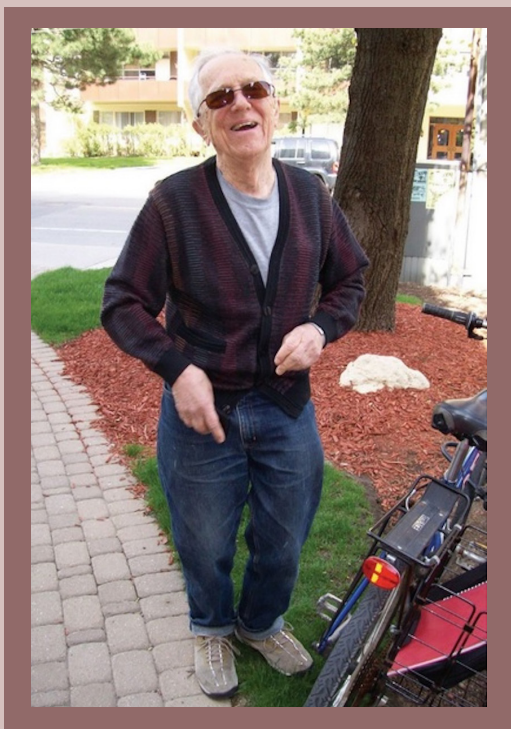


# HEAR! HEAR!

## Remembering John Beckwith



**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2023  
7:30 P.M.**

**WALTER HALL  
FACULTY OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**

## John Beckwith (1927–2022)

The composer, music educator, and writer John Beckwith was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1927. He began piano lessons at age six, and from age eight was appearing in public recitals and singing in local choirs. As a student at Victoria's Oak Bay High School during the war years, he earned a special citation for his involvement in journalism, drama, and music. His association with the University of Toronto Faculty of Music began in 1945 when he enrolled in the BMus degree program, studying piano with Alberto Guerrero. Sixty years later, he wrote *In Search of Alberto Guerrero* (2006; Spanish translation 2021), the first full biography of his teacher.

After graduation in 1950, Beckwith went to Paris to study composition with Nadia Boulanger, and then returned to Toronto in 1952. He taught on contract at the Faculty of Music for three years and became a full-time faculty member in 1955. After completing his MMus degree in composition in 1961 under the supervision of John Weinzweig, he was promoted from lecturer to assistant professor. Fifty years later, he co-edited *Weinzweig: Essays on His Life and Music* (2011) with Brian Cherney, a tribute to another one of his teachers and mentors. During the 1960s, he rose through the academic ranks and served as the Dean of the Faculty of Music from 1970 to 1977 and the inaugural Director of the Institute for Canadian Music from 1985 to 1991.

Concurrently with his academic career, Beckwith was active as a music critic, CBC broadcaster, editor, and public intellectual. A hard-working and prolific scholar-composer, he wrote over 160 compositions, a similar number of articles, and 17 books, the last of which, *Music Annals*, was published in September 2022. His compositions include four operas, a dozen orchestral works, chamber and solo works, songs, and works for chorus. His richly detailed and beautifully written memoir, *Unheard of: Memoirs of a Canadian Composer*, was published in 2012.

Among the many accolades he received during the course of his long and productive career were honorary degrees from five Canadian universities, and awards from the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, the Arts Foundation of Greater Toronto, the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Canadian Music Centre, the Canadian Music Council, the Canadian University Music Society, and the Société québécoise de recherche en musique. He was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada in 1987. John Beckwith died on December 5, 2022, after a short illness. He leaves behind a rich legacy of scholarly and creative work, and will long be remembered for his unparalleled contributions to the musical life of Canada.

