

the
Annex
singers



E L E M E N T A L

Saturday, May 23, 2026

7:30 PM

Grace Church on-the-Hill
300 Lonsdale Road

Director's Note



Anyone who dreams of appearing on *Jeopardy!* knows that studying the periodic table is a must. Given pride of place in my high school chemistry classroom, the table presented an orderly view of the basic building blocks of our world: hierarchical, numbered, and linear. When Mendeleev produced the first version in 1869, it was an expression of the 19th-century enthusiasm for classification, categorization, and codification. Each element was weighed, atomized, and generally unconcerned about its colleague — what had hydrogen to do with lawrencium?

Earlier cultures, like that of ancient Greece, posited four basic elements — earth, water, air, and fire — and many indigenous cultures also maintain these same fundamental categories. Indian Vedic wisdom includes a fifth — that of space (sometimes translated as ether), which is the glue that holds the other elements in relationship with one another. An ancient Chinese philosophical system known as Wuxing affirms five interacting energies: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water.

Now, given that I still harbour some *Jeopardy!* delusions, I will not turn my back on the periodic table, just as I will not cease the Sisyphean task of memorizing the capital cities of the world. However, it is worth noting that there may be, inherent in any representation of truth, unacknowledged assumptions or biases.

Consider the absurdity of a globe which spins only on a (more or less) vertical axis so that the northern hemisphere is always decorously on top. The periodic table contains its truths, but so do earlier world views. Ancient and indigenous views reveal the essential interplay of the elements that comprise our material world, stressing relationship and lively collaboration.

For a musician, the idea of the elements engaged in a synergistic polyphony is irresistible. When I first conceived of this programme, I knew it would be fun and that there would be plenty of repertoire to

support the theme. Even so, I assumed we would progress through the elements in a stately fashion, grouping pieces according to their kind, moving from heaviest (earth) to lightest (fire). But the music convinced me that this approach was utterly wrong. It proved impossible to categorize most of the pieces — the poets and composers were simply not colouring within the lines — and most pieces could fit nicely under several “headings.” But mainly, I did not want to separate that which seeks connection.

The problem with an atomized view of the material world is that it can foster a “divide and conquer” mentality and lead us to commodify everything around us — even elements that are essential to life, health, and wholeness.

Choral singers know, at the deepest level, the joy and existential “rightness” of coming together with others in musical conversation to create something that is so much greater than the sum of its parts. We are therefore so pleased to welcome our guest artists this evening, master shakuhachi player Debbie Danbrook and multi-instrumentalist Afraaz Mulji, as well as percussionists Jack Fischer and Dominik McDonald, and oboist Hingyi Cui. We are especially grateful to renowned scholar Deborah McGregor for sharing her wisdom and insights on living harmoniously in nature.

— Maria Case, Artistic Director



Elemental

Invocation

Debbie Danbrook, shakuhachi, and Afraaz Mulji, organ

I denna ljuva sommartid traditional, arr. Anders Nyberg
Melanie Conly, solo

Tundra Ola Gjeilo

I Am Ice Frank Horvat

On the Wings of Song (premiere) Maria Case



There Will Come Soft Rains Kevin Memley
Annex women, with Hingyi Cui, oboe

High Flight Ēriks Ešņvalds
Treble Ensemble

Fyre, fyre! Thomas Morley
Chamber Ensemble

Lotus Stem

Debbie Danbrook, shakuhachi, and Afraaz Mulji, organ



Fire Katerina Gimon
with Jack Fischer and Dominik McDonald, percussion

Shenandoah traditional, arr. James Erb

Deep River African-American spiritual, arr. Normal Luboff
Lutzen Riedstra, solo

Water Fountain Tune-Yards, arr. Kristopher Fulton
with Jack Fischer and Dominik McDonald, percussion

Heartsong

Debbie Danbrook, shakuhachi, and Afraaz Mulji, tabla



Kōjō no tsuki Rentarō Taki
Joshua Clemenger, solo

Earth Teach Me Rupert Lang
with solos by Victoria Fisher, Meghan Symon,
Joshua Clemenger, Lutzen Riedstra

Revoici venir du printemps Claude Le Jeune
with solos by Melanie Conly, Victoria Fisher,
Meghan Symon, Joshua Clemenger, Lutzen Riedstra

Measure Me, Sky! Elaine Hagenberg

Programme Notes & Texts

Invocation

We open our programme with a special musical conjuring by guest artists Debbie Danbook on shakuhachi and Afraaz Mulji on organ. “Invocation” invites us to experience the elements in a visceral way, as the ancient Japanese bamboo flute transforms rivers of air into melodies that flow over the grounding foundation of the organ.

