

# BIO: Catherine Wilson

Virtuoso pianist and recording artist **CATHERINE WILSON** “... the pride of Canada...” (Burlington Standard Press, U.S.A.), is one of Canada’s most interesting and innovative concert pianists and recording artists. She has been repeatedly honoured for her exceptional artistry, sensitive, passionate musicality, and magical music-making. *“Catherine Wilson’s superb pianistic talents have been demonstrated time and time again throughout her career in her live performances as well as on her*



*recordings. Her innate pianistic abilities are many. Her tone and musicianship are exemplary. She possesses a warm, singing touch, a rich musical imagination, and her involvement in the music is heartfelt and passionate. Her playing touches the hearts of her audience, and this ability to communicate and deeply connect with her audience is one of many abilities that makes her a stand-out and unique among performing artists.”* (Patricia Parr, O.C., Concert Pianist).

Catherine’s artistry has also been distinguished by her innovative genre-diverse programming, which includes Classical, and the syncopated rhythms of Ragtime, The Great American Song Book, Latin and other Jazz-Related styles. As a soloist and with her internationally acclaimed group **ENSEMBLE VIVANT**, Catherine has been steeped in these diverse genres for over 30 years. Jazz great Rick Wilkins, C.M. commented: *“No matter the genre, there is magic in Catherine Wilson and Ensemble Vivant’s music-making.”*

Catherine Wilson’s passionate dedication to music and her audience has included extensive research and the exciting discovery of works from the classical and jazz genres that have become obscure. She

has re-introduced these newly found gems to audiences world-wide in concert and on recordings.

Founded and led by Catherine, who is also the group's artistic director, Ensemble Vivant has been a pioneer in the piano chamber music world. The group is known for its unique genre-diverse programming, unique instrumentation, and its wide appeal to audiences of all ages. *“Ensemble Vivant...what you get is absolute magic...familiarity of old friends, yet their playing always retains a sense of gracious etiquette associated with the noble chamber ballroom...sincere and poised...great warmth and swing...just the chamber group you would want when you need music to sound symphonic...”* (The Whole Note Magazine).

Catherine and Ensemble Vivant's 14 internationally acclaimed CDs on the Opening Day Label (ODEG) are broadcast on radio worldwide. Opening Day's President Conrad (Chuck) Daellenbach, C.M., PhD, wrote:

*“Having followed Catherine Wilson's brilliant international work for over 30 years, it was only natural to turn to her when we started our Canadian Indy classical recording label in the early 2000s. Because of significant interest from our fan/customer base, we have featured her works in all our international marketing endeavours. Following the group's many recording successes, **Latin Romance**, Ensemble Vivant's 14<sup>th</sup> recording, establishes Ensemble Vivant as an important national icon. Catherine and her group Ensemble Vivant continue to create at the highest musical level – knowing no borders – with a mission to take great music to a plethora of diverse audiences. Ensemble Vivant is becoming known as a national treasure.”*

Catherine has been the invited soloist with many symphony orchestras, including the New York Pops on the main stage concert series at **Carnegie Hall**, where her sold-out concerts were a triumphant success. Her performance of Leroy Anderson's Piano Concerto with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra was filmed by PBS and appears in the documentary on Anderson's life, *Once Upon a Sleigh Ride*, which along with other of Catherine's and

Ensemble Vivant's videos, is frequently broadcast on PBS and Classic Arts Showcase.

Of her performances of this concerto, Maestro Skitch Henderson wrote: "*Catherine Wilson brings great technical virtuosity and magical music making... she possesses rare depth combined with highly sensitive artistry that is tremendously refreshing.*"

Ensemble Vivant's beautiful 2-CD recording, *The Music of Leroy Anderson*, has received critical acclaim internationally, and includes several solo piano selections, including Catherine's live performance of Anderson's Piano Concerto with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Joseph So from La Scena Musicale wrote: "*Catherine Wilson's affinity for Anderson's music is much in evidence in this delightful recording...her sensitive piano playing shines.*"

Catherine is the founder and artistic director of **EUTERPE: Music for Health Canada**. Named after the Greek muse of music, Euterpe is a well-established registered not-for-profit charity whose mandate includes providing live, high-calibre, interactive performance programs of classical, jazz and related musical styles to children and others who might not otherwise be exposed to these life-enhancing opportunities. With a principal focus on children in underserved communities, Euterpe's programs involve children's active participation in a variety of hands-on ways that are creative, inspirational and educational. Euterpe musicians, of which Ensemble Vivant is the flagship performance group, are leaders in the classical and jazz communities and are dedicated to Euterpe's mission. Euterpe's unique programs are free-of-charge.