Cover photo by Daniel Foley

# Program

*All music composed or arranged by John Beckwith*

## **Calling**

*New Music Concerts Ensemble*

SPEAKER: *Larry Beckwith*

## **From *Six Songs to Poems by e.e. cummings***

3. o purple finch

4. Jimmie's got a goil

*Bradley Christensen, baritone; Steven Philcox, piano*

## **“Halifax”**

arr. JB with original text by Jay Macpherson (1931–2012)

*Alison Beckwith, Katy Clark, Teri Dunn, voices; Dianne Aitken, flute*

SPEAKER: *Ellie Hisama*

## **All at Once: two fragments by bpNichol (1944–1988)**

*Opus 8 Vocal Ensemble (Robert Busiakiewicz, director)*

## **Follow Me**

Third movement

*Peter Stoll, clarinet; Christopher Bagan, piano*

## **Act I, Sc. 6 and Act II Prelude from *Taptoo!***

Libretto by James Reaney (1926–2008)

*University of Toronto Opera (Sandra Horst, director; Spencer Kryzanowski, piano)*

SPEAKER: *Brian Cherney*

## **Sonatina on “Mairi’s Wedding”**

*Robert Aitken, flute; Christopher Bagan, piano*

## **“A Man and His Flute”**

Text by Miriam Waddington (1917–2004)

*Monica Whicher, soprano; Steven Philcox, piano*

SPEAKER: *Robin Elliott*

*Sharon Fragments*

Texts by David Willson (1778–1866)

*Soundstreams' Choir 21 (David Fallis, director)*

SPEAKER: *Kathleen McMorrow*

**“Ae fond kiss,” from *Three Burns Songs***

trad. arr JB, texts by Robert Burns (1759–1796)

*Soundstreams' Choir 21 and Opus 8 Vocal Ensemble*  
*Christopher Bagan, piano*

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**Please join us for a reception in the lobby of Walter Hall following the concert**

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## **Ensemble Performers**

### **New Music Concerts Ensemble (Brian Current, Artistic Director)**

James Gardiner, flugelhorn | Carina Lam, euphonium  
Vanessa Fralick, tenor trombone | Megan Hodge, tenor trombone  
David Pell, bass trombone | Shannon Wojewoda, double bass

### **Opus 8 Vocal Ensemble (Robert Busiakiewicz, Director)**

*Soprano:* Katy Clark, Clara Fraser  
*Alto:* Veronika Anissimova, Rebecca Claborn  
*Tenor:* Robert Busiakiewicz, Jamie Tuttle  
*Bass:* Martin Gomes, Bryan Martin

### **University of Toronto Opera (Sandra Horst, Music Director)**

Cassandra Amorim, Ana Castro, Rosie Chan, James Coole-Stevenson, Ben Done,  
Ellita Gagner, Joel Glickman-Rosen, Jun Lam (Wesley) Hui, Lyndon Ladeur, Luke Nofall,  
Ayana Platt, Emily Rocha, Alex Sorensen, George Theodorakopoulos, Burak Yaman

### **Soundstreams' Choir 21 (Lawrence Cherney, Artistic Director; David Fallis, Director)**

*Soprano:* Vania Chan, Katy Clark, Clara Fraser, Rebecca Genge, Clara Krausse  
*Alto:* Veronika Anissimova, Julia Barber, Rebecca Claborn, Alison Roy  
*Tenor:* Robert Busiakiewicz, Nathan Gritter, Cian Horrobin, Nicholas Nicolaidis, Mitchell Pady  
*Bass:* Bradley Christensen, Martin Gomes, Bryan Martin, John Pepper, David Yung

## Program Notes and Texts

Tonight's program celebrates the originality of John Beckwith as a composer, his commitment to Canadian musical history, and the many strong personal and professional relationships that he cultivated throughout his long life. The following notes are in his own words, taken from *Unheard Of: Memoirs of a Canadian Composer* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012) and the liner notes for the recording *Calling: John Beckwith Instrumental Works, 2006–2016* (Centrediscs, 2018).

