



THE RAZOR'S EDGE

Lorne Pankratz, Member

Artists in Russia, including musicians, came under renewed repression under Tsar Alexander III, in part as a reaction to the assassination of his father, Alexander II, who liberalized artistic freedom as part of his program to free the serfs.

This repression carried on through Alexander's son, Nicholas II and culminated after the Russian Revolution, reaching a high point with Joseph Stalin in 1933. Known as "Social Realism," the movement insisted on four "guidelines" that were to be followed by all artists, irrespective of their medium:

1. Art must be relatable to the masses. It should have a patriotic or nationalist character.
2. It should stress the everyday life of the typical Soviet citizen.
3. Representations should be realistic as opposed to abstract.
4. It should be highly nationalistic, supporting the goals and aims of the state and Communist Party.

Those who failed in this endeavour risked persecution, imprisonment, exile, or even death.

Later, this oppression was further formalized in 1946 by the "Zhdanov Doctrine" whereby artists were to reject Western influences which were deemed "bourgeois" or "anti-state." Composers such as Dmitri Shostakovich (topic of this issue's "[Composer Corner](#)") and Sergei Prokofiev were specifically targeted in 1948 under this Doctrine for "formalism," which was a term used to designate music that was deemed destructive to Soviet ideals. As a result, their music was carefully scrutinized which had the unfortunate effect of suppressing their creativity.

In order to survive, artists, including composers, had to conform and even "repent". Soon after the inauguration of the "Zhdanov Doctrine," the Russian Composers' Union held a special congress for the purpose of forcing composers to disavow any of their works that did not meet the standards of the State.

This "Doctrine" was maintained until the death of Stalin in 1953. Artistic restrictions were lessened somewhat under Nikita Khrushchev's "Thaw" (1955–1964) but were resumed and heightened under Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982). This censorship remained until it ceased altogether in 1991 with the fall of communism.

Unfortunately, artistic repressiveness in Russia is flourishing again under the autocratic regime of Vladimir Putin (2000–2008, 2012–present), especially targeting those who are critical of his policies regarding the Ukraine. ■



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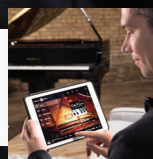
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Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue!

IMPROMPTU EDITOR

Maryellen Pankratz

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Maryellen Pankratz

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For a detailed list of our board and conveners, sign into <https://armta.ca/calgarybranch/>

ADIEU TO You

Note from the Editor

Maryellen Pankratz

Five years ago, *Impromptu* nearly came to its demise. No one seemed to be interested in volunteering for the role of Newsletter Editor. With a background in Graphic Communication, I held a secret enthusiasm for design and layout. But without another person to take the reins, I remained silent. Finally, one of the Members-at-Large serving on our Board volunteered to take over the Editor role. That energetic young lady was of course, Rachel McLellan (pictured at right).

I sensed from our meetings, that she was ambitious and energetic, as she had long been volunteering on other committees and projects for ARMTA Calgary. I finally spoke up about my Desktop Publishing credentials and a team was formed. We created our first issue together in September 2021. Along the way, Rachel married her sweetheart, Kevin, and in the spring of 2023, they had their first child, Quinn. Nearly three years later, they welcomed their second child, Taron into their home and Rachel's already busy life became even busier.

Thank
you



With everything that goes along with managing a studio, keeping a home, nursing a baby, and chasing after a toddler, her motivation for *Impromptu* understandably began to wane. Rachel has decided that it is now time to step down from *Impromptu*, but she's still a member, so we're not losing her entirely. Let us always remember the years that she dedicated to various assignments, volunteering her time and skills for the benefit of our Branch. On behalf of ARMTA Calgary, thank you Rachel, with warmest wishes for you and your family.

Now as the sole Editor of *Impromptu*, I would like to invite others to bring forward their submissions for publishing. Content is embraced not only from members, but from friends and colleagues of ARMTA Calgary, as well as students of our members. ■

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GREETING FROM THE CHAIR

Sandra Joy Friesen, Member

As we begin an exciting new music season of lessons, concerts, conferences and competitions, I write this message as a reflection of gratitude to the all those who step forward with their time, dedication and skills to help ARMTA Calgary thrive. Highlighting outstanding members in equal order, I extend my deepest thanks to: our Board members who show their care and passion on a regular basis in our once-a-month Monday 10am meetings via Zoom to deliberate important issues and decisions; our Sponsorship convenor Andrea Case, whose efforts in securing donations and advertising provides our students with opportunities and scholarships; OSR (Outstanding Student Recital) convenor Jayne Luy who orchestrates one of our biggest events of the season acknowledging the excellent efforts of students in their RCM exams; the committed and cheerful efforts of Nadia Khlynovskaya who serves as both Catering convenor ready for every event and Music Marathon team member; the enthusiastic energy of Sandra Narvaez also on the Music Marathon team and new Archives convenor; convenors Kaylee Read, Alexandra Andrievsky, recital hosts, and Michelle Gao, who all contribute to creating performance opportunities for our students; our long time Calgary members Nathene Arthur, Barbara Robertson, Carolyn Steeves who continually volunteer in different capacities to implement opportunities for our students; the tireless efforts of our brilliant administrator Maryellen Pankratz – I cannot image the challenges we would face without her expertise behind the scenes; our enthusiastic conveners Barbara Robertson (Communication), Babur Tongur (Social Media), Melodie Archer

(New Members) who take care of important communication with our members; the former editor of our creative and interesting newsletter Rachel McLellan; and especially the outstanding efforts for the past four years by our amazing Music Marathon team leader and former Treasurer Lorna Sewell! It is with disappointment to announce our dear Lorna has left our Branch (and Calgary) to be near family in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. I deeply thank and appreciate Lorna for all her past work with our Branch and of course wish her the very best next door in SK!

Clearly, the grand success of our Branch hinges on volunteers as well as promoting who we are and what we do to the larger community. Two of our most substantial events, the ACRA (ARMTA Calgary Recital & Awards) and Music Marathon fundraiser need Convenors this season, plus our Branch would really benefit from a charismatic Promotions Convenor. I kindly ask for enthusiastic teachers to step forward to take on these roles or contribute to any other area that interests you. If you submit students into our programs such as OSR, ACRA, recitals, masterclasses, etc. but are not stepping forward to volunteer, I implore you to do so! These events will only run if we have dedicated teachers who get involved, and always remember that our wonderful group of teachers on the Board is ready to help out. Reach out to me directly (sandrajoyfriesen@gmail.com) if you can volunteer for your Calgary Branch!

Wishing everyone a spectacular year of music making and teaching. ■



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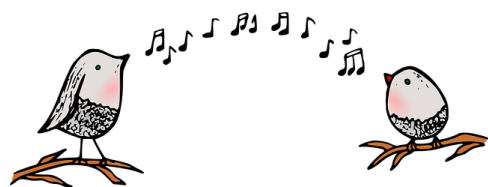
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THE CALGARY BRANCH

Welcomes Two Newcomers to our Board

The Board of Directors manages the business and affairs of our Associations. This includes both ARMTA Calgary Branch and Endowment Society of the Calgary Registered Music Teachers. For nine months out of the year, these selfless members serve behind-the-scenes by attending our monthly meetings, and more. [See page 3](#) to view the list of members involved and be sure to thank them for their service. We are delighted to introduce our newest Board Members to join us in this endeavour. Rachel and Mary Jane both have fascinating profiles; let's get to know them a little better! ■



I had a rather indirect path into working in music. Way back in high school I attempted to teach two students how to play piano and failed. From this poor experience I figured that since teaching wasn't for me, and working as an accompanist didn't seem feasible, I'd find a more practical job that didn't require so much personal interaction. This led me to getting a degree in Computer Science and working in the aerospace industry for almost ten years.



