

new music concerts

93-94 season Robert Aitken artistic director



new music concerts presents

Harry  
Somers  
...a portrait

**Sunday, April 24, 1994**

**7:15 pm discussion**

**8:00 pm concert**

**Walter Hall**

**Edward Johnson Building**

**Sunday, April 24, 1994**  
**8:00 pm**  
**Walter Hall**  
**Edward Johnson Building**

Harry Somers

**...a portrait concert**

Harry Somers  
**Movement for String Quartet**  
(1982) dur. 16'  
Accordes String Quartet  
Fujiko Imajishi, violin  
Marie Berard, violin  
Douglas Perry, viola  
David Hetherington, cello

Tim Sullivan  
**Saffron** (1993) dur. 10' 45"  
(electroacoustic work)

Charles Ives  
**General William Booth**  
**Enters into Heaven** (1914) dur. 8'  
Brian Nickel, baritone  
David Swan, piano

Charles Ives  
**Psalm 90** (1923) dur. 12'  
The Rosedale United Church Choir  
under the direction of Wayne Strongman  
David Harrison, organ  
Richard Sacks, David Swan, bells

### Intermission

Harry Somers  
**Chura-churum** (1985) dur. ca.30'  
Tapestry Music Theatre  
under the direction of Wayne Strongman  
Renée Bouthot, Janet Coates, sopranos  
Kristine Anderson, Susan Cooper, altos  
Martin Houtman, Peter MacDonald, tenors  
Brian Nickel, Tony Radford, baritones  
Robert Aitken, flute  
Erica Goodman, harp  
David Swan, piano  
Robin Engelman, percussion  
Russell Hartenberger, percussion  
Richard Sacks, percussion  
Trevor Tureski, percussion  
Chris Rudyk, sound engineer

**This evening's performance is being recorded for future broadcast on CBC's 2 New Hours with host Richard Paul, CBC Stereo 94.1**

Special thanks to SOCAN for their kind assistance in making this concert possible and to Wellington Audio Productions for supplying their equipment.

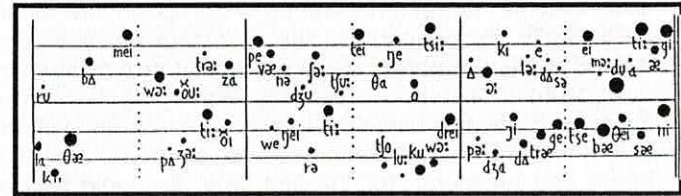
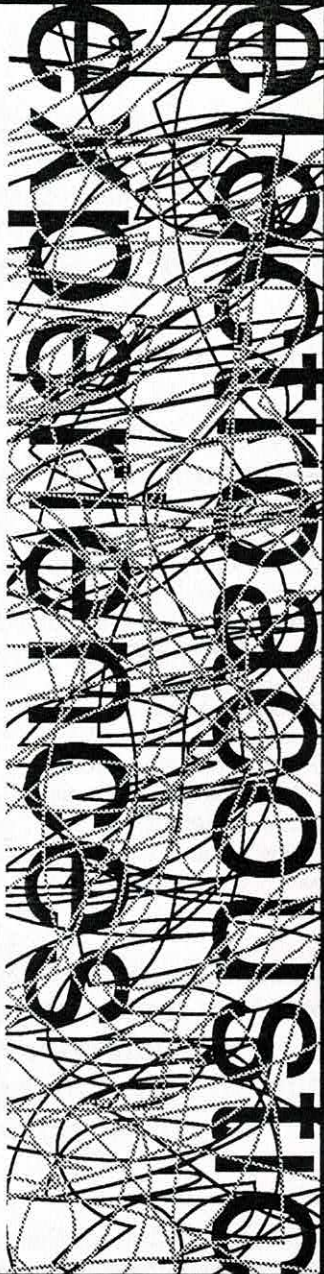


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 programme 1, 3:00 pm  
 programme 2, 8:00 pm  
 Gallery School  
 Art Gallery of Ontario  
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new music concerts



**Harry Somers** was born in Toronto in 1925. He entered the Royal Conservatory at the age of 16 where he was a scholarship student of pianists Reginald Godden and Weldon Kilburn and, from 1941 to 1949, composer John Weinzweig. A subsequent Amateur Hockey Association scholarship provided an opportunity to study with Darius Milhaud in Paris.

