Kevin Lau

Hailed as a “self-assured voice” (Barczablog) with a “masterful control over his idiom” (Classical Music Sentinel), Kevin Lau is one of Canada’s most versatile and sought-after composers. Awarded the prestigious 2025 Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize, Kevin’s creative output is often inspired by the surreal and the fantastical, and is unified by the search for deep connections amidst surface diversity – connections that serve as a metaphor for the reconciliation of seemingly fundamental differences.

Kevin’s music has been commissioned and performed by ensembles across North America, including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, Hannaford Street Silver Band, National Brass Project, Equinox Chamber Music, and the Houston-based River Oaks Chamber Orchestra. His work has been performed abroad in countries such as Denmark, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic, and has been championed by acclaimed artists such as Jonathan Crow, Rachel Mercer, Scott. St. John, Lizzy Hoyt, Nathan Williams, Caitlin Broms-Jacobs, Charles Hamann, Andy Lin, Conrad Chow, Angela Park, Michelle Colton, and Marc Djokic. He has held composer residencies with orchestras such as the Niagara Symphony Orchestra (2018–2019) and the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra (2021–2023.) His six string quartets have been commissioned and performed by internationally renowned quartets, including the Viano, Poiesis, Tesla, Afiara, Dior, and Cecilia String Quartets. Three of his quartets have been programmed in the Banff International String Quartet Competition, and in 2023 his Third Quartet was selected as the test piece for the Saint Paul String Quartet Competition in Minnesota.

In 2016 Kevin composed the score for the National Ballet of Canada’s original full-length ballet Le Petit Prince, featuring choreography by NBOC Principal Dancer and Choreographic Associate Guillaume Cote. His second ballet score, Dark Angels, was commissioned by the National Arts Centre Orchestra for its Encount3rs project in 2017, and was described as riveting (Ottawa Citizen) and extraordinarily accomplished (Artsfile). His most recent large-scale work, an opera-film hybrid (Bound) commissioned by Against the Grain Theatre and recorded by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, was hailed by the Globe and Mail as “a brilliant creation.” His new interdisciplinary ballet Kimiko’s Pearl, commissioned by Bravo Niagara! and featuring choreography by Yosuke Mino and dancers from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the Boston Ballet, will premiere in 2024. His music to The Spirit Horse Returns, an orchestral family concert featuring Indigenous artists and storytellers, has been performed across Canada many times since its premiere in 2022.

Kevins discography includes two JUNO award-winning albums: “Detach” (Redshift, harpist Angela Schwarzkopf) and “Mosaique” (Ensemble Made in Canada). Other albums include “Solo Seven” (ATMA Classique, violinist Marc Djokic), which won Best Album at the 2020 East Coast Music Awards; the JUNO-nominated “Spin Cycle” (Centrediscs, Afiara Quartet and DJ Skratch Bastid); and “Encount3rs” (Analekta, National Arts Centre Orchestra). His 2021 composition Little Feng Huang is featured on the album Lumena (Redshift, Topaz Duo) which was voted among

the “best 22 classical albums of 2022” according to CBC. His most recent JUNO-nominated album, Under a Veil of Stars (Leaf Music), features exclusively his chamber music, as performed by the St. John-Mercer-Park Trio). His music-and-text adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s fable The Nightingale was published as an illustrated children’s book by ROCO and Lil’ Smith; over two thousand copies were distributed to the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

Born in Hong Kong, Kevin received his doctorate in 2012 from the University of Toronto under the supervision of Christos Hatzis; shortly after, he was appointed Affiliate Composer of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra till 2015. He is also an active film composer, and has written the scores to over a dozen films, including Charles Officer’s acclaimed feature documentary Invisible Essence: The Little Prince (2018). From 2021–2024 he served as a professor at Humber College’s Media and Creative Arts Faculty, where he taught composition, orchestration, score study, and music for contemporary media, and has delivered guest lectures at institutions such as the University of Toronto, University of Ottawa, University of Manitoba, Brock University, York University, the University of Houston, and Laurier University. He currently lives in Ottawa with his wife Alexa and his son Robin.