I denna ljuva sommartid

The elements continue their happy confluence in “I denna ljuva sommartid,” a Swedish hymn that celebrates the extravagant, verdant beauty of “this delightful summertime.” The words, written by Paul Gerhardt in German in 1653 and translated into Swedish soon afterwards, express the richness and abundance of the regenerated Earth, adorned with its glorious green raiment. This arrangement of the well-known melody by choral conductor and composer Anders Nyberg features lush, jazz-inflected harmonies.

Text: Paul Gerhardt

I denna ljuva sommartid
Gå ut, min själ, och gläd dig vid
Den store Gudens gåvor.
Se, hur i prydnad jorden står,
Se, hur för dig och mig hon får
Så underbara håvor.

*In this delightful summertime,
step out, my soul, and rejoice
in the gifts of the mighty Lord.
See, how Earth is adorned,
see, how she gets her bounties
for your sake, and mine.*

Av rika löv är grenen full,
Och jorden täckt sin svarta mull
Med sköna gröna kläder.
De fagra blommors myckenhet
Med större prakt och härlighet
Än Salomos dig gläder.

*The tree branches abound in leaves,
and Earth has covered her black soil
with glorious green clothes.
The multitude of fair flowers,
delights you with greater splendour
than Solomon in all his glory.*

Tundra

We remain in the northern hemisphere, moving now to Norway for composer Ola Gjeilo’s “Tundra.” Gjeilo writes: “The lyrics for ‘Tundra’ were written by Charles Anthony Silvestri, specifically for this work. I asked him to write a text based on the title, and some photos of a part of

my native Norway that is very dear to me, the Hardangervidda mountain plateau. The area is quite barren, and intensely beautiful. It is easy to feel that you are treading on sacred land.”

Text: Charles Anthony Silvestri

Wide, worn and weathered,
Sacred expanse
Of green and white and granite grey;
Snowy patches strewn,
Anchored to the craggy earth,
Unmoving;
While clouds dance
Across the vast, eternal sky.

I Am Ice

We are happy to reprise Frank Horvat’s “I Am Ice,” a work the choir commissioned and premiered on *In the Margins* in December 2023. The composer writes: “In June 2023, I was fortunate to be part of an artist residency aboard a tall ship sailing around the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic. I had ample time to contemplate the immense expanse of our world. I also witnessed a lot of melting ice. It led me to wonder what ice might have to express regarding its current plight of abnormally rapid melting. When I read Leonor Anthony’s poem on the idea of ice having feelings and facing its mortality, I quickly realized that this was an impactful way to turn the lens back on ourselves. I composed this choral work to be a passionate lament for the state of our world. My intention is for this piece to become a resonant voice for something typically silent — the ice itself, which has so much to tell us. All that remains is for us to lend our ears and truly listen.”

Text: Leonor Anthony

In the vastness of the icy domain
A frozen world where silence reigns
I, a piece of ice, now set apart
Unhinged from my glacier’s noble heart

Oh how I clung with every might
To the icy shore, my tethered flight
Yet relentless warmth, a fearsome blow
Dissolved the bond that I used to know.

Now adrift, like a soul unbound
In this desolate ocean, no solace found

A singular tear from Earth's weeping eye
Lost in the chaos of a changing sky.

I am but a piece of ice set free
Aching for the times that used to be
As I melt, dissolve in time's embrace
I am but a silent sacrifice
lost in the tale of human vice

On the Wings of Song

Choir member John Warden is one of my favourite living poets, and the premiere of "On the Wings of Song" marks another felicitous collaboration, following our song cycle *The Slow Hand of Time* and award-winning choral piece "Storm Birds." In a few brief lines, the poem exquisitely distills our overwhelming desire to ascend on the wings of song and soar above the troubled world. The final line echoes the end of Dante's *Paradiso* — at the crest of light, when will and desire are finally in complete harmony, we find "the song that moves the sun and all the stars."

Text: John Warden

What is this slender stream that lifts
us through the circles of the mind,
past deep woods and mountain clefts?

Open your wings, and leave behind
the damp earth, the world's scars.
There, at the crest of light, you'll find

the song that moves the sun and all the stars.



There Will Come Soft Rains

Kevin Memley's "There Will Come Soft Rains" for treble voices, piano, and oboe is the second movement of his choral trilogy *Impressions (Reflections on Humanity)*. It is a lyrical setting of Sara Teasdale's poignant poem written in 1918 in the last months of World War I. The poem imagines the natural world continuing peacefully in its cycles, regardless of whether we are here to experience them. The prospect of our potential self-annihilation is expressed in the restless, subtle shifts in rhythm, while nature's resilience finds a voice in the lush harmonic

language. The haunting oboe solo, played by Hingyi Cui, finds the note of our gentle disquiet.

