

Spring 2017 Edition

# UBC High Notes

The Newsletter of the School of Music at the University of British Columbia

## A SONG OF JOYS

UBC School of Music celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

Check out the new  
School of Music website!



[www.music.ubc.ca](http://www.music.ubc.ca)



## THE CHAN CENTRE AT 20

Celebrating one of Canada's premier launching pads for talented young musicians

On April 8th, 2017, the UBC School of Music celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts with a special performance of Mozart's *Requiem* and Dr. Stephen Chatman's *A Song of Joys* featuring UBC Choirs and Symphony Orchestra.

Designed by renowned Vancouver architect Bing Thom, D.Litt. *Honoris Causa* (UBC), the Chan Centre is recognized as one of Canada's premier musical venues thanks to its bold architecture and state-of-the-art acoustics. Over the past two decades it has also become an important launching pad for ambitious and talented student musicians.

Photo Credit: Daryl Kahn Cline

“ Without question, the Chan Centre experience is at the heart of our learning and artistic enterprise for everyone in the School. With this celebratory concert we want to thank the Chan family for their extraordinary vision and generosity, and to showcase the abundant talents of our students. ”

— Dr. Richard Kurth, Director of the UBC School of Music

For percussionist and M.Mus. student Julia Chien, performing at the Chan Centre is exciting — and a little terrifying. “It’s such a privilege. I’m always challenged beyond the limits of what I think I am capable of!” she says. Chien will perform the timpani solo in *A Song of Joys*.

Dozens of UBC Music students have parlayed their experiences at the Chan into exciting careers. Baritone Tyler Duncan (BMus '98) credits the Chan with setting the stage (so to speak) for a life in music that has taken him around the world, with stints at the Metropolitan Opera, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Carnegie Hall.

“I remember singing [in the inaugural concert] and being in awe of the amazing acoustics. I walked across that stage to receive my Bachelor of Music

degree and one of my first professional jobs as a singer with Early Music Vancouver was there... the Chan feels like home to me,” Duncan says.

Other notable alumni include Cynthia Yeh, principal percussionist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, soprano Shirin Eskandani, who this year made her debut with the Met in *Carmen*, cellist Luke Kim of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and up-and-coming pianist Bogdan Dulu.

The *Song of Joys* concert features the next generation of incredible student musicians performing under the direction of School of Music conducting faculty Dr. Graeme Langager and Dr. Jonathan Girard.

The concert is dedicated to the memory of Bing Thom, who passed away suddenly in 2016. Thom's architectural vision and his attention to acoustic detail have made the Chan Centre the world-class facility it is today.

*Visit [music.ubc.ca/song-of-joys](http://music.ubc.ca/song-of-joys) to read more about the anniversary concert and the history of the Chan Centre, including memories from School of Music faculty and alumni.*

**Photo caption:**

Conductors James Fankhauser (left) and Jesse Read (centre) meet with Chan Centre architect Bing Thom backstage at the inaugural concert.

## New dual degree program

Music careers are famously diverse. Some musicians perform and record exclusively. Many also teach, or produce, or work in an entirely different industry. There's no single career path — that's why the School of Music strives to offer degree programs that give students the flexibility to pursue multiple interests and vocations.

In 2016 we launched the dual Bachelor of Music/Bachelor of Education degree program. This new offering allows students to complete both the B.Mus. (general studies major) and the B.Ed. (music major) within five years, gaining practical teaching experience much sooner in their studies.

For trombonist and fourth-year student Janine King, the dual degree was appealing for its practicality: "The program allowed me to visit a local high school on a weekly basis, which led to a really great relationship with the teacher and the students at that school," she says. "I find teaching to be extremely fulfilling and rewarding, and these experiences have been so vital for me in order to confirm that I am pursuing a career that I know is right for me."

### OUR FACULTY

#### Turning Point Ensemble on *Thirst*, community, and the business of making a living in music

When trombonist and School of Music lecturer Jeremy Berkman formed Turning Point Ensemble (TPE) with a group of like-minded musicians in 2002, their ambition was to raise the profile of the music they loved: "We were all busy in our lives professionally, but we were rarely being engaged to perform music of the 20th century that we thought important to play," Berkman says.

As a large, nontraditional chamber orchestra dedicated to performing new and underappreciated works by the likes of Luciano Berio, Barbara Pentland, and Paul Hindemith, they knew that passion alone wouldn't be enough to sustain them. They needed to take an entrepreneurial approach to their project.

"What's very important to realize as a student of musical performance," Berkman says, "is that you are not only a potential employee, but also a future employer and entrepreneur and can create the work you wish for."

The dual degree program requires 30 fewer credits and costs about \$6000 less (domestic) than do the two degrees if completed separately. By working on the B.Mus. and the B.Ed. at the same time, students interested in music education can pursue a more focused program of study than the traditional, consecutive-degree (the "4 years +1") option.

The new program is, of course, a work in progress. For King, one of the first dual degree students, it has not been without its early kinks, mainly to do with the existing curriculum being adapted to a new timeline: "Integrating the dual degree students into the traditional [4+1] program's classrooms has been confusing and tricky, because we are taking classes alongside students who have already completed their practicum," she says. "But I am excited for the dual degree program to continue to develop and allow students to benefit fully from both degrees!"

The B.Mus./B.Ed. program takes its place among the School's dual degree offerings, which also include the B.Mus./Master of Management; B.Mus./Bachelor of Arts; and B.Mus./Bachelor of Science.

