

Renée Michèle Walrafen

Renée is a composer, performer, academic, director, and teacher. Renée has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Simon Fraser University (Burnaby, 1999) and a Master of Arts from York University (Toronto, 2007), both in music composition. While studying at the Bretton Hall College of the University of Leeds in England, she received intensive training in performance, musical theatre, and community music.

Renée has been teaching and directing for over a decade. Her involvement in choral leadership began in England, where she directed a small community church choir. Upon arrival back in Canada, she founded and directed the Harbourview Harmony Chorus, a non-auditioned community group of amateur singers. Renée's most recent position was Music Director at the Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation (Toronto, 2005-2007), where she was responsible for creating and implementing the music program. Additionally, she directed the Neighbourhood Spirit Choir, liaised with the staff and minister, led music fundraisers, and emceed a monthly music soirée. Renée also has many years of experience teaching piano, flute, and music theory. She works with all ages and levels and teaches a variety of styles, including Classical, contemporary, free improvisation, popular, and jazz.

As a composer, Renée Michèle Walrafen's interest lies at the intersection of contemporary Western Art and Popular music genres.

During her education, Renée studied with Vancouver composers Rudolf Komorous, Rodney Sharman, Barry Truax, and Owen Underhill, as well as Toronto musicians David Mott, William Westcott, and David Lidov.

Renée's compositional specializations include collage, spacialization, contemporary Western Art Music, the popular song, electronica, and alternative application of text and vocal material. Specific compositions include her most recent major work, Tonhenge, a non-narrative contemporary opera that received its premiere at Toronto's Dancemakers Centre for Creation on June 13th, 2007. In May 2007, her piece, The Lion's Roar, for solo male singer/performer and gong, was performed by Nicholas Nanos at Toronto's Glenn Gould Studio as part of Soundstream's Young Artist Overture. Most recently, her saxophone and tape piece, 101-76, was performed by Greg Sinibaldi at the Good Shepherd Centre as part of the Reeds portion of Seattle's contemporary music series. Renée is currently working on Moonshine, the second piece in a series of commissions for piccolo and electronics.

As a performer, Renée plays flute, bassoon, and piano. Renée enjoys performing a variety of styles, including Western Art Music, contemporary, jazz, popular, ethnic, and free improvisation. Renée counts renowned jazz pianist George Essihos and improviser Casey Sokol among her instructors. She has studied flute with Hans Boellaard, Jos Zwaanenberg, and Anne-Elise Keefer. She has attended masterclasses by Ian Clarke, Peter Lloyd, James Galway, Trevor Wye, Jim Walker, William Bennett, Robert Dick, and Camille Churchfield. Renée is passionate about ensemble performance, as is evident by her involvement with and establishment of many diverse ensembles. Renée currently plays keyboard and sings backup vocals in Indie Folk band Girls with Names.

Renée is a founding member of Toronto's contemporary ensemble Isospin and has acted as flautist for jazz-fusion group Isfahan, performer and composer for folk group The White Pixies, founding member of the New Millennium Flute Choir, and pianist for trio Kriya. Moreover, she founded Vancouver's Bel Canto Chamber Ensemble, which acted as the ensemble in residence at Newland's Golf and Country Club, and which performed at Burnaby's Simon Fraser University, Coquitlam's Place des Arts, and Victoria's Camosun College and Summer in the Square.

Finally, Renée is passionate about the collaborative process and endeavours to work with other artists at every opportunity. Most recently, at an artist residency with composer and flautist Robert Dick at the Atlantic Centre for the Arts, Renée collaborated with composers Clifford Dunn and Greg Sinibaldi and poet Jayne Fenton-Keane on a thirty-minute performance piece entitled The Nerve Opera. Renée has also been involved in two of director Dylan Robinson's works: Ligeti and The Pentland Project. The Pentland Project, co-sponsored by Vancouver's The Western Front, was a collage-based work commemorating Canadian composer Barbara Pentland's extraordinary career.