Though the connection between hockey and culture may seem a bit tenuous to some, this peculiarly Canadian institution provided his colleague John Beckwith with a similar opportunity to study abroad in 1950. In the post-war years, before the establishment of major cultural institutions such as the League of Composers, the Canadian Music Centre, the Canada Council, national television networks and the various provincial arts administrations, Somers, along with the other pioneers who worked to create the aforementioned institutions, mastered the art of survival through ephemeral pursuits such as taxi-cab hacking, broadcasting and, most significantly, the high-pressured life of a commercial music copyist. For Somers this was an activity that was carried out on short notice in a dingy office in one long shift that inevitably saw a coterie of dazed composers cringing at the sight of another dawn.

Throughout the 1950's Somers demonstrated his versatility in every genre, with compositions for his own chosen instrument (five piano sonatas and two concertos), works for orchestra (*North Country* for strings and the orchestral *Fantasia* being particularly successful), chamber music (the Second and Third String Quartets and two violin sonatas) and, increasingly, music for stage, screen and television.



A grant from the newly-formed Canada Council enabled Somers to return to Paris in 1960, where he absorbed the vibrant renaissance of European new music, particularly the concerts of the *Domaine musical* conducted by Pierre Boulez. He also spent some time studying Gregorian chant at Solesmes, presaging his future interest in vocal music. By this point his compositional abilities were being recognized to such an extent at home that he found, for the first time, he could support himself on the income from commissions. A great many of these were from the CBC, which also employed him as a radio announcer.

The instrumental works Somers wrote in this period (*Movement, Five Concepts, Stereophony, Picasso Suite*, all for orchestra) were influenced by his experiences in the cinema, where stylistic juxtapositions and textural (as opposed to thematic) structural procedures are the norm. It was the human voice, however, that came to dominate his thinking, beginning with his 1963 setting of *haiku* texts in *Twelve Miniatures* and culminating in the epic three-act opera *Louis Riel*, commissioned for the Canadian Opera Company by the Floyd Chalmers Foundation in celebration of Canada's centennial celebrations.

The day following the premiere of *Louis Riel* in 1967 saw the marriage of Harry Somers to the distinguished Canadian actress Barbara Chilcott. Her influence on Somers has been profound in both musical, theatrical, and spiritual terms. A student of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at his *ashram* in Rishikish, Kashmir in 1960, Barbara's interest in Eastern religions brought Harry full circle to his childhood and his mother's deep involvement with comparative religions - in particular the study of the Hindu scripture known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. In fact, it was the piano solos and duets he heard at a summer retreat of her Theosophical group in 1939 that led to his obsession with music.

In 1971, after two years in Rome on a grant from the Canada Council, Somers and his wife made a three-month return to Canada from the East, visiting India, Nepal, Thailand and Bali. **Chura-churum** (and a near-fatal bout of malaria) was the direct result of these experiences.

First performed by **New Music Concerts** in 1985, **Chura-churum** is perhaps the most notationally complex of Somers' vocal works. Eight solo voices are amplified by loudspeakers; through the use of "choral choreography" the emanation of sounds vary throughout the composition as the singers move from one microphone to another. An instrumental ensemble of flute, harp, piano and four percussionists offers both support and opposition to the chorus.

