ALUMNI MAKING WAVES

Kathleen Allan (BMus’11) talks about her love of singing, conducting, and writing music; the three-headed monster that is her career; and her return to the West Coast.
ALUMNI MAKING WAVES

Engineering’s Loss Is Music’s Gain

Math and science whiz Kathleen Allan was anticipating a career in engineering when she stumbled across the composition program at the UBC School of Music. “I had all but accepted a full scholarship to Waterloo for electrical engineering,” she says, but decided to apply to UBC and “get music out of my system for four years. Yeah... That didn’t work at all.” The busy grad is an in-demand singer, conductor, and composer, with a growing reputation throughout North America.

“UBC was fantastic, in that it allowed me the flexibility to do a lot of different things.” Bruce Pullan was an early choral mentor, and when he retired Graeme Langager proved a wonderful teacher and mentor. Studying composition with Stephen Chatman, whose music Allan performed growing up in Newfoundland, was very exciting for her. Later, Dorothy Chang supervised her first orchestral compositions. “It was a place that allowed me to do it all. It really gave me the platform to do what I wanted to do,” she says.

After UBC, she attended Yale University for her MMus in Conducting, and then relocated to Toronto, where she was managing a busy career.

But then she got a call from the Vancouver Academy of Music with a unique opportunity: the position of Director of Choral Studies and Associate Conductor of Orchestras. Allan jumped at the chance to run the new, privately endowed choral program. “I’m really looking forward to having a set of ensembles of my own, to working on creating my sound as a conductor with the same group on a regular basis; really exploring that relationship,” she enthused.

In addition to her duties at the Academy, Allan maintains a thriving career as a soloist and choral singer, and manages numerous commissions as a composer. “It sort of works itself out,” she says of balancing singing, writing, and conducting. “I enjoy all three, and I feel that each provides a respite from and informs the other. When I conduct I like to put myself in the composer’s shoes and think about why the composer may have written certain things, and likewise as a conductor and singer I get to study all these incredible works that have been written and allow that to influence, either subconsciously or consciously, the works that I compose.”

Read more about Kathleen Allan online at music.ubc.ca/highnotes

CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL

Student Fanfares Celebrate 100 Years at UBC

From September 2015 to May 2016, UBC has been celebrating its Centennial year, and the School of Music has played a part in the festivities. Centennial activities at the School (and beyond) included UBC Opera Ensemble’s Centennial Tour of BC and collaborations with the Beijing Central Conservatory’s Opera Centre; roundtable discussions with distinguished alumni; a free public conversation with jazz great Branford Marsalis; and ten new fanfares commissioned from alumni and current students performed by the School’s large and small ensembles. Nova Pon (MMus’15, current DMA student) and Aidan Wong (current BMus student) were among the student composers chosen to write a fanfare; Nova for saxophone quartet and Aidan for brass quintet.

For Aidan, the commission was a new experience. “I’ve composed for hire before, but those pieces weren’t necessarily commissioned works for a set ensemble. I’ve composed music for student films and art student animations where I was given ‘more or less’ free reign. I’ve also had many friends request I compose pieces for them. Typically I’m just grateful that as a student, I have performers willing to ask for pieces and perform them at a high level and so I don’t charge for those works,” he says, considering his Fanfare his first “real” commission.

For Nova it was old hat. For eight years she taught music privately and freelanced as a composer in the Calgary area, generally working on one commission or other for various musicians and ensembles.

Both composers took the commission in stride. For Aidan, the stressful thing was not composing to a deadline, but writing for brass quintet for the first time. Nova felt the pressure, but, “it’s a nice sort of pressure; like a springboard to bounce off of for ideas,” she said. “Most of my projects are like that so I’m used to it by now, and the deadline was reasonable.”

Both also found the Centennial theme inspiring. Nova researched the history of the university and took her inspiration from its coat of arms and early motto, finding the heraldic language poetic. The title of her piece, Waves azure, a sun in splendour, an open book, springs from that. “At the surface level, the piece has textures of waves that ebb and flow out of each other contrasted with bright “sunny” harmonies in shimmering textures. The idea of the open book, and phrase ‘Tuum Est’ in the coat of arms, translated as “it’s up to you” was also part of the work’s inspiration,” she says. Aidan’s Fanfare for Brass Quintet is a jovial, high energy, and triumphant fanfare, as he sought to create a celebratory energy in honour of this event.

