

# Résumé • Morna Edmundson

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## Choral Leadership

1987-Present Co-founder and Artistic Director, **Elektra Women's Choir**  
2018-Present Artistic Director, **EnChor Choir**  
1993-2008 Artistic Director, **Coastal Sound Youth Choir**  
1992-1999 Founder and Artistic Director, **Vancouver Orpheus Male Choir**  
1986-1987 Co-conductor, **Collegium Musicum Vocal Ensemble at University of British Columbia**

## Formal Education

1991 Master of Music (Choral Conducting), **University of Western Washington**  
1985-1986 Diploma in Choir Pedagogy, **Royal Conservatory of Music**, Stockholm, Sweden  
1981 Bachelor of Music, **University of British Columbia**

## Recognition and Awards

2023 Nominated for the **2023 Oskar Morawetz Award for Excellence in Music Performance**.  
2021 **CBC Radio's This is My Music** guest host  
2020 **CBC Radio's In Concert Classical Music Hall of Fame** induction  
2017 **Alumni Builder Award, University of British Columbia**  
2011 **Woman of Distinction, Arts, Culture, and Design, YWCA Vancouver**  
2009 **B.C. Community Achievement Award**  
2000 **B.C. Choral Federation Healey Willan Award**

## Volunteer Activities and Community Service

2022-Present President, **Choral Canada**  
2020-2022 President-Elect, **Choral Canada**  
2000-Present Advisory Group, **BC Choral Federation Willan Council**  
2013-2022 Board of Directors, **Chorus America**  
2019-2021 Chair, **BC Choral Federation Willan Council**  
2015-2017 Chair of the Artistic Panel for the **Pacific Spirit United Church Property Development Project**  
2011-2017 Coordinated performances by Vancouver choirs in support of **Pacific Spirit United Church**  
1999-2005 Member, Board of Directors, **International Federation for Choral Music**

## Awards and Achievements Received with Choirs

2020 **The Light of Hope Returning**, 70-minute collaborative winter solstice video viewed by 10,000 over a three-week period  
2017 First place, **Choral Canada National Competition for Canadian Amateur Choirs: Equal Voice—Women's Choirs**  
2016-2019 Presenter, **Celebrating Women Composers** concert series raising the profile of women composers  
2010 First place, **National Competition for Canadian Amateur Choirs: Equal Voice—Women's Choirs**  
2002 **Coastal Sound Youth Chamber Choir**, semi finalists, **CBC National Choral Competition**  
1988-1994 First place, four consecutive rounds of the biennial **CBC National Choral Competition: Equal Voice—Women's Choirs**

- 1992 Elektra's first CD nominated for a **Juno Award**  
 1992 First place, performance of best Canadian Composition, **CBC National Choral Competition**  
 1990 First place, contemporary category in the **CBC National Choral Competition**  
 1990 First place, **International Competition Kathaumixw**, Powell River, BC  
 1989 Finalist, **Let the Peoples Sing** international choral competition

## Significant Choir Performances—National and International

### *Elektra Women's Choir*

- 2018 *...float...* an immersive experience, a major project of **Choral Canada**, funded by **Canada Council New Chapter** program, St. John's, Nfld.  
 2018 **Podium Conference and Festival—Choral Canada**, St. John's, Nfld.  
 2017 **IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music**, Barcelona, Spain  
 2015 **Podium Conference and Festival—Choral Canada**, Edmonton  
 2013 **New Music for Treble Voices Festival**, San Francisco  
 2013 **Chorus America** Conference, San Francisco  
 2010 **Podium Conference and Festival—Choral Canada**, Saskatoon  
 200 **Festival 500**, Nfld.  
 2003 **National Convention of American Choral Directors Association**, Carnegie Hall Avery Fisher Hall, New York  
 2001 **World Festival of Women Singing, Americafest**, Seattle  
 2000 **Podium Conference and Festival—Choral Canada**, Edmonton  
 1997 **American Choral Directors Association National Convention**, San Diego  
 1996 **IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music**, Sydney, Australia
- ### *Coastal Sound Youth Chamber Choir*
- 2002 **Podium Conference and Festival—Choral Canada**, Toronto