Text: Sara Teasdale

(War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;
And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,
And robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;
And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

High Flight

"High Flight" by Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds is a treble-voice setting of John Gillespie Magee's famous euphoric sonnet in which the poet describes something many of us only dream of: "Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth." The composer rises to the occasion with soaring melodies, astringent harmonies, and playful rhythms. Tonight, "High Flight" is sung by a small ensemble of twelve singers.

Text: John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
of sun-split clouds — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air

Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew —
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

Fyre, fyre!

Thomas Morley's lively five-voice madrigal "Fyre, fyre!" (1595) belongs to a light-hearted sub-species of the genre called the ballet, which features dance-like rhythms and "fa-la-la" refrains. The text, most likely by the composer himself, uses the metaphor of fire to convey the discomfiture of burning, unrequited love. Melodrama abounds with mock-tragic "Ah, me!" expostulations in the Italian manner, underscored by sudden shifts in mood and momentary sharp dissonances. Even so, from the major key and sprightly tempo to the deft interplay of the contrapuntal lines, we can gather that the hapless lover is quite sanguine, if not cheerful, about his situation.

Text: attr. Thomas Morley

Fyre, fyre! My heart! O, I burn me! Alas! Fa la la la la.
O help, alas! Ay me, I sit and cry me
And call for help, but none comes nigh me. Fa la la la la.
I burn, alas! Ay me, will none come quench me?
O cast water on and drench me! Fa la la la la.



Fire

We move to another type of conflagration in Canadian Katerina Gimon's "Fire," the third movement of her award-winning choral work *Elements*. In this energetic movement, Gimon incorporates vocal and body percussion, nonsense syllables, nasal singing, and other quasi-feral vocalizations. Percussionists Dominik McDonald and Jack Fischer help the choir evoke the primal force of this most volatile of elements.

Text: Katerina Gimon

fire
heat, light
strength, fuel, drive
burning, melting, evaporating, and transforming
fire

Shenandoah

With our choral landscape ablaze, we proceed like good stewards with three watery pieces to douse the flames. The much-beloved American folk song "Shenandoah" is ostensibly about a river that flows through the Virginias, but there are competing origin stories. The song, which certainly originated with fur trade voyageurs who travelled down the

Missouri River in canoes, may, in fact, refer to the Oneida chief John Skenandoa of the Iroquois Confederacy and a certain lovelorn trader who wanted to marry his daughter. In any case, James Erb's lovely choral arrangement ebbs and flows with a deep sense of longing.

Traditional folk song

Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you,
And hear your rolling river,
Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you,
'Way, we're bound away,
Across the wide Missouri.

I long to see your smiling valley,
And hear your rolling river,
I long to see your smiling valley,
'Way, we're bound away,
Across the wide Missouri.

'Tis seven long years since last I see you,
And hear your rolling river,
'Tis seven long years since last I see you,
'Way, we're bound away,
Across the wide Missouri.

Deep River

"Deep River" is an African-American spiritual known for its emotional intensity and sense of great longing for the promised land. The central metaphor of crossing the river Jordan can be understood on several levels — as a passage to heaven or eternal life, or as a literal crossing into Canada, the symbol of safety and freedom for those who escaped enslavement by travelling the Underground Railroad. Norman Luboff's classic choral arrangement features rich, sonorous harmony that moves with slow certitude towards "campground."

African-American spiritual

Deep River,
My home is over Jordan.
Deep River, Lord,
I want to cross over into campground.

Oh, don't you want to go,
To that gospel feast;
That promised land,
Where all is peace?

Water Fountain

The last of our watery pieces, “Water Fountain,” is by the indie pop group Tune-Yards, arranged here by Kristopher Fulton. Fun, energetic, rhythmically driven, and at times even chaotic, it nevertheless delivers an important message of environmental anxiety: there is no water in the water fountain! Claps, shouts, and vocal slides, all supported by percussion, capture the ebullient spirit of youthful protest.

Text: Nathaniel Brenner & Merrill Garbus

No water in the water fountain, no side on the sidewalk.

If you say Old Molly Hare, whatcha doin’ there?

Nothin’ much to do when you’re goin’ nowhere

Wooha! Wooha! Gotcha

We’re gonna get the water from your house, your house.

No water in the water fountain, no wood in the woodstock...

Nothing feels like dying like the drying of my skin and lawn,

Why do we just sit here while they watch us wither ‘til we’re gone?

I can’t seem to feel it, I can’t seem to feel it,

I can’t seem to feel, I’ll kneel, I’ll kneel the cold steel.