Read more online at music.ubc.ca/highnotes
CATCHING UP
WITH OUR STUDENTS

A Partnership Forged in Music

High Notes talked to current MMus (choral conducting, graduating December ’16) student Frances Roberts (BMus’82, BEd Secondary’02, MMus’10), and another student, Carrie Tennant (MMus’12), about the choral program at Argyle Secondary in North Vancouver, and Geordie is Director of Music Ministry at Highlands United Church, teaches singing at Capilano University, and sings with the Vancouver Chamber Choir on top of their individual musical projects and family life.

How do you juggle or meld two busy music careers? Or do you?

Juggle is a good word. We take it day by day, and use a family calendar a lot. Both being musicians makes it a lot easier to be empathetic when one career or another takes one of us away from home for a couple of weeks at a time. We also understand the stresses that come in this line of work. It has been a test of our ability to cover for one another and it was very challenging when our children were small. Geordie took time off to be more of Mr. Mom after our second child was born so I could go back to teaching full time. Most of the time we have been able to juggle and cover for one another in a parent role and sometimes in a professional role.

What sparked your return to school, Frances?

I got interested in taking my Masters after 20 years of teaching secondary music and having three boys who were now at a stage where I might be able to get away without too much disruption to the family. I was in a secure position in the North Van school district, at the same school for 20 years, where my choral program was thriving and all was generally good. I was concerned about staying motivated and fresh as a teacher. While teaching at a BC Choral Federation Choral Directorship course in the summer with Dr. Graeme Langager, I spoke with him about the prospects of doing a Masters at UBC and how it might work for me in my current position, where I could only get a one year’s leave from my school district. I also spoke with some trusted colleagues and friends, Fiona Blackburn (BMus’82, BEd Secondary’02, MMus’10), Carrie Tennant (MMus’12), and Frank Lee (MMus’14), about the program and what to expect. Then it was a matter of timing with all the other elements of my life.

Read more about Frances and Geordie Roberts, including their advice for young students, online at music.ubc.ca/highnotes

Music is the furnace of your being

The UBC School of Music has a wealth of student talent, from performers, to theorists; from musicologists to mix-masters. High Notes talked to Director of the School, Dr. Richard Kurth, about music, music education, and society at large.

In a world where technology and science are moving forward at an incredible pace, and education is increasingly focused on employment skills, studying music can seem like an anachronistic choice. But not for Richard Kurth. “For me, the definition of music would be: coordinating the body, the mind, the imagination and expression into a single activity that can draw on all of them. That’s why we love music. We are charging our whole being—physically, intellectually, emotionally--using music as a way of getting everything fired up as intensely as possible. Music is like the furnace of your being.”

The way our culture experiences music has definitely been affected by technology-driven changes. “It’s actually hard to grasp how much the whole musical culture has changed in the last few decades. In many ways the changes are extraordinarily positive because we have now access to much more music and a greater diversity of musical traditions than we ever had, or could have had, in the past,” he says.

“We have music of other cultures available to us; we can revisit the music of the past with a few keystrokes. Music used to be very hard to acquire, now it’s easy.”

That ease of acquisition paradoxically makes Kurth uneasy. “In the past, music was something you did, by singing or playing. Now for many people it’s something you own.” That slippery slope inspires Kurth in his work at UBC. “I think it’s important that we do everything we can to ensure that music remains a participatory culture—not just something we surround ourselves with, but something we do.’ He includes running to music, dancing to it, playing a guitar alone, and listening to great jazz in a club as ways that people can engage actively and keep their own furnace burning, in addition to the obvious activities of performing and studying that take place at the School.

Students of all faculties can reap the benefits of this participatory philosophy. Ensembles from the UBC African, Balinese, and Korean music ensembles to the many choirs, jazz ensembles, orchestra, and others are open to students from outside the School of Music. And there are almost daily opportunities for the public to hear students and faculty perform.