Rachel Baljeu
ARMTA member
since 2015

Eventually I discovered that this career wasn't working for me. I quit my job and hiked the 4300-km Pacific Crest Trail, walking from Mexico to Canada in 5 1/2 months. One of the other hikers I met along the way said he was a Collaborative Pianist, and this got me thinking that maybe I could give it a try. When I returned from my trip, I completed a Bachelor's degree in music at Grand Valley State University. Here I had the invaluable opportunity to study piano pedagogy with Helen Marlais, and this set me up to be a much more successful piano teacher (no wonder I failed at my earlier attempt at teaching in high school!). I followed this degree with two masters' degrees, in Collaborative Piano and in Piano Pedagogy, from Michigan State University.

Since 2014 I've been working as a collaborative pianist and piano teacher in Calgary. My collaborative activities include accompanying string students in the Amici String Program, the adult amateur choir One Accord, students at the University of Calgary, as well as other various places. In addition to this, I maintain a private piano studio with about 15 students. I enjoy knowing that my students benefit from the skills and insights in practicing and performing that I am continually learning while doing my own practicing for my collaborative work, and also benefit from the analytical nature of my Computer Science background. ■

Mary Jane is a professional violinist who loves to perform and teach. This has been a part of her daily living from a very young age since she was born into a family of musicians including nine siblings who all play instruments. Mary Jane has enjoyed performing for various events throughout her life including summer camps, festivals, competitions, performing chamber music abroad and solo with orchestra, CBC and CKUA radio recordings, cruise ships, Vancouver Symphony and various local orchestras and groups including chamber music with her own children. She loves the variety of music that can be performed and the ability to constantly grow as a musician. Mary Jane started teaching at the age of fourteen and has enjoyed sharing her expertise and love for music with students for over thirty-five years. It's a fulfilling career to watch young people work with their parents to achieve an exceptional level of playing music which they can share with the rest of the world. Mary Jane especially loves to perform with her children and together share beautiful music in communities throughout Calgary. ■



Mary Jane Vandekerckhove
ARMTA member since 2018

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Farewell to Lorna Sewell Nadia Khlynovskaya, Member

As Lorna begins a new chapter in Saskatchewan to be closer to her family, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for her many years of dedication and service to ARMTA. Lorna is one of those rare people whose enthusiasm, organization, and sense of responsibility inspire everyone around her. For the past several years, she has served as Convenor of the Calgary Music Marathon, dedicating countless hours to planning, coordinating, and ensuring the event's success. Thanks to her leadership and attention to detail, the Music Marathon ran smoothly year after year, while raising valuable funds to support ARMTA's programs and initiatives.

I had the privilege of working alongside Lorna as a Music Marathon Convenor for the past four years. It was always a pleasure to collaborate with someone so dependable, thoughtful, and committed. Her positive attitude, willingness to help, and ability to keep everything organized made even the busiest times enjoyable.

Lorna's contributions to our association have left a lasting impact, and her presence will be greatly missed by colleagues, students, and fellow ARMTA members alike.

On behalf of all of us, with warmest wishes and sincere appreciation, thank you, Lorna, for your hard work, dedication, and friendship. We wish you every happiness as you settle into your new home. May this next chapter bring you many joyful moments with family, new opportunities, and continued success in all that you do. ■



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February 28, 2026
Jayne Luy, Member and OSR Convenor



Certificate and Medal Recipients

The Outstanding Student Recital took place at the beautifully renovated Bonavista Church. 29 performers presented a magnificent variety of vocal and piano music from many distinct eras and styles. These performers had qualified for this prestigious recital by achieving 87% or higher on their practical RCM exams, as well as passing the corresponding theory exam. 19 of these students received medals for achieving a mark of 90% or higher! They are all to be congratulated on their outstanding achievements and the dedication they show to their discipline.

A jury of 3 judges awarded 10 additional scholarships to performers whose poise, artistic interpretation, and technical abilities were clearly on display that evening.

Many congratulations to all 29 performers, to their parents, and to their teachers! Learning to be a proficient musician is a long road requiring much dedication from all three of these parties. The road is well worth it! ■

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Reflections on the Importance of Solo Performances at a Local Music Festival

John Burge

When examined in the rearview mirror, I expect most of us can pinpoint an aspect of our childhood that had a far more significant effect on our career and personal development than was apparent at the time. As a composer, pianist and educator, it is probably not surprising that I would reach back to performing in solo piano classes in the local music festival, as providing crucial preparation for a career in music. No doubt music teachers reading this article will find echoes of this sentiment in their own lives. However, after almost four decades of being a music festival adjudicator (as well as experiencing my own students and children's festival performances), I am convinced that all young musicians who perform in a solo capacity at a local music festival, even those who don't go onto a career in music, benefit greatly from this opportunity.

Over the past decades, it seems to me that there are fewer occasions where children are encouraged to take center stage alone. Beyond attending school, much of growing up these days appears focused on team sports or group activities. These kinds of collective interactions are incredibly important in developing collaborative and social skills, but truly, there is really nothing quite like performing as a young solo musician at the local music festival, especially when one factors in the immediate feedback and encouragement received from an adjudicator. Receiving both

a verbal and written artistic assessment, while the performance is still fresh in everyone's mind, really doesn't have a corollary elsewhere in a child's life. As an adjudicator, I greatly enjoy the conversations that I have with young performers during my spoken remarks at the end of a festival class. In fact, it is during these moments of interaction that one can start to see young personalities developing and confident oral speaking skills begin to shine.

For the youngest performers, the months of preparation in advance of the festival performance (with the patient guidance and support of teachers and parents), is a remarkable journey of planning, practice, test-runs and achievement. The more experienced students, with years of festival performances under their belts, soon take ownership of this process and construct their own practice regime that will lead to success. It cannot be overstated how analogous this process is to the kind of "project management" upon which our lives and jobs often depend later in life.

I have also noticed a composure and confidence apparent in young musicians who perform repeatedly at previous festivals. These performers have learned that first, before even playing a note, it is best to walk confidently to the stage and graciously acknowledge the audience with a bow, perhaps even announcing the title of the composition. Then, after completing the performance, they convey their joy in the achievement by smiling and bowing before leaving the stage. In my own case, there has always been a close connection between performing and public speaking and one learns quickly that to, "own the room," is to frame every moment in the vicinity of the stage with care and poise.



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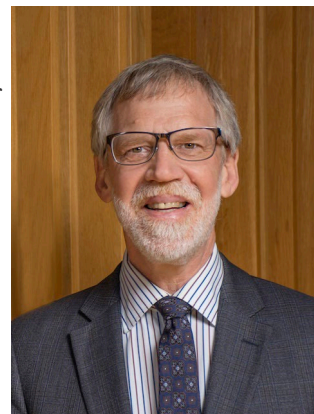
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John Burge grew up in Calgary, graduating from Western Canada High School in 1979. He is forever grateful to his father for starting his piano studies and to Dorothy Hare, who later guided him in completing his ARCT diploma in Piano Performance before he headed off to complete degrees in Composition and Theory from the University of Toronto (BMus and MMus) and the University of British Columbia (DMA).



John Burge

After 38 years on the music faculty at Queen's University, he retired in 2025. With lots of family still living in Calgary, he was pleased to return to the city in Feb. 2026 to present his talk, "Piano Teaching Tricks I Have Learned Over the Years," to the ARMTA Calgary Branch and provide this short reflection for this issue of the Fall Newsletter. He looks forward to returning to Calgary to adjudicate piano and composition classes at the Calgary Festival for the Performing Arts in 2027—the fifth time he has had the pleasure to provide this service over the years.

There are plenty of additional lenses that I could apply to music festival performances, but it seems best to conclude by stressing how intrinsically inspiring it can be to spend time with some of the great masterworks of the past, as well as more recent compositions that reflect today's world, and to use a festival performance as a benchmark to gauge one's progress. For me, it is this aesthetic viewpoint that sets musical performance apart from sports. However, it is worth mentioning that one of the similarities between the arts and athletic pursuits, is that the knowledge gained in achieving success as a child in both these kinds of endeavors, results in an appreciation one carries into adulthood. As an adult, watching professionals perform these same activities in concert halls and arenas (or on video and in broadcasts) makes the viewing experience so much more meaningful when the adult has previously demonstrated some mastery of the same sport or musical instrument during their youth.