Catherine's research on *Music and Healing*, for which she received her PhD, supports Euterpe's mandate. Euterpe's invaluable musical initiatives, which have been enriching the lives of children and their communities for over a dozen years, have been endorsed by the scientific community. Catherine's vision for Euterpe foresees multiple simultaneous live performance programs so that more and more children reap the life-enhancing benefits that this music is known to

provide. Her philosophy is that this will make for happier, healthier children, communities and nation as a whole.

Catherine has performed for several heads of state, including Queen Elizabeth II. As a composer, Catherine has written for many CBC productions and Ensemble Vivant recordings. Catherine was Assistant Adjunct Professor of Piano at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan for over five years, and from 2005 to 2016 taught Classical Piano and was Course Director for such courses as the African American Musics Piano Performance Course at York University in Toronto, which includes Ragtime, Boogie Woogie, Novelty Classics and Blues Piano repertoire.

Catherine has won the hearts of fans and critics alike with inspired, soulful and virtuosic interpretations. Her renditions of Chopin (described as “exquisite” by the Toronto Star) have been compared to the great Artur Rubenstein. She has been equally applauded for her renditions of Ragtime, Latin and other jazz-related styles: *“Catherine Wilson’s Ragtime playing is second to none...virtuoso technique and beautiful touch with the right feel and groove combined with a rich musical imagination.”* William Albright, American Ragtime composer, pianist

Of Catherine’s performance of Piazzolla’s “Oblivion”, François Paré, Radio-Classique, Montreal wrote: *“To my heart, your rendition of Oblivion is the most touching I have ever heard: Bravo!”*

**Rick Wilkins, C.M. wrote:** *“Catherine Wilson is a wonderful amalgam of talents. She is a virtuoso pianist combining ample technical fire power with the refinement and grace required in an all-round consummate performer. No matter the genre, there is magic in her music-making. I have known and worked with Catherine for 30 years and am continually amazed at her accomplishments and artistic gifts as well as her dedication to ensuring that her musician colleagues reap the benefits of her efforts including through the countless concerts and numerous exciting recording projects, all of which have original themes and concepts, that have resulted through*

*Catherine's creativity, musical imagination, brilliance and tireless efforts."*

**Jazz Great Don Thompson, O.C. wrote:**

*The passion and beauty of Catherine Wilson's piano playing is overwhelming. She is a beautifully gifted pianist and musician with a depth of feeling that separates her from the rest and makes her a real standout...She is an inspiration to everyone who knows her. Don Thompson, O.C.*

**ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND**

**Music and Healing**

It was through music making that Catherine found a nurturing, safe haven. From the outset, audiences of all ages responded to her music, saying how deeply her playing affected them and how much joy, excitement, solace and healing it brought them. With sporadic access to an upright piano starting in grade school, it was her natural ability that ultimately led her to studying with concert pianist Patricia Parr, where she was introduced to the world of piano chamber music. This, coupled with Catherine's opportunity to play in bands, planted the seeds that led to Catherine founding her own musical ensemble, Ensemble Vivant, in the wake of her university studies.

**A Pioneer: Innovative genre-diversity**

From early on Catherine had a love of various musical styles and genres, and from her university days was performing Ragtime, Latin, and other jazz related styles, along with mainstream classical repertoire, both solo and chamber music. During the mid-late 1980s it was *very* unusual for a classical based pianist and classical based piano chamber group to have this genre-diversity in concert performance and on recordings. Catherine's Ensemble Vivant was a pioneer in the piano chamber world, championing these diverse genres and styles. The group's first recording hit the international airwaves in 1988 on the Pro Arte/ Intersound label to rave reviews.

