

ARTIST'S STATEMENT BY MORNA EDMUNDSON

October 2024

My 37-year career in Vancouver as Artistic Director of the adult treble choir [Elektra](#) (formerly Elektra Women's Choir) has been intrinsically linked to the success of Canadian composers. My work goes beyond commissioning and premiering to extensive and strategic activity performing, recording, promoting, and disseminating Canadian choral works for soprano and alto voices in national and international settings.

Under my leadership and starting in an era where there was a dearth of quality repertoire for adult treble/women's voices, the presence of Canadian music is now widely felt in our subgenre of choral music due to Elektra's legacy. Over 1/3 of Elektra's total repertoire over nearly 4 decades has been Canadian, most of it by living composers. The choir has commissioned and premiered 120 compositions and arrangements from 96 established and emerging composers, songwriters, and arrangers*. These range from short, *a cappella* works to multi-movement suites and even entire full-length concert works. Many of these works have been performed multiple times by Elektra in local, national and international settings, and many also now enjoy a place in the programs of choirs around the world.

My strategy is not only to commission new works from Canadian composers, but to follow the creation's path to give the works the maximum chance of being performed by other choirs and heard by other listeners. Elektra has released 17 studio-recorded CDs including 114 Canadian works over its history to date, all of which are currently available on Spotify, iTunes, Apple Music, and over 100 streaming services. Elektra's Spotify reach is currently 5,000 streams per month, the results of which is that Canadian choral music is widely consumed by listeners around the world. Many of these works have their first or only commercially-available recordings by Elektra.

Elektra has always served a role of leading by example and providing tools for other conductors and choirs. As such, I created a [Repertoire database on our website](#) that lists all works performed by Elektra. Accessible by composer name, by work titles, and by multiple tags such as "Canadian composition", "sacred music", "women composers", "over 8 minute duration", etc, this tool is widely used. In many cases, there are notes from me or the composers about the work, and there are always links to the composer's own website, sheet music publishers, etc. Texts, where copyright is not an issue, are frequently included. I field inquiries several times a month from conductors about specific works. Many of the emails include comments about how many years they have been using the resource and how valuable it is to them when programming for their university or community adult treble/women's choir ensemble. The site also offers each performance's repertoire list and concert program pdfs dating back 37 years, demonstrating how each concert was shaped. Elektra is recognized by funders at all levels of government and in the private sector as a strong proponent of the work of Canadian composers.

The growth of YouTube as a programming resource for choral conductors has caused Elektra to put a lot of energy into its [channel](#) in recent years. Our playlist of Canadian works now includes 90 tracks, a combination of live concert performance videos and tracks imported from our CDs. In all cases, permission to post was obtained from the work's copyright holder and performers.

Significant recent commissioned Canadian works include:

2024 [Earth, Beloved](#) by Nicholas Ryan Kelly was a 12-minute work for adult treble/women's choir and full symphony orchestra on a commissioned text by Ontario-based Wendy Jean McLean. Elektra paid the commissioning fee with the assistance of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and the Victoria Symphony through the Hugh Davidson Fund at the Victoria Foundation. The two-year journey to convince a symphony orchestra to program the work sight-unseen was amply realised when the Vancouver Symphony, under Maestro Otto Tausk, included it in a Diamond Masterworks concert alongside Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto* and John Adams' *Harmonielehre*. Please read Tausk's comment about the premiere in the link. The Victoria Symphony is hoping to do its premiere of the work in the fall of 2025. Through my extensive network of adult treble/women's choir conductors across North America, I hope it will enjoy many more performances.

2021 [Snewiyalh tl'a Stakw \(Teachings of the Water\)](#) by T. Patrick Carrabré and words in the Squamish language contributed by Rebecca Duncan

2019 (premiered in 2022 due to the pandemic) [The Lost Words: A Spell Book](#) with words by Robert Macfarlane and music by Carmen Braden, Alex Eddington, Katerina Gimon, Nicholas Ryan Kelly, Ramona Luengen, Don Macdonald, Monica Pearce, Marie-Claire Saindon, Rodney Sharman, and Stephen Smith

2018 [Rain Makes Its Own Night](#) by Alexina Louie written for outdoor performance by Elektra in Newfoundland in "...float", a project envisioned and hosted by Choral Canada with support from the Canada Council for the Arts New Chapter funding program.

Where the page layout allows, I always ask composers to include a brief biography of themselves and a photo on the score. I find this greatly enhances the singers' engagement with the work, knowing that the composer is alive and creating specifically for them. Where emerging composers and arrangers are involved, I have always taken the position that their score will work best with some coaching on presentation on the page, proper notation of text, tessitura for the various vocal lines etc. I do not write the music with them, but I do my best to provide positive support such that, in the hands of the singers, they will appear professional and skilled in the choral idiom.