Some athletic disciplines, such as figure skating and gymnastics, do have an important artistic component, and interestingly, I note that many young figure skaters and gymnasts pursue music studies at the same time. There is in music though, the possibility for a highly reflective and interpretive component gained in performing a solo piece in public from memory, that has the potential to connect very expressively and intimately with both one's own inner spirit and an audience. Indeed, it is in these moments that the magic happens, and it is this magic that can propel a person along for an entire life, whether they become a professional musician, perform for their own pleasure, or simply remain lifelong lovers of music. ■

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Top pledge collectors won valuable prizes!

Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra donated a pair of CPO tickets. Studio Bell National Music Centre donated a 1-year membership.

This day could not take place without the tireless efforts of this year's conveners and volunteers. A "grande grazi" to these dedicated members!

Lorna Sewell, Nadia Khlynovskaya, Sandra Narvaez, Nathene Arthur, Lyudmila Brandman, Karen Gerelus, April Leung, Kaylee Read, Naomi Williams

Music Marathon is always an enjoyable day for volunteers. Come on out next year and join the fun! ■



Pictured from left to right, Branch Members:
Lorna Sewell, Nadia Khlynovskaya, Nathene Arthur, Karen Gerelus

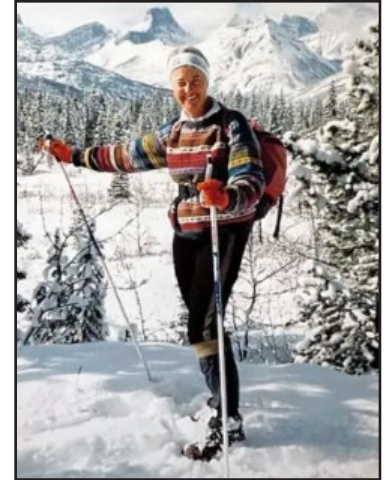
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REST IN PEACE

Obituaries Provided with the Assistance of Audrey Poirier, Provincial Life Member

Lee Workun October 3, 1937 - April 16, 2026

Lee passed away on April 16 at the age of 88 and her funeral was held on July 6. Lee was a long time member of the Calgary Branch of ARMTA, Alberta Piano Teachers Association (APTA), and Koterie Music Group. As a 50+ year member of Morning Musicales, this group of ARMTA Calgary Branch teachers gathered monthly for musical and educational advancement. Lee was immersed in music her whole life. She played piano and organ for 50 years and she was always seen around town attending musical events with her many friends. Lee was happy when she was in the mountains and was a long time member of the Tuesday Hikers Club. Her hiking, cross-country skiing, and cycling adventures took her to many interesting places. When not out and about, she was crocheting blankets for babies and seniors in need. Lee was such a special friend to many and always had her car ready to drive a request whenever she was needed. ■



Eileen Craig April 20, 1942 - June 19, 2026

Eileen passed away on June 19 at age 93 after a lengthy illness. Her funeral was held on July 11. Eileen was a long time and active member of the Calgary Branches of ARMTA and the RCM Alumni Association, and she was a founding member of the latter. Eileen was very proud of her students with some of them continuing to pursue their dreams by attending graduate music programs at some of the most prestigious schools. Eileen was touched by tragedy with the loss of her son John, but she was never alone. Friends were close by and most importantly, Jesus was a provider of joy and comfort throughout good times and bad. ■

Aino Robinson March 10, 1940 - July 9, 2026

Aino passed away on July 9 at the age of 86 and her funeral was held on July 18. Her life was filled with music of all kinds. Aino was a member of ARMTA and of Calgary Branch's Morning Musicales. She was a Branch teacher of Mount Royal College (now University) for most of her teaching life. She loved her students, many of whom went on to get their ARCTs from the Royal Conservatory of Toronto in either Performance or Teaching and many also received diplomas from Mount Royal. Aino and her husband Sy were members of the Queens and Jacks Square Dancers Club for many years and enjoyed the Calgary Legion dances. For over 20 years, Aino played tennis with three fellow ARMTA members every Wednesday morning. She was a fine bridge player in the Little Bridge Club at the Uplands in Hawkwood. Her pies, baking, and preserves were enjoyed by many, and any drop-ins were always welcome. ■



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Alex Tangkitsiri

COMPOSER CORNER

Dmitri Shostakovich 1906 – 1975

(Composer Corner compiled by the Editor)

“I think it is clear to everyone what happens in Russia. We are afraid of everything. We are afraid of the past, we are afraid of the present, we are afraid of the future.”

Communism in Russia

1917-1922 Communism in Russia begins with the Revolution in 1917, triggered by the Bolsheviks seizing power of the country. Founded by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks were an ideologically Marxist party. Lenin dies in 1924 at age 53.

1918 Czar Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, their five children, and their servants were brutally murdered by the Bolsheviks.

1924-1953 Dictator Joseph Stalin transforms the Soviet Union from a peasant society into an industrial and military superpower until his death in 1953. However, he rules by terror, eliminating anyone who might oppose him.

1939-1945 WWII begins when Germany invades Poland and ends when Germany and Japan surrender.

1945-1947 The cold war begins. United States President Harry S. Truman's doctrine in 1947 implements policy that the US support countries or peoples threatened by Soviet forces or Communist insurrection.

1985-1991 Mikhail Gorbachev rises to power in the Soviet Union and introduces “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (restructuring). Once people could speak freely, they wanted democracy, national independence, and an end to one party rule.

1989-1991 The cold war ends and Communist regimes collapse across Eastern Europe.



The Romanov Empire

For years, widespread resentment had been growing in the Russian Empire over the Romanov dynasty's power, which had gone nearly unchecked for about three centuries. Nicholas II's father, Alexander III, had been an especially strict leader and thought his son would follow in his footsteps. In reality, Nicholas II had no interest in ruling an empire, but he begrudgingly accepted his role and soon became the subject of public contempt. But Nicholas II never expected to find himself in the midst of a historical event like the Russian Revolution, which would lead to the overthrow of the Romanov family's power and, eventually, their bloody deaths. ■

The Three Names of St. Petersburg

1703 Tsar Peter the Great founded the port city of St. Petersburg, Russia, reshaping it from marshy floodplains to imperial grandeur.

1914 St. Petersburg was renamed “Petrograd” to make it sound less German.

1924 Petrograd was renamed “Leningrad” to honour the life and death of the founding leader of the Soviet Union.

1991 The city's name returned to St. Petersburg after the fall of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).

Dmitri Shostakovich, Walking a Political Tightrope Maryellen Pankratz, Editor

The second of three children, Dmitri Shostakovich was born in Russia on September 25, 1906 and raised in St. Petersburg, a city that would play a defining role in his life and music. His father was an engineer at the city's Bureau of Weights and Measures and both parents had roots in Siberia. At the age of nine, he started taking piano lessons from his mother, a professional pianist. He showed impressive talent. From memory, he was often able to play a piece that she had played for him during the previous lesson.

At age 13, he was enrolled at the Conservatory in Petrograd (St. Petersburg). He was mentored by the Headmaster, who ensured that Dmitri had opportunities to compose and perform. During school, Dmitri helped make ends meet by working as a pianist in a cinema. He graduated in 1925 with his First Symphony in F Minor written as his graduation composition. At age 19 he was already world-famous, as it's triumphant premiere was followed by performances in Europe and the USA. Another requirement for graduation at the time was a compulsory exam on Marxist theory, a sign of the times and a taste of what it meant to be an artist in the USSR.

For the remainder of the 1920s and early 1930s, he mainly composed music for the stage and for film. Throughout his life, he composed scores for more than 30 films. Dmitri married his first wife, Nina Varzar in 1932. This initially lasted just three years, although they remarried when she became pregnant. Their first child, Galina would go on to become a noted pianist and biologist. The couple then had a second child, Maxim, in 1938. Similarly, Maxim would retain the family's musical legacy and became a famous conductor and pianist.