You will ride the whip, you’ll ride the crack, no use in fighting back,

You’ll sledge the hammer if there’s no one else to take the flak,

I can’t seem to feel it, I can’t seem to find it,

Your fist clenched my neck, we’re neck and neck and neck and neck and neck and —

No water in the water fountain, no phone in the phone booth.

If you say old Molly Hare, whatcha doin’ there,

Jump back, jump back, Daddy shot a bear...

I saved up all my pennies and I gave them to this special guy,

When he had enough of them he bought himself a cherry pie.

He gave me a dollar, a blood-soaked dollar,

I cannot get the spot out but

It’s okay it still works in the store.

Greasy man come and dig my well,

Life without your water is a burning hell,

Stuff me up with your home-grown rice,

Anything make me look nice,

Se pou zanmi mwen, se pou zanmi mwen,

And a two-pound chicken tastes better with friends,

A two-pound chicken tastes better with two,

And I know where to find you,

So listen to the words I said,

Let it sink into your head,

A vertigo round and round and round

Now I’m warm in your bed,

How did I get ahead? woo!

Thread your fingers through my hair,

Fingers through my hair,

Give me a dress, give me a dress,

A give a thing a caress,

Would-ja! Would-ja! Would-ja!

Listen to the words I say

Sound like a floral bouquet,

A lyrical round and round and round,

Okay take a picture it’ll last all day,

Run your fingers through my hair,

Do it ‘til you disappear,

Gimme your head, gimme your head, gimme your head!

No water in the water fountain, no side on the sidewalk...



Kōjō no tsuki

“Kōjō no tsuki” (“The Moon over the Ruined Castle”) is a song known to every Japanese student. Composed in 1901 by Rentarō Taki to lyrics by Bansui Doi as a pedagogical “lesson song,” it has since achieved enormous popularity, with covers by such diverse artists as jazz great Thelonius Monk on his 1967 album *Straight, No Chaser* and the German heavy metal band Scorpions. The poem uses an archaic form of Japanese, evoking a gently elegiac tone. Debbie Danbrook introduces the pentatonic melody on the shakuhachi, and tenor Joshua Clemenger sings the first verse solo.

Text: Bansui Doi

Haru, kōrō no hana no en

Meguru sakazuki kage sashite

Chiyo no matsu ga e wake ideshi

Mukashi no hikari ima izuko.

*Spring, a feast for cherry blossom
viewing held at the castle;*

*Sake cups passed around, the
moonlight casting shadows over them.*

*That glorious moonlight coming
through the ancient pine branches —
Where has it gone?*

Earth Teach Me

“Earth Teach Me” by Canadian Rupert Lang is the result of a commission that stipulated that the composer write a choral work using a First Nations text. Lang set a Ute prayer that petitions the Earth to share and impart its deep wisdom. Slow and sustained, with an upward arcing melodic line that unfolds over long drones, the music gives way to a quickening energy as it moves upwards from earth to air on keywords such as freedom and regeneration.

Text: Prayer from the Ute Nation

Earth teach me stillness
as the grasses are stilled with light.
Earth teach me suffering
as old stones suffer with memory.
Earth teach me humility
as blossoms are humble with beginning.
Earth teach me caring
as the mother who secures her young.
Earth teach me courage
as the tree which stands alone.
Earth teach me limitation
as the ant which crawls on the ground.
Earth teach me freedom
as the eagle which soars in the sky.
Earth teach me resignation
as the leaves which die in the fall.
Earth teach me regeneration
as the seed rises in the spring.
Earth teach me to forget myself
as melted snow forgets its life.
Earth teach me to remember kindness
as dry fields weep with rain.
Earth teach me.

Revoici venir du printemps

Love is in the air (and on the land and in the sea) with “Revoici venir du printemps,” a charming chanson by late Renaissance French composer Claude Le Jeune. For the nature lover, the text is an ode to springtime and all the delights of the natural world; to the more worldly reader, it is a typical song of seduction (in the manner of John Donne’s early songs) that encourages the listener to embrace all the pleasures of the

amorous season. The fresh, lilting rhythm, with shifts from duple to triple metre, demonstrates the relatively new style of “*musique mesurée*” which sought to represent the natural patterns of speech, and of which Le Jeune was a chief proponent.

Text: Jean-Antoine de Baï

Revoici venir du printemps,
L’amoureuse et belle saison.

*Here again comes the spring,
The amorous and fair season.*

Le courant des eaux recherchant
Le canal d’été s’éclaircit;
Et la mer calme de ces flots
Amollit le triste courroux:
Le canard s’égaie se plongeant,
Et se lave coïnt dedans l’eau;
Et la grue qui fourche son vol,
Retraverse l’air et s’en va.

