

István Anhalt: Pathways and Memory. Edited by Robin Elliott and Gordon E. Smith. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. xx, 425 p., ill., music. \$75.00 ISBN 0-7735-2102-X

Robin Elliott and Gordon E. Smith, whose role in this volume is authorial as well as editorial, have crafted a substantial tribute to Canadian composer István Anhalt. As a reader, I had the extra benefit of enjoying professional associations with both editors as well as the composer. I began reading the book with lively personal interest and ended the task with admiration for an ambitious job extremely well done.

On one level, Elliott and Smith have compiled a classic "life and works" account of a man whose artistic significance and seriousness have rarely been doubted, a man who has been variously described as "the heavyweight among Canadian composers" (Udo Kasamets in MacMillan and Beckwith, 1975, 8), or one who "speaks strongly with contemporary eloquence" (Carl Morey in Kallmann and Potvin, 1992, 27). Similarly, in the words of contributors to the volume under review, Anhalt is championed as one who evoked "a sense of the absolute seriousness of the composer" (Rochberg, 355), or was ranked "among the best of our time" (Benjamin, 165). But this book goes beyond a celebratory life-and-works by striving to be Anhalt-like in its very construction. With a focus on the nature of memory, it is a multivocal monograph (dare we say a "pluri-drama"¹) that incorporates the voices of musicologists, theorists, fellow-

composer/friends, and Anhalt himself. The composer's own reflective articles effect yet one more "mirror" (a metaphor he has frequently invoked) in his life and work. As Gordon E. Smith writes in the "Introduction," "these texts also may be considered as explorations leading to new landscapes of music and meaning" (xx). Since Anhalt himself frequently uses self-reflection to reach larger abstract truths, I have little doubt that he would like the fact that this book similarly uses his life and work in an attempt to open new philosophical vistas in the study of (Canadian) music.

The book is organized into four parts: three biographical chapters called "Life Lines;" four analytical chapters entitled "Compositions;" four essays on miscellaneous themes called "Writings;" and five commentaries or lectures by Anhalt, appropriately grouped under the rubric, "In Anhalt's Voice." A list of his compositions and writings to date constitutes an appendix. Eight plates of photographs are sandwiched between the Introduction and the body of the volume. An additional photo faces the title page. Yet one more image is the dust jacket, an expressionist adaptation of a photo by Sylvia Tait.

Elliott wrote the biographical chapters on Anhalt's early life in Europe and Montreal, while Smith contributed a chapter about the Kingston years. The detailed history of his years in Europe is especially admirable since this account undoubtedly involved research with the

¹ The word invented by Anhalt for his work *Traces (Tikkun)*.

composer about some very painful memories of his childhood, vagaries of Hungarian governance, soldiering in miserable conditions in which those of Jewish descent were placed during the war, the loss of deeply important friends such as László Gyopár, and narrow escapes. In a fluid narrative, Elliott manages to convey a great deal of detail about social history, family relationships, and also manuscript sources for the early works. The reconstruction of the Canadian years must have been somewhat easier. One wonders whether Beate Anhalt as well as István's daughters, friends, and colleagues were interviewed; there are no traces of their voices in this biography. We are encouraged to look out from the composer's perspective rather than in from the vantage point of those around him.

The analytical chapters vary considerably in style, from detailed overviews (by Elliott as well as composers John Beckwith and David Keane) designed for a musically atune but general readership to William Benjamin's extensive, 143-page, analytical treatment of the *Symphony* (1958) and *SparkskrapS* (1987). One might deduce from the contrasts among these essays that there was a certain crisis about the nature of the audience for this book. But this would be unfair since each contribution was a "gift" to the composer in this Festschrift by any other name. Their diversity is a tribute to the range of his intellect and interests. It is, on the other hand, ironic that this section of the book should focus on the instrumental works. As several authors note, this runs counter to the composer's central concern with the human voice.

Furthermore, the bias in this section reinforces the stereotype that instrumental music is somehow worthy of more intense analytic scrutiny. The imbalance here is rectified in Carl Morey's essay in the third section and by the section of Anhalt's own writing, which is focused entirely on texted works and mostly on the dramatic ones.

The analyses in Section Two have a lively quality since they not only provide sonic detail but contextualize it well. Beckwith and Keane, in particular, situate Anhalt in relation to modernist music history. Benjamin, whose contribution constitutes over one quarter of the entire book, provides some of the clearest descriptive detail of pitch structures and processes that one could wish for. Furthermore, he frames this detail with interpretive overviews of the two works and articulates their implications vis à vis such things as the ideological baggage of genres such as the symphony for mid-century modernists, the idea of composition as "style mastery," or the shifting roles of tonality in Anhalt's work. I applaud the clear statement that "any way of theorizing about, and therefore analyzing, some music can only be judged in relation to the purpose for which that music is being studied" (p. 179). On the other hand, I would love to argue with Benjamin's assumptions about the consistency and abilities of "cultivated audiences," but this would digress from the central issues of his impressive work.

