

2024 / 2025

# ANNUAL REPORT

# PRAIRIE DEBUT: SUPPORTING CANADIAN ARTISTS AND COMMUNITIES FOR OVER TWO DECADES

We are proud of our history of bringing performance excellence to communities across the Prairies. Thanks to the talents of our artists and the generosity of our funders and sponsors, we are able to introduce some of the best Canadian global and classical artists in concert, musical education and outreach activities.

This past season, music lovers were treated to a wide range of instrumentation, with artists featuring exquisite cello, piano, a capella vocals, santur, percussion, clarinet, marimba and classical guitar. They performed in 43 communities across the Prairies, in venues including community halls, churches, theatres, schools, seniors' centres, hospitals, and even "pop-up" performances in cafes and hotel lobbies.

The 2024-25 season also included residencies in Fort McMurray and Edmonton, where Prairie Debut artists mentored students in masterclasses, and shared their music and experiences in workshops and community concerts.

Another stand-out event was a collaborative concert series with Prairie Debut duo Farhad Khosravi and Daniel Stadnicki and the Eya Hey Nakoda singers/drum group from the Stoney Nakoda Nation.

Our thanks go out to all who support Prairie Debut, especially our presenting partners, regional presenting networks and sponsors. With your backing, we continue to put Canadian talent on display.

Po Yeh  
Executive Director, Prairie Debut

## OUR TEAM

### *Executive Director*

Po Yeh

### *Board Members*

Chair | Andrea Davison  
Past Chair | Kevin Korchinski  
Treasurer | Malcolm McKay  
Board Member | Eugene Carnegie  
Board Member | Jane Ireland  
Board Member | Andrew Kwan  
Board Member | Kali Weber

**55**

PERFORMANCE  
ACTIVITIES - SCHOOL  
AND SENIORS CONCERTS,  
MASTERCLASSES,  
LECTURES  
AND WORKSHOPS

**44**

CONCERTS ACROSS  
THE PRAIRIE  
PROVINCES, BRITISH  
COLUMBIA, YUKON  
AND NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES

**55**

ARTISTS AND  
ENSEMBLES WHO  
APPLIED TO TOUR  
WITH PRAIRIE DEBUT

**10,500+**

CANADIANS REACHED

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF  
AUDIENCE MEMBERS AT  
OUR CONCERTS, MUSIC  
EDUCATION AND  
OUTREACH EVENTS

**51**

APPLICANTS  
IDENTIFIED AS BIPOC,  
LGBTQ2S+ OR WITH  
DISABILITIES

**43**

COMMUNITIES  
HOSTED PRAIRIE  
DEBUT ARTISTS  
THIS SEASON

## A SEASON OF FIRSTS

- Viðarneistí gave the debut performance of Burman University's new marimba
- Obsidiana Duo was the first Prairie Debut ensemble to offer vocal masterclasses as part of their Fort McMurray residency



2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

## BLUE DAWN QUARTET

*A capella vocals*

RONA NADLER

KIMBERLEY LYNCH

ALEXANDRA ASHER

MEAGAN ZANTINGH

*Activities*

CONCERTS

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Singers Kimberley Lynch, Meagan Zantingh, Alexandra Asher and Rona Nadler draw listeners into a captivating performance as they showcase that simplest and most ancient of instruments, the human voice. They offer a richly textured soundscape, buoyed by the personal warmth and chemistry of four exceptional vocalists.

The quartet developed a holiday program especially for the audience in High River, Alberta. They also surprised guests with "pop-up" performances at the Alt Hotel East Village in Calgary.

*“Thank you very much again for having us host the Blue Dawn Quartet. Our team got amazing feedback from the hotel guests!”*

Alt Hotel East Village  
Hotel Representative

watch

→ [Here On These Branches](#)



2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

## ORONTES GUITARISTS

### *Classical Guitar*

GABY AL BOTROS

MOHAMMED MIR MAHMOUD

ORWA AL SHARAA

### *Activities*

CONCERTS

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Orontes Guitarists understand the power that music holds to build bridges and to heal. All hailing from different cultural and religious traditions themselves, the musicians are keenly aware of how music transcends barriers. Their programs offered an uplifting mix of Middle Eastern and Arabic-inspired classical guitar, inviting audiences to expand their horizons through story and song. There was a special poignancy to the connection between the artists and audiences. Through a shared musical experience, we realize how much we have in common.

