**Canadian Soprano, Anna Caroline Boyes,**

**on her Interest in the Music of Naresh Sohal**

While I have been trained in Western art music my whole life, I have been keen to learn something about Indian classical music as well. My father has a Scottish background, but my mother’s family is from India (Punjab). My vocal teacher at the University of Toronto, Lorna MacDonald, encouraged me to pursue this interest, so earlier this summer I started taking lessons in Hindustani vocal music.

Last year, I started researching composers who write for Western art singers but include aspects of Indian music in their writing. I came across Naresh Sohal’s website and listened to recordings of his works. I was drawn to his unique Western compositional style which, in his vocal music, incorporates the use of Indian poetry, microtones and quarter tones, as well as improvisation and the use of reduced and exaggerated vibrato.

 I studied Sohal’s ‘Poems of Tagore 1’ and presented it publicly in March 2022 in Walter Hall at the University of Toronto along with music by Kamala Sankaram and Reena Esmail (both Indian-American composers who have written Western vocal music with an Indian slant). The programme was very well received. I would love to bring more awareness of these composers and their works to voice teachers and students in Canada (and elsewhere if the opportunity presents itself!). I was very excited to read that Naresh had worked with Peter Oundijan, who was the music director at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for some time.

 Finally, I don’t speak Punjabi myself, but my mother used to speak it when I was growing up. I thought it would be so lovely to sing songs that use the poetry and the folk songs of the language that my extended family speaks. I don’t know of any Western vocal composer besides Sohal who provides this opportunity. This is another reason that I am very much looking forward to working on his ‘Songs of the Five Rivers’. I find his works not only beautiful, but very interesting on multiple levels.

*Anna Caroline Boyes, September 2022*