Dmitri's four-act opera *Lady Macbeth* was initially praised, but the tide soon turned against him. At the 1934 premiere in Moscow, Joseph Stalin walked out before the final act. When Dmitri came onstage to take his bows, audiences noted that he was "white as a sheet." After that, he faced public condemnation and lived in constant fear for his life and freedom. The 1930s was a period when the Soviet regime began to turn its strict censorship towards the arts, when in a 1932 decree, the state asserted control of all artistic output in the USSR. Innovation, in particular, was hunted down and repressed. Dmitri eventually fell victim to this persecution. Under Stalin's oppressive and authoritarian regime, loss of work and privileges like owning a car were the least-worst consequences of failing to please; imprisonment and execution were distinct possibilities for non-conforming artists.

The years 1936 to 1938 saw a political purge launched by Stalin to remove anyone suspected of being disloyal to him and his rule. During the persecution, many of Dmitri's family and friends suffered the most. He watched with trepidation as friends and colleagues disappeared and were killed, seemingly at random. His sister and brother-in-law were arrested and imprisoned, his mother-in-law was dispatched to a labour camp. Another friend, a writer, spent 20 years in the gulag. Two close friends were executed, and two colleagues were executed. Around the country, an estimated 600,000 people were killed during the purge, Writers, intellectuals, and artists were heavily targeted during this time. Dmitri was so afraid for his life that he kept a packed briefcase near his front door, in case he ever needed to escape. Despite this censorship and oppression, he continued to write music and he was able to keep a low profile by composing film music.

Near the end of 1937, his situation changed for the better. Dmitri began to teach composition at the Leningrad Conservatory, which provided some much-needed financial security. The success of his "Fifth Symphony" around this time put him in good standing once again. It premiered in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), bringing many audience members to tears.

When German leader Adolf Hitler invaded the USSR in 1941, Dmitri became a volunteer for the Leningrad Conservatory's firefighter brigade. He was charged with extinguishing incendiary shells that might land on the roof of the Conservatory. He delivered a live radio transmission to the Soviet people with the sounds of war audible around him, stating "I am speaking to you at a moment when the enemy is at our gates..." announcing in this



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2026/27 Season concerts
Kensington Sinfonia

October 4/26: **Cultural Renaissance** - music of Bell, Shaw, Esmail and Sohy. With special guest Jeremy Brown (sax) - 3pm, St. Stephen's Anglican.

February 7/27: **Of Youth and Beauty** - music of Piazzolla, Mozetich, Carreño and Wijeratne. With special guest Danielle Green (violin) - 3pm, St. Stephen's Anglican

May 9/27 - **Chaos and Creation** - music of Lu, Flores, Day Rider, Puccini and Estacio. With special guest Derek Chu (piano) - 3pm, St. Stephen's Anglican

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famous broadcast that his Seventh Symphony known as Leningrad was underway. It was this piece which led him to become an important Soviet cultural figure and he even graced the cover of Time magazine. As a result of his reinstated status, he and his family were ultimately evacuated from the horrific Nazi siege of the city that lasted until early 1944.

In 1954, Dmitri's wife Nina was admitted to the hospital where a tumour was discovered in her colon. She emerged from surgery in a coma and never woke up. He married his second wife, Margarita Kainova two years later. Margarita worked as an activist for a Communist youth league. The couple were not happy together, and divorced five years later. His third and final marriage to Irina Supinskaya in 1962 was it seems, a happy one.

Dmitri Shostakovich died at age 68 in Moscow's Central Clinical Hospital on August 9, 1975. His death is variously attributed to lung cancer or heart failure. He was a composer of operas, ballets, concertos, string quartets, and 15 symphonies. His life was essentially a prolonged, terrifying high-stakes game of survival, which resulted in some of the most emotionally raw music of the 20th century. ■

SOURCES: <https://interlude.hk>
<https://www.classical-music.com>
<https://www.worldhistory.org>

<https://historysphere.com>
<https://allthatsinteresting.com>
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Developing Keyboard Skills Through Composition Michalis Andronikou, Member

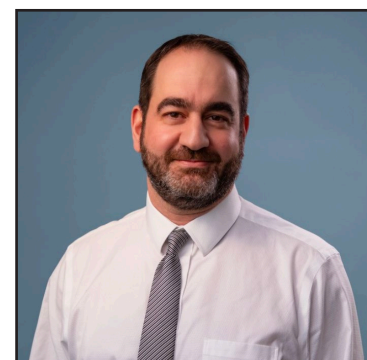
I'm delighted to share the news of the upcoming publication of a book I co-authored with Katrina Estok. The project grew out of a real need I observed among some of my university students who were not pianists and therefore struggled even with the simple task of placing their hands on the keyboard.

Over time, I developed the idea of a self-study method that combines composition, improvisation, and piano pedagogy. I then invited Katrina to help shape and expand the piano pedagogy component. The result is a collection of twenty piano dances from around the world that I composed, accompanied by composition and improvisation suggestions, as well as pedagogical guidance designed to support university students—or anyone interested in learning the basics of piano, composition, and improvisation—while “traveling” through the diverse cultures that inspired these pieces.

I have no doubt that this book will bring meaningful results to those who use it. I have already tried the method with some of my students, and the outcomes have been truly remarkable. The YouTube link below features performances of the pieces included in the book. ■

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQtKPA3W4JU>

[Developing Keyboard Skills Through Composition Inspired by Dances from Around the World](#)



Michalis Andronikou, PhD

Endowment Society of the Calgary Registered Music Teachers

2026 CREATIVE STORY COMPETITION WINNERS

Read all the winners' stories on pages 15 to 23!

Elementary Age Group

Intermediate Age Group

Senior Age Group

First Place

Katie Hughes

Student of Lorne Pankratz

Linnea Sodderberg

Student of Leila Noonan

Nathaniel Chiang

Student of Leila Noonan

Second Place

Sofia Bellon-Asuncion

Student of Esther Bing

Matthew Henninger

Student of Rhona-Mae Arca

Olivia Tran

Student of Leila Noonan

Third Place

Gabriel Kudding

Student of Leila Noonan

Ray Lu

Student of Colleen Athparia

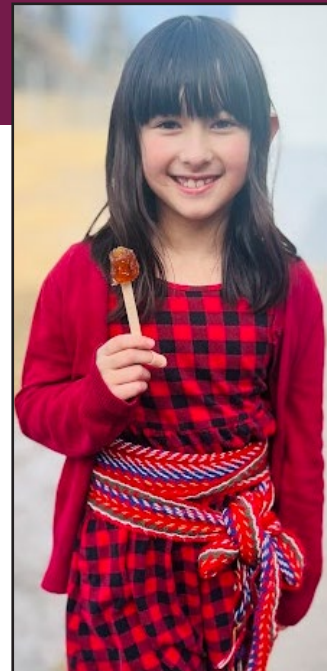
Honourable Mention

Jaylyn Ji

Student of Leila Noonan

Elias Guenette

Student of Nathene Arthur



The Looking Glass River, by Katie Hughes

First Place, Elementary Category

Once upon a time, there was a little fish named Katie, who lived in a beautiful river that looked like glass. One day Katie wanted to swim up the river to see her friends, but then she saw a beaver named Randall Fabre. Randall had lived on the river for many, many years and he named the river the Looking Glass River. Randall was building a dam, so the river was blocked! Katie could not see her friends! She was so sad. Katie thought she would have to fight Randall the beaver, and then break the dam and then she could see her friends. But then on the side of the river Katie met a turtle named Henry. Katie told Henry about her problem, but Henry could not understand as he had very small ears. Katie then explained her problem in a loud and *forte* voice. Henry said, instead of fighting the beaver, why don't you ask him nicely if he can build the dam somewhere else? Katie then swam to Randall and asked him politely if he could build his dam somewhere else. Randall said Oh I'm so sorry! I didn't know that I blocked you from seeing your friends. I will move my dam for you! Katie made a *staccato* laugh and she was so happy. Then all the animals lived happily ever after. The end. ■

Katie is 8 years old and in Grade 3 at a French Immersion school. Katie enjoys playing the piano, figure skating and loves reading Harry Potter books.



Sofia is a happy and creative Grade 3 student who is currently studying Level 3 piano. She is very friendly and loves expressing her thoughts freely in everything she does.

