the background of the steps we took and the relationships we built, I encourage you to watch the Elektra website for information about the simultaneous June 9 launch of three related videos:

- The 25-minute music video was filmed by [Mike Southworth of Collide Entertainment](#) and audio recorded by [Don Harder](#) and [Grant Rowledge](#) based on a storyboard created by Mi'kmaq artist and educator [Shelley MacDonald](#) and Jeanette Gallant. The soundtrack is the music you will hear in the May concert.
- A 17-minute Squamish language instruction video is for anyone curious about learning the work with their own choir, or simply learning more about the language and culture being shared
- A Listener's Guide video which has spoken background material explaining the water teachings and the project by myself, Jeanette Gallant, Patrick Carrabré, Squamish Nation educators Tsitsáyxemaat (Rebecca Duncan), Candice Halls-Howcroft, and Yeltsilewet (Faye Halls, Elder), and Interior Salish collaborators Gägala-Ái'ætko (Nadia Joe) and Nk'xetko (Mary Jane Joe, Elder).

Singing in the Squamish language requires the Elektra singers to make sounds that were previously unfamiliar to them, and only Rebecca's detailed and heartfelt instruction in May 2021 made it possible. After choosing suitable words and phrases to represent the five concepts, she gave composer Patrick Carrabré the welcome news that it is acceptable to break up words in her language and use syllables or incomplete portions of words. You will hear this technique used in many places in the work. An interesting twist is that the work could be done by a choir in another part of North America or anywhere in the world, substituting a local indigenous language for the Squamish currently in the score. Please [contact Patrick](#) if you are interested in exploring that possibility.

1. **Keksín ti syatshn** (The Natural World)
Eshelhá7kwhiws *how everything is connected*

To my mind, this majestic opening to the whole work represents the immense landscape of BC's coast, the home of the Squamish Nation.

2. **Kwis na xwey** (Birth)
kwis na xwey *when you were born*

The energy of this movement reflects the momentum of birth. The opening “xway” being tossed back and forth from part to part is meant to sound like a game, in which the rhythms become more challenging and syncopated. The melodic fragment that interjects flow like water.

3. **Shúkw'em (Ceremony)**

Shúkw'em *spiritual cleansing*

Xwip'i7án *brushing off or cleansing with wet cedar boughs*

with poem by Candice Halls-Howcroft

This mesmerising movement mimics the brushing of a cedar bough on a person's body in the cedar brushing ceremony, which is meant to brush away all negativity from the recipient. In its traditional form, which is still practised by the Coast Salish people, the brushing is done by women, while a man sings the ceremonial song and plays the drum.

4. **Slúlum (Song)**

lúlum

slúlumcht

to sing

our song

In the Squamish culture, people receive songs which are personal to them, and which then serve as a strength and support throughout their lives. Often these are received while on a personal journey of discovery, which frequently involves travel on water.

5. **Úxwumixw (Identity)**

méymeŷem

i7xw wa méymeŷem

ripple

everything is a ripple

Lineage and family connection are critically important to self-identity in the Coast Salish people. Hence, identity is essentially tied to health and well-being. The title of the movement is the word “identity” and we sing that “everything is a ripple”.

Two Shakespeare Songs

texts by [William Shakespeare](#) from *As You Like It*,

music by [Stephen Smith](#)

(world premiere; commissioned with the generous support of Roland and Catherine Haebler)

Elektra's pianist, Dr. Stephen Smith, has been a critical part of our music-making for two decades. No composer understands the sound and strengths of Elektra like Stephen does, so it is always a great pleasure to bring a new work of his into the world. Commissioner Catherine Haebler knows that well, as she was an Elektra singer for many years. These two works reflect the nuance and naïveté of Shakespeare's charming words from *As You Like It*. In the first - a canon in two parts - we are invited to "shun ambition" and lie under a tree, worrying about absolutely nothing. The second is a celebration of love, spring, and trysts in the tall grass. To me, "hey nonny-no"s and "fa-la-la-la-la"s amount to "nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more." Lots is left to our imaginations! I found [this commentary](#), published in the *Spectator*, lovely.

Under the Greenwood Tree

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
 Here shall he see
 No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

Who doth ambition shun
And loves to live i' the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
 Here shall he see
 No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

It Was a Lover and His Lass

It was a lover and his lass,
 With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
That o'er the green cornfield did pass,
 In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Between the acres of the rye,
 With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
Those pretty country folks would lie,

In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

This carol they began that hour,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
How that a life was but a flower
In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

And therefore take the present time,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
For love is crownèd with the prime
In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

intermission

We heard a taste from the Sitka String Quartet in the concert's opening, but this is their moment to present themselves to us in solo repertoire. *Shore* by [Danish String Quartet](#) cellist Fredrik Sjölin sounds to me like the beginning of a journey, and that's what we wanted to signal here at the beginning of the concert's second half, where we begin to move into the sounds of a starry night. The DSQ has an influence on quartets around the world, and make sheet music of their unique repertoire available to other ensembles. In the style of the DSQ, Sitka is pairing *Shore* with a lively, traditional Danish folk song. Both pieces are from an album called "Last Leaf", which struck me as a beautiful, if invisible connection to the choral work that follows by Marie-Claire Saindon.

