

John
BURGE

(b. 1961)

Sinfonia Antiqua
One Sail • Forgotten Dreams
Upper Canada Fiddle Suite

Joanna G'froerer, Flute • Rachel Mercer, Cello
Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra
Kevin Mallon



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The Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra (Ottawa) has a particular dedication to the work of living composers. This is exemplified by this recording, as it contains four compositions by Canadian composer John Burge that were all commissioned and premiered by the orchestra. Many of these pieces have gone on to be performed by chamber orchestras across Canada and internationally, and it has been a pleasure for Thirteen Strings to return to these pieces with fresh interest under the baton of Kevin Mallon.

Sinfonia Antiqua was commissioned for the orchestra's 25th anniversary season in 2000/01. The first movement was, in fact, composed and premiered as a stand-alone movement the year before for a Thirteen Strings' concert in 1999 that included a group of 13 young string players playing alongside the professional ensemble. For this earlier concert, it was requested that the commissioned music have a joyous, celebratory quality to open the programme. The resultant *French Overture* proved to be so popular that following the premiere, Burge was asked to add additional movements in a similar neo-Baroque style. The additional movements all make use of traditional rhythmic and melodic gestures that will be familiar to many listeners, from the ornamentation in the *Minuet* to the *Gigue's* fast triple metre. The emotional heart of the work is the *Aria*, which is built around the violas' slowly descending repeated notes, with the opening expressive cello solo melody moving to the first violins at the end of the movement.

Forgotten Dreams was premiered in 1995 with flautist Joanna G'froerer. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this impressionistically evocative work is the division of the string accompaniment into two groups of six players each: a sextet, consisting of pairs of violins, violas and cellos; and a separate group of six violins. It is requested that the six violins stand at some distance from the flute and sextet which generates a distant or dream-like quality to the passages between the two string groups and soloist. Throughout the work, the flute presents very long lines which occasionally double back to the opening phrase.

One Sail, the first composition that John Burge wrote for the orchestra, was premiered in 1993 with cellist Shauna Rolston. This work draws its inspiration from the opening line of a short poem written by Canadian poet Margaret Avison (1918–2007), whose poetry often draws a kind of spiritual symbolism from the Canadian landscape. The three-line poem is titled *Discovery on Reading a Poem**, and is just one sentence long:

One sail / opens the wideness to me of the waters, / the largeness of the sky.

This text provides a compelling metaphor for the power and relevance of poetry – as a sail converts the wind's force to achieve motion, so too can a poem capture the spirit of humanity and thereby create enlightenment in the reader. Both mechanisms are revealed to be vehicles of transportation, one physical and the other transcendental. The musical interpretation further captures the visual image of the poem in the way that the solo cello charts a course through the textural fabric of the larger string body.

Upper Canada Fiddle Suite was premiered in 1997. 'Upper Canada' is the name given by European explorers to the region of Ontario that surrounds the waterways near the Great Lakes. This old fashioned name is used to help convey to the listener, in advance, the nostalgic quality of the composition. The music, though, is entirely original, and this will certainly be apparent in the unexpected ways that some of the traditional fiddle clichés and rhythms are treated. A particularly audible aspect of the work is the prominent solo violin in the *Waltz*, which is played on a violin that has been re-tuned to a fiddle tuning (*scordatura*). The resultant effect is that all of the retuned instrument's open strings resonate in a beautifully transparent A major chord. The unusual demands placed on a violin in adjusting to this tuning require that for the sake of efficiency, the soloist needs to have a second violin prepared in advance to play this solo.

John Burge, Kevin Mallon

* *Discovery on Reading a Poem* reprinted from *Always Now*, Volume 2, by Margaret Avison (The Porcupine's Quill: Erin, Ontario, 2004). Used by permission.

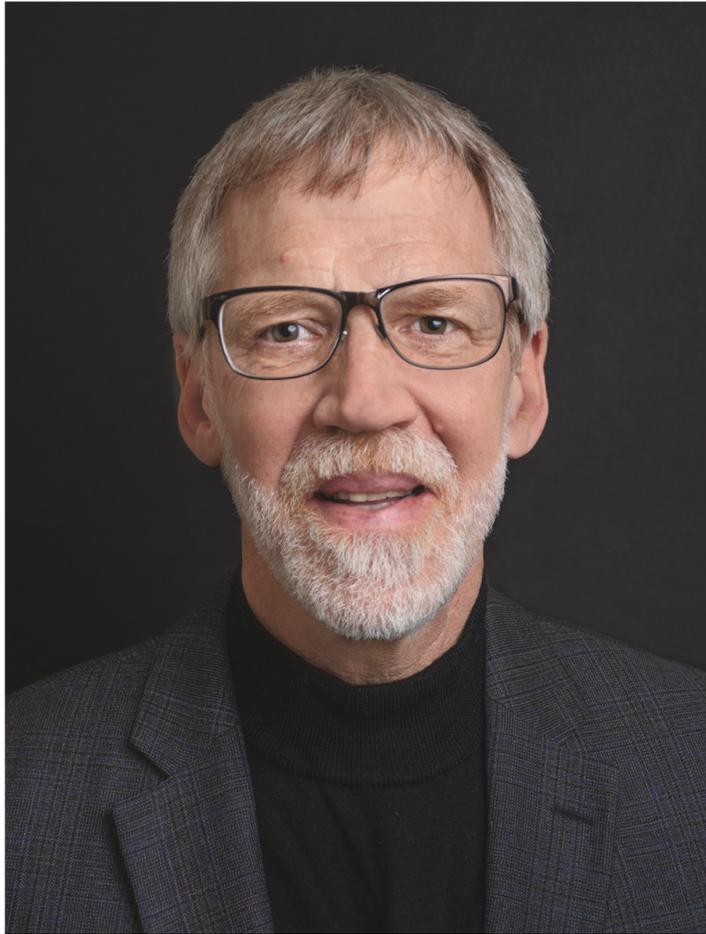


Photo © Kristen Fitchie

John Burge

Since 1987, John Burge has taught at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he is a professor. A JUNO-winning composer, in 2014 he was inducted into the Royal Society of Canada in recognition of his success as a composer and support of the arts in Canada. Burge also has a strong affinity for writing for string instruments, having composed over a dozen works for string orchestra. A passionate advocate for Canadian music, he was a board member of the Canadian League of Composers from 1993 to 2007 (president from 1998 to 2006), as well as serving on many other arts organisations' boards. www.johnburge.ca