She enjoys arts and crafts, drawing, and making fun, kid-friendly educational videos and posts on her YouTube channel. She also loves swimming and can stay in the water for a very long time!

She has received Honours with Distinction in her Level 2 piano exam and performed at the 2026 OSR, where she received a scholarship award. She also won 2nd place in the ARMTA poster competition last year.

At home, she loves spending time with her favorite bunny stuffed animal, who is always nearby. She lives with her mom and grandma and enjoys going on fun trips and adventures with her family. When she grows up, Sofia dreams of opening her very own café where she can sell her baked cookies and make people smile.

The Magical Dancing Piano by Sofia Bellon-Asuncion

Second Place, Elementary Category

One school morning, our teacher decided that we would go to a legendary music museum. Our teacher also added that we would be in groups, and I am super excited! When we got there my group and I started looking for a piano. We started searching every nook and cranny, until we found a beautiful grand piano, free for playing. I sat on the chair and decided to play Ragtime Cha-Cha by Melody Bober. I imagined the melody in my head, thinking of every note before I started. After I get ready to play, with my hands ready on the keys and a long deep breath, I play the first note, and the piano starts to glow. Suddenly every time I play a note, there are lots of colorful and joyful lights in every place! Instruments start playing around me too! The drums made loud and strong bangs that could be heard. The cellos played in the background participating and the trumpets were playing non-stop! My group was astonished by the magical sight happening in front of them. While our teacher had her jaw dropped, she was surprised, and happy too. My whole class started dancing to the catchy beat of the song. When playing, I wanted to stop, so I let go. But then the piano started

playing by itself. I was nothing but amazed by the sight. I could hear all sorts of sounds, like dynamics and staccatos! Everything was magical! But when the song ended, everything went back to normal! Instruments stood still, lights stopping. Everything turned back to how it was before. Our class wanted to stay a little

longer hoping the magic would happen again. And from that day on, I never forgot that every song has something magical hidden inside it, and that when I play music on the piano, I can bring a whole world to life. ■

Dog Chase, by Gabriel Kudding

Third Place, Elementary Category



Gabriel is a 7 year old boy who loves all things music. This is his 3rd year taking piano and he is about to take his level 2 RCM exam. He also recently also started playing drums! He is in grade 1 and has enjoyed learning to write his own stories this year. Gabriel is a great friend and brother, always wanting to include everyone in his at home band concerts he puts on!

Once upon a time there were these boys that went to the park one day and they played on the slides, the teeter-totter and played on the monkey bars until...

"ruf ruf" said the dog very happily.

"Aaaaaaaa" screamed Gabe, Jack, Spen, Nick, and Flex. They all ran as fast as their legs could carry them but the dog was at their heels. The dogs bark crescendoes more and more until it was as loud as it could be.

"We need to run faster!" said the boys

"Got to go to my house" Nick said.

"See you later" said Spen as he ran out of breath to his house.

"Same" said the others, scared.

The next day Gabe, Jack, Spen, Nick, and Flex went back to the park and they thought that the dog wasn't there but then came the dog charging right at them again.

"Here we go again, quick climb up the slide!" Jack shouted out.

They all climbed up the slide and the dog was trying to get up too, but the dog couldn't. The dog began to sit quietly. They all decided to go down the slide and try to pet the dog. They pet the dog very softly. They were happy that they found a new friend. Flex went to all of their houses and invited their families to a picnic with lots of food to eat. They ate and ate with the dog until their tummies were full. The kids were all playing fetch and the dogs jumps were staccato. The parents ate, turned on 4th Street Rag and danced. Gabe talked with his friends about naming the dog.

"I think we should name the dog Daniel Alexander" said Gabe happily.

"That's a good name Gabe" they all said at the same time. ■

A Princess Dancing, by Jaylyn Ji

Honourary Mention, Elementary Category

Once upon a time there was a little princess who lived in a big palace. It was a great place because she had a view of the village. Her name was Rosey Pinks, and she had a great talent for dancing.

One day, she got up early and happily in the morning getting ready for a ball. She dressed in her favorite clothes and shoes. Then she cleaned her teeth as shiny as she could. She started practicing her dance called Malaguena until she heard staccato tick tick tick that meant it was time for the ball!! She ran as fast as she could and tried not to be late for the ball. She saw her dancing partner Pablo de Sarasate waiting for her. That's when she realized she was ten minutes late. She asked Pablo de Sarasate to forgive her and he said of course. That is when they started to dance. Rosey felt thankful, they still had time to dance. Rosey heard the crowds of the audience cheering fortissimo loud!!!! Rosy danced and danced and danced until she heard tick tick tick. In fact, it was so loud and all the audience ran away!!

Jaylyn is a well-rounded and curious young girl with a love for music, movement, and exploration. Alongside her piano studies, she enjoys a wide range of activities including tennis, indoor climbing, figure skating, and swimming. She brings the same energy and creativity to her music as she does to her many interests. A passionate world traveler, Jaylyn has already visited close to 20 countries, gaining inspiration from different cultures and experiences along the way. Her openness, curiosity, and adventurous spirit shape both her playing and her way of expressing emotion.



That must have meant it was time for Rosy to go home! She gave Pablo de Sarasate a big hug and said bye to him. Then she went home and ate dinner and dressed into her pajamas. Once again she brushed her teeth nice and clean. She tucked herself in the nice and warm blanket and went to sleep. ■

The Music Mystery, by Linnea Soderberg

First Place, Intermediate Category

Linnea is 11 years old from Calgary, Alberta. She is currently in grade 6 and enjoys music, Mandarin, and reading. Her favorite animal is the snow leopard. Linnea has been playing the piano for 5 years.

It is a dark and stormy night as I tiptoe down the creaky basement stairs. I reach the bottom step and see a stack of old boxes that I have been planning to sort through. All of a sudden, I hear a loud bang and then music starts playing. My hands start shaking and my heart beats faster as I slowly move forward. The sound is coming from a nearby room that looks dark and creepy. I am typically never brave enough to explore something this scary, but the music draws me in. I grab the doorknob with a nervous hand and slowly turn it. Inside the room there is a small brown cardboard box, and I open it to find a music box. Confused, I open the music box and I see a small golden label that says Deux Rigaudons. I realize that must be the name of the piece it plays. I also see a tiny pink ballerina in the middle of the music box that starts spinning and twirling as the music plays on. Soon I close my eyes and am lulled to sleep by a dull humming sound.

When I open my eyes, the music is much louder and I am in a completely different room. The new room is dark with dusty paintings on the walls and instruments in a corner. I frantically try to find my way out of the room when I realize I am wearing something different. I grab for the door, push my way out, and gasp. I am wearing a pink puffy dress with white decorative pearls on the front and a train on the back. I look around the room and see a lot of people wearing bright colourful outfits and dancing to the music. The dancing looks like so much fun so I decide to join in and worry about how I got to this place later. As I dance around the room, I notice that someone is locking the door to the room I came out of. I am about to rush over and tell them not to lock it because it's my only way home, when things suddenly turn chaotic.

I realize that the music playing in the room is Deux Rigaudons. There are two men arguing with each other and claiming that they are the true composers of the piece. The strange thing is that the two men look exactly the same. I rush over and people are asking if anyone can figure out who the real composer is. I get an idea

and volunteer to figure it out. I say that I will ask four questions and if I can identify the true composer then I will get the key to the room I came out of. Everyone agrees. Just then a short lady with a bright yellow dress walks past me and silently hands me a sheet of paper with facts about Jean-Philippe Rameau who is the composer of Deux Rigaudons. I ask the two men their first question. "What is your name?" The two men say, "Jean-Philippe Rameau" in unison. Even their voices sound the same. I move on to the second question. "What year were you born?" I ask. Once again, they say in unison, "1683". I start to worry and my voice comes out ansioso, tight with nerves. "What instrument were you taught to play before you could read or write?" They both answer "harpsichord" but one of the men says it slightly later than the other. I still cannot figure out who is the true composer, so I move on to my last question. My hands are shaking and I am fidgeting with my sleeve, scared because if I cannot figure it out, I will have to stay in this place forever. I ask my last question. "What subjects did you struggle with when you were young?" This time I ask each of the men separately. One of them says confidently, "spelling and writing". The other one says, "Do I have to answer, or can I answer a different question?" I firmly tell him to answer this one and he finally also says, "spelling and writing". I tell the crowd that I have my answer. I tell them that even though the first person got the question right, he answered too confidently and Jean-Philippe Rameau would have been embarrassed, so he is the fake. The other man did seem to be embarrassed by the question and so he must be the real Jean-Philippe Rameau. Everyone starts cheering and the lady in the yellow dress hands me the key to the locked room. Before I leave, I dance with a gioioso spirit. I have so much fun.

