

**On the Air: Narrative Electroacoustic Music.** By Martin Gotfrit. Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Music Centre Centrediscs, 2004. CMCCD 9904. One compact disc. \$19.98. Contents: All the Knowing (9:50); Balloon (9:54); The Mystery of His Will (4:33); Flights (4:59).

Martin Gotfrit has had a long and distinguished career (nearly twenty-five years) as a composer, performer and educator at Simon Fraser University. Born in Montreal in 1952, he studied composition and film studies at Concordia University. His graduate studies at McGill University included intensive studies in electroacoustic music. He describes himself as “an interdisciplinary composer/performer whose work mostly involves collaborations with other artists: filmmakers, choreographers, poets and other composer/performers.”

Gotfrit’s newest recording, entitled *On the Air*, is a collection of five electroacoustic compositions dating between 1998 and 2002. All are *musique concrète* pieces that he refers to as personal narratives “about home, away and history.” As he notes, a central feature of his compositions is to find possible ways to augment the central musical qualities of everyday sounds, thereby creating new and vibrant ways to develop its overall sequence of events. For instance, the first composition, “All the Knowing” (from 2001) contains, in part, the sounds of Gotfrit’s grandparents speaking and singing, along with other important childhood memories—railway cars, steam whistles, dog barks, marching feet and vital speeches; the sounds are adroitly combined into a fascinating and convincing musical design.

Gotfrit is without doubt a master of integrating a seemingly endless variety of sounds, rhythms and textures. But while the strength of the ideas and musical craft is

indisputable, I must admit a certain amount of discomfort with this disc. Specifically, for all the brilliant skill inherent within each piece, there is a relatively static, narrow emotional arch to them—an ironic characteristic given that these works are meant to represent personal narratives which, one would expect, should contain a much wider palette of emotional affect. The sole exception to this assessment is the final work on the disc, “Flights.” Commissioned by the CBC in 2002 to commemorate the first anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, the piece deftly coordinates sounds from a stairwell in Vancouver and the announcements (in Arabic) of a commercial flight over the Arabian Sea to generate a searing portrayal of the victims of this disaster, both on the plane and within the Twin Towers (hence the double meaning of the title). Simply stated, this is an important work: although its duration is short (five minutes) its emotional intensity is so captivating that it seems much longer.

In sum, a frustrating disc. Although “Flights” is a powerful composition, I hesitate to label the recording as a “must have” purchase, given that the remaining four works do not come near it in terms of impact. My criticism notwithstanding, *On the Air* is a warmly recommended addition to the catalogue of current Canadian electroacoustic music by one of western Canada’s vital exponents of the genre. Adequate notes, although I would have preferred that more biographical information be included.

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