

# Break-Up Music:

## Nicole Lizée's Karaoke Orchestra



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**September 14, 2025 – 7:30pm**  
**West End Cultural Centre**

A person in a dark suit is playing a double bass. The image is a vertical poster with a light blue background. The person's hands and the body of the double bass are visible on the left side. The text is on the right side.

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# Curator's Message

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Two months before the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily shut down travel and live performance around the world, a handful of North American musicians joined the Australian Art Orchestra at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in a rehearsal residency with composer Nicole Lizée. The new work being put together: *Karappo Okesutura Vol. III*. I was fortunate to be part of that residency and the Toronto premiere – who wouldn't want the last music they play before an extended hiatus from live performance to be highly technical, rhythmically complex, conceptually tight and hilarious modern karaoke versions of 80's and 90's pop culture icons?! Given Nicky's connection to the Canadian prairies, I knew that one day this work needed to come to Manitoba.

I first met Nicky at the 2010 X-Avant New Music Festival at Toronto's Music Gallery. I had never played anything like her music – I loved its intensity,

jabs at pop culture, smarts, and cool humour. We connected instantly – since then, we've performed together across Canada, we've talked a lot of tennis, she composed a cello concerto for me, and of course she's achieved international success. I'm thrilled to welcome Nicky back to Winnipeg in my first concert as an Artistic Director of GroundSwell.

Joining us tonight is a new music dream team of extraordinary instrumentalists: Montreal guitarist Steve Raegele, Manitobans Ben Reimer, Eric Platz, Everett Hopfner, Jennifer Thiessen, Meredith Johnson, Sean Irvine, John Sellick, and featuring the indelible Helen Pridmore on vocals. *Karappo Okesutura Vol. III* pushes each of us to absolute extremes of technical virtuosity and versatility – enjoy the ride!

**Leanne Zacharias**



### ***Karappo Okesutura Vol. III***

Helen Pridmore,  
*vocals*

Nicole Lizée,  
*turntables, electronics, video*

Ben Reimer & Eric Platz,  
*drumkits & percussion*

Steve Raegele,  
*electric guitar*

Leanne Zacharias,  
*cello*

### **Nicole Lizée**

Jennifer Thiessen & John Sellick,  
*violas*

Mer Johnson,  
*double bass*

Sean Irvine,  
*saxophone & clarinet*

Everett Hopfner,  
*piano & keyboard*

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## **Programme Notes**

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### ***Karappo Okesutura Vol. III* by Nicole Lizée**

*Karappo Okesutura Vol. III* is the latest instalment in a collection of works that explore the phenomenon of karaoke. About 20 years ago I started collecting and subsequently manipulating karaoke tapes. Initial

experiments were on a Tascam 4-track and soon I was delving into other formats. I was drawn to the obscured details that are revealed once the primary identifiers for a song (the lead melody and lyrics - often

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the first thing that the listener's ear gravitates towards in a pop context) are removed. Hand claps, bass lines, synth textures and particularly, the backing vocals take on a surreal urgency and prominence. Once the less obvious details and colours are exposed these are woven together to create a sonic landscape over which the karaoke singer performs the new version of the song. This skeletal rendition is a perfect opportunity to contort a song without completely losing all identification or traces of the original.

In 2005 I created my first volume of *Karappo Okesutura*. It premiered in Montreal that spring. The pieces were written with this scenario in mind: a karaoke singer takes to the stage to perform an 80s chart-topper only to find that the karaoke machine is behaving erratically. It begins jumping to different sections of the track, rewinding and stopping without warning. The karaoke tape itself is damaged and warped – the pitch and speed are fluctuating, parts of the tape have been chewed by the machine. Yet the singer is still able to keep her composure; she follows and keeps up with the machine, changing tempo and pitch in tandem with the tape, and finishes the song like a professional.