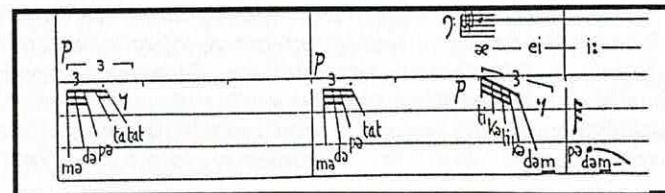
The text of the work is based on a puja or prayer in the ancient Sanskrit language of India. The phonetic version as presented by Somers reads as follows:

*Uhkunduh manduluh kuhrum,  
Veeuptuhm yaynuh churah-churum,  
Taht puhdum dahrsheetum yaynuh,  
Tazmay shree gooroovay noomah.*

In an English translation:

*Unbounded as the endless canopy of the sky,  
The omnipresent in all manifest-  
unmanifest creation,  
The sign of that as being revealed by  
him who was that,  
Therefore to him, to Shri Gurudev, I bow down.*

In addition to the text the chorus intones phonic materials in the form of 27 consonants and 13 vowels in all manner of vocal techniques and colours: chanted, unvoiced (whispered), spoken, shouted, sung, glottal, nasal, open, and so on. The panoply of vocal techniques are an extension of the procedures worked out in his earlier composition, *Voiceplay*, commissioned by the CBC in 1971 for the extraordinary talents of Cathy Berberian.





Concerning the structure of the work, the composer has provided the following notes:

"I selected the phrase, **Chura-churum** for the title both for its wonderful sound and its meaning. **Chura-churum**— all manifest-unmanifest creation. To the sages the manifested and unmanifested fields of life comprise the whole of reality. I figured that about covered everything, all right. Fascinating, but I was not writing philosophy. I was creating a sonoral composition. It was by extension of the phrase that the shape and substance of the piece was created: all formed-unformed, to the adverbial forming-unforming, and so on. Here's a thumbnail sketch:

After crotale cymbals announce the commencement of the work, the two tenors chant short streams of vowels and consonants. There follows a period of unvoiced and breath sounds of all types. Periodically, lines of the verse appear as do sung notes. This all accumulates to a peak of density of spoken and chanted sounds with, at the same time, extreme activity by the instruments. Following a tapering down and dying out of this activity, all suddenly forms into a stretch of rhythmic shouting and clapping, which breaks apart, then forms again with the chorus engaged in rhythmic shouting while the orchestra punctuates main beats. This finally tapers, and following a silence (sound and silence are regarded as two essential components forming a totality throughout the work,) the harp introduces one of the motives which are central to the piece and which evolve in various ways with the vibraphone and marimba doing the same, while gongs, cymbals, and drums set up different vibrations and the chorus presesents fragmentations of the puja intoned and sung.

At the termination of the previous section, marked by a period of silence, all coalesces, the chorus singing lines of the **puja** in alternation with dynamic statements from the orchestra. Two gong notes, of long duration, terminate this section and from this emerges the most extended "formed" part of the work with clear rhythmic chanting, singing, intoning, and sustained sounds from the chorus with the orchestra joining in with

punctuations, counterpoint, and movement on diverse rhythmic planes. All these elements gather and accumulate to a peak of intensity.

Instant break to solo voices engaged in a stretch of virtuosity: a kind of vocal cadenza display, with percussion eventually joining in and leading everything to a final peak of rhythmic shouting of the **puja** by the chorus with instruments making great punctuations.

There follows a fragmentation and dissolution of the composition's main elements until a series of long, and audible, inhalations and exhalations of breath terminates the work.

Harry Somers

Somers' **Movement for String Quartet** (1982) was commissioned with the assistance of the Canada Council as the imposed work of the 50th Anniversary String Quartet Competition at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts. This challenging and powerful work was designed to test the abilities of the dozen or so quartets competing in that annual event. Not the least of the difficulties they are faced with in this piece is the ability to play independently of one another and to control the carefully planned dynamic envelopes of the work.

Falling into four large sections, the composition begins dramatically with a series of rhythmically staggered unison E-flats which gradually distend their radius to form a cluster of germinal pitches. This process generates the material of an energetic *allegro* section which begins with a series of rising scalar gestures, the contours of which are subjected to inversions and other transformational procedures. The third section of the work begins with an even quarter-note pulse from the first violin leading into passages of considerable polymetric complexity with simultaneous metres of 4, 7, 6 and 5 beats to a measure. The final section leads us back through the previous materials and ends with the sustained E-flat with which the work began.



