

Harry Freedman. *Canadian Composers Portraits.* Toronto: Centrediscs, 2002. CMCD 8402. \$20.00. Two compact discs. Disc 1: Freedman documentary produced and prepared by Eitan Cornfield. CD2: *Tableau* (CBC Vancouver Symphony, Mario Bernardi, conductor) (8:45); *Tangents* (Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Kazuyoshi Akiyama, conductor) (15:48); *Touchings* (Nexus) (22:18); *Town* (Esprit Orchestra, Alex Pauk, conductor) (13:50).

As part of this series, the two-disc set about Harry Freedman is a well-deserved tribute to one of Canada's respected senior composers. He is highly regarded in international circles, and his contributions to the development of Canadian music have frequently been recognized. He has been a mainstay of Canadian music for well over half a century and remains committed as a full-time composer to creating works which have accessibility and integrity.

The documentary disc, produced by Eitan Cornfield, is very thorough in its coverage, with a highly effective approach that is more a comprehensive discussion of Freedman's character and style than a linear recounting of biographical details. Its reliance on commentary from Freedman himself, as well as his wife Mary Morrison, his primary teacher John Weinzweig, critic William Littler, and collaborator Brian Macdonald, lends an authoritative air to the content; interspersed are musical excerpts which aptly illustrate the script, in a concise but not cursory fashion. Most informative are the descriptions of jazz influences, the discussion of his style by multiple commentators, and Freedman's own perspectives on his compositional philosophy and approach. Statements about his lifelong links to color and visual stimuli, his own *ur-*motive (the sequence B-E-F), and his emancipated view of the twelve-tone system as not being a method requiring strict adherence ("the tail wagging the dog"), prepare the listener for a fuller understanding of the compositions.

The four works for large ensemble are presented in chronological order, specifically *Tableau* (1952) for string orchestra, *Tangents* (1967) for orchestra, *Touchings* (1989) for orchestra and percussion ensemble, and *Town* (1991) for orchestra. As emphasized in the documentary, jazz influences are apparent in the rhythmic aspects of each composition, as well as in some melodic lines and instrumental combinations. The harmony is not aggressively dissonant, notwithstanding the use of serialism. While the jazz influences become more overt in the later works, as Freedman himself admits in the documentary, the use of tone color is deep and mature even in the earlier works. The description of his approach to musical architecture as a "series of episodes" is precise; this is reinforced by his understated use of melody, which might be described as athenatic. Overall, these appealing works reveal a style which places rhythm and experimentation in tone colour ahead of harmony and melody.

Each of the performances is exceptionally well done, with precision and strong emotional presence. Perhaps the most successful is in *Touchings*, where Nexus adds brilliance and subtlety to the sound quality and vitality to the rhythm. The sound quality of the two earlier recordings, while good, reveals some surface hiss and lack of richness in tone colour, as might be expected with fifty-year-old technology. The later recordings do much better justice to the color experiments which seem to be central to Freedman's work.

Owing to the multiplicity of authors, the liner notes are variable in quality, even including typographical errors in both languages. The biographical component of the written notes is sparse in comparison to the documentary, but appropriately so. In contrast, three of the works have descriptions which are more pointed, providing the first-time listener with a helpful roadmap of musical events within the composition. It is an oversight that the notes for *Town* do not provide this same assistance.

As to how one decides on which of Freedman's 175 compositions fulfill the

Portrait series' mandate as the "most important works," this collection unfortunately only presents large-scale and large-ensemble works. It may be that these compositions *are* his most important, but as a series designed to chronicle the legacy of Canadian composers, the inclusion of smaller and more intimate chamber music would have provided not only greater variety for the listener but a broader perspective on more aspects of Freedman's craft.

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