



here
be
sirens

here be sirens

We are so excited to present our third show, *here be sirens*, at the TRANZAC. Having started our organization's journey with our 2021 virtual production *Hanging By a Thread* at the Canadian Music Centre, and continued it with *Fair Use* at Native Earth's Aki Studio in 2022, this concert is special in marking a sort of arrival, where we are finally able to produce large-scale immersive experiences. Central to our mission is creating shows that are communicative, yet indescribable. Tonight you'll hear operatic moments without the context of opera. You'll hear chamber music, but not in a chamber concert. You'll hear choral parts, but not in a choral concert.

While we decided over a year ago to give our concert its singular bent through the unifying theme of "siren song," we are ultimately presenting a view of this theme that is not one-dimensional but kaleidoscopic, thanks to a multiplicity of artistic authors. "Sirenas sunt monstra maris" (sirens are monsters of the seas), so says Theobaldus of Cambridge. Yet our travels will take us far beyond the seas; to lands both distant and nearby. Who says the female voice is monstrous? If we have collectively decided this is the case, what sort of Dr. Frankenstein made it so; told us to accept this as truth? Who does this monster pose a danger to? Hopefully you are able to examine some of these questions tonight through varying musical moments of lightheartedness, tenderness, terror, and heartbreak.

We thank the SOCAN Foundation, our private donors, the TRANZAC; organizations and publications who have helped us get the word out including Ludwig-van, Against the Grain Theatre, Tapestry Opera, and York University; the First Nations of this land; and finally you for attending! Now we set sail, but be warned: *here be sirens*.



HEUSTRA

Here Be Sirens Suite – Kate Soper

- I. Prologue
- II. O Sailor

Beckoning – Paul Lessard *
solo cello version

Sigh, Run, Cry – Tristan Zaba *

Here Be Sirens Suite – Kate Soper

- III. Across the Turbid Waves/In a Silent Valley

INTERMISSION

soft hands – Ashley Seward *

Sheevan – Aida Khorsandi *

- I.

Beckoning – Paul Lessard *
solo soprano version

Sheevan – Aida Khorsandi *

- II.

A Lure of Freedom – Kathryn Knowles *

Here Be Sirens Suite – Kate Soper

- IV. Here to Me from Krete
- V. Naufragium



* *World Premiere*

notes

Here Be Sirens Suite (Soper)

"Here Be Sirens" is a phrase used as cartographical notation on medieval maps, scrawled over uncharted water to signify dangerous unknowns. It is also the name of an opera in which these creatures struggle to investigate their own convoluted origins, desires, sorrows and fears through the one medium they control utterly: song. The Suite culls from the full-length opera a few of the Siren's specialties--ethereal medieval chant, gentle otherworldly melody, and the terror of the sublime--to present an exquisite corpse-like portrait of these beloved and familiar monsters in all their murderous and irresistible glory.

Beckoning (Lessard) *

Beckoning is a so-called "microdrama" for open instrumentation, telling the age-old tale of a sailor encountering a siren. According to myth, legend, and Homer's *Odyssey*, sirens are demi-gods with supernaturally alluring voices. So beautiful are their songs that passing sailors are brought to their deaths pursuing the source of the beautiful melodies. Here the story is told purely musically, without words. Beginning from nothing but the sounds of the ocean, the loud, boastful, angular, and strongly articulated qualities of the sailor are contrasted with the fluidity and beauty of the siren's song. Though the sailor at first resists, the siren's influence eventually overtakes him, with the sailor gradually incorporating elements of the siren's song into his own throughout. Eventually the sailor crashes his ship into the rocks and drowns. The work ends with, once again, nothing left but the sound of the ocean.

