

Poetic Conversations: A Musical Journey Through Nature, Beauty, and Life, with Waterloo Chamber Players

Anita Brooks Kirkland

Music is always about conversation. The composer speaks to the audience through the conductor and musicians, who are charged with interpreting their ideas, and the audience responds as the music inspires. Music has the power to move us beyond words, connecting to our deepest understanding, and to our souls. When experienced live, this poetic conversation evokes a visceral connection between musicians and the audience. There is really nothing else like it. For the first concert of our season on October 3, 2026, Waterloo Chamber Players conductor William Rowson has created a program that explores musical conversations inspired by nature, beauty, and life itself.



William Rowson, conductor

Inspired by Poetry

Many composers of the Romantic Era took their inspiration from poetry. Evoking the deeper meaning of the poem freed the composer from the dominance of musical structure, allowing the free flow of ideas and emotions, the musical retelling of a story, or a descriptive journey. The great composer Franz Liszt was the first to explore the potential of the symphonic poem, a work in one movement where the composer uses thematic transformation to parallel poetic ideas. For example, a love theme might transform into a foreboding suggestion of disaster, with the composer free to use shifts in timbre, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, harmony, and orchestration to enhance the transformation.

Our program includes Liszt’s *Les Préludes*, the most famous of his twelve symphonic poems. The work is a musical interpretation of a poem by his friend Alphonse de Lamartine. Liszt himself paraphrased the poem in the score. “What is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown song whose first solemn note is tolled by death? The enchanted dawn of every life is love. But where is the destiny on whose first delicious joys some storm does not break?”

Nationalism and the Beauty of Nature

In the middle of the 19th century the political structure of Europe was shifting radically with the rise of nationalism. The Czech composer Bedrich Smetana was raised in a Bohemia which was under the rule of the Hapsburg Empire. Although his first language was in fact German, Smetana was caught up in nationalistic fervor. *The Moldau*, or *Vltava* in Czech, is one of a set of six tone poems depicting scenes from his beloved Bohemian countryside. Smetana masterfully paints the flow of the great river, the Moldau, from its bubbling source in the forest and its growing strength as it transverse the countryside, past a wedding celebration, castles, and ancient ruins. Ultimately the great river surges through rapids on to its journey through Prague and ultimately spilling into the Elbe River. This beautifully descriptive piece evokes our connection with nature, with a deeper underlying message of nationalistic pride and the Czech people’s battle for freedom.

A Poetic Conversation Between Composers



Sharon Wei
Viola Soloist

WCP welcomes violist Sharon Wei to perform the *Concerto for Viola & Strings in the style of J. C. Bach*, by Henri Casadesus. A dynamic and multifaceted musician, Wei has established herself as one of the most respected violists on the scene today. As well as being a member of the New Orford String Quartet, Sharon has appeared with major orchestras around the world, and has a distinguished academic career, currently as Associate Professor of Viola and acting Assistant Dean of Research at Western University.

The concerto evokes a conversation of a different sort, between the French composer of the late 19th and early 20th century Casadesus and Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782), whose style he imitates. When it was written the relationship went beyond imitation to forgery. Casadesus presented the piece as being by Bach, claiming that he had only edited a work recently

discovered to be by the much earlier composer. This sort of practice was common at the time, before effective copyright laws and with limited general familiarity with the music of past eras.

I asked our viola soloist Sharon Wei if some of Casadesus’s own style might have crept into the work. She replied, “Casadesus and his brothers wrote a number of concertos in different styles (i.e., Handel and Mozart in addition to J.C. Bach) and they were quite adept at mimicking styles, though traditions of their own time period are also evident in the work.” Casadesus was quite adept at creating his own unique musical conversation, as Sharon commented. “I would say that the second movement is most poetic especially because there is a wonderful conversation that takes place between the solo viola part and the concertmaster’s line in the second part of the movement. It really feels like a conversation that is lyrical and beautiful.”

Sharon Wei is quite excited about this concert. “Though I have taught this work extensively, this will be my first time performing it with orchestra! In the past I’ve had the chance to perform concertos by Telemann, Bruch, Bach, Benjamin as well as premiered new concertos by living composers such as Saman Shahi and Richard Mascal. I’m super excited to have a chance to perform this with Waterloo Chamber Players!”

Duo Soloists in an Inspired Musical Conversation

Despite ultimately writing several pieces featuring the flute, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart purportedly had a low opinion of the instrument, saying to his father in a letter, “You know that I am quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument which I cannot bear”. He was seemingly indifferent to the harp, having never included an orchestral part for the instrument in any of his symphonies. And yet in 1778 he managed to write this most beautiful concerto for the French Duke de Guines, whose flute playing the composer admired, and the duke’s daughter, whose harp playing he also thought well of. (He was far less complimentary of her ability as his composition student.)



Daniella Kistemaker



Tawnya Convoy
Flute

We are thrilled to feature two WCP principal players as soloists for this performance. Having studied orchestral performance at Wilfrid Laurier University, Tawnya Convoy has become an active performer throughout the region. Her warm, expressive musicality will be familiar to regular WCP audience members. Our harp soloist Daniella Kistemaker is also a WLU music graduate and an active performer in the region. How fortunate we are to have Daniella’s insights into the Mozart concerto as she is currently working on her PhD in Music Theory at the University of Toronto. She describes the structure of the piece as a kind of push and pull, with conversations taking place between the flute and the harp as well as between the soloists and the orchestra. She comments, “One thing I have really been enjoying about the preparation of this piece is how lighthearted it seems on the outside, somewhat fairytale-like in a sense, but how there is so much complexity on the inside. Preparing this piece has been a unique experience for me since I have actually analyzed it before, so I already had a good idea of the formal organization, as well as the important harmonic and textural moments, but it has been illuminating to figure out the moments that are significant but don’t seem like it from my theoretical analysis. It is also so fun to act both as a soloist and sometimes as a secondary role to Tawnya’s flute part.”

Live performance is so important for bringing these musical connections to life, giving us the unique opportunity for musicians and audience to connect through these musical conversations. Waterloo Chamber Players is pleased to invite you to its first concert of the season, *Poetic Conversations*, on Saturday October 3, 7:30 pm, at Knox Presbyterian Church in Waterloo.

