

The Yeats Project: Artist Bios

Sarah Jerrom (voice, composer, arranger): Sarah Jerrom is a Toronto-based vocalist, composer, lyricist, and arranger whose music reflects a mix of eclectic and diverse influences. She is involved as a leader and collaborator in several improvising projects that include jazz, creative/contemporary music, folk, roots, and Irish music. As a composer, Sarah has written pieces for her own nine-piece chamber jazz group “The Yeats Project” which features music set to the poetry of W.B. Yeats. She has also written pieces for smaller jazz ensembles, including the title track of her 2007 debut album, “Illuminations”, which has generated considerable attention for its originality and musicianship. Encompassing original compositions, jazz-inspired arrangements of contemporary songs and traditional jazz standards, “Illuminations” continues to receive widespread media attention and radio airplay locally, nationally, and internationally. Sarah has had the privilege of performing alongside jazz greats such as Ingrid Jensen, Christine Jensen, Maggi Olin, and GP Prasanna. Sarah has headlined at the 2012 and 2009 Lakefield Jazz Festival and at “The Central” during the 2007 Toronto Downtown Jazz Festival. A graduate of the University of Toronto’s jazz performance program, Sarah has studied with some of Canada’s most in-demand musicians, including Andrew Downing, Heather Bambrick, Lisa Martinelli, Christine Duncan, Terry Promane, and Phil Nimmons. Sarah attended the 2008 Banff International Program for Jazz and Creative Music under the direction of Dave Douglas. Sarah works as a music educator. She was on the vocal faculty at the Swarnabhoomi Academy of Music in Chennai, India for the 2010 summer semester. www.sarahjerrom.com

Ernesto Cervini (drums): Drummer Ernesto Cervini is making a name for himself as a consummate bandleader and in-demand sideman, praised for his deeply musical, infectiously energetic talents. *Time Out New York* encapsulated Cervini as “a buoyant drummer as well as a sharp composer and bandleader,” while the jazz bible, *Downbeat*, described his fluid style as one that “exemplifies ‘float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.’” The drummer released *There*, his third album as leader of the Ernesto Cervini Quartet, in fall 2011. Reviewing the album, *Modern Drummer* magazine said: “Cervini recalls such old-schoolers as Art Blakey and Billy Higgins. . . It’s his robust, magnetic personality that fascinates consistently.” *There* – Cervini’s first release via the New York-based Anzic Records, following his albums *Little Black Bird* (2009) and *Here* (2006)– was recorded live and features the drummer alongside saxophonist Joel Frahm, pianist Adrean Farrugia and bassist Dan Loomis. Of the recording, *The Ottawa Citizen* said: “On *There*, you can often practically hear the musicians smiling and reveling in their creativity and musical repartee. . . some superb, high-energy, spur-of-the-moment music.” Born in Toronto in 1982, Cervini graduated from Canada’s Royal Conservatory of Music with a degree in classical piano and clarinet before focusing his energies behind the drum kit. After then graduating with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Toronto (where he now conducts masterclasses) and a master’s degree from the Manhattan School of Music (during a life-changing sojourn in New York City), Cervini laid claim to a diverse musicianship, one that has taken him to some of the hippest stages in North America – from the Montreal Bistro, Top Of the Senator, Rex Jazz & Blues Club, Massey Hall and Glenn Gould Theatre in Canada to Birdland, the Jazz Standard and 55 Bar in New York City. Cervini has performed with Joe Lovano, Clark Terry, Benny Golson and Cleo Laine, among other jazz legends. He has opened for such star headliners as Herbie Hancock, Kenny Garrett, Roy Hargrove, Dave Holland, Roy Haynes and Poncho Sanchez. As a sideman, Cervini continues to play drums for the Amy Cervini Quintet (led by his singer sister), Strange Attractors and the four-part vocal group Monday Off. In the studio, the drummer has recorded albums with the Tara Davidson Quintet (*Code Breaking*, nominated for a Juno award), as well as saxophonist Hiromi Masuda (*Maybe September*) and Amy Cervini (*Lovefool*). As part of MEM3 with pianist Michael Cabe and bassist Mark Lau, Cervini recorded *Pennsylvania Grey*, described by *The Whole Note* as a “tour de force.” Cervini also co-leads the trio Myriad, with pianist Chris Donnelly and bassist Dan Fortin. www.ernestocervini.com