*“Gaby, Meer, and Orwa gave us a fantastic concert this afternoon, and our audience gave them an instant standing ovation! The trio played with superb ensemble, amazing technical brilliance, and all with deep musicality. The musical selections were truly captivating with their cross-cultural sounds. A superb evening!”*

Wendy Markosky, Burman University



PHOTO: JANELLE DUDZICK PHOTOGRAPHY

2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

## KHOSRAVI & STADNICKI

### *Santur & Percussion*

**FARHAD KHOSRAVI**  
SANTUR

**DANIEL STADNICKI**  
PERCUSSION

### *Activities*

CONCERTS

MUSIC EDUCATION/OUTREACH

This year, Farhad Khosravi and Daniel Stadnicki partnered with the Eya Hey Nakoda singers/drum group from the Stoney Nakoda Nation. Prairie Debut brought the two groups together in a workshop setting, giving them freedom to explore ways to unite the sounds of santur, percussion and drums. With the support of artsPlace Canmore and the Calgary Separate School Division, they brought a unique experience to students in Calgary, Cochrane and Canmore.

*“Music is a language, and a culture. [There is] diversity and power in music. Creativity—especially with the drummer explaining all the different parts he added to his drums—shows that you don't have to follow expected norms and conventions. [The two groups were able to] work together, and create and mix current and traditional music and instruments. Some schools, like ours, currently don't have a music program, so having musical groups come in is very valuable.”*

Educator

watch

→ [Percussion Project with Eya Hey Nakoda](#)



2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

# CROSS-CULTURAL PERCUSSION PROJECT

with

ARTSPPLACE  
CANMORE

EYA HAY NAKODA  
BIG DRUM GROUP

FARHAD KHOSRAVI  
& DANIEL STANWICKI  
DUO

CALGARY SEPARATE  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

This past year, Prairie Debut collaborated with several organizations to present two percussion-based groups from two very different cultures. Eya Hey Nakoda Drumming Group, Farhad Khosravi and Daniel Stadnicki combined ancient Persian santur, modern percussion and Indigenous drumming in this performance for six schools.

*“There’s so much negative discourse today. Actually working with people and finding common bonds is so important. Giving kids the opportunity to experience different kinds of art—different kinds of culture—is fundamental.”*

Jeremy Elbourne,  
artsPlace Executive  
Director





2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

## VIÐARNEISTÍ

### *Clarinet & Marimba*

**CATHERINE WOODS**  
CLARINET

**VICTORIA SPARKS**  
MARIMBA

### *Activities*

CONCERTS

MUSIC EDUCATION

OUTREACH

Clarinet and marimba duo Catherine Wood and Victoria Sparks. come together as Viðarneistí (pronounced vee-thar-nest-ee). The Icelandic term for “wood spark” is an apt description for what happens when the rich, sultry tone of the clarinet meets the percussive punch of marimba.

These warm and personable artists completed a residency at Edmonton's MacEwan University, including workshops, a lecture for the arts & cultural management program, and performances. They also gave the inaugural performance of a new marimba donated to Burman University, at their Sunday at Four concert series.



2024/25 RESIDENCY

## OBSIDIANA DUO

*Mezzo-Soprano  
& Piano*

**CAMILA MONTEFUSCO**  
VOICE

**YOLANDA TAPIA**  
PIANO

**Activities**

MUSIC EDUCATION

Vocalist Camila Montefusco and pianist Yolanda Tapia showcase exquisite folk songs from their countries of origin, Brazil and Mexico, as well as Canadian lullabies and ballads from their adopted homeland.

In February, they shared their passion for folk art music in a three-day residency in Fort McMurray.

