

CentreStreams: The launch of a digital audio archive at the Canadian Music Centre*

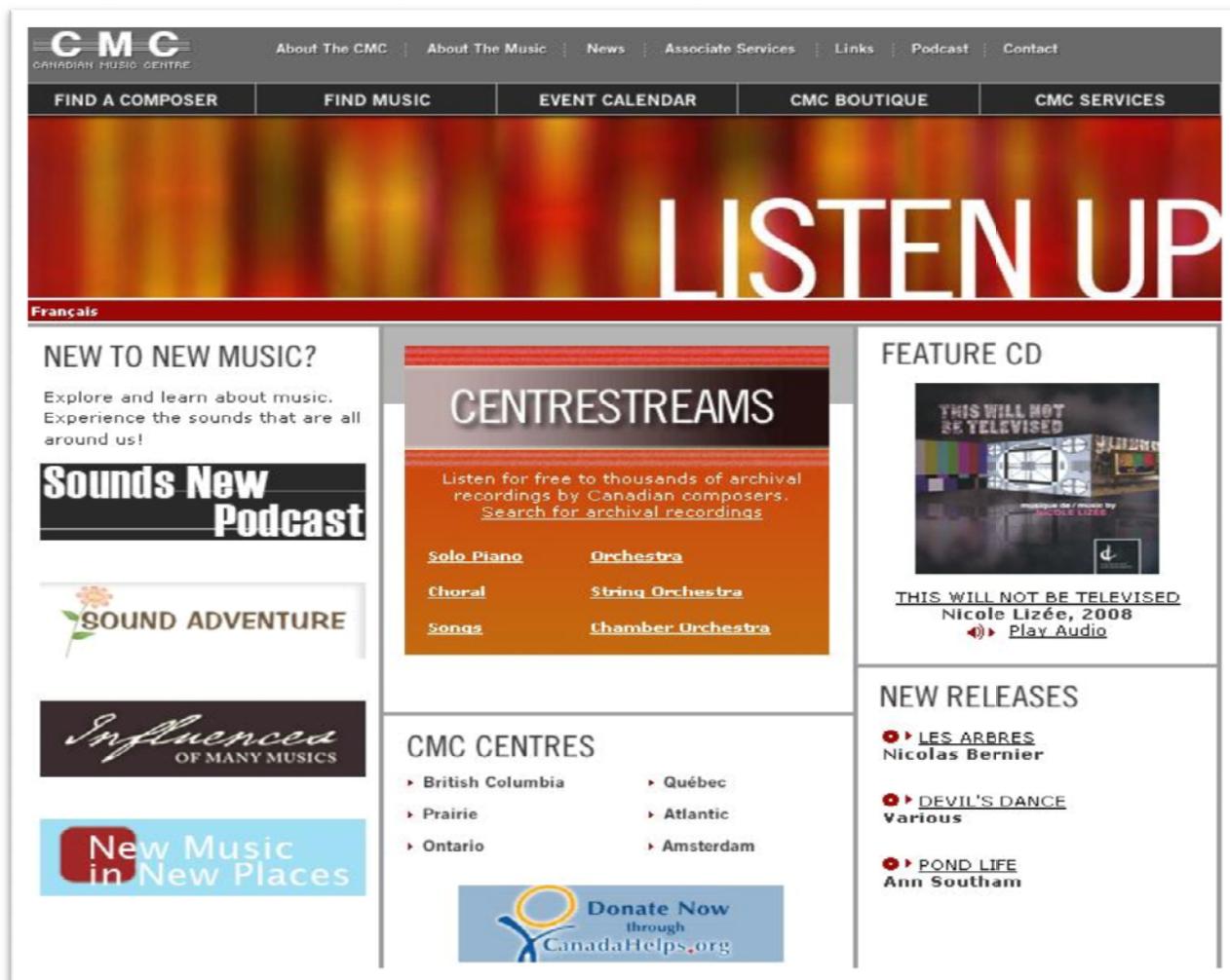
By Michelle Arbuckle

The evolution of the Ann Southam Audio Archive at the Canadian Music Centre has led us from boxes of cassettes and open reels to a globally accessible and interactive searchable online tool. Now open freely to the public for browsing and streaming, the audio archive has experienced five decades of growth and change. Since its opening in 1959, CMC has been collecting audio tracks from our Associate Composers. These were usually deposited by the composers themselves in the form of open reel tape. Since then we've received submissions through DAT, cassette tape, CD-R and multiple digital formats – each of varying stability and quality. With each generation of technology, CMC staff has had to revisit its approach to preservation and access, questioning how to maintain a stable archive of quality audio tracks as well as the aging systems on which to play them back.