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### *Calling* (2016)

Invited to “curate” an event in the New Music Concerts series in Toronto in 2017, I suggested among other works a favourite, Stravinsky's *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas*. The idea was accepted, but it implied the addition of four trombonists to the playing cast – for a scant three or four minutes of playing. To justify this, what other works requiring trombones might we add? When no immediate ideas emerged, I said, “Well, okay, I'll write something,” and I did. Asking one of the trombonists to take up the euphonium, and enlisting a trumpeter to play flugelhorn, I produced *Calling*. The title occurred to me when I thought of the historical association of the trombone with time-callers, signals, and especially religious or other-worldly moments (think of the graveyard scene in *Don Giovanni* or the trial scene in *The Magic Flute* or for that matter the “Tuba Mirum” of Mozart's *Requiem*). The “calling” motives in the piece are first sounded by the bass trombone and are later shared by other brasses in solos or duets in other registers, against a counterpoint of something like free conversation.

### *Six Songs to Poems by e.e. cummings* (1982)

The six e.e. cummings songs for baritone and piano were composed between 1980 and 1982, thirty years after *Four Songs to Poems by e.e. cummings* for soprano and piano (written in 1950). During those thirty years I had many contacts with first-class singers but evidently no interest in adding to the song repertoire. The only examples from that period are an album of songs for children and the *Chaucer Suite* (both 1962) and two sets of arrangements from Canadian traditional-music sources. I had continuing interest in problems of English-language prosody, and I discussed them with my students. Rhythm, pitch contours, punctuation, accent – these were constant concerns in my choral and operatic writing. But it was a period when, like many composers, I wondered whether setting extant poetry to be sung was still a valid exercise, the so-called “art song” (in French, *mélodie*; in German, *Lied*) still a valid medium. Were voice-and-piano partnerings like those of Mahler, Wolf, Debussy and Duparc still possible? If setting extant poems or prose texts, what texts? My restart, signifying that my answer to the first question was “yes,” began when I decided to write out the music which for years had been going through my head for cummings's burlesque lyric, “Jimmie's got a goil.” One thing led to another, and in leisure moments I returned to his poetry and at length found I had another cycle. Performances by Mark Pedrotti, Gary Relyea, Doug MacNaughton, and other singers have been reassuring. William Aide has been an invaluable champion. The experience was for me a prelude to further solo-voice ventures.

3.

“o purple finch  
                                  please tell me why  
this summer world (and you and i  
who love so much to live)

                                  must die”

“if i  
          should tell you anything”  
(that eagerly sweet carolling  
self answers me)

          “i could not sing”

4.

Jimmie’s got a goil

                          goil

                          goil,

                          Jimmie

’s got a goil and  
she coitnly can shimmie  
when you see her shake a  
shimmie how you wish that you was Jimmie.  
Oh for such a gurl

                          gurl

                          gurl,

                          oh

for such a gurl to  
be a fellow’s twistandtwirl

talk about your Sal-

                          Sal-

                          Sal-,

                          talk

about your Salo

-mes but gimmie Jimmie’s gal.

### “Halifax” (2007)

The tune “Halifax,” by Stephen Humbert, one of about two dozen original tunes by him, appears in his compilation *Union Harmony* (2nd edition), Saint John, NB, 1816 – the first tune-book published in what is now Canada. No copies of the first edition (1801) have survived, so “Halifax” may have been composed earlier; but 1816 is the latest possible date. Its modal flavour and rough-hewn harmonies (in three voices) are characteristic of New England psalmody at the turn of the 19th century. Unusual features are the alternating metres (2/2 and 3/2), the short “echo” after the penultimate phrase, and the long melisma which extends the final phrase to seven bars instead of

the expected four. “Halifax” is set by Humbert to Isaac Watts’s hymn beginning “Now in the heat of youthful blood/Remember thy Creator, God,” a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes. For this new adaptation – for SSA and solo flute – the Canadian poet Jay Macpherson has written new words expressing communal feelings in the 21st-century ecological crisis. “Halifax” was commissioned by the Oriana Women’s Choir, Toronto (conductor, William Brown).

What can we do, where shall we turn?  
We missed the way, we failed to learn:  
    How can we undo what is done?  
    We slept too long, the time is gone.  
Now that we’re shaken from our dream  
    (our dream),  
Surely the loss of time we can redeem.

Earth once entrusted to our care –  
    So full, so rich, so fair, so dear  
    Our gift to cherish – we betrayed:  
Where then, so late, can we seek aid?  
    God’s word was never faint or dim  
(or dim):  
Plainly, our minds and hands must act for him.

