

***This Isn't Silence: Works for Symphony Orchestra by Brian Current. Toronto: Centrediscs, 2007. CMCCD 12607. 1 compact disc. \$17.98*** Contents: *This Isn't Silence* (Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Andrey Boreyko, conductor (11:40)) - *For The Time Being* (CBC Radio Orchestra, Bramwell Tovey, conductor (12:01)) - *Concertino for Flutes and String Orchestra* (Robert Aitken, flute; other soloists; New Music Concerts; Brian Current, conductor (7:22)) - *Kazabazua* (Esprit Orchestra, Alex Pauk, conductor (12:24)) - *Symphonies in Slanted Time* (Esprit Orchestra, Alex Pauk, conductor (13:23)).

*This Isn't Silence* is a collection of the most prominent Canadian performances of the orchestral works of the Ottawa-born composer, Brian Current. The recordings are of such a high quality that one is scarcely made aware that this is an album made up entirely of live performances! This is not a common occurrence, and it is a ray of hope for composers across Canada who wish their work to be heard in this medium, but who are constrained by the prohibitive cost of orchestral recording sessions.

The pieces on the CD, including the titular work, which was nominated for a Juno Award in 2008, demonstrate the dramatic range of the composer's imagination. They also trace the development of a technique, which Current calls "slanted time," that has been at the centre of his creative thought for the last decade. While the role played by slanted time varies from piece to piece, its presence in each is unmistakable. The technique establishes a state where the tempo of the music is constantly changing-either accelerating or decelerating-and, by layering this affect, Current gives the impression of constant movement in one direction or the other (similar to the seemingly perpetual movement of pitch in "Shepard Tones").

The use of slanted time culminates in Current's 2005 work, *Symphonies in Slanted Time*, where it serves not only as the primary compositional focus, but also the driving force for the development of the material within the piece. The change-states are so complex that straightforward accelerandi begin to lose their transitional functions and instead feel like points of stasis or repose. The work's title reflects the fact that more traditional materials such as pitch and harmony, and even timbre and orchestration, become incidental in the face of the nearly overwhelming temporal flux.

In the remaining four pieces, the technique is relegated to a more supportive role. This is outwardly felt in *Kazabazua* (2003-06), where it primarily serves the metaphor of the piece. Named for a Quebec town north of Ottawa (near where the piece was written), *Kazabazua* is an Algonquin word meaning "disappearing [or] hidden waters." The piece uses slanted time to depict the flow of water in a local river as it passes both above and below ground and to give a sense of gravity to the listener.

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The Concertino for Flutes and String Orchestra (2002, rev. 2004) focuses on the juxtaposition of the roles of the solo flute (performed fervently by the renowned Robert Aitken), its three spatially-separated counterparts, and the accompanimental (but seldom subdued) string orchestra. The use of the "back of the hall" flute trio blurs the lines between the soloist and the orchestra, performers and audience, and musical form and formlessness. Slanted time is used here as a means to highlight and decorate the more traditional musical materials rather than as a thematic material focus itself.

In *For the Time Being* (2000), Current uses slanted time to control the sense of directions through the piece's three sections: the first decelerates, the second accelerates, and the last remains constant. Sonic materials come to the fore and the composer inserts artifacts of the familiar in the form of emphasized major or minor harmonies, to comfort and ground the listener in the tumult of textural and dense harmonic changes. These relics of tonality punctuate and exaggerate the formal structure not only of this work, but *This Isn't Silence* (1998, rev. 2001) as well.

Slanted time is used to create and manipulate texture in *For the Time Being* and *This Isn't Silence*. The orchestra builds to startling, whirring highs, taking on almost mechanical and electro-acoustic characteristics. The timbres that Current is able to conjure from the orchestra are often breathtaking, yet surprisingly familiar. *This Isn't Silence* uses the slanting of time to push the materials beyond their breaking points. In the score, this is visible when the materials break into a scrambled graphical notation where the performers improvise and develop further their given materials.

As mentioned above, the performances provided by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the CBC Radio Orchestra, New Music Concerts with Robert Aitken, and the Esprit Orchestra are all exceptional. The energy and accuracy with which the ensembles execute their respective scores is as much a credit to their professionalism and talent as to the inspirational quality of the material.

The quality of the recordings, however, is a little inconsistent, though only marginally so. On average these recordings are easily as well-polished as any session-based recording available. The liner notes by Canadian composer Evan Ware are clear and informative, though often more concerned with the superficial details of the works than on their more deep-rooted and substantial qualities or implications.

The aesthetic of this music could be described as one of conservative exploration. Each piece manages a sophisticated balance between accessibility, sensuality, and intellectualism. There is a visceral excitement and energy in all of Brian Current's music that translates especially well into the orchestral idiom. This collection comprises a fantastic representation of the composer's work that should not be missed.

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