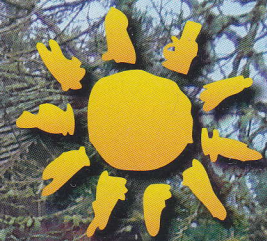


#GoWestShore



MAGAZINE

The Landscapes Issue

APRIL 2018

KAREL ROESSINGH

Listening to Nature
Inspires His Music

A TREASURED OASIS IN SOOKE

The Artisan's Garden

NEIGHBOURHOOD UPDATES

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Training Centre,
Westhills,
Belmont
Market

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Celebrating the Spirit of the West Shore

Hearing Music in Everyday Sounds

Interview By Anne Marie Moro

Karel Roessingh is an accomplished composer, arranger, producer and musician extraordinaire. He has written scores for over five hundred television episodes, many award-winning films, documentaries and promotional videos as well as performing on countless recordings for other artists. He has produced more than fifteen of his own recordings, including several for the Canadian Naturescape series, two jazz trio CDs and many solo piano CDs. He has performed with symphony orchestras and rock, jazz, folk show and country ensembles throughout the world.

I went to visit him at his home and 'treehouse' studio in the Highlands last month to find out more about him, his amazing life and inspired music.

Q: Karel, let's step behind your published biography for moment and explore what it was like for you growing up. I understand you were born in Leiden, Holland but actually grew up in Calgary, Alberta?

A: Yes, I spent all my school years in Calgary. My parents also had a guest ranch in the foothills of Alberta so I spent all my summers there. Growing up was kind of a mix of urban and country life. The country life was idyllic. It was wonderful!

Q: Perhaps that experience inspired you to find a place like the Highlands that offered that same kind of peace and solitude?



A: Absolutely! I really treasured those experiences because [throughout my childhood] I spent all my spare time out in the woods. I was often off by myself riding in the wilderness, where there was no one else around. I was there every summer and most weekends in the winter. When I was about twenty, I spent an entire winter at the ranch building a log house. I think that was the deepest quiet I've ever experienced.

Q: I was very impressed with how your love for nature inspired your last CD, 'Birdsong in the Parkade'. Do you think that musicians like yourself have a special way of hearing? Do you think you hear things differently from a lot of other people?

A: Oh, absolutely. Of course, I'm paying more attention to sound than anything else. I mean there are often things I don't notice visually, but I think there are very few things I don't notice with my ears. I'm always listening for ambiances—like the acoustics in Victoria's View Street parkade for example—but also the whole concept of waking up at campgrounds and hearing birds singing and noticing the melodies they make and making a note of them. I don't know that I'm hearing anything that anybody else doesn't hear, but I do know that I can pick out melodies and tunes from everyday sounds that I hear [around me].

Q: If you could meet any composer who ever lived, who would that be?



"I think there are very few things I don't notice with my ears. I'm always listening for ambiences..."

Karel recording his 'Birdsong in the Parkade' CD on a magnificent Steinway piano at Victoria's View Street Parkade, August, 2017.

A: That's a really good question. Lately, I've been playing a lot of Bach and I would be fascinated to meet him or Mozart or Beethoven because their music is incredible. It's amazing to me that Bach could think like that in so many parts. That just truly amazes me.

Q: *How has living in the Highlands influenced you and your craft?*

A: We have birds singing here all the time. [It's a place where] there are opportunities to have really good quiet time—which is essential for me to write music. I need quiet space where there's not a lot going on and not a lot of distraction. I can't write unless there are very few distractions.

Q: *It's a beautiful place that you've built here.*

A: Yes, well the Highlands is such a beautiful place. We were so thrilled to have moved here [in 1989]. We're surrounded by trees. My studio feels like it's right up in the trees, so I call it 'Treehouse Studio'.

