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Contemporary Music in Canada - 1

In looking at the present picture of our music, it must be realized that we are actually the first generation of Canadian composers. Before our time music development was largely in the hands of imported English organists, who, however sound academically, had no creative contribution to make of any general value.[1]

It is supremely ironical that an article which purports to introduce a predominantly British audience to Canadian music should begin with a scathing denunciation of British academicism, a deadening and stifling influence which, it can be argued, has long hindered the natural growth of the arts in this broad Dominion. For those who, in the memorable phrase of H. G. Wells, choose to walk into the future backwards, Canada has long been an anachronistic haven, a 19th century country in many ways, as Marshall McLuhan is fond of telling us, a secure and comfortable perch from which one can view the swerving movements of the 20th century with smug complacency and an uncertain sense of pride.

Given the peculiar topography of the country, Canadian culture could hardly have taken a different course. Art, in most senses of the word, is primarily and fundamentally an urban phenomenon. As much as the Romantics despised, or pretended to despise, the labyrinth of the modern city - that great harlot which seduced man from nature and the paths of righteousness - the vibrant stimulation of the crowd was basic to their very existence. Thus, at different times, Vienna, Paris, London, New York became in effect vast stages on which were acted out the hidden fantasies of the nation. This much, it would seem, has not changed, and, at the risk of lapsing into a sociological half-truth, may in fact be put forward as an important ingredient in any attempt to explain the relative artistic inactivity of countries such as Norway and Portugal which exist on the fringes of the European continent, or like Switzerland remain ensconced in splendid xenophobic isolation behind a magnificent and timeless natural barrier.

Canada, too, exists on the fringe of a continent, its two or three cultural hamlets strung out over some 3,000 miles of territory precariously united by a vague and rapidly diminishing sense of 'Britishness', more concretely by a thin ribbon of railway and a trans-continental communications network. Hence, the flow of ideas across the nation, until relatively recently, has been sluggish in the extreme, a situation exacerbated by the presence of the American giant to the south, long an object of morbid fascination to the citizen of the north and a powerful magnetic force which manages to attract and repel at the same time.

The immediate post-war years seem to have brought about an acute awareness of the fact that Canada's musical house was in serious disorder. In 1954, Ettore Mazzoleni, then Principal of the Royal Toronto Conservatory of Music, painted a rather grim picture of the nation's musical life:

The existing facilities for the promotion and publication of Canadian music are far from adequate. There is no adequate library of Canadian music - in fact, there is no adequate library of music - and no central bureau of information. There is an almost complete lack of recordings of Canadian music and musical organizations. The concert stage is larely controlled by well-organized and powerful outside agencies. The country possesses few satisfactory concert halls. The crowding of the best professional musicians into the large centres is a threat to the rest of the country. There is no published history of music in Canada. Scholarships are inadequate, and no Canadian university offers postgraduate courses in musical research. Above all, there is no effective national organization

to represent the musical profession as a whole or to promote its interests both at home and abroad.[2]

The above remarks add up to a fairly accurate representation of the state of Canadian musical life in the year of Charles Ives's death, hardly the kind of environment conducive to the creation of enduring works of artistic genius. It does not take a great deal of imagination to conjure up a fairly clear vision of the musical products of such a society. A perusal of the critical literature of the period draws attention to the situation with distressing regularity:

> *In a recent symposium of contemporary music it was remarked of some Canadian composers that they seemed unaware of anything that had happened in music for the last fifty years. The relevance (or irrelevance) of such a remark as a critical reproach bothered me as I listened to Healey Willan's Second Symphony in the excellent performance that Ettore Mazzoleni conducted with the Royal Conservatory Orchestra in Toronto. Here was a work that could have been written in 1910, full of Edwardian pomp and thick texture, combined with suggestions of English or Celtic folk-songs: an obvious relative of Elgar and early Vaughan Williams. If it had been written in Canada in 1910, it might be accepted now and revived as a classic of Canadian music. Being written today, its chances for survival are far less, despite the enthusiasm with which it was received.*[3]

And later the same evening:

> *On the same program Mr. Mazzoleni played Godfrey Ridout's Two Etudes for String Orchestra. Although the texture is much sparer and the melody and harmony more angular than Dr. Willan's, Mr. Ridout's music is equally firmly based on English music forty years ago. The opening of the second etude suggests Elgar, and much of the material has been passed through the folk-song idiom of Vaughan Williams. Mr. Ridout obscures this basis by a veneer of modernism . . . which has only been partly assimilated.*[4]

It goes without saying that not all Canadian composers active in the 50s looked to the Mother Country for models. A few hardy souls struck out in different directions in search of inspiration:

> *The Piano Sonata by Philip Nimmons of the Royal Conservatory belongs to . . . the world of the Rachmaninoff concertos. Loose, atmospheric, and expansive, it combines an occasional charm and vigor of invention with a tendency toward padding and smudgy virtuoso work. This padding sounds like background music without the script which can give it meaning. Yet, despite many amorphous and excessively atmospheric passages, the material is worth tidying up. The opening theme of the last movement . . . is excellent, and the middle section of the slow movement has a Rachmaninoff-like charm, although a little more old-fashioned than rests easily on the rest of the sonata.*[5]

Every British school child is familiar with the dedicated work of Cecil Sharp and the folksong revivalists who, through the genius of Vaughan Williams and a few others, managed to revitalise the music of Das Land ohne Musik in the early years of this century. Likewise Bartók and Kodály in Hungary, Ives and Copland in the United States, Pedrell, Albéniz, and Falla in Spain, Janáček and Martinů in Czechoslovakia, Chávez and Revueltas in Mexico - the list is almost endless. It would seem for all this that an intensely nationalistic phase is the first step towards musical independence, that without a healthy infusion of the traditional values of the soil, a nation is doomed to remain encapsulated by an immediate and alien past. Where, then, are the Canadian nationalists?