### ***All at Once: two fragments by bpNichol (1995)***

This “secular motet” was composed for the marriage ceremony of Teri Dunn and Lawrence Beckwith – Toronto, 5 January 1996, written at their request. It is dedicated to them both, with love.

every (all at (toge (forever) ther) once) thing  
*The Martyrology*, book 5:10

...simply to share  
caring we have come to value  
the simplest things reassert themselves  
love passion honour  
make up the will  
thrill of living we have found together  
each in our own ways  
seek to carry forward to the end of our days...  
    from *The Martyrology*, book 5:9

[for (toge (all at (everything) once) ther) ever]  
    adapted from *The Martyrology*, book 5:10

## ***Follow Me* (2013)**

This work was composed at the request of the clarinetist Peter Stoll, with whom I had collaborated on several previous pieces. He gave the first performance with the pianist Adam Zukiewicz in November 2013. I was reviewing the *Goldberg Variations* of Bach during the composition period, so I guess my head was full of canonic formations. The third movement features canon and imitation between the clarinet and the piano; hence the title. [It] is a palindrome: the two instruments play each other's lines in reverse order.

## ***Taptoo!* (1993)**

*Taptoo!* is a historical pageant or saga in Reaneyesque terms, where real-life characters mingle with invented ones and where simple stage devices depict key events often with a tinge of satire. Its topic, as Jamie succinctly put it, is why Canadians are not Americans. Another Reaney characteristic: the story is told as if through the eyes and ears of a child, the drummer boy Seth Harple in Act One, and his son Seth Junior in Act Two. Jamie had visited the Fort York archives and researched the musical background, indicating contemporaneous tunes that could be quoted in the opera. The title he chose itself has musical relevance: it refers to a military ritual, the last bugle and drum signal of the day, calling troops back to barracks from their tavern visits and other evening revels. It struck me that what we were working on was the modern equivalent of a ballad opera, in which scraps of familiar songs and dances would now and then drift into the musical score. I ended by including about twenty such musical references – hymn tunes, popular sentimental or patriotic songs, dances, marches and of course period military music. Some of the tunes were well known, others more obscure. When asked to define the genre of *Taptoo!* I called it a “documentary ballad opera.”

*ABOUT THESE SCENES: In the final scene of Act I, drummer boys are making an effigy of a “Queen’s Ranger” sentinel. Ebenezer Hatchway, deserted to them, is not helping but juggling some apples. The young Seth Harple can’t bring himself to participate in the gauntlet ritual the soldiers perform, and Major John Graves Simcoe counsels him. The scene ends with a melancholy “glee” about the life of a soldier, based on the anonymous tune “How Stands the Glass Around.” The Prelude to Act II begins with the chorus “Ten-Mile Creek,” sung by a band of immigrant Loyalists, using the tune “Wyndham,” written in 1785 by the New England composer Daniel Read.*

## **Sonatina on “Mairi’s Wedding” (2013)**

For a concert in April 2013 I was asked by the Toronto Arts and Letters Club to compose a short duo for flute and piano for two veteran Canadian performers, Robert Aitken and William Aide, valued friends whose performances and promotion of my music I have greatly appreciated. It happens that earlier that year as a keen Scottish country dancer I attended the Tartan Ball, the annual peak of activities by the Toronto branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, and the melody of one of the favourite dances, “Mairi’s Wedding,” proved so catchy I couldn’t get it out of my head. With its



modal character it could be taken for a Scottish traditional tune from the 17th or 18th century, but it was actually written in Glasgow in the mid-1930s. Rather than a conventional set of variations, my piece builds new phrases from fragments of the tune; the whole tune is heard only just before the end, once in the flute and once in the piano.

