

Seasons of the Sea:

A Cross Cultural Collaboration of Music and Storytelling



ROSEMARY GEORGESON &
VETTA CHAMBER PLAYERS

music by
JEFFREY RYAN



Joan Blackman,
Artistic Director

For 30 years Vetta Chamber Music has shared exciting concert programs showcasing excellence in chamber music. Under the artistic direction of Joan Blackman for the past nine seasons, Vetta explores a variety of repertoire each season and has established itself as one of the region's preeminent chamber music series.

With performances by some of the country's most respected musicians combined with a commitment to promoting the understanding of music through education, Vetta is a creative hub of chamber music and cultural collaboration. Presenting highly successful concert series in both Vancouver and on Salt Spring Island, Vetta performs music from across the centuries and shares contemporary classics through commissions.

Vetta's most recent project, *Seasons of the Sea*, is an exemplary example of pairing a classic that has stood the test of time in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with a new cultural collaboration written by award winning artists, composer Jeffrey Ryan and First Nations Storyteller Rosemary Georgeson and performed by the Vetta Chamber Players, a collective of some of British Columbia's exceptional chamber musicians.

'...it was very deep and spoke to the soul.'

August Sylvester,
Elder of the Penelakut Nation

Seasons of the Sea

Seasons of the Sea weaves together contemporary classical music written by award winning Vancouver composer Jeffrey Ryan with narrative written and performed by Sahtu Dene / Coast Salish artist, writer, and storyteller Rosemary Georgeson, past winner of the Vancouver Mayor's Arts Award. The work describes the seasons on and by the sea, and the words are inspired by the 13 moon seasons of the Coast Salish peoples who used the tides and seasons of the sea and the life it brings as their calendar.

Seasons of the Sea is equal parts Jeffrey Ryan's concerto for solo violin with string ensemble and harpsichord, and stories from several First Nations communities as told by Rosemary Georgeson, woven together into a seamless 40-minute journey. *Seasons of the Sea* is paired with Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* which provides a contrast and comparison between past and present and between cultures; it is an evocation and celebration of coastal living through the inspiration of the sea.

To the Coast Salish, a season is defined by the weather, the tides, the life that thrives at that time of year. Rosemary weaves stories of her family and stories that Elders shared with her into the evocative narrative. The musicians then respond through the music resulting in a collaborative performance that reflects on coastal life from both indigenous and newcomer perspectives. The music of *Seasons of the Sea* is written to adapt to the spoken word, with room in the narrative for stories from each First Nation community we visit to be inserted should they desire. Thus, it is a living work that will evolve, allowing a sense of ownership and participation for First Nations audiences, and enrich the work for all who hear it.

To learn more about this project or to book workshops, educational outreach and concerts in your community, please visit www.vettamusic.com or email us at info@vettamusic.com



Artists

Joan Blackman, project curator & solo violin
Jeffrey Ryan, composer
Rosemary Georgeson, storyteller & narrator

Vetta Chamber Players

Performances have included the following artists:

Carolyn Cole, violin
Ashley Plaut, violin
Jennie Press, violin
Roxi Dykstra, viola
Tanya Popoff, viola
Heather Hay, cello
Rebecca Wenham, cello
Dylan Palmer, bass
Michael Jarvis, harpsichord

Performances and Outreach

2016

ArtSpring world premiere
Vetta Chamber Music Series premiere
Community performances

Salt Spring Island
Vancouver
Salt Spring, Gulf Islands
Vancouver
Penelakut First Nations

2017

Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Baumann Centre, Victoria
Victoria Summer Music Festival

'I wanted to send you a quick note to say how very much I appreciated hearing yesterday's beautiful concert at the Baumann Centre. Rosemary Georgeson's (and her family's) stories set to strings was very moving to me. Thank you for bringing in this important recently commissioned work to Victoria.'

Monique Lacerte,
Community Arts Development & Partnership Officer, BC Arts Council

Creative Team

Joan Blackman,
Artistic Director & Project Curator

Artistic Statement

'In commissioning *Seasons of the Sea*, I stumbled upon something much more powerful than I had imagined: a collaboration which is relevant to today's issues of reconciliation and our environment. It is unusual to be able to reach a new audience with a work that speaks to their hearts and at the same time enrich our regular audience's understanding of another culture. It is such a pleasure to work with Rosemary while performing the brilliant music of Jeffrey Ryan who has given me the freedom to improvise in a true dialogue as new stories from each First Nations community we visit are incorporated into the work.'