The assumption must be that a nationalist music can only succeed in a country where the roots of folk culture lie strong and deep. The fact is that Canada is a country of many cultures, all of which have come together to create a characteristic mosaic. In this, the Canadian experience differs markedly from the American. A homogenising process has created in the United States a distinctive blend of cultural attitudes which are recognisably American, occasional regional variants notwithstanding. In order for a nationalist art form to be

meaningful as a conscious expression of a particular culture group, it must somehow plumb the collective psyche of that group, a process which cannot develop in the absence of a rich community of experience.

Canadian society is fragmented into dozens of ethnic groups, each tending to retain, with a tenacity bordering on cultural schizophrenia, a firm grip on its (mostly) European roots. It is this very fragmentation, encouraged by a common yearning for old ways and customs and maintained by an isolation and insularity born of broad spaces and great distances, that more than anything else has contributed to a definition of the Canadian character. And although the mosaic is beginning to crack under the post-war pressures of massive urban growth, one cannot yet speak of anything resembling a unified community of experience. Mainly for these reasons, an intrinsically Canadian folk music is virtually non-existent, outside of the indigenous Indian and Eskimo varieties which, however, cannot be expected to signify very much to most Canadians, certainly not as a rich source of inspiration for the musical folklorist in search of a 'Canadian' identity. Consequently, the various attempts to extract musical sustenance from the native soil have resulted in frightfully parochial inspirations which of necessity reflect only a tiny facet of the mosaic.

Early examples of the genre are the Two Sketches on French Canadian Airs (1927) for string quartet or string orchestra by Sir Ernest MacMillan (1893-1973), from 1931 to 1956 conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Dean of the Faculty of Music of the University of Toronto until his retirement from academic life in 1942. MacMillan's Two Sketches are charming miniatures which, characteristically, bear a closer resemblance to the bucolic aspect of Vaughan Williams than to French-Canadian folk song. Nonetheless, if MacMillan is remembered at all as a composer it will be most assuredly on the strength of unpretentious and skilfully wrought genre pieces such as these rather than his grandiose setting of Swinburne's England, a cantata in the best Victorian academic tradition with which the composer gained the degree of Doctor of Music from Oxford University.

Although MacMillan's contemporary Claude Champagne (1891-1965) has left several works of substance, such as the darkly lyrical Symphonie gaspésienne (1945), the String Quartet of 1951, and the powerful symphonic poem Altitude (1959), he is perhaps best remembered for his many lively and picturesque evocations of French Canada, most notably the Suite canadienne (1928) for choir and orchestra and the exuberant Danse villageoise (1930).

The list of folk-inspired compositions in Canada is long but ultimately of limited importance. Such characteristic works as the Red Ear of Corn (1948-49), a ballet based on a peculiar blending of French-Canadian and Indian folk styles, by the Toronto composer John Weinzweig (b.1913), the Miramichi Ballad (1954), an orchestral suite based on three New Brunswick folk songs, by McGill University's Kelsey Jones (b.1922), and the Indian-inspired Algonquin Symphony (1957-58) by the Saskatchewan composer Murray Adaskin (b.1906), have a certain faded period charm which reflects not only a post-war urge on the part of many Canadian composers to find a national voice, but also a curious ignorance of, or indifference to, the richly varied avantgarde trends emanating from France, Germany, and the United States.

A nationalistic phase undoubtedly made it possible for countries such as England, the United States and even France to break the Germanic hegemony of the last century, to rediscover their musical souls and re-emerge with refurbished artistic personalities liberated from the oppressive weight of a solid but alien tradition. For reasons which have been outlined, this route has not been conspicuously open to the Canadian composer, and continuing effort in this direction will do no more than perpetuate a kind of picture-post-card aesthetic, what Donald Mitchell has called "a folkish mask imposed on an eclectic face."[6] Few Canadian composers of the generations trained before 1950 have explored new modes of thought and feeling; and if they have in any way shown us a dim reflection of ourselves, it is at best a cameo portrait, tiny, monochrome, incomplete, and two-dimensional.

When the chronicle of Canadian music in the 20th century is known in full, the decades 1955-1975 will be viewed as a period of rich and varied creative activity. These are, to borrow a phrase from Roger Shattuck, Canada's 'banquet years', an era of fresh discovery and vibrant creativity sparked in part by the general unwillingness of a new generation of composers and musicians to remain ensconced, safe and secure, in the dreary and torpid confines of the organ loft, a symbol of musical colonialism and reactionary academicism to a new breed of young artists in search of a brighter, cleaner, more intellectually bracing atmosphere. Since the mid-1950s, when all but the most blindly optimistic educators echoed Ettore Mazzoleni's rather depressing diagnosis of the country's musical ills quoted above, Canada has witnessed an impressive upsurge of cultural activity on all fronts.

Performers such as Glenn Gould, Maureen Forrester, and Jon Vickers are known and respected throughout the world; the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the National Ballet of Canada, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, established in 1939, 1951 and 1952, respectively, have gained considerable critical acclaim in recent years beyond the borders of Canada; and at least three orchestras - the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra based in Ottawa - can be considered world-class musical organisations. Accompanying this rapid growth on the performance level has been a dramatic expansion of music education in recent years. Major electronic music studios have been established at the University of Toronto (1958) and at McGill University (1964), with many other institutions rapidly following suit. Doctoral programmes in musicology exist at the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia, soon to be followed by the University of Western Ontario. Many other institutions, including McGill University and l'Université de Montréal, have long offered the master's degree in all branches of music instruction, and new doctoral programmes in performance, ethnomusicology, and music education are in the planning stages at several Ontario universities.