*“...after this year’s masterclass, one of my students I’ve had for a few years told me and her parents that she wants to pursue piano and music more seriously... I think being able to see and work with a professional musician in that setting is encouraging for young musicians like her...”*

Music teacher, Fort McMurray



PHOTO : TAM PHOTOGRAPHY

2024/25 TOURING ARTISTS

# PRAIRIE SONS

## **Cello & Piano**

**DAVID LIAM ROBERTS**  
CELLO

**GODWIN FRIESEN**  
PIANO

## **Activities**

CONCERTS

MUSIC EDUCATION

OUTREACH

watch

→ [Prairie Sons Tour](#)

As the Prairie Sons, cellist David Liam Roberts and pianist Godwin Friesen embody the expansive, nuanced perspective of their home landscape in their concert program. Both hail from the Prairies, began performing alongside other members of their families, and have been named to CBC's list of Hot 30 Classical Musicians Under 30.

Audiences across all three provinces were keen to hear this engaging duo, who performed 29 concerts and 15 outreach activities as Prairie Debut artists. They toured for a full month in spring 2025, and treated listeners to Godwin's new composition, "Psalm 133 for Cello and Piano."

*“This duo was so talented! I was fortunate enough to be sitting at the front of the hall so I could enjoy seeing their artistry and expressions up close. Amazing! They were wonderful at engaging the audience, explaining the pieces so those of us not so knowledgeable about classical music could get the most out of the experience.”*

Audience Member



28  
CONCERTS

5  
WEEK TOUR

16  
OUTREACH  
ACTIVITIES

## SNAPSHOTS FROM A PRAIRIE TOUR

### *Prairie Sons in Performance*

In spring 2025, cellist David Liam Roberts and pianist Godwin Friesen spent over five weeks on the road, winding their way through rural towns in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. They shared an engaging musical compilation ranging from traditional classical to Metis fiddle tunes and familiar songs by Joni Mitchell, Randy Bachman, The Guess Who, and Neil Young.



While audiences were warm, the weather sometimes wasn't!



# OUR IMPACT

This year, we consulted with audience, educators and presentors to learn more about the impact of our work. Here, we've captured some of what they had to say.

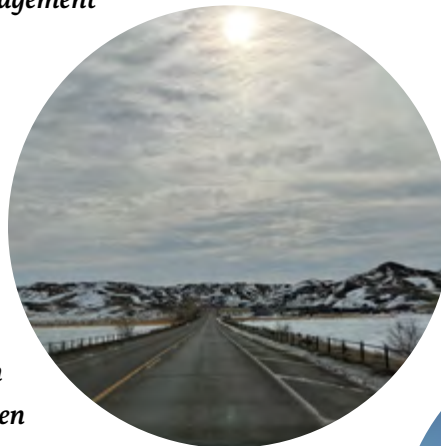
## ARTISTS

*“When people in the Prairies show up for a concert, they show up with their full heart. They're always listening because they want that. They're not saturated, as in Toronto, for example. The audiences are engaging full on, 100 percent all the time.”*

*“Having these moments where we speak directly to the audience, I think, really helps engage people that might not know much about classical music .... they hear our voices speaking directly to them. I think that immediately sparks interest and engagement with any audience. Giving the music a little bit more context so they understand it better before we even start .... it is a really helpful way to engage more rural audiences.”*

*“What I really appreciated about this tour in particular is that it removed the barrier between classical guitar and the audience. This is the first time where I [didn't] feel that I have to have the theatre persona [or] the etiquette. Just talk to people, play music for them, joke with them, be funny, be yourself. [The Prairie Debut experience] was a huge lesson and I needed that because when we study classical music academically, we are not taught that.”*

*“For me, it was a really great experience, and as a musician a really important thing to be doing. And I laud very much the work of Po and Prairie Debut .... It's really important work, and I'm glad that we got to be a part of it.”*



## OVERALL VALUE

Presenters sang the praises of Prairie Debut for the work that it is doing to bring diverse classical and global music to rural audiences across the Prairies:

*“We are definitely motivated to include it. We love the program that Prairie Debut has. As a smaller presenter, it's really meaningful for us because the performance fees are usually quite accessible for us, so we really value the program.”*



*“Well, we really try to bring in diverse acts. It's really nice to have that different genre and a different type of music that we bring in so that we're bringing something for all community members. The last show we brought in, the audience was blown away. And there were lots of people there that weren't generally classical music lovers, and they said it's the best performance they've ever been to in our venue.”*



*“I think it is so important to be able to expand horizons and I appreciate that about Prairie Debut.”*

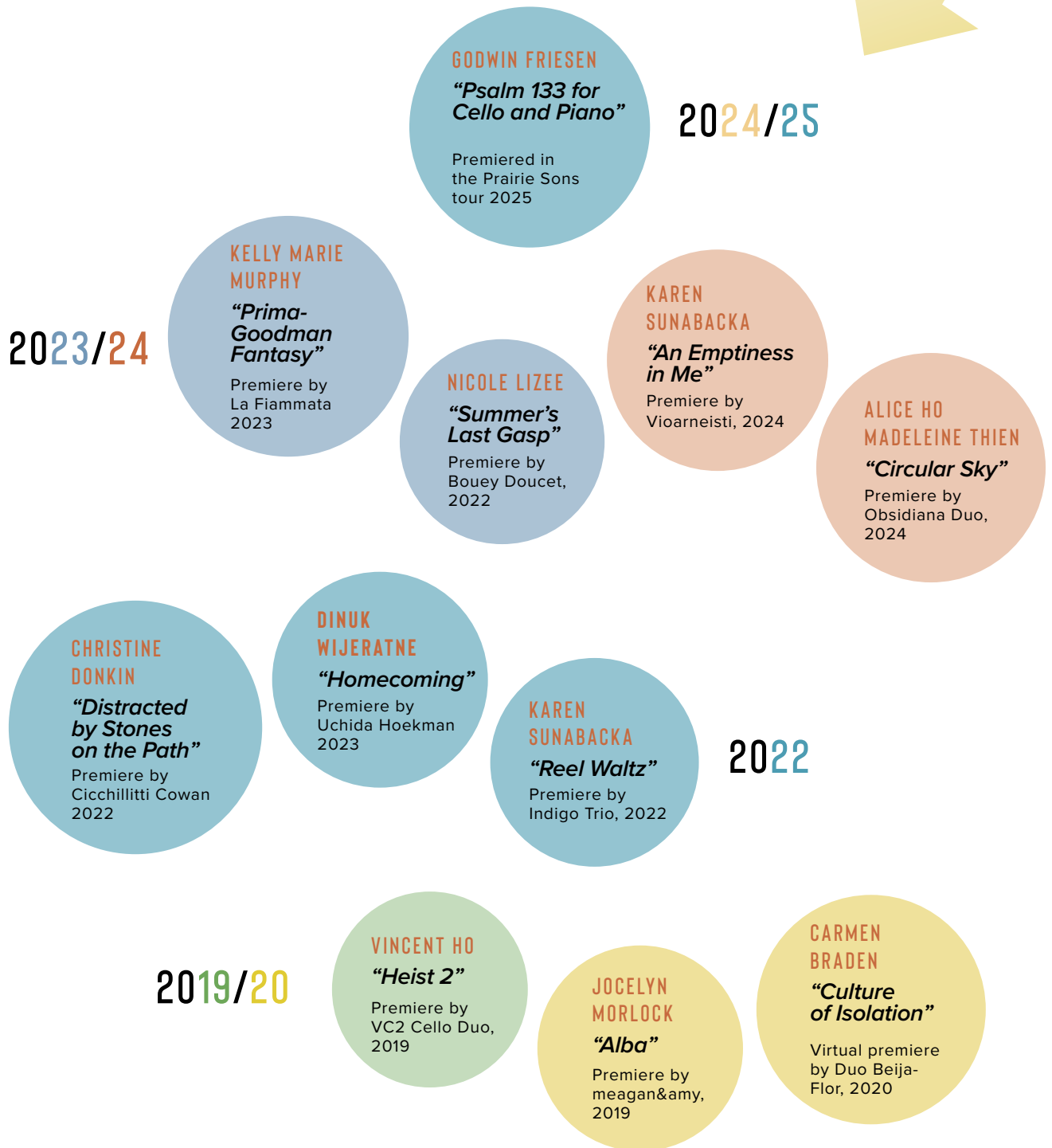


*“Oh, I think it brings us great value, especially to those people that get to experience it. I have heard so many people (especially the season ticket holders) say, I came to this concert, and I wasn't thinking I was really going to enjoy it; and then I got really involved in the performance. Or somebody said, I just moved to this community, and we saw that this was being offered, and we're so glad that we came. It just made us glad to be here in this community where it was offered.”*

# CANADIAN COMPOSITIONS

## A LEGACY OF NEW WORKS

The commissioning of new works by Canadian composers has become an integral part of Prairie Debut programming. These works are shared in communities across the country - a legacy of music to be enjoyed now and in the future.



**Land Acknowledgement**

We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