## **“A Man and His Flute” (2001)**

For a contribution to the Aldeburgh Connection’s “Toronto Song Book” by various local composers in 2000, I made a setting of a poem by Miriam Waddington, another writer whom I had known slightly and whose work I admired. The title was “A Man and His Flute,” and I believe (though unable to verify this) that it was inspired by a concert performance by Robert Aitken. The flute has to be imagined in the piano part, and the ending, an atmospheric line about the scent of lemons, proved a real challenge (the singer hums a monotone). The first performance, by Monica Whicher and Stephen Ralls, stimulated me to further settings of Waddington’s poetry.

A man in a black coat  
plays a song  
on a black flute  
in a concert hall.  
He plays with his whole  
body with his hands  
with his trunk until

he becomes a tree and  
his arm a branch;  
his fingers are urgent  
extensions that startle  
the air in the leaves.

His song is obscurely  
about a lemon  
picked from an old tree  
in another country then  
brought home and cut  
against the blue  
of a winter sky.

The lemon and the  
black flute and the man  
in the black coat who  
sways with the music

in the concert hall  
takes the blue sky the  
yellow lemon and the  
cold sunlight of March  
and turns it into an April  
filled with the blueness  
of hyacinth; winter turns  
its back and melts away  
in the runnelled snow piled  
against frozen houses.

The man and his flute  
play their song,  
the audience is pierced  
by the blueness of sky,  
the audience hears  
the snow melting,  
the audience sees spring  
approaching the audience  
stands up the audience claps,  
the audience dances.

The man and his flute  
end their song,  
a smell of cut lemon  
fills the air.

## ***Sharon Fragments (1966)***

In the mid-1960s I became interested in the 19th-century Children of Peace sect, their leader David Willson, and their Temple at the village of Sharon, about sixty kilometres north of Toronto. James Reaney had written about Willson and regarded him as a major figure in Canadian philosophy; Helmut Kallmann, in his music history, had published research about the musical life of the sect; and Keith MacMillan had produced a CBC Radio documentary on the subject, illustrated by recordings of the Temple's historic barrel organ. This instrument, homemade on-site by the English bandmaster Richard Coates in the early 1800s, intrigued me on visits to the Temple, sometimes with groups of my history-of-music students. In 1966 Walter Kemp, a former student who was then dean of music at Waterloo Lutheran (later Wilfrid Laurier) University in Waterloo, Ontario, and director of the student choir there, proposed a commission, and I put together passages from various of Willson's prose and verse writings to use as a text. I took a long time over this compilation but completed the music in less than a week. The musical setting is based on two tunes found on the Temple barrel organ, "Wells" and "Armley"; both are of English 18th-century origin and were widely sung in their day. *Sharon Fragments* approaches the level of difficulty of *The Trumpets of Summer*, and it therefore surprises me that it has become my best known and most often performed choral work. Its compactness together with its textual interest may explain this; in addition, the two quoted tunes do emerge now and then in clear tonal form as a focus for listeners. The words of Willson which I selected touch on his search for religious meaning and on the beliefs of the sect; the sincerity and simple imagery of the hymn verses appealed to me, and I found there was much I could relate to from my own "life struggle." I am always touched when I am introduced to someone and they immediately sing me a phrase they recall from having participated in a performance of this work. Such moments may be similar to the communal feeling choristers often cite as "what choral music is all about."

**I.** I know not my own form; I have a beginning, but know not the end, because my life is not finished according to thy will...I wander in the earth,...seeking a city where I may find friends...I see myself more miserable than other men...I hear men talk of heaven and the terrors of hell; but...I must be between these two kingdoms, where none are willing to dwell with me but God alone.

**II.** Cloth'd with some terror from on high, / I hear a voice that I must die!  
My heart doth flutter and remove / From everything I dearly love.

The Lord gives me mine end to see / That I must go where princes be,  
Where kings and queens do lose their crown / And with the worm in earth lie down.

**III.** All things written in the Scriptures have (orig. *hath*) been known to the mind from whence they did proceed, and are revealed to us by human beings – the family of God whom he hath chosen to be loving, kind, and tender parents to the world.

IV. With the pen I have drawn the lines of his spirit as to me they have been given. They are not the handwriting of the scribe or eloquent in speech; they originated in my mind, and I commit them to memory as a debt I owe to the Lord.

