

REVIEWS

The Canadian Musical Heritage / Le Patrimoine Musical Canadien. 1: Piano music I/ Musique pour piano I. Elaine Keillor, Editor/Directeur de l'ouvrage. Ottawa, 1983. (xxiv, 246 p., \$30.00)

Only a few years ago, the idea of publishing a "Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Canada" would have been laughed at. It is a sign of the maturity of musicology in general in this country and in particular the study of Canadian music history that a historical series is now underway and that it is to be taken seriously. Not that the music of this first volume of The Canadian musical heritage / Le patrimoine musical canadien is itself "serious". It is salon and popular music for piano of no weighty pretensions, but it is nonetheless an important part of 19th century musical life, and without its availability, our historical view of ourselves must be incomplete.

The volume contains the kind of scholarly and critical apparatus that is established practice for historical sets. There is an "Editorial aims and methods" that sets out the criteria for selection and presentation of material in a multi-volume series. The criteria are clear, but commendably flexible, so that music of all kinds will be included, and considerations of historical and social importance will weigh equally with aesthetic value. A lengthy "Introduction" by the volume editor, Elaine Keillor, includes biographical information, and some observations on style, publishing, and similarly related matters. Finally, the "Critical notes" give all the known publication information, location of copy used as a source, and textual errors and corrections. The music itself is reproduced in facsimile from the original prints, except manuscript pieces, which have been re-copied for this publication.

It is stated that the principal desire of the Editorial Committee "is to provide clear and legible text for both the performer and the scholar". Unfortunately this is sometimes not realized for the performer in this first volume. Staff lines sometimes disappear or become so faint that the music is difficult to read. There is seldom a problem in ascertaining the correct pitches after a moment's consideration, but most of this music is less

to be studied than it is to be played through, and it is frustrating to stumble over unclear texts. The fault seems to be in the printing process, and not with the reproduction of old copies, because the problem occurs also in pieces which have been newly prepared by a modern copyist. The volume is bound in stiff paper covers, and at a glance it looks as if it would easily separate with much use, but this reviewer can state that so far it has survived active service at the piano. Some of the internal margins are very small, though, and, rebound in stiff library covers, the volume will likely have more value on a desk than on a piano rack.

The introductory notes are informative, but in future volumes it might be useful if editors gave some attention to the size and nature of the repertoire from which the choices were made. Someone coming fresh to this publication of forty-two pieces dating from 1817 to 1866 would likely have little idea of the size of the repertoire or its geographical distribution. Only in an incidental remark can we learn that there were "more than one thousand Canadian piano pieces examined for this volume", and although there is allusion to publishers developing outside Toronto and Montreal, all but five of the pieces published in Canada come from those two cities.

The music falls less under the selection criterion of artistic merit than it does under historical or social significance, but it is no less worthy because of that. The only oddity is the opening Canadian dance, published in Philadelphia, and composed by G. Pfeiffer, who is not known to have had any personal association with Canada. One is tempted to see an all-too-Canadian trait in introducing a series on Canadian music with a work published abroad, and composed by a foreigner. Thereafter, however, the composers all have a solid association with the country, through settling and living here, or by birth, including in the former category such figures as Theodore Molt and George Strathy, and in the

latter such celebrated expatriates as Lavallée and Mazurette. While much of the music is reasonably simple to play, a few pieces make some demand on the player, and would probably be suitable for the advanced amateur in the drawing room, or even at public musical evenings. Others, such as several pieces by Lavallée and Mazurette, are concert material appropriate to mid-19th century mixed programmes of songs, arias, miscellaneous instrumental pieces and sentimental or showy keyboard pieces. The level of imagination varies from the near-simple-mindedness of the rhythmically constricted pieces of J.P. Clarke (Canada's first Mus.Bac.), through the unaffected Royal welcome waltzes of Brauneis, to the pianistic and accomplished miniatures of Lavallée. Of historical interest for the musical views they represent are the "danse sauvage" by Ernest Gagnon called Stadaconé, an evocation of native music, and the ambitious but commonplace Joy and grief by George Strathy, a work in the vein of piano solos by Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn. Both show attempts to fashion pieces not influenced by the ballroom or the military march, and reflecting, however modestly, the style of the character

pieces so common in the middle of the 19th century. Entirely lacking are attempts at large-scale sonata-form, a situation which probably is related to the repertoire of concert programmes of the day, where such works seldom appeared but where endless fantasias and variations were heard in abundance.

