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Guest Artist: **Louise Bessette**, solo piano (Montréal)

Saturday November 12, 2005 • The Music Gallery

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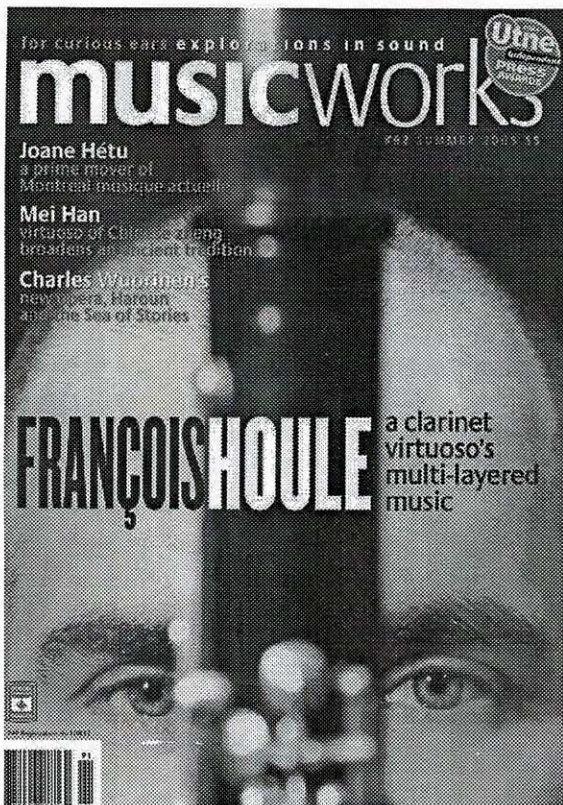
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As Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, I offer my congratulations on New Music Concerts' 35th anniversary season. Many thanks to the organizers and, particularly, the talented composers and musicians from across the country and abroad who have helped make this concert series a success.

Enjoy the concerts!

Liza Frulla

Canada

of both pedals. The music manifests both constant flow and inertia, and since Scelsi rarely uses bar-lines, it seems to unfold in an almost unrestrained manner. The first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth movements share an almost never interrupted eighth-note pulse and various ostinato patterns. The second, sixth and eighth movements, on the other hand, present stationary sounds, unisons, often enriched by fast rhythmically diversified ornaments such as trills, dotted rhythmic cells or melodic fragments in a high register.

Harmonically, the "Tai"-Suite embraces a variety of techniques. In the first movement, for instance, chromatic notes circle around the focal point b-flat paralleled by a line in dissonant intervals; the second movement displays clusters and the fourth pentatonic textures. Tonality, minor and major chords often tinted with adjunct notes, is used throughout this suite as well. Thanks to its manifold, subtle and engrossing sonorities based on a very few musical elements, Scelsi's "Tai"-Suite, composed in 1953, has gained the attention of an increasing number of performers and listeners. Yet, like the Second and Fourth Sonatas, it received its premiere more than two decades after its origin in 1976 in Rome. The pianist was Frederic Rzewski.

— Text and translation by Sabine Fejst

from: Giacinto Scelsi, The Piano Works I. Louise Bessette, Mode Records

Giacinto Scelsi — Un Adieu

Scelsi's last published work is derived from an improvisation recorded in 1978. It was transcribed and edited shortly before his death in collaboration with pianist Marianne Schroeder, who gave the first performance of this gentle and meditative work in 1988.

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Mediterranean. Scelsi claimed that 'Rome is the boundary between East and West. South of Rome the East begins, and north of Rome the West begins. This borderline runs exactly over the Forum Romanum. It runs right here, through my drawing-room'. His titles offer further evidence: *Aiôn* (1961) is subtitled 'Four Episodes in a day of Brahma', *Anabit* (1965) is 'A Lyric Poem dedicated to Venus', *Puyll* (1954) is a Welsh druidic term, while the title of *Konx om-pax* (1969) brings together the ancient Assyrian, Sanskrit and Latin words for 'peace'.

