

## LOVE IS A BATTLE FIELD

Curated by Cris Derksen

April 20, 2023 • 7:30 PM

Featuring:

**Cosette Justo Valdés**, conductor

**Cris Derksen**, cello / vocals

**Rebecca Benson**, vocals

This program does not include an intermission.

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### **SONNY-RAY DAY RIDER**

*Blackfoot Sunrise* (ESO Premiere)

(4')\*

### **JESSICA McMANN**

*Muskwa's Mountain Home* (ESO Premiere)

(10')\*

### **SONNY-RAY DAY RIDER**

*The Blood Alchemist Wateraga: Matriakii of Magic* (ESO Premiere)

(9')\*

### **CRIS DERKSEN**

*War Cry* (ESO Premiere)

(4')\*

### **CRIS DERKSEN**

*Love is a Battle Field* (ESO Premiere)

(10')\*

### **CRIS DERKSEN**

*Top Shelf*

(4')\*

### **ANDREW BALFOUR**

*Pyotr's Dream* (ESO Premiere)

(4')\*

*Program subject to change.*

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Blackfoot Sunrise***  
***The Blood Alchemist Wateraga: Matriakii of Magic***  
**Sonny-Ray Day Rider**

Sonny-Ray Day Rider (B.A., Music) is a Blackfoot composer and pianist from the Kainai Blood Tribe. Sonny-Ray has a broad musical palate working with many genres.

Sonny-Ray is pursuing advanced studies (M.mus) in music composition at the University of Lethbridge. He shows great promise in the field, having accumulated a large breadth of significant creative projects as an emerging Kainai (Blackfoot) artist in an impressively short time span.

Of his works to be performed tonight, Sonny-Ray says:

“*The Blood Alchemist Wateraga: Matriakii of Magic* is a musical work where I explore the reification and source of magic, which I think encapsulates a whole range of human, natural, and supernatural phenomenon. It has become part of my current practice to carefully title my works with narratives that deify and anthropomorphize human emotions and relationship with spirituality and the natural world.

I used the word Blood in the title (and other works) to allude to my Blackfoot Indigenous background, as I am from the Kainai ‘Blood’ tribe, which is one of the four tribes that make up the Blackfoot confederacy. I also use the word Blood in the title to refer to a life force which connects us all.

Wateraga is the name of a magic spell from a video game series I grew up with and I use the narrative connector Alchemist in the title to signify our complex bio-connection with water.

Matriakii is compound word derived from both the English word ‘matriarchy’ and the Blackfoot word ‘akii,’ which means woman.”

“I composed *Blackfoot Sunrise* as a sort of prelude to preface a Blackfoot story telling production titled “Napi and the Rock”. The music is meant to encapsule the wonderment of the sun finally breaking over the prairie horizon during sunrise.

I am a Blackfoot indigenous person from the Kainai-Blood Tribe located in Southern Alberta and the territory I am from is very important to me and I like to reflect the land (and nature) in my music.”

***Muskwa’s Mountain Home***  
**Jessica McMann**

Jessica McMann is an Alberta-based Cree musician (Cowessess, SK), contemporary dancer, and choreographer who explores themes of Indigenous identity and history through her multidisciplinary artistic practice. A classically trained flutist, she holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Calgary and an MFA in Contemporary Arts from Simon Fraser University. Her artist’s residency at the Banff Centre in 2019 resulted in an album of Indigenous classic music called *Incandescent Tales*, which was released on June 4th, 2021.

Of her work *Muskwa's Mountain Home*, Ms. McMann has written this:

“When I think of home, I think of the land. The rolling foothills, the vast plains, the coulees and valleys, the prairie grasses and berry bushes, the hot sun and the crackling cold of the winter. What is the home of the bear? How can I bring those chilly mountain winds, and crackling of twigs in the frosty fall, and the steady footsteps of a bear in the fall? I hope that this evocative piece will transport you to these places where the bear lives.”

