

Art Of Time Ensemble featuring Sarah Slean Black Flowers

HOW DID THESE NINE EXQUISITE SONGS COME INTO THE WORLD? They are, of course, a mutual venture involving the imaginations and abilities of a number of figures from in and around Toronto. Let us start with Andrew Burashko. A classically trained pianist, from Moscow by way of Bathurst-and-Finch and the Royal Conservatory of Music, Burashko burst onto the scene early, debuting as a teenager with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. As he was touring North America and Europe as a soloist, he began to develop ideas on how to present music—avant-garde, popular, cabaret, jazz—in ways audiences hadn't experienced.

"I was always looking for a way to reach outside of the classical music world," he says.

"Classical music can be compelling to anybody if it's presented in the right context." The result was The Art of Time Ensemble—an ever-evolving chamber music series that has integrated performers from the dance, theatre, film, literary, and circus worlds.

"The first big opportunity to test a large non-classical audience came when we were asked to open for k.d. lang at Roy Thomson Hall." The experiment, a night of jazz standards that brought together classical and non-classical musicians, proved so popular that further



evenings were commissioned—followed by a program that combined classical repertoire interpreted by pop musicians.

Enter Sarah Slean. Singer, songwriter, poet, painter, Slean had contributed two songs to the evening of music inspired by Schubert's Piano Trio No. 2 in E-Flat. Planning a new night of popular songs arranged for classical and non-classical musicians, Burashko turned to her. "I thought of Sarah immediately—we had done the Schubert evening together and I was totally enamored of her—so I asked her to choose some of her favorite songs." Slean had begun appearing professionally in Toronto when she was just twenty, playing the clubs and back rooms along King and Queen streets, those early gigs made memorable by her encounters with contemporary songwriters with whose music she fell in love. "It was important that Sarah had an emotional connection to the songs," Burashko continues. "No matter how the songs were messed with, there still had to be a strong connection for her. I'm not a fan of cross-over—I'm really not into pop musicians doing classical songs or vice versa. These are still pop songs, but they're also adventures. And they get way more adventurous than most pop songs get." Slean selected the songs, Burashko the arrangers and musicians, and the program, called The Toronto Songbook with Sarah Slean, played to sold-out audiences at Harbourfront Centre's Enwave Theatre on May 10 and May 11, 2007. And now, very wonderfully, the intricate magic of those evenings has been memorialized. Recorded at Puck's Farm, an analogue studio just north of Toronto, and produced by





Jonathan Goldsmith, these nine songs have now found their way to you. The playing is expert, the arrangements superb—and long may they glimmer in the great black night.

