



Program

Holberg Suite, Op. 40 (1884)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

mini-intermission ✨

Chant Ancestral (2024)

Genevieve Gros-Louis (1992-)

Ya' ta' (2025)

World premiere commission, Indigenous Creativity in Music Composition Project

Genevieve Gros-Louis (1992-)

✨ mini-intermission

Concerto for string orchestra (1948)

Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)



PERFORMERS



Violins

Ladusa Chang-Ou
Russell Iceberg
JuEun Lee
Julia Mirzoev
Taylor Mitz

Jacob Niederhoffer
Will Thain
Brooklyn Wood
Yiyun Zhao



Violas

Marilou Lepage
Xavier Lepage-Brault
Sofia Morao

Cellos

Ariel Carrabré
Evelyne Méthot
Joshua Morris



Basses

Gabriel Rioux
Freddy Speer

Percussion

Polly Aretakis
Theo Lysyk

Piano

Amanda Kohn

Storyteller

Dominic Ste-Marie



What is the Indigenous Creativity in Music Composition Project?

The Indigenous Creativity in Music Composition Project is a unique initiative inviting Canadian composers of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis heritage to propose the creation of new works for string orchestra or chamber ensemble.

In January of 2025, the inaugural Project was launched and several impressive applications were submitted. In May, a jury of three Indigenous performers and composers met and selected one proposal. The piece was then created over the summer of 2025 to be performed this evening.

This project offers the selected composer a \$5,000 commission to craft a 6–10 minute piece to be performed by Ensemble Urbain Musique. Additionally, the project features a co-curation element, in which the composer selects a work to be paired with their commissioned piece on the program.

For tonight's program, Genevieve has chosen another of her works, *Chant ancestral*, to pair with her commissioned work, *Ya'ta'*.

This project is made possible by the generous support from the Museon Fund for Creativity. In 2025 it is also supported by Guilde des Musiciens et des Musiciennes du Quebec and Innovations en concert.

Project Jury



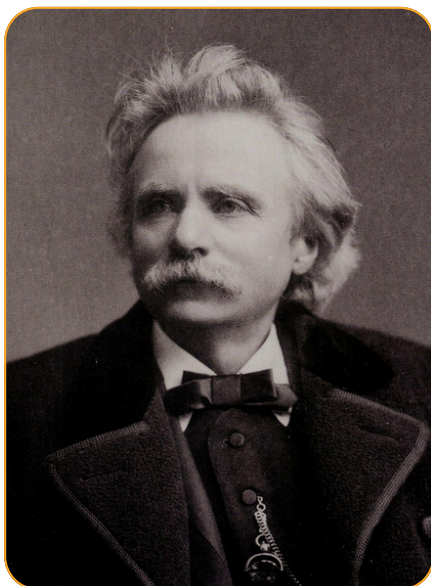
Sherryl
Sewepagaham



J. Alex.
Young



Ariel
Carrabré



Edvard Grieg

Edvard Grieg was a Norwegian composer and pianist. He is widely considered one of the leading Romantic era composers, and his music is part of the standard classical repertoire worldwide. His use of Norwegian folk music in his own compositions brought the music of Norway to fame, as well as helping to develop a national identity, much as Jean Sibelius did in Finland and Bedřich Smetana in Bohemia.

In 1884, at the peak of his career as a musician and composer, Grieg was commissioned to write a work in celebration of the bicentenary of the Norwegian-Danish writer and playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). He composed the Holberg Cantata for male voices for the occasion but as he was completing it, he also wrote a set of piano pieces, which he titled “From Holberg’s Time: Suite in the olden style”. The following year, he arranged this suite for string orchestra—the form in which it’s best known today.

Grieg modelled the Holberg Suite on the instrumental form that was popularized during the Baroque period, the one in which Holberg lived. It consists of a series of stylized dances, that is, music that’s meant to be listened to rather than danced to, but retains the distinguishing characteristics (tempo, meter, rhythms) of these dance types. The movements are unified by being all in the same tonality; G, in the case of this work (and for the most part G major, except for excursions into G minor for the Air and the Rigaudon). In general, Grieg sought to evoke this older style in his Holberg Suite, rather than imitate it.

