

# Émergences [f. pl.]

**Sara Constant**, flutist | **An-Laurence Higgins**, guitarist

presented by **Innovations en concert**, **Association of Canadian Women Composers**  
and the **Canadian Music Center**

Le Livart, 3980, rue St-Denis, Montréal | July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, 8pm

Canadian Music Center, 20 St-Joseph Street, Toronto | August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, 8pm

## program:

**Shelley Marwood** : *[Toward] Chaotic Neutral*

**Véronique Girard** : *Entre les lignes*

**Thais Montanari** : *La désintégration de la culture*

**Lieke van der Voort** : *Thought Replacement Worksheet*

**Gabrielle Harnois-Blouin** : *Points de rencontre*

Émergences [f. pl.] was first presented at the art center Le Livart in Montreal and then at the Canadian Music Center in Toronto. The recital of the duet of the flutist Sara Constant and the guitarist An-Laurence Higgins programmed five pieces by five Canadian women composers. Wait a second. When was the last time you heard a concert with music written exclusively by women composers performed by women musicians? This is too much of a rare event. Contemporary music, as classical music, has always been the business of men. We could add of white men. We all know the stories of Fanny Mendelssohn, the sister of the other, of Clara Schumann, the wife of the other and we realize quite a bit late that this game is still going on and strong in this 21 century. This is why there is a podcast on the subject, Listeningtoladies, which relates of the under

representation of women in contemporary music. This concert is such of an exceptional event that the podcast will donate all their profits made from the sale of the promotional merchandise of this month to the five composers who were played.

The Canadian Music Center in Toronto is a tiny venue, full to the roof for the occasion. What makes this project worked out though is the quality of the works performed with a remarkable commitment from the two musicians.

Shelley Marwood's piece is very well structured, it is narrative and uses a pretty classical musical language with some flavour of folkloric music. The music has some waves of intensity, goes from some gentleness to some almost violent moods. The guitarist explores every range of expressions for her instrument. The return of the first repeated notes of the very beginning of the piece close the narration, as we end the reading of a tale, there was a storm, it is over and we can catch our breath.

On her side, Véronique Girard was very demanding both to the musicians and the audience. Her work requests quite a lot of technical gears and a fair amount of flexibility from the performers. A video, which seems to be a graphic score, is projected on the wall and on the musicians as they perform in the dark. The musicians are more dancers here as they tie to each other with elastic ropes, the flutist controlling the movements of the guitarist, or the opposite, making the melodic line slur and derive. *Entre les lignes* is sometimes close to anarchy, the performers find themselves in strange posture that have nothing to do with traditional concerts. If the focus of the audience is a bit diverted from the musical gesture, the music is still very efficient and actual. Its organized chaos shows how the composer masters the musical language and the instrumentation. A larger stage would have helped to understand better this ode to soft and tender craziness.

In a totally different tone, Lieke van der Voort offered a piece of a rare dramatic intensity. Using a pre-recorded tape, words pop out, the sounds of the tape are reproduced by the instruments but eventually give space to rhetoric, to the testimony of an abuse, an assault suffered and voiced. Up to the unbearable, to the non-tolerated. The performers throw themselves heart over head in this timeless drama, this infinite pain. The audience does some active listening for this obviously liberating artwork. Lieke van der Voort has a strong signature, she uses words and sounds to transmit her messages. Her voice certainly matters and is an important one within the new generation of composers. Her punching art always request some time to be ingested, to be appreciated to its true value.

Also dense, the music narrative of Thais Montanari is although more opaque. Projections of the moon, of the Earth on small round screens are placed close to the musicians. Some strange sounds come from the hand rubbing the side of the amplified guitar, some pre-recorded words about the space for culture in our society and some other topics; everything here is exploratory and a quest for beauty. An unexplored world opens up; we can feel there are many layers of understanding. There is a lot to see and a lot to hear and quickly we understand this work will need to be seen and heard again in order to fully enjoy it.

To close the concert, Sara Constant and An-Laurence Higgins simply sat down with their instrument and played, without the help of any technic or any movement, a minimalistic music composed by Gabrielle Harnois-Blouin that totally mesmerized the audience. Very simple, the language is atonal but without any asperity, in the form close to the *ricercare* where the guitar has an *ostinato*, which allows the ears to find its way; showing a great mastery in music writing and asking for deep focus from the performers. After this hurricane of sounds, movements and images, here we are in front of an apparently very simple music, a music that softly questions our vision of what is actual music. This misty poem received a listening as passionate as for a big symphonic cavalcade.

A huge thank for this evening of discoveries initiated by the two musicians. If Olivia Messian and Karla Stockhausen never existed, let's hope that there is right ahead a more brilliant future for women composers. This concert showed easily, if need was, that their voices are as unique and as innovative as the voices of their masculine colleagues.

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