

**Musicanada 2000: A Celebration of Canadian Composers / Un hommage aux compositeurs canadiens.** Edited by S. Timothy Maloney, assisted by Ulla Colgrass, Mireille Gagné, and Véronique Robert. Montréal: Éditions Liber, 2001. 180 p., ill., music. ISBN 2-921569-96-5. \$12.00

The title of this book betrays a distinct lack of imagination. *Musicanada* has already been used for at least three periodicals, a film, a festival of Canadian music held in Europe, and a set of primary school music textbooks. It is one of those made-up “bilingual” words (i.e., it means nothing in either French or English) that Canadians seem to love. I find it both ungainly and feeble, so let me begin with a plea: Let us have no more musicanas!

The Canadian Music Centre (CMC) was founded on 1 January 1959. This book is a fortieth birthday tribute, although in the end it appeared two and a half years after the event. As such, it is a companion piece to *Célébration* (Toronto: CMC, 1984), a book of essays published under the editorship of Godfrey Ridout and Talivaldis Kenins for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CMC. An anti-academic bias is common to both volumes: the editors of *Célébration* urged their authors to “avoid the odour of the academic style” (p. 5), while the editorial committee for *Musicanada 2000* wanted the tone of their book “to be informative while avoiding academic stuffiness” (p. 16). Nevertheless, Ridout and Kenins wanted their essays to be “anecdotal, combative, personal and provocative” (p. 5), whereas the *Musicanada 2000* team asked only for “factual accuracy” (p. 16) rather than strong opinions. The eleven essays in *Célébration* have an average length of over 6,000 words, which

permitted an in-depth, if not scholarly, treatment of each topic. *Musicanada 2000* contains twice as many essays, but the average word length is one-quarter that of the earlier book, so that only a superficial treatment of each of the chosen subjects was possible. *Célébration* contains no illustrations or music examples, whereas *Musicanada 2000* has 65 photos and 13 score excerpts.

Information technology was in its infancy when *Célébration* was published; books were still the principle means of disseminating knowledge back in 1984. In the meantime, the CMC has wholeheartedly joined the IT revolution, and is digitizing its library holdings for remote access and distribution via electronic means. Text is passé; hypertext is the new (virtual) reality. It seems that people now prefer to download bytes of information in cyberspace rather than read books. *Musicanada 2000* is a product of this new era, and as such it shows the triumph of style over substance. Numerous names are misspelled – Alexander Brott (p. 169), Calixa Lavallée (p. 165), Keith Campbell MacMillan (p. 169), Ben McPeck, Colin McPhee (both p. 166), and James Rolfe (p. 158) among them – and a major donor, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, is cited incorrectly (p. 125). But the book does look nice, in a glossy magazine sort of way.

*Musicanada 2000* is in three sections. The first contains the foreword (by Elisabeth Bihl), the preface (S. Timothy Maloney), and an account of technological projects of the CMC (Simone Auger). The second section is titled "The CMC's Regional Offices," and includes brief accounts of the activities of the CMC offices in British Columbia (Colin Miles), the Prairies (John C. Reid), Ontario (David G.H. Parsons), Quebec (Mireille Gagné, the only author who also contributed to *Célébration*), and Atlantic Canada (Peter Higham), followed by a survey article on "The State of Canadian Music and Culture at the Millennium" (Maloney). The last section, "Prevailing Aesthetic Trends," includes five survey articles about composition in different parts of Canada (by, from east to west, Alasdair MacLean, Serge Provost, Gary Kulesha, John Estacio and Owen Underhill), as well as two essays on music education (Glen Carruthers and Nicole Carignan), two on women composers (Mary Gardiner and Sophie Galaise), two on broadcasting (Lary Lake and Sylvia L'Écuyer), and one each on the recording industry (Richard Truhlar), electroacoustic music (Jean-François Denis), orchestral music (jointly authored by Reid and Bob Clark), and opera (Parsons). Also included are lists of CMC presidents, executive directors, associate composers, honorary members, and major donors.

Seven articles appear in both French and English, ten are in English only (three of these include a brief précis in French), and five are in French only (one with a brief précis in English). The bilingual articles are in sections one and two of the book. With one or two

exceptions, the unilingual French articles deal solely with Quebec, and the unilingual English articles cover the rest of Canada. The perhaps unintended but nevertheless clear message is that it is assumed that Quebeckers speak French, the ROC speaks English, and neither has a great interest in the particulars of what the other is up to. I am puzzled as to the rationale for this feature of the book: was it a cost-saving measure, or were there no contributors who were able to write with equal authority about music in Quebec and the rest of Canada? In either case, it is a sad commentary about the perceived state of bilingualism and national unity.

Moving from the medium to the message, I find that the book consists, for the most part, of boosterism and propaganda. There are recurring complaints about funding cutbacks and a lack of respect for, appreciation of, and/or knowledge about Canadian composers. But none of the essays deals with issues of context, value, or identity, which might shed some light on this perceived lack of status. I longed for a closely reasoned account such as Raymond Deane has provided for the situation of contemporary composers in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The many factors which have led to the fading of the privileged position of composers in Western society, such as the proliferation of popular music (which values the performer as much as, or more than, the creator of music), a broader knowledge of the music of other times and places,

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Deane, "The Honour of Non-Existence: Classical Composers in Irish Society," *Irish Musical Studies 3: Music and Irish Cultural History*, eds. Gerard Gillen and Harry White (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995): 199-211.

and the rise of new critical methodologies which have called into question the supposedly timeless and transcendent qualities of the western art music canon are, by and large, not even acknowledged here, never mind addressed.

Canadian composers find themselves in an unenviable position: trading on the (rapidly fading) prestige of Beethoven and Brahms to argue for their privileged status in society, while at the same time complaining about the stranglehold that this European repertoire has in the concert hall. In a misguided effort to counter this European monopoly, Reid and Clark in their article on orchestral music (pp. 143-50) provide a list of 120 Canadian orchestral works that they propose for canonic status. John Beckwith has provided a detailed and passionate rebuttal of this article and of the very concept of a Canadian orchestral canon.<sup>2</sup> Beverley Diamond,

moreover, has reasoned that anti-canonization is a characteristically Canadian phenomenon that distinguishes music and music scholarship in this country from that elsewhere (particularly the United States), and she specifically cites the CMC as an advocate of anti-canonization.<sup>3</sup> What we have here, then, is an article published by the CMC in its own commemorative volume that advocates a stance that is diametrically opposed to the CMC's mission.

It is perhaps unfair to single out this article for criticism though, as it is characteristic of the book as a whole. To this reader, at least, what is most evident in *Musicanada 2000* is that the CMC is no longer clear about its mandate, or even its own strengths. It is a pity that this celebratory publication was not the occasion for a more thorough and insightful account of the recent activities and future plans of this fine institution.

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<sup>2</sup> John Beckwith, "Letter to the Editor," *Prairie Sounds* no. 51 (Spring 2002): 3. The editor of *Prairie Sounds* is John Reid, one of the authors of the article under consideration here. (Incidentally, Beckwith questions whether Schafer's *No Longer Than Ten Minutes* was ever performed again after the premiere; it was, at least once: I recall playing in a performance of it in a concert given by the Kingston Symphony.)

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<sup>3</sup> "What's the Difference? Reflections on Discourses of Morality, Modernism, and Mosaics in the Study of Music in Canada," *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* 21, no. 1 (2000): 72.