As a result of this enrichment of educational opportunities at home, many young Canadian scholars are taking an unprecedented interest in Canada's music, although to date the three most important and comprehensive books on Canadian music have been written or edited by European-born scholars: Helmut Kallmann's A History of Music in Canada 1534-1914 (1960), Aspects of Music in Canada (1969), a symposium edited by Arnold Walter, and Music in Canada 1600-1800 (1975) by Willy Amtmann, a professor of musicology at Carleton University in Ottawa. Along with these general historical studies, several important journals have appeared in recent years, beginning with the now defunct Canadian Music Journal (1956-1962), followed by three active publications, The Canada Music Book (since 1970), the Journal of the Canadian Association of University Schools of Music, which appeared in 1971, and the recent (1973) Canadian Folk Music Journal.

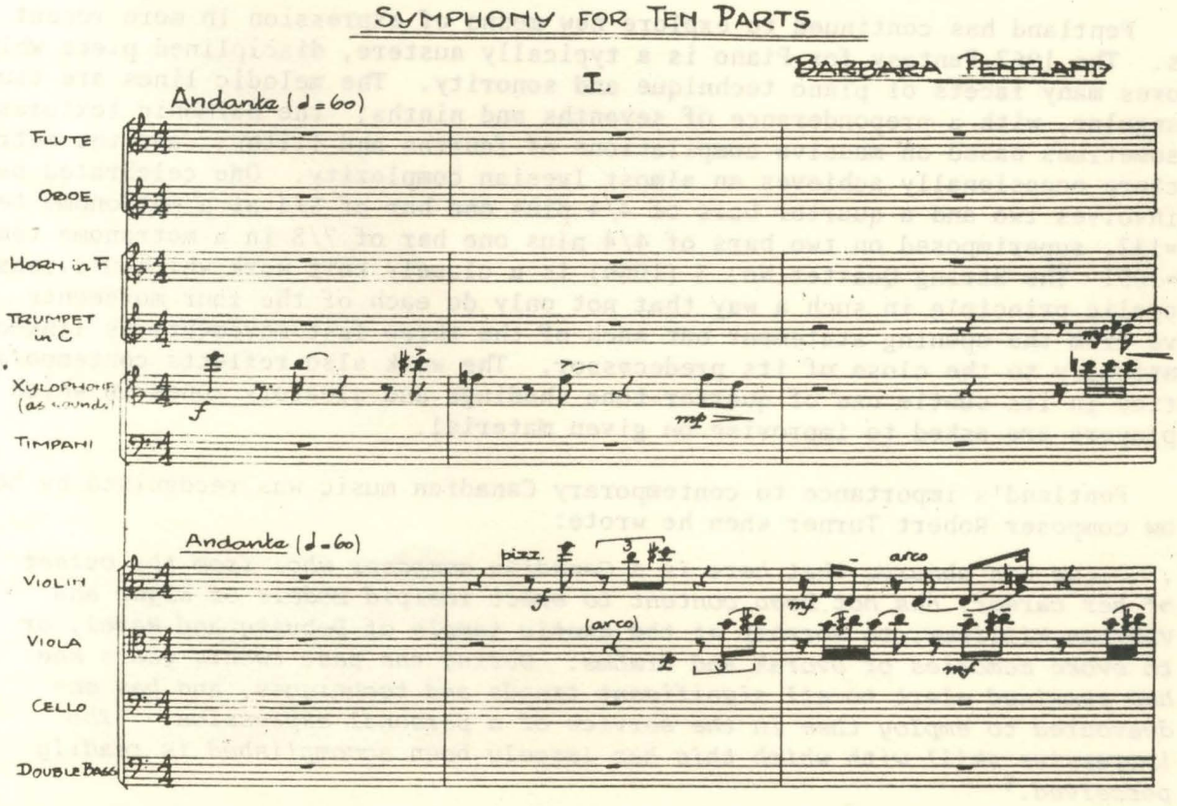
The years leading up to the Second World War saw the first signs of a shift away from the eclectic aesthetic ideals of the Willan-Champagne 'school'. A new generation of Canadian-born composers reaching artistic maturity at this time managed to widen greatly the scope of Canadian composition, largely through a somewhat belated discovery of such established European masters as Schoenberg, Bartók, and Stravinsky. Barbara Pentland (b.1912), John Weinzweig (b.1913), Alexander Brott (b.1915), and Jean Papineau-Couture (b.1916) are probably the most important of Canada's first 'modernists', and in their various roles as performers, conductors, propagandists and pedagogues, they have significantly enriched the fabric of Canadian musical life, providing in their works valuable models for yet another generation of young composers intent on taking their place in the larger world community.

