

For Immediate Release: February 24, 2016 – Toronto, ON

Big Choral and Orchestral Sound with Myths, Legends & Devotions

On Thursday March 31st at Koerner Hall, Esprit Orchestra will present a concert titled *La création du monde* with **The Elmer Iseler Singers** as guest artists. The program features two World Premieres by Canadian composers: **Douglas Schmidt's** *Sirens* for orchestra, and **Alex Pauk's** *Devotions* for choir and orchestra.

Also on the program will be two movements from *Nur: Reflections on Light* for choir alone by Ismaili-Canadian composer **Hussein Janmohamed** as well as *La création du monde*, **Darius Milhaud's** jazz-inflected orchestral dance score from 1923.

Alex Pauk, Esprit's Music Director, will conduct the Milhaud and Schmidt as well as his own work. **Lydia Adams** will conduct the Janmohamed.

The concert theme is inspired by the African creation myth and exoticism conveyed in Milhaud's work. At the time of its premiere, *La création du monde* was the world's first important work blending American jazz harmonies and rhythms with classical Western music. This vivid piece created a sensation in the Paris of the early 1920s when African and Afro-American fashion and art was sweeping the city.

Pauk's *Devotions*, a large-scale work in five movements, is spiritual and uplifting in nature without being strictly religious. The piece draws on a wide variety of sources for its texts including: Taoist writings on the life force of the universe; Inuit poetry; ancient Chinese poetry; a fragment from Goethe's *Faust*; a Balinese prayer for departing souls; Biblical passages; and the composer's own words. Calling for the full virtuosic capabilities of The Elmer Iseler Singers, the work also features the five players of Esprit's percussion section and incorporates harp cadenzas to be performed by Esprit's principal harpist, Erica Goodman.

Janmohamed's *Nur: Reflections on Light* was commissioned for and premiered by The Elmer Iseler Singers at the opening of the Ismaili Centre Toronto and the Aga Khan Museum. The composition interweaves melodies from Ismaili Muslim devotional literature, quaranic recitation and classical Indian ragas into textures inspired by early and contemporary choral music.

Sirens, the mythological birds with female human heads, were known for their hypnotic songs that lured sailors to their deaths on the ocean. These creatures inspired Schmidt's *Sirens*, a tone poem with three sections representing their songs, the futile struggle of the main character (represented by a harmonium organ) succumbing to the songs, and lastly, a fragmented counterpoint, revealing distorted and convoluted memories of the victim's past life. The piece is suggestive of how technology and media attract and manipulate us and blur things so that we can only try and remember who we really were.

Esprit Orchestra – La création du monde

Thursday March 31, 2016

Alex Pauk – conductor / **The Elmer Iseler Singers** / **Lydia Adams** – conductor

Pre-concert chat moderated by composer **Alexina Louie** with composers **Douglas Schmidt**, **Hussein Janmohamed**, **Alex Pauk**, and conductor **Lydia Adams**

Program:

Darius Milhaud (France/U.S.A.) *La création du monde* (1923)

Hussein Janmohamed (Canada) *Nur: Reflections on Light* (2014)
for choir
2. Light: Unveiled
4. Light: Suspended

Douglas Schmidt (Canada) *Sirens** (2016)

Alex Pauk (Canada) *Devotions*** (2016)
for choir and orchestra
1. Wondrous Tao
2. Be Brave!
3. Lifting Hands
4. Mask
5. Luminous Spheres Ascending

Concert Sponsors: Timothy & Frances Price

*World Premiere – commissioned by Esprit with generous support from The Koerner Foundation

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La création du monde
Thursday March 31, 2016, Koerner Hall
8:00PM Concert | 7:15PM Pre-Concert Chat

Royal Conservatory of Music TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning
273 Bloor Street West, Toronto

Individual concert tickets start at: Adult, Senior, Under 30: \$20; Student \$18

Please call (416) 408-0208 or visit performance.rcmusic.ca For more details: espritorchestra.com



Esprit Orchestra is Canada's only full-sized orchestra devoted exclusively to performing and promoting new orchestral music. Esprit Orchestra gratefully acknowledges Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Foundation, Business for the Arts, SOCAN Foundation, The RBC Foundation, The Koerner Foundation, The Hal Jackman Foundation, The Mary-Margaret Webb Foundation, The Max Clarkson Family Foundation, and Timothy & Frances Price for their generous support.

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