Scelsi's approach to composition was itself hybrid: for him music was not a communicative medium but something immanent, revealed through the creative process. His reluctance to describe his working methods as 'composing' stemmed from the belief that music passed through him; it was not something 'put together' by him. Indeed the working method of his mature years was unusual, depending primarily on the selective transcription of improvisations made in a quasi-meditative state. He would perform these improvisations generally at the keyboard, either the piano or, in later years, the Ondiola, a three octave electronic instrument with a rotary attachment for producing microtonal inflections. Scelsi would also invite performing musicians who showed a particular affinity for his work to improvise for him, painstakingly refining their instrumental resources for the sound-world he wanted, so that works such as the *Canti del capricorno* (1962–72) or the cello *Trilogy* (1956–65) became intimately associated with their first interpreters, the singer Michiko Hirayama and the cellist Frances-Marie Uitti.

Each improvisation was recorded (the process of cataloguing the tapes was begun after Scelsi's death) and the most successful improvisations were then transcribed and realized as instrumental scores. Exceptionally, some improvisations were used more than once: the Fifth String Quartet (1984) and the amplified piano work *Aitsi* (1974) are both transcriptions of the same tape. The actual writing of the scores was undertaken by an assistant, working under Scelsi's direction. After Scelsi's death his most frequent collaborator, Vieri Tosatti, revealed the extent of his involvement in the making of Scelsi's scores, claiming that he had worked with Scelsi since 1947 and had written out all his major works since then. The discovery that Scelsi was not the sole author of his scores has troubled some critics who, associating it with his lack of a conventional compositional apprenticeship, have accused him of dilettantism, even of a sort of artistic fraud. Scelsi's collaborative approach was, however, consistent with his compositional philosophy, as was his reluctance to make public appearances at performances of his work, and his refusal to be photographed. By the time of his death his music had achieved an eminence which its composer resolutely rejected for himself.

— Christopher Fox, 'Giacinto Scelsi', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy

Giacinto Scelsi — Sonata No. 4

The Fourth Sonata of 1941 was written at the end of Scelsi's first creative period and premiered by Yvar Mikhashoff on July 1, 1986 at the Almeida Festival in London. Like the Second Sonata, this piece consists of three sections, two fast outer movements, *Con moto* and *Con impeto estremo, violento*, surrounding a contrasting *Lento* movement. The first movement features chromatic contrapuntal textures, jagged rhythms and frequent change of metre. It starts smoothly with two- and three-part textures in the low register and gradually becomes more complex and intense due to forte and fortissimo dissonant and sometimes cluster-like chords, while moving toward higher registers at the same time. At the conclusion it sinks back to bass pitch and energy subsides in a *Tranquillo-Lento* section. The second movement is reminiscent of a song without words. Mikhashoff incidentally considered it a "Beautiful and dark elegy, one of the composer's most deeply felt creations."

Herein Scelsi picks up principles employed in his Second Sonata, namely the focus on, and reiteration of, single pitches. Underpinned by sustained, mostly dissonant harmonies, the very linear melody unfolds in tone repetitions gradually shifting to neighbouring pitches. In the course of the piece registers change and the melody appears in the lowest or middle voice. Although the last part of the movement is intense, the texture becomes sparser. Chords are omitted until the very end, where they occur once again. The last movement is vigorous and relentlessly intense, demanding dynamics between forte and fortissimo. And similar to the first, this movement ends in a soft, dry and thinned out *Tranquillo* section where repeated eighth note cords and intervals, often separated by eighth note rests, trickle out.

Giacinto Scelsi — Suite No. 9 "Ttai" (Peace)

Scelsi characterized this work as "a succession of episodes alternately Time (or more precisely Time in Motion) and Man, as symbolised by cathedrals or monasteries, with the sacred sound of *Om*."

Emphasising the suite's calm, meditative and mysterious character, Scelsi wondered if this piece should be played at conventional concerts at all and advised in its preface: "This suite should be listened to and played with the greatest inner calm. Nervous people stay away!" In fact, this suite with its formally simply structured movements dispenses with traditional thematic organization and dramatic expression (some directions for playing read: *calme, senza espressione* or *uguale, inespresivo*). Instead, it features musical material of low contrast, repetitive elements, stationary tones and chords, and blurred sounds due to the frequent use

GIACINTO SCELSI

Scelsi's extraordinary life encompassed many aspects of the intellectual, spiritual, social and musical life of the 20th century. He was born into southern Italian aristocracy, inheriting the title Count D'Alaya Valva, and as a young man travelled extensively, moving within Europe's most elevated social circles. His English wife, Dorothy (whose nickname 'Ty' figures in the titles of two of Scelsi's works) was a distant relative of the British royal family; their wedding reception was held at Buckingham Palace. His music attracted a number of prestigious performances, particularly in Paris where Pierre Monteux conducted the première of *Rotative* in 1930. During World War II he lived in Switzerland; after the war his wife returned to England, never to contact him again. He spent the latter part of his life in Rome, where his apartment overlooked the Forum.