Holberg Suite, Op. 40

The opening Praeludium features a vigorous galloping rhythm with forceful accents and dramatic crescendos. Overtop, violins play a delicate melody that progresses down by step. The mood shifts to stormy with thrilling cascading passages, then suddenly quiet, with a haunting phrase. Later, the initial music is reprised with some variation, and ends with a grand flourish.



The Sarabande is a slow dance in triple metre with its characteristic emphasis on the second beat. This one has some quirky touches, such as the plucked basses joining in halfway through the first part. In the second half, solo cello takes the poignant phrase from the violins, after which two other cellos join to create a close-knit trio. The remaining strings enter and rise to a warm peak, then subside at the close.

Grieg takes inspiration from the Gavotte's signature double upbeat to create an uplifting theme made of ascending motifs, with accents highlighting the dance rhythm. The Gavotte bookends a central Musette, with cellos intoning a drone and the upper strings playing circular patterns above, evoking the Baroque-era French bagpipe from which the musical style takes its name.



The Air is a moving song without words—set in G minor, it has an affecting melancholy. Violins introduce the lyrical melody with its expressive embellishments, after which it's taken up by the cellos and double basses. In the second half, the violins enter into a duet with solo cello, after which they reach an emotional climax. It recedes, only to build to intensity once more before dissipating quickly at the end.



The final movement is a Rigaudon, a lively French dance. Here, the tune is given to solo violin and viola who play rapid, energetic figures, against a quietly plucked backdrop. By complete contrast, the gentle middle section, in the minor mode, employs the warmth of the full ensemble. The Rigaudon returns to close the Suite with an exuberant finish.

Program notes by Dr. Hannah Chan-Hartley





Geneviève Gros-Louis

With a career that spans classical performance, film scoring, and Indigenous cultural advocacy, Geneviève spent over a decade as a section first violinist with the Des Moines Symphony and Des Moines Metro Opera. Her versatility as a performer and composer allows her to move seamlessly between concert halls, fashion runways, and film studios—always with the goal of fostering deeper cultural understanding through music and storytelling.

Through every performance, composition, and collaboration, Gros-Louis honors her roots while pushing artistic boundaries. Her work is a call to listen—deeply and intentionally—to the voices, stories, and histories that too often go unheard. Geneviève Gros-Louis is a Los Angeles-based composer, violinist, and producer from the Huron-Wendat Nation in Wendake, Québec, whose powerful, story-driven music explores mental health, sexual violence, and the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous communities. She draws from both personal experience and her community's history to create work that is emotionally resonant, culturally grounded, and unapologetically bold.

A graduate of McGill University with a degree in violin performance, Geneviève has captivated audiences across the world through interdisciplinary collaborations and performances. She has presented her original compositions at prestigious events including the Cannes Film Festival, Paris Fashion Week, Strawberry Moon Festival, Santa Fe Indian Market, and Pechanga Pow Wow. Her work has also been featured in the Washington State History Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, Anchorage Museum, and Des Moines Art Center, as well as in a recent exhibition installation for the Erie Canal's Bicentennial commemoration at Buffalo's canal-side waterfront.

Gros-Louis brings a distinctive voice to film and television, weaving Indigenous identity and emotional depth into every score. Her recent work includes composing for *Life Below Zero: First Alaskans* (Season 3) and *Life Below Zero* (Season 12) for National Geographic. She also created original music for the Clooney Foundation for Justice, scored *Courage*—an award-winning short film by world champion hoop dancer and Cirque du Soleil performer Eric Michael Hernandez—and composed music for *Reclaim My Skin*, a documentary series by award-winning director Marie Clements. In addition to her film and television work, she has performed violin on *Dancing with the Stars* and collaborated with artists such as Nelly Furtado, Tony Duncan, and Pura Fé of Ulali—seamlessly blending Indigenous musical traditions with contemporary cinematic and pop styles.