If one is tempted to dismiss this collection on the basis of the slight aesthetic merit of its contents, it might be salutary to remember that such a consideration has seldom bothered the compilers of more illustrious musical anthologies which have revered places on library shelves. This is an important chronicle of Canadian life, and we are in the debt of the general editors and of Elaine Keillor for this first volume of what must become an extensive series of publications. And if some of the music might bring an unintended smile to the player or listener, a little effort at adopting a 19th century point of view will bring the reward of much innocent pleasure.

-Carl Morey
Faculty of Music, University of Toronto

Barbara Pentland. By Sheila Eastman and Timothy J. McGee. (Canadian composers, 3.) Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. (viii, 134 p., [84 p. of plates] \$30.00)

While preparing to review this book I was sitting in our living room listening through most of the available recordings of Pentland's music. After about an hour my wife came into the room and remarked, "that's no worse than most of the other stuff that you listen to". I recall having expressed a lack of enthusiasm for the task of listening to the dozen or so available recordings. By the time I reached the end of the records and the book my feelings about it had altered considerably. But more about that later.

The first thing that should be said about the book Barbara Pentland by Sheila Eastman and Timothy J. McGee is that it is well written in a lucid and engaging style. Right from the first chapter the authors' evident warmth and enthusiasm for the composer and her music makes one want to go out and listen to some of her music. In fact, I think that the best way to read the book is to first go out and buy, beg, borrow or steal as many of the Pentland records as you can lay your hands on and

then listen to the pieces as you run into them in the book. Many of the works available on disc are discussed fairly extensively by the authors. (Appendix B contains a discography which was published too early to include the excellent recording of her String quartet no. 4 performed by the Purcell String Quartet on Centrediscs 0782.)

In spite of the authors' evident sympathy for the composer, by the end of the book one is left with the impression that Pentland is a somewhat abrasive, hard-edged person. Much is made in the early chapters of Mother Pentland's opposition to her daughter's desire for a career in composition. While this may well be true, it seems a bit over-emphasized in view of the fact that Barbara's parents financed composition studies for her in both Montreal and Paris. Besides, one has to have a certain sympathy for parents saddled with a grown daughter who both refuses to equip herself to earn a reasonable living (still not very possible in composition) or to catch a

man to take her off their hands. What is one to make of a person who allegedly walks out in the middle of a concert of music by a supposedly close friend and colleague because she can't stand to listen to "nineteenth century music". On the other hand she is described as being "good company - lots of fun" by the same friend. The reader is left with a contradictory picture of the composer's character. Perhaps this is accurate - I have no way of knowing. I doubt, however, that Pentland is very enthusiastic about this portrait of herself.

The book is written in a way that seeks to integrate the character and personality of the composer with the analysis of her music. While this is an admirable goal, I think that in the music-analysis aspect the book goes off track. The assumptions that are made about Pentland's fundamental musical thought processes affect the way the authors present Pentland as a person. She is presented as someone who is anxious to be considered a hard-core avant-garde composer: her work is presented as having a rigorous evolutionary development that gathers all the newest compositional techniques and integrates them into the continually newer and better Pentland style. While there is undoubtedly an accretion of new compositional techniques in the chronological sequence of Pentland's works, I don't think that this always resulted in better music. I find, for example, that her 1957 Symphony for ten parts is a not-too-successful imitation of Webern's Symphonie op.21. I thought that the xylophone "licks" in the first movement sounded like Pentland trying to break out of her 12-tone cage. I think that she does break out in her piano Toccata of 1958. This sounds to me much more like genuine Pentland with its aggressive driving rhythms alternating with tranquil tone paintings, which are like a gentle Prairie evening - cool, quiet, and refreshing to the spirit. A good clue to the interior of Pentland's musical personality is found in her own description of her Concerto for piano and strings (p.80). In an interesting bit of sophistry she gives the audience the "programme" for the Concerto while denying its validity. This double-talk is understandable in the context of the 50's when no forward-looking composer would openly admit to a weakness for programmatic musical ideas. In my view, Pentland occasionally got side-tracked from her own personal mode of expression by such things

as her 12-tone experiments. It is fortunate that she didn't get stuck in these conceits but was able to return to a more personal and freer style which is characterized by lyricism, a sense of space and wonder, and tone painting from nature and remembered sounds.