When the perfect storm of tech-savvy CMC staff and digitally-focused government funding came together in 1999, the idea to digitize CMC holdings became a concrete plan. Efforts moved forward over the subsequent years to build the backend infrastructure and to establish a related staff workflow. After three phases of development (undertaken with support from the AV Preservation Trust and the Department of Canadian Heritage) and with the cooperation of the CBC, SOCAN and the American Federation of Musicians, CMC was able to publicly launch the digital audio archive on December 8, 2008. Now renamed “CentreStreams,” the archive contains over 8,700 tracks of contemporary classical works by over 700 Canadian composers. With the cooperation of the new music community, performers, and the staff of CBC Radio2, we are aiming to make available an archival recording for every one of the scores housed within our regional libraries. While the performance quality of material found in the archive may range from professional level concert hall premieres to those by student and community groups, the service remains a vital way to make Canadian composers' music more accessible and available to a broad public.

This project provides many benefits for our users: those who are seeking to program Canadian works; students conducting research; teachers seeking new and challenging works for their students; and of course those simply seeking an exposure to new music. CentreStreams enables each of our unique user groups to achieve their goals.

The CentreStreams interface allows visitors to access the digital audio archive in three different ways, by using three different search/browse options. Whichever way one enters the archive, they will be prompted to enter a login and password – this requires the creation of a CMC library account. We’ve tried to construct a very limited and quick standard sign-in process that allows us to gather basic patron information. If the user’s system is set up to save cookies, this should be a single sign-in process.



The first entry path to CentreStreams is found on the home page, and allows the user to browse by instrumentation with the choices of solo piano, choral, songs (solo), orchestra, string orchestra and chamber orchestra. Choosing any of these options launches the CentreStreams player, with a random assortment of 30 tracks from the catalogue within the selected genre. These are each accompanied by an image of the composer (when available), the title of the work, and the duration of the track. With each allotment of 30 tracks, the user then has the option to refresh and get a new listing of 30 additional tracks. This option was built with a first-time user in mind – particularly performers who are unfamiliar with Canadian composers’ music and prefer to hear what has been written for their own instruments.

FIND A COMPOSER	FIND MUSIC	EVENT CALENDAR	CMC BOUTIQUE	CMC SERVICES
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FIND A COMPOSER

Français

Browse by Family Name: [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

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[Andrew Staniland](#)
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[📁 Sample Works](#)



Andrew Staniland is a composer and new media performer whose music is performed and broadcast internationally. Recent commissions include works the virtuoso group Toca Loca, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Andrew's music has been described as "beautiful and terrifying" (New Yorker Magazine) and as a composer who "will emerge as one of the most individual voices in this country" (National Arts Centre Press Release, November 2002). He holds a doctorate in composition from the University of Toronto, and has received numerous accolades, including top prizes in the SOCAN young composers competition, and the 2004 Karen Keiser Prize in Canadian Music. Staniland is currently Affiliate Composer with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

[📁 Recordings for sale at CMC](#)

