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**CHOIRS ONTARIO ANNOUNCES THE
WINNER OF THE 2021 RUTH WATSON
HENDERSON CHORAL COMPOSITION COMPETITION**

TORONTO, ONTARIO | AUGUST 7, 2022 - The Board of Directors of Choirs Ontario is thrilled to announce that Matthew-John Knights has been selected the winner and recipient of the 2021 Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Composition Competition.

Over 25 submissions were received from composers across the country. The compositions were reviewed by an accomplished jury panel of composers, conductors, and choral professionals.

I heard the Spring Wind Whisper by Vancouver-based composer, Matthew-John Knights was unanimously chosen as the winner. Matthew-John will receive a cash prize of \$2,000.00 and a premiere performance of his winning composition.

“Wonderful composition, text, and attention to detail; the score is professional and great care and craft was taken. Beautiful, evocative opening gesture which layers the entries. [We] love the mixed metre to bring out the phrasing of the poem”

Statement from President of Choirs Ontario, Andrew Walker

“Matthew-John Knights' piece, *I heard the Spring Wind Whisper*, is a well-deserved selection for this year's Ruth Watson Henderson Composition Competition. Choirs Ontario is proud to support the growth of choral composition across our province, and it is thanks to composers like Matthew-John that we have a thriving, exciting future for our community.”

Upon learning of his achievement, Knights remarked; “I cracked open my eyes early one morning, and checked my phone for emails. I saw that I had one from Choirs Ontario, and expected to find a polite rejection regarding a submission I had sent in. Instead I was overjoyed to find that I had been chosen as the recipient of the Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Composition Award for 2021! My heart was racing and I excitedly scrolled through the email again, re-reading the news and details, almost ready to pinch myself, I felt the news to be so exciting. I'm now very much looking forward to sharing my piece, “*I Heard the Spring Wind Whisper*,” with both the choir and the audience in the upcoming season. The text I chose is a selection of lines from a poem by Bliss Carmen. I chose lines of his text that were most evocative and descriptive, those that conjured vivid images in my mind. I set these to music, playing with the choir's ability to weave and overlap voices, and to flirt with tonality, creating interesting sonic colours to accompany the beautiful, and overwhelmingly positive text”.

In the early stages of his career Matthew-John Knights has already begun to make a name for himself winning several important prizes. His piece, "Blessed by Beauty and Rage" recently won the Thirteen Strings Call for Scores in 2019 and premiered in June of that year under the baton of Kevin Mallon. With the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, Matthew-John created "Adherent; Unyielding" for violin and piano, which was premiered in July of 2019 by its dedicatee, Gregory Lewis, collaborating with pianist Frédéric Lacroix. In January of 2020, Matthew-John's orchestral debut took place with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, at the Winnipeg New Music Festival, under the baton of Julian Pellicano. In 2020, Matthew-John received a SOCAN chamber music award for his piece "Distorted Reality, Imaginatively Amended," written in 2019 while he studied at Orford Music Academy with Véronique Lacroix and Dorothy Chang. Further studies at Orford included working with Ana Sokolović, Jean Lesage, Nicolas Gilbert.

Matthew-John has a special interest in creating theatrical works, that is, music that involves physical movement/staging. His piece, "Shadow Figures," for two oboes was played in March 2022 at the Sonic Boom Festival in Vancouver, and features movement of the oboists to tell a more immersive story. "Abstraction" for solo bass clarinet will also feature staging in an upcoming music video project with Turning Point Ensemble. His thesis, a part of his DMA program at the University of British Columbia, will also heavily feature movement and staging in a work for mezzo-soprano, flute/alto flute, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano and mixed percussion.

ABOUT THE RUTH WATSON HENDERSON CHORAL COMPOSITION COMPETITION

The Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Composition Competition was born out of a concert held in November 1992 to honour Ruth's 60th birthday including Toronto Children's Chorus, Elmer Iseler Singers, Amadeus Choir, Bach Children's Chorus, Elora Festival Singers, Oriana Women's Choir, and TMC Youth Chorus. The proceeds of this joint concert were used to establish the RWH competition. The administration of the competition was handed over to Choirs Ontario with Ruth Watson Henderson involved in judging the competition up until 2017.

One of Canada's foremost musicians, Ruth Watson Henderson is renowned internationally both as a composer and pianist. Her works are acclaimed, performed, and recorded worldwide. The Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Competition was established in 1996 to recognize Ms. Watson Henderson's invaluable contribution to the art of choral music. Ms. Henderson is very pleased to encourage the contribution to Canadian choral music that the competition provides, and appreciates the work of Choirs Ontario who administers this program.

Choirs Ontario is proud to support Canadian composers and add to the rich legacy of Canadian choral music through the Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Composition Competition. Past winners of the competition include: Jason Jestadt, Mark Sirett, Leonard Enns, Allan Bevan, and Elise Letourenau.

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