For detailed information on the First Peoples and Traditional Territories of the regions we serve, please visit: → [tinyurl.com/Honoring-First-Peoples](https://tinyurl.com/Honoring-First-Peoples)

**ALBERTA**

- AIRDRIE
- BANFF
- BARRHEAD
- BLACKFALDS
- BRAGG CREEK
- BROOKS
- CALGARY
- CAMROSE
- CANMORE
- CAYLEY
- COCHRANE
- CONSORT
- COLD LAKE
- DRAYTON VALLEY
- EDMONTON
- EDSON
- EXSHAW
- FORT MCMURRAY
- FORT SASKATCHEWAN
- GRAND PRAIRIE
- HIGH RIVER
- LACOMBE
- LEDUC
- LETHBRIDGE
- LLOYDMINSTER
- MORINVILLE
- OKOTOKS
- OLDS
- RED DEER
- RIMBEY
- SHERWOOD PARK
- SPRUCE GROVE
- ST. ALBERT
- STETTNER

- STRATHMORE
- VERMILLION
- WAINWRIGHT
- WESTLOCK
- BRITISH COLUMBIA**
- CHILLIWACK
- CRESTON
- GOLDEN
- NEW WESTMINSTER
- MANITOBA**
- ALTONA
- BRANDON
- CARBERRY
- CARMAN
- FLINFLON
- GLADSTONE

- HAMIOTA
- HOLLAND
- KILLARNEY
- MINNEDOSA
- MORDEN
- NEEPAWA
- OAKBANK
- PINAWA
- PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE
- RESTON
- SHOAL LAKE
- SNOW LAKE
- SOURIS
- ST. JEAN BAPTISTE
- STEINBACH

- STRATHCLAIR
- THE PAS
- THOMPSON
- VIRDEN
- WINKLER
- WINNIPEG
- NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**
- YELLOWKNIFE
- ONTARIO**
- KENORA
- SASKATCHEWAN**
- ASSINIBOIA
- BIGGAR
- CANORA
- EASTEND
- ESTEVAN

- HUDSON BAY
- INDIAN HEAD
- KINDERSLEY
- KIPLING
- LA RONGE
- LEADER
- LUSELAND
- MELFORT
- MELVILLE
- MOOSE JAW
- MOOSOMIN
- NIPAWIN
- NORTH BATTLEFORD
- OUTLOOK
- PRINCE ALBERT
- QUILL PLAINS
- RAVENSCRAG

- REDVERS
- REGINA
- ROSTHERN
- SASKATOON
- SHAUNAVON
- SWIFT CURRENT
- THEODORE
- TISDALE
- UNITY
- WATROUS
- WEYBURN
- WYNYARD
- YORKTON
- YUKON TERRITORY**
- DAWSON CITY
- HAINES JUNCTION
- WHITEHORSE



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group



**PO YEH**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
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