The major problem with this book is that it does not sufficiently recognize the underlying character of Pentland's music. The analyses repeatedly describe her as a composer of "intervals". In the analysis of Piano sonata (1945), for example, the authors make a page of remarks about interval content which culminate in the non-informative statement that "the three movements are related only on the level of the motif: the intervals of a second and a third are present in all of them." First of all, the mere presence of a given interval doesn't make it a motif: it also needs appropriate rhythmic definition, and secondly, if one takes seconds and thirds with their inversions, one has two-thirds of all possible intervals within the octave - hardly a strikingly distinguishing feature, especially since fourths and fifths also creep in. If you listen to the work, I'm sure that you'll be struck by the prime importance that harmonic organization plays in this work as well as in many other Pentland compositions. While I haven't done any detailed analysis of her scores, I feel that Pentland's harmony, especially in her neo-classical works, is very much an extension and development of traditional harmonic practice. This is denied by the authors, who hold that the harmonic organization is "according to intervals rather than the traditional concept of tonality". At best this indicates an extremely narrow view of the concept of tonality.

However, this is quibbling about details. The real problem is that the authors don't get to the core of Pentland's ideas. What is missing is a description of the kinds of musical ideas and feelings that Pentland composes, and an analysis of the structure that makes them tick. For example, the first theme of the second movement of String quartet no.1 is described as "a wandering single line, treated in a contrapuntal fashion". This theme is only characterized by the authors as "wandering", but to me it gives the impression of loneliness tinged with melancholy. Why? It is, first, played by a violin solo, muted - giving a soft, distant aloneness to the sound. Then, the harmonic structure of the melody is

very interesting. The ascending portion in the first seven bars is built on a series of four minor triads each a perfect fourth above the previous one (the first structural triad is probably diminished, but the fifth is missing or perhaps delayed). The descending portion is also based on triads, ending with a dominant seventh chord resolving one bar after the entry of the second voice. One could view the whole opening theme as an extended dominant chord. This tonal structure, together with the subtle alternation of duple and triple meters gives the passage its melancholy, suspended feeling. This is a trivial example picked at random, but it illustrates what I find lacking. Not that the authors should duplicate my particular analytic eccentricities, but after reading an analysis of a piece of music, I would like to feel that I know something about what kind of musical expression the composer intended, and why and how it does or doesn't work. The analyses given here are often sterile and I don't find that after reading them and after listening to the music that they are particularly enlightening.

I feel that the real Barbara Pentland is the ten year old who wrote Twilight and Dawn; the 54 year old who wrote Suite borealis, who at age 68 writes her String quartet no. 4, which elicits the description: "It starts in a mood of quiet mystery - like dawn... or life - breaking into activity with some suggestion of bird sound and themes..." (record jacket notes, Centredisc 0781). Barbara Pentland may

well "compose with intervals", but that is of minor interest. What is of interest is that the best of her music distills into sounding forms the essence of a particularly Canadian (perhaps its more northern and western) sensibility. It contains the breadth and inwardness, the tranquility and violence, the loneliness and friendliness of that peculiar landscape.

In summary, this book is readable and worthwhile, in that it brings to our attention an important Canadian composer. While I feel that the analyses are largely superficial and don't tell me much of what I would really like to know about Pentland's music, they do provide a starting point for study and discussion. In any event, if you really want to know what Barbara Pentland is about - go and listen to her music.

After I had finished reading the book and listening to the available Pentland records, I was by chance approached by a colleague who was interested in putting a work by a Canadian woman on her next concert, but who was unwilling to spend the effort to learn a substantial new work unless she could feel that it was a "masterwork" worth the effort. I was happy to be able to tell her that she should look at some of Pentland's pieces, and that I felt she would find what she was looking for.

-Paul Pedersen
McGill University

Alternative voices: essays on contemporary vocal and choral composition. By Istvan Anhalt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. (xi, 336 p., \$35.00)

Let me say, from the very beginning, that I think this is a very valuable book, rich in detail, full of original observations and insights, which should serve as one of the primary sourcebooks for people with any interest at all in the complementary fields of poetic and musical compositions for voice. Anhalt has definitely been very thorough in his research, and although one can disagree here and there, the disagreements are, finally, just quibbles; a different take on what is significant doesn't mean that what the other person's chosen doesn't have significance too. The book is not, on the other hand, an easy read. You're going to have to work for what

it has to offer, and work hard. Unless you're a reader who can mentally file references to numerous compositions (references which are used to further an argument or a line of reasoning) under the general heading of "TO-BE-LISTENED - TO - WHEN - I - FINALLY - GET - THE - TIME" you're going to have to pause frequently, locate a recording of the work in question (if you can; some of them have never been recorded), and then listen and read and listen and read and listen, etc. This problem is alleviated somewhat by Anhalt's including selections of some scores under discussion (notably during his very detailed examinations of Berio's Sequenza III, Ligeti's Nouvelles aventures,

