



**Western
Music**

Don Wright Faculty of Music

FRIDAYS AT 12:30 SERIES CURRENTS OF CHANGE

Friday, September 19, 2025

12:30 p.m., von Kuster Hall and [via livestream](#)

This program explores themes of water and water rights through music. Featured performers soprano [Lucy Fitz Gibbon](#) (Bard College Conservatory), violist [Sharon Wei](#) and cellist [Zachary Mowitz](#) (LA Philharmonic) will premiere Juantio Becenti's work based on Supreme Court rulings and Navajo water rights. Also included on the program are Nick DiBerardino's piece for cello and electronics, reflecting coral reef decline, and [Ian Cusson](#)'s solo viola work La Pieta, inspired by Kent Monkman's [painting](#) of Indigenous water protectors. We are fortunate to welcome Juantio and Ian today to speak about their works.

Sensory Ecology

Nick DiBerardino (b. 1989)

***North American Premiere*

Sensory Ecology celebrates research by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute's Sensory Ecology and Bioacoustics Lab. These scientists have taken audio recordings of healthy coral reefs -- some from decades ago -- and played them back on underwater speakers into damaged reef ecosystems. What the researchers have discovered is extraordinary: the sounds of a healthy reef can encourage coral larvae to recolonize, healing damaged ecosystems. This incredible fact serves as a guiding metaphor for this music, in which every sound in the electronics is generated from a coral reef recording.

This piece was commissioned by the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel. Electronics support and video design were provided by Gulli Bjornsson. Coral reef recordings were generously provided by Tim Lamont, Lancaster University; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and Aran Mooney and collaborators, including Nadege Aoki, at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute.

Four Songs

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

II My soul has naught but fire and ice

*My soul has nought but fire and ice
And my body earth and wood:
Pray we all the Most High King
Who is the Lord of our last doom,
That He should give us just one thing
That we may do His will.*

III I sing of a maiden

*I sing of a maiden
That matchless is.
King of all Kings
Was her Son iwis.*

*He came all so still,
Where His mother was
As dew in April
That falleth on the grass:*

*He came all so still,
To His mother's bower*

*As dew in April
That falleth on flower.*

*He came all so still,
Where His mother lay
As dew in April
That formeth on spray.*

*Mother and maiden
Was ne'er none but she:
Well may such a lady*

God's mother be.

Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano
Sharon Wei, viola

La Pieta after Monkman for solo viola

Ian Cusson (b. 1981)

Musical reflection on the painting [*La Pieta*](#) by Kent Monkman (2018)

Twelve Settings of Lorine Niedecker Words

Harrison Birtwistle (1934-2022)

III. Along the river

Along the river
wild sunflowers
over my head
the dead
who gave me life
give me this
our relative the air
floods
our rich friend
silt

VI. My life by Water

My life
by water--
Hear

spring's
first frog
or board

out on the cold
ground
giving

Muskrats
gnawing
doors

to wild green
arts and letters
Rabbits

raided
my lettuce
One boat

two--
pointed toward
my shore

thru birdstart
wingdrip
weed-drift

of the soft
and serious--
Water

Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano
Zachary Mowitz, cello

Cello Sonata

Zachary Mowitz, cello

Juantio Becenti (b. 1983)

A Place Where The Water Meets

Text "after Sacred Water (Our Emergence) by Kinsale Drake

***World Premiere*

Juantio Becenti (b. 1983)

I.
in the summers we would flock to my great-aunt's
swimming hole down the canyon
dizzy from the jumbling in a truck bed
poke at the tadpoles squirming in the red clay
my mother watched from orchard shade
she had been down here many years before
with her sisters her brothers
picking apples, following the bend
of the river leading the goats to the wayside to drink
now the water glooms
with cow manure uranium
we trace the mud with our eyes
watch the petroglyphs stretch
in the shadows
miss the feeling of the sun wicking river from our skin

