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Sound Atlas returns to hit the right notes for contemporary music fans



Musicians play at the inaugural Sound Atlas Music Festival at Contemporary Calgary in 2023. COURTESY SOUND ATLAS/CHRIS SANTOS

By **Aryn Toombs**

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Without a doubt, the music festival season this summer is a busy one in Calgary, from Sled Island to Folk Fest, and from Cowboys to Oxford Stomp.

But in its second iteration, the Sound Atlas New Music Festival is returning to Contemporary Calgary to fill a niche for music lovers in the city that can't be found anywhere else.

That, said Jani Parsons, co-director of Sound Atlas and Executive Director of Latitude 49, is exactly why their festival exists.

"If you know Calgary, you know that as soon as June comes around we're in festival season for the rest of the summer, which is exciting. The thing that we like to draw attention to is there aren't any other contemporary music festivals quite like ours," she said.

"It is a sort of a niche thing that fills a specific need, and in the first year, it was really, really exciting. We were able to feature a wide range of quite a few local groups, and we were really able to bring together a community."

The festival runs from June 27 to June 29 at Contemporary Calgary.

New, experimental, but don't think classical

Contemporary music, said Parsons, is a bit experimental and a bit art, but distinct from what is generally thought of as classical music.

"I really hate to call it classical music, because it has such a connotation with old classical music. Really what we're doing is presenting music that's just been just been written by today's composers," she said.

"Sound Atlas Festival is basically an experiment in sound. We have artists from all across North America and composers that come together. It's a celebration of contemporary music, and a lot of music that audience members will hear will be performances that will be the first time that piece has been heard, or a very least the first time in Canada."

Among the artists performing includes Parson's own mixed-chamber ensemble Latitude 49, Juno-nominated eclectic composer Jared Miller, Juno-nominated Calgary group Land's End Ensemble, Paris-based modern harpist Parker Ramsay, Chicago composer and saxophonist Nick Zoulek, Calgary Philharmonic principal trumpeter Adam Zinatelli, Mount Royal University's internationally-renowned pianist Akiko Tominaga, Calgary creative music improvisers Circular Sparrow, and Calgary's own Juno nominated percussionist and composer Chris Sies.

Pointing out the harp work of Ramsay as emblematic of the festival, Parsons said that is a way to contrast the perceptions of what traditional music is versus contemporary works.

"We don't often think of contemporary music quickly associated with the harp, it's usually pretty traditional and viewed very traditionally, in the classical scene. But that's why I'm really, really excited about his set. He'll be sharing a bunch of music by a composer Tom Morrison, who's a good friend of ours, and it's music for harp and electronics," she said.

"Then we'll have Parker featured on the last day of the festival, doing a big brand new piece that's basically a harp concerto for him and the ensemble that I'm a part of."

Nothing quite like Sound Atlas

Parsons said that one of the exciting things about Sound Atlas was the way that it connects people to music and art.

"There are people here in Calgary who are really excited and interested in coming out to things that present new music, and new experiences. It's our hope that we can just continue to build," she said.

That interest has grown from last year's festival, she said, and along with it the ability to bring in more international artists to play alongside the lineup of some of Calgary's top contemporary composers and musicians.

"I think the thing was getting it off the ground, just making sure that you have something that's unique that people actually want to go to, and knowing what the market is that you're that you're going for," Parsons said.

That market, said Parson, is unique because it offers a lot of overlap between the contemporary music scene, and the contemporary art scene.

In fact, attendees to the festival will be getting a mix of both, as the musicians at Sound Atlas will be playing in amongst the exhibitions at Contemporary Calgary.

"It's exciting to present it at Contemporary Calgary because there's just a lot of compatibility with what they're doing, with presenting living artists' work," Parsons said.

"There's connection, like our audience can actually observe these different exhibits in the different galleries that are happening in contemporary Calgary and kind of see the intersection of contemporary art in all of its forms. It's a really beautiful thing."

Still, there was some effort made to better align the schedule of Sound Atlas this year to the overall festival season by avoiding double booking against some of the larger music festivals, Parsons said.

"We tried to do our best due diligence and kind of tried to dodge as many of the big festivals that we don't want to be competing against. Last year, we were almost simultaneous with Sled Island, and that was a little bit difficult, because we had some of our artists who were in both," she said.

Tickets for Sound Atlas start at \$25 for students, and \$65 for general admission, and \$150 for an all-access weekend pass, which also includes a complimentary one-year membership to Contemporary Calgary.

For more information, and for tickets, see www.soundatlasfest.com.



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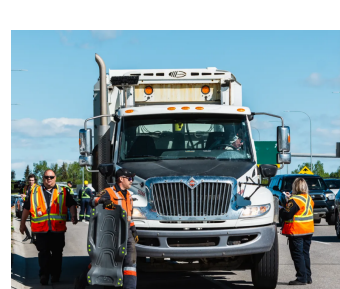
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