Barbara Pentland received her advanced musical training at the Schola Cantorum in Paris with Cécile Gauthiez, a pupil of d'Indy and a staunch Franckist, at the Juilliard School of Music in New York with Frederick Jacobi and the Dutch-American composer Bernard Wagenaar, and at the Berkshire Music Center in Massachusetts, where her principal teacher was Aaron Copland. Predictably, a great deal

of her music reflects certain aspects of the neo-classical 20s, with echoes of Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and her teacher Copland. Writing in the late 1950s, John Beckwith, one of the most balanced observers of the Canadian musical scene and an important composer in his own right, characterised Pentland's musical style as "firm in its structural aspects, fresh in melodic quality, [and] lean in texture"[7], all of which implies an adherance to neo-classical concepts of classical form, clarity of line, and economy of material. Among the composer's many works in traditional forms are four symphonies, a set of orchestral variations on a theme of Boccherini, concertos for violin, organ and piano, and numerous chamber works, including a piano quartet, three string quartets, two violin sonatas, and a piano trio, as well as a considerable number of works for piano solo.

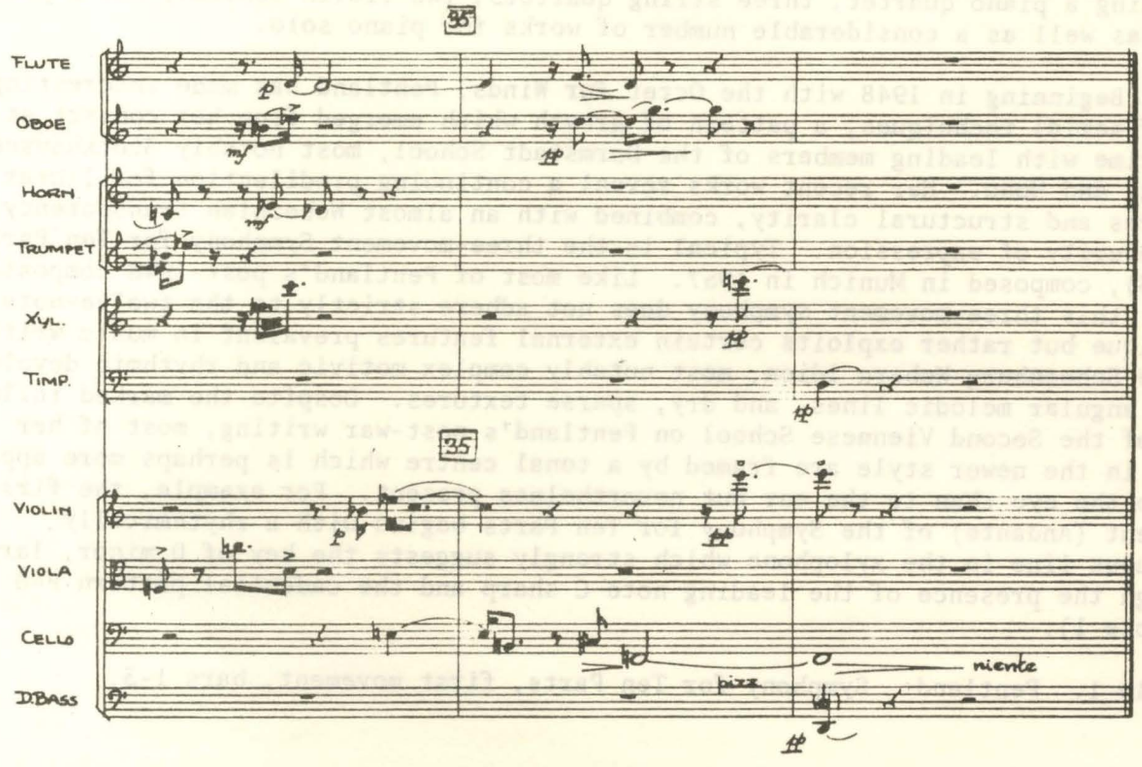
Beginning in 1948 with the Octet for Winds, Pentland has made interesting use of serial techniques, a pattern of growth which emerged from her contact at that time with leading members of the Darmstadt School, most notably Stockhausen, Boulez, and Nono. Her recent works reveal a continuing predilection for linear textures and structural clarity, combined with an almost Webernian transparency and severity of expression. Typical is the three-movement Symphony for Ten Parts (No. 3), composed in Munich in 1957. Like most of Pentland's post-1948 compositions, this three-movement symphony does not adhere strictly to the twelve-note technique but rather exploits certain external features prevalent in music written in the Schoenberg-Webern idiom, most notably complex motivic and rhythmic development, angular melodic lines, and dry, sparse textures. Despite the marked influence of the Second Viennese School on Pentland's post-war writing, most of her works in the newer style are framed by a tonal centre which is perhaps more apparent to the eye than to the ear but nevertheless present. For example, the first movement (Andante) of the Symphony for Ten Parts begins with a rhythmically ambiguous line in the xylophone which strongly suggests the key of D minor, largely through the presence of the leading note C sharp and the cadential pattern F-D (Example 1):

Example 1. Pentland: Symphony for Ten Parts, first movement, bars 1-3.



Despite the tonal ambiguities resulting from the highly chromatic language of the movement, the D minor tonality persists and is ultimately confirmed in the final cadence. Here the cello states a rhythmic variant of the initial xylophone motive, falling on to a sustained F which is then resolved by a single pizzicato D in the double bass, making an unambiguous case for D minor despite the gentle dissonance produced by the high E violin harmonic (Example 2):

Example 2. Pentland: Symphony for Ten Parts, first movement, bars 34-36.