Finally, I use the key to unlock the door to the secret room. I step through and I am back in my basement. I sit down and think about everything that just happened. I wonder if it was all just a dream. Then I see that I am still wearing my beautiful pink puffy dress. It was not a dream after all. ■

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The Moon is Gone, by Matthew Henninger

Second Place, Intermediate Category

Once there was a little land called maplespire. It was a beautiful land with rolling hills and gentle streams and one town. The town was in the middle of the land and in the middle of the town was a tall spire, a spire as tall as a maple tree. That is where the land got its name, Maplespire. In this land lived a rat whose name was Rattholemew the 56th (Theo for short).

Theo was unhappy. Everywhere he went, the other creatures gave him dirty looks. They followed him and watched him. Theo was not a bad rat but there were many rumors about rats like "oh I heard that they carry plagues with them" and "I heard they're a sign of pestilence." Whatever the rumors said, nobody trusted rats. They didn't even want to be around them because a few rats had stolen from the rich and from the graves of old kings. Theo knew that this was true but really, it was only a few rats spoiling it for all the rest. Most rats were quite respectable actually.

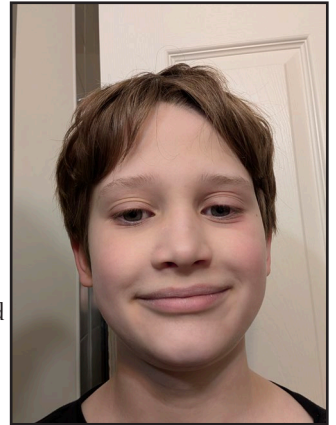
Rats liked the countryside. They lived and worked on the land and to Theo, they were dull and boring. If you knew one rat, you knew them all and Theo knew plenty of rats. He also knew all their stories. Theo also had a gift. A gift that very few rats had. None that Theo knew of for sure. Theo could do magic. Theo longed to know other animals and find other creatures with magic. What stories did they tell? How did they use their magic? He wanted to know what they knew. That's why he moved to town but to his dismay, he found that the town people only knew the bad rats

I am Matthew and I am 10, almost 11. I am a student of Ms. Rhona Mae. I am trying to make games on scratch and roblox studio.

and they weren't interested in knowing Theo. He also had no luck finding other creatures who did magic. Theo was lonely.

One night, after a very hard day he decided that he would take revenge on the creatures of Maplespire. He climbed to the top of the spire and he cast a spell that made the moon disappear leaving all the town creatures in darkness unable to see anything. The town creatures started to sing a tune with a slow mournful tempo. At first it was so quiet, it could have been the wind but soon it grew into a beautiful bel canto.

As Theo listened, he felt bad. What had he done? He loved the moon. How was he going to get it back? He started to sing along with the song of the town creatures. His tune soon turned into a counter melody. The harmony wove around the song. Theo could feel magic growing as the song continued. The dark night pulsed with magic. The song grew louder and louder. A final crescendo swelled and magic burst out of Theo and shot straight into the air. The moon burst into sight full and brighter than Theo had ever seen before. Theo knew that it wasn't just his magic that brought the moon back. There must be others. He would try again. ■



Ready, Set, Go!, by Ray Lu

Third Place, Intermediate Category

The starting buzzer sounded, sending the four teams racing down the track. They leaned over the brightly-coloured hurdles, putting their all into the race. The spacious stadium was crowded with supporters, the center lined with eight rows of maroon track. The ceiling was lined with bright long lights, leaving no dark spots. Leo steadied himself, preparing for his teammates to hand him the baton. His fellow teammates executed each jump with flawless precision, pulling ahead of their red-clad foes. He jolted away from watching the race, steeling himself, his heart beating a short, jumpy staccato rhythm. He quickly snatched the baton,

almost tripping from the hurried action. After nervously lurching forward, he leaped with all his might, his legs bending into a lunge. Much to his surprise, the tip of his blue, specialized running shoe clipped against the block, and he tumbled to the floor. His fall cost his team the victory as the other runners breezed past him.

After the grim competition, he sat sullenly in the spacious locker room, ignoring his teammates' scornful looks. He thought back to their training sessions, him lazing around and goofing off while the others did drills. Not paying attention to his coaches' tips and corrections. Now, he could see the dull consequences of his actions. From then on, he vowed to work harder and focus on everything he did. He thought of learning Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum by Debussy on the piano, and how he had to focus and practice often to learn and memorize it. Leo knew that to get similar success in hurdles, and to truly be able to run "Allegro" like his coach always told him to do, he would have to work his hardest every practice, using all his energy, no matter how tired he was.

Two weeks later, he emerged from the changing room sweating and out of breath. Even though his muscles ached and his heart pounded, he felt satisfied and proud of himself. He had improved significantly over the past two weeks, correcting all of his small mistakes. By following his coaches' tips and instructions, he managed to get higher records each practice, much to the amazement of his teammates. He could feel how much stronger he was, and knew he was prepared for the next race as his heart beat with a stately, steady, strong marcato. ■



Ray Lu is a Grade 6 student who likes science and math. He enjoys playing sports such as badminton and volleyball, and has won awards for martial arts at various competitions.

Ray plays the piano and trombone in his school band. He reads often in his free time and his favourite books include the Arc of a Scythe series.

Blood Moon, by Elias Guenette

Honourable Mention, Intermediate Category

Cedar, sleepily watched the hunting patrols leave. Cedar is a big bernese mountain dog and is the leader of the Forest Tribe who lives in a large cave. The cave is in the middle of an immense forest filled with prey, next to a river. He finished his squirrel and walked back to his den in a small side cave. Once he entered his nest he slipped into sleep while hearing the wind of fall whisper through the trees. "Winter will be here soon" he thought as everything went dark.

"Filthy robbers!" yelled a dog furiously, waking Cedar up. Cedar opened his eyes and slowly got up, when he heard all the noise outside he ran out to the main cave hoping that no one attacked. "Enough!" he yelled, when it was quiet he continued "What's happening?" Randall Faber, a large german shepherd who led a border patrol that morning said, "We found Moor Tribe scent on our territory, we also found feathers and bird blood mixed in!" Yowls of rage chorused through the clearing, one voice rose over the others, "Let's find a patrol and attack them as a warning, that should teach them a lesson!"

"Silence" yelled Cedar, when the voices stopped he continued in a calmer voice "There will be no blood spilled over this for now, tonight is the night of a gathering with all the tribes. We will send a warning." Murmurs of disapproval spread through the Tribe, though they all continued with their day. At sunset, Cedar rounded up his tribemates. They crossed the river by the tree bridge and reached the clearing with the huge oak tree trunk. The Mountain Tribe had already arrived and so had the Moor Tribe. Once Cedar clawed his way onto the trunk the gathering commenced. The



Elias Guenette is 11 years old and is from Calgary, Alberta. Elias has been playing piano since kindergarten. He also enjoys playing hockey, football, and video games with his brother. He has a large Bernese Mountain dog cross, which inspired the main character of this story, as well as his appreciation for the Warrior books.

Moor Tribe leader, Moon, climbed on the trunk. Boulder, the Mountain Tribe leader, said his part on how his tribe is doing. After him, Moon spoke and said that the prey was running well and everything was fine.

