

Dr. Robert Riseling, clarinet

Guest Artist Series
Recital Hall | December 5, 2019 | 7:30 pm

Program

Motor City Memoir

Alan Torok
(b. 1947)

Robert Riseling is Professor Emeritus at Western University's Don Wright Faculty of Music. Other university positions include schools in Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, Kansas, Illinois, Nova Scotia, France, and China. He has a BME, MM (Composition, University of Texas) and DMA (Performance, University of Michigan). He has performed, taught, coached chamber music, and given master classes in Canada, USA, Mexico, England, France, Belgium, Slovenia, Italy, Norway, Iceland, and Israel. More than forty broadcasts on CBC Radio Canada have included many of the 70 works written for him. He has performed at eight International Clarinet Association festivals and taught/performed at numerous summer institutes and festivals in Canada, the USA, Mexico, Europe, and China. His 30-year relationship with Hungary included numerous performances, Magyar Radio broadcasts, and teaching at the International Clarinet Camp and the Franz Liszt Academy. For his many performances of Hungarian works, he received two awards from Hungary's ARTISJUS, including the medal PRO ARTIBUS. From 1993–2011 he made 15 trips to China and taught, coached, and performed across the country and received five honorary professorships.

Denise Jung graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree from Western University where she studied with Tina Yanchus and John Hess. She received a diploma in Chamber Music from Wilfrid Laurier University and Bachelor of Education from the University of Toronto. She has performed with Orchestra London, Clarion Symphony, and London Community Orchestra. Denise currently accompanies the Young Men and Primus choirs of Amabile and is the new music director at Calvary United Church. She also maintains a small piano studio and is in her second year of supply teaching for the TVDSB.

Program Notes My *Motor City Memoir* is a group of pieces that tell short stories of my time in Detroit from 1960 to 1969. They are meant to be a coherent whole and are inspired (if that is the right word) by a visit in 2012, to my old home during those years, at Outer Drive and Gratiot Avenue. The dereliction and destruction I saw there gave impetus to my writing of this music

I dedicate the piece to the American corporate criminals and their government accomplices, who presided over the destruction of Detroit.

School of Music

ASU Herberger Institute for
Design and the Arts
Arizona State University

1961: High Hopes: At the end of 1960 my mother and I emigrated to the USA from Windsor, Ontario—just across the Detroit River. Mother was looking for better economic opportunities than were available in Ontario at the time. This piece tries to capture some of the optimism that came from our emigration. Detroit did seem like a bright new world. A fragment of the Motown hit “Dancing in the Street” provides some source material for the rhythms of this piece.

1962: Running Man: This is a portrait of my de-facto stepfather, William T. Grifor, “The Running Man.” He was 34 years old in 1962 and an incipient alcoholic. He worked two and three jobs for many years but blew all of his earnings on the horses . . . and booze. Bit by bit he became a hopeless, useless drunk. It was my mother’s misfortune to marry him. The 1962 Motown hit “Do You Love Me?” by the Temptations sets the rhythmic character of this piece. Its restless dance rhythm (remember “The Twist”) dominates the pieces and has interspersed within it more reflective episodes. This is his memorial. My mother separated from him in 1997. When he suffered a stroke ten years later, his body was not discovered for several days. He died as drunks die: alone.

1963: The Proposition: I was on my way home after school in Downtown Detroit waiting at a bus stop when I witnessed a memorable scene. A comely girl was spotted by a group of young fedora-sporting guys in a convertible. They were even more impressed by this girl than I was. Circling the block several times, they repeatedly buzzed her and brazenly tried to entice her into their car. Traffic was heavy but they came back again and again. She wisely ignored them and took the same bus I did. My piece tries to evoke the musically fed, brazen aggression that I saw at work that day: four guys in a late-model muscle car, blaring rhythm & blues music . . . trying to pick up a girl they took to be a tart.

1964: The Sweet Drunk: Old Eddie Zimmer was a barfly that my family hired to do manual work on our building projects. My stepfather would periodically search for him in the variety of bars and blind pigs that he haunted. If he was sober enough, Eddie would come home and work for us. If not . . .? The music shows him in the “then,” but it also possesses a past for him.