Pentland has continued to explore new means of expression in more recent works. The 1962 Fantasy for Piano is a typically austere, disciplined piece which explores many facets of piano technique and sonority. The melodic lines are taught and angular, with a preponderance of sevenths and ninths; the harmonic textures are sometimes based on massive compilations of fourths and fifths; and the metric structure occasionally achieves an almost Ivesian complexity. One celebrated passage involves two and a quarter bars of 4/4 plus one bar of 5/4 at a metronome tempo of ♩=132, superimposed on two bars of 4/4 plus one bar of 7/8 in a metronome tempo of ♩=109! The String Quartet No. 3 (1969) is a closely knit work which utilises the cyclic principle in such a way that not only do each of the four movements evolve from the opening statement but each of the three last movements is linked thematically to the close of its predecessor. The work also reflects contemporary practice in its subtle use of quarter-tone shadings and aleatory zones in which the players are asked to improvise on given material.

Pentland's importance to contemporary Canadian music was recognised by her fellow composer Robert Turner when he wrote:

> *. . . we can observe that here is a Canadian composer who, from the outset of her career, has not been content to erect insipid models of Elgar and Vaughan Williams, to worship at the exotic temple of Debussy and Ravel, or to evoke memories of Dvorak and Brahms. During the past twenty years she has remained alert to all significant trends and techniques, and has endeavoured to employ them in the service of a personal expression. The impressive skill with which this has largely been accomplished is readily perceived.*[8]

It is generally accepted that John Weinzweig was the first Canadian com-

poser to employ serial techniques in his writing, giving him something of a pioneer status in this country. It is also generally accepted that Weinzweig is something of an elder statesman of Canadian music, a composer who, largely through his long affiliation with the University of Toronto (since 1952), has created something perilously close to a Weinzweig 'school', numbering among his students a good many of the brightest hopes for the future of Canadian musical creativity.

After a solid academic grounding under Leo Smith, Healey Willan, and Ernest MacMillan at the University of Toronto, Weinzweig journeyed, in 1938, to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester where he came under the influence of Bernard Rogers, a most remarkable teacher who made a lasting impression on the composer.

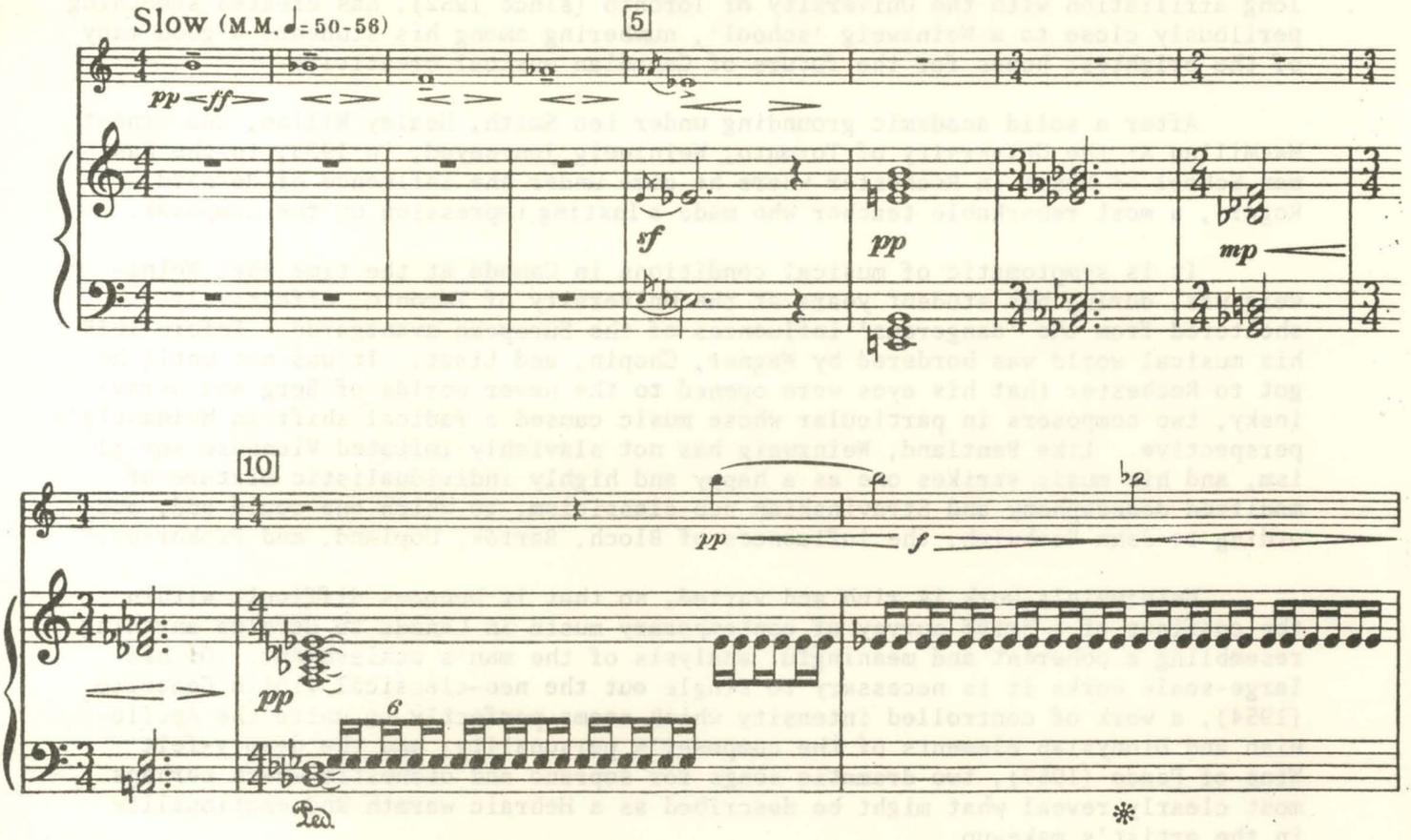
It is symptomatic of musical conditions in Canada at the time that Weinzweig was, during his student years at the University of Toronto, effectively sheltered from the 'dangerous' influences of the European avantgarde. Before 1938 his musical world was bordered by Wagner, Chopin, and Liszt. It was not until he got to Rochester that his eyes were opened to the newer worlds of Berg and Stravinsky, two composers in particular whose music caused a radical shift in Weinzweig's perspective. Like Pentland, Weinzweig has not slavishly imitated Viennese serialism, and his music strikes one as a happy and highly individualistic mixture of modified dodecaphony and Stravinskian neo-classicism, to which one could add, according to John Beckwith, the influences of Bloch, Bartók, Copland, and Prokofiev.[9]