"Fox dung," Cedar thought angrily, "I can see how skinny you are and you're stealing from us!" "Prey is running well in our territory too," Cedar started, "but there are prey stealers!" The crowd gasped. Cedar said that his patrols found bird blood and Moor scent all over their territory. And if it doesn't stop there will be consequences. Moon yelled, "My tribe would never do such a thing, ever, we're a proud tribe!" The Moor and Forest dogs in the crowd were growling at each other and spitting insults "Enough!" yelled Bolder, "This gathering is OVER!"

Two days after the gathering, at sunset the Forest Tribe waited impatiently for the border patrol to return. Leaf, one of the fastest warriors, burst through the entrance yelling, "The Moor Tribe is attacking near the border at the bottom of our territory!" Cedar jumped up to his feet and took the warriors to go battle. As they got closer the yowls of battle crescendoed louder. He burst through the bushes and saw Randall Faber taking on two Moor warriors, he leaped onto one of them scratching his face. The battle raged on for several minutes. Suddenly the moon poked out of a cloud, it was blood red. Everyone paused fighting and the Forest Tribe backed into the trees worried that it was a sign from their ancestors to stop fighting, while the Moor Tribe raced back to their territory.

In truth, it was a Lunar Eclipse or blood moon, a natural event and Cedar was the only one who knew that. As the patrol returned, he climbed up the high rock to speak to his tribe. He explained that it was natural and the Tribe gasped in surprise then Randall spoke up "We should attack them again." Yowls of approval chorused through the cave, once the crowd silenced Cedar spoke "We will if the moor dogs attack again." After one fortnight the moor dogs never stole again and there was peace in the tribes for a while. ■

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Where the Current Carries, by Nathaniel Chiang

First Place, Senior Category

Beneath the surface of the ocean, far from the boisterous world above, lay a quiet twilight zone. A place so still you could almost hear the water breathe, as the last rays of sunlight shimmered and drifted through the depths. In the distance, three elongated figures—formed of flowing, kelp-like projections—curled around one another. Layers of muted browns and greens masked their presence as they glided effortlessly through the water. They moved in perfect harmony, each leaf-like extension coasting and circling with quiet precision. Among them was one smaller figure, with shorter, seaweed-like limbs, struggling to keep pace with the swift, fluid motions of the others.

“Why are you so slow? You’re going to make us late!” Lira, the largest and most elegant of the three, called sharply. “It’s not my fault I have these short, useless fins,” Ryu snapped back, his movements uneven as he drifted behind. “Don’t be so harsh on him,” Elaris said, glancing back briefly. Before Ryu could respond, a sudden rush of water surged past them, leaving a trail of bubbles in its wake. The force of the current propelled Ryu, dragging him deeper into the ocean. “Quick—the currents are finally here. We need to leave now!” Lira urged. “But what about Ryu? He can’t miss the crowning,” Elaris said, hesitating. “It doesn’t matter. He’s perfectly capable of catching the current and arriving on his own.” “He can barely swim in still water—what makes you think he’ll manage this?” “He is not our responsibility. It’s time he learned to take care of himself!” Lira snapped. Elaris hesitated for a moment, then exhaled softly, turning away. The two of them dove headfirst into the fast-moving current, their bodies blending seamlessly with the rushing water.

Left behind, Ryu tumbled and spun, the force of the current tossing him weightlessly. At last, he collided with the rough, grainy ocean floor, his body halted against a large boulder. For a moment, everything was still. Slowly, he steadied himself, adjusting to the pull of the water. Ryu lifted his head, gazing upward at the fading stream as his friends disappeared into the distance, moving with effortless grace.

“I hate these fins!” Ryu snapped, thrashing his limb in frustration, as if he could shake them off. Slowly regaining his composure, he



My name is Nathaniel Chiang. I am a Grade 12 student completing my final year of high school and am currently at Level 8 in my piano studies. I have been playing the piano since I was six years old, and it has remained one of my most meaningful hobbies. Over the years, I have developed a strong appreciation for music, particularly through learning and performing recognizable pieces from movies, television shows, and popular music. Piano has allowed me to express my creativity and continues to be an important part of who I am.

drifted toward the edge of the current. Even from a short distance away, he could feel its strength—the water pulling, urging, alive with motion. Ryu hesitated, watching in awe. He knew that if he entered the stream, he would be swept away in an instant. “Lira and Elaris wouldn’t even help me if they were given a thousand clams,” he muttered, pacing restlessly through the water as he weighed his next move. As he stared into the rising clusters of bubbles, a faint orange glow began to spread through the depths. Ryu turned sharply, his eyes widening. “The sun’s setting... the ceremony’s going to start soon.” Turning back toward the stream, Ryu watched it intensely, his mind racing with what to do next. “I can’t miss the crowning. Who’s going to be the next leader?” His heart pounded.

Then, without giving himself time to hesitate, he dove headfirst into the rushing current. As expected, Ryu was immediately swept away, his body tumbling through the water—somersaulting, limbs



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flailing uncontrollably. In a desperate attempt to steady himself, he spread his fins, but instead of helping, they sent him spinning further out of control. He fought against the current with all his strength, but no matter how hard he tried, nothing responded the way he wanted. The water refused to obey him. Frustration surged through him as he imagined the other sea dragons watching—laughing at his struggle. Anger gave way to something deeper—an aching desire to be seen as worthy.

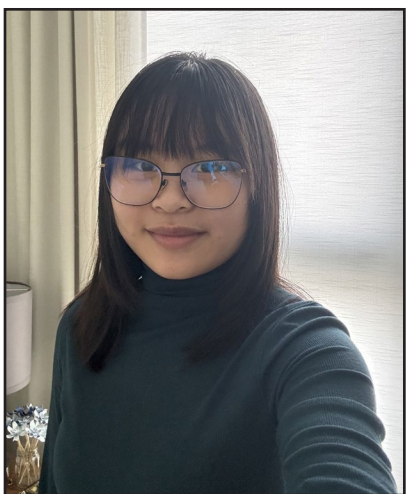
Closing his eyes, Ryu imagined himself moving with ease, gliding through the water, twisting and turning just as he had always dreamed. And for a moment, he was still. The current no longer fought him. Instead, it wrapped around him like a gentle embrace. The rushing noise softened, fading into a quiet hush. His body grew lighter, no longer rigid, but loose—aligned with the flow of the water. In the midst of it all, something shifted. Beneath his delicate fins, a faint blue glow began to emerge. At first, it flickered—soft and uncertain—before crescendoing to form fragile extensions. One by one, new leaf-like limbs unfurled from his body, flowing freely around him in shades of blue and green. They moved with the current, not against it, catching the water like drifting seaweed. Ryu's body followed, no longer rigid or frantic, but smooth—controlled. His eyes snapped open. "What's happening?" Ryu gasped, his voice filled with astonishment. Hesitantly, he shifted his body, and the current responded. He didn't spin. He glided. Now moving almost legato, Ryu flowed with the stream, his glowing fins carrying him effortlessly through the water—far beyond anything he had ever imagined.

The current slowly widened, opening into a vast clearing bathed in the fading gold of the setting sun. Dozens of sea dragons circled slowly, their movements graceful and deliberate as the ceremony unfolded. At the center stood an elder, his long, flowing limbs drifting like ancient kelp in still water. The ocean itself seemed to quiet in his presence. "For generations," The general of the sea dragons began, his voice steady and low, "we have followed the current, guided by strength, by unity, and by grace." The

surrounding dragons stilled, their attention fixed upon him.

"There are those who speak of a leader unlike any before—one who does not fight the current, but becomes one with it. One whose form reflects the very rhythm of the sea." A murmur rippled softly through the gathering. "It has long been spoken in prophecy that, within our Kingdom, the greatest leaders are radiant enough to light even the darkest depths. Some say this truth is reflected in the ancient composition Leafy Sea Dragon, written by Ina Dykstra, said to echo the rhythm of the ocean itself. Yet such a being has never been seen." The water fell silent once more. "Tonight, we gather to select the next leader—one who will guide our kingdom through both our highest tides and our lowest depths. A leader of great integrity and strength." Whispers spread through the crowd as the sea dragons exchanged glances, each forming their own quiet predictions. Lira, I'm getting worried. The ceremony's already started, and Ryu's still not here," Elaris said softly. "Relax, Elaris. He'll come eventually—and if he doesn't, maybe it's a sign he was *never enough*," Lira replied coolly.

