

**Ovation, Volume 1.** Toronto: CBC Records/Disques SRC, 2002. PSCD 2026-5. \$35.00. Five compact discs. Disc 1: Music of John Weinzweig (61:51) . Disc 2: Music of Jean Coulthard (66:39). Disc 3: Music of Murray Adaskin (62:42). Disc 4: Music of Jacques Hétu (61:54). Disc 5: Music of Harry Freedman (77:57).

As an “outsider” and a non-specialist in Canadian music, I have been deriving a lot of pleasure from this set of CDs, which covers the work of five well-established Canadian composers from across more than five decades, the earliest work in the set being Jean Coulthard’s *Music on a Quiet Song* of 1946, the latest, Murray Adaskin’s *Musica Victoria*, written in 2000. Examination of the styles and biographies of this first “mighty handful” (a second “handful” appeared in *Ovation*, volume 2, issued late in 2002) reveals many common threads, of which probably the most significant is that both Adaskin and Freedman were taught, and heavily influenced, by John Weinzweig, a seminal force in Canadian musical life. Furthermore, most of the five have composed music with obvious Canadian connections, including Coulthard’s *Quebec May* and *Canada Mosaic*, both of which appear on CD no. 2. Weinzweig, Hétu and Freedman have all experimented with serial techniques. Freedman and Adaskin both served apprenticeships as orchestral musicians. Freedman and Hétu have had some contact with Olivier Messiaen, Coulthard and Adaskin with Darius Milhaud. And so on.

It’s also fun to play “spot the influence,” especially, perhaps, in the case of Jean Coulthard, whose music in this set showcases a composer who is able to balance individuality with eclecticism. Few listening to her *The*

*Bird of Dawning Singeth All Night Long* will miss echoes of *The Lark Ascending* by her teacher Ralph Vaughan Williams, and this same influence is also present, though to a lesser extent, in *Spring Rhapsody*, her set of songs written in 1958 for the contralto Maureen Forrester, who performs it here. In *Quebec May*, on the other hand, one might detect Copland, whose Piano Variations of 1930 are proposed by David Gordon Duke in his CD notes as an influence on the form of Coulthard’s own piano *Variations on BACH* of 1952. Whether or not this is so, the Bach variations are extraordinary, and reveal a completely different side to their composer: they have a wonderfully self-assured intensity that makes an immediate impact, and inspires one to repeated hearings.

CD no. 4, devoted to Hétu, is unusual in its inclusion of a whole symphony (his third), along with two concertos, one for guitar, the other for trumpet. Although there is no statement in the CD notes from the compilers of *Ovation 1* about how they have selected the works to be included in the set, it seems that one of their general principles has been to present works of no more than twelve minutes’ duration (there are exceptions, of course). On the strength of this compilation, Hétu’s multi-movement compositions reveal themselves to be unusual, in that his slow central movements are the longest in a work, and his finales extremely

short only just over three minutes each in the Third Symphony and Trumpet Concerto. Hétu is the only one of the "handful" to have undertaken major musical studies in France, in his case with Henri Dutilleux, and Dutilleux's sound world is indeed often present, especially in Hétu's slow movements.

The issue of choosing which works to include in and which to leave out from this sort of compilation is always a matter for debate, and has been raised among others by Edward Jurkowski in his report in *CAML Review* for April 2003 of the CD given over to the music of Jean Papineau-Couture (coincidentally, another of Hétu's teachers) in Centrediscs' *Canadian Composers Portraits* series. Decisions are, doubtless, made for all sorts of financial, pragmatic and artistic reasons (probably in that order), but a check against the articles in *EMC2* on each of our five composers reveals that only a very few of the works in *Ovation 1* are noted by that reference source as worthy of special notice. That said, it would be unfair to expect only works that revealed, for example, significant stylistic development or a change in compositional direction to be included: one of the functions of *Ovation* must surely be to offer tempting musical morsels, and to whet the listener's appetite for Canadian music. On the other hand, reading in *New Grove 2* that John Weinzweig's *Spasmodia* for piano of 1938 was the first work by a Canadian composer to employ a twelve-note series does make one wish to hear it. Weinzweig is nonetheless well represented here by two of his twelve divertimentos (numbers one and five, the first neo-classical in style, the fifth much

sparer in texture and thematic material), and by works ("Shoppin' Blues," "Hockey Night in Canada") that show his fondness for the musical possibilities presented by word sounds, something also to be encountered in Harry Freedman's *Pastorale* on CD no. 5. The *Canadian Composers Portraits* CD devoted to Freedman in 2002 and reviewed by Jon Gonder in *CAML Review* in April 2003 presented four works beginning with "T," and there are two further "T" works in *Ovation 1*: the virtuoso *Toccata* for flute and voice (1968), and the story of *Tikki Tikki Tembo* (1971), surely worth mentioning if only because it was commissioned by a public library!

Turning finally to Murray Adaskin, the *Ovation* selections include his *Sonatine Baroque* for solo violin, which employs lots of Bachian figuration; his String Quintet of 1995; and his masterly *Musica Victoria* for piano quintet. The March no. 1, composed in 1950 for the Canadian television show *Opportunity Knocks*, is included mainly for its fun and nostalgia value.

The performances on all five discs are of high quality, and frequently are outstanding, especially from solo players. Andrew Dawes, dedicatee of Adaskin's *Sonatine Baroque*, does the work full justice. Freedman's *Toccata* is marvellously performed by Robert Aitkin and by Freedman's wife, the soprano Mary Morrison, for whom it was written. And James Campbell exhibits wonderful control of his clarinet in Freedman's *Chalumeau*, written for him in 1981 to a CBC commission. Several other works in the set are performed by those who commissioned

them, so for example Judy Loman plays three of Weinzwieg's *Fifteen Pieces for Harp*, and Rita Costanzi performs Coulthard's *Of Fields and Forests*, also for harp. Adaskin's String Quintet is presented by the Lafayette Quartet and Gary Karr, and Gerry Mulligan performs in Freedman's *Celebration*. Of the ensembles, I was impressed by the Elmer Iseler Singers in Freedman's *Pastorale*, and by the Toronto Opera in Concert Chorus in Weinzwieg's "Hockey Night in Canada." These are just the most notable among much other excellent work. The sound quality, too, is very good.

In conclusion, I am impressed by the efforts being made in Canada to

encourage the promotion of her music through initiatives such as this one. What this set of CDs will do is to entertain, intrigue and challenge listeners, especially new converts, and to my mind it presents a useful, if perhaps rather comfortable, panorama of the Canadian music created by a selection of composers from a couple of generations ago. (Hétu, born in 1938, is the youngest of the group; the senior figure in the set is Adaskin, born in 1906.) It does this very well, and *Ovation 2*, which includes R. Murray Schafer and Violet Archer, continues the work. Please may we now have a compilation of Canadian avant-garde?

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