Within each subsequent volume, I looked to further expand ways of 'damaging' the tapes and also expand the live performers' ways of interacting with them. While the malfunctioning karaoke tape and/or machine is the centre of the project

it's the presence of the live ensemble that transforms it.

Volume 3 places the focus on Canadian and Australian pop music and culture. The two countries seem to share similar qualities borne perhaps of their physical realities as large land masses within the Commonwealth. In the 80s, both countries produced pop music that was identifiably not "American" and perhaps the resulting sounds came from the countries being on the "outside looking in" to more dominant global cultures. At any rate, I was completely drawn to Australian music as much as Canadian pop.

I'm thrilled to see this work receive its Manitoba premiere in Brandon and Winnipeg—two cities close to my heart. Performing this work at my alma mater—having completed my undergrad at BU from 1991 to 1995—is undeniably special. It's a delight to share the stage with both old friends and new ones. I have fantastic (and undoubtedly outrageous) memories from my time at BU, and I'm excited to create new ones, now 30 years later.

Special thanks to Brandon University, Leanne Zacharias, the Brandon Chamber Players, GroundSwell, and the West End Cultural Centre for hosting and presenting us.

Special thanks also to all the incredible performers and audio/visual technicians who bring this work to life.

**Nicole Lizée**

An abstract black and white photograph featuring architectural elements. A large, light-colored, textured surface, possibly a wall or a large piece of paper, is the central focus. It is surrounded by dark, geometric shapes and structures that suggest a modern interior or a complex architectural design. The lighting creates strong contrasts and highlights the textures of the various surfaces.

# Composer Biography

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## Nicole Lizée

Called “a brilliant musical scientist” (CBC), “breathtakingly inventive” (Sydney Times Herald), and “utterly inspiring” (I Care If You Listen), multi-award winning composer and filmmaker Nicole Lizée explores themes of malfunction, glitch, turntablism, rave culture, urbex, film theory, psychedelia, game culture, experimental fashion, and thrash metal to create a new kind of expression. Nicole’s compositions range from works for turntablist featuring turntable techniques fully notated and integrated into a concert music setting, to other unorthodox instrument combinations that include the Atari 2600 video game console, vintage board games, omnichords, stylophones, Simon™, Ouija boards, and karaoke tapes. In the broad scope of her evolving oeuvre she explores such themes as malfunction, reviving the obsolete, and the

harnessing of imperfection and glitch to create a new kind of precision. Awards include a JUNO Award for Classical Composition of the Year, a Music Critics Association of North America Award for Best New Opera, a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Opera, a Prix Opus for Composer of the Year, a SOCAN Award, and the Canada Council Jules Léger Prize for Chamber Music. Her works are regularly performed worldwide to international acclaim. Her commission list of over 60 works includes the Kronos Quartet, BBC Proms, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Bang On A Can, National Arts Centre Orchestra, l’Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, Ligeti Quartet, Southbank Sinfonia, Donaueschingen Festival, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and Tapestry Opera.





# Performer Biographies

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## Everett Hopfner

Everett Hopfner is not a harmonium player. However, if you need a harmonium player, you're in luck: he'll probably say yes. An enthusiastic explorer of the piano (or whichever keyboard instrument happens to be nearest), Everett's performances exude joy and intention, qualities he translates to his roles as teacher, administrator, advocate, and life-long learner. Everett's reputation as a generous, thoughtful, and brilliantly skilled player continues to grow. As a member of "Tönky Hönk", he has recently completed residencies at New Music on the Point and Avaloch Farm Music Institute,

researching and performing microtonal keyboard repertoire. Upcoming presenters include New Music Edmonton and the Canadian Music Centre. Everett is a laureate of the E-Gré National Music Competition and previously directed the Conservatory of Music at Brandon University. Currently based in Winnipeg, he serves as Executive Director for Prairie Voices Inc. and is in high demand for teaching, collaborating, and adjudicating.