## ***Love is a Battle Field***

### ***WarCry***

### ***Top Shelf***

### **Cris Derksen**

Juno-nominated Cris Derksen is an internationally respected Indigenous cellist and composer. In a world where almost everything — people, music, cultures — gets labelled and slotted into simple categories, Derksen represents a challenge. Originally from Northern Alberta, she comes from a line of chiefs from North Tallcree Reserve on her father's side and a line of strong Mennonite homesteaders on her mother's. Derksen braids the traditional and contemporary, weaving her classical background and her Indigenous ancestry together with new school electronics to create genre-defying music. As a performer, Derksen has appeared nationally and internationally as a soloist and in collaboration with some of Canada's finest, including Tanya Tagaq, Buffy Sainte Marie, Naomi Klein, and Leanne Simpson, to name a few. Recent concert destinations include Hong Kong, Australia, Mongolia, Sweden, and a whole lot of Canada: the place Derksen refers to as home.

Derksen's commissions include pieces for the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Ottawa's Chamberfest, the City of Toronto, Edmonton New Music, the Edmonton Symphony with support from the National Arts Centre, Vancouver's Blueridge Chamber Festival, Vancouver Transform Cabaret, and a four-part docuseries for the Knowledge Network. A new album of Cris Derksen's works will be released in 2022.

Ms. Derksen has supplied the following note about *Love is a Battle Field*:

“*Love is a Battle Field* is a piece about the peaks and valleys of falling and staying in love. It's about many firsts — the first spark, the first embrace, the first fight. The vulnerability of it all. Everything is on the table, everything is heightened, the stakes are high as both parties want to succeed. And the only winners are if they both win.”

As for the other two works by Cris Derksen, she tells us this:

“*WarCry* is one of my older works. I wrote it during a time when I was feeling very disillusioned by the world around me: politics, environmental, racial... and to be honest not much has changed from when I wrote it. But I wrote it as a way to find strength in my ancestors.

“*Top Shelf* is a duet written by Rebecca Benson and I. It's a two-spirit love song.”

## ***Pyotr's Dream*** **Andrew Balfour**

Andrew Balfour is an accomplished artist and is also known for his beautiful choral works. It is no wonder that he also composes for strings in a way that often reminds us of the human voice. Of Cree descent, Andrew Balfour is an innovative composer/conductor/singer/sound designer with a large body of choral, instrumental, electro-acoustic, and orchestral works, including *Take the Indian* (a vocal reflection on missing children), *Empire Étrange: The Death of Louis Riel*, *Bawajigaywin* (Vision Quest) and *Manitou Sky*, an orchestral tone poem. His new indigenous opera, *Mishaboos's Realm*, was commissioned by L'Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal and Highlands Opera Workshop.

Andrew is also the founder and Artistic Director of the vocal group Camerata Nova, now in its 22nd year of offering a concert series in Winnipeg. With Camerata Nova, Andrew specializes in creating "concept concerts", many with indigenous subject matter. These innovative offerings explore a theme through an eclectic array of music, including new works, arrangements and innovative inter-genre and interdisciplinary collaborations. Andrew has become increasingly passionate about music education and outreach, particularly on northern reserves and in inner-city Winnipeg schools where he has worked on behalf of the National Arts Centre, Camerata Nova, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and various Winnipeg school divisions. In 2007 Andrew received the Mayor of Winnipeg's Making a Mark Award, sponsored by the Winnipeg Arts Council to recognize the most promising midcareer artist in the City.

*Pyotr's Dream* was written as a commission from Toronto's Tafelmusik, where it shared a program in which Tafelmusik performed music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky for the first time. The premiere took place on September 19, 2019. Andrew Balfour writes:

"This new commission was exciting for me because of my background in early music as a choral singer and my great love for Russian classical romanticism. I wrote it to complement the already-designed program, and while I first thought it might be linked to a specific indigenous theme, it became apparent that I needed to instead fall back on my Western learning of the early classical music canon to create something intriguing.

"Tchaikovsky himself believed in the 'poetic charm' of the church, revelling in the music and liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church. *Pyotr's Dream* is based on Tchaikovsky's *Hymn of the Cherubim*, a choral composition he composed in 1878, taken from the *Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*. It is considered one of the most celebrated of the Eucharistic services of the Eastern Orthodox Church and suggests a certain romantic ritualistic protocol which is familiar to me as the son of an Anglican priest.

"This work expands beyond the particular beauty of choral music in church and embraces an appreciation of music as a spiritual truth. The period strings lend themselves to a singing tone, echoing the voice of the choral tradition, and help create a heightened sense of spirituality that is a universal beyond any church, religion, or ritual."

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