Biography

Joan Blackman is the Artistic Director of Vetta Chamber Music. As a violinist, she has been a long-time member of the Vancouver Symphony as Associate Concert master, soloing with the VSO, Victoria Symphony, and the CBC Radio Orchestra. Well known throughout Canada and the US for her chamber music skills, Joan has performed on Music in the Morning, Music Fest Vancouver, the Pender Harbour Music Society Concert Series, The Jeffery Concerts in London, Ont., and the American String Project, as well as the Hornby Island Festival, the Pender Harbour Chamber Music Festival, and the Victoria Summer Music Festival.



Jeffrey Ryan,
Composer

Artistic Statement

'Composition is typically a long stretch of solitary work, followed by a flurry of rehearsals a few days before the premiere. It is exciting when an opportunity to collaborate with other artists comes along. Even more exciting, *Seasons of the Sea* not only allowed me to write a violin solo for dear friend and colleague Joan Blackman, but to collaborate with Coast Salish/Sahtu Dene storyteller Rosemary Georgeson to create a major music and spoken-word piece that reflected on the sea and the environment from our two cultural perspectives. Our journey and process together has been rich, profound and illuminating.'

Biography

Praised for his "strong personal voice" (Globe and Mail), composer Jeffrey Ryan is a four-time JUNO nominee and recipient of SOCAN's Jan V. Matejcek New Classical Music Award whose music runs the gamut from orchestral and chamber works to opera, art song, and choral music. Born in Toronto and raised in Fergus, Ontario, he has called Vancouver home since 2002, when he began a five-year stint as the Vancouver Symphony's composer-in-residence, then stayed to be part of Vancouver's burgeoning new music community. He remains as fascinated today by the English Bay tides as on the day he arrived. Follow Jeffrey's blog: jeffreyryan.com



Creative Team

Rosemary Georgeson Storyteller

Artistic Statement

'When Joan and Jeffrey first approached me about "Seasons" I was intrigued by sharing stories of Seasons. I thought about it for a while and all my thoughts took me back to my father and the many stories he would share with my brothers and myself so we could learn our way around on the water. Dad would speak of all these places with these "exotic" names like Tseballos, Namu, Klemtu and he had stories from every place he travelled on this Coast in every season during his lifetime. It was through all of the memories of my father that I found this piece. All the good memories came flooding in, then came Dad's words about what was going to happen to our way of life on the water and the changes that were yet to come.

Art speaks louder than just words. Art makes us think and it creates change from not just within ourselves but how we view our world. This amazing, powerful and passionate collaboration between Joan, Jeffrey and myself makes me realize even more that we are all the same and we all have a responsibility to this planet we call home.'

Biography

Rosemary was the recipient of the 2009 Vancouver Mayor's Award recognizing her as an emerging artist in community arts. Rosemary has provided outreach and story consultation for Vancouver Moving Theatre's In the Heart of a City: The Downtown Eastside Community Play and co-wrote and provided cast hospitality for We're All In This Together: The Shadows Project. She was Urban Ink Productions Community Liaison and worked closely with Marie Clements on the CBC radio drama Hours of Water involving 100's of participants – decades of women who lived and worked in the drowning west coast fishing industry. Rosemary's first documentary "We Have Stories" screened in the fall of 2013 at "The Heart of the City Festival" and was also part of "Indigenous Women In Film" Screening / Discussion / Q&A at Liu Institute for Global Issues at UBC in May 2014. Rosemary was also Vancouver Public Library's Aboriginal Storyteller in Residence 2014.

*'I just loved it, such beautiful, clever compositional choices,
magical sounds and a lovely arc of storytelling —
I was very moved.'*

Julie Poskitt,
former BC Arts Council program officer



The Georgia Straight

Vetta Chamber Music blends story and sound in Seasons of the Sea

by [Janet Smith](#) April 20 2016

To mark Vetta Chamber Music's 30th anniversary, First Nations storyteller Rosemary Georgeson lends her voice to a new composition by Jeffrey Ryan.

The creation of *Seasons of the Sea* began by White Rock's Crescent Beach, amid a stone circle that depicts the 13 months of the Saanich First Nation calendar. On each of 13 rocks is inscribed what happens at that time of year: the time when the salmon head out to the ocean, or the time of storytelling when the sea is too dangerous to fish.