Sigh, Run, Cry (Zaba) *

This four-channel surround-sound electronic piece is a vision of individual humanity being subsumed by mindless forces and driven into patterns of the past, specifically represented by human sounds battered by oppressive inhuman sounds until they themselves are twisted to the point of inhumanity. Special attention is paid to gender, gendered sounds, and symbolism surrounding Greek mythological sirens (the title is a homophone of "siren cry"). For those unfamiliar, sirens were said to be half woman/half bird creatures who inhabited rocky oceanic areas and led men to either jump overboard or run their ships aground with their transfixingly beautiful songs. Many feminists consider this myth as deeply tied to various patriarchal cultures' associations of women's voices with danger. Much of this piece is rooted in recognizable soundscapes and musique concrète techniques, in order to convey a sense of realism, as well as to allow for audience identification with the perspectives of imagined listeners. I personally sampled most sounds at locations around the greater Toronto area, including beaches, highways, my studio space, and my apartment. I was surprised, upon completion of this piece, at its bleakness. However, its point is not nihilism, but to prompt introspection.

soft hands (Seward) *

soft hands is about processes of transgender undoing and becoming; about moments grand and liminal that characterize a gender transition. Ulysses' curiosity leads to the death of her old self at the hands of the sirens, but she must continue in the shambling, undead guise of a male hero; the only life she's ever known.

soft hands

Rough hands. Brotherhood steers my men homeward
Northwest, further towards that most devious place
Sirens, evil things, wrenching good men from their seats of power
I need to hear thy obscene wisdom!
Island of sirens, I must heed thy bewitching song. (Dewy eyes, long hair, silky skin. Soft lavender. Sing with us)
Teach me wisdom, show me love, soothe my sorrow!
These men, brothers at arms, we are healing windward
Uneasy, our brazen fraternity unsettled
By our rough hands we sail home to rugged glory!
Teach me wisdom, show me love, soothe my sorrow! (Be careful what you wish for!)
(Spurn your god, meet your true form, find yourself in the darkness!)
A new song is dawning, a song of salvation and softness and delicate, silky skin. (Silky skin!)
A ballad of long hair and dewy eyes (Dewy eyes!)
Symphony velvet and lavender (Lavender!)
Sweetness and gentleness (Gentleness!) Tenderness! Soft hands!

(Arise! Spurn your gods, meet your true form!
Arise! Find yourself in the darkness!
Arise! Fame and glory [life and love] mean nothing when you're hiding.)
Grant me freedom from this flesh; soothe my sorrow.
(Silk and satin and velvet caress) Lavender.
(Sweet and delicate girl) Tenderness.
(Breathe this clean air; feel softness in your hair) I cannot linger in your soft paradise.
(Sing with us on our bed of clouds) My men and I, heroes.
(Arise and emerge, fair one) Men must remember me.
(Clean air, softness in your hair, arise) I cannot wear this satin gown.
(Sing with us, arise) A man alone.
(Drowning, drowning) Under the sea.
(Drowning, drowning) Penelope, prepare the table for my arrival.

~ Ashley Seward

Sheevan (Khorsandi) *

Sheevan is the cry of disbelief,
wail on their child's graveyard,
not letting their lifeless body go.

Sheevan
is the resistance against the brutal reality of death,
the force for empathy.

Sheevan,
a screaming expression of loss,
a piercing expression of sorrow,
a recurring self-oscillating echoing (e)affect.

Sheevan is an electronic piece, as a tribute to the lost, displaced and vanished young lives under the rubbles of collective subconscious.

A Lure of Freedom (Knowles)

Commissioned by Slow Rise Music for VC2 Cello Duo, *A Lure of Freedom* was inspired by the theme of "Siren Song." At times, the piece strives to embrace this theme literally, revelling in its rich mythology, and at other times, as metaphor for the lure and call of something more powerful than ourselves.

The electronic track features material drawn from the composer's practice as a cellist herself, interspersed with sounds inspired by the mythology of Greek sirens, including ocean waves, and turbulent wind. The composer's own voice can be heard reciting and singing an original poem written on the theme of temptation and the spurious perils of desire. It can be seen as a comment on the need for expression, and how the struggle for equality can be manipulated to villainize the victim. But this longing for meaningful and substantial freedom is an innate, nonmoral human desire.

The title of the piece should be interpreted with two meanings: 1) A Lure of Freedom, meaning the specific temptation of proffered freedom; and 2) Allure of Freedom, meaning our fascination with it as a concept – the powerful, mysterious attraction freedom represents to us as humans.