**Charles Ives** (1874-1954), reclusive composer, expansive insurance broker, reluctant millionaire and transcendent visionary, created in the first decades of this century a body of audacious works that expressed in uncompromising terms an uniquely indigenous musical language.

Ives has long been noted for his innovations in the concurrent use of multiple tonalities, rhythms, and textures. Though created in an atmosphere of almost total artistic isolation, his music gradually came to be seen as the embodiment of the American populist spirit.

Typical of Ives' iconoclastic sense of adventure are his settings of Psalm texts dating from the early 1890's, begun when the composer was still a teenager. His 1894 *a cappella* setting of Psalm 67, for example (described by Ives authority John Kirkpatrick as "a prophetic masterpiece"), caused considerable consternation in Ives' hometown of Danbury, Connecticut due to its newfangled use of two simultaneous tonalities. Throughout the work the women sing in the key of C major while the men sing in G minor. When questioned about this precocious example of polytonality, Ives replied that this particular combination of keys best conveyed an expression of "dignity and a sense of finality."

Two earlier versions of **Psalm 90** from the 1890's were lost. Some thirty years later, after a fruitless attempt at reconstructing the original from memory, he recomposed the work. It is this version, completed in 1923, that his widow (*née* Harmony Twitchell) described as the only one of his works with which Ives was satisfied. It proved to be among his last original works. Though he lived to see another three decades, his composing came to an end in the following year, just as his astonishingly original music was beginning to receive international acclaim. In failing health, he retired from business in 1930 and devoted the remainder of his life to fitful revisions of his earlier works and anonymous acts of philanthropy.

To contemporary ears unfamiliar with the context of Ives' era, **General William Booth Enters into Heaven**

may convey a tinge of irony. This misunderstanding often arises due to Ives' characteristic quotation of hymns and popular songs in a dissonant context - in this case the evangelical tune, *Cleansing Fountain* ("There is a fountain filled with blood..."). For Ives, however, the melody conjured up memories of boyhood camp meetings and his heartfelt belief in the Baptist 'old-time religion'. This 1914 setting of a part of Vachel Lindsay's poetic homage to the founder of the Salvation Army is considered by many to be the greatest of Ives' 180 songs.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Cleansing Fountain' by Charles Ives. It features a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The score is divided into four measures, each with a specific text label above it: 'The Eternities Creation', 'God's wrath against sin', 'Prayer and Humility', and 'Rejoicing in Beauty and Work'. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *ppp*, and phrasing slurs. The vocal line includes the instruction *(lunga)* and a *(fall.)* marking. The score is written in 4/4 time and uses a key signature of one sharp (F#).

**Timothy Sullivan** was born in Ottawa in 1954. He obtained both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Music from the University of Toronto after studying with Samuel Dolin at the Royal Conservatory of Music. He also taught at the R.C.M. throughout the 1980's.

In recent years Sullivan has devoted himself to composing works in theatrical genres. The first of his three operas, the monodrama **Tomorrow and Tomorrow**, was premiered in New York in 1987 and was seen in Canada in a broadcast version by CBC Television in 1989. **Dream Play** was produced while he was composer-in-residence with the Canadian Opera Company in 1988 and was re-staged in New York the following year. His latest opera, **Florence**, was the centrepiece of the 1992 Elora Festival and is scheduled to receive its British premiere this August at London's Bloomsbury Theatre.



Sullivan has been particularly active of late composing music for modern dance, collaborating with Tedd Robinson (**No First Storey**, Ottawa, 1992), William Douglas (**Saffron, Thorn, Echo** and **Apollo**, Montreal 1993), Menaka Thakkar (**Untitled**, Ottawa and Toronto 1993) and, most recently, John Alleyne's **The Archeology of Karl... A Romantic Adventure** in a production by Ballet British Columbia. Upcoming projects include pieces for choreographers Katherine Labelle, Roger Sinha and William Douglas as well as concert works for the Aldeburgh Connection and the Mississauga Sinfonia.