*The currents of water seeking
Their summer channel become clearer;
And the sea calms her waves,
Softens the sad anger.
The duck, elated, dives in,
And washes itself happily in the water,
And the crane branches in flight,
Crosses back over and flies away.*

Le soleil éclaire luisant
D’une plus sereine clarté:
Du nuage l’ombre s’enfuit,
Qui se joue et court et noircit.
Et forêts et champs et coteaux
Le labeur humain reverdit,
Et la pré découvre ses fleurs

*The sun shines brightly
With a calmer light:
From the cloud the shadow flies
And plays and runs and darkens.
And forests and fields and hillsides
Human labor makes green again,
And the meadow unveils its flowers.*

De Vénus le fils Cupidon
L’univers semant de ses traits,
De sa flamme va réchauffer
Animaux, qui volent en l’air,
Animaux, qui rampent aux champs,
Animaux, qui nagent aux eaux.
Ce qui même ne sent pas,
Amoureux, se fond de plaisir.

*Venus’ son, Cupid,
Seeding the universe with his arrows,
Warms with his flames
Animals that fly in the air,
Animals that crawl in the fields,
Animals that swim in the seas.
Even the insentient ones,
Once in love, are melted by pleasure.*

Rions aussi nous: et cherchons
Les ébats et jeux du printemps:
Toute chose rit de plaisir:
Célébrons la gaie saison.

*So let us, too, laugh, and let us seek
The frolics and games of spring.
All the world laughs with pleasure:
Let us celebrate the happy season.*

Measure Me, Sky!

We end with “Measure Me, Sky!” (2022) by Elaine Hagenberg, a work that soars ecstatically in spiralling arpeggios over a billowing

accompaniment. The composer writes: "I want singers and audiences alike to see themselves inside the music — guided by the melodies and the text as one. The effect of the poetry...is instantaneous; it's as if one's arms have been cast wide, and their eyes turned to the heavens to take in the expanse both around and above. I wanted to launch singers into flight and invite listeners into the same breathless exclamation."

Text: Leonora Speyer

Measure me, sky!

Tell me I reach by a song

Nearer the stars;

I have been little so long.

Horizon, reach out!

Catch at my hands, stretch me taut,

Rim of the world:

Widen my eyes by a thought.

Sky, be my depth,

Wind, be my width and my height,

World, my heart's span;

Loveliness, wings for my flight.



Biographies



Artistic Director **Maria Case** is a highly regarded artist and educator in Toronto's music community, working as a pianist, singer, choral conductor, and composer.

Maria maintains a busy private studio and is active as an examiner, adjudicator, and lecturer on piano and theory pedagogy and musicianship for the Royal

Conservatory, where she served as Chief Examiner of

Theoretical Subjects from 2006 to 2013. She is the co-author of the nine-volume *Celebrate Theory* series, and has designed curriculum for theory, piano, and musicianship. Maria has been the Artistic Director of The Annex Singers since 2005, leading the choir with dynamic and imaginative programming. She is also the Music Director of Glebe Road United Church in Toronto.

Maria is an award-winning composer, with the majority of her compositions celebrating the voice and inspired by texts from a wide range of texts and traditions. Recent works include choral pieces "Storm Birds," "In Winter," "First Sparrow of Spring" and "Everyone Sang," and song cycles *Nightsongs*, *Into Flight*, *Songs of the Seasons* and *The Slow Hand of Time*. Maria holds ARCT Performance Diplomas in Piano and Voice, as well as a Bachelor of Music in Composition from the University of Toronto. Other studies include English literature, conducting, and jazz at the Berklee College of Music.



Anne Lee, collaborative pianist with The Annex Singers since 2011, began piano studies at a young age in Vancouver after an exhaustive search for a teacher willing to take on a pint-sized aspiring pianist with too-small hands. Her musical roots flourished through her school years as she explored a diverse portfolio of instruments, including clarinet, bassoon and

saxophone. She studied English literature and Music Performance at Queen's University and, along with her academic studies, participated in various musical ensembles as a chorister, accompanist and instrumentalist. She has studied with notable music educators such as Edward Parker, Gordon Craig and Dr. Christopher Foley. Anne is valued for her sensitive artistry and profound understanding of choral collaboration. Her intuitive and supportive musicality has been an asset in her accompanying and creative collaborations with students, soloists, and various organizations and ensembles.