A Lure of Freedom

I'll sing you a secret song
set loose on a windy sea
come, come to me
come set me free

Listen, hear my secret song
breathe in the windy sea
come, follow me
I'll set you free

~ Kathryn Knowles



bios

Natalya Gennadi – soprano (*Here Be Sirens Suite, Soft Hands*)

Ukrainian-Canadian soprano Natalya Gennadi is establishing a career in North America in a wide range of repertoire and disciplines. She was a multimedia creator and resident artist with the 2022-2023 Civic Engagement Artist Residence at Pacific Opera Victoria, and during the pandemic co-founded the HBD! Project with mezzo-soprano and educator Catharin Carew, which was well received and has since expanded internationally. She has seen vocal engagements with Opera York, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Tapestry Opera, and Southern Ontario Lyric Opera, and recently made her Pacific Opera Victoria onstage debut as Gerhilde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

Jo Greenaway– music director

Jo Greenaway (they/she) is a collaborative pianist residing in Toronto, ON. They have performed across Canada, the US, France, Italy, and China. With experience in performance of both song and operatic repertoire, Jo is much in demand as a recitalist and coach, and is currently working as a freelance vocal coach with students at the University of Toronto. They hold a Masters degree in Collaborative Piano from the University of Western Ontario, as well as a BMus (Hons) in Theory and Composition with French. Past engagements include coach and répétiteur for UWOpera (London), music staff for Oberlin in Italy (*Arezzo*), and music director for programs such as Opera Jeunesse, Capitol City Opera, Opera in Concert, and Summer Opera Lyric Theatre.

Jessica Hiemstra – set designer

Jessica Joy Hiemstra is a visual artist and award-winning set designer. She works in a variety of mediums and on many kinds of surfaces – from watercolour and thread on paper to acrylic on acetate to plastic sewn into canvas. Jessica is also a writer, editor, and illustrator. From poetry to children's books to murals to large-scale installations, Jessica views making art as an act of listening – to space, to people, to her materials. They say an adventure is a story you don't know the ending of, and it's with this approach Jessica squares off with whatever she's making.

Aida Khorsandi – composer (*Sheevan*)

Originally from Tehran, Iran, Aida (written Aida but read Eye-duh) Khorsandi is a musician, composer, researcher, and music educator currently pursuing doctoral studies at York University. Aida's philosophy to musicking is based on experimentation, welcoming chaos and randomness, unlearning hierarchies and ear training in musical practices, and decolonizing sounds and musics. She particularly likes displaced sounds, repetitive sounds, erratic sounds, and ever-shifting sounds.

Kathryn Knowles – composer (*A Lure of Freedom*)

Kathryn Knowles is a composer, cellist, conductor, and writer. She holds a Master of International Business from Queen's University and a Master in Music Composition from U of T. Her compositions have been played in workshops by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the New Orford String Quartet, and the Penderecki String Quartet. She is currently collaborating with Morgan-Paige Melbourne on a musical entitled *Between Fires*, funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. Kathryn also performs regularly as a cellist in various chamber ensembles around Toronto, and in 2022 acted as guest principal cellist with the Scarborough Philharmonic.

Paul Lessard – composer (*Beckoning*)

Paul Lessard is a composer, saxophonist, and educator whose burgeoning musical career has already taken him and his music to seven countries across three continents, with that number only set to grow in 2023. Armed with sharp musical wit, Lessard has developed a language that juxtaposes the rhythmic and the lyrical, the serious and the zany, and the absurd and the sensible. His work has been performed by artists and groups including the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra, pianist Stephanie Chua, and the Trinity Laban Conservatoire Saxophone Choir. Paul is a Professor of Composition at East Tennessee State University.

Midori Marsh – soprano (*Here Be Sirens Suite, Soft Hands, Beckoning* soloist)

Soprano Midori Marsh was recently named by the CBC as one of Canada's 30 hot classical musicians under 30, has appeared numerous times with the Canadian Opera Company as a member of their Young Artist Ensemble, and in 2019 took home first prize and the audience choice award at the COC's Ensemble Studio Competition. She has appeared with companies including the Waterloo Symphony, Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, and Tapestry Opera. She recently appeared in Tapestry Opera's *Rocking Horse Winner*.

Shantelle Przybylo – soprano (*Here Be Sirens Suite, Soft Hands* soloist)

Canadian soprano Shantelle Przybylo is a graduate of Washington National Opera's Cafritz Young Artist Program. She has performed many roles with WNO, and appeared with companies including Highlands Opera, Tapestry Opera, and the Mississauga Symphony Orchestra. She was a regional finalist of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and winner of the Prix Jeune Espoire Lyrique Canadien in the Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques competition, and recently sang Donna Anna in Brott Festival's *Don Giovanni*.

