



FLÁNDERS FIELDS REFLECTIONS

Sinfonia Toronto

Nurhan Arman, conductor with Shauna Rolston, cello

Upper Canada Fiddle Suite was commissioned and premiered by The Thirteen Strings of Ottawa in 1997 and has gone on to be performed by orchestras across Canada. “Upper Canada” is the name given by European explorers to the region of Ontario that surrounds the waterways near the Great Lakes. This old-fashioned name is used to help convey the nostalgic quality of the music. All three movements are entirely based on original material which often incorporates traditional fiddle clichés and rhythms in a slightly off-beat fashion. One aspect of the work that is particularly audible is the prominent solo violin part in the Waltz which is to be played on a violin that has been re-tuned to a fiddle tuning. The resultant effect is that the retuned instrument’s open strings now resonate in a beautifully evocative A major chord. In performance, the soloist needs to have a second violin prepared in advance to play this solo.

One Sail was also commissioned by The Thirteen String of Ottawa and premiered with cellist, Shauna Rolston, in 1993. This work draws its inspiration from the opening line of a short poem written by Canadian poet, Margaret Avison (1918-2007), whose spiritual poetry often draws its symbolism from the Canadian landscape. The poem is actually titled, “Discovery on reading a poem,” and is just one sentence long:
One sail/opens the wideness to me
of the waters/the largeness of the sky.
This text provides a compelling metaphor for the power and relevance of poetry—as a sail converts the wind’s force to achieve motion, so too can a poem capture the spirit of humanity and thereby affect enlightenment in the reader. Both of these mechanisms are revealed to be vehicles of transportation, one physical and the other emotional. The musical interpretation further captures the visual image of the poem in the way that the solo cello charts a course through the textural fabric of the larger string body.

Flanders Fields Reflections was commissioned by Sinfonia Toronto and premiered in 2006. The composition musically interprets five phrases taken from John McCrae's famous World War I poem. The poem is remarkable in the way that it follows the fixed poetic form of the rondeau (which requires the repetition of the opening phrase at the end of the second and third verses), while simultaneously expressing the extreme emotional gamut of loss, despair, sacrifice, obligation and hope. At times, the music is literal in its representation of the words, as with the wind effects in the first movement's "The Poppies Blow," or the high, bird-like violin solo in the second movement's, "Still Bravely Singing." The middle movement's, "We Are The Dead," is captured with a slow funeral march while the final movement conveys the sentiment, "We Shall Not Sleep," with a melody that keeps returning in an extended series of endings. The work's most expressive music is found in the fourth movement's realization of the phrase, "Loved and Were Loved." These few

words represent vividly, the individual tragedy that is contained within every single death in contrast to in the stark numerical tallies of war fatalities that can be summarized all too quickly. In this movement, a simple descending line of six notes is maintained throughout, as if to symbolically show that our search for love is perhaps humanities' most constant desire.

John Burge was born in Dryden, Ontario in 1961. Since 1987 he has been teaching at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario where he is a Professor of Composition and Theory. He has composed a large body of instrumental and vocal music, but is particularly renowned for his choral compositions, many of which have been published by Boosey and Hawkes. His love of Canada has often served as a point of inspiration in his compositional process and this can be observed in the three works recorded here by Sinfonia Toronto. A passionate advocate on behalf of all Canadian music, John was a member of the executive

council of the Canadian League of Composers for fourteen years, serving as President from 1998-2006.

Sinfonia Toronto was founded in 1998 by Maestro Nurhan Arman. Now considered one of Canada's finest chamber orchestras, its core of thirteen virtuoso string players are heard in this recording. In the tradition of great chamber orchestras, they perform standing, blending each musician's soloistic energy and passion into a brilliant ensemble style under Maestro Arman's inspired direction. Often augmented by Toronto's best woodwind, brass and percussion players, the orchestra performs the full range of chamber orchestra repertoire. Over the years the orchestra has made a dedicated effort to perform Canadian music on all of their concert programs and as a result, they have directly commissioned and premiered a number of works from Canadian composers, which includes *Flanders Fields Reflections*.

Conductor **Nurhan Arman** has appeared to critical acclaim with orchestras throughout Europe and Eastern Europe, Russia, South Korea, Mexico, the US and Canada. Currently Music Director of Sinfonia Toronto, he is Music Director Emeritus of Symphony New Brunswick and has also been Principal Guest Conductor of the Armenian Philharmonic. He has served as an adjudicator for the International Fitelberg Conducting Competition, Canada Council Conducting Competition and Heinz Unger Competition, and has taught conducting at the Orford Arts Centre and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. He has recorded for PBS, CBC Radio, Armenian Radio and TV, Radio Moscow and many European networks.



Shauna Rolston is recognized by the press, peers and fans alike to be one of the world's most compelling and distinctive musical voices. Praised for her blazing technique and her ability to captivate the imagination, she continues to delight and amaze with a busy schedule of concerts and recordings. As an enthusiastic performer of the music of our time, Shauna has premiered an astonishing number of works specifically written for her including *One Sail*.

Following an undergraduate degree in Art History, she carried on to earn a Master of Music Degree from Yale University where she studied with renowned cellist and pedagogue Aldo Parisot. Shauna is currently Professor of Cello and Head of the String Department at the University of Toronto and a Visiting Artist for the Music and Sound Programs at The Banff Centre.

Canada

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Producer: Keith Horner

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12Thirteen – Randal Boutilier

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

MARQUIS

181 CARLAW AVE., SUITE 210
TORONTO, ONTARIO, M4M 2S1
T: 1-888-627-6165 F: 416-690-7346
E: INFO@MARQUISCLASSICS.COM
WWW.MARQUISCLASSICS.COM

SINFONIA TORONTO

Violin I

Mary-Elizabeth Brown,

Concertmaster

Helen Hong

Praise Lam

Albina Molodozhan

Violin II

Phoebe Tsang, *Principal*

Martin Bazarian

Sarah Boyer

Emily Hau

Viola

Anthony Rapoport, *Principal*

Julian Knight

Cello

Rachel Mercer, *Co-Principal*

Andras Weber, *Co-Principal*

Bass

Jonathan Cegys



FLANDERS FIELDS REFLECTIONS

Music of John Burge

Upper Canada Fiddle Suite

1. Reel: Moderately fast 5:04
2. Waltz: With simplicity[†] 7:33
3. Jig: Vigorously 6:42
4. One Sail 14:49

Flanders Field Reflections

5. The Poppies Blow 5:57
6. Still Bravely Singing[†] 3:35
7. We Are the Dead 7:54
8. Loved and were Loved 6:47
9. We Shall Not Sleep 7:41

[†]Mary-Elizabeth Brown, solo violin

[‡]Shauna Rolston, solo cello



IN FLANDERS FIELDS

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields,

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

- John McCrae (1872-1918)