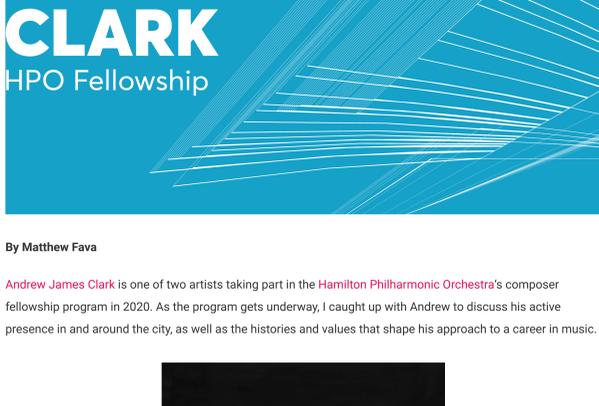


HPO Fellowship / Andrew James Clark



By Matthew Fava

Andrew James Clark is one of two artists taking part in the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra's composer fellowship program in 2020. As the program gets underway, I caught up with Andrew to discuss his active presence in and around the city, as well as the histories and values that shape his approach to a career in music.



A photo of composer Andrew James Clark

fava.matthew 11:00 AM | @Andrew Clark just a heads up that I am at the ready. Once you log in we will get underway

Andrew Clark 11:01 AM | I'm here and ready.

fava.matthew 11:02 AM | Awesome.

Shall we begin!?

Andrew Clark 11:04 AM | Yes! Fire away.

fava.matthew 11:04 AM | First off

Are you engaged to be married!?

Andrew Clark 11:07 AM | I knew you would ask. Yes, Domenic Jarikaganova (also a Canadian composer) has been studying composition in the Netherlands for three years. Long distance relationships are not ideal for anyone. I went to visit her over the Christmas break and low and behold she had already been conspiring with my parents for months to propose to me, which she did. And now I'm engaged. Who'd a think it.

fava.matthew 11:07 AM | Wonderful. Congratulations, Andrew!

Andrew Clark 11:08 AM | Thanks! She'll be moving back this summer. The wedding is in September.

fava.matthew 11:08 AM | Is the plan to remain in/around Toronto?

Andrew Clark 11:10 AM | We haven't decided yet. It might simply come down to money. I'm fortunate to have a full time teaching job at the moment and am living quite comfortably. Domenic is planning to come home and find work for a year or two, then we'll decide if we want to hang around or not.

fava.matthew 11:11 AM | Has Toronto always been home for you?

Andrew Clark 11:11 AM | Yes always.

fava.matthew 11:12 AM | I am interested to know about your early musical life, and perhaps you can share the moment when you felt connected to a music community. Did that community feel centred geographically? Was it constituted in some other way?

Andrew Clark 11:18 AM | Actually, for better or for worse, my defining characteristic so far has been that I'm not connected to a particular music community. My parents enrolled me in piano lessons when I was four simply as a disciplinary measure. Around the age of twelve our local church needed a pianist and I was thrown onto the platform. I learned to play by ear because I couldn't read chorals fast enough to keep up with the congregation. After that I completed the RCM piano curriculum and did two composition degree's at U of T. Now I'm a theory teacher.

fava.matthew 11:18 AM | I am really intrigued to read that!

11:19 | I wouldn't claim to know all of your actions, but I see your operating at a really high level as an instigator of community.

Perhaps I should ask at this point about Classical Context

11:20 | I can see that it serves a variety of functions in terms of your individual growth, an outlet for your various skills/interests

What was the original impetus for the series?

Andrew Clark 11:26 AM | We should mention **Classical Context** is a concert series I run in Scarborough. I think for a lot of young composers the question always is: should I join a preexisting community or make one myself? Because I was so isolated from professional musicians growing up all I knew about Classical music was whatever I'd read in Beethoven's biography. I'd read that Beethoven was a composer, pianist, conductor (attempted), so I assumed that's what being a classical musician meant. Obviously that's not the case, however directing Classical Context for seven years now has allowed me not only to foster a small community around the organization but also compose, perform, lecture, and conduct the way I fantasized I would as a child.

fava.matthew 11:26 AM | TO BECOME BEETHOVEN

Andrew Clark 11:26 AM | Exactly. My dream.

