

MEDIA RELEASE – June 19, 2020

## **Westben Launches its First Digital International Performer-Composer Residency**

Westben Centre for Connection & Creativity Through Music is bringing new music to audiences in a new way this season through its online ***International Performer-Composer Residency Program***. The program has been reimagined for COVID times and will now feature workshops and performances involving over 60 participants from around the world in a virtual collaborative environment.

Since its inception in 2018, the Performer-Composer Residency has enjoyed outstanding popularity and success. This year as a direct response to COVID-19, the program's **Creative Director Ben Finley**, with co-facilitators Davy Sumner and Sarah Belle Reid, have decided to offer a novel way to share the residency experience through a new digital venue. For the first time, residency performers and composers will be collaborating remotely in small ensembles with original pieces and workshops. Over ten countries are involved, including participants from Tunisia, Argentina, Mexico, Germany, Iran, Panama, China, Netherlands and all across the United States and Canada. They hail from over seven time zones and are have been divided into thirteen multi-geographical ensembles. Each ensemble has four to six participants with intersecting interests.

The residency program will welcome the public to listen and engage during the week of the premieres (July 6-July 11) and beyond on Westben's website, [www.westben.ca/](http://www.westben.ca/). There will be thirteen performances presented daily over the week where anyone can join in, listen and participate. Local chefs and environmental partners will be featured in new Westben Dare to Share videos premiering alongside the performances of the Performer-Composers. Partners include Angela Roest (Centre & Main Chocolate), Melissa Smeets (Melly Rolls), Douglas Hope (Sper), Tina Bastas (Humble Herb), Nikki Fotheringham (Green Moxie) and Kim Davidson (Sans Kitchen).

Ben Finley says: "We are ecstatic to welcome over 60 inspiring artists from across the biosphere to this digital experiment. As an artist-run centre, we are thrilled to cross pollinate and build exciting musical hives. I have no doubt that if we listen to each other and co-create new digital music making spaces, we will build invaluable tools to weather future challenges."

Music from the Performer-Composer Residency Program usually comes directly from The Barn, with its wondrous rural setting of rolling hills. These are not usual times. COVID-19 and its impacts have motivated the participants to look at how to digest the tragedies of this pandemic. What can music provide to the ailing cultural ecosystems? Although many digital adaptations have been made, can music help cultivate meaningful connections to navigate and re-orchestrate our (often alienating) digital public spaces? For this moment and post pandemic, can we listen and respectfully engage with each other as we self-isolate in our local environments?

Ben also feels that part of the residency's mandate is to respond to current the social and political climate.

"Let's play music together," he says, "being open to listening to each other's musical souls and shared humanity. Let's respond to the injustices we see in our communities and model compassion, empathy and community in our own ensembles—and take that beyond our time together here."

The Westben Performer-Composer Residency is a meeting space to exchange and fully support diverse musical practices. It is a place that doesn't set specific genre or musical identity restrictions. This year it promises to be more innovative and compelling than ever.

Editor Notes:

Westben Centre for Connection & Creativity Through Music near Campbellford has been offering interactive concert experiences for twenty years at their summer music festival, Concerts at The Barn. This 400 seat venue near Campbellford, east of Toronto, in Northumberland County, is a purpose built timber frame Barn with doors that roll open to reveal the beautiful meadows of the 50 acre Westben farm. Audiences come from across Canada and beyond come to Westben to experience international quality concerts, along with their one-of-a-kind, interactive Experiences called Dare to Pair, featuring local chefs, expert Sommelier led wine tastings, and local storytellers.

**For more information contact:**

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