

HONENS MEDIA RELEASE

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HONENS FACILITATES COMMISSION OF DEEPLY PERSONAL PIANO CONCERTO BY COMPOSER KATI AGÓCS FOR 2018 HONENS PRIZE LAUREATE NICOLAS NAMORADZE

New work honours the memory of Canadian jazz pianist, mathematician, educator, and composer Bruce McKinnon; to be premiered in 2022



CALGARY, AB, July 30, 2020—Arisen from a remarkable confluence of events and people, the Esther Honens International Piano Competition Foundation (Honens) announces the commission of a piano concerto for 2018 Honens Prize Laureate Nicolas Namoradze by Canadian-American composer Kati Agócs. The new work, in memory of Canadian jazz pianist, mathematician, educator, and composer Bruce McKinnon, is to premiere in 2022 with additional performances across Canada and internationally anticipated for the 2022 / 23 season.

This concerto commission fits both pianist Namoradze and composer Agócs perfectly. Namoradze shares, “I am a passionate advocate of new music. Having a major concerto written for me by a young composer I have the greatest admiration for is a dream come true.” The piece will be an expressive, virtuosic showcase for Namoradze, twenty minutes in duration. For Agócs, concertos have become her trademark in the last few years. Her new horn concerto for James Sommerville will premiere in 2020 / 21 as a consortium commission from five orchestras in the U.S. and Canada. Her recent *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra* was featured last summer at the Aspen Music Festival with Jennifer Koh as soloist, and recorded for the Naxos label. Continuing this thread of writing for great soloists in the concerto genre, a piano concerto with standard orchestration is the natural next step.

Honens President & CEO Neil Edwards comments, “We feel there is no one better than Team Agócs / Namoradze to pay musical tribute to Bruce McKinnon. Through a pan-Canadian partnership, this new piece will represent the Calgary area across Canada and on the world stage. We believe that this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity has the potential to bring disparate communities together to honour Bruce and to make music at the highest level.”

This commission project is rooted in deep relationships. Agócs met McKinnon at the age of 16 when they represented their respective provinces in the same year at Pearson College (United World Colleges). Their special friendship formed during that first year, when they each wrote old-fashioned paper letters to each other over Christmas break, and lasted throughout his life, which was cut short at age 32 by cancer in 2007. McKinnon encouraged Agócs to perform and to write her own music, which helped to launch her as a musician. Although he did not get to see her come into her own as an orchestral composer, their last conversation impacted Agócs greatly. She was writing her quintet *Immutable Dreams* at the time, and the last movement “Husks” evoked his presence and anticipated his imminent loss.

Several years later, in 2015, *Immutable Dreams* was performed at the Chelsea Music Festival, for which Namoradze was the pianist. This first collaboration for Agócs and Namoradze was the beginning of a warm friendship—they share a Hungarian background, cosmopolitanism, and musical synergy. Namoradze was very moved by the background story of the quintet, and during the preparation for this premiere would reflect on how he’d have loved to have met Bruce, given the many interests and passions they shared.

A few years later after winning the triennial Honens International Piano Competition, Namoradze serendipitously befriended a couple in Calgary who were supporters of Honens and would turn out to be McKinnon’s parents. Just a week before his Carnegie Hall debut, Namoradze received an email from Russell and Vickie McKinnon who had found *Immutable Dreams* in his repertoire list online, and informed him that Bruce was in fact their son—a testament to how art and music can connect us all in ways we could never expect.

However, the interpersonal connections don’t stop there. Neil Edwards and Kati Agócs have also worked together previously. They met when Agócs was serving on the Composition faculty of Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John’s, her first job, from 2006 to 2008. Edwards was CEO of the Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, who performed her works on three different occasions during this time period.

Agócs remarks, “These unprecedented times have underscored music’s unique ability to connect and sustain us. I am honoured to fulfill a commission from Honens to write a new piano concerto for the brilliant Nicolas Namoradze in memory of Bruce McKinnon, one of my oldest and most deeply influential friends, lost far too soon. Bringing together so many collaborative threads, this partnership has the potential to tap into the metamorphic power of art to convert loss into renewal.”

Honens will be reaching out to orchestras across Canada and around the world to perform the new work.