11:27 | I don't count my coffee beans though.

fava.matthew 11:27 AM | HAHA, that is really quite endearing to hear. What was his number... 35 beans?*

Will Callaghan has told me before but I keep forgetting

Andrew Clark 11:27 AM | That sounds right. Yes Will would know.

fava.matthew 11:28 AM | I just want to emphasize

that question of joining a preexisting community v making one

is a really significant one.

11:29 | My impression is that for all of the power that Western European Classical music wields, it is also quite vulnerable, in large part due to the impenetrable nature of a highly institutionalized art form (I say this as a staff member of one of the institutions)

And your instincts around the art form are compelling to me as a result. You assemble collaborators, and you find spaces to program the music.

11:30 | And I am interested to know, has it always been the case that you perform each concert twice?

Once in the downtown, and once a bit outside of the core

In Scarborough, correct?

11:32 | Oh, also, you can fully disagree with my assertion about W. European Classical Music, which I know was offered as a blanket remark based on personal opinion/observation

Andrew Clark 11:32 AM | I think I started in 2013 with two shows a year only in Scarborough, then it grew to three shows a year in Scarborough, then in 2017 and 2018 we had six shows a year: Three shows in Scarborough which we then duplicated the following evening at the Canadian Music Center.

fava.matthew 11:33 AM | Why was it important to you to mirror the shows in Scarborough?

Andrew Clark 11:40 AM | That's a complicated question. We get excellent attendance out in Scarborough, and most of the audience never listens to classical music let alone contemporary Canadian music. They are there mainly to learn, and witness live performances. They respond particularly well to Late Romantic music. While I love my Scarborough audience, over time I began to wonder if my performances and intellectual chops could stand up to a downtown Toronto audience, who are, how would you say, a little more unforgiving. It became important to see how both audiences responded to my shows. I have to combine the humour and educational lectures that the Scarborough audience love with "performance perfection" for the critical ears of the downtown core. I think it's made me a better person...

fava.matthew 11:42 AM | Interesting. As someone who grew up in the deep suburbs (Woodbridge) and found a rather curious and radical range of musical offerings downtown, I never really looked back. But that comparative analysis is intriguing.

I grabbed a quote from you that I want to bring up

... just a moment

"It's not about programming accessible music, it's about featuring accessible, friendly and enthusiastic performers"

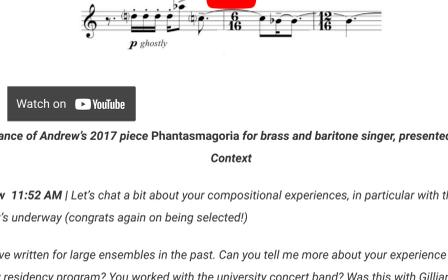
11:43 | Can you unpack this for me? It feels something like a mission statement

You have had the chance to program and collaborate with folks like Michael Murphy, Michael Bridge, Rashaan Alwood, and you yourself take time in your presentations to talk directly to the audience about the music

I think you are quite good at this

And I would love to know more about your thinking about accessibility as it relates to the art

Andrew Clark 11:51 AM | I think I wrote this specifically with a "non-classical audience" in mind. From my experience it is extremely important to hire charismatic performers with a certain amount of magnetism, particularly those who have thought through the repertoire they are performing and need to share what they've learned with others. If the audience sees that the person on stage is genuinely amazed, enthusiastic, and most importantly, thankful for the repertoire and the ability to share it with someone they don't already know, the listeners will be on board no matter what the tonality, duration or style the music is in.



