

Music Papers: Articles and Talks by a Canadian Composer, 1961-1994. By John Beckwith. Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1997. 256 p. \$22.95 ISBN 0-919614-72-8 (pbk.)

John Beckwith's *Music Papers* is a compendium of musings, polemic, reminiscences, bitter vivisection, and perceptive analyses of things musical in general and of musical things Canadian in particular. Judging by his tone in the book, Beckwith is probably too modest to seek the title "Dean of Canadian Composers," and despite his own formidable *œuvre*, he would face strong competition from both his own and the succeeding generation: Violet Archer, Clermont Pépin, John Weinzweig, Bruce Mather, Murray Schafer, Barbara Pentland, and Claude Vivier, to name but one stellar handful. Strike a Medal of Honor for Champions of Canadian Music, however, and Beckwith should be first to receive it. (He received the Order of Canada in 1987, so the proposed medal is probably not to be coveted.) His influence on younger composers (Mather was one of several students at the University of Toronto) and his "persistent ... search for a Canadian voice through music" (*EMC*) mark him as one to whom scholars and aficionados of Canadian culture should pay heed. Beckwith has spent most of his multi-faceted career in Toronto, where he has rubbed shoulders with figures whose influence spanned a Canadian epiphany, from the post-colonial period (Healey Willan *et al.*) through the Statute of Westminster into what might be called Canada's first republican era (Margaret Atwood and the post-W.W.II composers).

There are five sections: I. A "Universal Tongue"?, II. CanMus, III. Some Toronto Musicians, IV. Composing, and V. Sounds Like . . . , into which the twenty-five articles and talks in general fit without forcing, though the final section's two brief items required their own rubric for lack of a good fit elsewhere. The 20 musical examples and 16

illustrations are situated near the texts to which they relate, facilitating their usefulness; lists of them are provided in the front matter. The index (prepared by Kathleen McMorrow) is excellent—I looked up several expected terms, from *rock-and-roll* to *McLuhan, Marshall*; all were there. Cross-references are sparing, but adequate. A few minor proofreading gaffes appear in the text and index: on page 82, the Andrews Sisters are the "Andrew" Sisters, and on pages 116 (in footnote 11) and 251, *s.v. New Harvard dictionary*, Don Michael Randel's name is misspelled as Randal, but these are exceptions. Grouping the texts by subject rather than following a strictly chronological arrangement was sound, especially as they have been edited to guide the reader to earlier or later mentions of the same or similar topics that occur out of chronological sequence. Footnotes frequently amplify the text, adding value to the citations.

The most provocative section of the book is the second, "CanMus." Beckwith is the likely progenitor of the term, which he admits to copping from Atwood's "CanLit." In it, he complains of America's ignorance of Canada and the absence of current, accurate information about Canada in American (and other) reference works on music. My own belief is that they result mainly from sheer lack of critical mass. There just isn't enough of Canadian *anything*, despite our intimidating geography and status as their largest trading partner, to matter one whit to the megalomaniacal United States—and U.S. trends in musicology tend to be followed slavishly by the rest of the world. What is not writ large is invisible. (Beckwith objects to the use of the term "American" by U.S. authors and publishers to refer only to that which is of or pertains to the U.S. (p. 113), but I disagree—usage, particularly in Canada,

has long ago rendered his objection strictly academic.)

With regard to Beckwith's complaints concerning American nonchalance, must we then conclude these are futile? (See the items "About Canadian Music: The P.R. Failure," p. 35-49, and "A Failure Revisited," p. 111-121.) He frequently strikes me as a frustrated little boy, tugging at an adult's pant leg for attention. But why? I am still passionately Canadian. I can immediately call to mind passages of great Canadian music (all learned, I confess, prior to my emigration), from Mercure's *Kaleidoscope* to Somers' *Five Songs for Dark Voice* to Archer's *Sganarelle* to Hétu's piano concerto. What has happened to me, that I feel so impatient with Beckwith's ardent cultural nationalism? The fact that this book makes me ask such uncomfortable questions helps illustrate its importance to CanMus studies. Beckwith asks: What is Canadian music? Who listens to it? Who doesn't, and why? Why is the rest of the world so ignorant of it, and why is Willan still almost the only name (other than Bryan Adams or Céline Dion) that Americans can call to mind when asked what they think of Canadian music? While he never quite arrives at my monolithic conclusion that a mere lack of volume is the central issue, Beckwith provides both stimulating answers and additional probing questions that spring from the initial dilemmas.

The section entitled "Some Toronto Musicians," is less satisfying, providing only

vignettes from Toronto's musical life and no in-depth look at the nature of its many musics aside from the first essay, "Musical Toronto: A Contradiction in Terms?" (p. 131-139), in which he outlines cursorily various musical genres found in the city from the mid-19th century onward. The item began as an after-dinner talk at a concert in 1984 celebrating the establishment of the Institute for Canadian Music, so its perfunctory aspects may be forgiven. It at least serves to pique one's interest in the subsequent, personally revealing essays on Willan, MacMillan, Glenn Gould, and Weinzwieg, though the musicians' relationships to Toronto comprise little more than marginalia.

This collection deserves representation in every academic and large public library in Canada. As an excellent introduction to the comparatively recent notion of "CanMus" and what constitutes Canadianism in music, it should also find its way into U.S. academic and research libraries, but may fail ironically, because of the perceived irrelevance of its themes to Americans. Acquire this book, feature it on your "New Titles" shelves for as long as credibility allows, and encourage its use in your classrooms.

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