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Joanna G'froerer

Principal flautist of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) of Canada since 1992, Joanna G'froerer enjoys an exciting career as an orchestral player, chamber musician, soloist and educator. G'froerer regularly performs as a soloist with the NACO, and has appeared with many of Canada's other fine orchestras and ensembles. She has been featured in chamber music festivals across Canada and at Brazil's Festival de Campos do Jordão. Her discography includes Mozart's flute quartets (CBC Records), and for Naxos she appears on Saint-Saëns' *Music for Wind Instruments* (8.570964), and is the flute soloist on Rodrigo's *Complete Orchestral Works, Vol. 8*, which features the *Concierto pastoral* (8.557801). Joanna G'froerer is a member of the faculty of the University of Ottawa's School of Music.

Rachel Mercer

Principal cello of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) in Ottawa and artistic director of the 5 at the First Chamber Music Series in Hamilton, Canadian cellist Rachel Mercer has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician across five continents. She plays with the Mercer-Park Duo, and was a member of JUNO-winning Ensemble Made In Canada (2008–20), and the Aviv Quartet (2002–10). An advocate for new Canadian music, Mercer has commissioned over 25 works for cello including concertos by Stewart Goodyear and Kevin Lau, as well as solo and chamber music. Mercer plays a 17th-century cello from Northern Italy. www.rachelmercercellist.com

Kevin Mallon

Irish/Canadian conductor Kevin Mallon studied composition with Peter Maxwell Davies and conducting with John Eliot Gardiner alongside singing and Baroque violin. He served as concertmaster with Le Concert Spirituel and Les Arts Florissants in Paris before moving to Canada to take up posts with Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and the University of Toronto. In 1999 he founded the Aradia Ensemble, with whom he has toured widely and has made over 50 recordings for Naxos. In Ireland, he was appointed Artistic Director of Opera 2005, formed to celebrate Cork's tenure as European Capital of Culture. In 2009 he began working with Odessa Opera, Ukraine, conducting productions in Odessa before touring across Holland, Belgium and Spain. Mallon is Music Director of Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra in Ottawa and has recently been appointed Artistic Director of Symphony in the Barn in Ontario. www.kevinmallonmusic.ca

Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra

Founded in 1976, Thirteen Strings is one of Canada's leading chamber orchestras, consisting of thirteen professional string players and directed by award-winning conductor, Kevin Mallon. The orchestra's repertoire is diverse, covering music from the Baroque era to the 21st century. The orchestra has a strong focus on celebrating and promoting Canadian talent, having commissioned more than a hundred new works from Canadian composers. The orchestra also supports the development of the next generation of local talent through its youth programme, the Camerata, by providing local high school students with mentorship and performance opportunities. Thirteen Strings can be heard at its six annual concerts held in Ottawa, at local festivals and events, and on recordings and broadcasts on CBC Radio and Radio-Canada. The orchestra has also been heard in over 140 countries on EWTN. Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra is a registered charity, and is supported by government grants, corporate sponsorships and individual donors. Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra made its debut on Naxos in 2015 with a recording of Franz Beck's *Symphonies, Op. 2* (8.573323). www.thirteenstrings.ca





Previous page:

*(Top) **Kevin Mallon** Photo © Michael McLuhan*

*(Bottom) **Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra***

Photo © Peter Polgar

This page:

*(Left) **Rachel Mercer** Photo © Bo Huang*

*(Above) **Joanna G'froerer** Photo © Fred Cattroll*

John Burge is a JUNO Award-winning composer and a passionate advocate for Canadian music who has a strong affinity with writing for string instruments. All of the works in this recording were commissioned and premiered by the Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra. Opening with the joyous and celebratory *Sinfonia Antiqua*, the mood shifts to an evocative and impressionistic atmosphere in *Forgotten Dreams*, while *One Sail* captures the compelling power of poetic imagery. The *Upper Canada Fiddle Suite* blends tradition and nostalgia with entirely original inventiveness, and concludes an album that perfectly represents Burge's eloquent and deeply expressive compositional style.



**John
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(b. 1961)

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| Sinfonia Antiqua (2001) 23:34 | 6 One Sail (1993) 14:15 |
| 1 I. French Overture: Maestoso – Allegro 5:57 | Upper Canada Fiddle Suite (1996) 17:41 |
| 2 II. Minuet: Grazioso – Trio: L'istesso tempo 6:33 | 7 I. Reel: Moderately fast 4:56 |
| 3 III. Aria: Largo 6:09 | 8 II. Waltz: With simplicity 6:06 |
| 4 IV. Gigue: Poco allegro 4:48 | 9 III. Jig: Vigorously 6:33 |
| 5 Forgotten Dreams (1995) (version for flute and string orchestra) 8:39 | |

Joanna G'froerer, Flute 5 • Rachel Mercer, Cello 6
Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra
Julian Armour, Cello 3 • Manuela Milani, Violin 8
Kevin Mallon

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