

Media Release

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Calgary Premiere of Cris Derksen's Controlled Burn

Dynamic cellist-composer inspired by traditional Indigenous fire keeping practices

Calgary AB (Feb 27, 2025) —The Calgary Philharmonic is thrilled to welcome innovative cellist and composer Cris Derksen to perform with the Orchestra at the Singer Concert Hall on Saturday, March 15 for the Calgary premiere of *Controlled Burn*. Derksen was commissioned to write *Controlled Burn* by Montreal's Orchestre Métropolitain with Artistic Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin and it premiered there in 2024. Derksen also performed the piece for her debuts at Carnegie Hall and Philadelphia's Kimmel Center last year in addition to an appearance with the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra.

Controlled Burn takes its name from and is inspired by traditional Indigenous fire keeping practices that were banned in Canada shortly after Confederation but that have since been accepted as a useful tool in combatting the conditions that lead to the catastrophic fires that have been plaguing areas and communities in North America with ever-increasing frequency. The work addresses the sense of loss that came with the banning of Indigenous cultural practices. She speaks of a time, pre-contact with European settlers, in which burns were a safe community event populated by "running children" and "aunties laughing."

"Now, obviously, forest fires are not safe," she says of the flames that have caused such destruction in locations as far flung as Los Angeles and Jasper. "The sound of these fires are military — the sound of helicopters and water bombers."

It's the latest triumph for the JUNO-nominated artist, who has performed across the globe as a soloist-composer, serves as Artistic Advisor to the Calgary Phil, and has collaborated on such projects as the Pulitzer Prize-winning podcast, *Surviving St. Michael's*. No matter how high her star rises, though, Derksen, who comes from a lineage of chiefs from the NorthTall Cree Reserve on her father's side and strong Mennonite homesteaders on her mother's, has remained true to her core philosophy of making music inclusive and accessible to all.

"I've always been about making music relatable to my peers," says Derksen. "Taking the cello outside of the concert hall and bringing it down to street level was something that I really cared a lot about when I was just starting out — to get rid of the classism that comes with classical music. As I grow and find myself in the classical sphere, I feel like I'm bringing the street level into the classical world as well, bringing all my worlds together."

The *Controlled Burn* concert program also includes Music Director Rune Bergmann leading the Orchestra for Josef Suk's soul-stirring 'Asrael' Symphony, a moving memorial to Dvořák, his beloved teacher, and Dvořák's daughter Otilie, who was Suk's wife.

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About the Calgary Philharmonic

The Calgary Philharmonic has been a pillar of Calgary's vibrant arts scene since 1955 and in that time has grown to be one of Canada's most celebrated live music ensembles. Led by Music Director Rune Bergmann, the Orchestra presents a wide range of concerts, inspiring education programs, and reaches audiences worldwide through free and accessible digital programming. In addition to 66 full-time orchestra musicians, the Calgary Phil is one of two major symphony orchestras in Canada that has its own chorus of over 120 volunteer singers. In a typical season, the Calgary Phil welcomes over 100,000 visitors, connecting audiences to live music experiences, and serves the city of Calgary by fostering creativity and belonging. Your Phil. Your Music.