Weinzweig's work is rich and varied, so that it becomes difficult within the confines of a brief survey of contemporary music in Canada to develop anything resembling a coherent and meaningful analysis of the man's achievement. Of his large-scale works it is necessary to single out the neo-classical Violin Concerto (1954), a work of controlled intensity which seems perfectly to unite the Apollonian and Dionysian elements of the composer's personality, and the deeply-felt Wine of Peace (1957), two dramatic songs for soprano and orchestra which perhaps most clearly reveal what might be described as a Hebraic warmth and emotionality in the artist's make-up.

In his usual felicitous manner, John Beckwith has captured a dominant trait in Weinzweig's musical personality when he speaks of "a mimetic quality, a playfulness, an almost distinct outline of body gesture in the music".[10] Pursuing this line of thought, it would seem, despite the composer's assured handling of the large forms, that his most endearing and perhaps characteristic qualities are found in works of more slender proportion and less serious intent, such as the series of five divertimenti for solo winds and small orchestra composed between 1946 and 1968.[11] Here are found in abundance humour and wit, scintillating jazzy rhythms, and a kind of Gallic verve and lyrical charm which tend to belie the fact that each of the works is serially constructed. In keeping with the spirit of these delightful pieces it is wickedly tempting to refer to Weinzweig as a kind of dodecaphonic Jean Françaix, at the risk of committing an injustice against both composers.

The Divertimento No. 1 for Flute and String Orchestra, which also exists in a version for flute and piano, provides a good example of the composer's unique assimilation of serial technique. Like Pentland, Weinzweig has managed to absorb twelve-note elements into an almost classical scheme of tonalities, mainly through a telling use of triadic harmonies. The central slow movement of the First Divertimento is based on the first five notes of a twelve-note set (B - B flat - F - A flat - E flat), a group characterised by successive falling fourths, which is first heard in sustained flute notes. What follows is simply a triadic harmonisation of these five notes which in its course reveals the remaining seven notes of the complete set of twelve: [E - G] [G flat] [D - D flat] [A - C]. The strong root movement of the progression suggests unmistakably an E-flat tonal centre, a conjecture which is immediately reinforced by the rapid reiteration of the E flat growing out of the last of the five chords (Example 3):

Example 3. Weinzweig: Divertimento for Flute and Piano, second movement, bars 1-11.



In view of the tortured expressionism and the cerebral sterility that has marked an enormous quantity of music drawn from the Schoenbergian well, it is eminently satisfying to witness the technique put to use in such a forthright and unaffected manner as this. At the same time, Weinzweig's music confirms the manifold possibilities inherent in the once dreaded 'system'. To close this brief discussion of John Weinzweig, it is revealing to quote a portion of a conversation the composer once had with his pupil and colleague Harry Somers. He told Somers:

> *There's no point in writing music for myself. If there was I'd just write for the piano so I could play it myself. You must be thinking of an audience as soon as you get to doing things for an orchestra, thinking of a response. Those who deny it are defending themselves from criticism. There's no point in writing unless it has a social purpose.*[12]

Of the remaining two composers classified as the most important of Canada's first 'modernists', Alexander Brott is the more difficult to characterise. Opinion seems to be strongly divided on the merit of his music, though none would deny that his activities as a conductor and teacher deserve unstinting praise. After study at the McGill Conservatorium and the Juilliard School of Music, Brott began his career as concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. At a very young age he became assistant conductor of that orchestra and while still in his 20s went on to create the McGill Chamber Orchestra which, over the years, has functioned as a kind of personal laboratory for the composer's compositional activities. Brott is a free-ranging eclectic of a conservative bent whose music generally lacks a distinctive profile. He is by temperament, one suspects, a romantic who is happiest when dealing with an external stimulus of some kind. A good deal of his music is written for string orchestra, and almost all of it carries a programmatic title. Characteristic examples in this medium are: Lament (1940), Laurentian Idyll (1940), Ritual (1942), Lullaby and Procession of Toys (1943), Three Astral Visions (1959), and Circle, Triangle, 4 Squares (1963). In addition, Brott has