and Lutoslawski's Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux) but since, as Anhalt himself points out, most of the scores differ in performance from their notated forms (in some cases very substantially due to performer-controlled variables that are built into the composition), your imagination of the sound of the piece may differ wildly from its performed sound. To some degree you have to be familiar with the issues and compositions under discussion for the book to make any sense. And that is not to contradict what I said in the opening sentence. Any book on music has the same problem. The more "difficult" the music under discussion, the more "difficult" the book about it. And Anhalt has not set out to write a popular introduction to the field. His express purpose in writing the book is to answer the question: "Given the continuing growth of this repertoire, and its very considerable diversity, do we have in it a development of lasting importance?" What this review will attempt to do, then, is to see whether or not Anhalt has answered this question.

In asking the question, the reader would assume that Anhalt is asking whether or not these alternate approaches to vocal and choral composition are of lasting importance to music. This was certainly what I assumed, and I read everything that followed in the light of that assumption, i.e. are these approaches in fact expanding the art, increasing the range of what is technically possible, adding things of lasting value to the craft? Reading through Alternate voices the answer would have to be a resounding "yes". In a comparatively short span of time an incredible range of techniques and formal ideas have been introduced and/or re-introduced into western music, so much so that it will probably take a few centuries to absorb them all. Some of these ideas and techniques are overly identified with particular composers at this point in time, but that will change, indeed, is changing, as more and more composers find ways to incorporate these elements into their own works. But Anhalt's argument is of a different order: "I regard this group of works as an important repertoire by virtue of the intrinsic merits of its best pieces and also on account of the insight it provides into many facets of the human personality and the human condition." And, in the closing paragraph of the book, goes on to add: "The compositions and the related ideas discussed in this book can be looked at as constituting

but minute details from the broad, imperative perspective of man's struggle for survival and persistence. Even so, they have played a useful part and thereby have made a contribution." The slant of his argument (which really has to do with that old question of "significance") is part and parcel of his heavy borrowings from various theories of individual and group dynamics (sociological, psychological, etc.) to "explain" what's happening in certain pieces. His explanations are always interesting, but as regards the more abstract compositions I'm not sure they have any more significance than a recording of one's own response to a Rorschach test. Certainly, when the piece itself is rooted in a clear narrative situation (as in, say, R. Murray Schafer's Apocalypse) then Anhalt is on firmer ground, but even here what his approach boils down to is thematic literary criticism applied to music. The problem with such an approach is simple: bad art is about great themes too. Thus to say that these works are important because they are about important things is, finally, to say nothing. The whole question of what, then, makes them better than bad art about the same themes is bypassed, subsumed, as in this case, in the term "intrinsic merit". (It also does not give enough weight to the fact that what we tend to see as the "great" repertoire is governed to a large degree by political questions, i.e. those bodies and individuals who have the power to choose the repertoire we are most exposed to (if I'm choosing what's "great" from a list of 100, that has a good chance of being a different choice than if I'm choosing it from a list of 1000), nor does it define what constitutes that ineffable quality "greatness"). But through the entire book Anhalt shows us that the repertoire under discussion is of lasting importance to the art of vocal and choral music precisely because of what it allows the human voice to do and say, because of the sense of possibility it opens for composers, performers and audience. Since Anhalt does point to these very qualities over and over again in his book (i.e. I'm taking my argument against Anhalt's conclusion from his own text and from his obvious passion for the works mentioned, Anhalt versus Anhalt as it were), it's troublesome that he doesn't deal with the question raised in the beginning in a more straightforward manner. I suspect the problem is twofold. 1) It is a book of essays. The constituent parts were not

originally intended as one long argument. Thus the tacked-on feeling of the conclusion. That's also why you can ignore what Anhalt concludes and still get such a tremendous amount from the book. The book is not really structured to conclude. 2) He got led astray by the seductive nature of symbolism. The problem with that kind of reading into a text is that all those wonderful meanings begin to appear before your eyes, and, as in a trance, you just feel you have to say them. I must add that, as a final note, I not only argued with the conclusion, I was surprised by it. In the bulk of the book Anhalt refuses to draw conclusions. He opts instead for the string-of-questions technique. I.e. "Is it this way? Is it this way? Or is it, finally, maybe perhaps this way?" (Generally speaking, in the string-of-questions technique the reader is left feeling that whatever the last question pointed to as the answer is the real formulation of what the writer thinks. But you can't be sure.) Anhalt seemed to be resisting the whole notion of conclusion, of summing up in that sense, and, as a technique, that seemed very related to a lot of the compositions he discusses. I had thought, in fact, that he was pointing towards a conclusion which, to some degree, would negate the whole notion of concluding. Hence, I thought, his insistence on the word "Essays" in the title.