Dr. Deborah McGregor is a professor and Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Indigenous Planetary Well Being at the University of Calgary. She is Anishinaabe from Whitefish River First Nation (Ontario). Her work focuses on Indigenous knowledge and legal systems and their applications in diverse contexts, including environmental governance, environmental and climate justice, forest policy and management, and sustainable development. Formerly the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Environmental Justice at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School, Dr. McGregor coordinated the first ever Indigenous Environmental Justice (IEJ) symposium in 2016, featuring the voices of women and youth, and established an IEJ knowledge network linking the scholarly community and broader society. The IEJ website is a forum for disseminating knowledge about Indigenous environmental and climate justice issues, providing videos, podcasts, a global listserv, and a variety of other resources for educators, artists and activists.

Prior to joining Osgoode in 2015, Dr. McGregor was an associate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives and the Aboriginal Studies program. She currently serves on the Canadian Climate Institute's expert panel on adaptation, Natural Resources Canada's National Assessment Process Advisory Committee, and the Assembly of First Nations' Advisory Committee on Climate Change Action. Dr. McGregor also remains actively involved in a variety of Indigenous communities, serving as an advisor and continuing to engage in community-based research and initiatives.



Debbie Danbrook is a musician, composer and recording artist specializing in music for meditation, relaxation, gentle movement and healing. She is a Master player of the shakuhachi flute, an ancient Japanese instrument originally played by monks as a type of Zen called *suizen* or "blowing Zen." Debbie lived in Japan for several years to study this difficult flute and is the first woman to have become a Shakuhachi Master.

Weaving flute and voice, Debbie's ethereal music has been embraced by healers and spiritual practitioners around the globe. She has released over 20 recordings of Healing Music and performed extensively internationally. She was featured at the 2005 World EXPO in Aichi, Japan, played for Japan's Prince and Princess Takamado at the

opening ceremony for a Zen meditation garden, and was invited to Rwanda to offer her healing music at the Kigali Genocide Memorial. Her shakuhachi flute playing was featured in the CBC 2021 Olympics theme.

Debbie offers workshops at conferences and spiritual events and has taught at the University of Toronto. She teaches shakuhachi privately and online, offers healing and meditation sessions and Mantra sessions for individuals and groups, and, as a celebrant, officiates at memorials and celebration of life ceremonies. www.debbiedanbrook.com.



Afraaz Adam Mulji is a multi-instrumentalist and composer with a deep passion for blending musical traditions from around the world. With a polymathic approach, he explores the quantum and mathematical nature of music, drawing inspiration from figures like Bach, al-Farabi, Scriabin, and Ramanujan. He takes a scientific approach to art, recognizing the inherent physical and metaphysical nature of sound and its application in broad contexts, including sound healing and mental health. He has performed for diplomatic and royal delegations and continues to contribute to global conversations on cultural exchange and artistic erudition.

Determined to unite people through music, Afraaz explores diverse musical traditions, skillfully blending genres like jazz, soul, rock, fusion, world, and contemporary classical music. With an extensive array of instruments, including piano, flute, tabla, and organ, he offers a unique perspective on 21st-century music, captivating global audiences. His insatiable curiosity and commitment to connecting with people drive his evolving career in the musical arts. www.afraazmulji.com



Seventeen-year-old oboist **Hingyi Cui** currently studies with Sarah Jeffrey, Principal Oboe of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and will soon begin studies at the Curtis Institute of Music's Young Artist Initiative, studying with Katherine Needleman and Philippe Tondre. Hingyi has been a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, touring

nationally, and has also performed with the World Youth Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra. She has been accepted into leading international festivals, including the Aspen Music Festival, NYO Canada, Verbier Festival, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and the Music Academy of the West.

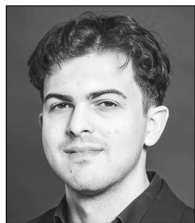
Hingyi has received top prizes in numerous competitions, including the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra Concerto Competition, the

Guelph Symphony Concerto Competition, the Classical Stars International Music Competition, the Couperin International Music Competition, the UK International Music Competition, the World Exceptional Musicians Competition, the Gold International Classical Music Competition, and the Hong Kong International Music Festival. She will make her solo debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra during the 2026–2027 season and will also appear as a soloist with the Guelph Symphony Orchestra.



Percussionist **Jack Fischer**, a native of Buffalo, New York, is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the Glenn Gould School. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music and, starting this fall, will be pursuing a Master of Music degree at the University of Michigan. He is an alumnus of several festivals, including the National Orchestral Institute, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, the Manhattan School of Music Percussion Summit, and the Northwestern Percussion Symposium. This summer, he will be attending the Aspen Music Festival and School.

As a collaborator, Jack has premiered new works throughout Canada and the United States. As an orchestral player, he has performed with the Toronto and Youngstown symphony orchestras. Also an educator, Jack currently serves as a mentor with both the Oscar Peterson Program and the Intermediate Band Program at the Royal Conservatory of Music.