Ya'ta'

This piece was composed as a commission from the Indigenous Creativity in Music Composition Project.

1st Movement – Yäa'tayenhtsihk

This is what we call Sky Woman, like our Mother Earth and creator. It tells the story of Sky Woman's fall from Sky World—she descended toward a water-covered world, landing on the back of a turtle. She asked her animal friends in the water to bring her dirt, which she spread with her feet, and the turtle's shell grew into what we call Turtle Island (North America). This is our creation story.

2nd Movement – Ya'ta'

“Ya'ta'” means “Clay” in Wendat. The story continues with Sky Woman's two sons, who were tasked with creating everything on Turtle Island—the trees, mountains, and rivers. One son created a cave and discovered the souls of Sky World within it. They were incomplete, so he shaped figurines from clay, and the souls inhabited these clay bodies—this is how humans became whole.

3rd Movement – Tsonywa'nde'nion'

This means “we have all caught up with the day we were born” and is our Wendat word for “rebirth.” It symbolizes how, just as humans were created from clay, we return to the earth in death, becoming one with the clay again. The circle of life continues as we are reborn and reunited with the earth once more.

Chant ancestral

Inspired by a Wendat welcoming song, this piece draws from a traditional song performed at feasts to welcome new guests into the community.

The Story of Yätaentsic and Turtle Island

Part 1

Long ago, in the Sky World, the people lived around the Tree of Life. A woman named Yätaentsic was ill, and to find a cure, she began digging at the tree's roots, using them for medicine. In her efforts, she accidentally created a hole in the ground. The cloud she was on collapsed, and she fell through, clutching the Tree of Life's roots as she descended.

She fell for a long time towards a world of water below. Birds saw her falling and flew together, forming a cushion with their wings to catch her safely. They then called out to the animals for help. A wise snapping turtle heard them and offered his back as a temporary resting place for her. The birds gently placed Yätaentsic on his shell.

Yätaentsic needed land to live on. Many animals bravely tried to dive to the bottom of the water to bring up soil. The muskrat dove first, but was unable to reach the bottom. Then the otter tried, and then the beaver, who stayed below for a long time before he too had to surface without success. It was a tiny animal, the old grandmother toad, who finally volunteered. She dove deep and stayed for a long time. When she resurfaced, she was exhausted and held a tiny bit of soil in her mouth. However, her efforts cost her her life.

Yätaentsic took the soil and, with the help of a small spotted turtle, began to spread it across the snapping turtle's back. She did this by sliding her feet sideways, just like the movements women make during our traditional round dances. The earth began to grow and expand, forming the continent we know today as Turtle Island.

On this new land, Yätaentsic gave birth to a daughter, who in turn had twin sons: Iouskeha and Tawiskaron. The twins worked to shape the world, but in different ways. Iouskeha made the world easy to live in, creating gentle rivers, fertile land, and useful animals. His brother, Tawiskaron, made the world challenging, creating rushing rapids, rugged mountains, and difficult creatures. Their work created a balance in the world—a reminder that life holds both ease and struggle.

The Story of Yätaentsic and Turtle Island continued

Part 2

Eventually, their differences led to a fight. To defeat his brother, Iouskeha tricked him, asking what his greatest fear was. Iouskeha, being deceptive, said his was sweetgrass. ; Tawiskaron, revealed that he was most afraid of the antlers of the deer. Iouskeha used the antlers to defeat his brother, sending him to the spirit world, out west.

In the meantime, all the people from the Sky World had been gathering in a sacred cave not far from Stadacona. Realizing this, Iouskeha created the bodies of the first humans from the dirt, mud, and clay found at the cave's entrance, so they could walk on Turtle Island

Part 3

This story, which has been passed down for generations, is more than just a legend. It's our origin, and it's also a reminder of our connection to the earth.

