

Canadian Music of the Twentieth Century by George A. Proctor.
University of Toronto Press, 1980. \$27.50.

Let me get it off my chest right away, that phrase publishers so much love quoting: "This book ought to be on the shelf of every music library." Indeed it should, and I assume that every Canadian library with a music shelf in fact has acquired a copy by now. After all, this is a book music librarians have been waiting for for years, a book that does away with the embarrassment of having to refer a patron to a 10-page essay, a catalogue of cold facts, or a bibliography of more such items. The whole is more than the sum of its parts: thus even the fine Contemporary Canadian Composers (1975)/ Compositeurs canadiens contemporaines (1977) with its composer-by-composer arrangement cannot provide a discussion of overall developments. At last we can direct our patrons to a book-length discussion of what in the long run matters most in our musical life, contemporary composition.

The book is divided into seven chapters in chronological sequence. Each begins with a sketch of the background and continues with sections on choral music, piano music, chamber music and so on. The first chapter covers the 20 years to 1920, the colonial period; the second goes to 1940 and is named "Early Nationalism." "Neo-classicism at Its Height," and "The New Romanticism" respectively. The Centennial Celebrations which provided an occasion for numerous commissions get a separate chapter, and the last one describes "Recent Trends" from 1968 to 1978. The chapters grow in length, from 10 pages of text for the first to 31 for the last, reflecting the rapid growth of composition in Canada. The conclusions will not surprise anyone familiar with the subject: "there is much more Canadian music in our present century than is generally believed; ... this music encompasses the complete stylistic range of twentieth-century music; and ... the quality of much of it is of a high calibre and deserves to be more widely known than is now the case." (p.214).

On the whole Proctor has succeeded admirably in sifting through the massive literature and putting down his observations in clear language and orderly sequence. He has striven also to produce a highly practical work, selecting for discussion, as far as possible, works of which either the score or the recording, if not both, are readily obtainable and he takes pains to help the reader on the search for these scores and records (Preface, p.xi, and Abbreviations, p.xv - xxvi; the latter providing names and addresses of publishers and recording companies). These and other virtues hold inherent dangers which are not always avoided: the desire for clarity can adopt the tone of a schoolbook, neutrality can make for blandness, and practicability can consume space in the shape of special lists and appendices, space used at the expense of discussion. Anxious to read about Canadian music one feels a little let down when one realizes that of the 297 pages, fully half are taken up with matters other

than prose: lists of Selected Works after each chapter, musical examples, notes, a chronological table, a bibliography, and an index. The examples are clearly printed (as is the rest of the book), the index is suitably detailed, the bibliography rich. But is it really necessary to list Hector Gratton's Chanson écossaise and several hundred other works twice in the index (under title and composer) and once in the list of Selected Works when the text (p.46) mentions merely that the work "employs folk music elements"? Each of the four listings has a unique function, but it should have been possible to do without the approximately 58 pages of Selected Works. They merely repeat the same titles and dates in the same categories one has just finished reading about (and that stick out clearly with their italicized print) with the sole addition of publisher and recording information (e.g., Ricordi, 1973 - CMC tape 715). The lists may contain a few titles not mentioned in the text, but these could have been added. I would much rather see the text or index cluttered up with publisher-recording information in parantheses and read more about the Chanson écossaise.

But given the confines of a mere 150 pages for the discussion of several hundred compositions, Proctor has coped well. His task was not only the stupendous labour of getting to know the music, identifying stylistic trends, sorting out influences and trends, or assessing merit, but to transform his observations into palatable prose. He had to avoid the extremes of expounding a personal point of view on music, treating individual works as mere examples or counter-examples, and of fleshing out a catalogue. Everyone familiar with surveys of four centuries of choral music or five continents of piano pieces knows how annoying it is to be treated to long lists of titles that are "also noteworthy" and composers who "must also be mentioned."

I should like to consider in turn the various options open to the surveyor of musical literature. The first consideration is the limitation and definition of subject matter. I think Proctor was wise to restrict the discussion to so-called serious music. Borderline cases of composers best known for light orchestral or radio background music, such as Agostini, Chotem or Farnon are not included, although some who have specialized in film music are. Two other limitations are that historical background is reduced to a minimum, and that the discussion concentrates on compositions rather than composers. This may be a virtue in an introductory volume, for after all it is the music itself that matters, but it rules out any deeper penetration into the relationship between composer and society or composer and his creation. More about this later. In any case, biographical facts are easily available in reference books, but without such a book nearby it is difficult to sort out who is a student and who is a mature composer in a discussion of, for example, chamber music of the 1950s. (Years of birth and death are given in the index).

The next options deal with the selection of individual pieces for discussion. If a literature has 1000 compositions, some will be eliminated by necessity, because scores and recordings are not accessible, others by design, because they are not worth mentioning. Proctor ends up with perhaps 500 works (I didn't count). Other writers might have picked out 50 masterworks, discussed them in depth, assuming that the analysis of landmark compositions will facilitate the understanding of minor works, and merely paid lip service to the bulk. Proctor has preferred a more democratic approach. Only one work, Somers' Louis Riel receives as much as one whole page; no attempt is made at thorough analysis.