Much of the detail of Scelsi's life is shrouded in mystery, something he himself did much to encourage. It seems, however, that after some initial successes as a composer, he suffered a devastating mental breakdown between the composition of *La nascita del verbo* (1947–8) and the *Suite no.8 'Bot-ba'* (1952). Scelsi's early compositional career had been a progression through some of the principal aesthetic tendencies of 20th-century music – futurism, neo-classicism, dodecaphony, surrealism – preoccupations fed variously by periods of private study with Respighi and pupils of Scriabin and Schoenberg, and by his friendships with Henri Michaux, Pierre Jean Jouve, Paul Eluard and Salvador Dalí. The later works reveal a new preoccupation with an obsessive reiteration of individual sounds, a legacy of the lengthy period of rehabilitation from his illness. Scelsi described how he would spend days repeatedly playing single notes on the piano, developing a new, intensely focussed mode of listening. The multi-movement form of many subsequent pieces can also be heard as an extension of this reiterative exploration – sequences of movements are intended not to provide contrast but to offer a repeated re-examination of the same sound object.

Although Scelsi's music continued to attract occasional performances in the 1950s and 60s, his career was eclipsed by the emerging Italian composers of the post-war period, and his compositional concerns, as far as they were known, were regarded as of marginal interest. It was not until the 1970s that the significance of his work began to be recognized by a new generation. Younger composers, including the American Alvin Curran, the Prix de Rome guests Grisey and Murail, and the Romanian exile Radulescu, discovered in Scelsi's work aspects of the musical world which interested them, struck particularly by the concentration on gradual timbral transformations.

At the beginning of the 1960s many avant-garde composers had begun to explore the inner life of sounds, writing music which focussed on small fluctuations within sustained sonic bands. What distinguished Scelsi's work from Ligeti or Cerha's scores of the period was the profound subjectivity of Scelsi's engagement with his material, an engagement in which abstraction seemed to play no part. In his most wholly characteristic works pitch, timbre, register and dynamics are heard as the inherent expressive potentialities of each sound, rather than as separate parameters to be controlled more or less independently. The *Quattro pezzi (su una nota sola)* (1959), for example, use microtonal pitch inflection, timbral transformation and rhythmic reiterations to animate the 'note' on which each movement is based, stretching its identity far beyond that of a mere frequency.

Subsequent works explore this plasticity of sound yet further, drawing a handful of musical strands out of an initial tone and allowing them to diverge. Usually such divergence covers an interval of no more than a third, but it makes possible a beguilingly unpredictable harmonic architecture in works of the mid-1960s such as *Oboi* (1966) and the Fourth String Quartet (1964), arguably Scelsi's finest music. Inevitably, given his microscopic examination of instrumental sound, intervals derived from the harmonic series predominate. His intuitively composed work can therefore be heard to anticipate later, more systematic developments: not only the 'spectral' music of the *Itinéraire* group but also the exploration of the pitch-timbre continuum in computer music.

As word about this extraordinary, neglected music spread, performances and then recordings began to multiply. The critic Harry Halbreich was a persuasive advocate; promoters such as Adrian Jack at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Wolfgang Becker at WDR and Ernstalbrecht Stiebler at Hessische Rundfunk organized portrait concerts of Scelsi's work. The Arditti Quartet took up the string quartets, Marianne Schroeder and Yvar Mikhashoff the piano music, and conductors such as Jürg Wyttenbach the orchestral works. This period of rediscovery culminated in the mid-1980s with belated first performances of many of Scelsi's largest scores, and triumphantly acclaimed presentations of Scelsi's work during the 1986 Holland Festival and the 1987 ISCM World Music Days in Cologne.

