

Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation. Music by Christos Hatzis. Performers: Tanya Tagaq, Steve Wood, vocalists; Northern Cree Singers; Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra; Tadeusz Biernacki, conductor. Toronto: Centrediscs, CMC-CD 22015, 2016. 2 compact discs (90:03).

The ballet, *Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation*, is the culmination of an intercultural collaboration between Metis writer Joseph Boyden, choreographer Mark Godden and composer Christos Hatzis, that was commissioned by Artistic Director André Lewis of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet for its seventy-fifth anniversary. The work is presented in memory of the late Cree Elder, Mary Richard (Ah Kha ko cheesh), who, with André Lewis, sought to create an Indigenous ballet in the spirit of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, the celebrated Indigenous play that was made into a Royal Winnipeg production in 1971. Developed with the support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Going Home Star* depicts the intergenerational impacts of the state-sponsored, church-run residential schools that Indigenous children were forced to attend since the inception of the Indian Act in 1876; the last residential school closed in 1996, a disturbing fact that should not be lost on anyone, especially in light of the history of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to which students were subjected.

The ballet tells the interconnected story of the four principal Indigenous characters: Annie, a hairdresser in an urban centre; Gordon, Annie's counterpart, a trickster living as a homeless man; and Niska and Charlie, two school-aged children from the past who attend residential school. Through the course of the ballet Annie is transformed through her interactions with Gordon, who suffers the literal and figurative burden as a survivor of residential school (visually represented by a reliquary or small model of a residential school). Together Annie and Gordon learn about Niska's and Charlie's suffering and abuse at the hands of school guardians through vignettes depicting them in various situations, including the physical punishments by the clergymen after Niska and Charlie are discovered with previously-confiscated traditional medicine (in the form of a pouch of a tobacco). Annie grows stronger and more supportive of Gordon, who is increasingly weakened by the weight of the residential school experience witnessed through Niska and Charlie. Specific musical cues and sound effects augment and serve to remind listeners of the Indigenous-focused narrative.

Following in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this work is an intercultural creation that engages Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to raise awareness of the legacy of residential schools and their intergenerational impact. The complex collaboration of Metis author Joseph Boyden, Inuk singer Tanya Tagaq and the Northern Cree Singers with Greek-



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Canadian composer Christos Hatzis and choreographer Mark Godden marks a distinct moment in intercultural arts creation (Hatzis addresses the anxiety he felt and the solutions he sought in creating a work based on Indigenous histories and characters in the CD liner notes). The narrative of *Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation* is provided by Boyden, and the names of the main characters resonate with characters drawn from his stories, including the novels *Through Black Spruce* and *Three Day Road*, and his short story “Born with a Tooth.” For readers familiar with Boyden’s works, these connections add a layer of meaning to the narrative of the ballet. Likewise, the creative and impactful integration of Indigenous music, such as Tanya Tagaq’s throat singing, Northern Cree Singers’ powwow songs and Steve Wood’s Cree “Morning Song” at key moments, alongside recorded and live orchestral music, allows listeners to consider the dialogue and musical sharing that is enacted in this work.

One of the most compelling juxtapositions of various musics is in scene 2 of act 2, “I got to build my fire up.” Identified as the beginning of reconciliation in the ballet, symphonic music is juxtaposed with Tagaq’s vocalizations, Woods’ and Tagaq’s oration of Boyden’s text, the music of Jean-Baptiste Lully, and the Cree “Treaty Song” sung by Wood. A musical and textual representation of imagined first encounters between Indigenous peoples and Louis XIV’s colonizers, the spoken text recounts the reliance of early settlers on local Indigenous knowledges necessary for survival. The energetic symphonic writing creates a sense of urgency juxtaposed with the throat singing of Tagaq, the lyrical and gentle “Treaty Song,” electroacoustic music, and various nature sounds, leading to Tagaq’s disturbing testimony about the abuses suffered and witnessed by children in residential school, as reflected in the persistent utterings of “I watched.” In this way, the audience is likewise called upon to witness and understand the dark history of colonial encounters and residential schools, in order to move towards reconciliation.

Going Home Star is a powerful ballet that, in live performance, is aesthetically pleasing in its uncomplicated yet symbolic sets, beautiful choreography, dramatic story and complex, yet accessible music. At a performance in Ottawa that I attended in January 2016, the lobby of the National Arts Centre had banners documenting the history of residential schools, and, in one corner of the main foyer, Indigenous Elders were on hand to support audience members who were emotionally affected by the performance. The inclusion of Elders as a support resource for audience members reflects the sensitive content of the ballet and the role that Elders have in cultural recovery and cross-cultural education. While one might question this “high arts” performance venue for an Indigenous-focused work in terms of affordability, the space was filled to capacity with appreciative Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members of all ages who commended the performance with a standing ovation. This work was created in the spirit of reconciliation, a notion that celebrates the revitalization and renewal of healthy and respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada; and in many

ways, *Going Home Star* serves “to decolonize the audience,” as Beverley Diamond has put it, thus creating a space for dialogue and understanding.

As I write this review, the live tour of the Royal Winnipeg production of *Going Home Star* is continuing across Canada, where CDs of the work are also for sale. The CD release includes the music in its entirety, with liner notes that summarize the plot and provide biographical information about the key artists, including commentary by Hatzis about the artistic collaboration. Although it does not include the visual dimensions of the ballet, the recording testifies to the negotiation of artistic perspectives and world views. It allows listeners to hear the music and consider the creative and respectful intercultural dialogue that was necessary in this work’s development, while pondering what reconciliation looks and sounds like today.

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