In a way, we were all clay before, just as our first ancestors were. We feed ourselves from the soil through the plants and animals that live on this land, and we drink from the same rivers that have flowed since the time of Iouskeha and Tawiskaron. The mud and clay of Turtle Island are in our bones.

We have been made from this land, we thrive because of it, and we shall be one with it again. The story of Yätaentsic reminds us that we are not separate from nature but are a fundamental part of it, and it gives us a responsibility to care for the earth that has cared for us since the very beginning.



Grażyna Bacewicz

Grażyna Bacewicz was given a nickname during her lifetime—"The First Lady of Polish Music." A force of musical nature, she was the first Polish woman composer to achieve national and international acclaim. Like many celebrated musicians of the 20th century, Bacewicz studied composition in Paris in the 1930s with the seminal French music teacher and composer Nadia Boulanger. An accomplished violinist as well, Bacewicz took lessons with the renowned Hungarian pedagogue Carl Flesch and was principal violinist of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1936 to 1938.

Her career as a composer coincided with the post-World War II era, during which Poland was effectively governed by Joseph Stalin, and Bacewicz had to contend with Soviet censors. In *Grażyna Bacewicz, The 'First Lady of Polish Music'*, author Diana Ambache writes, "There was a particularly oppressive period under Stalin's control (1948–53) with the dictates of socialist realism, when the creative process was compromised by state censorship." Despite the cultural confines, her career flourished.

In 1948, Bacewicz wrote what would become her most frequently performed work, *Concerto for String Orchestra* in three movements. The concerto premiered in June 1950, during a meeting of the General Assembly of the Polish Composers' Union. That same year, it received the National Prize and was performed in the US by the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC. Bacewicz was praised by Polish critic Stefan Kisielewski for being a woman who saved the "honor of Polish composers," branding the work as "a modern Brandenburg Concerto."

In a 1958 letter to Lithuanian composer Vytautas Bacevicius, Bacewicz wrote, "The work of composing is like sculpting a stone, not like transmitting the sounds of imagination or inspiration.... There is a saying: The house will fall down if it were to be built without principles." In composing her concerto, Bacewicz applied the foundation of the Baroque concerto grosso form, combining it with a rigorous approach to tonality and motivic development that features individual players.

Concerto for string orchestra

Marked *pesante* (heavy), the first movement introduces the pervasive scales climbing up and down the fingerboards. Individual lines evolve into unexpected harmonies until solos pass between instruments—giving multiple players a moment to shine in this shared concerto. Range plays a critical role, such as when cellos climb high as the violins dig deep into their low register. This sense of expansion, much like an accordion, is underscored by sudden dynamic changes, swells, and exhilarating outbursts.

The violins are muted in the hauntingly beautiful opening of the slower second movement, clearing the way for the singing cello solo. Bacewicz builds an expressiveness into the melody with unexpected half steps. Solo moments stand out, with a climbing melody in the upper register of the viola passing seamlessly to the solo violin—creating a kind of hybrid instrument. The movement expands across the strings, culminating in 12 separate parts.

The lively final movement starts off with unified string sections, but not for long. As it continues, the sound accumulates as the parts divide. Melodic material and showy runs spin out of the scales that have been present since the first movement as the composition drives to the end.

Bacewicz's music is frequently categorized as "neoclassicist," a label that she personally objected to despite her predilection for using traditional forms such as the concerto grosso. On the subject, Polish composer Witold Lutosławski wrote: "Concerto for Strings is probably the highlight of that 'no-nonsense' period in Grażyna's oeuvre which encyclopedias simplistically refer to as 'neoclassical.'" —Anna Heflin for LA Phil



Thank you for coming!

Ensemble Urbain's mission is to enrich the greater Montréal community through innovative chamber music concerts that elevate the artistry of Canadian, Québécois, women, BIPOC, and 2SLGBTQ+ composers.

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