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## Sean Irvine

Winnipeg-based musician Sean Irvine (he/they) has rapidly gained recognition as a top-tier performer, composer, and woodwind expert. Irvine's versatility and skill in capturing the essence and tone of various woodwind instruments have led to collaborations with artists such as Royal Canoe, David Braid, Derrick Gardner, and the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. In live performances, Irvine has accompanied renowned acts like the Dirty Catfish Brass Band, Don Amero, Ron Paley, Papa Mambo, Kiko Freitas, Jon Gordon, Jimmy Greene, and Scotty Barnhart. In addition to his work as a session

musician, he plays significant roles in projects such as the Winnipeg Jazz Collective, Still Crazy: Paul Simon's Tribute, Big City All Stars Band, and the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. Irvine's second album as a bandleader, *Forgotten Stories Suite*, performed in collaboration with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, is set for release this fall. Featuring all original compositions, the work reflects on the journeys and struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, bringing harrowing stories to life through orchestration and musical imagery.

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## Meredith Johnson

Meredith Johnson is the principal bassist of the Winnipeg Symphony orchestra, a position he has held since 2004. He is an inaugural member of the All Star Orchestra and a member of the bass faculty of the Eastern Music Festival in Greensboro, NC. In addition to his orchestral schedule, Meredith is an enthusiastic teacher and chamber musician. He is the double bass instructor at the University of Manitoba, a regular guest clinician at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador and maintains a private teaching studio. Meredith has performed at numerous

chamber music festivals in Canada and the US and is the bassist and vocalist for the Winnipeg based crossover quartet, The neWSOunds. He has also been involved in the commission of several pieces of contemporary music, most recently leading a consortium of bassists and cellists from around the world to commission Parlour Games, an exciting new duo for bass and cello by Canadian composer Michael Oesterle. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife, violinist Susan McCallum and their three children.

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## Eric Platz

Eric Platz is a drummer whose creative work intersects with Jazz, Americana, North African, and Contemporary Improvised music. As a member of singer Carrie Rodriguez's band, Eric toured extensively throughout North America, appeared on "Austin City Limits", performed with Bill Frisell and Lucinda Williams, and collaborated with producer Lee Townsend on the recording Love and Circumstance. Life After Life, a recording featuring Eric's compositions for clarinet, cello,

bass, and percussion, was called "an extraordinary debut" by DOWN BEAT Magazine. Eric is an Associate Professor of Music at Brandon University where he teaches drumset, Jazz & Contemporary Popular Music, and non-Western music traditions.

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## Helen Pridmore

Helen Pridmore is a singer and sound artist, focused on contemporary scored music, experimental music and improvisation. With a voice described as “acrobatic, finely-tuned and characterful” (UK composer Michael Finnissy), and with an “impressively extended technical and stylistic range” (The Whole Note), she loves to explore new sounds and vocal experiments. Helen has performed across Canada and the US, including a solo appearance at Carnegie Hall, as well as in Europe, Mexico and Japan. She’s worked with a wonderful array of artists, ranging

from purely classical to extremely experimental. Helen can be heard on a number of recordings, including “...between the shore and the ships” (Canadian Music Centre release), which won an East Coast Music Award in 2013. Helen also writes music, for herself and others. In her current home of Saskatoon (Treaty 6 Territory) she leads several community music groups and continues her performing career, presenting both composed and improvised works for voice and occasionally piano as well.