Andrew Downing (cello): Andrew Downing is a Toronto based double bass player, cellist, composer and educator born in London, Ontario in 1973. He plays primarily in the creative jazz scene in Canada, but also performs classical chamber music, improvised music, folk and roots music, and world music. He practices the unusual craft of tuning his bass in fifths an octave lower than a cello. His teachers include *Jack Winn, Dave Young, Don Thompson, Shauna Rolston* and *Joel Quarrington*. His own projects span a wide variety of styles and practices. Most recently, he has begun a collaboration in İstanbul, Turkey with ud (Turkish lute) player *Güç Başar Gülle* that incorporates Ottoman Classical music in a collection of new compositions for ud, cello, percussion and kaval (a Turkish folk instrument). Their first album **Anahtar** will be released in October of 2013. He also has a collaborative multi-media project with Canadian songwriter *John Southworth* and visual artist *Yesim Tosuner* called **Easterween** featuring songs written by John and arranged by Andrew for his 7-piece chamber ensemble. He also leads his chamber-jazz ensemble *Melodeon*, which plays live scores for silent films such as **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Phantom of the Opera** (with choir), **Maciste in Hell, Impossible Voyage** and **The Shock**. As a composer, Andrew has written pieces for Nordic Folk group *Ensemble Polaris*, banjo player *Jayme Stone*, *The Vancouver Bach Choir, Ensemble Meduse, Toca Loca* and *The Prince George Symphony*, and has written arrangements for *Patricia O'Callaghan, The Gryphon Trio, The Annex Quartet* and *The Art of Time Ensemble*. He has won two Juno awards, one for his own recording **Blow The House Down** with his former group *Great Uncles of the Revolution*, and one with the Vancouver-based group *Zubot and Dawson*. He has also won two West Coast Music Awards, a Socan Award, and the Grand Prix de Jazz from the Montreal Jazz Festival. Andrew currently teaches double bass, composition and improvisation at the University of Toronto and has taught at Wilfred Laurier University, the Banff Centre's Jazz Workshop and the Creative Music Workshop in Halifax. www.andrewdowning.com

Aleksandar Gajic (viola): Serbian-born Aleksandar Gajic is one of Toronto's leading violinists. Since his arrival in Canada in 2002 he has worked with a number of leading classical orchestras and string quartets, as well as participated in a number of world and folk music ensembles. He eventually graduated with a degree in violin performance from the **Academy of Arts in Novi Sad** (former Yugoslavia). In 1991 he became a member of the **Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra** and **Belgrade String Quartet**. In 1992 he was awarded the prestigious **AMADEUS Scholarship** for master study in London, England. Between 1993-1995 Aleksandar lived in Dominican Republic, where he remained actively engaged in symphonic, chamber, Latin Pop and Jazz music. Upon his return to Serbia in 1995 he became **concert-master** of the **Symphony Orchestra of Radio Television of Serbia** and **guest concert-master** of the **Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra**. Also during this period, Aleksandar co-founded the **Bellotti String Quartet**, with whom between 1995-2002 he would perform over 400 concerts, both in the former Yugoslavia and abroad. Throughout this tumultuous period in his native country, Aleksandar was at the forefront of the country's classical and folk music scene, maintaining in addition to his formal classical commitments an impressive freelance career in composing, arranging, and studio production. Since his 2002 arrival in Canada Aleksandar has continued adding to his already impressive resume. In the classical field he has served for many years now as **Associate concert-master and Principal Viola** with **Ontario Philharmonic Orchestra**, and as first violinist with the **Windsor Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Philharmonia, Sinfonia Toronto, Canadian Sinfonietta, Gould String Quartet, and Senior String Quartet**. As of March 2009 Aleksandar has been installed as **Concert-master** of the **Oakville Chamber Orchestra**. In addition to these formal associations, Aleksandar has also remained active with various string quartets and eclectic chamber music combos. Aleksandar's professional involvement in folk and world music has increased dramatically since his arrival in Canada. In December 2004 he became a member of the acclaimed klezmer/east European fusion ensemble **Beyond the Pale**, with whom he has toured extensively in North America and Europe, and participated in three live concert Broadcasts on CBC Radio. The group's newest CD "Postcards" (prominently featuring Aleksandar's playing and his compositions) has received wide critical acclaim and a number of honours, including a leading four nominations and two wins from the 2010 Canadian Folk Music Awards ("Instrumental Ensemble of the Year" and "Pushing the Boundaries"). In 2008 Aleksandar co-founded his own **Hotland Trio**, an eclectic ensemble known for high-octane fusion of world and folk music with

