

## **Agócs    *Northern Lights***

*Northern Lights* is a cycle for solo harp that incorporates folk songs from three regions of Canada, bookended by a prelude and postlude of original material that set the mood, interpolate, and comment. The three central movements are not folk song arrangements, but instead subject the original melodies to my own harmonic inflections, fragmentation, and juxtaposition with new motives. Much of this process involves searching for ways to make the material sound resonant on the harp. In this way, the piece builds upon my 2005 harp cycle, *Every Lover is a Warrior*, where I worked with folk songs from Appalachia, France, and Hungary.

Since I spent my first nineteen years in Canada and many of its folk songs are as familiar to me as breathing, choosing and working with its songs presented a special challenge. I needed to cast aside my own associations with the songs, to hear them in a new light, and to mine the musical material for its own intrinsic beauty.

*À la claire fontaine* is a lyrical French Canadian folk song about lost love. I used changes in modality and unusual non-diatonic pitch collections to capture the bittersweet essence of the original words: “It has been a long time that I have loved you; I will never forget you.”

*I’s the B’ye* is an irrepressible Newfoundland jig, its title in dialect: “I am the boy who builds the boat, and I am the boy who sails her...” I interwove continuous melodic layers with cross-rhythms against the tune and played with the coloristic possibilities of harp harmonies, making a hybrid that resembles a Maritime jog fused with a Baroque toccata.

*The Huron Carol* (*’Twas in the Moon of Wintertime*) is a Christmas song introduced to Canada by the Jesuits with the goal of converting its Native people. It describes the birth of Jesus in a silent, snow-covered winter landscape. Wise men’s gifts are replaced by furs and pelts harvested by the native people in the woods. This movement links the mystery of Christian mysticism with the pristine natural environment in Ontario, the country’s central region.

My prelude, the opening movement, features bell-like sonorities; the postlude is a perpetual-motion movement that accumulates resonance over the entire range of the harp, evoking the emergence of the Northern Lights (*Aurora Borealis*).

*Northern Lights* was written on a private commission from the Boston-based couple Conrad and Louise Golaski to celebrate their fortieth wedding anniversary in 2011.