Shore / The Dromer music by [Fredrik Sjölin](#) / traditional Danish, arr.
Danish String Quartet

Blinded by a Leafy Crown poem "Leaves" by [Sara Teasdale](#), music by
[Marie-Claire Saindon](#)

Elektra fans who have been with us for a few years might remember our spring 2019 concert with guest soprano, Suzie LeBlanc, in which Montreal-based composer Marie-Claire Saindon was also with us. Her name appears with growing frequency on choral programs across North America, and I was delighted that the Lake of Stars concert was the perfect place to bring back one of my favourite of her works. You will see Elektra is divided into two "choirs" that take on different aspects of the texture of the work.

With this piece, we begin a three-part journey into a starry night: 1) for choir *a cappella*, 2) for string quartet solo and 3) for both together plus alto flute and bass.

In Sara Teasdale's poem "Leaves", the writer expresses that her faiths are deserting her "like leaves from a tree", which at first worries her deeply. Then she realises that she can now see the starry sky above and the earth below. Hear Marie-Claire talk about her composition in [this YouTube video](#).

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.

Starry Night [Aleksandra Vrebalov](#)
for string quartet with pre-recorded soundtrack

In this fascinating [work](#) by Syrian American composer Vrebalov, we hear recorded ocean sounds before the string quartet enters to add its delicate, unfolding landscape of overtone-rich sounds recalling a starry night on the coast of Northern California. This is one movement of *The Sea Ranch Songs*, commissioned for the Kronos Quartet on the 50th anniversary of the fabled Sea Ranch community. As described on the composer's website, this work "delves into the stunning panoramas and metaphysical geography of a unique place where people and nature are harmoniously intertwined." Read more about the Sea Ranch Songs [here](#).

Lake of Stars text by [Charles Anthony Silvestri](#), music by [Santiago Veros](#) (world premiere)

This brand-new work by Argentine composer, Santiago Veros, is for women's choir, vocal soloist (in our performances, Stephanie Schollen), string quartet, bass, and alto flute. It was created as the result of a collaboration between five women's choirs from across North America

- Cantala (Lawrence University Women's Choir) - Phillip A. Swan, conductor
- Canzona Women's Ensemble - Jill Anderson and Cricket Handler, Artistic Directors,
- Elektra Women's Choir - Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director
- Nazareth College Treble Choir - Brian M. Stevens, Director
- Sora Singers (Brock University) - Rachel Rensink-Hoff, conductor and with the support of Howard Dawson, Joy Hewitt and Martha Cathleen Dawson.

In his prologue to the work, written in consultation with Veros, conductor Brian Stevens has this to say: "Our lives are a circadian journey into the unknown. Different paths await us each moment, every day, as we awake from our dreams and open our eyes. Our choices create branches through time, some filled with struggle or pain, others with serenity and joy. Each day we are remade, transformed by experience and time, and begin a fresh journey with new dreams, ideas, and opportunity! The concept of transformation and renewal through light over a lake is akin to the grace of living. Sunrise at dawn sets nature abuzz with excitement, the silence broken with the exuberant cries of life on the wind, the stillness of the water is set in motion again, and light washes over all bringing hope. When dusk arrives, and the sun lowers behind the trees, the world is again transformed. It is at this precise moment when the lake become still again, and the stars take their place both above and below, in the reflection of the water, that we realize that a billion suns have now risen to comfort and inspire us. The stars are beacons of joy, sentinels of time, illuminating our dreams until with the dawn, we again open our eyes and are remade and the waters stir again."

Sailing through this longest of nights
Across dark waters, and darker thoughts,
The distant shore
Only the shadow of long ago,

I reach for the memory of the green of your eyes,
For the smell of spring, the whispering of butterflies;
But wrapped in a cloak of deep forgetting,
I begin to fade away.

From the darkness gather, luminous,
The guardians of past and future;
They surround me, whispering, Rise and remember!

Follow, and we will guide you home!

The voices awaken a shower of stars,
Banishing night, revealing the path
To the once distant shore,
And the promised light of long-awaited dawn.

Kisti du Kom traditional dance tune from Dalarna, Sweden, with thanks to the Danish National Girls' Choir and the Danish String Quartet (arr. [Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen](#)).

To close the concert, we return to the Nordic countries, this time to a rousing arrangement by one of the violinists in the Danish String Quartet. This is actually a mash-up of two Swedish songs, both about meeting up with a lover in a remote and leafy patch of countryside. Especially given the tempo of the first piece, the Elektra singers and I were grateful for the fact there is only one stanza of text repeated over and over, with a *hey-diddle-dee*-style refrain throughout! See the text below to understand how this is the least-profound moment of the concert... Inserted into *Kisti du Kom*, and with fragments of its melody still sounding in the string parts, Elektra launches into one of Sweden's most famous and best-loved folk songs. *Uti Vår Hage* is everything *Kisti du Kom* is not - lyrical, tender, heartfelt, and noble. This combination of the fun and serious seemed like the right way to send you out into the blossom-covered streets of Vancouver.

Kisti du kom
du nog vill du väll svänga
ser jag rätt på dig
så har du nog lust

*Kisti, you've come,
And I think you're glad you're here.
If I look at you right,
You'll probably be in the mood.*

Uti vår hage där växa blå bär.
Kom hjärtans fröjd
Vill du mig någe', så har du mig här!
Kom liljor och aquileja,
Kom rosor och saliveja,
Kom ljuva krusmynta, kom hjärtans fröjd!

*In our pasture grow blueberries.
Come, heart's joy.*

*If you need me for something, we will meet there!
Come lilies and aquilegia,
come roses and salvia!
Come sweet crisp-leafed mint, come, heart's joy!*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Morna'.

Morna