



Entertainment

Singing the Earth celebrates Bella Coola, B.C.

Multimedia work by Anna Hostman and Dylan Robinson, sung by Marion Newman, at Wychwood Theatre Dec. 4 and 5.



The natural beauty of Bella Coola, B.C., is being showcased in Singing the Earth at the Wychwood Theatre Dec. 4 and 5.

By: Trish Crawford Music, Published on Tue Dec 03 2013

Soprano [Marion Newman](#) was born in [Bella Coola](#), B.C., while her mother was teaching there.

Although the visit there was short and the family moved on, Newman, who is native, has not forgotten the beautiful community of the [Nuxalk](#) people who have lived there through many waves of immigration.

It is a good fit, then, that the mezzo-soprano is singing in the unusual project [Singing the Earth](#), which runs Dec. 4 and 5 at Wychwood Theatre.

Anna Hostman, who is descended from the Norwegian settlers who arrived in Bella Coola in 1894, composed the hour-long piece. She is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto with a doctorate in composition.

Dramaturge Dylan Robinson is an installation artist and musicologist bringing a multimedia aspect to the event with video, photos and installations throughout the performance. His family is of the First Nation community of [Sto:lo](#).

The interdisciplinary work includes a septet with conductor and is presented by [Continuum Contemporary Music](#).

Here is an edited interview with Hostman.

How did this project get started, what was its inspiration?

Dylan and I have a long history of creating sound installation pieces together — in Canada, in England, Russia and Mexico — and wanted to work on something new that would explore current interests. Dylan was at that time focusing on First Nations contemporary art music and I was missing the coast where I've lived most of my life, and thinking especially about the isolated and beautiful valley where I grew up. We talked with Marion Newman about the project early on as she is such a wonderful singer and she was born in Bella Coola. Her family continues to have strong ties to the community.

How important are the visual components to appreciating the music?

Travelling to the valley in three different seasons, we were struck by how vivid the colour was in the valley — greys, shadows, greens, browns, blues — by how present quiet was, how thick and varied were the mosses hanging from the trees, and how the textures of nature became a means of understanding the place itself. The valley acted on our senses in ways we hadn't experienced before. The music, text and visual components each speak to these various sensory experiences.

Will the audience understand the parts not being sung in English?

The text is poetic, imagistic and filled with stories and allusions to stories. Bella Coola is a community of only 2000 people; our imaginations were struck by the confluence of languages and histories within such a small and isolated community. The canneries which were open in the early 20th century had English, Nuxalk and Norwegian, Chinese and Japanese working side by side.

How long have you been working on this project?

After our first visit in the fall of 2011, Dylan wondered if we might spend a more significant amount of time doing fieldwork in Bella Coola. A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant provided funding to return an additional two times, for which we were very grateful.

What do you hope audiences will take away from the performances?

What we have been learning about in our exploration of this community has to do with struggle and resilience. We also hope to share with the audience glimpses into the Nuxalk culture, those people who have always lived in the valley. The evening will begin with the screening of an amazing film, [Cry Rock](#), by Nuxalk filmmaker Banchi Hanuse, that questions how oral traditions are shared with the younger generations.

What is the future for Bella Coola?

There are continual questions for the community about access to food, as Bella Coola is dependent on a 300-mile road to the nearest town of Williams Lake for the delivery of goods (and this road closes down regularly). There is also a great deal of discussion about sustainable forms of economic development. People have always lived off the surrounding natural resources — logging, mining, fishing (and even a pine-mushroom industry that started in the 1980s) — but these are all currently depleted or in some kind of flux. The Nuxalk and many other residents of Bella Coola are resolutely opposed to the development of pipelines across their territories. But since people

depend for their living on natural resources, it's never a simple question of just rejecting or accepting economic proposals.

How would you describe Singing the Earth's message?

Like the people who live there, we consider the piece a collection of eccentricities, struggles, hopes, strengths and contraries. It's a necessarily incomplete portrait of the people and place, our own creative response to their warmth and spirit, as well as to the valley's stunning beauty.