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## Stephen Raegele

Stephen Raegele is a guitarist and composer whose work spans jazz, contemporary classical, experimental music, and indie rock. A mainstay of Montreal’s creative music scene, Raegele is recognized for his intuitive approach to improvisation and his idiosyncratic compositional voice. He has performed across North America, Europe, and Australia with a wide range of artists including The Dears, John Hollenbeck’s JHQ, Nicole Lizée’s SaskPower, and Thom Gossage’s Other Voices at venues in Berlin, London, Paris, Mexico City, Oslo, Sydney, Melbourne, New York,

and across Canada. Raegele’s 2010 album Last Century (Songlines Recordings), featuring bassist Miles Perkin and drummer Thom Gossage, was praised for its inventive approach and subtle textures. A long-standing member of the Orchestre national de jazz de Montréal, Raegele appears on the Juno-nominated album Under The Influence Suite (2017) and recording projects with The Dears, Murray Lightburn, Christine Jensen, Isaiah Ceccarelli, The Besnard Lakes, Nicole Lizée, Emma Frank, and the Australian Art Orchestra’s 2021 and 2025

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## Ben Reimer

Ben Reimer has been called a “genre-bending wiz” (PuSh) and a performer of “stunning virtuosity” (Ludwig-Van Mtl). He has been a soloist in the CBC JUNO Showcase, the Bang On A Can Marathon, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver New Music Festivals, Music on Main, Luminato, Tapestry Opera, Open Ears and others. He has performed with such ensembles as Paramirabo, the Australian Art Orchestra, Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec, Collectif9, Standing Wave, Land’s

End Ensemble, Architek Percussion and TorQ Percussion. His debut album *Katana of Choice: Music for Drumset Soloist* is described as “an exhilarating musical ride” (Wholenote). Ben holds a Doctor of Music from McGill University and is a contributing author to the *Cambridge Companion to the Drumkit*. Ben is the Acting Principal Percussionist of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and is a Sabian Cymbals, Yamaha Canada and Vic Firth artist.

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## Jennifer Thiessen

Jennifer Thiessen has performed, recorded, and curated extensively as a solo and collaborative artist in Canadian classical and creative music communities. As a historical and contemporary viola and viola d’amore player, she has been presented by No Hay Banda, Innovations en Concert, Ottawa New Music Creators, send+receive, GroundSwell, suddenlyLISTEN, Cluster Festival, Festival Montréal Baroque, Lamèque International Baroque Festival, Oakville Chamber Orchestra, and Rosamunde Festival. She writes music for viola, voice, and electronics as Daily Alice, and with her duos

the JUNO-nominated Toninato & Thiessen, and Park Sounds with Ben Reimer. Based in Montreal for two decades, Jennifer joined such groups as Ensemble Caprice, collectif9, Ensemble SuperMusique, and La La La Human Steps for concerts, recordings, and international tours. Since returning to Manitoba, she plays regularly with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and was Artistic Director of Virtuosi Concerts from 2021 to 2025. She writes music journalism, essays, and poetry for a variety of publications and projects.

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## Leanne Zacharias

Cellist Leanne Zacharias is an interdisciplinary performer, educator and curator who collaborates with composers, songwriters, architects and artists of all stripes. Her unique, immersive concerts in museums, galleries, chimneys, stairwells, rowboats and other unorthodox sites have been presented by the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, LandMarks2017, International Cello Festival of Canada, Austin's New Music Coop, Winnipeg Design Festival, Newfoundland's Sound Symposium, the Banff Centre for Arts, and internationally in Iceland, Scotland and Germany. Once a member of the Houston Symphony, she left the orchestral track to move through period practice early music, experimental and improvised music, chamber music and the indie festival circuit. She co-directs Wheat City Nuit Blanche, the Wild Studio creative workshop, the Hybrid Intensive

workshop in San Francisco, and has served on juries for the Juno Awards, Canada Council for the Arts, Winnipeg Arts Council, Warming Huts Art and Architecture competition and Canadian New Music Network. On faculty at Brandon University, she has lectured at the Parsons Design School in New York, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Banff's Research In Culture workshop and delivered masterclasses across Canada, the US and Mexico. An energetic educator, she adjudicates across Canada and has taught at numerous summer festivals including Domaine Forget International Academy, Cadenza, Rosamunde and the Prairie Cello Institute. Her 2021 solo album *Music for Spaces* was released on Redshift Records, and her second album is forthcoming this year.

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