## Administrative Leadership

- 2016-2017 Administrative Director, **World New Music Days**, annual program of **International Society for Contemporary Music**, co-hosted by the **Canadian League of Composers** and **Music on Main**, Vancouver  
 2001-2012 Administrative Director, **MusicFest Vancouver**  
 2001 Executive Director, **World of Children's Choirs 2001 Festival and Symposium**  
 1991-1992 Executive Assistant, **IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music**, Vancouver

## Three Video Links

Follow this [link](#) and scroll to the appropriate videos:

1<sup>st</sup> on page: **Raven** from *The Lost Words: A Spell Book*  
 words by **Robert Macfarlane**, music by **Don Macdonald**

2<sup>nd</sup> on page: **Snewiyalh t'l'a Stakw (Teachings of the Water)** (excerpt), **Movement 5, Úxwumixw (Identity)**  
 Squamish words contributed by **Rebecca Duncan**, music by **T. Patrick Carrabré**

Bottom of page: **To Every Thing There is a Season**  
 Texts: **Ecclesiastes 3:1-6 / Stabat Mater Sequence**, music by **Ramona Luengen**

## Artist Statement

My career as a choral conductor has been inextricably linked to Canada's composers for over 35 years. **Elektra Women's Choir** in Vancouver, which I co-founded in 1987 and serve as Artistic Director, is my principal artistic voice. My work with this ensemble fuels and inspires my passion for choral expression. Elektra's mandate *to inspire and lead in the choral art form through excellence in performance and the creation, exploration, and celebration of women's choral repertoire* gives me scope to push boundaries, explore and celebrate the past, and forge a stronger future for adult women's choirs beyond Elektra itself. Together with other leaders in this genre across North America, I know that my work has resulted in better repertoire, better ensembles, and a stronger reputation for the artistry that is possible with ensembles of soprano and alto voices only. That important work continues to this day.

Under my direction, the 45-voice Elektra is known for the richness of its tone, the expressivity of its interpretations, and for creating new repertoire that is uniquely suited to the timbre and life perspective of adult women. We are known around the world and have produced 17 CDs, all but one of them including a significant percentage of new Canadian repertoire. We have invited artists such as **Isabel Bayrakdarian, Suzie LeBlanc, Nancy Argenta, Jane Coop, Ben Heppner, Beverley Johnston, Martha Guth, Alexander Weimann**, the **Pacific Baroque Orchestra**, conductors **Maria Gamborg Helbekkmo** and **Ko Matsushita**, and broadcaster **Shelagh Rogers** on stage with us in original productions.

### Working with Composers

With Elektra, I have commissioned over 100 works in our 35-year history, mostly from Canadian composers in every stage of their career. These range from folk song arrangements to challenging, original compositions, and include works by **Kathleen Allan, Howard Bashaw, Carmen Braden, Robert Buckley, T. Patrick Carrabré, Timothy Corlis, Rita Costanzi, Alex Eddington, Susan Edwards, Susan Evans, Natalie Fasheh, Malcolm Forsyth, Kristopher Fulton, Katerina Gimon, Keith Hamel, Beth Hanson, Stephen Hatfield, Laura Hawley, Edward Henderson, Sarah Jaysmith, Nicholas Ryan Kelly, Serouj Kradjian, Rupert Lang, Catherine Laub, Katrin Lohuaru, Alexina Louie, Ramona Luengen, Cassie Luftspring, Kate MacColl, Don Macdonald, David MacIntyre, Jocelyn Morlock, Kelly-Marie-Murphy, Larry Nickel, Monica Pearce, Sheldon Rose, Jeffrey Ryan, Marie-Claire Saindon, Rodney Sharman, Ron Smail, Stephen Smith, Bramwell Tovey, Leslie Uyeda, and Cameron Wilson.**

I believe that we exist in an interdependent ecosystem of performers, composers, lyricists, publishers, and audiences—one in which all parties must thrive. In my work I have come to realize that name recognition for a composer is a game changer. My commissioning of emerging composers is not the reason that many have gained broader recognition—their music has carried their message. But I know that Elektra's weight behind them, our publicity, a first live or studio recording of their work issued publicly, publication of their music in my curated series at **Cypress Choral Music**, has sometimes put them into the spotlight at a critical moment. I work to maximize my singers' and our audiences' recognition of living composers through residencies, through the production at Elektra's expense of spoken **YouTube** videos by them about their work, down to making sure a photo, bio, and artist's statement is part of every new score. We use **CLC** rates and contribute to composers' livelihoods. We also collaborate across Canada and into the US as co-commissioners of new works.