“We want the school to be diverse in terms of where people are coming from; and diverse in the types of music that we make--music of different cultures, but also music from all of the long and multicultural Western tradition as diversely as possible, across history and cultural geography; because all the countless forms of music are different manifestations of human experience, and we learn from them all,” he says.

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OUR FACULTY

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Concerts in Care
Since 2008, the School of Music has partnered with the Health Arts Society to deliver the Concerts in Care UBC Ambassadors program. This outstanding program benefits community members by sharing accomplished student performances with audiences in residential care and retirement homes. To date, 112 graduate and undergraduate students have been selected by audition to participate in the program and presented 498 concerts throughout the Lower Mainland and BC interior.

“We see the Concerts in Care UBC Ambassadors program as a wonderfully inspiring and effective way to train musician citizens who contribute compassionately to the community,” says Dr. Richard Kurth, director of the UBC School of Music.

“Their Concerts in Care performances teach them to connect as directly as possible with their audiences, and to be communicative and eloquent in their playing and their conversation with the audience.”

Hands-on learning opportunities such as this are vital for students' training. They provide opportunities for students to refine their craft—teaching performance and communication skills, perseverance, confidence and professionalism—in addition to illustrating the transformative and restorative power of music.

“I truly believe that this program demonstrates the power of music and its healing qualities,” says soprano Eva Tavares, a 2016 UBC Ambassador. “Music makes an impact on human beings, and that impact stays with you throughout life. It marks the highs and lows of life in ways that nothing else can. This program proves that, and proved to me why my job as an artist is vital.”

In the coming year, the School of Music and the Health Arts Society aim to double the number of music students in the program as well as the number of concerts they perform. They will also integrate Concerts In Care into the curriculum, offering course credit and instruction focused on performance and communication skills attuned to this context. The tailored feedback, direction and guidance will help students redefine the goals of their performances and give them presentation skills to maximize the benefits they can share with their audiences in healthcare settings.

“Every year we witness how the Ambassadors grow and blossom as artist-citizens through their Concerts in Care performances,” says Kurth, noting the robust program has presented approximately 60 Concerts in Care events every year. “We would like many more students to be nourished by this transformative experience, and we aim for many more people and healthcare centres to be delighted and fortified by their concerts!”

We invite you to join us to help expand the program as much as possible. Over the summer, alumni will receive a special appeal from UBC requesting support. Every donation will help us to increase student involvement, local performances and tours. We hope that you will consider making a gift to this important program.

To get involved today, please visit donate.startanevolution.ca

SUMMER AT UBC MUSIC

VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL SONG INSTITUTE (VISI)
JUNE 18 – JULY 2, 2016
VISI returns this summer to UBC with two intensive programs. The Art of Latin Song will have singers and pianists working with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Serouj Kradjian and other VISI faculty. The Graham Johnson Sessions led one of the worlds leading experts in Art Song, Graham Johnson, will focus on Schubert’s songs and Schumann’s Spanisches Liederspiel.

songinstitute.ca

UBC SUMMER MUSIC INSTITUTE
JULY 3 – 16, 2016
The two week-long programmes offered in concert band, jazz band, and string orchestra. An opportunity to meet and make music with other serious young musicians from across BC and other parts of the world.

UBC SUMMER VOICE WORKSHOP
JULY 3 – 16, 2016
Workshop for young singers to focus intensely and creatively to further their talent and interact with UBC School of Music Faculty, as well as professional classical musicians from all over the world.

UBC WIND CONDUCTING SYMPOSIUM
JULY 21 – 25, 2016
The University of British Columbia School of Music invites band conductors of all levels to attend the 4th Annual UBC Wind Conducting Symposium. Refresh your conducting skills and learn about band repertoire, score study, and rehearsal techniques under the guidance of UBC Director of Bands Robert Taylor and distinguished guest artists Gillian MacKay (University of Toronto) and Emily Moss (California State University, Los Angeles).

VANCOUVER EARLY MUSIC SUMMER PROGRAMMES
AUGUST 1 – 12, 2016
The UBC School of Music is delighted to host the annual Vancouver Early Music Summer Programme. This year courses include: Baroque Vocal Programme — The Compleat Singer, a Baroque Dance Workshop and a Harpsichord Maintenance Workshop. Please visit www.earlymusic.bc.ca for details of concerts and programmes.

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