

The Tokaido: The Choral Music of Harry Freedman. Toronto: CMC Centrediscs CMCCD 11206, 2006. \$19.98. 1 compact disc (59:53). Amadeus Chamber Singers and the Elmer Iseler Singers; Lydia Adams, conductor. Contents: *1838* (3:20) — *Songs from Shakespeare* (16:08) — *The Tokaido* (14:27) — *Voices* (7:50) — *Valleys* (13:03) — *Keewaydin* (Toronto Children's Chorus, Jean Ashworth Bartle, conductor) (5:05).

With the death of Harry Freedman last year, Canada lost one of its most prolific composers of the past half century. With an output of over 175 compositions, Freedman embraced many styles and genres, from the concert hall to incidental music for stage, TV and film. He also played a significant role in several Canadian musical organizations, including as a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers (for which he served as president from 1975-78) and the Guild of Canadian Film Composers.

Freedman was also a highly respected choral composer. The present disc contains six of his most important compositions in the genre and represents an excellent introduction to several facets of Freedman's art. The pieces date from 1964 (*The Tokaido*) to 2002 (*Valleys*), and vary in technical difficulty from moderate (*Songs from Shakespeare* and *Keewaydin*) to the virtuosic (*The Tokaido*). Further, while some pieces are written a cappella, others employ a variety of media—for instance, electric guitar, bass and drums (*1838*) and wind quintet (*The Tokaido*).

Although traditional texts are found in Freedman's music—on this recording there is English, Japanese, Cree and Ojibway—Freedman's predilection for the sonic aspect of a word over its literary meaning prompted him to create his own texts. *Valleys* and *Keewaydin*

are examples of such inventions. Writing about this attribute, Freedman notes that in *Valleys* there is an "abstraction of primitive languages that consist largely of consonant and vowel, consonant and vowel, thus avoiding the diction problems that plague conventional settings of Western poetry."

The compositions on this CD feature two of Canada's premiere choral ensembles—the Amadeus Chamber Singers and the Elmer Iseler Singers. Lydia Adams conducts five of these works. The exception is *Keewaydin*. One of Canada's most well-known choral pieces, it is performed by the Toronto Children's Chorus led by Jean Ashworth Bartle, the group and conductor who have championed the piece for most of its existence. Each work receives a highly committed and polished performance. Not only is the intonation and diction nearly flawless (no mean statement, given the knotty polyphony in several of these pieces), but the tonal shading and musical phrasing is outstanding and simply has to be heard to be believed. As an example, I suggest that any first-time listener begin with *Valleys*.

The notes consist of an introduction, a brief biography of Freedman and program notes on each piece written by the composer. Freedman's notes are particularly informative, striking a

sensible balance between describing the compositional background of a piece and choices of texts. However, no texts to the compositions are provided in the booklet—an unfortunate cost-saving decision. One hopes that in the future the CMC will place the texts on its web site. The sound quality, clarity and ambience all meet the excellent standard of current CMC Centredisc releases.

This is an essential recording by one of Canada's vital composers. I would strongly recommend it.

Edward Jurkowski
University of Lethbridge