**Saffron** is an excerpt from the opening moments of a ballet written for William Douglas. The simple scale passages which open and conclude the work are transformed through a series of episodic sections that develop some attribute of the notion of "scale", whether expressed as melody *per se* or simply "line". Though the timbral palette of the work is restricted to the sonorities of harp and strings, its electroacoustic nature enables the composer to create rapid scalar canons, repeated notes and accelerandi beyond the realms of what is humanly possible.

*Program notes by Daniel Foley.*

## Tapestry Music Theatre

Tapestry Music Theatre has an unrivaled history as a developer of critically acclaimed new works for music theatre. Tapestry's most recent production, *Nigredo Hotel*, won two Dora Mavor Moore Awards and was nominated for a Chalmers Award as Best Play of the Year. Following its Toronto premiere at Tarragon Theatre in May 1992, *Nigredo Hotel* received its national broadcast premiere on CBC radio. In May 1993 it was invited to play at two leading British festivals, the Brighton Festival and Glasgow's Mayfest, where it earned rave reviews.

Tapestry is currently developing *Iron Road* by Hong Kong-born Canadian composer Chan Ka Nin and writer Winston Kam, an opera about the Chinese workers who built the final and most treacherous stage of the Canadian Pacific Railway; *Elsewhereness*, a chamber opera about colonialism and identity, with libretto by filmmaker Atom Egoyan and music by Vancouver composer Rodney Sharman; and *As the Pilot Ground His Teeth*, a comic opera by *Nigredo Hotel*'s Nic Gotham with libretto by Banuta Rubess.

Tapestry is currently touring *Colours in the Storm* on a 30 city tour of Ontario. *Colours* features the words and music of Canadian composer Jim Betts.

**Wayne Strongman** has been Artistic Director of Tapestry Music Theatre since its founding in 1978 and of the Bach-Elgar Choir of Hamilton since 1984. Under his direction, Tapestry has established a national reputation for touring performances, and, since 1985, developing strong new works for music theatre. As a conductor, Mr. Strongman is frequently invited to premiere new works, and has produced events for New Music Concerts, The Music Gallery, the Stefan Wolpe Festival, and CBC Radio. He has conducted the premieres of Harry Somer's *Churachurum* and the b.p. nichol/David Mott opera *Meme*. In Hamilton he has premiered many new works and commissions with the Bach-Elgar Choir, as well as producing the major Bach and Handel oratorios, most recently Handel's *Solomon* with Shari Saunders singing the role of the Queen of Sheba.



### **Accordes String Quartet**

The Accordes String Quartet were originally brought together in 1975 to premiere a string quintet by John Beckwith. Their keen interest in contemporary music has continued over the years, particularly since 1978, when they began presenting their own recitals in venues such as Hart House and Roy Thomson Hall.

Their numerous appearances for New Music Concerts have included performances of Elliott Carter, Ben Johnson, Peter Paul Koprowski, Brian Cherney, Peter Michael Hamel and Ann Southam. Most recently they have recorded Jean Papineau-Couture's *Slano* for string trio for a CentreDiscs recording.

### **Brian Nickel, baritone**

Brian Nickel is currently a member of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio. Last summer he performed the role of Nick Shadow in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at the 1992 Aldeburgh Festival under the baton of Roderick Brydon.

Mr. Nickel's concert experience includes recording for both CBC radio and television. He has performed the St. John Passion with the Niagara Symphony. He has also studied lieder repertoire with Martin Isepp and his recital work includes several recitals in recent Banff Summer Festivals.

Recent engagements include roles with the Canadian Opera Company in *Carmen*, *Madama Butterfly* and the world premiere of *Nosferatu*.

**David Swan** was born in 1959 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He holds degrees in piano performance from the University of British Columbia and Indiana University. He has been a past winner of the CBC Talent Competition and the Eckhardt-Gramatté Competition. He has performed as a soloist across Canada as well as in the United States, England and Hungary. Mr. Swan has been working locally as a freelance keyboard artist since 1986, making recent appearances with the Esprit Orchestra and for CBC Radio.

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