Beyond selecting the composer, setting the new work's parameters, and being involved in choosing texts, my commissioning contracts include an important final stage of reviewing the notation before a score is considered final. I see my role in the process as being an advocate for four important stakeholders: 1) I want to ensure that the composer, potentially unknown to my singers and first "met" through the first reading of the score, is well-represented as skilled at writing effective choral music, 2) I am advocating for my singers who need clear information about how to perform the work, 3) I am advocating for myself to be able to conduct effective rehearsals free of unnecessary questions, 4) I am advocating for the audience members who will hear the most compelling performance of the work if the rehearsal process has been smooth. Every composer with whom I have worked on this phase over the last 20 years has said they appreciated the "best practices" I was able to share in a constructive and collaborative manner.

From 2016–2019, recognizing that I had not put any emphasis on developing women composers, Elektra undertook a formal program called **Celebrating Women Composers**, funded by the **Vancouver Foundation** and the **BC Arts Council**, which intersected all aspects of our work for three seasons. In that time, we improved from 18% of our performed works being by women composers to 25%.

Elektra hosts a biennial **Reading Session of New Compositions** in which 3-4 composers' works are selected to be read by Elektra with a professional composer and myself on hand to give suggestions, including from the choir members. The purpose of these events is to bring composers who might not have thought of writing for adult women's choirs into an understanding of what works, what the timbre possibilities are, and into relationship with me and Elektra. This program helps make me aware of emerging composers in our area.

A new work being premiered **March 10<sup>th</sup>** is a good example of nurturing an emerging composer. Toronto-based Palestinian-Jordanian composer **Natalie Fasheh** is in her mid-20s and a passionate proponent of community-engaged art-making. In 2022, I noticed on her website that she was looking for an ensemble for whom to write an original choral piece on a melody, **Ya Amar (The Moon)**, that she had written during the pandemic. We became that ensemble, singing for the first time in Arabic, and making a strong connection with her through learning her work.

Another current project is that I want to create a substantial original work for women's choir and symphony orchestra. I identified BC-based **Nicholas Ryan Kelly** as an outstanding emerging composer. Elektra is ready to pay the commissioning fee but we needed an orchestra to commit to programming the work. I worked with Nicholas in 2021 to create a demo reel of his orchestral writing and began proposing the project to three professional orchestras in BC. I was delighted when the **Vancouver Symphony Orchestra** contacted me mid-February 2023 to announce that they have found a spot for this on their 23/24 season under **Otto Tausk's** leadership and have contracted Elektra to be the premiering choir. The **Victoria Symphony** and **Okanagan Symphony** are seriously considering it for 24/25. As described below, Elektra is a resource for other choirs across North America looking for interesting repertoire. I have no doubt that this new work will also have performances in the US.

### **Recent, Significant Commissioned Works**

Elektra is fortunate to have created a **Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund for Elektra Women's Choir** in 2009, when co-founding conductor Diane Loomer retired from Elektra. Having this reserve available as needed, we are not hindered by waiting for results of grant applications before proceeding with commissioned works.

Some significant, recent commissioned works have included:

- **The Lost Words: A Spell Book.** This 90-minute, 20-movement work is the most significant work ever commissioned by Elektra. Using texts ("magic spells") by author **Robert Macfarlane** and using art by **Jackie Morris**, this is the music of five Canadian women and five Canadian men at different stages of their careers. The work's purpose is to bring words about the natural world back into the lives of children. I chose each composer because I felt they had the imagination to make their own magic of Macfarlane's words and was not disappointed. Significantly delayed due to the pandemic, this work had its very successful premiere in October 2022 and will be toured by Elektra to three cities in the UK in June, including at **St. John's Smith Square** in London. A video of the Vancouver premiere will be released in March. Pending an agreement between the author, illustrator, and Canadian music publisher, **Cypress Choral Music**, my hope is that this work will be available as sheet music to other choirs worldwide by the summer.
- **Snewiyalh tl'a Stakw (Teachings of the Water)** Squamish words contributed by **Rebecca Duncan**, music by **T. Patrick Carrabré**. Modified several times to accommodate pandemic restrictions on choirs and audiences, this video project released free on YouTube was Elektra's first foray into a collaboration with First Nations. Working closely with women from the local **Squamish Nation** who are educators and elders, the sound track for the video was recorded in **Pacific Spirit United Church** and the videography by **Collide Entertainment** at various natural locations. Water teachings were shared by the women directly in the video. My work was guided by ethnomusicologist **Dr. Jeanette Gallant** over a three-year period, and we documented our process in a 68-minute **Listener's Guide** video. Sung in Squamish, the work is intended to be flexible enough to be re-set by other choirs in the language of their local indigenous people, creating opportunities for meaningful collaboration virtually anywhere. A Seattle-based choir has already reached out to inquire. In May 2022, Carrabré, Gallant, and I presented about this project at **Choral Canada's Podium** conference in Toronto.
- **The Light of Hope Returning** is a 60-minute video collaboration in the first year of the pandemic between Elektra, a Bay Area choir **WomenSing**, US composer **Shawn Kirchner**, and Syrian American visual artist **Kevorg Mourad**. It is a Christmas/Winter Solstice work that we subsequently performed live in Vancouver in November 2021.
- **Rain Makes Its Own Night** was commissioned from **Alexina Louie** in 2017 for a **Canada Council New Chapter** project in Newfoundland called **...float...**. This 7' minute work is on a poem by **Anne Michael**.

The assignment from producer **Choral Canada** was to represent an aspect of water that was symbolic of our region of Canada. In the same concert, I conducted five massed choirs in ***Of the Surface of Water*** by **Andrew Staniland**, also commissioned specially for the project by Choral Canada.

- ***Songs of Envious Time*** is a suite of three movements by **Bramwell Tovey** on 17<sup>th</sup> Century English poems. First scored for choir with brass quintet and organ, Tovey subsequently orchestrated it for chamber orchestra and programmed it with **Elektra** and the **Vancouver Symphony Orchestra**.

### **Building National and International Awareness of Canadian Choral Music**

Elektra is known worldwide and its website at [elektra.ca/repertoire](http://elektra.ca/repertoire) is used by hundreds of conductors who are looking for new repertoire. Canadian works are indicated, and as much information on publication, texts and translations, program notes, etc., as possible is included. The choir's **YouTube** channel features over 170 tracks, more than half of which are by Canadian composers. Interviews and background information such as for ***Snewíalh t'l'a Stakw (Teachings of the Water)*** are provided as learning tools.

Whenever I conduct festival choirs or present lectures on repertoire in Canada, the US, or further afield such as Japan, Canadian music is always featured prominently. Elektra has performed at two **World Symposia on Choral Music**, Sydney (1996) and Barcelona (2017). At the former, **David MacIntyre's** stunning ***Ave Maria*** was an instant hit and has since sold tens of thousands of copies. At the latter, **Kristopher Fulton's *Valkyrie*** for women's choir with soprano saxophone and **Kathleen Allan's** suite, ***Primary Colours***, were performed at the famed **Palau de la Musica**. In June 2023, Elektra will perform the music of **Saindon**, **Carrabré**, and **Hanson** at a new women's choir festival in Peterborough, UK, where I will also present a session to choral people on Canadian repertoire including that of **Laura Hawley**, **Stephen Smith**, and **Nicholas Ryan Kelly**.

Every three years, Elektra hosts ***Tapestry International Celebration of Women's Choirs***, during which each conductor rehearses repertoire from their own country. Canadian repertoire, therefore, is always included, as well as in Elektra's solo performances.

### **Community Engagement**

Since the pandemic began, I have been hosting a weekly Zoom meeting of conductors of adult treble choirs called ***Forward Thinking: Women's Choir Conversations***. Over 100 conductors signed up to receive the weekly notices of upcoming content, representing ensembles from across the US and Canada. I recently hosted the 116<sup>th</sup> session in this series.

Through Elektra, I curate and co-host annual **Cultural Conversations** on Zoom. Under the guidance of ethnomusicologist **Dr. Jeanette Gallant**, this free, interactive series is intended to build networks and open fruitful conversation around respectful, informed, and inclusive cross-cultural collaboration in our community.

In 2017, with **Dr. Iris Levine**, Artistic Director of **VOX Femina**, I planned and hosted a **Women's Choir Symposium** for fifty conductors across North America.