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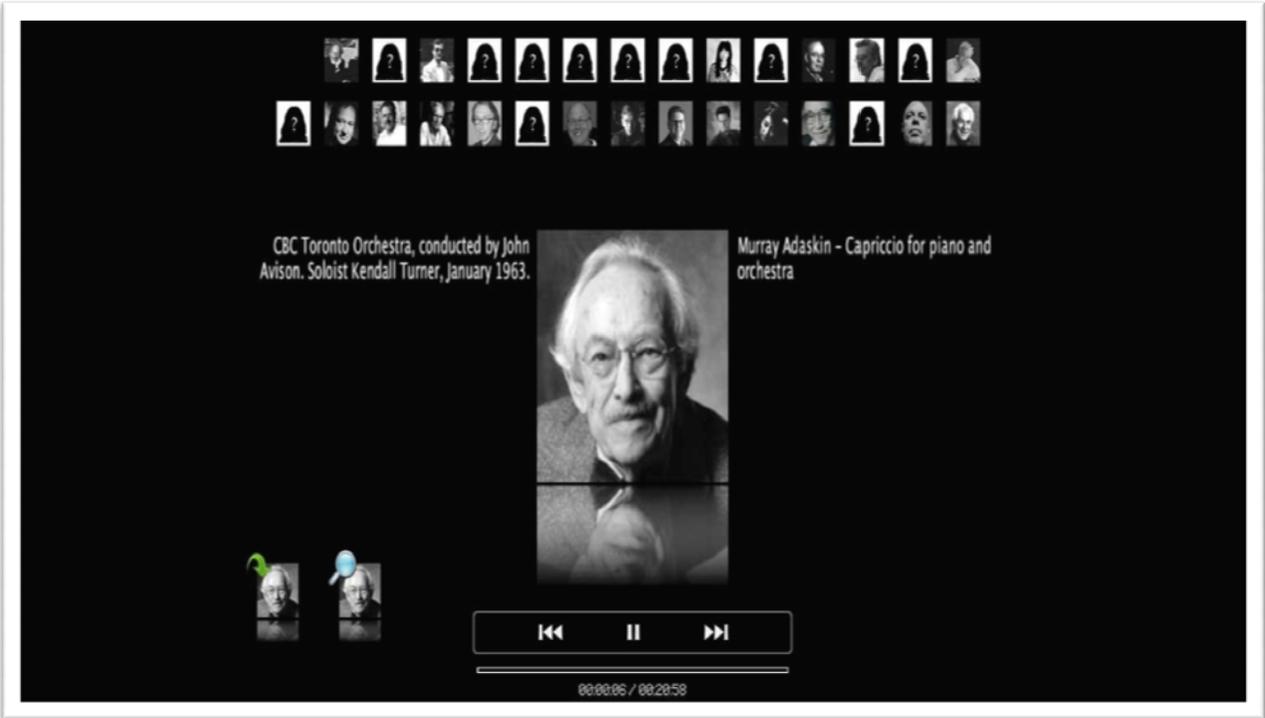
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[⬆️ Back to Top](#)

Following the link to “Find a Composer” allows the user to choose a specific composer name and learn more about the composer’s history and style of composition. We have also linked CentreStreams to each of these pages so that users may explore the audio archive of an individual composer. Currently, the left-hand navigation menu of each composer page allows for the exploration of items for sale in the CMC Boutique, items for loan in the library, and now audio tracks to stream through the CentreStreams player. On the occasion where there are no tracks listed to stream, this indicates that the composer has not made any submissions to the digital audio archive. This option was built for those users seeking to hear the overall catalogue of a specific composer. It has also been popular with our Associate Composers, who enjoy having easy access to their own performance recording archives.

CentreStreams tracks have been integrated within our overall library catalogue, allowing users the same search functionality that has always been afforded them. I will admit that this is still the area where the greatest number of improvements need to be made. Currently, users can limit searches to streaming archive tracks by limiting the Audio/Score field to “Full Audio.” This can be combined with added search details like instrumentation, keyword, composer or date. Unfortunately, there is not yet an easy search technique for those seeking to limit their search to those titles for which we have both a print score AND audio track. This is a feature that we are working on for a future iteration and hope to make much more intuitive for our users.



We are already hard at work making improvements to the CentreStreams system. For example, a new interface for the streaming player has already been developed and is scheduled for launch in the Fall of 2009. We have integrated new features that allow users to glean more detailed information about a piece directly from the player, as well as to link back to the composers' page and related audio tracks. We are also busy preparing to survey our users to capture their feedback and suggestions. A brief satisfaction and usability survey will be distributed over the next few months and we would encourage your critique and comments. Please contact library@musiccentre.ca if you require any more information about this project.