

Esprit Orchestra | Biography: Alex Pauk | Music Director & Conductor

Alex Pauk is the 2007 winner of The Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize. In selecting him as the recipient, the jury said:

“A passionate and visionary conductor, artistic director, composer and educator, Alex Pauk has demonstrated remarkable skills in the arts of initiative, risk-taking and the building and promotion of a leading Canadian arts organization, Esprit Orchestra, which is recognized around the world. A fervent believer in the richness and vitality of Canadian new music, he is a cutting-edge leader in the cultivation and presentation of contemporary music, in Canada and abroad. His true brilliance has emerged in the way that he has introduced new audiences – including young people and more traditional audiences for orchestral music – to the joys of exploring uncharted terrain, both musically and in the new and unusual venues where he has set his performances. Alex Pauk is a true champion of new music who continues to introduce Canadian and international composers to the world.”

Alex Pauk is also winner of the 2007 Yorkton Film Festival Golden Sheaf Award for his musical score for the film dance drama “Roxana”. He is the winner of the 2002 Louis Applebaum Award for Excellence in Film Music Composition and his music as well as CD recordings as a conductor have repeatedly been nominated for Juno Awards as well as Gemini Awards.

As composer, conductor, educator, entrepreneur, Alex Pauk had much to do with revitalizing Canadian orchestral musical life for composers by founding Esprit Orchestra in 1983 as Canada’s only orchestra devoted to new music. Esprit, with a core of 50 of Canada’s best new music instrumentalists and an annual subscription series in Toronto, encourages composers from across Canada to take bold new directions. Through building and sustaining its high calibre performances, commissioning programme, innovative programming (80% Canadian), recordings, performing arts videos and DVDs, *Toward a Living Art* Education Programme, *Creative Sparks* mentoring and creative leadership programme, outreach initiatives, tours and interdisciplinary arts and multi-media ventures, Pauk has made Esprit a major force for developing and promoting Canadian music at home and abroad. As a conductor he attains performances of the highest caliber on stage and in recordings. Every Esprit concert since the group’s founding has been recorded for broadcast on CBC Radio. His innovative programming and commitment to the community through Esprit have garnered the 2005 Vida Peene Fund Award for excellent standards of performance and innovative programming, the SOCAN and Chalmers Awards as well as three Lieutenant Governor’s Awards. He was named *Musician of the Year* (1999) by peers at the Toronto Musicians’ Association and he has helped many composers advance their careers through commissions, high profile performances, recordings and broadcasts. Pauk’s recordings of music by Canadian composers Chris Paul Harman and Brian Current helped them win, respectively, prizes in the International Rostrum of Composers (Paris) and Barlow (USA) competitions. Pauk’s commissioning, performance and promotion of Canadian music (composers of all ages and stylistic trends) is central to his work with Esprit. His six CBC Records compact discs of Canadian music are an important set in the overall catalogue of CDs in Canada and his work with performing arts filmmaker Larry Weinstein of Rhombus Media, with projects such as *Ravel’s Brain*, have set new standards in the genre. Since 1985, Pauk’s *Toward a Living Art* Programme with Esprit has provided approximately 1,500 students annually with a range of experiences; “sitting in” with Esprit musicians at rehearsals and performances, composing for Esprit, attending special student concerts and workshops, receiving free concert tickets and study guides. Pauk has been a leader in taking new music out of the concert hall and to people in their communities with performances in unusual locations such as the CN Tower and night clubs, and he has provided opportunities for choreographers and dancers, stage and lighting designers, actors and directors and media and visual artists to combine their talents with Esprit in adventurous cross-disciplinary projects. Pauk has lead Esprit on several Canadian tours (including Calgary Winter Olympics Arts Festival 1988,

Western Canadian Tour 1998, and Montréal/Nouvelles Musiques Festival 2005) and in 1997 initiated an ongoing exchange and touring project with The Netherlands, a venture which included Esprit's debut European tour in 1999 and remains vital to this day.

Alex Pauk has a very wide range of experience as a composer with works for every kind of performing ensemble (some including electroacoustic sound), the theatre as well as dance companies. Revealing this depth of experience, his most notable compositions of recent years include; *Touch Piece*, a multimedia work for full orchestra, 16 channel surround sound with electroacoustic sound, sounds of nature and altered orchestral sound projected from loudspeakers, multi-screen video environment (images of nature and the Cosmos) and fabric sculptures with special theatrical lighting; *Farewell to Heaven*, a full length work for the Menaka Thakkar Indian Dance Company (blending Southeast Asian musical elements with Western orchestral sounds); three works involving important Canadian virtuosos: *Concerto for Harp and Orchestra* (Erica Goodman – harp), *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* (Duo Turgeon – pianos) and *Flute Quintet* (Robert Aitken – flute with Cuarteto Latinoamericano). Currently Pauk is composing a work for large ensemble commissioned by La Société de musique contemporaine du Québec.