From the edge of the gathering, an elder figure approached, her movements slow yet deliberate, carrying the weight of experience and quiet authority. "Lady Zerithra," the general announced, bowing his head slightly, "will do us the honour of selecting our next leader." Lifting her gaze toward the crowd, Lady Zerithra observed the sea dragons in silence, her expression unreadable. One by one, she studied each individual, weighing their worthiness for leadership. As her gaze drifted across the gathering, it lingered—pulled gently toward a faint, distant glow. Soft at first. Flickering and growing brighter. Heads turned. Movements slowed. From the far edge of the current, a figure emerged—gliding, not struggling. Ryu. His luminous, leaf-like fins drifted around him, catching the current with effortless precision. Each movement was smooth, controlled, and graceful. He did not rush. He simply flowed forward, carried by the ocean itself. And for the first time, every eye was on *him*. ■



A Cheerful Catastrophe, by Olivia Tran

Second Place, Senior Category

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The hands of the glossy sage clock hovered over the number twelve, in perfect unison. *It's 12 o'clock already?! Will I be able to finish?* My hand moves faster, ending with one final stroke of indigo shadow that makes the image pop.

I step back to absorb the scene. It showcases an pristine, ivory duck with water drops falling off its shaking, outstretched wings. His marigold coloured beak opened as if he was laughing. The duck stands in a deserted street located beside a small lake. The sunshine shone down on him, creating a halo effect. Just the view of it made one feel like they were there, playing in the water, smiling.

The painting is the final piece for the biggest art exhibition in the city. It is where all the prestigious art critics and famous artists gather. Not to mention my big debut in this industry, I have to make a good impression.

I am Olivia Tran and in high school. I've been taking piano and theory lessons with Leila Noonan and Luke Neilson for 5 years, but have been playing piano for a long time. I enjoy playing classical music and other interesting songs that I find. My hobbies outside of piano include art and baking.

Glancing at the time I sigh in relief, just enough time to let the water colour dry. The relief is short-lived as I'm interrupted by the buzzing of my phone. It's my friend, Sarah. Tapping accept, I ask, "What's up?"

"Hey Alyssa! So, about driving you..." she begins. "I've been pulled into a last minute meeting that I can't cancel! Sorry! I'll show up as soon as I finish!"

"Umm, ya! Of course, don't worry!", the words come out before I fully process the situation. Beeeeep. Sarah hung up as abruptly as she called. I pause for a moment as I comprehend what just happened. Then I rush grabbing everything scattered across the room that seems useful and stuff it into a tote bag splattered with so much paint that the original colour is unrecognizable. Finally snatching the freshly painted canvas as I fly out the front door.

Running though the streets at full speed, I hop onto the train, seconds before it leaves the station. Taking a moment to catch my breath I put on my AirPods and start the focus playlist. "Sonatina in A Minor" by Georg Anton Benda begins to play in my ear and I get comfortable for the long train ride.

"Arriving at Kensington." The intercom announces. I brace myself, holding the hanging handle with one hand and the canvas with the other, as the train screeches to a stop. It's been 5 stops since my neighbourhood and I've finally entered downtown. The doors spring open, a rush of people crowd into the cart, going somewhere, presumably for their lunch hour. An elderly man with his thermos full of steaming coffee stands in front of me, rubbing up against the watercolour. I adjust my body and use it as a shield to protect the goods in my arms. *Ugh. Just four more stations, just survive four more stations!*

As I lose myself in the music a tiny child wearing a baby pink tutu dress and matching purse squeezes through the gaps, stopping right beside me. Glancing at her for a second I quickly scan for her parents. Letting out a sigh of relief when I notice them a meter away and keeping an eye on her.

"Hiiii!", she squeaks. "My name is Wendy! Whatcha holding?" Her tiny eyes sparkling with life and curiosity. I spin the canvas around carefully to ensure it doesn't whack any bystanders, unable to turn her down.

"Hello Wendy! I'm Alyssa! How do you like my painting?", I ask.

She squeals loudly, "It's so cute!!!". The old man startled from the sudden noise and threw his thermos straight on to my painting. If I was not in a panic I would've laughed at the comical toss of the cup and at the shocked face of every passenger that witnessed. Unfortunately for me, I had to rush straight to the painting, trying to dab as much off using the hem of my white maxi-skirt.

"Arriving at Kingston." Plays over the crescendoing noise of voices. *What?! It's already my stop? Oh no!* I quickly mumble an excuse to the concerned man and Wendy before scrambling out into the station. It was a ten minute walk, weaving through the mixture of shining skyscrapers and open parks full of blooming flowers. The busy streets are crowded with friends chatting with each other over coffee and joggers taking their variety of dogs



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out for fresh air. The peaceful atmosphere almost made me forget my day's troubles for a moment. At least until the art gallery came into view. The worn columns and high arches gave it a sophisticated ambience, while the crimson banners advertised the event taking place soon. The extravagance of it all makes me feel excited and I find a tacet corner to fix my duck.

I dig through my tote, laying all the materials I brought with me in front of the coffee splattered painting. One paint brush, a mini palate, and tubes of phthalo blue, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, and lemon yellow. Unscrewing the lid of my bottle, I fill it up with water and dip my brush in. My hands move automatically letting the pigment flow across the canvas. The seemingly random bursts of colour swirled around, taking shape.

The original parts of the painting shone through, cheerful, as if a sunny day was captured in the paint. Splashed on top of it was the coffee stain, inside of it was the same scene of a duck but with a vintage filter over it. Like two identical photos from 50 years ago and now were expertly woven together, joining two worlds into one.

I hold up my masterpiece. It might even be better than before. I cradle it as if it were fragile glass as I head to my station. I was so focused earlier that I wasn't aware I was running out of time, not until I entered the gallery. There was an almost vibrant air as the employees and artists run around, trying to finish getting everything ready before the crowds enter.

"Alyssa! Where were you?!", somebody calls from behind me. "Why didn't you pick up your phone? I was getting worried!". I spin

around to see Alice, she's the coordinator for the event and an old friend of mine.

"Hey! Sorry there was an incident that I had to deal with.". I showed her the painting.

"What happened?! Actually nevermind that, we have to get you set up ASAP."

We hurried over to the side where a tiny placard had my name on it and placed the canvas on a tiny nail. I admire it, as I never imagined I'd experience something like this. It was stunning.

Fifteen minutes later the guests walked in and the first group stopped before my art. I held my breath, unsure of how they'll react to it. At first no one said anything. Then one commented on its beauty and originality. My heart beats in staccato. *Do they really like it? No way, I can't believe it.* Another one chips in, complimenting the colour palate. I ensure to listen to every person who sees it and by the end of the day I've only heard positive reviews. By the time my family and friends show up I have a child-like grin across my face.

"Congrats Alyssia!", they exclaimed before dragging me out to dinner.

Time passed by like a blur and somehow I ended up at home, laying in bed from the shock of it all. Did this really happen? *Did I really do it? Was my last minute fix really enough?* I couldn't help but doubt my success at first, but once it sunk in all that's left is joy and anticipation for my next big project. ■

Calgary Civic Symphony's Rising Stars Concert Featuring Winners of the Rotary Calgary Concerto Competition (RC3)



The four talented winners of the annual Calgary Concerto Competition performed with the Calgary Civic Symphony on June 7th at the Jack Singer Concert Hall. The competition is open to all instrumental students under 18 who are studying with a music teacher in Calgary. Pictured from left to right: Dallevin Lapaire, Sophie Ryskine, Bowen Li, Josephine Wen, and ARMTA Calgary Teacher, Barbara Robertson. Barb is RC3's Assistant Competition Director and ARMTA Representative. She has given her time and talent to RC3 for over a decade. Her behind-the-scenes contributions ensure that the competition runs smoothly and she can be spotted behind the microphone on competition weekend as the emcee. ■

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