Ashley Seward – composer (*Soft Hands*)

Ashley Seward is a composer living and working on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Her works explore and showcase her own personal brand of queerness, expressed through quirky forms and phrases and through juxtaposing lush triadic harmony and dimly-lit post-tonality. She is most interested in composing in chamber contexts and for the opera stage, and has collaborated with artists and ensembles including Standing Wave, Luka Eriksen, and Allegra Chamber Orchestra.

Kate Soper – composer (*Here Be Sirens Suite*)

Kate Soper is a composer, performer, and writer whose work explores the integration of drama and rhetoric into musical structure, the slippery continuums of expressivity, intelligibility, and sense, and the wonderfully treacherous landscape of the human voice. She has been hailed by the Boston Globe as “a composer of trenchant, sometime discomfiting, power” and by the New Yorker for her “limpid, exacting vocalism, impetuous theatricality, and mastery of modernist style.” A Pulitzer Prize finalist and 2024 Rome Prize fellow, Soper has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation and Koussevitsky Foundation, and has been commissioned by ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, and Yarn Wire, among others.

VC2 – cello duo (*Soft Hands, A Lure of Freedom, Bryan Holt* as *Beckoning* soloist)

VC2 is an innovative cello duo, captivating audiences through their performances of classical masterworks, unknown gems, and boundary-pushing music alike. Comprised of cellists Amahl Arulanandam and Bryan Holt, CBC calls VC2 “a tight unit, with excellent intonation and expression.” As cellists they have performed with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Soundstreams, Art of Time Ensemble, Continuum Contemporary Music, Thin Edge New Music Collective, and many more. As a duo they have been featured artists with festivals including 21C, the Toronto Summer Music Festival, New Works Calgary, and the soundscape Festival (Italy).

Mariah Warriner – graphic designer, social media manager

Mariah Warriner is a freelance graphic designer, media manager, and film buff currently pursuing her Undergraduate degree in Communications Studies at Concordia University. She is excited to partner with Slow Rise once again for *Here Be Sirens*.

McKenzie Warriner – soprano, Slow Rise co-founder (*Here Be Sirens Suite, Soft Hands*)

McKenzie Warriner is a Saskatchewan-born soprano bringing music and text to life in works ranging from the 17th century to the cutting-edge. She is the 2023 Eckhardt Gramatté Competition winner, and has appeared with companies including Vancouver Opera, the Regina Symphony Orchestra, COSA Canada, and the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra. She is a former Vancouver Opera Yulanda M. Faris Young Artist and Aldeburgh Festival Britten Pears Young Artist, and recently sang Papagena in Vancouver Opera's *Magic Flute*.

Tristan Zaba – composer (*Sigh, Run, Cry*), livestream technician, Slow Rise co-founder

Tristan Zaba is a Toronto-based composer, vocalist, production worker, and multi-disciplinary artist breaking down any and all boundaries between his various practices. He is equally at home in classical, rock, and free-improv settings, and has appeared in events including Libby Larsen's Intergalactic Night Club at the Source Song Festival and Melissa Auf der Maur's 12 Hour Drone show at the Winnipeg New Music Festival. Tristan has a passion for collaboration, and recently saw both the premiere of his and Jessica Hiemstra's audio-visual work *Red-Winged Blackbird* at Lund Contemporary in Sweden, and the release of a new album of his piano and vocal works called *Unfinished Business* on the Centrediscs label featuring McKenzie Warriner and pianist Paul Williamson.

Land Acknowledgement

Slow Rise Music is based in Toronto, Ontario, also known by the Mohawk word Tkarónto. We honour and acknowledge the ancestral caretakers of this land: the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Anishinaabe, the Wendat, and all other Indigenous Nations who care or have cared for these territories, acknowledged and unacknowledged, recorded and unrecorded. Toronto is covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum and by Treaty 13. We at Slow Rise Music are grateful to be able to practice our art in this place where so many have before, and continue to do so, while also recognizing the historical and ongoing oppression of Indigenous Nations, People, and Cultures by the Culture and Institutions within which we exist. We are dedicated to ensuring our activities are respectful of this land's First Peoples and of the land itself, and in the spirit of peace.