A performance of Andrew's 2017 piece Phantasmagoria for brass and baritone singer, presented by Classical Context

fava.matthew 11:52 AM | Let's chat a bit about your compositional experiences, in particular with the HPO program that's underway (congrats again on being selected)

You have written for large ensembles in the past. Can you tell me more about your experience with the U of T Faculty residency program? You worked with the university concert band? Was this with Gillian MacKay?

Andrew Clark 11:57 AM | Actually I worked with Jeffery Reynolds and his Concert Band. I learned a tremendous amount from this experience. I had to come to terms with the fact that the musical complexities I'd gotten away with while writing chamber music were not compatible with a large ensemble. The piece I wrote which I named "Groove" was actually delayed because it couldn't be learned in time. I attempted to combine the piece with rhythmic variants I'd heard in Japanese Taiko Drumming performances, however it made life for the ensemble slightly difficult. I'm very grateful Prof. Reynolds gave the piece a second chance the following year and performed it after I'd graduated!

fava.matthew 11:57 AM | Ah, glad to hear that there was a commitment to the piece!

11:58 | Now with the HPO program you will be writing for string orchestra, correct?

Andrew Clark 11:58 AM | Yes.

fava.matthew 12:00 PM | You have written for strings before (you completed your first quartet last year?), and I am wondering how you are approaching your HPO piece? How might the artistic mentorship with HPO staff help with the conceptual and practical preparations of your music?

If you have some early, or more developed thinking about your piece, feel free to share!

Andrew Clark 12:10 PM | For the HPO piece I'm actually going down a path I've never gone before. I wanted to write something fun, more in a "popular style". The question then became how does one write pop music for an orchestra, also with no singer. I realized for myself in particular Baroque music and main stream pop music have a lot in common. As such I've been listening to a plethora of Baroque Concertos and my HPO piece is becoming something equivalent to a jazzy Brandenburg Concerto. Abigail Richardson Schulte has been an outstanding mentor even in the short time I've been engaged in the programme. She's been encouraging while I explore this new style and has been vital for the piece's "practicality" in regards to the ensemble.

fava.matthew 12:11 PM | Amazing. Abigail plays that role quite well!

How are you for time? Do you have a couple of moments for rapid fire questions?

Andrew Clark 12:11 PM | Sure do.

fava.matthew 12:12 PM | Is your music more like a serif, or sans serif font?

Andrew Clark 12:12 PM | Serif. I'm rigid.

fava.matthew 12:13 PM | HAHAAHAA

Can you add personal SEO to your list of tasks for 2020?

I unwittingly spent a few minutes on the page of "ANDREW CLARKE" the other day

12:14 | Since there was no prominent profile picture I assumed I was looking at your personal page

(his site was a top hit even with the correct spelling of your name)

Andrew Clark 12:14 PM | Ya, if you google my name Andrew James Clark there's a prominent drunk driving accident that comes up.

fava.matthew 12:14 PM | NO!

Andrew Clark 12:15 PM | Hopefully the staff at the HPO can help me optimize my online presence

fava.matthew 12:15 PM | Last question: Hamilton, the city. Have you visited often?

"prior to this program" is perhaps a suitable modifier

Andrew Clark 12:19 PM | Only once. I was tricked into (by my now fiancée) being an extra on a new amazon TV series. I had to spend a day pretending to cheer for never super as an extra ever in Tim Hortons Stadium in the July heat for 10 hours or something like that. I swore I'd never act as an extra ever again.

fava.matthew 12:19 PM | HAHAI! Oh, this is so wonderful.

12:20 | Next time we chat I will tell you about my random appearance as an extra on a show...

but for now, we must conclude!

Thanks so much for taking part in the interview!

Andrew Clark 12:20 PM | Wonderful. Thank you Matthew.

**Matthew has indeed forgotten. Will Callaghan, celebrated Toronto-based organizer, conductor, french horn player, and Mortal Kombat 11 legend, verifies that the correct number of coffee beans that Beethoven would count was in fact 60.*

By mFava | 5 February 2020 | Categories: News, Ontario, Region | Tags: Andrew James Clark, Classical Context Series, Composer Interview

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