Backgrounder Attached

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Information

Alberta Media Relations
Amanda Smith
Honens
403 975 7438
asmith@honens.com

Worldwide Media Relations
Patricia Price
8VA Music Consultancy
1 800 530 3318
patricia@8vamusiconconsultancy.com

BACKGROUND

ABOUT KATI AGÓCS

“One of the brightest stars in her generation of composers” (*Audiophile Audition*), Kati Agócs writes music that delivers visceral power and otherworldly lyricism with soulful directness. Performed by leading musicians worldwide, her diverse and growing body of works has often been praised for its elegance and emotion. A recent Guggenheim Fellow, she has also been awarded the prestigious Arts and Letters Award, the lifetime achievement award in music composition from The American Academy of Arts and Letters. She was nominated for a JUNO Award—the Canadian equivalent of a Grammy Award—for Classical Composition of the Year in 2017.

Music by Agócs has been commissioned and performed by many premier ensembles and organizations including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Chamber Players, Minnesota Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival and School, and the multiple Grammy-award winning ensemble Eighth Blackbird, who toured the U.S. with her *Immutable Dreams*. Agócs is a citizen of Canada, the United States, and Hungary. She studied at The Juilliard School, Sarah Lawrence College, Aspen, and Tanglewood, and currently serves on the composition faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston. For more information, visit www.katiagocs.com.

ABOUT NICOLAS NAMORADZE

Pianist and composer Nicolas Namoradze, whose performances have been hailed by critics as “sparkling ... sensitive and coloristic” (*New York Times*), “simply gorgeous” (*Wall Street Journal*) and “astonishing” (*International Piano Magazine*) came to international attention in 2018 upon winning the triennial Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary, Canada—the largest piano prize in the world.

As the 2018 Honens Prize Laureate, besides performing in the world’s most remarkable classical music venues including Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, and Konzerthaus Berlin, Namoradze’s activities include performances with orchestras such as the London Philharmonic Orchestra this fall, recording releases on the Hyperion, Honens, Edition Klavier-Festival Ruhr, and Steinway labels, and residencies at leading festivals and music centers around the world such as the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

After completing his undergraduate studies in Budapest, Vienna, and Florence, Namoradze moved to New York for his master’s degree at Juilliard. He now pursues his doctorate at the CUNY Graduate Center holding the Graduate Center Fellowship. His teachers have included Emanuel Ax, Yoheved Kaplinsky, Zoltán Kocsis, Matti Raekallio, and Elisso Virsaladze in piano, and John Corigliano in composition. For more information, visit nicolasnamoradze.com.

ABOUT BRUCE MCKINNON

Bruce McKinnon was a jazz pianist, mathematician, educator, and composer from Calgary. He began piano lessons at age five. After graduating from Lester B. Pearson United World College, he went on to earn a degree in mathematics from Harvard University while playing jazz professionally. He taught math in Paris briefly, and then came back to earn a master’s degree in jazz performance and composition from the Manhattan School of Music. He continued living in New York teaching, composing, and performing as a jazz pianist with J.J. Johnson, Don Byron, Alvin Batiste, Don Braden, Conrad Herwig, Django Bates, Doug Beavers, and Marc Mommaas.

McKinnon was twice a participant in the Jazz and Creative Music program at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, and in 2005 was a visiting guest artist-in-residence at the University of Calgary’s Department of Music. McKinnon passed away on January 9, 2007 due to a rare form of cancer.

ABOUT HONENS

The Honens International Piano Competition takes place every three years and is considered one of the world's most prestigious events of its kind. Honens prepares its Laureates for the rigours and realities of professional careers in music and creates opportunities for growth and exposure. The annual Honens Festival is one of Canada's premier classical music events, intended to share Mrs. Honens' love of world renowned music with Albertans every year.

Esther Honens created a legacy of musical excellence to be enjoyed for generations. In 1991, knowing she was near the end of her life, Mrs. Honens gave \$5 million to endow an international piano competition in her hometown of Calgary, Canada. Her generosity, vision, and love of music continue to touch the lives of Calgarians, Canadians, musicians, and music-lovers around the world.

Honens Legacy Partners support the ongoing growth and development of Esther Honens' vision by securing the organization's future. The Legacy Partners Endowment Fund enables Honens to provide wide-reaching programming through its annual festival and other enriching community education and outreach initiatives.