A native of Ames, Iowa, percussionist **Dominik McDonald** is currently an Artist Diploma candidate at The Glenn Gould School. Before moving to Toronto, he served two seasons with the Ashland Symphony Orchestra in Ohio. He has also performed with the Toronto, Canton, Akron, West Virginia, and Lima symphonies.

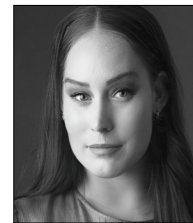
Dominik's honours include first prizes in the Modern Snare Drum Competition, the Aspen Music Festival Solo Percussion Competition, and the Black Swamp Percussion Collegiate Snare Drum Competition. He was also awarded third prize in the Great Plains International Marimba Competition and was a finalist in the Music Academy of the West Duo Competition in Santa Barbara, California, where he was a percussion fellow. He attended the Aspen Music Festival for two summers.

As an educator, Dominik has served as a percussion coach with the Canton Youth Symphony and presented classes and outreach programs for children in underserved communities in East Cleveland. He completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees at the Cleveland Institute of Music, studying with Marc Damoulakis and Paul Yancich, and was awarded the school's Bruce D. Collie Percussion Prize.



Lauded for her "passion and charm" (*Now Magazine*) and "sweet voice delivery" (*Toronto Star*), soprano section lead **Melanie Conly** is acclaimed for her distinctive voice and musical understanding. She first trained in musical theatre and later classically, cultivating a diverse skill set that serves her wide range of work. An experienced chamber musician and recitalist, she often solos with choirs and orchestras and is frequently sought out for her compelling performances of new music. She has performed in many series and festivals across Canada and creates and performs unique themed concerts in a wide range of musical styles.

Alongside performing, Melanie maintains a voice and piano studio in Toronto. She was the singer for the Frederick Harris Music recordings for the Royal Conservatory Vocal Series 2012 and 2019 editions. In 2019, she was a presenter and adjudicator at the Royal Conservatory of Music Summit in Toronto, and in 2020 became a member of the Royal Conservatory College of Examiners. She is a choral clinician and certified yoga instructor, and is currently cultivating workshops that explore tools for performance, creativity and life — a synthesis of her passions as a teacher, performer, yogi, and meditation practitioner.



Alto section lead **Meghan Symon** is praised for her "consistent beauty of singing and stage presence" and is noted for her "warm, velvety mezzo-soprano" (*Stage Door*). Recent and upcoming winter engagements include the roles of Madame Mathurin in Gertruy's *Richard Coeur de Lion* with Voicebox: Opera in Concert, The Duchess in *The Gondoliers* and Anhilte in *The Czardas Princess* with Toronto Operetta Theatre, The Page in Strauss's *Salome* with Opera by Request and Beethoven's *Symphony 9* with Mandle Philharmonic.

Meghan holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Toronto, where she studied under Canadian soprano Mary Morrison. She has sung with a number of companies including Manitoba Opera, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Cathedral Bluffs Orchestra, Manitoba

Underground Opera, The Theatre of Early Music, Toronto Operetta Theatre and Voicebox: Opera in Concert. Notable roles include the title role in Handel's *Rinaldo*, Le Prince in *Cendrillon*, Annio in *La Clemenza di Tito*, Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*, Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*.



Tenor section lead **Joshua Clemenger** began his training in the Theatre Aquarius Performing Arts Programme in Hamilton, Ontario, where he studied with Tom Oliver. He then earned a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance with Torin Chiles at the University of Western Ontario. After a few years teaching abroad, he returned to earn a master's degree in Opera at the University of Toronto, studying with Lorna Macdonald.

Joshua's recent opera credits include Koloman Zupan in Toronto Operetta Theatre's *Countess Maritza*, L'Abete in *Adriana* and Fatty in *Rise and Fall of the City Of Mahagonny* with Opera in Concert, Count Belfiore in *La Finta Giardiniera* with UofT Opera, Ferrando in *Così Fan Tutte* at La Musica Lirica, and Ralph in TrypTych's production of *H.M.S. Parliament* in Kenora. He can't wait to join The Annex Singers in another fantastic collaboration!



Bass section lead **Lutzen Riedstra** is a Postulant for Ordination in the Diocese of Toronto (Anglican). Mr. Riedstra holds a Master of Divinity from Wycliffe College, conjoint with the Toronto School of Theology and University of Toronto, specializing in Church Planting and Anglican Studies; and a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance, specializing in Opera

studies, where he studied with Lorna MacDonald and Nathalie Paulin. Other notable teachers are bass-baritone Gary Relyea, Barbara Steed Young, and Earl Clark.