[Read the whole story on the High Notes blog at music.ubc.ca/blog.](https://music.ubc.ca/blog)

That's what we did — we developed a business plan, attracted a Board of Directors, and created an organization that would support the musical activity we wished to engage in."

Their approach has led to big things. The ensemble, whose members have included UBC faculty Brenda Fedoruk (flute), Vern Griffiths (percussion), Benjamin Kinsman (horn), Heidi Krutzen (harp), and Jim Littleford (trumpet) has released four albums, scored films and multimedia projects, and been recognized with a number of awards.

This year, TPE is nominated for a Juno (Classical Composition of the Year) for their recording of Ana Sokolović's "And I need a room to receive five thousand people with raised glasses...or...what a glorious day, the birds are singing 'halleluia.'" The song appears on the ensemble's new album *Thirst*, a collaboration with the vocal chamber group Musica Intima and several different composers, released by Redshift Records.

"The success we've achieved has been beyond expectations — and yet what we had hoped for," Berkman says.

[Read the full Q & A with Jeremy Berkman on the High Notes blog.](#)

Photo Credit: Chris Randle





# ALUMNI MAKING WAVES

## A Homecoming in *Eugene Onegin*

*Eugene Onegin* has always been important to baritone Krzysztof Biernacki (DMA '06). While studying for his doctorate at the School of Music, he cut his teeth in the role of the arrogant and tragic title character of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 1878 opera.

"[*Onegin*] cannot be compared to anything else in the operatic canon. It's full of sensitive lyricism, fantastic melodies and real passion. The language is absolutely gorgeous, and Tchaikovsky really captured the essence of Russian life in the 19th century," Biernacki says.

Since graduating a decade ago, Biernacki has performed in and directed a wide range of productions across Canada, the U.S. and Europe, from *La Boheme* to *Die Fledermaus*, *Dido and Aeneas* to *The Consul*. His credits include principal roles with Vancouver Opera, Calgary Opera, and Manitoba Opera. In 2007 he established the University of North Florida Opera Ensemble and in 2008 made his singing debut at Carnegie Hall with the UNF Wind Ensemble.

But *Onegin* remains a touchstone, and UBC his home away from home. When the opportunity to return to Vancouver this year as guest director of UBC Opera's production of the classic Russian opera, he jumped at the chance: "I was hugely grateful for the invitation," he says.

Recently, Biernacki spoke with High Notes about this homecoming and the challenge of staging Tchaikovsky's masterpiece.

### What made you want to direct *Onegin* in particular?

I performed the lead role at UBC in 2005. So coming back to UBC to direct *Onegin* was a dream come true. I just love this score perhaps because it is so special to me in my personal and professional life. This opera will always hold a special place in my heart.

My favourite part of that 2005 production was Professor Nancy Hermiston's staging. Our set was quite limited that year so the blocking had to be very imaginative. I remember thinking how well thought out this entire production was. I have to admit that when I planned my own blocking for this production, I had a hard time not imitating certain moves from Nancy's 2005 original. I remembered them so well and of course I still had my old markings in the score. I still created my own vision of the opera, but I was certainly influenced by Nancy's ideas.



Photo Credit: Tim Matheson

### Are there specific challenges that *Onegin* presents for a director and the performers? Technical or otherwise?

It is a difficult piece. The main challenge has to do with the Russian text and Pushkin's original in particular. Tchaikovsky took most of the text straight out of Pushkin's poem in verse. Conversational Russian is not easy for Canadian singers, so singing it in poetic verse is that much more challenging for students. On a dramatic level, this is a very grown up piece. Young singers are required to portray very subtle emotions with strong emphasis on poetic nuance. It requires experienced singers who can act.

Also, this opera has a lot of stylized dancing in it. The Act 3 Polonaise is very well known as a concert piece. But there is also the Mazurka and the large harvest scene in Act 1. We actually had to choreograph the dances with singers who do not have much dance experience. It took us some time, but we did it. Everyone took really well to it also learning some new dance steps in the process.

### Can you talk about the experience of working with the student opera company?

That's always a real challenge. Maintaining high artistic standards, teaching through the creative process, sticking to a short schedule, and staying faithful to the composer's original intent — that's a tall order. However, UBC Opera is not an ordinary student opera company. As far as I am concerned, this is essentially a professional opera company with outstanding faculty, excellent professional team, and access to tremendous theatrical resources.

Read the full Q & A with Krzysztof Biernacki on the High Notes blog.

Pianist **Bogdan Dulu** (DMA '15) recently embarked on a seven-week, 19-date Canadian tour with Jeunesses Musicales du Canada.

Composer **Matthew Emery** (BMus '14) released *Sing Your Song*, a new choral album with Amabile Choirs of London, on CMC Centrediscs. The album was featured on CBC Music in February. In 2016, Emery was named one of CBC's "hot Canadian classical musicians under 30."

**Cynthia Yeh** (BMus '99), principal percussionist with Chicago Symphony Orchestra, gave a masterclass at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Music et de Danse de Paris during the CSO's European tour this winter.

**Jocelyn Morlock** (MMus '96, DMA '02), the current Composer-in-Residence for the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, has been recognized with a City of Vancouver Mayor's Arts Award in the music category.

Catch up on all the latest alumni news at [music.ubc.ca/highnotes](http://music.ubc.ca/highnotes).

#### UBC High Notes

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Front cover photo: Maestro Jonathan Girard rehearses

with UBC Symphony Orchestra. Photo credit: Don Erhardt



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