Q: *How do you spend your spare time outside of music?*

A: Well, I've spent a lot of my spare time as a municipal councillor for the District of Highlands [four terms + 2 terms as mayor]. I'm also on various boards: the Metchosin International Summer School for the Arts, and the Island Biodiesel Co-op. My wife and I like to travel. We have a camper so we love to go camping and we're also planning some international trips this year. I love to swim in the local lakes and we walk quite a bit. Those are the main things we're interested in.

Q: *I see that you are on the board for the CRD Arts Commission.*

A: Yes. Being on the council, all councillors have assignments to represent Highlands in the region, and in this term my assignments are the CRD Arts Commission, the CRD Housing Trust Fund, and CREST, for which I chair the Finance Committee. In the past I've served on and chaired the Greater Victoria Public Library Board and the CRD Board.

Q: *On one hand, Karel, you're an artistic, creative person and yet on the other, you are very involved politically with organizations that—some would say—are more bureaucratic. It seems an unlikely balancing act for a musician. How do you do it?*

A: [laughing] Well, politics in the Highlands is not horribly bureaucratic! We're more involved directly with the people we're serving. It was [the spirit of] this community that got me interested in doing community service because there is such an amazing community here.

I'd have to credit Bob McMinn who along with his wife Nancy, really created the community of the Highlands. He was our first mayor and he really does encourage people to get involved and he certainly encouraged me. Although the Highland residents are scattered and we don't necessarily see our neighbours every day, there is a great sense [of collaboration] about how all of us would like to protect this place. That was my main motivation for getting involved.



Q: It's almost like living in a small town?

A: Yes, it is very much a 'small town' atmosphere. We only have twenty-five hundred people living here and when we have community events, we all come together and share our Highlands experiences. It's not like living anywhere else in the West Shore, really.

I know that people comment that the Highlands Council moves like a snail. It's because we care about the policies that affect people and protect our environment. We're here to see what the people want for their community and try to carry that out. That really gets people where they live, you know. We're just representatives of the community, not bureaucrats. We don't have to be.

Q: I read somewhere you worked on music for interactive electronic toys!

A: Victoria has a pretty active high-tech industry [sector]. So, a while back, a company that makes computer games for kids and computer toys asked me to write music in various styles, modes and feelings that would suit their games. It was good fun.

Q: How is that different from writing a musical score for a film?

A: Well [with gaming], I wrote music in little short pieces that didn't necessarily have to fit with a video. When I'm scoring for film, the music has to be an absolutely perfect match with the activity on screen. Of course, I would collaborate with the producer or the director so that I understand his or her vision and contribute my musical interpretation to that vision. I'd say how I thought the scene should feel. The music is meant to match a particular feeling, character or situation for a very specific scene.

Q: What's the most interesting thing about you that we wouldn't learn from your bio alone?

A: I used to ride in rodeos when I was in my early teens. I

mean that's something a lot of people probably don't know about. I still have the prize silver buckle that I got when I was twelve for winning the Water Valley Rodeo steer riding competition.

Q: You were lucky you didn't fall off a horse at some point and injure yourself or ruined your hands! Good grief! Your life could have been very different as a result.

A: I know. I've been very fortunate in my life. Wonderful opportunities have come up unexpectedly all along the way, and I am very grateful for them. ☀️

A Highlands Community Treasure



The building shown on the front cover this month is a hand-squared log cabin called the Caleb Pike House. It is a District of Highlands Heritage Building (1883) and one of three heritage-designated buildings located in Caleb Pike Heritage Park, a three-acre parcel of land in the municipality of the Highlands.

The original Caleb Pike house was restored and opened as a community building in 1985. It is often used for events such as weddings, family birthday celebrations, corporate retreats or as a location for courses or workshops. The Highlands Municipality also uses this facility for its council meetings and numerous Highlands community events. Every second Saturday night each month, for example, the Caleb Pike House plays host to the Highlands Music Coffee House event that affords the community an opportunity to gather and listen to good music and have a place where kinship can grow. Doors open at 7pm. See GoWestShore's Community Event pages for details. ☀️