

**The Music of Harry Freedman.** By Gail Dixon. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. 190 pages, ill., music. ISBN 080208964X. \$45.00

Gail Dixon's new book on the life and music of Harry Freedman is a valuable addition to the growing body of research devoted to Canadian composers. It also is sorely needed. Freedman has been one of Canada's most vital and prolific composers of the past half century, achieving that all-too-rare status in contemporary art music—critical *and* commercial success. With an output of over 175 compositions, Freedman's music embraces many styles and genres, including incidental music for stage, TV and film. He has also played a significant role in several Canadian musical organizations, including as a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers (for which he served as president from 1975-78) and also the Guild of Canadian Film Composers.

In seven chapters, Dixon's book chronicles the periods of Freedman's career. With such a large oeuvre, only representative compositions can be discussed with any degree of depth. Dixon, however, has been careful to select works that either are the most representative of certain points in his career, that are watersheds to new compositional directions, or that are regarded as particularly important.

The introductory first chapter contains two parts. First, Dixon identifies briefly Freedman's various compositional styles. The second part

contains a primer on the technical vocabulary employed throughout the book—largely the Forte set theory and row labeling procedures commonly found in the scholarly literature that examines twentieth-century repertoire like Freedman's.

Chapter two discusses the composer's early career up to 1952 and, in particular, Freedman's struggle to synthesize his compositional voice from multifarious influences such as visual art, jazz, mathematics and serialism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the piece that marked the end of Freedman's apprenticeship—the orchestral work, *Tableau*, from 1952.

Chapter three discusses the compositions written between 1953 and 1961, the period during which Freedman further developed his musical language while eschewing the serial techniques of earlier years. At the same time, Freedman's music began to incorporate attributes of composers such as Bartók, Messiaen and Stravinsky. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of the First Symphony from 1960—one of Freedman's most impressive works and, by his own account, the first composition where he no longer sensed his musical mentors were looking over his shoulder.

In chapter four, “The Quest for Independence (1962 to 1969),” Dixon identifies how Freedman—always the experimentalist—gradually incorporated both jazz improvisatory elements and aleatoric attributes as important structural features. The chapter concludes with analysis of *Five over Thirteen* from 1969. The composition marks the culmination of Freedman’s fascination with using mathematical procedures to govern a significant portion of a work’s structure, as well as his first significant foray into electronic music.

Nineteen seventy marked a turning point in Freedman’s career. After twenty-five years, he left his position as English horn player for the Toronto Symphony to devote himself solely to composition. With this new-found freedom, Freedman’s output increased significantly as did his reputation both in Canada and abroad. Chapters five and six, respectively entitled “New Directions (1970 to 1976)” and “The Mature Stylistic Spectrum (1977 to the Present),” chronicle Freedman’s works during the past thirty-five years. Dixon denotes 1977 not so much as a stylistic change in Freedman’s music, but rather as a demarcation of greater stylistic plurality; this chapter is the largest in the book.

In the final chapter, Dixon summarizes the path of Freedman’s career and formulates some general stylistic features. She also devotes several pages to the importance of Freedman’s art to post-1950 Canadian music. Finally, the chapter

contains a fascinating précis of the various stages of Freedman’s compositional process (there are two examples that illustrate the preliminary notes and sketches for the 1983 Third Symphony).

I sincerely doubt if Freedman could have had a more passionate advocate to author this book. Dixon’s ardent interest has extended over a long period; her earliest writing in the book’s bibliography dates from twenty-five years ago. Although her fervor for Freedman’s work is apparent on almost every page, she is careful to remain objective in her assessment. She deftly avoids the trap of idolatry and wisely lets the music speak for itself.

The book contains end notes, a chronological list of works, a selective bibliography, and an index. The production work and editorial work is generally excellent; the hard cover format contains very good quality paper and sew-in stitch binding.

Despite my great enthusiasm for Dixon’s book, I do have two small criticisms. The first is the convention Dixon uses for labeling row forms. Specifically, the integer used in row form labels such as P<sub>0</sub>, R<sub>6</sub>, RP<sub>11</sub>, are by convention placed as a subscript font style—in other words, P<sub>0</sub>, R<sub>6</sub>, RP<sub>11</sub>. The absence of these subscripts represents one of the rare slips by the editor.

The second point involves the labeling of pitch-class sets. Dixon relies upon Allen Forte's categorization as presented in his 1973 *The Structure of Atonal Music*. Most often, however, the pitch-class set name is associated with its prime form—for instance, the tetrachord C, C#, D, D# would be designated 0123, or 4-1 in Forte's terminology. While the Forte labels are well-known, they are in the end simply one system of taxonomy. The really important label is the prime form. The problem is that unless Forte's numbers are actually committed to memory, one must constantly refer to his chart to find out what the prime form of any chord might be. Unfortunately, there are

many instances where Dixon just lists the Forte number instead of the Forte number combined with the prime form.

These minor concerns aside, Dixon's book is an impressive achievement and should be held as the standard on Freedman's music for years to come. I strongly recommend that it be purchased by all music libraries.

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