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## MEDIA RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

Award-winning Rolston String Quartet to offer accessible concert

Toronto, Canada, December 10, 2019 – The award-winning Rolston String Quartet (winners of the 2016 Banff International String Quartet Competition) will be performing a special accessible concert for Xenia Concerts on December 15, 2019. The concert will take place at 11:00 am at Meridian Hall (formerly Sony Centre), and will be sensory friendly and specially formatted to welcome all music lovers, including those on the autism spectrum or disabilities.

“As a former Laureate of the Competition,” says Sarah Nematallah, Director of Xenia Concerts and former violinist of 2010 BISQC winner the Cecilia Quartet, “I am very aware of the incredible chamber music talent that has come out of Banff, and to be able to share some of this talent with the Xenia audience brings me such happiness, especially during the holiday season when togetherness and joy are so important!”

The Rolston String Quartet has also won other prestigious prizes such as the Cleveland Quartet Award, Grand Prize at the Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition, and has performed at some of the world’s finest concert halls such as Carnegie Hall (New York) and Wigmore Hall (London UK). Rolston recently performed a Xenia Concert in partnership with The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and Indefinite Arts in Calgary AB, where their performance was met with enthusiastic praise for its artistry and accessibility.

Xenia Concerts is a Toronto based organization that is devoted to presenting top quality classical, jazz, and world music concerts that are designed to welcome music lovers who might experience barriers to other such concerts due to physical, mental, or financial barriers. Since its inception in 2015, Xenia has featured internationally acclaimed artists such as The Gryphon Trio, Ensemble Made in Canada, and TorQ Percussion Quartet, and is warmly loved by its audience members who see Xenia has a warm and caring environment where all types of listeners can enjoy the beauty of music.

“Xenia Concerts have prepared us to take our children [on the autism spectrum] to the symphony at Roy Thompson Hall. I would not have had the confidence for bigger events without Xenia. We continue to learn from them at every performance. We are forever grateful,” says Jaime, a regular Xenia attendee.

“As a family with a disability, it’s not easy to find an experience like this that welcomes and nurtures each family member. We wait anxiously for the email and book our tickets as soon as possible. Our son puts it on his calendar and the countdown begins to our favorite family day out. The hour-long concert is perfect, there’s space to move about and be ourselves. We love the familiar environment of Meridian Hall and the many welcoming faces we meet each time we go. We leave each concert inspired, happy, amazed, energized and grateful. Thankyou Xenia for giving this precious gift to our family.” (Adena, a regular Xenia attendee.)

People interested in attending can reserve tickets here:

<https://xeniaconcerts.com/event/the-rolston-quartet-at-meridian-hall/>

Tickets cost \$5 per person plus HST, and when audience members arrive at the concert they receive a gift card for the amount they paid before tax from a major retailer. This ticketing policy is part of Xenia's commitment to financial accessibility.

Xenia is thankful for support from the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Heritage Canada, The Co-operators, the Hunt Family Foundation, and other anonymous donors.

Backgrounder Attached

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#### Information

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#### BACKGROUNDER

#### **Rolston String Quartet – Biography**

**Luri Lee, violin**  
**Emily Kruspe, violin**  
**Hezekiah Leung, viola**  
**Jonathan Lo, cello**

Canada's Rolston String Quartet continue to receive acclamation and recognition for their musical excellence. As the 2018 recipient and first international ensemble chosen for the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award from Chamber Music America, their accolades and awards precede them. In 2016, a monumental year, they won First Prize at the 12<sup>th</sup> Banff International String Quartet Competition (BISQC), Grand Prize of the 31<sup>st</sup> Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition, and Astral's National Auditions. That same year, they were also prizewinners at the 2016 Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition (BISQC) and the inaugural M-Prize competition. There is no wonder they were named among CBC Radio's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30" in 2016.

In the 2017-2018 season they tipped the 100-concert milestone with performances throughout Canada, United States, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Israel. Highlights included the Smithsonian, Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts, Koerner Hall, and the Esterhazy Palace. An even busier 2018-2019 season included debut performances at Carnegie Hall in New York and Wigmore Hall in London, as well as performances at Freer Gallery, Chamber Music Houston, two major tours in Canada under the Prairie Debut and Debut Atlantic touring networks, and three European tours with dates in Leipzig, Berlin, Lucerne, Heidelberg, Barcelona, Graz, and other centres. As *Ludwig van Toronto* states, "they performed with a maturity and cohesion rivaling the best string quartets in the world."