In that place, while they took in the salty air and the grey November colours of the water and sky, composer Jeffrey Ryan, Sahtu Dene/Coast Salish storyteller Rosemary Georgeson, and Vetta Chamber Music violinist Joan Blackman reflected on their own experiences of living near the ocean and the way they each followed the changing seasons. From there, they embarked on a unique new work that interweaves storytelling, music, and profound ideas about this place and the forces that threaten our climate. Commissioned to mark Vetta's 30th anniversary, *Seasons of the Sea* is a West Coast response to Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. It will join the early-18th-century masterpiece on an upcoming program, bridging cultures and centuries. Ryan tells the Straight over the phone that he was amazed at the synergy between him and Georgeson, despite their far-flung backgrounds. Ryan hails from southern Ontario and is a relative newcomer to the coast, having spent the last 13 years in Vancouver (where he's made his mark as an award-winning composer for everyone from the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra to Kokoro Dance). Georgeson has deep roots on Galiano Island, where she grew up in a First Nations fishing family.

"Rosemary would talk about what the weather was like at a certain time of year and the colour of the sea at a certain time of year. And I would think of English Bay: in the fall you get those windy days where the sea is very rough. At the foot of Davie Street, you can see the fog roll up the street," the composer of everything from symphonies to operas explains over the phone from his Vancouver home. "What she said makes me look at that in a bigger, deeper way. So, we're each having our take on the sea and what that's like in the cycle of the year."

For her part, Georgeson says being Coast Salish and growing up on the water has made watching the seasons and the weather a way of life. "The first thing I do in the morning is open my blinds and look at the clouds and try to read them in the way my father taught me," Georgeson, who served as aboriginal storyteller in residence at the Vancouver Public Library in 2014, tells the Straight in a separate phone interview.

While considering the weather was second nature to her, listening to Vivaldi to prepare was new territory, she reveals with a laugh: "That I could relate to the seasons when I was listening to Vivaldi's music—for me that's strange, because I'm an old rock 'n' roller. This is a very new world for me, but it's been very, very interesting and fun to hear our connections. It was kind of interesting, because Vivaldi's seasons and what I think of as seasons—there were some similarities: the calmness, the intensity, the feel of the warm sunlight and the wind on your face."



The Georgia Straight continued...

The pair worked separately, Ryan on his violin concerto, Georgeson on her stories. Then, in mid-March, they joined with Blackman and spent three days of intensive work, figuring out how the words and music would intertwine. Rather than separating the piece simplistically into speaking and musical response, Georgeson and Ryan went for an aural tapestry.

“There were honestly moments where we’d try something and then it would lock into place and we would just look at each other. It was a total goose-bumps moment and we’d say, ‘This is going to be so powerful for the audience,’” Ryan reveals with excitement. “It’s more than just my music and more than Rosemary’s stories—it’s more than just those parts. It’s been great to collaborate with someone in a completely different medium than I do.”

The creative team felt that the natural season to start with would be what we call winter, a time when, as Georgeson remembers, her father was home from sea and told stories to his family. The piece moves into spring, when the fishers get their boats ready. It carries through to the other seasons, but it also moves into a look at today—now that the weather and the sea are facing a more unpredictable future.

“We can’t talk about just seasons without looking at things that are happening now,” Georgeson emphasizes. “We’re talking about a time when I remember the seasons being different. Forty or 50 years later, climate change has had an impact on our way of life as First Nations people.

“I’m feeling the loss—the change of the fish and the weather. Look outside: this isn’t normal. We should be getting rain every day right now. If we’re going to collaborate right now and our two cultures are coming together, we need to acknowledge that this is happening and make sure both cultures are aware.”

So, *Seasons of the Sea* will flow between ancient and contemporary concerns. But are there any recognizable nods to Vivaldi? For one thing, Ryan will be writing a part for a harpsichord—for the first time—in this piece.

He also reveals: “There are little gestures from the Vivaldi buried in my piece.... You may hear a fleeting moment where you say, ‘Oh! That sounds like Vivaldi through a contemporary lens.’ I suppose it’s a little game thing for me.

“But that’s just a small part of it for me,” Ryan adds with emphasis. “What I want is for people to listen to this continuous journey of the traditional Salish year. I want people to just go along on that journey.”