The spiritual world of Scelsi's mature works is rooted in an exotic mix of pantheism and theosophy, derived from Gurdjieff, Blavatsky and Sri Aurobindo, but also stimulated by Scelsi's own visits to India and Nepal. Scelsi saw his work as straddling the aesthetic worlds of East and West, using the instrumental resources of the West in music whose meditative focus on individual tones has obvious links to both the monastic traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and the *ison* principle of Byzantine Orthodox worship. Elsewhere, particularly in the works of the late 1950s, there are elements of arabesque reminiscent of the folk music of the eastern

produced in collaboration with Marc Hyland) and *Liberté en Cage* for the ECM's event *Cage en Liberté* which won the Prix Opus for the musical event of the year; *Al sole* for string quartet (commissioned by the Molinari quartet) and *Légendes* for narrator and orchestra (the Nouvel ensemble moderne and Festival de Lanaudière commission) and *Versetti*, a short musical theater for soprano, clarinet, piano, percussions and dancers for José Navas, director of the Flack dance company.

Prelude VIII: Il giorno della mia morte

I must say trying to write such a short text on my own work is something of a chore... But here are the main threads that run through my work. The relationship between poetry and music has always fascinated me, a garden most fertile and the principal force at play in my creative path. After analyzing a series of poems by Pier Paolo Pasolini, I wrote a twelve-movement cycle for a variety of instrumentations, including six preludes for piano, a madrigal for the keyboard, so to speak, as well as a diary, where "intimate correlations" become sources of coherence. I've grown a deep interest in the field of rhythm, relating to the overall distribution of pitches and blocks of sounds, and I also work on degrees of density, on harmonies and colors, dominant focal threads, the concept of duration, as in the "duration that is experienced in real-time, versus psychological duration", and the basic repetitions of a motive, a musical gesture, a rhythmic cell or an idea. Like Duchamp and Pasolini, I enjoy exploring various avenues of creativity. At this point, I am working on my first string quartet. It's midnight on an autumn night, and a full moon shines above, free of any painterly pretension... Today was magnificent, intertwined with mundane revelations and fruitful shining moments of intellectual and physical stimulus. I recall something Debussy wrote exactly a hundred years ago in the November 15, 1901, edition of *la Revue blanche*, an article which aptly conveys my state of mind, and entitled "Of a few superstitions and an opera": *Perhaps the time when I most loved music was that time when I didn't hear about it. I was struck by its absolute beauty rather than by tiny, overheated and constrained symphonic or lyrical fragments.*

That is my credo: to invent and to experiment is fine, but one should never lose concern for the work's finality, because, as Marcel Duchamp said: *Carelessness is the only thing that cannot be interpreted as art...*

— Silvio Palmieri

SERGE ARCURI

Born in Québec in 1954, Serge Arcuri completed composition and analysis studies at the Montréal Conservatory in 1981 with Gilles Tremblay. Later he studied electroacoustic music with Yves Daoust and Marcelle Deschênes at the Conservatory and the University of Montréal. He won CAPAC's Sir Ernest MacMillan Prize in 1981 and received honorable mention in two categories in the CBC Competition for Young Composers. He has also been awarded several grants from the Canada Council and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. He has received commissions from a variety of organizations, including La Société de musique contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ), CBC Radio, Vancouver New Music, Musica Camerata Montréal, Le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, L'Ensemble contemporain de Montréal (ECM), L'Orchestre Baroque de Montréal, L'Ensemble Arion, Le Quatuor Molinari and soloists Lawrence Cherney, Robert Cram, Joseph Petric, Brigitte Poulin, Silvia Mandolini, Catherine Perrin and Louise Bessette. He served as president of l'Association pour la création et la recherche électroacoustique du Québec (ACREQ) and as production director of le Printemps électroacoustique de Montréal from 1985 to 1988. He also likes to write music for film, television, theatre and his friends.

Fragments

Pieces of matter, object, time. They may be significant, incongruous, or irrelevant but still remain. Sketches of past sounds. The bells of Saint-Jean-Baptiste church, near Rachel Street where we lived. Bells no longer sounding, E flat a bit low, G higher and crisp, and F, natural and comforting. This work I do not fully understand but recognise as a certain kind of resonance. It was commissioned by La Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, thanks to a grant from the Canada Council.

*Leur écho nous parvient par le filtre du temps
Carillons diluviens vers un profond beffroi.*

*Des chorals d'harmoniques au solitaire bourdon
Le rythme des battants se décale.*

*La mémoire qui distille des fragments éclatés
Souvenirs intangibles de la voix d'un clocher.*

*La mesure des jours qui rassemble les pièces
d'un passé qui s'est décomposé.*

De ces sons qu'on avait oubliés.