V. O Lord, the stone will not remove / Where thou has plac'd redeeming love.  
A broken heart, a humble mind, / Will mercy at thy portals find.

The proud are lost in troubl'd seas, / Or, as the fowl, toss'd in the breeze,  
With a false hope their mind's impress'd / Seeking, but never finding rest.

The worlds depart, the heavens flee, / And death and hell is where they be;  
O humble mind! more sure abode! / The place and pathway of our God.

VI. Life inspires all our actions. The body can feel nothing, but it touches the mind, therefore it is the man within that is the life of the body, and exists in all our limbs.

VII. We have built a habitation for the poor and ignorant...*Peace* is our motto and *Union* our praise...  
Contentment crowns our offerings, and our time is spent in the praise of the Lord.

VIII. Oh Gilead's joy, where is thy spring, / Or healing that thy balm affords?  
Oh, where do Zion's children sing, / Or Jesus loose the binding cords?

O Lord, where doth the city stand, / Or the bless'd kingdom of thine own?  
Where is that lost, but promis'd land, / Which was to sons of Israel known?

My soul doth rest, I know not why / My spirit doth in secret sing;  
The kingdom of my God is nigh, / My soul doth taste the joyful spring.

### **“Ae fond kiss,” from *Three Burns Songs* (1987)**

The annual summer “Music at Sharon” festivals, under Lawrence Cherney’s direction, regularly included a “heritage program,” for which I would research, arrange, and sometimes assist in performing (as keyboardist or conductor) musical repertoire associated with early Canada, early Ontario, or specifically early Sharon – to be performed by the Elmer Iseler Singers and whatever instrumental ensemble seemed suitable (or affordable). We exploited the special acoustics of the Temple by sometimes positioning singers or instrumentalists in the balcony; we were fortunate to be able to use not only the barrel organ but the chamber organ (also built by Richard Coates and dating from the Temple’s early years); both instruments had been painstakingly restored by Geoffrey Payzant. Reflecting perhaps my time in Edinburgh, one such program centred on historical compositions from Scotland and by Scots-Canadian composers.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their kind and generous assistance in making this evening possible:

Julia Armstrong, Canadian Children's Opera Company (Teri Dunn, Music Director), Canadian Music Centre, Lawrence Cherney, Brian Current, Eric Chow, Robin Elliott, Ellie Hisama, Glenn Hodgins, Institute for Music in Canada, Jeff McFadden, New Music Concerts, St. Thomas's Anglican Church, Daniel Weinzweig

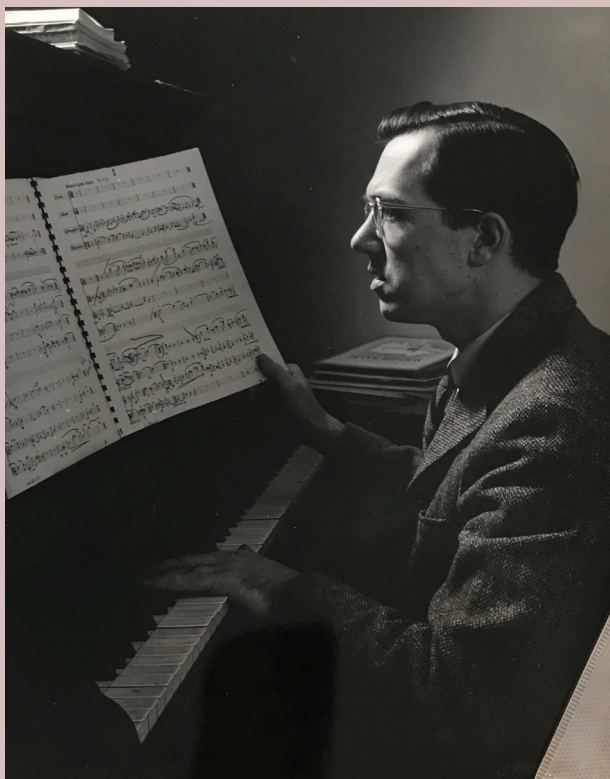


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