But I said I was quibbling. The fact that I can argue with Anhalt's conclusion is because his book has allowed me to organize my think-

ing in the first place. The list of compositions and the bibliography are worth the price of admission all by themselves. And it is precisely the breadth of Anhalt's scholarship that allows him to draw from such diverse sources. His intercutting between various disciplines and modes of composition permit the reader to see the very real connection between the work of a Berio and the work of, say, a Kurt Schwitters. I would've been interested, from my side, in seeing something about Raoul Hausmann's notion of optophoneticism, or some discussion of Ann Southam's work with Sean O'Huigin (the longest-running collaboration between a sound poet and a composer that I'm aware of; and available on record too), but then that's the point: you begin to think of other things you'd like to hear Istvan Anhalt's comments about, and that tells you you're getting a lot out of the book. I can't imagine a student of vocal and choral composition who wouldn't benefit by reading the book, and I know a lot of sound poets for whom Part II would be extremely useful. One of the nicest things for me about reading the book was that I found myself writing sound poems for single voice again, something I haven't done in close to six years. It really does get you thinking. As I said to begin with, I recommend this book highly. Just remember to draw your own conclusions.

-bpNichol
Toronto

Sonances: revue musicale québécoise. Ed. by Jean-Michel Boulay, Urbain Blanchet, Irène Brisson, Jacques Boulay, Pierre Lapalme, Yves Préfontaine. Quarterly. V.1, no.1, Oct. 1981. Subscription: Sonances, 857, av. du Chanoine-Martin, Sainte-Foy, Québec G1V 3P6. Individual: \$12/year; institutional: \$17/year.

Sonances (the title means something like "Soundings") was established 3 years ago to fill what the editors saw as a need for a publication addressed to musicians and music-lovers which would be Québec-based and yet "ouverte sur le monde". It has therefore included reports on events in Québec (the McGill organ conference, the ARMuQ conference on the state of Québec music archives) and also descriptions of musical visits to Prague, Haydn's Austria, the USSR, and various European summer festivals. Among the articles there have been series on such widely-ranging topics as the history of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, baroque music in France, the discography of Mahler,

and aspects of Québec's musical past. The eclectic interests of the editorial group, which is centred in Laval and the Québec Conservatoire have been further reflected in examinations of the music of Schreker, of Busoni, and of young Rumanian composers, and, in the Oct. 1983 issue a long interview with György Ligeti, by a former student, Denys Bouliane.

Most pieces are written with enthusiasm in a straightforward and accessible style. They include a mixture of summaries of and reflections on established research, and of reports of original work; they are occasionally illustrated and always well-documented.

Up to one-quarter of the magazine is occupied by reviews of recordings, with a concentration on 20th-century music, or on recordings of earlier repertoire that have some unusual feature (e.g. a Canadian performer). Book and score reviews appear from time to time, in much smaller numbers, and with no such obvious rationale. And a small column of news items - organization events, concerts, deaths, competitions - again appears to be chosen idiosyncratically. Finally, sprinkled as "fillers" at the ends of pieces, are paragraphs, usually ironic in content, excerpted from biographical publications, from 1920 to the present, under the rubrics "Ce que les grands musiciens ont pensé des autres grands

musiciens" or "Sourire en musique", and under the heading "Perles de critiques", bits in translation from Slonimsky's Lexicon of musical invective. While these fragments are perhaps mildly amusing, their appeal, and their relevance to the issue at hand, frankly escape me.

With slender resources, and a limited audience (it is not a fanzine of the Music magazine type) Sonances has maintained an engaging variety of content, and an admirable consistency in editorial policy, timetable, and in its sober yet attractive format.

-Kathleen McMorro
University of Toronto

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HOME SWEET HOME.

IMITATING WAVES IN A STORM.

Composé par S. MAZURETTE. Op. 17.

Moderato, maestoso.

INTRO.

pp *legato.* *ritard.* *legato.* *ril.* *cres* *echo.* *pp* *echo.* *pp* *echo.* *pp* *echo.* *M.D.* *con leggieressa* *ad libitum.* *ritard.*

-One of the triumphs of late 19th-century music printing in America, reproduced in "Piano music I/ Musique pour piano I", v.1 of The Canadian Musical Heritage/ Le Patrimoine Musical Canadien.