



Canadians at the Keyboard. Elaine Keillor, piano and organ. Compact disc. Carleton Sound CSCD-1008. \$20.98

From Molt to McPhee: A Century of Canadian Piano Music. Shelley Katz, piano. Compact disc. Carleton Sound CSCD-1004. \$20.98

Canadians at the Keyboard, featuring Elaine Keillor, is a valuable listening companion to the *Historical Anthology of Canadian Music*. The recording is an eclectic collection of piano and organ compositions and transcriptions spanning from 1791-1939. The program notes are meticulously written and offer an excellent summary of important historical information. Dr. Keillor's playing is clean and direct, and there are many outstanding moments throughout which display the excellent use of sonority ("Tintamarre"), or an atmosphere of spontaneity and charm ("Cavalcade"), the result being a highly convincing interpretation.

However, I have two main concerns. First, the engineering process seems to leave the

performances somewhat lacking in depth of sound and reverb; perhaps this is due to the recording facilities, the piano, or both. Furthermore, Dr. Keillor does not always go far enough in exploring the interpretive aspects or potential of this music. While the works recorded here are not standard or commonly performed examples of western art music, they merit careful examination and performance by professionals and students in order to form a comprehensive picture of our musical heritage. In this regard, it could be argued that these compositions hold a unique historical position, and that a recording such as this is a worthy undertaking. Considering the nature of this music, the performer must therefore apply every possible element of sonority and interpretive insight to evoke many of the implied characteristics. Without

this, the result can easily sound dry or cliché. One example is “Stradaconé,” where the indication *pesante* requires much more depth of sound in the handling of the bass and in the voicing of the chords than is heard on this recording. The performance of “Papillon” lacks a sense of sweep, brilliance, and freedom and shape in the phrases, all of which are necessary in this nineteenth-century virtuoso character piece.

A couple of other issues are worth mentioning. First, there is an error in the track-list on the back of the CD jewel case. The problem arises with track-number six (“Quadrille Canadienne”); here, the individual sections of the Quadrille are given separate tracks on the recording, but the work in its entirety is listed as a single track on the back of the CD case. This results in a misnumbering for all 25 subsequent pieces on the CD. For other works, (e.g., “Prélude” by Mathieu), the timing listed is incorrect. It is unfortunate that these mistakes were not discovered in the editing process.

While listening to these performances, I was reminded of a comment by the great pianist, Artur Schnabel: “We are sometimes required to be the composers, to reveal what a composition implies, especially if the composition is not very important. There are certain compositions which become more important by the interpretations of a very great performer.”¹ It is exactly this that Shelley

Katz achieves in his recording of relatively unknown piano works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two compositions, “Silhouette” and “Marche de la St-Jean Baptiste,” are featured on both Keillor’s and Katz’s recordings; it is interesting to compare these performances. Shelley Katz displays an abundance of color and character that makes the music more vibrant and direct with a wider range of sonorities. Overall, his work is expressive and spontaneous, and the result raises each composition to an impressive level of importance. The listener is consistently aware of the great artistic care, thought, and insight which are reflected in each performance. The program notes are excellent and the engineering offers an appropriate and effective level of reverb and depth. Mr. Katz, a highly accomplished artist, is to be commended for an outstanding recording.

In conclusion, I congratulate Carleton Sound and the artists for taking the initiative to make this little-known material available to today’s listeners.

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¹Dean Elder, *Pianists at Play: Interviews, Master Lessons and Technical Regimes* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1989), 1.