

**Romance: Early Canadian Chamber Music.** Elaine Keillor, piano; Edvard Skerjanc, violin; Rosalind Sartori, violoncello. Carleton Sound CSCD 1009. \$20.98. Available from the Canadian Music Centre Distribution Service: [www.musiccentre.ca](http://www.musiccentre.ca)

**Gena Branscombe: Sonata in A Minor for Violin and Piano**

**Claude Champagne: Habanera**

**Alexis Contant: Romance**

**Laura G. Lemon: Mazurka**

**Edward B. Manning: Piano Trio**

**Rodolphe Mathieu: Lied**

**Leo Smith: Indian Romance;**

**Sonata for Violoncello and Piano**

The steady discovery of the depth and breadth of the Canadian musical repertoire has progressed substantially in the last decades. *Romance: Early Canadian Chamber Music*, published by Carleton Sound, adds to this awareness by focussing on a number of figures writing for chamber ensemble before the Second World War. Elaine Keillor, one of the pre-eminent figures in the musical heritage movement, is the pianist on this CD; she's joined by Edvard Skerjanc, violin, and Rosalind Sartori, cello. Together they've created a uniquely valuable CD featuring two major duo sonatas and a significant piano trio, fleshed out with a attractive succession of shorter works.

The composers represented fall loosely into three generational groups: Alexis Contant, Clarence Lucas, and Laura Lemon were born in the mid-nineteenth century; Edward B. Manning, Leo Smith, and Gina Branscombe date from the mid-1870s and early 80s; and Québec composers Rodolphe Mathieu and Claude Champagne were born in the early 1890s.

The grandest composition is Edward B. Manning's full-length Trio, dating from the first years of the twentieth century, though apparently subject to revision until the 40s. An expatriate working in New York, Manning studied with MacDowell and Humperdinck. His trio complements the better known Trio of Alexis Contant; but where Contant's work is innately part of late French romantic tradition—represented on this disc by Contant's slight but charming *Romance* for cello and piano—Manning's work is a sturdy, more academic piece, rather less imaginative, and, for me at least, rather less ingratiating.

Picton Ontario native Gena Branscombe was another expatriate who, as it turns out, also studied in Berlin with Humperdinck. Her one-movement Violin Sonata, which dates from 1920, is also in the florid and extroverted (and, in its own day, the increasingly conservative) late romantic idiom, but is more formally innovative and focussed than the Manning trio.

The remaining big work is a portion of Leo Smith's Cello Sonata, composed in the early 1940s. London-born, Smith came to Canada before World War I. The sonata's slow movement is surprising and fresh: hints of Celtic twilight modality flavour writing that is both imaginative and personal. In the sonata's complex finale, Smith occasionally seems out of his compositional depth as he strives to relate a number of tempos and cyclic references. The performers make a convincing effort at presenting this quite remarkable

work—and one longs to hear the unrecorded first movement.

Also recorded is Smith's *Indian Romance*, more of a salon piece than a chamber duo. Purportedly based on fragments from First Nations' music, Smith's materials are worked out in a rather more conventional idiom than the Sonata.

The remaining shorter works range from Lemon's *Mazurka*, an unabashed potboiler, and Clarence Lucas's *Legende* to Mathieu's quirky and harmonically advanced *Lied* (from 1915) and Champagne's sultry *Habanera*.

It's uncanny how one CD can bring up such a number of key issues in the study of Canadian music: the export of Canada's most

promising composers; the importation of others; the regional identification with conservative or radical European traditions; and the obvious and undeniable separateness of the musical tradition in Québec.

Performances are solid, and the recorded sound good. One senses that the point of the CD is to encourage other performers, especially those active in the great chamber music boom of our own age, to present these works to the broader musical public. The disc is a required acquisition for any collection concerned with the heritage of Canadian music.

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