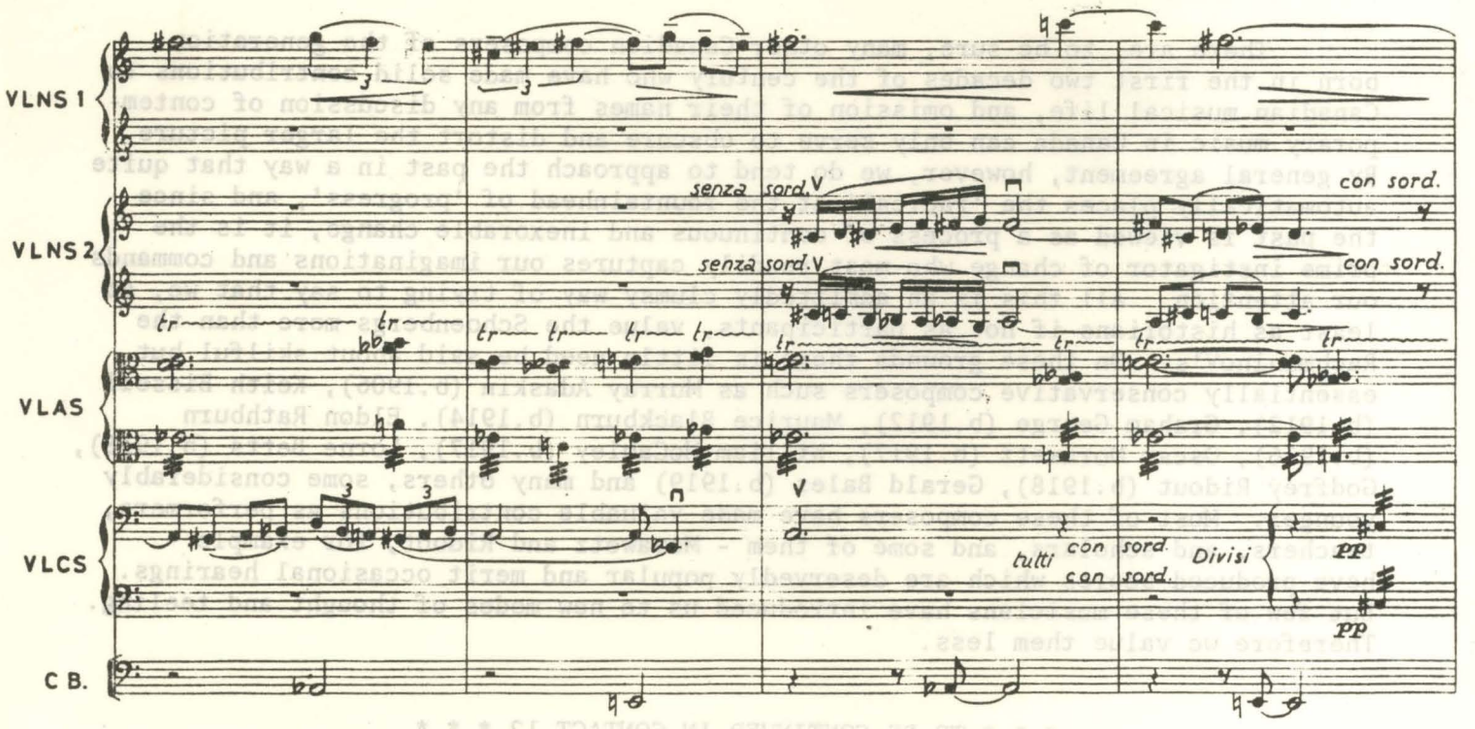
written about a dozen works for full orchestra, a Concerto for Violin and Chamber Orchestra (1950), a considerable amount of chamber music, including one work, Critic's Corner (1950), for the unusual combination of string quartet and percussion, several choral works, a handful of songs for high voice and orchestra, and a very few piano pieces of which the composer himself has singled out the Vignettes en caricature. Very little of Brott's music has been published.

In a recent interview, Brott revealed something of his aesthetic position when he said:

> *There are only two means of making music, either one stops (to say nothing new), or continues (to embroider the old). The judicious balance between the two pervades all forms. Form and means relate to function and use. When either disappears, they are of interest only in the historical sense, in either museum or concert hall.*[13]

A brief quotation from the second movement (Andante) of the Three Astral Visions will demonstrate one aspect of Brott's essential eclecticism. Here the influence seems to be Bartók, as is suggested vaguely by the convoluted conjunct melodic lines, the mirror-form passage in the second violins, and the muted note clusters in the violas. The entire movement generates an atmosphere reminiscent of Bartók's characteristic 'night music' (Example 4):

Example 4. Brott: Three Astral Visions, second movement, bars 5-8.



The indefatigable John Beckwith, who has sacrificed enormous amounts of his own time as a composer promoting the music of his colleagues, sees four, possibly five, stages in the stylistic development of the important French-Canadian composer Jean Papineau-Couture. He defines these as (1) neo-classical (1942-48); (2) semi-dramatic (1948-50); (3) transitional (1951-54); (4) dodecaphonic (1956-); and (5) church music as a special category.[14]

Papineau-Couture, a Boulanger student, is a gifted craftsman who may be considered the chief representative of the post-Sacre Stravinsky aesthetic in Canada. Like Stravinsky's post-World War I compositions, Papineau-Couture's music is compounded of clean, often angular, lines, dry rhythmic and melodic ostinatos, and a remarkable sensitivity to tone colour. He is at heart a contrapuntist, and in his ingenious pursuit of new solutions to old formal problems (fugue, sonata,

concerto grosso, etc.) he shares with Stravinsky the characteristic 'problem-solving' approach to musical composition.

It is interesting to note that among Papineau-Couture's most idiomatic compositions are five works entitled Pièce Concertante. In each of these pieces, patterned on the baroque concerto grosso principle, the composer cleverly exploits a particular constructional device. Pièce Concertante No. 1 (1957), subtitled 'Repliement' ('Folding-back'), is formally a single large cancrizans structure, while the second Pièce Concertante (1959), subtitled 'Eventails' ('Fans'), is based on short retrogradations plus a process of constant expansion and contraction of note lengths and harmonic density. The third Pièce Concertante (1958-59), scored for a concertino group of flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and harp with string orchestra ripieno, consists of a theme, ten variations, and a fugue. Pièce Concertante No. 4 (1959) for oboe and strings is constructed on a proportional expansion of note values, and the last Pièce Concertante (1963), in keeping with its subtitle, 'Miroirs', is a study in mirror devices.