— Serge Arcuri

recognition of her contribution to contemporary music. In October 2001, she was received as a Member of the Order of Canada, and appointed, in June 2005, Officier of the Ordre national du Québec. Since fall 1996, she has been Professor of piano at the Montréal Conservatory of Music.

SEAN PEPPERALL

Sean Pepperall was born in Montreal in 1961 of both French and English Canadian origins. After a period in science classes that might have lead him to medical school, he discovered at 19 the music of Richard Wagner. This had and still has a resounding impact on his life. Between 1985 and 1988 he studied music theory at the University of Montreal with Massimo Rossi and contemporary analysis with Serge Garant and André Prévost. In 1988, he started his Composition studies at the Montreal Conservatory of Music with Gilles Tremblay and Yves Daoust. He graduated in 1993 with a unanimous First Prize in composition. His music is best characterized by simplicity of structure that arises from a very classical but yet personal way of treating musical intervals and by clarity of dialogue which is best summoned by his genuine interest in melody. Very fond of operas and music that has a singing tone, his main influences, to name a few are Wagner, Debussy, Varèse, Berg and Messiaen. He is now a private music teacher, father of two and enjoys playing the piano. Of no specific mainstream contemporary aesthetics and by nature of independent mind, one could say he's a lonely rider. He is presently composing his *Athora Symphony*, a work for soprano and orchestra.

Cosmographie

The title combines the words cosmos and "graphie" with the latter originating from the Greek *graphein*, i.e. writing or describing something. Quite often in our collective minds and imagination, the word cosmos triggers another word and concept which is one we call inner space. This gigantic emptiness between stars, this absence of life, matter and light may bring forth to us a picture of a deserted and remote area. A spooky place where everything seems to go so slow, where time has stopped and where a doomsday silence covers you up. It is both all and nothing, the presence and the absence of, the being and the void. So with these few images in mind, I went, as far away as possible from all the noise "down here", looking for textures, sonorities and impressions. I must say that during the composition of this work, came to me the relentless image of a luxurious celestial garden. Why? I do not know. *Cosmographie* is a monody with harmonies that are often the result of melodic sounds being added up. Harmony here has the function of supporting and colouring

the melody. The musical form of this piece is that of a classical rondo with the refrain being stated from the top. Its characteristics are a descending perfect 4th (A-E), followed by a descending chromatic melisma that concludes to an upward and expressive major 7th skip (B-A#). The chords and melodies of this music are built around these four sounds along with what they carry within and between them.

— Sean Pepperall

SILVIO PALMIERI

Silvio Palmieri received his musical studies at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec in Montréal where he studied composition and analyses with Gilles Tremblay; counterpoint and orchestration with Clermont Pépin, electroacoustics with Micheline Coulombe-Saint-Marcoux and Yves Daoust, choral conducting with Marcel Laurencelle and voice with Jeanine Lachance. He took part in, among others, Pierre Boulez's séminaire in Paris, Arraymusic of Toronto's Composer's Workshop and the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal's Ateliers-concert... His works have been performed by the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal with conductor Véronique Lacroix; the pianist Louise Bessette, Les événements du neuf conducted by Lorraine Vaillancourt; the SMCQ Ensemble; Arraymusic of Toronto; the Ondes Martenot Ensemble of Montréal; ondes Martenot performer Estelle Lemire, the soprano Natalie Choquette, the Claudel Quartet, pianists André Ristic and Marc Courroux, trombonist Alain Trudel, the Alizé flute ensemble, violinist Silvia Mandolini, soprano Chantal Lambert, Atelier lyrique de l'opéra de Montréal and the Bulgarian pianist Angela Tosheva in Montréal, Toronto, Paris, Rome and Milan.