1965: Plymouth Coupe: During my senior year of high school, I would occasionally take rides home with a friend who had his own car. Karl Miller was car crazy—this was Detroit in its heyday, after all—and he drove a machine he rebuilt himself: a 1950 Plymouth. Many a typical ride home out Gratiot Avenue would feature a carful of 16–17-year-olds blasting Roy Orbison, Smokey Robinson, Mary Wells, et al. This piece, however, was inspired by the Motown hit “Shotgun.” It was a one-chord dance hit for Junior Walker and the All-Stars.

1966: Punch-press: For five summers I worked for a Detroit auto company to make enough money to last through a year of art school. Its factories were huge. They were city-blocks long with 4500+ workers over 24-hour shifts. Inside were confusions of giant machines, each one many tons of measured steel. Every department had its own characteristic noise types. In punching plants, the noise was deafeningly deep and constant. In grinding areas, it was high-pitched and shrill. The look of various departments was also unique and memorable: in roller-

School of Music

ASU Herberger Institute for
Design and the Arts
Arizona State University

grinding areas, the light was dim bluish-white due to the fluorescent light blending with the milky lubricant that evaporated from the machines. *Punch-press* combines R&B texture and some James Brown/Maceo Parker quotes with an image of Bower Roller Bearing Inc.

1967: Undercurrent: In July 1967 while I worked my third summer in the factories, a revolt broke out about ten blocks from my old high school in downtown Detroit. It started with a 4 a.m. raid by the racist Detroit police on a blind pig. Some Vietnam vets were celebrating the return (alive) of one of their members. The vets refused to be arrested and were joined in their resistance by residents of the neighborhood (all black, of course) . . . and the revolt was on. It spread throughout the black and mixed-race parts of the city over the course of a few days. Fires, shootings, looting, national guardsmen posted throughout the city, the US Army itself was brought in and martial law was declared. As a white immigrant kid, I had no idea that the undercurrent of racism in Detroit was so close to general revolt. *Undercurrent* develops two contrasting musical sections in gradually increasing opposition to each other until . . . the breaking point.

1968: On the Factory Floor: During my second-to-last summer in the Detroit auto factories, I worked the midnight shift in the heat-treating department of Bower Roller Bearing Inc. My main job was to work both ends of the house-size heating ovens: feed stock into the ovens and then move the filled metal bins at the exit end. The heat was so intense you couldn't sit on any of the metal chairs strewn about. The echoing racket came in pulverizing waves as the heavy metal stock clattered through its steel corkscrew exit mechanism. Metal clangs against metal in ever-increasing and dangerous decibel levels. The manic piano part of this piece especially evokes the vision of an unbearable night-world.

1969: Farewell: That year, after a year of planning, I left the US and re-emigrated to Canada. The major reason for my leaving: the Vietnam War was still on. Export of democracy was in full swing in the form of napalm, high explosives, and Agent Orange. North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were the grateful recipients. *Farewell* is certainly nostalgic—it represents the clear end of adolescence for me—but it is also highly cognizant of the continuing violence of the time. Knitted into the fabric of this piece are fragments of two songs of that time, “The End” by The Doors and “Eve of Destruction” by P. F. Sloan.

2012: Echoes and Remains: In the summer of 2012 I took a trip back to Detroit, my first since leaving my home there in 1969. I revisited my old home and neighborhoods. What I found has been well-documented: many square miles of burned out and abandoned buildings, factories, and neighborhoods: ruin. The final piece of this musical memoir is a meditation—sometimes very angry—on what has been done to this city and its people. Fragments of another Motown hit of the time by The Supremes are knitted into the piece. A clear quote from the tune ends the piece and the set.

Most of the pieces from the set use characteristic turns of phrase from the top-40s music of that time to form their language. A few of the pieces quote actual phrases.

—Alan Torok

School of Music

ASU® Herberger Institute for
Design and the Arts
Arizona State University

School of Music

ASU Herberger Institute for
Design and the Arts
Arizona State University