Quite obviously Papineau-Couture approaches musical creativity in a classical mode. That is to say, he is more concerned with underlying form than with surface appearance. As a result, his music, like much of Stravinsky's, lacks an element of poetry and fantasy. Compensating for the emotional restraint, however, is the kind of cerebral pleasure that comes from participating in the creative process itself, that allows one to observe, as it were, the creative mind in action. As Andrée Desautels has noted: "A work of art, according to [Papineau-]Couture, is nothing but an order imposed on time, autonomous in form and free of purely human concerns".[15]

There are, to be sure, many other Canadian composers of the generation born in the first two decades of the century who have made solid contributions to Canadian musical life, and omission of their names from any discussion of contemporary music in Canada can only serve to obscure and distort the larger picture. By general agreement, however, we do tend to approach the past in a way that quite automatically places the 'radical' at the fountainhead of 'progress', and since the past is viewed as a process of continuous and inexorable change, it is the prime instigator of change who most readily captures our imaginations and commands our attention. All this is an admittedly clumsy way of trying to say that we, at least as historians if not as participants, value the Schoenbergs more than the Rachmaninov's. On these grounds there is little need be said about skilful but essentially conservative composers such as Murray Adaskin (b.1906), Keith Bissell (b.1912), Graham George (b.1912), Maurice Blackburn (b.1914), Eldon Rathburn (b.1916), Oscar Morawetz (b.1917), William McCauley (b.1917), Lorne Betts (b.1918), Godfrey Ridout (b.1918), Gerald Bales (b.1919) and many others, some considerably younger. Most of these composers have made valuable contributions as performers, teachers, and scholars, and some of them - Morawetz and Ridout, for example - have produced scores which are deservedly popular and merit occasional hearings. But few of these musicians have introduced us to new modes of thought and feeling. Therefore we value them less.

* * * TO BE CONTINUED IN CONTACT 12 * * *

PART II: THE AVANTGARDE AND BEYOND

NOTES:

[1]Barbara Pentland, 'Canadian Music, 1950', Northern Review, III (February/March 1950), p. 43.

[2]Ettore Mazzoleni, 'Music in Canada', Queen's Quarterly, LX (Winter 1954), p. 489.

[3]Milton Wilson, 'Canadian Music', The Canadian Forum, XXX (July 1950), p. 87.

Healey Willan (1880-1968) was born near London and educated at St. Saviour's Choir

School, Eastbourne. In 1913 he arrived in Canada to head the Theory Department of the Toronto Conservatory of Music. For 50 years the composer was associated with the University of Toronto, first as lecturer and examiner and later as university organist and professor. In these capacities, Willan became one of the dominating personalities in Canadian music, occupying a position not unlike that of Sir Hubert Parry in England a generation earlier. Willan's Symphony No. 2 in C Minor (1948), dedicated "to Ettore Mazzoleni with gratitude and affection", was recently recorded by the late Karel Ancerl and the Toronto Symphony (CBC Radio Canada SM 133).

[4]Ibid., p. 88. Godfrey Ridout, born in Toronto in 1918, was a student of Willan's at the Toronto Conservatory. Still very much active as a composer and lecturer in the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, Ridout continues to espouse an aesthetic firmly rooted in the early 20th century British tradition. He has a particular affection for Holst, Walton, and Elgar, and, more so than any other composer, he has attempted to perpetuate the worn and faded ideals of his mentor. The Two Etudes for String Orchestra date from 1946.

[5]Milton Wilson, 'Canadian Music', The Canadian Forum, XXX (August 1950), p. 114. Philip Nimmons was born in British Columbia in 1923 and educated at the Juilliard School of Music and at the Royal Conservatory, Toronto, where his principal teachers were Arnold Walter and John Weinzweig. In addition to the 1949 Piano Sonata, Nimmons has composed several small works for orchestra, a string quartet, and a handful of songs. In the past 25 years it is fair to say that the composer has made little impact on Canadian music, except perhaps in his newer role of jazz musician.

[6]Donald Mitchell, The Language of Modern Music (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966), p. 110.

[7]John Beckwith, 'Music', in The Culture of Contemporary Canada, ed. by Julian Park (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 150.

[8]Robert Turner, 'Barbara Pentland', The Canadian Music Journal, II, No. 4 (Summer 1958), p. 24.

[9]See John Beckwith, 'Composers in Toronto and Montreal', University of Toronto Quarterly, XXVI (October 1956), p. 47ff.

[10]Ibid., p. 49.

[11]No. 1 (1946) for flute and string orchestra; No. 2 (1948) for oboe and string orchestra; No. 3 (1959) for bassoon and string orchestra; No. 4 (chronologically No. 5, 1968) for clarinet and string orchestra; No. 5 (1961) for trumpet, trombone and wind band.

[12]Quoted in Peter Such, Soundprints: Contemporary Composers (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1972), p. 18.

[13]Alexander Brott, 'A Portrait', Musicanada, No. 17 (March 1969), p. 11.

[14]See John Beckwith, 'Jean Papineau-Couture', The Canadian Music Journal, III, No. 2 (Winter 1959), p. 9.

[15]Andrée Desautels, 'The History of Canadian Composition 1610-1967', in Arnold Walter, ed., Aspects of Music in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 120.

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