In addition to the Esprit Orchestra, Pauk has conducted the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony, CBC Vancouver Radio Orchestra, Hamilton Philharmonic, Winnipeg Symphony as well as smaller orchestras and ensembles throughout Canada. With the Esprit Orchestra, he has recorded five CDs of Canadian music for CBC Records, and two film soundtrack CDs – one for the Varese Saraband label (music by Mychael Danna for Atom Egoyan's films) and one for the SONY Classical label containing the Pauk/Louie film score for Don McKellar's feature film *Last Night*. All of Pauk's concerts with Esprit are recorded by CBC Radio for national and/or international broadcast and several Esprit events have been taped for television broadcast on the BRAVO! Channel.

Pauk has been involved in conducting, composing, arranging, producing and consulting for a wide range of film productions including features, made-for-TV dramas, documentaries, docu-dramas, animations plus five performing arts films produced by Rhombus Media including *Eternal Earth*, *The Radical Romantic*, *Ravel*, *For the Whales* and *September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill* (with Pauk and Esprit appearing on camera in several of these films). Pauk's score for the National FilmBoard animation *Blackberry Subway Jam* was nominated for best film score at the 1986 Actra Awards. Among recent film projects by the Pauk/Louie team are soundtracks for feature films (Don McKellar's *Last Night* and Jeremy Podeswa's *The Five Senses* that received praise and awards at the Cannes and Toronto International film festivals and are now sold in territories throughout the world. The music for *Last Night* was nominated for a 1999 Genie Award for best original film score.

Other Pauk soundtracks include *After the Harvest*, a made for television movie directed by Jeremy Podeswa, *24fps*, a short film commissioned to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Rhombus Media docu-drama *Ravel's Brain* directed by Larry Weinstein, *The Interogation of Michael Crowe* (dir. Don McBrearty), *Perfect Pie* (dir. Barbara Sweete), *Marth, Ruth and Edie* (dir. Deepa Mehta). Pauk also recorded the *Ravel's Brain* score in Cologne conducting the WDR Symphony Orchestra.

Recent soundtracks include Paul Gross's film *Passchendaele*, and Larry Weinstein's film *Mulroney: The Opera*, a comedic opera composed by Pauk's wife, Alexina Louie.

Alex Pauk's discography as a conductor includes – CDs in which the repertoire is 100% Canadian. The list includes:

<i>The Esprit Orchestra</i>	(CBC SMCD5101)
<i>Iridescence</i>	(CBC SMCD5132)
<i>Music for Heaven and Earth</i>	(CBC SMCD5154)
<i>Tabuh-Tabuhan: Music of Colin McPhee</i>	(CBC SMCD5181)
<i>The Adjuster</i>	(VSD5674)
<i>Harry Somers –Celebration</i>	(CBC SMCD5199)
<i>Music for a Thousand Autumns</i>	(CMCCD 7902)
<i>R. Murray Schafer – Letters from Mignon</i>	(ATMA 2553)
<i>This Isn't Silence – Music by Brian Current</i>	(CMCCD 12607)

Pauk graduated from the University of Toronto - Faculty of Music in 1971, attended the Ontario Arts Council's Conductors Workshop, helped found the Arraymusic in Toronto, then moved to Japan for conducting studies at the Toho Gakuen School of Music. In 1973 he settled in Vancouver and established the new music group *Days Months and Years to Come*. After studies in Europe in 1978/79 he made Toronto his base, founded Esprit Orchestra, served as co-chair for the 1984 ISCM World Music Days and was Music Director and Conductor for the Satori New Music Festival (Winnipeg Symphony). He has conducted opera including R. Murray Schafer's *Princess of the Stars* performed on Wildcat Lake, Haliburton Forest and Wildlife Reserve and Timothy Sullivan's *Dreamplay* and Charles Wilson's *The Summoning of Everyman* for Opera in Concert. In 2004 he was guest conductor for the Ergo Ensemble on their tour to Lithuania. Pauk has composed more than sixty works and has both composed for and conducted CBC Vancouver Orchestra, New Music Concerts, Vancouver New Music, Québec Symphony, Hannaford Street Silver Band and the Toronto Symphony.

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