II.
in 1956/ the glen canyon dam began construction/ with an explosion/
was hit with a demolition blast keyed/ by the push of a button/
in the oval office/ the bottom of the canyon/ dotted by navajo/
ute/ paiute footprints/

still cooling/ the explosion/ a scar in the earth still aching
with uranium mines/ yellowcake/ yellow corn/ tumbled
in the runoff/ what do you call ancestral homestead/stopped
like a kitchen sink/ the water/ of your people
redirected to ranches/ fatten cattle that render the san juan undrinkable/
quench the white men/ in bars/ that don't admit NDNs/ water
and mineral/ packed into bombshells/ how do you drown
by your own artery/ today
the lake has never been shallower/ a drought
of its own becoming/ not even time to weep/ before the crossing
before the fleeing/ marina of familiar fossils/ zebra mussels
scour the bones of old adobe/ still
beneath the surface/ the ancient sun rendered closer
every day/ as the ranchers lament the withering/ the tourists
dock their houseboats/ the people who have known
this land/ see the slickrock
still/ emerging

III.

in the third world, coyote took the water monster's baby
so the water monster decided to make it rain endlessly
the water rose and choked the peaks
of sacred mountains
the beings that lived there
did not know where to escape the flood
& what saved the world was a reed curling
into the sky a way to climb out into a fourth world
IV.

There are things that remain stolen that holy people
weep for And others look to us with upturned hands
Ask where the reeds come from
Flee to the highest peaks
Dream of another world
They can scurry into
Through a wound in the sky They created
We have no answer for them
We have known this the entire time
So we tell our stories Go to the water
Tend this land
& remember

Kinsale Drake (Diné) is winner of the 2023 National Poetry Series for her debut poetry collection *The Sky Was Once a Dark Blanket* (University of Georgia Press, 2024). Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Poets.org*, *The Atlantic*, *Best New Poets*, *Black Warrior Review*, and elsewhere. She directs programming for NDN Girls Book Club, which distributes free books to Indigenous youth and communities.

Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano
Sharon Wei, viola
Zachary Mowitz, cello

*This concert is supported by the
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BIOGRAPHIES

Ian Cusson, composer

Ian Cusson is a composer of art song, opera and orchestral work. Of Métis (Georgian Bay Métis Community) and French Canadian descent, his work explores Canadian Indigenous experience including the history of the Métis people, the hybridity of mixed-racial identity, and the intersection of Western and Indigenous cultures.

He studied composer with Jake Heggie (San Francisco) and Samuel Dolin, and piano with James Anagnoson at the Glenn Gould School. He is the recipient of the Chalmers Professional Development Grant, and grants through the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council.

Ian was the inaugural Carrefour Composer-in-Residence with the National Arts Centre and was Composer-in-Residence for the Canadian Opera Company. He was a co-Artistic Director of opera in the 21st Century at the Banff Centre and the recipient of the Jan V. Matejcek Classical Music Award from SOCAN and the 2021 Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize. Ian is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre and a member of the Canadian League of Composers. He lives in Collingwood with his wife and four children.

Juantio Becenti, composer

Juantio Becenti (Diné/Navajo) lives in the four corners area of New Mexico close to his birthplace on the Navajo Nation. He began composing music at a young age and received his first commission from the Moab Music Festival in 1998. He has since received commissions from Dawn Avery (North American Indian Cello Project), Raven Chacon (Native American Composers Apprenticeship Program), Michael Barrett (New York Festival of Song), George Steel (Abrams Curator of Music, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), and others.

His compositions have been performed by the Phoenix Chamber Orchestra, Dawn Avery, ETHEL, America's premier postclassical string quartet, and the Claremont Trio. He has studied at the Walden School for Young Musicians which he attended on full scholarship. He was the recipient of a grant from the First Nations Composers Initiative which he received in order to create original music for the film "Two Sprits", a documentary about the life and murder of Fred Martinez, a transgendered Navajo teenager.

Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano

Noted for her "dazzling, virtuoso singing" (Boston Globe), soprano Lucy Fitz Gibbon delights in the range of sonic possibility inherent in the human voice. With a repertoire ranging from the Baroque to the present day, she specializes in the dusty corners of the canon, giving modern premieres of rediscovered works from the Baroque through the mid-20th century, and is sought-out for her collaborations with today's composers.

Ms. Fitz Gibbon has appeared as soloist with ensembles such as the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Tafelmusik, American Symphony Orchestra, and Hong Kong Philharmonic. An avid chamber musician, recent collaborators include the Aizuri and Brentano String Quartets, Merz Trio, violinist Alexi Kenny, and flutist Marina Piccinini, as well as her husband and collaborative partner, pianist Ryan McCullough. In the 24-25 season, she performs new works by Katherine Balch, Tan Dun, Deirdre Gribbin, György Kurtág, Helmut Lachenmann, and Elizabeth Ogonek, among others.

Lucy has spent summers at the Tanglewood Music Center and Marlboro Music Festival, and serves on the faculty of Bard College Conservatory. She is honored to be the recipient of a 2024 Fellowship from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, whose generous support will enable upcoming commissioning, recording, and performance projects.

Sharon Wei, viola

Sharon Wei is a dynamic and multi-faceted musician, establishing herself as one of the most respected violists on the scene today. She has appeared as soloist with orchestras including Kingston Symphony, Sinfonia Toronto, San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, and premiered Mascall's "Ziigwan" concerto with London Symphonia. She has performed recital tours with Debut Atlantic and Prairie Debut. In 2025-2026 will premiere Saman Shahi's viola concerto inspired by the Northern Tornadoes Project with symphonies in Montreal, Nova Scotia, Stratford and Prince Edward Island.

As a chamber musician, Sharon regularly takes part at festivals such as Marlboro, Verbier, Banff, Seattle and Ravinia. She is the violist of the award-winning New Orford String Quartet and has performed with renowned musicians including James Ehnes, Claude Frank, Joseph Silverstein, the Amernet, and St. Lawrence String Quartets. Sharon co-founded Ensemble Made in Canada in 2006 and their Mosaïque Project won a 2021 JUNO for Classical Album of the Year which toured across Canada in both traditional venues and eclectic ones such as the seabed of Hopewell Rocks at low tide.

Sharon was on faculty at Yale and Stanford University and is currently Associate Professor of viola at Western University where she has also been Assistant Dean of Research. She is a regular faculty violist at Curtis Summerfest, Scotia Festival, Toronto Summer Music and Orford Academy. Sharon won the viola prize at Yale University, is a Western Faculty Scholar and has been the recipient of grants through the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and FACTOR.

Zachary Mowitz, cello

Cellist Zachary Mowitz, a Princeton, NJ native, made his solo debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2018. Equally at home as a performer and cultural innovator, he is Co-Artistic Director of the genre-blurring collective ensemble132and the nonprofit Nodality Music, a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the SAKURA cello quintet, and an Associated Artist of the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel.

A passionate chamber musician, Zachary has performed alongside artists including Itzhak Perlman, Donald Weilerstein, Jonathan Biss, and Peter Wiley, with appearances at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Kimmel Center, and festivals such as Marlboro, Caramoor, and Gstaad Menuhin.

He studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, Royal College of Music, and the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel, training with Peter Wiley, Carter Brey, Richard Lester, Jeroen Reuling, and Gary Hoffman.

Through Nodality Music, Zachary leads projects at the intersection of music and social impact, including the Climate Commissioning Initiative, which invites composers such as Nick DiBerardino, Reena Esmail, Rene Orth, and Juantio Becenti to respond to climate change through new works. He also recently co-taught a class on social entrepreneurship at Curtis.

In his spare time, Zachary enjoys exploring the endless world of podcasts and tossing a frisbee.

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