Music Magazine, for example, wrote: *“The overall effect is joyous and compelling”*.

### **Founder, Leader, Artistic Director**

As well as founding Ensemble Vivant, Catherine has been the group’s leader and artistic director since its inception. Now 32 years later, Ensemble Vivant has 14 recordings that are heard on radio around the world and which have received critical acclaim internationally. Ensemble Vivant has been Catherine’s musical family all these years. As the artistic director of Ensemble Vivant, Catherine has worked with many leading arrangers and composers who have championed her artistry and that of Ensemble Vivant.

### **Some examples include:**

Jazz Great Rick Wilkins has championed Catherine and Ensemble Vivant’s artistry for the past 30 years and has written dozens of brilliant imaginative arrangements and original works for Catherine as a soloist and for Ensemble Vivant.

Piazzolla expert, bandoneonist, composer Julien Labro has written numerous exceptional arrangements for Catherine as a soloist and for Ensemble Vivant of Piazzolla’s music as well as of the music of other Latin composers. An example of his praise for Catherine’s stylistic affinity for this genre includes his comment: *“Catherine Wilson and Ensemble Vivant’s concert performances and recordings of Piazzolla’s music are a precious contribution to the discography of this composer’s works. This is truly great playing that sings with heart-felt passion, tenderness, elegance and originality. Their Homage to Astor Piazzolla recording is destined to become a classic.”*

Canadian composer John Burke has written many original works for Catherine as a soloist and for Ensemble Vivant. He donated his piece *Mysterium* to Ensemble Vivant as his ensemble of choice. He also wrote his 55 minute work *Heiratikos* with Ensemble Vivant in mind. He wrote: *“The necessary catalyst is musicianship beyond ego. The*

*profound depth of artistry and musicianship of pianist Catherine Wilson and that of the extraordinary musicians in her group Ensemble Vivant, perfectly embodies that. These wonderful artists establish an unerring connection to communicative source.”*

### **Ensemble Vivant’s genre-diversity has inspired other performers**

Catherine as a soloist and Ensemble Vivant have inspired and influenced the players of yesterday and today, with musicians young and older, wanting access to the dozens of unique arrangements and original compositions from the Classical, Ragtime, Latin, Jazz and jazz-related styles, which were written exclusively for Catherine and Ensemble Vivant by outstanding arrangers of those genres and styles. Catherine will make all of these available internationally to other piano soloists and piano chamber groups, a generous and important contribution.

### **Music as Saviour ... Founding Euterpe: Music for Health Canada ... A VISION in ACTION: to benefit children and people of all ages**

Catherine describes having had the chance to make-music starting in late grade school as having saved her life. Music was and remains her saviour. In addition, her deeply caring soul and desire for others to benefit from the known life-enhancing benefits that music-making provides, in the ways that it did and continues to do for her, led her in 2003, to found the not-for-profit charity **Euterpe: Music for Health Canada**. Catherine’s vision for this well-established Toronto-based registered non-profit charity is to ensure that children (and others) who might not otherwise have the chance to be exposed to live, high calibre performances of classical, jazz and related styles, are given these enriching opportunities. Euterpe’s programs involve children’s active participation throughout and plant the seeds that lead to many wanting to play an instrument, wanting to make-music and much more.

Based on having founded [Euterpe: Music for Health Canada](#), Catherine was invited to research and write a PhD dissertation based on the invaluable work she had done with Euterpe and the

tremendously positive effects this organization has on children and others. The result was Catherine's dissertation on *Music and Healing*, for which she received her PhD. Euterpe has been endorsed by the scientific community.

Leading neuroscientist Dr. Laurel Trainer, founding director of the McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario proclaimed: *"Euterpe's performance programs realize in action what cognitive psychologists and other scientific researchers have determined to be beneficial for children and others through ongoing experimentation whose results have been documented and widely disseminated. Without Euterpe's work, for example, the scientific findings in and of themselves are not able to benefit our children and youth. The wonderful interactive high caliber performances of classical, jazz and related styles that the Euterpe musicians brings to our children and youth are of vital importance for planting the seeds of music in our lives and putting people on a path to be enriched by the benefits of music."*