chamber music influences with whom, earlier this year, he released CD "Most". This recording was made possible through the assistance of the Canada Music Fund and the Music Section of the Canada Council for the Arts. A further glance at Aleksandar's resume over the last five years reads as a veritable "who's who" of Canadian folk, world, and jazz musicians, including the groups **Gypsology**, **Autorickshaw**, **Mirobolus string trio**, **Projecto Charanguero**, **Tipica Toronto**, and artists **Suba Sankaran**, **Molly Johnson**, **Socalled**, **Eliana Cuevas**, **Hilario Duran**, **David Wall**, **Roberto Occhipinti**, **Mark Kelso**, **Quinsin Nachof**, **Andrew Downing**, **Roby Botos** and many others.

Johnny Griffith (bass clarinet): Johnny Griffith is a multi-Juno Award nominated saxophonist and composer. As co-leader of the Griffith Hiltz Trio, (with Nathan Hiltz and Sly Juhas), Johnny has travelled from Victoria to the Yukon to St. John's, picking up a Grand Prix du Jazz nomination at the Montreal Jazz Festival. Their debut album "Now and Then" was produced by and features jazz legend Don Thompson and was selected by Jazz FM 91.1 as 2009 Album of the Year. GHT's second release "This is What You Get...", produced by multi-Juno award winning musician Hawksley Workman, reached #1 on the National Radio Jazz Charts for three straight weeks in 2013. Most recently, The Johnny Griffith Quintet, featuring Jeremy Pelt (New York based trumpet player and five time rising star award winner from Downbeat magazine) and multiple Juno winning Canadian musicians Jon Maharaj, Adrean Farrugia and Ethan Ardelli, has recently recorded an album of Johnny's original music which will be released in late 2014. As well as his quintet, Johnny also heads up "The Big 8", an octet performing all original selections and features top Toronto talent Alex Dean, Terry Promane, Shawn Nykwist, Brian O'kane, Jon Maharaj and Nathan Hiltz. Upcoming projects include a duo woodwind/percussion album with Hawksley Workman, due out in the near future. Born in St. Bonafice, Manitoba, Johnny has a Bachelor of Music from Humber College, a Master's Degree in Jazz performance from University of Toronto and is member of the Humber College Faculty of Music. Johnny currently resides in Toronto.

Tara Kannagara (flugelhorn/trumpet): As a trumpet player/vocalist, Tara Kannagara has established herself as a fresh talent on the Canadian jazz scene. Studying both classical and jazz at the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto, her education allows her to bring a breadth of knowledge and experience to her own music. Tara has had the opportunity to work and perform with leading international jazz artists, including Esperanza Spalding, Theo Bleckmann, Tim Hagans, Donny McCaslin, Tim Ries, Kirk MacDonald, Andrew Downing, and Terry Promane.

