

No Exit to host Aether Eos

by Mike Telin



This weekend No Exit will take a short break from performing and put on their presenter hat when they host Aether Eos — the duo of violinist/composer/visual artist Leah Asher and pianist/composer Christopher Goddard — on Sunday, March 3 at 3:00 pm at Heights Arts and Monday the 4th at 7:30 pm at Kent State University's Ludwig Recital Hall. Both performances are free.

Their varied program will explore a kaleidoscope of expressive states in Tonia Ko's *plush earth in four pieces*, Carrie Frey's *Seagrass/Reed*, Giacinto Scelsi's *Chemin du Coeur*, Linda Caitlin Smith's *Unbroken*, and Michael Hersch's *the wreckage of flowers*.

Founded in 2017, Aether Eos has been presented by Codes d'accès (Montreal), Constellation (Chicago), and MISE-EN_PLACE (New York). The duo have been guest artists at the Montreal Contemporary Music Lab, Ball State University, Western Michigan University, College of the Ozarks, and Western Illinois University, and have premiered works by Chin Ting Chan, Pang Chun-ting, and Luke Carlson, in addition to performing Eric Wubbels's *the children of fire come looking for fire* extensively across North America. As part of their mission to explore the intersection of composition, performance practice, and improvisation, Asher and Goddard have presented workshops on topics such as creative collaboration and graphic score notation.

No Exit's Laura King spoke with Christopher Goddard. The following is reposted with the permission of No Exit.

A Canadian performer, composer, and advocate of contemporary music, Christopher Goddard keeps active as a pianist, organist, and keyboardist in solo, chamber ensembles,

orchestral and collaborative settings. He holds a D.Mus. in composition from McGill University, an M.M. in contemporary performance from the Manhattan School of Music, an M.M. in composition from Rice University, and a B.Mus. in composition and theory from McGill University. Since 2017, Christopher has performed in Aether Eos, a duo project with New York-based violinist Leah Asher that has commissioned new work and toured throughout North America.

We caught up with Christopher recently to discuss his musical path and collaborations.

Laura King: Hi Christopher, please give us a musical bio in bits. What moved you at a young age to connect with piano and composition, who was your most important mentor, and what is your favorite musical accomplishment to date?

Christopher Goddard: Both of my grandfathers were piano teachers, so I grew up in a musical home with access to lots of piano scores. Reading through those scores as a child, I became more interested in how the music was put together than how to play it properly, so composition just organically emerged as another way of trying to understand how music works. I remember spending car trips analyzing Bach fugues like they were puzzles to be solved, and my excitement when I felt that I had done so! In many ways I'm doing much the same today, whether as a composer, performer, or music researcher. Among my many mentors, I would name my doctoral advisor John Rea as having had the biggest impact on my way of writing and thinking about music, and my favorite recent accomplishment was premiering my piano concerto in 2022 with Esprit Orchestra in Toronto...that's every pianist/composer's dream, right?

LK: How and when did Aether Eos, your duo project with violinist-composer Leah Asher, come about? Please share how that collaboration has evolved since 2017 and where you intend to take it.

CG: Leah and I were colleagues in the Contemporary Performance program at the Manhattan School of Music from 2010-12. We performed together in a lot of ensembles during that time, but it wasn't until 2017 that we had the idea to form a duo, in part out of my desire to play a big piece by composer Eric Wubbels.

I think our partnership is effective because we're both strong advocates for the cause of contemporary music and we also come at it from different perspectives—me being more of a conventional pianist/composer type, and Leah being interested in things like improvisation, graphic score interpretation, etc. We really enjoy presenting intense, ambitious programs that challenge each other's comfort zones... I expect this will continue for the future, hopefully along with more composer collaborations.

LK: Please talk about your No Exit Presents concert event. What inspiration and intention did you hold as you curated the program, described by artistic director Tim Beyer as “really thoughtful, unique, and engaging.”

CG: In the past we've built our programs around a predetermined piece of repertoire, but this is the first one we've made from scratch. Leah proposed several pieces she had her eye on, and we went back and forth until we settled on a program that we both were very excited about and felt fit together as a cohesive whole.

Michael Hersch's duo the wreckage of flowers, a haunting work in 21 short movements inspired by poetry by Czeslaw Milosz, forms the backbone of our program. The bracing modernism of this piece is mirrored somewhat in the program's opener, Tonia Ko's plush earth in four pieces. Giacinto Scelsi's Chemin du Coeur and Linda Catlin Smith's Unbroken are contrasting works of a kind of wistful lyricism, and Carrie Frey's enigmatic Seagrass/Reed showcases Leah's skill at interpreting open scores. This is a program of expressive range and psychological depth that will forge unexpected aural pathways between radically different kinds of music.

LK: What has it been like for you to work with No Exit as a commissioned composer? What do you see as the ensemble's unique contribution to the contemporary music scene?

CG: As a composer, I am lucky to have been commissioned several times by No Exit over the years. Our most ambitious collaboration was my 2018 ensemble piece trope (en)trop, and most recently I have written three short solo piano pieces that are slated to be premiered next season. No Exit has been a delight to work with, always embracing the collaborative process and delivering high-quality performances with a total commitment to the score.

What I especially respect about No Exit is the effort they make to engage the local community, to show up in places where contemporary music isn't typically heard. In my view, this is a tremendously noble and difficult task. I also appreciate how their programs have a distinct artistic vision, especially when that vision incorporates non-musical art forms. At the end of the day, contemporary music should be fun and surprising, and No Exit understands this mission as well as any other new music ensemble today!

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