Mr. Riedstra has been the bass section lead and soloist at several churches of different denominations, including Kingsway-Lambton United Church in Etobicoke and Trinity-St. Paul's in Toronto, as well as Yorkminster Park Baptist Church for eight years. Other choral positions include being a Sidgwick Scholar for four years with the Orpheus Choir of Toronto under the direction of Robert Cooper, CM, and singing with the Hedgerow Singers under the direction of Eric Robertson. Currently, he can be heard singing at St. Cuthbert's Anglican Church in Leaside, and with The Annex Singers and the Oakville Choral Society.

The Annex Singers

Soprano

Tessa Cernik*	Evelyn Hawes*	Madeline Sikes*
◆ Melanie Conly*	Carol Hensley	Rachel Tucker*
Joanne Eidinger	Claire Jensen	Julia Weinland*
Laura Farrugia	Zoe Kelsey	Emma Whyte
Angelica Fenner	Elizabeth Koester*	Azalea Wong
Victoria Fisher*	Gloria Lipski*	
Zena Gopal*	Emma McDonald	

Alto

Jane Dalziel	Barbara Leonard	Ann Rosenfield
Diane Faught	Gail Littlejohn	Andrea Slane*
Ishbel Halliday	Yuliya Nastiuskina	Lucija Stankovic
Christina Hough*	Patricia Rios*	◆ Meghan Symon*
Leah Jackson	Sara Rodrigues	Luba Tichonova*
Anne Lee*	Maggie Rogow	Ruth Wahl

Tenor

Elizabeth Block	Santiago Arango Gonzalez	Sam Hanna*
◆ Joshua Clemenger*	Juancho Gotera	Dawn Keenan
Layla Coulbeck	Don Hanna*	Gerald Martindale*

Bass

Michael Bunce	Billy Graydon	Darryl Wadsworth*
Mark Dodici*	◆ Lutzen Riedstra*	John Warden
Joseph Ernst*	Samuel Victor*	

◆ Section lead

* **Annex Chamber Ensemble** ("Fyre, fyre!") and/or **Treble Ensemble** ("High Flight")

2025-2026 Donors

The Annex Singers gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following donors this season.

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Sing with us!



If you love to sing and have strong musicianship skills and vocal/choral experience, we invite you to join The Annex Singers. We are especially seeking tenors and basses at the present time and will hold our next auditions in June (for the 2026-2027 season).

About The Annex Singers

The Annex Singers of Toronto is a spirited, auditioned 60-voice community choir with an eclectic repertoire that spans a thousand years and showcases a wide range of styles,

from plainchant to jazz. This year we are celebrating our 46th season and our 20th year under the dynamic leadership of Artistic Director Maria Case. The choir is known for inventive, relevant programming and for collaboration with a wide array of guest artists and composers.

We rehearse on Monday evenings at St. Thomas's Anglican Church on Huron Street and perform three concerts each season, featuring guest soloists and instrumentalists, as well as our own Annex Chamber Ensemble and smaller ensembles. As a benefit of membership, we provide ongoing professional development to all choir members and encourage young singers with a sponsorship program.

**If you love to sing,
we would love to meet you.
Schedule your audition now!**

I had an amazing time with your lovely choir. I am so impressed by the openness, enthusiasm, and sense of community in The Annex Singers. Very few groups have achieved the sort of connection and social capital that you have fostered. It was so inspiring to be in their presence.

*— Dr. Gerard Yun,
Choral Improvisation Workshop*



Add your name to the list! Donors play a vital role in the success of the choir, enabling us to expand our reach artistically, to promote and premiere works by Canadian composers, and to support young singers as they launch their careers. To learn more, scan the code and visit our "Support Us" page at annexsingers.com/support-us/.

To learn more about us, please visit us at

www.annexsingers.com

Thank You

For their invaluable assistance with tonight's concert, we wish to thank:

Steve Vargo, stage manager

Sandy Miranda, front-of-house manager

Alex Sadowski, livestream production

Steve Raiman, sound engineer

Dimana Kolarova, graphic designer

Toru Kotani, Arden Rogow-Bales &

Michael Bales, "Kōjō no tsuki" text research

Grace Church on-the-Hill

&

Our wonderful team of concert volunteers:

Ece Akay

Benjamin Muarre

Fhaye Tulin

Yujoo Chung

Arthur Noranovich

Marcel Villalon Jorge

Astrid Gorga

Demir Ozbulut

Sophie Wong

Kian Lesanpezeshki

Juan Jose Sanchez



Our home in the heart of Toronto has for thousands of years been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and, most recently, the Mississauga people of the New Credit First Nation. We are thankful for the opportunity to live, to work, and to sing on this land.

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46 seasons of
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next season!

the
Annex
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