

Made in Canada. New Sounds at the Sound

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With the arrival of warmer weather, it's time to dive into the world of summer music festivals. One that caught my attention this year is Festival of the Sound, located in the heart of vacation country, the town of Parry Sound. This year's festival, which runs from July 20 to August 11, is offering two unique contemporary music events, both of which focus on themes related to cultural identity, history and place. I'll be concluding the column with a summary of a few new music events happening this summer within the city of Toronto.

The piano quartet Ensemble Made in Canada will be premiering their unique and ambitious

Mosaïque Project at Festival of the Sound on July 26. The ensemble got their start in 2006 at the Banff Centre for the Arts, when Angela Park (piano) and Sharon Wei (viola) were inspired to begin a chamber music ensemble that would enable the two of them to play together – thus a piano quartet was formed rather than the usual choice for chamber ensembles, the string quartet. Additional members of the current quartet include Elissa Lee (violin) and Rachel Mercer (cello), and it was Lee who I had a conversation with about Mosaïque.

A few years ago, the quartet began brainstorming about future projects, and had the vision of travelling across the country by train. Not able to physically manage it – since until recently taking a cello on VIA Rail was not allowed – they came up with the idea of commissioning a piece of music that would do it for them.

The original idea was to commission 13 composers (one for each province and territory), but later this increased to 14 composers, who were then selected based on the quartet's attraction to their individual compositional styles rather than on where they lived. After the composers were on board, the quartet then came up with a strategy to allocate a specific province/territory to each composer to serve as the initial starting point for their compositions. As things turned out, even though each composer was given free reign to find their own inspiration related to the assigned province/territory, a majority of them chose the theme of water as their point of departure. In our conversation, Lee remarked how nature is “so close to our hearts as Canadians,” so it's no surprise that this would emerge as a common thread amongst the creators. Each of the pieces is four minutes in length, and in the premiere performance in Parry Sound, all 14 of these miniatures will be woven together. An extensive tour is planned across the country after the premiere, with dates and locations scheduled into the fall of 2019 and a changing set list of Mosaïque selections for each show. Audiences in Toronto will be able to hear the complete set of 14 works on November 15, as part of Music Toronto's concert season and their full touring schedule is available on their website.

One of the distinctive features of this project is a visually based



Ensemble Made in Canada (from left) Elissa Lee, Angela Park, Sharon Wei and Rachel Mercer

component that will engage the audience. During the concert, audience members will have the opportunity to doodle or draw while listening. Lee explained that many audience members only want to experience familiar music and are more skeptical of contemporary pieces. Based on Lee's own practice of doodling while talking on the phone, she had the inspiration that if people were doing something more unconscious like doodling, “they could abstract the music and be less apt to judge it. By engaging in a drawing experience, people are able to tap into their own creativity and draw something based on what they're hearing to inspire them. It opens up a different approach to how you digest the music and is much more friendly. People may find themselves hearing something in the music they would otherwise miss,” Lee said. The other goal of the visual element is to concretely capture how the music is inspiring the audiences. “Canada is inspiring

the composers, the composers are inspiring the ensemble, and since the concert is travelling throughout the country, the music is inspiring a nation-wide audience. We can capture what is being created and put it on our website, creating a visual mosaic as another layer to how we celebrate and represent our country.” Through the Mosaïque Project, Canada's diversity and richness are celebrated not only through the music, but also through the eyes and ears of its people.

Sounding Thunder

The second contemporary music event at the Festival of the Sound is the world premiere of *Sounding*