Having settled on how many and which compositions to discuss or mention, the author has to face the most important question of all: what to say about each. It is to Proctor's credit that he has used very sparingly the kind of extraneous information with which writers of program notes and popular books pad their paragraphs: who commissioned the work, what prizes it won, in what summer cottage it was written, and which conductor fell off the platform at the premiere performance. He has also avoided the lazy man's approach of excessively quoting the composers. There would be more justification in giving poetic or philosophical interpretations, popular among 19th century commentators but despised by more recent ones, though some music of Beethoven, Schumann, Mahler and, probably, quite a few contemporary composers, wanted to be understood in those terms. Instead Proctor has adopted the prevalent approach of noting stylistic and technical features that distinguish a piece or that link it to significant models and trends. In sketching such descriptions Proctor is at his best. To examples may suffice. On p.25 Proctor comments on Willan's Symphony No.1: "Obviously modelled after the symphony of the same key by another church musician, Franck, the melodies tend to revolve chromatically around a central tone. Combined with this feature is a predilection for a faburden-like use of thirds and sixths in the English manner (particularly in the second and third movements) and a triumphant, imperial-sounding second subject in the third movement which is reminiscent of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance marches (1901-30). The symphony has never been accepted into the repertoire of Canadian orchestras, possibly because of its outdated rhetoric and great length."

About Anhalt's Fantasia (p.65): "'In its doleful, understated way, this is one of the finest piano works of its period.' Thus pianist Glenn Gould describes Anhalt's Fantasia (1954), a subtle, yet warm and romantic work in the expressionistic idiom of Schönberg. Based upon a free manipulation of the tone row (including constant fragmentation and transposition), the Fantasia makes frequent reference to the 'front end' and 'back end' of the row, both of which outline the major and minor third. At the same time the texture, while not thick in a chordal sense, is extremely active contrapuntally, with sometimes as many as four separate melodic strands going on simultaneously. The work evolves in a stream-of-consciousness fashion,

making frequent use of repetition within each section, but, as in a renaissance fantasia, it gives no sign of a return to such material once it has been treated exhaustively." Such characterizations are the results of a staggering amount of labour, and Proctor can be forgiven, like the very best writers of such surveys, if once in a while the need to "get through" a pile of scores or records at one quick listening or reading session results in picking out some feature, any feature, that allows one to "say something." One wishes, however, that some almost meaningless generalizations had been avoided, e.g., certain chamber music compositions by Adaskin, Betts, Bissell, and Turner "follow paths previously established by these composers" (p.197).

When it comes to assembling all the mass of observations on individual compositions into a logical sequence of paragraphs and chapters, again several options are beckoning: grouping according to major styles or currents, such as traditionalists, serialists, folklorists, mixed-media composers (and the inevitable "special cases"), or grouping by Canadian "schools" around leading teachers, by regions, or by forms of composition. Proctor has adopted a chronological pattern. It makes sense, since such influences as colonialism, discovery of contemporary European music, establishment of music faculties and of nationwide service organizations have affected all composers of a given generation. There is a price to pay, however. Willan's choral music, for example, cannot be discussed as one continuous development, but is chopped up into segments treated in chapters 1,2,3, and 4: The frequent picking up of subject matter dealt with in an earlier chapter takes up a fair amount of space and each time the subject is dealt with only in a fragmentary way.

Considered as a whole, Proctor's book follows what is probably the most useful plan to introduce the undergraduate and the uninitiated music lover (that means just about everyone) to Canadian music. But to some extent the author has become a victim of his own sense of orderliness. Proctor is the first one to recognize the impossibility of "tidy categorization" (p.108), and the frequent references to neo-classicism and neo-romanticism (for which I cannot find a satisfactory definition in the book) should be regarded as very, very broad generalizations. It is hardly Proctor's fault that since the introduction of terms such as aleatoric music, mixed-media, etc., some 20 or 30 years ago, few, if any, names have come up for new currents in composition (strange, when one considers how fast 20th century music is supposed to develop, or does it?) But after a few chapters the designation of basic preferences as neo-classical or neo-romantic becomes almost an obsession. Must the music of composers who consider themselves lightyears ahead of even Debussy, Sibelius, or Hindemith, be categorized in terms of derivation? Surely the new elements of style and technique, the break with tradition is what characterizes avant-garde composers. In my student days, in the late 1940s, composers wrote "new", "modern", or "contemporary" music, and