Section Three has less coherence but in its diversity I found it one of the most interesting portions of the book. Morey explores Anhalt's texts with a fresh

perspective on the relationship between poetry and music. Examining the composer's "motion towards music" (from language) he looks at the verbal (including the non-lexical) components of *Six Songs from Na Conxy Pan*, *Three Songs of Love*, and *Three Songs of Death*, *Comments*, *Cento*, *Foci*, *La Tourangelle*, *Winthrop*, *Thisness*, and *Traces (Tikkun)*. One is struck by the number of elements in Anhalt's texts that are evocative rather than unitarily meaningful. Austin Clarkson writes a sort of diegesis of Anhalt's book on contemporary vocal techniques, *Alternative Voices*, drawing on the psychoanalytic approaches that inflect the work of both musicologist and composer. A key point made in passing is Clarkson's observation that Anhalt "does not confront the differences between Ligeti's paradigm of meaning and his own" (234). It is in the composer's writing that unitary meaning is asserted and superimposed on the music of his colleagues. There is, then, an interesting tension between these interpretations and the intentionally ambiguous, evocative qualities of his music. In my own use of the analyses in *Alternative Voices*, I encounter many who contend that the reading of the Berio *Sequenza* in particular reinforces stereotypes between women and hysteria and who counter Anhalt's superimposition with more playful interpretations of Berberian's performance. Kallmann's brief account of the extensive Anhalt *fonds* in the National Library of Canada is a practical overview but also a thoughtful one in which he suggests questions that could be addressed in future studies. The extent of Anhalt's correspondence perhaps reminds us that, in this day of

electronic communication, the Anhalt generation may be the last to give us a legacy of written letters from which to reconstruct lives and community histories. Finally, American composer George Rochberg provides the only personal tribute of the volume (why did none of the Canadian contributors feel they could do this?). It is a humanizing account of a friendship that seemed very needed in this anthology. As Rochberg states, both their lives disrupt any idea that composers' lives are "comfortable, safe" or indeed "passionless."

Anhalt himself contributed an original essay on the operatic triptych (*La Tourangelle*, *Winthrop*, and *Traces (Tikkun)*) of the late 80s and early 90s, as well as introductions to several works of the 90s, including his most recent at the time of publication, *Millennial Mall (Lady Diotima's Walk): A Voice-Drama for the Imagination*. A lecture on *Traces*, formulated as an interview or dialogue, takes us into the world of the Kabbalah that shaped much of Anhalt's thinking during the 1990s. The chapter, "From 'Mirage' to *Simulacrum* and 'Afterthought'," playfully works with the mirror metaphors that permeate much of Anhalt's writing in both verbal and musical discourses. He does not cite authors such as Baudrillard or Deleuze, whose theorizations of simulacra are arguably most familiar to many contemporary humanists and social scientists. One wonders if Anhalt would agree with Baudrillard that a simulacrum is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal....it is the map that engenders the territory" (In Natoli and Hutcheon 1993, 343). Is his reflective writing the modeling that becomes more real than his

compositions? Since he frequently has a ready “afterthought,” perhaps he will yet respond to these theorists.

While I admire this volume in all its diversity and complexity, I would not be a vigilant reviewer if I did not also indicate some questions that it raises for me. One is certainly the matter of whether the anthology actually offers multiple perspectives or variants of a single one. Anhalt has generously provided a great deal of help to those who would try to fathom the depths of his work. His reflective essays not only explain but also reinterpret earlier work in an ongoing attempt to find continuities. His 500-page “guide” to his own extensive and still growing archival record helps shape and organize the work of scholars who have used the archive. Even when he plays with dialogue, as in the lecture on *Traces (Tikkun)*, he crafts the questions as well as the answers. I don’t criticize these wonderful initiatives but merely observe the composer at work, the organizer and constructor of the account of his life. There is an exciting tension between the diversity (indeed seeming randomness at first encounter) of his musical quotations and borrowings and his verbal search for continuities and relationships within and among his works. Most of the contributors to this volume seem, in my reading, to buy the composer’s claims of continuity: the reality of the simulacrum. Would the story of this composer be any less real if we were to assume that the work, like the life, was filled with accidents and close encounters with violent differences of opinion (now taking the form of differently shaped hearings rather than different religious or political ideologies). What would a

study look like that resisted the composer’s narrative or insisted on a disjuncture between this narrative and the musical compositions themselves?

A second group of questions that emerge relate to issues of gender and to the historical patterns by which musicology has constructed notions of “genius.” The markers are all here. “Serious” work by a heroic young man who suffered and survived, hints of his attractiveness to the opposite sex, institution building efforts at two universities, a certain amount of rejection by performers who could not muster the rehearsal hours to produce good performances of difficult music, and vastly important philosophical truths deduced from the life experience of a single individual with fine capacity to intellectualize his experiences. It’s all true. I don’t want to take any of this away from István Anhalt whom I admire as a composer and value as a friend. Other things are also true: the sense that this remarkable man still seems to convey that his difficult life is fragmented and torn (as indeed it was in his early years), that he must create the threads of continuity that will make it whole; or the sense that few of us in the context of Canadian music schools know enough about the complex issues that shaped his thinking and his work.

So I suggest instead that we could yet write a different sort of account about remarkable individuals such as Anhalt. We could indeed look in from the outside by interviewing those around him and validating their perspectives. We could examine the social structures that led both to his occasional persecution and his veneration. We

We could examine the social structures that led both to his occasional persecution and his veneration. We could begin to ask who has a remarkable story to tell that fits less easily the construction of exceptionality. With this book, Elliott and Smith have made a fine

contribution to a project of opening the doors of biography, and opening the history of Canadian music to larger realms of experience and philosophy. It is an appropriate honouring of a distinguished creative artist and intellectual.

Works Cited

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