His repertoire includes the opera *Elia* nominated for the prestigious Prix de la fondation prince Pierre de Monaco (ECM commission in collaboration with l'Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal); *Versetto* for the Ensemble baroque de Montréal; *Versetti* for soprano, piano and percussion; two important cycles, the first, *Duchamp*, unfinished, and the second, *Pasolini*. He has written many preludes for piano including *Prélude V Mistero*, *Prélude VI Alba*, *Prélude X paraphrase pasoliniene*. His *Poesiole Notturme I-II-III* for soprano and chamber orchestra (Radio-Canada commission) is based on three sonnets by Pier Paolo Pasolini. All these works are part of an important cycle devoted to the poetic and multi-formal world of the great Italian poet, playwright and film maker Pasolini. He has also composed the soundtrack for the videos *Les années Jules-Félix* by Josette Bélanger, *Anémic-Cinéma* by Marcel Duchamp; and electroacoustic works such as *Dada Musik* (a large electroacoustic fresco for the CBC radio show *Le Navire / Night*,

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LOUISE BESSETTE

An exhilarating yet elegant concert pianist, Louise Bessette stands out as one of the pre-eminent performers of twentieth century music. Her combination of eclectic repertory and impeccable delivery has earned Louise Bessette several of the most prestigious honours awarded for the interpretation of contemporary music, including, most notably, the First Prize at the Concours International de Musique Contemporaine in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France, 1986), and both the First Prize and the Special Prize for Piano at the International Gaudeamus Competition for Contemporary Music (Rotterdam, 1989). The Conseil Québécois de la Musique awarded her the Prix Opus 1996-1997 in the category "conductor or soloist of the year" for her recital devoted to the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Olivier Messiaen

Born in Montréal, Louise Bessette began studying piano at the age of five. Admitted to the Montréal Conservatory in 1971, she studied with Georges Savaria and Raoul Sosa. She won no fewer than five first prizes during her student years. After perfecting her skills with Eugene List in New York over a two-year period, she set her sights on Paris, where, from 1982 on, her masters were Yvonne Loriod, Claude Helffer, Jay Gottlieb and Dominique Merlet.

Contact with these luminaries was to prove as decisive for her aesthetic choices as for the development of her unique talents. A recognized world specialist on works for piano by Olivier Messiaen, Louise Bessette has given numerous performances of *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* that have met with unreserved praise by music critics. Whether in recital or as a soloist with orchestras or chamber formations, Louise Bessette makes regular guest appearances in concert halls throughout all of Europe, North and Central America. A devotee of original works regardless of their provenance, she has contributed to the advancement and dissemination of new music by her noted participation in international music festivals and by the premiere performances she offers of works specially written for her by, for example, the Canadians Serge Provost, André Villeneuve and Serge Arcuri, and French composers Bruno Ducol, Jacques Lejeune and Claude Ballif.

Louise Bessette has more than a dozen records to her credit, six of which were solo; here as elsewhere, she has made a personal hallmark of setting off original music with her energetic playing style. She founded in 2003 her own label Sept Jardins, which has released her most recent CD *Tango Diablo!*. In addition, on chamber music recordings, she has joined forces with such outstanding artists as Marc-André Hamelin, the Quatuor Alcan (Québec) and the London-based Arditti Quartet. She has earned numerous distinctions, including Woman of the Year, Arts Category, at the 1989 Montréal Salon de la Femme, and the 1991 Flandre-Québec Award in



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MUSIC GALLERY

New Music Concerts
Robert Aitken, director

NMC | 05
06

35th season | 289th event
Saturday November 12, 2005

The Music Gallery

7:15 Intro | 8:00 Concert

New Music Concerts presents

A Scelsi Centenary

Co-presented with the Music Gallery at Saint George the Martyr

Guest Artist: **Louise Bessette**, solo piano (Montréal)

Programme:

Sean Pepperall (Canada 1961)

* *Cosmographie* (1996) 12'

Giacinto Scelsi (Italy 1905–1988)

Sonata No. 4 (1941) 16'

I – Con moto II – Lento III – Con impeto estremo, violento

Silvio Palmieri (Canada 1957)

* *Prelude VIII:*

Il giorno della mia morte (1998) 5'

Serge Arcuri (Canada 1954)

* *Fragments* (1997) 9'

— *Intermission* —

Giacinto Scelsi

Suite No. 9 "Ttai" (1953) 35'

I – Calmo, senza espressione II – Lentissimo III – Uguale, senza espressione

IV – Non molto legato, ma sempre appoggiando profondamente

V – Uguale, scorrevole VI – Lento VII – Uguale, inespressivo

VIII – Lento IX – Molto eguale, non troppo legato

Giacinto Scelsi

Un adieu (1978) 5'

* *Canadian work*