if memory does not fail me, "neo-classical" was a term reserved for works that strove not only for "clarity of texture, emotional restraint, balance, and proportion" (p.42) but that actually employed 18th-century turns of melody, harmony, and rhythm. Thus the Papineau-Couture Rondo (1943) on p.36, after the removal of numerous "wrong" notes, might be restored to something resembling the music of 1790 or 1800 (Forgive me, Jean!), whereas the opening of Weinzweig's Divertimento No.1, p.43, could not be reduced in such a way, despite its coincidental use of a phrase from Mozart's Overture to the Abduction (flute, bars 14-15) and the main phrase of the Scherzo from Schumann's Symphony in C Major (piano, bar 12). Modern music reaches out for inspiration not only to old music of many ages but also of many cultures, but the new usually dominates in the listener's awareness. And is it not true that classical and romantic traits exist in the same composer, and even in the same work - look at Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. If one passes beyond the broad generalizations, one may observe that there are as many possibilities of combining classical and romantic features as there are composers with individual personalities. Is it not possible to find emotional restraint combined with muddy texture, or excessive emotionalism combined with formal control?

At the present time, when audiences, performers and critics as yet have had insufficient exposure to Canadian music to allow a sifting into masterworks and lesser ones, Proctor's book presents a vast step forward. He has helped indeed "to bridge the sizeable gap which at present exists between the producer and the consumer of Canadian music" (p.ix). Once the permanent repertoire has established itself (partly thanks to Proctor's guidance, I am sure), a different approach may suggest itself to the surveyor. At that time a larger point of view should be possible, one that traces the connection between the composer and his work, and between society and both in greater depth. It should then be possible to discover the shaping forces, practical and intellectual, of the 1960s in more than the establishment of the Canadian Music Centre, the holding of conference-festivals in Stratford and Montreal and the celebrations of Canada's centennial. I should like to learn more about the mutual relationships and contacts between composers, as teacher and pupil, as fellow students, as friends, as observers of each other's music, and about the resulting groupings, influences, antipathies, stylistic turnabouts, debates, polemics and so on. One could trace Canadian developments from the starting point of identifying certain 20th century problems and crises and see how Canadians have grappled with them: the assimilation of new dissonances, the exploration and integration of new sounds, transformations of composer-audience relationships, new media of communication, and many more. I share Proctor's reluctance to get embroiled in the old question of whether there is or ought to be a distinct Canadian music (he has an interesting generalization about the contrast between French and English-Canadians on p.199), but I

wonder whether there are some significant world trends that have not been echoed in Canada, and whether others have begun, or been developed crucially, in Canada.

Lest I be accused of being one-sidedly concerned with Proctor's performance rather than his message, I should like to append a few specific comments. I have not attempted to do a systematic check of omissions and accuracy of detail, but merely offer a few random observations. The book certainly is reliable and there are few printing errors (on p.65 it should read Louise, not Louis, Laplante).

On p.5, why keep secret the identity of the English-born and the French-Canadian composers, both of whom lived in Montreal but met only once or twice? Could it have been Douglas Clarke or Alfred Whitehead vs. Léo-Pol Morin or Rodolphe Mathieu?

On p.9, Willan was the third, not the second Canadian to receive the Lambeth degree. He was preceded by C.A.E. Harriss and Percival Illsley and followed by Godfrey Hewitt and Hugh Bancroft.

On p.11, surely the opposing of two musical ideas, one showing virility and one femininity and charm, is as old as Haydn and Mozart, and is associated most closely with such Beethoven works as the Coriolanus Overture. It was "old hat" in Liszt's day.

The choice of composers before 1940 makes me aware of the injustice that writers on the subject (including myself) have committed over the years in elevating certain musicians to COMPOSER status while stereotyping others as organists, pianists, or teachers who "also" composed. These self-perpetuating pre-judgments, based on such external factors as previous recognition, accessibility of scores, or contemporary publicity, may be corrected one day when the music will be better known. It is entirely possible that Emiliano Renaud, Frederic Lord, Léo Roy, or Luigi von Kunits will be elevated to COMPOSER status and others relegated to the occasional or less-important status.

To p.19 it should be added that in addition to "the two festivals of Canadian folk arts held in Quebec City in 1927 and 1928" there were at least 15 others organized by Gibbon in various cities for the CPR. Not all featured folk arts (although the one in Quebec in 1930 did) but all had music and Willan ballad operas were premiered also in Banff, Victoria and again in Quebec in 1930.

The Ernest Gagnon and Edward Sapir (with Marius Barbeau) collections, mentioned on p.19 should be dated 1865 and 1925 to show the vast difference in age. There had been quite a few songbooks with accompaniments in the intervening years, among them the interesting accompaniments by Achille Fortier. Choral arrangements (p.20) had also been published, some by Ernest Gagnon himself.

The Opera Guild of Montreal (p.51) presented its last opera in 1969.

Helmut Kallmann.

Editor's note: Canadian Music of the Twentieth Century has been selected by the American Institute of Graphic Arts to be exhibited throughout the United States and at the Frankfurt Book Fair. It will then be deposited in the archives of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University.