The Community Engagement programs I have created for Elektra involve work with high school aged singers, their teachers, community choirs and conductors, and composers. Specific to this nomination, the biennial [Reading Sessions of New Compositions](#) create a supportive and intimate workshop-style interaction in which I meet composers unknown to me, and they learn that writing for adult treble voices, which they may or may not have done in the past, is an artistically-satisfying pursuit. All Community Engagement programs of Elektra include performance of Canadian repertoire, be it by Elektra in solo performance or massed choirs rehearsing and/or performing works. These provide critical exposure to Canadian composers and their works for young singers.

From 2016-2019, funded by a grant from the Vancouver Foundation, Elektra embarked on a project called Celebrating Women Composers. From Hildegard von Bingen to emerging women composers, this project met all of its targets and shone an important spotlight on deserving works, many of them Canadian.

Elektra has performed in highly-visible national and international conferences of choral professionals, where the programs always contain a large percentage of Canadian works. Events included the World

Symposium on Choral Music in 1996 in Sydney, Australia and Barcelona, Spain in 2017, the American Choral Directors Association National Conventions in San Diego (1997) and New York (2003). At the 1997 event, the choir sold \$14,000 worth of CDs in four days at its trade fair booth.

For the past decade, I have curated a series of sheet music published by Cypress Choral Music, which is based in Vancouver and known internationally as an all-Canadian source for choral scores. My series is targeted to advanced adult treble/women's choirs. Owner Larry Nickel has been extremely supportive of my wishes to have entire new works included in the catalogue, including the massive *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* and the Squamish rooted work *Snewiyalh tl'a Stakw (Teachings of the Water)*.

The final chapter of my career with Elektra is coming up in the summer of 2025, when my last concert, [Legacy](#), will feature exclusively Canadian works originally commissioned and premiered by Elektra. In addition to these works which span every decade of the choir's history, composers Laura Hawley, Cassie Luftspring, and Tawnie Olson have been commissioned to create new works. The Hawley work includes a new poem commissioned from Yukon-based Clea Roberts. The search for my successor is underway and the continuation of Elektra's commitment to Canadian composers has been clearly stated in the job posting.



* Patricia Abbott, Lydia Adams, Kathleen Allan, Howard Bashaw, Allan Bevan, Peter Bjerring, Gerda Blok-Wilson, Carmen Braden, Robert Buckley, Stuart Calvert, T. Patrick Carrabr , Steven Chatman, Timothy Corlis, Susan Crowe, Eleanor Daley, Christine Donkin, Alex Eddington, Malcolm Edwards, Susan Edwards, Matthew Emery, Jeffrey Enns, Susan Evans, Salvador Ferreras, Robert Fleming, Malcolm Forsyth, Kristopher Fulton, Katerina Gimon, Allison Girvan, Srul Irving Glick, Paul Halley, Keith Hamel, Beth Hanson, Stephen Hatfield, Laura Hawley, Wade Hemsworth, Edward Henderson, Ruth Watson Henderson, Derek Holman, Eric Hominick, Guy Isabelle, Sarah Jaysmith, Otto Kelland, Nicholas Ryan Kelly, Richard Kidd, Serouj Kradjian, Rupert Lang, Matthew Larkin, Catherine Laub, Katrin Lohuaru, Diane Loomer, Alexina Louie, Ramona Luengen, Cassie Luftspring, David Scott Lytle, Kate MacColl, Don Macdonald, Alistair MacGillivray, David MacIntyre, Joni Mitchell, Ruth Moody, Jocelyn Morlock, Kelly-Marie Murphy, Paul Nash, Larry Nickel, Tawnie Olson, Kathryn Parrotta, Donald Patriquin, Monica Pearce, Oscar Peterson, Erica Phare-Bergh, Sarah Quartel, Meghan Quinlan, Imant Raminsh, Doreen Rao, Sid Robinovitch, James Rolfe, Sheldon Rose, Jeffrey Ryan, Marie-Claire Saindon, R. Murray Schafer, Sherryl Sewepagaham, Rodney Sharman, Jane Siberry, Mark Sirett, Ron Smail, Stephen Smith, Harry Somers, Nancy Telfer, Bramwell Tovey, Joel Tranquilla, Shari Ulrich, Leslie Uyeda, Patrick Wedd, Cameron Wilson, Willi Zwozdesky