Rob McBride (double bass): Rob McBride has been active on the Toronto jazz scene for the last fifteen years, playing at the city's top clubs as well as venues in and around the Greater Toronto Area. A former student of Canadian legend Don Thompson, Rob attended Humber College before becoming the in-demand bassist he is today. Rob has played with Pat LaBarbara, Reg Schwager, Don Thompson, The Niagara Symphony, John Sherwood, Sarah Jerrom, Carissa Neufeld, Trent Reschny, and Richard Whiteman amongst many others.

Carissa Neufeld (piano): Carissa Neufeld is a musician of many dimensions whose musicality is rooted in classical training and steeped in jazz. This diverse musical background has fuelled a colorful professional career that includes composing, performing, teaching and adjudicating across Canada. Carissa's own jazz compositions and arrangements have been showcased at Toronto venues such as The Rex Hotel and Jazz Bar, Gate 403, Arts and Letters Club, McMichael Gallery and "Jazz on the Ridge" at Peninsula Ridge Estates Winery. Her many varied performance engagements include pianist with the Toronto Jazz Orchestra and Composers Collective Big Band, pianist for Sarah Jerrom's "The Yeats Project", pianist and vibraphonist with the Christ Hunt Tentet, harpsichordist with the Fraser Valley Symphony and percussionist for internationally acclaimed tenor Ben Heppner. For over 14 years, Carissa has been teaching classical and jazz piano, successfully preparing students for specialized university programs and RCM accreditations. She has also been an adjudicator and clinician across Canada including the Yukon, British Columbia and Ontario and currently owns and manages an ensemble based music school in Leslieville called "On the Off Beat" together with her husband Michael Skinner. She

currently sits on the executive of the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association where she has organized master classes with internationally renowned clinicians such as David Braid as well as developed a jazz curriculum for their student scholarship auditions. Carissa completed her Bachelor of Music in Jazz Studies at Humber College studying with Don Thompson, Dave Restivo and Hilario Duran. Early piano studies include completion of her ARCT in piano performance under the tutelage of Dr. Betty Suderman and extensive classical piano studies at the University of Victoria with Dr. Robin Wood.

Tom Richards (conductor): Tom Richards is a trombonist, pianist, composer and conductor living in Toronto. Tom leads an electro-chamber-jazz ensemble called Riverrun and is a sideman in more than a dozen other projects. In June 2014, Riverrun will release its fourth album in three years. As a trombonist, Tom has recorded and performed with The Wooden Sky, The Hidden Cameras, Spoon, Friendliness and the Human Rights, Engine, The Thing Is, The Australian Art Orchestra, Theatre Columbus, and many others. As a conductor, Tom recently performed the debut of Ali Berkok's original score for Eisenstein's silent film "Battleship Potemkin". In March 2013, Tom conducted Sarah Jerrom's ensemble, "The Yeats Project", for a TD Jazz Festival Special Projects Initiative concert.

Linnea Thacker (violin): A native of Thunder Bay, violinist Linnea Thacker has performed as a soloist and in a variety of ensembles ranging from orchestras and string quartets to folk groups. In 2010, Linnea became a founding member of the Toronto-based Ton Beau String Quartet, performing within the GTA and as far as California. In an orchestral setting, Linnea performs with the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra and was a member of the 2007 National Youth Orchestra of Canada. Linnea's varied performing experience has included fiddling, giving her opportunities to perform at folk festivals including the Marathon Music Festival, Trout Forest Music Festival, and Winnipeg Folk Festival as well as a tour of Cape Breton. Linnea graduated from the University of Toronto with a Masters of Music in 2011, studying with Annalee Patipatanakoon. Previous studies include an undergraduate degree at Wilfrid Laurier University where she studied with Jeremy Bell and Stephen Sitariski. Linnea has received a number of awards and as a winner of the Wilfrid Laurier University Concerto Competition in 2008, Linnea performed as a soloist with the WLU Symphony Orchestra. Linnea will be returning to the University of Toronto this September for the Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance program.