Rolston String Quartet completed a two-year term as the Yale School of Music's fellowship quartet-in-residence in spring 2019. They have also served as the graduate quartet-in-residence at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and have participated in residencies and fellowships at the Academie musicale de Villemo, Aspen Music Festival, Banff Centre, McGill

International String Quartet Academy, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Robert Mann String Quartet Institute, St. Lawrence String Quartet Seminar, and the Yehudi Menuhin Chamber Music Festival.

Notable collaborations include performances with renowned artists Andres Diaz, Gilbert Kalish, Mark Morris, Arthur Rowe, Robert McDonald, Donald Palma, Jon Kimura Parker, and Miguel da Silva. Additionally they have worked with songwriter Kishi Bashi and composers John Luther Adams and Brian Current. Primary mentors include the Brentano Quartet, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith, and the quartet has received additional guidance from the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Barry Shiffman, Miguel da Silva, and Alastair Tait.

Rolston String Quartet – Luri Lee (violin), Hezekiah Leung (viola), Jonathan Lo (cello), and new members as of spring 2018 Emily Kruspe (violin) – was formed in the summer of 2013 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity's Chamber Music Residency. They take their name from Canadian violinist Thomas Rolston, founder and long-time director of the Music and Sound Programs at the Banff Centre.

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## Xenia Concerts Inc. – Overview of Organization

### Mission

The mission of Xenia Concerts Inc. is to offer high quality music and arts performances, presentations, and educational programs, in an environment that welcomes those who might not have access to such events and activities due to physical, mental, or financial barriers.

### Vision

Re-imagining music and arts events and activities to make them inclusive, relevant, and accessible to all members of society, thereby improving quality of life and promoting the enjoyment of the arts.

### Values

- **Enrichment** – Xenia Concerts Inc. fundamentally believes that music and the arts improve the quality of life of all listeners
- **Inclusion** – Xenia Concerts Inc. believes that everyone should have access to live music events and other arts programming/education
- **Quality** – Xenia Concerts Inc. believes that an accessible concert or arts event should be of the highest professional quality
- **Inspiration** – Xenia Concerts Inc. seeks to inspire audiences by exposing them to new arts experiences
- **Community** – Xenia Concerts Inc. seeks to nurture social development and create community through accessible and inclusive arts events

### Our Story

XENIA CONCERTS was launched by the Cecilia String Quartet during the 2014/2015 season as a pilot program to address a barrier in the arts: people living with autism often do not feel welcomed to attend classical concerts because they have tendencies to move around and make sound during the performance. Despite this unfortunate reality, recent scholarship shows that live classical concerts make powerful impressions on those with autism, and can greatly improve their quality of life. In order to address this need, the members of the Cecilia String Quartet spent a year learning about and connecting with members of the Toronto autism community. They took what they learned and used it to create a truly accessible series of classical concerts that welcomes people affected by autism and disability. These first concerts were met with enormous

praise, and in response to continuing demand to accessible arts programming, Xenia Concerts Inc. is now a registered charity devoted to creating an accessible arts events for all members of society who may not have access due to physical, mental, or financial barriers.

Xenia Concerts Inc. firmly believes that concerts should be inclusive events that enrich the lives of all types of audiences, and that everyone deserves equal access to high quality live performances of classical music. Our unique approach to programming makes these chamber music performances more accessible and appealing for audiences who self-identify as having little or no access to traditional concerts, while at the same time maintaining a commitment to presenting internationally recognized artists performing at the highest standard. Whether Xenia is presenting for members of the autism community, or other individuals or groups who want better access to the arts, Xenia Concerts happen in spaces that allow audiences to listen in the way they feel most comfortable, even if this means moving around and making sound. Audience members can sit, stand, dance, and play with toys as they enjoy the music.

Xenia Concerts Inc. officially became a Registered Charity in May of 2017. Xenia Concerts Inc. is grateful to have a number of supportive partner organizations that help us bring Xenia Concerts to communities across Canada. In the future, Xenia Concerts Inc. will develop new projects that will bring incredible music and art to every person in society regardless of what might stand in their way.